

**Archie Mafeje and the Question of Philosophy as a  
liberatory discourse**

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**201716838**

# **Archie Mafeje and the Question of Philosophy as a liberatory Discourse**

A Thesis submitted to the Social Science and Humanities faculty, University of Fort Hare,  
East London, in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts: Philosophy.

East London, 2018

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## **ABSTRACT**

This dissertation seeks to articulate a liberatory conception of philosophy which interprets reality on its own terms. It is an attempt to intervene in the practice of philosophy in South Africa, which has continued along colonial lines expressed through the marginality of African philosophy up to the present, to the general neglect of the unjust and divisive social reality that defines South Africa. It is our argument that such a continuity is indicative of outstanding liberation on the part of the indigenous people conquered in the unjust wars of colonisation. Our main task then is to struggle for this liberation at the epistemic level with Archie Mafeje, through an examination of his intellectual works and life as a revolutionary intellectual, as an inspiration and an instance of a liberatory practice of philosophy. We draw on the work of Archie Mafeje to elaborate and defend his account of African Philosophy, as a historically specific expression of the liberatory struggle of Africans against unjust Euro-centric colonial domination. This shall be achieved in three instances.

In the first instance, Chapter 1, we trace the history of institutionalised philosophy in South Africa outlining Eurocentrism and mimesis as its defining features. In the second instance, Chapter 2, a history of contemporary African philosophy is outlined as emanative from the question concerning the existence of African philosophy, of which mainstream South African philosophy has largely been ignorant. In the final instance, Chapter 3 and 4, a liberatory practice of philosophy is presented, as a necessary response to this context, with Mafeje's account of African philosophy defended as such an instance. The birth of the Azanian Philosophical Society is also presented as such an instance and as a challenge to the unchallenged hegemony of white philosophy in South Africa.

Keywords

Eurocentrism, African Philosophy, Archie Mafeje, Africanity, Liberation

## **DECLARATION**

I, Thabang Dladla, declare that this is my own work. It is submitted for the degree of Master of Arts: Philosophy in the University of Fort Hare, East London. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination at any other university, nor has it been prepared under the aegis or with assistance of anybody or organisation or person other than the University of Fort Hare.

Submitted in the year 2018 by:

Thabang Dladla

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## Chapter 1 Introduction: Afrika My Beginning<sup>1</sup>

The key question that has marked the existence and practice of African philosophy historically is whether there could legitimately be said to exist branches or practices of ideation in 'black' Africa that could be technically specifiable as philosophical speculation. This can be summarised as the question of whether African philosophy exists. This question has initiated a heated debate among those who have been professionally trained as philosophers and those who may not have had that opportunity, going back at least as far as the 1940s. It can be said that this question initiated and shaped the broader debates of what constitutes the practice of African philosophy up to the present. However, in our considered judgement the posing of this question in itself could not have initiated the beginnings of abstract speculative thought in Africa. There would always have had to have existed some form of African philosophy, in the precise sense of the ineluctability for any human societal functioning of a structuring metaphysic ('...a prior theoretical transcendental ground...a constitutive infrastructure' [Headley, 2007], so to speak) serving to undergird its operative world sense.<sup>2</sup> The distinctively modern modality/acceptance of philosophical practice inaugurating circa at the dawn of the independence era within the African academy laboured under the asphyxiating weight of an intellectual and cultural imperialism brought to bear upon the Africans by direct European colonial domination of the continent of Africa and its indigenous peoples (Ramose, 1999:4). The question of whether or not there exists an African philosophy has tended to focus exclusively at the epistemic at the expense of due scrutiny upon such an interrogative's would be ideological matrix – this question's presumptive conditions of possibility<sup>3</sup>. Ramose has argued that the question does not and in fact could not come from indigenous Africans themselves (Ramose, 2003). In other words, to ask this question one would necessarily have had to be situated outside the cultures' own precincts and effectively be viewing the African from without. More often than not, the question arises from a standpoint of malicious

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<sup>1</sup> Taken from Ingoapele Madingoane's poem with the same title. We have opted for the 'k' instead of 'c' in writing Afrika at this point to highlight the absence of the 'c' in the indigenous pronunciation, and also to point out the contestations of the meaning and origin of the name which in this dissertation we use under protest which the 'k' only at this point aims to signify.

<sup>2</sup> According to Sylvia Wynter (as quoted in White (2010)) "What is normally imperative to each culture as a living system is that it knows its reality adaptively, i.e., in ways that can best be orient the collective behaviours of its subjects, together with its mode of subjectivity (the I) and of conspecificity (the We)." Furthermore, according to Derric White (2010), "Wynter's... scholarship has consistently explored and exposed how a particular society's intellectual class narratively instituted the idealized identity of self. According to Wynter, intellectuals, whether they are the clergy, the shamans, the soothsayers, the scientists, or the academics, create and re-create narratives of symbolic life and death that outline the local culturally specific notions of what it means to be human. These narratives are paradigm of value and authority that associate positive and negative traits to particular behaviours, beliefs and ultimately groups who best exemplify them."

<sup>3</sup> 'To the question "is there an African Philosophy? ..... we oppose another: " what is the source of this inquiry? Who at times such as these, arrogates the right to put a question that can be innocent only in appearance?', Olabiyi Yai (1977:7) "Theory and Practice in African Philosophy: The Poverty of Speculative Philosophy"

ignorance, if not an outright emotively racist outlook<sup>4</sup>. This project here attempts to respond to this hackneyed question of academic philosophy in Africa, just as Archie Mafeje (1936-2007) himself had occasion to respond (See Mafeje 1992). Through Mafeje's works, this research endeavours to faithfully adumbrate the contouring of an African philosophical practice emanative out of (and presumably, in turn organically engaged with) the African condition itself- the pressing reality of African being within our contemporary setting- with an express view to drawing out such an African Philosophy's most salient liberatory implications.

Philosophy proper does not ponder philosophy texts but ponders the non-philosophical, the reality. Thus pronounces Argentinean Mexican liberation theologian and philosopher, Enrique Dussel in perhaps one of the most implacably materialist of his philosophical promulgations:

Philosophy, when it is really philosophy and not sophistry or ideology, does not ponder philosophy. It does not ponder philosophical texts, except as a pedagogical propaedeutic to provide itself with interpretative categories. Philosophy ponders the non-philosophical; the reality. But because it involves reflection on its own reality, it sets out from what already is, from its own world, its own system, its own space. The philosophy that has emerged from the periphery has always done so in response to a need to situate itself with regard to the centre – in total exteriority (Dussel, 1985: 3).

As we will attempt to show in the proceeding, the salient thrust of Mafeje's overarching philosophical project- as evidenced, in particular, in his broad engagement with Anthropology and the social sciences in Africa- entails an indispensable liberatory element, focused principally upon the themes of anti-colonialism. Through a discussion of Mafeje and in direct response to Dussel's above expressed concerns with the propensity for "scandalous extroversion" of philosophical production in the periphery of the world system, this project endeavours to show that authentic philosophy invariably is a product of its particular social and political milieu. As famously contended by Kwame Nkrumah: "the social milieu affects the content of philosophy and the content of philosophy seeks to affect the social milieu, either by confirming it or by opposing it" (Nkrumah, 1964:56). No philosophy is apolitical since no condition is apolitical; history may be an accident but the conditions that it gives rise to are most definitely not. As per Mafeje's (2008) clever paraphrasing of Marx: "Nobody can think and act outside historically determined circumstances", which means that "while we are free to choose the

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<sup>4</sup> 'Our speculative philosophers are unaware of the fact that this question can be asked only from a position of superiority. Clearly if one takes it as given that European Philosophy (however varied and contradictory the definitions one gives it) provide the only valid paradigm for philosophy, and if one insists that the hypothetical African Philosophy must conform to this paradigm in order to qualify, the answer to the question is known in advance. It is clear, then, that the question could not have been put innocently, nor could the answer be objective' (Yai, 1977:7).

role in which we cast ourselves as agents of history, we do not put on the agenda the social issues to which we respond as these are given to us by history". Mafeje's status as an Anthropologist has tended to overshadow his philosophical writings in the literature. This scholarly exegesis of Mafeje's writings purports to provide a defensive account of his interpretation of African philosophy as a historically and politically reflexive critical discourse of liberation.

### Archie Mafeje and African philosophy

*When we speak of history, who is speaking? It is someone of a given, class and society – in short, someone who is himself a historical being. And this very act, which founds the possibility of an historical knowledge (for only an historical being can have the experience of history and can talk about it) prevents this knowledge from ever acquiring the status of complete and transparent knowledge – since it is itself, in its essence an historical phenomenon which demands to be apprehended and interpreted as such. The discourse on history is included in history. (Castoriadis, 1978:23)*

It is important to underscore the differences between Mafeje's professional works in what may be characterised explicitly as African philosophy and his general works in the social sciences more broadly, particularly anthropology- wherein the workings of Mafeje's philosophical orientation, which we will call an African philosophy of liberation, remains discernible albeit seamlessly interwoven within the tapestry of specifically social scientific concerns: the demand for endogeneity (Adesina, 2011) or Authentic interlocution (Nyoka, 2012). Mafeje's then is a philosophy not defined by the boundaries of disciplines but rather by the practice of philosophy proper as defined by Dussel: engagement with one's own immediate reality. It is for this reason that Mafeje serves as an inspiration to this study, which is an attempt to articulate a liberatory conception of philosophy within the present context of renewed calls for decolonizing the curriculum or knowledge in the South African academy and even outside of it.

We concur with Nyoka (2017:3) that the call concerning epistemological decolonisation has taken a life of its own: "talking about decolonisation long enough without engaging in the actual *process* of decolonising so that the term loses its content" (emphasis in the original). Indeed such a tendency diminishes the importance of such a call and its meaning and results in what Nyoka (2017:3) terms 'epistemic posturing' and not engaged in the actual act of knowledge decolonisation. This research aims to contribute to the African knowledge archive through an attempt to facilitate an epistemic rupture within the field of philosophy in South Africa where African philosophy remains marginal. The distinct epistemic significance of this study is its insistence on African philosophy as a basis for any philosophical undertaking. This is to problematize the current exotified status of African philosophy where it is an add on to the already existing framework of what constitutes philosophy which would

give credence to the question of whether African philosophy exists, which often overlooks the debates emanating from the African continent for the past 70 years.

In the debate concerning the existence of African philosophy, Mafeje in *African Philosophical Projections and Prospects for the Indigenisation of Political and Intellectual Discourse (1992)* points out two opposed tendencies; the first being the abstract/speculative tendency epitomised by say Henri Maurier, who believes that the answer to the question of whether there is an African philosophy is surely “no! Not yet!” Mafeje points out that what Maurier seemingly had in mind is “philosophy as formally defined in the occident and the new world”. For Maurier according to Mafeje “The necessary conditions for first a philosophy and then an African philosophy have not been met yet”. Patently indicating that Maurier is implicitly assuming a notion of philosophy as formally constituted discipline “with a distinctive set of universally agreed upon ground rules”- that (crucially) are perennially given in advance (Mafeje, 1992:2). Satirising this endemic attitude within abstract/speculative philosophical circles vis a vis the specific question of what may legitimately regarded as philosophy qua philosophy, Veroli (2001:1) has had occasion rather sardonically to quip,

Is not philosophy, after all, the mark of eternity on the minds of mortals? They, it is well known, leave not a trace on its frozen surface. They may wave away the dust here and there but must, eventually surrender themselves to its unalterable presence

To this normatively bequeathed, smug academic sense of the “philosophical”, Veroli- eager as ever at re centring the role of human agency- radically queries, ‘But what if one [was] to refuse supposing that philosophy is inscribed in eternity? What if, instead, one [was] to consider philosophy’s boundaries – its limits – as produced rather than given?’. An incontrovertibly radical gesture which creates the opening for Veroli’s hazarding of his heterodox formulation of “philosophical conjuncture”- connoting precisely, ‘the idea that philosophy might intersect with human history in a way that would be anything other than accidental’.

The second tendency Mafeje points out is that spearheaded by Africans in the diaspora. This was a movement that was able to “raise the clarion call for the black cause”. This movement included, inter alia, stalwarts such as Edward Blyden, Jean Price Mars, W. E. B. Du Bois, Aime Cesaire and Marcus Garvey. According to Mafeje this was an expression of hurt pride by those who had suffered the crushing agony of slavery and concomitant bitter racial humiliation whose brunt they bore in the new world (Mafeje, 1992:2). African philosophy or African philosophical projections according to Mafeje are to be understood vis a vis these outlined two tendencies: on the one hand lies negation of our subject of deliberation with a purist (Eurocentrist) pronouncements of what constitutes philosophy, while on the other hand lies resistance to such negations.

However, Mafeje (1992:2) suggestively probes “whether philosophy can legitimately be confined only to its literary forms”. It would seem that the answer to this question is definitely no because philosophy does not exist in texts solely, contrary to Hountondji’s (1983) view that African philosophy exists solely as a set of texts “written by Africans and described as philosophical by their authors themselves”, but is already prefigured in human reality and existentiality as constitutive elements for any philosophy deeply indebted to the imagination as a positive reality as Castoriadis (1978:18) contends;

This element - which gives a specific orientation to every institutional system, which ... is the creation of each historical period, its singular manner of living, of seeing and of conducting its own existence, its world, and its relations with this world, this originary structuring component, this central signifying-signified,... the basis for articulating what does matter and what does not, the origin of the surplus of being of the objects of practical, affective and intellectual investment, whether individual or collective — is nothing other than the *imaginary* of the society or of the period considered.

Castoriadis’ recuperation of the imagination away from its incarceration in the Cartesian philosophical system and the creation of the philosophical subject, or with modern western philosophy precisely and its relationship to science, precedes the radical transformatory possibilities for philosophy that comes with the movements of the 1960’s which transforms the essence of philosophy “from having been almost exclusively a form of interpellation of subjects by the educational state ideological apparatus, it becomes — potentially — a form of creative intervention in the ontological production of identity” (Veroli, 2001:16). Indeed such a liberation of the imagination from reason, as had been the case with Descartes, forecloses Hountondji’s enumerations about the sole possibility of an African philosophy being textual as a precondition for any science. Such enumerations will be exposed for their extraverted philosophical underpinnings and their indebtedness to the unchallenged received notions of philosophy. However, Mafeje’s philosophical inclinations will be shown as concerned with challenging and interrogating received knowledge, particularly as it relates to Africa.

According to Mafeje (1971:253);

European colonialism, like any epoch, brought with it certain ways of reconstructing African reality. It regarded African societies as particularly tribal. This approach produced certain blinker or ideological predispositions which made it difficult for those associated with the system to view these societies in any other light. Hence certain modes of thought among European scholars in Africa and their African counterparts have persisted, despite the many important economic and political changes that have occurred in the continent over the last 75-100 years. Therefore, if tribalism is thought of as peculiarly African, then the ideology itself is particularly European in origin.

In the above quoted text Mafeje (1971), *The Ideology of Tribalism*, demonstrates his commitment to holding to scrutiny Europeans speculations about African reality as with the contestable concept of tribe which has no equivalent in African people's languages as Mafeje contends. However, such an interpretation of the African reality demonstrates preconceived European ideas which wilfully neglects African understandings which are contained in the oral traditions as opposed to texts. Put differently Colonial subordination of African ways of living and of understanding reality is further aggravated by the tendency in western philosophy to fetishize abstract principles at the expense of human existential reality.

The first tendency then, to seek to account for African philosophy as formal discipline, as outlined by Mafeje seems not to be a plausible way to go for African philosophy as it seeks to confine African philosophy to European conceptions of philosophy. To legitimate his point Mafeje (1992:2) adduces the article; *Theory and Practice in African Philosophy: The poverty of Speculative Philosophy* by Olabiyi Yai (1977) who in turn objected to the assumption that European philosophy is the sole provider of a valid paradigm for philosophy. Yai according to Mafeje (1992:2) states that "If there is an insistence that African philosophy conform to this paradigm in order to qualify, then we are still faced with the usual European ethnocentrism". The first tendency thereby is negated and the second one endorsed. It is then from the purview of the second tendency that African philosophical projections ought to be engaged. Operating from the second tendency Mafeje (1992) points out the implicit combination of concerns "about... liberation of Blacks in general and that of Black Africans in particular", underlying much of the modern intellectual/philosophical ferment and traditionally expressed in four main modes of discourse, viz, "Political, intellectual, cultural revivalism and philosophical discourse sensu stricto" (1992:3). Hence, Mafeje's conception of African philosophy can be understood as explicitly entailing a liberatory element, the liberation of Africans. Another aspect of liberatory philosophy to be explored concerns the indispensable imperative for any such project, rightly so called, to bring about in its wake some concomitant liberation of philosophical discourse itself, just by virtue of its necessary ground clearing labours involving, as they do, the critiquing of Eurocentricism. However, as we shall see in chapter 3, Mafeje's view of philosophy emanating from his work finds itself entangled within such a problematic: of being indebted to an idealist (or transcendentalist) conception of philosophy which necessitates supplementing which shall be done by turning to the contribution of Nicolas Veroli's *Imagination and politics* (2001) which argues for a materialist conception of philosophy, or the implications of materialism for philosophy: to imagine philosophy as having nothing more than an historical essence; the refusal of the idea of philosophy as inscribed in eternity but the acceptance of the role history plays in the development of philosophical discourses. This will be done to relate Mafeje's ideas and to show their contemporary relevance.

In the article *Africanity: A combative Ontology* Mafeje (2008) purports to provide a reading of some of the salient arguments explored in *Out of one, Many Africans* (1999) by William Martin and Michael West: the issues concerning the demise of Africanity and the necessity of Afrocentrism, which constitute a very important and controversial aspect of African existence in the social sciences. Any earnest engagement with such matters, in as far as Mafeje is concerned, would have to enjoin commitment to rigorous and historical thinking, in turn, as “Nobody can think and act outside historically determined circumstances”, which means that “while we are free to choose the role in which we cast ourselves as agents of history, we do not put on the agenda the social issues to which we respond as these are given to us by history”. To wit, as Mafeje (2008:106) perceptively points out,

[W]e would not talk of freedom, if there was no prior condition in which this was denied; we would not be anti-racist if we had not been its victims; we would not proclaim Africanity, if it had not been denied or degraded; and we would not insist on Afrocentrism, if it had not been for Eurocentric negations.

It therefore is strictly within the locus of a historically determined role (as against the vantage point of, “... the ontological Negro of Senghor or Nkrumah”) that Mafeje’s conception of Africanity and Afrocentrism ultimately is articulated. This is also another virtue in this that, at least in this research, we call an African philosophy of liberation- it locates the subject, the African in this case, within the broader horizon upon which philosophical discourse should be engaged i.e. at the level of reality as is for Dussel (1996:7);

Liberation philosophy affirms that ethics (and therefore politics, as first horizon) is *prima philosophia*. Philosophy begins with reality, and human reality is practical, always a priori person to person relationships in a communication community (of language and life), presupposed in reality (objectively) and transcendently (subjectively).

Moreover, Dussel (1985:9) adds;

The Philosophy that knows how to ponder this reality, the de facto world reality, not from the perspective of the centre of political, economic, or military power but from beyond the frontiers of that world, from the periphery- this philosophy will not be ideological. Its reality is the whole earth; for it the “wretched of the earth” (who are not nonbeing) are also real.

Mafeje’s articulations encompass an unmistakable liberatory element and to that extent then redound to the credit of the corpus of The African philosophy of liberation broadly- whose concerns, include but are by no means exhausted by the question of whether or not there exists an African philosophy.

Mafeje (2008:106) makes the distinction between Africanity and Afrocentrism, although the terms could be used interchangeably, by some conventions. However, for Mafeje (2008) it is conceptually possible to distinguish the two. In as far as Mafeje’s concerned (2008:106)

Afrocentrism can be regarded as a methodological requirement for decolonising knowledge in Africa, or as an antidote to Eurocentrism through which all knowledge about Africa has been filtered. Although this has been justified by appealing to dubious 'universal standards', the fact of the matter is that Africa is the only region which has suffered such total paradigmatic domination.

Mafeje (2008:106) demonstrates this point by referring to an unpublished communication from Kwesi Prah, which states;

[That] Rather strikingly, in comparative terms it is remarkable that when Chinese study Chinese culture and society in their own terms and for their own purposes, western scholarship does not protest. This is because sovereignty of Chinese scholarship on China is accepted. India and the Arab world have almost reached that point. Russians do not look west for understanding their society....neither do the Japanese.

It is specifically in this light that Mafeje finds it important that African scholars insist on producing African centred works about Africa. According to Mafeje (2008:106) Afrocentrism is "a legitimate demand that African scholars study their society from inside and cease being purveyors of an alienated intellectual discourse". This is yet another liberatory philosophical element in Mafeje's work in that it seeks to combat Eurocentric negations of intellectual and philosophical discourse. This is a discourse concerned with authentic self-representation and the unshackling of the imagination from Eurocentric conceptual incarceration. As expressed by Serequebehan (1997) "one of the most important and basic tasks of the contemporary discourse of African philosophy is its critical negative project". This means that the critique of Eurocentrism is a *conditio sine qua non* for the practice of African philosophy because the horizon, the (Post) colonial condition, of contemporary discourse on African philosophy itself entails colonialism and Eurocentrism.

Africanity on the other hand is different from Afrocentrism according to Mafeje (2008), Afrocentrism is referential while Africanity has an emotive force (political, ideological, cosmological, and intellectual). Mafeje (2008:107) points out that the ontology of Africanity is thereby influenced by prior "exclusivist ontologies such as white racist categorisations and supremacist European selfidentities in particular". These, the exclusivist ontologies, had it them the basic belief that black people are inherently inferior and this brought about the tradition among Africans in the diaspora which may be classified as 'vindicationist'. An example of this tradition that can be pointed out is that of Negritude proudly espoused by the Senegalese Leopold Sedar Senghor, which according to Mafeje (2008) was an appeal to greater human qualities from the Africans as opposed to the appeal to race an example of which is referred to as Ubuntu in the Bantu languages. According to Mafeje (2008:107) "Africanity is an assertion of an identity that has been denied; it is a Pan-Africanist revulsion against external imposition or refusal to be dictated by others". Understood from this point of view then Africanity can be understood as political and ideological reflex which has with it the renewed vigour

to initiate an African renaissance. However, for Mafeje (2008) although this may seem to include every black African in the world but for Mafeje (2008) this is not so because this is at odds with reality both socially and conceptually. According to Mafeje (2008:108) “Culturally, socially and historically the African-Americans and the west Indians have long ceased to be Africans unless we are talking biology”. What then is an African? It would seem that according to Mafeje (2008) being an African involves being situated in the continent of Africa. Indeed According to Mafeje (2008:109) even the whites in southern Africa have Africanity but have been denying it because they have been playing ‘European’ for too long. From this logic even the Arabs in the northern part of Africa are also Africans since they are also located in the continent.

Are these justifiable enough grounds for Mafeje to exclude African Americans from the realm of Africanity as he proposes? And to what extent have white South Africans denied their supposed Africanity? I aim to provide further clarification of these issues in the research.

Mafeje (2008:108) adds;

Afrocentrism made in America is a contradiction in terms. Black Americans, no matter how well intentioned they are, cannot make indigenous knowledge for Africans in America nor could continental Africans do the same for any length of time in America. While individual African-Americans can become experts on Africa, they cannot in the name of Africanity speak for the Africans. Africanity insists that Africans, in the continent, think, speak, and do things for themselves in the first place.

This is a well-founded point made by Mafeje in that it seeks to empower the Africans in the continent to speak for themselves about their own problems they encounter. However, Mafeje (2008:108) also admits that this does not imply that Africans in the continent cannot learn from diasporic Africans. This admission serves to inform us that a meaningful working relationship can be established between continental and diasporic Africans without any domination. And this can also be done in the name of Africanity since “life is mutual aid” or “Izandla ziyagezana” according to Ubuntu.

Another radical liberatory element contained in Mafeje’s (2008) Africanity may be discerned in his questioning of the end of African studies in Africa. According to Mafeje (2008:109) “African studies are an anomaly in Africa found only in South Africa, the vortex of white racism. To study themselves, Africans do not need African studies as a separate intellectual or political endeavour”. This then is a call for radical decolonisation of the social sciences and philosophy in Africa in that everything has to be authentically African. This is because if African studies exists as a separate category then what would be offered in the mainstream? It would be not African. It would then seem that every discourse in the university that concerns the humanities will have to be articulated from an African perspective and this is liberatory, both to discourse and the oppressed as they have long suffered intellectual

alienation as expressed by Mafeje. It would thus be understood that Archie Mafeje has insisted on the African centeredness of philosophy in Africa as a historically and politically reflexive critical and emancipatory discourse which serves to liberate the oppressed and consequently liberates the discourse itself away from what he calls Eurocentric negations which are evident in the European epistemological paradigm. This is a philosophy which ponders the reality and its own reality as opposed to being concerned with abstractions about the real which borrows nothing from the real but duly concerned with reality as to effect positive change, and thereby qualifies to be called a philosophy of liberation that is articulated from the periphery and that which seeks to liberate the oppressed and the consequent liberation of discourse itself with his radical critique of Eurocentricity and the insistence of the end of African studies in Africa which only serve to maintain the colonial order. Bongani Nyoka (2012, 2013), Jimi Adesina (2008), have noted the significance of Mafeje's methods for decolonising sociology in South Africa and the pursuit of endogeneity. Dani Wadada Nabudere (2007) has also discussed the significance of Mafeje's intellectual activism for decolonisation of the social sciences as well as Lungile Ntsebenza (2014) for an account of Mafeje at UCT. For the purposes of this research I shall work out a synthesis of the implications of such non-disciplinary work to map out a liberatory philosophical practice emanative from Mafeje's work.

### Research problem

Drawing on the work of Archie Mafeje to exposit the nature and content of African philosophy as emancipatory discourse, this research aims to address the problem of the question concerning the existence of African philosophy as it has presented itself here in South Africa where it remains marginalised and exotified. Ongoing marginalisation and quarantining of African philosophy constitutes a very serious problem for epistemic justice. The question concerning the existence of African philosophy is causally related to the ongoing marginalisation of African Philosophy: the question would not have arisen if African Philosophy constituted any basis for the philosophical enterprise since this is an African country. This epistemic injustice has been propelled by what black philosopher Charles Mills has termed *white Ignorance*, which is the intentional cultivation and protection of ignorance; not a lack of knowledge but a practice of conditioned and intentioned not-knowing (Mills, 2007). And, in the case of this country, over-reliance on the presupposed superiority of European and or Anglo-Saxon models and their reproduction and maintenance, also constitutes the problem.

## Research questions

The problem can be summarised as thus;

1. How does the marginalisation of African Philosophy and white ignorance provide grounds for the question of its existence?
2. What essential criteria and conditions for African Philosophy does Mafeje identify?
3. How can Veroli's account of materialist conception of philosophy help supplement Mafeje's account of African philosophy as a historically and politically reflexive liberatory discourse?

## Theory and methodology

This study takes on the position of African philosophical hermeneutics which describes here a position of interpretation from the perspective of the indigenous people conquered in the unjust wars of colonisation (Okere, 1975, Serequeberhan, 1994). We agree with Serequeberhan that as a practice of resistance "African philosophy has a double task: de-structive and constructive. In this it is a practice of resistance, for it is engaged in combat on the level of reflection and ideas, aimed at dismantling the symmetry of concepts and theoretic constructs that have sustained Euro-American global dominance. It is a resistance focused on challenging the core myths of the West—its self-flattering narratives—in terms of which its domination of the earth was justified". This is important for an exposition of Mafeje's philosophy which recognises this primary fact about thought and its relation to its historicity (ala Castoriadis).

This is a desktop research which will employ a standard method of philosophical analysis and argumentation (synthesis). At one level, this method involves conceptual or linguistic analysis, to provide clarity on how we use concepts and on the meaning of words. The other level is that of argumentation and defending particular theses and substantive views. Philosophy is about understanding that invites action. In order to understand something dialogue is necessary. On this this research follows Ramose's insight that Dialogue is the method and means of doing philosophy. It is reliance on reason and not force as the means to resolve conflicts even if the resolution may be to agree to disagree. As Dladla (2016:18) points out "dialogue consists, in part at least, of questions. Questions are, of course, always asked by someone from somewhere. The reason for the questions is tied very much with the identity of the asker who derives both his ignorance and will to know from his identity and experience. Central to our conception is the understanding that philosophy when it is

philosophy proper is not about itself as a reified ‘objective’ abstraction inviting only interpretation. On the contrary, philosophy proper is inescapably about experience upon which it reflects critically”

Table linking research questions to research method

Research question	Data sources and methods	Justification
1. How does the marginalisation of African Philosophy and white ignorance provide grounds for the question of its existence?	Sources for this will be secondary sources which have dealt with eurocentricity in philosophy and the marginality of African philosophy. This will be aided with the primary experience I have as a student of philosophy.	This will allow the examination of the literature from the researcher’s own lived experience as a student of philosophy in South Africa where African Philosophy remains marginalised.
2. What essential criteria and conditions for African Philosophy does Mafeje identify?	Mafeje’s primary texts will be consulted both that deal explicitly with African philosophy and those concerned with the broader social sciences particularly anthropology	To identify the essential features of African Philosophy Mafeje presents in his engagement with questioning of the existence of African philosophy.
3. How can Veroli’s account of materialist conception of philosophy help supplement Mafeje’s account of African philosophy as a historically and politically reflexive liberatory discourse?	Here Nicolas Veroli’s PhD Dissertation <i>Imagination and Politics: A study in historical ontology</i> will be discussed and contrasted to Mafeje’s materialist/Marxist approach in his work.	To draw on Veroli’s account of materialist conception of philosophy to help clarify and supplement Mafeje’s account of African philosophy as a mode of historically and politically reflexive liberatory discourse.

### Significance of the study

The significance of this study is its attempt to engage with some of the debates concerned with decolonisation/Africanisation/transformation of the curriculum which have come to the fore with the student movement since 2015. The aim is to elucidate and defend the points about the decolonisation of the curriculum and why African Philosophy should be the basis of philosophical activity in an African country which was also Mafeje’s concern, whose contribution has often been overlooked. More, importantly this study seeks to demonstrate the fractured boundaries of what constitutes disciplines in the African context and how African researchers in different disciplines, like Sociology, Anthropology etc., are led to philosophical deliberations which necessitate the transcendence of the constituted boundaries

## Structure

### 1. Chapter 1 Introduction

Here we aim to introduce the topic and how it has unfolded from the experience of being a student of philosophy in South Africa post 1994 where African philosophy and philosophers remain marginal. We wish to outline the relationship philosophy has to its place, or social milieu, and how the persistence of the question of African Philosophy, its denial to be precise, constitutes a problem for epistemic justice. We shall show how some of the themes explored by Archie Mafeje in his writings constitute a philosophy of liberation concerned with epistemic justice.

### 2. Chapter 2: Philosophy in South Africa: the northern problem

In this chapter we shall follow the history of the practice of philosophy in this country as outlined by More (2004) and Dladla (2016) whose ideological predisposition to it is identical to one which we wish to elaborate in this project particularly their problematizing of 'South Africa' as it comes to exist through time and how philosophical practice is entangled within this problematic. We wish to show how the doubt concerning the humanity of the African legitimises the northbound gaze South African Philosophy has been engaged in and the negative implications this has for the colonized. We problematize this practice as counter to what philosophy should be. In other words I wish to show the colonial character of such a practice. We shall follow Dussel, Ramose, and Serequebehan in disentangling such a practice in this regard.

### 3. Chapter 3: The Question of the existence of African Philosophy

In this chapter we shall map out the debate about the status of ethno-philosophy and professional philosophy, though not to exhaust it, pertaining to the existence of African Philosophy. We shall try to limit ourselves to Pauline Hountondji, Abiola Irele and Macien Towa who detail the history of the evolution of modern African philosophical practice. In this we shall rely on Tsenay Serequebehan's synthesis of such a debate from a hermeneutical philosophical position: all Philosophy and African philosophy in particular is ethno-philosophy, meaning that all philosophy is inseparable from the society which produces the philosophy contra Hountondji and others who adhere to the view of the western epistemological paradigm's superiority. We shall enumerate the views of these philosophers around what philosophy is and what it needs to be.

### 4. Chapter 4: Archie Mafeje and the liberation of 'philosophy'

In this chapter we situate Mafeje within the corpus of literature concerned with the existence of African philosophy, or what constitutes a philosophy so to speak. In this I seek to demonstrate through

an interpretation of Mafeje's methodological approach and the evolution of his thought, with epistemic justice as the core concern of his deliberations.

#### 5. Chapter 5: The liberation of Philosophy as a Philosophy of liberation

In this chapter we follow the discussion of the historical essence of philosophy by Nicolas Veroli "Imagination and Politics" and Castoriadis in dialogue with Mafeje's considerations and that of other African philosophers. This will be done to show why the persistence of the question about the existence of African philosophy is fixated within the Eurocentric conception of philosophy which in our case manifests through conquest and invasion which Mafeje's philosophical projected was so fixated in disentangling which however run into some limitations which necessitate supplement.

#### 6. Chapter 6: Conclusion (The end of White Philosophy and the Azanian challenge)

Here we will reflect on the philosophical implications of the recent happenings in philosophy in South Africa, the demise of Philosophical Society of Southern Africa and the birth of the Azanian philosophical society, and the radical potentialities for philosophy therein. Given the nature and content of African Philosophy, as a historically and politically grounded emancipatory discourse, which the advent of the Azanian society demonstrates to which my interpretation of Mafeje's work also presents such a challenge to the status quo in South African philosophy.

## Chapter 2: Philosophy in South Africa: The Northern Problem

*In spite of decolonisation, the philosophical character of the European standpoint on colonisation together with its corresponding practices remains unchanged in its relations with its erstwhile colonies. It is precisely this condition which calls for the need for the authentic liberation of Africa. This speaks of a two-fold exigency. One is that the colonised people's conception of reality, knowledge and truth should be released from slavery and dominance under the European epistemological paradigm. Without this essential first step there cannot evolve a common authentic and liberating universe of discourse. The second exigency is that the evolving common universe of discourse must take into account the rational demands of justice to the colonised arising from the unjust wars of conquest that resulted in colonial dispossessing of territory as well as the enslavement of the colonised. These rational demands of justice are specifically the restoration of territory to its indigenous rightful owners and reparations to them. This two-fold exigency is the indispensable necessity for the authentic liberation of Africa and, indeed, all the colonised people of the world. – Mogobe Ramose (1999:33)*

*If by integration you understand a breakthrough into white society by blacks, an assimilation and acceptance into an already established set of norms and code of behaviour set up and maintained by whites, then YES I am against it. I am against the superior-inferior white-black stratification that makes the white a perpetual teacher and the black a perpetual pupil (and a poor one at that). I am against the intellectual arrogance of white people that makes them believe that white leadership is a sine qua non in this country and that whites are divinely appointed pace-setters in progress. I am against the fact that a settler minority should impose a system of values on an indigenous people -Steve Bantubonke Biko (2004:26)*

### Introduction

It is important to begin this first chapter with a brief history of philosophy in South Africa, a history which is straightforwardly tied to the history that is constitutive of what has come to be known as 'South Africa' today. Indeed the two cannot be separated as exploring one without the other will be like taking the grocery bag and leaving the groceries behind. The colonial character of South African philosophical practice, which we aim to discuss in this chapter, is a by-product and expression of the European colonial enterprise which found its articulation with the arrival of the first Dutch settlers of 1652 and the British 1820 settlers. Both settler populations were unified against the indigenous conquered population after the resulting wars between themselves, over our land and its resources

(including our labour), which have been identified as the wars for South Africa<sup>5</sup>. South Africa then comes to be a republic after the unification of the two Boer republics (the Transvaal and the Orange Free State) and Natal and the Cape of Good Hope which were in the possession of the British. South Africa comes to exist as a reconciliatory pact between the two oppressor groups who have become one in a union that is South Africa<sup>6</sup>. This establishes South Africa as a product of a colonial imagination, and thereby deeply troubling and problematic in the imagination of the indigenous populations as the poet Ingaopele Madingoane (1978) enunciates:

They came from the west sailing to the East// with hatred and disease flowing from their  
flesh// and a burden to harden our lives// they claimed to be friends// when they found us  
friendly// and when foreigner met foreigner they fought for the reign

Indeed the material living conditions of the indigenous conquered peoples speak volumes in this regard: landlessness, informal settlements, low life expectancy, poor health etc. This is the burdensome life of the native/colonised that Frantz Fanon (1963) identified as opposed to that of the settler<sup>7</sup> which can be distinguished as the zone of life and the zone of death respectively. Moreover, the colonised situation, or the black condition, is what Afro pessimists, followers of Frantz Fanon, have termed social death, following Orlando Paterson's *Slavery and Social death*, which is a fatal being

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<sup>5</sup> According to Mogobe Ramose (2005:9) "the Anglo-Boer War was waged on the assumption that the British and the Afrikaners had the right to claim title to South African territory. By the time the war actually broke out, both belligerents had contending claims to acquired rights over South African territory. Conspicuously missing in these claims was the question whether or not the indigenous conquered people of South Africa had a prior right to title over South Africa. This omission is consistent with western discourse on conquest. An essential feature of this discourse is that morality, law and justice applied only to the "civilised" people like the British and the Afrikaners. According to this reasoning it reasoning, it was correct to hold that South Africa belongs only to the British and the Afrikaners."

<sup>6</sup> Ndumiso Dladla (2016:162) relying on Jon Soske shows how non-racialism developed so as to bridge the gap between the Afrikaner and the English, Dladla (2016:162) elaborates : "Soske has argued that despite the popular tendency assuming that the concept of the "non-racial" originated from within the ranks of the liberal tradition, specifically around the qualified franchise in the Cape, it is, in fact, surprisingly the case that "non-racial" was used first in South Africa in the beginning of the 20th century to describe "inter-group" relations between the English and Afrikaner people without regard to ethnicity. This early use originated from the Afrikaner Bond. In its early use, it came to indicate pro-imperial white unity in South Africa. It did not as such from its beginnings in South African discourse emerge in the supposed opposition to racism but rather marked an explicit evolution of racism; of better cooperation by the conqueror in pursuit of the subjugation of the indigenous conquered people."

<sup>7</sup> "The 'native' sector is not complementary to the European sector. The two confront each other, but not in the service of a higher unity. Governed by a purely Aristotelian logic, they follow the dictates of mutual exclusion... The colonists sector is a sector built to last, all stone and steel. It's a sector of lights and paved roads, where the trash cans constantly overflow with strange and wonderful garbage, undreamed of leftovers...the colonized sector, or at least the "native" quarters, the shanty town, the Medina, the reservation, is a disreputable place inhabited by disreputable people... the colonized sector is a famished sector, hungry for bread, meat, shoes, coal and light" (Fanon, 1963:4).

alive<sup>8</sup>. Being a Black<sup>9</sup> student of philosophy what was of concern to me always was how philosophy shunned from reality, or perhaps my reality, and how this robbed us of philosophy proper, a concern with the real, non-philosophical or everyday, instead of uncritically mimicking what is being done in the North: continental Europe, England and north America. This chapter will explore the history of philosophy in South Africa, which is linked with the history of the coming to being of South Africa itself, and the resulting north-boundedness of the practice which establishes it as purely colonial. We shall not exhaust the entire history of the discipline but shall limit our discussion to the overarching themes: mimesis and Eurocentrism. Moreover, this chapter will also explore the existential challenges of such an undertaking on the part of the colonised. Furthermore, this chapter aims to show how such a colonially inspired practice has readily at hand the questioning of the existence of an African philosophy which is tied to the denial of equal human status to the colonised. In the following section we shall provide a short history of institutionalised philosophy in South Africa following Mabogo More (2004) and Ndumiso Dladla (2016) who have discussed the coming to being of it elaborately, and whose ideological predisposition and orientation we fully share (precisely their incredulity to pronouncements about the present which would render it as a radical rupture from an old 'apartheid' as has been the Azanian school's tendency). Our purpose will be to outline the overarching themes in such a historical unfolding: mimesis and Eurocentrism<sup>10</sup>, which as we shall argue remain undisturbed albeit the supposed transition to a 'post' apartheid. Consistent with our argument it shall be revealed that this 'post' in post-apartheid should not be understood as the unravelling of the fundamental contradiction in South Africa since apartheid,<sup>11</sup> beginning in 1948 was the "strengthening and

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<sup>8</sup> Following Lewis Gordon's schematisation of Frantz Fanon's arguments in 'Black Skin White Masks' Frank Wilderson (2008:98) points out; "The world cannot accommodate a black(ened) relation at the level of bodies—subjectivity. Thus, Black "presence is a form of absence" for to see a Black is to see the Black, an ontological frieze that waits for a gaze, rather than a living ontology moving with agency in the field of vision....there is 'something' absent whenever blacks are present. The more present a black is, the more absent is this 'something.' And the more absent a black is, the more present is this something." Blackness, then, is the destruction of presence, for Blacks "seem to suck presence into themselves as a black hole, pretty much like the astrophysical phenomenon that bears that name"

<sup>9</sup> A descendent of the indigenous people conquered in the unjust wars of colonisation is what 'blackness' refers to in this regard as an inherent category of conquest: the triumph of the colonizers 'whiteness' which creates its other as 'black' i.e. without white there is no sense or meaning of black. For a detailed elaboration of this position see Frank B. Wilderson, III (2008) 'Biko and the problematic of presence' in *Biko Lives* edited by Andile Mngxitama et.al

<sup>10</sup> Following Tsenay Serequebehan (2002:64) we define Eurocentrism as "a pervasive bias located in modernity's self-consciousness of itself. It is grounded at its core in the metaphysical belief or idea (idee) that European existence is qualitatively superior to other forms of human life".

<sup>11</sup> According to Gail Gerhart (1978:4) "Apartheid, or the doctrine of racial segregation, is the philosophy of the National party which has ruled South Africa since 1948. The earliest roots of race discrimination can be found in the seventeenth century when whites first colonized the Cape of Good Hope, but apartheid as a full-fledged political ideology developed much later, following the transition to an industrial economy in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Pressed both by white employers and white workers, who shared an interest in the tight control of black labor, successive governments enacted a structure of laws and regulations designed to guarantee the superior economic status of whites and to perpetuate a master-servant relationship

perfecting an already existing system of racial discrimination and domination” (Dladla, 2016:34). Rather it is our argument that the focus on apartheid as a fundamental contradiction serves to obfuscate the real problem that is conquest<sup>12</sup> which continues to express itself through the marginality of African philosophy, which is rather anomalous in an African country as Biko (2004:26) well noted;

[For] one cannot escape the fact that the culture shared by the majority group in any given society must ultimately determine the broad direction taken by the joint culture of that society. This need not cramp the style of those who feel differently but on the whole, *a country in Africa, in which the majority of the people are African must inevitably exhibit African values and be truly African in style* (my emphasis).

It is thereby imperative for this chapter to begin with a brief examination of the history of institutionalised philosophy in South Africa to illustrate the continuities in the present with the supposed colonial past and to provide the justification for a liberatory practice of philosophy through an examination of Mafeje’s work.

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between the races in all spheres. Gradually gaining ground against the entrenched vestiges of integrationism built into the political system inherited from Britain at the time of Union in 1910, segregationists achieved a major breakthrough in 1936 with the removal of the last Africans from the common voters' roll of the Cape Province—a political turning point to which we shall refer again in due course. The [present] ascendance of apartheid as an ideology began with the 1948 election victory of Daniel F. Malan and the National party, which at that time drew its support almost entirely from rural and working-class Afrikaners.”

<sup>12</sup> According to Ramose (2007, 320), “[t]he proliferation of ‘anti-apartheid’ organisations, especially in Western Europe, certainly made a positive contribution towards freedom in South Africa. However, they had the infelicitous effect of misleading the gullible into the belief that apartheid in South Africa was the fundamental problem. Abolish apartheid, so the reasoning went, then all shall be fine. In this way, the question of freedom in South Africa was reduced to the problem of the constitutional recognition of the ‘civil rights’ of the conquered peoples of South Africa. Thus an all-inclusive constitution, recognising the ‘civil rights’ of all the peoples of South Africa, was deemed to be the solution to the apartheid problem. On this reasoning, it was unnecessary to question the morality and political legitimacy of the ‘right of conquest’ because South Africa belonged to all who lived in it”. Ramose’s diagnosis of the fundamental problem in South Africa is consistent with the reasoning of the Pan Africanist Congress of Azania concerning the African’s sovereign title to territory which the Europeans through their questionable rights to conquest consistently denied. Izwe Lethu! The PAC slogan went, reacting to the Kliptown Charter of 1955, which was officially adopted in 1958, where the Africanists staged their exit from the ANC. The charter famously asserts that “South Africa belongs to all who live in it; black and white”, which therefore nullifies the sovereignty of the African over the lost territory due to the unjust wars of colonisation against the indigenous people by equating their claim to that of their conqueror (whites). This then was to be the ideological impetus which inspired the ANC-led struggle for inclusion, which received its success through the negotiated settlement that brought about what was to be the “new” South Africa. To this Ramose (2007, 320) laments: “The defenders of the compromise that has resulted in the ‘new’ South Africa argue, among other things, that the compromise was the best option at the time since it averted an impending ‘civil war’. Suffice it to state that, since colonisation, South Africa has been practically in a state of war. A hypothetical ‘civil war’ in the 1990s could not justify the sacrifice at the altar of compromise of the moral and political imperative to bring about a just and peaceful end to the ensuing colonial war.

## Some notes on the relationship between Philosophy and History

*How do those whose ground is taken from them, who are taken from their ground, who are taken away from themselves as ground—how do they embrace that groundlessness as possibility when it is likewise marked by the scandal of an unaddressed crime? Jared Sexton (2018), On Black negativity or the affirmation of nothing*

Perhaps before we can continue with our discussion concerning the history of institutionalised philosophy in South Africa it is important to outline our understanding of what is meant by history and how it relates to our understanding of what is philosophy. Because history itself is not the past, but an account of it or an attempted reconstruction of it, it is inadvertently impossible to imagine unanimity on any such account or its objectivity so to speak. Precisely because there exists no such a place outside of society, and our position within it, from where we can examine it or have any meaningful account of it. This predicament prohibits any such account's ability to achieve the status of objectivity, not to say there has not been any such pretences, but to outline every such attempt as socially located. Furthermore, it is our aim and project to understand those pretences and attempts as articulating a socially dominant position in society, which in our case inescapably is the position which advances the interests of white elites and their predominantly white allies. Not surprising considering the overt exclusion and marginalisation of Africans to date, not to speak of the attachment to Europe, as would a colony to its mother, that South African education, including philosophical education, has proven a mimicry of European and American education and norms as the exclusive sites for any philosophical justifiability. Because in the colonial psyche there exists no such possibility in a supposedly dark continent, void of any history and possibility of knowledge (ala Hegel), they have come to enlighten.

Ndumiso Dladla (2017) has identified racism, following Steve Biko before him, and particularly *Against an analytic(liberal) conception of race/ism* with its attendant aversion to history, as rooted not only in feelings of superiority by whites to their racial others, but more importantly their *power* over them, what Dladla (2017)<sup>13</sup> has designated as *historical power*: precisely “the historical establishment and systemisation of political and existential synonymy between whiteness and humanity (and its correspondent rights)”. According to Dladla (2017) “white supremacy has meant that, beyond the Eurocentricism which has imposed European cultural and social standards as the human standard, the very life chances and life expectancies of white people are better and higher in the world”, what Frantz

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<sup>13</sup> Dladla, N. 2017. *Blacks Could be racist: a note on historical power*.  
[https://www.huffingtonpost.co.za/ndumiso-dladla/blacks-could-be-racist-a-note-on-historical-power\\_a\\_22022517/](https://www.huffingtonpost.co.za/ndumiso-dladla/blacks-could-be-racist-a-note-on-historical-power_a_22022517/)

Fanon has theorized as the Manichean reality/*materiality* of the colonial situation; more acutely the zone of the settler and that of the native<sup>14</sup>.

Furthermore, following Bernard Makhosezwe Magubane (2007:252) it would certainly be a cliché to state that such an oppressively racist and colonial state as South Africa needs a racist historiography. Indeed this is another dimension of historical power as identified by Dladla (2017) because white supremacy, as a form of historical power, “is established on the one hand through the enjoyment and exercise of social, economic and political power collectively, that is as a group, over a significant period of time” while on the other hand, and more importantly for our project “it includes the enjoyment of power over the very enterprise and discipline of *historical writing and representation itself*” which includes: “the power to create institutions of historical production, as well as representative academics, cultural producers and public figures who authorise one's version of the account of the past” (Dladla, 2017 emphasis mine). As Magubane (2007:252) laments; “to be an African, in particular in South Africa, meant and still means to suffer privation, on a daily basis. But among South African historians, it seems not to have been a very important issue”. There are many reasons that can be given to account for such a situation including the peculiar form of ignorance associated with being white, which we discuss in further detail in chapter 2 following Charles Mills’ conceptualisation. However, for our purpose in this section it is important to highlight the existential plight of the African, who becomes black through conquest by the white, which renders her *invisible* to history.

Precisely because conquest of the indigenous Africans, in the unjust wars of colonisation, was predicated on the unethical doubt concerning their humanity, which justified their brutalisation through enslavement and seizure of territory precisely because they not human beings to begin, who are forever imperceptible to the plight of human possibility. That such a doubt was harboured and nurtured, in Western philosophy, by such luminaries of the Western philosophical project as far back as Aristotle, not to mention moderns like Kant, has been the work of Black/African philosophy as a critical negative project which has broadened and enhanced our understanding both of the West and philosophy itself. Furthermore, this has meant a re-evaluation of Western philosophy from the perspective of her non-European others who have suffered alienation from it, and a re-examination of its methods and starting points; many of which who were inordinate for understanding our reality.

A study of the history of South African philosophy, which cannot be untied with that of South Africa writ large, presents to us an opportunity to ponder on the reality that is South African philosophy to

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<sup>14</sup> Precisely the difference between the abundant life of the colonizer and the living death of the colonized.

date without the pretence of not being positioned in this unfolding as its negative as part of the *Wretched of the earth*, to use Fanon's pertinent phrase. As Magubane (2007:252) reminds us:

Forces that emerged victorious in the struggles between the colonizer and the colonized created South African history, as written by recognized historians. If one looks at the history of higher education in South Africa, there is no question that the forces that endowed its institutions were the major beneficiaries of African helotry.

This should cast doubt on the objective status of such accounts, as those by liberals and neo Marxist revisionist that Magubane identifies, precisely because, as Magubane (2007:253) adds: "the subjects we choose to study, the questions we ask, the concepts and theories we use, are not neutral, or motivated by purely academic concerns. What we study has a lot to do with relations of power", which in our case is the lack of any power or subordination. Mills (2007) has theorized white ignorance as an epistemic deficiency resulting from the privileged position whites occupy in society, which leads them to be incredulous about many aspects of reality that the subordinated, the Blacks, cannot afford to be. This then leads to the subordinate position as the productive site for knowledge about the world and reality as Mills (1998: 17) attests;

Insofar as this is a philosophy that develops out of the resistance to oppression, it is a practical and politically oriented philosophy that, long before Marx was born, sought to interpret the world correctly so as better to change it... philosophy is here called upon to evaluate and counter the dehumanization to which people and ideas of African descent have been subjected through the history of colonialism and of European racism. In a broad sense, virtually all African-American philosophy is "political," insofar as the insistence on one's black humanity in a racist world is itself a political act.

It is therefore from such a position, that of being Black in South Africa with much similarities with being African-American, that the history of institutionalised philosophy shall be narrated for the reason of understanding our present as not having changed much from the past. Real change in this regard would be to undo the Eurocentric character of the practice and its northboundedness. Following Mills (1998) we agree that Black philosophy is inherently political in that it aspires to make an impact to the world and reality as a matter of urgency, and cannot afford to leave everything as is. Such an impact, in our case, cannot be made without understanding our object historically as a philosophical enactment of conquest and its undisturbed continuity to the present.

## Philosophy in South Africa: a short history

Precisely because post-apartheid is not post conquest, which is to say that there is a continuity between apartheid and its afterlife 'post 'apartheid which leaves the problem of conquest undisturbed as Mahmood Mamdani has so poignantly pointed out<sup>15</sup>, this section then outlines the history of institutionalised philosophical practice in South Africa from the position of the conquered whose epistemic position, indeed positioning, has received less elucidation in the learned public let alone in philosophical discourse. To problematize conquest, instead of focusing on the illusory apartheid, as has been the focus of the so called 'liberation movement', necessarily also calls into question the naming of this territory as 'South Africa': because it is not from the volition of the indigenous conquered people<sup>16</sup>, which then properly establishes it as a purely colonial invention. Precisely, as Valentin Mudimbe (1988:1) informs us;

Colonialism and colonisation basically mean organisation, arrangement. The two words derive from the Latin word *colere*, meaning to cultivate or design. Indeed the historical colonial experience does not and obviously cannot reflect the peaceful connotations of these words. But it can be admitted that colonists (those settling in a region) as well as colonialists (those exploiting a territory by dominating a local majority) have tended to organise and transform non-European areas into fundamentally European constructs.

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<sup>15</sup> In his inaugural lecture at the University of Cape Town suggestively titled "When Do Settlers become Natives?" Ugandan intellectual Mahmood Mamdani provides illuminative remarks concerning conquest and its particular significance as exemplified by the South African situation; "Settlers are made by conquest, not just by immigration. Settlers are kept settlers by a form of the state that makes a distinction—particularly juridical—between conquerors and conquered, settlers and natives, and makes it the basis of other distinctions that tend to buttress the conquerors and isolate the conquered, politically. However fictitious these distinctions may appear historically, they become real political facts for they are embodied in real political institutions... The South African transition has a double significance from a continental point of view. For the first time in the history of African decolonisation, a settler minority has relinquished exclusive political power without an outright political defeat. I am not arguing that this minority has given up its interests, only that it has consented to exploring ways of defending these interests other than a monopoly over political power and the rights of citizenship. In doing so, I believe it has established—in the native eyes—a political and moral claim to citizenship in a post-apartheid order ... the south African transition means that nowhere on this continent has a settler minority succeeded in declaring and sustaining the independence of a settler colony".

<sup>16</sup> This was the contention of the Africanist school in liberation struggle history which revolutionised the congress movement in the 1940's, giving it a mass character instead of being merely a petitionist movement as it was from its inception, with the birth of the ANC youth league championed by the Africanists such as Anton Lembede and Peter Mda. However, such revolutionary sentiments were to find independent expression and articulation in 1958 when the Africanists exited the congress movement, after its infiltration by white communists who wrote the freedom charter for them which contended that "South Africa belongs to all who live in it Black and white", and founded the Pan Africanist Movement of Azania in 1959. It is interesting to note that the Black consciousness movement that would be born about a decade later also refused to be identified as South African and also opted for Azania which is a contention against the questionable right of conquest that gave the conquerors the right to name this territory as 'South Africa'. For a history of the PAC of Azania and struggle history see Gail Gerhart (1978) *Black Power in South Africa*. And Thomas and Karris Carter *From Protest to Challenge vol 3 1953-1964*.

Indeed the coming to being of South Africa is made possible by violent incursions by the colonisers against the colonised and the seizure of territory that accompanies it which, by some accounts, began in the mid seventeenth century with the arrival of the Dutch (Terreblanche, 2002). However, such violence found justification because the African was in the lack in terms of properly human qualities: rationality, which the coloniser had in abundance, as demonstrated by Western philosophy's denial of African humanity among others since Aristotle at least (Ramose, 1999; 5).

Furthermore, the founding of the universities by the European settler ultimately solidifies the image of the African as a lesser human, incapable of creating knowledge, which saw the settler recreate Europe in Africa as Dladla (2016:28) attests;

Initially the school was to serve the settler's immediate personal interest fulfilling the wish to remain intimately connected to 'the metropolis' or "source" (of civilisation and culture). Thus the curriculum and approach to teaching were as consistent with the trends in the original home of the settler as possible. The initial objective was to ensure that the graduate of the university in the colony received an education comparable in character and quality to that of her counterpart at home.

Even the architecture of the seating in lecture rooms was consistent with those in the metropole notwithstanding the teaching and examining procedures, which speaks of a deliberate ignorance of the space and experiences which the place they exist in affords (Dladla, 2016:29). Apart from the settlers personal interests in recreating the university in the image of true civilisation and culture, that the mother country ceaselessly has in abundance, the school and the university alike were to serve an altruistic function for the colonised: "to civilise (humanise) the as yet "sub-human African" by introducing her to the culture, language, religion, values and knowledge of her supposedly superior conqueror" (ibid). Notwithstanding 1994 supposedly marking a transition to a more just society predicated on the values of non-racialism, as pronounced in the constitution, the outlined situation has continued undisturbed<sup>17</sup>.

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<sup>17</sup> Dladla (2016:31) attests to the fact that "[m]uch of the curriculum in South African universities is still obdurately chauvinistic and not even, as might arguably be the case with other parts of the world, a locally-derived cultural chauvinism but the most classical and unapologetic Eurocentrism. It has a bias against and condescension towards "non-European" thought and even more especially against the African thought and experience. The scholars, theories, methods and experiences favoured are usually exclusively Western. In the case of African philosophy for example after previewing a typical South African curriculum and teaching programme one could be forgiven for assuming that African Philosophy did not exist". Indeed my personal experience as a philosophy student in a post-apartheid South Africa is testimony to this, I remember asking one of my educators whether Africans had any contribution to philosophy and was told that there was none and that perhaps I could be the first (I offer my personal reflection in the following section).

To be sure, South Africa has two contending traditions of colonialism: the Dutch (who arrived in 1652) and the English (who arrived in the 1820s). The former albeit it's self-proclaimed re-identification as Afrikaner and its language Afrikaans has continually relied on Continental Europe for cultural, religious and intellectual inspiration. While the latter has also looked upon Britain and America for its cultural inspiration. These two traditions reproduced themselves respectively in the realms of institutionalised philosophy and respective university orientation: the Afrikaner with European Continental philosophy and the English with analytic philosophy (More, 2004). It is interesting to note that both traditions that would constitute institutionalised philosophy in South Africa began in the nineteenth century (Dladla, 2016. More, 2004). We shall begin with a brief exposition of the Afrikaner tradition then followed by the Anglo-Saxon.

The Afrikaans institutionalised philosophical tradition owes its beginnings to the theological school in Stellenbosch where there was offerings in the history of philosophy (More, 2004:151). According to More (2004:151);

After Stellenbosch, several Afrikaans-medium universities emerged in the Orange Free State and around Johannesburg and Pretoria. From the cultural and religious traditions of the Afrikaner people a certain distinct Calvinist and neo-Fichtean philosophy developed, especially at Potchefstroom University. Most of its advocates came from or studied in Europe under philosophers such as Schelling, Herder, or Fichte and were also under the influence of Kant, Kierkegaard, Husserl, Abraham Kuyper, etc. – mostly German and Dutch philosophers. From the outset, the dominant tradition in most Afrikaans universities has been Kuyperian neo-Calvinism combined with neo-Fichtean nationalism, both of which provided the bases for the apartheid system. One of the characteristic tenets of Calvinism is “the election by predestination of the few through grace to glorify God...and the damnation of the rest of mankind, also to the glory of God”.

Indeed Dladla (2016:36) relying on Peter Duvenhage points out the blend in continental philosophy and protestant theology in the development of institutionalised philosophy at Afrikaans universities duly attributable to the powerful Dutch Reformed Church. According to Dladla (2016:36);

From the doctrines of divine election and predestination in Calvinism were the justification for the social ideology of a chosen people which justified racial conquest and domination. From Fichte the concept of nature was invoked to justify the maintenance of separation between groups of different languages as well as his view of the individual sub-ordinate aspect of the Absolute Spirit which reveals itself historically in the life of the community. Much of this thinking was to provide a philosophical basis to apartheid under the leadership of the

Afrikaner Nationalist party. Once apartheid had commenced (after 1948) most Afrikaans university philosophers explicitly defended it. A variety of approaches were employed towards this end including Rawls's Theory of Justice.

Moreover, Husserlian and Heideggerian phenomenology were also of greater use and were the chief architects of the apartheid state's philosophy of education which was steered by the Afrikaans University of Potchefstroom for Christian Higher Education (Dladla 2016, More 2004). What's more is that the relationship between the university and political power reveals more than a relationship of intellectual support but a tangible and historical agenda of maintaining white supremacy. To demonstrate this point Dladla (2016:37) relies on political journalists Ivor Wilkins and Hans Strydom's writing of the Afrikaner secret society known as the Broederbond which had representation in the top echelons of all Afrikaans speaking Universities;

Amongst those who would come to light are several philosophers who at one point in time taught at some of these universities. Prof Nico Diederichs was by far the most famous broeder philosopher, going on to become the first vice-chancellor of the Rand Afrikaans Universiteit (later the University of Johannesburg) and Finance Minister before becoming State President of South Africa in 1975. Before his rise to academic administration and politics, Nico Diederichs had been chair of political philosophy at the University of the Orange Free State and had studied in both Holland and Germany, had made many politically relevant contributions in his academic career. He had, for example, theorised a social metaphysics opposed to human equality in his *Nasionalisme as Lewesbeskouing en sy Verhouding tot Internationalisme* (Nationalism as a Weltenshaaung and Its Relation to Internationalism) (Dladla (2016:38).

However, it is important to note as Dladla (2016:39) does that Diederichs was not the only<sup>18</sup> active Afrikaner academic who was politically minded and that such relationships most likely affected teaching and learning at Afrikaans speaking universities. The University of South Africa occupied a unique position of offering tuition both in English and Afrikaans, however according to More (2004:150) it was ideologically aligned with Afrikaans speaking universities. Indeed Dladla (2016:39)

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<sup>18</sup> According to Dladla (2016:39) "There were many more senior Broederbond members who had senior positions at universities.... Amongst senior Broeders who were Vice Chancellors or Rectors of universities, for example were, Dr Hilgaard Muller (former Minister of Foreign Affairs) at the University of Pretoria, Prof Samuel Pauw, University of South Africa. Professor WL Mouton the University of the Orange Free State, Professor EJ Marais at the University of Port Elizabeth(now Nelson Mandela Metropolitan university), Professor Tjaart van der Walt at the University of Potchefstroom. One need only wonder whether or not there is a family relationship between these paragons of apartheid and some of the academics either still active in universities or just recently retired. If there are indeed family relationships then it is pertinent to ask how far – to translate an Afrikaans idiom – has the apple fallen from the tree."

points to an interesting case of the UNISA chair of philosophy from 1951 to 1965 Herman de Vleeschauwer who was a Kant specialist invited by Nico Diederichs who was at the time a member of parliament. According to Dladla (2016:39) de Vleeschauwer was an escaped convict for Nazi war crimes committed during the German occupation of Belgium during the Second World War and immigrated to South Africa facilitated by Diederichs, Dladla continues;

The Diederichs-de Vleeschauwer amity represents a natural relationship between apartheid and institutional philosophy in South Africa. To all appearances, the successors of de Vleeschauwer as Heads of the Department of philosophy, including other academic staff, were likely to have been sympathetic to apartheid either as members of the Broederbond or the National Party. It is unlikely that at the time, Professor Samuel Pauw, himself a member of the Broederbond and Vice-Chancellor of the University of South Africa, would have sanctioned the appointment of academic, even administrative staff who posed a substantial and serious challenge to apartheid.

The relationship between institutionalised philosophy and the solidification of conquest as represented by its legal codification in apartheid is not limited to the Afrikaans-continental tradition which was explicit in its racist pursuits but also extends to the Anglo-Saxon tradition to which we now turn to.

To be sure academic philosophy in South Africa has always been the terrain of whites, particularly white males (it would have been interesting to say more about the exclusion of females from the practice, although it would have been exclusively about white females, however such a discussion is beyond the scope of this chapter). Moreover, albeit the perceived differences between the English and the Dutch descendants both were united in making sure that South Africa is a white man's land as More (2004:152) demonstrates quoting from the then minister of Bantu affairs M. C. de Wet Nel who asserted;

The philosophy of life of the settled white population in South Africa, both English speaking and Afrikaans-speaking in regard to the colour or racial problem...rests on three basic principles.... The first is that God has given a divine task and calling for every People in the world, which dare not be destroyed or denied by anyone. The second is that every People in the world, of whatever race or colour, has an inherent right to live. In the third place, it is our deep conviction that the personal and national ideals of every individual and every ethnic group can best be developed within its own national community. Only then will the other groups feel that they are not being endangered. This is the philosophic basis of the policy of

apartheid.... To our People this is not a mere abstraction, which hangs in the air. It is a divine task, which has to be implemented and fulfilled.

Indeed such unanimity between the Afrikaner and the British is predicated on the western form of life as qualitatively superior to all other forms, this is Eurocentrism par excellence. However, the Anglo-Saxon academic philosophical tradition began at the University of the Cape of Good Hope which was established in 1873 (More 2004 and Dladla 2016). According to More and Dladla from the onset the English speaking universities preoccupied themselves with the British philosophical traditions such as empiricism and with such figures as Locke, Hume, Mill, Russell etc. The ideological orientation of such a preoccupation was undoubtedly liberal as Dladla (2016) has so aptly demonstrated<sup>19</sup>. Indeed one of the first notables of the English tradition at the South African College (later the University of Cape Town) was R. F. A. Hoernlé who became one of the major figures in the intellectual formulation of South African liberalism. Hoernlé's inaugural address as professor of philosophy in 1923 at another English university, the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) "stressed the significance of liberalism in a multiracial society such as South Africa. A text he authored in 1939 with the title South African Native Policy and the Liberal spirit argued for racial separation as opposed to assimilation or parallelism" (Dladla, 2016:41 and More, 2004:153). An interesting note by both More and Dladla is that apartheid was an articulation of such a 'liberal'<sup>20</sup> view<sup>21</sup>. With the advent of apartheid officially in 1948 the English-speaking universities became more associated with supposedly apolitical analytical philosophy, itself an expression of Englishness/Britishness (Dladla, 2016). According to More (2004:154);

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<sup>19</sup> According to Dladla (2016:129) "Despite analytic philosophy's famous apolitical reputation, an examination of the lives of the philosophers themselves and the history of their opinions suggests that analytic philosophy enjoys a close relationship with liberalism. This is hardly surprising when one considers firstly, the relations between analytic philosophy and empiricism and, secondly, that the great British empiricists such as Locke, Berkeley, Hume and Mill could broadly be characterised as liberals". However, it is important to note that this was a later development in the English speaking Universities when they were assuming a more "neutralist" approach and detached themselves from explicit political expression.

<sup>20</sup> Laying out a definition of liberalism in South Africa as a political ideology Gail Gerhart (1978:7) likens it with Trusteeship in that they "feel that the black wards of the white man deserve a free and fair chance to "grow up" and become the white man's equal. Whites, in fact, according to the usual liberal view, have a duty to promote the black man's assimilation, through education and through the extension of political rights appropriate to his level of acculturation. Unlike apartheid, which calls for blacks to "develop along their own lines" and in pursuit of their own separate variants of culture, liberalism has always recognized one common human standard of measurement: the adoption of "civilized" or modern, western ways. Until 1936, the qualified but nonracial Cape franchise with its premise of gradual democratization was an embodiment of the liberal ideal. "Equal rights for all civilized men," ran the classic liberal credo, echoed at the time of the founding of the Liberal party in 1953, "and equal opportunity for all men to become civilized."

<sup>21</sup> It is interesting because in the political scene that will follow the liberals were "opposed" to apartheid, which was the policy of Afrikaner nationalists in the form of the national party and were for "integration". It is such liberal sentiments that Steve Biko and the Black consciousness movement were duly opposed and developed the philosophy of black consciousness antithetical to such sedimentations.

Philosophy at most English-speaking universities, while still embracing the liberal spirit, increasingly became associated with analytical philosophy. It is in this group that we find most neutralists, those who believe that “philosophy ought to be pursued for its own sake” without intervention in social and political issues of the day. Since philosophy, according to the neutralists, is a second-order activity concerned mainly with the logical analysis of concepts, the task of the philosopher is therefore the clarification of the logic of concepts and their meanings. Social and political issues are not, accordingly, the responsibility of the philosopher qua philosopher but qua active citizen. These are philosophers who Ronald Aronson characterized as “professionally indifferent to what goes on in South Africa today. Whatever their personal commitments, professionally they have no difficulty staying out of politics”.

In a review essay of Ronald Aronson’s *Stay out of Politics* More (1996) laments the indifference of the liberal philosophers to apartheid and their abstract thinking, which for him is not real thinking as it is thought without a thinker. However, such indifference though perceives itself as not politically involved is an expression of a political sentiment: “In politics indifferent means satisfied.... in bourgeois society, the label ‘non-partisan’ is merely a veiled, hypothetical way of saying that the person in question belongs to the party of exploiters. In philosophy, too, indifferent cannot mean anything but satisfied.... This is the real significance of abstention” (Paul Nizan, as quoted by More 1996). It is similar to claiming to be a non-smoker in a place polluted by all forms of smoke (More 1996). However, Dladla (2016:42) contends that the cherished a-political disposition of the English-speaking philosophers need not be overemphasised at the expense of examining some of the political activities that took place within those departments. Dladla (2016:42) makes use of an article by historian Teresa Barnes on how the English speaking universities have, as with most individual politicians and activists, been over celebrated for their “struggle” and “resistance” against apartheid. According to Dladla (2016:42) the English philosophers’ proclaimed quest for academic freedom demonstrable through students they produced who became antiapartheid activists were also complicit in the sustenance and support for apartheid in South Africa. Barnes (2015:21) dealing in particular with the case of UCT’s philosophy department, reveals some interesting details about the departmental history which contradict the idea that philosophers “Stayed Out of Politics” to use Aronson’s phrase<sup>22</sup>.

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<sup>22</sup> Dladla (2016:42) relying on Barnes points out that “Professor Andrew Howson Murray, who held the chair of UCT’s department of philosophy and ethics from 1937-1970 was a well-known and widely employed collaborator and agent of the apartheid regime. In the course of his academic work Murray, for instance, contributed chapters to volumes published in honour of two conservative South African philosophers the Belgian ex-Nazi fugitive Herman de Vleeschauer of Unisa and Stoker of the University of Potchefstroom. Barnes writes “As a philosopher and educator, Murray’s perspective was that the concept of pluralism was the

Professor Murray was also brought in as a state witness in the Treason Trial where his task was to identify the accused's writings as "communist" to which the defence also made him to read his own work which he also identified as communist, [he] "also worked for the Publications Appeal Board (the main South African censorship body from the 1960s until the 1980s)". According to Barnes (2015:23) "Murray was the head of the political committee of the Board and wrote many opinions that were central in the Board's decisions to ban books and silence authors of critical political materials... in some instances recommended authors be investigated by military intelligence. Barnes goes on to show that he was not the only professor at UCT who worked for the apartheid regime but that there were countless, spies and agents at the so-called open universities who did such work".

Such a history of the discipline is very informative and also helpful in understanding our present, for those of us who did not witness it and who have been kept in the dark about it (I was born two years before the birth of the "rainbow nation" in 1994). It is evidence of our collective discomfort with the university as it currently exist in South Africa, which is continuous with this history, which found articulation in 2015 with the #RhodesMustFall and currently with the #decolonisingthecurriculum movement which in the philosophy circles expressed itself as the formation of the Azanian Philosophical Society, which I am a founding member. The history of institutionalised philosophy outlined above illustrates the colonial character of discipline and its overreliance on Euro-American classifications which continues to undermine the particularities of the African experience. This necessitates the liberation of the practice from its North boundedness and aversion to reality as is our aim with Mafeje as an inspiration. We shall turn to a reflection of an experience of philosophy in the post 1994 era South Africa from a student perspective to show the marginality of African philosophy, and the neglect of reality, that is inherent in South African philosophy.

### Teacher don't teach me nonsense: The unchallenged hegemony of white philosophy in South Africa<sup>23</sup>

*For not only are Whites "prosthetic Gods," the embodiment of "full presence," that is, "when a white is absent something is absent," there is "a lacuna in being," as one would assume given the status of Blackness but Whiteness is also "the standpoint from which others are seen";*

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only answer to the challenges of life in a multi-racial society. Although in other settings pluralism can be a reasonable call for democratic decentralization, in Murray's hands it was deformed into an apology for apartheid""

<sup>23</sup> The following is a revised version of my presentation at the annual meeting of the Philosophy Society of South Africa in January 2017 held at Rhodes University in a plenary panel titled "liberating philosophy from racism". We staged our exit from the racist body to form the Azanian Philosophical Society which was launched in Pretoria at the Black August Festival this year.

*which is to say Whiteness is both full Presence and absolute perspectivity*—Frank. B. Wilderson III (2008:98).

The apparent whiteness of South African Philosophy is not something which was readily visible to me before I acquainted myself with the peculiar history of how the present came to be. This is to say it never appealed to me as a concrete subject for philosophic reflection and this is attributable to my uncritical rainbow consciousness. I was one of the many believers in the project of the “new South Africa”. I was taught to see no colour. This was strange because the idea of the rainbow implies a particular colour consciousness, but this was to be a passive awareness of it because the gist was colour-blindness, since repeating the mistakes of ‘the past’ was not part of the ideal of what is to be the ‘new’ or ‘post-apartheid’ South Africa. But colour revealed itself to be seen, in more ways than one, until I had to take a direct look and really observe exactly what for so long I have been taught not to see. Philosophy proper had begun, since philosophy concerns itself with the non-philosophical; the reality or everyday if you like. And it was the everydayness of my blackness and that of many others who had to stand with me on the long bus queue, going back home from a long day at school to study Immanuel Kant, whose philosophy could not explain this reality to me, perhaps because to him I’m just a nigger, that the whiteness of the philosophy I was being taught began to reveal itself to me. Not even the debate between John Rawls and Robert Nozick came close to explaining that reality to me. The reality of being a Black student from Soweto, one of a few that makes it to University with aid from a National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) loan that one has to queue the whole day for and the humiliating affidavits required; where one needs to explain the abject conditions of one’s poverty in order to qualify. The reality of being the first suspect whenever anything goes missing.

The whiteness of my instructors and of those few students who readily understood the work was clearly observable to me, even the examples that were supposed to aid my understanding of the work were mostly foreign to me and other blacks. We had to go out of our world to make sense of what was conveyed. It was this time that I began to search for the literature that could explain that reality to me and I came across Frantz Fanon’s *Black Skins White Masks* and *The Wretched of the earth*. I read about the Manichean reality in the colonies, the zone of life and the zone of death, the divide between the settlers and the natives, the abstracted expression of what I knew concretely as Sandton and Alexandra. From then onwards those private conversations with other Blacks came to be understood in their proper existential terms. Reflections on the existence of Black South African philosophers had been giving me sleepless nights. This is because my white instructor had told me I could be the first since there existed none. This should be testament of the far reaching consequences of white ignorance, indeed at seminars and colloquium’s one is not surprised by the utter ignorance of the existence of African philosophy let alone African Philosophers expressed in the question “is there an

African philosophy?”(We deal with the problematique of this question in the following chapter) which is an expression of a deliberate ignorance of such an existence. Such ignorance we argue (in chapter 2) is indicative of a privileged social position that comes with being white; which is the intentional cultivation and protection of ignorance; not a lack of knowledge but a practice of conditioned and intentioned not-knowing and, in the case of this country, over-reliance on the presupposed superiority of European and or Anglo-Saxon models and their reproduction and maintenance.

To this day this continues to be the reality of those students who are engaged in philosophical study in South African universities. The names of scholars like Mogobe Ramose, Chabani Manganyi, Joe Tefo and Mabogo More are still together with their philosophical work on the reality that is South Africa and Africa silenced, erased and ignored. Together with the ignorance of these academics is the work of philosophical importance produced by the experience of a multi-century struggle for liberation and the intellectuals and intellectual work (some philosophical) which it has produced. The UNISA trained philosopher Muziwakhe Lembede’s Africanism, the African studies scholar, linguist and political philosopher Mangaliso Sobukwe’s Pan-Africanism and the existentialist prophet-theoretician of Black Consciousness philosophy Bantubonke Biko.

Philosophy in South Africa continues to shy away from the reality of present day South Africa where blacks have got less life chances and life expectancies than whites. It continues to shy away from those who have to wait in long queues to receive R350 social grants to feed their families for a month, the visible blackness of those who have to clean after them, do their garden and ensure that they are kept safe from ‘criminals’ (read blacks), while philosophy establishment is blinded from reality by its northbound gaze, preoccupied with mimicking what the “real” philosophers are doing in continental Europe or England and America. Uncritical followers of a philosophical world that doesn’t even know of their existence, that doesn’t cite them, invite them or write about them even as they continue to idolise, worship and copy. As Enrique Dussel (1985:12) so aptly observed about colonial philosophy<sup>24</sup>:

[T]he colonial philosophers of the periphery gaze at a vision foreign to them, one that is not their own. From the center they see themselves as nonbeing, nothingness; and they teach their pupils, who are something (although illiterate in the alphabets imposed on them), that really they are nothing, that they are like nothings walking through history. When they have finished their studies they, like their colonial teachers, disappear from the map geopolitically and philosophically, they do not exist. This pathetic ideology given the name of philosophy is

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<sup>24</sup> Dussel (1985:11) enunciates; “I call colonial philosophy that which was exported to Latin America, Africa and Asia beginning with the sixteenth century (the universities of Mexico and Lima were founded in 1552 with the same academic ranking as those of Alcalá and Salamanca) and especially the spirit of pure imitation or repetition in the periphery of the philosophy prevailing in the imperialist [centre].”

the one still taught in the majority of philosophy schools of the periphery by the majority of its professors.

As we have demonstrated with the history of philosophy in South Africa above the situation remains unchanged as Dladla (2016:47) reports;

Around September 2013 an incident took place which caused a bit of a disturbance in the world of philosophy in South Africa. Louise Mabile, a young lecturer in philosophy at the University of Pretoria made national news after she wrote a controversial article in the Afrikaans cultural blog PRAAG, run by Afrikaner intellectual and cultural activist Dan Roodt. In her article she wrote that black South African males rape babies as a “cultural phenomenon”. In order to support her claim she averred that they [Africans] had not even invented the word rape (and were impliedly unfamiliar with the concept) until their “meeting” with their enlightened civilisers from Europe” (Dladla, 2016:47)

Following Dladla (2016) it is indeed difficult to imagine that Mabile was a recent convert to racism. However, it is highly likely that she has held her views throughout her studies, teaching and social life and with enough confidence to publish them on the internet in her own name with no expectation of consequences. On the other hand the people, including the Philosophy society of South Africa (PSSA), who populate the institutions that distanced themselves from her during this embarrassing incident were also likely former teachers, mentors, students and colleagues. Indeed if we consider the history of philosophy in South Africa as well as its character today it emerges that there is high probability that far from being exceptional, Mabile is, in fact, the rule. Her exceptionality is that she was caught out as Dladla (2016:48) attests:

She is the double-victim of both a poor education which was in part responsible for her perspective and a scape-goat paraded as a convenient exception; a gangrened limb amputated to save a diseased body of which she was an ordinary and consistent part before wounding herself by exposure. Her expulsion was a wasted opportunity for thorough reflection which might get to the root cause of the problem her incident brought to light. It also prevented the philosophical community from moving a step closer to the necessary fundamental change which can liberate philosophy in South Africa. This was, however, no mistake. The body was merely preserving itself.

However, the marginal status of African philosophy and that of Africans in philosophy in South Africa today speak of outstanding liberation, the negotiated settlement and the post-apartheid South Africa that follow it has upheld the philosophical doubt that the African is not rational animal, or not of equal

human status with the white. Liberation for us requires not simply the development and practise of a philosophy of liberation but also the liberation of philosophy itself, as we duly discuss in chapter 4. Philosophy in South Africa itself needs to be liberated because it is a philosophy of oppression and a philosophy of oppressors which continues to justify the unacceptable conditions that the majority of South Africans live in today precisely because, as Kimberle Crenshaw (as cited by Mills 1998:102) attests: "a society once expressly organized around white supremacist principles does not cease to be a white supremacist society simply by formally rejecting those principles. The society remains white supremacist in its maintenance of the actual distribution of goods and resources, status, and prestige", which is what new South Africa truly represents, substantially continuous with a supposedly old apartheid South Africa. This section through personal reflection of the alienating experience of being a black student of philosophy in South Africa was an attempt at demonstrating the northbound gaze of the practice, mimicry and the commitment to ignorance of the philosophical establishment which is in need of rectification.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter has discussed the history of philosophy in South Africa as comprising of two contending traditions coinciding with the two traditions of colonialism in this country: the Dutch and the English. The mimetic nature of the practice of philosophy in South Africa was also discussed as expressive of a northbound gaze which we have identified as Eurocentrism. Although separate the two tradition of both the Afrikaner and the English speaking were united in the conquest of the indigenous people in the unjust wars of colonialism, this is expressed with the formation of the union of South Africa after the two Anglo-Boer wars were the white identity was solidified as expressed in the first use of non-racialism. It has been argued that albeit the transition to a post-apartheid, which is not post conquest, there is much continuity with the supposed past than a break with it expressed through the commitment to Euro-American models of philosophical justifiability and aversion to our immediate reality. A personal reflection as a student of philosophy in this post-apartheid era was also offered to demonstrate the unchallenged hegemony of white philosophy in this country which has with it the readily questioning of the existence of African philosophy which we shall expand in chapter 2. This chapter, through a historical exposition of the institutionalised practice of philosophy and the necessarily reconstructionist foundations of such an undertaking, was an attempt at showing the Eurocentric and colonial character of South African philosophy to display the need of liberating philosophy from the pervasive condition of the northbound gaze.

## Chapter 3: African philosophy? Questioning the unquestioned

*When we speak of history, who is speaking? It is someone of a given, class and society – in short, someone who is himself an historical being. And this very act, which founds the possibility of an historical knowledge (for only an historical being can have the experience of history and can talk about it) prevents this knowledge from ever acquiring the status of complete and transparent knowledge – since it is itself, in its essence an historical phenomenon which demands to be apprehended and interpreted as such. The discourse on history is included in history.*

--Cornelius Castoriadis (1978:33)

### Introduction

African philosophy, at least the modern modality of its practice, is said to have been initiated by the overwhelming question concerning its existence: is there an African philosophy? (Bodunrin, 1981, Oruka, 1990, Mohmoh, 1989, Keita, 2001). No doubt such radical questioning concerning 'knowledges' from Africa is overdetermined by an overarching, indeed imperial, definition of what is understood to be 'philosophy'. In other words this question sought to determine whether those knowledges from Africa could be said to fit the category of what is known to be philosophy in the western world – which has assumed global dominance since the "enlightenment"- introduced to us through slavery and conquest. This in turn means that this question is not apprehensive about the distinctiveness of such an African philosophy, but really concerned with integrating it to the broader western scheme as a lesser part (this will be developed later in this chapter in our exploration of how doubt, ignorance and power facilitate such an integration). The repercussions of such an undertaking, incorporating African expressions to western presuppositions, are far-reaching in that African philosophy properly defined is yet to find an independent expression, i.e. an expression that is not dependent on an imposed or self-imposed European paradigm. Understood in this way African philosophy cannot but be a philosophy of liberation par excellence, as what propels it forward ultimately has to be this will to extricate itself from the domineering European epistemological paradigm brought to bear upon it by the multi-centuries experience of subjugation. I deal with this latter part in the following chapter, *Archie Mafeje and the liberation of philosophy*. In this chapter I deal with the historical question pertaining to the existence of an African philosophy and the present reiterations of this question. I begin with an interrogation of such questioning to (i) subvert the question and thereby undermine the basis of its questioning – that is the task of the first section, (ii) to examine the underlying structures of coloniality in Western philosophy and its colonising effects- to show how such a question is rooted in doubt, ignorance and power as functionaries of the European epistemological paradigm facilitating

epistemological dominance , and (iii) to use the questioning of the question as a basis from which to develop an account of what African philosophy is through a discussion of the brief history of African philosophy as recapitulated by Mabogo More and W.J Ndaba- I aim to show how *doubt* and *ignorance* coupled with *unrelenting power* on the side of the oppressor, and those bought into the project of facilitating (epistemic) oppression, function to suppress the genuinely *philosophical* and *liberatory* character of African philosophy. This is to adumbrate the history of African philosophy which the philosophical establishment in South Africa has remained ignorant of and the impending need to remedy such an ignorance which is to liberate philosophy from such an ignorance.

### Questioning the question/questioner<sup>25</sup>

*The philosopher presenting his philosophical discourse [in relation to the present historical moment] cannot avoid the question of him being part of this present...about his membership of a particular 'we,' if you like, which is linked to a greater or lesser extent to a cultural ensemble characteristic of his contemporary reality. This 'we' has to become, or is in the process of becoming, the object of the philosopher's own reflection.*

--Michel Foucault (2002)

It is from the difficulties of our present that our enquiries relating to it have to become part of our reflection as well – since we are also part of this present- and this being our precondition for being what we are – people enquiring about this present- which is the condition possibility of such an enquiry as Castoriadis and Foucault (above) contend. Castoriadis (1978:7) elaborates;

There exists no place, no point of view outside of history and society, or 'logically prior' to them, where one could be placed in order to construct the theory of them – a place from which to inspect them, contemplate them, affirm the determined necessity of their being thus, 'constitute' them, reflect upon them or reflect them in their totality. Every thought of society and of history itself belongs to society and to history. Every thought, whatever it may be and whatever may be its 'object', is but a mode and a form of socio-historical *doing*. It may be unaware of itself as such – and this is most often the case, by a necessity which is, so to speak, internal to it. And the fact that it knows itself as such does not take it out of its mode of being as a dimension of social-historical doing. But this can enable it to be lucid about itself.

Indeed, it is from the confines of our present that the meaning of such an enquiry- questioning the question concerning the existence of African philosophy- finds meaning and articulation. This is

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<sup>25</sup> Some parts of this section are reproduced from my paper *Archie Mafeje and the question of African philosophy* (2017) although there have been some modifications and additions.

because such a question – does an African philosophy exist? - has enjoyed the legitimacy of it being asked and not itself questioned. It is important here to note the distinction between the historical iterations of the question, which saw the development of the vast literature that defines African philosophy up to the present, and the South African enunciation of it which is largely ignorant of the literature that has dealt with it, a result of what philosopher of race Charles Mills has characterised as white ignorance- an intentioned aversion to knowledge that is a result of the dominant position they enjoy in society. We shall deal with both the historical and the present iterations, not paying less attention to the development of African philosophy up to the present.

Moreover, the question is itself not independent from the person posing it: “questions are, of course, always asked by someone from somewhere. The reason for the questions is tied very much with the identity of the asker who derives both his ignorance and will to know from his identity and experience” (Dladla 2016:17). It is the purpose of this section to interrogate this questioning to expose its underlying assumptions and limitations which we shall elucidate in the following section.

Perhaps before we can continue with our enquiry pertaining to the historical question regarding the existence of an African philosophy it may be useful to enunciate our understanding of what philosophy is. Although this is dealt with in greater detail in the following chapter, however, it seems useful to reproduce some of the central tenets of our definition and contention against detractors. Philosophy is not about itself as a reified ‘objective’ abstraction which is solely interpretive. As Ndumiso Dladla (2016:16) argues; philosophy, is about understanding which in turn invites action. This account coincides with Marx and Engels’s contention against aristocratic conceptions of philosophy which claim to be contributing to reality by examining ideas without taking into account their *material* reality<sup>26</sup> (to be discussed further in the following chapter). In this respect Dladla (2016) follows his teacher Mogobe Ramose’s insight that dialogue is an essential method of philosophy since understanding is the end goal informing what in turn we must *do*. According to Ramose (2014:74);

Dialogue is the method and means of doing philosophy. It is reliance on reason and not force as the means to resolve conflicts even if the resolution may be to agree to disagree. ... Dialogue is an indispensable element in the definition of philosophy precisely because it demands the positive recognition of the other as a partner and not just a partner but an equal partner by virtue of our human equality. Equal partnership on this understanding does not necessarily mean that all the partners in the dialogue possess cultures that automatically must be accorded equal weight. On the contrary, the cultures are sites of comparison on the basis of dialogue as equal partners. The outcome of the dialogical comparison is neither the

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<sup>26</sup> *The German Ideology*

putative superiority nor inferiority of one culture over another. Instead, it is the validity or invalidity of particular cultural norms or practices tested against the power of reason.

Dialogue as means and method of philosophy thus conceived informs my pursuit and interrogation about the question concerning the existence of an African philosophy i.e. I aim to dialogue with the historic and present recapitulations of the question pertaining to the existence of an African philosophy. The implications of such a method relating to the question concerning African philosophy's existence are to expose the one-sidedness/monologous nature of such an enquiry which does not meet the set criterion of equal partnership for dialogue to occur. As Dladla (2016:17) reminds us that dialogues consist in part of questions which should be understood in relation to the identity of one who is posing them from her lived actuality (experience), which in turn is the object of philosophy properly defined i.e. philosophy reflects critically on human experience (the non-philosophical as per Enrique Dussel or everyday as per Henri Lefebvre) as a matter of necessity as opposed to reflection solely on its conceived self-image apart from the pedagogical propaedeutic to provide itself interpretive categories. Human experience on the other hand always unfolds at a given place and time which makes it necessarily particular – because no one can occupy all the space and time there is- as opposed to idealised universality as contended by Kwame Nkrumah (1970) that “even philosophical systems are facts of history” and confirmed by Sophie Oluwole (1997: xvii) that “there are no universal paradigms which all forms of thought must adopt everywhere in the world, philosophy belongs to a social group that gives it identity in place and time”. The relationship which exists between the universal and the particular in this case is one of co-productivity: it is only from the particular that we can make universal proclamations i.e. it is from somewhere that we always speak, and this the precondition for any discourse to proceed. However, this is not to say that discourses have not proceeded without paying due attention to this precondition; but to identify those as colonially inspired as Mafeje (2007) demonstrates in the case of the discipline of Anthropology which sought to study its ‘objects’ relying on supposed universal paradigms. The presupposed universal character of such paradigms, liberalism or Marxism for instance, derive not from their comprehensive understanding of our world and the ability to inspire positive change therein, however it is from the fact of European dominance of the world for the last five centuries (Dussel, 1996) , According to Oluwole (1997:25):

One fundamental question that has become germane in recent times is whether or not there exists only one intellectual culture in the world which has attained the ultimate level in the realm of the development of the human mind and consequently deserves to be accorded the status of the universal ideal and in terms of which every other intellectual culture of the world must be assessed and justified. Many scholars have answered these questions in the

affirmative identifying the Western paradigm as that ideal. The suggestion is that the principles of Western philosophy, more especially when the discipline is pursued as a science, coincide with those that define a universal intellectual culture.

Indeed the supposed supremacy of the western paradigm is something which has assumed the status of common sense or self-evident. It is the ethnocentrism of the European paradigm inaugurated in their enlightenment which coincides with the enslavement of Africa and its colonisation together with the so-called third world. This is to say that the legitimacy the western paradigm is made possible through conquest as a long tradition in European culture which Yves Winter (2011:2) contests its origin as predating the colonisation/discovery of the new world by at least 500 years as is often assumed. According to Winter (2011:2): “the European Christians who sailed to the coasts of the Americas, Asia and Africa in the fifteenth and the sixteenth century came from a society that was already a colonising society”. Winter (2011:2) elaborates referring to the work of Robert Barlett, a historian, who attests that “medieval Europe developed not only an ‘expansionary mentality’ but an entire ‘terminology and rhetoric of violence’ that celebrates the heroism and mythologises of the brutality of conquest”, with the conquerors “deriving their political rights and authority from the fact of conquest”. For Winter (2011:2):

Even though conquest was not yet formalised in any juridical sense, by the 11<sup>th</sup> and the 12<sup>th</sup> centuries, it was already more than merely the rule of force. Conquest was seen as a *foundational moment, a political and legal caesura that ruptures customary rights and obligations and institutes a new order.* (My emphasis)

Indeed, it is from this understanding of conquest as a *foundational* moment that institutes a new order that we are to make sense of the proclaimed supremacy and universality of the western paradigm which was initiated through this very process of conquest that legitimises itself through the production of appearances, signs and symbols alluding to a return to a state of stability and customary legitimacy that preceded it. This is to say it is self-legitimising and there for the benefit of those subject to it as western civilisation is superior to “primitive culture”. The designation of primitive people’s derives from Europe’s self-understanding in relation to non-Europeans as precisely their ontological negative. Abiola Irele (1983:11) argues that such promulgations, of the superiority of the West, were best articulated and defended by the philosopher Hegel particularly his *Philosophy of history* which Irele (1983:11) contends was a celebration of the triumphant European spirit particularly how Africa features in Hegel’s speculations. Moreover, for Irele (1983:12) the exclusion of Africa from the process of the fulfilment the human spirit, as postulated by Hegel, Africa is at the opposite pole to Europe precisely as “it’s ideal and spiritual antithesis” as Irele (1983:12) elaborates;

Hegel's philosophy of history remains the most exalted statement of European self-affirmation in opposition to other races, the most elaborate rationalisation of European ethnocentrism. It provided a powerful philosophical base for the chorus of denigration of the non-white races which accompanied and buoyed up the European colonial adventure... if much of the literature that provided the parts for this chorus of denigration was manifestly inferior, if not downright feeble-minded, it was left to the new discipline of anthropology to sustain the main theme under the guise of a science.

It is important to note the intricate relationship between European colonial expansion and the development of anthropology "as a constituted discipline devoted exclusively to the study of non-Western peoples, to whom were attached the labels 'savage', 'inferior', 'primitive' as qualifications to their [Europeans] full participation in a human essence" (Irele, 1983:12). Such a relationship, between European colonial expansion and the development of anthropology, would assure European dominance at the level of knowledge production about those societies to assist the colonisation process. This would see general homogenisations of particular specificities into universal ones which exclude ontologically those who are its determinate other, as the labels of 'primitive', 'savage' etc. suggest. However, Oluwole (1997:3) contends;

if culture in all its ramifications, is time and space relative, then the idea of regional intellectual cultures become antithetical to the goal of philosophy as a scientific endeavour. It is for this reason that the very concept of culture-based philosophies becomes suspect since each culture is prone to dogmatic defence of its basic principles by its proponents within or beyond its borders and in the process yield results which are invariably partisan - the very opposite of the conception of philosophy as a universal rational endeavour. Are there ways of reconciling this presumed universality of philosophy as a discipline with the reality of authentic cultural variations? Are there universal principles in terms of which local species are to be evaluated and assessed? In other words, how can the notion of local philosophical systems be integrated into the assumed universality of Logic and Reason?

This is the subject of the project of African philosophy as a critically negative project to disentangle itself from the asphyxiating dominance of the European epistemological paradigm veiled in its pretence to universality – "the universal of imperious Europe that tramples underfoot and colonises and reshapes the world in its own image" (Serequebehan, 2007:96), which Serequebehan (ibid) contraposes with that proclaimed by Aime Cesaire which is : "that of a universal rich with all that is particular, rich with all the particulars, the deepening and coexistence of all the particulars". It is this, Cesaire's, idea of universality that informs African philosophy as a practice of resistance and insistence

on the importance of the particular for any universalistic project. And it is from this understanding that the question concerning the existence of African philosophy is interrogated for the reasons already outlined above – (i) to subvert the question and thereby undermine the basis of its questioning, (ii) to examine underlying structures of coloniality in Western philosophy and its colonising effects, and (iii) to use the questioning of the question as a basis from which to develop an account of what African philosophy is in order to demonstrate the liberatory character of African philosophy.

The question of whether an African philosophy exists or not already incorporates in its basis a presumed fixed understanding of what philosophy in fact is. In this way, what is to be understood as philosophy is what the questioner of the question already has in mind as regards its legitimate formal configurations. In other words, this is an inherently self-serving question. Contention here is with a presumed canonical understanding of what philosophy is and the unwarranted and imperious projection thereof by our interlocutor. Without a doubt, philosophy and the social sciences have by and large, at least in modern times, been a product of the triumphalist west, (that is Europe and the so-called New World). In large measure, these disciplines have been a reification of Europe's imperial gaze, one in turn borne of the conquering project itself as Herman Melville, *White Jacket* (1850), attests; "We are the pioneers of the world, the advance-guard...the political Messiah has come in us, if we would but give utterance to his promptings. And let us always remember that with ourselves, almost for the first time in the history of the earth, national selfishness is unbounded philanthropy; for we cannot do a good to America but we give alms to the world."

This is precisely why the project of liberation and decolonisation in parts of the world that were visited upon by European imperialism, or any other form of domination, has typically been one of self-determination and the restoration of the people's sovereignty (including sovereignty over self-representation) which was, and many times still is, violently taken away by colonialism. Colonialism sought prescriptively to define what experience was to be to the colonised, the effect of this being to introduce an internal structure of domination predicated upon which any arbitrary enactment of injustice and privation upon the dominated could be effectively routinized as Steve Biko is most famous for his saying that: "the most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor, is the mind of the oppressed", which was the subject of Frantz Fanon (1952) *Black Skins, White Masks*. Colonisation, derived from the Latin word *colere*, means to cultivate or inhabit. Hence colonialism, understood from the context of modern world history, hereby means to organise and transform "non-European" territories to European ones (see Mudimbe 1988). This entails organising a country or a region proceeding from the standpoint of the European imaginary as a meaningful point of departure. Furthermore, colonisation is also predicated on a theory of the (non)humanity of the African – as

qualitatively inferior or inherently questionable (See Ramose 1999, for a discussion of Aristotle's definition of man)

Therefore, the question of whether there exists an African philosophy finds meaning and articulation in this context of a privileged prerogative of having had both philosophy – as such – defined in advance, and the humanity of the African made questionable necessarily. This logic seems to incorporate an oppressive element as Moya Deacon (2002:97) apprises;

Questions concerning the existence of African philosophy are perceived as reflecting a Western colonial bias that there is no such thing as, and has never been (and some would even say, cannot be) an African philosophy, because Africans are not rational or not as rational as Westerners, or do not have the temperament needed to produce philosophy.

Indeed, this is the foreclosure upon the African's prerogative to explain or define what philosophy might be from her perspective and meaningful experience, as it is the prerogative of every human society as Sylvia Wynter (as quoted in White 2010, 131) attests; "[w]hat is normally imperative to each culture as a living system is that it knows its reality adaptively, i.e. in ways that can best orient the collective behaviours of its subjects, together with its mode of subjectivity (the I) and of conspecificity (the We)". Furthermore, according to Derrick White (2010, 131), "Wynter's...scholarship has consistently explored and exposed how a particular society's intellectual class narratively instituted the idealized identity of self. According to Wynter, intellectuals, whether they are the clergy, the shamans, the soothsayers, the scientists, or the academics, create and re-create narratives of symbolic life and death that outline the local, culturally specific notions of what it means to be human. These narratives are paradigms of value and authority that associate positive and negative traits to particular behaviours, beliefs and ultimately groups who best exemplify them". This demonstrates how philosophy is a fundamentally human undertaking from the limits of being situated in a particular space and time and under constraints of a particular culture.

Understood in this manner then, it can be said that the question seeks to coerce the African to respond to terms other than African ones deriving from a point of origin alien to Africa – and thus one necessarily extroverted in its stance. Given the history of oppression and subjugation of what is African, it comes as no surprise that the question derives its legitimacy by it being asked, and not by providing a rationale of how the question comes about in the first place. Put differently, the denial of sovereignty, the sovereign title to territory, and the natural right to self-determination to the African is what gives legitimacy to the question of whether an African philosophy exists. However, as will be shown here, African philosophy does not find nor owe anything to Europe. It exists legitimately in and by itself. Our engagement with this question is to subvert it which thereby undermines the basis of its

questioning – as we attempted with this subsection of this chapter. Moreover, our engagement with this question is to examine underlying structures of coloniality in Western philosophy and/or its colonising effects – which is the subject of the next subsection. Furthermore, this questioning of the question forms the basis from which to develop an account of what African philosophy is – the critique of eurocentrism (as Serequebehan 1999 shows)- which is the subject of the last subsection of this chapter.

Moreover, the individual who is asking the question may be coming from a point of ignorance with regards to the existence of an African philosophy. And many reasons can be given for this resulting ignorance from those who ignorantly ask the question. One of the reasons that may be given in this regard is that of *learned* ignorance with regards to the existence of Africa and the African. This may be attributed to the point that “man is a rational”, a declaration by Aristotle, was not spoken of the African among many others. This means that the existence of Africans is insignificant, at least at the realm of rational animals- with reason as precondition for being human which was the sole property of the European- which also gave him proprietorship over the land, and thereby establishing this as a deliberate ignorance which Mills (2007:1) has termed White ignorance which is causally linked to white supremacy as a social and political system; “an ignorance militant, aggressive, not to be intimidated, an ignorance that is active, dynamic, that refuses to go quietly—not at all confined to the illiterate and uneducated but propagated at the highest levels of the land, indeed presenting itself unblushingly as knowledge” : the intentional cultivation and protection of ignorance; not a lack of knowledge but a practice of conditioned and intentioned not-knowing and in the case of this country, over-reliance on the presupposed superiority of European and or Anglo-Saxon models and their reproduction and maintenance. An example of this is the work of John Rawls, who in his Theory of Justice, fails to mention the historical and political situations of Amerindians and African people despite the book being centred on North America. <sup>27</sup>

Another reason for the European questioning of African philosophy is conquest i.e. the denial of sovereignty to the Africans by their European enslavers. Many critics have taken it upon themselves to always question this continued reference to colonialism as being unproductive or uncreative or even perhaps “being stuck in the past”. Such critics include Cameroonian cultural theorists Achille Mbembe (See “*African Modes of self-writing*” (2001)) who put forward the criticism that African modes of expression are stuck in imperial domination, colonialism, slavery and apartheid with very few of such expressions being outstanding in richness and creativity. This then means that African

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<sup>27</sup> This was duly pointed out by Charles Mills in The Racial Contract, Rawls on Race or Race in Rawls, White ignorance among many of his pioneering works.

modes of self-writing, indeed African modes of self-expression, are unable to move beyond these events in their attempt at writing (indeed thinking) the self, hence their lack of progress thereof. It would appear that for Mbembe (2001) these modes of expression fail to meet existing European criterion, German philosophy for example, which is afforded a privileged status for its supposed richness in creativity which is forward looking and future oriented in his view. Archie Mafeje duly responds to such critics, especially Membe (See Mafeje's "Apropos 'African Modes of self-writing' Adeu Mbembe", to be discussed further in the next chapter), where Mafeje shows those claims to be unfair- to compare western thought to African- and based on dubious grounds- that a discourse on the self to be duly rich and creative has to concern itself with the future (because what conditions both the present and the future is the past which stands in the position of being parent of the former and actively present with it) with Mbembe for Mafeje being an uncritical mimic of western traditions. In the meantime we shall turn to a discussion of doubt and ignorance coupled with power as functions of European epistemological dominance to demonstrate the untenability of taking the question, is there an African philosophy, as legitimate.

#### On doubt, Ignorance and power

What has been illustrious as the age of reason, or enlightenment as commonly known, in the west coincides with the enslavement of Africans and the colonisation of Africa, Asia and Latin America together with the 'discovery' of the New World. Modernity as Oyoronke Oyewumi (2002:393) illustrates is hallmarked by the "expansion of Europe and the establishment of Euro/American cultural hegemony throughout the world" with gender and race as "two fundamental axes along which people were exploited and societies stratified". According to Oyewumi (2002) this process has profoundly impacted upon the production of knowledge about societies, human behaviour, history and cultures with Euro/American institutions and social categories being dominant in the writing of human history. This Eurocentrism which Tsenay Serequebehan (2002:65) has defined as a "pervasive bias located in modernity's self-consciousness of itself. It is grounded at its core in the metaphysical belief or idea (idee) that European existence is qualitatively superior to other forms of human life". Indeed this amounts to the racialisation of knowledge which Oyewumi (2002:391) has identified as distinctive of the modern age: "Europe is represented as the source of knowledge and Europeans as knowers", which Oyewumi has identified as the privileging of the white male experience in the generation of knowledge.

This epistemology of the Europeans as superior is informed by the ontological fiction that they are superior to the rest of humanity. This is because the assertion by Aristotle that "man is a rational animal" was not spoken of anyone else other than the European man; Amerindians, Africans and women are not included in this equation i.e. man (the true human) is a rational animal and others,

e.g. Africans, are not rational, which means then that Africans are not “men” (true humans). The late colonial thesis, as demonstrated by the 1820 English settlers in South Africa, is slightly more complex, with a scale of civilization for different people, measured by their capacity for self-determination (i.e. “maturity” in the Kantian sense of an individual’s restraining the influence of impulses, desires and external forces on behaviour and thinking by willing in accordance with principles one has assessed and accepted on the basis of empirical evidence and logical reasoning). It will then follow that their existence, women, Africans and Amerindians, is insignificant and it is for the European man to decide what to do about them. According to Ramose (1999, 5),

Aristotle’s definition of man was deeply inscribed in the social ethos of those communities and societies which undertook the so-called voyages of discovery, apparently driven by innocent curiosity.

To demonstrate this point Serequebehan (2012, 139) provides reading from Anne Hugon that further shows this point of the innocent curiosity to discovery which were earlier expressed by other colonialists,

In 1788 [i.e. the heyday of the Enlightenment], a booklet was issued in London by the newly formed Association for promoting the discovery of the interior parts of Africa (or the African association). It stated [at its founding] that at least one third of the inhabited surface of the earth was unknown, notably Africa, virtually in its entirety. For the first time this *ignorance* was seen as a shameful gap in human knowledge that must immediately be filled.

However, as history teaches us, these “voyages of discovery”, perhaps by accident or design, then changed into “violent colonial incursions”, which are not justifiable even under the principles of the theory of just war, and whose consequences are still suffered by the people concerned (Ramosé 1999, 5). For Ramosé (1999), decolonisation, which was set out by Africans and other people conquered in the unjust wars of colonialism, has not addressed the questionable belief that “man is a rational animal”, which only refers to European men and not women, Australians, Amerindians, and Africans. A justification of this view by Aristotle is to be found in Immanuel Kant’s anthropological work (which has been downplayed in philosophical discussions of his work) where, according to Eze (1997:115) Kant characterised “non-Europeans” as “devoid of ethical principles because [they] lack the capacity for development of ‘character’...presumably because they lack adequate self-consciousness and rational will”. According to Eze (1997, 115), for Kant, the Amerindian, the African and the Hindu give the impression of being inept in “moral maturity” because of their lack of talent, a gift from nature, according to him. For Kant, as quoted by Eze (1997, 115),

[T]he race of the Negroes...is full of affect and passion, very lively, talkative and vain. They can be educated but only as servants (slaves), that is they allow themselves to be trained (by Europeans presumably).<sup>28</sup>

Ultimately it is the use of force, unrelenting power, on the part of the Europeans that would result in their domination of the world and people's concerned and not reason as they would at times have us believe. Moreover, it is from the position of such power that the quality of the African's humanity would be in doubt, and indeed questionable at least in the realm of rational animals which in turn conditions the questioning of the existence of an African philosophy. Indeed if philosophy is a fundamentally human undertaking then why would there be doubt concerning the existence of an African philosophy unless doubt concerning the quality of the human of the African is affirmed as Olabiyi Yai (1977) has shown; "this interrogative [does an African philosophy exist?] is but an ill-disguised affirmation or, in other words, the affirmed negation of African Philosophy" (1977, 6). As already pointed out the notion of what counts as human being proper is predicated on a Eurocentric understanding of 'man' who is understood to be self-sovereign (rational), which are qualities presumed to be lacked by Africans.

However, doubt as Ramose (2003) has shown is impossible without its object which one has to take as existing before one can proceed doubting which in relation to the doubt concerning the existence of African philosophy one must acknowledge its existence first which illuminates his chosen title / *doubt therefore African Philosophy exists*. Furthermore, that such doubt persist is a function of what Mills (2007) has identified as white ignorance: which is the intentional cultivation and protection of ignorance; not a lack of knowledge but a practice of conditioned and intentioned not-knowing. In the case of this country, this ignorance, is conditioned by the over-reliance on the presupposed superiority of European and or Anglo-Saxon models of rationality (i.e. self-understanding) and their reproduction and maintenance. According to Linda Martin Alcoff (2007:49) Mills' argument is predicated on a definition of whiteness as a socio-political construct as opposed to it being an ethnic category. According to Mills as quoted by Alcoff (2007:49) such a socio-political system, whiteness, brings with it a "cognitive model that precludes self-transparency and genuine understanding of all social realities," which ensures that whites will live in a "racial fantasyland, [or] a 'consensual hallucination,'" and that the root of all this is the "cognitive and moral economy psychically required for conquest,

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<sup>28</sup> According to Eze (1997, 115), "[training], for Kant, seems to consist purely of physical coercion and corporeal punishment, for in his writings about how to flog the African servant or slave into submission, Kant 'advises us to use a split bamboo cane instead of a whip, so that the 'negro' will suffer a great deal of pain (because of the 'negro's' thick skin, he would not be racked with sufficient agonies through a whip) but without dying'. The African, according to Kant, deserves this kind of 'training' because he or she is 'exclusively idle', lazy, and prone to hesitation and jealousy, and the African is all these because, for climate and anthropological reasons, he or she lacks 'true' (rational and moral) character".

colonization, and enslavement”. Indeed such insights, by Mills and Alcoff, best illuminates the situation in South Africa and makes it apprehendable to us since South Africa is a settler colonial society predicated on the doubt of the humanity of the indigenous people including their epistemic practices, which justified the seizing of their land and their enslavability. It is no wonder why the question concerning the existence of African philosophy would find meaning and articulation because the type of ignorance outlined is *structural* as Alcoff (2007:49) elaborates;

The structural argument focuses not on generally differentiated experiences and interests, but on the specific knowing practices inculcated in a socially dominant group. Where the last argument argued that men, for example, have less interest in raising critical questions about male dominance, the structural argument argues that whites have a positive interest in “seeing the world wrongly,” to paraphrase Mills. Here ignorance is not primarily understood as a lack—a lack of motivation or experience as the result of social location—but as a substantive epistemic practice that differentiates the dominant group.

While it is the case, as Alcoff (2007:43) quoting from Sandra Harding shows, that “members of oppressed groups have fewer interests in ignorance about the social order and fewer reasons to invest in maintaining or justifying the status quo than do dominant groups”, whites as a dominant group, which also seeks to maintain its dominance, have a rewarding interests in maintaining their ignorance about their social reality.

Doubt and ignorance about the existence of African philosophy is thus a function of European epistemological dominance which leaves un-interrogated the question concerning the existence of an African philosophy which we have scrutinized. As Ramose (2003) has demonstrated that it is impossible to doubt ‘no thing’ and in relation to the doubt concerning the existence of African philosophy one has to take it as existing before continuing doubting, which by itself proves that indeed African philosophy does exist. Such doubt however is conditioned by a wilful ignorance which we have identified as white ignorance – which is causally linked to white supremacy as a socio-political system- which is not an aversion to knowledge but a practice of not knowing which comes from occupying a privileged (indeed dominant) status in a society. The question then about the existence of African philosophy cannot and should not be taken seriously as a critical, indeed philosophical, question because of it being conditioned by a blissful ignorance and uncritical doubt. The question should however be taken as expressing preconceived notions of what counts as philosophy and thereby seeking to determine whether African philosophy fits that rubric. Our questioning of the question has allowed us to expose the underlying presuppositions, which are undergirded by Eurocentric conceptions, which thereby demonstrates that the question cannot be taken seriously. Moreover,

questioning the questioning gives us the space to elaborate African philosophy as a practice of resistance against extroversion.

### Eurocentrism as a philosophy of domination

As we have noted what Eurocentrism is: the idea located in modernity's self-understanding that European existence is qualitatively superior to other forms (ala Serequebehan) – or to use Oyewumi's expression, Eurocentrism presumes the idea of 'Europeans as knowers'. This section seeks to briefly outline the impact of this idea as it affects the production of knowledge concerning Europe itself, its reified self-image, and those victims of its self-understanding i.e. non-European<sup>29</sup> people. To be sure the past does not determine the present – in the sense that all that the present is can be understood from what happened in the past as causally determined by it (a progression from it) – but it is the present that draws on the past to make meaning of itself as present, and it is from our neo-colonial present that we seek to engage with our colonial 'past' to disentangle ourselves. The former notion, of the past determining the present, can be attributed to the west as a historical system as Cedric Robinson (1990) aptly demonstrates in his appraisal of the work of Trinidadian sociologist Oliver Cox<sup>30</sup> who laboured tirelessly to disfigure this myth of Western historiography. Adducing Eric Wolf's *Europe and the people without History* Robinson (1990:5) points out that;

[T]he triumph of the West as a historical system has constituted a nearly incontestable essentialist envelope surrounding Western literature for the past three centuries. The telos of the narrative of the *epistemic* West is by now so familiar and its logic so compelling that it can be costumed as natural history: "the West" is conceived in a genealogy of civic virtue and moral progress from ancient Athens to twentieth-century America.

It is important to note how this is not only limited to history as a discipline but largely concerned with the self-image of the west, how it makes sense and meaning of itself. This can be thought of as concerning the civilizational narrative of the west's self-progression as Wolf (as cited by Robinson) demonstrates:

We have been taught, inside the classroom and outside of it, that there exists an entity called the West, and that one can think of this West as a society and civilization independent of and in opposition to other societies and civilizations. Many of us even grew up believing this West has a genealogy, according to which ancient Greece begat Rome, Rome begat Christian Europe, Christian Europe begat the Renaissance, the Renaissance the Enlightenment, the

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<sup>29</sup> Following Ramose I use the term non-European here under protest to designate those who have been victims of the de-facto self-globalisation of Europe and not necessarily as the ontological negative of Europe.

<sup>30</sup> Oliver Crumwell Cox and the historiography of the west.

Enlightenment political democracy and the industrial revolution. Industry, crossed with democracy, in turn yielded the United States, embodying the rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

The West's indebtedness to ancient Greece as a civilizational progenitor is best demonstrated by how philosophy itself has become inconceivable outside of its ancient Greek origin<sup>31</sup>. This is Eurocentrism at its best: writing itself into dominance over others. Veroli (2001:56) relying on historiographer of philosophy Lucien Braun "has observed that modern historians of philosophy until Hegel were in the habit of tracing the origin of their discipline back to Egypt, if not to ante-diluvian (i.e., pre- Flood) times, rather than arbitrarily stopping with Greece, as has become the habit since". Indeed Veroli (2001) adduces arguments by Martin Bernal concerning the Afro-Asiatic roots of Western civilisation that it has come to mask as he demonstrates:

The hermetic magic of the Renaissance, for instance, spearheaded by such figures as Giordano Bruno and Marcilio Ficino during the 16th century, puts forward a conception of the historical origins of Civilization that is deeply indebted to those who would rapidly become the other par excellence for all the nascent and rising colonial empires (Spain, Portugal, The Netherlands, England, France). The Africans, whose labor was rapidly becoming necessary for the American expansion of the European empires, were supposed to be — in the Hermetic and, more broadly, Renaissance interpretation -- the originators of everything that their enslavers held to justify their bondage. Indeed, as such scholars as Frances Yates and Martin Bernal have noted, it is Africans, and particularly Ancient Egyptians, who were widely held, during the Renaissance, to be the inventors of culture, an idea that was in large part propagated by the canonical texts of Hermetic Magic, the Corpus Hermeticum. This conviction, or so Bernal argues, held for many well into the Enlightenment. In spite of Isaac Casaubon's attempt in 1614 — i.e., when Descartes was 18 years old — to debunk the claims to Egyptian authenticity of the Corpus Hermeticum, the principal text on the basis of which those claims were made, many would continue to believe in the original priority of Africa in the historical constitution of human civilization. From Lorenzo de Medici's deathbed order to Ficino during the 1490s that he translate the Corpus before Plato's dialogues to Napoleon's insistence on taking a team of Egyptologists with him on the way to conquering Egypt in the

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<sup>31</sup> As Serequebehan (Our Heritage Chapter 5) shows referring to Heidegger's statement that "the statement that philosophy is in its nature Greek says nothing than that the west and Europe, and only these are, in the innercourse of their history, originally philosophical" and Cornelius Castoriadis's remark that "among the creations in our history, greeko-roman history, there is one that we judge positively and take credit for: putting things into question, criticising them, requiring a *logon didonai* — accounting for something and giving reason for it- which is the presupposition for both philosophy and politics".

early 19th century, there can be no doubt that the priority of alterity haunted Early Modern European consciousness. (Veroli, 2001:55-56)

To be sure, it has been a concern of African scholarship, at least since Cheick anta Diop and Theophile Obenga among others to demonstrate the richness of African heritage as can be traced back to ancient Kemetic traditions and how they influenced and gave birth to western civilisation. Indeed Afrocentric scholarship has demonstrated at length the extent of the indebtedness of ancient Greek philosophy to ancient Egyptian philosophy<sup>32</sup>. However, it was the European prerogative and project of dominance to privilege Greece over Egypt/ Africa and to declare it as a place of darkness as Hegel shows:

The peculiarly African character is difficult to comprehend, for the very reason that in reference to it, we must quite give up the principle which naturally accompanies all our ideas— the category of Universality. In Negro life the characteristic point is the fact that consciousness has not yet attained to the realization of any substantial objective existence ... in which the interest of man's volition is involved and in which he realizes his own being. This distinction between himself as an individual and universality of his essential being, the African in the uniform, undeveloped oneness of his existence has not yet attained.... We must lay aside all thought of reverence and morality— all that we call feeling— if we would rightly comprehend him.... At this point we leave Africa, not to mention it again. For it is no historical part of the World; it has no movement or development to exhibit. What we properly understand by Africa, is the Unhistorical, Undeveloped Spirit, still involved in the conditions of mere nature, and which had to be presented here only as on the threshold of the World's History. (Hegel 1956, 93)

The antithetical positing of Africa for Hegel here becomes the possibility condition for celebrating Europe as the epitome of the development of World spirit (Irele,1983), or to use Wilderson's (2012) words, how the West posited itself as the personification of humanity by denying the humanity of the enslaved Africans who were later to be colonised. It is interesting to note how this positing of Africa by Hegel acts to justify the domination of Africa that was unfolding at the time he delivered the lectures. To be sure the colonial project also justified itself as a civilising project that was to save those who had not been bestowed with the gifts of enlightenment. But how can a child beget its mother? How can Europe as a junior and student of Africa in terms of civilisation claim to be civilising Africa? Only to mask the unethical practice of enslavement and colonising that was to become the norm which Mafeje and his contemporaries came to confront in all the disciplines attempting to analyse or produce knowledge about Africa. Furthermore, it is the result of the de-facto self-globalisation of

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<sup>32</sup> Diop *African Origin of civilisation: Myth or reality? Asante Afrocentric idea*

Europe through slavery and colonialism that it would assume dominance in all spheres including discourse which Serequebehan (2007:11) argues is “grounded on the West’s claim to superiority based on the belief, bias, or idea that, its historicity has ‘at last compelled [Man] to face with sober senses his *real* conditions of life and his relations with his kind’”, because “Modernity grasps the real in contradistinction to the ephemeral unreality of non-European existence”. As such modernity (Eurocentrism) proves itself to be a pervasive condition of thought particularly concerning the existence and experience of non-Europeans which is not real for it, which further concretises it as a philosophy of domination. Mafeje’s contribution towards the revival of African scholarship post-independence was precisely to combat this Eurocentrism particularly as it expresses itself concerning the African condition. It was, and continues to be through the legacy of his scholarship which we are building on, combative of Eurocentric negations.

### African Philosophy: past to present

Mafeje (1992:4) has pointed out the great challenge among African philosophers with regards to authenticity in their discourse. For Mafeje (1992:4) while there is a general agreement that the beginnings of African philosophy are in fact traceable to the work of Father Placide Tempels, *Bantu Philosophy* (1946) which was followed by Alexis Kagame’s *The Bantu-Rwandaise Philosophy of Being* (1953) which have had a tremendous influence on what was to be the first generation of philosophers<sup>33</sup>. The negative representations of Africans by early anthropologists no doubt left a radical impulse to refute them although this tended to be what Mafeje (2008) characterizes as vindicationist: an extraverted attempt to justify ourselves to a purely European audience, and on terms best understood by them (Hountondji, 1983:37). However, those negative representations, or negations to use Mafeje’s (2008) own terminology, give us the occasion to deeply reflect upon them and their impact to our situation so as to disentangle ourselves from their binds as per the demands of African philosophy as a critical negative project (Mafeje 2008, Serequebehan 1997). According to Mafeje (1992:4) what remains to be resolved by this philosophical discourse, that conditioned by the present, is “a) the philosophical status of ethno philosophy or folk philosophy; b) the universality of the western criteria for judging whether or not a given discourse is philosophy; and c) whether there could be an equivalence between European and African philosophical status”. Indeed these are concerns of the modern practice of African philosophy given Henry Odera Oruka’s (1981)

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<sup>33</sup> It is here important to note that the African philosophy that Mafeje is hereby referring to is that conditioned by present modalities- the predominant European epistemological paradigm which also conditions the questioning of any such thing as an African philosophy- and not particularly African philosophy proper that is independent of colonial domination- which emanates from the long history of African philosophy predating the colonial era, a philosophy emanating from African cultural expressions and expressions of existentiality

characterisation of the four trends in African philosophy: ethnophilosophy, Sagacity, national-ideological, and professional philosophy.

The preponderance of professional philosophy has no doubt left a cavity on the status of ethnophilosophy, and that of sagacity as Oruka's reaction to the critique of ethnophilosophy as collective philosophy, as a philosophy which has tended to reinforce the western criterion for judging the philosophicality of a discourse which leaves African philosophy indebted to western conceptions (Hountondji 1983:33-34, Bodunrin 1998, Mohmoh 1985). The pejorative meaning ethnophilosophy has come to acquire has largely been attributed to Hountondji (1983:34) who has been assumed to have coined the term while Kwame Nkrumah is said to have been its progenitor in the 1940's already in an unpublished Doctorate he did at the University of Pennsylvania (Ajei, 2013:131). However, the pejorative coinage of Hountondji (1983), as opposed to Nkrumah's somewhat neutral use, comes as a response to the dominion of the methods of anthropology particularly ethnology which tend to portray a static picture of African societies and their beliefs. Such undertakings, like Placide Tempels' *Bantu Philosophy*, according to Hountondji (1983:34) "ethnological works with philosophic pretensions" addressed to Europeans<sup>34</sup>.

While Tempels' *Bantu Philosophy* may have been a response to the conservative gestures of early anthropologists like Lucien Levy-Bruhl, "who devoted his entire life and career to the demonstration of the radical disparity between the nature and quality of mind of the European and what he called 'primitive mentality', which he attributed essentially to non-Western peoples and cultures" (Irele, 1983:12), his, Tempels, reaction is still indebted to the methods of ethnology and its presuppositions which leaves his attribution of a philosophy to the Bantu people as not the equivalent to the western conception (Hountondji, 1983:36). In other words Tempels has substituted primitive for Bantu and mentality with philosophy, which still leaves open the task of identifying what African philosophy could be. Hountondji (1983:34) would then define African philosophy as an alienated literature: that literature produced by Africans and defined by their authors as thus. This for Hountondji (1983) would be to demystify the picture painted by ethnophilosophy's descriptions of African societies and the supposed unanimity about those descriptions from Africans themselves<sup>35</sup>.

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<sup>34</sup> "The black man continues to be the very opposite of an interlocutor; he remains a topic, a voiceless face under private investigation, an object to be defined and not the subject of a possible discourse" (Hountondji, 1983:34).

<sup>35</sup> According to Hountondji (1983:45) "The African ethnophilosopher's discourse is not intended for Africans. It has not been produced for their benefit, and its authors understood that it would be challenge, if at all, not by Africans but by Europe alone. Unless, of course, the West expressed itself through Africans, as it knows how best to do. In short, the African ethnophilosopher made himself the spokesman of All-Africa facing All-Europe at the imaginary rendezvous of give and take- from which we observe that 'Africanist' particularism goes hand in glove, objectively, with an abstract universalism, since the African intellectual who adopts it thereby

No doubt there are resonances between Hountondji's preoccupation with the critique of ethnophilosophy and that of Mafeje's critique of anthropology and the extraversion of its discourse. However, Hountondji (1983) is captive to the western idea of an individual philosophy as opposed to collective philosophy while Mafeje (2008) is more concerned about authentic representations of Africans emanating from their collective world sense and understanding. Furthermore, their respective critiques of anthropology can be understood as external (Hountondji) and internal (Mafeje), which can be explained by their respective training as intellectuals, Hountondji in philosophy while Mafeje in Social anthropology. However, their concern about Africa converges them to a properly African philosophical practice that Lansana Keita (122) has identified as "to help in the imparting of knowledge of the natural and social world and to assist in the constant discussion of the optimal set of value judgements and cultural assumptions that social man must make to take the fullest advantage of the sum of scientific knowledge available". According to Keita (123);

It would be an error, therefore, for the philosopher in the African context to assume that philosophy as it is practiced in the Western world should serve as a model for the practice of philosophy. A useful approach, it seems, would be to regard philosophical activity as an engaging in theoretical analysis of issues and ideas of practical concern. But in modern society, it is the social and natural sciences that discuss ideas and issues relevant to practical concerns. Thus the practice of philosophy in the African context should be concerned first with the analysis of the methodology and content of the social sciences, etc. for it is the methodology of research of a given discipline that determines the orientation of research in that discipline and the kinds of solutions to problems ultimately proposed. Furthermore, analysis of the methodology of the sciences of human behaviour would be constantly alert to the notion that the modes and objects of human thought are potentially value-laden.

Indeed the convergence of Mafeje's concerns and that of Hountondji's speak to the distinctive method African philosophy ought to adopt in relation to the present postcolonial concerns, which depletes the boundaries of disciplines and inherited thought.

Moreover, apart from the rootedness of ethnophilosophy in anthropology that would inspire Hountondji's dismissal of it, it is also the use to which ethnophilosophy has been deployed to legitimate the somewhat corrupt African elites and leaders who speak of a glorified return to the past. Such a return to the past and ethnophilosophy's endeavour to uncover it neglects what philosophy proper for Hountondji (1983:47) is and could be: a science. According to Hountondji (1983:97)

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expounds it, over the heads of his own people, in a mythical dialogue with his European colleagues, for the constitution of a 'civilisation of the universal'.

philosophy is a scientific endeavour due to its organic link in its development and fruition to the development of modern sciences as per Althusser's *Lenin and Philosophy* (as cited in Hountondji 1983:97);

Philosophy has not always existed; it has been observed only in places where there is also what is called a science or sciences- science in the strict sense of theoretical discipline, i.e. ideating and demonstrative, not an aggregate of empirical results..... for philosophy to be born or reborn, it is necessary that sciences be. That is why, perhaps, philosophy in the strict sense began only with Plato, goaded into being by the existence of Greek mathematics; was blown up by Descartes, roused into its modern revolution by Galilean physics; was recast by Kant, under the influence of the Newtonian discovery; was remodelled by Husserl, stung by the first axiomatic etc.

Such a view of philosophy no doubt glorifies a fairly Eurocentric genealogy of philosophy that neglects other traditions that predate the Greek civilisation and which Greek civilisation was also indebted to, but also pedestals an absolutely aristocratic conception of it which Marx sought to refute in the *German Ideology* although with little success, largely due to the preponderance and deterministic logic of *historical materialism*. To be sure Hountondji's (1983) view of African philosophy, in light of the above declarations, is a theoretical discipline which is the reserve of experts, much like other sciences require expertise. Furthermore, such a philosophy is purely literature as is the precondition for scientificity, or the mere existence of a science. Therefore, African philosophy is that literature produced by Africans and described as philosophy by their authors as Hountondji (1983:53-54) elaborates;

Admit then that our philosophy is yet to come... African philosophy like any other philosophy cannot possibly be a collective worldview. It can exist as a philosophy only in the form of a confrontation between individual thoughts, a discussion, a debate...The Africanness of our philosophy will not necessarily reside in the themes but will depend above all on the geographical origin of those who produce it and their intellectual coming together. The best European Africanists remain Europeans, even (and above all ) if they invent a Bantu 'philosophy', whereas the African philosophers who think in terms of Plato or Marx and confidently take over the theoretical heritage of Western philosophy, assimilating and transcending it, are producing authentic African work.

This geographic definition of African philosophy would seem to exclude work done in the African diaspora, and weaken attempts to achieve a thematic focus on realities facing the African continent and its peoples as Serequebehan (2000:1) intervenes:

But if it is not "themes" that define the Africanness" of our philosophy, what does? Around what will the "intellectual coming together" of those who "produce it" occur? For philosophers (African or otherwise) are human beings and, like everybody else, "congregate or come together" around issues, concerns, or celebrations focused on a common theme and/or a cluster of themes. Indeed, Hountondji is well aware of this as it pertains to the development and practice of modern European philosophy. What, then, of African philosophy? Is Hountondji's geographic and nonthematic conception a different "special" type of philosophy for Africa? Is he vying with the ethnographic conception, whose critique he initiated, for a "special-status philosophy" for Africa?

Indeed Hountondji's (1983) conception of both philosophy and African philosophy has generated a lot of responses, including that of Serequebehan (cited above), which have enhanced the development of African philosophy up to the present. To be sure both Marcean Towa (1998) and Olabiyi Yai (1977) take issue with the scientific picture of philosophy and its theoreticism/epistemologism, not to mention its individualistic focus to the exclusion of any collectivistic outlook although also critical of ethnophilosophy.

According to Yai (1977:9) it is not enough to react against ethnophilosophy without providing radical critique against it because "in philosophy, when we come to the collective and the individual, things are tiny bit less straightforward than our pure philosophers would have us believe" for Yai (1977:9); "it is important here to distinguish between objective and subjective, or the material conditions that enable one or other philosophy and the vehicles for its expression to come into being". Undeniably, Yai whom Mafeje (1992) adduces, duly responds to the challenges of an African philosophy concerned with present conditions as it disregards the legitimacy of the Western paradigm as universal and with their philosophy, contra Hountondji, as individualistic. Indeed according to Yai (1977:10):

The vital point, in a debate about the existence or non-existence of a philosophy cannot therefore be (unless one is subjective) the emergence of individual philosophers. Rather, it must be "the material base". Philosophy, like history in general, cannot be conceived as the work of "geniuses". In any case oral African tradition abounds in examples of individual philosophers, who are expounders of explicit philosophies.

The relationship between the individual and the collective cannot be considered as mutually exclusive one to the detriment of the other. However, they are mutually advantageous to respond to present reality faced by the African collective as Towa (1998) has defined philosophy as the thought about the essential. We will hereby turn to the exchange between Mabogo More and WJ Ndaba, who are

themselves marginal figures in the philosophy scene in this country, to explicate the concerns as identified by Mafeje.

In the article *African Philosophy Revisited* More (1996) interrogates western conceptions of African people and African philosophy. According to More (1996) Africans have been subjected to a “panopticon gaze” by the west and this may be attributed to the western valorisation of reason. For More (1996:109) “Western valorisation of reason is directly connected to the interrogation of the legitimacy of African philosophy; that rationality – that undergirds Western philosophy’s self-conception, and self-image, and its articulation of human nature – is the primarily the source of this exclusionist attitude”. Therefore, for More (1996:110), what is thereby to be understood as African philosophy needs to be validated by the Western paradigm which is the epitome of rationality;

A human being, declared Aristotle, ‘is a rational being’. Those beings who do not meet the criterion of rationality, those who lack reason, are for Aristotle slaves. In Aristotle there is an equation of a natural relation between reason and power. Rationality provides the right to rule over those who lack reason. So, domination of those supposedly at the lower rung in ‘the great chain of being’ by those regarded as occupying a higher up position is thought by Aristotle to be a natural condition.

Indeed it is the lack of reason that justified the conquest of indigenous people by those who were higher up in the great chain of being which also justifies the attempted epistemicide which validates the subsuming of African philosophy under the Western paradigm. More (1996) can thereby be seen to be addressing the denial of an African philosophy by the west and their insistence of African philosophy to be measured by their own hegemonic cultural norms and standards. Under the section titled ‘veiled denials of African Philosophy’ More (1996:119) begins by posing a series of questions aimed at showing the affirmed negation of African philosophy;

‘What is African philosophy?’, Does African philosophy exist?. ‘Is there such a thing as an African philosophy?’ These are some of the questions that emerged following Placide Tempels’ *Bantu Philosophy*. Normally, questions of the type, ‘what is....?’, ‘is there such and such?’ or does such and such exist?’ are standard philosophical questions sometimes assuming, for example, the form: ‘What is truth?’, ‘Does God exist?’ and so forth. Why then would questions of the same sort about Africa generate so much heat, rather than mere philosophical curiosity? Aren’t they as much philosophical questions as other questions of a metaphysical or ontological nature? If such questions about Africa and the African are simply standard philosophical questions, why, as we enquired earlier, are similar questions not asked in relation to the British, Chinese, French, Indians etc.?

Indeed such questions seem to be legitimate only when they are asked about Africa and seem to be irrational when enquired about the British for instance. For More (1996:119) what is at issue in this questioning of the existence of an African philosophy is an attempt to call into question the humanity of Africans from the position of the “Greek-cum-European philosophical- anthropological paradigm centred on the notion of ‘rationality’”. Moreover, philosophy is the highest echelon of western humanism which Africans, by virtue of their lack of reason, cannot live up to. According to More (1996:119) “it is the self-image of Western philosophy and the constructed identity of African otherness by western philosophical heroes that it is responsible for the denials- veiled or explicit- of African philosophy as a legitimate discursive field”. And to make this point More (1996) turns to the situation in the South African context through a discussion of Augustine Shutte’s *Philosophy for Africa* whose title reveals the author’s prejudice about Africans. More (1996:120) refers to the opening statement of Shutte’s book which reads: “This is a book about philosophy and Africa. That philosophy and Africa should appear together in the same book might seem strange”, More (1996:121) elaborates;

According to Shutte, philosophy, in the Western sense of the word (as if there is unanimity about its Western meaning), is methodologically a rigorous, self-critical and analytic discipline. In this sense of rational activity, philosophy in Africa has been absent. What, however, has identified Africa is not philosophy qua philosophy but rather what he calls ‘traditional African thought’.

For African traditional thought to be elevated to the status of philosophy needs to be mediated through Western philosophy, hence the ‘for’ in Shuttes title (Ramose 2003), which is philosophy par excellence. Such considerations coincide with the colonisation of Africa veiled as a mission to civilize as Ramose’s (2003) review of Shuttes book attests to such a denial of the existence of African philosophy.

According to More (1996) in the Western epistemological paradigm knowledge is given birth by a methodology and therefore African Philosophy, at least in the western sense, does not exist – because of its assumed lack of a methodology and systematicity. More (1996:123) provides a demonstration of this assertion by Westerners such as Rauche whom he, More that is, references in this regard when they assert; “[T]here is in traditional African thinking no methodologically constituted philosophy, in this sense scientific philosophy in the western meaning of the word”. According to More (1996:123) in Rauche’s mind there exists no Philosophy in Africa at least Philosophy in the western sense which can be characterised with a capital ‘P’. However, Rauche feels that the only honour due to African traditional thought is that of Philosophy which can be characterised by a small letter ‘p’ which can be

called folk philosophy or ethno philosophy as per Hountondji. For More (1996:123) “this strategy” that of Rauche outlined above “is designed to maintain power relations by giving acceptance and recognition to a threatening and radical upsurge in a non-dangerous sphere”. And this means that “accept African philosophy as a marginally important enterprise, necessary for Africans, part anthropology, part ethnology and ‘you do not give it full status as a philosophic investigation with universal significance’”. This is generally the case with African philosophy within South African practice of philosophy where there is a continuation of the white supremacist order that privileges Western philosophy and treats African philosophy as a separate cultural practice that should exist alongside Western philosophy as real philosophy. What is to be understood as African Philosophy does not constitute the basis for philosophical training and is offered either as an elective or as a third year course where what is ‘real’ philosophy (western) has been constituted. As More pointed out, this helps maintain the order in that what is understood as philosophy is what has been defined in the western sense continues to be taught as The philosophy, while African philosophy is relegated to the position of insignificance in the periphery of African studies. More’s position thereby gives a clear outline of the impediments and perceived status of African philosophy.

W. J. Ndaba (1999) replied to More’s arguments in a rather sceptical manner which can be read as partly in defence of the colonial establishment and partly moving the discourse of African philosophy forward. This can be seen with Ndaba’s (1999:174) reductionist attitude towards More’s arguments and reducing them to strong feelings, as if no sound philosophical reasons were given in defence of the position More assumes. Moreover, Ndaba (1999:174) is also ambiguous about western epistemological domination which thrives in underestimating African capabilities for intellectual discourse. This can be seen as the outright overlooking of such realities and the defence of what Africans are attempting to liberate themselves from. Ndaba (1999) however is in agreement with More regarding his contention against the valorisation of western models of rationality, although he feels that More’s position does more harm than it does any good – where the good is understood to be a harmonious co-existence of both Western and African conceptions of philosophy. Ndaba (1999:176) views More’s position as providing no contribution towards the understanding of African philosophy – other than being overly critical about the domineering Eurocentric paradigm. To do this Ndaba (1999:177) invokes the hermeneuticist defence of African philosophy by Theophilus Okere which argues for the situatedness and cultural-indebtedness of all philosophy. For Ndaba (1999:179)

Although More’s (1996:110-119) challenge to the statements of some ethnocentric Western philosophers is understandable, his protest about the aberrations of Western philosophy misses the benefits which the two traditions of philosophy could provide for one another. His catalogue of ethnocentric expression, inferences and veiled accusations of the lack of

rationality is counterproductive for the progress of African philosophy in dialogue with other traditions of philosophy.

Indeed, Ndaba seems to think that the ethnocentrism (indeed Eurocentrism) of Western philosophy is an aberration and that African philosophy can be a useful partner in dialogue with the West. However, is ethnocentrism an aberration to the Western philosophical project as Ndaba assumes or is it part of its constitutive core? The latter seems more plausible taking into account the racism of the icons of the Occidental tradition (Kant, Hegel and Marx as Serequebehan has done in his *Contested Memory: The icons of the Occidental tradition*) up to and including Martin Heidegger whom Ndaba invokes to make his points. This is not to say that Western philosophy and African philosophy cannot mutually advance each other, but it is to admit that such a relationship is only possible on an equal footing as the requirement set out by Ramose (above) which the Western project unequivocally denies. Moreover, what may not be apparent to Ndaba is that it is only when we understand what the others, especially those who have played the oppressor role in the scenes of European colonialism of Africa, perception and views of us is that we can gain knowledge on what to do. This means we have to critically understand that which oppresses us in order for us to liberate ourselves from the shackles of European colonial domination, as it is the critical negative project of African philosophy, than assuming a non-existent equality between the two traditions of thought.

Furthermore, it is only when we take the question of whether there exists an African philosophy or not as valid that we may feel the need to provide further justification of its existence using western categories – because the question itself comes with an already conceived notion of what counts as philosophy which is undoubtedly western. However, if we understand philosophy to be a product of a society then African philosophy exists whether the west likes it or not. This is because philosophy is “inherently interpretative undertaking grounded in the mortal existentiality of human existence” and this is done in a lived background, or what we may understand as historicity (Serequebehan, 1994:2). Moreover, “Philosophy always presupposes and grounds its reflexive and reflective discourse in and on the actuality of a lived historico-cultural and political milieu” (Serequebehan, 1994:2).

#### African modes of self-expression: whither Eurocentrism?

*...One man has the ability to develop a new skill but another to judge whether it will be a curse or blessing to it's user. Now ... this invention (writing) will cause those who use it to lose the learning of their minds by neglecting their memories; since through this reliance on letters... they will lose the ability to recall things within themselves. You have invented not a medicine to strengthen memory but an inferior substitute for it. You are providing your students with a way of seeming wise without true wisdom: for they will appear to have learned without*

*instruction: they will seem to know a good deal, while they are really ignorant of many things: and they will become nuisances. These man who look wise but lack wisdom.*

--Egyptian god Thamus (quoted from Oluwole 1997)

Myth has it that Africans converted to christianity<sup>36</sup> because it is based on the written word and that African spiritualities lacked such a firm grounding. Not only does such a myth privilege preconceived western ideals but also serves to obfuscate the reality behind such a conversion which need to be understood historically, particularly since christianity has been a handmaiden of European expansionism as Yves Winter (2011:2) has noted. Furthermore, according to Winter (2011:3)

Indigenous peoples had the right to refuse conversion, but they could not restrict the rights of Europeans to preach the word; any restriction on Christian proselytising constituted the basis for just war.

Ramose (1999:13) elaborates;

Cultural differences (between the indigenous people and their christian colonisers) were to be eliminated if and when they were perceived either as a threat or as a contradiction to the intent of both colonisation and Christianisation. Thus the will to conquer and dominate was anchored upon the two pillars of colonisation and Christianisation. The legitimacy of the former was derived from the deliberate and complete violation of all the principles of the theory of the just war. The result was the emergence and protection of the so called right of conquest... Christianity justified its domination and elimination of indigenous African religions by appeal to Jesus Christ's instruction: go ye and teach all nations. So it is that colonisation and Christianity assumed epistemological dominance crystallizing in their unilaterally conferred, though no less questionable, right to determine and define the meaning of experience, knowledge and truth on behalf of the indigenous African.

A common saying has it that when the colonialists came to Africa they had bibles and Africans had the land and now the colonialists have the land and Africans bibles. What is often missing in the narration of this common saying is that the colonialists had the bible only on the one hand while the other had a gun. This is an important part in the story which helps illuminate our understanding of how the conversion went about: the use of brutal force. The transition to the western way of life was not a smooth one because the colonizer was justified to kill savages, non-christians, if they refused conversion. And conversion itself marked such a transition from being a lesser human to being

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<sup>36</sup> We follow Ramose's protest, following Soyinka, against the capitalising C in christianity since many other religions are not afforded such a privilege.

recognised as work in progress towards attaining full human status. Not only was the colonialist ignorant about African ways of life but couldn't care less because of the unequal human status accorded to his conquered. Now we understand that it was through unrelenting power that conversion was facilitated and therefore we cannot readily assume the power of the written word towards understanding of ourselves as African. Indeed it is the amplification of the text, at the expense of the oral African traditions, that the denial of a philosophy to Africa is best facilitated as Oluwole contends. This is because the text as a model for thought is limited and best complies with the given western models of science and philosophy. The task of a genuine philosophical undertaking on the part of the Africans has to take seriously the oral traditions that an African philosophy is best articulated. However, the preoccupation with texts for Oluwole needs not be seen as opposed to exploring the oral as these two can be complementary which goes to show the impeding need for endogeneity.

### Conclusion

African philosophy as a philosophy of liberation describes a position of interpretation from the perspective of the indigenous people conquered in the unjust wars of colonisation. As Serequeberhan (1994:55) has noted that as a practice of resistance "African philosophy has a double task: de-structive and constructive. In this it is a practice of resistance, for it is engaged in combat on the level of reflection and ideas, aimed at dismantling the symmetry of concepts and theoretic constructs that have sustained Euro American global dominance. It is a resistance focused on challenging the core myths of the West—its self-flattering narratives—in terms of which its domination of the earth was justified. The practice of African philosophy is consequently internal to the very process through which the formerly colonized world is presently reclaiming itself. It is, in this sense, a concrete practice of resistance." Indeed, it has been the task of this chapter to resist Eurocentrism presented to us as the curious question concerning the existence of an African philosophy. We began with an interrogation of such questioning and exposed the limitations of such an undertaking which demonstrates the unmistakable Eurocentric character of it. This chapter also examined the underlying structures of coloniality in Western philosophy and its colonising effects where we revealed how such a question is rooted in doubt, ignorance and power as functionaries of the European epistemological paradigm facilitating epistemological dominance. Moreover, the questioning of the question also provided a basis from which to develop an account of what African philosophy is through a discussion of the brief history of it as recapitulated by Mabogo More and W.J Ndaba. This chapter has also demonstrated how doubt and ignorance coupled with unrelenting power on the side of the oppressor, and those bought into the project of facilitating (epistemic) oppression, function to suppress a genuinely

philosophical undertaking and the liberatory character of African philosophy which this thesis aims to outline and defend through an exposition of Mafeje's work which we now turn to.

## Chapter 4: Archie Mafeje and the liberation of philosophy

*Archie Mafeje has fought the battle and run the race successfully; for those of he has left behind, especially those of us whom he inspired, the challenge before us is clear: Keep the Mafeje spirit alive by investing ourselves with dedication to the quest for the knowledge we need in order to transform our societies – and the human condition for the better.* Adebayo Olukoshi (2007) *A Giant Has Moved On: Tribute to Archie Mafeje*

### Introduction

From the previous chapter, it is important to recapitulate our working understanding of what philosophy is and to extend this view. This is because we had focused on the question concerning the existence of African philosophy which already incorporates within itself an established notion of what philosophy is, and indeed should be. Our chief contention was that this is a colonial understanding of philosophy of which we here intend to elaborate our critique as necessary for a deconstructive aspect of African philosophy (see Tsenay Serequebehan and Lucious Outlaw respectively<sup>37</sup>) duly concerned with liberation. Our view of philosophy shall not be limited to its disciplinary boundaries - as received from the West - but will be considered broadly as an inherent human endeavour concerned with understanding of itself and its world – and the boundaries themselves explained as arising from a world of concerns totally different from our own.

Occasion shall be had to comment on the social sciences in Africa and their decolonisation as per Mafeje's concern which shall be broadly characterised as the liberation of philosophy from its Eurocentric entanglement – the boundaries notwithstanding. This chapter aims to reveal how Eurocentric philosophy is characterised by domination and reproduces itself in relation to those who are its others under the façade of universalism. Moreover, the aim of this chapter to show how Archie Mafeje's intellectual life and work sought to combat this Eurocentrism albeit with some limitations. Through a discussion of Mafeje's work the inherently liberatory character of his account of African philosophy shall be outlined and the resulting limitations explored. It will be the subject of the following chapter to supplement Mafeje's limitations. However, the purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate Mafeje's account of African philosophy as that which is duly concerned with liberation of the oppressed and of philosophy itself.

### Portrait of an African Philosopher

The imperial character of the global division of intellectual labour has left a devastating mark on the discourses emanating from the social sciences and humanities in Africa. Part of the struggle by African scholars has been against the theoretical extraversion emanative from anthropological discourses (Hountondji 1983, Adesina 2010). Adesina (2006, 2010) has delineated three tendencies that define

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<sup>37</sup> Serequebehan. Critique of Eurocentrism and the Practice of African Philosophy and Outlaw. African/a Deconstructive and Reconstructive aspects

scholarship in the African social sciences thus: regurgitation, protest scholarship, and works of distinct epistemic significance. According to Adesina (2010:3) “scholarship as regurgitation imposes received categories (concepts, theories, and paradigms) on local conditions. While the data and the sociologist may be local the narrative and analysis function as extensions of Euro-American discourses”. Such scholarship often results in a translation of the tenets of African culture to western academic terms which reinforces “the terms of international division of intellectual labour” (Adesina 2010:3). Protest scholarship is focused in eliminating the negative effects of the international division of labour where Africa is only an object of study. According to Adesina (2010:4) while protest scholarship may generate a lot of materials it does not “generate new *epistemic insights that march the distinctness of the local ethnographic data on which they stand*”. On the other hand endogeneity requires a recognition of the way in which local data “instigate distinct epistemic insights or lead to epistemic rupture” (Adesina 2010:4).

No doubt Mafeje’s own works would fall under Adesina’s third category because of the epistemic rupture they facilitate not only in Anthropology but the entirety of the social sciences in Africa. Nyoka (2017:4) has argued against the tendency to weaken Mafeje’s work limiting it to a critique of anthropology only. According to Nyoka (2017:4) such a minimalist view makes a reformist out of Mafeje whose work is best understood as “criticising all of the social sciences for being Eurocentric and imperialist”. It is this view that we appraise, following Nyoka (2017), and establishes Mafeje as an African Philosopher following Ramose’s argument (1999:33) that;

An indigenous African trained in philosophy as a discipline is not automatically doing African philosophy whether he or she philosophises. In order to do African philosophy and acquire the appellation, it is essential that the professional philosopher concerned must base his/her philosophical reflections upon “the culture and experience of African peoples”. Proceeding from this basis the African philosopher would, at the very minimum, be arguing implicitly for the liberation of African philosophy from the yoke of dominance and enslavement under the European (Western) epistemological paradigm.

Contrary to the view of Hountondji (1983), mentioned in the previous chapter, that the Africanness of African philosophy resides not so much in themed discussions but from the geographical origin of the authors and their coming together, Mafeje’s intellectual journey as an African intellectual opposed to Eurocentrism offers us an attractive picture of what African philosophy should be in our contemporary world: engagement with reality. As we have noted before, following Ramose, Dussel and Dladla, philosophy properly defined is not about itself as a reified objective but about the non-philosophical i.e. reality, or, to follow Marcién Towa’s formulation, philosophy is the thought of the essential.

Without a doubt Mafeje's concerns in his theoretical work is none other than the need to understand the African reality on terms emanative of its experience, as Mafeje (2001:28) enunciates;

I began to doubt the validity of colonial anthropological categorisations when I was doing fieldwork in the urban and the rural areas in South Africa in the mid-sixties. By the 1960s there were no tribes to talk about in South Africa and there was no absolute division between town and country, thanks to labour migration since the discovery of diamonds in 1867 and gold in 1884, and the incorporation of the African societies into the British colonial state towards the end of the 19th century. But from the era of racial segregation under the British settlers after the defeat of the Boers to apartheid after the takeover by the Afrikaners in 1948, all South African governments maintained the classification of Africans according to "tribe". This was even so despite the fact that some chiefs as a reaction to white oppression had become black nationalists and their followers had become Pan-Africanists (known as Ama-Afrika Poqo in South Africa meaning Africans by themselves and for themselves).

Indeed such a recognition of colonial mystifications of African realities and the need to contest their hold speak of a practice of African philosophy as a philosophy of resistance as Serequebehan (2009:46) has identified that "it is engaged in combat on the level of reflection and ideas, aimed at dismantling the symmetry of concepts and theoretic constructs that have sustained Euro-American global dominance". Moreover, "It is a resistance focused on challenging the core myths of the West—its self-flattering narratives—in terms of which its domination of the earth was justified. The practice of African philosophy is consequently internal to the very process through which the formerly colonized world is presently reclaiming itself. It is, in this sense, a concrete practice of resistance" (Serequebehan, 2009:46). Furthermore, Mafeje (2001:48) attests to being committed to such a revolutionary undertaking in defence of emancipated conception of self away from Eurocentric negations.

Achieng (2015:252) has noted the imperative, in approaching Mafeje's (1991) work, to outline two tendencies: "first, knowledge production for the generation of theory or for conceptualizations of society"; and secondly, "knowledge production to inform praxis". According to Achieng (2015:252) such an appreciation, between knowledge for theory or for praxis, should, nevertheless, be that "whether it is knowledge for theory production or knowledge that is praxis oriented, how we approach our units of analysis (methodology) and the lenses with which we choose to analyse these units (epistemology) should be constants that have to be put under perpetual scrutiny". Indeed such promulgations speak of the attentiveness to the materiality of situations away from possible idealisations emanative of disciplinarity as Achieng (2015:254) attests;

Mafeje questioned his own acquired discipline – anthropology –, leading him to refract from it by adopting sociological lenses to his own study of anthropology. Such an interdisciplinary stance, one can comfortably assert, guided him to a superior conceptualization of the society he was studying.

However, in describing his own method Mafeje (2001:55) refrains from asserting any interdisciplinarity simply because every discipline has its own set of assumptions that would require attentiveness to, or as Mafeje (2001:55) put it; It would have demanded its own pound of flesh, which leads him to postulate his approach as non-disciplinary;

If I had attempted to be interdisciplinary, instead of simply learning from others, I would have got bogged down in intractable methodological problems, as each discipline would have demanded its pound of flesh. To avoid all this, I simply used the discursive method (not in its unflattering English sense but its original sense of *discursus* meaning a reasoned discussion or exposition).

Indeed such a discursive method is able to assist Mafeje (1991:2) to decipher “social phenomena which had been looked at through the lenses of non-Africans”, simply because “in theory building significant differences do not occur at the level of “facts” but characteristically at the level of interpretation of “facts””<sup>38</sup>, which see Mafeje (1991) critique erudition as valuable to theorizing.

Without a doubt Mafeje’s outlook on the role of the social sciences in Africa speak of a thematic methodological confrontation with Eurocentrism as it emanates from the impositions of certain categories for the interpretation of African social phenomena, which consequently contrasts Hountondji’s (1983) pronouncements about a theme less African philosophy. Furthermore, Mafeje’s theoretical promulgations speak of the imperative of a modern African philosophy as identified by Keita (123):

It would be an error for the philosopher in the African context to assume that philosophy as it is practiced in the Western world should serve as a model for the practice of philosophy. A useful approach, it seems, would be to regard philosophical activity as an engaging in theoretical analysis of issues and ideas of practical concern... the practice of philosophy in the African context should be concerned first with the analysis of the methodology and content of the social sciences, etc. for it is the methodology of research of a given discipline that determines the orientation of research in that discipline and the kinds of solutions to problems

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<sup>38</sup> “This presupposes that every professional practitioner has an adequate stock of information from which sustainable propositions can be made. In normal scientific practice such information is standardised, only subject to individual emphases and refinement” Mafeje (1991:ii)

ultimately proposed. Furthermore, analysis of the methodology of the sciences of human behaviour would be constantly alert to the notion that the modes and objects of human thought are potentially value-laden.

Mafeje's (1971, 1991, and 2001) confrontation with such methodical problems, particularly alterity in reference to anthropology, as they emanate from the study of African societies speak of an African philosophical practice concerned with liberation, both theoretical and practical. No doubt such an articulation, although it diverges from Hountondji's (1983) concerning thematic focus, it nonetheless converges with Hountondji's (1983) scientific focus. However, such a convergence can be explained with resort to the differences in focus and training of both Hountondji and Mafeje, with the latter having a firm roots in the social sciences. Moreover, Hountondji's own training in the pseudo-science that Marxism pretends to be would afford him such a theoretical focus. Mafeje on the other hand is salvaged by his confrontation with such presupposition and the demand to decolonise the social sciences in Africa. However, the theoreticism of any attempt to be scientific would prove limiting to decipher social categories that are purely imaginative as African culture and history abounds with such. This would necessitate an enhancement of Mafeje's own revolutionary outlook through a materialist ontological grounding of discourses which guarantees universal acceptance only on the basis of particular exactitudes.

However, Mafeje's contribution to the liberation of the social sciences from Eurocentric negations has been hailed from all over the African continent, while his contribution remains unknown in his own country of birth which still speaks of the need for Africanisation/decolonisation of the curriculum. Bongani Nyoka (2012) has identified the particular importance of Mafeje's work and methods for the decolonisation of the sociology curriculum in South Africa<sup>39</sup>. In a defence of Mafeje's notion of authentic interlocution, which refers to approaching an object of enquiry from its own terms, Nyoka (2012a:7) asserts:

The significance of Mafeje's oeuvre lies in his argument that 'ideographic enquiry yields deeper insights than nomothetic enquiry' (1981: 123). To the extent that this is so, Mafeje holds that knowledge is first local before it can be said to be universal. This, it should be noted, is no invitation to parochialism. Nor is it refusal to endorse universally upheld standards of analytical rigour, logical precision and clarity of expression. Mafeje had in mind the view that researchers ought to take their objects of enquiry or units of analysis on their own terms. He

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<sup>39</sup> Nyoka, B. 2012. *Sociology Curriculum in a South African University: A Case Study*. A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in the Department of Sociology, University of the Western Cape.

argued that researchers' theoretical inclinations should not dictate to data. But rather, researchers ought to generate insights from the data itself.

However, as a critique of positivist science Mafeje himself falls into the same trap by assuming that the data can speak for itself without the mediation of the researcher herself. Indeed this also speaks of the epistemological focus of Mafeje's work that Nyoka (2012) appraises. According to Adesina (2008:133) "the meaning of Mafeje for generations of African scholars is found in his uncompromising aversion to the 'epistemology of alterity' – the 'othering' of Africa and Africans – and the advancement of scholarship grounded in the centring of African ontological experiences". Furthermore, for Adesina (2008) it is the "aversion to alterity and pursuit of endogeneity" that Mafeje's lasting legacy for new generations of African intellectuals is to be appreciated. For Adesina (2008:134);

Against the prevailing (mis)representations of Africa and the Africans, an important aspect of Mafeje scholarship was devoted to a vigorous combating of what he referred to as the "epistemology of alterity." No discipline came up for harsher rebuke from Mafeje than Anthropology, the field of study in which he received much of his graduate education. Beyond 'protest scholarship', however, Mafeje's works equally involve a resolute affirmation of endogeneity — a scholarship grounded in and driven by the affirmation of African experiences and ontological accounting for the self.

Indeed this best articulates Mafeje's status as an African philosopher concerned with liberation from the tutelage of Europe as demonstrated in his internal critique of Anthropology which he describes as deconstructionist (Mafeje, 2001:29). Such a deconstructionist approach would confront the problems of colonial anthropological categorisations and insists on what Adesina (2008) has identified as endogeneity contra Hountondji's notion of extroversion or alterity. It is noteworthy that although Hountondji (1983) is quick to dismiss anthropology as a colonial enterprise Mafeje is not quick to do so, which would see his reconstruction of anthropology as Adesina (2008:140) appraises;

Mafeje uses 'anthropology' in at least two senses: anthropology as a conceptual concern with ontological discourses and Anthropology as "a historically defined field of study". The former has to do with origin of something — as in his discussion of the "anthropology of African literature". The latter has to do with a discipline rooted in the 'epistemology of alterity.' While Mafeje associate the latter with the discipline, it is equally as much a mode of thinking and writing that considers the 'object' as the inferior or the exotic Other. It is the latter that one would classify as the 'anthropologized' reasoning about Africa; a discursive mode that persists, which constitutes for me the curse of anthropology in the study of Africa. As a discipline, however, Mafeje was careful to distinguish between the works of Colonial Anthropology

(most emblematic of British Anthropology) and works of practitioners such as Maurice Godelier and Claude Meillassoux. The former is more foundationally associated with anthropology “as a study of ‘primitive’ societies”... the latter, Mafeje insisted, must be taken seriously: “their deep idiographic knowledge, far from diminishing their capacity to produce nomothetic propositions, has helped them to generate new concepts”. They approached the African societies on their own terms — without alterity.

This is Mafeje’s distinctive confrontation with colonialism at least at the level of ideas which should moreover inform praxis.

### Archie Mafeje and a liberation discourse<sup>40</sup>

This section, through an exposition of Mafeje’s writings, explores Archie Mafeje’s thought on philosophy and African philosophy to demonstrate the inherently liberatory character of his persuasions. It is important to note the differences between Mafeje’s professional works in what may be constituted as African philosophy and his general works in the social sciences, particularly anthropology, in which Mafeje’s philosophy, which we will call an African liberation philosophy or African philosophy of liberation, is most evident. The latter then is a philosophy which is not defined by boundaries of disciplines, but the practice of philosophy proper as necessarily engaged with its reality.

Mafeje delineates two tendencies in the ensuing debate concerning the existence of African philosophy, the first being that of Henri Maurier (as cited by Mafeje 1992), who is of the persuasion that the disseminate answer to such a question is surely “no! Not yet!” According to Mafeje (1992) such people as Maurier have in mind, when they respond to such questions as that concerning the existence of an African philosophy, “philosophy as formally defined in the occident and the new world”. As for Maurier, as cited by Mafeje (1992), “[t]he necessary conditions for first a philosophy and then an African philosophy have not been yet met”. This demonstrably outlines that Maurier is thinking of philosophy as a formal discipline “with a distinctive set of universally agreed upon ground rules” (Mafeje 1992, 3). However, the practice of philosophy, even in the West, has shown this not to be true, as philosophical discourse even there comprises primarily contestations about the meaning of philosophy itself. It would then seem that this accustomed disciplinary state of affairs does not obtain in the colonies, or to those who have their humanity questioned, as they always need guidance from the colonial master who has given himself the parenting role of philosophy itself upon the Africans. It should also be said that there are Africans who espouse such views that have maintained that the only site or horizon of authentic philosophic engagement is that endowed to the Africans by

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<sup>40</sup> Some portions in this sections are from my recently published paper on the same topic.

their colonial master. It comes as no surprise that there would be some Africans who themselves espouse such views, as the so-called (post) colonial situation in the continent itself instructs us that the white supremacist order of colonialism often can be maintained without the presence of white bodies. White supremacy and colonialism have also taught us that it is able to reproduce itself, the colonial condition, without its actual physical presence. It is in this regard that the seminal work of Frantz Fanon's 1952 *Black Skin, White Masks* is to be appreciated.<sup>41</sup>

This first tendency then, as sketched by Mafeje, appears to be not acceptable for outlining what African philosophy properly should be, due to its fixation to confine African philosophy to European conceptions of philosophy. To authenticate this point, Mafeje (1992, 2) adduces the article *Theory and Practice in African Philosophy: The poverty of Speculative Philosophy* by Olabiyi Yai (1977) who objects the assumption that European philosophy is the sole provider of a valid paradigm for philosophy; "[i]f there is an insistence that African philosophy conform to this paradigm in order to qualify, then we are still faced with the usual European ethnocentrism".

The second inclination, contra the first, Eurocentrist, stated above, Mafeje points out it is that which was spearheaded by Africans in the diaspora. This was a movement that was able to "raise the clarion call for the black cause" (1992:5), through stalwarts such as Edward Blyden, Jean Price Mars, W. E. B. Du Bois, Aime Cesaire and Marcus Garvey, whom Nicolas Veroli (2001) *Imagination and Politics* has identified as the first appearance of a Black counter public<sup>42</sup>, contra the Public sphere which had been instituted in the early seventeenth century Europe on the basis of bourgeois reason/rationality articulated through the works of Rene Descartes and his discovery of the philosophical subject, the Cartesian subject, through which the domination of its others and the world was justified (Veroli,2001:21). However, according to Mafeje this, the movements by diasporic Africans, was a mere expression of wounded pride by those who had suffered the crushing agony of slavery and subsequent bitter racial humiliation that they bore the brunt of in the New World (Mafeje 1992). African philosophy then, or African philosophical projections, according to Mafeje are to be understood vis-à-vis these outlined two tendencies, that of negation in the instances of a Maurier and affirmations on the efforts of diasporic Africans.

However, Mafeje (1992, 2) queries a supplementary question for philosophical intelligibility and investigation as to "whether philosophy can legitimately be confined only to its literary forms". It

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<sup>41</sup> Insofar as Fanon is able to show that the "black" is the creation of the white, i.e. the black is only black in relation to the white.

<sup>42</sup> Particularly Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), whose enormous contribution to the articulation of a Black radical paradigm in the early twentieth century South African political landscape has often been overlooked (e.g in Gail Gerharts (1978) *Black Power in South Africa*), and later with the Harlem renaissance which dramatized the politics of representation as such.

would appear that the answer to this question is an emphatic “no”, contra Hountondji’s (1983) delineations of the prerequisites for a philosophy/science being solely texts, merely because reality, the proper object of philosophic investigation, is not instantiated only in texts, but already exists in human reality and existentiality. Simply because philosophy, as Mafeje suggests, cannot be confined to literary iterations, as the Western tradition of philosophy has often insisted, it is then imperative for the African scholar/intellectual to insist on the oral traditions as instances of philosophy in the African cultural setting which demands to be interpreted in its own accord. Moreover, it is also to insist on the interpretation of African phenomena from an African perspective away from colonial superimpositions and mystifications as Mafeje (1971, 253) explains;

European colonialism, like any epoch, brought with it certain ways of reconstructing African reality. It regarded African societies as particularly tribal. This approach produced certain blinker or ideological predispositions which made it difficult for those associated with the system to view these societies in any other light. Hence certain modes of thought among European scholars in Africa and their African counterparts have persisted, despite the many important economic and political changes that have occurred in the continent over the last 75–100 years. Therefore, if tribalism is thought of as peculiarly African, then the ideology itself is particularly European in origin.

From the above quoted from the 1971 piece, *The Ideology of Tribalism*, Mafeje delivers an understanding of African reality as viewed from a European point of view which is an unbecoming interpretation of the African reality. It therefore particularly important to interpret such phenomena from the position of its self-understanding which encompasses no concept of tribe or tribalism. This is to say that European idealisations of African realities neglect, in fact overdetermine, the materiality of the situation which serve to obfuscate the domineering political agenda of characterising those realities in that particular fashion e.g. tribe. Mafeje (2000) shows that such resistance to colonial categorisations, as demonstrated by the 1971 piece, became his preoccupation which he developed into a liberatory method essential for the decolonization of the social sciences in Africa, as Mafeje’s 1991 monograph *The Theory and Ethnography of African Social Formations: The Case of the Interlacustrine Kingdoms* demonstrates.

Roseline Achieng’s (2015) remarkable review essay of Mafeje’s monograph, cited above, aptly demonstrates Mafeje’s groundbreaking methods which are particularly important for producing knowledge that is reflective and responsive of the African situation. According to Achieng (2015:251);

The African researcher and knowledge producer – now faced more than ever before with the dual task of a) the need to produce knowledge that speaks to African-lived realities and b)

finding, cementing and sustaining his/her place in the universal wheel of knowledge production – has unfortunately, due to social, economic and political circumstances, delved deeper into the abyss of scanty methodological articulations, non-significant theoretical propositions, simplistic conceptual angles and praxis orientations that are quite divorced from his/her everyday life.

Indeed such alienation of the African researcher may be attributed to the impairments of inherited thought which Mafeje sought to confront. According to Achieng (2015:251) “Archie Mafeje uncoupled the life-world from the system thus offering us what can authoritatively be positioned as the first significant articulation of a critical alternative treatise on how the ‘native’ can emerge out of his/her self-imposed immaturity and, in this way, how knowledge that speaks to African-lived realities can be and should be produced”.

In a 1988(original date but republished 2008) article on the role of culture in development published in the Codesria bulletin Mafeje argues for the necessity of culture in issues concerning the development of a society broadly defined. Moreover, Mafeje (2008:59) notes how this problem of culture and development is old as the social sciences themselves which he correctly acknowledges their being a handmaiden of the West. Furthermore, within the West – at least since the nineteenth century- two traditions contend: idealism and materialism which contemporarily feature as liberalism and Marxism. However, Mafeje (2008:59) notes that it is liberalism that has assumed hegemonic status and articulation in the social sciences, with Marxism excluded and only resurrected at the time of world economic crises which also saw its renewal. According to Mafeje (2008; 59) this renewal of Marxist studies at the time of crisis and the ascendancy of political economy would prove a renewed confrontation between dominant liberal scholarship and ascendant neo-Marxism which in the third world “coincided with the questioning of Eurocentric social science which in turn is a reflection of the intensification of anti-imperialist struggles which are its antecedents”. It is on the basis of this questioning of Eurocentric social science and the re-emergence of Marxism, which Mafeje is indebted to, that he would foreground his reflections on the role of culture in development on both. Opposed to Marxism in the West Mafeje (2008) outlines three dominant schools that are of liberal persuasion: (1)Modernisation theory which is based on the assumption that “traditionalism is to modernity as parochialism is to universalism...significant shifts from the traditional end of the spectrum to the other marks *social change*”,(2) Parsonianism which equates traditionalism to low culture and modernity to high culture and,(3) technological evolutionism which posits a distinction between instrumental and ceremonial values with traditional societies being dominated by the mainly ceremonial values. Marxism for Mafeje (2008:59) appears at first closer to technological evolutionism, particularly historical materialism, however its epistemology: the distinction between the superstructure, which

represents philosophical and legal rationalisations, social ideologies and cultural forms and beliefs, and the infrastructure, which represents material and productive forces that Marxism is able to be salvaged. However, for Mafeje (2008:59) it is the latter two (accumulated and alive labour) that are accorded a determinant role. The superstructure is treated as a derivative category i.e. it is a reflection of what goes on in the infrastructure.

It is for these reasons that in Marxist theory culture has received limited attention except in relation to the question of the rights of nations to self-determine or what inherently defines a nation. And as such marks the limitations of Marxism as “a child of European rationalism” that “is ill equipped to deal with what is perceived subjective aspects of social existence” (Mafeje, 2008:60). However, Mafeje (2008:60) states that it is important to note that the insistence by Marxism on the material as opposed to the non-material was in fact opposition to Hegelian idealism to which he poses a question whether Marxism will forever be haunted by its Hegelian ghost. Indeed it is the ghost of Hegelianism that obfuscates social reality with its teleological positing of it (abstractly/idealistically) that Marxism would insist on positing it materially albeit the problem posed by such positing (teleology).

Furthermore, Mafeje (2008:60) makes the observation that it is with the rise of third world social science that the insistence of culture would find articulation in opposition to the modernisation theories that presumed national development ought to follow the carbon copy blueprint of the West. This critical resistance to Eurocentric assumptions of development, according to Mafeje (2008:60) took the form of a third world nationalist revulsion that began with the *dependencia* in Latin America, which insisted on making use of the standards provided by the Latin American experience. However, Mafeje (2008:60) points out that it was a structural problem between developed and underdeveloped countries that was the issue for the Latin Americans, and not necessarily an issue of culture as Mafeje would have it defined, and this was a product of Marxist critique against liberal incarnations. To this Mafeje (2008:60) provides an enunciation of his understanding of culture – as that which distinguishes human from animals - and its importance for development. Mafeje (2008:60) carefully notes that it is Western civilisation that has solely attempted to homogenize culture through its expansionist projects and that it is the project of the third world intellectual project to reject received theory and to grow an awareness of indigenous knowledge and modes of thought and doing. Indeed, “Africa is the worst victim of intellectual and cultural imperialism and is now in the worst development crisis ever” (Mafeje, 2008:60).

However, Mafeje’s (2008) postulations on culture do very little to help us understand African culture and its imperatives other than positing it contrast to the West which has sought to homogenize it. Furthermore, his insistence on it, African culture, seems more impelled by the over determining

ideology of progress (development), rather than understanding the Africa on its own terms, which is attributable to the West (Marxism) and the political economic centeredness of such a concern, which is very limited in providing any substantive understanding of the depth and functioning of culture, not to mention the vistas which it is able to afford us for any speculative understanding of our situatedness. In other words it privileges the political economic understanding/ imperative than understanding culture on its own terms. As such there is no essential understanding of what such a culture entails from an understanding internal to it as per the insistence of the third world intellectual project. It is such a limitation, particularly as it pertains to the depth of African culture, which will also prove problematic in Mafeje's attempt to exclude African Americans from the realm of Africanity on the basis of history and culture in the exposition that follows.

In his ground-breaking 2000 article titled, *Africanity: A combative ontology*, Mafeje (2000) purports to provide an interpretation of some of the prominent arguments explored in *Out of one, Many Africans* (1999) by William Martin and Michael West (As cited by Mafeje 2000): the demise of Africanity and the rise of Afrocentrism, which is constitutive of a very important and controversial aspect of African existence in the social sciences. Any earnest engagement with such matters, in as far as Mafeje is concerned, would have to enjoin commitment to rigorous and historical thinking, in turn, as “[n]obody can think and act outside historically determined circumstances” (2000, 106) which means that “while we are free to choose the role in which we cast ourselves as agents of history, we do not put on the agenda the social issues to which we respond as these are given to us by history” (2008:106). As Mafeje (2000, 106) perceptively outlines that “we would not talk of freedom, if there was no prior condition in which this was denied” namely; “we would not be anti-racist, if we had not been its victims; we would not proclaim Africanity, if it had not been denied or degraded; and we would not insist on Afrocentrism, if it had not been for Eurocentric negations”.

Mafeje's (2000) conception of Africanity and Afrocentrism ultimately is articulated from the locus of a historically determined role as opposed to the vantage point of “the ontological Negro of Senghor or Nkrumah”. Such a historical determinacy, as Mafeje attempts to interpret Africanity and Afrocentrism (which he distinguishes as ontological (Africanity) and epistemological (Afrocentrism) fulfilling a complimentary, yet not determinate, function against negations at the hand of the Europeans, but not to be equated. Such articulations encompass an unmistakable liberatory element and to that extent then redound to the credit of the corpus of African philosophy of liberation broadly – whose concerns, by way of interest, are somewhat at a remove from the question of whether an African philosophy exists or not. As pointed out Mafeje (2008, 106) makes a distinction between Africanity and Afrocentrism, although the terms could be used interchangeably by some conventions.

However, for Mafeje (2008) it is conceptually possible to distinguish the difference between the two. In as far as Mafeje is concerned (2008, 106);

Afrocentrism can be regarded as a methodological requirement for decolonising knowledge in Africa, or as an antidote to Eurocentrism through which all knowledge about Africa has been filtered. Although this has been justified by appealing to dubious “universal standards”, the fact of the matter is that Africa is the only region which has suffered such total paradigmatic domination.

It is specifically in this light that Mafeje finds it important that African scholars insist on producing African-centred works about Africa. According to Mafeje (2008, 106), Afrocentrism is “a legitimate demand that African scholars study their society from inside and cease being purveyors of an alienated intellectual discourse”. This is a discourse concerned with authentic self-representation and the unshackling of the imagination from Eurocentric conceptual incarceration. As expressed by Tsenay Serequebehan (1997), “one of the most important and basic tasks of the contemporary discourse of African philosophy is its critical negative project”. This means that the critique of Eurocentrism is a *conditio sine qua non* for the practice of African philosophy, because the horizon, the (post) colonial condition of contemporary discourse on African philosophy itself entails colonialism and Eurocentrism.

According to Mafeje (2008) Afrocentrism is referential, while Africanity has an emotive force (political, ideological, cosmological, and intellectual), which Afrocentric representations would lack? Mafeje (2008, 107) points out that the ontology of Africanity is therefore influenced by prior “exclusivist ontologies such as white racist categorisations and supremacist European self-identities in particular”. These, the exclusivist ontologies, had in them the basic belief that black people are inherently inferior, and this brought about the tradition among Africans in the diaspora which may be classified as “vindicationist”. An example of this tradition that can be pointed out is that of Negritude, proudly espoused by the Senegalese Leopold Sedar Senghor, which, according to Mafeje (2008), was an appeal to greater human qualities from the Africans as opposed to the appeal to race, an example of which is referred to as ubuntu in Bantu languages. According to Mafeje (2008, 107), “Africanity is an assertion of an identity that has been denied; it is a Pan-Africanist revulsion against external imposition or refusal to be dictated by others”. Understood from this point of view then, Africanity can be understood as a political and ideological reflex which has with it the renewed vigour to initiate an African renaissance. However, for Mafeje (2008), although this may seem to include every black African in the world, this is not so because this is at odds with reality, both socially and conceptually. According to Mafeje (2008, 108), “[c]ulturally, socially and historically, the African-Americans and the

West Indians have long ceased to be Africans unless we are talking biology". What then is to be an African? It would seem that according to Mafeje (2008) being an African involves being situated in the continent of Africa. Indeed, according to Mafeje (2008, 109), even the whites in southern Africa have Africanity, but have been denying it because they have been playing "European" for too long. From this logic, even the Arabs in the northern part of Africa are also Africans since they are also located on the continent.

It is essentially perceptive to pose a couple of historically analytical questions for clarity in this regard: Are these justifiable enough grounds for Mafeje to exclude African-Americans from the realm of Africanity as he proposes? And to what extent have white South Africans denied their supposed Africanity? To the second question, Mafeje would reply that to the extent that they have been "playing" European and thereby treated the African as the "other". However, it is far from clear that what whites in South Africa, since their arrival from 1652 onwards, have been doing can be summed as "playing" rather than truly "be-ing" Europeans, divinely destined to rule, to dominate their conquered. The material living conditions of the conquered, to date, are abundant evidence of the foregoing. The continued presence of white South Africans in this part of the African continent is predicated upon the dubious right to conquest that the transition to the supposedly "new" South Africa failed to do away with.<sup>43</sup> In this regard South Africa would remain a conquered territory despite the black vote won in 1994 signifying the "post" apartheid as opposed to post conquest. However, insofar as Mafeje's notion of Africanity recognises the need to recover lost sovereignty by Africans with the suggestion that Africans should be captains of their own destiny, it should then appear that whites in South Africa have no Africanity to deny simply because of the upheld rights of conquest with

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<sup>43</sup>As Ramose (2007:320) has perceptively pointed out; "[t]he proliferation of 'anti-apartheid' organisations, especially in Western Europe, certainly made a positive contribution towards freedom in South Africa. However, they had the infelicitous effect of misleading the gullible into the belief that apartheid in South Africa was the fundamental problem. Abolish apartheid, so the reasoning went, then all shall be fine. In this way, the question of freedom in South Africa was reduced to the problem of the constitutional recognition of the 'civil rights' of the conquered peoples of South Africa. Thus an all-inclusive constitution, recognising the 'civil rights' of all the peoples of South Africa, was deemed to be the solution to the apartheid problem. On this reasoning, it was unnecessary to question the morality and political legitimacy of the 'right of conquest' because South Africa belonged to all who lived in it". Ramose's diagnosis of the fundamental problem in South Africa is consistent with the reasoning of the Pan Africanist Congress of Azania concerning the African's sovereign title to territory which the Europeans through their questionable rights to conquest consistently denied. *Izwe Lethu!* The PAC slogan went, reacting to the Kliptown Charter of 1955, which was officially adopted in 1958, where the Africanists staged their exit from the ANC. The charter famously asserts that "South Africa belongs to all who live in it; black and white", which therefore nullifies the sovereignty of the African over the lost territory due to the unjust wars of colonisation against the indigenous people by equating their claim to that of their conqueror (whites). This then was to be the ideological impetus which inspired the ANC-led struggle for inclusion, which received its success through the negotiated settlement that brought about what was to be the "new" South Africa. To this Ramose (2007, 320) laments: "The defenders of the compromise that has resulted in the 'new' South Africa argue, among other things, that the compromise was the best option at the time since it averted an impending 'civil war'. Suffice it to state that, since colonisation, South Africa has been practically in a state of war. A hypothetical 'civil war' in the 1990s could not justify the sacrifice at the altar of compromise of the moral and political imperative to bring about a just and peaceful end to the ensuing colonial war.

which they colonised the land. The marginality of African philosophy in South African universities is best testimony to this: if whites had any Africanity to speak about the questioning of the existence of African philosophy would not be of concern to us presently. This is to say it is precisely of their Europeanness and its reproduction in the university that gives meaning to our dealing with the questioning of African philosophy.

With regard to the first question, about the status of African-American's Africanity, Mafeje's conclusion that they are no longer Africans is contested, precisely because his cited examples of African-American intellectual imperialism cannot be said of the general black American population who still remain on the outside of white America in terms of their material living conditions, which Afro-pessimists have, through a reading of Fanon, designated as social death. To be sure what can we understand Mafeje to be meaning when he posits culture, sociality and history as grounds from which African-Americans and West Indians have seized to be African unless we are talking of biology. For Mafeje the Middle passage effected a rupture between continental Africans and diasporic Africans that is reflected in the behaviour of diasporic Africans towards the continent and its black inhabitants; their distance from Africa and socialisation in the New World has shaped them in ways that have disconnected them from the culture, history and experience of the continent.

It would appear, from earlier on, that what Mafeje understands by culture, society and history seems to be overdetermined by political economic underpinnings and as such provide very little substantive understanding of what we could consider an ontological break between diasporic Africans and continentals and this marks the limitation in Mafeje's thought as it falls into the same trap his work is attempting to escape: European idealisations of African reality which neglect its actuality. Emphasising political economy with regards to African reality is also to neglect particular cultural expressions at the expense of the economy. This necessitates a supplement to Mafeje's understanding with a materialist ontology which predicates universal insight solely on the basis of particular cultural expressions of experience in order to achieve Mafeje's desired objective of allowing Africans to speak for themselves and from their position which categories of political economy may hinder (chapter 4).

Blacks in the diaspora remain connected to the Africans on the continent via the history of slavery, which is as much African history as much as it is African-American history, a history that concretised the unethical doubt concerning the humanity of the African as Joel Modiri's (2018:216) exposition of Cedric Robinson's *Black Marxism* shows;

Cedric Robinson locates the revolutionary impulse of the black radical tradition in the history of African peoples against European domination, and the specific cultural meanings that formed the basis of African resistance. Robinson sets out to draw out the "ideological

connective” between the Armistead slave rebellion and other slave ship uprisings, the maroons who escape slavery and formed independent settlements, the Haitian Revolution, African anti-colonial wars of resistance, slave insurrections in the Caribbean and the Americas, the freed slaves who emigrated back to Africa and the successive movements of national liberation, black power, self-determination and civil rights. Robinson notes that such a connection cannot be comprehended or anticipated within the Western historical imagination which typically treats this wide array of struggles as “geographically and historically bounded” and connected only by the similarity of their sociological elements (i.e. being slave and colonial society)<sup>44</sup>.

Furthermore, Modiri (2018;216) adds;

In Robinson’s historical archaeology, Africa is the “material, social and ideological foundation” of the black radical tradition. As he illustrates, African persons forcibly shipped from Africa to be enslaved in the New World (the Americas and the Caribbean) “also contained African cultures, critical mixtures and admixtures of language and thought, of cosmology and metaphysics, of habits, beliefs and morality”. Thus Blacks who arrived in the United States as slaves were not decultured or intellectually bereft. The memory and symbol of Africa as their prior episteme gave them “a knowledge of freedom” and defined the terms of their humanity.

African culture continues to bind Africans on the continent as well as those abroad since it was African culture that facilitated their survival in the plantation and which also inspired their revolt against brutal enslavement. This revolutionary spirit was also to inspire anticolonial struggles on the African continent. In this regard, in history and culture, they remain connected. This does not, however, mean that African-Americans are not guilty of some of the intellectual imperialism Mafeje (2008, 108) charges them with.

Afrocentrism made in America is a contradiction in terms. Black Americans, no matter how well intentioned they are, cannot make indigenous knowledge for Africans in America nor could continental Africans do the same for any length of time in America. While individual African-Americans can become experts on Africa, they cannot in the name of Africanity speak for the Africans. Africanity insists that Africans, in the continent, think, speak, and do things for themselves in the first place.

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<sup>44</sup> From Joel Modiri (2018) *THE JURISPRUDENCE OF STEVE BIKO ;A STUDY IN RACE, LAW AND POWER IN THE “AFTERLIFE” OF COLONIAL--APARTHEID*. PhD thesis University of Pretoria

This is a well-founded point made by Mafeje in that it seeks to empower the Africans on the continent to speak for themselves about the problems they encounter, which however does not imply that Africans on the continent cannot learn from the experiences diasporic Africans, as they have.

However, what appears to be more problematic and in need of revision and elucidation is the delineating of Africanity and Afrocentrism as respectively epistemological and ontological, where such a separation makes it possible to produce work that is demonstrative of African self-understanding without necessarily being in the position of the African on the continent to espouse any Africanity as Mafeje posits. Such a distinction between Afrocentrism and Africanity only works mechanically but begs the question of wherefrom can such knowledge be produced if not from the pervasive condition of otherness which positions Africans even in the so called new world which Sabine Broeck (2016), *Legacies of Enslavism and White Abjection*, has thus summarised;

[t]he humiliate-ability, the enslave-ability, the rape-ability, the abuse-ability, and the ship-ability of Black people in the discourses and practices that shape European white collective memory as well as in the contemporary repertoire of thinking Blackness in the white European mind. These discourses and practices add up to a *longue durée* of white abjection and un-humanization of Black being dating from the early modern period, through Enlightenment modernity into the postmodern moment. The 'slave's' assumed 'slavishness,' that persistent topos in which Blackness has been contained in white philosophy from Hegel to de Beauvoir has blatantly disregarded the histories of Haiti, and other local and globally important acts, practices, and Black discourses of Black rebellion, and of Black freedom narratives, and has kept negating all forms of Black life.

No doubt Afrocentrism articulated from Black America is cognisant of such a condition as it emanates from modern discourse, which Mafeje would identify as colonial negations, and is able to combat it on the basis of Africanity which is emanative of their resistant culture and history. It is interesting to note that it is exactly on the basis of culture and history, to mention just these, that Mafeje feels justified to say that diasporic Africans are no longer Africans. However, evidence seems to demonstrate that it is not the case, at least for both culture and history, that they have ceased to be thus. On the contrary it is precisely on the basis of both that they undoubtedly continue to be, and never cease to inspire the revolutionary spirits in the continent.

Another radical liberatory element contained in Mafeje's (2008) Africanity is that of the end of African studies in Africa. According to Mafeje (2008, 109), "African studies are an anomaly in Africa found only in South Africa, the vortex of white racism. To study themselves, Africans do not need African studies as a separate intellectual or political endeavour". This then is a call for radical decolonisation of the

social sciences and philosophy in Africa in that everything has to be authentically African. This is because if African studies exist as a separate category, then what would be offered on the mainstream? It would be not African as Ndumiso Dladla (2016:33) elaborates with this tendency to ghettoise<sup>45</sup> African enquiries:

While Africa as a place of some Other may justify the existence of African Studies in Europe or the Americas, where the European or American is silently prefixed against other disciplines or studies, its existence in Africa suggests precisely that all else, that is, those disciplines which are not specifically pre-fixed with “African” are not African. The reason for the foregoing is the persistence of doubt concerning the reality or quality of African knowledge and the importance and value of the experience which brings it about. It is a doubt which has its philosophical foundation in the racist doubt concerning the humanity of Africans themselves. In the academe it is largely the reason for which we continue merely to have universities in Africa rather than African universities

It would then seem that every discourse in university that concerns the humanities will have to be articulated from an African perspective, and this is liberatory both to discourse and the oppressed as they have long suffered intellectual alienation, as expressed by Mafeje. It would thus be understood that Archie Mafeje has insisted on the African-centeredness in discourse, which serves to liberate the oppressed and consequently liberates the discourse itself away from what he calls Eurocentric negations which are evident in the European epistemological paradigm. Thus it can be said that Mafeje’s works, with their radical critique of Eurocentricity and their insistence on a pan-African identity, constitute an African philosophy of liberation which is engaged with the African condition and reality. Furthermore, it is Mafeje’s commitment to meaningful praxis that would see his appraisal of the revolutionary Soweto moment of 1976 -1977 as indeed much needed. Mafeje’s (1978:17) recapitulations are illustrative of the revolutionary character of the student movement, its independent from the influences of the then exiled movements<sup>46</sup> as the African National Congress

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<sup>45</sup> According to Dladla (2016:33) “Although the contemporary meaning of “ghetto” is “a part of the city, especially slum area, occupied by a minority group”, its original meaning referred to “the quarter of the city, chiefly Italy where Jews were restricted”. Ghettoising comes to mean then both placement of someone in an inferior and precarious place subtracting from equal citizenship as well as an ethnic quarantine where those ghettoised are identified for particular ethnic or racial reasons. What one finds in practice then are African history, politics, epistemology, psychology within this Ghetto where the history, politics, philosophy and psychology departments in the same university continue to exist undisturbed in their unbending Eurocentrism and racism. In this way “that African stuff” has no way of affecting the mainstream (read Eurocentric) and dominant curriculum. The effect of the pre-fix Africa before philosophy or history is the same effect as that of scare quotes, diminution or a question mark”

<sup>46</sup> “Revolution seems an ambiguous thing. It is a symbol of a new justice and yet not infrequently it is accompanied by prejudice, self-interest, fear and petty jealousies. Nothing illustrates this more vividly than Soweto and its aftermath. At first, stunned, puzzled and yet elated, South African political exiles genuinely felt

(ANC) the Pan Africanist Congress of Azania (PAC) and the Non-European Unity Movement (NEUM) which Mafeje was a part, which was not limited to the insurrection of June 16 1976 but spread out to even the following year of 1977.

Such a revolutionary insurrection Mafeje (1978:19) duly attributed to the influence of the philosophy of Black consciousness (BC) articulated by the Black consciousness Movement<sup>47</sup>. While Mafeje (1978) is appreciative of the influence of BC in the revolutionary moment that defines Soweto 1976 as movement to awaken the political consciousness of the people. However, Mafeje (1978:22) has reservations about the revolutionary potentialities of such a consciousness as it cannot be equated with *class* consciousness. Black consciousness according to Mafeje (1978:22);

Like the Black Power Movement in the United States, it created great resonance in the hearts of the oppressed black masses and generated a new sense of self-confidence which not only defied police bullets but also transcended the artificial racial divisions among non-whites in South Africa. For the first time in South African history Coloured popular masses proclaimed their black affinity and in the manner of Soweto denounced Coloured Representative Councils and kindred bodies. Granting that this is a necessary step forward, it may still be asked, is it sufficient? Ideologically and analytically, the answer must be an emphatic 'NO'. 'Black Consciousness' is a diffuse nationalist ideology. While nationalist movements can be regarded as progressive insofar as they are anti-colonialist and anti-racist, insofar as they do not see this in the context of class struggle and socialist transformation they are limited.

Indeed throughout the piece Mafeje (1978) would chastise the student movement and Black consciousness because of its precarious relationship with so called workers. I say so called workers as it remains to be shown whether they can really be subsumed under that category as opposed to other categorisation (e.g brothers and sisters of the students, parents for example, or simply as Black people

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that their cause had been vindicated. The kids had done it on their own. How? At the moment of elation party gurus on all sides confessed that it was spontaneous and unexpected. Yet, barely three months after the thunderous explosion of 16 June 1976, it was as if all true believers had been put on trial. Without a murmur from the Soweto militants, certain South African movements abroad became extremely defensive and started claiming responsibility for the uprising" (Mafeje, 1978:17).

<sup>47</sup> "The three movements that have been associated with the Soweto uprising are the South African Student Movement (SASM), composed mainly of secondary school pupils; the South African Student Organisation (SASO), consisting basically of college students; and the Black People's Convention (PBC) — an offshoot of the latter. SASO was the driving spirit behind the formation of the other two organisations. However, the dividing lines among all three of them remained nominal, as individuals often belonged to more than one organisation and attended one another's meetings. This gave the movement greater cohesiveness that would be suggested by the different labels by which they were known. On the negative side it meant weaker links with groups outside the student or ex-student milieu. Indeed, it is striking that SASO and its sister organisations are the first black student movements in South Africa not to be allied with any of the national movements" (Mafeje, 1978:21).

as BC would have it). Moreover, it remains to be shown that only a configuration of class struggle, as Mafeje (1978) has it<sup>48</sup>, solely provides any movement revolutionary potential. Such indebtedness to Marxist formulations, as the centrality of the workers and class struggle to any meaningful struggle, proves to be Mafeje's limitations which we will address ourselves to in the following chapter.

## Conclusion

This chapter has endeavoured to exposit Archie Mafeje's account of African philosophy as a historically reflexive discourse of liberation. Furthermore, we have shown through a discussion of Mafeje's work how his intellectual project was dully concerned with liberation from Eurocentrism, the overdetermination from without of African social realities, although with some limitations, as the last case of the Soweto revolt demonstrates. However, this is understandable because; "philosophers ... are not themselves abstractions, but ... beings of flesh and bones who belong to a continent, to a particular culture, and to a specific period. And for a particular philosopher, to really philosophize is necessarily to examine in a critical and methodic manner the essential problems of his milieu and of his period. He will thus elaborate a philosophy that is in an explicit or implicit relation with his times and his milieu" (Serequebehan). And to wit Mafeje's intellectual project need also to be appreciated and read as a philosophy of liberation concerned with epistemic justice that was inherently caused by Eurocentrism as a philosophy of domination. As Mafeje points out that we are not seeking praise from the Europeans but merely insisting on understanding ourselves with categories developed from our own experience. It will be the task of our last chapter to supplement Mafeje's philosophy with a materialist ontology which posits universal insight only through particular expressions in line with Mafeje's philosophical methodology. This will be done to achieve Mafeje's objective of letting African singularities speak for the situation without pre conceptions that may obfuscate such realities.

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<sup>48</sup>Mafeje (1978:22); "from all evidence it is apparent that in mounting their campaign the students had taken the workers for granted. It was only when they were faced with state power in its nakedness that they turned to the workers. Even then, ideologically and organisationally, they were handicapped. In the meantime, it was evident that to the state their role is dispensable, while that of the workers is essential for the survival of the system".

## Chapter 5: The philosophy of liberation as the liberation of philosophy

*For, if the contradictions of capitalist society implicate the symbolic plane in precisely the same way that they do the material one, then it is no longer sufficient for theory to have a revolutionary content, to be a theory of revolution without being a revolutionary theory. -*  
Nicolas Veroli (2001: 255)

### Introduction

To concisely summarize our argument and project: philosophy in South Africa is *colonial*- it is a part and parcel of the European colonial project which extended to this part of Africa since 1652 (which marks the arrival of the first Dutch settlers in the cape of good hope) - and has continued without much disturbance even after the appearance of the South Africa which is “new” (Chapter 1). The colonial character of such a philosophical practice reveals itself with the unethical doubt and ignorance of an African philosophy. This coincides with the unethical doubt concerning the humanity of Africans which provided justificatory grounds for colonisation- which finds articulation with the supposedly innocent question – is there an African philosophy? We have exposed the underlying presumptions of such questioning: that it is predicated on a fixed understanding of what philosophy is (Western philosophy) and what African philosophy ought to be, which is itself of a specific kind of ignorance – white ignorance- which is causally related to occupying a socially and politically dominant position – white supremacy (chapter 2). Archie Mafeje’s pioneering philosophical contribution towards an understanding of African philosophy was pondered as comprising a liberatory element against eurocentrism as a philosophy of domination and as a pervasive condition of thought albeit with some limitations which necessitate supplementing (chapter 3). This chapter aims to supplement Mafeje’s shortcomings which obfuscate a full liberatory project – the uncritical reliance on received categories which assume universalist undertones which are nothing more than expressions of particularities. Indeed as Veroli (in the epigraph above) correctly asserts it is not enough for a theory to have revolutionary content, indeed become a theory of revolution, without being a revolutionary theory itself which in our case means that it is not enough for a philosophy to have content opposing domination without as such being a liberated philosophy itself. This chapter proposes a materialist ontology which necessarily predicates universal insight through particular socio-cultural expressions. This shall be done through a critique of Mafeje’s notion of culture which is steeped in concepts centred on political economy which consequently instrumentalizes culture and provides no understanding from within it. In other words Mafeje’s political economic reductionism of the culture of African philosophy proves to be a limitation on his proclaimed commitment to endogeneity. In this chapter we supplement Mafeje’s account with a more comprehensive materialist ontology, which overcomes the universalist pretensions of the Marxian methodology informing Mafeje’s understanding of African

philosophy. Moreover, through a discussion of African American philosophy and Black studies – as expressions of culturally particular experiences that have to do with their lived Africanity- we shall problematize Mafeje’s displacement of diasporic Africans from Africanity and the misplacement of South African whites, we shall map out the socio-cultural ties that bind Africans in the continent and those in the diasporas although recognising the points by Mafeje against intellectual imperialism by diasporic Africans. Indeed this is to supplement Mafeje’s liberatory discourse so that it is not only the content that is liberatory but the way of relating to the perceived phenomena itself is that liberated.

### The hermeneuticity of culture

In the article about the necessity of culture for development Mafeje (2008) does outline that the West has been the sole civilisation which has sought to homogenise culture i.e. to place themselves as the sole culture or ‘high’ culture as opposed to low brow or no culture at all, as Ndumiso Dladla (2016:65) attests:

It is for instance a prevailing practice that in the world of fashion that the styles of dress or hair of peoples other than West Europeans are called “Ethnic”. In the field of musicology, adherence to this differentiation is maintained with the appellation, Ethno-musicology. The suggestion of this insistence to differentiate is that only West European culture is culture proper and thus universalisable. The demand on thought, science and theory that before it attains the status of propriety, authenticity or scientificity it ought to be universal turns out to be a demand for such thought to deny its own specificity and experience. Compliance with this demand is, in reality, is submission to Western Europe’s questionable claim to the right to describe and define experience, knowledge and truth for all other human beings in the name of the universality of science.

Without a doubt this synonymy between what is culture and West European culture is best evident in the social sciences as Mafeje (2008) has pointed out. What’s more is how such synonymy was achieved through violent processes of conquest and colonialism which Africa has come to bear witness. Furthermore, this hegemonic status of the Western cultural paradigm best manifests itself in discourses that cover this and thereby assumes a status of unquestionability or universality as in the world of fashion as Dladla has pointed out. However, what is even more surprising is how such an ideology easily reproduces itself even in discourses that are supposed to be critical like the social sciences and philosophy. This is to say that it is less surprising for such to continue in the fashion world as their enterprise is not explicitly concerned with subjecting such views to interrogation. Nonetheless it is surprising for those disciplines which make it their vocation to be critical of the world that surrounds them and the categories to make sense of it. While Mafeje (2008:60) does acknowledge

the victimhood of Africans to the cultural imperialism of the West his deliberations on African culture are still undergirded by appeals of the political economic paradigm, putting emphasis on the economy as the prime driver of social and political change which leaves much to be desired in terms of African cultural expressions. This is to say there is no understanding from the point of view of African culture about the problems it encounters but is merely instrumentalized for ends other than its own which makes Mafeje (2008) a victim of the pervasive condition of thought that is Eurocentrism which imposes on the reality it aims to study.

However, it was the vocation of an African philosophical hermeneutics as lead the way by Theophilus Okere to enunciate the hermeneuticity of culture as such as Dladla (2016:65) notes:

African philosophy as hermeneutics may be understood then as a refusal to give up the specificity of the African experience as the grounding basis for doing philosophy. Theophilus Okere, describing the ambition of his Doctoral thesis and work that followed it, suggests that it was much more than simply initiating a tendency or way of doing African Philosophy. His work sought to show that “All philosophy is hermeneutics. Not only African philosophy but all philosophy is hermeneutical in nature, meaning simply that all philosophy is an effort of interpretative understanding, understanding one’s world, one’s environment, one’s culture or one’s reality”

This emphasises the point about the situatedness of all thinking and its indebtedness to its horizon and culture that our deliberations about the world have to recognise and appreciate. Moreover, to do so is to privilege African culture as our locus of enunciation which would allow us to make sense and meaning of the world as such as Mafeje (2008) correctly emphasised referring to Afrocentrism which is a legitimate demand to view the world from our own situatedness without being vindicationist. However, as noted in the previous chapter Africanity for Mafeje is not only epistemological as Afrocentrism is but is ontological: it is an ontology that is combative against all repudiations which Mafeje claims excludes Africans in the diaspora. It is interesting to note what Mafeje cites as justifications for excluding diasporic Africans from the realm of Africanity: history, social and culture. What is even more disturbing is how Mafeje readily extends this Africanity to South African whites whom for him have been “playing” European for so long instead of being an extension of it and thus Europe forming a constitutive aspect of their being as such<sup>49</sup>. We shall now turn to a discussion of

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<sup>49</sup> As Dladla’s (2016:171) elucidation of Robert Mangaliso Sobukwe shows : “The Europeans are “the dominant group [...] the exploiting group, responsible for the pernicious doctrine of white supremacy which has resulted in the humiliation and degradation of the indigenous African people. It is this group which has dispossessed the African people of their land and with arrogant conceit has set itself up as the "guardians", the "trustees" of the Africans” (Sobukwe: 1978: 18). In South Africa in particular (before apartheid, under it and even after it) the doctrine of White Supremacy had a complicated structure of racial stratification in which the Supreme

African American endeavours to combat Eurocentrism in the social sciences and in philosophy to demonstrate the ties that bind them to continental Africans as precisely that of culture and history contrary to Mafeje's postulations. This will necessitate a supplementing of Mafeje which shall be done in the section to follow, for now a discussion of the Africanness of diasporic Africans is due.

### Ties that Bind

In this section we shall follow closely Joel Modiri's (2018)<sup>50</sup> critical exposition of the literature and arguments that map out the connections between Africans in the continent and those in the Diasporas as well as Tsenay Serequebehan's philosophical project of illuminating the lived heritage of Africans as well as those of African Americans. It is even more interesting to note the affinities African American philosophy shares with African philosophy as a liberatory project. A brief discussion of arguments by Black philosopher Tommy J Curry will prove necessary to show these affinities.

Modiri (2018: 215) aims to demonstrate the legacy of Cedric Robinson in elucidating the links of Black radicalism to the enduring African heritage which was the basis of resistance in the new world Modiri (2018: 221) elaborates:

The novelty and enduring legacy of Robinson's work is its restoration of black radicalism to its interminable African roots. The consciousness and history of African civilisation which was never fully ruptured by the interdictions of European invasions and violence thus formed the basis of black radicalism as a world-historical revolutionary tradition and enlivens the deep historical and symbolic link - those ties that bind - between Black rebellions across the modern world in earlier centuries and the articulations of a theory and movement of Black radicalism in the 20th and 21st centuries. The powerful trace of Africa that suffused struggles for Black liberation could not be accounted for in a Marxian paradigm precisely because it was outside of the signposts and markers of Western experience.

Indeed as Robinson (as quoted by Modiri 2018:222) elaborates;

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Whites were followed on the fictitious ontological hierarchy by the Indians, the so-called Coloured and the African at the bottom of being's chain. Each of these strata in the hierarchy was accompanied also by differentially better life chances - that is, a corresponding hierarchy of access to and quality of education, healthcare, housing and safety. At the cultural and intellectual levels also White Supremacy expressed itself as Eurocentrism, according greater value and respect to the cultures of the groups who were the links on being's vertically hanging chain in proportion to their proximity to Whiteness. There existed in terms of apartheid ideology a biological basis for the degree of inferiority or superiority possessed by a particular race. Racism is for Sobukwe is a false dogma developed and asserted with the purpose of justifying the conquest and dispossession of Africans by Europeans."

<sup>50</sup> [THE JURISPRUDENCE OF STEVE BIKO: A STUDY IN RACE, LAW AND POWER IN THE "AFTERLIFE" OF COLONIAL--APARTHEID particularly Chapter 4 "Who's Afraid of Critical Race Theory?": Blackness, Revolt and the African Diaspora]

the political “outrage” expressed by the Black radical tradition against the racism of white European society:... was most certainly informed by the Africanity of our consciousness - some epistemological measure culturally embedded in our minds that deemed that the racial capitalism we have been witness to was an unacceptable standard of human conduct ... The depths to which racist behaviour has fouled Western agencies transgressed against a world-consciousness rooted in our African past. Nevertheless, the sense of deep sadness at the spectacle of Western racial oppression is shared with other non-Western peoples.

This exposition demonstrates that the target of critique by Robinson was the limiting western paradigm like that of Marxism to exposit the African heritage of struggle as demonstrated by Blacks in the new world. According to Modiri (2018:215) continues:

Robinson interprets Black radicalism as a fundamentally oppositional and utopian structure of feeling, a struggle by enslaved and colonized Africans who were extracted and displaced from their African social formations to recreate their lives

Robinson (as quoted by Modiri 2018:222) attests;

[I]t was the ability to conserve their native consciousness of the world from alien intrusion, the ability to imaginatively re-create a precedent metaphysic while being subjected to enslavement, racial domination, and repression. This was the raw material of the Black radical tradition, the values, ideas, conceptions, and constructions of reality from which resistance was manufactured. And in each instance of resistance, the social and psychological dynamics that are shared by human communities in long-term crises resolved for the rebels the particular moment, the collective and personal chemistries that congealed into social movement. But it was the materials constructed from a shared philosophy developed in the African past and transmitted as culture, from which revolutionary consciousness was realized and the ideology of struggle formed.

What seems to be the target is indeed views like that of Mafeje which aim to exclude diasporic Africans from the heritage of Africanity which is a function not of African culture or of history but precisely that of European imperialism that facilitated the violent removal of Africans from the continent through slavery and thereby establishing the African diaspora as we have come to know it. However, this is not to downplay Mafeje’s defence against perceived intellectual imperialism that witnesses diasporic Africans speaking on behalf of continental Africans. Furthermore, it is on the basis of the past (history) and lived actuality (culture) that blacks in the new world are inherently African and share in the lived heritage of Africanity as Serequebehan has noted. This is because the past is a constitutive aspect of

the present like a mother and child and therefore was the basis for their survival in treacherous situations like colonialism here on the continent and enslavement in the new world. It is so precisely because African culture and historical consciousness are at the basis of our lived otherness (blackness) which should not be understood negatively but as those resistant aspects that continue to shape our being in the world which has been denied.

More importantly for the struggle of an African philosophy away from Eurocentric negations as we have concerned ourselves in this project it is interesting to note how Black philosophy in America finds itself in the same problematic as it also concerns itself with authenticity in its discourse as Curry (2010:315) exquisitely observes;

As a discipline, philosophy still operates under the implicit assumption that to be philosophical is to be bound by a European philosophical tradition. Currently, Black thinkers function as the racial hypothetical of European thought whereby black thought is read as the concretisation of European reflections turned to the problems of race, and Black thinkers are seen as racial embodiments of white thinkers' philosophical spirits.

It is as if Curry is talking about the situation in South African philosophy where the Eurocentrism of the Western philosophical tradition are not problematized, however Black philosophy in America seems to be much further ahead than the situation proves here in South Africa mainly because of the absence and marginalisation of African philosophy from the curriculum, a consequence of the absence and marginalisation of Africans from the practice, which has impeded the development of a genuine philosophical practice. Moreover, Curry (2010:315) laments;

African American philosophy has sustained its marginal disciplinarity as a movement focused on the revision and rehabilitation of the various imperialist theories that have emerged out of the Western philosophical canon. Despite the acknowledgement of the Eurocentric and anti-black nature of western philosophy, hence the limitations of both continental and American traditions, by authors like Charles Mills and the late Emmanuel Eze, African American philosophy largely contents itself in aiming to extend the applicability of white theories molded on a rational European philosophical anthropology to the Black Anthropos.

This proves itself to be a philosophical problem similar to the one we are confronted with here since the supposed universality of the western paradigm and its presuppositions is still unchallenged which our project with Mafeje as a philosopher concerned with liberation and epistemic justice aims to address. The affinities between Black philosophy as outlined by Curry and our concerns with liberating philosophy from Eurocentrism prove Mafeje's adumbrations wrong and inadequately grounded in

material history and culture despite his attempt to achieve this. However, this is not to downplay the extent to which the white academy in South Africa finds Blacks from the Americas palatable with its project. For instance Lewis Gordon, a Jamaican American, enjoys a visiting professorship at the white Rhodes University, while the also white philosophy department University of Cape town has hosted another Jamaican American Charles Mills to give lectures on blackness. In the year 2014 a group of Black Americans led by Paul Taylor held a conference to decolonise South African philosophy. This is to be understood as intellectual imperialism, which does not necessarily mean that Blacks from America are outside of Africanity as Mafeje claims, but it is to recognise how their being in the new world and its academy is attractive to the white establishment particularly here in South Africa where their voices are deployed to displace those of blacks here. This is because the claims here are different to those in America in that Blacks in America are a numerical minority and at best can only hope for inclusion into the American polity on an equal basis. In Africa, particularly in South Africa, the struggle is for territorial sovereignty and self-determination. However, this has less to do with the ultimate project of Black philosophy which is to provide an understanding of the world as seen and experienced from the Black point of view. We now turn to what a liberated philosophy from Eurocentric impediments would look like, one which grants universal credibility only on the basis of the particular.

#### Philosophy of liberation as the liberation of philosophy

*The idea of a “philosophical conjuncture” – the idea that philosophy might intersect with human history in a way that would be anything other than accidental – might seem surprising, not to say nonsensical. Is not philosophy, after all, the mark of eternity on the minds of mortals? They, it is well known, leave not a trace on its frozen surface. They may wave away the dust here and there but must, eventually, surrender themselves to its unalterable presence. From the point of view of eternity, then, the idea of a “philosophical conjuncture” is, strictly speaking, a non sequitur. But what if one were to refuse supposing that philosophy is inscribed in eternity? What if, instead, one were to consider philosophy’s boundaries – its limits – as produced rather than as given? (Veroli 2001:4)*

What this section seeks to achieve is to map out the relationship between philosophy and liberation. It will therefore be argued that what influenced European colonial domination over Africa, what sometimes may be referred to as European expansion, is an underlying philosophical position about other people, people that are not of European origin, and Europe’s self-conception in the world. It is with the critique of this position that authentic liberation can be sought for Africans, in particular, and other oppressed peoples of the world mainly because such a disposition deliberately ignores, at best idealises, realities of people who are not of European descent and thereby facilitating their

domination. This is what Mafeje's scholarship was mainly concerned with and the project of an African philosophy as expressing this desire for independent self-expression.

Liberation philosophy then begins with the critique of conquest, the unjustly issued rights of conquest by the European world. Conquest is informed by a particular theory about what exists outside of Europe and what is to be done to it. This epistemology of the Europeans as superior is informed by the ontological fiction that they are superior to the rest of humanity. This is because the assertion by Aristotle that "man is a rational animal" was not spoken of anyone else other than the European man; Amerindians, Africans and women are not included in this equation. It will then follow that their existence, women, Africans and Amerindians, is insignificant, at least in the realm of rational animals, and it is for the European man to decide what to do about them. According to Ramose (1999, 5),

Aristotle's definition of man was deeply inscribed in the social ethos of those communities and societies which undertook the so-called voyages of discovery, apparently driven by innocent curiosity.

To demonstrate this point Serequebehan (2012, 139) provides reading from Anne Hugon that further shows this point of the innocent curiosity to discovery which were earlier expressed by other colonialists,

In 1788 [i.e. the heyday of the Enlightenment], a booklet was issued in London by the newly formed Association for promoting the discovery of the interior parts of Africa (or the African association). It stated [at its founding] that at least one third of the inhabited surface of the earth was unknown, notably Africa, virtually in its entirety. For the first time this ignorance was seen as a shameful gap in human knowledge that must immediately be filled.

However, as history teaches us, these "voyages of discovery", perhaps by accident or design, then changed into "violent colonial incursions", which are not justifiable even under the principles of the theory of just war, and whose consequences are still suffered by the people concerned (Ramosé 1999, 5). For Ramosé (1999), decolonisation, which was set out by Africans and other people conquered in the unjust wars of colonialism, has not addressed the questionable belief that "man is a rational animal", which only refers to European men and not women, Australians, Amerindians, and Africans. A justification of this view by Aristotle is to be found in Immanuel Kant's anthropological work (which has been forgotten in philosophical discussions of his work) where, according to Eze (1997:115) Kant characterised "non-Europeans" as "devoid of ethical principles because [they] lack the capacity for development of 'character'...presumably because they lack adequate self-consciousness and rational will". According to Eze (1997, 115), for Kant, the Amerindian, the African and the Hindu give the

impression of being inept in “moral maturity” because of their lack of talent, a gift from nature, according to him. For Kant, as quoted by Eze (1997, 115),

the race of the Negroes...is full of affect and passion, very lively, talkative and vain. They can be educated but only as servants (slaves), that is they allow themselves to be trained (by Europeans presumably).<sup>51</sup>

According to Ramose (1999), decolonisation was unable to alter the philosophical standpoint of Europe in its relations with the erstwhile colonies. Which is what an African philosophy of liberation must address itself to. From understanding this condition, that of Europe’s unchanged character, Ramose (1999) sets out the call for the authentic liberation of Africa which takes a two-fold exigency, the first being that “the colonised people’s conception of reality, knowledge and truth should be released from slavery and dominance under the European epistemological paradigm” (1999:33). The first step is essential in that the universe of discourse also needs authentic liberation. The second exigency is that the evolving common universe of discourse must take into account the rational demands of justice to the colonized arising from the unjust wars of conquest that resulted in colonial dispossessing of territory as well as the enslavement of the colonized. These rational demands of justice are specifically the restoration of territory to its indigenous rightful owners and reparations to them (Ramosé 1999, 33).

The two-fold exigency is, for Ramose (1999, 33), and for us, “the indispensable necessity for the authentic liberation of Africa and, indeed, all the colonized people of the world”. This is able to shift the centre of discourse away from the European centre to what is constituted as the periphery, as Dussel (1996), Ramose (1999) and other liberation philosophers have argued. A hermeneutic African philosophical position, as espoused by Theophilus Okere and Tsenay Serequebehan, is also an articulation of this *liberatory* element insofar as it recognises the horizon of its discourse. As Serequebehan (1994, 29) notes,

[t]he hermeneutic orientation in contemporary African philosophy or African philosophical hermeneutics is thus thematically and historically linked to the demise of *direct European colonial dominance* and is aimed at the de-structuring of the persistence of *neo-colonial hegemony* in contemporary African existence. It is focused on the theoretic consummation of

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<sup>51</sup> According to Eze (1997, 115), “[training], for Kant, seems to consist purely of physical coercion and corporeal punishment, for in his writings about how to flog the African servant or slave into submission, Kant ‘advises us to use a split bamboo cane instead of a whip, so that the ‘negro’ will suffer a great deal of pain (because of the ‘negro’s’ thick skin, he would not be racked with sufficient agonies through a whip) but without dying’. The African, according to Kant, deserves this kind of ‘training’ because he or she is ‘exclusively idle’, lazy, and prone to hesitation and jealousy, and the African is all these because, for climate and anthropological reasons, he or she lacks ‘true’ (rational and moral) character”.

this demise. For the concrete resurrection of Africa beyond the tutelage of Europe requires in all spheres of life a rethinking of the present asphyxiating inertness in terms which are conducive and congenial to Africa and its diverse peoples (emphasis added).

Such an articulation recognises the *inherently political* nature of philosophical discourse, something Western philosophy has not been successful in obscuring. The exclusion of women, Africans and Amerindians from equal normative consideration by Western philosophers such as Aristotle and Kant can only serve the political interest of European male *dominance* over these groups. And it is from such a realisation that a philosophy of resistance/liberation is born, which is also a liberation of philosophy insofar as it challenges the oppressive, exploitative, patriarchal and colonial character of modern Western philosophy or Western philosophy in general. Which is responsible, or provided justification for the domination of women and non-Europeans (Mies 1986; Pateman 1988); Serequebehan 1997; Mills 2001). In its classical definition, philosophy is “*theoria* as opposed to *praxis*, contemplation rather than activity, leisure rather than labour” (Veroli 2001. 242). According to Veroli (2001, 242),

[i]t belongs to the realm of freedom, while its opposite belongs to the domain of necessity. John Dewey<sup>52</sup> once shrewdly suggested that this definition was no doubt indebted to the *division of labor* in Ancient Greece between *citizens* and *slaves*. The citizens, unfamiliar with the physical process of creating forms – something which the servants did on an everyday basis – developed the strange notion that all forms were eternal and uncreated so that they need only be contemplated. Conveniently this enabled them to justify their *social dominance* by differentiating their own activity (philosophical contemplation – the contrary of practical activity) from that of their servants (servile labor) (emphasis added).

It is interesting to observe that women (Greek) were not regarded as *citizens* because of their inferior character as human beings – the male body, according to Aristotle contained life, something the female was incapable of, and by extension reason, which prevented them from participation in the decision-making processes – and thereby incapable of philosophy (Mangena 2008).

According to Veroli (2001, 242), modern capitalism, or modernity, transformed this classical definition of philosophy for the justification of the subjects, the Cartesian “I”, domination over nature.<sup>53</sup> For Veroli (2001, 242–243),

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<sup>52</sup> John Dewey, *Experience and nature*. (as cited by Veroli 2001)

<sup>53</sup> And this also meant the domination over other human beings, especially women and non-Europeans. For a discussion of the woman experience in modernity – “witch-hunting”, and “housewifification”, the domestication of the female other as a result of the public sphere being a sphere of rational “subjects”, and since women,

[t]he opposition between *theoria* and *praxis* thus remained, but it was re-articulated as a relation of power along rationalist lines: the soul controls the body, knowledge must order action or else run the risk of unreason. In short, the capitalist, having to control the activity of the worker with ever-increasing exactitude in order to increase productivity (and hence, profit) must tighten his hold on the latter's activity, and on nature's more generally – in a way that the Greek citizen never had to – though without ever seeming to. Philosophy thus remains imagined as a form of passivity, but no longer as contemplation of the eternal. It becomes, rather, reflection (or representation) of nature and, in particular, of its universal laws.

Marx and Engels staged a revolt against this conception of philosophy by upholding labour (*praxis*) as the constitutive ontological element, which perturbs the supremacy of contemplation. They devoted an entire book, *The German Ideology* (As cited by Veroli 2001) to dealing with this problem, which they identified as bourgeois ideology, since the point was no longer to interpret the world but changing it.<sup>54</sup> This was to say that philosophy is not free from class antagonisms, which recognises philosophy as an inherently political activity, and which occurs in an already politicised field. This is what Veroli (2001:17) calls historical ontology:

Historical ontology is the name of metaphysics, once it has accepted that it stands neither above nor outside history. Once it accepts that history is not an option it can either take up or ignore but a constitutive aspect of its being, metaphysics becomes historical ontology. When it takes it as given that it is a fundamentally unfinished project that can never claim the status of completed System because it is always practice as much as contemplation, intervention as much as speculation, metaphysics becomes historical ontology. In short, historical ontology is the name for a genuinely materialist metaphysics, one that takes ethico-political responsibility for its existence by actively taking a stance for the mass social movements that are tendentially attempting to transform the dominant order into a participatory reality. . . Above all else, then, historical ontology recognizes that reality is always *praxis* (action) as much as *physis* (nature), a product as much as a given, becoming as much as being.

Historical ontology can then be understood as the fundamental transformation of both the object and method of philosophy since history is understood to be the constitutive aspect of its being and does not claim to be above *praxis*. This is fundamentally important to supplement Mafeje's limitation of over determining culture to the political economic presuppositions which take for granted its own

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together with the slaves, are lacking in rationality, they are confined to the private sphere – see Maria Mies (1986).

<sup>54</sup> From the 11<sup>th</sup> thesis on Feuerbach (Marx, 1973)

indebtedness to history. This can be understood as a critique of superimposed categories in the study of human reality which foreshadow their existentiality and their being part of history, what Henri Lefebvre (as cited Veroli 2001:115) called the critique of philosophy by everyday life; “Confronting everyday life, philosophical life declares itself to be superior, but discovers itself to be life abstracted and absent, distanced, detached. Philosophy attempts to decipher the enigma of the real, and soon diagnoses its own lack of reality.” This is the insistence on philosophy becoming praxis in its confrontation with the everyday as itself. Particularly important for our supplementing of Mafeje then is the insistence on philosophy to be critical of its own categories which in our case on Mafeje’s limitations entails being critical of categories of political economy in deliberations on culture. This then is a materialist grounding of discourses which gives precedence to universal pronouncements based on particular expressions of culture as Castoriadis (1978:7) enunciates; “There exists no place, no point of view outside of history and society, or ‘logically prior’ to them, where one could be placed in order to construct the theory of them – a place from which to inspect them, contemplate them, affirm the determined necessity of their being thus, ‘constitute’ them, reflect upon them or reflect them in their totality.” Which then means that every thought about the social and history itself belongs to society and to history i.e. every thought is but a mode and a form of socio-historical *doing*.

The philosophy of liberation then has the two-fold agenda, expressed by Ramose, which is the liberation of the oppressed through the rational demands of justice and the restoration of sovereignty (through the restoration of sovereign title to territory, in the particular case of South Africa), and the liberation of philosophical discourse itself, which is the liberation from the European epistemological paradigm which thrives by upholding the ontological fiction of the African, and other oppressed peoples, as inherently inferior which Mafeje’s works and articulation of African philosophy, as we have come to show, is illustrative of his attentiveness to the liberation agenda. However, as we have attempted to show, Mafeje himself does not break free from such a hold of the oppressive European epistemological paradigm through his deliberations on the value and depth of culture as generative grounds for philosophy.

Furthermore, his attempt at expelling diasporic Africans, on the basis of culture and history, from Africanity falls short precisely because of his neglect of African culture from an understanding internal to it, other than what it can provide us e.g. “development”. Such speaks of the centredness of political economy in some of Mafeje’s deliberations which prevent him from making a clean break with inherited thought. It is however imperative as Veroli (2001) has noted that if the contradictions of capital also implicate the symbolic plane, in pretty much the same way that it does the material one, then it is not enough for a theory to have content that would be deemed revolutionary without the theory itself being revolutionary. Indeed Mafeje’s (1978) promulgations of the Soweto revolution of

1976 cannot fully be appreciated because of supposed imperatives as class struggle and socialist transformation. As for Mafeje (1978) the political consciousness of Blackness as defended by Biko for instance is insufficient of revolutionary potential simply because it is not class consciousness. This would be a superimposition on the given material situation where people are not oppressed because of the particular relationship they have with the economy (workers), but precisely because of their blackness, it therefore makes no sense to demand that their revolution has no meaning if it does not elevate itself to a class consciousness to use Mafeje's (1978) example<sup>55</sup>. However, it could be argued that it was in the spirit of the times to argue for socialist transformations and class struggle as breeding grounds for any revolutionary consciousness Mafeje's (1978). However, as Veroli (2001) attests it was that precise period of the late 60s that saw a revolutionary transformation of the essence of philosophy with the movements of the sixties to which Black consciousness was a part, with its insistence on antiblackness as the fundamental contradiction in society as opposed to class. It can be said that Black consciousness was far ahead of its time that even revolutionaries as Mafeje were not able to grasp: Azania: the imagination of a liberated post conquest society.

## Conclusion

*Total order and total disorder are not the components of the real, but limiting concepts which we abstract from it, pure constructions which, taken in absolute terms, become illegitimate and incoherent. They belong to the mythical extension of the world created by philosophy over the past 25 centuries, and this is something we must rid ourselves of, if we want to stop including our own phantasies in what is to be thought. – Castoriadis (1978:178)*

In an essay in honour of Theophilus Okere suggestively titled '*Philosophy: A Particularist Interpretation With Universal Appeal*' Ramose (2005:154) elucidated Okere's astounding intellectual contribution towards the understanding of African philosophy which had been denied. The title of the essay speaks more about the conditions of all philosophy which western philosophy has so far been able to veil particularly with its universality that neglects the particular. Ramose (2005:154) correctly shows the immense contribution by Okere in liberating philosophy from Eurocentrism as he notes:

Okere's demand that African philosophy should be "homegrown" is an endorsement of the view that philosophy like any other scientific or academic discipline is, in the first place, concrete and particular. Concrete in the sense that it must arise from actual experience at a particular place within a particular time; particular in the sense that concreteness does, ontologically, require the erection of boundaries that make the construction of identity

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<sup>55</sup> 'Black Consciousness' is a diffuse nationalist ideology. While nationalist movements can be regarded as progressive insofar as they are anti-colonialist and anti-racist, insofar as they do not see this in the context of class struggle and socialist transformation they are limited.

possible and meaningful. On this reasoning, Okere clearly advocates particularity in and of philosophy.

Indeed if it is true that it is impossible to occupy all the space and time there is then we have to admit that we are always particular and this is in itself meaningful for the construction of our identity which the insistence on universalism unscrupulously denies. However, this is not to be understood as the denying of any universality, but a discomfort with the universalism that denies our particularity as Castoriadis (1978:28) notes;

The fact that we can never explore more than the successive 'aspects' of a given object does abolish the distinction between a blind man and a man who sees, between someone who is colour blind and someone who is normal, between someone who is subject to hallucinations and someone who is not. It does not abolish the distinction between someone who does not know that the bent stick in the water is an optical illusion and someone who knows it, and who, as a result, sees at the same time a straight stick. Aiming at truth, whether in respect of history or anything else is nothing other than this project to clarify other aspects of the object and of ourselves, to situate the illusions and the reasons why they appear, and to connect all this up in a manner we call coherent.

Moreover, as we have already noted that philosophy is about dialogue which invites meaningful action this insistence on universality at the expense of the particular violates the preconditions for dialogue to occur: equal partnership. As Patrice Lumumba was fond of saying that we are not against the West as such but we are against being dominated. And it is from this point of view that Mafeje's views needed some supplementing as it took for granted some concepts which were paraded as universal. This chapter has discussed the hermeneuticity of culture to counterpose Mafeje's uncritical apprehension of it which reduced to nothing African culture and the particular understanding it comes with. Furthermore, historical and cultural affinities between Africans in the continent and diasporic that Mafeje assumed to be the basis for their exclusion from the realm of Africanity. This showed continuities between the two and how both are indebted to the African past as constitutive of our apprehension of the present and to show how Mafeje has been mistaken. Moreover, the affinities also proved to be important for our elucidation of an African Philosophical liberatory project which Mafeje is our anchor and thereby supplementing his views for the our theory not to only have a liberatory content but to be a liberated philosophy.

## Chapter 6: Conclusion: The end of white philosophy and the Azanian Challenge

*Azania here I come// from apartheid in tatters// in the land of sorrow from that marathon  
bondage// the Sharpeville massacre// the flames of Soweto// I was there// I was born there//  
I will die there// in Africa my beginning// in Africa my ending – Ingaopele Madingoane (1978)*

*The fact that we can never explore more than the successive ‘aspects’ of a given object does  
abolish the distinction between a blind man and a man who sees, between someone who is  
colour blind and someone who is normal, between someone who is subject to hallucinations  
and someone who is not. It does not abolish the distinction between someone who does not  
know that the bent stick in the water is an optical illusion and someone who knows it, and  
who, as a result, sees at the same time a straight stick. Aiming at truth, whether in respect of  
history or anything else is nothing other than this project to clarify other aspects of the object  
and of ourselves, to situate the illusions and the reasons why they appear, and to connect all  
this up in a manner we call coherent- Cornelius Castoriadis (1978)*

Although South Africa has produced a significant number of important African intellectuals during its colonial and apartheid eras who are admired globally and particularly on the continent for the value their work has contributed to African epistemic liberation, the work of these intellectuals is largely under-studied in contemporary scholarship (Delpont and Dladla 2013, 2014). Where their work has been studied this has largely been by white intellectuals<sup>56</sup> especially emanating from the liberal and so-called radical perspectives. For political and ideological reasons some of these studies have been obfuscatory and sometimes outright misrepresentative. This has been costly to the generation of students and researchers I belong to since many of these thinkers have provided important contributions regarding the intellectual decolonisation of the disciplines and our society at large, which has been an ethical and intellectual rallying point for the student movement for a decolonised Free education which erupted in 2015.

Indeed Archie Mafeje represents such an intellectual who bears greater significance for his contribution outside the country that is the case in the South African academy as Adesina (2007:15)

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<sup>56</sup> The point regarding their being white has proven largely relevant as a result of the racial political history of South Africa. Amongst other things this has meant the statistical over-representation of white scholars and scholarship and a lack of critical engagement with black intellectuals who have borne the experiential brunt of racial oppression and its relative experiences. In addition the critique has been extended from the ranks of the black intellectual world outside the universities at least since the late sixties (Black Consciousness era), that whites speaking on behalf of blacks or about black experience has been with the sometimes unforeseen symptom of translating or distorting their interests in service of white domination. see Taylor (1992) and Worger (1991 and 1992) for the manifestation of this problem within so-called radical historiography and More (2004) and Dladla (2017) for the problem's manifestation in academic philosophy. In the case of Mafeje scholarship in particular, Nyoka (2013) has taken issue with Banks' treatment of Mafeje)

expresses that “Archie returned home to exile in South Africa”. Such marginality of-course speaks of outstanding liberation on the part of the colonised in South Africa which the negotiated settlement of 1994 has failed to deliver where the indigenous conquered people are still largely landless and poor, especially vulnerable to police brutality, disease, pollution and death while whites have really never been richer, safer and healthier as group. This can be surmised as whites enjoying life while blacks are subjected to death. What is worse is that this rings true even at the global level with white countries enjoying a superior quality of life while black ones despite an immense material wealth in natural and human resources that benefit the white nations continue to be poor and prone to death as are blacks in white countries. The historical imagination demonstrated by the Azanian school throughout history is what we bring as a challenge to philosophy in the contemporary setting: confronting the materiality of the black condition/ reality as the proper subject for philosophy.

### The Azanian antidote to colonialism

In 1955, eight years after the untimely death of Anton Muziwakhe Lembede, several close friends and comrades like Ashby Peter Mda and Petlako Leballo celebrated the Annual Lembede Memorial Service in Orlando. The Lembede Memorial Service was re-christened as National Heroes Day in August 1959, the same year as the official formation of the Pan Africanist Congress of Azania. It was on the first annual event of Heroes Day 1959 on which Sobukwe stated “*[This memorial] service is significant because it indicates our determination no longer to swallow the white man's propaganda. In deciding who our national heroes are, we set up our own criteria which needs must be different from those of the oppressor, so that his scoundrels are our heroes, and his "heroes" are our renegades*”<sup>57</sup>. The idea of writing a Masters dissertation on Archie Mafeje came as a realisation of this insight by the Azanian school which is precisely the initiative to invoke a counter historical imagination that seeks to self-determine against mimicking Europe/an.

Furthermore, Mafeje provided a basis for the authentic liberation of social science discourse and the end of African studies in Africa as Dladla (2016:33) attests;

While Africa as a place of some Other may justify the existence of African Studies in Europe or the Americas, where the European or American is silently prefixed against other disciplines or studies, its existence in Africa suggests precisely that all else, that is, those disciplines which are not specifically pre-fixed with “African” are not African. The reason for the foregoing is the persistence of doubt concerning the reality or quality of African knowledge and the importance and value of the experience which brings it about. It is a doubt which has its

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<sup>57</sup> Gerhart G; 1978; Black Power In South Africa, The Evolution of an Ideology

philosophical foundation in the racist doubt concerning the humanity of Africans themselves. In the academe it is largely the reason for which we continue merely to have universities in Africa rather than African universities.

Indeed it was one of Mafeje's critical insights to point out to this problematic of socially alienated discourses. This is because these do not disturb the status quo as it is but allows undisturbed continuations.

### The challenge

Writing about the curriculum and its development Dladla (2016:48) reflects on the intentions of the 1995 governmental plan to transform curricular from the previous year which tended to be inflexible and alienating particular groups of learners. The 1995 White paper on education and training aimed to correct such deficiencies and aimed at the achievement of social justice. However, this remains a dream in all spheres of learning in the country and much more in philosophy as Dladla (2016:49) relying on Hogan and Smith shows:

[T]here exist two distinct positions in relation to the question of how "philosophical reflection can inform the conduct of educational practice" (Hogan and Smith, 2003: 165). The first position they trace back to Plato. This approach they characterise as purely theoretical. They suggest it derives its character directly from Plato's metaphysical thought and the conception of truth as pure, objective, immutable and eternal. They contrast this position to one which they say is espoused by American philosopher Richard Rorty (Hogan and Smith, 2003: 165) who declared doubtfulness about the value of philosophy to education and takes what might be taken as a pragmatic approach. He held instead that education had two functions. The first is "the socialisation of pupils into the communal historical narratives of their nation [the main function of primary and secondary education]" (Rorty quoted in Hogan and Smith, 2003: 166). The second function (reserved for higher education) would be concerned with "enabling students to 'reinvent themselves' in such a way that they would aspire to an open personal future for themselves and an open social future for their society" (Rorty quoted in Hogan and Smith, 2003: 166)

Moreover, Plato is to be blamed for this reversal of the precedence of practice to pure speculation and Hogan and Smith according to Dladla (2016:51) see hermeneutics as a corrective in this regard; the hermeneutic approach "defends practical and political reason against the domination of technology based science. It resists idolatry of scientific method and encourages the citizen virtue of decision making instead of delegating it to experts" ....

Hermeneutics, they argue, promotes an orientation towards learning where dialogue as a pedagogical discipline assures “a rich understanding of the limitations and possibilities of human understanding itself”, “an informed but fallible conviction (convictions) about how human of the understanding might now best be advanced” and “the integrity of education as a critical and constructive practice [...] distinguished from both theoretical and coercive undertakings”

The hermeneutical approach to learning philosophy can prove to be very useful as it will foster reflections on the prevailing social reality which speculative philosophy has hindered. This was our argument with Mafeje as a focus to confront the passivity with which philosophy tends to instil in those who take it up as a subject of study. The abstractness of the discipline is regrettable as there is so much in the material world that even such a philosophy is embedded in that deserve philosophic reflection. In South Africa since 2015 there has been a lot of conversations about colonialism and the nature of the university. However, philosophy has been shaken however to preserve the status quo. Dladla (2016:47) notes that after the Louise Mabile affair at the University of Pretoria there was an introduction of a course on race and the enlightenment. This too was to be short lived. Moreover, some philosophy departments both in the English speaking and Afrikaans speaking universities have introduced courses in African philosophy however epistemic control over it proves to be problematic. Writing about UCT philosophy Dladla (2016:52) notes that;

UCT has, for example, since 2014 hired a British lecturer to teach the philosophy race. The course is filled with an assortment of readings especially of academic debates in the North American situation but does not, with the exception of Steve Biko (A speech by Pixely kaSeme and an article by Barney Pitso are also included), contain any studies of philosophical work produced by contemporary African philosophers dealing specifically with the South African question. Through the detachment of the existential, political and economic dimensions of racism, it is turned to an analysis of concepts without reference to the history of conquest and dispossession, impoverishment and systemic killing of the indigenous conquered people: a killing that subsists in our time. The UCT curriculum has ghettoised the problem of racism keeping it far away from its courses on Ethics, Epistemology and Political Philosophy. These courses are taught in the orthodox fashion unsullied by discussions on the racist dimensions of the thought of the philosophers studied or the complicity of the discipline in the oppression of “non-European” peoples. The course, of course, is also an elective unlike Political philosophy and Ethics which are construed as “essential” to any philosophy programme worth the name. In this way the gesture of including the philosophy of race appears to be progressive at first sight. That is to say, it appears to be correcting the historical problem of a decontextualized and quite frankly colonial curriculum. In the end, the addition of this course

turns out to be a conservative gesture which only serves to prevent any substantial change and challenge of the status quo.

This is a missed opportunity to reflect on the constitutive problems, such as race, that define South Africa today and should form the basis for teaching and learning. South African philosophy continues to look north/West for its inspiration continuous with its history. However, with the formation of the Azanian Philosophical society one can only hope that both the object and method of philosophy shall be transformed as we have attempted to do with this small contribution inspired by the Mafeje.

### Conclusion

Philosophy in South Africa is colonial: it continues to be prefixed on Euro-American models for philosophical justifiability. This is to say that South African philosophers continue to mimic what their colleagues are doing in continental Europe and the Oxbridge traditions respectively. This is also to say that the underlying axiom generative of such a practice is that European existence and experience is qualitatively superior to all other forms. Philosophy in South Africa is Eurocentric. African philosophy remains marginal: it is not presented as the basis for philosophizing but understood according to the European philosophical anthropology, and most practitioners remain wilfully ignorant of its existence while dismissively asking whether any such thing exists. The question concerning the existence of African philosophy is an old question in African philosophy which is distinct from the ignorant posing of such a question. The genealogy of the modern practice of African philosophy was outlined showing the inherently liberatory character of such a development. This is what Serequebehan has identified as the critical negative project of African philosophy, what we can call unshackling ourselves from European epistemological dominance. Archie Mafeje was presented as committed to this liberatory project that defines African philosophy through an exposition of several of his essays on the social sciences, intellectual discourse and anthropology. Mafeje was not a critique of anthropology only, as argued by Nyoka (2017), but a revolutionary intellectual committed to decolonising the social sciences in Africa. However, as we have noted that his revolutionary commitment met some limitations including political economic reductionism relating to issues of culture and the Soweto revolt. Following Veroli (2001) we concur that indeed it is not enough for a theory to have revolutionary content, to speak of revolution, without itself being a revolutionary theory precisely because the material contradictions similarly implicate the symbolic plane as well which necessitate that we accept that only particularities have universal relevance.

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