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Tradition and Modernization: Siting Philosophy for Children Within the African Outlook

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Abstract In this philosophical paper, we investigate the project of doing philosophy with children in Africa. While the philosophy for children program has its roots in the Anglo-Saxon world, we contend that it can sit well in Africa if given an African outlook. We challenge Eurocentric specialists, who are attempting a wholesale introduction of the Matthew Lipman model of philosophy for children in schools in Africa, to realign their perspective. This paper takes a critical look at the currency of the post-colonial and Africanization agendas in education by exploring the plausibility of a uniquely African philosophy for children program. We argue that for any philosophy to be African, it should be an amalgamation of the traditional and the modern in order to epitomize the twenty-first century African existential conditions that ameliorate educational practices previously subject to Eurocentric hegemony.

Keywords Decolonization · Modernization · Africanization · Critical thinking · Education · Child

Introduction

One of the central themes of postcolonial African philosophy is the relationship between tradition and modernity (Horsthemke 2004). From the early 1960s to the present, African scholars outside the social sciences have claimed that there are, have always been, and will continue to be, widespread psychological and cultural themes and patterns that are unique to sub-Saharan Africa (Lassiter 2000). *Africa* is exceedingly difficult to define and consequently many academic and popular

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discourses on African identities are problematic. Does traditional Africa *live in peace* with modern Africa or it is altogether a thing of the past? To what extent are the traditional modes of thought worthwhile resources for Africa to modernize? We will explore these questions in the context of whether an African perspective of doing philosophy can be located in traditionalism as a *cultural revivalism* paradigm (Gyekye 1997, p. 233) or in a modernist paradigm.

In this paper, we explore the notion of *the African outlook* in the context of philosophy for children, with respect to four contestable processes namely: tradition, modernization, decolonization and globalization. The African perspective or outlook that we posit addresses the following key questions that have currency in contemporary times:

1. How does the tradition–modernity debate contribute to our understanding of an African perspective?
2. What kind of contributions can Africa make to the construction of contemporary educational discourses?
3. Is there a purely African culture that allows us to distinguish unique or truly African concepts or philosophical artifacts?

In other words, given the new engagement with the politics of the universal, that is the politics of globalism, can we genuinely speak of African exceptionalism? We discuss the above issues in the context of doing philosophy with children in Africa. We start by conceptualizing the notion of philosophy for children before we contribute to the tradition–modernity discourse. We then enter the debate on the contemporary relationship between decolonization and globalization as it informs doing philosophy with children from an African perspective. We provide a critique of the main issues raised before making concluding remarks. We initiate the debate by clarifying the notion of philosophy for children in the next section.

What is Philosophy for Children?

Philosophy for children, a Matthew Lipman-initiated educational program developed in the 1970s in the United States of America, is committed to exploring the relationship between *philosophy* and *childhood* (Vansieleghem and Kennedy 2011). It is a form of dialogic education with an emphasis on the development of critical and creative thinking, through questioning and dialogue, between children and teachers and between children and other children (Fisher 2007). For Matthews, although philosophy is natural and enjoyable for children, they are "socialized to abandon" it (1980, p. vii). However, philosophy for children can assist in augmenting communicative skills and developing habits of intelligent behavior by encouraging children to be:

1. *Curious*—through asking deep and interesting questions.
2. *Collaborative*—through engaging in thoughtful discussion.
3. *Critical*—through giving reasons and evidence.

4. *Creative*—through generating and building on ideas.
5. *Caring*—through developing awareness of self and care of others. (Adapted from Fisher 2006, p. 2).

A formal philosophy for children class starts with a structured session in which a stimulus, in the form of a story, a picture, or a video, is provided. Children are encouraged to draw on their imaginations to ask a question centered on amazement (e.g. I wonder why…?). Children then make a collective, democratic decision on the question they are most interested in discussing. The discussion then begins, and is not delimited. It follows its own course directed by the children's thoughts and ideas as they agree and disagree, but continually give reasons for their point of view. The teacher facilitates dialogue while also actively participating in the children's deliberations. But to what extent has philosophy for children, as a programme manifested itself?

Philosophy for children, though developed in the West as a program for developing thinking, has since been adapted and developed for use in approximately eighty countries around the world, though in Africa, it has only been implemented to a very limited extent. The question that then arises is: what motivation is there for implementing a philosophy for children project suitable for Africa? We argue for a project with an African outlook based on both the traditional and the modern.

The Tradition–Modernity Debate

Originating from the Latin verb *tradere*, which means to transmit or to give over, and the noun *traditio*, a process through which something is handed down, the term *tradition* encompasses an array of existing beliefs, practices, and modes of thinking inherited from the past. These may be used to guide and organize, as well as regulate, a people's way of life to make meaning of their world. All people understand and construct their identities in terms of the traditions of which they are part (Kanu 2003). Whatever their technological evolution, every human society pays a large amount of attention to conveying its cultural heritage to its young members. This facilitates social solidarity and has contributed to the endurance of societies over the ages and this also applies to cultures in Africa.

Africa is a gigantic continent consisting of about fifty-four nation states inhabited by people of different cultural and religions although we will argue that there are common threads that run across the territorial boundaries hence our reference to African traditions as if they were all homogeneous. Like all human cultures, African traditions and their belief systems represents a variety of social facets of the various cultures in Africa. However in traditional Africa, one of the most core values is the communocratic thrust of human life. The community is the custodian of the individual, hence he must go where the community goes. Therefore the traditional Africans emphasize community life and communalism as a living principle of which the basic ideology is community-identity. Life in the African community is based on the philosophy of live-and-let-live as a way of life indisputably pivoted on human interests and values; a mode of living evidently characterized by empathy, and by

consideration and compassion for human beings. In this section, we deal with those traditions that have been either neglected, or dismantled, or both, but which continue to exist on the margins as worthwhile fragments that deserve our attention in the present time. We argue that these contribute to the African concept of *doing things*. But how do we distinguish the traditional from the modern?

Discourses on modernity draw our attention to *recent times*, the present, as opposed to the more distant past (Mungwini 2011). The Latin word *modernus* implies the present, that is, *for the day*. *Modernus* is rooted in *modo*, meaning *of today*, *present,* or *just now*. The basic premise of the modernization paradigm is that modernization occurs when traditional values, beliefs, and ways of doing things give way to innovative views and methods (Bhabha 1994). Modernity puts an end to the replication of traditions and other apparently permanent structures of human social life. Scientific thinking, "an analytic and systematic way of observing and interacting with the world that we observe around us is often recognized as the hallmark of modernity" (Olshin 2007, p. 3). Hence, modernity and scientific development are sometimes regarded as the opposite of tradition, which is regarded by many as being backward and ignorant. Spiritual and mystical beliefs are contrary to modern, rational systems, and are associated with the traditional. Hountondji therefore calls for a "clean break" with the pre-modern era in order to meet the demands of the present (1996, p. 48). But, do traditional values and norms necessarily impede the process of scientific modernization, or can they in fact enhance it?

Reflecting on the understanding of tradition and modernity in the context of Africa, a conflicting relationship between the two concepts can be observed, especially when considering the cultural milieu. Modernity, in Africa, has largely been the imposition of European enlightenment economic, political, and cultural ideals on non-Europeans in order to indoctrinate and gain control, with a simultaneous subjugation of African values. It must be admitted, however, that even among and within African societies, people tend to discriminate between the different aspects of foreign cultures they come into contact with, and approve certain aspects while turning others away.

The *traditional African* way of doing things is seen to be "the wholesale, uncritical, nostalgic acceptance of the past—of tradition" (Gyekye 1997, p. xi), which is typified by "the absence of visions of alternatives" (Kanu 2007, p. 154), while *modern* is usually associated with Western origins, progress and development. But it is true that science, as an endeavor and a phenomenon, cannot be conceived in a cultural vacuum, and it is "greatly influenced by the prevailing cultural traits and worldview of a people, such as their social values, priorities, ideas, skills, ethics, perception of social reality and belief systems" (Inokoba et al. 2010, p. 23). Modern advancement in technology is, in the main, an illustration of the already present cultural values. From the point of view of a broad conception of tradition, every society in our modern world is *traditional* in as much as it maintains and cherishes values, practices, outlooks and institutions conferred on it by previous generations (Gyekye 1997), and all, or much, of what it takes pleasure and pride in, and builds on. The "truth in the assertion that every society in the modern world inherits ancestral cultural values, implies that modernity is not always a rejection of the

past" (Gyekye 1997, p. 217). By this reasoning, it is not necessary to perceive tradition and modernity as opposites, but rather as complementary elements, with tradition acting as a springboard from which modernity begins. The modern can be said to be a development from the traditional. Hence, it is unjustifiable for modernists to reject tradition out-of-hand since all modernity, and therefore the twenty-first century African perspective too, cannot be defined without reference to its traditional past.

In addition, no human culture totally refuses to take advantage of the potential profits of change. To subscribe to the revivalist perspective is to assert that authentic modernization in Africa can only materialize through the revitalization of key African cultural norms, values and beliefs. A total rejection of the worth of Africa's products of a cultural past merely on the basis of their connection to the past would be irrational as "cultural nostalgia is a universal phenomenon" (Oke 2006, p. 341). We question, however, Africans' tendency to be uncritical about their traditional ways of life. The African perspective of philosophy for children that we are proposing should not be a blind, unreflective and patronizing retention of traditional ways of doing philosophy with children, under the same description. The revival of some cultural ways of doing philosophy with children in Africa's traditional past, by adapting them to suit present generations, is one of the possible ways of imparting an African perspective. What then separates tradition from modernization in the context of Africa?

The gap between the cultural revivalists and their critics revolves, in large part, around the contrasting understanding of modernity and modernization. For revivalist thinkers such as Shutte, the goal of an African perspective is to mobilize African tradition to address contemporary problems so that we "rediscover and resume our proper selves" (2003, p. 181). Hence, the revivalist school seeks to decolonize Africa by asserting that a careful re-examination of African culture will address questions about modernization. They cite the traditional use of medicinal herbs, advanced agricultural methods, and methods of food preservation as forms of African scientific knowledge that are equivalent to modern science (Owomonyela 1991). However, we argue that while there might be some elements of science that are common in pre-colonial and postcolonial Africa, there are also some serious conflicts between traditional modes of thought and the scientific aspect of modernization. As Ciaffa writes, "we cannot ignore the glaring gap between scientific development in the West and Africa … due in part to traditional ways of thinking about the natural world" (2008, p. 130). While the gap is a reality, and it can be attributed, at least in part, to historical circumstances, there is no justification to the view that this is a sign of a sharp difference between Western and African minds (Wiredu 1997). The African perspective that we argue for does not propose mimicry of Western forms of thinking as evidence of superior mind-sets, but rather is one that positions African thought at the center, geared towards the specific challenges of African societies, including poverty, ignorance, disease, war and unresolved ethnic conflict.

The question then is: What form should the African perspective on doing philosophy with children take in twenty-first century Africa—the traditional or the modern or should it be a fusion of both? The African perspective we propose

acknowledges a meeting of tradition and modernity, which Olshin describes by means of four possible scenarios:

1. The modern society incorporates elements of traditional cultures.
2. There is an attempted complete synthesis of the two systems, where elements of the traditional culture are consciously preserved in a society that is otherwise modernizing.
3. The traditional culture rejects scientific thinking and modernity, and there is an overt clash.
4. The traditional culture wholly adopts scientific thinking and modernity. In this case, the traditional beliefs and practices do not disappear, they are unconsciously preserved and suppressed and appear in different forms (2007, p. 23).

The traditional African model that we propose for doing philosophy with children would have the characteristics of both points 1 and 2 above. The two might struggle to coexist, but the duality of modernity and tradition is more than likely to persist in the twenty-first century. As indicated earlier, modernity feeds from the tradition that precedes it. The modern is a product of the progress, innovation and change that has taken place in the tradition of a people or culture. Questions arise about any possible African modernity, given that *modern* is associated with Western civilization.

Many scholars argue that "a defining characteristic of the modern scientific canon is the way that it *defies* integration and assimilation with non-Western systems of knowledge" (Lauer n.d.). The point of the African perspective of doing philosophy with children that I am developing is to emphasize traditional African modes of philosophizing, often "condemned as irrational and backward… [thereby]… shaping a unique African modernity" (Viriri and Mungwini 2010, p. 39). We agree with Gyekye (1997), who allocates to Africa a unique and distinct modernity as evidenced by differences between Africans on the continent and those in the diaspora. Our definition of an African perspective of modernity concurs with that of Viriri and Mungwini, as it is "modernity experienced by Africans… it involves how Africans have interacted with and, at the same time, transformed Western modernity as they shaped their own lived experiences" (2010, p. 39). It would be narrow-minded not to recognize the fact that modern practices are subsumed in a variety of ways by indigenous Africa cultural milieus and integrated within their traditions.

Further to the above, Gyekye cautions against unreservedly praising the cultural past in its entirety, since "not every aspect of a cultural past—not every cultural product of the past—ought to be revived and given a place in the scheme of things in the present" (1997, p. 239). He argues that it "would be otiose, meaningless and irrelevant if tradition were *merely transmitted*" (ibid., p. 221). According to this view, a mere handing down implies that a culture accepts that what worked in the previous generations should be equally relevant to the present—a situation which is pragmatically unsound and, indeed, unrealistic. Gyekye cites traditional African thoughts and practices that should be examined afresh including superstitious beliefs, belief in witchcraft, ancestorship, and the negative aspects of the

communitarian ethos such as the inheritance systems and patronage that come with the extended family system. To this end, he proposes that for Africa to move forward scientifically and technologically, "science should be rescued from the morass of (traditional) African religious and mystical beliefs" (1996, p. 174). We argue for an African perspective on philosophy for children that is selective in its resuscitation of Africa's cultural products of the past. Africa should chart its future from its indigenous cultural traditions, and adopt and adapt only those aspects of non-African cultures that are compatible with Africa's needs, goals and circumstances, to be specific, a scientific perspective and Western educational practices. The modernity–tradition debate in the context of the African perspective of philosophy for children would be incomplete without considering the distinctive characteristics of the people inhabiting present-day Africa as will be examined below.

In *personality and person perception in Africa* (2002), Karl Peltzer identifies three types of persons with reference to sub-Saharan Africa, namely:

1. Traditional persons who are little affected by modernization.
2. Transitional persons.
3. Modern individuals.

Traditional persons, even in twenty-first century Africa, are little influenced by modernization and are operating within the realm of their customary and apparently changeless cultures. Transitional people, according to Peltzer, are "often living in, and shuttling between, the two cultures in the course of their daily round of activities, for example, between work and home or between the temporary, urban, living dwelling and the ancestral traditional village where the extended village continues to reside" (1995, p. 25). Modern individuals participate fully in the activities of the contemporary industrial and post-industrial world and have little or no contact with traditional customs and cultural practices. The above categories also relate to the various modes that differentiate children as they are raised and socialized and become adult members of their respective communities. With the provision of a more modernized (Western) form of education, many children, possibly now the majority in Africa, are moving along the social continuum to the *transitional* category and, progressively more will, in time, live their adult lives as *modern* individuals. The current young generation of African children almost never debates the significance of tradition in Africa in the traditional milieu, and often associates tradition with a difficult life and a gloomy future. Issues of traditional values and ways of life in Africa are of concern primarily to rural people while the opposite holds true in urban settings. This invites the question of who or what is *African*? The very presence of the three categories of persons is not unproblematic in discourses on doing philosophy with children from an African perspective. The questions that then need to be addressed are:

1. Who is the African child under discussion—the traditional, the transitional or the modern?
2. What form of philosophy for children is appropriate for the African child?

3. Can traditional ways of philosophizing with children contribute to the present modes of doing philosophy with children in Africa?

The issues above will be problematized as the debate unfolds. But at this point there is need to locate the notion of philosophy for children within the contemporary issues of globalisation and decolonisation especially given Africa's historical and economic circumstances. Globalization and decolonization are primary areas of focus in modern educational discourse. An additional question can therefore be added to the three above:

4. To what extent can an African perspective on doing philosophy with children be relevant, in the light of twenty-first century globalization, while contributing positively to the decolonization of Africa?

Globalization and Decolonization

While the geographic extent of Africa is largely accepted (Ramose 2003), African scholars claim that widespread psychological and cultural themes should draw attention to what it means to be African. In the face of mounting global westernization, it is especially necessary to clarify and exalt the virtues of Africanness and promote its significance (Senghor 1964; Gyekye 1996; Mbiti 1970; Nyasani 1997; Shutte 1993; Makgoba 1997). We appreciate the impatience that African intellectuals have, especially given the disappointing politico-economic achievements since the end of colonization. Their impatience is directed at Africa's difficulties as it comes to terms with its postcolonial condition and growing economic and social globalization. Contemporary globalization has generated many social, cultural, economic and political changes in Africa. However, globalization is, more than anything, a matter of increasing transculturality, given that not only does the West influence Africa, but it is itself influenced by trends and developments in Africa and the global South. The process of globalization is "not unidirectional and there are several trajectories which have generated opposite reactions" (Osha 2011, p. 153). For instance, globalization has led to growing cultural self-consciousness and increased the focus on cultural identity, together with homogenizing certain aspects of the cultures of Africa. Equally, there are several parallel aspects of African tradition that have developed as a result of adoption and rejection. However, and most importantly, Africans have a unique way of managing and cognitively engaging with the world, deriving from their rigid and strict indigenous social and cultural environment. The African perspective we endorse seeks to reassert Africa's importance in the broader philosophical and cultural evolution of humankind by clarifying and extolling the virtues of what it means to be African in the face of increasing global westernization. In effect, to talk of an African perspective is to focus on the "contemporary African experience… throwing light on the contemporary problems… relevant to the condition of life in Africa" (Gbadegesin 1991). What then does this imply in the context of this debate?

The African perspective that we suggest for philosophy for children, involves situating the children within the context of their own cultural references as a base from which to "relate socially and psychologically to other cultural perspectives" (Asante 1991, p. 171). This perspective seeks to allocate the African person the appropriate centrality in every situation (Asante 1987). However, we hasten to stress that the proposed African perspective does not, in this regard, endorse ethnocentric valorization at the cost of dismissing other perspectives of doing philosophy with children. We therefore propose an amalgamation of the Lipmanian and other models from around the globe, and the traditional African modes of doing philosophy with children, to produce a twenty-first century African perspective for philosophy for children.

We question the exclusive imposition of other perspectives, especially as and when they are viewed as *universal* and *classical*. Against this, we put forward a perspective that is African, relevant, valid and non-hegemonic. Our proposal is premised on Kwame Gyekye's assertion that if a view is to be said to be African "it [should] be extracted from the cultural, linguistic, and historical background of the African peoples" (Gyekye 1987, p. 42). While Gyekye is arguing for the retrieval of African tradition as the pioneering model of educational reconstruction and a positive starting point, it does make sense to retrieve and preserve an African tradition that is dated, out of touch with present-day developments, and based, to a large extent, on questionable values. It would, however, be equally indefensible and practically unjustified to ignore tradition entirely "since to all appearances there is certainly something to retrieve and preserve" (Ramose 1992, p. 69).

On the contrary, protagonists of the Western model might suggest an African perspective that appropriates, in its entirety, the Western form of philosophy for children, since Western cultures have become part and parcel of many cultures in Africa. To some, this might sound quite plausible, since throwing the Western model overboard completely will not assist Africa in restoring its lost status. Our argument is for a paradigmatic reconciliation of the two traditions (traditional African and Western modern) to produce a twenty-first century African perspective of doing philosophy with children. Admittedly, African modernism is a product of postcoloniality and is therefore characterized by an overwhelming hybridity (Bhabha 1996; Odora-Hoppers 2001), stemming from the interweaving of both colonized and colonizers' cultural elements. Cultural systems, whether Western or non-Western, influence each other and learn from each other, and by viewing reality via the conceptual lenses of others, we come to realize our shared human experience. We agree with Reagan's statement that an understanding of cultural plurality will enhance and broaden the minds of those who believe in cultural superiority or inferiority based on race. He writes, "[a]n understanding of how other people have tried to educate their children… may help us think more clearly about some of our own assumptions and values… to help us to become more open to alternative viewpoints about important educational matters" (2005, p. xi). One of the greatest challenges for my proposed African perspective project is to suitably identify and separate the modern as located in the universalist paradigm, from that situated in the realm of the African particular. But, unless Africa discovers what to

do with modernity and establishes a relationship between tradition and modernity, it would be non-productive to call for an African perspective on doing things.

In addition to confronting the tradition–modernity paradox, when talking of an African perspective, one cannot avoid the discourse on the process of decolonization. This process is usually modulated by and associated with the politics of ethnicity, race, territoriality, citizenship and belonging (Kebede 2011). Decolonization demands the recognition of the oppressed state in which indigenous peoples formerly existed, thereby making a more realistic account of their history possible. In the process, the oppressed indigenous peoples discover the common enemy that creates(d) and maintains(ed) oppression. Decolonization fosters an understanding of a particular people and revitalizes a sense of nationality. It foregrounds shared indigenous ancestry and recognizes the strengths of the associated knowledge and practices. In addition, it exposes citizens to the truths of their history, thereby demystifying the fallacies and misinformation circulated by colonialism with regard to indigenous history and culture. Decolonization is, in effect, modern Africa's first self-directed project to attempt communal reclamation of its African identity.

In support of the above, we submit that as part of the process of decolonization, it is important that, in Africa, philosophers "ask new questions, answer old questions in new ways and make important meta-philosophical contributions, … their work provides important critiques of Western philosophy, and also makes available resources and models for indigenous philosophers in other cultures" (Vest 2009, p. 3). When we argue for an African perspective, it is not only to showcase the importance of Africa's contribution to the worldwide intellectual discourse of philosophy for children but is also to critique the ways in which it was (and still is) being done in traditional African communities. Despite the signifier *Africa* having long been used, as Mudimbe argues, to "justify the process of inventing and conquering and naming its 'primitives' or 'disorders' … as a subsequent means of its exploitation" (1988, p. 20), we propose the contemporary African perspective as a reconstructive field of inquiry that "takes place in a dynamic in-between space in the always 'contemporary' interstices dividing the past and the future" (Gratton 2003, p. 64).

While we accept that Africa exists in the global village, our case for an African perspective is grounded in the thesis that Africa and Africans cannot be defined from *the outside,* they have to define themselves. We concur with Phillip Nel's argument that the African self's identity, having been "trampled upon and dislodged from its inherent cultural confines… is pleading for new identities and trends by stressing… African ways of thinking and doing as well as a restoration of African identity and pride" (2005, p. 9). But by taking such a standpoint we should not subject ourselves to "cultural fixity[1]" (ibid., p. 10). In addition, we agree with Kai Horsthemke who advises us to take cautious steps "against essentialism and divisiveness" (2009, p. 9).

Our concern is not to take sides in the power struggle between Western and African paradigms within which we position our African perspective, especially

[1] Here Nel is referring to African demands for the reclamation of indigenous knowledge, without setting up what he calls "new forms of stereotyping indigenous Africa in essentialist ways" (2005, p. 10).

with respect to the notion of philosophy for children in twenty-first century Africa; but, we argue that a case can be made for a model that is *African*, that takes cognizance of African conditions, and whose existence and practices can share in, and be exported to, practices elsewhere around the globe. We however, owe due respect to the immense contribution and initiative of the late Matthew Lipman's innovation of philosophy for children, as described above, as well as its manifestation in the West. However, our argument is that, by acknowledging and courting the worthwhile virtues inherited from African cultures, an African perspective can inform ways of doing philosophy for children in our present circumstances. We ask the question: If philosophy for children has been adopted in schools in America, Europe, Asia and Australasia by situating it in those cultural and historical and geographical contexts, is it not possible to situate it in Africa too?

We contend that understanding of a particular perspective is enhanced by an understanding of the relevant context, customs, traditions, languages and daily practices of the people, even though it is not necessary to be native to that tradition. Thus, in order to approach Africa, and to understand the people's ways of life, there is a need "to work hard to determine what is significant from the point of view of its people" (Bell 2002, p. 1). To develop an understanding of an African perspective of thought or action is to develop awareness of, and be attentive to, African modes of expression and to strive to translate those within one's own means of communicating. The ability to see and accommodate *other* categories and concepts that give expression to life is of fundamental importance.

The an African perspective of doing philosophy for children project that we envisage is a way of understanding how philosophy for children can be employed using methods and techniques that are informed by Africa's traditions, languages, thoughts and practices. But, is this view compatible with the language of universalism and globalization? We will answer this question in the affirmative, while at the same time adopting a more cautious position by calling for a hybrid approach. While philosophizing emanates from a people's existential circumstances, there are universal concepts that philosophers engage with in their practice. Horsthemke and Enslin (2009) argue, with reference to the practice of African philosophy in education, that doing philosophy from an African perspective would include, among other things, "trying to come to grips with African educational issues and problems… to address pressing practical issues and problems" (Horsthemke 2009, p. 212). One might argue that an African perspective of philosophizing with children will "emerge from life experiences and from the ways these are socially articulated… given that the life experiences of Africans on the African continent are commonly different from those of learners elsewhere" (ibid., p. 212). Therefore, its aims, content and pedagogy should reflect alternative approaches suited to the African existential conditions.

We agree with Gyekye's (1997) culturalist paradigm when he argues that human experience occurs mostly directly within some specific social or cultural context, and consequently, thought is not worked out in a cultural or historical void. An African perspective, in essence, entails an active set of principles and forces that are shaped and stimulated by the African people's unique roots and aspirations to know and inhabit their life-world. It is based on the role of Africans as subjects in the

activity of doing philosophy rather than as "Africans in the periphery of human thought and experience" (Mkabela 2005, p. 179), and Africans as agents rather than passive recipients. An African perspective should keep an eye on the contemporary African experience and, "all must be done with a view to throwing light on the resolution of contemporary problems … [M]ore than anywhere else, contemporary Africa requires the nurturing of a philosophical preoccupation that is relevant to the conditions of Africa" (Gbadegesin 1991, p. 22). Despite the African perspective project's emergence from various African people's social lives, and the undoubted value of *localness,* it does not follow, as a matter of necessity, that the project is immune to external criticism (Horsthemke, 2009). The question then is: Does the African perspective of doing philosophy with children have to gaze at African's past and its tradition to inform thought and practice in the twenty-first century?

Wamba dia Wamba argues that, "we must move away from the process of moving away from traditional society and internalizing the colonial state" (Wamba dia Wamba 1992, p. 73). Nevertheless, while we need to look back to our African past, and it is necessary and proper to reengage with that tradition now, we challenge the assertion that *everything* in the pristine tradition of the people of Africa was perfect. Wamba dia Wamba puts forward the idea that traditional African and Western cultures are hostile to each other and cannot function in harmony. This apparent incompatibility means that, to date, Western values, which have been seen by many to be superior, supersede traditional African ones. However, we do not necessarily endorse Wamba dia Wamba's idea of an antithetical relationship between traditional African societies and the colonial state. Rather, we view the *alien* cultures as constituent and complementary parts of the African experience. It is dishonest, if not destructive, to think or pretend that twenty-first century Africa can ignore other cultures because they are *alien*. As Kwame Nkrumah explains,

> [while] African society must be treated as enjoying its own integrity, [and] its history must be a mirror of that society… the European contact must find its place in the history only as an African experience, even if as a crucial one. That is to say, European contact needs to be assessed and judged from the point of view of the principles animating African society, and from the point of view of the harmony and progress of this society (1970, p. 63).

We argue that an African perspective of doing things in the twenty-first century will benefit by not completely transforming or rejecting the centuries-old African traditions of social organization (Diop 1987; Williams 1976). It is also not necessary to abandon the European conqueror's educational paradigm completely (Ramose, 1992). Rather, a reconciliation of the radically-opposed educational paradigms can be effected so that the two coexist in an enlightened manner. This viewpoint is in line with Ali Mazrui's contention that Africa needs to tame globalization through indigenization, domestication, diversification and horizontal interpenetration (Mazrui 2008, pp. 6–8). Indigenizing implies supporting "areas of indigenous culture, retooling indigenous skills for use in modern contexts, and making sure that indigenous human and natural resources are utilized in the optimum interest of the local people" (p. 6) while domestication means "making imported foreign

institutions or imported technologies more relevant to the needs of local populations and societies" (p. 6). Mazrui argues that, through a strategy of diversification, Africa "must ensure that it learns not just from Western culture, but also from the Indians, the Japanese, from Muslim history, from Chinese economic and social experiments" (p. 7). The strategy of horizontal interpenetration "involves cultivating partnerships with countries at approximately the same level of development as that already attained by one's own society" (p. 8).

Critique

We are aware of the criticisms of the *Africanization* agenda, including that of Horsthemke, who, while appreciating that such views "emphasize relevance", also criticizes them for evoking "a false or at least a superficial sense of belonging" and, more importantly, for being "hazardously close to a comprehensive relativism" (2004, p. 571). However, in proposing an African perspective, I am not suggesting the rejection of other cultures that are not African, but am projecting ways of doing things in Africa that include all cultures—traditional African and non-African. The processes that adopt an African perspective should be informed by the African experience. As noted earlier, we recognize that Africa and African tradition should not be regarded as one homogeneous, collective unit with a single culture. However, we cannot ignore the reality that there are more common threads linking African cultures to each other than we would find between African cultures and cultures from other continents.

African societies encompass many cultures and, as Gutmann affirms, "it is morally wrong and empirically false to teach students as if it were otherwise" (1995, n.p.). An African perspective should recognize that philosophizing is not only about what is particular to Africa, but it is also about appreciating African lives in a world of shared citizenship, hence there is a need to develop an "intellectual curiosity about people who happen to live in other societies" (ibid., n.p.). Given the multicultural nature of societies in Africa, an African philosophy of education and, hence, an African perspective of doing philosophy with children, should aim to recognize the social contributions and life experiences of the diverse groups that make up these societies. However, such a perspective should avoid the cultivation of what Gutmann calls "separatist cultural identities" (n.p.) in the attempt to reinforce learners' self-esteem. The African perspective, like Afrocentrism should guard against labeling the accomplishments of one group's ancestors as *superior*, since this leads to racial discrimination. An African perspective of a democratic Africa should take a cue from Gutmann's proposal that an appropriate curriculum would be one that included:

> the achievements of Africa and Africans, ancient and modern… alongside the treatment of other continents and peoples, and in which the links (causal, cultural and emotional) between the history of Africa and the history of [other peoples]… *are made plain* (1995, n.p.).

To deny that there can be an African perspective is to refute the presence of the particular, the indigenous and the promise of difference—Africa remains Africa, despite the various influences it has been exposed to over the ages. The *African*, whether colonized, evangelized, or *educated*, still has something authentically African in him or her. The survival of African entities and institutions has been facilitated by this authentic *Africanness*. It has proved difficult for many people from other cultures to fully appreciate and understand the African. The folklore, mythology, traditional wisdom, religion, education, socio-political organizations and other aspects of African cultures relevant to African needs may form the material, the content and subject of philosophy for children in the context of Africa. This does not suggest an inflexible prioritizing of models used in appraising African culture itself but rather a critical and creative appraisal as well as the use of consistent and coherent methodologies unique to Africa. However, contributions from other parts of the globe may be adopted and adapted to suit the African child in the new millennium since the central reference point of a value system is the individual and the society (Chinweizu, 1987). The perspective is African in that it attends to problems that arise in the context of African experience.

Concluding Remarks

The discussion above submits that generating an African perspective involves reclaiming what colonization stole from Africa. *Africanizing* all that Africa is, from economic and social structures to political institutions and education processes should be on the liberative agenda that is at the heart of the African outlook of a philosophy for children project designed for Africa. This requires a shift in paradigm in which African potential is lauded and centered while externally-imposed educational paradigms from the West are reassessed and amalgamated with those from Africa to create the hybridized perspective relevant to Africa in the twenty-first century. We therefore argue against imposing the method of philosophizing with children that lies at the heart of a rapacious Eurocentric model of civilization that threatens to destroy the conditions that make African thought and ways of philosophizing possible. The case for an African perspective offers a new orientation for scholars concerned with Africa, both those seeking to position twenty-first century Africa within traditional philosophy, and those demanding a new, modern social order. To view an African perspective of doing philosophy as a twenty-first century backward gaze towards an outmoded tradition would be a false interpretation of the relationship between tradition and modernity, with respect to the education of young members of our society. philosophy for children, as an intellectual enterprise, engages children in Africa with African reality, including way of life, experiences and relations. It is about tapping indigenous African philosophies, resources and raw materials, and by using the past to reveal the future, seeks to found twenty-first century African educational philosophies.

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