

# Tradition, African Philosophy and the Issue of Development in Africa

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## Abstract

One of the central themes in postcolonial African philosophy is that of the relationship between tradition and African development. One of the fundamental questions relating to this is what should be the attitude of African to their traditional cultural heritage. Response to this question bifurcated African philosophy into two major orientations, that is the traditionalist and modernist orientations. This essay critically engage the attitude of these orientations to African traditions and Western cultural hegemony. I argue in the essay that both orientations demonstrate improper attitudes to African tradition because they treated tradition as product rather process that allows for change in the development process. If Africa would have to develop, whether in philosophical or socio-political terms, it needs no legitimation from the West. This however does not imply uncritical romanticisation of African cultural material. The Essay concludes by looking at how tradition can be put to good use.

**Keywords:** Tradition, Development, Traditionalist, Modernist, Self-definition

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## 1. Introduction

The relationship between tradition and African development has been a central theme of postcolonial African philosophy. In fact, Oladipo (2002) thinks that when think in terms of the narrative history of African philosophy, it could hardly be coherent without reference to the concept of tradition. While African philosophers have examined the theme of tradition and development from different angles, several basic questions have become the focus of the ongoing debate and discussion on the issue. Such questions include: What is the relevance of indigenous African traditions to the challenges of contemporary life? Do traditional modes of thought and behaviour constitute resources or impediments to the projects of development and modernisation in Africa? What, precisely, is meant by the term “development” when it is used in reference to the continent of Africa? And so on. It is important for us to note that the discourse on tradition is central to the discourse of African philosophy and the question of development. When we look at the division in African philosophy between the traditionalist and the modernists, we will without much ado discover that development and social reconstruction is the powerful end that orients and gives direction to their arguments. On the one hand, the traditionalists argue that the powerlessness of Africa is due to its straying away from its legacies and cultural tradition and, hence that some kind of revival is necessary. On the other hand, the modernists argue that we adopt a critical attitude towards our cultural tradition and embrace the agencies of science and technology and their associated forms of rationality. For instance, Owolabi (1999) remarks that the very concern of the first generation of African philosophers for the resolution of the tension between traditional values and Western paradigm is an implicit acceptance of the need to reflect on the question of development.

A critical examination of the two major orientations in African philosophy, that is, the traditionalist and modernist orientations shows a strong correlation between them and theories of development, especially modernisation and dependency theories. The traditionalists, on the other hand, share the assumption of the dependency theory. Dependency theory posits that the strong developed countries exploit the weak less-developed countries for their own benefits. They see Africa’s underdevelopment as the product of her dependence on the West. It is felt that stewardship to the West cannot produce beneficial development for the less-developed. The traditionalists, therefore, advocate cultural autarchy and a deconstruction of Western hegemony in all spheres. The modernists on the other hand share the assumption of the modernisation theory supposing that development is the overcoming of tradition and the cultivation of the rational attitude in order to achieve modernity.

Until recently, the issue of development was subsumed under the issue of self-definition in African philosophical debate. Owolabi admits this fact when he says that the theme has been implicit in the debate concerning the existence of African philosophy in earlier days (1999: 28). This un-explicitness of the issues of development probably explains why an improper attitude has been demonstrated toward tradition. As Oladipo (1995) explains, there was a European discourse of African which denigrated the Africans and depicted culture as inferior to that of the Europeans. According to him, the discourse specifically “denied that reason played a significant role in the development of society and culture in Africa as it did in Europe” (1995:26) in an attempt to provide an ideology to justify and legitimate the colonial exploitation of Africa. It is in order for Africans to

free themselves from the social subjugation and cultural and political subjugation that went with it that initiated a counter-discourse which aimed to reclaim African humanity. In Oladipo's perspective, the "reclamation took the form of demonstrating the rationality of African beliefs within the framework of the people's world-views and cultural practices. In epistemological terms, it involved the postulation of a form of rationality unique to Africans who, in metaphysical terms, were said to have a personality different from, but not in any way inferior to, the European personality". It is thinking from this perspective that Osha (2011) rightly describes ethnophilosophy which is a traditionalist orientation in African philosophy as an ideological counter-articulation to the hegemonic discourse of colonialism in relation to Africa. Osha remarks that, in some respects, ethnophilosophy could be seen to "have aided nationalist agitations and postcolonial ideologies of liberation that gave rise to counter-discourses, to colonialism and the master-discourses that promoted it, through which modern African thought gained its different discursive orientations, momentum, and stability" (2011:41).

## 2. The Tradition-Development Debate

In African philosophy, the tradition and development debate centres around Africa's response to the Eurocentric ideology, and on the discourse of what should be the relation of African philosophers and scholars to traditional African philosophy, on the one hand, and Western philosophy, on the other hand, in the various attempts at social reconstruction in Africa. (Oladipo, 2002: 11). The debate is typified in the opposition between the traditionalists, represented by Griaule, Kagame, Mbiti, Idowu, Opoku, Sodipo, Anyanwu etc; and the modernists, represented by Hountondji, Bodunrin, Towa, Irele, Eboussi-Boulaga etc. As Oladipo rightly remarks, both the traditionalists and the modernists have misconceived tradition as a product rather than as a process by seeing it as "a set of enduring or recurring beliefs, values, linguistic and other symbolic usages and social practices which define a people's way of life," (Oladipo, 2002: 12). For this reason, they have not given adequate attention to African tradition and African traditional philosophy. The traditionalists advocate the method of tenacity and an attitude of loyalty to this tradition while the modernists advocate its rejection.

We must understand the motivations of the two camps. The traditionalists were responding to the Western discourse (Eurocentrism) on Africa which denigrated and relegated it to the background. The Africans were accused of traditionalism and irrationality. The Western discourse on Africa is engaged in "the othering" of Africa. It is based on the constructed "oppositions between us and them, science and barbarity, modern and traditional" (Dirks, 1992: 8). Africa and its inhabitants were seen as inferior. Depicted as primitive and barbaric, Africans were banned to the lowest level on a scale of human civilisation. By relating itself to the African backwardness, the Western world measured its own progress. The Western discourse can be divided in three phases but the ideological tendency remains the same. The phases are pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial phases. During the colonial times, the Western discourse constructs the differentiation between the Black and the White race. The post-colonial discourse revolves around the ideologies of "developmentalism" and "democratisation." The dominance of the Western discourse reflects the power relations in the international system. There exists a mutually reinforcing relationship between power and knowledge. The unequal distribution of power in the system enables Western actors to construct the knowledge of racial and developmental superiority and to write history as a master narrative. It allows the West to name and label particularities in Africa and invent the concepts of "development."

The discourse on Africa received the ideological support of some of the best minds in Western philosophy such as Hume, Kant and Hegel. Colonialism suppressed African culture, language and knowledge. The colonizers' language was the means of communication: the use of African languages suppressed. In schools and educational facilities the colonised were taught about the Western cultural achievements. Everything was done to drive into the colonised heads the belief that their culture was inferior to European culture and that colonialism would lift them up from barbarism and bestiality to civilisation. Fanon clarifies this by applying the metaphor of colonialism as a "mother who unceasingly restrains her fundamentally perverse offspring from managing to commit suicide and from giving free rein to its evil instincts. The colonial mother protects her child from itself, from its ego, and from its physiology, its biology and its own unhappiness which is its very essence" (Fanon, 1967: 170).

### 2.1 The Traditionalist Orientation

In a defensive and combative mode, the traditionalists try to justify African culture and tradition by articulating its logicity and utility and also by castigating Western culture. Oladipo notes some of the characteristic of this orientation. According to him, it is characterised by an

Affirmation of an African world-view which is undergirded by a distinctive form or rationality; a certain degradation of scientificotechnical rationality and adoration of intuition and emotion as alternative sources of knowledge; an attempt to move African culture to site out of criticism by celebrating locality as the ultimate determinant of cultural authority; belief action; and recommendation of a solution to the crisis of self-definition in Africa which says that Africans

should discover what they were previously and take steps to be such again (Oladipo, 1995:28-29).

The modernists' rejection of African tradition was based on the fact that, they, being trained in Western analytic philosophy, were lured by its systematisation and development to believe that Africans need to embrace the Western culture and philosophical model in order to develop or to become human as it were. My contention is that the attitude of both camps demonstrates some ideological commitments that prevent adequate definition and problematisation of tradition and, therefore, proposes an unjustified opposition between tradition and modernity or, in this case, development. This is because, as just noted, the discourse relating to the role of tradition in the development process is embedded in the question of African philosophy and humanity. This has been buried or subsumed under the discussion relating to the questions. The response of African scholars to these questions has been that of self-definition which has diverted the attention of African philosophers from the crux of the issues involved in the development debate. The traditionalists in the African philosophical debate have been referred to as cultural revivalists and ethnic nationalists. For instance, Oladipo argues that "the traditionalist programme is informed by considerations of nationalism more than any other thing (Oladipo, 2000: 41). The work of the traditionalists, cultural revivalists or ethnic nationalists, whatever we call them is represented by a trend in African philosophy derogatorily referred to as ethnophilosophy.

A typical example of the ethno-philosophical work was the philosophy of Negritude developed by Leopold Senghor. Negritude is, of course, a philosophy of black identity. Senghor argued that black people had a particular way of knowing, determined by their psychophysiology, which may be described as knowing by participation. In contrast to Western ways of knowing, which, he said, analyses the object, breaking it into pieces; so to speak, African cognition proceeded by embracing the object. Wiredu remarks that Senghor actually once said approvingly, in a lecture in Nigeria in the 1960s, that this cognitive procedure "con-fused" objects rather than breaking them down; which raised anxieties among some African intellectuals that this came a little too close to making non-hyphenated confusion a congenital trait of the African psyche (Wiredu, 2004:6). Wiredu further remarks that, for the Francophone critics of ethnophilosophy, indeed, the mere postulating of a peculiarly African mentality was obnoxious enough (Ibid). Senghor accepted the idea of fundamental differences between black Africans and white Europeans, and his account of the black and white mentalities echoed at least some of the ideas that had long been part of colonial discourse. For example, Senghor argued that "the negro is a man of nature" (Senghor, 1995:117), more sensuous and responsive to the rhythms of the environment than his white counterpart. In contrast, whites approach the world in the manner of a scientist or an engineer, differentiating themselves from the natural world, placing nature at a distance, so to speak. Through this objective stance, the natural world can be surveyed, measured and, ultimately, manipulated for human purposes. In distinguishing these two mentalities, Senghor directly challenged claims of white superiority, almost to the point of inverting the colonial racial hierarchy. In his view, Africans did not lack reason, but displayed a different form of reason, a more fundamental way of apprehending the world, one that allowed objects to shine forth in their "primordial reality" (Senghor, 1995: 121). In contrast, Senghor argued that the objectifying reason of classical Europe "slays the object" and "feeds off" the natural world. Negritude needs to be associated with the second phase of rejection since it does not break with the Western discourse. By focusing on the differentiation of races Negritude stays within the racist discourse. But it functions as a stepping stone for following African intellectuals to initiate an emancipative discourse.

Viewed from the angle of development, ethnophilosophy toys with a twofold target, namely, the criticism of the Western conceptions of Africa and the rehabilitation of African cultures. The task is regarded as the major condition of African renaissance and hence modernisation. The premises of this thinking are found in Placide Tempels. Ciaffa notes that it is Tempel's work that provided a key stimulus and touch stone to African cultural revivalism (Ciaffa, 2008: 125). Appiah also notes that the claim to philosophy is what is most important, most difficult and most fundamental in the Western tradition (Appiah, 1992: 112).

The critique of ethnophilosophy which resurfaced after independence seems to have drawn its inspiration from Fanon. This is especially the case with those philosophers who took a radical stance. Fanon had already broken off from the philosophies of Africanity by the late 1950s (Chachage, 1994: 54). For Fanon, Africanity was one of the pitfalls of national consciousness as it championed the interests of the bourgeoisie. The task of independence was to complete the liberation of Africa, in terms of total transformation of society rather than harping about the 'cultural unity of Africa', or the cult of the permanence of Egyptian civilisation. It was not a question of a model offered by the past; rather, a reality lying in the future as a perpetual creation. Culture was apprehended as a process of becoming, rather than a state of affairs. In fact, Fanon seemed to suggest that the issue of African identity should be laid to rest so as to clear a new ground of thought:

To believe that it is possible to create a black culture is to forget that niggers are disappearing, just as those who brought them into being are seeing the break-up of their economic and cultural supremacy. There will never be such a thing as black culture because there is no single politician who feels he has a vocation to bring

black republics into being. The problem is to get to know the place that these men mean to give their people, the kind of social relations they decide to set up and the conception that they have of the future of humanity. It is this that counts; everything else is mystification, signifying nothing ...Adherence to African-Negro culture and the cultural unity of Africa is arrived at in the first place by upholding unconditionally the peoples' struggle for freedom (Fanon, 1967: 188-189)

While Fanon was talking about the total transformation of society after independence, the politicians and other intellectuals adhering to Africanity were busy talking about African socialism, African humanism, African culture, and authenticity, blending it with modernisation. As a result of the aftermaths of independence, there was a renewal of the critique of Africanity which was viewed as static to the extent that it could not account for the diverse forms of concrete African realities. Africanity was condemned in the spirit of Fanon and Cabral as a system of imperialist ideas. The critique of Africanity, therefore, called for a renewal of the critique of Tempels' ethno-philosophy which inspired the ideas of Africanity. Ethno-philosophers were judged and condemned as wrong to imagine that they were restoring an African traditional philosophy. With this new spirit, it was no longer a question of viewing African philosophy from the point of view of the geographical origins of the authors; rather, a question of specificity of a particular content. African philosophy was being broadened in terms of its horizon and being treated as a methodical inquiry with the same universal aims as those of any other philosophy in the world.

## 2.2 The Modernist Orientation

In reaction to what they saw as the pitfalls of early works by ethno-philosophers, the modernists sought to avoid simplistic and uncritical over-valuations of African traditions. Recognising the trap entailed in defining African philosophy as the antithesis of Western philosophy, they nevertheless fell into the same traps. For example, the work of the modernists such as Bodunrin and Hountondji was motivated by their desire to disprove Western stereotypes that African thought was pre-logical, irrational, and non-scientific; that African culture was particular, subjective, and not universalisable; and thus that Africans had no heritage of philosophical thought (Vest, 2009: 14)

Their preoccupation with these stereotypes had many implications for the formulation of the field. It meant, for instance, that members of the professional school have sought to minimize the distinctions between African and Western philosophies in their formulation of an African philosophy that closely resemble mainstream British and Anglo-American forms of philosophical production. Because the explicit debate at the centre of early professional African philosophers' formulation concerned the universality of philosophy, it was important to them that African philosophy should have universal value. They gave it universality by universalising Europe - and trying to place African philosophy as its subset without which it finds no existential significance. In other words, African philosophy needs a Western stamp to legitimise it as an authentic enterprise. It is thinking in this perspective that ran the modernists into problems.

One can see the above sentiment expressed, for example, in the work of Hountondji, who has argued that European philosophy has universal value whereas African philosophy – as defined by the early traditionalists – does not. He is impatient with the lengthy debates that have occurred over the definition of African philosophy, and is urgent about the need for African philosophy to have the same universality that European philosophy has. It must have the same universal aims as those of any other philosophies in the world. Hountondji has been very critical of “ethno-philosophers”, whose work, he contends, is coloured by their compulsion to dialogue with the West in order to defend and reinvent themselves. This dialogue according to him encourages the worst kind of cultural particularism. He doubts whether the word philosophy can retain its habitual meaning when qualified by the word “African”. For him, what is at stake in defining an African philosophy unique to Africa, or at least different from the “habitual meaning” (Hountondji, 1983: 66) is “the universality of the word ‘philosophy’ throughout its possible geographical applications” (Hountondji, 1983:56). He remarks that a philosophy that is explicitly cultural can never be universal. However, he seems to have forgotten that what is being universalised is European cultural particular. Like Ghanaian philosopher Appiah, Hountondji believes that while themes and questions can vary from philosopher to philosopher and from culture to culture, a single style of inquiry must be preserved (Hountondji, 1983, Appiah, 1992). He does not believe we should define such a style of inquiry for Africa: he believes that the best style of inquiry already exists. For him, “the African peoples who take over the theoretical heritage of Western philosophy, assimilating and transcending it, are producing authentic African philosophy” (Hountondji, 1983: 67). It seems to me that Hountondji does not seem to anticipate the implication of his thought on development for the African continent. Inadvertently, he was calling for Africans to embrace European modernity and so be totally lost in it. Towa describes this as being fundamentally Europeanised.

Bodunrin (1981) advances similar arguments as Hountondji. For him, any study of traditional society must begin by an examination of philosophical issues and conceptions that have loomed largely in the history of world



philosophy. “If a problem is philosophical...it must have a universal relevance to all men” (Bodunrin, 1981:173). For him, the history of Western philosophy is the history of world philosophy, and it alone defines what is of universal relevance. In Bodunrin’s perspective, there is an antagonistic relationship between the particularity of African culture and the universality of Western culture. Opines that “our culture may be dear to us but truth must be dearer” (1981:176). And so, we must be wary of our traditional accretion or that we must totally abandon them to embrace what is European.

He also limits the field of possible questions to those which European philosophers “have not found a solution to yet” (Bodunrin, 1981:175-6). He believes that certain questions are already answered - that because certain Western philosophers have addressed certain problems, they are no longer in need of further reflection. However, twenty years after his first publication on the topic, Bodunrin came to the point of admitting that a certain Western bias had prevented him from recognising the existence of non-European forms of philosophy.

In an interview, he admitted that there may be more than one way of doing philosophy, but he still believed that the Western approach was the superior one. In reference to his change of opinion regarding the existence of non-European philosophies, he explained: “...I agree that the Western is one way of looking at the world, the Chinese is one way of looking at the world, the Islamic is one way of looking at the world, the Christian...But the world cannot stop here. Let us go to the next stage to argue well. You are this way. I am this way and-the way I am is better than (sic) the way you are...we have to be able, however unpleasant it may be, to our own cultures, to ourselves, we have to be able to say: A is better than B” (Graness, 1996 cited in Vest, 2009:).

What we see in the modernists is an uncritical infatuation with Western model of philosophy and development. Since Africans are encouraged to join the bandwagon of Western philosophy and development at the expense of African socio-cultural realities, we see the net outcome in the consecration of the normativeness of the West. Kebede thinks that this results from their allegiance to Western philosophy (Kebede, 2004). In line with this he argues that

The allegiance to Western philosophy is such that the anthropological characterisation of African thinking as collective, spontaneous and irrational is literally reproduced. The allegiance prevented Hountondji and Towa from developing the slightest doubt about the accuracy of the terms used to describe African traditional thinking (Kebede, 2004: 120).

In this way, we see the modernists as supporting the catch up theory of development. And this persistent meaning of development which proposes to African countries an exogenous rather than an endogenous standard of development is, according to Dalfovo, opiate rather than incentive. The reason, for him, which I think is right, is that “developing countries cannot effect their development by aiming at ‘catching up’ economically, socially, politically or culturally.” (Dalfovo, 2002: 131). The development path suggested by the modernist position in the development debate will not make Africans to be autonomous in the development plans and objectives. For this reason it will not terminate dependency of African countries on the metropolitan but will continue it in deeper dimensions.

Hountondji notices and laments this lack of autonomy and dependence and Western hegemony when he argues that there is an “historical integration and subordination of...[systems of knowledge]... to the world system of knowledge and “know how,” just as underdevelopment as a whole results, primarily, not from any original backwardness, but from the integration of our subsistence economies into the world capitalist market.” (Hountondji, Quoted in Serequeberhan, 2002: 300). In my perspective, the fact that this is recognised as the Africa's post-colonial development situation should suggest the urgency or re-orienting Africa’s philosophic work and development towards indigenous traditions and cultural values though not exclusive of what development is going on in other place in the world. Hountondji does well to have pointed to our lamentable dependence on the West, it is however, as Serequeberhan rightly suggests, necessary to go further and formulate the substantial thematic context in terms of which the source of this dependence can be critically explored and unhinged (Serequeberhan, 2002).

In this respect African philosophic enterprise has the task of deconstruction and reconstruction. In its deconstructive aspect, its task relates to a critique of Western Hegemony and normativity. In this way the African philosophic practice ceases to be reactive. Constructively, African philosophic enterprise has the task of engaging in systematic and critical study of indigenous traditions. The purpose of the study should not be to show or that we have certain things in our tradition that are different from or correspond to what the West has. The aim, as Serequeberhan rightly points out, should be “a systematic exploration—holding our educated Eurocentric biases in abeyance—of the skills, wisdom and know-how of our traditions in view of locating and critically updating the paradigmatic framework that underpinned their practice” (Serequeberhan, 2002: 301). The aim of all this is not to be able to produce something that is uniquely African or to channel a path of development that is essentially African but to critically integrate the elements of African tradition with the Western culture of science. In this way, rather than be an oppressive overlay on our traditions, Western science and methodological framework can aid the validating and development of our traditional knowledge and

scientific practices. However this involves a selective process. We cannot import everything Western and use everything African in the integration process. There is the need for critical selection of what is good in Western culture and a discarding of what is anachronistic and sterile in our own culture. The purpose of doing this is to use the good elements of both cultures to confront the exigencies of Africa's historical situations and developmental problems. Fanon and Cabral provide a mode by which the integration of Western into African tradition could take place.

### 3. Conclusion: The Good Use of Tradition

The perception of tradition in the contemporary scheme of thing is due to the discourse in which tradition is designated not only a product but as a "mode of thought and a praxis proper to a certain kind of society known as tribe or clan, and is conceived in opposition to modernity or progress" (Makang, 1997: 324-325). As Shils also emphasised, tradition or traditionality became associated with a particular kind of society and culture (Shils, 1981:6). There is an ideological twist to the conception of the relation between tradition and modernity. This is the deliberate attempt on the part of the West to see African societies as fundamentally traditional and European societies as essentially modern. It assumes, as Amato remarks, that "there is something about Western thought that makes it modern and something about African thought that makes it not modern (more typically the term "pre-modern is used")" (Amato,1997: 74). Tradition was regarded as the cause or consequences of ignorance, superstition, clerical dominance, religious intolerance, social hierarchy, unequal wealth distribution and other states of mind and social institutions which were not approved by rationalism and progressivism. It was thought that when tradition yields place to reason and scientific knowledge, all vices associated with it would fall away (Amato, 1997). Put differently, tradition was depicted as the opposite of reason and freedom by the rationalist and the progressivists. This conception which sees tradition as an unchanging and static corpus of representation, as we have shown, has its root in the Enlightenment thinkers' representation of other cultures. While fully acknowledging the historical significance of the Enlightenment and its critique of tradition, one cannot but point out that by setting tradition in opposition to reason and freedom and progress, the Enlightenment fails to capture the meaning and essence of tradition. The position we have tried to defend in the essay is that tradition is relevant in the development process. It is an improper understanding of tradition which is consequent upon its muddled meaning that makes it difficult to place it correctly in the development process. By reducing African traditions to a fixed past and to a nostalgia for the pristine, development discourse seems to strip African people of their historicity; and traditions that could be useful are marginalised in the development process. To my mind, tradition survives by adapting itself to new historical situations, and most of the time by learning from other traditions and assimilating from them elements which can contribute to its revitalisation. The pertinent question at this point is how do we make a good use of tradition for African development? First, there are certain steps that must be taken.

The first step has to do with the need to develop the right attitude to African tradition. This begins by the recognition of the fact that there are multiple traditions – African, Western Asian and that there is no reason to uncritically submit to any of these traditions. In other words, the belief that Western culture represents the only human path to development should be reassessed. On the other hand, Africans should not fall into the temptation of excessive self-identification with and romantic attachment to their own culture in self-defence and justification. These are the dangers that we are facing today (Hountondji, 2000: 6). The uncritical response to the Western ethnocentrism most of the time moves us to develop a kind of relation with our culture and tradition which is not so pure and straightforward. The fact that our culture and tradition is still under attack today from the West makes us to defend the indefensible and justify the unjustifiable. In other word, as Hountondji rightly remarks, "our relation as individuals to our original cultures is frequently biased, not to say poisoned by the obsession of collective self-defence imposed on us by a hostile environment" (2000:6). We align with Hountondji's thought that:

One of the most serious issues, therefore, is how to get rid today of this obsession of the Other and develop again a free and critical relationship to our own cultures. In other words: in places or circumstances where the internal debate within particular cultures has been slowed down or even stifled down by external aggression, how to revive this debate? How to minimise the negative impact of racism and colonial contempt on the way people behave towards their own culture? How to get mentally liberated from other cultures' view on our own culture, in order to prioritise our own debate with and within the latter? (2000:6).

We can get rid of this obsession and develop a critical relationship with our own culture and tradition when we cease to see and treat the issues in African philosophy and development as conversations with Europe. This allows us to interrogate African philosophy and development on its own. Vest has rightly proposed that "Nobody can define what is necessary for Africans but Africans themselves" (Vest, 2009: 4). The significance of this is that we need to relativise the West and deconstruct its dominance on our thinking and development. We should

also consciously and deliberately determine the course of our own development. This is not to say, however, that cross-cultural comparativity and borrowing and dialogue should not be part of the process, but one-sided monologues initiated and instigated by colonising discourses are not productive for African culture and development.

When we are able to deal with this obsession, we will focus on the development of our culture and culture and tradition. This will allow us to see the internal pluralism of African tradition, the internal tensions that made them living and dynamic traditions. Following from this is the jettisoning of the need for self-justification and the development of a new reading of our past which is likely to produce internal debate within our culture in such a way that it may develop new and the best possible alternatives. What we are saying is that to put tradition to good use, there is the need to liberate African self-representation from Eurocentrism, for no view of African difference and philosophy can be authentic if it remains entangled in Eurocentric distortions. As Kebede rightly counsels, "So long as the African mind is bogged down by Western representations, no development policy, however thoroughly contrived and skilfully planned, can initiate a sustained process of development" (Kebede, 2004:126).

Another way tradition can be put to good uses is suggested by Makang. According to him, tradition can be made to function as an ideology or as a regulative utopia (Makang, 1997: 335). This for him implies pointing out points of common reference in particular contexts in which Africans daily construct their societies. This point of common reference is aimed at historical intelligibility that leads to action and collective creativity (Ibid: 336). For me this conception of the good use of tradition is inadequate. The reason is that, as a regulative utopia, tradition can point to what is congruent or what is not congruent with the common references in a particular culture without mobilising for action and validation of the elements of that culture. In this sense the tradition may go into extinction. Living traditions are traditions that are being constantly proved or validated through material conquest. I, therefore, think that the suggestion by Kebede that development is the validation of belief is correct. (Kebede, 1999: 55). The validation of traditions and development requires a competitive spirit not just copying what is going on in other cultures but through the objectification of the culture and tradition of the people with add-ons that are critically selected and appropriated from other cultures of the world.

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