

POSTETHNOPHILOSOPHY: DISCOURSES OF MODERNITY AND THE FUTURE OF AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY

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ABSTRACT

This work examines how the so-called postethnophilosophical phase in African philosophy – propounded by Osha (2011) – fits into the perceived trajectory of the discipline and its overriding emancipatory mandate. The work appropriates ideas from arguably the two most popular “posts”: postmodernism and postcolonialism. This is done to analyse how the postethnophilosophic turn (in its attempt to transcend the discourses of ethnophilosophy and to be postethnophilosophy) opens up new possibilities for African agency and the creation of knowledge. The work argues that postethnophilosophy should concern itself with the analytic task of unmasking the darker side of modernity in order to open up those horizons and experiences once held hostage by modernity and coloniality. It is within this context that a truly global and polycentric knowledge landscape can emerge. In its quest to expose and dismantle hegemonic discourses of colonial modernity, postethnophilosophy finds itself located within the same theoretical horizon occupied by postmodernism and postcolonialism, ready to benefit from their auto-critical habit.

Keywords: Postethnophilosophy; African modernity; postcolonialism; postmodernism; polycentrism.

INTRODUCTION

Postethnophilosophy joins the family of other “posts” (including postmodernism and postcolonialism) in their quest to open up horizons of knowledge and experience, that were held hostage by modernity and colonialism – particularly in postcolonial societies such as Africa. The attractiveness and popularity of these “posts” in the analysis of discourses in societies consigned and defined as the “Other” through historical processes of exclusion and derogation, is located in their radical critique of the centre and its hegemonic tendencies. These “posts” – particularly postcolonialism and postmodernism – have defined a new path of conceptualising reality that questions modernity’s grand narratives and its universalising theories. Alongside other theories

like deconstruction, they have drawn attention to the often suppressed reality that before the hegemonic imposition of the West as the ideal, the world was truly polycentric with many centres of power and knowledge, each suited to the needs of their respective communities. Although postmodernism and postcolonialism will not constitute our major focus, this work draws from these two arguably most popular “posts” in order to provide the framework within which we can make sense of another “post” called postethnophilosophy.

To our knowledge postethnophilosophy seems to be a term that has been brought into the limelight by the recent publication of Sanya Osha. We refer here to his book *Postethnophilosophy* published in 2011 by Rodopi. In this book Osha articulates what he envisages as “the beginning of a postethnophilosophical phase in modern African thought”. He argues that time is now ripe to move African philosophy beyond the realm of traditional African philosophy and its preoccupation with age-old questions of definition and origin. Like other “posts”, postethnophilosophy promises to define a new agenda and a new way of thinking in African philosophy. It also seeks to create a site for the production of new knowledge and modes of philosophical engagement devoid of all representational and hegemonic discourses. By defining its relationship to the colonial past in this way, it becomes apparent that there is in existence theoretical and philosophical connections between postethnophilosophy and the theories of postcolonialism and postmodernism. Since postethnophilosophy is a reaction to the West’s exclusionary discourses of Othering and representation, it inevitably finds itself located within the same conceptual horizon occupied by postmodernism and postcolonialism. The post in postethnophilosophy seems to call for a broadened and critical reading of Africa’s condition of coloniality and how new spaces for the production of knowledge can be crafted. The encounter of the African world with Western modernity through violent conquest and usurpation has to a larger extent shaped the social and philosophical processes unfolding in Africa. It is within this historic encounter and the effects thereof that we seek to engage with postethnophilosophy.

As we harness ideas from postmodernism and postcolonialism for our analytic purposes, we are also aware of the problems and controversies that surround them. For one, it has been stated that since Africa has transcended neither modernity nor coloniality, the theories of postmodernism and postcolonialism are irrelevant to Africa. We submit that just like its counterparts (postmodernism and postcolonialism) postethnophilosophy may have its own share of problems. Quayson (2005:89) submits that “the prefix ‘post’ in postcolonialism and postmodernism aligns them both to similar problematics of temporal sequence and transcendence in relation to their second terms, colonialism and modernism.” The same logic applies with equal significance to postethnophilosophy. Questions will always be raised about the sense in which discourses of African philosophy can be truly postethnophilosophy, although there is near consensus that African philosophy should move beyond the preoccupations that defined ethnophilosophy. For the reason that ethnophilosophy was a creation of Eurocentrism and its penchant for

invidious comparisons, moving beyond ethnophilosophy creates opportunities not only for articulating African modes of thought but also for asserting the multidimensional conception of cultural rationality. It was in their appeal to logico-scientific reasoning as the standard for cross-cultural assessment that Africa was portrayed in an inferior light in point of rationality by the West (Healy 2000). Far from being a unitary phenomenon, cultural rationality is a multifaceted phenomenon whose articulation depends on the values most highly prized in a given culture (see Healy 2000:70 citing David Wong). The acquisition of historical consciousness so key for Africa, would allow Africans to “become aware of the relativity of the rational principles that permit the justification of knowledge” (Quesada 1991:145), and hence engage with the claims of Western modernity in an appropriate manner.

It is for this reason that Dussel’s submission on the need to transcend the Eurocentrism of modernity is crucial. According to Dussel (2009:499) it is only through the recognition and acceptance of the meaning, value and history of all regional philosophical traditions on the planet that genuine inter-philosophical dialogue, respectful of differences and open to learning from the useful discoveries of other traditions, can be realised. That kind of inter-philosophical dialogue is what holds the key to the creation of a truly global and polycentric knowledge landscape. We conceive polycentrism as an attitude of openness that recognises the independence and right of other cultures to be entitled to their conception of reality. A polycentric global epistemology is therefore a knowledge landscape in which the imperium and tyranny of Western epistemology give way to the creation of “a world in which many worlds fit” (Maffie 2009:62). It allows for the endorsement of an African epistemology that is defined by its own difference, free from all the hierocratic reasoning and ranking implications implied in the history of conquest and its buttressing logic.

This work is divided into four sections.

- The first section is an analysis of the three “posts” – two of which are employed to provide analytic insights into postethnophilosophy.
- The next section entitled “from ethnophilosophy to postethnophilosophy” is an attempt to examine how discourses of ethnophilosophy in and of themselves create conditions necessary to call for a postethnophilosophical turn in African philosophy.
- This is then followed by a brief reflection on African modernity.
- Lastly we explore the role that African philosophy can play in defining a new African modernity consistent with the quest for a polycentric global epistemology.

THE “POSTS” AND AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY

On the contested cultural turf of today, not only are we not ‘past the last post’ but the ‘posts’ seem to want to proliferate (Hutcheon 1994:205).

So prophetic was Linda Hutcheon in her observation that today, almost two decades later, we are indeed engaging with another new addition to the “posts”, namely, postethnophilosophy. This section is a *seriatim* analysis of the three posts: postmodernism, postcolonialism and postethnophilosophy, and how they interrelate within the context of African philosophy. Given the volume of work that already exists on the first two concepts and coupled with our own interest in the newly coined post, we shall avoid an in-depth analysis of these “posts” other than highlighting key ideas that are significant to this discussion. We are aware of the controversy and diversity of opinion elicited by these theories – particularly how different scholars characterise them.

A) POSTMODERNISM

Turning our attention to postmodernism we start by acknowledging the existence of a deluge of opinions and literature on this theory (Bauman 1991; Connor 2004; Hutcheon 1994, 2002; Lyotard 1979; Quayson 2005; Sim 2001) among a host of other scholars. While there are indeed in existence diverse views and opinions about how to adequately define and characterise postmodernism, there is consensus that it finds its identity from what it comes after, which is “modernity”. We take modernity to define those modes of social life and organisation that emerged in Europe from about the 17th century onwards and which subsequently became more or less worldwide in their application. Cognisant of the intellectual caveat contained in the submission “if there is one thing the postmodern is, it is not one thing” (Clines & Moore 1998:277), we chose to settle only for a working definition of postmodernism. For that reason we adopt Bauman’s definition of postmodernism. According to Bauman (1991:272):

...postmodernity is no more (but no less either) than the modern mind taking a long, attentive and sober look at itself, at its conditions and its past works, not fully liking what it sees and sensing the urge to change...[it] is modernity coming to terms with its own impossibility: a self-monitoring modernity, one that consciously discards what it was once unconsciously doing.

It is only appropriate that a theoretical turn which requires modernity to take a sober and honest look at itself in terms of the ills it has brought about, should constitute the defining element of “post”-modernism and hence modernity going forward.

In more general terms, to embrace postmodernism is to assume a sceptical standpoint regarding most of the teachings of modernity and the philosophies of the Enlightenment that underpinned it. This postmodern turn is aptly captured by Cornel West as a drive “to trash the monolithic and homogenous in the name of diversity, multiplicity, and heterogeneity; to reject the abstract, general, and universal in light

of the concrete, specific, and particular; and to historicise, contextualize, and pluralize by highlighting the contingent, provisional, variable, tentative, shifting, and changing” (West 1990:19). Postmodernism, therefore, emerges as “a rejection of many, if not most, of the cultural certainties on which life (particularly) in the West, has been structured over the last couple of centuries” (Sim 2001:vii).

On the basis of its historical origin some scholars have expressed scepticism about postmodernism and its relevance to cultures outside the West, such as Africa (Ekpo 1995). There were also strong fears that it may in fact conspire against the emancipatory agenda in Africa. However, if by postmodernism we refer to the deployment of philosophy to question and possibly overturn the grand narratives and universalising theories in culture both at the theoretical and political level (Sim 2001), then there cannot be any question concerning its relevance to postcolonial Africa. In fact, it is in formerly colonised cultures more than anywhere else that the power and promise of postmodernism as a critical theory of society is seriously required. We would do well to learn from Outlaw’s (1991) famous article *African philosophy: deconstructive and reconstructive challenges*, in which he appropriates the theory of deconstruction from within the Western academy to make effective use of it in unmasking and undoing the Eurocentric residues inherited from colonialism that continued to influence discourses in African philosophy. Maybe it is true that “the antidote is always located in the poison” as alluded to by Serequeberhan (1994:11) while acknowledging the difficulty of avoiding recourse to Western theories in the process of redeeming Africa. It is important for African philosophy to be able to appropriate theoretical ideas from the West for its own positive development and as effective tools for the critical rejection of colonial discourses. This is how postmodernism can be utilised in African philosophy.

Postmodernism provides, in the words of Kenzo (2002:323), an opportunity for African scholars “to think differently and otherwise about Africa”. Kenzo argues strongly that “it is legitimate to think of Africa in terms of postmodernism because the current postcolonial situation calls for it and it is beneficial to think about Africa in terms of postmodernism because postmodernism clears free space at the margins of Enlightenment reason where true alterity can be sought and expressed” (Kenzo 2002:324). As such, we remain convinced that given the extent to which modernity and its Enlightenment project conspired against Africa, it seems reasonable that any theory which attempts to question modernity or to review its normative framework and rules of engagement, should out of necessity also take root in Africa. It is only when modernity is able to acknowledge through critical self-introspection the existence of different ways of interpreting reality, that new spaces for the emergence of a polycentric global epistemology can be created. There is no doubt that the postmodern turn holds promise for Africa going forward. Through its radical, uncanny unmasking of the principles and ruses of Western culture, power and history, the postmodern turn is opening the way for non-Westerners in general and Africans in particular to radically re-think the fundamental categories through which they have hitherto perceived, received or rejected

the West (Ekpo 1995:129). This is what makes postmodernism as a theory relevant to contemporary Africa. Having looked at postmodernism we now turn our attention to provide, though in brief, an account of postcolonialism and how it can be located within the overarching African philosophical quest for liberation.

B) POSTCOLONIALISM

Just like postmodernism, postcolonialism is another buzz word, highly contested and difficult to pin down. Like most essentially contested concepts, mapping its logical geography is highly problematic. Even the different ways in which it is written are pointers to the contested nature of the concept. Some authors prefer to write it as two words with a hyphen (post-colonialism); others prefer it as one word (postcolonialism); while others see it appropriate to place the post in parenthesis or to write it as Eze (1997) proposes, under erasure as (post)colonialism to signify its paradoxical meaning. However written, the point that remains central to this discussion is that postcolonialism describes something controversial, highly charged and emotional. Like its counterpart postmodernism, so much has been written about it by scholars from different academic persuasions ranging from literary theorists, historians, political scientists and philosophers. The term derives its meaning from what it attempts to transcend, that is, the colonial. In agreement with Eze (1997) we take colonialism to designate that:

...incredible crisis disproportionately suffered and endured by African peoples in their tragic encounter with the European world...a period marked by the horror and violence of the transatlantic slave trade, the imperial occupation of most parts of Africa and the forced administration of its peoples, and the resilient and enduring ideologies and practices of European cultural superiority (ethnocentrism) and 'racial supremacy' (racism) (Eze 1997:4).

Postcolonialism therefore draws our attention to the painful past; it reminds us of lived history (Mukherjee 1990:2). As a theory it is a reaction to what Tabensky (2008) calls centuries of humiliating colonialism and exploitation. For this reason Eze (1997:4) submits that the term (post)colonial cannot be understood outside the question of its cousins: the "colonial" and the "pre-colonial". For the same reason Quayson (2005:89,93) submits that "as a second order meditation on conditions in the contemporary world in which we live, postcolonialism involves a studied engagement with the experience of colonialism and its past and present effects, both at the local level of ex-colonial societies, as well as at the level of more general global developments thought to be after effects of empire." Of fundamental importance is not only the fact that postcolonialism is a reaction to the colonial experience, but more importantly, it is an effort to theorise about Africa in a different way than that set out by colonial scholarship. It is in the words of Kenzo (2002) an attempt "to think differently and otherwise about Africa".

The relationship between the centre and the periphery is revisited and questioned in an attempt to dislodge the hegemonic tendencies of the West. It is in this determination to confront the derogatory insults of modernity and the Enlightenment that postcolonialism

shares the same platform with postmodernism and contemporary African philosophy. In fact it is postcolonialism as a critical theory which informs the practice of African philosophy, hence the popular descriptor “postcolonial African philosophy” in recognition of the historical context out of which the philosophical practice is born. For this reason Tabensky is correct to assert that “African philosophy is to some extent unique in that it is born of rage and humiliation. It was born in order to overcome and to redeem Africa”, hence it literally seeks to “repair wounds and find lost dignity” (Tabensky 2008:290,292). It is not, therefore, accidental that any theoretical tendency which sees itself as anti-hegemonic is then easily taken to be affiliated to postcolonialism (Quayson 2005:96). Since the practice of colonialism was premised on the metaphysical denial of African existence (Eze 1997), postcolonialism as a theory invariably aims to deconstruct and to collapse the ideological scaffolding that supported Eurocentrism and to challenge the way we look at society and its inherited institutions. As such, postcolonialism as a theory provides not only the driving force and new impetus in African philosophy but also one of the best avenues for dealing with the colonial discourses in a bid to fashion new futures for Africa.

C) POSTETHNOPHILOSOPHY

A quick internet search on scholarly entries for the term postethnophilosophy would immediately point one to Sanya Osha’s recent publication *Postethnophilosophy*. Without in any way attempting to downplay other occurrences of the term (which we have not encountered at this point) it may seem appropriate unless otherwise indicated, to credit the contemporary popularity of the term “postethnophilosophy” to Sanya Osha’s 2011 publication with the same title. Although what the author describes and subsumes under this nomenclature is in no way unique to his work, it is the ground-breaking popularisation of the concept that we need to acknowledge. In the editorial foreword to the book, Andrew Fitz-Gibbon (Osha 2011:ix) proclaims that “Osha makes a bold announcement for the beginning of a postethnophilosophical phase in contemporary African thought.” For Osha, ethnophilosophy is a product of the long and deep history or relationship between Africanist anthropology and African philosophy. Keen to see this strong relationship between colonialist anthropology and African philosophy severed for the good of the discipline, Osha defines postethnophilosophy as “the discursive rupture in this foundational relationship between Africanist anthropology and African philosophy” (Osha 2011:ix). For him postethnophilosophy attempts to depart from the classical ethnophilosophical tradition and the overriding problem of origins in contemporary African thought (Osha 2011:ix). Postethnophilosophy is portrayed here as an attempt to move beyond the realm of ethnophilosophy and its proclamations about the nature and focus of African philosophy. It also refers, in Osha’s own words, “to the complexities of contemporary Africanity in which questions of race, place, and belonging have moved beyond the primary concerns of ethnophilosophy” (Osha 2011:ix). It also addresses themes relating to the traumas and realities of colonisation,

the dynamics of postcolonial subjectification, processes of decolonisation, questions of agency and modes of knowledge construction in Africa (Osha 2011:ix). Herein lies postethnophilosophy's affinity to postmodernism and postcolonialism.

Osha seems to have embraced the position of Hountondji on African philosophy where modern African scholars need to be wary of the temptation to perpetuate those thought-patterns and Africanist discourses articulated and defended by ethnophilosophy. In his articulation of postethnophilosophy it seems for him (as for Hountondji) that "philosophy should, directly or indirectly, enable its practitioners to understand better the issues at stake on the political, economic, and social battlefields, and thereby contribute to changing the world" (Hountondji 1983:xii). Although postethnophilosophy seems to designate the same object as postcolonial African philosophy, the selection of the term postethnophilosophy seems significant in that it seeks to take issue with even those forms of postcolonial African philosophical practice which continue to harbour and propagate ethnophilosophical tendencies and sympathies.

Postethnophilosophy can therefore be taken in two senses, first as an era in the practice of African philosophy that follows after the period dominated by ethnophilosophy and its discourses as found in colonial anthropological writings about Africa and the publication of a work by Tempels (1969), *Bantu philosophy*. Secondly, postethnophilosophy can be construed as the coming of age in African philosophy in the sense of the development of an African philosophical discourse that no longer concerns itself with traditional questions about the existence of African philosophy but with broadening the horizons of philosophy to deal with existential questions that confront African humanity in this postcolonial and global environment. It is in this sense that African philosophy is called to play its role in refashioning an African modernity that is both reflective and respectful of the Being of the African in this global arena. In this sense postethnophilosophy becomes nothing more than the critical practice of responding to the residual challenges connected to the colonial matrix of power and the coloniality of Being in particular.

Coloniality of Being is a concept commonly associated with the work of Latin American philosophers of liberation such as Dussel (1985), Maldonado-Torres (2007), Mignolo (2011) and Quijano (2007), who theorise on the conditions of existence of previously colonised peoples. As the name suggest "coloniality of being" combines two terms: being and coloniality. In its most basic interpretation "being" refers to the act of extantness/existence or essence. If "being" means that which exists, that which is, then that which does not exist is "non-being". It is because of the act of existing in reality that something is a "being" and therefore distinguishable from "non-being". And it is when existence is denied of some things that those entities are consigned to the category of "non-being". In the history of philosophy attempts were made to consign Africans to this category. Coloniality on the other hand is a term closely connected to the words "colonial" and "colonialism", and in that sense it captures the effects of being colonised existentially and mentally. Coloniality of being defines the act of denying the being or extantness of another person by instituting processes or systems

of domination and subjugation. Coloniality is a condition that outlasts colonialism, where the standing patterns of power that emerged during colonialism continue to define culture, organisation of labour, economics, inter-subjective relations, and even knowledge production. Long after the coloniser has left, the practices and institutions of control and patterns of political, social and economic subordination established through conquest, continue to operate as before and with similar effectiveness. Other than debunking discourses of ethnophilosophy, postethnophilosophy has to confront the legacies of colonialism such as the coloniality of being. Of course, like its other related posts, postethnophilosophy remains indebted to a past which is by no means easy to come to terms with. For that reason we are required now and again to realise the need to apply Heidegger's *sous rature*, (writing under erasure) in order to deal with the paradoxical nature of these "posts" – including postethnophilosophy.

FROM ETHNOPHILOSOPHY TO POSTETHNOPHILOSOPHY

In any work on African philosophy we cannot afford to turn our back on theoretical and methodological controversies that have defined the discipline over the last five or so decades. However, in doing so, we shall not concern ourselves with providing a detailed historical account or narrative of the attritional methodological wars – bruising and draining debates that have characterised the history of African philosophy as an academic discipline. Nevertheless, we equally acknowledge that just as in other disciplines, like African history, "the expression of this long confrontation has sometimes been illuminating and constructive, sometimes trite, repetitive and disrespectful, but in any event, the issues that have informed it have been, and remain, real and important ones" (Gardner 2010:8).

In African philosophy the major issue has been the question of how to evolve a philosophy that is true to its name and capable of championing the liberation of Africa. Accusations and counter-accusations have defined the tone and nature of African philosophy – not only in the context of Africans reacting to delirious comments from outsiders but among Africans themselves as they attempted to define their discipline and how it should compare with other world philosophies. Early writings in African philosophy are replete with debates about the definition of African philosophy, the nature of African philosophy, its possibility and the methods and approaches that are best suited to yielding authentic African philosophy. It is within this context that scathing attacks were lodged against ethnophilosophy and scholars complicit in that grand project for championing colonial discourses on Africa. The lead figure in those attacks was Paulin Hountondji.

Several scholars have followed in the footsteps of Hountondji accusing those identified as belonging to the ethnophilosophical school of doing a disservice not only to the discipline of African philosophy, but to the greater African cause in general. The point of departure in these debates is the meaning of the term philosophy, which seemed

to shift in meaning when applied to Africa. It was Hountondji's conviction that African philosophy should exhibit the same logico-scientific rationality as its Western counterpart – anything less would not suffice. Responding to what he felt were misplaced attacks by those who missed his point on the need to be savvy in the usage of the term philosophy (which some scholars were surprisingly missing) Hountondji submitted:

Allow me to make a few remarks, in a most direct manner, a clarification of meaning, scope and aim of my criticism of ethnophilosophy. I am forced here to go through an exercise which I do not like; to respond point by point (or 'fist by fist', in line with a joke of a friend of mine whom I cannot mention here) to criticisms which sometimes just look like personal attacks. But I do it with much pleasure, because, beyond these 'ad hominem' criticisms, founded on a strong will not to understand, there are fortunately many others, which do justice to the problems presented and have the additional merit of pointing out real theoretical problems and, from time to time, at inaccuracies and other loopholes in my formulation (Hountondji 1989:3).

For our purposes the analogical significance of "fist by fist" and the subsequent cringe, while figurative, deserve serious attention. This is because it captures in significant ways the emotive and highly charged nature of discourses involving African philosophy, whether it is between Africa and the West or amongst African philosophers themselves. The discourse of African philosophy is highly charged and political from the onset and for this reason some like Nkrumah (1964) have warned that African students of philosophy should not and cannot approach the study of philosophy in the same way their Western counterparts do.

While academic debates in the mould expressed by Hountondji (1989) above are indeed the hallmark of philosophy, the emotions that such debates trigger in African philosophy cannot be underestimated. To this day debate still rages on between those who advocate that African philosophy be conceived and modelled alongside its Western counterpart as a scientific discipline which has universal methods and approaches, and those who on the other hand see the direct connection between philosophy and culture and the indebtedness of African philosophy to culture; that is the schools of universalism and particularism respectively. These debates remain of great significance to the theory and practice of philosophy in postcolonial Africa, whether in its newly christened nomenclature – postethnophilosophy – or not. In other words the whole methodological controversy between particularism and universalism in African philosophy is to a large extent a debate on the continued relevance or irrelevance of ethnophilosophy to the discipline of postcolonial philosophy. In his book *Africa's quest for a philosophy of decolonization*, Kebede (2004) revisits the historical problem of ethnophilosophy. Unsurprisingly Kebede (2004:xi) concludes that "the outcome of the analysis confirms not so much the irrelevance of the ethnophilosophical school as the need to better understand its persistent significance...[and that] the objections against ethnophilosophy will become interesting only to the extent that they succeed in integrating it." It is with this in mind that we argue that African philosophy, whether known by the name "postcolonial African philosophy" or "postethnophilosophy",

will forever remain indebted to ethnophilosophy and will always find itself mired in its controversies just as postmodernism and postcolonialism (despite their enormous successes) seem unable to rid themselves of the ghosts of modernity and coloniality they have always sought to transcend.

AFRICAN MODERNITY AND THE POSTS

African modernity, being modernity as experienced from the point of view of the Africans and entailing “a reworking of the familiar into new and changing times and conditions” (Masolo 2000:165), and notwithstanding its multifarious forms, brings Africans together in thinking about their place in the world and the possibility of a more tolerant global knowledge landscape. Being incredulous towards metanarratives and colonial discourses about Africa and the concomitant ability to reconstruct knowledge for Africa from the African viewpoint, stands out as the most distinct challenge for African modernity. There is in postcolonial Africa a real need, in the words of Escobar (2007:179), “to craft another space for the production of knowledge”. That space no doubt requires new mental and theoretical frameworks such that African scholars will not find themselves being forced to abandon their indigeneity when entering the academy (Hart 2010). Postmodernism and postcolonialism are arguably two conceptual categories from which the ideas of African modernity/modernities remain deeply indebted for their theoretical and hermeneutical endeavours. Postmodernism’s rejection of grand narratives in Western culture and fundamentalist tendencies that were creeping into knowledge and truth, and their replacement with notions of multiplicity and historicism, constitute valuable epistemic departures that can help Africa not only to redefine its relationship with the “Centre” but also to fashion out its own modernity. There is no doubt that both postmodernism and postcolonialism serve as a way of thinking about (African) modernity and coloniality (Pratt 2008). It is when postmodernism is conceived as a historical process in which modernity encountered its limits as a critical discourse of modernity (Mignolo 2008) that its affinity with postcolonialism and postethnophilosophy becomes apparent. Perhaps, for Africans, the prefix “post” also indicates that the workings of colonialism, Euro-imperialism and modernity are now available for reflection in ways they were not before (Pratt 2008:460). As critical social theories on the realities and consequences of the African encounter with European modernity, these posts help us to make sense of Africa; where it came from and where it is going.

Postethnophilosophy, like postmodernism, advocates the redeployment of philosophy to undermine the colonial narratives on Africa, be they cultural or epistemic, creating that room for thinking differently and otherwise about Africa within the global knowledge landscape. It is important to remember that postcolonial Africa is a complex socio-cultural and political space that by its very nature favours a way of life proper to postmodern consciousness (Kenzo 2002:334). The ability to move beyond the categories created and imposed by Western epistemology in order to reassert African

agency in the production of knowledge, holds the key to epistemic liberation. Just like astute artists, African philosophers should strive to create knowledge by refashioning, revising, reconstructing and re-imagining new knowledges from existing traditions – always in response to Africa’s problems and requirements. For Keita (1991:205) African philosophy would make much more useful contributions to modern Africa if it sought to help resolve questions raised by the African political scientist, economist, historian and technologist (Keita 1991:205). African philosophy has to be instrumental in shaping the ideological and technological outlook of modern Africa and its civilisation. This is the trajectory that Osha (2011) sees as defining the postethnophilosophy phase in African discourse. Since postethnophilosophy attempts to shift the focus in African philosophy to examine the role philosophy can play in knowledge construction, we shall turn our attention to examine how it can assist in the installation of a global knowledge landscape devoid of crippling hegemonic tendencies. African philosophy has a historic responsibility to create forms of consciousness that will lead ultimately to the epistemic liberation of Africa.

POSTETHNOPHILOSOPHY AND POLYCENTRISM

Traditionally the world was polycentric but after conquest the world order entered into a process in which polycentrism began to be displaced by an emerging monocentric civilisation. Western civilisation emerged not just as another civilisation in the planetary concert, but as the civilisation destined to lead and save the rest of the world from the Devil, from barbarism and primitivism, from underdevelopment, from despotism, and to turn unhappiness into happiness for all and forever (Mignolo 2011:29).

This submission by Mignolo articulates in precise terms the origins and nature of the problem confronting most postcolonial societies. There is no need at this point to rehearse the argument surrounding the mission to civilise and the moral, political and ideological questions that it raises particularly in Africa. Most African philosophers have done a good deal of work on that already. The analytic task of unmasking this darker side of modernity is what in part defines the enterprise called postcolonial African philosophy. In the quotation above Mignolo (2011) captures the historical circumstances that render thinking differently and otherwise about Africa and its condition in the mode demanded by postmodernism, postcolonialism and now postethnophilosophy not only important, but imperative. It is through the use of critical theories of deconstruction, postmodernism and postcolonialism, among others, that postcolonial philosophers can articulate a critical and combative hermeneutics for the dawn of a new era in Africa and the possibility of an epistemic pluriverse or polycentric epistemology. The African objection to global epistemological hegemony opens room for polycentrism in political and epistemic relations. Polycentrism is about transforming subordinating institutions and discourses (Maffie 2009 citing Shohat & Stam 1994) and imagining a future in which many knowledges coexist (Mignolo 2011). As these “posts” question

modernity's grand narratives and hegemonic discourses, the goal is to create spaces for other voices and perspectives of reading reality to emerge. What brings this triad of the "posts" together are the hegemonic tendencies of modernity and its residual effects on contemporary African society. These are, as argued by Lucius Outlaw (1991), the deconstructive and reconstructive challenges that African philosophy has to pose to the dominant epistemologies and to Western discourses about Africa.

As one looks at the different "posts" selected for analysis in this work, they all lay down the theoretical framework for what Ramose (1999:1) calls "the struggle for reason in Africa". A struggle which is necessitated by the disparaging discourses about Africa expounded by early anthropologists and philosophers to serve as the pretext for conquest. Within the context of our African philosophical engagement these three "posts" constitute in their individual and collective form attempts to confront and dislodge the colonial matrix of power whose legitimating authority lies in modernity and its self-aggrandising tendencies. Questions of representation and marginality both existentially and epistemically inform much of the contemporary African philosophical discourse. In all these "posts" modernity is the culprit. It is modernity that created and silenced the subaltern; it is modernity that conjured conquest, the mission to civilise, and gave birth to white male supremacist ideologies that the entire world has to contend with today. Highlighting these ills does not in any way seek to turn a blind eye to the benefits that modernity and its Enlightenment have brought to the world, but it seeks to emphasise the necessity for modernity to be critical of itself as it ponders about what it could have done differently – which constitutes the focus of our selected "posts".

There is no doubt that contemporary society owes its successes to modernity, but also its despairs. The seal of modernity is visible everywhere in this world including in the suffering of peoples of colour, women and others regarded as not "normal". These are the ills that make critical theorists within the postmodern, postcolonial and postethnophilosophical persuasion livid and desperate to effect radical changes in the way society thinks. African philosophy can only develop by reflecting on its own history, and new contributors must feed on the doctrines of their predecessors, even of their contemporaries, extending or refuting them, so as to enrich the philosophical heritage available in their own time (Hountondji 1983:62).

Postethnophilosophy is both a condition that forms African theoretical discourse and also an attempt to institute a different set of problems (Osha 2011:xix). It is an attempt to overcome the ideological limits and the theoretical and methodological shortcomings of ethnophilosophy and to open up new avenues for the African philosophical agenda. The legitimacy of Africa as a centre within the context of a polycentric world has to be part of what ought to define postcolonial African philosophy in both its nature and focus.

By highlighting the common elements of convergence among the three "posts" we attempted to map out the direction which modern African philosophy is being touted to take by those like Osha (2011) who advocate its postethnophilosophical credentials and focus. Seen in this light, postcolonial African philosophy has a significant contribution

to make in enriching human experience by opening up those horizons of knowledge and life that were kept hostage by modernity and its belief in the superiority of Western forms of knowing. The postethnophilosophy phase in African thought should not be satisfied with putting ethnophilosophy and its contentions to rest and end there, but rather it should attempt to transcend the limitations imposed by discourses that fuelled speculation about African rational capacities by helping Africans become co-creators of knowledge.

CONCLUSION

The three “posts” of postmodernism, postcolonialism and postethnophilosophy – despite controversies surrounding them – are a way of thinking differently and otherwise about Africa and its discourses. The postcolonial *zeitgeist* creates a platform from which philosophers and theorists in Africa are able to raise serious questions concerning the mythic horizons within which colonial discourses about Africa were choreographed. It is within this context that a new agenda is set for African philosophy in order to deal with the condition of coloniality and other problems relating to the darker side of modernity. This is what defines the postethnophilosophical turn in African philosophy. It is by adopting this new impetus that African philosophy can contribute meaningfully to the realisation of a polycentric knowledge landscape.

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