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# No Game Is Fun if Only One Side Keeps Winning (Jẹ Kí N Jẹ Níí Mú Ayòó Dùn)

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**ABSTRACT**: This essay extends my ongoing polemic against the erasure of African-produced, African-inflected knowledge in global discourse. Although it is almost routine for people to lament the inadequacies of knowledge production in contemporary Africa, what is not often remarked is how knowledge that is produced in the continent and by its motley intellectuals are hardly ever referenced in different areas of expertise. While conviviality goes on in the innumerable fora to which Africans are invited to contribute, diverse knowledge is barely to be seen in the annals of intellectual discourse. What will it take to alter this unfortunate, yes, it is unfortunate, situation? I propose to end with some suggestions.

**KEYWORDS**: Africa, erasure, Humanism, Metaphysics of Difference, History of Philosophy, Philosophy Canon, universal

In this contribution, I propose to share with you my ongoing polemic against the erasure of African-produced, African-inflected knowledge in global discourse. Notice that I refuse to geographize or culturalize knowledge. My reason is very simple. Anyone who has access to the tools by which knowledge is produced can become a co-owner, co-producer even, regardless of their location or cultural heritage. It is almost routine for people to lament the inadequacies of knowledge production in contemporary Africa, and I am aware of some of the not so sound explanations of why this is the case, one of which relates to some of the themes of our panel. What is not often remarked is how knowledge that has been and is being produced in the continent, and by its motley intellectuals, is hardly ever referenced in different areas of expertise. I argue later in this discussion that explanations for this

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erasure built on geo-political areas, entire cultures, and intellectual traditions they engender as units of analysis, themselves end up beggaring some of the traditions on behalf of which they would like the unsuspecting to believe they are protesting. While conviviality—eating, drinking, and making merry with one another—(I am deliberately making this simplistic) goes on in the innumerable fora to which Africans are invited to contribute, diverse knowledge is barely to be seen in the annals of intellectual discourse, the real locus of the dissemination of ideas. What I insist does not go on or I hardly see much evidence of it is what social scientific literature is now working to turn conviviality into: living together of heterogeneities and, in the present case, scholarly traditions. What will it take to alter this unfortunate, yes, it is unfortunate, situation? I propose to end with some suggestions and what stands in the way of them being legible to the scholarly community.

We are living in interesting times. These are times when, despite appearances to the contrary and clamorous protestations from many of us, binaries rule and ruin some of our noblest aspirations. We live in a time when binaries denominated by identity rule the roost. If you are "North," you cannot be "South," if you are "African," you are "Non-Western," if you subscribe to the very meaning of "universal," the instantiations of which are forever seeking for adequation to it, you are an easy dupe of our "colonizers" who, despite their plurality, are forever represented and traduced in the singular. Sadly, this discourse is more productive of heat than it is of illumination. I intend to stay away, as I have always done in my scholarly exertions, from this well beaten path.

As I make clear presently, every people claim the universal just as every advanced civilization has a story of creation of the world and the humans that inhabit it.[1] When I make a case against erasure, it is not in the name of any identity—if that is understood in any but the historical accident it always is—but in the name of an idea that many reading this can embrace: the production and dissemination of the best, most adequate, and most-reflective-of-the-human-condition knowledge that we can muster, this being the goal of that ever fleeting ideal of a liberal education, for our time and our posterity. The most effective indictment of any erasure is to be found in how those that enact it claim on one hand, to be offering the best education while, on the other, they are busy subverting their proclaimed ideal.[2] I contend that this ideal is the standard to which we must hold our offerings and such offerings are to be embraced or scorned by how well or ill they measure up. As I have written elsewhere,

> Affirmative answers [to the question of why we should study and learn the ways of being human other than our own] are, in fact, necessitated by the goal of education: the need to create educated folk imbued with an expansive sense of the human experience and trained to identify unifying themes in this experience through history. The more restricted the scope covered in the educational system, the less educated its products will be. There will be too many blind-spots in the knowledge of the products of such an educational system. . . . Teachers should not be in the business if they are not committed to providing their students with as wide a range of knowledge as is available to us at any particular time. (Táíwò 1993, 289–90)

The epithet, "universalist," in these times, is almost a four-letter word and, in our attempts to resist provincialism masquerading, often accompanied by an insufferable arrogance, as universalism, we end up dissolving the very idea of the universal. That, I contend, is not merely a mistake; it is one with extremely dangerous implications for our very understanding of what it is to be human, and for what binds us in that not always comfortable species-dom that we call "humanity." Every time we try to adjectivize freedom, as if it were the exclusive property of any of our human tribes, we miss out on the most severe indictment of those who proclaimed their love of it while holding their own kind in thrall: the seizure of those same ideas by their victims who actually turn out to be better and more credible singers of freedom's song than those who stumbled on the idea but could not fully make it real. This is especially so in our accounting of chattel slavery and the colonialism that followed in the wake of its abolition. In trying to bring to our awareness, inserting registers that have suffered unwarranted erasure, i.e., the African renditions of modernity's freedom song, we back into an unwitting embrace of what I have in numerous writings dubbed "the metaphysics of difference."

> The first obstacle that we have to get rid of is what I now call the metaphysics of difference. This is the idea that Africans are so radically different from the general run of humanity that in talking about Africans and things African we need a language other than that with which we routinely talk about the rest of the world. The Absolute Other has been laid to rest or, at least, muted in other areas; it is alive and kicking in African Studies. It remains legal tender in much of African and Africanist scholarship about Africans and things African. (For the distinction see, Táíwò 2012, 971). And Africans are the guiltiest in peddling this myth: "We are unlike Westerners," "We are a different people," "We are communal; they are individualistic"; the alibis proliferate. (Táíwò 2015, 60)[3]

Acceptance of this undifferentiated generalization about what it is to be African, I argue, has pernicious consequences and one of them is to make easy the erasure that we are discussing. It means that the heterogeneities domiciled in the continent are flattened into an uninteresting, doubtless uninspiring, caricature that people only entertain because, as I point out presently, they have embraced a simple view of Africa and its phenomena. It also means that the debates that have always characterized the continent ever since it was forced, yes, forced by outsiders to become aware of itself as, possibly, a unity—here, again, Africa is no different, if Hegel is to be believed, Europe's awareness of itself was not innocent of its contact with the Americas—respecting what it is to be an African and the rich history of discourses concerning this specific fact, remain occluded from the purview of both indigenous and alien scholars. For instance, it would mean the abandonment of a signal injunction by S. R. B. Attoh Ahuma that Africans recognize the importance of the self in the engagement with reality (Táíwò 2010) and Amílcar Cabral's later warning that we do not permit ourselves to be lured into embracing an undifferentiated hypostatization of what it is to be African (Táíwò 2013).

> I shall not go into the philosophical genealogy of this metaphysics of difference but it is traceable to the constitution of Africa and Africans in the Euro-American imaginary and, now by extension, the global imaginary that

> takes its cue on Africa from the West, which was enacted by Enlightenment philosophers at the dawn of Modernity (See Eze 1997). Frantz Fanon knew the origin of this ugly metaphysics. According to him, "And it is all too true that the major responsibility for this racialization of thought, or at least the way it is applied, lies with the Europeans who have never stopped placing white culture in opposition to the other noncultures" (Fanon 2008, 150). Unfortunately, Africans who are pretty much all now graduates of colonialism-inflected education have bought into this falsehood with aplomb and we now live and die for difference. "Following the unconditional affirmation of European culture came the unconditional affirmation of African culture" (Fanon 2008, 151), is how Fanon put the deployment of the metaphysics of difference in our discourse. (Táíwò 2015, 61)

But therein lies the problem. I am convinced that this idea of the absolute alterity of the Other is almost peculiar to Africa or, at least, is most emblematic of the place of Africa in the global imaginary. Whoever uses difference as the metric of framing boundaries of discourse that has any aspiration to the universal immediately confronts a problem that is rarely apprehended and, when apprehended, elided by all and sundry.

I cannot successfully insult you if, at bottom, we do not share the same universe of meaning. And, here, I am not even extending my purview to the art of the polite insult that requires even insiders to reach beyond the surface to catch the intended slight. Yes, you may divine, depending on whether you are inclined towards charitability or hostility, what my grimace, my hand gestures, and my body language, are trying to tell you. Your success at making sense of them requires that something bind us, that my idioms share with yours elements of a syntax; and only in this way can we fight each other meaningfully or embrace each other with anything that approaches sincerity.

But, as those who are familiar with debates in philosophy of language and the philosophy of the social sciences would know, some of what I just said should remind us of the issue of the incommensurability of meaning across domains and the translatability of cultural usages and models. At the risk of doing violence to the complexities of those debates, I would like to suggest that when we are quick to denominate certain ideas with certain bylines, for example, designating some "Western" or "Northern" or "Southern" or "Non-Western," and feel compelled to oppose to them others that we think are absolutely other or nearly so, we have backed, even if unwittingly, into the same binaries that we would like to think we are repudiating in those we accuse of foisting unacceptable choices on us. Here I would like to direct us to the erasure of knowledge produced in my neck of the global intellectual woods and by its denizens. Yet, in doing so, I must disavow the metaphysics of difference and refuse, simultaneously, any suggestion that what I claim has been erased is special or utterly other from what has been substituted by those who perform the erasure.

The idea of the universal is a simple one that is not decomposable, nor does it come in multiples or with cultural qualifiers. (Of course, I am making this claim only in respect of the English language. It may turn out that what I say here does not apply in a different language.) Whenever we affirm of something that it is

universal in any language, to the extent that the idea or its referent is translatable into another language, and its meanings in both languages are commensurable, we may not affirm that we have two different things, but one thing under different nomenclatures. A universal that is not all encompassing in this sense will be a spurious one and when we see one, we should just call it out as such. Doubtless, we may talk, argue even, about temporal variations, i.e., the historicity of the idea and identify changing identifications of the idea. What we may not do is talk as if there are certain ideals that are so radically different in different societies, regions, cultures, times, that they are, ultimately, untranslatable into other idioms or comprehensible across different cultures or temporalities.

I argue that a successful case for erasure can be made only if we grant that there is a universe of meaning and a measure of commensurability in cultural understanding and usages. If Europe or Africa wants to talk to itself about itself behind its geographical or cultural boundaries—notice how awkward it is to talk of cultural boundaries when the referents are continents!—I wouldn't have any problem with it, and it would be odd to have either berate the other for erasing its register. But once Europe or Africa deigns to talk about the world beyond its boundaries, claims to disseminate knowledge about the species, to the extent that it turns its kind into being one with the species while, simultaneously, ignoring what other members of the species have to say about their shared kind, there we have erasure and there, indisputably, is a problem.

I ask, following this, how can we talk of erasure when perpetrators and victims alike inhabit exclusive universes and are afflicted with severe cases of incommensurability and\or untranslatability across their respective cultural boundaries? It is this assumption of mutual solitudes that explains the ease with which dubious terms are being foisted on unsuspecting proselytes. If you believe that Africans are defined by difference from the rest of humanity, then in the name of what, beyond exchanges of our different products, do you accuse others of not being able to read your script? Meanwhile, and talk of irony, their scripts are legible to you—it is the only way you know they are putting you down—you insist that your script is nothing like theirs and they, therefore, must enroll in your school to become legible in your script, too. Short of being able to do to them what they did to you—colonization, enslavement, conversion—what might you offer them as their gain in striving to speak your idiom? I already provided an answer at the outset when I spoke about our shared commitment to educating one and all about the varieties of human experience as part of an excellent education regime.

In fact, many, and here I am talking of the so-called global South, who accuse others of erasure perform erasures of their own when they fail to mind, much less take seriously, those in their own ranks who cross boundaries, who insist, as I do, on the unicity of the human experience, on the fact that our respective languages are, at bottom, idioms of a single syntax that I call "human-ese" as opposed to, say, "dog-ese"—assuming that dogs have their own syntax that is attached to their very own mode of being-in-the-world. If this is plausible, then we should pay attention to the real erasure that should exercise us and on which I elect to focus in the rest of this essay.

When we talk about erasure, we need to be aware that we are talking about several things under this rubric. I identify at least three.

*ERASURE 1*

There is the erasure of content original to Africa, curated by Africans, derived from various African languages, practices, processes, and institutions. Here, erasure may be a product of lack of recognition, motivated by ignorance or omission or denial, or lack of requisite resources, for example, languages, it matters little, if at all. All sterile debates concerning whether there is "African anything" from philosophy to history to literature to religion to music, belong under this category. It is an erasure that should only attract contempt and opprobrium, not argumentation, from us. Both Africans and non-Africans perform this erasure. The most egregious example of this which as I have written in previous work continues to dog Euro-American philosophy to this day was enacted by G. W. F. Hegel in his infamous Introduction to the *Philosophy of World History* (1956) where he wrote Africa out of time and, therefore, out of history. In fairness to him, he at least was informed about Africa, including some of the empires, e.g., Ọ̀yọ́ and Dahomey, and their operations. Not so for his successors. It is just as bad, if not worse, when, driven by the metaphysics of difference, scholars, African and non-African alike, end up burnishing Hegel's libel by talking of so-called pre-colonial or traditional African philosophy which, again in a different work, I have argued end up unwittingly putting African intellectual offerings outside of time (Taiwo 2023). Notice that I am suggesting that this erasure is not the exclusive preserve of the so-called North leaving denizens of the so-called South unblemished. This erasure is also in play when we insist that the only true African philosophy should be rooted in what Biodun Jeyifo calls "absolute autochthony" (Jeyifo 2018). The consequence of that is to eliminate African contributions to Christianity, Islam, their respective theologies, as well as philosophy. It is why it is not too long ago that a thinker like St. Augustine started being listed in the ranks of African philosophers (See Wiredu 2004). Enactors of this erasure are not neatly lined up on either side of the divide.

*ERASURE 2*

There is the erasure, related to the previous one but distinct from it and is the one that we mostly harp on. It is enacted when, say, the canon of Euro-American philosophy is made to look as if it only ever had authors who looked a certain way and came from one tribe of the human race. This erasure fails to account for, much less embrace others within the discursive tradition we identify with Europe, who happen to fall outside of the epidermal inheritance of its supposed constructors. Here is how the contributions of non-White thinkers, and the role played by confutations of Euro-American certitudes by those imperialized, enslaved, colonized, and calumniated by Euro-American operators in and out of the academy, are excluded from the chronicles of philosophy. Examples include Ottobah Cugoano, Olaudah Equiano, David Walker, Frederick Douglass, James Africanus Beale Horton, Alexander Crummell, and Edward Wilmot Blyden, who are erased from the annals of the tradition. When we omit from the records Europe-based,

African-descended interlocutors within the European discursive tradition, e.g., Terence, Septimius Severus, Anton Wilhelm Amo, Samuel Taylor-Coleridge; or Europe's debts to traditions beyond its boundaries accrued from North Africa and Asia, especially the role played by Egypt, we have performed instances of this kind of erasure. By the same token, as we pointed out above, those who perform this erasure do not look one way. If, misdirected by the metaphysics of difference, we donate to Europe this pan-human legacy of ratiocination, we are no less guilty of erasing ourselves from the annals of discourses that our forebears contributed to constructing. If, as I always insist, and as competent and honest historians of ideas readily admit, the road from Athens to Königsberg never originated in the Greek islands but in Egypt, and later went through Cairo, Damascus, and Qom, then any chronicle of the tradition that omits this can only be a product of fraud or incompetence. Either way, we have no business allowing it to stand because it serves our ideological purposes.[4]

*ERASURE 3A AND 3B*

Finally, erasure may also be the product of a refusal, motivated by identity, to extend recognition to, or deny acceptance of, materials that fail a litmus test delineated by a certain sense of belonging. This is of two related kinds.

(3a) The first is when Euro-American scholars—it is immaterial whether they are white or non-white—fail to acknowledge much less cite the contributions of African scholars to Plato scholarship or Marx scholarship or Phenomenology or Analytic philosophy, inflected by ideas from the Euro-American intellectual traditions. For example, you would think that Samir Amin was the only significant Marxist thinker from the African continent and you would not know that before the late Kwasi Wiredu allowed himself to go into the rabbit hole of decolonization, his most important original contributions were in Logic, Philosophy of Language, and Philosophy of Mind or that J. T. Bedu-Addo was one of the top scholars of the Theaetetus of the last century. For instance, Wiredu is rarely, if ever, cited in epistemology and many of his followers in the decolonizing industry, as became clear in the commemorations of him since his passing, are lamentably unaware of his work in logic and epistemology. A student of P. F. Strawson, Gilbert Ryle, and Stuart Hampshire, at Oxford University, who went beyond the bounds of analytic philosophy to what he calls "a genetic method," inspired by Deweyan pragmatism, with profound reflections on language, communication, and cross-cultural understanding, one must be sorry that this incredible philosopher is now identified with a near pedestrian insistence that we must adopt a critical approach to whatever tools we are using in our philosophical reflection and some not so persuasive canvassing of what he called "consensual democracy" (Wiredu 1980, 1996).

> I am not an analytic philosopher, for, as just indicated, I believe that analysis is only one of the missions of philosophy. That there is, in addition to the analytic method, also a genetic method of great importance. I explained [that] long ago in *Philosophy and an African Culture* (1980). Somehow some observers have not yet got around to taking seriously that passage and, indeed other genetical reflections in my publications. (my emphasis) (Hallen 2021, 20–21).

According to Barry Hallen, "Part of the reason the genetic dimension to his thought has gone underappreciated may be that it was mistaken for a form of linguistic analysis" (Hallen 2021, 21). How much more insightful would it be if we could encourage our students to study Wiredu and his method as we do for lesser lights rather than this fool's errand of chasing slights? But thanks to Barry Hallen, another great philosopher from the so-called South who works in the analytic tradition, there is an easily accessible handbook to Wiredu's work for those who are interested.

And talking of Barry Hallen, an original, even pathbreaking, thinker who, having bagged a doctorate on Karl Popper from Boston University, found his way to Nigeria, settled down, became a student of Yorùbá culture, learned the language, and introduced the methods of analytic philosophy to doing philosophy in a Yorùbá key. Unfortunately, just like Wiredu, he is better known for his *A Short History of African Philosophy* (2009), and itself a significant contribution to the history of philosophy.

Meanwhile his fundamental work built on doing fieldwork with intellectuals of the culture, onísègùn, as the ones he interviewed are called—no, this is not Sage philosophy à la Henry Odera Oruka—and extracted serious consequences for epistemology, aesthetics, and moral epistemology therefrom. The best way to characterize Hallen's work that follows his own description is doing analytic philosophy in a Yorùbá key. His focus turns on epistemology and philosophy of language, moral epistemology under which he argues that knowledge claims and their validating criteria in Yorùbá are imbricated with moral presuppositions, and aesthetics. One very important implication of Hallen's work is to undermine any connection between theories or philosophical methodologies and specific cultures or geographical areas. The central idea is that Yorùbá, like any other ordinary language, contains within it "meanings of philosophical consequence" which it is the job of philosophers, deploying the methodology of "analysis" to elicit (Hallen and Sodipo 1997; Hallen 2000, 2006, 2009).

Rather than some blanket references to "African philosophy," going granular the way I have done here is more likely to educate our audience of the complexity and historicity of the discipline, the debates—Wiredu was one method, Hallen was another method, Kwame Gyekye did not align with Wiredu's path through Akan-inflected philosophy and the theory of truth he derived from it was controverted by J. T. Bedu-Addo and criticized by Henry Odera Oruka (Bodunrin 1985; Oruka 1997); nor did Moses Makinde (1988) or Ṣẹgun Gbádégẹṣin (1991) join Hallen in his analytic experiments even though they all worked on Yorùbá-inflected themes. Those who wish to save Africa from the ravages of imperialism will do well to become better students of philosophy in Africa with deeper engagements with its heterogeneities.

(3b) Then there is what happens to those of us who work on our own traditions, but do so in what are considered alien languages or use theories that are of alien provenance among our colleagues from the same geographical, cultural traditions. We are doubly orphaned as a result. To our own kind, we are inauthentic. Our Euro-American counterparts think we suffer from some pathology that makes us, at best, mimics or, at worst, wannabe whites. This last type has a related iteration. This occurs when an item that a third party can easily identify to belong to a group

is shunned by other members of that group and ignored or treated as illegitimate. This last group becomes doubly orphaned as a result. The erasure involved here is quite extensive.

In the area of political philosophy, for instance, the rest of the world, including Africa, need be informed of African thinkers who embraced liberal representative democracy ranging from James Africanus Beale Horton (1969) and Alexander Crummell (1862) in the nineteenth century, to Nnamdi Azikiwe (1961, 1963), Kwame Nkrumah (1963), in the earlier phase of his intellectual evolution, Kofi Busia (1967), Julius Nyerere (1961), again in the first part of his political development, Nelson Mandela (1965), Fatima Mernissi (2002), and Obafemi Awolowo (1968), in the twentieth. There were different Marxist tendencies in the continent in the twentieth century that remain occluded in the annals of the tradition to this day from Medhi Ben Barka to Eduardo Mondlane, Abdel Khaliq Raghoub, Abdulrahman Mohammed Babu, Agostinho Neto, and Joe Slovo. This is not to leave out critics of Marxism like Julius Nyerere, Kenneth Kaunda, and Leopold Sédar Senghor, yes, that Senghor!

In the area of ethics, I have always been dubious of ethics that are circumscribed by geography or even culture! And when much of a continent's diversities, heterodoxies and heterogeneities are panel-beaten into a nebulous African humanism called Ubuntu, we are occluded from discovering, much less engaging, the many variations on the theme of humanism offered by different thinkers from the continent. On my part, I have written on the humanism of Kofi Awoonor (Táíwò 2019), Amílcar Cabral (2026), and Wole Soyinka (Táíwò, forthcoming). They do not come from the same cultural traditions; neither does any of them offer us their reflections as reports of their culture. On this score, Soyinka is particularly noteworthy for crafting a humanism that is, on one hand, quintessentially modern while, on the other, deriving it from and undergirded by a metaphysics rooted in his Yorùbá heritage. No, Soyinka does not donate to the world "Yorùbá humanism" but a philosophical model he has crafted with materials from Yorùbá culture. We may find another thinker from the same tradition authoring a different version based on the same inheritance. I will take such rich divergences any day over and above some anthropological reportage of "what Yorùbá believe" as if a culture can believe anything!

No thanks to this obliviousness on the part of our self-styled saviors, Africans and non-Africans alike, one of the most important debates in contemporary ethics is obscured from the eyes of a world that is eager to learn from Africa. This is the debate concerning the ethics of forgiveness and reconciliation between Senghor (1998), Desmond Tutu (2000), and Soyinka (1999).

I argue that not one of the preceding erasures can be identified with any geographical location, cultural group, or linguistic preferences. So, when I speak of one side doing all the winning, I do not mean by that that those who comprise it do so based solely or even principally on their racial inheritance. Doubtless, it often appears as if all the erased look a certain way and the erasers, too, look a certain but different way. But the variants of erasure just adumbrated should induce caution in how we conceive of and describe who is erasing whom and what in academia. Talking as if the erased and the eraser are easily identified explains why we often

miss the erasure that unfolds within the same group and limit ourselves to inter-group erasure. Intra-group erasure is no less pernicious to our common project of educating the mind than inter-group erasure. Neither should get a pass from us.

The point I am driving at is this. Take all the prattle about the exclusion of African ideas from the so-called mainstream of various disciplines on the part of many in what I have styled "the decolonizing industry." The irony is that because they are so consumed with chasing the latest slights from their "Western," "Euro-American" traducers, they hardly ever do the kind of archaeology that I have foreshadowed in the preceding paragraphs. When they do, as I have argued in my recent book (Táíwò 2022), they resort to dredging up all kinds of atavisms that are motivated by identitarian commitments underpinned by what I identified above as the metaphysics of difference. Often misguided by a bastard periodization, they end up offering an Africa that is almost dehistoricized and seems to require a different language to make sense of its phenomena from what is usually deployed to understand the human experience beyond Africa's borders (Táíwò 2023). Those who are motivated to call out erasure end up, unwittingly for the most part, performing the other erasures that I have identified above.

This is what I mean by whether in philosophy, literary theory, theology, legal theory, feminism, and so on, one is always hard put to find African thinkers in the mix, even if it is for purposes of showing why their ideas are wrong or unpersuasive. We are simply ignored. To stay with the subdiscipline of political philosophy, does anyone seriously entertain the idea that Africans do not do political philosophy or never did? Or is it the case that what we do is unworthy of the name, and we never did in the past? Or that we did and still do political philosophy, but it is not of the sort that the world's academia, much less other constituencies, should be interested in? And to be sure, this attitude is shared by many Africans in and out of academia. For example, one of our most celebrated contemporary philosophers, Dismas Masolo, said: "Leopold Sédar Senghor of Senegal, Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, and Julius Nyerere of Tanzania . . . were not philosophers, and despite their obvious political and cultural significance, their pronouncements were not meant as philosophical claims" (Masolo 2010, 230). Doubtless, it is easy to see how he could have come to that conclusion. There is no single unambiguous definition of philosophy. And if we suppose that others deal honestly and strive to find other instances of philosophy in the field ploughed by Masolo, there will not be any problem. However, he knows as well as I do that, given the history of Africa's representation in philosophy or lack thereof, the impact of his declaration, regardless of his many qualifications and nuances that follow, is sure to discourage already reluctant seekers from venturing further. Language matters.

Although philosophy anthologies now strain to include Africa, they do not do so in quite historically correct or philosophically sound ways. For example, entries on Christian, Jewish, and Islamic philosophers do not reference Africa or Africans even when such thinkers were African and did their work within spaces that are firmly within Africa's boundaries. Oftener recent entries respecting Africa are contemporary iterations of Euro-American philosophical concerns. Entries on core subdivisions of philosophy, especially epistemology and metaphysics, are often shorn of African iterations. Think of the Wiredu and Hallen examples above.

The omissions here can be quite egregious. They come in two flavors. There are those omissions of African-inflected—origins, thinkers, debates—instances of those subdivisions through time. And those omissions are marked by the elision of the works of African thinkers in Euro-American-inflected philosophical discourses in any of philosophy's subdivisions, as was remarked above.

In the study of religion, in discussions of religion and its features, African religions are hardly, if ever, represented. Again, I would not like to be misunderstood. Yes, in the anthropology of religion, so-called "African Traditional Religion" is well-represented (See, for criticism, Taiwo 2008). But when it comes to the philosophy of religion, to considerations of the more theoretical dimensions of religion—cosmogonies, theologies, liturgies, theodicy, and so on—it is almost as if African religions have little or no illumination to offer the seeker. As sophisticated as some of the discussions in "African Traditional Religion" are, few think they form legitimate members of the universe of discourse attached to theoretical aspects of religion.

Finally, in legal theory and philosophy of law, recurrent themes include the grounds of the normativity of positive law, the fate of a legal system the day after a revolution or advent of any kind of "extra-constitutional" rule, or the role that jurisprudence plays in adjudication outcomes and legal interpretation. Perusing the annals of discourse is not likely to educate the seeker on the role of events in Africa or what African thinkers have made of or contributed to our understanding of them. For example, the locus classicus of debates regarding the fate of legal systems in the aftermath of a coup d'état or similar extra-constitutional overturning of government are actually to be found in Pakistan, Zimbabwe (when it was still Rhodesia), and Nigeria. And some of the most astute critics of analytical jurisprudence, dominant in much of the Anglophone world, have come from India and Nigeria. I leave out internal debates in Nigeria and Ghana respecting the grounds of constitutional normativity, judicial activism, and so on. As I write this, unlike the African situation, U.S. Supreme Court, too, before it was taken over by the purveyors of Originalism, a scam theory if there be any, had begun occasionally to give a nod to Indian, yes, Indian, jurisprudential discussions and judicial decisions in a kind of gesture towards comity across boundaries in the larger community framed by the common-law tradition.

Simultaneously, the question of the relationship between Islam and modernity of which the struggle for democracy is only one aspect is as urgent for Tunisia as it is for Nigeria, Sudan, Somalia, and Kenya. On this score, Tunisia is more like Nigeria than it is like Jordan or Bahrain. But when scholars, on all sides of the debates, are driven by identity denominated by the metaphysics of difference, and Africa is dubiously divided according to skin color and what side of the Sahara people happen to inhabit, so much less becomes legible to even the most diligent of scholars. Yet, there is a considerable body of scholarship on all these points that suffer the various erasures that we have registered in this work.

I have argued in this discussion that the tropes that are deployed to make sense of the erasure of African contributions to the global circuit of ideas by, mainly, the decolonizing industry, are misdirected and, for the most part, obscure rather illuminate our understanding. My solution is very simple. Good scholarship should

be identified by how well it educates us about the panorama of human experience reflected in the catholicity of its sources, themes, references, and so on. The present situation where even those who claim to be correctors end up shafting those on whose behalf they claim to be working serves no one. And I insist that in the game as it is played currently, only one side keeps winning. And that side, in my opinion, is not a monolith of any sort.

I would like to end with a declaration from the seventies of the last century from one of our most important thinkers who continues to attract opposition, opprobrium even, from those brains addled by unproductive identity commitments, Wole Soyinka. Here is one of the world's contemporary greatest thinkers and a Nobel laureate in Literature to boot who has for a long time addressed in very profound ways many of the issues that are routinely litigated by those who are ever so solicitous when it comes to the erasure of African contributions to the global circuit of ideas. Yet, he hardly, if ever, features in their discourse. I would let Soyinka speak directly.

> **BJ:** You once expressed—in a private conversation—your admiration of Shakespeare, Beethoven and Picasso above all others in Western culture and art, for their protean range and mastery of diverse styles, forms and subjects. But Proteus, as a metaphor of the creative principle, comes from Western culture while you have also adopted Ogun as an essence of the creative artist. Similarly, in your important essay, "The Fourth Stage," you conjoin classical Greek and traditional Yoruba deities and idealities as expressive paradigms of the psychic aspects of art in general and tragedy in particular. Such procedures have drawn a label of "Europhile" intellectualism from certain African critics. What is your reaction to this?
>
> **Soyinka:** Well this "Europhile" criticism used to be the favourite terminology of people like Chinweizu, and there's so much nonsense in this accusation that I don't think it's even worth replying to. For a start, many of these people are not even critics, they're merely "throwback" activists, the kind of criticisms which they make about literature they will also make about the bearing of foreign names, as if this is what the radicalisation of society in thinking is all about. That pattern is not my conception of what the African heritage is. If I want to name my son after Fidel Castro nobody is going to stop me, if I want to name him after Lenin, after Garibaldi, for reasons of sentiment or optimism, whatever, nobody is going to stop me. . . . because I don't think that constitutes a betrayal of my African resources. So these throwbacks—I call them "Neo-Tarzanists"—who lack the intellectual capacity to even first of all appreciate the kind of exploration which I am making into points of departure as well as meeting points between African and European literary and artistic traditions and quite unabashedly exploiting these various complementarities, or singularities, or contradictions, in my own work. For me, they are missing out on a lot that can be enjoyed intellectually in the entire creativity of man. <u>There's no way at all that I will ever preach the cutting off of any source of knowledge: Oriental, European, African, Polynesian, or whatever. There's no way anyone can ever legislate that once knowledge comes to one, that knowledge should be now buried as if it never existed</u> . . . (Jeyifo 2001, 122–123) (My emphasis)

> **BJ:** You have called for the adoption of one single language for the entirety of black Africa and have translated from Yoruba to English. Yet you continue to use English and are uncontestably entirely self-assured in that language. Are we now beyond the *Prospero-Caliban* syndrome of the complexes which attend the adoption of a language of colonial imposition?
>
> **Soyinka:** . . . . The Prospero-Caliban syndrome, I think, is dead. In fact those who are suffering from the Prospero-Caliban syndrome are middle class, bourgeois upstarts, the noveau-riche, and the medium of that syndrome for them is not of course words, but jet planes, the most sophisticated stereo equipment, the very latest in whatever happens to be the most expensive cars going on in the world . . . the superficies of material indulgence without even the slightest understanding of the mechanisms, the operations, the technology, of these things which they consume. I think they are the ones within that syndrome at the moment, not the artists. (Jeyifo 2001, 127–28)

In yet another interview, he addressed another burning issue that dominates anti-erasure discourse.

> **Agetua:** Some critics talk a lot about Greek, American poetry with reference to your work. You'd read a lot in the classics?
>
> **Soyinka:** I've read widely in the world's literature, European, Asiatic, American, there are Buddhist's reference points and mythologies in my poetry too. In other words, I cannot cut off and will not attempt to cut off what is my experience and what is afterall, the world's experience. There is a great deal of intercommunication in the world. A lot of people tend to forget that. As long as I find the means of expression, a form of communication which does not alienate my immediate readership and I do not deliberately cram my work with foreign references to a point where the work is indigestible—these are faults which should never be permitted by any serious writer. I believe that in expanding the horizons and the curiosity also of my readership, I think I'm contributing to both their intellectual and general universal conceptualization even of their immediate experiences. The actual form, the medium, the metaphor, which one uses is ultimately unimportant because this is merely the framework upon which one poses certain themes. As I said as long as the actual metaphor itself does not become an obstacle to the appreciation of the entire message, I don't think a poet should worry unduly about the eclectic appearance or structure of his work. We must not think that traditionalism means raffia skirts; in other words it's no longer possible for a purist literature for the simple reason that even our most traditional literature has never been purist. (Jeyifo 2001, 35–36)

One would wish that we all take seriously the history of ideas in Africa and its place in the global circuit of ideas through time. It would limit the time wasted on re-litigating puerile debates that are driven by identity concerns inflected by fears of contamination when, doubtless, hybridity rules the history of culture in all of human history. When we do that, we all win from the production of knowledge built on facts and the best arguments.

## ENDNOTES

1 For instance, the Yorùbá story of creation is so universal that it makes every human so many degrees of separation from being Yorùbá. On this account, the world began at Ilé-Ifẹ̀ and physical changes in various human groups are contingent consequences of the influence of the climate on various cohorts of outward migrants. It is more universal than the biblical Genesis account.

2. I have had to confront institutions where I have taught in the United States how, if before I joined them, they never had Africa in their curriculum, no way they could have been right in telling the students who had passed through their portals that they were getting the best education that could be had given that those graduates were uninformed about the historical experiences of a significant segment of humanity in their course of instruction.

3. Unfortunately, this battening down of pseudo-cultural hatches is now being used to support rabid homophobia across Africa: "We are Africans; we don't do that" that being, at the present time, homosexuality.

4. I have recently in a different context argued that the annals of the history of ideas in Europe should reflect the racial pluralism of its participants through time. See Táíwò 2018, 2024; Senghor 1971; Otele 2021.

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