

# Epistemological Ethnocentrism and Afro-Humanism: An Afro-Constructivist Narrative

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## **Abstract**

*Aristotle made it clear in the opening paragraph of his metaphysics that it was the desire of all men (universal affirmation) to know. However, it is unfortunate how the epistemological ethnocentrists are now arguing that the use of reason is restricted only to the western world/white race. They also argued that Africans in particular are either not civilized enough to access and make use of reason. The submission of these scholars regrettably got the approbation of some pseudo-scientists who through depraved and voracious apologetics supported this intellectual scam and thrash and also out-rightly defended this highly mendacious point of view. This paper then scrupulously analysed this hasty and tenuous position. This is against the backdrop of some afro-constructivists who come up to refute these spurious and rapacious claims and also went further to re-establish the fact that Africa has always been endowed with reason and has so much historically, materially, artistically, intellectually and economically as a race to buttress this claim. However, while the foremost Liberian scholar, Blyden relied on traditionalism in its bid to reconstruct the African worldview, it is remarkable and palpable that other scholars like Appiah and Mudimbe advocated for a synthetic and symmetrical approach, thereby not throwing away the baby with the bath water. Through the scheme of afro-reconstruction, this paper aligned with this later submission of eclecticism. However, the level and measure of associating the traditional and the western models appears to remain a teething issue now and always.*

**Key words:** *African, Race, Epistemological Ethnocentrism, Pseudo-Scientists, Humanism*



## Introduction

It was indeed during the golden age of western philosophy that one of the most celebrated golden age philosophers, Aristotle remarked that man by nature desires to know. This seeming intrinsic quest of man to know has been one of the most remarkable of the many qualities that defines human nature and existence. This natural quest and epistemic inclination of man has been the foundation of the many discoveries that has given the human person its distinctive place in nature. Little wonder Norbert Wildiers reasons that one might almost say that exploration of the universe invariably had the appearance of a venture into space. It was a quest for the world, the size and volume of the earth, the distances between the planets, the stars and the spiral nebulae, and their positioning relative to one another (Max 1965, 55). However, despite this axiomatic declaration and submission of Aristotle, some scholars especially the eurocentrists think otherwise and rather went further in error to classify the genre of human persons that can aspire to know or to appreciate the wholesome scheme of speculation which is as old as human nature. These scholars who at best have been described as epistemological ethnocentrists contend that the African race does not have the capacity to reason. They posit on the other hand that it is only the western specie that has the birthright to reason. But seriously speaking, this mode of

expression is not just spurious, unfortunate and mendacious it is also quite perplexing state that despite the contributions of Africans and Africa to civilization and global development, the continent has always been treated with levity. This treatment is obvious in the academic spheres nay philosophy and in the humanities. This informs the assertion of Masolo that the first experience African philosophy had of this negation was during the *great debate*. He also reasoned that the western judgment or attitude on Africa have been on mere cultural bias, which gradually grew into a formidable two-pronged historical reality: slavery and slave trade on the one hand and academic expression on the other hand (Masolo 1994, 2). This rather horrid and awkward presentation of the African epistemological experience led to the disposition and activities of the afro-constructivist like Blyden, Cesaire, Appiah, Mudimbe, Masolo and a host of others who came up in defence of the African continent against the brash position of the epistemological ethnocentrists. They attempted this not just with shallow and trivial submissions but with existential, historical and pragmatic presentations. This paper then intends to interrogate the position of these scholars in lieu of further analyzing their implication towards an authentic African humanism with a rigorous and genuine epistemological base.

### **Epistemological Ethnocentrism**

Epistemological ethnocentrism is a myopic epistemological presentation of ideas originated and propagated by some thinkers in the western tradition. It is the belief that there is nothing to be learned from Africans and by extension other traditions that is not theirs. That if at all something is learned, it came from them, the superior race. For them, there is indeed a distance that demarcates civilization from savagery as far as progress is concerned (Mudimbe 1988, 6). According to Ramose, the assertion of superficialities as the basic feature of man by Locke laid the foundation for this negative difference based on colour (Ramose 2002, 12-13). Even before Locke, Charles de Montesquieu has become infamous for stating categorically that Africans are in fact not human beings. This French pseudo-scientist based his position on the description of the flat nose and the black skin of the African, he even went ahead to argue that God cannot just descend to create a good soul, a soul due for salvation, and then put it inside such an ugly body as that of the African. For him it is natural to think that it is colour that constitutes the essence of humanity and the determinant colour of the skin must be judged by the colour of the hair. (Montesquieu 1956, 158). Still basking in the euphoria of his pseudo-science, he later added a caveat as it concern the humanity of Africans, he stated that if indeed the negro was human, then that would logically lead to the

negation of the Christianity of the oppressed (Montesquieu 1952, 110). However Oguejiofor (2007) clever enough was quick to remark that imperialism also later brought this cruel distinction to the fore where they undermine other races as non-human. This imperial mode of dehumanization according to Hannah Arendt would have faded away if not for the imperial system that the west later ushered in.

It is highly probable that the thinking in terms of race would have disappeared in due time together with other irresponsible opinions of the nineteenth century, if the scramble for Africa and the new era of imperialism had not exposed western humanity to new and shocking experiences. Imperialism would have necessitated the invention of racism as the only possible 'explanation' and excuse for its deeds, even if no race-thinking had ever existed in the civilized world (Mudimbe 1988, 108).

This epistemological bias was finely tuned by Hegel (1956, 93) when he stated that the Negro's consciousness has not yet attained the realization of any substantial objective existence for God etc; that the African is undeveloped and has not yet attained the knowledge of an absolute being.

Patently, in the Hegelian scheme, the Prussians are the real manifestation of the absolute spirit. He even put Africa outside the realm of humanity, this is sequel to the fact that for him, to understand Africa, one needs to divest his/herself of all the standards associated with human culture and civilization. It is unfortunate that Hegel never visited Africa or knew Africa so well, but off course he needs this unsavoury scheme to deny Africa humanity which was *en vogue* then. This explains why he severed Egypt from Africa and saw it as rather having close ties with the west and east. Regrettably, David Hume, one of the foremost empiricists ended up toeing the epistemological ethnocentrism of Hegel. For Hume, the superiority of the whites over the blacks is even innate; he further posited that there is no sign, invention and indication of any form of civilization among the blacks. Please, take a note on Hume as he vomits sarcasm:

I am apt to suspect the Negroes to be naturally inferior to the whites. There scarcely was ever a civilized nation of that complexion, nor ever any individual, eminent either in action or speculation. No ingenious manufacturers among them, no art, no science. On the other hand, the most barbarous of the white, such as the ancient

Germans, the eminent among them, in their valour, form of government or some other particular. Such a uniform and constant difference could not happen, in so many countries and ages, if nature had not made an original distinction between these breeds of man...in Jamaica, indeed, the talk of one Negro as a man of parts and learning; but it is likely he is admired for slender accomplishment... (David Hume, quoted by Ruch and Anyanwu 1984, 185).

However, when this scathing falsehood was challenged with good examples, Hume retorted and reneged on this brash proposition (Immerwahr 1992, 481-483) Hume later added a caveat to his revised submission that even if there were inventions among the blacks, it is just akin to a parrot that was being appreciated for uttering words that appeared to be human (Immerwahr and Burke 1993, 23). Seeing the logical implication of the position of Hume, Oguejiofor remarked that the empiricism that Hume professed seems to align with was laced with racial thought, based on the fact that it relied on observation and this can lead to translating observable disparity among different groups into the dictates of their nature. With this, Oguejiofor submitted that adherence to the principles of empiricism does not permit one to

make deduction from a handful of people to million (Oguejiofor, 2001, 81-83, 2007, 62). However, in further analysis of this pseudo-science and empiricism of Hume, Oguejio for (2007) made reference to Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze's work, *Achieving our Humanity* (2002), where the latter took out time to expose the flawed intention and pseudo-scientific exposition of Hume couched in epistemological ethnocentrism. Now, it is the belief of Hume that diverse races are naturally gifted with various shades of cognitive abilities. But he was quick to assert that nature did not endow some races with the gift of intelligence which is the 'higher philosophical determination of the mind'. Hume interestingly stated that reasoning is all about comparison and that there are three basic levels of that. In ascending order they are as follows; when two objects are present, when neither is present or when only one is present. In defence of his epistemological bias, Hume names the first intelligence, the second is perception and with the level of perception, the mind merely records what appears before it with thinking (Eze 2002, 66-67).

For Eze then, if the black race cannot engage in the process of thinking, then they are left at the level of perception. Meaning that what they have is just passions and not minds. It is instructive to state here that in 'Of the reason of animals' a section of Hume's *treatise of human nature*, Hume even assigned the same level of mental activity he assigned to the

inferior race to mere animals as well and this level is far from the sphere of intellectual life. If, then, for Hume the mental capacity of Negroes as a race, which is to say the level of their humanity, is more nearly animal than white, is there any reason why the Negroes could not be sold by the white like a horse...For Hume, the Negroes were, in the language common at the time, a legitimate 'articles of trade' (Eze 2002, 67).For Richard Burton (1864, 199), the Negro is still at the crude level with no idea of a personal deity or does he believe in the future, punishment or reward. This was compounded by Samuel Baker (1976, 2) who writing about Africans said, "...without any exception, they are without a belief in a supreme being, neither have they any form of worship or idolatry, nor is the darkness of their minds enlightened by even a ray of superstition". Their convictions stems from the contention of Levy Bruhl that the western format is the yardstick for assessment. It is quite disheartening that the cognitive level and epistemological status that a large number of enlightenment scholars assigned to the black race is either close to nothingness or at the same level with animal. This is quite horrendous but Oguejiofor simply stated that these thinkers were but just "sophistic mouthpieces of inhuman generations" (Oguejiofor 2007, 62). This best describes them and their tirades

### **The Precursors of Epistemological Ethnocentrism**

It has been stated by some scholars that this whole pseudo-scientific perspective of the eurocentrists is rather novel as it has never been that way. This is sequel to the fact that Africa remains the creole of civilization. However some events and variables tended to rebrand Africa worldview and this later paved the way for and fuelled this unfortunate deceitful and sneering epistemological preachment. These events are; globalization, colonialism and the slave trade saga.

**Globalization:** It is apparent as Jane Stensil avers that globalization depicts a new World War against humanity as a whole and this war assassinates, forgets, and leads to a new world order and divisions (Jane Stensil, 2006). This new order from globalization increases the powers of the powerful and the misery of the miserable. In fact:

...to begin with, globalization is the continuation of the trend of growing openness and integration among economies that have brought the world a half century of unparalleled prosperity and world trade grew no less than 540 fold relative to a fivefold growth in world population and forty fold growth in world GDP...yet, the gap between rich and poor nations between

developed and undeveloped nations is as wide today as it ever was perhaps a great deal wider than before (Garba, 2005,p. 273).

This state of affairs definitely bolstered the quest of the eurocentrists to initiate the epistemological ethnocentric scheme.

**Colonialism:** This is the establishment, maintenance, acquisition and expansion of colonies in one territory by people from another territory. It is a process whereby sovereignty over the colony is claimed by the subduing territory and the social structure, the government, and economics of the colony are changed by colonialists from the colonial masters. Markedly, colonialism depicts a set of unequal relationships and interaction that exists between the colonialists and the indigenous population. If it is the case that the *colonial period* refers usually to the period in history from the late 15th to the 20th century when European nation-states established colonies on other continents, then it is not strange that they can take advantage of the colonies and continually relegate them on all grounds. When it is viewed thematically, existentially and historically, the system of colonial rule is a practice of domination that involves the subjugation of one people by another. In this case the whites and the blacks.

Colonialism is a relationship between an indigenous (or forcibly imported) majority and a minority of foreign invaders. The fundamental decisions affecting the lives of the colonised people are made and implemented by the colonial rulers in pursuit of interests that are often defined in a distant metropolis. Rejecting cultural compromises with the colonised population, the colonisers are convinced of their own superiority and their ordained mandate to rule (Jürgen Osterhammel, 1997,p.16).

And that the outcome of this unequal relationship turning out to usher in epistemological ethnocentrism is not strange. This is based on the fact that the fulcrum of the colonial schemes precipitated the emergence of this novel and disparaging epistemological ideology.

**Slave trade:** The obnoxious and caustic enterprise of the slave trade did not help issues at all as it concerns the epistemological framework and impression of the epistemological ethnocentrists. However, it is remarkable to state that the perplexity that surrounds African humanity is relatively new in academic and historical circles. For Frank Snowden it is clear that “overall but especially

the more detailed Greco-Roman view of blacks was highly positive (Snowden, 1983,p.70). For Snowden therefore, this type of racial prejudice that came up later was as a result of the ignominies that the trans-Atlantic slave trade came with and also brought about. It is pertinent to state here that there are indeed some traces of chauvinism everywhere among different groups of people; it can come in cultural, linguistic, physical, racism or historical form. But the shade of dehumanization and indignity that is associated with the trans-Atlantic slave trade plus its duration makes room for an intellectually expedient conjecture.

#### **Pseudo-Scientism and the Western Justification of the Absurd**

It is quite unfortunate that this lousy scheme of epistemological ethnocentrism was championed by the enlightenment thinkers. Interestingly, they were empowered and emboldened by the remarks of the racists especially the brand of Arthur de Gobineau who said that “the only history is white” and Caillois who corroborated the former when he remarked that “the only ethnography is white”. They used his submission to justify their pseudo-science philosophically. It is disastrous that while ordinarily, the distinctive mark of the enlightenment era after that of romanticism was to highlight the evergreen status of reason against the reign or prejudice, faith, authority, traditionalism, these pseudo-scientists just ended up in allowing themselves to become apologist for the “most



iniquitous transaction in human history (Anene 1966,p.92).This explains why Cesaire commented on the personality of Caillois thus "...while claiming to be dedicated to rigorous logic, sacrifices so willingly to prejudice and wallows so voluptuously in clichés (1972,p.56). From their credentials it is blatant that they are the authorities as far as western philosophical tradition is concerned, thinkers like; Hegel, Hume, Kant, Charles de Montesquieu, What a shame! This is really a significant infamy because the challenge in philosophy is not just that these thinkers were rationally jaundiced and cynical in their remarks about other races based on the spirit of their time, but the critical concern was the complicity of the western tradition of philosophy towards the very gaffe. Strikingly, Oguejiofor calls this disposition, '*the grave errors of the enlightenment*', because the history of philosophy so presents these scholars without reference to their scathing and irrational remarks on the black race in particular. A typical example of this connivance and complicity is evident in the work of Norman Smith (1966) on David Hume where he did not just mention the sarcastic position on the later about superiority and inferiority of races.

Even Ram Adhar Mall in his work *Hume's concept of man* (1967) refused to mention the fact that Hume graded humanity in his bid to blackmail the black race. This scholar even went ahead to disparage the submissions on James Beattie who

critically reviewed the positions of Hume. Mall (1967,p.26) described the submissions of Beattie on Hume as 'hard, rude and roughly personal' he said this, feigning ignorance of the fact that Hume had described Beattie as 'a bigoted silly fellow'. However, Beattie was optimistic that 'succeeding ages will be astonished to hear that their forefathers were deluded or amused by such fooleries (that is the positions of Hume). But regrettably, Mall points out in a footnote that 'the treatment that Hume has got in the hands of posterity is just the opposite of what Beattie prophesied' (Mall 1966, 26 n. 6). The reality of the prophesy of Mall is not in doubt only because the western tradition of philosophy blatantly refused to appreciate its messy past. Interestingly, Oguejio for quotes Chukwudi Eze who highlighted the fact that a recent work *A Kant's Dictionary* (Caygill 1994) did not take account of the views of Kant on race even though the latter wrote five treatises on race matters (Eze 1997,p.3).Furthermore, even when Kurt Steinhauer wrote *Hegel: bibliography in* 1995 which was a compilation of essay on Hegel in the past one hundred years, he refused to add not even one article of Hegel on Africa. And the implication of these deleterious sophistry and pseudo-science is that the western tradition is not sincere in its analytic endeavours and also wants to perpetrate the annihilation of other races through academic and scholarship prejudices. This probably explains why even as

recent as in 1916 Bertrand Russell still maintains that Germany had the effrontery to annex colonies (Russell, 1916,p.61) and Hitler predicated his quest to acquire more colonies within Europe on this.

### **African Epistemology**

From the era of these pseudo-scientist and maligners of the enlightenment ideology, Africa has been trapped in the epistemological dilemma of seeing their epistemological schemes consigned to the western paradigms. This precipitated the candid endeavour of the Afrocentrists and Afro-constructivists to re-establish the existence of African epistemology. This section is about African epistemology while the next section is on afro-constructivism. However, studies have helped to state the obvious that Africans perceived reality as distinct from the west. It was explicated that a strong interpersonal relations with others as well as harmony, peace with nature, communalism, and spirituality were the basic features of African epistemology. Ukwamedua (2012) quoting Sentwali Bakari (2010) analysed the evidence available which states that African epistemology even dates back as far as 4000 B.C.E. (Before the Common Era). Although much of African history has been passed down by oral traditions, there were numerous calligraphies that gave clues to ancient African epistemology, that is, African epistemology ever before the commencement of formal

epistemological schemes in the west. The scripts includes; the three scripts of ancient Egypt: hieroglyphic, hieratic and demotic; the Moroitic and Coptic scripts of Nubia; the Sebean and G'eez scripts of Ethiopia; the Toma and Vaisripts of Liberia; and the Mum scripts of Cameroon. However, a great emphasis is placed in the Egyptian scripts and history because; Afrocentric scholars contend that the greatest world achievements have come out of the Egyptian civilization. As a constructivist, I would also like to also emphases the moroitic and Coptic scripts from Nubia based on the fact that Nubia is the indeed one of the earliest civilizations of the ancient north-eastern Africa, and it is on record that Nubian kings even conquered and ruled over Egypt and its civilization for over a century. However, as early as 4000 B.C.E., the Egyptians established a spiritual system of law, order, truth and righteousness and even the social-historical setting for the Maatians (maat) ethics dates back to the 4000 - 3500 B.C.E. Thus, African epistemology places great emphasis on ethics and morality, spirituality, symbolic imagery, science, self-awareness and tradition. The use of symbols was the means of conveying a precise rationale. However, Bakari was apposite to add that symbolic imagery did not prelude recognition and use of rationality or scientific logic; rather, symbolic imagery as a means of knowing offset the use of rationality. The great achievement by the

Egyptians indicated an undeniable appreciation for rationality and scientific logic, and this is in contrast to the submission of the epistemological ethnocentrists who messed up the stance of the enlightenment with their pseudo-science.

In practical and existential terms, African epistemology is a reflection of the way the African mind appreciates knowledge and reality. This epistemology is situated within the precincts of African cultural practices; for Gyekye (Coetzee & Routz 1966,p.32) it is a rational investigation into the epistemic values, knowledge, method and extent of acquisition of African human cognition. The major currents in African epistemology are truth and belief. In a similar way, Sogolo (1993,p.76) remarked that when a traditional African is asked why he or she thinks that witches exists the likely answer will be "...because I know that witches exist or because I believe that witches exist" the submission then is that believe and knowing are one and the same. As in the western epistemology believe and truth has close affinity because one invariably leads to the other. Sogolo states that the concern then of the African when a claim to knowledge is made is mostly, whether it is true or false. Attempting to explicate this concept of truth and falsity, Peter Winch asserts:

Whether a statement is true or false will depend

upon what it means. What it means...will depend upon how it is being used, how it functions as part of the form of life it belongs to. The notion then, of translating one form of life into the terms, concepts, preconceptions of another, does not make such sense. The way belief operates in a form of life is peculiar to that form of life. In particular, there is no reason to suppose that a statement true-to-them is translatable into a statement true-to-us but if it is translatable into a statement true-to-us that does not show that it is false-to-them... (Jarvie 1992,p.44).

This contention of Winch's further lends a hand in buttressing the existence of African epistemology, because Winch claims that knowledge is a product of societal convention rather than an objectivistic phenomenon as against the submissions of the epistemological ethnocentrists. This is expedient when one remembers how Cesaire reminded Caillois that the infamous law of participation that Levy Bruhl devised was appallingly retracted by the same Levy-Bruhl where it was recorded that in the evening of his last existence on mother earth, he confessed to the world that he was wrong in "trying to define a characteristics that was

peculiar to the primitive mentality so far as logic was concerned” he proclaimed rather that he was then convinced that “these minds do not differ from ours [the western tradition] at all from the point of view of logic. He concluded therefore that the Negroes cannot tolerate a formal contradiction anymore and forthwith, they renounce any activity that is logically incredible (Les Carnets, 1949, quoted by Cesaire, pp.51-52).

### **Race/Racism and the Search Creole Authentic African Humanism**

Certainly the mendacious disposition of the precursors of the western philosophical tradition was quite damaging to the African psyche and situation. Verily, it has not only aided its further denigration but it also has the capacity to maintain the status quo. This explains why the process of narrating and interpreting the African past has long been an intellectual struggle against the unfounded assumption and prejudices of the Europeans. As the historian David William Cohen reasons, “the major issue [then] is the reconstruction of the African past in the question of how far voices exterior to Africa shape the presentation of Africa’s past and present. This led to copious reactions and counter reactions from some Afrocentrists. Consequently, the latter set out to not only correct the impression of the pseudo-scientists but to also reconstruct the African experience in lieu of generating an authentic African humanism; this task

drew its strength both from culture, tradition, history and philosophy of the African past and present. However, it is apposite to mention here that the betrayal, denial and pseudo-scientific submissions of the western tradition did not go without its repercussion. One of such repercussion according to Oguejiofor (2007) is the situation whereby the oppressed later turned out to become the oppressor. This played out practically in Liberia when after its colonization, the same country went ahead to set the record of having one of the longest uninterrupted reign of a single party in the political history of the world. This was the case until the forceful and violent takeover of government by Samuel Doe. How his death was supervised by the United States later is now history. Nevertheless, it is on record that despite this tendency, Liberia is the birthplace of one of the most intelligent philosopher that Africa has produced in history. His name is Edward Wilmot Blyden.

He was among the first to attempt to reconstruct a new African humanity towards rebranding the African personality that was battered by the pseudo-scientist. He was indeed the one that started the Pan-Africanist movement without employing the crummy logic of the oppressor of his time and place. The preoccupation of Blyden was not to promote either white or black racism but rather to expunge “any form of racial prejudice and social chauvinism and [to use it] as a catalyst to construct a type of

solidarity among Africans (Masolo 1994,p.12). Nonetheless, the basis of this novel African personality that he wanted to erect will stand on the strength of pristine culture and tradition of Africa. His focus was on the outstanding past that Africa has. He then took advantage of the African psyche to employ them to stand up to their race. For Blyden, Africans will only remain the scorn of others when they renege on this and this is imperative for Africans because it is a mandate from the divine and any form of abdication amounts to 'the worst type of suicide' (Masolo 1994,p.12). Based on this mode of expression which focused on African directly, Blyden is seen as the precursor of negritude. He was not just scratchy with the faulty impression of African by others but was more worried about the destructive knowledge being passed on to Africans in the name of education. Actually, "they sang of their victory, which was the history of our degradation. They recited their triumphs, which contained the records of our humiliation. To our great misfortune, we learned their prejudices and their passion and thought we had their aspirations and their power" (Mudimbe 1988,p.121).The traditional African schemes that Blyden sought for includes; the unity and integration that characterize being in African, the bond among human beings, the existence of familyhood, values, kinship relations, hospitality, fertility, altruism all summed up in African communalism; and all these according

to Oguejiofor (2007) can bring about some form of romanticisation which is seemingly inevitable. May be this explains the position of Abraham that the human psyche needs as an anchor an *ab initio* stage in which everything was acceptable as a prop for the will to fight for survival(1985,pp.19-34).

On the other hand, while Blyden went traditional, Appiah didn't fancy that option because of the obvious epistemological implication. The caveat in aligning with the Afrocentric but challenging position of Blyden stems from the fact traditional African philosophy has become ineffective as it concerns attending to the conquering powers of Europe. It is also ignoble that even the respect for humanity among Africans in some cases stop at the kinship and ancestral level. This accounts for why some privileged Africans were emboldened enough to traffic and sell-off their fellow to the slave marauders which later spurred and aided imperialism and colonialism. And Chinweizu seems to understand this precarious scenario, hence he expressed the view that:

We had long been pathetically weak; finally our weakness stood exposed. And all because, for four preceding centuries, our leaders had been preoccupied with exporting, with inadequate compensations or none at all, our human and material resources, had been too busy

organizing our continent for exploitative advantage of Europe, had been too busy with slaving raid upon one another, too busy decorating themselves with trinkles imported from Europe and throwing away our invaluable manhood, our irreplaceable gold, diamonds and ivory- too busy, under various European inducement, impoverishing and disorganizing the land to take thought and long-range action to protect our sovereignty. And at the end of those four missed centuries, where our ancestors had sowed ruinous gain, we, their descendant, reaped conquest and humbling indignities. We must keep before us the pivotal importance of that conquest (1978,p.53).

The above submission disparages the potency of the traditional philosophy that Blyden sought to use as a tool for reconstruction. Hence, Peter Bodunrin a staunch advocate of critical philosophy avers that “a way of life which made it possible for our ancestors to be subjugated by a handful of European cannot be described as totally glorious (Bodunrin 1984,p.7). So, it appears clearer now that African philosophy alone could not have assisted Africa to wage the

war against the Europeans. It alone could not also have been able to abate colonialism and slavery because, the overwhelming military and technological superiority that Europe enjoyed over Africa in this pre-colonial era cannot be underestimated (Boahen 2003,p.22). This then explains the position of Cesaire that “it is a good thing to place different civilization in contact with each other; that it is an excellent thing to blend different worlds; that whatever its own particular genius may be, a civilization that withdraws into itself atrophies [because] civilization exchange, is oxygen (Cesaire 1972,p.11). This is exactly the contention of Appiah when he opted for a synthetic approach in the reconstruction of the African world in the modern time. In his famous work, *In My Father’s House: cracks in the Philosophy of Culture*. Appiah argues that we should not just swallow the African culture raw, whole and entire as it is, rather he posits that we should take and save elements in the African world that are worthy of intellectual interaction and consideration and discard the ones that are not just otiose and anachronistic but vicious. This is predicated on the demands of modern intellectual and developmental issues and discourse and Africa should not be lagging or left behind in a fast globalizing world. A graphic description of this position is evident in the cover of this same book. The cover is adorned with a piece of African art. And furthermore, in the seventh chapter, it was obvious

that the piece of African art used as the book cover was a piece of art exhibited in 1987 at the Centre for African Culture in New York. In the museum, the art was named; 'Yoruba Man with a Bicycle'. Now the Yoruba man is the African while his Bicycle represents the western influence which underscores the point of synthesis. For Appiah therefore the piece of art stands for a:

Polygot, speaking Yoruba and English, probably some Hausa and a little French for his trips to Cotonou or Cameroun, someone whose 'clothes do not fit him too well'...It matters little who it was made for; what we should learn from it is the imagination that produced it. The ... bicycle is produced by someone who does not care that the bicycles is the white man's invention... it is there because someone cared for its solidity [and] because it will take us further than our feet will take us (Appiah, 1992,p.157).

The situation appears complex for some people but a closer critical scrutiny explores its inescapability if the African world is to make meaningful progress and align with the pace and force of globalization. The bicycle is not just meant for Africans but for all those who truly and really

need it and this underscores the spirit of synthesis that the modern world demands. So in plain terms, the implication is that the sole reliance on traditionalism by Blyden does not just stand its own test, it does not also stand the test of time hence a collaboration among civilization and 'worlds' as reasoned by Cesaire and a host of others is inevitable for Africa to move forwards. This is without prejudice to the fundamentals and fulcrum of epistemological ethnocentrism. This is the submission of this paper.

### **Concluding Reflections**

The academic activities of the epistemological ethnocentrists and the connivance of the western tradition of philosophy in their preachments have indeed done African so much bad in terms of image making and personality formation. However, it is pertinent to state that the mode of response from some African scholars seem not to be enough to gravitate Africa from the false consciousness it was meant to embrace. The recourse to traditional African philosophy by Blyden was not potent enough to do the reconstruction. So the question is this, can philosophy or African traditional philosophy really helps to rebrand the African personality? If yes, to what extent? If no, why? For Nyasani (1994,p.183), the long years of exploitation, humiliation, subjugation, vilification and utter contempt for human equality has gradually and progressively brought about a sad process of mental,

spiritual and social degeneration of the colonized African'. The seeming implication is that with this condition, the African has become confused on which side they fall, whether on the side of the oppressor or on their own depraved side and this ushers in an inferiority complex that breeds brainwashing. This then affects the relationship with others. Infact,

The colonial acts of indignities perpetrated against the African were themselves bewildering and astute enough to pander to the Africa's belief that he was indeed inferior, superior only to his own kin. Thus in almost the same degree, the colonial master pooh-pooed the African for his backwardness; the African themselves poured scorn on each other and in effect created haloes and auras of superiority in inferiority around themselves according to colonial experience and locale of oppression (Nyasani 1994,p.187).

The above situation seems to make a way out difficult but not uncalled for especially the option that involves the synthetic approach of Appiah. This makes the point of Ramose (1992,p.65) expedient anyway, that there is the imperative of returning to the traditions of Africans, however, this tradition must function

only but as a source from which to extract elements that will help in the construction of an authentic and emancipative epistemological paradigm relevant to the conditions in Africa at this historical moment. However, the west and all its attendant civilization should not only retrace their step and apologise for this misrepresentation of fact but they should be careful less their flame also turn out to consume them, just the same way Cesaire warns:

...I note that here too there is great danger; that colonial enterprise is to the modern world what roman imperialism was to the ancient worlds: the prelude to disaster and the forerunner of catastrophe. Come, now! The Indians massacred, the Moslem world drained of itself, the Chinese world defiled and perverted for a good century; the Negro world disqualified; mighty voices stilled forever; homes scattered to the wind; all this wreckage, all this waste, humanity reduced to a monologue, and you think that all that does not have its price? The truth is that this policy *cannot but bring about the ruin of Europe itself*, and that Europe, if it is not careful, will perish from the void it has created around itself (Cesaire 1972, 57).



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