



# **African philosophy in search of historiography**

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Since African philosophy is a part of the world philosophical heritage, a major task facing African philosophers is the development of comprehensive history of their theoretical work. This paper addresses the problems and challenges involved in writing a history of African philosophy and how those challenges might be overcome. It examines the debates about the historiography of African philosophy and its periodization. The author proposes that: (i) a viable historiography of African philosophy should proceed in a piecemeal, and be selectively focused on histories of African philosophies as opposed to a comprehensive history of African philosophy; (ii) a vibrant historiography of African philosophy should seek to be historico-thematic in approach as opposed to the current trend of focusing on historical individuals dominant in Western philosophy; (iii) for an authentic histories of African philosophies, its periodization must align with the historic experiences and identities of Francophone, Anglophone, Arabophone and Lusophone African societies as opposed to aping the Western periodization models.

There are few comprehensive publications on the history of African philosophy (Asante 2000, Hallen 2002, Ogunmodede 2004, Ndjana 2009, Abanuka 2001): when and where it emerged, its periodization and the standards of writing its history. Part of the challenge is how to account for the trends, influences, ideas and problems that have

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shaped the African philosophical space. The problem of the historiography of African philosophy has to do with how best to characterize the paradigm for a history of African philosophy. The search for historiography in African philosophy includes dealing with the problems of definition, documentation and methodology. While the debate on such problems remains unresolved, there is an urgent need to develop our understanding of the history of African philosophy.

In order to show that African philosophy has, just like Western philosophy, a history, attempts have been made by African scholars to document the history of African philosophy.

The question of a clearly thought-out periodization is pertinent for any exercise on historical documentation of African philosophy. Modernist scholars such as Okolo (1987), Bodunrin (2004), and Hountondji (1977) draw on the advent of formal education and advent of writing in Africa as the historical starting point of African philosophy. For these scholars, there is no significant historical periodization of African philosophy outside the colonial and post-colonial African philosophical experiences. However, African traditionalists, such as Oruka (1991), Momoh (1989), Oluwole (1999), and Wiredu (2004) argue for the inclusion of the period of oral tradition and undocumented history as the beginning of the history of African philosophy. For yet others such as Anta Diop (1974), Bernal (1991), Sumner (1985), Kete Asante (2000) and Graness (2000), a documentation of the history of African philosophy is incomplete without a taking account of its Egyptian and Ethiopian ancestry. This paper focuses on the history of African philosophy by critically surveying how it has been mapped and the implications thereof.

A triple periodization of African philosophy is defended in this paper: 'pre-colonial', 'colonial' and 'post-colonial'. The main claims are: (i) African philosophy must have its own periodization on the basis of its particular historical and cultural experiences; (ii) a viable historiography of African philosophy should seek to be historic-

thematic in approach, as opposed to the Western trend and emphasis on historic philosophic figures; and (iii) an authentic historiography of African philosophy should be selectively focused on histories of African philosophies in different cultural groupings as opposed to a uniform and comprehensive history of the discipline.

### **Writing the history of African philosophy**

Bello (2004) argues that the question of the history of African philosophy is an empirical one, which can be settled only after considerable data has been pooled on African philosophers, philosophical schools or traditions. According to him, "the availability of such data presupposes the existence of written or otherwise documented sources of African philosophy" (Bello, 2004: p. 74). By implication, we cannot therefore have a general answer of yes or no to the question of the history of ancient African philosophy, applicable to all regions of African philosophies be it West Africa, Southern Africa, East Africa or North Africa. This is because of the complexities and differences in their historical and literary developments. The trajectories of literacy in Africa considerably differ as oral literatures flourished for longer period in some parts of Africa with late start in writing than some others.

Bello is of the view that for parts of Africa where there was no written culture until recent times, the historian of African philosophy will have to base their historiography on a history of contemporary African philosophy and nothing more. For parts of Africa where there were early writing cultures such as Ethiopia, ancient Egypt and other parts of Africa where Arabic writing was used, the task of the historian of African philosophy, in Bello's view, is to collect and analyse relevant data on philosophers, philosophical schools and traditions that existed and dominated the intellectual heritage of that part of Africa. Bello considers that there is nothing of yet of that kind, and that history of African philosophy remains to be undertaken.

However, Ashante's (2000) provides a strong textual presentation of the Egyptian and African origin of philosophy, which largely satisfies the historiographical requirements Bello urges.

Bello's historiographical scepticism, logical though the argument may be, cannot be sustained on pragmatic reason. For one, the textual compilation of the history of African philosophy is important because such an engagement has the strong potential of restoring the crisis of identity that Africans and African cultures have been riddled with since the first half of the twentieth century. For another, the horizon of African philosophy has the potential of being expanded with new added dimensions of connections among the different historical intellectual traditions in Africa. The essence of the history of African philosophy is to create and recreate the events surrounding the development of African philosophy from its ancient period in order to solidify its knowledge in the present, and tracing its continuous movement in the present, and making it a guideline for future inquiry into African philosophy.

The history of African philosophy has the power to create a roadmap to what we should make the focus of African philosophy in contemporary period by revealing the of African philosophy. The history of African philosophy is the history of Africa in a special way in that it will show the connections among various areas of interest in African philosophical space. Such a history has the potential of unearthing how things fit together and the place that individual works and the community memory codified in oral traditions occupy in the arena of African philosophy.

While African philosophy has had a history of prolonged debates on the meta-philosophical question of existence, "rather than a history of tradition and available literature with which to preserve and expand it" (Azenabor, 2002: p. 33) it is pertinent to consider profiling the histories of African philosophies. The question is: where does it begin? One answer provided by Graness is that "the history of philosophy in Africa is still a young discipline, although

philosophical thinking (concept, manuscripts, books and philosophers) can be traced back until ancient Egypt" (Graness, 2015: p. 78). This view on the beginning of African philosophy is also expressed and supported by chains of African scholars: Anta Diop (1974), Olera (1977), Bernal (1991), Onyewuenyi (1993), Masolo (1994), Kete Asante (2000), Ogunmodede (2004), and Obenga (2006). A common consensus in the claims of these scholars is that Egypt was not only the cradle of civilization; it is the birth place of philosophy, including the birth of Greek philosophy. Their argument is that since Egypt is in Africa, ancient Egyptian philosophy is African philosophy. It is argued further that there could not have been Greek philosophy and western philosophy, were it not for the existence of ancient Egyptian philosophy. Since Egyptian philosophy is African philosophy, it follows that Greek and Western philosophies have their origin in African philosophy.

In response to Western bias on the history of African philosophy, these historians see the root of African philosophy as synonymous with Egyptian philosophy. Egypt's history is traced to 10,000 B.C., and early farming in Africa is estimated to have developed in the Nile delta in Egypt in 6,500 B.C. (quoted in Lawhead, 2006: p. 599). Though controversy abounds on the racial profile of the early Egyptians and on whether Egypt is authentically African in culture, identity and civilization, Diop authoritatively claims that "ancient Egypt was a Negro civilization. The history of Black Africa will remain suspended in air and cannot be written correctly until African historians dare to connect it with the history of Egypt" (Diop, 1974: p. xiv). Diop further asserts that the main Greek philosophical systems such as Pythagorean mathematics, the theory of the four elements (water, fire, air and matter) in Ionian philosophy, Plato's theory of forms, and Epicureanism are rooted in Egyptian cosmogony. His conclusion, as noted by Azenabor, is that "the history of African philosophy must include a study of Egyptian philosophy as Western philosophy does of Greek philosophy" (Azenabor, 2010: p.19-20).

Like Diop, Onyewuenyi (1993) in his work, *The African Origin of Greek Philosophy: An Exercise in Afrocentrism*, espoused his view on the Egyptian origin of African philosophy. Pitching his tent with the 'Afrocentric' argument on the historical foundation of African philosophy, he holds that historical proofs and facts show ancient Egypt as the beginning of philosophy. Onyewuenyi's claim is premised on the cited written testimonies of early Greek philosophers such as Aristotle, Plato, Aetius and Plutarch of Chaerones, and the documented observations of early Greek historians such as Herodotus and Diogenes Laertius. James (1892) claims in his monumental work, *Stolen Legacy*, that Egyptians were the original authors of Greek philosophy and that the philosophies allegedly ascribed to ancient Greeks were prototypes and plagiarized forms of the Egyptian motifs. In his words:

the true authors of Greek philosophy were not Greeks, but the people of the North Africa community called the Egyptians, and the praise and humour falsely given to the Greeks for centuries belong to the people of North Africa, and therefore to the African continent (James, 1892: p. 7).

Unlike Onyewuenyi (2004: p. 206) who thinks that the "Greeks had always acknowledged their indebtedness to Egypt," James' view of ancient Greek philosophy is emphatically one of a stolen intellectual legacy having root in the Egyptians mystery system. Corroborating the views of Diop, Onyewuenyi and James on the Egyptian origin of African philosophy and philosophy in general, Ogunmodede opines:

The march of philosophical speculation in the ancient world became definitive with the Black Egyptian who developed centres of learning and civilizations between 5000 and 3200 B.C., that is, before those of Mesopotamia and very, very long time before the Greeks came into existence and when Chinese and Indian civilizations were yet to begin (Ogunmodede, 2001: p. 38).

While implicitly accepting the claims of Diop, Onyewuenyi, and Ogunmodede on Egypt as the origin of philosophy, Asante vehe-

mently defends the idea that Egyptians were the earliest philosophers in history with Imhotep being the first philosopher (Asante, 2010: p. 335). Imhotep had no writing of his own, but his ideas became known through the extant manuscripts of Ptahhotep. Graness has provided a thorough-going analysis of Ptahhotep's ancient Egyptian texts: *The Teachings of Vizier Ptahhotep*, *The Tale of the Eloquent Peasant*, and *The Dialogue of a Man with his Soul*.<sup>2</sup> His argument is that not only do the texts offer sufficient evidence of the origins of practical wisdom in ancient Egypt, but that all the texts "fulfill such criteria of philosophical thinking as argumentative approach, criticism of existing conditions and norms, ethical ideas and values concerning a 'good life' and social cohesion" (Graness, 2015a: p. 13).

In a somewhat different narrative from the historians of Egyptian philosophy, Graness (2015b) writes that "Africa was not always rejected as a source of philosophical knowledge. Until the end of eighteenth century, volumes on the history of philosophy still refer to Chaldean, Persian, Arab, Indian, Chinese and Egyptian philosophies" (Graness, 2015b: p. 81). However, from then on Egyptian philosophies began to be silenced and subject to historical revisionism.

For instance, Momoh (in Graness, 2015a: p. 16) is of the view that if concrete evidence could be shown on how Egyptian thoughts constitute the origin of Greek philosophy, it does not prove the existence of African philosophy. To justify the conclusion that ancient Egyptian philosophy is more representative of philosophical reflec-

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<sup>2</sup> *The Teachings of Vizier Ptahhotep* is a monologue-didactic wisdom concerned with how to live a virtuous life. Written around 2388-2356 BCE under the dynasty of King Isesi, the original text of the *The Teachings of Vizier Ptahhotep* is not available any longer except for its translated version in Papyrus Prisse archived in the British Museum. *The Tale of the Eloquent Peasant* is a narrative of a trader, Khunanup, and his experiences having been robbed by Nemtinakht. The tale has as its subject the issues of truth, justice and the functions of political authority in maintaining social order. *The Dialogue of a Man with his Soul* is a reflective internal dialogic discourse between a man and his soul on the challenges of human existence such as the meaning of life, death, life-after death and the rationale for suicide.

tions in ancient Africa requires that such reflections were available in other parts of Africa. Furthermore, this could be due to the cultural, economic and intellectual exchanges between ancient Egypt and Europe. Ancient Egypt, it is claimed, was not connected sufficiently to other parts of the continent.

Similarly, Chimakonam argues that “even if the philosophers of stolen legacy were able to prove a connection between Greece and Egypt, they could not prove in concrete terms that Egyptians were black Africans or that black Africans were Egyptians” (Chimakonam, 2015: p. 12). In other words, the classical intellectual tradition of Egypt (and Ethiopia) cannot be entirely regarded as indigenous creations of black Africans. However, Martin Terris holds that position that “irrespective of the race of the ancient Egyptians, they were cultural forebears of Europe” (Terris, 1976: p.29).

The history of Africa philosophy is highly contested. Some have argued that the non-delineation of philosophy from other studies of mysteries in ancient Egyptian society may have limited the chances of Egyptian philosophy being considered as the cradle of African philosophy. The Egyptian mystery system is broad, and its breadth does not give independence to the characteristics of philosophy inherent in the system. Rather it connects these mysteries in relation to one another; thus, making the cradle of African philosophy allegedly pre-systematic and unsystematic in articulation. There have been attempts by some Western scholars (Hume 1758, Kant 1831, Hegel 1956) to deny any coherent system of thought and ideas in ancient Africa. For such scholars, African philosophy began as a result of the incursion of the Europeans and colonial masters. In this connection, Emmanuel Eze rightly observes:

Many of the greatest thinkers of the modern era, including David Hume, Immanuel Kant, and Thomas Jefferson, considered Africans to be so intellectually handicapped as to make them philosophically invalids, incapable of moral and scientific reasoning. Thus, prior to the twentieth century, the idea of African Philosophy was, for most educated Europeans and Americans, an oxymoron (Eze, 1997: p. 4-5).

Modernist scholars, such as Okolo (1987), Bodunrin (2004) and others, have argued that there is no philosophy without a written tradition, and that African philosophy only started with the beginning of literate tradition in Africa. African philosophy, in its traditional setting, does not therefore exist. They contended that philosophy requires a tradition of written communication, and that African cultures must evolve beyond oral traditions if they are to develop the levels of critical exchange required for sophisticated scientific and philosophical activities (*Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2017). Okolo (1987) is clear in his position that “there was no African philosophy before the dawn of literacy in Africa. The dawn of formal education in Africa, which coincided with colonialism, may well be the start of formal African philosophy” (Okolo, 1987: p. 27). If the era of written tradition is formal philosophy, as suggested by Okolo, then the unwritten era may perhaps be characterized as the age of informal African philosophy. Both periods involve some sense of the periodization of the history of African philosophy.

### **On periodization**

Arguments regarding the periodization of African philosophy are based on different scholars’ understanding of African philosophy and its origins. I take African philosophy to mean that intellectual inquiry which raises universal and particular fundamental questions in relation to African experiences be it in the area of religion, politics, socio-cultural life, morality, art, economy, technology, and intellectual heritage among other aspects of philosophical concerns. A fundamental link exists between the understanding of African philosophy and the period of its beginning. The ways periods are constructed, and the names given to them can affect the way they are viewed and studied (Tosh, 2006: p. 168-169). Many scholars have attempted to divide African philosophy into different epochs according to particular elements.

African philosophers such as Makinde (2010), Oruka (1991), Momoh (1989), Keita (1991), and Ogunmodede (2004) periodized African philosophy in diverse ways. Makinde (2010) listed a three-phase history of African philosophy: the age of the unknown or unidentified philosophers of unwritten tradition; the age of colonial ethno-philosophers-cum-anthropologists; and the age of professional philosophers who imbibed western philosophy. Makinde's periodization lacks the precision in terms of historical time and the appropriateness of each of the periods proposed. Ogunmodede, however, prefers a multi-dimensional model of periodization, which according to him, "allows for a much broader, detailed and enriched historical investigation in African philosophy" (Ogunmodede, 2004: p.77). He divided the history of African philosophy along the following lines: the ancient period (10,000BC – 700BC); the Greek period (600BC to the birth of Christ); the early Christian period (1<sup>st</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> century AD); the Islamic and African period (7<sup>th</sup> – 13<sup>th</sup> centuries); the early European contact period with Africa (14<sup>th</sup> – 17<sup>th</sup> centuries); and the Western colonial period (18<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup> not 19<sup>th</sup> & 20<sup>th</sup> centuries). Ogunmodede's multi-dimensional scope of periodization, as he calls it, is more of a lineal epochal delineation than a multi-prong historical classification of African philosophy. There are little or no indication of the possible different forms of influences that one period has over the other, Ogbogbo thinks that the multi-perspectival approach of Ogunmodede "is too broad and cumbersome to deal with" (Ogbogbo, 1995, p. 38.).

Bello (2000) posits that there is not yet enough documentation or data to show that the philosophers and philosophical traditions mentioned by Ogunmodede in his classifications constitute a continuum. It is doubtful that there were any records of philosophers that followed the Hermopolitan, Heliopolitan, Memphite or Theabean traditions of the ancient period of the Egyptian and Ethiopian philosophers. In the words of Bello, "how many philosophers followed the Hermopolitan, Heliopolitan, Memphite or Theabean tra-

dition? What are their names, dates and places of birth and death, and their philosophical teachings? Do the traditions continue to the present time?" (Bello, 2000: p. 73). The point of Bello is that even if we are to grant that there were philosophers or philosophic traditions among ancient Egyptians, such philosophers or traditions today is of no archival value as it is a dead end. "Like the history of a completely destroyed settlement, which terminates with its destruction, the history of ancient Egyptian philosophy is a dead end because no philosopher followed or is following the tradition of the ancient Egyptians" (Bello, 2000: p. 78). Bello concludes that considerable relevant data has to be collected on African philosophers, philosophical schools and traditions and consequently analysed. Not until this is done, is it possible to have a good history of African philosophy.

Unsatisfied with the periodization proposed by Ogunmodede, Keita proposes the following classification: the Classical, the Medieval and the Modern periods (Keita, 1991: p. 229). The Classical period evinced the influence of Egyptian philosophical thought; medieval period was permeated by Islamic influence; and the Modern era which is "less well developed and distorted due to the colonial experience" (Azenabor, 2010: p. 37). The medieval period in African philosophy is controversial owing to the fact that the subject treated during this period by the scholars (although African by root and birth) are not rooted in African experiences and its world. The period is characterized by the history of Christian philosophy in North Africa, and later Arabo-Islamic influence in both the North and Western part of Africa. In the Christian tradition, we have Augustine of Hippo in North Africa, whose work dealt with specific issues such as the relation between faith and reason, and ways to prove of the existence of God, which does not relate to discourses in African philosophy, because it was based on Jewish, Christian and Greco-Roman intellectual tradition. In some other parts of Africa, like in sub-Saharan Africa, such issues are of less frequent concern.

Ogbogbo argues that in "writing the history of Africa, there are no neat periodizations or categorizations. Most times what we have is arbitrary nature of temporal and spatial divisions we impose on the subject matter" (Ogbogbo, 1995: p. 265). These three-tier classifications were criticized by Ogunmodede as inadequate to encompass the number of philosophers and scholars, and their views on African philosophy.

African philosophy must be understood within an historical frame. The origin, evolution, and development of African philosophy follows the streams and currents of African history (Obenga, 2006: p. 31). "[A]ny philosophy must be evaluated from the context of its history" (Olela, 1977: p. 89). Hountondji proposes that African philosophy can only "develop [by] reflecting on its own history, [such] that new thinkers must feed on the doctrines of their predecessors, even of their contemporaries extending or refuting them, so as to enrich the philosophical heritage available in their own time" (Hountondji, 1977: p. 89).

African philosophy must be divided into periods on the basis of Africa's own historical and cultural experiences. It will be erroneous to say that there is an ancient African philosophy, a medieval African philosophy and a modern African philosophy without presenting the argument and evidence to show that these periods correspond, broadly, to periods of social, political, intellectual and cultural developments in Africa.

A more systematic periodization template is provided by Ogbogbo 'geographical grouping' (the totality of the geographical regions in Africa and their thought systems); 'major themes' (that characterize African philosophy, an evaluation of these themes and problems, and how they apply to Africa and the philosophy in the period during which they occurred); and 'age and personality approach' (this entails using the thought and ideas of various thinkers and scholars on African philosophy in chronological order to eluci-

date the history of African philosophy, an approach that is necessary because the historian of African philosophy should also be interested in the personalities behind ideas) (Ogbogbo, 1995: p. 164).

“[I]n respect to ancient and medieval history of African philosophy, the major advantage the West has over African philosophy is transmission and preservation” (Kanu, 2015: p. 72). Owing to the absence of the art of writing in ancient African times, the philosophical thoughts of the African thinkers are in the form of mythology, wise saying, proverbs, stories, socio-political organization and religious doctrines and practices. These are preserved in the memory of the people, especially the elders, who are perceived to be custodians of ancient wisdom and traditional norms. Unlike the works of Western thinkers, which are preserved in written works, those of African philosophers are preserved in memories. The problem with memory is the fact that it sometimes fails.

A viable historiography of African philosophy should proceed piecemeal, and be selectively focused on histories of African philosophies as opposed to attempting a comprehensive history of African philosophy. Oguejiofor (2002: p. 1300) argues that a comprehensive history of African philosophy would stretch from ancient Egypt to North African Christian thinkers of tenth century, to later Islamic philosophers, to Ethiopian philosophers, to philosophy of Africans in Diaspora and to contemporary African and Afro-American discussions). Having all these in a volume is not an impossible task, but it is desirable to approach this bigger picture of African philosophy in its particular contexts along regional or linguistic lines.

A vibrant historiography of African philosophy should seek to be historico-thematic as opposed to the current trend of focusing on historical individuals, the approach that is dominant in Western philosophy. Contributions of African philosophers to identified themes in any given area should be documented. This will be different from a chronological profiling of the philosophical figures in the discipline of African philosophy.

For authentic histories of African philosophies, the periodization canon must align with the historic experiences and identities of Africa along official linguistic and sub-regional divides: Afrikaans, Francophone, Anglophone, Arabophone and Lusophone African societies. Given the intricate nexus between language, thought formation and cognition of reality, such characterization and historical documentation of African philosophical ideas is more cogent than merely aping the Western models of ancient, medieval, modern, and contemporary periodization in African philosophy. By following the model of the West, it suggests that had there been no history of Western philosophy, Africa would not have had a model for the history of her philosophy, and by implication no philosophy. A possible objection to this suggestion is given by Anthony Kanu when he writes:

Some writers fanatically reject the present adoption of Western model without alternative. If there is no alternative, we should continue with the existing one, with its existential relevance...: the ancient, medieval, modern and contemporary periods (Kanu, 2015: p. 132).

The suggestion that in the absence of periodization alternative existing Western paradigm of periods should be adopted is logically invalid. There are cogent periodization alternatives that do not necessarily ape the Western model. While some of these have been discussed above, whichever periodization model a historian of African philosophy one chooses to use, one inevitably runs up against another historian that has chosen another perspective. No periodization model is perfect. I suggest historical delineation along the lines of African historic experiences, especially, colonialism. Many African states had colonial experiences except for a few. Notwithstanding the non-universal African historic experience of colonialism, the struggle against imperialism is a common front among African states. Thus, the periods in African philosophy are *prima facie* typified as: pre-colonial African philosophy, colonial African philosophy and the post-colonial African philosophy.

This classification into history allows us to stop using African philosophy in general sense without some specificity of location in time and space. I identify as pre-colonial, a period belonging to a remote antiquity in African history, ending approximately before the period of early European exploration of Africa in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. A study of the pre-colonial period of African philosophy will therefore be the critical study of the ancient philosophical doctrines of the Egyptian civilization, Ethiopian civilization, and other parts of Africa before the advent of colonialism as embodied in myths, proverbs, folklores, imageries, and oral traditions with their philosophical imports. This pre-colonial period will also cut across the philosophies of the North African Church fathers such as Augustine, Tertulian, Origen and Cyrils to include the philosophical thoughts of African Islamic scholars of North African and West African Empires. One implication of this expansive pre-colonial periodization is that there is no philosophy of the Africans in the diaspora. This is because the period of early European exploration and colonial contacts with Africa, which gave birth to the diasporic experience between the fourteenth and seventeenth centuries, will be exempted from the pre-colonial period.

Now, I turn to the colonial period. Though, the official start of colonialism was with the Berlin conference of 1885, history was a witness that colonialism and European exploitation of Africa began much earlier than this date. European exploration of Africa was dated back to the 15<sup>th</sup> century, and the colonial enterprise did not come to an end uniformly in Africa. Many states in Africa gained their political independence between early 1950s and late 1960s with Zimbabwe in 1980 and the end of apartheid in South Africa in 1994. So, in this colonial periodization of African philosophy, my concern is not strictly with date chronology but with events. Any works of Africans in any area of philosophy whether reflecting African cultural experiences or not, fall under the colonial period of African philosophy.

Prominent figures in this period include: Danquah (1944), Temples (1959), Amo (1968), Yacob (in Sumner 1976/78), Heywat (in Sumner 1976/78), Kagame (1956), Fanon (1961), Senghor (1964), Griaule (1965), Maurier (1984), and all early narrative works (by anthropologists and ethnographers) aimed towards explaining to foreigners, how Africans lived by their ideas. The philosophical relevance of such works relate to fundamental ideas regarding issues such as God, mind, time, causality, freedom, justice, development, destiny, morality, etc., were discussed, sometimes, unphilosophically.

The post-colonial period of African philosophy cannot be addressed chronologically but instead by addressing the intensity and robustness of the tradition of debates and counter-debates on thematic issues and meta-philosophical concerns. Some of the issues that dominated the colonial period of African philosophy provided an impetus for further serious philosophical cogitation in the post-colonial period. Some of these issues having spill-over effects on post-colonial African philosophy including issues of European enslavement, colonialism, neo-colonialism and development, African decolonization (political and conceptual), identity crisis, etc. Beyond the ponderous meta-philosophical controversies that dominated the discipline in its early post-colonial period, serious philosophical issues in metaphysics, ethics, epistemology, aesthetics, feminism and gender theory, and socio-political theory have combined to define the research concerns of contemporary African (and Africanist) philosophers in the post-colonial history of the discipline.

### **Conclusion**

The issue of the existence of a history of African philosophy and its appropriate periodization has been over-emphasized. Scholars who are sympathetic to African philosophy have made efforts to assert the existence of a history of African philosophy. Attempts to re-

construct the past have been greatly frustrated by the absence of a written tradition for most peoples of the continent as well as some meta-philosophical concerns on historiography. While the past eludes the African philosopher, the present is within his/her grip and the future is anticipated. The historian of African philosophical heritage has the task of discovering, systematizing and bringing to the fore, the time-tested pre-colonial history of African philosophy; the colonial historical phase of African philosophy and ultimately, the post-colonial African philosophical scholarships.

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