

## **African Philosophy, Genesis, and the Quest for Theoretical Relevance: Reconsidering Tempels's Bantu Philosophy**

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**Abstract:** African philosophy, from its very inception till now, has been grappling with rationality debate; that is, the questioning of Eurocentric discourse and sifting out an inherent contradiction in their arguments. Falsifying wrong perceptions about Africans is not wrong by itself, but too much excessive reliance and explication of western discourses helps at best Europeans than Africans. This article is an attempt toward challenging this philosophical orientation. It argues that dealing with deconstructive mindset is part of doing philosophy; rather than doing philosophy. African philosophy, to live up to its name, must reconstruct itself with African cultures. The paper stresses that philosophy is culturally bounded, and thus, the edifice of African philosophy is impossible without African world view. It concluded by saying that intra-dialogue among Africans leads toward rational intercultural dialogue.

**Keywords:** Philosophy, rationality, Eurocentric, African world view, intra-dialogue, intercultural-dialogue

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

The debate of African philosophy, from its very inception till now, has been struggling with false assumptions about Africans; or a continuous deconstruction of the rationality of Eurocentric colonial discourse. The discourse revolved around 'reason' which, in one way or the other, rested on Aristotle's famous definition of man, that is, "man is rational animal." Later on, underlined by an enlightenment movement as an obligation to release humankind from irrationality. Man, in view of Enlightenment, ought to be "released from his self-incurred tutelage." Having combined these, the proponents of modernity discourse put human kinds into rationality/irrationality based on reason. Those who thought to have reason and who do not have reason. Consequently, the white man took up the responsibility to help others in distributing reason, specifically, to those who thought to have no reason in general and Africans in particular. Having taken reason as a privately owned property, the white men embarked on clearing spaces- emptying the colonized mentality. Everything African in view of modernity men, is traditional, which according to their narrative, useless to human lives. African world view is indiscriminately branded as primitive, pre-logical, and superstitious and thus, perceived as negative other to that of western mode of thinking. Accordingly, in view of modernity discourse, what makes the black man similar to white is only his physiological make up. The objective behind all these stereotypes against Africans' is clear; that is, to justify colonization. The combined of efforts of Anthropologists, missionaries and finally, physical force had been taken as modernization or 'the civilizing mission.' However, of all these colonial instruments what poses serious threat to African humanity is, the association of African world view with the superstition and the equation of black men to children. At the center of this claim, the logical argument is that African mode thinking is uncritical and thus, irrational; and therefore, to be rational, they necessarily need white man's help. The net outcome of this is/was to put Africans in a total self-doubt. From this multiple confusions emerge, for instance, "the usual suspect" widely seen on foreign trained African intellectuals on the rationality of Africans as humans and their right to philosophy; namely, the questionable existence of African philosophy is part of self-denial. For instance, as some scholars affirmed the situation specifically with the French speaking Negro intellectuals may be outrageous ".....in order to be acceptable socially in the western world, it was necessary for him to deny a part of himself –conformity to white ideals was only possible at the cost of a repression of his original self"( A. Owolabi2001:134).

The discourse of modernity is not only diverted away the directions of African philosophical debate from within to the outside, it went to the extent to framing African souls. As a result, many of early African thinkers used to speak about Africa in a manner contrary to the realities on the ground. Instead of refuting the discourse of modernity, some of these thinkers celebrate African otherness, which is being taken up as a pretext by whites to tutor Africans. Some thinkers, on the other hand, disregarding African world view; namely, the

traditional African cultures and instead, recommending science as imperative to Africa before philosophy. For instance, Senghor embraced the binary oppositions without questioning its ideological implication and then, insisted on reversing this binary oppositions. Professional philosophers, on their part, insisted on the view that philosophy is a critical enterprise. However, to be critical, philosophy ought to be existed in written form. They believe that Africans have had philosophies; however, in so far as there were no individuals who written down their memories, it is justifiable that there is no African Socrates. This lack of clear stand on African world view is not due to lack of will, rather this seemingly deceiving indicates how far they stupefied by the discourse of modernity. This failure as A. Owolabi suggests, is not due to lack of effort or will, but basically results from using inappropriate means of recovering what distorted as useless; that is, the lost heritage of traditional philosophy (2001:152).

The critical question right now is, how to rehabilitate Africa? Is African problems addressed without taking into account African world views? Because culture, as Odera Oruka suggests, “is man’s contribution to the nature of environment. It is a way of life of people, which, among other things demonstrates their celebrated achievements in thought, morals, and material production” (Oruka, 1981:70). If this is the case, can one think of African rationality or African philosophy, without paying attention to Africans’ mode of thinking? In my view, African problems in general, whether it is, economic issues, or political, or personality issues could not be addressed without treating African world view as the center of debate. Accordingly, African philosophy, to be African in content and focus, must dealing with African culture, ethos, values and ways of life. Acting in contrary to this basics, either by reducing or negating Africans ‘culture, is amount to creating rupture, which is according to hermeneutics serious flaw. According to this school of thought, “whatever direction philosophy takes, it must involve an interpretation mediated by individual, his culture, environment, personal experience and history. On the other hand, hermeneutic interpretation “must succeed in capturing faithfully the meaning concealed under the symbol, and recreate it in the space of conceptual thinking. In precise, hermeneutic is to overcome the “distance between a knowing subject and object to be known, once the two have been estranged” (Owolabi, 2001: 9).

In general, philosophy, in view of Hermeneutics is all about “return to the source.” So again the rational question is, which sources in case of Africa? The answer is obvious; it is simply to mean African world views; namely, African cultures, ethos, values, norms, proverbs....etc. Consequently, the next serious issue is that, of philosophical works in Africa, which one has gone to the surface to touch these realities on the ground? Senghor’s search for new value may be noble, however, it is failed because of his reliance on western epistemological foundation. Professional school, on the other hand, is right in introducing ‘criticism’ as a way forward. However, their indiscriminate rejection of African past as superstitious and instead, suggesting western yardstick as the only philosophical means is backfiring. I contend that, both views irrespective their theoretical role as philosophical works in Africa, are failed to touch Africans’ real life situations. As Confucian saying goes, “.... We may learn wisdom in three ways: the first is by reflection which is the noblest; the second is by imitation, which is the easiest; and the third by experience, which is the bitterest.” Having this in mind, I contend that ethno philosophy, irrespective of its historical paradoxes, has gone far into the lives of Africans. We have to bear mind that western values are also human values and that “ultimately the antidote is always located in the poison (Serequeberhan qtd in Okolo 2017:21). So that the paper interrogates specifically Temples ‘encounter with Congolese’ his despair and then, his concession to ‘revise strategy’ of preaching Christianity. The revised strategy shows two ways arrows; one toward purifying true message of Christianity and the other toward studying Bantus’ world view, in which, the net outcome is the ‘searching for points of convergence’ in both cultures. In my view, this imparts multiple lessons to who critically pay attention to it. Thus, this paper takes into account the importance of intercultural-fertilization aspect took place during this encounter. It also advises African intellectuals, politicians and policy makers to take into account the smart philosophical move, namely; the ‘fusing’ of two relevant essences for the sake of overcoming failure.

Having said this, let me outline the structure this paper. The first part of this paper is dealing with a precise summary of Bantu philosophy which later on, has been given the name Ethno philosophy. Besides it takes into account African philosophers’ reaction against colonial discourses in general and Bantu philosophy in particular. The last part takes into account Temples ‘encounter with Congolese’ and reflects specifically on the situations that forced Temples to revise his strategy of tutoring to dialogue. And what Africans ought to do to lay foundation of African philosophy

### **Bantu philosophy or Ethno philosophy?**

Africa’s encounter with Europe started with human tragedy and accompanied by physical invasion, dehumanization and exploitation of the black race. Since then, though physical colonization ended around five decades ago, the residues of colonialism are still with us and thus, working back to their interest. The colonialists says EA. Thomas, came to Africa, “holding death of the body in their right, the minds annihilation in their left; because they knew that the capture of the mind and the body both is the slavery far more lasting, far

more secure than the conquest of the body alone”(http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in.8080). It is the occupation of another people’s physical space, including material dispossession, displacement, and coercion. But the greater part of the system’s power like an iceberg, lies hidden below the surface (Lindon, 2002:10). Moreover, colonization can be defined as “a process by which one culture subordinates and oppresses another (qtd in Susan, 2006:10). M.Jackson associated colonialism with an attack of soul. According to him, *The attack of soul was so terrible that it would lead to a weakening of faith in all things that had nourished it. The demeaning of the values that cherished it, the language that gives meaning to its soul, the law that gave it order, and the religion that was its strength were ultimately to affect the belief of persons themselves (ibid).*

This entails a systemic and multiple psychological war opened against Africans’ which, at the end intend to justify their inferiority. Having justified this, missionaries and the colonizers appointed themselves to the superior position that enable them to tutor and then, enslave Africans. By virtue of having this position, the missionaries and colonizers in general, as Ramose said, “claimed unilaterally the right to speak on behalf of Africans and to define the meaning of experience and truth for them (Readers in African philosophy, 2002:1).” Ethno philosophy was the result of this historical encounter. Thus, in what follows I will precisely present it.

### **Bantu Culture and its philosophical thought**

The central notion in Bantu philosophy for Tempels is *vital force*. It is comprising all living and nonliving things with different degrees. God is perceived as the one, who possesses force in himself. God according to Tempels is source of forces of every creature (Tempels 1959:46). God by virtue of creating force, endowed everything on earth, that is, human, animal, vegetable, and mineral with vital force. Vital force is seen as comprising both positive and negative poles; each and every vital force has strength, and consequently, has the capacity of being rendered potent or impotent (Tempels 1959:56). Non-human forces have been designated by God as existing for the sole purpose of use by human beings in order to strengthen human vital force (Tempels 1959:46). Accordingly, force and being are assumed as being intimately and essentially linked, Tempels contends that ...’Bantu speak, act, and live as if for them beings were forces. Force is not something suddenly occurred in their life, rather it is the essential quality of beings. *Force is perceived as the nature of being, or force is being and being is forced* (Tempels 1959:51.emphasis Tempels). As indicated above, forces are different in terms of their qualities. The forces of **Muntu** and **Bintu** are different in terms of attributes and hierarchies. **‘Muntu’** as human sense signifies....as vital force, endowed with intelligence and will..... while **‘Bintu’** in the sense of objects or things, are ...’ forces not endowed with reason, not living’(Tempels 1959:55).

Forces are integrally connected, sharing an intrinsic relationship; thus the existence of the interaction between forces (Tempels 1959:58). Therefore, it is inevitable that nothing moves in this universe of forces without influencing other forces with its movement (Tempels 1959:60). A hierarchical ordering of the forces exists. Forces are situated within the hierarchy according to the strength of their vitality (Tempels 1959:61). The hierarchical structuring of the universe is founded by God, who exists at the top due to the strength of his force, following by the arch patriarchs of the tribe, the founding members of the various clan, and the dead of the tribe according to their eminence, and the living, who are also arranged according to a hierarchy. Beneath the human vital forces exist the forces of animals, vegetables and minerals, each of which is classified according to its own hierarchical vital force (Okere qtd in readers in African philosophy 2002:125). The mutual and co-existence of forces and how they execute influence on one another and operate according to set laws, and Tempels thus finds that the;

*Bantu universe is not a chaotic tangle of unordered forces blindly struggling with one another.... There are possible and necessary actions, other influences are metaphysically impossible by reason of the nature of the forces in question. The possible causal factors in life can be formulated in certain metaphysical, universal, immutable and stable laws (Tempels 1959:67).*

Having established Bantu world view, Tempels proceeds to underline how the concept of vital force permeates (being and object) and then, related to other categories such as knowledge, ethics and psychology and operate in Bantu existence. Knowledge or wisdom according to Bantu world view revolve around the nature of beings, of forces; true wisdom lies in ontological knowledge ( Tempels 1959:71). It is thus that Bantu knowledge is seen as being indisputably metaphysical in nature, as it relates to an intelligence of the forces, of the hierarchical ordering of the forces, their accord, and their association (Tempels 1959:73).

Bantus’ notion of knowledge is entirely based on the principles of hierarchy. God is as the top in the hierarchical orders in having knowledge. The reason is clear, because God is recognized as all knower; or he knows all forces, their order, their potential, their dependence, and their mutual interactions (Tempels 1959:71). With regard to humans, what matters is age; meaning that elders thought of as having knowledge than youth, so that by virtue of being and aged person, experience and vital force bestow an eminent understanding of the nature of things (Tempels 1959:73). The vital force which is in the kernel of Bantu thought, closely related to the knowledge of human hierarchy and the destiny in the universe.

*The Bantu sees in man the living force; the force or the being that possesses life that is true, full and lofty. Man is the supreme force, the most powerful among created beings. He dominates plants, animals and minerals. These lower beings exist by divine decree, only for the assistance of the higher created being, man (Tempels 1959:97).*

Bantu thoughts of human psychology are linked in one way or the other to the mutual and co-existences of vital force in the universe. Human beings are not an isolated unit, because for the survival or strength of vital force, interaction and interconnection is an imperative. Human beings are perceived as an integral part of a community where reaction and interaction might take place (Tempels 1959:103).

With regard to their ethics or practical philosophy such as good and evil, Tempels says, Bantus' were returned to their lived system of philosophy; and toward their knowledge of God, in order to extract their principle on good and evil (Tempels 1959:116). In view of Tempels, Bantu moral standards depend essentially on things ontologically understood (Tempels 1959:121). Bantu ethical view seriously reorient toward the notion of vital force. The conduct condemned includes fraud, dishonest, adultery, fornication, and theft because of their destructive influence within the community and negative influences of vital forces of individuals within social group (Tempels 1959:118). He thus, explains this as:

*[e]very act, every detail of behavior, every attitude and every human custom which militates against vital force or against the increase of the hierarchy of the 'muntu' is bad. The destruction of life is a conspiracy against the Divine Plan; and the 'muntu' knows that such destruction is...ontological sacrilege: that it is for that reason immoral and therefore unjust (Tempels 1959:121).*

Having this brief discussions in mind, let us proceed to what does it mean to Tempels? The intention behind this (Tempels) work is clear; that is, his arrival on African soil was to impose the 'law of God' on pagans and savages (or Africans'). Or the Christianization's of Africans which as Tempels and his disciples believed, the liberations of Africans from suppressions and an animists beliefs. However, the result of their finding was somewhat shocking. All negative perceptions on which missionaries and colonizers relied on have reversed altogether. The discovery of Bantu philosophy falsified the gloomy cloud of white men's' rhetoric about Africans and exalted them to rationality. Unlikely, though this endeavor was thought be a revolutionary as a refutation of negative Eurocentric views heaping on Africans, Tempels, who was pioneer in this work is, remaining the victim of his success. In what follows, I will briefly present some critical reactions against Tempels' Bantu philosophy.

### **Bantu philosophy and critics**

As tried to touch above, Tempels's work, namely, Bantu Philosophy attracts negative reactions from both within and outside of Africa. As all missionaries, Tempels work in Africa would have been specific, that is, filling African minds with false images of white man under the cover of preaching Christianity. The success of this mission as missionaries thought, depends on the distortions of African mode of thinking as irrational, illogical as well as mystic. Thus, falsifying this is tantamount to face condemnation as heretical. Though Tempels devotion to fuse Christianity with Bantu world view is rational as well as scientific as intercultural dialogue, his effort was welcomed negatively by his colleagues. On the African side, though Bantu philosophy has an immense role as a theoretical response to false stereotypes heaping on African personality, it rather received less appreciations from some African philosophers. The first critical reaction comes from professional school; specifically from Hountondji. Hountondji, in his article entitled "**Comments on Contemporary African philosophy,**" identified his position as follows; his main objective was to debunk what he dubbed as 'ethno philosophy.' And then, to construct true African philosophy which is dependent neither in theory nor in substance on Europe. According to him, though the materials Tempels relied on are unfitted to philosophy, his work, at least denounced the reductionist view of western Anthropologists. In Hountondji's words ethno philosophers;

*at first sight they appear to be generous, since he had set out to correct a certain image of the black person discriminated by Levy-Bruhl and his school, to show the African world view could not be reduced to that celebrated primitive mentality which was supposed to be insensitive to contradiction, indifferent to elementary law of logic, proof against the ways of experience and so forth (Hountondji, 1983:148).*

Hountondji says, upon close scrutiny this enterprise plays double game; in which the first is to tutor Africans and the second is to realize the hierarchy among Africans and the white man. Their sole mission in view of Hountondji is;

*We do not claim, of course, that Bantu are capable of formulating a philosophical treatise, complete with an adequate vocabulary. It is our job to proceed to such a systematic development. It is we who will be able to tell them, in precise terms, what their inmost concept of being is. They will recognize themselves in our words and*

will acquiesce, saying 'you understand us,' you know us completely,' you "know" in the way we "know" (Deacon, 1996:127).

Tempels used to display his primordial assumptions while he was at first stage of priesthood. However, this invites an array of hostile reactions from both Hountondji and his proponents. Based on this Hountondji says, the implied sources of this text are anonymous and silent—the Bantu themselves do not speak, for they are the objects of study and the voices belongs the Belgian missionary- Tempels. He also added quoting Cesaire's words, "Bantu philosophy is an attempt to create a diversion. It diverts attention from the fundamental political problems of the Bantu peoples fixing it on the level of fantasy, remote from the burning reality of colonial exploitation" (ibid). The second reason for why professional philosophers in general and Hountondji in particular harshly reacted against ethno philosophy is that it relies on sources entirely unphilosophical. According to Hountondji, ethnophilosophers present African traditional culture and religion as philosophy. In their view says Hountondji, African philosophy; " is an implicit 'philosophy' conceived as an unthinking , spontaneous, collective system of thought, common to all Africans or at least to all members of severally, past, present, and future, of such-and such an Africa ethnic group"(qtd in Kebede,2004:99). Of this emerged an expression such as Dogon philosophy, Akan philosophy, Bantu philosophy which imply; the problem with ethno philosophy as there is a collective and spontaneous system of philosophy exists. According to Hountondji, this is a mistaken assumption, because there is no such thing as homogeneous culture in Africa; rather African culture is dynamic and heterogeneous. This insistence on collective thought and unconscious thinking as philosophy implies that African philosophy is commensurate with their particularity. By so doing, the conclusion is that there is no individual thinker in Africa. Hountondji conclude this by saying;

*Behind this (implicit and collective world view) usage .....there is a myth at work, the myth of primitive unanimity, with its suggestion that in "primitive societies.....that is to say, non-western societies .....Everybody always agrees with everybody else. It follows that in such societies there can never be individual beliefs or philosophies but collective system of beliefs" (qtd in Kebede, 2011:9).*

However, the critical question ahead of us is what is philosophy for Hountondji? He leveled critical criticisms against Tempels's work; namely, Bantu philosophy. It is fascinating as well as constructive to some extent, but only inspiring and suspending the reader is enough, the difficulty will be how to come up with something persuasive. Edward Lindon (2002) said in his comments on Senghor's essential nature of Blacks by saying that in Senghor's view, "Black is what white is not." Likewise as the preceding discussions indicate, philosophy in view of Hountondji is something radically different from how ethno philosophy used to display. Ethno philosophy has been accused of being unphilosophical due to its relying on the myth of primitive unanimity---the unconscious world view which in Hountondji's view, fixed and thus, do not open itself to critical investigation. The question still lingering is, can we speak of African philosophy without African world view, specifically, by leaving aside African past? Hountondji argued that ethno philosophers attempted to establish philosophy on what has never existed. What Hountondji meant is not philosophy but the inaccessible sources that ethno philosophy rely on as philosophy. Hence, what is philosophy for Hountondji is clear and precisely what accessible in a written form and then, able to go under thorough analysis. Thus for Hountondji, "the reappropriation of the past knowledge failing to be the restitution of past philosophy; African philosophy is yet to come; it is before us; not behind us, and must be created today by decisive action" ( qtd in Kebede, 2004:88). Rechar H. Bell (2002) says, Hountondji wants a fresh start—a break from ethno philosophy and other "intellectual impediments and prejudices." But he also wants to carve out a more specific channel for African philosophy (2002:28). And accordingly, says Bell, philosophy for Hountondji is a perpetual movement, chains of responses from one individual philosopher to another across the ages. To open up his view, Bell says, Hountondji establishes four criteria against which any written literature should be met. First, that philosophy be written. Philosophy, Hountondji says, is critical reflection par excellence, cannot develop fully unless it "write its memoirs or keeps a diary; philosophy is a set of texts written by Africans and described as philosophical by their authors themselves" (2002:28-29).

Secondly, the literature or discourse be "scientific" related to the first criteria, Hountondji makes a distinction between what he calls "artistic literature" and "scientific literature." Philosophy belongs to the latter (ibid). For there to be an African philosophy, Hountondji believes there must first be an African science.

It is not philosophy but science that Africa needs first. This, he says, will get us away from "Metaphysical problem, "the meaning of life,' and problems of "human destiny" and "the existence of God" (ibid). Thirdly, that the discourse be exclusively of African Geographic and ethnic origin. Not only does Hountondji rule out most oral discourse and virtually all artistic literatures, "but most of the so-called ethno philosophical literature can only be an occasion for African philosophy since vast majority of it is written by Europeans and North Americans. African philosophy is restricted to "scientific" texts by Africans.....texts

signed by such.....and such.....authors whose origin is African soil”(ibid). The forth is that the internal texture of philosophy be purely dialectical. According to Bell, this is the most far reaching and most promising of Hountondji’s criteria. All learning, Hountondji says, appears as “an event in language, or more precisely, as the product of discussion.” African philosophy must develop in the context of a “constant free discussion about all problems concerning its discipline.” Paradoxically by such an internal discussion among Africans, Hountondji believes that African philosophy will develop beyond narrow ethnic boundaries and become universal (qtd in Bell, 2002:31). Philosophy as this dialectical event in language must secure for itself “freedom of expression as a necessary condition for all science, for theoretical development and, in the last resort, for all political and economic progress” (ibid). He continues in saying , after securing liberty for criticism, philosophy may then begin its more concrete tasks of developing its own theoretical course- it may take on its own history in African context. This dialectical development in philosophy for Hountondji is to mean in Socrates words “truth is the very act of looking for truth,” of enunciating propositions and trying to justify and found them.

Having this critical points in mind, the question then is, are these stringent criteria rationally welcomed? As the preceding discussions imply, any pieces of written work to be accepted as philosophy, must be critical, rigorous or in other words, it must open itself to dialogue. Given this conditions, only what existed in written form that can be accessible to this task. In this case, if being critical and rigorous are the only means through which one’s work is rendered the name philosophy and then, only what is written meeting this criteria, then the fate of illiterate society would uncertain, since, as the name implies, philosophy is the sole criteria by which the rationality of man is granted. But in so far as being rational is an essence that is the attribute of all human beings and this is undeniable, whether one’s view existed in written form or not, is not an issue, as long as the objective is to establish the rationality of all human beings across the world. Hountondji says, there were philosophies in African past however, there was no individual philosopher because of the absence of recording system in pre-colonial Africa. “Writing is an important vehicle for the systemization and growth of knowledge (qtd in Kebede, 2004:108).” However, lack of recoding system doesn’t mean sufficient reason for the absence or the existence of right thinking. Because what is written is something which its existence is already proved. In this case, truth exists independently of this technique and then, this technique is perhaps used to more amplify it. Oyenka Owomoyela’s objection to Hountondji is at best fitted here. He says, Hountondji tells us that “truth cannot exist except in a written mode” (qtd in Lindon, 2002:97).

Secondly, when we come to Hountondji’s characterization of philosophy to scientific literature, we found out quite his leaning on materialist view of philosophy. He accused ethno philosophers of presenting unconscious world-view as philosophy. Philosophy, as treated above relies on something critical, rigorous, and provable written works, instead of something which never exist. Science is the remedial reaction to superstitious and unconscious fixed beliefs that Temples and his disciples perceived as philosophy. So to secure the right to critical thinking, science must proceed philosophy. However, the question is what is to be defended? African philosophy or something else? If what is going to defend is really African philosophy which inextricably linked to the rehabilitation of African humanity, Hountondji in my view, has glossed over the burning issue—the questionable rationality of Africans. As critic pointed out, the reduction of philosophy to ‘epistemology’ explains Hountondji’s mistaken rejection of traditional African philosophy. As Messay kebede indicates, to say that he is mesmerized by western philosophy to the point of endorsing the anthropological discourse by characterizing African thinking as collective, spontaneous, and irrational is hardly an exaggeration. No where do we see them developing the slight doubt about the accuracy of terms used to describe African traditional thinking. Against the charge of collective, uncritical and non-individual thinking, Messay said by quoting Kwame Gyekye;

*There is strictly speaking, no such thing as “collective” thought, if this means that ideas result from the intellectual production of a whole collectivity. What has come to be described as “collective” is nothing but ideas of individual wise people” (qtd in Kebede, 2004:104).*

To sum up, the reaction against Hountondji’s criteria is too vast to present concisely. So it is advisable to focus on why things replay in such a way? According to Kebede, Hountondj and his colleagues are deceived by what is philosophy. Instead of demystifying Eurocentric notions of rationality, they rather, relied on it as ultimate truth. Hountondji accepts the idea of western philosophy as universal yardstick, thereby overlooking the grave distortions imparted by Eurocentrism. Speaking of Hountondji Kebede said, he “fails to do that preliminary work of questioning the Eurocentric structures as he appropriate, European philosophy” (ibid). In a similar line, Pascah (2011) says by quoting Masolo, “modern African intellectual history is part of a consistent escape from the harshly negated African past”(2011:28). For instance; Towa argued that “a traditional philosophy existed, but it needed not recovered for the simple reason that it was utterly worthless” (qtd in Kebede, 2004:104). “What fails Hountondji is that his criticisms of the west, no doubt pertinent, are not radical enough, being but repetitions of what Marx says about capitalism. Marxist critique of the west doesn’t really question western hegemony; it only advocates assimilation to the European culture defined as the universal and most progressive culture” (Kebede, 2004:105). According to Kebede, real and radical criticism starts when the

west has no longer viewed as a model, when its Euro centrism is denounced and its model of philosophy questioned.

Having cleared the spaces of Eurocentric residue, it is time to open eyes wide in search of what is really rehabilitating Africa? For the virtual rehabilitation to occur in Africa, Africans should abandon enriching western scientific theories in the name of deconstructing contradictions inherent in Eurocentric discourses. African philosophers as Jennifer said, seeking to respond to the questions as to whether or not Africans have the capacity to reason are engaged in perverse dialogue, and thereby squandering time that would be better used in truly philosophical issues that are of relevance to their continent” (2009:4). Of course, criticisms alone do not constitute doing philosophy. Philosophy is defined as “criticisms of ideas people live by (Staniland qtd in Okolo 2007).” If this is the case, which idea of Africa would be the subject of reflection? To be frank, I seriously doubt, except Tempels’s Bantu philosophy, the rest are owing their excessive muscle to explicate Eurocentric discourses. Thus Bantu philosophy, irrespective of its philosophical draw backs, is entirely dealing with African life system. The rest of philosophical trends Africa are in way or the other either the responses to or simply an endorsements of Eurocentric narratives. This does not mean that their efforts are out of doing philosophy. Rather, it is to mean that it is part of doing philosophy and thus, the stem or the parcel, which is so critical is neglected. Tempels, no matter how his footing on African land has clearly expressed objectives that is negative to Africans’ well-being, his encounter with Congolese, taught him, enlightened him above all, empowered to him to revise the primordial arguments of colonialism. In what follows, I will present Tempels confrontation with Congolese, outcomes and prospects.

### **Evangelization, failure, and Tempels’s reaction**

Tempels commitment to his religion-Christianity, has brought remarkable outcomes within and outside of Africa. The reversion of negative stereotypes against Africans and the approval of the existence of native philosophy, are together a moral courage to the natives. By virtue of this, Africans exalted to the level of having dialogue with the whites. However, though Tempels Bantu philosophy is a ‘revolutionary’ to both natives and his fellow missionaries, it is not welcomed positively within and outside of Africa. He was reacting to the prevailing belief about Africans, argued in earlier works by anthropologists such as Lucien Levy Bruhl, and by his own catholic church, that Africans were incapable of rational thought, and hence, they were less humans. He responded by arguing that there was a coherent and interesting philosophy among the Bantu. However, the rational argument might not be the failure of missionary work and consequently, the discovery of Bantu philosophy, the critical issue right now is, how far this starting point taken up as further lesson. Based on this revised strategy of preaching, Tempels reaction shows two way relationships, that is, purifying Christianity and recognizing the natives’ world view,-- and then, searching for points of convergence. Two reasons can be accounted for Tempels to devise this strategy. The first is his honest commitment to the Christian mission and the second is the resistance from what has already been resurfaced; namely, the African world views. Individual Congolese were relapsed to their original religion during crisis. Having this as a failure of his mission, Tempels hurried up to revise his way of preaching. Scholars divided his life in Congo into three phases. Let us see these phases.

The first was his ‘priest phase’ in which Tempels assumed himself as “boss, lord and master of his church, who knows all, says all, while faithful have only to listen and keep quiet” (Deacon, 1996:118). During this time Tempels had in mind the primordial ideas of Europeans against Africans, the view that Africans were primitive, backward and so that their custom is stupid and superstitious. In adopting this imperious attitude, which had become implanted in Tempels psyche by popularly accepted colonialist thought of the time, he had experienced that his missionary work as being a dismal failure. However, as Messay says, the fact of the failure doesn’t incite Tempels to call for upgrade efforts of conversion. His diagnosis is a simple and direct as it is perplexing: the denial of the existence of a native philosophy is the main reason for the failure of missionary work in Africa. It was at this phase that Tempels decided to abandon his old belief about himself and the negative assumptions toward the natives. He announced...” The gods are dethroned, the disinherited stand before us as equal (Tempels 1959: 75)” This brings him to the ‘adaptive phase.’ Tempels’ adaptation phase becomes notably influenced by ‘adaptive’ opinion present in Belgian colonial circles by 1940s. “Individuals in the legal profession were among the main of the adaptation theory, it is being recognized by them..... that traditional Congolese law, like European law, could not be understood without reference to “certain general notions about (Congolese) political and social organization and ontology” (Deacon, 1996:119). Being thus influenced by the notions of the ‘adaptive’ thinking and perception of his missionary venture as a failure, Tempels began focusing on the African people, socially and anthropologically. By 1943, Tempels was explicitly gathering information from BaLuba people concerning their culture, beliefs and custom (ibid, p.120). Being socially involved with the Baluba people, and become educated in the culture and traditions of the group, Tempels realized that conversion is impossible without accepting the humanity of natives. His decision lead us to draw two conclusions. His determination to reconcile his old beliefs with Bantu world views and then,

holding a dialogue with Africans for the success of his missionary work. Hence, “conversion is conceptualized more as an outcome of dialogue than as molding of a dispossessed soul. The immediate effect of the recognition of philosophy is to stimulate the disposition to dialogue” (Kebede, 2004:42). The third phase is the culmination of all what he had learned and experienced from the first two phases as a missionary. Given this understanding, Tempels stated his humble views as follow;

*man is created for the other that man came only to self- realization, to really being man, in his encounter with others. Man, in order to be really man, has to change, has to take the other into itself, and has to give himself to the other. Only then does man become truly man” (Deacon, 1996:120).*

In this last phase, Tempels as this quotation entails has announced openly his firm belief to rely on true message of Christianity as the surer way to clear the way to conversion. Though he is not openly exposing the hidden agenda that spoil his evangelization, he stresses that the devaluation of Bantu ontology and thereby their humanity is the cause of relapses. As Messay puts it,

*This continuous resurgence of old beliefs and practices testifies to a superficial conversion that failed to the root of Bantu soul. The real meaning of the relapses becomes patent when we note that they are associated, with moments of crisis, caused by intense sufferings or threat to life. This existential sense of the relapse indicates the depth of the reaction and the evidence of the powerful impact of traditional beliefs on the natives” (2004:41).*

Being aware of this, Tempels unequivocally turned his face back on his corrupted religion as part of obstacle. Tempels held the idea that arrogance alone prevent the method of conversion to Christianity from being consonant with Christian love. But his firm stand is not limited to European Christianity, it rather goes beyond that to Bantu philosophy. He said, ....”possibly we shall feel regret for all the time and valiant endeavor that have been in vain, but we shall have the joy of cherishing the hope that we have at length discovered the true point of departure (Tempels 1959:74).” What does this ‘true point of departure’ mean? Tempels said, “we must proceed with Bantu towards its sources to the point at which ‘the evolution of primitive peoples’ was led into a false path by false deductions; and, taking this as our point of departure, help the Bantu to build their own Bantu civilization, stable and noble of their own (Tempels qtd in Kebede, 2004:49).” From this points of view, a true conversion is a matter of cultural interbreeding.

## II. CONCLUDING REMARKS

What can Africans learn from this concise discussions? As various research pointed out the discovery of African philosophy poses both deconstructive and reconstructive threats to what has been previously thought of as universal and ultimate true. As some scholars argued, “African philosophical views emerged from the clear perception of the deep damage caused by the internalization of the colonial discourse ( Kebede 2011:4).” As the result of this, excessive muscles was owing to refute and then, correct the wrong perceptions about African personality. However, as underlined above, this is only the part of or the branch of the stem. Because criticisms or deconstructing a given text alone does not constitute doing full-fledged philosophy. African philosophy to be African, its reflection ought to be centered on African life systems. Because it is only then that, Africans, as seen everywhere, ought to offer or contribute something to enrich universal human knowledge and vis versa. But to do so is not an easy task for Africans in this 21<sup>st</sup> century. As Grusovnik in his article entitled ‘Globalization inside philosophy’ (2008) stated, the philosophical and theoretical activities *mimic economic* one. So given the multiple problems in African today, the way forward is without doubt, full of ups and downs.

As indicated from the outset, ‘the antidote located somewhere in the poison’ at best fitted here. Tempels tiresome activities in Congo was not to actually study Bantu culture, rather his main objective is to plant Christianity on African land. Doing this was not as easy as he predicted, he faced serious confrontations. Thus, to overcome this challenges, he had to go through lengthy and depth processes so as to look for a vacant places to sow his Christian seeds (or beliefs). However, the vacant places are not actually refers to the land, rather it is to mean the gap in Bantus’culture which is in Tempels’s view, translated as ‘where the evolution of primitive peoples’ was led into false path by false deduction’..... . Having identified this as a research gap, Tempels then proceed in filling the gap through fusing the relevant elements in both cultures that complement one another. To be honest, Tempels strategy is philosophically promising as well as scientifically verifiable. In philosophy, the reconciling process to open dialogue in between two different cultures could be taken as intercultural philosophy, which is a recent development as a response to extreme universality. And in Science, the symbiosis of two closely associated animals or plants could provide an offspring through either cross-breeding, or give us a sweeter fruits through grafting respectively.

Keeping this mind, let us come to what Africans ought to do if they really want to lay philosophical edifice in Africa. As William James stated, “if philosophers can treat the life of the universe abstractedly, they must not complain of an abstract treatment of the life of philosophy itself (qtd in Grusovnik, 2008:2).” According to James, treating ‘philosophical activity’ abstractly- is simply means from a distance. This is at best explaining what we call today African philosophy. For instance, if one takes a close look to what have been written in Africa in the name of philosophy, nearly all of the written texts are dealing with what was said by



European early thinkers such as Aristotle, Plato, Descartes, Hegel, Kant, ...etc. However, this doesn't mean giving responses is totally wrong; rather owing excessive energy to explicate these texts and too much reliance on this is a perversion. As James says, African philosophy has been either staying abroad in exile or caught somewhere in the sky. So that I contend that it is rational as well as justifiable to bring home African philosophy. What does this mean in the context of this work? It is simply to mean that African philosophy to be really African, its contents, nature, analysis, and interpretation, must entirely focuses on African lives. By virtue of doing this, African philosophy can contribute a lot to both Africa and the rest of the world. As Vincent Shen said, as the world entering globalization, philosophy should answer two interrelated questions.

*The first, how could each philosophical tradition draw the best of its cultural resources for the benefits other philosophical traditions. And the second, how could each philosophical tradition achieve self-understanding by facing impartially other philosophical traditions, and, furthermore, let philosophizing become indispensable for the mutual understanding of all cultural tradition in the world (Shen 2003:350)*

To upgrade its philosophical theories to this level, Africans should address its perennial problems; namely, the extroversion of resources as well as knowledge. As Hountondji claims, "scientific activity in Africa remains basically extroverted, alienated, and dependent on international division of labor (qtd in Grusovnik,2008:3)" Houtondji raised so many points, however, of these the serious one in the context of this paper is," lack of original theory- building-the 'means of production'- for the theory building have to be imported. According to Hountondji, what is missed in Africa is "the second stage" in scientific procedure. The scientific procedure can namely be divided into three steps: data *collection*, *processing*, and *application* The most important one---the heart of it---is, of course, processing stage: there theories that shape the world as we see it are made (Ibid: 3). For Hountondji, this missing link is the same as the missing link in African economy: "Laboratories were missing just as industrial plants were missing in the colonies (qtd in Ibid 2008:4)." The missing of these two determines how far Africa is in state of failure. The absence of Laboratories or where ideas are processing relegates African scholars to "*Adjusted audience* (qtd in Grusovnik, 2008)" or data providers. Whereas the absence of industrial plants too forced Africans to export raw materials. No doubt, the absence of the two have incurred Africa a lot and continue to damage it in the future. Thus, shifting this trend is an imperative so as to bring back Africa on the right track. However, the question is what will be the starting point?

Every human interaction has both positive and negative outcomes. The same is true for Africa's encounter with Europe. The negative sides of colonization are countless, and of these the main target however, was African cultures. African cultures were judged as useless to humankind. Even though the denial of rational thinking finally led to the birth of Bantu philosophy, it has diverted the debate of philosophical works from within to outside. Though this South-North dialogue is philosophically an intercultural and thus, seemed fruitful, it has remained futile because of the historical encounter between the two continents. What worsening the relations is that Europeans have had both processed ideas and industrial plants on their hand, and has the power to impose policies, strategies and so forth on Africa. Africans on the other hand, have had nothing on their hand but to receive what is imposed on them no matter how the consequences are. The issue right now is how to strike this imbalance relationships? Shifting the dialogue from South-North to within Africa is an imperative in whatever cost. And embracing and harnessing indigenous knowledge (or African cultures), or awakening the reconstructing task of philosophy has a paramount importance. In this globalized world, Africa needs not only commercial centers where commodities will be exchanged, but also centers of ideas where ideas exchange. As the two cannot stand independently, it is appropriate to have both at the same time. Their relation is similar to that of the relation between ruled and the ruler. When we use such phrases as research driven market or research driven economy in writing, it is implying that there an implicit hand which is guiding these activities. So what is lacked in Africa right now is not activities, but the smart hand which guides and keeps the activities in the right truck. Africa needs a research institutions that is capable to govern overall its activities. However, the main concern of these institutions would be Africa and Africans and their subject area or concern for producing knowledge ought to be their immediate environment, that is, Africa itself. So the starting point for Africans, in my view, is critically engaging with intra-dialogue among Africans. Doing this is so challenging given the various barriers in Africa such as physical infrastructure and languages. The rationality behind this intra-dialogue is to come up with where ideas within and outside Africa converge; namely, the common denominators among cultures. Just as research institution whose primary concern is studying Soil, includes in studies varieties of soils, its ingredients, its potential deficiencies, its productive capacities, and what it lacks so as to determine the input, African intellectuals too ought to turn their face toward intra-dialogue among Africans. In conclusion, this is all about '*tilling the land before sowing the seeds.*'

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