

# Philosophy and the Black Experience



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## FROM THE EDITORS

Anthony Sean Neal and Björn Freter

## SUBMISSION GUIDELINES AND INFORMATION

## ARTICLES

Abiodun Paul Afolabi

*Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and the Making of a Globalectical Citizen*

Siseko H. Kumalo

*Thinking from the Ruins—African Thought Between Ngũgĩ, Mudimbe, and the Archive*

## INTERVIEW

Björn Freter

*Philosophy and the Existential Realities of Africa: A Conversation with Nigerian Philosopher Dorothy Oluwagbemi-Jacob*



APA STUDIES ON

# Philosophy and the Black Experience

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ANTHONY SEAN NEAL AND BJÖRN FRETER, CO-EDITORS

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## FROM THE EDITORS

Anthony Sean Neal  
MISSISSIPPI STATE UNIVERSITY

Björn Freter  
TOWSON UNIVERSITY

Dear Colleagues,

We write to you in strange times. Yet we will not, by any means, lament the hopelessness of these times. Rather, we wish to highlight their potential for rebellion and, at the same time, emphasize the significance, beauty, and irrepressibility of Black philosophy.

There is so much to learn, so much to remember, and so much to do. Two important African thinkers who have profoundly shaped the philosophy of Black experience have left us, and we wish to celebrate their thought and insist on their ongoing importance. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o and V. Y. Mudimbe have taught us to unlearn the world as we have inherited it and to reimagine the very grounds of knowledge itself. We will be delighted by every philosopher we can remind of these great minds, or perhaps introduce to them for the very first time. Their insights remain vital, not as relics of a past intellectual struggle, but as living instruments for the present—tools for thinking, undoing, and rebuilding. Theirs is a philosophy that insists language, history, and imagination belong to no empire, and that thought itself must be decolonized again and again.

It is in this spirit that we are especially proud to present a remarkable interview with Dorothy Oluwagbemi-Jacob, whose clarity, courage, and critical depth extend this tradition of radical reflection. Her words remind us that Black contemporary philosophy is not a closed canon but an unfolding conversation—one that reaches from the academy into the world, from mourning into movement.

We trust that readers will find in these pages something encouraging to keep thinking, rebelling, teaching, and learning. We cannot give up, we shall not give up, and we will not give up.

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## SUBMISSION GUIDELINES AND INFORMATION

*APA Studies on Philosophy and the Black Experience* is published by the Committee on the Status of Black Philosophers. Authors are encouraged to submit original articles and book reviews on any topic in philosophy that makes a contribution to philosophy and the black experience broadly construed. The editors welcome submissions written from any philosophical tradition, as long as they make a contribution to philosophy and the black experience broadly construed. The editors especially welcome submissions dealing with philosophical issues and problems in African American and Africana philosophy.

All article submissions should be between ten and twenty pages (double spaced) in length, and book reviews should be between five and seven pages (double spaced) in length. All submissions must follow the APA guidelines for gender-neutral language and *The Chicago Manual of Style* formatting. All submissions should be accompanied by a short biography of the author. Please send submissions electronically to [apa.philbe.newsletter@gmail.com](mailto:apa.philbe.newsletter@gmail.com).

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### CO-EDITORS

Anthony Sean Neal, [apa.philbe.newsletter@gmail.com](mailto:apa.philbe.newsletter@gmail.com)

Björn Freter, [bfreterb@gmail.com](mailto:bfreterb@gmail.com)

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- The *APA Studies* adhere to *The Chicago Manual of Style*.
- Use as little formatting as possible. Details like page numbers, headers, footers, and columns will be added later. Use tabs instead of multiple spaces for indenting. Use *italics* instead of underlining. Use an “em dash” (—) instead of a double hyphen (--).
- Use endnotes instead of footnotes. Examples of proper endnote style:

John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Harvard University Press, 1971), 90.

See Sally Haslanger, “Gender and Race: (What) Are They? (What) Do We Want Them To Be?” *Noûs* 34 (2000): 31–55.

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## ARTICLES

### *Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o and the Making of a Globalectical Citizen*

Abiodun Paul Afolabi

ADEKUNLE AJASIN UNIVERSITY, AKUNGBA-AKOKO, ONDO STATE  
 ABIODUN.AFOLABI@AAUA.EDU.NG

#### 1. INTRODUCTION

The legacy of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o emerges not merely as literary or political defiance, but as an ontological and epistemological reorientation of how we have conceived meaningful existence. His words serve as a compass, pointing us toward new ways of being-in-the-world that resist imperial flattening while affirming shared humanity. However, in a world spun tight by the threads of globalization, cross-cultural flows, and epistemic contestations, the question of who belongs, that is, who counts as a citizen, has never been more urgent. This brief essay explores what I call the *globalectical citizen*, a figure implied, though never explicitly named, in Ngũgĩ’s writing. I will demonstrate that this citizen is not merely a legal subject of the globe but a dweller in the tensions of rootedness and motion, embodying a sense of belonging that is both anchored in place and open to the multiplicity of global encounters. Through his advocacy for linguistic decolonization, his rethinking of the local-global dynamic, and his elaboration of *globalectics*, I submit that Ngũgĩ invites us to rethink citizenship as a form of dialogical and ethical consciousness. This reconception offers a vision of global belonging not based on erasure or assimilation but on interconnectedness without domination.

#### 2. NGŪGĨ’S GLOBALECTICS: A COSMOLOGY OF KNOWING

Ngũgĩ first introduces globalectics in his 2012 work, *Globalectics: Theory and the Politics of Knowing*. The term fuses “global” and “dialectics” to signify a method of thinking, reading, and relating that is grounded in interconnectedness of humanity, equality of cultures, and the dynamic tension of multiple standpoints.<sup>1</sup> Yet, he shows that *globalectics* is more than an interpretive tool; it is a cosmology, a way of knowing and being that challenges the inherited hierarchies of European empire. I will first address Ngũgĩ’s view of globalectics as an epistemological framework before looking at this concept as a way of being-in-the-world.

In introducing the concept of globalectics, he writes: “Globalectics, derived from the shape of the globe, is the mutual containment of hereness and thereeness in time and space, where time and space are also in each other.”<sup>2</sup> Here, globalectics challenges Eurocentric notions of epistemic centrality in which various points on the surface all intersect with one crucial center, forming the shape of a hub and spokes. According to him, the single center point produces homogenizing forces, universalizing impulses, and centralizing tendencies so that globalization fundamentally entails being centered in the ways of the

West, which have now been defined as universal when they are in fact merely Western. Ngũgĩ rejects Eurocentric knowledge frameworks that rely on a fixed center and peripheries that feed into it.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, this is a critical reflection of the notion that Western knowledge has been exalted to the point where it is hegemonic in the world. In contrast, Ngũgĩ proposes globalectics as a world of radial multiplicities, where every point may serve as a center of cultural and intellectual production. In globalectics, Ngũgĩ already suggested a paradigm that displaces the dominant model of globalization, which, under the guise of universality, often enacts the violent erasure of non-Western ways of knowing.

Ngũgĩ first proposes globalectics as an attitude towards reading and comprehending literatures to dismantle linguistic hierarchies that have encouraged neocolonialism. According to him, “reading globalectically” is a way of approaching any text from whatever times and places to allow its content and themes from a free conversation with other texts of one’s time and place, the better to make it yield its maximum to the human.<sup>4</sup> In his exact words,

Reading globalectically is a way of approaching any text from whatever times and places to allow its content and themes form a free conversation with other texts of one’s time and place, the better to make it yield its maximum to the human. It is to allow it to speak to our own cultural present even as we speak to it from our own cultural present. It is to read a text with the eyes of the world; it is to see the world with the eyes of the text.<sup>5</sup>

Ngũgĩ calls literary scholars to shatter the glass ceiling of classified theories through their own imagination. However, this imagination must start from the self to the social space. Ideas must be examined not just on their local merits but also for their global impact. This, according to Ngũgĩ, is the task of “illuminating the internal and the external, the local and the global dynamics of social being.”<sup>6</sup> Ngũgĩ criticizes hierarchical thinking that is based on language and cultures as a lack of consciousness about “our common heritage” and “our common humanity.”<sup>7</sup> This critique is a call to “desuperiorize” specific cultures and language as dominant in the global order.<sup>8</sup>

Globalectics thus becomes both a method of reading and a politics of relating. It calls on us scholars to let texts—whether literary, historical, or philosophical—“speak to our own cultural present even as we speak to them from our own cultural present.”<sup>9</sup> This reciprocal engagement dissolves the boundaries between the reader and the read, the self and the other, the local and the global. As a way of relating, Ngũgĩ gestures towards the point that demonstrating the attitude of globalectics through imaginative reading of literature works is also a process of self-examination. Hence, a globalectical engagement is not only outward-looking; it is also deeply introspective. To read globalectically is to undergo “self-examination,” to be transformed by the encounter with otherness without surrendering one’s rootedness.<sup>10</sup> In this, Ngũgĩ insists on the simultaneity of personal and collective emancipation.

Hence, Ngũgĩ does not talk about knowing in isolation, but knowing must have a bearing upon the self. The mind of the knower must be transformed, and this must reflect a new kind of *Being*. The act of knowing must reflect a transformation in the knower. Thus, to adopt a globalectical stance is not only to interpret the world but to reposition oneself within it. Beyond applying globalectics to literary criticism, there is a sense in which it speaks to ways of being-in-the-world that is of great importance, particularly for those interested in seeing a better world.

### 3. GLOBALECTICS AS BEING-IN-THE-WORLD

To be in the world today is to exist within a dense web of entanglements across borders, histories, technologies, and ideologies. The conditions, as well as the experience of globalization, invite reflections on what it means to be in a world shaped by flows and fractures. In this terrain, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's concept of globalectics emerges not just as a theory of knowing, but as a vision of being-in-the-world.

Ngũgĩ offers an idea of the "globe" or "global" where horizontality replaces hierarchy. This means that for Ngũgĩ, the world is not one that is layered or hierarchized. Ngũgĩ's world is not one in which some cultures, languages, or epistemologies are deemed superior to others. Ngũgĩ's world vision insists that all cultures occupy the same ontological and epistemic plane. It affirms that all cultures, all languages, and all knowledges can speak—and be spoken to—without requiring translation into a dominant tongue. In this globalectical model, no single location has the monopoly on truth, or even meaning.

In describing the *self* as an agent in the world, we learn from Ngũgĩ that the globalectical *self* is anchored in its linguistic, cultural, and historical specificity while remaining receptive to the plurality of global voices. His rejection of the binary between the local and the global does not ask us to choose between rootedness and openness. The insistence here is that it is possible and indeed necessary for the self to be strongly rooted in traditions yet open to global voices. This contrasts sharply with the neoliberal model of the "global citizen," which often celebrates mobility, hybridity, and cosmopolitanism at the expense of cultural roots.<sup>11</sup> Ngũgĩ critiques this form of rootlessness as a subtle extension of imperial logic. In his earlier work, *Something Torn and New* (2009), he warns against the erasure of mother tongues and the displacement of indigenous memory, arguing that "memory is the link between the past and the present, between space and time, and it is the base of our dreams."<sup>12</sup>

To be globalectical, then, to forfeit one's *being* to the global, it is to carry one's rootedness into dialogue with the world. It is to practice a form of belonging that does not demand assimilation, but encourages exchange. From this globalectical position, it can be inferred that being-in-the-world is always co-being and requires humans to pursue relationality. This is the existence of the *self* that is inherently social and co-constituted. In this context, language becomes essential for reconnecting with Africa's ontological foundations.<sup>13</sup>

The condition of being-in-the-world for the contemporary African must transcend timidity and passivity; it demands a

consciously engaged and critically responsive orientation. At the core of globalectics is a radical critique of imperialism, not only as a historical event, but as an ongoing structure of epistemic and ontological violence. For Ngũgĩ, being-in-the-world becomes a struggle over visibility, voice, and viability of the African. It asserts that to be in the world as an African is to speak the world in one's own tongue and also to demand that the world listen. In this sense, globalectics as being-in-the-world is a profound call to decolonize existence. It is a plea to shatter the inherited myths of superiority and inferiority, to affirm that the margins have always been centers in their own right. While Heidegger's notion of *being-in-the-world* is grounded in ontological and phenomenological inquiry, Ngũgĩ's description of globalectics extends *being-in-the-world* into the ethical and political realms.

### 4. RETHINKING CITIZENSHIP THROUGH GLOBALECTICS

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o does not merely teach us to read differently; he invites us to be differently in a world increasingly entrapped by the spectacle of shallow cosmopolitanism and transactional belonging. In an age where the rituals of citizenship are still largely choreographed by the nation-state, his concept of globalectics offers a profound reorientation. The traditional understandings of citizenship that is anchored in legal status, territorial sovereignty, and exclusionary nationalism are fast becoming inadequate signposts for navigating the fluid realities of our interconnected world. As borders blur under the weight of mass migrations, digital migrations, and diasporic affiliations, the question is no longer simply who belongs, but how do we belong ethically, dialogically, and even plurally?

The modern world now teems with many identities in motion. There are refugees, transnationals, stateless persons, cultural hybrids whose very lives question the fixity and finality of state-centric belonging. The consequences of narrowly construed citizenship are not theoretical; they are visceral, lived in the bodies and silences of the dispossessed. Against this backdrop, Ngũgĩ's globalectics does not propose a citizenship of borderlessness, but one of radical relationality. Although similar to Kwame Anthony Appiah's vision of cosmopolitanism,<sup>14</sup> Ngũgĩ's globalectical citizen is envisioned as one who is at once situated and connected. It suggests that citizenship need not be a function of geography or paperwork, but an ethos, that is, an orientation toward others rooted in mutual recognition and the equality of all epistemic and cultural positions.

When infused into the discourse of belonging, Ngũgĩ's globalectics dismantles the vertical scaffolding of identity, whether in the political or ethnical sense, and offers in its place a horizontal communion of pluralities. It asks us to imagine citizenship not as exclusion or enclosure, but as "conversation among languages and culture."<sup>15</sup> This is not merely a conceptual shift; it is a moral imperative in a time when the world demands new forms of solidarity untethered from colonial residues. Through Ngũgĩ's lens, we come to see that to be a citizen in the globalectical sense is not to own a passport, but to hold space for difference without

domination and ultimately, to dwell ethically in a shared and tangled world. He writes:

Globalectics embraces wholeness, interconnectedness, equality of potentiality of parts, tension, and motion. It is a way of thinking and relating to the world, particularly in the era of globalism and globalization.<sup>16</sup>

Ngũgĩ's vision of globalectics is comprehensive. However, it is a quiet sorrow, one that reverberates in the silences of contemporary scholarship—that the name *Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o* is too often absent in discourses on cosmopolitanism and global citizenship. Amid the flourishing debates on borderless identities, transnational ethics, and planetary belonging, his contribution on belonging, rooted in the soil of African epistemologies and the dream of decolonial futures, is overlooked. Yet, Ngũgĩ's concept of globalectics offers a triadic model of citizenship urgently needed in our fractured times. First, it posits citizenship not as a matter of territory or legal fiction, but as a practice of dialogical and ethical engagement. Citizenship, in this light, becomes a space of mutual learning, where cultures do not assimilate but converse, and where the human is discovered not in sameness but in relation. Second, Ngũgĩ calls for a dynamic citizenship, one that is attuned to the currents of historical change and human movement, one that flows rather than freezes, adapts rather than ossifies. Third, and most crucially, he envisions a citizen who is not consumed by the mirror of the self, but who listens to and affirms subaltern voices, who holds space for indigenous epistemologies, and who honors the essential particularities that shape our collective humanity.

Ngũgĩ's vision of a globalectical citizen is a transformed human being, one who understands what it means to be a human being and how to demonstrate this humanness in a globalized world. This is quite different from the vision of global humanism that sees human beings in terms of hierarchies and dichotomies, making room for the possibility of domination of specific human, by a specific, generally self-conscious group of other humans. Siphamandla Zondi offers a compelling and lucid exposition of the promise that globalectics holds for reimagining a new humanism in the context of globalization.<sup>17</sup>

In Ngũgĩ's vision, the globalectical citizen is not an abstract cosmopolitan ideal, nor a passive beneficiary of global mobility, but a transformed human being—a being who understands what it means to dwell ethically in the world, and who enacts that understanding in relation to others. This conception departs radically from dominant visions of global humanism that reproduce hierarchies under the guise of universality—visions that silently permit the domination of one class of humans by another, often through the insidious logic of cultural superiority or epistemic exclusion. Ngũgĩ's alternative is not utopian but rooted, not uniform but plural. As Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni has rightly noted, this form of citizenship is deeply attentive to histories of violence and "power structures," while gesturing toward a planetary ethics of humility, mutuality, and liberation.<sup>18</sup> It is in this tension between rootedness and openness, memory and motion that Ngũgĩ's globalectical citizen finds

her form: not as a master of the globe, but as a listener, learner, and co-dweller in a shared, contested world.

## 5. TOWARD THE MAKING OF A GLOBALECTICAL CITIZEN

Ultimately, one must inquire into the very possibility of (re)constituting the globalectical citizen. What forms of pedagogy are capable of nurturing such a being? For Ngũgĩ, the answer resides in a radical reimagining of curricula, language policy, and cultural institutions. He calls for the teaching of literature that reflects the plurality of human experience.<sup>19</sup> If our children are to become better citizens, they should not only read Shakespeare and Sophocles, but also Chinua Achebe, Aimé Césaire, Bessie Head, and Mahasweta Devi. All stakeholders must ensure that education must be dialogical, attentive to power, and rooted in lived realities. Such a pedagogy must also challenge the neoliberal university, which prioritizes profit over people and standardization over creativity. In place of a monologic, test-driven model of learning, Ngũgĩ envisions an educational practice that is deeply ethical and profoundly political: one that prepares students to speak with rather than speak over, to listen as well as to articulate, to connect struggle with imagination.

More importantly, to cultivate a globalectical citizen is also to recover the centrality of language as a site of being and resistance. Ngũgĩ reminds us that the language of instruction is never neutral. Language shapes not only what we know, but how we understand ourselves in relation to others. In *Decolonising the Mind*, he argues that the domination of colonial languages in African education systems severs learners from their cultural memory and collective identity.<sup>20</sup> A truly globalectical education must therefore restore linguistic dignity, ensuring that mother tongues are not relegated to the private or folkloric sphere but elevated as legitimate mediums of critical thought, scholarship, and public discourse. In such a model, multilingualism becomes not a barrier but a bridge, enabling students to dwell in the richness of their own worlds while engaging others with humility and respect.

Furthermore, the making of a globalectical citizen calls for an education that is rooted in struggle and animated by solidarity. This means foregrounding histories of anti-colonial resistance, feminist insurgencies, ecological justice, and indigenous survival—not as footnotes to a Western canon, but as the currents of world-making. Students must be trained to read not only books, but the world itself—its inequities, silences, and possibilities. They must be equipped to interrogate systems of power while imagining alternative futures grounded in equity and care. In Ngũgĩ's framework, education is not a rehearsal for elite citizenship but a crucible of ethical becoming. It is in this crucible that the globalectical citizen is forged: not as a consumer of global culture, but as a creator, connector, and conscience of a world in search of justice.

With all this considered, a pressing question arises for me: Can the prevailing learning environments in Africa truly enable the emergence of a globalectical citizen? This concern is not rooted in doubt about Africa's intellectual

traditions, but in the structural limitations, epistemic exclusions, and pedagogical constraints that often define its educational systems. For the globalectical citizen to emerge, the learning environment must become a space of radical possibility where critical engagement, historical memory, and ethical imagination are not peripheral, but central to the educational experience.

## CONCLUSION

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o has departed this cosmic world, but his work compels us to rethink what it means to be a citizen in a world marked by asymmetry and interdependence. As I have shown, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o’s globalectics enables a reparative reimagining of citizenship in the era of globalization. The globalectical citizen is not an abstract ideal but a necessary figure for our time: one who navigates local identities and global solidarities, who reclaims voice through language, who resists the flattening forces of empire, and who dares to imagine a world otherwise.

## NOTES

1. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, *Globalectics: Theory and the Politics of Knowing* (Columbia University Press, 2012).
2. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, *Globalectics*, 84.
3. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, *Globalectics*, 84.
4. See Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, *Globalectics*.
5. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, *Globalectics*, 84.
6. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, *Globalectics*, 85.
7. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, *Globalectics*, 89.
8. See Björn Freter, “Decolonization of the West, Desuperiorization of Thought, and Elative Ethics.” In *Handbook of African Philosophy of Difference*, ed. Elvis Imafidon (Springer, 2019), 1–24.
9. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, *Globalectics*, 85.
10. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, *Globalectics*, 89.
11. See Bhikhu Parekh, “Cosmopolitanism and Global Citizenship” *Review of International Studies* 29, no. 1 (2003): 3–17.
12. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, *Something Torn and New: An African Renaissance* (Basic Books, 2009), 12.
13. Brian Sibanda, “Language as Being in the Politics of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o,” in *Decolonising the Human: Reflections from Africa on Difference and Oppression*, eds., Melissa Steyn and William Mpofu (Wits University Press, 2021), 159.
14. See Kwame Anthony Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* (W. W. Norton, 2006).
15. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, *Globalectics*, 2.
16. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, *Globalectics*, 16.
17. Siphamandla Zondi, “A Fragmented Humanity and Monologues: Towards a Diversal Humanism,” in *Decolonising the Human: Reflections from Africa on Difference and Oppression*, eds. Melissa Steyn and William Mpofu (Wits University Press, 2021), 233–34.
18. Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, *Epistemic Freedom in Africa: Deprovincialization and Decolonization* (Routledge, 2018), 8.
19. See Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (James Currey, 1986), 90.
20. See Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, *Decolonising the Mind*, 90–93.

## Thinking from the Ruins—African Thought Between Ngũgĩ, Mudimbe, and the Archive

Siseko H. Kumalo

ALI MAZRUI CENTRE FOR HIGHER EDUCATION STUDIES  
UNIVERSITY OF JOHANNESBURG, [SISEKOK@U.AC.ZA](mailto:SISEKOK@U.AC.ZA)

## INTRODUCTION

At the heart of this paper lies a central question: Has African thought moved beyond the impasse diagnosed by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o and V. Y. Mudimbe? My aim is not only to engage this question but to map how these towering figures of African literature and philosophy equip us to move beyond the critique that has long defined decolonial scholarship—particularly in the wake of renewed calls to decolonize the university. If we are to arrive at an African philosophical trajectory that is not tethered to Western standards or epistemological framings of what counts as philosophy, then we must be willing to engage sources that lie outside the disciplinary canon. It is in this regard that I follow Bongani Ngqulunga’s methodological orientation, particularly when he suggests that we can—and should—locate rich intellectual reflection in archives not conventionally classified as “philosophy.” As he writes, “Black newspapers were the prime medium for conveying black intellectual thoughts, whether antagonistic or not.”<sup>1</sup>

This question is sharpened by my location: I write from within the South African context, ten years after the eruption of the #MustFall moment, which dramatically altered the terrain of higher education. Sparked by the call to remove Cecil John Rhodes’s statue at the University of Cape Town, this moment catalyzed a re-evaluation of curriculum, pedagogy, and institutional culture. While the reverberations were felt across the entire sector, the discipline of philosophy found itself at the very center of the debate. Notably, these discussions were neither new nor uniquely South African—they were long embedded in broader philosophical discourses across the continent and diaspora. Here, Robert Bernasconi’s engagement with Dismas Masolo is instructive. Reflecting on *African Philosophy in Search of Identity*, Bernasconi writes: “Masolo closes his book . . . by stating: ‘Philosophy is experience. It is a personal point of view insofar as it is mine, and because philosophy consists not in persuading others but in making our own minds clear.’”<sup>2</sup> He further affirms that “It is possible that the basis of dialogue is not the presumption of agreement, but the admission on the part of the hearer that he or she is incapable of understanding.”<sup>3</sup> This observation—the admission of non-understanding as the basis for philosophical dialogue—provides an important hermeneutical ethic in reading African thought. It opens up room for epistemic humility, which is central to the theoretical moves of both Ngũgĩ and Mudimbe.

Ngũgĩ’s seminal *Decolonising the Mind* offers a critical intervention in this regard, especially in his insistence on the necessity of writing in our own languages.<sup>4</sup> His position goes beyond linguistic preference—it speaks to an ontological orientation that is central to the epistemic

justice I seek in the Black Archive. Importantly, the Archive is rich with texts produced in African languages, texts that engage questions of ethics, justice, and being with rigor and clarity, even if they have long been excluded from disciplinary definitions of philosophy.

This returns us to the role of the press, which arrived in South Africa in 1823 and became a vital vehicle for the expression of Black/Indigenous intellectual life. Far from being merely a platform for reportage, Black-controlled newspapers cultivated a literary and philosophical culture that allowed deep reflection on the political, cultural, and social issues of the day.<sup>5</sup> As in Europe, where the Suffragette movement gained prominence in public debate, early twentieth-century South Africa had its own intellectual leaders, particularly Black women, who challenged patriarchal domination. One such voice was Charlotte Maxeke, writing in *Umfeteli wa Bantu*. She proclaimed:

Sifuna amadoda okok'usela abafazi besizwe sawo, ingengawo ahamba egqugula ukwenzakaliswa kwabafazi bakuba namehlo okwazi. Sifuna amadoda alusindiso lwe Ntombi zesizwe sawo ezinokuwatemba ngobuko bawo. Sifuna amadoda ayakuti wona azitobe ukuze isizwe siwapakamise, abe zi nkwenkwezi ze Africa nakwizizukulwana ezizayo. Nantso into efunwa yi Afrika, nantso into elilelwa ngabafazi bayo nabayitandelayo.<sup>6</sup>

In this poignant declaration, Maxeke argues for a vision of nationhood premised on gender equality and collective uplift. She contends that the promise of a new South Africa must not entrench patriarchal logics—whether precolonial or colonial. Rather than being read as an endorsement of colonialism, her words mark an insistence that new political futures must be imagined with women at the center. And crucially, her plea—like much of the Black intellectual production of her time—was written and circulated in African languages, advancing an early model of epistemic justice.

Thus, the philosophical import of Maxeke's intervention and others like hers, found in the vernacular press, must be taken seriously. Their contributions gesture toward alternative methodologies rooted in lived experience, political struggle, and ethical commitment. This paper, therefore, joins Ngūgī and Mudimbe in thinking against epistemic dependence and toward a new intellectual orientation: one that begins from the Black Archive and moves through language, memory, and struggle to articulate a philosophy that is ours.

## NGŪGĪ WA THIONG'O AND THE QUESTION OF LANGUAGE

This section foregrounds Ngūgī wa Thiong'o's seminal contribution to African literature and philosophy, particularly as it pertains to the politics of language. My concern here is not merely to offer a close reading of Ngūgī, but rather to situate him within a broader network of intellectual interlocutors—African thinkers who have taken up, expanded, and contested the terrain he laid bare. This analysis must be read in continuity with earlier arguments

concerning the limits of Eurocentric epistemologies and the call for a radical reevaluation of what counts as legitimate knowledge. Importantly, I wish to alert the reader that South African literary and philosophical circles have long grappled with the question of constructing an authentically African intellectual tradition. Already in the 1980s, this was evident in works such as Nadine Gordimer's<sup>7</sup> *The Essential Gesture* and J. M. Coetzee's<sup>8</sup> *White Writing*. Notably, it was in *White Writing* that Coetzee first articulated the notion of an "Adamic language"—a primordial tongue in which things are known by their true names. This philosophical longing for an unmediated linguistic order provoked Lewis Nkosi<sup>9</sup> to consider whether an "African vocabulary" might be possible, a question that directly inspires the epistemic project of the Black Archive. It is this archive that enables theoretical innovations grounded in African ways of knowing.

The historical and conceptual stakes of language are further evidenced in the exchange between Es'kia Mphahlele<sup>10</sup> and Mazisi Kunene.<sup>11</sup> Their debate centered on whether the English language should be domesticated to serve African expressive needs or rejected in favor of Indigenous languages. Mphahlele, aligned with the pragmatist camp, advocated for domestication, arguing that English, despite its colonial baggage, could serve as a practical medium for articulating African thought. In this sense, his approach resonates with the framework outlined by Robert Bernasconi, who, following Dismas Masolo, critiques the imposition of European standards in evaluating African philosophy. Bernasconi observes: "The question was addressed at that time by asking whether African thought met certain criteria set from Europe."<sup>12</sup>

Kunene, in sharp contrast, argued that the adoption of English—even when "domesticated"—amounted to an epistemic concession to the very structures responsible for the intellectual and cultural erasure of African peoples. Kunene's position is consistent with Teodros Kiros's<sup>13</sup> reading of Serequeberhan<sup>14</sup> and Bernasconi, who collectively insist that "African philosophers need to formulate their differing positions in confrontation and dialogue and on their own, that is, minus foreign mediators/moderators or meddlers."<sup>15</sup> Kunene's suspicion of English reflects a broader rejection of Eurocentric frameworks and a commitment to restoring African epistemologies on their own terms. For Kunene, the wealth of intellectual work already carried out by early African thinkers was sufficient to provide a vocabulary capable of reconfiguring disciplinary boundaries and undermining the assumed universality of European reason.

However, we must acknowledge that these early intellectuals were themselves shaped by broader Pan-African and transatlantic currents. Bongani Ngqulunga captures this well in his analysis of Pixley ka Isaka Seme's 1906 speech, "The Regeneration of Africa," delivered at Columbia University. Ngqulunga<sup>16</sup> reads this address as a direct rebuttal to Alexander Crummell's 1861 address of the same name. Where Crummell saw Africa as a continent devoid of significant achievement in art, science, or philosophy, Seme offered a vision of a rising Africa, proud of its intellectual and civilizational accomplishments, poised to make unique contributions to humanity. Thus,

Kunene's linguistic project—like Ngũgĩ's—is an extension of the political and philosophical vision articulated by Seme. Indeed, Seme's vision itself emerged from the ideological crucible of the 1900 Pan-African Conference convened in London by Henry Sylvester Williams, J. E. Casely Hayford, W. E. B. Du Bois, and William Kinloch, a gathering that also addressed South Africa's mining conditions under the exploitative regime of Cecil John Rhodes (cf. Ngcukaitobi<sup>17</sup>).

This intellectual genealogy—tracing Seme, wa Thiong'o, and Kunene—demonstrates a continuous effort to retrieve Africa's occluded memory and thought traditions. It is precisely this excavation that animates the Black Archive, which I conceptualize both as a methodological commitment and a conceptual resource rooted in praxis. The Archive is not simply a collection of texts but a horizon of possibility wherein African philosophy is thought from within the linguistic, spatial, and ontological coordinates of the continent itself.

Within the Black Archive, language is not merely a vehicle of communication. It is a site of epistemic struggle and a medium for reclaiming Indigenous modes of knowing. The archive preserves and amplifies the work of African intellectuals who, despite colonial suppression, chose to think, write, and theorize in African languages. As elaborated in the historical overview provided in note five, the establishment of the press in South Africa—beginning with Lovedale Press in 1823—enabled the proliferation of African-language publications. These included *Umteteli wa Bantu*, *Imvo Zabantsundu*, *Ilanga lase Natali* and *Isigidimi samaXhosa*, among others. These media outlets offered critical analyses of Black life, politics, and society in languages intimately tied to the lived realities of their readership.

This historical fact throws into sharp relief the limitations of Coetzee's search for an Adamic language. In privileging a metaphysical idea of originary naming, Coetzee failed to recognize that the languages he sought already existed in the very landscape from which he wrote. His ignorance was not innocent. It stemmed from a narrow literary and philosophical canon dominated by English and Afrikaans, and deeply rooted in the tradition of the *Plaasroman*.

My own work on the African vocabulary<sup>18</sup> and the Black Archive<sup>19</sup> reinforces this critique. I remind my readers that the "Adamic" language did not arrive with the printing press. It predates the press through oral traditions, place names, and dialogical modes of being that stood in radical contrast to the Cartesian dualisms of the Enlightenment. These traditions reflected a relational epistemology—one that did not bifurcate subject from object, body from mind, or nature from culture. This is where Bernasconi's insights, grounded in Masolo's theoretical propositions, become especially germane. He insists that a foundational epistemic injustice occurred when African thought was rendered legible only through frameworks intelligible to European interlocutors. The expectation that African epistemologies be understandable to the "Other," without that Other acknowledging their own epistemic limitations, has led to the erasure and marginalization of internally coherent traditions. These traditions do not require

European validation to be philosophically legitimate; they require only the courage to be read on their own terms.

## V. Y. MUDIMBE AND THE INVENTION OF AFRICAN GNOSIS

Mudimbe defines *gnosis*<sup>20</sup> as "seeking to know, inquiry, methods of knowing, investigation, and even acquittance with someone." This expansive definition strikes at the core of the epistemic challenge posed to philosophy by the resurgence of decolonial discourse in South Africa, especially in the wake of #RhodesMustFall a decade ago. To situate the disciplinary dimensions of this challenge more accurately, Praeg offers a provocative framing of the decolonisation of philosophy. He writes:

The attempt to invoke a subject ('Africa') whose very self-understanding is constituted as political contestation—in order to (re)define a Subject (philosophy), which in its own self-understanding cannot, by definition, be defined, was in a sense as necessary as it was futile.<sup>21</sup>

Praeg suggests that it was "necessary, because it tackled the question of the politics of philosophy head on; futile, because it did so by invoking one indefinable concept to qualify another."<sup>22</sup> I read this diagnosis generously, in line with Mudimbe's distinction that *gnosis* "is consequently different from *doxa* or opinion, and on the other hand, cannot be confused with *episteme*, understood as both science and general intellectual configuration."<sup>23</sup> Put differently, the futility that Praeg refers to is located in the epistemic foreclosure that occurs when science is presumed to be self-evident and beyond methodological scrutiny—especially if it is assumed to bear universal authority. Mudimbe's insights unsettle these assumptions, by insisting that what counts as science is already conditioned by specific histories of power and domination.

This generosity, however, reaches its limits when Mudimbe moves to discuss the "conditions of possibility" for discourse. He writes that "what the notion of conditions of possibility indicates is that discourses have not only sociohistorical origins but also epistemological contexts."<sup>24</sup> Here, he underscores that what is posited as universal in philosophy is always already marked by the colonial and racial histories that undergird Europe's global epistemic dominance. In this reading, Mudimbe's critique aligns with Bernasconi's powerful indictment of Europe's erasure of Africa. As Bernasconi puts it, "Europe's exclusion of Africa from history, from religion, and philosophy has been so total, so extreme, so hysterical, and marked by such ignorance and prejudice that one cannot even say Africa was inscribed within Western metaphysics as its opposite. Africa was regarded as non-assimilable."<sup>25</sup>

My deliberate placement of Bernasconi in conversation with Mudimbe serves to emphasize Mudimbe's most urgent contribution: the claim that Africa, as we know it in the philosophical and epistemological archive, is a colonial invention. This invention proceeds from an ontologization of Africa—by which I mean the fixing of Africa in a mythical, premodern past, imagined as static and unchanging. This is

not to be confused with ontology in the sense of an inquiry into the nature of African being or experience as it evolves and adapts to contemporary realities.

The distinction is crucial. While ontologization is a colonial strategy that renders Africa childlike, undeveloped, and in need of Western guidance, ontology invites us to account for Africa's own evolving intellectual and historical trajectory. My argument, as developed above through the work of Charlotte Maxeke, illustrates that African societies were already engaged in deep social critique and transformation long before colonialism's roots were firmly placed in Africa, often via intellectual traditions that colonial epistemologies refused to recognize. It is precisely through the Black Archive that such historically grounded ontological accounts become possible. Without this Archive, we remain at risk of reproducing the very ontologizations that subordinate Africa to Euro-American logics—logics that continue to manifest today in exploitative economic policy regimes that benefit former colonial powers and their allies at Africa's expense.

According to Mudimbe, the colonial invention of Africa imposes a responsibility on contemporary African thinkers. That task is nothing less than the epistemological and historical uncovering of what was obscured by colonialism. This is what Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni<sup>26</sup> names "remembering"—the painstaking reconstitution of fragmented histories and silenced knowledges. Yet this project must be reflexive: it must avoid the temptation to romanticize the past or reinstate the patriarchal and elitist exclusions that some early African reformers—like Maxeke—already contested. To put it in another way, the process of remembering cannot be read as a return to an unsullied *arche* of contemporary inventions of what the past was like. For even as we have access to the Black Archive, in South Africa, we must always read the intellectuals contained therein with a level of scepticism. Such a disposition arises from the reality that even said intellectuals were themselves part of a colonial system and were educated in colonial institutions that were already convinced of the lack that "abounds" in Africa.

This—the reforms of intellectuals like Maxeke—is why I push back against Praeg's conclusion of futility. The very conditions of possibility that legitimized colonial racism—and which continue to underwrite the imperial ambitions of the Global North—can and must be challenged. The Black Archive is a material and conceptual tool through which that challenge is being mounted. Moreover, the process of mounting such a challenge will not come without its own challenges; however, in truly taking heed of the call sketched in the illustrious heritage we gain from Mudimbe and Ngũgĩ's scholarship, we must forge ahead with such a challenge.

When we take Mudimbe's legacy seriously, alongside the untapped potential of the Black Archive, we gain the critical resources needed to reimagine what it means to do philosophy from Africa—not as an imitation of Europe, nor as a reversal of its hierarchy, but as a fundamentally different mode of being and knowing. This is not a call for parochialism or nativism. Rather, it is a call—echoing

both Mudimbe and Ngũgĩ—for relational justice. If our engagement with these thinkers is to be ethical, it must be guided by a vision of epistemic and historical justice, one that refuses the violent foundations of the Western philosophical canon while also resisting the lure of inversion or resentment. This vision does not merely contest Praeg's claim of futility—it renders his framing obsolete.

## THE BLACK ARCHIVE AS METHOD AND PRACTICE

The outline I have developed thus far has had a singular objective: to pose and begin to answer the question—Has African thought moved beyond the impasse diagnosed by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and V. Y. Mudimbe? Engaging the Black Archive has revealed at least two significant insights in this regard. First, the critical diagnoses found in the works of Ngũgĩ and Mudimbe do not emerge in isolation, nor are they solely reactive to Euro-American intellectual traditions. Rather, their work joins a continuum of historical debates that have shaped and defined the lived realities of colonised life in South Africa since at least the early nineteenth century, marked most notably by the arrival of the printing press in 1823. In recognizing this, we are reminded that their contributions gain greater depth and meaning when read within the *longue durée* of African intellectual history—one that long predated, and only later came to engage, the racist logics of Euro-American philosophy and the accompanying disciplines of imperial conquest.

Second, and more urgently, this engagement with the Black Archive affirms the expansive scope and richness of intellectual traditions that have long existed across the African continent. These traditions, deeply embedded in vernacular languages and rooted in locally relevant epistemologies, demand that decolonization today—well into the twenty-first century—be driven by an active reorientation toward this inheritance. In this regard, the task before us, in South Africa and across the broader African and diasporic communities, is to take seriously the imperative of thinking with our intellectual heritage, rather than from a place of epistemic subservience. The challenge lies in rejecting what I have elsewhere called the work of distraction—that is, the compulsion to respond from a position that we ought never to have been relegated to in the first place: as underlings to Euro-American modernity.

Framed this way, the Black Archive—when understood not only as a repository but as a living method and active practice—demands that we take seriously the languages in which our ancestors reasoned, theorized, and philosophized. It is in this regard that Ngũgĩ's *Decolonising the Mind* remains so profoundly relevant. His critique addresses not only the colonial imposition of language, but also the linguistic frameworks that continue to mediate our conceptual world. In doing so, he foregrounds the need for linguistic justice as an essential component of epistemic justice.

For readers situated in the global North or elsewhere in the Black diaspora, this emphasis on African languages often invites translation as a method of solidarity—an effort to

bridge geographies of Blackness and articulate conditions of shared struggle. While well-intentioned, translation remains fraught with limitations. If not ethically undertaken, it risks reproducing the very hierarchies it seeks to transcend. Translation, in the service of global Black solidarity and the rediscovery of *gnosis* as imagined by Mudimbe, must be accountable to the philosophical integrity of the source language. It must honor the worldview, the syntax, the poetics, and the political significance encoded in the mother tongues of African thinkers. Any failure to do so risks reinscribing the very asymmetries that the project of decolonization aims to undo.

Herein lies the political and ethical demand of the Black Archive as praxis: it insists on a radical fidelity to Africa's own conceptual vernaculars and a vigilant awareness of how knowledge is framed and legitimized. Deploying the Black Archive as methodology is not a neutral exercise. It is, instead, an act of re-membering—an orientation toward repair, recovery, and resistance. But beyond re-membering, the Black Archive as praxis calls for a rigorous ethical commitment: to recognize and resist the strategies—subtle or overt—by which Africa continues to be cast as a subordinate in global knowledge production. These strategies are not always deployed by the obvious actors. Indeed, they may be taken up by those who position themselves within global Black solidarities, but who nevertheless operate from within the logics of empire, often reproducing the dominance of the Anglo-philosophical tradition under the guise of inclusion or cosmopolitanism.

To truly honor the spirit of Ngūgī and Mudimbe, then, requires more than citation—it demands an epistemic disobedience. It requires that we reject the authority of the colonial archive as the default referent, and instead prioritize the conceptual, ethical, and linguistic resources made available through our own traditions. The Black Archive—understood as a living, dynamic, and evolving mode of thought—offers just such a framework for reimagining philosophy and theory in Africa and for the world. Its imperative is not simply to critique, but to build: to lay down intellectual foundations that do not merely speak back to empire but speak otherwise—from a ground that is ours, already, and always.

#### NOTES

1. Bongani Ngqulunga, "Tribes Must Go: New African Intellectuals and the Contested Idea of Black Nationhood," *Critical Arts* 38, no. 1 (2024): 25–43, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02560046.2023.2204443>.
2. Robert Bernasconi, "African Philosophy's Challenge to Continental Philosophy," in *Postcolonial African Philosophy: A Critical Reader*, ed. Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze (Blackwell, 1997), 214–36.
3. Bernasconi, "African Philosophy's Challenge."
4. Ngūgī wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (James Curry, 1986).
5. The Lovedale Press was first established in 1823—three years after the arrival of British colonial settlers, whose presence remains memorialized to this day by the 1820 Settlers Monument in Makhanda (formerly known as Grahamstown), Eastern Cape, South Africa. This initial press was set up at the Missionary Station in the Tyhume Valley, just five kilometers east of what would later become the University of Fort Hare. Fort Hare itself would go on to be one of South Africa's and the continent's most respected institutions of higher learning, long serving the educational aspirations of Indigenous communities and producing leaders such as Kenneth Kaunda, Nelson Mandela, and Gatsha Buthelezi, among many others. In its earliest phase, the press was under the directorship of Reverend John Ross of the Glasgow Missionary Society. Unfortunately, it was destroyed during the Frontier War of 1834–35 and only re-established in 1839. This second iteration also met its demise in the War of the Axe (1846–47). One may infer from these episodes of destruction during anti-colonial conflict that the written word itself was perceived as a threat to the precolonial order. That is, the press's obliteration in moments of Indigenous resistance points to the epistemic and political significance of the printed word in contesting colonial imposition. Seen in this light, the elimination of the press served the purpose of safeguarding the existing worldview, that preceded colonial incursion, by obstructing the emergent culture of letters among the colonized. This hypothesis is taken up for detailed analysis in my turning to Ngūgī's proposition of writing in our own languages as I continue to develop my argument. Despite these early setbacks, the press was re-established with durability and purpose in 1861, achieving long-lasting impact and surviving into the twentieth century. It published foundational works such as Tiyo Soga's *Uhambo lo Mhambi* (Lovedale Press, 1867), S. E. K. Mqhayi's *Ityala Lamawele* (Lovedale Press, 1914), and R. R. R. Dhlomo's *An African Tragedy* (Lovedale Press, 1928)—the first novel written in English by a Black/Indigenous South African author. Thereafter, it published A. C. Jordan's *Inqumbo Yeminyanya* (Lovedale Press, 1939), a novel that would later be adapted in the 1990s as a television series for the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC). These titles represent only a small and widely recognized fraction of the press's rich and sustained literary output during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.
6. Charlotte Maxeke, *Umteteleli wa Bantu* (June 12, 1920).
7. Nadine Gordimer, *The Essential Gesture: Writing, Politics and Places* (Alfred A. Knopf, 1988).
8. John Maxwell Coetzee, *White Writing: On the Culture of Letters in South Africa* (Yale University Press, 1988).
9. Lewis Nkosi, "Review: White Writing," *Third World Quarterly* 11, no. 1 (1989): 157–61.
10. Es'kia Mphahlele, "Prometheus in Chains: The Fate of English in South Africa," *English Academy Review* 2, no. 1 (1984): 89–104.
11. Mazisi Kunene, "Problems in African Literature," *Research in African Literatures* 23, no. 1 (1992): 27–44.
12. See Bernasconi, "African Philosophy's Challenge," 183.
13. Teodros Kiros, *Self-Definition: A Philosophical Inquiry from the Global South and Global North* (Lexington Books, 2019).
14. Tsenay Serequeberhan, *The Hermeneutics of African Philosophy: Horizon and Discourse* (Routledge, [1994]/2012).
15. See Bernasconi, "African Philosophy's Challenge," 183.
16. See Ngqulunga, "Tribes Must Go," 28.
17. Tembeka Ngcukaitobi, *The Land Is Ours: South Africa's Black Lawyers and the Birth of Constitutionalism* (Penguin Books, 2018).
18. Siseko H. Kumalo, "Defining an African Vocabulary for the Exploration of Possibilities in Higher Education," *Alternation* 23, no. 1 (2018): 197–223.
19. Siseko H. Kumalo, "Khawuleza—An Instantiation of the Black Archive," *Imbizo* 11, no. 2 (2020): 1–21.
20. V. Y. Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge* (Indiana University Press, 1988).
21. Leonhard Praeg, *Philosophy on the Border: Decoloniality and the Shudder of the Origin* (UKZN Press, 2019).
22. Praeg, *Philosophy on the Border*.
23. See Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa*.
24. Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa*.
25. See Bernasconi, "African Philosophy's Challenge," 185.
26. Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, "Decoloniality as the Future of Africa," *History Compass* 13, no. 10 (2015): 485–96.

## INTERVIEW

### *Philosophy and the Existential Realities of Africa: A Conversation with Nigerian Philosopher Dorothy Oluwagbemi-Jacob*

The conversation was conducted (remotely) by Bjorn Freter on June 19, 2025, in Baltimore, MD. This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

*Dorothy Oluwagbemi-Jacob is a professor. She holds a BA (Hons.) in philosophy, MA, and PhD in Political Philosophy. She did her post-doctoral research at the Centre for Interdisciplinary Research on AIDS (CIRA) Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut, USA. She teaches at the Department of Philosophy, University of Calabar, Calabar, Nigeria. She was a Visiting Professor at the Department of Philosophy, University of Pretoria, South Africa, and is currently a research associate of the same. She participated in the Erasmus+ Mundus Mobility Exchange Programme (Project 2023-1-RO01-KA171-HED-000129500) in the academic year 2024–2025, in the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Bucharest, Romania. She has a research background in political philosophy, gender philosophy, coloniality/decoloniality, African philosophy, logic, and critical thinking. She has published in reputable journals on a variety of issues spanning Political philosophy, logic, coloniality/decoloniality, intercultural philosophy, African philosophy, and gender issues, as well as supervised ten master's degree dissertations and nine doctoral theses, and externally examined thirty-seven master's and twenty-five doctoral candidates. She has attended twenty-five conferences locally and internationally. She is a globally certified accreditor by the Virtual Institute for Capacity Building in Higher Education (VICBHE) Module 2: Fundamentals, Current Practice and Future Directions of Accreditation in Higher Education. She is also a certified facilitator by UNESCO International Institute for Capacity Building for Africa (IICBA) on "Transformative Pedagogy for Peace, Resilience and Prevention of Violent Extremism through Education."*

**Björn Freter:** Welcome, dear Dorothy. Thank you very much for being with us here today! I appreciate your time! The first question I would like to ask you is about African philosophy and the context of intercultural philosophy. What do you think of the ongoing work on defining African philosophy? Do you consider this to be for the benefit or the detriment of African philosophy? Does the question "What is African philosophy?" continue a tradition of ignorance towards African philosophy, or do you consider this an important question that should continue to be worked on?

**Dorothy Oluwagbemi-Jacob:** In Nigeria, where I come from, there was no such thing as African philosophy in the academic sense at the time I went through the university. I remember in my undergraduate days, it was not part of the philosophical curriculum. I graduated in 1985. The first time I encountered African philosophy in the academic sense was when I went to do my master's at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, as one of the courses

we did. And at that time, scholars were still contending with the question regarding the existence or nonexistence of African philosophy. And so many answers were given. And so many views were offered regarding its nature. Now, when you talk about defining African philosophy. It has a lot to do with critically assessing the fundamental beliefs, values, practices, and ways of knowing found within African cultures and communities. As an academic pursuit, its goal is to elucidate the philosophical basis of African cultures, historical narratives, and lived realities, while engaging with broader philosophical inquiries. In other words, African philosophy has a lot to do with bringing philosophy to bear upon the existing realities of the African. A philosophy may be inspired by the experiences of the people engaged in it. Part of the experience of the people engaging in African philosophy is that of colonialism, the experience of Africans being dominated by the imperialist powers. And that experience has generated a lot of problems for the African in terms of cultural identity, self-determination, and development. When one looks at African philosophy, it has a lot to do with reflections by Africans, or even non-Africans, on the issues pertaining to African existence, identity, and development. That is how I see African philosophy. Of course, you can go beyond that to talk about its relationship with other philosophies, like the American philosophical framework, and so on and so forth. But that is the way I see African philosophy: It's a reflection upon the existential realities, the experiences of the African, and bringing philosophy to bear on them. It involves a lot of critical analysis and assessment of what Africa has passed through, as well as the liberation of the continent from the legacies of colonialism and challenges of the modern times, which I consider not to be palatable.

**BF:** I see. African philosophy is something like a philosophy of liberation?

**DOJ:** Yeah, something like that, a philosophy of liberation. Liberation, both from external and internal agents. The existential realities of the African feature very much as far as African philosophy is concerned. But it also has to do with the [common] branches of philosophy, African philosophy comprises metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, aesthetics, and political philosophy.

**BF:** I understand. You mean it is reductionist to understand African philosophy only as a philosophy of liberation?

**DOJ:** African philosophy looks at philosophy from the African lens as it pertains to these different branches of philosophy. It is a holistic thing. It's not just about African liberation. It's also about the realities of the African—both from the perspective [of liberation and] of metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, aesthetics, political philosophy, and so on.

**BF:** So, African philosophy only understood as a movement against colonialism, neglects that there is genuine African thought that is not necessarily determined by the colonial experience.

**DOJ:** Exactly. The point I'm making is that if you restrict it to just having a philosophy of African liberation, then you

are limiting the scope. African philosophy goes beyond that.

**BF:** As you know, African philosophy is more recognized in Western academia than just a few years ago. But it is, as many non-Western philosophies are, still far away from being appropriately recognized as a part of human understanding and often relegated to the margins. There is, as you know, a very strict understanding of what are supposed to be the important issues in Western philosophy. Pretty much everything else is marginalized. So, what, in your opinion, are the reasons that Western philosophy or Western institutions continue to be so close-minded? What are they afraid of? What is their problem with opening up to African philosophy?

**DOJ:** The problem is that it questions the Western domination of knowledge production, the idea that Europe and its culture, history, and values are superior to other cultures (Eurocentrism). This elevates everything European to an absolute stance and of universal standard. Consequently, talking about any non-Western philosophy, or African philosophy tantamount to almost challenging that status of being the only voice that ought to be heard. That is why there is some sort of resistance, apathy or indifference to other knowledge frames. African philosophy does not enjoy wide endorsement, because from the Western point of view, it appears not to measure up to what they consider the universal. [The] Eurocentric perspective [is] that nothing good can come out of anywhere else, apart from Europe. But it doesn't hurt for the Western academia to embrace other perspectives. Knowledge is not absolute. What the European knowledge stands for may be different from what the African experience stands for. It will make for integration, it will make for a more improved kind of knowledge, if these other perspectives are explored. So, there is really no reason why people should get jittery about African philosophy or Indian philosophy, or Chinese philosophy. Each framework is looking at reality from a particular perspective, and it will be for the good of the entire humanity if these different systems of knowledge are integrated and harmonized.

**BF:** I understand. That is very plausible [and there] is no philosophical reason not to do so. If you look at Western philosophy [. . .] it is even inconsistent with Western philosophical self-understanding to be so ignorant. Western philosophers pride themselves on not being ignorant. Are these spoiled philosophers not wanting to give up their privileges? Or being afraid of other positions? This seems more like an emotional or habitual problem. I have never read anything that even remotely presented a good reason for this ignorance, even though I have read a lot of Western philosophers rejecting African philosophers. I think that's a very good point that you emphasize that there's no philosophical reason not to listen. It is anti-philosophical, which means refusing to be a good philosopher.

**DOJ:** And it's being dogmatic where colleagues ought not to be. People should be open-minded about some of these issues. When somebody is open-minded, it gives that person an opportunity to receive and consider new ideas. Unless you consider new ideas, you may not be able

to know whether there is anything good to be found in this other perspective. It's not good to close up. [This is] operating from a position of superiority. [. . .] It's not the right attitude for a philosopher.

**BF:** I wonder if it is possible at all to find any example in the whole history of world philosophy where being close-minded has had a positive impact. I can't imagine that it ever had. . . .

As you know, this interview is for the *APA Studies Philosophy and the Black Experience*. Do you have any particular understanding of what African American philosophy is? Do you have any particular understanding of the difference between African and African American philosophy, or perhaps of an ongoing dialogue, or of a dialogue that should happen?

What do you think should be done to foster the dialogue? If you consider that dialogue to be necessary in the first place, of course.

**DOJ:** Now, to answer that question, I'll have to first of all start from the focus of American philosophies. We may have points of convergence, and we may have points of divergence. The little I know about American philosophy is from the history books, where I learned that it emphasizes pragmatism, which has to do with the practical consequences of ideas and the role of experience in shaping knowledge. It is also instrumental in nature. There is also emphasis on individualism and liberty. The little I know is rooted in Enlightenment ideals. There is a strong emphasis also on individual rights, freedoms, and self-reliance. Concepts like natural rights and the social contract have been foundational in American political thought. I also have this issue of democracy and social reforms. We have heard about American philosophers being engaged with questions of democracy, justice, and social reform, and also the philosophical aspect of experience and empiricism. American philosophy is also associated with that. Now, when you look at African philosophy from the point of view of divergence, we can look at issues of collectivism versus individualism. That is the most striking difference between African philosophy and American philosophy. African philosophy, generally, prioritizes the well-being, the interconnectedness of the community, while American philosophy, particularly in its [historical] development, emphasizes individual rights, autonomy, and self-reliance. [Or] look at epistemology. African Epistemology often incorporates ethno-philosophical and narrative approaches. What do I mean by that? It focuses on a holistic understanding and integration of different forms of knowledge. Like, the spiritual and the communal. American philosophy, particularly influenced by the Enlightenment, has leaned towards rationalism and empiricism with a strong emphasis on scientific method and individualism. When you put the two side by side, you can see this one is on this side, and this one is on this other side.

We can also look at the historical context and focus of the two philosophies. African philosophy has largely developed in the context of colonialism and post-colonialism, and the acquisition of cultural identity.

American philosophy, also shaped by historical events, like the Revolution and the Civil War, has focused more on the construction of a new society, democratic ideals, and individual freedom. These are the areas where the two divorce.

If you look at the points of convergence between the two, we can begin to look at their concerns with human existence and morality. The two are concerned with human existence and morality. Both traditions grapple with fundamental questions about human existence, ethics, and the good life from different starting points. When you look at the dialogue between African and African American philosophy, there is such a rich and evolving intellectual exchange rooted in shared histories of colonialism, slavery, the struggle for liberation, and their quest for identity and self-determination. I had made that point before. That conversation goes beyond geographical boundaries. It highlights the interconnectedness of the African continent and its diaspora. It is not just about Africa as a continent, but about people of African descent. This ongoing dialogue is organized around shared historical contexts.

When you look at the historical context, it has a lot to do with slavery, colonialism, and post-colonialism. These are the shared historical contexts. I want to believe that both African and African American peoples experienced profound dehumanization and systematic oppression. That is one thing to share. When you look at an African American, and you want to begin to trace the origin of an African American, you can trace that to Africa, to the slave-trade that shipped millions of able-bodied young men and women to the Americas. That is one area that has given rise to dialogue.

And such common questions about humanity and dignity. What does it mean for somebody to be human [or to have dignity] in the face of systematic dehumanization? How can dignity be reclaimed? Those are questions that both the African and American philosophers try to address. We [all] talk about justice and liberation.

You can ask the question, what constitutes true freedom? How can you begin to talk about freedom in a scenario where there is oppression? These questions are for the African philosopher and the African American philosopher to answer.

You also talk about the issue of identity and belonging. What does it mean to be African? Or of African descent. And what is positive identity? How can it be forged? These are questions that both the African philosopher and the African American philosopher can be in dialogue about. This shouldn't be seen as a mere academic exercise. It is something that is aimed at bringing about social transformation.

**BF:** I understand that there is an existential commonality because of the experience of suppression, even though the suppression of African people on another continent is different from the suppression of African people on their own continent.

**DOJ:** [Let me add to this. For Africa], there are both the externalist and internalist perspectives for the challenges of the continent. From the externalist perspective, colonial modernity is blamed for everything that went wrong in Africa. From the internalist perspective, there is the phenomenon of elitist agency where African elites themselves have helped to underdevelop Africa with the collaboration of their foreign partners through assorted mechanisms. The shoddy quality of leadership provided by these elites, endemic corruption, and lack of accountability combine to keep Africa and its people down. These are issues for the African philosopher to reflect on.

**BF:** That's an important point, this difference of being oppressed by, so to speak, the other, and then to be oppressed, as an African by Africans ...

What do you think about the intercultural dialogue or, rather, polylogue? What would you imagine is required to be able to, for example, get in a practical, extensive dialogue with Western philosophy? In other words, what would Western philosophers need to learn to become proper conversational partners?

**DOJ:** In this respect, we're talking about the practice of intercultural philosophy. For that to be possible, there are certain habits, attitudes that may be required of the Western philosophers. These will include open-mindedness, as I had said before, the ability to be receptive to new ideas. And also to know that one's perspective is just one out of several perspectives, that one's position is not absolute, that we should give room for other voices, because we are likely to discover that these other voices have something to offer that will enrich our own perspective. Beyond that, there is a need for *intellectual humility*, and that demands that we should all realize that our knowledge is limited. We should also recognize the extent of our ignorance and rid ourselves of intellectual arrogance, thinking that we know everything. We need that attitude, and unless we have that attitude, we may not be able to give listening ears to the other party. It takes two to dialogue, it takes two to converse. If one party in the intercultural dialogue maintains a stance of superiority, in terms of knowledge or whatever, that person may not be disposed to listen to what the other person is saying. Beyond that, it requires *intellectual empathy*. It's a situation where we should put ourselves in the other person's shoes to feel what the other person is feeling, trying to understand the other person's perspective to go beyond [ourselves], to broaden our perspective. You know, this point is important because it helps us not to degrade what we do not understand. When the Europeans came to Africa, they did not understand why Africans were doing certain things that they were doing, and they dismissed those as primitive. A savage, devoid of reason? That shouldn't be the attitude of somebody who wants to engage in intercultural philosophy.

Another aspect is that it will require *intellectual courage* on our side. What does that mean? You know that all of us are products of our environment, we are products of our culture. Before coming to the intercultural table, we have had some preconceived notions or things that we believed and had imbibed, by reason of our education, and by

reason of our interactions. We should be able to have the courage to abandon some of those beliefs in the face of a [better] argument. It takes intellectual courage to do that.

It may also require some levels of *intellectual integrity*. Trying to abide by the principles that we preach, not saying one thing and doing another, avoiding double standards. We do declarations, we talk about tolerance, and we talk about inclusiveness at the level of theory. But when it comes to practice, we have contradicted the very principles that we have preached.

**BF:** Those are all excellent points. One would think that if Western philosophers had taken their own comments seriously on what they thought tolerance or open-mindedness is. We would have significantly fewer problems. It is one of the strangest things in Western philosophy that you just pointed out. All those essays on tolerance, all those declarations of equality—and none of them were meant seriously? One really wonders why Western philosophers did not just say at one point, openly confess, yes, we are best? But no. In their writings, they always, from the Declaration of Independence to the *Categorical Imperative*, they always pretended to talk about all human beings, when we all know it was not. It was about a very, very small group of human beings, white, male, heterosexual, [able-bodied] human beings. So, if you speak of humanity, and you cut all those who are not like this out, it is not humanity anymore. It is just your buddies. I think many Western colleagues, until today, seem to have some trouble with.

In one of your papers, you wrote that, and I quote you, “interculturality is the viewpoint that philosophy is culture-bound and is not the preserve of any one nation. Specifically, it affirms that the place from which we do our philosophy is our condition or culture as racially different people. It takes cognizance of the mixture of cultures,”<sup>1</sup> and you summarize that “interculturality is something worth pursuing to preserve our cultures amid so many conflicting cultures. [. . .] It helps philosophers of non-Western or European origin to assert their identity amid the globalizing community and other forms of domination.”<sup>2</sup> Could you elaborate a bit more on this? Could you maybe elaborate on this, and this idea of how philosophers of Western or of non-Western origin can assert their identity, but in a way that is not superiorist, not as a relationship of superior to inferior, but a relationship of mine, which I love, and yours, which you love, but I’m not taking yours, and you’re not taking mine.

**DOJ:** Yes. I am coming from a perspective, and you are coming from a perspective. Nothing stops us from looking at our perspectives and then trying to work out whether there can be an integration. Everybody is looking at reality from a particular point of view. And it makes more sense to appreciate that each point of view has something to say about reality. And we have a more holistic understanding of reality if we pull our perspectives together. That’s integration. Instead of one perspective, saying: Look here, my own is universal, my own is absolute. When you consider your own perspective to be absolute, you are saying that the other person’s perspective does not

matter. That shouldn’t be the attitude of somebody who is engaging in interculturality.

All that I’m saying is that reality is apprehended from different perspectives.

**BF:** So, you would argue that it is an outright anti-philosophical undertaking if you want to find everything out on your own?

**DOJ:** Yes, it will pay humanity better if we pull our perspectives together because when you put the perspectives together, you have a more holistic understanding of reality. Instead of one perspective elevating itself to an absolute stance, thereby denigrating the other ones, we should rather work towards integration.

**BF:** Because reality, as you said, is apprehended by a plethora of people, and if you refuse to be in dialogue, or to be in polylogue, you are negating your chance to find out anything about truth or reality.

You made another important point in that same paper, which we have already talked about, and I’ll quote you again. You write that the acquaintance of “African intellectuals with the writings of men like Jean Jacques Rousseau, Thomas Paine and other social theorists caused them to awaken to the injustices of colonialism. They utilized the very weapon that the colonialist used to exploit and oppress Africans to fight colonialism. This informed the assorted philosophies for Africa, including negritude. Their existential and social analysis utilized the conceptual schemes and ideas of continental philosophies for reflecting on the African condition at that time, which included the colonial situation and the challenges of the newly independent states.”<sup>3</sup> How do you think these thinkers could think their Superiorism and their Enlightenment at the same time? How do you think it was possible for Rousseau, Kant, Hume, and so many more to understand themselves as enlightened, as tolerant thinkers, but to be, at the same time, awfully superiorist? How do you think that was to philosophize against the very thing you say?

**DOJ:** You know, when you talk about Thomas Paine, John Locke, and all those theories about human rights, democracy, respect for equality, tolerance, and all that, these make sense in the countries or nations where these theorists articulated their views. Those who are benefiting from scenarios of oppression will always [find a way to] defend it. When there is a relationship of superiority and inferiority, the superior person will try to justify his actions. The colonialists or imperialists never even believed that the African was human. They never even believed that the African was rational. All those articulations about equality, about civil rights, were meant for the people they thought were rational and human, and those were the whites. When you talk about how it was possible for them to articulate justice, talk about social justice, equality, freedom, and then at the same time in practice contradict themselves, you could begin to understand the psychology of the people we’re dealing with. [. . .] The one never saw the black as somebody who was human or could relate to them. If you heard them speak about human rights, freedom, and

equality of human beings, the human beings referred to the Whites.

When our Black people, like Nkrumah, went abroad [. . .] and had the opportunity of going to those Western countries and mixing up with them, they saw that there was nothing really different between the whites and the blacks. They read those books written by all those [Western] people, and now they knew that these [Western philosophers] were not being genuine, were not being truthful. And they carried those ideas to come back to the African continent to sensitize their brothers and sisters.

[There was] egocentrism involved, including selfish interests to protect, and [these Western philosophers] needed some theories to justify their actions in relation to the non-Western world. That's the explanation.

**BF:** I think the shocking thing about it is, again and again, when you think about these things, how vulgar in the end that all is. It's not philosophical, it's just somebody seeing something that they want, and then just inventing a whole world of difference [to justify robbing it]. [. . .] It's important that we [Western philosophers] understand, yeah, we really messed that up, and we cannot discuss ourselves out. The only thing we can do is change it. . . .

I would like to move on to another section of your work, which we could call African logic. You have worked quite extensively in that area. It is, especially for Western scholars, often rather difficult to fathom that there might be something like an African logic, even though, for example, Marie Eboh,<sup>4</sup> Innocent Asouzu,<sup>5</sup> Chris Ijiomah,<sup>6</sup> or Jonathan Chimakonam<sup>7</sup> all have convincingly shown there is something like African logic and their findings so far are quite groundbreaking. You explain in one of your works that it "is tendentious to assert that the Western principle of modus ponens [. . .] breaks down in the face of the communitarian values of the African extended family system. It is important to note that even the uneducated Africans employ or conform to this principle in their dealings with one another."<sup>8</sup> Could you explain that to our readers? I do recall that in one of your works, you used an example of the Ubakala community, Umuahia in Abia state of Nigeria.

**DOJ:** Now, I had to bring in that example in order to critique the view of [Udoh] Etuk<sup>9</sup> as cited by [Chris] Ijiomah<sup>10</sup> that communitarian principles affect Western logic in Africa. Etuk used the following example:

if anyone cuts another person's palm fruits, he will pay fine. S has cut another person's palm fruits.

According to Etuk and Ijiomah, if it is in Western logic, with the two premises above, it does follow that S should pay fine. But according to the duo, in the African worldview, if S is the grandchild of the "other person" in the community, S will not pay fine. I asked, "is this really the way the communitarian logic functions? I tried to argue that even amidst the communitarian ontology, S could still pay fine if cutting the palm fruits of the grandmother was done without the latter's knowledge or consent, and it is well

known in the community that S is a troublesome grandchild who is not on good terms with the grandmother.

I used the Ubakala community to illustrate that the Modus Ponens argument does work in the communitarian setting. In this community, palm trees in the village farmlands, what we call Ubi,<sup>11</sup> are not harvested individually, even if they are found in one's private farmland. When the fruits are ripe for harvesting, the elders meet to make a decision regarding when harvesting is to take place. they fix a date and announce to the community to go en masse to harvest them. This is called *iwu nkwu* (palm harvesting rule). The rule allows an individual to harvest palm fruits from any farmland, not just one's own. Harvesting the palm fruits outside the approved time by the elders, even if such are found in one's farmland, can attract sanctions from the community. The Modus Ponens argument can be stated thus:

If anyone harvests palm fruits from the farmland outside the approved time, then they will face sanctions,

X has harvested palm fruit outside the approved time.

Therefore, X will face sanctions.

As the locals would not make this rule and watch it violated, they are the ones that enforce the sanction attached to such a violation. They refuse to live in contradiction.

It is not right to say that the modus ponens does not work in the communitarian setting.

**BF:** I understand. Another question about logical principles like these would be about the universality of logic. You have written, "Anywhere people have to deliberate on issues that concern them, be they social or political, it is taken for granted that questions related to the above will be thrown up. This is bound to happen irrespective of whether the society is pre-literate or literate. This is what it means for logical thinking to be universalizable."<sup>12</sup> Could you elaborate on this idea of universality? Can you elaborate a little bit on that? This is a pretty exciting idea. What do you think indicates that there is some sort of character of universality in logic?

**DOJ:** This has to do with the issue of consistency. It is very easy to detect when people are contradicting themselves. In a community setting where people relate with one another, it is expected that their ideas and actions hold together, and not to say one thing and do another. By the reason of this principle, people do not expect that what you are saying or doing should negate something else you are saying or doing. Even an uneducated person will tell you that what you said or did before does not align with what you are saying or doing now. This principle of logic applies everywhere, regardless of one's geographical location. No society, whether literate or pre-literate, operates on contradictory principles.

I disagree with the view that Aristotle's three laws of thought are nonviable in the African context. Rather, I argue that though they may be limited or inadequate in explaining the connection between physical and spiritual realities, there are instances where they apply.

**BF:** Yeah, I think that makes a lot of sense. We just have to understand that the logic that Aristotle found represents valid principles of human interaction. A mistake would be to consider these to be exclusive to the Greek or the Western people. Aristotle found out that consistency or non-contradiction is important, but it is a mistake to consider that non-contradiction as something that you can find only in, for example, the Greek understanding of logic. You say, that's something we find everywhere. As you pointed out, it will be rather difficult to find a community that operates on contradicting each other. Perhaps that does exist, but I would think it would be rather rare.

And that brings me to the next question, which I think is one of the groundbreaking ideas of African, or of the recent African logic, which is complementarity. The Aristotelian idea of non-contradiction works pretty often, but there are situations where it doesn't work, and these seem to be the situations where complementarity could help. It would be very interesting if you could explain to us what this idea of complementarity means within the recent African Logic.

**DOJ:** When we look at [Innocent] Asouzu's theory of complementarity, it is trying to tell us that there is this principle of missing links. That principle says that when you have X, it does not exclude non-X. It only sees X as a complementary aspect of it.

Instead of saying X, excludes non-X, we should rather see non-X as something that makes up an aspect of X. [ . . . ]

[Innocent] Asouzu was trying to show that the complementarity principle fosters integration and makes room for unity. When people pursue X, excluding non-X, they are bifurcating reality, and this gives birth to conflict. So instead of looking at non-X as the opposite of X, we should rather look at non-X as a missing link of X, as something that complements X in its limitedness. This is the selling point of African philosophy.

**BF:** Would you then also say that the idea of the complement would be part of an anti-superiorist philosophy, because the complement allows one to avoid these kinds of hard oppositions, like, for example, if the one thing exists, the other thing categorically does not exist. With the complement, we would be able to assume that one thing, X, exists in a complementary relationship to another thing, non-X, which would avoid the consequence of annulling one of them. Complementarity opens this new space to continue to bring together Western or Aristotelian, or whatever logic, together without risking superiorist binaries. That is one of the great triumphs of African philosophy, the abandonment of binary logic. Logic is not just this formal, detached, pure rationality. It's deeply embedded into our lives. If it were just this formal, detached thing, it probably wouldn't matter that much to us.

I would like to move on with some questions on work on gender. In Western research, as you know, a particular understanding of what sex and what gender are has emerged. That Western paradigm has been, for quite some time, challenged by African philosophy—perhaps since Eboh's dissertation<sup>13</sup> or even before. This seems to indicate that gender and sex are not as universally definable as it is in some Western sources sometimes presented. You have pointed that out as well in your studies on Igbo society. You write that, in Igbo society, one can find a "flexible gender system in the midst of sexual polarization."<sup>14</sup> You also note that "Sexuality means different things for males and females, and their sexual roles are defined by the culture."<sup>15</sup> Could you explain to us the Igbo understanding of sex and gender? This seems especially important as there are some significant differences between Igbo and Western understanding! You point out, for instance, that "Until later childhood, there was no marked sexual difference between little boys and girls; both participated in what were deemed as female duties, which were mainly domestic. The child is expected to have general knowledge of things before he or she is made to specialize in areas assigned according to sex."<sup>16</sup> It would be great if you could explain to us what you think are the differences between the Western and the African understanding of sex and gender.

**DOJ:** From the little understanding I have about sex, it's a biological condition. It is understood in terms of physical characteristics, chromosomes, and hormones. When a child is born. You can decide from the physical outlook or characteristics of that child that this is a boy, and this is a girl. That is sex, the biological condition of being born either a male or a female. Now, when it comes to gender, gender has to do with upbringing, the difference between masculinities and femininities, what is expected of a female child in a particular cultural setting, and what are the expectations on the side of a male child. What roles such is expected to perform, as well as how such should conduct themselves in public.

**BF:** What about transsexuality?

**DOJ:** Yes, this falls under the third category by reason of undergoing certain medical interventions to change one's physical characteristics to be in alignment with one's gender identity.

The challenge lies with biological determinism that tries to account for the roles of men and women in terms of their biology and is used to justify the limited space allowed to women in the time past. When one says because I am a female, I am not capable of accomplishing certain tasks such as studying medicine and surgery, architecture, mathematics and that these domains are meant for the males who are naturally wired to perform such tasks, then that is biological determinism at work. Biological determinism is responsible for the discrimination against women. When it comes to politics, women used to be told, look here, because you're a woman, you cannot go into politics. Because you're a woman, you cannot do this or that.

Igbo traditional society recognized the fact that this person is a man and this person is a woman. But the fact that this one is a man and this one is a woman does not prevent the woman from reaching certain heights in society.

When it comes to gender upbringing, the Igbo society brought up the lady to perform certain roles. The female was groomed to be domestic: to be a good wife, be moral to play motherly roles and be able to take care of her household. She is taught to be industrious. The socialization of the boys emphasized masculinity equated with strength, valor, self-assertion, and independence. They are groomed to take responsibility and to be involved in activities that will generate income. The gender upbringing didn't create any division that worked against either the male or the female. Both of them worked in a complementary relationship.

In the domestic sphere, chores are meant for both sexes, though with differentiation on the basis of biological make-up. The males perform the role of splitting the firewood with axe, the females make fire, do the cooking and serving the meals. None of the tasks is considered more important or more prestigious than the other. I argued in the paper that that level of complementarity is good for society. Now, if it is said, because I'm a female, the role I am performing is neither important, recognized nor valued, that is where the issue of gender polarization comes in. The traditional Igbo society did not see things that way. That society saw the two of them as functioning in a complementary relationship for the well-being of both the family and the society. I was trying to argue that if modern society could draw a lesson from the Igbo traditional concept of gender, it would help women and men to come together in complementary relationship to achieve sustainable development goals in Africa.

**BF:** What is very interesting in what you just said is that it seems that the idea of complementarity is coming up here again! And again, it seems that the idea is very beneficial for developing a more caring interaction, because it insist radically on this or that.

There is one more thing I wanted to ask you about your work on coloniality and decolonization. You have written a pretty exciting paper on self-preservation and coloniality with Jonathan Chimakonam.<sup>17</sup> And in that paper, you analyze one of the, in Western philosophy, most beloved and most abused myths. And that is the understanding of the philosopher as the rational person.

By introducing rationality as the most important criterion, Western philosophers have developed a trick to exclude other people from philosophy. The African human being is a human being, but they are not rational, so we don't need to take them seriously [as thinking human beings, philosophers]. Your comment on that is quite exciting. Could you elaborate a little bit for us on your understanding of rationality, and most importantly, on this ingenious way that you connect rationality and coloniality?

**DOJ:** I was looking at rationality not just from the point of view of reasoning and argument. I employed the notion "to encompass a family of attributes and capacities which

include the ability to reason, deliberate over questions of actions, make reasonable and intelligent decisions on the basis of those deliberations, give reasons for our beliefs and weigh the consequences of such beliefs." In addition, rationality embodies benevolence and the ability to act humanely. In this regard, I quoted Confucius, who said that rationality without benevolence is empty and abstract. Rationality involves respecting the humanity of the other person. It involves making decisions that affect not just us, but also other people. Rationality involves deliberating on our actions and the consequences of our actions, which means that there is also an ethical dimension in rationality. It involves reflecting on our actions and ensuring that the other person's interest is carried along.

When one considers what colonialism stood for in Africa, one wonders whether we humans are actually rational. Colonialism in Africa was synonymous with exploitation, oppression, and dehumanization. Consider what happened in Belgian Congo where people's hands were chopped off and even killed because they didn't produce enough rubber. That was a case of man's inhumanity to man and a questioning of rationality.

The point I was trying to make was that it was purely self-preservation on the part of the imperialists that governed their actions. There was nothing rational about their behavior.

The main reason why they came was for economic reasons in order to export raw materials from Africa to serve the industrial setup of Europe. In the course of doing that a lot of injustice was committed. When one looks at the issue of rationality and connects this to colonialism, it is clear that a lot of rational principles were compromised in the course of colonialism. In the post-colonial era, where former colonized nations are said to have gained independence, colonialism now occurs in a new guise (coloniality). Even though the physical structures of colonialism have been dismantled, the logic of colonialism still operates, as resource extraction and the activities of the multinational corporations continue unabated, with the same implication for the former colony, namely, underdevelopment. It's not rationality, but self-preservation that drives coloniality.

**BF:** That is a rather convincing point. Maybe you can give us just a brief comment on what your decolonizing answers to that might be.

**DOJ:** African nations will need to come together, work as one in solidarity and in unity. The forces of neocolonialism are quite enormous, and it's not something African countries can contend with in isolation. That is why embracing the core values of Pan-Africanism is crucial. There is the need for integration. Also, the inherited curricula of education in post-colonial Africa needs to be dismantled and infused with content that is more aligned with African realities, including African knowledge system and ethical values. This will help to educate and re-educate the next generation, because many of the present elites occupying positions of power were products of colonial education. The educational system should be able to teach the generations of Africans about the injustices and contradictions in the past, how

the legacies of colonialism still haunts African people, and the way forward. These are some of the things I have recommended regarding decoloniality.

**BF:** Thank you very, very much for all your wisdom! I'm coming to my final two brief questions. First of all, what do you think are the most urgent tasks for full philosophers today, from your very personal point of view?

**DOJ:** The most urgent task is liberation. If one looks at the scenario in Africa today, it is not difficult to see that colonial legacies still speak. One will find such in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Sierra Leone, Cameroon, and Nigeria. In Nigeria, the Niger-Delta presents a test case of resource extraction and associated the harm to the people by way of environmental degradation. The role of mineral extraction in the conflict in DRC cannot be overemphasized. The resources (oil, diamond, copper, and gold) that ordinarily should be beneficial to Africa have rather become a curse.

African philosophers have a role to play in articulating and highlighting these contradictions and fashioning out ways to pull Africa out of the quagmire that has kept it down. They also have a role to play in building a politically conscious citizenry that is equipped to make the ruling elites accountable. African philosophers should have a way to address the issue of poverty, the issue of underdevelopment, and the issue of corruption. These are problems that are weighing Africa down. The talents and skills of the young people who are leaving the shores of Africa to Europe, some of whom drown in the Mediterranean Sea could have been harnessed for the development of Africa if the right leadership were in place. We have the brains, we have the manpower that can turn things around.

These are the issues that African philosophers should be addressing now. That's what I think.

**BF:** And then, as my very last question. What would be some readings that you would recommend from African philosophy to your African American philosophers? It could be something contemporary or something recent, or it could be a classic that you think should be more widely read.

**DOJ:** I think Mudimbe's book,<sup>18</sup> Nkrumah's *Consciencism*,<sup>19</sup> Julius Nyerere's book on Ujaama,<sup>20</sup> Kwasi Wiredu, his work on conceptual decolonization.<sup>21</sup> You could also read Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*,<sup>22</sup> and *The Wretched of the Earth*.<sup>23</sup> We can also add Jonathan Chimakonam!<sup>24</sup>

**BF:** Dear Dorothy, again, thank you so very much for sharing all your wisdom with us! Thank you for your time!

#### NOTES

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3. Oluwagbemi-Jacob, "Interculturality in the Context of Africa's Colonial and Decolonization Experience," 111.
4. See Marie Pauline Eboh, *The Structure of Igbo Logic as Shown in Dispute Settlement in Igboland with Special Reference to Nzerem Town* (PhD Diss, Pontifical Gregorian University, 1983).
5. See Innocent Asouzu, *Ibuanyidanda: New Contemporary Ontology: Beyond World-Immanence, Ethnocentric Reduction and Impositions* (Lit, 2007), and id., "Complementary Logic," in *Logic and African Philosophy: Seminal Essays on African Systems of Thought*, ed. Jonathan O. Chimakonam (Vernon, 2022), 273–324.
6. See Chris O. Ijiomah, *Harmonious Monism: A Philosophical Logic of Explanation for Ontological Issues in Supernaturalism in African Thought* (Jochrisam Publishers, 2014).
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8. See Dorothy Oluwagbemi-Jacob, "African Logic or Logic in Africa: Reflections on Chris Ijiomah's Harmonious Monism," *Ezumezu: African Perspectives on Logic, Transhumanism and AI Ethics* 1, no. 1 (2024): 9.
9. Udo Etuk, "The Possibility of African Logic," in *The Third Way in African Philosophy: Essays in Honour of Kwasi Wiredu*, ed. Olusegun Oladipo (Hope Publications, 2002).
10. See Ijiomah, *Harmonious Monism*.
11. See Oluwagbemi-Jacob, "African Logic or Logic in Africa," 11.
12. Oluwagbemi-Jacob, "African Logic or Logic in Africa," 14.
13. See Eboh, *The Structure of Igbo Logic*.
14. Dorothy Oluwagbemi-Jacob and Chima Eni Uduma, "Gender Equality, Gender Inequality, and Gender Complementarity: Insights from Igbo Traditional Culture," *Philosophy Study* 5 no. 5 (2015): 227.
15. Oluwagbemi-Jacob, "Gender Equality, Gender Inequality, and Gender Complementarity," 227.
16. Oluwagbemi-Jacob, "Gender Equality, Gender Inequality, and Gender Complementarity," 227.
17. Dorothy Oluwagbemi-Jacob and Jonathan Chimakonam, "Self-Preservation and Coloniality," *Dialogue and Universalism* 33 no. 1 (2023): 111–28.
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20. See Kwasi Wiredu, "Conceptual Decolonization as an Imperative in Contemporary African Philosophy: Some Personal Reflections," *Philosophies Africaines: Traversées des Expériences* 36 (2022): 53–64.
21. See Julius K. Nyerere, *Ujamaa: Essays on Socialism* (Oxford University Press, 1968).
22. See Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (Grove Press, 1967 [1952]).
23. See Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (Grove Press, 2004 [1961]).
24. See Chimakonam, *Ezumezu*.