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# African Studies Quarterly

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## Introduction

OLABIYI BABALOLA YAI

The articles in this issue of *African Studies Quarterly* are entirely devoted to studies of religion and philosophy in Africa. This is a wise decision at this juncture in the history of the cluster of disciplines called "African Studies". For, as it is generally admitted, African worldviews and religions inform all other aspects of African life. Consequently, African religious studies and philosophy, as second order discourses, are expected to provide conceptual tools for other disciplines. But, even before the term was invented, they have been infected by an earlier variety of "Afro-pessimism." Admittedly, the malady was not easily diagnosable, as it was often not acknowledged and, indeed, sometimes disguised as triumphalism.

Thus, the "we too have it" syndrome was rampant in African religious studies in the decades of 1960 and 1970 as a reaction to the colonial pejoration of African Traditional Religion (ATR). With due respect for their pioneering work, we must now admit that Bolaji Idowu and John Mbiti, the two giants in the field, have invented a paradigm mostly characterized by what Kwasi Wiredu in this issue aptly termed "unrigorous analogies of a foreign inspiration."

African professional philosophers did not fare better. Barry Hallen, a professional philosopher, was generous in his assessment when he said: "Most of the material that has been published to date under the rubric of African Philosophy has been methodological in character" (Hallen, 1995: 377). Olufemi Taiwo, his colleague, agrees with him when he asserts in this issue that "a good part of the current mention (of African Philosophy) is preoccupied with issues of pedigree." The title of D. A. Masolo's opus says it all: *African Philosophy in Search of Identity*.

The essays in this issue constitute a marked departure from the approaches summarized above. Firmly rooted in the African philosophical traditions and armed with the sharpest critical instruments of the Western tradition, their authors engage issues in African philosophy and religion. They do *philosophize*. Of recent, what has often been advertised as "African philosophy" are ruminations of African epigones of Derrida and Foucault, with little or no African content and concerns. If truth be said, the African philosophy establishment in African Studies circles preys on the francomaniac bulimia of the American academia, resulting, sometimes, in quasi-charlatanism. The essays in this issue constitute a healthy departure from this neocolonial turn in African philosophical studies. They are all traversed by a decolonization ethos.

Taiwo meticulously deconstructs Hegel. His essay convinces one that if one philosopher ever deserved the appellation "ethno-philosopher", it was surely Hegel. Says Taiwo: "neither Hegel nor many of his successors who are quick to dismiss African religion can be said to know from the inside the phenomena they so eagerly dismiss." This is to be meditated by all of us, including our African New Hegelians.

<http://www.africa.ufl.edu/asq/v1/4/1.pdf>

Wiredu's article is indeed an invitation to decolonization by example. Going against the grain of some critics of so-called ethnophilosophy who deem African oral traditions philosophically uninteresting, Wiredu affirms that "In the study of a culture ..., customs can be a veritable philosophical text", and he urges philosophers to "pursue the universal by way of the particular."

In African religious studies, he calls for a thorough critique of such unproblematic concepts as "spirit", "animism", "creation", and "supernatural" using indigenous African discourses.

In her contribution, Nkiru Nzegwu makes a compelling case for considering African art as a possible philosophical text. Her example is the celebrated Nigerian artist, Ben Enwoku. The latter, using the Igbo concept of *nka*, effectively combatted racism and colonialism "without sacrificing artistic excellence for political expediency."

With these four profound and thought-provoking essays, ASQ is proud to contribute to new directions in African philosophical and religious studies. The dialogue continues.

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## Exorcising Hegel's Ghost: Africa's Challenge to Philosophy\*

OLUFEMI TAIWO

Anyone who has lived with, worked on, and generally hung out with philosophy as long as I have and who, and this is a very important element, inhabits the epidermal world that it has pleased fate to put me in, and is as engaged with both the history of that epidermal world and that of philosophy, must at a certain point come upon the presence of a peculiar absence: the absence of Africa <sup>1</sup> from the discourse of philosophy. In the basic areas of philosophy (e.g., epistemology, metaphysics, axiology, and logic) and in the many derivative divisions of the subject (e.g., the philosophy of ...) once one begins to look, once one trains one's eyes to apprehend it, one is struck by the absence of Africa from the disquisitions of its practitioners. Now, I don't want you to get me wrong, for it is very easy to point out that Africa is neither the only region nor the only one whose discourse never shows on philosophy radar screens. It could be said that Indian, Chinese, Mayan, Inuit or Indonesian philosophies never appear either. That is true, but I would argue in what follows that although these others too may constitute an absence in the way that I have described it, they make their presence in other ways. It has always been the case that one might find references to Asian philosophy, Chinese philosophy, Indian philosophy, Buddhist philosophy, and the like in the philosophical taxonomy. This was never the case with African philosophy until very recently and such limited references as exist are the product of the last twenty, or at the most twenty-five, years. Even then, a good part of the current mention is preoccupied with issues of pedigree. Is African Philosophy philosophy? Or of the conditions of its possibility, or whether it ever was, is, or is a thing of the future? Perhaps others who know the comparative literature better can inform us whether or not questions of the sort just identified ever formed part of the discourse of Indian Philosophy or Chinese Philosophy. Worse still, even among those who are most generous in their deployment of the term "African Philosophy", their purview does not extend beyond the corpus of work that has been produced by contemporary professional philosophers. So we are talking about a quite significant peculiar absence.

For us laborers in the intellectual vineyard, the peculiar absence is very telling and jarring. For example, I remember once saying something concerning African Philosophy in a third-year philosophy of law class that I taught a few years ago. One of the students assumed a puzzled look and said, in effect, "I hope you do not take offense at what I am about to say, but when you referred just now to 'African Philosophy' it was the first time I've ever heard anyone put those two words together in a phrase."

This encounter took place in Chicago and it was rich in ironies. In the first place, Chicago's population is almost evenly divided between whites and blacks. So think of my student's putative view of his African-American fellow citizens' intellectual capabilities. In the second place, I happen to teach in a Jesuit university, a significant order in the Catholic Church.

<http://www.africa.ufl.edu/asq/v1/4/2.pdf>

Meanwhile, Africa is one of the few areas of the world where the Catholic Church is enjoying its most spectacular growth especially in terms of recruitment to the ministry. But there we were. The student, who is probably Catholic, had absolutely no clue about African contributions to global culture, including the fact that the future of his Church may depend upon African priests.

In **all** areas of philosophy, basic and derivative, Africa is a peculiar, almost total absence. This absence can be explained in several ways. One explanation might be that Africans have no philosophy or that nothing they do or say or write has any resonances in philosophy. Such an explanation would be counterintuitive. Were we to grant for purposes of argument that Africans have no philosophy, it is absurd to suggest that nothing in the African world resonates for or in philosophy. It is an abject understanding of philosophy that would resort to such a desperate move to save itself. Yet one cannot help the feeling that denials of both types--Africans have no philosophy, or nothing Africans do holds any interest for philosophy--have played a very large role in the absence we identify.

Another explanation might be that philosophy is simply not interested in what those blighted Africans think, say, or do. As a Yoruba proverb has it, the mouth of the poor person is no better than a machete; the only thing it is good for is to cut a path through the bush. Here we come to the big question: *Why is there so little, if any, respect for and, as a consequence, interest in African phenomena and their philosophical resonances* <sup>2</sup>? Different answers are possible. I would like to argue that the roots of the peculiar absence may be traced to a signal event in the history of philosophy and that this event may actually be the inspiration for the absence, but before I introduce this single event, a word of caution is in order.

I do not suggest that there is a mega or mini conspiracy to shut Africa out of the discourses of philosophy. Nor am I saying that if we asked any of the participants in these discourses they would trace the ancestry of their views to the source that I am about to identify. Indeed, I contend that the random appearance of the exclusions that constitute the peculiar absence, and the fact that one cannot point to any study that specifically traces its genealogy in the way that I propose, may deceptively suggest that this is a mere accident. But accidents have causes and the identification of one such cause below is meant to induce us to look more closely at other elements of the tradition that is indicted herein.

So far I have spoken of philosophy as a generic term. It has not been identified with any particular area or tradition. It is time to so identify it. We are talking of Western Philosophy. This should not be a surprise. It is only insofar as Western Philosophy has passed itself off as Universal Philosophy that we may talk of the peculiar absence. It is only insofar as we confront, or have to deal with, or inhabit a world constructed by Western Philosophy that we are forced to think of an absence and of how to make sense of it. And we must confront our absence from the history of this tradition because, no thanks to colonialism and Christianization, we are inheritors and perpetrators of this heritage. Additionally, given that the "West" presents itself as the embodiment and inventor of the "universal," we must protest even more loudly that its universal is so peculiar and that its global is so local. That is, the West, in constructing the universal, instead of truly embracing all that there is, or at least what of it can be so embraced, has merely puffed itself up and invited the rest of humanity, or the educated segment of it, to be complicit in this historical swindle.



I submit that one source for the birth certificate of this false universal is to be found in Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's *The Philosophy of History* <sup>3</sup>. The architectonic of exclusion that the history of Western Philosophy manifests, especially in the form of the peculiar absence, is contained in the Introduction to that book which one commentator has described thus: "the Philosophy of History remains the heart and center of Hegel's philosophy" <sup>4</sup>. I would like to suggest that this text is one possible source for an explanation of the peculiar absence. It is as if Hegel's successors have somehow internalized his injunctions and have adhered strictly to them ever since.

Hegel is dead! Long live Hegel! The ghost of Hegel dominates the hallways, institutions, syllabi, instructional practices, and journals of Euro-American philosophy. The chilling presence of this ghost can be observed in the eloquent absences as well as the subtle and not-so-subtle exclusions in the philosophical exertions of Hegel's descendants. The absences and exclusions are to be seen in the repeated association of Africa with the pervasiveness of immediacy, a very Hegelian idea if there be any <sup>5</sup>. Given this association, we can see why Africa is where Nature, another very Hegelian category, rules in its blindest fury in form of famine, or the continual recrudescence or persistence of disease and pestilences of unknown origins and severe repercussions, or "intertribal" wars that on occasion bring genocide in their wake, or in unrestricted "breeding", or in \_\_\_\_ --you may fill in the blank <sup>6</sup>.

Africa is the land that Time forgot, a veritable museum where there are to be found the relics of the race, the human race, that is: hence the anthropological preoccupation with hunting down (very apt phrase) exotic practices, primitive rituals, superceded customs.

According to legend, the African continent is suffused with gods, the Yoruba pantheon alone is reputed to have four hundred plus one! Yet, curiously, Africa lacks God. It is the land where, in light of the prevalence of disease and pestilence and war, death is a lived experience but not a philosophical challenge. Ultimately, it is the land where there is a surfeit of Traditional Thought but, amazingly, no philosophy. I have chosen just a few of the themes that are considered the perennials of philosophy anywhere--Nature, Time, Evolution, Ritual, God, Death-- to show that one can find some possible source-heads in Hegel for how subsequent non-reference to Africa came to be framed. Let us go to the text.

According to the plan of *The Philosophy of History* <sup>7</sup> there is no "African World." But there is Africa in the book and we shall come to it momentarily. In a style with which we are much too familiar by now, the author announces in the Introduction: "The subject of this course of Lectures is the Philosophical History of the World. And by this must be understood, not a collection of general observations respecting it, suggested by the study of its records, and proposed to be illustrated by its facts, but Universal History"<sup>8</sup>.

Notice how Hegel proclaims to give us the World without the slightest hint that his might represent just one way of telling the story of the world, that this telling may be a victim of its teller's *parti pris* which may not exclude possible other tellers' *parti pris*. No; such modesty would have been unbecoming of a writer who had the temerity to say later in the same text: "The History of the World travels from East to West, for Europe is absolutely the end of History, Asia the beginning"<sup>9</sup>. Europe is the end of History in at least two senses: 1) it is the end, as in the terminus, the point beyond which there is no other, the culmination of all that came prior to it; and 2), it is the end, as in the goal, the purpose, the final product to the achievement of which all

earlier efforts were tending. On either interpretation, the triumphalist import of Hegel's assertions are unmistakable. And the object of the Philosophy of History is to bring to "the completion of History ... the simple conception of Reason; that Reason is the Sovereign of the World; that the history of the world, therefore, presents us with a rational process"<sup>10</sup>. But what is History itself?

We have been told that History is a rational process, that it tends towards an end, and that it is the object of philosophy to apprehend this movement in its various stages. The ultimate subject of History is Spirit and the essence to which it tends, towards the realization of which its movement is directed, is Freedom. But to make this journey, Spirit gets itself embodied in Peoples, Nations, Volk, and peoples are to be judged by how much and in what way they have apprehended this essence of Spirit in them. This is the way Hegel put it:

According to this abstract definition it may be said of Universal History, that it is the exhibition of Spirit in the process of working out the knowledge of that which it is potentially. And as the germ bears in itself the whole nature of the tree, and the taste and form of its fruits, so do the first traces of Spirit virtually contain the whole of that History. The Orientals have not attained the knowledge that Spirit--Man as such --is free; and because they do not know this, they are not free. They only know that one is free. But on this very account, the freedom of that one is only caprice; ... That one is therefore only a Despot; not a free man. The consciousness of Freedom first arose among the Greeks, and therefore they were free; but they, and the Romans like wise, knew only that some are free--not man as such. Even Plato and Aristotle did not know this. The Greeks, therefore, had slaves; and their whole life and the maintenance of their splendid liberty, was implicated with the institution of slavery: a fact, moreover, which made that liberty on the one hand only an accidental, transient and limited growth; on the other hand, constituted it a rigorous thralldom of our common nature--of the Human. The German nations, under the influence of Christianity, were the first to attain the consciousness, that man, is free: that it is the freedom of Spirit which constitutes its essence <sup>11</sup>.

Hence the conclusion: "The History of the world is none other than the progress of the consciousness of Freedom; a progress whose development according to the necessity of its nature it is our business to investigate"<sup>12</sup>.

We have to fast forward at this point. Although the passages that I have cited hold promise of some fecund analyses, this is not the occasion for them. A few deductions may be made, however. For instance, for Hegel, only a few peoples are what he calls "world-historical" peoples. These are peoples who may rightly be adjudged to belong in History and to participate in its march towards that attainment of its final end. The "Orientals" caught a glimpse of Spirit and therefore made history only through the despot. The Greeks and the Romans saw it some more but missed out on the works. As it turns out, thanks to Christianity, only the Germans or northern Europeans saw Spirit in its full glory and secured a patent on Freedom as a result.

The picture is not yet complete. The Spirit of a People is the subject of History. But Spirit also requires space within which to unfold itself and enact its drama. To that extent, we must as part of the Philosophy of History be interested in its "Geographical Basis". "It is not our concern to become acquainted with the land occupied by nations as an external locale, but with the natural type of the locality, as intimately connected with the type and character of the people which is the offspring of such soil. This character is nothing more nor less than the mode of and

form in which nations make their appearance in History, and take place and position in it"<sup>13</sup>. Although Hegel went on to warn that we should not make too much of Nature, he insisted that "the type of locality" does remain intimately connected with how much and in what way people apprehend freedom:

In the extreme zones man cannot come to free movement; cold and heat are here too powerful to allow Spirit to build up a world for itself. Aristotle said long ago, 'when pressing needs are satisfied, man turns to the general and more elevated.' But in the extreme zones such pressure may be said never to cease, never to be warded off; men are constantly impelled to direct attention to nature, to the glowing rays of the sun, and the icy frost. The true theater of History is therefore the temperate zone; or rather its northern half, because the earth there presents itself in a continental form, and has a broad breast, as the Greeks say <sup>14</sup>.

This completes the exposition of the nature of History, its philosophical study and its enabling conditions. Having shown why the New World could not be considered part of History--at that time--Hegel proceeded to examine the "three positions of the globe with which History is considered: Africa = Upland; Asia = the contrast of river regions with Upland; Europe = characterized by the mingling of these several elements"<sup>15</sup>. From this point on, and for the next nine pages, we are treated to a harangue, a collective libel against Africa which, I insist, anticipated even if it did not inaugurate the different exclusions and show the possible antecedents in Hegel's "Introduction".

Many who read this are familiar with the phrases: "Africa South of the Sahara," "Sub-Saharan Africa," "Black Africa." They also probably know that Egypt is not in Africa; it is in the "Near East" or the "Middle East". "North Africa" is really not Africa. And in what must remain an incredible feat of geographical sleight of hand, South Africa suddenly became an "African" country in April 1994 with the election of Nelson Mandela and the overthrow of the bastard apartheid regime. Certain behavioral consequences follow from these identifications. I shall say more about them in a moment. For now let us turn back to Hegel.

According to Hegel, "Africa must be divided into three parts: one is that which lies south of the desert of Sahara--Africa proper--the Upland almost entirely unknown to us, with narrow coast-tracts along the sea; the second is that to the north of the desert--European Africa (if we may so call it)--a coastland; the third is the river region of the Nile, the only valley-land of Africa, and which is in connection with Asia"<sup>16</sup>.

The reader may begin to see what agenda Herr Hegel had in mind in resorting to the taxonomy contained in the passage just quoted. Recall that he had said earlier that in the "extreme zones man cannot come to free movement" and that "the true theater of History is therefore the temperate zone." Were North Africa to be included in Africa, Hegel would have had to deny that History found a station there. But such a denial would have flown in the presence of incontrovertible evidence of the many civilizations that had been domiciled there for millennia. It would have meant denying the glory that was Egypt, Carthage, Cyrenaica, and so on. He was not prepared to go this far. So why not reconfigure the geography so that Egypt is intellectually excised from Africa and make it safe for History? And there are indications in the text that this was the course that Hegel was compelled to take: The second portion of Africa is ... --Egypt; which was adapted to become a mighty center of independent civilization, and therefore is as isolated and singular in Africa as Africa itself appears in relation to the other

parts of the world. The northern part of Africa, which may be specially called that of the coast territory ... lies on the Mediterranean and the Atlantic; a magnificent territory, on which Carthage once lay--the site of the modern Morocco, Algiers, Tunis, and Tripoli. This part was to be--must be attached to Europe ... <sup>17</sup>.

We are not told what Hegel meant by his statement that the northern part of Africa was "to be attached to Europe." Hegel had no doubt that this job deserved completion and that part of Africa must be attached to Europe. And it has remained attached to Europe ever since. The phrases that I adumbrated earlier manifest this sundering of Egypt from Africa and its forcible attachment to Europe in the imagination of both Hegel and his descendants. There are other manifestations of this attachment. For example, the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto, Canada, for a long time did not have an African pavilion. Yet this did not prevent it from having a very impressive display of artifacts from Ancient Egypt as part of the "Near East" pavilion!

Having severed Egypt from Africa and making it safe for History, Hegel was free to zero in on what he called "Africa proper" and single it out for an extremely malicious libel, the outlines, if not the exact content, of which have continued to structure the understanding of Africa in the consciousness and institutions of Hegel's descendants. According to Hegel,

Africa proper, as far as History goes back, has remained-for all purposes of connection with the rest of the World-shut up; it is the Gold-land compressed within itself-the land of childhood, which lying beyond the day of history, is enveloped in the dark mantle of Night. Its isolated character originates, not merely in its tropical nature, but essentially in its geographical condition <sup>18</sup>.

We can now see why it was so important for Hegel to excise Egypt from Africa. It would have been not merely incongruous but also false to say of an area that enfolds Egypt, Carthage, and so on within its boundaries that it "is the Gold-land compressed within itself" or that it is "lying beyond the day of history." Egypt must be separated so that the racist attack to follow will have a veneer of respectability. How strong that veneer is can be seen in the persistence of this view of Africa in the imagination and discourses of Hegel's descendants.

It should be noted that Hegel had earlier written that "Africa proper--the Upland [is] almost entirely unknown to us." Yet that did not stop him from proclaiming that Africa proper "is enveloped in the dark mantle of Night". It would not have occurred to Hegel, and it still does not occur to his descendants, that there is nothing African about the "dark mantle of Night" that they remark but that it is the mantle of their own ignorance. And while this ignorance might have been excusable in Hegel's time, it is execrable now. But writing under the darkness of this mantle, Hegel went on to inform us of these Africans proper: "The peculiarly African character is difficult to comprehend, for the very reason that in reference to it, we must give up the principle which naturally accompanies all our ideas--the category of Universality" <sup>19</sup>.

Given the agenda that Hegel had, there was no way that he could have come to a different conclusion about the African character. Had he availed himself of the material available in Europe at the time he was writing respecting African achievements, he would have been forced to a radically different conclusion. More significant is the fact that consistent with the practice that still dominates discourse about Africa in Euro-America, the irony completely escaped Hegel that he had puffed his peculiarity into a universality and that giving up the principle, universality, which naturally accompanies all their, that is, European, ideas may indeed be

required if the African world is to be treated with the requisite respect for its integrity and heteronomy. Treating Africa with respect for its integrity and heteronomy does not translate into the kinds of deductions that Hegel proceeded to make about the African situation. Let us examine some of them.

According to Hegel, Africans lack the category of Universality. This arises from the fact that they are one with their existence; they are arrested in immediacy. This means that they have not separated themselves from nature. "The Negro," Hegel wrote, "exhibits the natural man in his completely wild and untamed state"<sup>20</sup>. As such, the African is shorn of the idea of a self that is separate from his needs and, simultaneously, has no knowledge of "an absolute Being, an Other and a Higher than his individual Self"<sup>21</sup>. Under this conception, central to religion is the idea of transcendence<sup>22</sup>, the idea that there is some reality that is beyond us, beyond our understanding, before which we submit ourselves in supplication; in short a *Mysterium*. This *mysterium*, however conceived, is the concern of Theology and of the Philosophy of Religion to reveal, to make sense of, as a condition for unearthing the place of humans in the scheme of things. In other words, Africans supposedly lack any *Theos* to the revelation of whose *Logos* Philosophy is dedicated. For Hegel, Negroes are mired in sorcery, worship of graven images that are easily perishable, and worship of the dead<sup>23</sup>. They do not possess a *mysterium*; they lack transcendence, and are without a *Theos* whose *Logos* they might have constituted a philosophy to reveal.

That was Hegel. How do things stand with his descendants?

One would be hard pressed to find any text in standard Philosophy of Religion<sup>24</sup> in which African Religions are represented. Nor would one find too many anthologies and textbooks on world religions in which African religious practices rate a significant, if any, mention at all. The absence is a manifestation of the kind of absence Hegel inaugurated. The primary reason is that for most of the writers concerned, even when they cannot be understood to have been directly influenced by Hegel, his rationalization for denying religious status to African religious practices is adequate<sup>25</sup>. For the most part the reasoning is that there are those things that Hegel already talked about and some others that represent, at best, further explications of his submissions. African religion is dismissed as *ancestor worship* or *spirit worship*.

This should not surprise us. In the tradition that framed Hegel's theoretical postulations, abstraction is privileged and highly rated; historical phenomena attract little spiritual significance. But in Yoruba religion, the ancestors that are supposed to be the recipients of supplication range from forebears in remote antiquity to the parent who recently passed away. Such a tradition in which those who lived recently are regarded as deserving of reverence cannot expect to have its claim to religious status taken seriously by another which considers this practice as bereft of transcendence or *mysterium*.

Related to this is the idea that African gods are infinitely expendable and are vulnerable to swapping. Finally, it is alleged that the proliferation of gods, polytheism, in African cultures is a mark of backwardness of the One *Mysterium*, the Being than which Nothing Greater can be Conceived! Thanks to this mindset, every time that an African intellectual writes about "African Religion" he/she is called upon to justify the attachment of the epithet "African" to the substantive "Religion". We are bogged down in arguments about pedigree that it should be obvious we cannot win.



The reason is simple; pedigree arguments always serve an imperialist purpose. The person who demands to be convinced that what his interlocutor is canvassing deserves to be admitted to the hallowed spaces that bear the name "religion", or some other equivalent, already presupposes that *his* characterization is unproblematic, is not particular, is universal, and therefore, supplies the metric by which all others must be measured. Even when it is unintended, especially when it is unintended, this sort of demand smacks of the kind of bastard Universality that we already encountered in Hegel at the beginning of his enterprise. Additionally, neither Hegel nor many of his successors who are quick to dismiss African religion can be said to know from the inside the phenomena they so eagerly dismiss. In the absence of some thorough investigation of the meanings of the practices concerned, the logic that animates them, and what theoretical analyses are offered by the intellectuals of the culture concerned, one could not tell whether or not the destruction of the icons of individual gods is construed as the destruction of the gods themselves. It is as if one were to accuse, as many Africans did when they first encountered Christianity, Christians of cannibalism every time they participate in the Eucharist.

In the final section of this paper, I shall provide some analysis that shows that Yoruba intellectuals did not think that their gods and the icons in which they are represented are one and the same. Unfortunately, the same attitude as Hegel's continues to dominate the mindset of his successors: pronouncing judgment on the basis of inadequate or nonexistent evidence or prior to an examination of the evidence. That in the closing years of the twentieth century we descendants of those libeled by Hegel are still being challenged by Hegel's descendants to show *only on terms acceptable to them* that we are part of the concert of humanity is an indicator of how strong the cold hands of Hegel remain more than a century after his death.

A closely connected idea that has remained firmly entrenched in the consciousness and practices of Hegel's descendants is that the African does not possess a knowledge of the immortality of the soul. Nor does he exhibit any awareness of or respect for justice and morality. Hegel again set the tone for his descendants. According to him, because the African is without the consciousness or recognition of a "Higher Being" that would have "inspire[d] him with real reverence"<sup>26</sup>, he installs himself as Supreme Being, possessed of the power to "judge the quick and the dead". "The Negroes indulge, ..., that perfect contempt for humanity, which in its bearing on Justice and Morality is the fundamental characteristic of the race. They have moreover no knowledge of the immortality of the soul, although specters are supposed to appear"<sup>27</sup>. From this lack follow the many manifestations of this contempt for humanity, cannibalism being the most offensive.

There are many possible responses to these charges. One is to try to advance evidences that refute Hegel's statements and undermine his arguments. But to do so will be to bow to an intellectual arrogance and an insufferable imperialism that already have seized the high ground of determining the contours of human being and are merely challenging the African thinker to show that she and her people deserve to be admitted to the concert of humanity. This could have been a fruitful way of answering the challenge had it come from the vantage point of knowledge and thorough grounding in the basics and intricacies of the cultures that were being denigrated such that we might say that the challenge arose from a thorough study and was based on a genuine disappointment that, after some serious searching, nothing of value was

found. Unfortunately, this was not the way that Hegel arrived at his challenge. The most that we can say for him is that where he seemed to have cited any evidence, we have cause to consider it to be of dubious value. The lectures on which the book was based were written at a time when the African continent remained largely unknown to Europeans and the darkness that enveloped them in their ignorance about Africa was projected upon the continent in their preferred sobriquet for her: "The Dark Continent". Thus much of what he wrote was fantasy.

But let us for purposes of argument suppose that Hegel had access to archaeological, historical, and other relevant information about Africa. In light of the state of Europe's knowledge of Africa at that time, such a supposition is plausible. In fact, where that is concerned, he represented a serious advance over his successors. One could at least find in his work references to "Dahomey" (even though the practice he attributed to the Kingdom was actually that of Oyo), and "Ashantee" (Asante), a rare occurrence in the writings of his descendants.

The possession of relevant information would be insufficient; interpretations must be offered. Where interpretations are concerned, Hegel's dilettantish glosses on the information available to him are embarrassing. The intricate justifications for the practices against which he inveighed, the nuances of the languages in which ideas of transcendence, or of immortality of the soul, or of justice and morality, and the complexity of life and thought among African peoples, some of whom had created Empires were, to be sure, unavailable to him. To try therefore to respond to the rantings of the uninformed is inadvertently to confer unwarranted respectability on what in more respectable discussions would be considered rubbish.

A different response to Hegel's challenge is conditioned by the need of those who seriously want to learn about Africa and who, while unappraised of the intellectual traditions of the continent, do not *a priori* assume their absence. And for such people help is easily available. The presence of such knowledge seekers in and out of the academy in North America is one good reason to look seriously at what damage is done by the contemporary practices of Hegel's descendants. How do things stand at the present time with respect to reflections concerning immortality of the soul, respect for humanity and its bearing on justice and morality? To what extent do Hegel's descendants take seriously the reflections of Africans on the issues just mentioned?

As with other areas, the peculiar absence asserts itself. It is difficult even now, in spite of recent progress, to find anthologies in which any efforts are made to include materials by Africans or on African responses to the questions raised by immortality of the soul, justice, and morality. When such efforts are made they are half-hearted, tokenist, or so perfunctory that one sometimes wonders why the material is included. In other cases, they are conveniently grouped together with others in a kind of gathering of the unwanted or the marginal. While it is no longer in fashion to assert that Africans are without knowledge of the immortality of the soul, and so on, there remains little to offer the eager seekers after this knowledge in Euro-American academies, especially in Philosophy.

The new form in which the peculiar absence is manifested is in the consigning to areas like Anthropology, Political Science, or Folklore what African materials are available. When this is not the case, African knowledge products are consigned to the dubious discipline of "African Studies." In African Studies the metaphysics of difference is supreme and overarching,

sometimes grotesque efforts to twist African reality out of sync with the rest of humanity--a back-hand way of affirming the African's non-membership of the concert of humanity without having to contend with accusations of racism. Thus the African remains on the edge of humanity's town. As a result textbooks on ethics, law, and metaphysics are unlikely to feature chapters on Africa or references to African answers to the perennial questions that are raised by them.

What is worse, even the limited presence in the form of libel that members of Hegel's generation represented in their writings has been expunged by their contemporary numbers: hence the peculiar absence. Africa is not overtly condemned as it was in Hegel's day; it is simply ignored or made to suffer the ultimate insult of having its being unacknowledged. One is right to wonder whether it is worse to be libeled than to be passed over in silence. All too often, when African scholars answer philosophy's questions, they are called upon to justify their claim to philosophical status. And when this status is grudgingly conferred, their theories are consigned to serving as appendices to the main discussions dominated by the perorations of the "Western Tradition."

Having laid out the many ways in which the African is supposed to fall short of the glory of Man, Hegel concluded: "From these various traits it is manifest that want of self-control distinguishes the character of the Negroes. This condition is capable of no development or culture, and as we see them at this day, such have they always been. The only essential connection that has existed and continued between the Negroes and the Europeans is that of slavery ... <sup>28</sup>.

From what I have argued so far it should be obvious that although Hegel's descendants no longer brazenly affirm the garden variety of racism that Hegel embraced in their attitude towards African intellectual production, a more benign but no less pernicious variety of racism continues to permeate the relationship between Euro-America and Africa. Of greater relevance for our claim that Hegel authored the frame in which Africa is perceived and related to by his descendants is his declaration concerning Africa's place in the discourse of world history. My argument is that the continuing failure to accommodate Africa, without qualification, in the concert of humanity in ways that this has been done for Asia, for example, illustrates the continuing impact of the reach of Hegel's ghost. Here is Hegel's finale:

At this point we leave Africa, not to mention it again. For it is no historical part of the World; it has no movement or development to exhibit. Historical movements in it--that is in its northern part--belong to the Asiatic or European World. Carthage displayed there an important transitional phase of civilization; but, as a Phoenician colony, it belongs to Asia. Egypt will be considered in reference to the passage of the human mind from its Eastern to its Western phase, but it does not belong to the African Spirit. What we properly understand by Africa, is the Unhistorical, Undeveloped Spirit, still involved in the conditions of mere nature, and which had to be presented here only as on the threshold of the World's History <sup>29</sup>.

Let us grant that Hegel's ignorance and crudities reflected in part the state of Europe's knowledge of Africa then. How do we explain his descendants' behavior now? It is only recently that Hegel's descendants began to come back to Africa. For until now, it is as if Euro-American Philosophy had remained in the cold vise of Hegel's ghost. There are many ways in which the peculiar absence reflects the Hegelian declaration of leaving Africa, not to mention it



again. For example all locutions concerning "Africa South of the Sahara," "Sub-Saharan Africa," "Black Africa" are, in their different ways, reflective of the Hegelian insistence that the areas so designated are "Africa proper" that must be deemed of no interest to World History. In this connection, one may cite the ongoing acrimonious debate on the epidermal character of ancient Egyptian civilization.

I argue that *all* efforts to show that Egypt was not an African civilization are geared towards affirming any or all of the following theses: (a) Egypt was not in Africa so it, *prima facie*, could not have been an African civilization; (b) even if Egypt had been an African country, geographically speaking, the principal constructors of its civilization were Hamitic peoples who were not original to Africa. If this is true, then Hegel was right that "Egypt does not belong to the African Spirit;" (c) a combination of (a) and (b). But the debate illustrates another aspect of the peculiar absence. The immediate occasion for the current fulminations over the paternity of Egyptian civilization was the publication of Martin Bernal's *The Afro-Asiatic Roots of Greek Civilization* <sup>30</sup>. A similar and more original precursor based on first-hand investigation of the evidence conducted by a trained African Egyptologist, Cheikh Anta Diop, had been published earlier <sup>31</sup>. Diop was dismissed and little attention was paid to his submissions in this country. That is, Diop was not even considered worthy of being refuted-- he suffered the insult of being passed over in silence. It took Bernal, who looks right, to generate a storm of protests about the paternity of Egyptian civilization. It matters little that Bernal cobbled his work from secondary sources--he is not an Egyptologist. But he has not only attracted attention, he has managed to spawn a whole new industry devoted to refuting his thesis that Western civilization has afro-asiatic roots.

The declaration that Africa's condition "is capable of no development or culture, and as we see them at this day, such have they always been" frames all discourses in which Africa is presented as unhistorical, as if its history is one seamless web with no periodization or any of the normal highs and lows of historical time that are characteristic of other areas of the world. Hence the prevalence in discourses about Africa of theoretical shibboleths like "traditional Africa," "precolonial Africa," and so on where what is being talked about would stretch, in the one case, from the beginning of time to when the first white man set foot in Africa or when colonialism was imposed.

Until recently, Hegel's descendants went one better than their ancestor. Because South Africa was for so long under apartheid they kept up the pretense that South Africa was either not part of Africa or was not considered an "African" country! We find the peculiar absence in the repeated disjunctions that one finds between: "ancestor worship" (African) and "religion" (the rest of the world); "tribalism" (African) and "nationalism" (the rest of the world); "traditional thought" or "modes of thought" (African) and "philosophy" (the rest of the world); "simple societies" (African) and "complex societies" (the rest of the world); "lineage division" (African) and "class division" (the rest of the world); "order of custom" (African) and "rule of law" (the rest of the world); etc. <sup>32</sup>.

We have said that Hegel's descendants are beginning to come back to Africa. For the most part they are coming back, not because they have come to acknowledge Africa's full membership of the concert of humanity, witness the preceding divisions just adumbrated, but because many within the Euro-American tradition have begun to put pressure on the dominant

forces in society, especially those in the academy, to begin to put some substance in their much-vaunted commitment to liberal education. Nevertheless, we should not make the mistake of thinking that Africa should be in the curriculum because students of African descent demand that their stories too be recognized or because some misguided elements in the dominant culture insist on learning about other cultures. Others in the academy outside of these categories too should be grateful that the students of African descent have elected to catalyze the bringing of the promise of liberal education to fruition. If it remains true, and I think it is, that the goal of a liberal education is to put before its recipients the study of humanity and its achievements wherever humanity happens to reside, and to create graduates who are required to learn as much as they can of as much as there is to know of as many themes as are available for investigation, then the present situation in which we permit Hegel's ghost to stalk the halls of the contemporary academy must be deemed unacceptable.

I conclude by offering a few suggestions on how the ghost may be exorcised<sup>33</sup>. I should warn that this is one mean ghost that will be tough to exorcise. In the past when it was fashionable to be racist, there were many who openly celebrated the sightings of the ghost as a much welcome reminder that Africans should know their place and stay there. How times have changed! The ghost has now insinuated itself into the innermost recesses of the academy and it is more likely now that Hegel's descendants will plead pragmatic considerations for why the peculiar absence persists. Such an explanation would likely blunt the edge of our criticisms because, as we all know, these are lean times and we must deploy limited resources for maximal uses. One can see how the ghost continues to stalk the present: the unspoken assumption is that Africa does not offer a good enough return to justify deploying resources to its study. It is a different strategy but the outcome is the same.

Another way in which the ghost affects the present is in the repeated suggestions that there are no appropriate texts or that none are good enough to occupy our philosophical energies. Recall how Hegel too knew that Africa had never developed even though he acknowledged that the area was "almost entirely unknown to [him]". How do you know without reading or finding the texts whether or not they are good or bad? This subverts a cardinal principle of scientific rationality--that one does not pass judgment in advance of weighing the evidence.

I have refrained in this paper from the usual response of waving before you what Africans have done. Until it is taken for granted that Africa is part of History, that the study of anything cannot be complete unless it encompasses this significant part of the world, no amount of iteration of what Africans have done will move the victims of Hegel's ghost. Until they get rid of the voice of the Hegelian ghost whispering in their inner ear that Africa is not worth it, that Africa has nothing worthwhile to offer, they will continue to botch the challenge that Africa poses to philosophy.

## Notes

\*This is a revised version of a public lecture delivered to the Association of Students of African Descent at Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, B.C., Canada, on Friday, 21st February, 1997.

1. Throughout this paper I shall mean by "Africa" the continent and its diaspora.

2. Of course there is interest in Africa's flora and fauna. Safari vacations are always a top draw. This preoccupation with nature in Africa in the popular imagination has its intellectual expression. This will be examined presently.
3. G.W.F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, trans. J. Sibree, introduction C.J. Friedrich (New York: Dover Publications, 1956).
4. C.J. Friedrich, "Introduction" to Dover edition.
5. I shall have more to say about this anon.
6. The same nature in its benign face, wild, beautiful is what attracts safari tourists and safari scholars alike.
7. See Appendix 1.
8. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, p.1.
9. Hegel, p. 103.
10. Hegel, p. 9.
11. Hegel, pp.17-18.
12. Hegel, p. 19.
13. Hegel, pp. 80-81.
14. Hegel, p. 80. Emphasis added.
15. Hegel, p.91.
16. Hegel, p. 91 Emphasis added.
17. Hegel, pp. 92-93.
18. Hegel, p.91.
19. Hegel, p.93.
20. Hegel, p. 93.
21. Hegel, p.93.
22. For contrary views, see Kwasi Wiredu, *Cultural Universals and Particulars* (Bloomington Indiana University Press, 1997).
23. Hegel, pp. 93-95.
24. I shall limit myself to the situation in Philosophy.
25. For those who are interested, see the discussions in E. Bolaji Idowu, *African Traditional Religion: A Definition*; Olodumare: God in Yoruba Belief; John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*; Olupona, J.K.; Benjamin Ray, *Concepts of God in Africa*; Geoffrey Parrinder, *African Traditional Religion*.
26. Hegel, p. 95.
27. Hegel, p. 95.
28. Hegel, p. 98.
29. Hegel, p. 99.
30. Bernal, M. 1987. *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization*. Vol. I, The Fabrication of Ancient Greece 1785-1985. London: Free Association Books; New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.
31. Cheikh Anta Diop,
32. I have explored the consequences of this difference-dominated way of framing discourses about Africa for the possibilities of genuine learning across cultural divides in

"African and Africanist Scholars, and Knowledge Production in African Studies", forthcoming.

33. I have done this in some detail in "On Diversifying the Philosophy Curriculum," *Teaching Philosophy* 16, no. 4 <sup>1993</sup>: 287-299.

# **Toward Decolonizing African Philosophy and Religion**

KWASI WIREDU

## **I. PARTICULARISTIC STUDIES OF AFRICAN PHILOSOPHIES AS AN AID TO DECOLONIZATION**

Let me begin by defining what I mean by decolonization in African philosophy. By decolonization, I mean divesting African philosophical thinking of all undue influences emanating from our colonial past. The crucial word in this formulation is "undue". Obviously, it would not be rational to try to reject everything of a colonial ancestry. Conceivably, a thought or a mode of inquiry spearheaded by our erstwhile colonizers may be valid or in some way beneficial to humankind. Are we called upon to reject or ignore it? That would be a madness having neither rhyme nor reason.

Yet there are reasons for adopting a doubly critical stance toward the problems and theories of Western philosophy--particularly toward the categories of thought embedded therein. The reasons are historical. Colonialism was not only a political imposition, but also a cultural one. Gravely affected, or even perhaps infected, were our religions and systems of education. I will address the question of religion later, but I want directly to notice an aspect of the system of education introduced by colonialism that is of a particular philosophical relevance. It consists in the fact that education was delivered in the medium of one foreign language or another.

Now if you learn philosophy in a given language, that is the language in which you naturally philosophize, not just during the learning period but also, all things being equal, for life. But a language, most assuredly, is not conceptually neutral; syntax and vocabulary are apt to suggest definite modes of conceptualization. Note, however, that I say "suggest" not "compel", for, if the phenomenon had the element of necessitation implied by the latter word, no decolonization would be possible. Nevertheless, the starting point of the problem is that the African who has learned philosophy in English, for example, has most likely become conceptually westernized to a large extent not by choice but by the force of historical circumstances. To that same extent he may have become de-Africanized. It does not matter if the philosophy learned was African philosophy. If that philosophy was academically formulated in English and articulated therein, the message was already substantially westernized, unless there was a conscious effort toward cross-cultural filtration. Of course, in colonial times such concerns were not the order of the day, to say the least, nor have they, even now in post-colonial times, acquired that status. This gives the present conference a special significance; for, as far as I know, it is the first conference on decolonization in African philosophy.

<http://www.africa.ufl.edu/asq/v1/4/3.pdf>

It would have been gathered already that philosophical decolonization is necessarily a conceptual enterprise; it is not just a critique of doctrine but also of fundamental conceptualization. I use "critique" here in the sense of an examination of validity rather than the exposure of invalidity. Indeed, philosophy, or at any rate the best kind of philosophy, is a critique, for the most part, of fundamental conceptualization. That is to say, it is the critical examination of the conceptual framework upon which the thought of a culture is erected. English philosophers, for example, brought up on the Western tradition of thought, are not supposed to take Western categories for granted. That would be to wallow in the unexamined life. They are expected to examine their conceptual inheritance afresh, as far as practicable, and this must be done on two fronts. First, they must review the accumulation of technical vocabularies presented in the tradition together, of course, with the associated theories. These often depart, sometimes quite radically, from common modes of conceptualization, although they may have some basic links with them. A technical heritage can have quite a commanding influence in the life of a culture. Yet, there is nothing sacrosanct about it, and philosophical genius sometimes consists in subverting good portions of it.

There is also a common-language front, for technical vocabulary is a specialization of common language and may owe some of its characteristics to that origin. It is this link that gives technical philosophy much of its cultural identity. Consider, for example, the use of the word "idea" in British empiricism. By "idea" Locke says he means the immediate object of our perception. But it turns out that he takes this to mean a sensation. Since a sensation is a condition of the human body, this means that the table I perceive is a state of myself, if it is an idea. Locke wavered on this, but Berkeley and Hume asserted it without any inhibition. Indeed, by the time we reach Hume, the perceived table has become a momentary state, not a perduring object, and the perceiver too has become nothing but the same momentary state without a possessor. This concept of a perceived object would puzzle any ordinary native speaker innocent of empiricist sophistication into fits. Yet, on the other hand, the straightforwardly substantive status of the word "idea" in English and its objectual idioms seem to facilitate making it into an object in an ontologically serious sense, at least to start with. The point now is that an analogue of this does not occur in every language. Obviously, in languages of a contrary tendency it would take an uncommon taste for paradox for one to come up with the empiricist idea. This suggests that in examining conceptual formations at the level of the technical discourse, philosophers need also to keep a critical eye on the conceptual intimations of the natural languages in which they work.

The situation is more complex in the case of Africans who have been trained in some foreign philosophical tradition, for instance, English-speaking philosophy, for there is now a cross-cultural dimension. They must assume both of the critical duties just noticed. But in addition, they must not forget that they have their own languages which have their own conceptual suggestiveness calling for critical study; which is why I said early on that African philosophers have to be doubly critical. Clearly, African philosophy at this historical juncture has of necessity to be comparative. This comparative approach is required not only when African philosophers work in areas of discourse called African philosophy in so many words but also in all philosophical work on all philosophical topics whatsoever. In particular, African philosophers should not wait until they are doing courses specifically designated African



philosophy before they bring their African conceptual resources to bear on their treatments of issues. Whether it be in logic, or epistemology, or ethics, or metaphysics, or whatever, they must introduce African inputs wherever feasible.

I think that it is a colonial type of mentality that regards African philosophy as something that should be kept apart from the mainstream of philosophical thinking. Compare how things stand or might stand in, say, the study of British philosophy. Surely, it would be more than mildly idiosyncratic for a British teacher of philosophy in a British university to propose, in his teaching of, Metaphysics, for example, to hold in abeyance all metaphysical insights deriving from British sources until s/he has the occasion to teach a course on British philosophy. In fact, there may be no such course in the given British university for the good reason that there may be no need for it. It would be a great day for African philosophy when the same becomes true of an African university, for it would mean that African insights have become fully integrated into the principal branches of philosophy.

That time has not come yet. In colonial times little, if anything, was heard about African philosophy. I finished my undergraduate studies in Philosophy in Ghana in 1958 just a year after our independence from Britain. In the whole of that period of philosophical study not a single word was said about African philosophy, nor, indeed, was the phrase "African philosophy" ever mentioned. In all fairness, my teachers cannot be blamed for this. They were hired to teach us Western philosophy, and that is what they did. Actually, it probably would have been an advantage if contemporary African philosophers had had to begin with a totally clean slate when they began in post-independence times to research into African philosophy. But, as it happens, religious and anthropological studies had been made of African world views in departments of religion and anthropology, and these tended to contain elements relevant to African philosophy. Now, although these studies were not technically philosophical, they were conducted not only in foreign languages, such as English, French and German, but also in terms of categories of Western metaphysical thought that have become widely received in Western culture. To take only a few examples, consider such categories of thought as those contained in the following dichotomies: the spiritual versus the physical, the supernatural versus the natural, the mystical versus the non-mystical, the religious versus the secular, being versus nothingness. These are modes of conceptualization that are very deeply entrenched in Western thought. I do not mean to suggest that every Western thinker believes that there are things falling under one side or the other of each of these dichotomies. What I think is the case is that most Western thinkers would find these dichotomies at least intelligible. Thus even a Western religious skeptic, while denying that there are any spiritual or supernatural beings, may, nevertheless, at the same time grant that the notion of a spiritual entity is not meaningless. Only logical positivists, and perhaps a few others, have wanted to say that such notions are meaningless. But the requiem for logical positivism is generally considered to be concluded.

When African thought was approached with intellectual categories such as the ones just mentioned some quite lopsided results ensued, although they did not seem to bother people much. Some of the findings of this sort of study of African thought that were, and still are, assiduously disseminated are that Africans see the world as being full of spiritual entities, that Africans are religious in all things, not even separating the secular from the religious, that African thought is, through and through, mystical, and so on. Some African philosophers have

followed this way of talking of African thought quite cheerfully. One reason may be that in their academic training they may themselves have come to internalize such accounts of African thought so thoroughly that they have become part of the furniture of their minds. Such minds are what may justly be called colonized. They are minds that think about and expound their own culture in terms of categories of a colonial origin without any qualms as to any possible conceptual incongruities. Such a mode of thinking may correctly be said to be unduly influenced by the historical accident of colonization. It may well be that if the concepts in question had been critically examined, they might have been found to be appropriate, but it may very well also be that they might have been found to be inapplicable in the context of African thought. In either case, an important preliminary question would have been answered and the way cleared for potentially enlightening accounts of African thought and its continuation in the modern world. In either case, moreover, the old accounts would have been decolonized.

In the negative case, that is, in the case in which critical inquiry discovers a foreign category of thought to be inapplicable within African thinking, an additional question of the greatest philosophical interest arises. If those categories do not make sense in African thought, does the fault lie in the concepts themselves or in African thought? I suspect that sometimes it will be the one and other times, the other. But we won't find out if we don't investigate, and if we don't investigate, then we wallow in colonized thinking. What makes the difference, then, between decolonized and colonized thinking is what I am in the habit of calling due reflection in our approach to discourses about African thought framed in foreign categories.

I have so far been talking of categories of thought, that is, fundamental concepts by means of which whole ranges of issues are formulated and discussed. But the question of decolonization also affects particular propositions expressed in terms of those categories. As an intellectual package, Christianity, for example, consists of particular metaphysical and ethical propositions. Any African who espouses Christianity without critical examination at some point of the truth or falsity of its propositions, or the validity of their supporting arguments, where there are any, must incur the label of being an intellectually colonized African. (I say "at some point" because many of us are already Christians by the time we have emerged from elementary school without ever having had the occasion to pose the question.)

On the other hand, if one goes along with the Christian package after due reflection, then one is entitled to be exempted from the colonized description. This point is worth emphasizing. An African is not to be debited with the colonial mentality merely because s/he espouses Christianity or Islam or any other foreign religion. It just may be that salvation lies elsewhere than in African religions. But an African should not take it for granted that this is the case simply from having been brought up in a foreign religion. The issue, in other words, needs to be confronted in the spirit of due reflection.

One way in which some Africans have seemed to want to evade this intellectual responsibility has been to say that religion is a matter of faith rather than reason and that, therefore, any critical probing is out of place. This expedient can be viewed from more than one unflattering perspective, but the following consideration should expose adequately the logical futility of the maneuver. Where two religions are in question, in this case, the indigenous African religion and Christianity, the suggestion that religion is a matter of faith is clearly



incapable of explaining a preference of one over the other. Moreover, ordinary common sense dictates that one should not jettison what is one's own in favor of what has come from abroad for no reason at all. It is, accordingly, difficult to see the faith defense as anything other than the rationalization of an intellectual inertia born of an early subjection to evangelism, that is to say, a colonized condition of the mind.

It is, as noted above, possible for Africans to be Christians in a non-colonized manner, but it is not clear that such Africans are always eager to acknowledge the widespread consequences of that persuasion for the evaluation of African religions. There are, as I will suggest later, definite incompatibilities between Christianity and various African religions. These are not incompatibilities that lie at the peripheries of these religions; they go to the roots. Consequently, an African who espouses Christianity on due reflection may have to admit frankly, and with stated reasons, that s/he rejects the religion indigenous to his or her culture. There is nothing wrong with this in principle. What is wrong is the apparent attempt on the part of some African Christians to have it both ways.

It is probably clear without further argument that the exorcising of the colonial mentality in African philosophy is going to involve conceptually critical studies of African traditional philosophies. I might mention that African philosophy consists of both a traditional and a modern component. It would have been unnecessary to make a point that, in the abstract, sounds so trite, were it not for the fact that some people seem to equate African philosophy with traditional African philosophy. It is, in any case, perhaps not so trite to insist that the imperative of decolonization applies to both phases of African philosophy.

As far as contemporary African philosophizing is concerned, it is important to understand that the imperative of decolonization does not enjoin anything like parochialism. There are cardinal branches of philosophical learning that were not developed in African traditions in most parts of Africa south of the Sahara. These include the disciplines of logic and its philosophy and the philosophy of mathematics and natural science. I have called for the domestication, in Africa, of disciplines such as these in previous writings, and I would like to take this opportunity to make a clarification. By domestication I do not mean the mindless copying of conclusions arrived at somewhere else. I mean taking up broad intellectual concerns relating to certain subject matters.

Consider logic. In our traditional life we do argue and we do evaluate arguments both with respect to their validity and soundness. In their disputations our elders are even wont to enunciate fundamental logical principles such as the laws of non-contradiction (viz. nothing is both the case and not the case) and excluded middle (viz. something is either the case or not the case). For example, among the Akans of Ghana inconsistent talk before any group of elders would be likely to invite the reminder that *Nokware mu nni abra*, literally, there is no conflict in truth, which, evidently, is an invocation of the principle of non-contradiction. And trying to evade an option as well as its contradictory will earn you the censure *Kosi a enkosi, koda a enkoda*, that is, you will not stand and you will not lie! The latter form of remonstrance, which is a stern way of trying to wake somebody up to the principle of excluded middle, is, in fact, so common that the logical carelessness in question will trigger it among almost any group of Akans, not just the elders.

Nevertheless, we do not, to my knowledge, have in Ghana the tradition of logical study as a formal discipline. It does not appear that we have formed within our traditions the habit of trying to set out the principles of reasoning, among which non-contradiction and excluded middle are of a very basic importance, in the manner of a system (as in logic). Nor, consequently, have we tended to investigate the assortment of theoretical questions that arise in such an enterprise (as in the philosophy of logic). For Africans to apply their minds to these projects, taking advantage of whatever insights may currently be available internationally in these areas of investigation, is for them to try to domesticate the disciplines concerned, in this case logic and the philosophy of logic. Since in the modern world Western logicians and philosophers have been engaged in these kinds of researches for a considerable time, there is no doubt but that the African who looks at their results might find something useful to build on. In this sort of thing, to be sure, there would be no wisdom in trying to reinvent the wheel.

Even so, in any such pursuits Africans will have to be doubly critical in the manner already explained. To attend to logic a little further: this discipline is a certain kind of study in syntax and semantics. Although it is fashionable to call the systems that are constructed and studied therein artificial languages, it cannot be supposed that these "languages" are totally independent of the natural languages in which the constructions are initiated. It is not inconceivable, therefore, that some aspects of the results obtained, especially in the philosophical reaches of the researches, may depend on characteristics of the syntax and semantics of the particular natural languages involved that are neither universal nor necessary to all natural languages. Africans working in these areas will have to be especially alert to this possibility lest they multiply concepts and concerns beyond necessity. Still, it is eminently reasonable to expect that there are some things of a universal validity in these disciplines, cross-culturally speaking. For example, if the simplest form of conditionality required for defining the relation between the premises and the conclusion of a valid argument must involve the notion of necessity, this will be so in Europe and America as well as in Africa, China, Japan, etc. Whatever the truth in regard to this question, it is of no consequence where its discoverer comes from. This is at once the basis of the possibility that we in Africa can learn something from the West and that the West, too, can learn something from us.

Decolonization, then, has nothing to do with the attitude which implies that Africans should steer clear of those philosophical disciplines that have at this particular point in human history received their greatest development in the West. Any Africans who take this view cannot, in any case, hold it consistently across all academic disciplines. They will have to have a strange mentality indeed to advocate, for example, stopping the study of mathematics and natural science in African universities. But if these disciplines are admitted, then why stop short of their philosophies? If Africans do not enter these areas of philosophy and make their presence felt in them, they will in perpetuity remain outsiders to the project of understanding and clarifying modes of thought that have played a huge part in the making of the modern world. Worse, they will have to call, at least occasionally, upon the help of those peoples who have mastered the relevant specialities; this means that they will be in a state of perpetual dependence.

Without prejudice to the foregoing reflections, however, it is clear that, for historical reasons, this is the time for the greatest decolonizing attention to be paid to the study of

traditional African philosophy. Since, as already noted, decolonization is a highly conceptual process, this implies that there will have to be intensive studies of those elements of culture that play significant roles in the constitution of meanings in the various African world views. Of these, language stands pre-eminent. One cannot hope to disentangle the conceptual impositions that have historically been made upon African thought-formations without a close understanding of the indigenous languages concerned. This immediately prescribes a certain methodology in the study of African traditional philosophy. Put simply, it stipulates that emphasis should be given to detailed, in-depth, studies of the traditional philosophies of specific African peoples by researchers who know the languages involved well. (This, I might emphasize, is a policy of emphasis not of exclusion. Other types of work, such as those of the domesticating type alluded to above, will also have to go on.)

Sometimes there are pressures on African philosophers to venture continent-wide generalizations about African philosophy. Perhaps, sometimes available information permits judicious generalizations of this scope. For example, a communalist outlook seems to be quite widespread in traditional life on the continent. This would lead one to expect a certain type of ethical orientation, but any such inferences, even if they seem to be supported by the anthropological data, will still need to be substantiated by linguistically informed and conceptually critical philosophical studies of the particular people concerned.

Such studies are what I call *particularistic* studies. They take the form of inquiries into topics such as "The Yoruba Conception of a Person", "The Chewa Notion of the Afterlife", "The Akan Conception of God", "The Nuer Notion of Spirit", "The Zulu Conception of Morality," and so on. Notice the concepts involved in these titles: Person, Afterlife, God, Spirit, Morality. Do these concepts have unproblematic counterparts in the language and thought of the people concerned? In any case, how do the African concepts that one has in mind compare and contrast with these concepts as they occur in Western thought or, more strictly, in various brands of Western thought? (This verbal circumspection is necessary owing to the fact that Western thought is not a monolithic structure but rather a variegated one, rich in diverse modes of conceptualization.)

The questions just raised are preliminary issues needing to be settled before we can take up issues of validity or truth. Clearly, they are issues whose treatment will require extensive knowledge of the relevant languages. That knowledge will have to be brought to bear upon the evaluation of specific philosophical attributions to various African peoples couched in terms of concepts such as the ones noted above. At present, particularistic studies in the literature have tended too precipitously to take cross-cultural equivalences for granted with regard to the concepts mentioned and a large range of others. This has meant that wittingly or, most likely unwittingly, African conceptions of the relevant subjects have been assimilated to Western ones. It is a remarkable fact that this conceptual superimposition can occur even in the process of an attempt to point out differences.

Consider the following example. Father Tempels in his *Bantu Philosophy* explains that the Western conception of being is static while the African counterpart is dynamic. The latter is, he says, dynamic in the following sense. For Africans "Being is force and force is being." In the face of a message of this sort, formulated in a foreign language, I recommend that African philosophers should ask themselves the following question, which, on the face of it, but perhaps

only on the face of it, is quite a simple question. How is the thesis proffered to be expressed in my vernacular? This is a question that our training in foreign languages tends to make us forget to ask. By contrast, many other peoples think philosophically in their own vernaculars as a matter of course.

In this matter I have tried to do as I preach with the following result: Zero! The thing cannot be done. The thesis cannot be expressed in my language, namely, the Akan language spoken in Ghana and the Ivory Coast. In this language, unlike, say, English, there is no such thing as the existential verb "to be". The only possible renditions of the notion of "being" are either predicative or adverbial. To be or being always prompts the question "To be what, where?" or "Being what, where?." The Akan expression for "to be" is *wo ho* or *ye*. The word *wo* in this context is syncategorematic; it is incomplete, requiring some specification of place, however indeterminate. Thus *wo ho* means "is there, at some place." Similarly, *ye* cannot stand alone; it needs a complement, such as in *ye onipa* (is a person) or *ye tenten* (is long). Thus the best that one can do in rendering the existential use of "being" would be to say something like "*Se biribi wo ho*" which translates back to English as "The circumstance that something is there, at some place." Good sense forbids trying to go any further in the experiment of casting "Being is force and force is being" in Akan.

The conclusion to which this ill-fated thought experiment brings us is that the thesis in question cannot rightly be attributed to the Akans. Apart from the intrinsic interest of this finding, it is of some relevance to the evaluation of Tempels' account as he often writes as if he thought that what is true of the Bantu is true of all Africans. We, on our part, however, do recognize that if it cannot be attributed to the Akans, it does not follow that it cannot be attributed to the Bantus that Tempels studied. Decolonization in African philosophy does not imply forcing philosophical unanimity upon the diverse peoples of Africa. As it happens, however, the late Alexis Kagame, a Bantu philosopher and scientific linguist, also argued that the existential verb "to be" does not occur in the Bantu group of languages, and pointed out that the Bantu analogue of "to be" always prompts the question "to be what where?" If Kagame is right, then whatever it was that Tempels noticed about Bantu thought was radically mis-stated by the use of an inapplicable Western category of thought, namely, the concept of being as existentially construed. It is a concept that was obviously deeply ingrained in Tempels' own manner of thinking, and he very well may have thought it universal to all human thinking. Since some concepts are actually universal, no necessary opprobrium should attach to Tempels' apparent procedure. Nevertheless, the necessity for a critical examination of accounts of African thought such as Tempels', with an eye to the unraveling of any conceptual superimpositions remains undiminished. And it is fair to say that any Africans who go about disseminating Tempels' claim without confronting the conceptual issue are simply advertising their colonial mentality for all who have eyes to see.

Let us be clear about one thing. That the existential notion of being cannot be rendered in Akan or, if Kagame is right, in the Bantu group of languages, does not in itself show that there is anything wrong with it. As previously suggested, it may possibly be that these African languages are inadequate and are in need of a supplementation in this regard. On the other hand, it may be that this existential concept of being is a semantically defective concept, notwithstanding its great currency in Western metaphysics. This is a separate question. All that

our remarks show, if they are right, is that the view that "Being is force and force is being" cannot be attributed to the Akans or the Bantus for a deep semantical reason. Should it enter the head of an Akan or Bantu metaphysician to argue that the Akan or Bantu way of expressing the notion ostensibly expressed in English by the existential verb "to be" is metaphysically superior to the Western construal as evidenced in Tempels' sentence and in certain even more famous sentences in Western metaphysics, that contention will have to be argued on what I have called independent grounds. I mean by that, considerations that are independent of the peculiarities of the given vernaculars and are, therefore, intelligible to all concerned irrespective of language, race, persuasion, etc. The possibility of independent considerations, by the way, is a precondition of inter-cultural dialogue. And the possibility of this last, we might note parenthetically, is the refutation of relativism.

Another thing we ought to be clear about in this connection is that the linguistic considerations involved in any African philosopher's attempts at conceptual decolonization need not be above debate. On the contrary, any such debate is a sign of a decolonizing vitality; for, remember, the hallmark of decolonized thinking is due reflection not durable deference among African thinkers.

There are still other things to be noted. The very idea of a communal philosophy that is entailed in the notion of particularistic studies of traditional African philosophies might be put in question. It might be suggested that to talk of the Bantu conception of this or the Zulu conception of that is to postulate a unanimity or consensus in philosophical belief among the traditional peoples for which there is not, and probably can never be, sufficient evidence. It is necessary, in response to this, to explain at once that talk of the communal philosophy of an ethnic group does not necessarily imply that the conceptions involved are entertained by all members of the group. What it means is that anybody thoughtfully knowledgeable about the culture will know that such conceptions are customary in the culture though s/he may not subscribe to it. The evidence for a communal philosophy is very much like that for the customs of a culture. In fact, in quite some cases customs are encapsulations of some aspects of a communal philosophy.

It is important, however, to note that a communal philosophy is the result of the pooling together over a considerable length of time the thoughts of individual thinkers. Propositions about, say, the constituents of human personality or the nature of time just don't materialize impromptu out of a cosmological bang, big, small, or medium. They emanate from human brains. In an oral tradition the names of the thinkers are often forgotten. This is not always so, however. In Ghana, for example, it is not at all rare for a proverb to be prefaced with the name of its author. Nor is it unusual for such sayings to evince originality and independence of mind. It goes without saying, therefore, that a communal philosophy is a gathering together of inputs from thinkers who may not have agreed on all points. And this, perhaps, accounts for the apparent inconsistencies that one sometimes notices in such bodies of belief.

Two lessons emerge. The first is this. There is nothing necessarily impeccable about a communal philosophy. It is the combining, in an almost imponderable process, of the opinions of fallible individuals. Moreover, these opinions are often only the most striking of the conclusions of the thinkers in question, preserved in the popular imagination in separation from the possibly complex and subtle reasonings that may have given rise to them. Such underlying



argumentation is usually, although not invariably, forgotten. Yet it is this that gives a philosophy its profundity when it has any. It is, accordingly, the responsibility of contemporary African philosophers to delve beneath the communal beliefs to find their underlying reasons wherever possible. That is a necessary preparation for evaluation and reconstruction, two responsibilities complementary to the first.

Why is this a decolonizing program? It is because, ironically, the models of exposition in African philosophy established by writers like Tempels, who directly or indirectly worked for the colonization of the African mind, portrayed African communal philosophies as doctrinal givens, unquestionable for the African consciousness, though otherwise extremely questionable in themselves. An associated phenomenon, which is doubly ironic, is that in reaction to what is perceived as the colonial denial of philosophical capabilities to the African psyche, some contemporary African philosophers are apt to approach African communal philosophies in an almost warlike spirit. Any criticism of any aspect of these philosophies is regarded as a racial affront or, if it is by an African, as nothing short of a betrayal. This is a retrograde inflexibility for which, by and large, we have colonialism to thank.

This inflexibility is particularly unphilosophical because a philosophical thesis is a fundamental claim on the entire universe. It says what reality, whether social, physical or spiritual, is like. Thus, when the Akans, for example, say that the life principle of a human being is a speck of the divine substance, they cannot be understood to be characterizing Akan human beings alone. They are claiming that all human beings--Chinese, Indians, Africans, Americans, Europeans, etc.--are of that description. Then, for example, may not European or Chinese thinkers subject the thesis to a critical examination, provided that they take the trouble to inform themselves properly of its meaning and eschew any attitude of racial superiority?

To present African philosophy as an untouchable possession of Africans is to invite a touristic approach from its foreign audiences. If the philosophies may not be evaluated as false, they may not be evaluated as true either. In that case they might merely be noticed as cultural curiosities. This would aggravate a situation which already is not very healthy, for one has the distinct impression that many foreigners, particularly in the West, who have woken up to the recognition that there is such an animal as African philosophy do not as yet manifest any tendency to suspect that it is something from which they might conceivably have something to learn.

The second of the two lessons lately foreshadowed is that it is important to search out and study the thought of the individual indigenous philosophers who are contributors to the communal philosophies of our traditional societies. Such original thinkers are, in any case, worth studying in their own right. Studies of this kind, which are even more particularistic than studies of African communal philosophies, have the following decolonizing potential. They are likely to help erase the impression fostered in colonial and colonial-inspired treatments of African thought that Africa is lacking in individual thinkers of philosophic originality. An added bonus could be that the example of critical and reconstructive thinking on the part of our own indigenous philosophers might also help to wean some of our contemporary African philosophers from the merely narrative approach to the study of traditional African philosophy. The work that Professor Odera Oruka of the University of Nairobi has done in this direction in

his *Sage Philosophy* therefore invites urgent continuation by as many workers in African philosophy in as many places on the continent as possible.

Since I mentioned customs at one point, let me repeat that, along with language, they constitute an essential resource in the study of a communal philosophy. Indeed language might, from one point of view, be seen as a kind of custom, a custom of symbolization. In the study of a culture, therefore, customs can be a veritable philosophical text. All of which suggests that if we want to correct any misapprehensions of a colonial origin about African philosophy, we ought to settle down to detailed investigations into particular African cultures.

This is not to say that there are no problems in this program of decolonization by particularization, so to speak. Take again the matter of language. Studies of the kind recommended involve essential uses of specific African languages. But there is a great multiplicity of languages in Africa, often inside a single African country. Thus if you take, Akan, for example, it is spoken by only a minute proportion of the population of Africa. The question naturally arises whether the particularistic approach would not create blockages in inter-African philosophical communication, not to talk of philosophical communication further afield. This is an important question. The answer is as follows. To begin with, particularistic studies of various African peoples making such uses of particular African languages actually do exist already, especially in the religious and anthropological literature, and they cry for a decolonizing corrective. Furthermore, the philosophical interpretation of one African language may lead African philosophers speaking other African languages to make analogous inquiries into their own vernaculars with fruitful, if not necessarily corroborative, results. Actually, in my experience such studies have tended to converge more often than diverge.

Another circumstance which makes particularistic studies based on a given language not particularly impenetrable to non-speakers is that, as a rule, they consist of inferences from primary data regarding which there is often little uncertainty and on which, consequently, the non-insider can relatively safely depend. It is for this reason that non-speakers, whether they be African or non-African, can often evaluate controversies among African philosophers speaking the same language regarding the interpretation of aspects of their vernacular. For a quick illustration, recall the information that in Akan "to be" in the sense of to exist can only be expressed as "*wo ho*", i.e. to be at some place. Suppose that two Akan philosophers, noting this, nevertheless disagree as to whether it follows that the notion of an immaterial substance is incoherent in the Akan language. I suggest that only a sense of logic is required in any other African or, for that matter, any member of the species *homo sapiens*, to deliberate on the issue.

It is worth emphasizing, besides, that African philosophers in our time cannot live by decolonization alone but also by the direct interrogation of reality. What is truth, goodness, freedom, time, causality, justice? What is the origin of the universe, the meaning of life, the destiny of the human soul (whatever it is)? What are the principles of correct reasoning? What are the best ways of acquiring knowledge? Grant that colonialism may have led to distorted accounts of the conceptions of our forefathers and foremothers on many of these issues. Grant that in some cases these issues may need recasting. Still, we contemporary Africans, too, have a duty to venture suggestions on these matters. In doing so we will, of course, have to take due account of our own heritage, as philosophers in other cultures routinely do. But we do not always need to call explicit attention to the cultural roots of our theories of reality. In any case,

we would need to offer independent justifications for them. It may be said, then, that although at the present time we are still in an era of post-colonial reconstruction which calls for a large dose of decolonization, we ought not to be oblivious to the other imperatives of philosophical thinking. Decolonization, even as only one of our preoccupations, is not something that we will be doing for ever in African philosophy. Of course, it will always make good sense in some contexts to speak, say, of the Bantu conception of something or other just as it still makes good sense for Western philosophers to talk of the ancient Greek conception of various things in historical and even analytical investigations, but such discussions will eventually not have quite the special urgency that they now have in African philosophy. The time will come when there would be, for the most part, no pressing need for the kind of particularism discussed above here.

For the time being, however, we in Africa have no option but to include in our projects, as a matter of urgency, a decolonizing program of pursuing the universal by way of the particular.

## II. THE PHILOSOPHICAL STUDY OF AFRICAN RELIGIONS

In the first part of this paper I looked at the decolonization of African philosophy mostly in general terms. Now, I would like to examine decolonization with specific reference to the philosophical study of African religions. As you might expect from my advocacy of strategic particularism, my focus here will principally be on Akan religion as an example of African religions. I invite others to compare and contrast (where appropriate) their own perceptions of their indigenous religions. Religion is, indeed, an area in which there is a superabundance of characterizations of African thought in terms of inappropriate or, at best, only half-appropriate concepts. I shall examine concepts like creation out of nothing, omnipotence and eternity, and categorial contrasts such as the natural versus the supernatural and the physical versus the spiritual.

Africans nowadays frequently are said to be a profoundly religious people, not only by themselves but also by foreign students of their culture. This was not always so. Some of the early anthropologists felt that the concept of God, for example, was too sublime for the African understanding, granting that they had any understanding at all. The present situation in which indigenes as well as foreigners vie with one another to testify to the piety of the African mind is a remarkable reversal of earlier attitudes and prepossessions. There is virtual unanimity, in particular, on the report that Africans have a strong belief in the existence of God.

On all or virtually all hands it seems to be assumed that it speaks well of the mental capabilities of a people if they can be shown to have a belief in God, especially a God of a Christian likeness. Accordingly, the literature on African religions is replete with generalizations about African beliefs in the Almighty. In this discussion I want to start with a fairly extended look at the concept of God in the thought of the Akans of Ghana. Since this is the group to which I belong and in which I was raised, I hope I may be excused some show of confidence, although, of course, not dogmatism in making some conceptual suggestions about their thought. I will also try, more briefly, to make some contrasts between Akan thought and the thought of some other African peoples on the question of the belief in God, though this time



more tentatively. It will emerge that not all African peoples entertain a belief in God and that this is, moreover, without prejudice to their mental powers.

Any cursory study of the thought and talk of the Akans will indeed reveal an unmistakable belief in a supreme being. This being is known under various names. I mention just a few here. *Nyame* is the word most often used for this being. It means something like "Absolute satisfier". Another of his names is *Onyankopon*, which means, literally, "He who is alone great", a notion that reminds one of St. Anselm's "That than which a greater cannot be conceived", though this is not to assume conceptual congruence in other respects. There is also the name *Twediampon* (He upon whom you lean and do not fall). Cosmologically, perhaps, the most important name is *Oboade*, which, for the time being, I will translate as Creator. Frequently, the word *Nana* is added to either of the first two names. The word means grandparent, or ruler, or, in a more general sense, honored personage. In this context all these meanings are available, but often it is the grandfatherly connotation that is uppermost in the consciousness of people invoking the name.

Indeed, in the literature this grandfatherly appellation of God has often been emphasized by indigenous writers because some early European writers had suggested that the Akan (and, more generally, the African) God was an aloof God, indifferent to the fate of his creatures. These foreign observers even had the impression that this attitude of the supreme being was reciprocated by the Akans when they (the visitors) found among them no evidences of the worship of God, institutional or otherwise. In fact, however, the Akan have a strong sense of the goodwill of God; only this sentiment is not supposed, cosmologically speaking, to be manifested through ad hoc interventions in the order of nature.

The word "nature" is, perhaps, misleading in this context, in so far as it may suggest the complementary contrast of supernature. Here we come face to face with an important aspect of the cosmology of the Akans. God is the creator of the world, but he is not apart from the universe: He together with the world constitutes the spatio-temporal "totality" of existence. In the deepest sense, therefore, the ontological chasm indicated by the natural/supernatural distinction does not exist within Akan cosmology. When God is spoken of as creator we must remind ourselves that words can mislead. Creation is often thought of, at least in run-of-the-mill Christianity, as the bringing into existence of things out of nothing. The Akan God is certainly not thought of as such a creator. The notion of creation out of nothing does not even make sense in the Akan language. The idea of nothing can only be expressed by some such phrase as *se whee nni ho*, which means something like "the circumstance of there not being something there". The word *ho* (there, at some place) is very important in the phrase; it indicates a spatial context. That of which there is a lack in the given location is always relative to a universe of discourse implicitly defined by the particular thought or communication. Thus, beholding a large expanse of desolate desert, an Akan might say that *whee nni ho*. The meaning would be that there is a lack there of the broad class of things that one expects to find on land surface of that magnitude. The absolute nothingness entailed in the notion of creation out of nothing, however, scorns any such context. This abolition of context effectively abolishes intelligibility, as far as the Akan language is concerned.

But, it might be asked, does it not occur to the Akan that if God created the world, as s/he supposes, then prior to the act of creation there must have been nothing in quite a strict sense?

The answer is that it depends at least on what one means by "create". In the most usual sense creation presupposes raw materials. A carpenter creates a chair out of wood and a novelist creates fiction out of words and ideas. If God is conceived as a kind of cosmic architect who fashions a world order out of indeterminate raw material, the idea of absolute nothingness would seem to be avoidable. And this is, in fact, how the Akan metaphysicians seem to have conceived the matter. Moreover, *Oboade*, the Akan word that I provisionally translated as "creator", means the maker of things. *Bo* means to make and *ade* means thing, but in Akan to *bo ade* is unambiguously instrumental; you only make something with something.

An almost automatic reaction to such an idea for many people is: If the "divine architect" fashioned the world out of some pre-existing raw material, then, however indeterminate it may have been, surely, somebody must have created it. But this takes it for granted that the concept of creation out of absolute nothingness makes sense. Since this is the question at issue, the reaction begs the question. If the concept of nothing in Akan is relative in the way explained, then obviously the notion of absolute nothingness will not make sense. The fundamental reason for this semantical situation in Akan is that, as pointed out in previous sections, in the Akan language existence is necessarily spatial. To exist is to *wo ho*, be at some location. So if God exists, he is *somewhere*. If nothingness excludes space, it has no accommodation in the Akan conceptual framework. On the other hand, if nothingness accommodates space, it is no longer absolute.

Of course, as suggested earlier, if a concept is incoherent within a given language, it does not necessarily mean that there is anything wrong with it, for it may be that the language in question is expressively inadequate. In the case of the concept of creation out of nothing, however, its coherence, even within English, is severely questionable. In English, the concept of "there is"-note the "there"-which is equivalent to "exists" is quite clearly spatial. Because the word "exists" does not wear its spatiality on its face, it has been possible in English to speak as if existence is not necessarily spatial without prohibitive implausibility. Besides, the maxim that *Ex nihilo nihil fit* (Out of nothing nothing comes), which, ironically, is championed by Christian philosophers, such as Descartes, conflicts sharply with the notion of creation out of nothing. That nothing can come out of nothing is not an empirical insight; it is a conceptual necessity, just like the fact that two and two cannot add up to fifty. Thus to say that some being could make something come out of nothing is of the same order of incoherence as saying that some being could make two and two add up to fifty. Besides, as I have pointed out elsewhere, the causal connotation of creation is incompatible with the circumstance or rather, non-circumstance, of absolute nothingness. Causation makes sense only when it is, *in principle*, possible to distinguish between *post hoc* and *propter hoc* (i.e., between mere sequence and causal sequence). If there was one being and absolutely nothing besides him, then logically, that distinction was impossible. If so, the notion of causation collapses and with it that of creation.

So the notion of creation out of nothing would seem to be incoherent not only in Akan, but also absolutely. At least, the last reason given in evidence of its incoherence was an independent consideration, in the sense that it was independent of the peculiarities of Akan or English. It appealed only to a general logical principle. In fact, the conceptual difficulties in creation out of nothing have not been lost on religious thinkers, which accounts for the fact that it is not very unusual to find a sophisticated Christian metaphysician substituting some such rarefied notion as "the transcendental ground of existence" for the literal idea of creation even while

cooperating with the generality of pious Christians in speaking of God as the creator. Another escape from the paradoxes of *ex nihilo* creation by some religious sophisticates, going far back into history, has been by way of emanationism. It might be worth remembering also in this connection that Plato's *demiurge* was an idea innocent of *ex nihilo* pretensions.

Be that as it may, it seems clear that the Akan supreme being is thought of as a cosmic architect rather than a creator out of nothing. The world resulting from the process of divine fashioning is conceived to contain all the potential for its development and bears all the marks of God's good will once and for all. In this scheme there are postulated various orders of beings. At the top of this hierarchy is God. Immediately below him are a host of extra-human beings and forces. Then come human beings, the lower animals, vegetation and the inanimate world, in that order. All these orders of being are believed to be subject to the universal reign of (cosmic) law. And the absence of any notion of creation out of nothing reflects the Akan sense of the ontological homogeneity of that hierarchy of existence.

Since I have mentioned inanimate things, I ought, perhaps, to dispose quickly of the allegation, often heard, that Africans believe that everything has life. The Akans, at least, are a counterexample. Some objects, such as particular rocks or rivers, may be thought to house an extra-human force, but it is not supposed that every rock or stone has life. Among the Akans a piece of dead wood, for example, is regarded as notoriously dead and is the humorous paradigm of absolute lifelessness. A graver paradigm of the same thing is a dead body. Thus the automatic attributions of animism to Africans manifests little empirical or conceptual wisdom.

To return to the subject of order. The strength of the Akan sense of order may be gauged from the following cosmological drum text.

Odomankoma  
He created the thing  
"Hewer out" Creator  
He created the thing  
What did he create?  
He created Order  
He created Knowledge  
He created Death  
As its quintessence

I quote this from J. B. Danquah's *The Akan Doctrine of God*. The translation is Danquah's, and it incorporates a bit of interpretation, but it is, I think, accurate. What we need particularly to note is that to the Akan metaphysician, order comes first, cosmologically speaking. The stanza is a statement, above all else, to quote Danquah again, of "the primordial orderliness of creation."

This sense of order in phenomena is manifested at another level in the strong belief in the law of universal causation. There is an Akan saying to the effect that if nothing had touched the palm nut branches they would not have rattled (*Se biribi ankoka papa a anka erenye kredede*). This is often quoted by writers on Akan thought as the Akan statement of universal causation. It is right as far as it goes, but there are more explicit formulations of the principle, such as one

quoted by Gyekye. *Asem biara wo ne farebae*, which, literally, means everything has what brought it about. There is another formulation which, in addition to being more literal and explicit, is also more comprehensive. It says simply that everything has its explanation (*Biribiara wo nenkyerease*). The advantage of this formulation is that it discourages any impression that the sense of order under study is only conversant with mechanical causation. In Akan thought this kind of causation corresponds to only one kind of explanation; there are other kinds of explanation that are taken to evince the orderliness of creation (understanding creation, of course, in a quasi-demiurgic sense). These include psychological, rational, quasi-physical explanations and their various combinations of them. As one might expect, they correspond to the orders of being postulated in the Akan world view.

To illustrate with a case which combines all these, suppose that an illness is interpreted as punishment from the ancestors for wrong conduct. There is here a cosmological dimension. The ancestors are conceived to be the departed spirits of erstwhile elders of our societies who live in a world analogous and contiguous to ours and work for the good of the living by watching over their morals. On this showing, they are both like and unlike the living. Like the living, they have an interest in morality of which they are, indeed, recognized as, in some ways, guardians. Moreover, in so far as any imagery is annexed to the conception of the ancestors, it is person-like. But unlike persons, they are not normally perceivable to the naked eye, and they can affect human life in super-human ways for good or, in exceptional cases, as by the present hypothesis, for ill. The explanation involved here, then, is at once psychological, rational, mechanical, and quasi-physical. It is psychological because it is supposed that the hypothetical misconduct incurs the displeasure of the ancestors, which is a matter of mental dynamics. It is rational in conception, for the imagined punishment is viewed as a reformatory and deterrent measure, which, in principle, is a reasonable objective for enforcing morals. It has a "mechanical" aspect in that the illness being explained involves a physiological condition that will in many ways exhibit scenarios of physical causality. Finally, it is quasi-physical because, as pointed out, although the ancestors are psycho-physical in imagery, the manner of their operation is not fully constrained by the dynamic and associated laws familiar in day-to-day experience.

That the activities of beings, such as the ancestors, are not supposed to be completely amenable to "physical" laws is not to be taken to imply that they are regarded as contradicting them. What, in Western thought, are called physical laws in the Akan word view are understood to govern the phenomena of one sphere of existence. But that understanding, as explained, also postulates another sphere of existence, which is believed to be governed, both internally and in interaction with the human sphere of existence, by laws different in some respects from physical or psychological laws and supplementary to them. Though generally Akans do not pretend to understand many aspects of the *modus operandi* of the beings and forces belonging to the super-human sphere, they still view them as regular denizens of the cosmos. Moreover, there is no lack of 'specialists' in Akan (and other African) societies who are supposed to have uncommon insights into the operations of such beings and enjoy expertise in communicating with them. Thus, the idea of ancestors punishing misbehavior evokes no sense of cosmological irregularity. On the contrary, it is perceived as exactly the kind of thing that might happen if people misbehave in certain ways.

Certain conceptual consequences flow immediately from these last considerations. To begin with, since all the orders of being are conceived to interact in a law-like manner, the natural/supernatural dichotomy will have no place in the Akan world view, which reinforces our earlier remark on this issue made in a slightly different connection. Furthermore, the notion of a miracle does not make sense in this context, if a miracle is something supposed to happen contrary to the laws of "nature." Strange things may happen, of course, but in this system of thought, if they cannot be accounted for on the basis of the laws of the familiar world, they will be assumed to be accountable on some quasi-physical laws. This cosmological orientation seems to be not at all uncommon in Africa.

Yet, in the literature on African religions there are profuse references to the supposed African belief in the supernatural, which is frequently inspired by such things as ancestral veneration, almost standardly misdescribed as "ancestor-worship." Obviously, these misconceptualizations are the result of that superimposition of Western categories upon Akan thought-formations which is also the quintessence of conceptual colonization. Through education in colonial or neo-colonial circumstances, many Africans have come to assimilate these modes of thought and, in some cases, have internalized them so completely that they apparently can take great pride in propagating stories of the ubiquity of the supernatural in African thought. Perhaps, none of us Africans can claim total freedom from this kind of assimilation, but at least we can consciously initiate the struggle for conceptual self-exorcism.

Other aspects of the conceptual superimposition need to be noted. The beings I have, by implication, described as super-human (but, note, not supernatural) are often called spirits. If the notion of spirits is understood in a quasi-physical sense, as they sometimes are, in narratives of ghostly apparitions even in Western thought, there is no problem of conceptual incongruity. But if the word "spirit" is construed, as so often happens, in a Cartesian sense to designate an immaterial substance, no such category can be fitted into the conceptual framework of Akan thought. The fundamental reason for this is to be found in the spatial connotation of the Akan concept of existence. Given the necessary spatiality of all existents, little reflection is required to see that the absolute ontological cleavage between the material and the immaterial will not exist in Akan metaphysics. Again, that Africans are constantly said to believe in spiritual entities in the immaterial sense can be ascribed to the conceptual impositions in the accounts of African thought during colonial times and their post-colonial aftermath.

It is, of course, an independent question whether the notion of an immaterial entity is intellectually viable. I will not pursue that question here. What is urgent, though, is to note certain further dimensions of the conceptual misdescriptions of African religions. One of the best entrenched orthodoxies in the literature is the idea that Africans believe in a whole host of lesser gods or lesser deities. That many Akans have bought this story of a pantheon of "lesser gods" in their traditional religion must be due to a consistent forgetfulness of their own language when thinking about such matters. There is no natural way of translating that phrase into Akan. None of the names, as distinct from descriptions, for God in Akan has a plural. In any case, it is very misleading to call the super-human beings and forces gods. Since the notion of a god, however diminutive, is intimately connected with religion, the use of that word in this context encourages the description of African attitudes to those entities as religious. Then, since



Africans do often regard themselves as being in relationship with them, the stage is set for the inference that their life is completely pervaded by religion.

African scholars have not left it to foreigners alone to proclaim this image of African thought. Some of them have assumed eminent responsibilities in that direction. Thus, John Mbiti, for example, in his *African Religions and Philosophy*, has said things like, "Wherever the African is, there is his religion: he carries it to the fields where he is sowing seeds or harvesting a new crop; he takes it with him to the beer party or to attend a funeral ceremony...", or "African peoples do not know how to exist without religion," or "religion is their whole system of being." At work here is an assimilation of African thought to Western categories.

At least as far as the Akans are concerned, it can be said that their attitude to those extra-human beings generally called minor gods in the literature is not really religious. On the contrary, it is utilitarian, for the most part. The powers in question are, as previously noted, a regular part of the resources of the world. If human beings understand how these powers function and are able to establish satisfactory relations with them, humans can exploit their powers to their advantage. One has, of course, to be circumspect because falling afoul of them could be dangerous. The way of establishing satisfactory relations with them is through those procedures that are often called rituals. But these rituals are not regarded as anything other than a method of making use of the super-human resources of the world. Because the powers that are called lesser gods are conceived to be, in some ways, person-like, the "rituals" often have a communicative component heavily laden with flattery. But the tactical character of the procedure is manifest in the fact that a so-called god who is judged inefficient, by reason, for example, of persistent inability to render help at the right time at the right place, is consigned to obsolescence by the permanent averting of attention. An attitude of genuine religious devotion cannot be thus conditional. Accordingly, it would seem inappropriate to call the 'rituals' in question religious. Nor, for the same reason, can the procedures be called acts of *worship* unless the word is used in so broad a sense as to make the concept of worship no longer inseparably bound up with a religious attitude. That the attitude under discussion is not religious or that the procedures do not amount to worship does not imply a judgment that the people concerned fall short of some creditable practice; it simply means that the concepts of religion and worship have been misapplied to aspects of the given culture on the basis of unrigorous analogies of a foreign inspiration. It would, in any case, be hasty to assume that there is anything necessarily meritorious about religious activities.

The Akans, in common with most other African peoples, nevertheless, do have a religious aspect to their culture. The question is as to its proper characterization. I would say that Akan religion consists solely in the unconditional veneration for God and trust in his power and goodness-i.e., in his perfection. This religion is, most assuredly, not an institutional religion, and there is nothing that can be called the worship of God in it. The insistence that any genuine belief in God must be accompanied with a practice of God-worship is simply an arbitrary universalization of the habits of religionists of a different culture. It is difficult, actually, to see how a perfect being could welcome or approve of such things as the singing of his praises.

Another significant contrast with other religions, particularly certain influential forms of Christianity, is that although God is held to be all-good, morality is not defined in Akan thought



in terms of the will of God but rather in terms of human interests. Neither are procedures for the promotion of morality attached to Akan religion; they belong primarily to the home.

The inclusion of the attitudes and practices associated with the Akan belief in various super-human beings and forces in the scope of Akan religion is an adulteration of the traditional religion that has exposed it quite severely to unconsidered judgment. It has helped to eclipse the religion in certain layers of the consciousness of the average educated Akan. The movement of thought has been as follows. When that overly inclusive view is taken of Akan religion, the supposed worship of the supposed gods looms so large in it that the whole religion becomes more or less identified with it. Thus it is that in Christian translation Akan religion is called *Abosomsom*, that is, the worship of stones. The same system of pious translation, by the way, called Christianity *Anyamesom*, that is, the worship of God. When, therefore ordinary educated Akans, brought up in Christianity, come to think that they have shed belief in the "lesser gods," they automatically see themselves as too enlightened for the traditional religion. Actually, the shedding of the traditional mind-cast is often only superficial. But let that pass. We were only concerned to illustrate what the uncritical assimilation of African categories by Western ones has done to an African self-image.

Let us return to the Akan God himself. An important question is how the Akans suppose that knowledge of him is obtained. In this connection there is an extremely interesting Akan saying to the effect that no one teaches God to a child (*Obi nkyere akwadaa Nyame*). This is sometimes interpreted to mean that knowledge of God is inborn and not the fruit of argumentation. But this is inconsistent with the implications of some of the names or descriptions for God in Akan.

One designation calls God *Ananse Kokroko*, meaning, the Stupendous Spider. The spider is associated with ingenuity in designing, and therefore the designation is clearly a metaphorical articulation of the notion of God as the Great Designer. Similarly, Oguah, citing an Akan designation which calls God The Great Planner, comments that we have here a hint of an argument which in Western philosophy is called a teleological argument. Oguah is, I think right, and this shows that the Akans do think that reasoning is involved in the acquisition of the knowledge of the existence of God. If so, the maxim cited above is unlikely to be one that seeks to rule out the relevance of argument. Its most plausible interpretation is that the reasons for the belief in God are so obvious that even a child can appreciate them unaided.

In my own experience the previous interpretation tallies best with the reactions of the Akans not steeped in foreign philosophies that I have accosted from time to time on the justification of the belief in God. They have never refused the invitation to reason, though they have tended to be surprised that so obvious a point should be the object of earnest inquiry. The following type of argument has often been proffered:

Surely, somebody must be responsible for the world. Were you not brought forth into this world by your parents? And were they not, in turn, by their parents, and so on? Must there not, therefore, be somebody who was responsible for everything?

Another type of argumentation that I have been supplied with is this:

Every household has a father, and every town or country a king, Surely, there must be someone who rules the whole universe.

In this last connection a very common Akan saying comes to mind, namely, "God is King" (*Onyame ne hene*).

Regarding these arguments, no one can, or should, pretend that they are cogent pieces of reasoning, especially the last one. It is relevant to note that these arguments were deliberately solicited from ordinary Akans, not from their metaphysicians. But two points can be made; the second is of special significance for our discussion. First, if these arguments were sound, they would prove the conclusions advertised or something close. They would, that is, prove that there is a cosmic architect or ruler of the universe or something like that. This is much more than can be said for almost all the principal arguments for the existence of God in Western philosophy. These arguments also are such that, if they were sound, they would only prove some such being as a cosmic architect or governor. Yet, as a rule, there is, at the concluding point, an inconceivable leap to the affirmation of an *ex nihilo* Creator-God! On this point Hume's words should have been the last. He pointed out, in particular reference to teleological arguments, otherwise known as the argument from design, that even if granted valid, it would only prove a designer, not a creator [*ex nihilo*]. But "faith", even when it pretends to argue, is apparently stronger than logic, and the concluding unphilosophical leap remains a favorite exercise for some philosophers.

Second, and more importantly, the fact that even ordinary Akans are so willing to reason about the basic proposition of their religion demonstrates a rational attitude to religion which contrasts with the attitude which fundamentalist Christianity brought to many parts of Africa through the missionaries. Their key idea in this regard seems to have been "faith" as belief inaccessible to rational discussion. Many Africans have taken the idea to heart and have, in some cases, even been born again. If you ask them for the reason behind their preference for the new religion over the traditional one, the standard reply is that it is a matter of faith, not reason. I explained in previous sections why this answer is not sufficient. The foregoing discussion enables us to show also that this irrationality is uncharacteristic of the traditional outlook on religion. In fact, the notion of faith as belief without, and inaccessible to, reason is untranslatable into Akan except by an unflattering paraphrase-*Gyidi hunu*-literally, useless belief, is probably all that is available, unless one preferred a more prolix circumlocution, which would be something like *Gyidi a enni nkyerease*, that is, again literally, belief without explanation. The pejorative connotation of the latter periphrasis, however, does not come through in the English version. Thus within Akan semantics it is difficult to validate the idea of faith being inhospitable to reason. In these circumstances one must admire the simplicity of the Christian solution to the problem of translating faith (in the non-rational sense) into Akan. They say simply *Gyidi*, which in genuine Akan means simply belief. Since this is patently inadequate, one must assume that the translators may have put their faith in *ad hoc* evangelical glosses. But it is also simple to see that decolonized thinking in religion must make short work of the evangelical talk of faith.

Let us once again return to the concept of God. Oguah advances the interesting claim that the Akan concept of God as the one who is alone great (*Onyankopon*) is the same as the concept of the greatest conceivable being or that than which nothing greater can be conceived, which formed the basis of Saint Anselm's ontological argument for the existence of God. In a formal sense this is correct, for an Akan believer cannot consistently concede the possibility of any

being greater or even equal to God. However, this formal identity pales into insignificance when it is recalled that the Akan God is a cosmic architect while Anselm's is an *ex nihilo* creator. These two concepts are so different that the chances are that the ingenious saint would have considered the Akan concept quite atheistic. Accordingly, when we use the word God to translate *Nyame*, we must bear the disparity in connotation between this and the orthodox Christian concept of God firmly in mind.

This is particularly worth stressing in view of the tendency of many African writers on African religions, proud of their African identity, to suggest that their peoples recognize the same God as the Christians, since God is one. The origin of this tendency seems to me to be the following: almost all these writers are themselves Christians, in most cases divines. Being scandalized by the opinion of some of the early European visitors to Africa that the African was too primitive to attain the belief in God unaided, they have sought to demonstrate that Africans discovered God on their own before a European or any foreigner, for that matter, set foot in Africa. However, since they themselves have been brought up to think that the Christian God is the one true God, it has been natural for them to believe that the God of their ancestors is, in fact, the same as the God of Christianity. Furthermore, they have been able to satisfy themselves that, in accepting Christianity, they have not fundamentally forsaken the religion of their ancestors. (Incidentally, in this respect, many African specialists of religious studies have differed from average African Christians, who, if they are Akans, would probably, at least verbally, declare traditional religion to be just *abosom*, the worship of stones.) Listen to what one famous African authority on African religions says:

There is no being like "the African God" except in the imagination of those who use the term, be they Africans or Europeans... there is only one God, and while there may be various concepts of God, according to each peoples spiritual perception, it is wrong to limit God with an adjective formed from the name of any race.

The writer was Professor Bolaji Idowu and the passage is cited in his *African Traditional Religion: A Definition*. Idowu was for many years Professor of Religions at the University of Ibadan and was in his retirement the Patriarch of the Methodist Church of Nigeria for some years. He is the author of, perhaps, the most famous book on the religion of the Yorubas, a book entitled *Olodumare: God in Yoruba Belief*. The Yorubas have a concept of God that is substantially identical with that of the Akans. This is confirmed by a careful study of direct descriptions of the Yoruba concept of God presented in the last mentioned book. In both cases what we have is a cosmic architect. But if this is so, it is an implausible suggestion that either the Yoruba or the Akan conception of God is just a different way of conceiving one and the same being as the God of Christianity. To see the fallacy clearly, consider that it is conceivable that God as a cosmic architect exists while an *ex nihilo* creator-God does not or cannot exist. Or, since Idowu's thesis is quite general, imagine that Spinoza, on the verge of ex-communication from his synagogue on account of his view that God and nature are one, had sought to placate the authorities by proleptically taking a leaf out of Idowu's book and assuring them that God is one and that therefore they were all, after all, talking of the same being. The inevitable aggravation of tempers would, surely, have been blameable on no one but Spinoza himself. As it happened, the gentle metaphysician knew better than to attempt any such misadventure. But in pure logic, when Idowu tries to serve both Olodumare and the God of Christianity, he is embarking on a

similar misadventure. More frankly, he is trying to eat his cake and have it too. The obvious lesson is that African thinkers will have to critically review both the conceptions of god as *ex nihilo* creator and god as a cosmic architect---and choose one or none, but not both. Otherwise, colonized thinking must be admitted to retain its hold.

Since, by the present account, God is the beginning and the end of Akan religion, it may be useful to probe still further the Akan doctrine of God. In doing so, it will be important to bear in mind the point made at the end of the last paragraph about the attributes of the Akan God. I had argued that there are Akan expressions of God that will warrant saying that he is conceived to be omnipotent, omnibenevolent, omniscient, all-wise, and eternal. However, these attributes, especially omnipotence and eternity, must be understood only in a sense applicable to the type of being that a cosmic architect is. For example, the eternity of this being means simply that he has always existed and will always exist. The pressure that some Christian thinkers have felt to say that God is eternal in the sense of being timeless, that is, of not existing in time, is absent from the Akan mind. This pressure acts on some Christian minds because if God created everything out of nothing, then it might conceivably be wondered whether he did not create time also (however time may be conceived). And if he did, he can hardly be said himself to have been existing in time. It is well-known that Saint Augustine held that God created time along with everything else. (This great divine, by the way, was an African, but his mind was soaked in classical Roman culture. It is, indeed, speculated that his thought was not totally untouched by his African origins. But, if so, this particular doctrine was not one of the ways in which that fact may have manifested itself.)

Again, if we take the concept of omnipotence, we notice the same absence of the pressure to push it to transcendental proportions. The Akan God is omnipotent in the sense that he is thought capable of accomplishing any conceptually *well-defined* project. Thus, for example, he will not be supposed capable of creating a person who is at once six foot tall and not six foot tall, going by identical conventions of measurements. And this will not be taken to disclose a limitation on God's powers because the task description discloses no well-defined project. Perhaps, to many people this sounds unremarkable. But what about the following? It is apparent from one of the most famous Akan metaphysical drum texts that God is not supposed to be capable of reversing the laws of the cosmos. The question is whether the project is a coherent one. The answer from the point of view of the metaphysic in question is: "Of course, not!"

Here, then, is another illustration of formal identity amidst substantive disparities. Formally, both the Akan and the Christian may subscribe to the same definition of omnipotence as follows. "A being is omnipotent if and only if s/he or it can accomplish any well-defined project." Substantive differences, however, emerge when information is volunteered on both sides regarding the sorts of things that are or are not taken to be well-defined projects. It is interesting to note, in the particular case of omnipotence, that even this formal identity evaporates in the face of certain Christian interpretations of the concept. Omnipotence, for some Christian thinkers, means that God can do absolutely anything, including (as in the example mentioned above) creating a person who is both six foot tall and not six foot tall at the same time. On this showing, omnipotence implies the power to do even self-contradictory things. So powerful a Western Christian mind as Descartes was apparently attracted to this idea.

To be sure, the Akans are innocent of such a solecism. But they are not free from the intellectual difficulties that have plagued the Christian doctrine of omniscience, omnibenevolence, omnipotence and unlimited wisdom. If God has all these qualities, couldn't he have prevented the abundance of evil in the world? And ought he not to have done so? This is the problem of evil. In discussing it one thing that will become clear is that the communal philosophy of a traditional society need not always display unanimity, contrary to the impression fostered by certain colonial-type studies of African life and thought.

It is sometimes suggested that the problem does not really arise in Akan thought. Helaine Minkus, an American researcher who went and lived among the Akwapim Akans, learnt their language and studied their philosophy, advances a view of this sort in her "Causal Theory in Akwapim Akan Philosophy":

God's attribute of transcendence and the concomitant belief that he has delegated power to the other agents that more directly interact with human beings pragmatically diminish His omnipotence. The other agents are treated in practice as if endowed with an independent ability to act... The postulation of a great number of beings empowered to affect events, joined with the acceptance of evil as necessarily co-existing with good from creation obviates the problem of evil so burdensome to those monotheistic theologians who define the Supreme Being as both omnipotent and totally benevolent and attempt a reconciliation of these qualities with the existence of evil.

Minkus talks here of the pragmatic diminution of God's omnipotence. But this represents a dilemma rather than a dissolution. If the diminution of omnipotence is only "pragmatic", God, as the ultimate source of the powers delegated to the "other agents", remains ultimately in charge, and the original problem, equally ultimately, remains. If, on the other hand, the diminution is real, this contradicts the well attested postulate of omnipotence in Akan cosmology. Is the contradiction a feature of Minkus' exposition or of the Akan system expounded? I shall return to this question below.

Interestingly, in an earlier exposition of Akan thought Busia had shifted the responsibility for evil from God to the "other agents" not pragmatically but positively. He remarks,

the problem of evil so often discussed in Western philosophy and Christian theology does not arise in the African concept of deity. It is when a God who is not only all-powerful and omniscient but also perfect and loving is postulated that the problem of the existence of evil becomes a philosophical hurdle. The Supreme being of the African is the Creator, the source of life, but between him and man lie many powers and principalities good and bad, gods, spirits, magical forces, witches to account for the strange happenings in the world.

Gyekye quotes this passage in his *Essay* and points out that if God is omnipotent, the question still arises why he does not control the "lesser spirits". This, he rightly concludes, shows that the problem of evil is not obviated. Gyekye's own account of the Akan solution of the problem of evil, which, for him, is a real problem in Akan philosophy, is that

The Akan thinkers, although recognizing the existence of moral evil in the world, generally do not believe that this fact is inconsistent with the assertion that God is omnipotent and wholly good. Evil, according to them, is the result of the exercise by humans of their freedom of the will with which they were endowed by the Creator, *Oboadee*.



On Gyekye's account, the Akan thinkers in question advocated a solution to the problem of evil which is also canvassed by some Western thinkers and is known as the "free-will defense." Gyekye is certainly right in seeing this solution in Akan thought. But Akan sources also reveal other solutions. Before noticing some of them, let us note two things with regard to the free-will defense, as it relates to moral evil. First, it does not provide a satisfactory answer to the question why God does not intervene to stop or forestall evil acts when they are planned. This is, of course, different from the idea that God could have guaranteed *ab initio* that human beings made only right choices. The usual reply to the suggested intervention is that it would destroy the free will of humans, but that reply does not appear to be plausible. Even human beings are sometimes able to intervene by force or by persuasion to stop the evil designs of others, without affecting their free will. In the abstract, countless smooth ways are conceivable by which God might forestall, counteract or neutralize the evil acts that humans might use their free will to contemplate. Possibly, there might be something wrong with this hypothesis; but clearly, it would not be because of any threat to free will. Second, this solution does not begin to deal with physical evil.

However, the problem of physical evil might, theoretically, be tackled by Akan advocates of the free-will defense with only a little elaboration on the remark of Busia quoted above. They might simply argue that the "principalities, good and bad, spirits, gods" etc., rather than God, are responsible for physical evil, in Busia's phrase, "for the strange happenings in the world." On this supposition, these happenings would be the result of the exercise, by those beings, of the free will "with which they were endowed by the Creator." In Western philosophy, by the way, the same idea occurred to Saint Augustine, who debited Satan and his cohorts with a lot of the physical evil in the world, a manoeuvre which has recently been exploited by some highly sophisticated apologists. In the face of these claims, one can but await probative evidence.

Meanwhile, we should note another Akan position on the question of evil which is evident in the quotation from Minkus (which she does not separate from her theory, on behalf of the Akans, of the pragmatic diminution of God's omnipotence). Minkus attributes to the Akans, "the acceptance of evil as necessarily co-existing with good from creation." What is proposed here is not just the semantic point that you cannot talk of good if the possibility of the contrast with evil did not exist, but rather the substantive cosmological claim that the components of existence which we describe as good could not possibly exist without those components we call evil. That the Akans do actually entertain this thought is attested to by a common saying among them. It is, indeed, one of the commonest sayings of the Akans, "if something does not go wrong," they say, "something does not go right" (*Se biribi ansee a, biribi nye yie*).

However, even if it is granted that good cannot exist without evil, that still does not amount to a theodicy, for it does not follow that the quantity of evil in the world does not go beyond the call of necessity. But there is another Akan saying that seems to suggest exactly this. The Akans delight in crediting their maxims to animals, and in this instance the epigrammatic surrogate is the hawk. It is said: 'The hawk says that all that God created is good' (*Osansa se nea Onyame yee biara ye*). The sense here is not that all is good to a degree that could conceivably be exceeded but rather that all is maximally good. Again, the hawk is not trying to fly in the face of the palpable facts of evil in the world; what it is saying is that the evil, though it is evil, is unavoidably involved in the good and is ultimately for the best—a sentiment that would have



warmed the heart of Leibniz, author, in Western philosophy, of the maxim that this is the best of all possible worlds.

But how do we know that? Possibly, because of the difficulty of this question the Akans, or at any rate, some of them, do not seem to have sustained this cosmic optimism indefinitely, and there is evidence of another approach to the problem of evil which seeks to dissolve it by foregoing the claim of the total omnipotence of God. This brings us back to the pragmatic diminution of omnipotence spoken of by Minkus. But this time the diminution is real, not pragmatic. So too is the possibility of inconsistency in the traditional thought of the Akans on this subject. Though in the context of cosmological reflection, they maintain a doctrine of unqualified omnipotence, in connection with issues having a direct bearing on the fate of humankind on this earth, such as the problem of evil, they seem to operate with a notion of the power of God implying rather less than absolute omnipotence. That power is still unique in its extent, but it is conceptually not altogether unlike that of a human potentate. Indeed, correspondingly, God himself comes to be thought of on the model of a father who has laid well-intentioned plans for his children which are, however, sometimes impeded not only by their refractory wills but also by the grossness of the raw materials he has to work with. In conformity with this way of seeing God, a popular Akan lyric cries: "God descend, descend and come and take care of your children" (*Onyame sane, sane behwe wo mma*). The apparent inconsistency in this dual conception of God and his powers in the Akan communal philosophy may possibly be due to its diversity of authorship; but, on the other hand, it may be well be a real inconsistency harbored in identical Akan minds. Actually, a similar inconsistency is evident in some Christian thinking on the same problem.

Be that as it may, the position in question is approvingly expounded by J. B. Danquah as the Akan solution to the problem of evil. I beg permission to quote from Danquah *in extenso*.

What, then, is the Akan solution to the fact of physical pain in man's animate experience? On the Akan view, we could only regard this as a difficulty if we lost sight of the fundamental basis of their thought, namely, that Deity does not stand over against his own creation, but is involved in it. He is, if we may be frank, 'of it.' If we postulate, as the Christians do, that the principle that makes for good 'in this world', *Nyame* or God, stands over against the community ... and if we postulate again that the aforementioned principle is omnipotent, and is also responsible as creator of this world, the existence of physical evil or pain ... becomes an insoluble mystery... It is quite otherwise if we deny that the principle is omnipotent but is itself a 'a spirit striving in the world of experience with the inherent conditions of its own growth and mastering them' at the cost of the physical pain and evil as well as the moral pain or disharmony that stain the pages of human effort... That is to say, in Akan language, where the Nana, the principle that makes for good, is himself or itself a participant in the life of the whole, ... physical pain and evil are revealed as natural forces which the Nana, in common with others of the group, have to master, dominate, sublimate or eliminate.

This must remind one of John Stuart Mill, who was constrained by the problem of evil to resort to the concept of a limited God.

Danquah is not quite right in seeming to think that the view just noted is the one and only solution to the problem of evil in Akan thought. Whether by way of inconsistency or doctrinal fecundity among Akan thinkers, there is, as shown above, a diversity of thought on the

problem. This discussion, then, demonstrates a vitality of philosophical thought in an African traditional society that the generality of colonial studies of African thought, in tending to give the impression of monolithic unanimity, has tended to obscure. It also shows another thing. It shows, in view of the repeated examples of philosophical convergences, that although it is the hallmark of decolonized thinking to be critically cognizant of the differences between African thought and its Western counterpart in its various forms, this is without prejudice to the possibilities of parallels in intellectual concerns and even doctrinal persuasion. This, it need hardly be added, can be a basis for fruitful exchange/interchange between African and Western (and, presumably, also Oriental) philosophy.

The reference to philosophical diversity early in the last paragraph is worth exploring at least briefly. The multiplicity of philosophic options is in evidence not only within the Akan tradition, but also across the African continent. Thus, it is not to be taken for granted that the Akan doctrine of a basically demiurgic God is universal in Africa. Based on the evidence of studies such as Harry Sawyerr's *God: Ancestor or Creator?* and Kofi Asare Opoku's *West African Traditional Religion*, it might be conjectured that it is widespread in West Africa. On the other hand, if Mbiti is right, this does not apply to certain other parts of Africa. The latter observes that the "concept of creation *ex nihilo* is ... reported among the Nuer, Banyarwanda and Shona, and undoubtedly a careful search for it elsewhere is likely to show that there are other peoples who incorporate it into their cosmologies." As regards the Banyarwanda, Maquet has written as follows:

The world in which men are placed and which they know through their senses was created *ex nihilo* by *Imana*. The Ruanda word *kurema*, means to produce, to make. It is here rendered "to create" because our informants say that there was nothing before *imana* made the world. This belief concerning the origin of the material world is universal and clear. To any question on this point, the answer is ready.

This account, if it is right, together with our previous findings, shows that not all traditional Africans think alike about God. It would seem that the Banyarwanda think more like orthodox Christians than like the traditional Akans. Actually, though, Maquet's account is not unproblematic. He says, for example, that *Imana*, the God of the Banyarwanda, "is non-material. His action influences the whole world; but Ruanda is his home where he comes to spend the night."

How does a non-material being spend the night, and in physical environs, such as Ruanda? Presumably, the idea is that a non-material being can sometimes materialize itself, i.e., manifest itself in a material guise. But this involves a category mistake not unlike that of supposing that the square root of minus one might be able to dance calypso from time to time. Moreover it is as full-blooded a logical inconsistency as ever there was. Is the present incarnation of that inconsistency Maquet's or the Banyarwanda's? While the question remains open, confidence in Maquet's report of the belief in *ex nihilo* creation among the Banyarwanda cannot be limitless, though it cannot be discounted out of hand.

According to Okot p'Bitek, the religious thought of both the Akans and the Banyarwanda is in vast contrast to that of the Luo of Uganda. For him the Central Luo do not entertain any belief in a Supreme, or, as he phrases it, High God. They do not even have truck with the concept of such a being, nor does the notion of creating or even molding the world make sense

within their conceptual framework. In two books, namely, *African Religions in Western Scholarship* and *Religion of the Central Luo*, he argues with intriguing illustrations that "the idea of a high God among the Central Luo was a creation of the missionaries."

If truth be told, Okot p' Bitek was the true pioneer of conceptual decolonization in African philosophy. His *African Religions in Western Scholarship* might well have been sub-titled "The Decolonization of African Religions." He is an interesting exception to the practice among African writers of endeavoring to prove to the world that Africans had, by their own efforts, reached a concept of God essentially identical with the God of Christianity before the arrival of the missionaries. The general assumption among these writers, as I pointed out earlier, has been that it is a glorious achievement for a culture to be able to arrive, without outside help, at the belief in a God who created the world out of nothing. p' Bitek had no such assumption. He was a skeptic, and found nothing necessarily creditable in such a belief. He thus had no special joy at the prospect of it being demonstrated that the Central Luo were original true believers. It is, of course, open to his critics to argue that, in writing as he did, he was foisting his own unbelief upon his people. There is, certainly, no substitute for an objective and conceptually critical examination of his account of Luo religion. That would, in itself, be an admirable exercise in conceptual decolonization. For my part, given the ease and frequency with which Western categories of thought have been superimposed on African thought, I am inclined to suspect him innocent until proven guilty.

According to p'Bitek, then, the Central Luo believe in a whole host of forces or powers called, in their language, *jogi* (plural of *jok*), each independent of the rest. These *jogi* are regarded as responsible for particular types or patterns of happenings. Some of them are chieftdom *jogi* who are supposed to see to the welfare of particular groups of people. Others are hostile. For example, *jok kulu* causes miscarriage, *jok rubanga* causes tuberculosis of the spine, etc. Even the supposed power of a witch to cause harm is called a *jok*. Some *joks* may be used against other *joks*, but no one *jok* dominates all. This is far cry, indeed, from the Christian religious ontology which postulates an omnipotent creator *ex nihilo* or from even the Akan system with its divine architect who is "alone great."

Substantiating his assertion that the idea of a high God among the Luo was the invention of the Christian missionaries, p' Bitek recounts the following incident in *African Religions and Western Scholarship*. I have quoted it elsewhere in a similar connection but I cannot forebear to quote it again in the present context, as it furnishes a perfect paradigm of conceptual imposition in perfect drama:

In 1911, Italian Catholic priests put before a group of Acholi elders the question "Who created you?"; and because the Luo language does not have an independent concept of **create** or **creation**, the question was rendered to mean "Who moulded you?" But this was still meaningless, because human beings are born of their mothers. The elders told the visitors that they did not know. But we are told that this reply was unsatisfactory, and the missionaries insisted that a satisfactory answer must be given. One of the elders remembered that, although a person may be born normally, when he is afflicted with tuberculosis of the spine, then he loses his normal figure, he gets "moulded". So he said "Rubanga is the one who moulds people." This is the name of the hostile spirit which the Acholi believe causes the hunch or hump back. And

instead of exorcising the hostile spirits and sending them among pigs, the representatives of Jesus Christ began to preach that Rubanga was the Holy Father who created the Acholi.

Disentangling African frameworks of thought from colonial impositions, such as this, is an urgent task facing African thinkers, especially, philosophers, at this historical juncture. Clarifying African religious concepts should be high on the agenda of this kind of decolonization.

## Notes

1. There are drum texts which suggest that the Akan thinkers were particularly conscious of this issue. See, for example, Kwasi Wiredu, "African Philosophical Tradition: A Case Study of the Akan", *The Philosophical Forum*, Vol. XXIV, No. 1-3, Fall-Spring, 1992-3, pp. 41 ff.
2. Kwame Gyekye insists, correctly, on what he calls "the locative implication of the existential expression *wo ho*" in his *An Essay on African Philosophical Thought* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987, p. 179).
3. Rene Descartes, *Meditations of First Philosophy*, Translated by Laurence Lafleur, New York: Macmillan, 1951, p. 39 (Third Meditation).
4. Kwasi Wiredu, *op. cit.*, p. 44.
5. London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd, 1944, Second Edition with new introduction by Kwesi A. Dickson, 1968.
6. When, therefore, Horton says that it is in the sphere of personal relations rather than inanimate phenomena that Africans primarily apprehend order he is, as far as the Akans are concerned, putting the cart before the horse quite exactly. See Robin Horton, "African Traditional Thought and Modern Science", in Bryan R. Wilson, ed., *Rationality*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1974 (Shorter version of an article originally published in *Africa*, Vol. XXXVII, Nos. 1 and 2, Jan. and April, 1967. Note, eg. p. 147 of the reprint.
7. See, for example, B. E. Oguah, "African and Western Philosophy: A Comparative Study" in Richard A. Wright, ed., *New York, University Press of America*, Third Edition, 1984, p. 217 and Helaine K. Minkus, "Causal Theory in Akwapim Akan Philosophy", *ibid*, p. 115.
8. Gyekye, *An Essay on African Philosophical Thought*, p.77.
9. Ironically, it is sometimes supposed that the category of mechanical causation escapes the African mind altogether, a fallacy which J. O. Sodipo sought to lay to rest, as far as at least as the Yoruba are concerned, in his paper "Notes on the Concept of Cause and Chance on Yoruba Traditional Thought", *Second Order: An African Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. II, No. 2, July 1973.
10. Okot p' Bitek even went as far as to say '... for the Central Luo the entities which they believed they encountered at the lineage shrine were not spirits but the ancestors as they were known before death; their voices could be 'recognized as they spoke through the diviner; they 'felt' hungry and cold, and 'understood' and 'enjoyed' jokes and being teased, etc. They were thought of as whole beings, not dismembered parts of man, i.e., spirits divorced from bodies.' (Religion of the Central Luo, Nairobi, Kenya East Africa

Literature Bureau, 1971, p 104.) I have quoted this passage in the same spirit in Kwasi Wiredu, "Death and the Afterlife in African Culture" in Kwasi Wiredu and Kwame Gyekye, *Person and Community: Ghanaian Philosophical Studies, I*, Washington D. C.: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 1992.

11. See, however, Kwasi Wiredu, "Universalism and Particularism in Religion from an African Perspective", *Journal of Humanism and Ethical Religion*, Volume 3, No. 1, Fall 1990. pp. 98 ff.
12. On this issue remarks by three famous Akan thinkers that I have quoted elsewhere (Kwasi Wiredu, "Morality and Religion in Akan Thought", in H. Odera Oruka and D. A. Masolo, eds., *Philosophy and Cultures*, Nairobi, Kenya: Bookwise Ltd., 1983, pp 11-12 or p. 220 of the reprint in Norm R. Allen, *African-American Humanism: An Anthology*, New York: Prometheus Books, 1991) will bear re-quotation here. K. A Busia says, 'The gods are treated with respect if they deliver the goods , and with contempt if they fail... Attitudes to [the gods] depend upon their success, and vary from healthy respect to sneering contempt'. ("The Ashanti" in Daryll Forde, ed., *African Worlds: Studies in the Cosmological Ideas and Social Values of African Peoples*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1954, p. 205.) J. B. Danquah, for his part, says that in Akan society 'the general tendency is to sneer at and ridicule the fetish and its priest'. ("Obligation in Akan Society", *West African Affairs*, No. 8, 1952, published by the Bureau of Current Affairs for the Department of Extra-Mural Studies, University College of the Gold Coast [now Ghana], p. 3) What W. E. Abraham says is also relevant, albeit somewhat indirectly: 'The proliferation of gods that one finds among the Akans is, in fact, among the Akans themselves superstitious. Minor gods are artificial means to the bounty of Onyame [God]' (*The Mind of Africa*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962, p. 56).
13. Kwasi Wiredu, (a) "Morality and Religion in Akan Thought." (See note 11) (b) "The Moral Foundations of An African Culture" in Kwasi Wiredu and Kwame Gyekye, eds., *Person and Community: Ghanaian Philosophical Studies*, Washington D. C.: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 1992 (c) "Custom and Morality: A Comparative Analysis of some African and Western Conceptions of Morals" in Albert G. Mosley, *African Philosophy: Selected Readings*, Englewood Cliff: Prentice Hall, 1995.
14. B. E. Oguia, cites the designation Opamfo wawanyi (from the Fanti sub-group of the Akans) which he translates as 'The Wonderful Planner'. In fact, 'The Wonderful Designer' would do just as well. See his paper "African and Western Philosophy: A Comparative Study" in Richard A. Wright, ed., *African philosophy: An Introduction*, New York: University Press of America, Third edition 1984, p. 217.
15. Unknown to the Ghanaian authors of this argument is the phenomenon, widespread in the United States of America, of single-parent households without a resident or, sometimes, even an admitted father.
16. B. e. Oguia, op.cit., p, 216.
17. London: SCM press 1973, p. 146.
18. London: Longman, 1962.
19. On this see Kwasi Wiredu, "African Philosophical Tradition", *The Philosophical Forum*, Volume XXIV, No. 1-3, Fall-Spring, 1992-3, pp. 41 ff.



20. Margaret Daule Wilson in her *Descartes* (New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978) assembles relevant passages from various sources in Descartes. See especially pp. 121-131. The author makes a valiant effort to make sense of this surprising turn in Descartes' thought.
21. In Richard Wright, ed., *African Philosophy: An Introduction*, New York: University Press of America, 1984, p. 116.
22. K. A. Busia, "The African World View", *Presence Africaine*, 4 (1965).
23. Kwame Gyekye, *An Essay on African Philosophical Thought*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987, p. 23.124. see also pp. 125-128.
24. See, for example, Stephen T. Davis, *Logic and the Nature of God*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1983, pp. 105 ff.
25. J. B. Danquah, *The Akan Doctrine of God*, London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., Second Edition with new introduction by Kwesi A. Dickson, 1968, pp. 88-89.
26. London: Longman, 1970.
27. London: FEP International Private Limited, 1978.
28. John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, London: Heinemann, Second Edition, 1990, p. 39.
29. J. J. Maquet, "The Kingdom of Ruanda" in Daryll Forde, *African Worlds*, Oxford: oxford University Press, 1954, p. 166.
30. Both were published by the East African Literature Bureau, Nairobi, Kenya. The second is dated 1971. The first carries no publisher's date, but the preface is dated November 1970.
31. *Religion of the Central Luo*, p. 50.
32. Kwasi Wiredu, "Formulating Modern Thought in African Languages: Some Theoretical Considerations" in V. Y. Mudimbe, ed., *The Surreptitious Speech*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992, pp. 301-2.



# The Africanized Queen: Metonymic Site of Transformation

NKIRU NZEGWU

Race as a category of classification has an infamous history of injustice and domination. In late nineteenth century Africa, it was deployed in a violent agenda of empire-building, in which European superiority became the organizing principle of the new political order. Following colonization, European cultural values, social norms, and conception of reality provided the privileged frame of representation, and the standpoint for understanding Africans whom Europeans considered to be subhuman. In the views of then Governor of Lagos, Sir Hugh Clifford, Africans lacked the organizing and creative abilities that were "the particular trait and characteristic of the white man" <sup>1</sup>. Vestiges of this racist legacy persist today in the West in the critical reception of the works of African artists. It underwrites the reluctance to accord intellectual sophistication to African artists, and the hesitance to grant the legitimacy of Africa's cultural paradigms in shaping the evaluative lens by which the creative expressions of Africans are framed. Nowhere is this ideological posture most evident as in the evaluation of the works of Nigerian's preeminent artist, Benedict Chukwukadiba Enwonwu.

In the colonial quest to position Europe at the center of analysis, minimal attention is paid to the creative politics of modern African artists. Instances of the artists representation of a white man or white woman are often unimaginatively explained away as instances of Africans' fascination with, or reverence for, the white man. The pervasive depictions of Tarzan on the side of mammy wagons, lorries, and luxurious buses are rarely seen for what it is, which is, the lunacy of a half-naked white man running around aimlessly in a jungle with animals for relatives and companionship. In an attempt to occupy the cultural high ground, hardly do the EuroAmerican interpreters of African visual forms of representation consider the rationale of art from the African perspective. For this reason, most miss the possibility that African artists could harbor revolutionary aspirations, or that they may be engaged in subversive activities even as they feign civility. Race representation, the depiction of white people in paintings and sculpture, in fact, has provided occasions in which imperial power relations are dramatically reversed so that the white oppressor becomes the loser in counter-hegemonic narratives.

In this essay I shall investigate the revolutionary anti-colonial politics underlying the production of the bronze portraits of Queen Elizabeth II by Enwonwu. I shall focus on the performative role these sculptures, formerly at the House of Representatives in Lagos, Nigeria, were designed to play. Of special interest is the symbiotic relationship of art and ritual, and the subversive way art production metonymically created a context for ritual invocation. The use of the naturalistic style achieved revolutionary potentials in shielding anti-colonial goals. This atavistic struggle between the colonizer and the colonized becomes obvious once we abandon both the colonizer's imperial gaze and its simplistic racialized interpretations. Shifting, as Enwonwu had insistently urged, from the Western conception of art and aesthetics to the

<http://www.africa.ufl.edu/asq/v1/4/4.pdf>

appropriate Onitsha-Igbo conceptual framework reveals a different explanatory terrain. Indeed, culturally centering this artist and his work, as is routinely done for artists in Europe and the United States, constitutes the only meaningful way to apprehend the counter-narratives of resistance and anti-domination uprisings that informed the production of the Queen's bronze portraits.

## I.

In a truly racially neutral context in which outstanding achievement is the yardstick for documentation, there is no question that Enwonwu would need no introduction. With works at the United Nations, in the private collection of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, the National Gallery of Art, Nigeria, the National Gallery of Zimbabwe, Federal German Government, United States State Department Building, Washington D.C., and the Commonwealth Institute in London, he has earned a respected place in the annals of art. That the recognition eludes him is not unconnected to racist expectations that African art must be visibly different to be acknowledged. Enwonwu attained international repute while Nigeria was still a colony of the British Empire. Born in Onitsha in 1921, he was introduced to carving by his sculptor-father. His appreciation for the Igbo conception of art comes from his belief that art is suffused with spirit force and energy, and that Western art is too much wrapped up with the physical. In his view, "Art [by which he means *nka*] does not imply good colors, lines and shapes, nor do these make up art <sup>2</sup>. Art ... is not a quality of things, but an activity" <sup>3</sup> that "objectifi[es] ... the artist's beliefs, his feelings, meanings or significance, and volition" <sup>4</sup>. The works produced under this condition of inspiration are both works of art and spirit-receptacles.

Two years after graduating from High School, Enwonwu received a scholarship to study art at The Slade School of Art. He graduated with First Class Honors in 1947, and then enrolled in a postgraduate program in Social Anthropology at the University College, London. He received his Master's of Art degree in 1948. He entered the program principally because he was disturbed by the racist rhetoric in England in the 1940's, and anthropology seemed to offer a space for the scientific study of the races, their physical and mental characteristics, customs, and social relationships. After enrolling in the program, he discovered the invidious dimension of the discipline and that the emphasis was on "primitive peoples and their cultures." The real objective of anthropology was the facilitation of the colonial agenda, "to create an intellectual barrier which makes it extremely difficult for most Africans to be considered qualified to play an important part in the development and preservation of their art" <sup>5</sup>. Though he was elected Fellow of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland (FRAI) after his study, he remained distrustful of the discipline and disenchanted with its practices.

Shortly after graduation from University College, Enwonwu was appointed Art Supervisor by the Colonial Government in Nigeria. The appointment required him to function as the nation's official artist and artist-ambassador. As part of his duties, he executed major art commissions for the government, represented the country in diverse international art events, and exhibited in London, Paris, New York, Boston, and Washington. The mid-1950's was a significant time in Enwonwu's life. In 1955, he was awarded an MBE (Member of the British Empire) for his contribution in the arts, and a year later, he received permission to produce an

official portrait of the Queen. The latter put him in the class of a small select group of artists that have been so honored. The recognition was historic for a variety of reasons: he was a youthful thirty-four years, he was the first black artist to be accorded permission to produce an official portrait of a European monarch, and the Queen actually sat for her bust and full-length bronze portraits <sup>6</sup>. The completed works were exhibited at the Gallery of the Royal Society of British Artists and Tate Gallery in London in 1957 before onward transportation to Nigeria.

From 1949 to 1994, Enwonwu lived a grueling life as an artist, artist-ambassador, administrator, and educator. He blazed an impressive path for African artists establishing an enviable record of achievements. By his death in February 1994, he had steadfastly pushed the plasticity of wood through exploring its formal limits in sculptural forms. In the area of painting, he had explored, re-translated, innovated, and extended our understanding of dance movement, by focusing on the artistic essence of such dances and *mmuo* (masks) forms. Unlike the European artists of the period who willingly ignored political issues in their art, Enwonwu devoted enormous attention to the politics and the multiple sites of operation of colonialism. He was aware of the power of visual representation in illuminating, distorting, or erasing people's realities and emancipatory struggles. For this reason, he directed his art to combating, in a non-propagandist way, the psychological effects of colonialism and racism.

## II.

Some who are unaware of Enwonwu's anti-colonial politics have quickly concluded from his professional relationship with the Colonial government that he was a collaborator. Unable to understand how he could be morally opposed to a system that served him so well, others who are aware of his anticolonial politics, are convinced that his politics were a shrewd attempt to deflect attention from his collaboration with the British and to give historical relevance to his actions. To interpret the historical Enwonwu in this light is to miss, however, the complex nature of colonial rule and subjugation, and to ignore the peculiar nature of life under colonial rule. Enwonwu's professional success as an artist derived entirely from the excellent quality of his work. The fact that he worked within the colonial administration cannot be construed as evidence that colonization was acceptable, or that he was a collaborator. Enwonwu never concealed his distaste for colonization and racial domination. As an anti-colonial activist in the heyday of British rule, he espoused the political ideology of Pan-Africanism while still a student at the Slade. By his own admission, he joined the Oxford Union "a purely political organization in Britain that had nothing to do with art" <sup>7</sup>. This political affiliation offered him an alternative intellectual space for critiquing the European construction of creativity, art, aesthetics, political structure, and reality. From the benign liberal politics of the Oxford Union, he progressed to the more radical counter-domination politics of the London-based West African Student Union (WASU). In the mid-1940's in Britain, the work of George Padmore and Jomo Kenyatta in the Pan-African Federation, and of Kwame Nkrumah in the West African National Secretariat (WANS) helped to transform liberation theorization into revolutionary protest movements.

Political activism revealed to Enwonwu the complex shifting nature of the colonial process and the multiple sites of inequities inherent in the structure. These sites were exposed as prominent political figures in different parts of the British Empire who called for the

dismantling of the British Empire<sup>8</sup>. In the arts, Negritude emerged as the cultural arm of Pan-Africanism. Articulated by Léopold Sédar Senghor of Senegal and Aimé Césaire of Martinique, Pan-Africanism stressed the need to capture the self-expressive manner of African cultural life, and under-scored the importance of self-pride as a basis for personal liberation. Using the concept of African Personality as a model of cultural action, Enwonwu merged his political beliefs with his visual representation<sup>9</sup>, without sacrificing artistic excellence for political expediency. Membership in the West African Writers' and Artists' Club in London provided him with access to artists, Vincent Kofi and Kofi Antubam of Ghana and the Senegalese artists Papa Ibra Tall and Iba N'Diaye, with whom to solve the technical questions that arose in the course of their political work. Reflecting on those times, Enwonwu stated, "[W]e were all so conscious of the struggle against colonialism, and of nothing else. We just wanted the colonial empire to end in Africa. . . . If we painted any picture it was about this freedom. If we sang a song, if like Senghor we wrote or recited poems, we philosophized. You find that in those days all the leaders of Africa were inspired"<sup>10</sup>.

In the course of his exemplary career, Enwonwu had his problems with Euromodernism. Part of his misgiving centered on the appropriation of African art and the subsequent devaluation of the socially affirmative aspects of African culture and life. The other part is based on ideological differences. The notion of creativity that Enwonwu valued stressed a connection between a certain class of sculptural objects and their performative role. In his view, *nka* (art, creativity and creative expression) is an "invocation of ancestral spirits through giving concrete form or body to them before they can enter into the human world"<sup>11</sup>. Treating art as a ritual of embodiment positions the artist to appreciate the sacral aspect of creation, and to confront the responsibility of infusing life into mundane physical objects. In his youth, he had perceptively noted the relationship between the spirit-related function of sculpted objects and their placement in family shrines at Onitsha and, in site specific installations at sacred spaces in Uyo and Calabar. In Benin, he witnessed the bronze sculptural forms on the mud platforms in family shrines. This relationship not only established that sculptures performed spirit-related tasks, they offered a compellingly different way of thinking of sculpture. Rather than thinking of it in the Euromodernist sense as physical objects with a completely visual role, one could think of sculptural forms as spirit receptacles to be energized and placed at sites where they are expected to act on their environment.

The difference between Enwonwu's view of art and the modern view is that in the former in which the concept of *nka* is dominant, artists consciously seek access to inner metaphysical knowledge, while artists in the modern view leave such matters to organized religion. On the older view, inspired imagination is required to apprehend creative forces, and spirit apprehension and embodiment constitute the basis for artistic creation. By attending to this close relationship between visual representation and cultural beliefs, Enwonwu successfully rescued for posterity the transformative element of creation that is central to Igbo conception of creativity. By so doing he challenged the underlying physicalist philosophy of the popular view of "art for art's sake," indicting modernist artists for their abdication of their moral responsibility and leadership. In some of his own works he demonstrated the process for recovering the principles of invocation and enactment, and effectively displaced the notion of physicality and inertia at the heart of the Euromodernist conception of sculpture. Conceptually stepping into

the metaphysical dimension of *nka*, he placed his works on a different ontological basis even as he appeared to be "wedded" to the Academy style, and appeared to practice art in the Western vein. As he succinctly put it, "[W]hen I use the pure art form of my father's images and I use my experience, academic knowledge, and my political motivations, I ... arrive at a point where realism and symbolism can meet. That to me is art. What will result and survive is the continuation of the aspirations of African people, their dignified way of life, their beliefs, their dreams, and their yearnings for intrinsic lasting values that are encapsulated in the new form"<sup>12</sup>.

Proud, urbane, Christianized, yet still steeped in the spiritual values of his culture, Enwonwu carried, molded, or separated the different facets of his identity as conditions demand. Although he espoused Negritude with his Francophone counterparts, unlike them he did not face the debilitating psychological problem of self-doubts that is the staple of the French assimilation policy. Emerging from the indirect rule reality of British colonialism, Enwonwu retained a stronger sense of his cultural identity and place in the colonial world of the first half of the twentieth century. As a result, he publicly dismissed as nonsense and a reflection of ignorance, the racist narratives which he encountered in the 1940's in England. Rather, viewing himself as the heir of an honorable heritage, he exhorted "the gods of (his) ancestors to tell (him) what art is and for what purpose it exists"<sup>13</sup> and he used the techniques he learned from the Slade to reproduce his ideas.

Because his creative philosophy underscored the metonymic character of objects, his works simultaneously occupy several states of existence. They are many things at the same time. In their specialized role as concretized incantations, however, sculpted objects enact the idea of embodiment by becoming instantiations of whatever ideal, objective, or prayer that was the motivating rationale for creation. Enwonwu's creative stance marks an important distinction between the idea of art as an immanent quality in things, and art as a relational quality. The stress on the idea of relationality is that we make our art and art is what we make of it, including investing it with goals and meaning, and the power to change our circumstances.

### III.

From 1947 to 1957, Enwonwu pursued his anti-colonial objectives of cultural freedom through visual representation. At a time when the positivist ideology of "art for art's sake" counseled the separation of art and politics, he unapologetically deployed his art to the political struggle for independence. His most profound, anticolonial statements were memorably stated in 1957, in his bronze bust and full-figure bronze portrait of HRH Queen Elizabeth II<sup>14</sup>. Enwonwu set the production in motion by presenting then Colonial Secretary, Mr. Alan Lennox-Boyd, with a proposal to execute a bust and a full-length portrait in bronze of the Queen<sup>15</sup>. The proposal was tabled to her Majesty in 1956, and was accepted the same year by the Queen. The timing was auspicious since Enwonwu had just been awarded an MBE for his contributions to the arts less than a year before, and the Queen had just completed a royal tour of Nigeria in 1956 in which she had been warmly received.

Enwonwu's sculptural incantation began with sittings at Buckingham Palace, which later moved to his Maida Vale studio when the transportation of the bust from the studio to the



palace became too cumbersome <sup>16</sup>. Completed in ten months in 1957, the bust and full-length figure of the seated Queen were cast in bronze <sup>17</sup>, then exhibited at the gallery of the Royal Society of British Artists, in London, and also at the Tate Gallery. Although they were acclaimed internationally as Enwonwu's greatest works, the sculptures sparked intense controversy <sup>18</sup>. Their Negritude statements were prophetic, not in charting a new artistic direction, but in the daring political statement they made.

In modeling the features of the young Queen, Enwonwu had taken liberties with the royal lips. Widening them, he gave them a fuller, sensuous more becoming pout. In so doing, he boldly inscribed an African aesthetic ideal of womanhood on the Queen's visage, the fountainhead of British imperial rule <sup>19</sup>. While the political ramifications of this act were missed, the artistic significance was not lost on the British art establishment, which perceived the inscription as an audacious rejection of their twentieth century European aesthetic ideals, with its concept of thin-lipped womanly beauty. Stunned by the act, the art critics responded sharply in editorials. The Empire telegraph crackled from London, England to Christchurch, New Zealand with news about this Africanized bronze portrait of the Queen <sup>20</sup>. Screaming headlines described the "controversy" in sensational terms-"The Queen Through African Eyes." Speculations as to the possible rejection of the sculptures were cut short by the Queen's official endorsement of them. The bust was mounted on a black marble plinth and, with the full-figure portrait, was sent to the House of Representatives in Lagos in 1958. The seated full-figure portrait was installed in the courtyard, while the bust was placed inside the chambers of the House. It joined the Speaker's Chair <sup>21</sup>, a pair of doors and plaques carved by Enwonwu <sup>22</sup>, and a group of murals he had painted.

Although, many correctly saw this substitution of European for African values as a political commentary on European aesthetic imperialism, they missed the more important incantatory dimension of the work. Too many people focused on the physical over the metaphysical. What many then, and now, have failed to grasp in responding to these portraits of the Queen is the subversive metaphysical message which Enwonwu deliberately refused to disclose. He prevaricated. His aestheticized comment that he had simply widened the royal lips to make them fuller and more becoming satisfied many enquirers since it suggested that this was merely a physical protest against aesthetic imperialism. Yet, this calculated physically-grounded explanation masked the metaphysical dimension of the act by treating the entire action as a symbolic gesture. Stripped of its revolutionary edge, the action becomes an ineffectual gesture, a vain cry for attention. However, correctly understood, the transposition constitutes the first stage in the rite of transubstantiation that alters the imperial objective by transforming the face/spirit of the British Empire. According to the mystical principles of spirit embodiment, a person's spirit may be captured and contained so that his or her intentions could be changed through auto-suggestion. Thus, within the metaphysical scheme of action, one way to free oneself or group from bondage is to neutralize the power of the oppressor, by containing it. This is what Enwonwu did with the portraits.



## IV.

A culturally grounded interpretation is needed to illuminate the significance of Enwonwu's solicitation and his Africanization of the Queen's portraits. Such a grounded interpretation transgressively subverts the central logic and materialist ideology of any artistic explanation that fails to comprehend the world in a similar way. On the latter framework, art is in a metonymic (symbiotic) relationship with other activities, and so sculpted objects are simultaneously artistic works and ritual objects. Given this, the bronze portraits of the Queen are receptacles in which spirits may reside, and specified wishes and thoughts may be contained. For precisely this reason, verisimilitude in representation was shunned in diverse parts of Nigeria prior to the rise of both photography and Christian beliefs. Sculpting another's likeness was thought to expose one's spirit to psychic manipulation by leaving it vulnerable to containment. Thus, to an anti-colonial activist who was aware of the ritual practice of spirit-containment, he or she was also more aware that political liberation is secured through using all available resources, including mystical means, to obtain physical liberation.

That the portraits are containment receptacles as well as public statues is explained by the fact that Enwonwu proposed to the Colonial Secretary <sup>23</sup> to execute a portrait in bronze of the Queen. In making the offer, he was aware of the following: that such a prestigious commission would enhance his career, and this is what some people would focus on; that the Colonial Government would appreciate the symbolic importance and glamour of having a renowned artist from the colony produce the bust of the Imperial Crown for the colony's House of Representative; that an appropriate vessel for spirit-containment was important to securing an efficacious ritual; and that he could exploit assumptions to mask his underlying objectives. Since there was no way the Queen was going to come calling for a portrait, and there was the very real possibility that a British artist would be given such a commission, Enwonwu had to seize the initiative in obtaining the Queen's consent to this rite of liberation. Although, he stood to gain professionally if his Trojan-horse proposal was accepted, he was aware that he would be represented as servile and of shamelessly seeking validation from the colonial masters. Regardless of this possible damage to his reputation, he presented his proposal knowing the importance of seizing the power of representation from an imperial power that claims a people as colonial subjects. Of course, those who are firmly located in a Eurocentric framework would fail to see the resistance in the act because they tend to see Africans as lacking revolutionary spirit. Within the anti-colonial movement, however, and the metaphysical scheme of his Onitsha culture, a different interpretation emerges that represents the proposal as establishing a ritual pathway to self-determination.

For the dramatic reversal of imperial power entailed by this act, the site of Enwonwu's anticolonial political statement was carefully chosen. The royal visage and body embodied the British Empire. To the colonized world of Africa, Asia and the Caribbean it was a symbol of imperial rule and its subjugation. Seemingly functioning as an artist located within the Western framework, Enwonwu shifted to the Igbo conception of art to avail himself of its metaphysical precepts. He knew that for the colonial subjects of the Crown to be free, it was also crucial that the "royal head be bound." After all, this was the most pervasive seal of British power. As an Imperial seal, he was aware that the Queen's head circulated profusely, occurring in stamps and

even the lowest currency denomination of far flung regions of the Empire. In its ubiquity, the monarch's head psychically regulated trade, psychically commodified life by controlling labor and its terms of exchange, and psychically monitored communication. Thus to secure freedom, it was crucial that the pervasive psychic force of this imperial seal be reigned in and neutralized.

The metonymic conception of art of his Onitsha heritage allowed Enwonwu to cloak his objectives and to transcend the limiting positivistic conception of Euromodernism that constrains both the power of objects and the efficacy of our psychic lives. On the positivists view, war or politics rather than creative expression or art enables people to overcome oppressive conditions. But on the metaphysical scheme in which the concept of *nka* finds its home, and in which relationality rather than individuation is the organizing force, creativity constitutes a pathway to liberation. Since things are relationally linked, it is believed that a corrective measure initiated in one domain has relational impact on another. Metonymically treating the bust and full-figure portraits as art and as aestheticized *aja* (or sacrifice) means that the artistic production of these portraits can (meta)physically/psychically (*ichu aja*) be deployed to prod the Crown into granting independence to its subjects. That Enwonwu's aesthetic sacrifice was successful is evidenced by the Queen's endorsement of the bust in the face of Eurocentric indignation.

In officially accepting the Africanized bust, an act that preserves intact the principle of artistic license, the Queen as the official head of the Empire inevitably accepted the immanent imperatives of the *aja* (sacrifice). In accordance with the obligatory principles of the ritual, she (and Britain through her) was bound by *nso ani* (the Earth's sacred law)<sup>24</sup> that was activated by the sacrifice. The law committed her to grant expeditiously the wishes inscribed on her visage, and to permit the peaceful emergence of Africa out of her imperial head and power. Significantly, less than three years after the execution of these bronze portraits, Nigeria peacefully became independent. Indeed, the African face that Enwonwu envisioned in the Monarch's face emerged in full form in the 1960's as the indomitable, irresolute will to freedom transformed the landscape of Africa.

Race and visual representation interweave in intricate ways to establish the outlines of explanation. To understand the meaning of Africans' representation of their racial other, African cultural paradigms are needed to unravel the objectives of sculptures and paintings that were produced during the anti-colonial struggle. As Enwonwu revealed, critics and art historians need to "know the mind of the artist" and to base their interpretations of modern African art on "philosophical ideas," since the artist is responding to "social, economic, educational, and even religious changes ... taking place in ... countries"<sup>25</sup>. It would be a mistake to trivialize the legitimacy of the offered interpretation and to dismiss the efficacy of Enwonwu's action on the ground that the process of independence was already well on its way. While that may very well be true, historical evidence shows, however, that independence was not a done deal. Familiarity with the history of the period reveals that although Nigerians had been engaged in constitutional talks since 1945, difficult conditionalities were imposed by the Colonial Office in London to further its own imperial agenda. Independence was not in the cards for Africans. On September 9, 1941, the British Premier Winston Churchill had explained to the House of Commons that clause three of the Atlantic Charter, which conceded "the right of all peoples to choose the form of government under which they will live," applied only to the white peoples

of Europe under Nazi rule. In his view, the conditions of this clause was a separate issue "from the progressive evolution of self governing institutions in the regions and peoples who owe allegiance to the British Crown" <sup>26</sup>.

Given this official declaration of the British Government, obstacles were accordingly placed on the path of colonized peoples in various parts of the world. In Nigeria, for instance, Governor Richardson drew up a constitution that was touted as the constitution for the new independent nation of Nigeria, but which was implicitly structured to work against the unification of Nigeria into a centralized state with a common identity. Faced with mounting criticism, that constitution was replaced in 1952 by the hastily drawn- up, short-lived MacPherson constitution. In 1954, the Lyttleton constitution was drafted to address the inherent weaknesses of the MacPherson constitution. Although this constitution remained in place until independence in 1960, the manipulative ploys of the colonial government, especially Britain's balkanization of northern and southern Nigeria, left severe structural rifts and conflicts. These could have preempted independence in 1960, as it had done in 1956. The point is that at the crucial historical juncture when Enwonwu created the portraits, independence was not a certainty and an abrupt reversal of the path to self-determination was still possible. There is no question that to fully appreciate the colonial and contemporary politics of visual representation, the underlying artistic philosophy of Enwonwu's is needed to grasp the historic and unprecedented nature of the bronze portraits and the decline of the British royals.

## Notes

1. West Africa, 26 July 1924, quoted in Michael Crowder 1962, 264.
2. Ben Enwonwu, "The Evolution, History and Definition of Fine Art (2)," West African Pilot, Friday, May 6, 1949, 3.
3. Enwonwu, West African Pilot, Friday, May 6, 1949, 3.
4. Enwonwu, "The Evolution, History and Definition of Fine Art (3)," West African Pilot, Tuesday, May 11, 1949, 2.
5. Ben Enwonwu, "Problems of the African Artist Today," *Présence Africaine*, 8-10 (June - November 1956), 177.
6. *Drum* (East Africa), May 1958, 36.
7. Interview, May 22, 1989.
8. These figures were Mahatma Ghandi and Pandit Nehru of India, Gamel Nasser of Egypt, Kwame Nkrumah of then Gold Coast, now Ghana, Nnamdi Azikwe of Nigeria, Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya, Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia and Julius Nyerere of Tanzania.
9. Interview, May 22, 1989.
10. Interview, July 1989.
11. Enwonwu, 1968, 421.
12. Interview May 1989, 22.
13. Ben Enwonwu, "The Evolution, History and Definition of Fine Art (1)," West African Pilot, Thursday, May 5, 1949, 2.

14. By 1955, Enwonwu had been awarded an M.B.E. (Member of the British Empire) for his contributions to the arts. This recognition made him one of the youngest holders of that award in the Commonwealth.
15. *West African Review* (London) no. 28 (352), 1957, 2.
16. *Drum* (East Africa), May 1958, 36. In Enwonwu's personal papers is a 1955 photograph of the Queen inspecting her statue in plaster form. Also see *West African Review* (London) no. 28 (352), 1957, 6.
17. The bronzes were cast by Galicie from the plaster molds made by Mark Mancini. *West African Review* (London) no. 28 (352), 1957, 6. A Nigerian painter and sculptor, Abayomi Barber, who worked in Mancini's studio also confirmed this during this writer's interview with him in, March 1994.
18. *Drum* (East Africa), May 1958, 35-37.
19. Issues surrounding this bust were discussed with him on various occasions, but especially during his birthday celebrations in July 1991.
20. The lead line of November 11, 1957 of *Christchurch Press New Zealand* newspaper. The event was also featured in *Otago Daily Times*, New Zealand. The cutting had been preserved by Enwonwu who first showed it to the writer in July 1989, with discussions following in July 1991.
21. *Drum* (East Africa), May 1958, 36.
22. Francis Osague states that his uncle Felix Idubor worked with Enwonwu in competing these commissions. As an assistant to his uncle, he (Osague) worked on the plaque carvings some of which were done in Idubor's studio at Tinubu Square. Interview, March 1994 at foyer of National Gallery of Modern Art, Iganmu, Lagos.
23. See *West African Review* (London) no. 28 (352), 1957, 2.
24. The sacredness of the earth is inherent in Igbo conception of life. This is why the earth is frequently referenced as an altar. People are constantly reminded to speak circumspectly, since words uttered on the earth-altar are oaths.
25. Source and attribution unknown.
26. Cited in Esebede 1982, 146.

# Is US Cooperation with the UN Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda Unconstitutional?

PAUL MAGNARELLA

## FACTUAL BACKGROUND

On December 17, 1997 US Magistrate Marcel Notzon in Laredo, Texas stunned the US State Department and human rights advocates around the world by ruling that the congressional legislation enabling the US government to surrender or extradite indicted fugitives to the UN Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) was unconstitutional <sup>1</sup>. The State Department had asked a Federal District Court in Texas to permit the surrender of Rwandan Elizaphan Ntakirutimana to the ICTR in Arusha, Tanzania where he had been indicted on several counts of genocide, conspiracy to commit genocide and crimes against humanity.

Allegedly, Ntakirutimana, the elderly, former pastor of a Seventh-Day Adventist Church in Rwanda's Kibuye Prefecture had conspired with and assisted Hutu militias in the murder of hundreds of his own Tutsi parishioners, who had sought refuge in his church back on April 16, 1994 during the height of the genocidal rampage in Rwanda. Shortly thereafter, he allegedly led bands of armed Hutu into the countryside of the Bisesero region to hunt down and kill those Tutsi who had survived the earlier attack. Ntakirutimana subsequently left Rwanda, eventually coming to the US in December 1994 where he joined one of his sons, an anesthesiologist living in Laredo, Texas.

As a result of its investigations, the ICTR included both Ntakirutimana and another of his sons, Gerard, among the twenty-one persons it has thus far indicted. Gerard was arrested and is among the thirteen indictees in custody in Arusha, awaiting trial before the ICTR.

After the ICTR's indictment of Ntakirutimana and its request for his surrender were properly certified by the US Ambassador in the Netherlands (the location of the ICTR's chief prosecutor) and transmitted to the US Secretary of State, FBI agents arrested the former pastor in Texas on September 26, 1996. He had remained in jail from that date until his release on December 17, 1997.

## LEGAL BACKGROUND

The UN Security Council established both the ICTR and the UN Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) under the authority of Chapter VII of the UN Charter, which provides that the Security Council shall "decide what measures shall be taken . . . to maintain or restore international peace and security." Under Article 48(1) of the Charter, "the action required

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to carry out decisions of the Security Council for the maintenance of international peace and security shall be taken by all the Members of the United Nations." Arguably, the US, as a UN member state, has a treaty obligation to honor the requirements imposed on it by Security Council resolutions governing the activities of the two Tribunals.

The general obligation of states to cooperate with the Tribunals is contained in paragraph 4 of Security Council Resolution 827, and paragraph 2 of Resolution 955, the resolutions establishing the ICTY and ICTR, respectively, and setting forth their structure, jurisdiction and procedures. These provisions both read as follows:

[The Security Council] decides that all States shall cooperate fully with the International Tribunal and its organs in accordance with the present resolution and the Statute of the International Tribunal and that consequently all States shall take any measures necessary under their domestic law to implement the provisions of the present resolution and the Statute, including the obligation of States to comply with requests for assistance or orders issued by a trial chamber . . .

The specific obligation to surrender fugitives is contained in Article 29 of the ICTY Statute and Article 28 of the ICTR Statute, which read, in part, as follows:

1. States shall cooperate with the International Tribunal [for Rwanda] in the investigation and prosecution of persons accused of committing serious violations of international humanitarian law.
2. States shall comply without undue delay with any request for assistance or an order issued by a Trial Chamber, including, but not limited to:
  - (d) the arrest or detention of persons;
  - (e) the surrender or the transfer of the accused to the International Tribunal [for Rwanda].<sup>2</sup>

On February 10, 1996, the US Congress enacted legislation to implement two executive agreements with the ICTY and ICTR for the purpose of arresting and surrendering to these Tribunals indicted fugitives found in the US<sup>3</sup>.

Importantly, all previous extradition agreements had been in the form of treaties between the US and foreign states. According to the US Constitution, the president "shall have Power, by and with the Advice and Consent of the Senate, to make Treaties, provided two thirds of the Senators present concur; . . ." <sup>4</sup>. Over the decades, however, US presidents have entered into many more international executive agreements, which do not require the advice and consent of the Senate, than treaties. For example, during the 1980-1992 period US presidents entered into 4,510 executive agreements, but only 218 treaties<sup>5</sup>. The US constitution makes no reference to either international extradition or executive agreements, and legal scholars have hotly debated the propriety of the latter<sup>6</sup>.

Congress can express its support for, or opposition to, any particular executive agreement by enacting or withholding the necessary implementing legislation. A number of prominent legal scholars have concluded that executive agreements supported by implementing legislation (so-called "congressional-executive agreements") are the equivalent of treaties<sup>7</sup>. Vagts notes, however, that,



As a political matter, the executive and legislative branches have not considered treaties and executive agreements to be fully interchangeable. They have looked to tradition. Agreements relating to extradition, freedom of establishment, taxation and so forth have traditionally been passed through the Senate process; whereas trade agreements have been routed through the two-house channel <sup>8</sup>.

The extradition legislation that the US magistrate in the Ntakirutimana case had declared to be unconstitutional had been the result of a congressional-executive agreement. The executive had entered into agreements with the two UN Tribunals and congress demonstrated its assent by promptly passing the necessary implementing legislation. Apparently, the US State and Justice Departments were confident that this arrangement was constitutionally sound <sup>9</sup>.

#### THE ELIZAPHAN NTAKIRUTIMANA CASE

In the subject case Federal Magistrate Notzon had to determine (1) whether the Court had proper jurisdiction over fugitive Ntakirutimana for purposes of extradition, (2) whether the fugitive is being sought for offenses covered by the applicable agreement, and (3) whether there is sufficient evidence to establish that Ntakirutimana committed the crimes for which he is charged. The magistrate concluded that the "instant request fails on the first and third prongs of the above inquiry" <sup>10</sup>.

With respect to prong 1, the magistrate reasoned as follows:

Throughout the history of this Republic, every extradition from the United States has been accomplished under the terms of a valid treaty of extradition. In the instant case, it is undisputed that no treaty exists between the United States and the Tribunal. . . . Without a treaty, this Court has no jurisdiction to act, and Congress' attempt to effectuate the Agreement in the absence of a treaty is an unconstitutional exercise of power. Accordingly, the Court FINDS that the provisions of Section 1342 of Public Law 104-106 are unconstitutional as they are applied to the Tribunal, . . . <sup>1</sup>

The magistrate appears to reason that what has not been done cannot be done. He cited no constitutional provision or case law that directly supports his conclusion.

The magistrate correctly stated that the third prong of the inquiry--sufficiency of evidence--must meet the probable cause standard. Citing *Parretti v US* <sup>11</sup>, the magistrate stated he was "free to exercise [his] discretion in judging the credibility of the evidence presented as in any other domestic case where the Court would be required to make a determination of probable cause." The fourth amendment to the U.S. Constitution requires, but does not define, "probable cause" for searches and seizures. Many judges have defined the concept rather vaguely as "reasonable grounds to believe." Consequently, judges exercise a good deal of discretion in determining whether probable cause exists in any particular case. Magistrate Notzon concluded that it did not exist in this case.

The magistrate was unconvinced by a number of factors. For one, the affidavit filed by a Belgian police officer assigned to the ICTR in support of the charges failed to list the names of its twelve witnesses and failed to note whether witness statements had been made under oath <sup>12</sup>. Although one of the witnesses claimed to have seen Ntakirutimana shooting at civilian Tutsi, he failed (according to the magistrate) to state whether anyone was killed. Four witnesses

identified Ntakirutimana from a photograph as a person who "participated in the attack," but Magistrate Notzon dismissed this evidence because "the affidavit fails to state when and under what conditions this photograph was shown to the witnesses, or whether the photograph was shown in conjunction with other photographs." For these and other reasons, the magistrate concluded that "the possibility for inaccuracy or incredibility in the witness' statements is high." Consequently, he concluded that the submitted evidence did not rise to the level of probable cause.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The magistrate could have decided the constitutional issue of this case differently. In his Memorandum and Order, Magistrate Notzon reasoned that the US-UN Headquarters Agreement--an executive agreement locating the UN Headquarters in New York City--was constitutional because that "agreement was enacted pursuant to a treaty [the UN Charter] ratified with Senatorial advise and consent" <sup>1</sup>. Hence, the magistrate concluded, "this places it [the Headquarters Agreement] in marked contrast to the Agreement with the Tribunal in the instant case" <sup>1</sup>. Unfortunately, the magistrate did not explain how this placed it in marked contrast.

The US President entered into the Tribunal Agreements pursuant to the same UN Charter treaty, which requires member states to assist the Security Council in its implementation of measures designed to maintain or restore international peace <sup>13</sup>. In order to restore peace in the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda the Security Council took judicial measures: it created the ICTY and the ICTR. Both of these Security Council creations need member states to assist them by, among other things, extraditing indicted fugitives. Hence, according to the magistrate's own reasoning, the US executive's Tribunal Agreements, having been made pursuant to a valid treaty, can be deemed to be constitutional. Moreover, an even stronger argument exists for asserting the constitutionality of the Tribunal Agreements than of the Headquarters Agreement: the US is obligated under the UN Charter to assist the Tribunals; it was not obligated under the UN Charter to agree to locate the UN Headquarters in New York City.

Part of the reason for the magistrate's ruling may result from the anti-UN bias harbored by some Americans. At an October 1996 hearing of the Ntakirutimana case, Magistrate Notzon reportedly said the following: "I question whether we are acting to subordinate U.S. sovereignty to the United Nations. I am particularly bothered by the potential harm of depriving this man of his freedom. . . . Little by little, we are losing the guarantees of those individual freedoms each time we give up a bit of our freedoms. It makes me, the grandfather of five little girls, worry about the future" <sup>14</sup>. Apparently, Magistrate Notzon fears that America's involvement with the UN is a dangerous slippery slope leading to the loss of sovereignty.

The magistrate's decision is a serious, but temporary, setback for US efforts to support the two UN Tribunals. In recent years the US has been pressuring countries, such as Kenya, Croatia and Serbia, to extradite indictees to the ICTR or the ICTY. Kenya has been critical of the ICTR, and has extradited some of the fugitives on its soil only grudgingly. Both Croatia and Serbia argue that their constitutions prevent them from ordering such extraditions. The US has rejected

this argument, but now Washington finds itself caught in a major contradiction--one that recalcitrant capitals will point to with glee.

On January 30, 1998, a spokesman for the US State Department read to this writer a statement expressing the Department's disappointment with the Ntakirutimana decision. He said the State Department is considering [unspecified] options to fulfill US obligations to the UN Tribunals.

The US executive can remedy the situation by submitting the Tribunal executive agreements to the Senate for its advice and consent. Since both houses of Congress have already signaled their approval of the agreements by enacting implementing legislation, it is highly probable that the Senate will give its consent.

With respect to the probable cause evidentiary requirement of extradition hearings, State Department lawyers must work more closely with Tribunal prosecutors to help them better prepare their affidavits so as to satisfy US magistrates who are unfamiliar with the history, the widespread violence, and the sad circumstances of Bosnia and Rwanda.

## Notes

1. In the Matter of Surrender of Elizaphan Ntakirutimana, U.S. Dist. Ct. Southern Dist. of TX, Laredo Div., Misc. No. L-96-5 (Dec. 17, 1997).
2. Statute of the International Tribunal for the Prosecution of Persons Responsible for Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law Committed in the Territory of the Former Yugoslavia Since 1991, UN Doc. S/25704, annex (1993); Statute of the International Tribunal for the Prosecution of Persons Responsible for Genocide and Other Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law Committed in the Territory of Rwanda and Rwandan Citizens Responsible for Genocide and Other Such Violations Committed in the Territory of Neighbouring States, SC Res. 955 (Nov. 8, 1994), reprinted in 33 ILM 1602 (1994).
3. National Defense Authorization Act, Pub. L. No. 104-106, 1342, 110 Stat. 486 (1996); for a discussion of the executive agreements, see Robert Kushen and Kenneth J. Harris, "Surrender of Fugitives by the United States to the War Crimes Tribunals for Yugoslavia and Rwanda," *American Journal of International Law*, v. 90, pp. 510-518 (1996).
4. Article II, Section 2.
5. Henry J. Steiner, et al., *Transnational Legal Problems*. Westbury, NY: Foundation Press, 1994, p. 561.
6. See, for example, Myres McDougal & Asher Lans, "Treaties and Congressional-Executive or Presidential Agreements: Interchangeable Instruments of National Policy" (pts. 1 & 2), *Yale Law Journal* v. 54, pp. 181-351, 534-615 (1945), and Edwin Borchard, "Shall the Executive Agreement Replace the Treaty?" *Yale Law Journal* v. 53, pp. 664-683 (1944); "Treaties and Executive Agreements --A Reply," *Yale Law Journal* v. 54, pp. 616-664 (1945).
7. For a series of quotes to this effect, see Detlev F. Vagts, "International Agreements, the Senate and the Constitution," *Columbia Journal of Transnational Law* v. 36, pp. 143-155 (1997).

8. Ibid., p. 153.
9. Robert Kushen and Kenneth J. Harris, "Surrender of Fugitives by the United States to the War Crimes Tribunals for Yugoslavia and Rwanda," *American Journal of International Law* v. 90, pp. 510-518 (1996).
10. For this and subsequent case quotes, see Note 1.
11. *Parretti v. United States*, 112 F. 3d 1363 (9th Cir., 1997).
12. The practice of listing witnesses by letters (e.g., A, B, C, etc.) rather than by name may be to protect them from assassination. Over 200 witnesses were murdered in 1996 alone. See, Zarembo, Taba. "Rwanda's Genocide Witnesses Are Killed As Wheels of Justice Slowly Begin to Turn," *Christian Science Monitor*, p. 7, Jan. 23, 1997; Buckley, Stephen. "Witnesses of Genocide Targeted; Protection Efforts Fail Rwandans Waiting to Testify in Tribunals," *Washington Post*, p. A24, Jan. 20, 1997.
13. UN Charter, Articles 39, 41 & 42.
14. McLemore, David. "Rwandan war crimes suspect to remain jailed in Laredo," *Dallas Morning News*, p. 25A, Oct. 12, 1996.

## BOOK REVIEWS

**The Myth of Continents: a Critique of Metageography.** Martin W. Lewis and Karen E. Wigen. Berkeley: University of California Press. 1997. 359 pp. \$55.00 (Cloth), \$19.95 (Paper).

Geographic scholarship has recently become much concerned with issues of language and representation, with the multiple ways that depictions of spaces and places embody biases, naturalize contingent social relations, and emphasize some political perspectives while marginalizing others. Readers interested in Eurocentrism, Afrocentrism, Orientalism, post-colonial thought, and geographic education will find *The Myth of Continents* a useful volume that summarizes a great deal of classic and contemporary research. It serves as an important stepping-stone between frequently obtuse, jargon-laden academic works on the one hand, and popular views of geography on the other.

Lewis and Wigen's concern is metageography, which they define as "the set of spatial structures through which people order their knowledge of the world" (p. ix). Geographies are thus much more than just the ways in which societies are stretched across the earth's surface. They also include the contested, arbitrary, power-laden, and often inconsistent ways in which those structures are represented epistemologically.

Lewis and Wigen's critique of metageographies (e.g., First and Third Worlds, North-South, etc.) reveals how earlier notions of world geography as a neat series of continents tends to disguise both an implicit environmental determinism and a blindness to the politics of space as a social construction. For example, the distinction between Europe and Asia has had many uses throughout history, including different sides of the Aegean Sea, the Catholic and Orthodox realms, Christendom and the Muslim world. Ostensibly "clear cut" boundaries such as the Urals, which separate European and Asian Russia, reflect changing political interests, particularly the desire to naturalize certain distinctions in the name of imperial expansion. Thus "Europe" as a separate region was largely a construct essential to the emerging hegemony of European culture and power. Similarly, as Edward Said has so powerfully shown, the Orient was also a construct of the overheated fantasies of the West. "Asia" has steadily migrated in Europe's eyes, from northwestern Turkey to the Muslim world, to the East-West divide of the Cold War, to the Far East of the Pacific Rim, in the process giving rise to terms such as the Middle East and South Asia as they were spun off from the broader conception of the Orient. Typically, the farther a region is from Europe, the more internal variations are overlooked, so that varying cultures within Europe's 'Other' are lumped together under convenient labels (e.g., "India," despite its massive linguistic diversity). Associated with these regional labels are ethnocentric, and often racist, views of the people who live within them. Asians, for example, were often portrayed as submissive in nature, resigned to life in stagnant and despotic societies

<http://www.africa.ufl.edu/asq/v1/4/reviews.pdf>

(e.g., Wittfogel's infamous Asiatic Mode of Production), in contrast to Western individualistic rationality. Even critics of these ideologies (Said included) incorporate simplistic East-West divisions into their critiques.

Readers of this journal will be most interested in Lewis and Wigen's critique of Eurocentrism and Afrocentrism. If Eurocentrism has persistently marginalized Africa's role in intellectual history, Afrocentrism repeats the error in another form. Radical Afrocentrism makes exaggerated and untenable claims; essentializing Africa's numerous real contributions in the form of some abstract quality of black people. In both cases, regions (Europe or Africa) appear to acquire a life of their own, attaining an aura of being "natural," pre-social, and immutable. Critical geography seeks to denaturalize this tendency, to unpack the political origins and consequences of regions as discourse. Although Lewis and Wigen resist the label of postmodernism, their work falls broadly within that perspective. Postmodernists are concerned with the linguistic construction of social and spatial reality; with the inescapable oversimplification that language always brings, of a complex and messy world, with the politics of the choices that underlie every categorization, and with the social consequences, as well as the origins of, discourse.

Lewis and Wigen cover an extensive body of literature concerned, among other things, with the use of civilizations as discrete units of analysis, Arnold Toynbee's influential conception of history, Sinocentrism, Wallerstein's world-systems theory, and the role of culture in the demarcation of regions as coherent entities. They explore how the formal system of world regions that pervades geography textbooks today arose after World War II, and provides the basis for most forms of "area studies" within universities, despite the fact that this scheme legitimizes some regions, such as Southeast Asia, which is fundamentally incoherent, and delegitimizes other regions, such as Central Asia, which has a long history as a trading crossroads and as a center of Turko-Mongolian heritage. This discussion prepares the groundwork for Lewis and Wigen's own regional classification, implicitly assigning priority to religion (e.g., the Eastern Orthodox realm) and/or race (e.g., African America, which includes the Caribbean, although Cuba is only 15% black, and northeastern Brazil). Their format strongly resembles most existing regionalizations. They conclude the book with ten principles of a critical metageography.

A strong concern for geographic education and literacy runs throughout the book. Given the abysmal, embarrassing, and widespread ignorance of world geography among university students in the U.S., pedagogic representations of the world's peoples and places are an important matter. Very few students are in a position to interpret regional schemes critically. The recent revival of interest in geography, particularly in light of the complexities of post-Cold War ethnically based geopolitics, has made geographic understanding all the more significant.

Readers interested in the politics of space, in questions of representation, and those who wish to introduce geographic pedagogy to contemporary social theory will find this volume useful. It would be especially so for instruction at the undergraduate college level as a supplement to existing texts in world geography. I highly recommend it.

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**Mau Mau from Below. Greet Kershaw. Athens: Ohio University Press. 1997. 354pp.**

The historiography of Mau Mau, Kenya's anti-colonial revolt of the 1950s has been totally revised during the last decade through research and publications by scholars in Africa, Europe, and the Americas. The common thread in this development has been a movement away from the earlier colonial generalizations and later nationalist counterfactualizations toward a focus upon the event itself as it happened on the ground. The discourses have shared a concern with the social and economic causes of Mau Mau, narrating the experiences of the squatters in the settler farms in the Rift Valley, the urban workers and the under classes in both Nairobi and Nakuru, to the thought systems of the Agikuyu themselves as they confronted this massive change in their values and expectations. Much of the latter input has been greatly influenced by the long-unpublished thesis by Greet Kershaw. Its publication at long last therefore is most welcome, particularly for what it says about Mau Mau as experienced in two villages in southern Kiambu District.

*Mau Mau From Below* is the agrarian history of two Gikuyu moieties, referred to as clans or *mbari*, from the nineteenth century into the mid-1950s when Kershaw first researched in the areas of *mbari ya Igi* and *mbari ya Thuita*. It is about the deep histories of the clans, and how their shadowy ancestors colonized the land, became devastated by two famines in the 1830s and again in the 1890s, and how on each occasion they sought to re-work systems of alliances for the accumulation of wealth in people who came as neighbors, dependents, and landless clients, *ahoi*.

By the time of the arrival of the British in late nineteenth century, this was a land and wealth conscious community with an ethos that linked wealth to virtue, and virtue to a sense of history that regarded land and goat ownership as a trust for future generations. Then in 1902-3 there arrived a *muthungu* (a white man). "He was like a Ndorobo, only better because he had guns to protect the goats" (p. 84). Soon enough he began fencing the good uplands and forbidding Gikuyu entry, cultivation, or grazing rights. The elders reported this trespass to the European administrator, John Ainsworth, who sided however with his kinsman. "The gist of the interview was that the *thirikari* (government) backed the European; the Kikuyu should understand that conditions had changed" (p. 86). The local community lost between thirty and seventy per cent of its best lands. The story of Gikuyu land hunger had begun. Groups of Gikuyu moved to found new communities in the Rift Valley.

Those that remained behind had to rework new property relations. The rich landowners tightened their hold on the land, gradually shedding off their gift-giving obligations (*tha*) in terms of access to land to their kin. The middle-class and poor peasants kept hoping for redress, especially when the British sent out the Carter Land Commission to look into the land grievances. The commission's report satisfied no one and "a sense of anger and urgency" filled the land (p. 104). The large landowners, who were also colonial chiefs like Magugu Waweru and Waruhiu wa Kungu, continued buying more land. The poor landholders found it increasingly impossible to subsist off the land while the males found it increasingly difficult to find jobs in Nairobi during the 1940s because of their lack of skills. Poor women coped with the triple burdens by working their patches of land, working for wages in the neighboring settler coffee plantations, and raising their families on little or no money. Poor men lost their positions

as heads of households. The poor invested much hope in education for their children (but school fees were hard to find for the women), and in the expectation that they would be allowed to grow coffee. They thought they would make money out of this and invest it more wisely than the Europeans who "ate what they earned and did not buy land" (p. 167). The lot of the *ahoi* became hopeless as they no longer had access to landowning patrons, could not find regular jobs for lack of skills, nor educate their children. The preconditions for Mau Mau were in place by the late 1940s. The Agikuyu began taking a variety of oaths in the Rift Valley, in Nairobi, and at Githunguri, Kershaw's research area.

Enter Jomo Kenyatta. After fifteen years abroad he had come back to a hero's welcome and settled in Githunguri as the head of the Teacher's College. His greatest welcome came from the young landless and poor. "He had been described as the man who could bring deliverance, the embodiment of new Kikuyu power" (p. 216). He settled down to being a Gikuyu elder by buying land and marrying well to a daughter of Senior Chief Mbiyu Koinange, by advocating the right of the Agikuyu to freedom and independence from British oppression, and to administering oaths of unity towards this end in Githunguri. "(H)e was familiar: he attended some oaths of heavy contributors" (p. 234). The colonial Governor declared a state of emergency and arrested Kenyatta on 20 October 1952.

Here is Kershaw's writing at its best:

"After months of anxiety and at times horror, after having suffered curfews, suspicions and being accused of crimes because they took oaths, land poor, landless and many landed exploded into *joy* (my emphasis)...Kenyatta's arrest, charged with being the leader of Mau Mau, changed fear and anger into hope. The landed had not given him a great deal of credit for leadership; they had seen him more and more as someone trying to become a landed Kiambu elder. Land poor and landless had seen this growth and sadly concluded that he had little to share now and offered even less for the future. No one doubted that he was in favor of resistance and his brand of Mau Mau, but the overwhelming opinion had been that he was not in control of Githunguri, nor of other Mau Mau. If in spite of what they had thought, he had secretly been in control, outwitting them and the colonial government for years, then he was far more astute than they had given him credit for. The time of secrecy was over; Kenyatta might be arrested, but freedom had never been so close. Those who had, against Kenyatta's will, offered their multiple oaths, should cease to do so and acknowledge him. All people should send Kenyatta a sign that they had understood and would follow: the time for *umoja* (unity) was now" (p. 248).

Much has been written on the myth of Jomo Kenyatta. This was its local grounding in Githunguri. "The government's arrest of Kenyatta, its declaration that he was the leader, renewed their hope and trust and they flocked to the oath-taking ceremonies" (p. 250). A calculated 57.7% of the people took the oath.

The British moved to curb this development by screening suspects and forcing them to take a cleansing oath, a strange instance of colonialism gone native. Concocted by the anthropologist Louis Leakey and rich landowners, including Chiefs Waruhiu and Kibathi, Harry Thuku and Mbira Githathu, the Agikuyu were to swear upon the *githathi* (sacred stones) for a reversal of the Mau Mau oath. In the instance, chiefs and Home-guards picked on some suspects and forced them to take this hybrid oath. In revenge, these elements organized an attack, resulting

in the Marige massacre of 5 April 1953. Kin turned against kin. "The *Mbari* has killed itself," an elder lamented (p. 257).

Marige effectively marked the end of Mau Mau in *mbari ya Igi* and *mbari ya Thuita*. The people were villagized, the Mau Mau were defeated, and by 1957 some of the detainees returned. By the time of Kershaw's research, there was hope that Kenyatta would return, get power and freedom under Kiambu leadership, and give land and hope to the poor. "All agreed that Mau Mau should become a closed chapter of history for the sake of the future and for peace... Though harder for some communities than for others, words such as Mau Mau member, Home-guard, or loyalist were to be erased from one's vocabulary" (p. 257). Collective amnesia would undo half a century of the deep cleavages of the clan. The Agikuyu were right about Kenyatta.

This is a powerful book, full of passion and meaning. It will make compelling reading for college students and faculty alike. The lack of maps is a drawback, as much of the narrative turns on the specifics of geographical scale.

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**Bureaucracy and Race, Native Administration in South Africa. Ivan Evans. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997. 403 pp.**

Before apartheid was declared officially dead, people used to puzzle over two big questions. One was whether the 1948 electoral victory of the National Party really represented a 'parting of the ways' from the preceding segregationist years. Another was how had the apartheid state managed to contain the resistance of the vast majority of the population. Ivan Evans' book answers both questions for the period extending roughly from the late thirties to the early sixties, focusing mainly on the 1940s and 1950s. In the 1940s the Department of Native Affairs [DNA] had been a "vacillating liberal outpost" staffed with paternalists, and after the 1948 election it gradually became an "arrogant apartheid fortress". The later, infamous phase flowed fairly smoothly, Evans argues, from the former, more benign one.

Evans shows the DNA, the bureaucracy responsible for African administration, enforcing obedience by many means other than force. Choosing three foci of the administrative process—labor bureaux, planned urban locations, Bantustans—Evans demonstrates how the DNA normalized coercion and conditioned African compliance. He reveals the philosophical and practical disjuncture between rural and urban administration, the former retaining its paternalistic bias while in the 1950s the latter became the galvanizer of apartheid. He sharpens our awareness of the fact that authoritarian regimes do not work by force and terror alone. The 1950s were particularly marked by the growth of the mundane workings of the newly centralized and authoritarian state administration. (This decade stands in contrast to the periods from 1960 to 1976, when repressive forces like labor control boards and internal security

apparatus ruled, and from 1978 to 1989 when repression was mixed with reform.) Apartheid worked initially because it was dispersed into the routine details of daily life.

No one should be surprised that a book with "bureaucracy" in the title reflects the language and tone of people who work in offices. Abstractions (such as "the African elite") abound, voices are often passive, and the impact of policies on people's lives is muted by bland words. Individual profiles rarely intrude to enliven matters. These barriers to a lively read could be said to go with the territory. From an analytical point of view, the sources may limit the book's revelations in a couple of ways. First, the immiseration of African rural life is stated in a blanket fashion as having been true for the entirety of the inter-war years rather than acknowledged to have been temporally, geographically, and personally variable. The focus on the Transkei, accompanied by references to indirect rule in Natal, effectively excludes discussion of rural administration in other African reserves. Secondly, the "curious" blindness of magistrates to the complexities of rural life is asserted rather than probed. Administrative ideology goes only so far in explaining this myopia; we need also broader some exploration of contemporary ideology which would include racism and scientism.

Evans' work joins several recent studies of South African administration, all drawing a far more complex picture of racial oppression than the simple paradigms of domination and resistance that flourished in the 1970s and 1980s. He sees little support for radical theories, put forward by Harold Wolpe, Frederick Johnstone and Marion Lacey, that posit a state obediently and efficiently serving the needs of capital. His approach provides an effective sequel to Saul Dubow's study of the DNA during its segregationist years (1919-1936). Like Deborah Posel, Evans rejects the view that the state is an undifferentiated "black box", preferring to accept that administrators have their own interests and power. He suggests, however, that she has underplayed the National Party constituency's "zealous predilection for grand plans" and overplayed the ad hoc development of apartheid policies. (While Posel's work focused more narrowly on labor bureaux, her title *The Making of Apartheid* fits Evans' book perfectly). Like Adam Ashforth, he is fascinated by the logic of administrators. Unlike Ashforth, who used seminal government reports to analyse the "politics of official discourse", Evans employed Native Affairs Department files, perforce up to the mid-1950s, to reconstruct the process of administration and not just its rationale.

The fact that a few top-down studies of apartheid's actual operation have appeared for the first time in the 1990s is a sign of how intently scholars used their profession to attack the regime's legitimacy during the apartheid years. (It is also a sign of archival restrictions, hence Evans' inability to extend his use of the DNA files past the mid-1950s.) Until recently, this topic might have been misunderstood to be an apologia. Now that apartheid is officially over and scholarly enquiry has become more free of pressures to be politically relevant, Evans has provided specialists with an excellent resource. His book will allow them to check readily which apartheid credos were actually enacted and why. It will help them gain a view of the making of apartheid policy that is truly "dynamic", a word much favored by Evans. He discusses, for example, how policy-makers responded to African nationalism and conservatism and in turn influenced their development. His clearly written book embraces an important sweep of time, issues and context rather than focusing narrowly on partial problems as so many monographs do. He takes into account the better part of three decades and situates problems within the

context of British imperial policy, the local political economy based on cheap labor, and even Nazi bureaucracy. Evans closes his book with the provocative suggestion that today's state cadres might learn from Minister of Native Affairs Verwoerd's ability to get things done in the 1950s, if they can force themselves to search beyond the regime's racist authoritarianism.

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**Confronting Leviathan: Mozambique Since Independence. By Margaret Hall and Tom Young. Athens: Ohio University Press, 1997. 252 pp.**

Margaret Hall and Tom Young have collaborated on a book that focuses on the past two decades of politics in Mozambique. A brief introductory chapter sets the stage at the end of Portuguese colonialism, with some limited information on the liberation struggle. The book then addresses the immediate post-independence period in a chapter titled "Anything Seemed Possible," which discusses the development of Frelimo's Marxism, development strategies, the rise of Renamo, and the increasing problems in the economy and political organization. Final chapters cover the nature of the war with Renamo, important political changes in the early 1990s, the peace talks, and, briefly, the elections in 1994. Much of the evidence presented is drawn from official statements and speeches as well as newspaper reports. Although Young, at least, was in Mozambique in the 1990s (he was present at a speech by President Joaquim Chissano in 1992 and was a United Nations observer at the 1994 elections), the book does not include much evidence of data collection or interviews conducted in Mozambique, or with Mozambicans.

Reliance on secondary sources means that the more original discussion in the book is at the level of political theory, and the more flawed areas are those that deal more directly with Mozambican society. Among the interesting insights are an analysis of Frelimo's Marxism, which the authors demonstrate was abstract, rather than grounded in Mozambican reality. Throughout they are at pains to explain how Mozambican politics was built on ideas from outside Mozambique: first on socialist and Marxist models, and more recently on Western liberal democratic capitalism. Although much of their evidence suggests that Mozambique has been a weak state that has suffered the imposition of the politics of others, they conclude that "In the case of both Constitutions [1975 and 1990] Mozambicans, or at least their leaders, had a considerable say in the matter and in some sense opted first for a version of socialism and latterly for a version of liberalism" (p. 219).

One useful task Hall and Young undertake is textual analysis of their sources. For instance, part of the explication of Frelimo's Marxism includes an examination of Samora Machel's speeches and his reliance on images and ideas about cleanliness and order as essential elements of his political vision, perhaps not surprising given his training as a nurse. The authors call for a detailed study of Machel's speeches, but they have made an important beginning in this book



(p. 66). Later they look closely at the language in the two constitutions as embodying Marxist and then liberal tenets (p. 218).

Despite the value of isolated sections of their political analysis, there are major flaws in this book, which unfortunately appears to have been rushed through production in order to be timely. There are numerous typographical errors, some more serious than others. For example, Nachingwea is placed "inside Mozambique" rather than correctly in Tanzania (p.13), leading to some confusion when discussing Frelimo activities in the following pages. Frelimo leader Armando Guebuza's name is misspelled in two different ways. "Machambas" is translated as "plantations," when it is most commonly used for small farms or fields, a very different type of agriculture than plantations (p. 20). The authors appear unwilling to credit Frelimo with any improvements, and this is in part because they essentially ignore the experience of Portuguese colonialism. It is easy to criticize Frelimo in hindsight, but in the immediate post-independence period the frame of reference was the contrast with fascist colonialism. People I spoke with in the early 1980s often commented on certain freedoms -- for instance to speak to co-workers at their workplace -- that had not existed less than a decade earlier. The other factor related to the colonial experience is the persistence of the Portuguese bureaucracy. Although some difficulties in implementing development strategies were related to centralized Soviet-style bureaucracy, many of the specific snarls were directly inherited from the colonial system, such as requiring specific documents, special paper, signatures, and fiscal and rubber stamps for every step of any official undertaking. Hall and Young simply ignore this aspect of Mozambique's colonial legacy, making it appear that all problems were related to the model of a centralized socialist economy.

The analysis is also flawed by the authors' confusion over the goals of Renamo and South Africa in Mozambique. They apparently dismiss the idea that Renamo's main goal was the destruction of Mozambique when they comment that "[T]his account of Renamo as a violent apolitical movement whose only rationale must be that it operated on behalf of some malevolent outside interests was assiduously cultivated by the Mozambican government and its academic and journalistic publicists with considerable skill and success" (p. 165). Elsewhere they call these other scholars "pro-Frelimo spokesmen" (p. 124), implying that these writers were so biased in favor of Frelimo's politics that they could not report reliably on what was happening. Yet their own evidence demonstrates the terrible extent of Renamo's violence and destructiveness. The diaries found in 1985 detail a meeting between South African and Renamo leaders to develop a "General Plan" which included as goal number one: "Destroy the Mozambican economy in the rural zones" (p.129-130). The authors also comment that "extreme brutality appears to have played a part in Renamo's rapid spread throughout Mozambique after 1980" with the twin goals of attacking the Frelimo state and paralyzing the population through fear. Attacking the state included the "destruction of the economic infrastructure" (p. 168). Thus the academics and journalists who worked to bring the facts of this devastation to world attention were reporting on actual events, not working as "publicists" at the behest of the Mozambican state.

Hall and Young may exhibit their own bias in the curious omission of any mention of the assassination of Ruth First in 1982. Likewise, the treatment of the 1986 plane crash that killed Samora Machel and many others is overly concise. Many in Mozambique and elsewhere still



hold South Africa responsible, while these authors simply state in a footnote that "The issues were highly technical, and opinion was split between those who blamed the crash on pilot error and those who suggested that the plane had been diverted by some sort of decoy beam" (p. 195). These two deaths convinced many observers of the hostility South Africa had toward Mozambique; it was this hostility that allowed such attacks to continue throughout the 1980s. Editorial decisions to omit or reduce factual information about South African apartheid terrorism results in a skewed retelling of that dreadful decade in Mozambique.

A major problem of omission is the nearly complete absence of gender analysis or any information on women. This is particularly glaring in the discussion of Renamo's development, where life in Renamo camps is described as having the "attractions of excitement and access to luxury items and women," with absolutely no reference to the fact that the women themselves were captured, raped, and forced to submit to sexual abuse in those camps (p. 170). This error is compounded a few pages later by a reference to the "wives of soldiers" being kept imprisoned at the camps (p. 176). It is simply not acceptable any longer to write a male-centered description of events that had such a devastating impact on women. An earlier discussion, otherwise useful, on the dissension over ideas about tradition and modernity in Frelimo politics, would have made more sense if it had included polygyny, bridewealth, and forced marriages among the traditional practices that Frelimo advocated ending. The traditional customs involving women were among the most contentious of those censured by Frelimo and the Women's Organization (OMM), and the analysis is extraordinarily incomplete when they are not included in the discussion.

An intriguing part of the book discusses the role of local religions and spirit leaders in Renamo and their links with Zimbabwean practices. Yet this is also flawed by the lack of any mention of the potential role of women as diviners, even when one is mentioned by title (Nyamasoro) (p. 182). The Nyamasoro has been long recognized as a spiritual leader in southern Mozambique, and has frequently been a position held by women. Dora Earchy, in her book *Valenge Women* defines Nyamusoro as "priestess" (Earchy, p.182 [London, 1933]; see also Luis Polanah's research from the 1960s, *O Nhamussoro*, [Lisbon, 1987]). The discussion of spirit leaders is also impaired by the lack of information on Naparama, which is mentioned only in passing many pages later in a different context. Any discussion of the role of local beliefs about diviners and occult religious elements during the war in Mozambique must include the rise of Naparama and its connection to Frelimo (p. 209).

My own experience in Mozambique includes living in Beira for two years (1982-84), years described several times in this book as the most difficult of the entire post-independence period. I returned briefly in 1989, and was also a UN observer at the 1994 elections (and I would agree with Tom Young's aside that "the opportunity to observe the UN [was] at least as valuable as the opportunity to observe the elections" [p. 231]). This relates to yet another omission: there is no analysis of the election results included here. In fact, with the exception of a vague footnote about União Democrática's unexpectedly good showing, there are no election results at all, usually considered a foundation of political analysis.

While Hall and Young have some scattered information and analysis that furthers our understanding of recent political events in Mozambique, the flaws are many and deep. Use this book in conjunction with other publications, such as William Minter's *Apartheid's Contras: An*

*Inquiry into the Roots of War in Angola and Mozambique* (London, 1994) and Stephanie Urdang's *And Still They Dance: Women, War, and the Struggle for Change in Mozambique* (New York, 1989), neither of which is cited nor even listed in the bibliography in the book under review.

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