

Ka Osi So Onye
*African Philosophy in the
Postmodern Era*

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Foreword

This edited book of readings comes at a good time in the journey of African Philosophy. It comes at a moment in the discourse when African Philosophy is actually being done, and the doers are now taking stock as to where they have been and where they are going. This state of affairs is in healthy contrast to that earlier moment in the African Philosophy story when much time was spent arguing what the nature of philosophy was and whether philosophy has shown its face on the African continent.

Yes, Virginia, there is such a thing as African Philosophy, and yes, Virginia, it is doing quite well. And on this very score, it is not so much that Europe has got its own Santa Claus, and this Santa really exists; and that we have got ours, and ours also exists; but that Santa or no Santa, each place has its world-making sufficient unto its space. That should have been evident “from the git go”, to use an expression beloved of the Americans. In any case, here we are, at this moment in our history, with this opportune appearance of a commendable philosophical volume of readings.

Those who see the story of philosophy as divided between the ancient, medieval, modern, and postmodern, periods are not in error in doing so. Acceptable sense can be made of this classification. But between the modern and the postmodern there lies a story, and if the story is to be told, it must be told using what I would like to call a “Principle of Interpretive Charity.”

In my view of the sequence of events, between the modern and the postmodern, this is what happened. Once Christian Europe started to fragment because of the loss of faith in heaven and an attendant parsimony in the cultivation of grace, that loss of belief also meant the loss of an epistemic center. In the voice of the old Testament prophets, God held it all together and was rightfully described in this way:

In whom there is no variableness

neither shadow of turning

Father of Light

It was this fixity of reference, now threatened, which Kant and the Enlightenment tried to reintroduce along the lines of a rational secular philosophy, a rational philosophy with its own fixed points of reference. Hence the Categorical Imperative understood as a fixed star for anyone to use to guide be-

havior in the moral realm. The command was put *not* in a hypothetical mode, a subjunctive conditional, but rather in an indicative mode, a categorical do or don't; not an "if--then" command structure. Deontology arrived insistent on forestalling the iffy-ness of a wobbly Teleology then rearing its head within the domain of ethics.

The point of all of this is not to engage in a heavy philosophical debate in what is meant to be a foreword to an edited volume of philosophical readings, but rather to advance two theses. First, the search for certainty and fixedness in philosophy has been a long and ongoing affair, and is not in itself a bad idea. Population groups need to be able to communicate within themselves, and a fixed point of reference, if it could be found, is beneficial to persons' wellbeing. Individuals just can't go about indiscriminately constituting their own private worlds without regard to what others in the neighborhood are saying. Lunacy for individuals can arise out of lunacy in the social realm. Here, to the extent that philosophy still has something to do with the love of wisdom, not just the love of cleverness, we must keep these matters in mind.

Which brings me to my second point, namely; the role that Africa can play in this newly arrived discursive field called postmodernism. This second point follows naturally from the first. Because of Africa's generally accepted communal way of looking at things, and the continent's impatience with abstraction for its own sake, we might be able to make do with the notion of "true enough" or "moral enough," i.e. *true* sufficient unto the task at hand, or *moral* sufficient unto the task at hand. This is not to argue for a notion of relativism in truth or a notion of relativism in the field of morality, for then one would also be engaging in an abstraction. The point, rather, is that with the *true* and the *moral* made sufficient, judging from the task at hand, the social and communal roles in the designation of knowledge, the doing of the moral thing, get to be preserved, as I believe they should. Truth is not found in the head of the individual alone, nor is morality found in the head or heart of the individual alone.

At this point, I have a proposal to make and it is to suggest that the habit of plural discourse, the very idea itself, ought to be made more prominent in our deliberations. And plural discourse, I dare point out, does not mean dissonance. For there is at core something around which the plurality gathers itself. A plurality of vice and a plurality of virtue, if one were a theologian, and also, of course, a plurality of voices (as in the present philosophical case)—each of these variant pluralities has its own distinct center. For "vice" and "virtue" and "voice" must be considered three different sorts of things, not one. Plural discourse aims to ascertain the core of each of the three, not the core of all three.

Or to offer another example, more concrete: A bricklayer, though he is obviously able to count, is not an expert discussant on high mathematics. Nor is the mathematician an expert practitioner in the laying of bricks. For the mathematician, we have good reason to avoid any homes that he has built, absent further evidence that he had acquired the relevant skills, regarding the laying of bricks. There is a measure to these things. As they say on the street corners of London: Tom and Dick are not equal, and Harry, he is not equal to either one of them, even though they, all three of them, have an equal vote in electing members to the House of Commons. The benefit of this strategy of working from the inside out, rather than from the outside in, is that it makes it easier, makes it certainly more effective, to dislodge any erroneous assumptions contained in an interlocutor's position than would otherwise be the case, working from the outside in.

This is the beauty of conversation as an approach to the doing of philosophy. In a situation of non-plural discourse, coming from the outside in, positions can readily harden and the person who is challenged will fail to see what the challenge is about. Meanwhile, the challenger will either decide to stay put and punch his way through, or else will abandon effort, feeling he has been boxed into an alien corner. Discourse then ceases, and, with the cessation, the progress of ideas also ceases. Everyone walks away a loser, as ignorant as when they first began.

Let me, by way of bringing these remarks to a close, call attention to one problem area where plural discourse should turn out to be very helpful. This problem area has to do with Europe and some of Europe's own contestations regarding the true nature of philosophy in so far as the academy is concerned. I refer to the conflicts between the British Analytical School of philosophy and the Continental School; in particular to the nastiness of some of these debates within the philosophy departments of American universities.

On the matter of Europe and certain of its contestations regarding the nature of philosophy within the academy, let me therefore say a few words. I have argued all along that there is a core, a gathering centre, which defines what we as philosophers do, and that this core, however finally it gets to be defined, is what sets us apart from what mathematicians do, or what historians, astronomers, lawyers, sociologists, or even bricklayers, do. In arguing for the unity of the philosophical enterprise I must again reiterate that I am not oblivious to the contentiousness of the disagreements mentioned above, i.e. the disagreements surrounding the many battles fought by Europeans (and Europe-descended Americans) within the larger field of philosophy—whether, for example, the Analytic School should prevail, or the Continental prevail, and whether there might come a day when the two schools could bake bread together.

But, as an African looking at these battles between the British School and the Continental School, one thought that comes to mind is this: against the background of the larger tragedies of Europe, England included, could one not reasonably come to feel that these fights were not at all necessary; that they were nothing but a tempest in a tea cup, a tempest stirred up by spoiled little children who have lost their way? Today it has taken some time for sanity to return to European philosophy; for the combatants to re-embrace good sense; taken some time for philosophy, as the love of wisdom, not the love of cleverness, to reassert itself. It is good for Europeans to keep their eyes on the prize, avoiding multiple distractions on the way. The older understanding of philosophy as the love of wisdom needed to be brought back and reinvigorated. A conversational approach to philosophy will continue to be helpful in this regard. This will keep all of us, Africa and Europe, moving toward a path of inclusive community for the benefit of our common world. The editors are to be complimented for putting together this excellent book of readings and for showcasing the need for a “brotherly” conversational approach to philosophy, guided by a postmodern spirit of productive tolerance.

Ifeanyi Menkiti

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Preface

The title of this book is *Ka Osi Sọ Onye: African Philosophy in the Postmodern Era*. The literal meaning of the Igbo expression *Ka Osi Sọ Onye* which translates to postmodern thinking is: as it pleases one which does not displease another. Figuratively, it connotes something that is particularistic but nonetheless universalisable or arising from a place but reaching other places. In our context, that thing would be philosophical reason. And if as Ludwig Wittgenstein suggests, every philosophy is supposed to be an attempt to solve a problem then every philosophy arises in a place and becomes an attempt to solve a problem that stimulated it. The aim of this book is to cause African Philosophy to assume a posture from which it can attend to the conditions in which its questions arise. It was Bertrand Russell who exclaimed that the circumstances of a people determine their philosophy. The journey of reason therefore begins not just in a place but in different places for different peoples. Postmodernism is that new doctrine that affirms the validity of this multi-perspective approach to philosophical exercise. This postmodern posturing gestures toward the existence of different philosophical places as contexts for the manifestation of reason. The existence of difference resonates with Jacques Derrida's question about the right place to philosophise? Our answer to this is: in any place where philosophical questions arise. The challenge before us in this book, then, is to curate the march of reason in the African philosophical place and to attempt to articulate its postmodern posturing.

Contributors are drawn from the pool of old and emerging scholars in the field of African Philosophy from across different Universities on the continent of Africa and beyond. The work aims at providing a postmodern interpretation and unveiling the journey of reason in African Philosophy. The target is to present some emerging ideas critically and pertinent questions in African Philosophy in one volume and in addition give them a critical reinterpretation from a postmodern perspective. The goal is to establish that one of the ways in which African Philosophy can be understood as one of the traditions in world philosophy would be to see it through the lens of postmodernism. This should not, however, depict it as reactionary or as a culture of resistance but rather as a resurgent culture. It was Richard Rorty who explains that philosophy in our time has become a form of "cultural politics" where each culture must strive to affirm itself or be denied.

To do this, on the one hand, each tradition must define itself within the universal configuration of philosophy. In other words, it must answer the questions: what makes our discourse ours? And what makes it philosophy? Epis-

temic formations in such cultures then must initiate a culture-inspired programme that is critical. It is on this basis that reason is positioned as a primary index for thought which has the individual as its ultimate pivot. My thinking is that reason is not a collectivist expression of all *selves*. It is not even the identity or an attribute of the individual self; it is rather, self-expression. Self-expression is a linguistic activity, and any entity capable of this manifests rationality. Similarly, any culture that is intelligent enough to develop language is rational. The way African Philosophy has fared in the manifestation of reason and the way it shall proceed are the focuses of the first part of this volume.

Postmodernism, on the other hand, is a philosophical theory which seeks to dethrone the Enlightenment legacy in the mode of absolute conception of reality and a strait-jacketed presentation of rationality. Thus it tends to uphold a multiverse rather than a universe. In an Africa-inspired conception, postmodern thinking aims to establish that more than one cock could crow. Although parts could form a whole, the recognition of the identity of the parts and their individual viability within or outside the whole and the non-absolutisation of the whole is a common aspiration of all postmodern thinkers and theorists. The turgidity associated with the opponents of the latter argument concerns African Philosophy in a subtle way. As a philosophical tradition, African Philosophy has been vitiated by scholars of other traditions. While some regard it as non-existent, others relate to it more like a pseudo-philosophical tradition. However, there are many informed scholars who now recognise African Philosophy as a towering and a rigorous discipline. To the latter, the postmodern presentation of African Philosophy (the focus of part two of this volume) would be a monumental exercise. But to the polemics, it would be a staggering school of lessons and a scholarly reawakening. Whichever way one looks at it, this project promises great intellectual, philosophical and comparative value.

African Philosophy by the very circumstances of its emergence is tugged in a war with both modernity and postmodernity. First, it is negated by modernity that decrees uniform manifestation of reason. Second, it is vitiated by postmodernity that ravages its communalistic memory. This memory is ontological and is a closed and a sanctimonious one. Of these two (modernity and postmodernity), African Philosophy was able to, in the course of the Great Debate and the disillusionment that followed afterwards, negotiate a new structure in which it shaded its closed unanimity and became open for conversation—a voice amidst other voices. It arose from this new vision to the reality that its voice, while no longer closed has become non-conformist thus rivalling the modern ‘other’. But the fact that it can speak to and be spoken back to heralded a postmodern consciousness. The development of African

Philosophy in the last few years, it is safe to say, has been on this path. Some have thought of it as a struggle first to become postmodern so that it might become modern. This is not the aspiration of this book. By becoming postmodern, it is reconstructing the lopsided reason birthed by Enlightenment. It is a struggle to liberate reason, to set it free from the prison of the cultural hegemony of modernism.

But this struggle must not be understood as mere cultural resistance to Europe; it is far more than that. It is a quest to decompose and recompose reason, to disband the philosophical city and reorganise it into villages. To break the monologue of the Greco-European logos which soliloquises and in its place, introduce a mode of conversation inspired by Okwu, a critical engagement in which every voice has something to say—an Okwucentric revolution—it is to recapture *sophia*, this time, from different philosophical places.

In this collection, we curate the journey of reason in African Philosophy prior to and since the end of the Great Debate as postmodern. Our goals are dual. On the one hand, we want to reconceptualise reason/rationality as language dependent and not dependent on the self. When erroneously conceived as an attribute of an individual person, it readily leads to the error or intended mischief of supposing that some have it while others do not. This eventually gives birth to what Michel Foucault calls “logophilia”, a sort of over-commitment to logos and to logocentricism which has continued to hunt the history of philosophy since the time of Aristotle. And even to what I call logomania—the unintended and unconscious addiction to the logocentric mode in the African philosophical inquiry. In this guise, logocentricism has become a weaponised idea of Eurocentric vision which not only collapses the fledgling human unity but draws divisive lines in humanity’s cognitive formation. What manifests in this divisiveness is a homogeneous order in which a determinate world-view attempts to impose its mindview on the rest of humanity. The dangerous thing is that homogeneity of this type symbolises epistemic closure.

On the other hand, we want to rearticulate the vision of postmodern thinking from the perspective of epistemic democracy. In the end, it may be possible to admit as Peter Bodunrin intones that A is better than B, and I should add, in a particular context which may not be the case in another. This, for me, is the beauty of democracy in political practice as in knowledge formations. When postmodernism is elementarily conceived as lacking in objectivity and universal appeal, it leads to the error of dismissing the postmodern as *standardless*, *centreless* and as radical differentiation. For us, there is another way of looking at the half empty glass. Non-totalisation or non-absolutisation does not necessarily imply lack of or absence of a universally applicable standard. What it implies is lack of an absolute standard. It is pos-

sible to have many different universally applicable standards none of which is absolute. A universally applicable standard is one that can apply in many a culture, save for some cultures and some contexts within the cultures but an absolute standard is one that can apply in all cultures and in all contexts within the cultures. Often, the postmodern is erroneously viewed to repudiate the former alongside the latter. The postmodern posturing we adopt is one that rejects the absolute and not the universal as conceived in the above.

Again, the difference is usually symbolised as inferior or irrational, but this is not correct. This must have inspired Jacques Derrida to discuss his ideas of “*différance* and *différence*”. Differentiation, when not understood in the sense of superior/inferior but rather that of variety, may be the ultimate justification of rationality when we take into consideration the insight that rationality may not exist in the absence of an opposing mindview.

On the whole, it is our aim to present philosophy as a disagreement discourse or as conversations. This suggests that once philosophy comes to one vision of reason as the homogeneity of modernism tends to demand, reason goes on holiday. Philosophers must be able to argue and disagree. There has to be dissent. Only in this way is reason truly free. Philosophy generally is about how humans should live. Different philosophical places represent rival views of the journey of reason on how best we should live. Without rivalry of thoughts, humanity, and Africa specifically will settle for far less. This gives postmodernism an important place, perhaps deservedly more important than the history of philosophy allocates to it. It is that philosophical moment that says ‘philosophers must cease speaking like gods in their hegemonic cultural shrines and begin to converse across borders with one another’. In this conversation, the goal for African philosophers must not be to find final answers but to sustain the conversation which alone can extend human reason to its furthest reaches.

This collection is thus about composing thought at the level of modernism and decomposing it at the postmodern level where many cocks might crow with African Philosophy as a focal point. It has two parts: part one is titled ‘The Journey of Reason in African Philosophy’, and part two is titled ‘African Philosophy and Postmodern Thinking’. There are seven chapters in both parts. Five of the essays are reprinted here as important selections while nine are completely new essays commissioned for this book. As their titles suggest, in part one, African Philosophy is unfolded in the manifestation of reason as embedded in modern thought while in part two, it draws the effect of reason as implicated in the postmodern orientation. While part one strikes at what V. Y. Mudimbe calls the “colonising structure” or the Greco-European logophallo-euro-centricism in thought, part two bashes the excesses of modernism and partly valorises postmodernism. In some chapters, modernism is

presented as an intellectual version of communalism characterised by the cliché: 'our people say'. Our thinking is that the voice of reason is not the voice of the people but the voice of an individual. The ideas expressed in this book are expected to stimulate further conversations among African philosophers.

The idea of this book is to open new vistas for the discipline of African Philosophy. African Philosophy is thus presented as a disagreement discourse. Without rivalry of thoughts, Africa will settle for far less. This gives postmodernism an important place, perhaps deservedly more important than the history of philosophy allocates to it. It is that philosophical moment that says 'philosophers must cease speaking like gods in their hegemonic cultural shrines and begin to converse across borders with one another'. In this conversation, the goal for African philosophers must not be to find final answers but to sustain the conversation which alone can extend human reason to its furthest reaches. It is expected to serve as an important research resource for many scholars, comparative researchers, teachers, and students of African Philosophy and studies in many universities in Africa and beyond.

We acknowledge all authors whose works have served as inspiration for the thoughts expressed in the chapters of this book. While we have strived to eliminate all errors of omission and commission in editing this volume, we apologise beforehand for any error that might have eluded us. As various African philosophers continue to work for the development of African thought, let us keep in mind that famous Igbo work song: *bunoo, bunoo, ibu anyi danda...* 'work together, oh ye African philosophers and do not despair, the burden is lighter when borne concertedly, work and do not despair for what lies ahead is greater'.

J. O. Chimakonam

Bayside, Calabar

Jan., 2016

Acknowledgements

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The editors heartily appreciate all the chapter contributors for their commitment to the growth of African Philosophy in our time. We thank most importantly those that granted permission to reprint their previously published works the original sources of which have been duly acknowledged in the above. We further acknowledge the authors of all the works cited in the various chapters of this volume. Also, we thank colleagues in different universities who assisted with the anonymous peer-review process that variously improved the essays and enabled us to make the final decisions for this volume. We thank in a special way, The Conversational School of Philosophy (CSP) which is at the fore-front of continuing development of African Philosophy in our time and which provided various forms of support during the preparation of this volume. Finally, the vice-chancellors and senates of University of Calabar and University of the Witwatersrand are hereby acknowledged for providing the academic space that aided the editors. It is our modest hope that this volume will make a significant contribution to the discipline of African Philosophy in transition.

Introduction: Reason and Postmodern Thinking in African Philosophy

Philosophers through the ages have contributed immensely to human civilisation. As a matter of fact, philosophers have postulated theories in such areas as Metaphysics, Epistemology, Ethics, Social and Political Philosophy, Linguistic Analysis, Philosophy of Science, Logic and Mathematics to mention a few. It is also true that there is philosophy of everything under the sun. Hence, applied disciplines such as Philosophy of Medicine, Sport, Race, Gender, Law, Economics and Religion are readily embraced because of their importance to human race. Philosophy itself, going by its etymology, started formally in ancient Greece, notwithstanding rejoinders to the contrary (see Onyewuenyi, 1993). What is more important is philosophy's claim to rationality and universality. These two attributes of philosophy necessarily imply such features as speculation, analysis, criticism and constructionism.

What then is the task of philosophy and by extension African Philosophy? It is no use rehearsing the polemic that the definition of philosophy itself constitutes a philosophical problem. Many have agreed that philosophy is the criticism of ideas which humans live by (Stanniland, 1979). The ideas could be about society, politics, economy, humanity, science, religion, transcendental entities, mathematical entities and so forth. For anything to be philosophical, it has to do with the reflection on the experience of a society, group or an individual. This reflection has been necessitated by wonders about some compelling difficulties, problems, paradoxes and mysteries of life and human existence (Oyeshile, 2007). Other essential ingredient of philosophy is that such reflection must be critical and logical. Going by these factors, any individual or group that meets these requirements can be said to engage in philosophy (see Omoregbe, 1985).

The above presupposes that there is no group of people in any part of the world that does not have philosophy because all human groups reflect on their experiences to find workable solution to them from time to time. The sophistication of philosophical reflection is another issue entirely. Perhaps, it is in the purvey of the sophistication of philosophical reflection that the spurious claim that philosophy is an European or Western enterprise is often made, which has subsequently led to the denial of philosophy in Africa.

What then is African Philosophy? There are a lot of debates, controversies, counter-claims and perspectives on African Philosophy and its existence, which we are familiar with. The issues and perspectives include but not lim-

ited to the colonial experience, the post-colonial experience, the traditional worldviews of Africans and contemporary socio-political situations. Key philosophers in the shaping of African Philosophy include Placid Tempels, John Mbiti, Paulin Hountondji, Kwasi Wiredu, Peter Bodunrin, Odera Oruka, C.S. Momoh, Joseph Omoregbe, K. C. Anyanwu, Dismas A. Masolo, Magobe Ramose, J.O. Sodipo, Olusegun Oladipo, Barry Hallen, Robin Horton and the enigmatic Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze of blessed memory. What bears pointing out from the foregoing analysis is that African Philosophy is the critical reflection on the ideas that guide African people and society in their various endeavours. As I submitted elsewhere,

African Philosophy involves the application of conceptual analysis, logic, criticism and synthesis to the reflections on issues that are of a paramount importance to the African needs and ways of life. African in this context is not based exclusively on geographical congruity, but also on certain shared values among Africans. (Oyeshile 2007, 47)

One of the contemporary issues in African Philosophy is the challenge of reason and postmodern thinking in African Philosophy. This issue is reflected in the title of this book. The crux of the matter is that reason, rationality and objectivity have been seen as the major defining features of philosophy and by extension Western Philosophy. The works of Hegel, Kant, Hume, Levy-Bruhl, Max Muller, Marx, Herbert Spencer and many others deny Africans and non-western races of philosophy because according to them, Africa is outside the purvey of reason and rationality. The belief is that the Western mind is the only logical and fertile mind that could accommodate philosophical rumination. The labels of pre-logical, primitiveness, savage and non-rational are used as the defining features of the African. Hence, such a primitive mind cannot participate in the activity of reason defined in terms of objectivity, pure thought and absoluteness. This conception of philosophy as a grand theory that validates other knowledge claims through pure reason has been the defining feature of Western philosophy. However, this trend collapsed, especially with Richard Rorty's deconstruction of philosophy as a grand theory that sits in judgement over other knowledge claims (Rorty, 1980). This mode of thinking that is opposed to philosophy as a totalising discourse or what Wiredu will refer to as a "form of reasoned criticism" (Wiredu, 1980) has given vent to postmodern thinking not only in African Philosophy but in other non-western philosophies as well.

Postmodern thinking provides a fertile ground for all forms of ideas to flourish. This trend is an inclusive approach to philosophy as it moves away from the search for the essence to existence. Postmodernism is a trend that oppos-

es the project of modern philosophers, for example Rene Descartes (1596-1650), who tried to provide indubitable foundation for knowledge. The post-modernists such as Rorty adopt a relativistic and inter-subjective approach to knowledge, truth and culture. In this sense, they may be opposed to absolute essence, objectivity, global or universal culture since there are different forms of life, depicted in different language games following Wittgenstein (Oyeshile, 2008).

According to Jim I. Unah, the terms 'post-modern' and 'post-modernism' are deemed to have appeared in literature dating back to early 1870s and 1920s respectively. But from the 1920s on, the use of the terms actually began to make rounds, and became so elastic as to include the expressions 'post-modernity' and 'postmodernist' (Unah 2000, 427). Let us note again that the postmodernists believe that any attempt aimed at discovering fixed and absolute truths about the universe is doomed to fail.

It should be noted that postmodernism, saddled with competing paradigms and frameworks, also leads to the promotion of human values as it promotes anything that is good for humankind irrespective of the origin of such an idea. Postmodernism therefore, as I argued elsewhere (Oyeshile, 2008) tends to remove the illusion of a grand theory, based on the illusion of pure reason, that is immutable, absolute and static which may engender authoritarianism, autocracy and tyranny in knowledge, culture and politics.

What then are the implications of postmodern thinking in African Philosophy? We begin by noting that any paradigm that promotes alternative views, and do not suffer from illusion of pure reason, as postmodernism is wont to do, will help to develop African Philosophy. This is because issues that are peculiar to the African-being-in-the-world will be given enough discursive space. Postmodern thinking will also provide a veritable guide against epistemological tyranny and authoritarianism. The complexity of the world, especially contemporary world calls for alternative conception from Africa and other sub-altern people to participate in the global discussion concerning the fate of humankind. Although, systematic or formal philosophy began in ancient Greece, the emerging philosophies in other climes deserve as much attention too.

However, the fact that postmodern thinking validates the participation of all races in the conversation of humankind, as Rorty will aver, is not a license for any uncritical, irrational, myopic and unjustified approaches to problem of life and existence from any group or culture. Postmodernism should not validate the tag "anything goes". Whatever the situation we find ourselves as African philosophers, the use of reason is very important. Although it may be difficult to arrive at pure objectivity since we operate within the categories of

time and space, we can arrive at a workable objectivity through the existentialist notion of 'intersubjectivity'.

The task of philosophy is to create a basis for resolving problems of life and existence. African Philosophy too must be focused on resolving issues that are reducing human development and promotion of happiness in Africa. While the extension of our argument may be directly connected with the European underdevelopment of Africa through different types of intellectual frameworks (such as philosophy) that have been used by Europeans at a given time in history to denigrate the humanity of Africa, it is high time African Philosophy rose to the challenge of resolving the internal contradictions that have plagued African development.

It is the case that Africa's crisis of underdevelopment can be traced mainly to lack of internal criticism of policies, actions, and visions of leaders in Africa, coupled with uncritical acceptance of certain values either domestic or foreign which have made development and attainment of social order daunting tasks in Africa (Oyeshile, 2008).

This book, *African Philosophy in the Postmodern Era* edited by Jonathan O. Chimakonam and Edwin Etieyibo, two scholars that have injected the necessary tonic into African Philosophy, is a welcome development. This work underscores the importance of culture as the basis of our contribution to universal discourse. The merit of this book is reflected by Olusegun Oladipo when he notes:

Our participation in a universal dialogue can be significant only if it is based on a firm foundation of concepts, theories or ideas we have developed by ourselves in the attempt to come to terms with the African reality in its various dimensions. It is our experiences that must provide the standpoint from which we make our contribution to the world. But to take our reality and experiences seriously is to put our people and their problems at the centre of our intellectual activities. (Oaldipo 1998, 90)

Postmodern thinking in African Philosophy is not to undermine the use of reason, rather it is to expand the purview of reason as reason is not the exclusive preserve of any race. It should be noted that the epistemological absolutism of Western philosophy purported to be predicated on pure reason is even undermined by the divergent, often contradictory, frameworks provided by Western philosophers themselves. This invariably gives credence to the postmodern approach which allows all philosophical flowers to blossom, including African Philosophy.

This edited book is made up of fourteen quality articles that interrogate Reason, Postmodernism, Culture and African Philosophy. Five of the essays: “The Struggle for Reason in Africa Reloaded”; “Questioning Reason”; “The Colour of Reason: The Idea in Kant’s Anthropology”; “This Falling, Falling into Freedom: Ubuntu and the Question of Emancipation”; and “We Are All Post-modernist Now! African Philosophy and the Postmodern Agenda” have all been culled due to their importance on postmodern thinking and the Reason question in African Philosophy. The other nine essays have been written to meet the contemporary discourse on African Philosophy and the challenge of reason and postmodern thinking.

The editors have grouped the fourteen chapters into two parts of seven essays each covering the areas of reason and postmodern thinking in African Philosophy. Beginning the part one is chapter one with the title “The Journey of Reason in African Philosophy”. In it, Jonathan Chimakonam produces an incisive account of reason’s manifestation in African Philosophy using his newly developed method of conversationalism. He recommends a switch from logocentrism to what he calls okwucentricism. This essay introduces some new concepts into the literature of African Philosophy. It talks about philosophical villages in opposition to philosophical city; arena of unities in opposition to pillar of unity; philosophizens in distinction to citizens; it also introduces mkpuru-okwu, okwu, okwucentricism and logomania. This essay is full of original insights as it is full of challenging ideas capable of stimulating productive philosophical debates. No well meaning African philosopher should ignore this essay, a brilliant curtain raiser to a truly rich collection. The second chapter is titled “The Struggle for Reason in Africa Reloaded” and is written by the South African philosopher Mogobe Ramose. He x-rays the structure as well as the politics of reason in philosophy and presents the struggle to which African thought had been inordinately condemned to by Eurocentric forces. It may be instructive to note that this version of the essay is different from the version published in P. H. Coetzee and A. P. J. Roux *The African Philosophy Reader* 2nd edn., 2003 with the same title. The editors have added the word “Reloaded” to make for easy referencing and to mark the difference. The version of the essay published in this volume is culled from the chapter one of the 2005 edition of *African Philosophy through Ubuntu* which represents the author’s current thoughts on the issue. It is in many ways different and highly improved version of the essay with the same title. The chapter is revealing and compelling. Chapter three is written by Bruce Janz and titled “Questioning Reason”. In it, the author examines the subject of reason as the instrument of philosophy and attempts to assess its contextualisation in African Philosophy. Culled from chapter three of his book *Philosophy in an African Place* (2009), the author

brings to light issues about reason in philosophy and in African Philosophy and digests them in a completely new and incisive ways. Anyone wishing to praise or criticise African Philosophy as a tradition should first read this piece. The chapter entitled “The Colour of Reason: The Idea of “Race” in Kant’s Anthropology” was culled from *Bucknell Review: Anthropology and the German Enlightenment: Perspectives on Humanity*, edited by Katherine M. Faull, 1995 and authored by Emmanuel Eze. In it, the author ventures into the dark corners of Kant’s ruminations, exposing and criticising Kant’s racist positions. He employs the interesting caveat “the colour of reason” to draw attention to the philosophical underpinning of Kant’s thoughts. This is a must read for those who have only now seen the logical side of Kant’s thoughts. Chapter five is titled “Ezumezu as a Methodological Reconstruction in African Philosophy” and written by Jonathan Chimakonam. In it, he responds to Lucius Outlaw’s call for a methodological reconstruction in African Philosophy. Using Ezumezu, a logical construct he had worked out earlier, the author articulates a methodological frontier for African Philosophy. He points out the postmodern flair of this methodology by weaving it into his concept of conversational thinking which is increasingly becoming regular in the literature of African Philosophy. He also talks of what he calls anarchistic or conversational orderliness. Those yearning for new vision, theoretic sophistication and new concepts in African Philosophy will find this piece of great interest. In chapter six entitled “Africana Philosophy as a Cultural Resistance” Michael Eze questions whether Africana philosophy could be viewed as a form of cultural resistance. In an attempt to answer this question, the author negotiates through race and sundry Eurocentric challenges to African/a thought to historicise and present it as a new consciousness. He did not subscribe to the vision of Africana philosophy as a cultural resistance. This for him will mount a creative blockade to the programme of Africana philosophy. He thus posits that “[O]ur new understanding of Africana philosophy rejects the universalism of reason as categorical truth for all peoples and societies. It is ambivalent to this Enlightenment projection of reason as the ultimate measure of humanity. It rejects the postulated universality of Eurocentric episteme as the ultimate paradigm of knowledge. Africana philosophy beckons a critical reading of history in a way that reflects the pluralism and heterogeneity of cultural knowledge forms and traditions. This pluralism not only restores historical dynamism to our understanding of culture, it locates the Africanist as an active interlocutor in a story told about him or her. He or she is not just a voiceless topic but a moral agent with emotional dignity. Africana philosophy mediates a new understanding in which difference does not symbolise a degenerate other deserving subjective obliteration. A people’s philosophy is determined by their specific worldview. The fundamental objective of Africana philosophy is to constitute this social

utopia". Eze's dexterity at weaving this new consciousness is commendable, brilliant and opens an interesting vista in the philosophy of the global south. Wrapping up the first part of this volume is Leonhard Praeg's essay entitled "This Falling, Falling...into Freedom: Ubuntu and the Question of Emancipation". In this chapter seven, the author addresses ubuntu as a historically marginalised epistemology. For him, "[T]o speak of Ubuntu as historically marginalised epistemology is to acknowledge that, *qua* 'southern' epistemology, its re-presentation or re-translation is so infused with the processes, structures - disciplinary, epistemic - of Western dominated knowledge production that we can no longer speak of it as a 'Southern epistemology' in any simplistic, that is, geographic way. Rather, its contemporary representation is as much the product of hegemonic Western modernity as it is a critical counter-hegemonic response to it". For that reason, the author "prefers not to think of it as an uncontaminated Southern epistemology or of its long awaited post-colonial liberating articulation (as if the word 'epistemology' does not already mark the precise locus of that contamination). Rather, I shall be assuming that there are southern concepts the relevance and meaningfulness of which have only become visible as a result of the violence inflicted on the south so that their contemporary re-invention is co-determined both by this history of violence as well as the resistance to it. This posits Ubuntu, not so much as 'southern epistemology' but rather as *southern epistemological praxis*, an epistemic praxis from the south that blurs, subverts and dismantles the northern conception of the relation between epistemology and political praxis in a way that may meaningfully contribute to counter-hegemonic globalisation struggles by suggesting, for instance, that the political is First Philosophy". On the whole, this piece rebuilds ubuntu discourse from a creative perspective. African and comparative philosophers are invited to savour this brilliant knowledge formation.

The second part begins with Edwin Etieyibo's essay entitled "African Philosophy in the Court of Postmodernism". In this chapter, the author inquires into what African Philosophy might be like when conceived from the postmodern framework. The author discusses two implications, for African Philosophy, of postmodernist view in the context of the postmodern displacement of universal rationality that percolates modernism viz-a-viz the postmodernist themes of the "interpretative turn" and the "death of the author". This piece inaugurates the postmodern reading of African Philosophy which is the focus of the second part of this volume. The chapter nine written by Adeshina Afolayan and titled "We Are All Postmodernists Now! African Philosophy and the Postmodern Agenda" is according to the author "an attempt to critically understand the utility of the concept of

postmodernism in African Philosophy, and by extension the analysis of the postcolonial African predicament.” Its urgency for him, “derives from the growing literature on the interpretation of the postmodern in African studies. For those I will call the ‘detractors’, there is a certain conceptual absurdity in the idea of postmodernism in a continent that is just grappling with the exigencies of modernity. Thus, Africa cannot be postmodern before being modern. For the ‘champions’ of the necessity of postmodern theorising in Africa, postmodernism offers an avenue to escape out of the *cul de sac* of intellectual nativism that has precluded Africa from the benefits of global open space of ideas.” This piece is a good x-ray of African Philosophy as a postmodern thinking.

The award winning author of *Existence and Consolation...* Ada Agada attempts in chapter ten entitled “Consolationism: A Postmodern Exposition”, to unveil his theory of consolationism in a postmodern vision. The author proposes “an African philosophical centre (consolation philosophy) as an alternative philosophical outlook to the Western outlook. My outlook will seek a phenomenological understanding of the structure of rationality rather than merely exhibit the characteristics of (instrumental) rationality. I will show that consolationism is a ‘post-postmodern’ philosophy or a postmodernism beyond Western postmodernism, or simply as an African philosophical current available as a type of postmodernism”. Those who are tired of ‘the talking’ and want to see ‘the doing’ of African Philosophy should read this piece.

In chapter eleven entitled “Asouzu’s Ibuanyidanda Ontology: A Postmodern Interpretation”, Lucky Ogbonnaya, a specialist in Ibuanyidanda theory propounded by the Nigerian philosopher Innocent Asouzu attempts a bold interpretation of the theory from the postmodern framework. Ogbonnaya concedes that ibuanyidanda theory affirms the particular disposition of realities as postmodernism does but goes on to identify a line of difference. For him, “[T]he point of departure is that while the postmodernists are of the view that the relative standpoints are complete in themselves, Asouzu states that no particular standpoint is complete in itself. This is to say that every position always stands in need of complementation”. Again, those who wish to drink from the rich fountain of African Philosophy’s substantive discourse should read this chapter.

Oladele Balogun engages with Kwasi Wiredu’s much taunted conceptual decolonisation in chapter twelve. Appropriately titled “Conceptual Decolonisation as a Postmodern Resistance”, the author aggressively discusses “conceptual decolonisation as a veritable tool of postmodern resistance in the hands of contemporary African philosophers. The aim of this endeavour is to rid Africa off distortions of their world-views and culturally embedded meanings, values and cultural understanding occasioned by modernity and westernisa-

tion". He brushes aside Mesembe Edet's incisive critique of Wiredu's idea of conceptual decolonisation and re-instates it as one of the veritable tools of the future development of African Philosophy. This essay is an interesting piece that gestures towards the importance of conversation in African Philosophy.

Uduma O. Uduma in collaboration with Victor Nweke engages with C. S. Momoh's theory of many-many truths in chapter thirteen captioned "Momoh's Theory of Many-Many Truths as a Prototype of Postmodern Thinking in African Philosophy". According to the authors "we present a lucid exposition of Momoh's theory of many-many truths, and then proceed to explicate why the theory of many-many truths is an exemplar of postmodern thinking in African Philosophy. We strengthen the plausibility of this argument by unveiling how the basic propositions of Momoh's theory of many-many truths necessarily incorporate, corroborate and amplify the position of notable postmodern thinkers in philosophy and vice versa. Consequently, we proceed to conclude that Momoh's theory of many-many truths is a prototype of postmodern thinking in African Philosophy because it fundamentally repudiates the hegemonic projection of the Western philosophical tradition as the sole legitimate paradigm of philosophy and universal truth". This piece demolishes any doubt about African Philosophy's ability to re-invent itself as a substantive discourse. The authors systematically did justice to the focus of this chapter.

And finally, Olajumoke Akiode draws the curtain by deliberating with postmodernism and feminism as accounts of resistance. With the title of her essay as "Deliberating with Postmodernism and Feminism as Accounts of Resistance: Implications for Thought in Africa", the author in chapter fourteen examines the implications of postmodern thinking and feminist discourse for thought in Africa. A compelling piece no doubt, Olajumoke reminds us just how the epistemologies of the north could impact those of the south and vice versa. This piece is a perfect ending to what is probably a challenging and an intellectually stimulating collection in this critical stage of African Philosophy's resurgence.

The pleasure has been mine introducing this brilliant collection that will surely make a significant addition to the literature on African Philosophy. This volume represents a big leap in the theoretic and substantive knowledge formations in contemporary African Philosophy. I commend the contributors who are seeking to advance the cause of African Philosophy through these illuminating essays. I commend even more the editors, two young and vibrant characters concertedly redefining and repositioning the fortunes of African Philosophy in our time. I commend all other actors in the frontier of African Philosophy who in their different locales are doing something for the disci-

pline; either writing, reading, teaching, commenting or which is most important, criticising works in African Philosophy.

Finally, this anthology opens a new vista for addressing the African predicament. It is a particularly useful heuristic approach in this epoch when the complexity of the African experience is becoming more and more intractable.

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