

An Examination of the Necessary Adjective: Decolonising “African” Philosophy

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Abstract

This paper engages in the decolonisation of African philosophy through a critical examination of necessary adjectives and their implications on global philosophy. I contend that decolonising African philosophy necessitates a transformative process that challenges the dominance of “Western” philosophy and dismantles the power dynamics perpetuated by necessary adjectives. By recognising the inherent problems within the discipline, engaging with diverse perspectives, and de-emphasising restrictive borders, philosophy can evolve into a more inclusive, equitable, and globally interconnected field of knowledge. By exploring discrepancies in usage of necessary adjectives between ‘Western’ and ‘non-Western’ philosophies, I uncover underlying assumptions and systemic devaluations inherent in these linguistic constructs. I argue that necessary adjectives are rooted in colonial logic which perpetuates racial hierarchies and systematically marginalises ‘non-Western’ philosophies. Necessary adjectives construct a binary framework in which Western philosophy is presented as normative and universal, whilst othered philosophies are relegated to the margins, requiring Western validation. This restricts diversity of thought and limits the scope of global philosophical discourse. Thus, in order to decolonise African philosophy, I argue for deeper engagement with the problematic nature of necessary adjectives. I advocate for the deconstruction of the Western perspective and its underpinnings in white supremacy, whilst emphasising the contextual situatedness of philosophies. By problematising “Western” philosophy, acknowledging its arbitrary nature, exclusionary practices, and its rewriting of history, I suggest a path towards decolonisation that encompasses inclusion of marginalised voices and a reimagining of both philosophy education in Africa, and of the borders between philosophies.

About the author

Joshua May is in his final year of BA (Humanities). Upon completion of his undergraduate degree, he plans to pursue an Honours degree in psychology in which he wishes to focus his research on matters of cross-cultural and community psychology. Beyond the academic sphere, Joshua is a seasoned and enthusiastic debater, involved in debate societies on campus and beyond.

The “African” in “African” philosophy is an adjective, an aspect of language which is meant to specify or describe its noun. However, the presence of an adjective here raises more questions than it answers. This adjective, an example of what South African critical psychologist Kopano Ratele calls a necessary adjective, seems to be related to the systematic devaluation of “African” philosophy. Problems created by discrepancies in the usage of necessary adjectives between “philosophy proper” and “non-Western” philosophies seem to point us to this realisation. I will be examining the effects of the presence – and absence – of necessary adjectives on philosophy. The aim of this endeavour will be to discover the root cause of these problems, with the aim of furthering decolonisation of African philosophy. Whilst I do not have the experience to make a comprehensive claim on how to decolonise philosophy, I will make an attempt at deconstructing harmful concepts and systems which serve to reproduce domination. It must be noted that any use of necessary adjectives here is done purely with the purposes of this theoretical deconstruction in mind.

Before we examine the effects of necessary adjectives, we must first understand what they are, and what they mean in the context of philosophy. The word ‘African’ in the term African philosophy is an example of a “necessary adjective”, a label used by a discipline in order to provide context (Ratele, 2019: 8). Ratele argues that one is compelled to use geographical labels as adjectives so that one will be clearly understood to be speaking from a specific situatedness, place, or context. The adjective is thus present to make explicitly clear the situatedness of the speaker. This informs us that they will be speaking for, from, or in a particular context, and thus, the philosophy will also centre the people, ideas, and issues that concern this specific context (ibid.: 8-9).

However, necessary adjectives seem to be less necessary for some philosophies than others. For example, the globally dominant philosophical tradition is rarely ever explicitly referred to as “Western” philosophy. Instead, it is often simply referred to as “philosophy”.

This notion seems to imply that it is *the* primary philosophy, a “philosophy proper”. Western philosophy seems to require no definition, nor philosophising about what makes it Western. On the contrary, all ‘other’ philosophies – such as African, or Latin-American philosophy – require adjectives to be given any form of recognition. This is not an accidental discrepancy. Rather, as Ratele states, “a consequence of the hegemony of American and European [philosophy], is that [philosophy] produced outside these regions of the world, and fully conscious of its situatedness in the places where it is practised, requires an adjective in order to be granted recognition” (Ratele, 2019: 8). This discrepant use of necessary adjectives reveals to us the first of many problems with the necessary adjective. That being, its inherent basis in racist colonial logic.

Colonial logic is a collection of constructed assumptions and hierarchical binaries asserted upon the world by ‘white’ colonial societies. These constructs were created and asserted by colonists as they saw differences between themselves and the peoples they colonised. These differences were moralised by colonial societies and placed on a binary hierarchy of superiority (Freter, 2018: 240). The construct of ‘whiteness’ was applied to the coloniser, and ‘blackness’ to the colonised ‘other’. Within these binaries, ‘whiteness’ is inherently superior to the black ‘other’. The ‘white’ is assumed to be universal and objective, whilst the ‘other’ is empty and “incapable of producing the universal” (Mbembe & Dubois, 2017: 49). The ‘other’ is reduced to a single, homogenous mass devoid of any philosophy, whilst the ‘white’ is nuanced and lays claim to all philosophy (Táíwò, 1998: 9-10). These arbitrary binary categories and assumptions became essentialised within the identities of the ‘white West’ and the ‘black others’ they dominated. These identity categories mutually define one another in the sense that the ‘other’ is whatever the West is not. Thus, the world is divided by colonial logic into two arbitrary hierarchical categories. The first category being the “West”, encapsulating all the superior qualities of the ‘white’ colonists. The second category being the “rest”, encapsulating all the inferior categories of the ‘black’

‘other’ (Hall, 1992: 188-189). This colonial logic serves to morally justify the dominance of the “West” over the “rest” as natural.

Unfortunately, this dichotomy continues to be relevant to the current landscape of philosophy. This is as necessary adjectives both express and generate these racial, hierarchical binaries within philosophy (Schuringa, 2020). Whilst ‘white’ and ‘black’ are not explicitly expressed by necessary adjectives, racist colonial logic is still clearly visible in their usage. This can be seen in the discrepant use of necessary adjectives between the “West” and the “rest” (ibid.). Firstly, they perpetuate the idea that the ‘other’ cannot produce universal knowledge. This is as the usage of necessary adjectives by non-Western philosophers forces them to visibly ground themselves in their particular context, whilst Western philosophy does not require such adjectivisation, thus making clear their difference. This brings into doubt the objectivity of the knowledge these ‘othered’ philosophies can attain, and thus bars them from the supposedly universal ‘philosophy proper’ (Ratele, 2019: 8).

Secondly, necessary adjectives are also drastically reductive, placing wildly different cultures and ideas under a single homogenous label. For example, ‘African’ philosophy is a scarcely useful term for determining situatedness, as it encompasses an entire continent which holds a vast variety of social and cultural groups (Bachir, 2016: 5). To refer to them all under a single label clearly reflects the reductionist nature of colonial logic. Not only does this limit the scope of African philosophy, it also reduces the diversity of thought that can be portrayed by the label (Táíwò, 1998: 12-13).

Finally, colonial logic assumes non-Western philosophies to be empty of important philosophical content, ideas and concepts. This is as Western philosophy has – as mentioned in my exploration of colonial logic – laid claims to large swaths of philosophy. The West has made claims of ownership over philosophical concepts to which it is not obvious that they have proprietary rights (Allias, 2016: 537). This false claim of ownership over concepts colludes with the colonial

assumption that “Africa” brings no meaningful contributions to philosophy. African philosophy is thus forced into an argument of pedigree, where it attempts to prove its worthiness to Western philosophy (Táíwò, 1998: 9). Thus, the perpetuation of colonial logic forces African philosophy to prove itself on the standards of Western logic and philosophy. This forces ‘othered’ philosophies to utilise Western modes of thought (Chimakonam, 2016: 24), acting as simply vestigial extensions to Western philosophy, and thus massively limits the extent to which African philosophy can generate new concepts, and limits the diversity of thought that can be explored by philosophy as a whole. Furthermore, this preoccupies African philosophy with mapping and self-definition, rather than generating new philosophical ideas or engaging with its historic ones (Táíwò, 1998: 10). Additional to the fact that this preoccupation with self-definition is harmful to the advancement of African philosophy, it is also pointless. This is as the idea that African philosophy needs to prove itself to the West is deeply mired in colonial logic. This is as, due to the very nature of colonial logic, African philosophy can never prove itself to the West, as it is assumed to be inherently inferior. The West imperialistically demands African philosophy to prove itself, yet it has not proven its own standpoint to be unproblematic (ibid.).

Thus, one finds that the necessary adjective is not simply a value-neutral tool for establishing situatedness. Instead, it is a system based in racism which systematically devalues the ideas of ‘non-Western’ cultures. The adjectives – rather than classifiers – act as reductionist boundaries which limit their scope and establish them as inferior to Western philosophy. It is thus clear that philosophy must escape the confinements of the necessary adjective, and the judgement of an external force, in order to be decolonised. Kopano Ratele argues that this can be done by “aiming for [the] redundancy” (Ratele, 2019: 8) of necessary adjectives. What would such redundancy look like? Ratele tells us that this would entail philosophies that tacitly place their contexts at their centre, whilst still

being open to interacting with other philosophies worldwide (Ratele, 2019: 8-9).

Whilst such a future for philosophy sounds ideal, I do not see a future where such freedom and openness of philosophical thought can develop by simply negating the usage of necessary adjectives. This is – as we have discovered – the problematic nature of necessary adjectives arises out of their basis in colonial logic. Thus, ridding us of necessary adjectives will not remove racist systems from philosophy. Rather, I argue, it would simply render ‘othered’ philosophical traditions without recognition once more and would also make racist systems in philosophy more difficult to identify. Furthermore, this could lead to decontextualised philosophy, as the work of philosophers would no longer be explicitly tied to their context. This could lead to misinterpretation and misappropriation of philosophical concepts outside of their cultural context. Instead, I will argue that the removal of necessary adjectives is not enough. The goal of a decolonised future for philosophy is not one that can be met without philosophical deconstruction and problematisation of the category of Western philosophy and the ideals which underly it, both in literature and in university curriculums (Allias, 2016: 544). Such deconstruction is pertinent, as simply rejecting Western philosophy would grant it too much. Rejection of Western philosophy would not only perpetuate exclusions within Western philosophy, but also grant it a false narrative about its origins, interactions, influences, as well as proprietary rights over any concept it has investigated (ibid.). This is not acceptable, as it does not address any of the problematic assumptions and practices underlying Western philosophy, and thus does not improve the current power dynamics in philosophy.

We have explored how Western philosophy harms ‘othered’ philosophies – and thus, global philosophical discourse – but this brings us no closer to understanding why, or from what, these harms arise. Thus, it seems pertinent that I now inspect the Western philosophical standpoint for the assumptions at the root of harmful practices such as colonial logic. The thread

that I have been pulling – the lack of an adjective in “Western” philosophy – once again seems to provide an answer. By not adjectivising itself, Western philosophy avoids overtly situating itself within a context (ibid.: 539). In doing so it hides its situatedness behind a thin veneer of objectivity, and thus makes itself appear to be universal. This is a behavioural pattern observed in the spread of many Western ideas and practices, such as language, economics, government, development, and philosophy. This trend is referred to as Western universalism (Tallman, 2013: 9-10). What this refers to is the Western trend to project itself as an objective, universal standpoint which is inherently superior to all others by virtue of its ‘neutral’, ‘logical’ perspective. This can be better understood through a distinction between *space* and *place*. Space and place are the two distinct contextual levels at which thought is situated. *Space* thus represents the universal, globalised, and intercultural, whilst *place* represents what is rooted within a particular localised context. African and ‘other’ localised philosophies are primarily located within their specific, distinct geographical and contextual place, whilst Western philosophy has laid claim to the universal space. Thus, it may be said that Western philosophy has “shed all vestiges of its particular origin, place and context, it belongs nowhere and can therefore penetrate everywhere.” (ibid.: 9). Thus, the ‘shedding’ of the necessary adjective by Western philosophy appears as an extension of this trend, a vestigial piece it has shed in an attempt to portray the universal. The absence of a necessary adjective here is important to note as it erases the fallible, contextually grounded humans from Western philosophy and makes them appear as Gods, superior to all other philosophers. This gives the impression of Western philosophy as simply philosophy – a supposedly neutral, normative perspective. By centralising itself, all ‘other’ philosophies are pushed to the margins (Allias, 2016: 539).

Thus, as the Western universalism has ‘colonised’ the arena of space, it relegates all ‘othered’ philosophies to their respective, particular *places*. Furthermore, as the West views itself as superior, all ‘othered’ philosophies

must be, by definition, inferior. This ties back to colonial logic binaries, whereby both identities – the “West” and the “rest” – negatively construct one another. Thus, by constructing itself as universal, normative and superior, Western philosophy makes all ‘other’ philosophies appear abnormal, inferior and heavily situated in place. This ideological dynamic further devalues ‘othered’ logic systems and thus generates, reproduces and justifies the domination of Western philosophy over the “inferior” “other”. Furthermore, it is this logical dynamic that allows the West to force ‘othered’ philosophies to prove itself to the West on the standards of Western logic: as it is supposedly universal, it – and only it – can make absolute truth claims for all other cultures of the world by measuring them in relation to its own narrow conception of reality (Tallman, 2013: 9). In this way the domination of the West obscures the contributions of ‘othered’ traditions to philosophy. Ironically, whilst the West uses this hegemonic domination to insist that ‘othered’ philosophies define and prove themselves, Western philosophy has not proven itself on the standards of its own logic (Allias, 2016: 542). The array of unfounded assumptions which define its interactions with other traditions should make that clear. The West’s conception that it is universal impedes the global interlocution of philosophy, and harms African philosophy. Therefore, if we truly wish to decolonise African philosophy, we must make clear the situatedness of the Western perspective and its flaws (Allias, 2016: 543-544).

The first flaw that I will make clear of the Western tradition is the emptiness of the term ‘Western’. This problem is one that arises as a consequence of both Western universalism and the flawed nature of necessary adjectives. It is also the reason for my constant use of quotation when referring to the Western perspective: I must use the term to discuss its nature, but I cannot accept the assumptions it entails. Firstly, the reductionist nature of both ideological and geographical borders delineated by necessary adjectives once more rears its head here. To what exactly the term the ‘West’ refers to, both ideologically and geographically,

is vague to say the least. The West may have first emerged in Europe, but it never referred to all of Europe. There was never a clear border between the West and non-West, and it would likely prove impossible to establish one, considering the contributions to Western thought by the Greeks, Egyptians, Chinese and Moors. Beyond this, now the ‘West’ has spread to various parts of the world, such as America. In the current day even Japan – a country in what is traditionally considered the ‘East’ – is considered ‘Western’ (Hall, 1992: 185). What this points us to is that the adjective “Western” does not function as simply a situating adjective; it is a much more complex term. Instead, the term “Western” – due to its severance from any particular place – has become a term which transcends geographic location or cultural description (ibid.). Hall (ibid.: 186) argues that the term “West” has instead become a concept which signals a certain type of society with a specific level of economic and technological advancement. This definitional shift makes clear the colonial logic on which the term is constructed: The “West” is a term which signifies a certain level of development and superiority measured on the standards of Western universalism. Thus, only that which the West arbitrarily accepts as sufficiently advanced may hold the label. The lack of geographical basis is made clear by the inclusion of technologically and economically successful Japan into the Western label (Schuringa, 2020). Beyond such arbitrary considerations of ‘success’, there seems to be no conceptual throughline underlying Western philosophy. Its dominant ideas, thinkers and fields have very little in common. There appears to be no underlying methodology, and no consideration of what makes Western philosophy Western (Allias, 2016: 543).

It is this exact arbitrariness, originating in universalist ideals, that has enabled Western philosophy to lay claim to broad swaths of philosophy which it has no rights to claim. However, this is not an act that Western philosophy has engaged in throughout its history. It is a trend that began to appear with the Enlightenment, and it is the second aspect of Western philosophy that I will problematise here. Western philosophy

has intentionally rewritten its history over time to exclude certain groups from the construction of philosophy and to claim ownership over ideas, even philosophy itself. The West has mythologised itself as a continuous tradition that stretches from its invention of philosophy to the present. This conceptualisation is blatantly false. Before the 18th century, it was widely accepted that philosophy traced its roots back to India, Egypt and Asia, among other traditions. In fact, the concept of the 'West' itself was not prominently used before this period. However, with the rise of Enlightenment values and racist ideologies of colonisation and slavery within the West, we begin to see a shift (Hall, 1992: 187; Bachir, 2016: 3; Allias, 2016: 542).

The dominant view in the West began to shift towards claiming a Greek, fundamentally Western, origin of philosophy with the rise of the Enlightenment in the late 17th early 18th centuries. This is as the idea of the 'West' was central to the Enlightenment, as European society at the time assumed itself to be the most advanced, storied civilisation, the epicentre of progress. Thus, it treated all of its progress as the result of entirely internal processes (Hall, 1992: 187). This is particularly visible in the works of Hegel, as he argues for the centrality of the West, stating: "the true theatre of History is therefore the temperate zone" (Hegel, 2001: 97). This statement characterises his attempt not only to centralise the West, but to disconnect the achievements of Egypt from Africa and bring Egypt under the Western banner. A concerted effort was made to characterise Egypt as part of the West, rather than part of Africa. This is as it was argued that the Egyptian tradition was too advanced to belong to "Africa Proper" (Táiwò, 1998: 8). The "West" is also seen to begin creating visible separations between itself and 'other' traditions. For example, the period when works of Greek and Roman philosophers were expanded upon by the Spanish Moors and the Arabic tradition is often referred to by the Western tradition as a "loss" (Allias, 2016: 542). The rich contributions of the Moors to these philosophies are often skipped over and thus obscured in Western depictions of the history of philosophy. All the above depicts the Western trend of

claiming sole ownership over philosophy. Any non-Western contributions are not considered (worthwhile to) philosophy, and any worthwhile contributions cannot be considered non-Western.

Upon further examination, we find these exclusions to be just as numerous within the Western Tradition. Furthermore, these exclusions all adhere to a pattern. Unsurprisingly, that pattern once again reflects racist, colonial, 'white-centric', patriarchal logic. We see this through the exclusion of marginalised voices within the self-representation of the West. Marginalised groups and their philosophies are neglected by Western philosophical discourse and are also assigned their own necessary adjectives to delineate them from Western philosophy. African American, Feminist, and Native-American philosophies are all examples of philosophies neglected within the American tradition (Allias, 2016: 540-541).

It is not coincidental that these exclusions and changes within Western philosophy align with the Enlightenment period in the West. The Enlightenment was a watershed moment for much of Western thought, characterised by a great optimism about the abilities of human instrumental reason and its ability to reach a unifying absolute Truth (Tallman, 2013: 8-9). However, as humanity, we have fallen drastically short of reaching any absolute, universal Truth. Nonetheless, as has been illustrated by this analysis, Western philosophy has purported its particular 'Truth' to be entirely universal as a means to dominate, exclude and devalue 'other' cultures. The pattern that I have gradually been revealing over the course of this work should now be apparent. There *is* an ideal that underlies much of Western philosophy. It has been given countless names: Unity, Totality, and Truth, among others. Of all these monikers "Truth" is the most telling, as it is very abstract, and thus forces us to ask questions. To what – or more importantly – *whose* truth does this refer? Ultimately, it is truth grounded in 'white' habitus. Western ways of seeing the world overwhelmingly correspond with 'white' ways of seeing the world, and exclude and devalue female, 'non-

white', marginalised perspectives at every turn. The totalising force of this heavily situated perspective spread by Western universalism has devalued difference and led to the domination and destruction of 'other' societies, languages and ways of seeing the world (Tallman, 2013: 8-9). All this under the guise of 'Truth'.

Western universalism is not only responsible for justifying the racist systems of classification and devaluation that have been explored here. Rather, one finds that the ideology of Western universalism is inseparable from historic and modern systems resulting in the domination and decimation of Africa and 'other' places. The often-violent spread of Western values has been justified as a 'civilising mission', as the 'white man's burden' to civilise the so-called backwards cultures and peoples of Africa and 'other' cultures. This is seen in the early spread of Western values through colonialism, wherein Christianity was spread violently to South America. It is seen in the horrific regime of Belgian king Leopold II, who claimed his regime served to 'civilise the savages' (Tallman, 2013: 10). This is as colonialism requires a whole system of thought in which everything good, advanced or civilised is defined and measured in European terms (Kelley, 2000). Western universalism serves this exact purpose, as it introduces hegemonic criteria for the classification of difference as inferior, thus allowing for the subjugation of indigenous worldviews so that they may be replaced with the Western "Truth" (Heleta, 2018: 50).

To situate this discussion within South Africa, this exact process is seen in the history of colonialism, Apartheid, and now modern-day neo-colonialism. The concept of this Westernising, 'civilising mission' allowed British powers to justify imperialist expansion into South Africa. This resulted in countless punitive wars against the indigenous peoples and the destruction of indigenous kingdoms along with much of their ways of life and thought. This system served to establish white domination and thus justify the capitalist exploitation of black people through slavery. Apartheid, in this sense, was simply an extension of the same

colonial ideals, maintaining hegemonic white power and the system of exploitation of black Africans established under colonialism for the benefit of white citizens (ibid.). In the modern 'post-colonial' South Africa, we have supposedly escaped colonial domination by the West. However, we still pursue 'modernity', 'development' and economic success through neoliberalism at the benefit of neocolonial powers. We find that the very language of modernity has Western universalism, and thus colonial practice, 'baked in'. "The rhetoric of modernity hides the logic of coloniality" (Anzi, 2021: 47), as within the logic of modernity and development, we find a totalising system of imperialism with its main goal being the pursuit of global market unity. This economic unity only serves to maintain the economic superiority of the West (Tallman, 2013: 11), whilst exploiting 'other' neocolonial states. It is thus no wonder that the West maintains its domination over the global economy, philosophy and the very idea of modernity. It is as the ideology of Western universalism at the root of this domination is still standing. If 'othered' societies are to escape this neocolonial conception of 'modernity', they must develop multiple modernities as alternatives to Western modernity, and representative of their specific contexts (Chakrabarty, 2000).

Upon remains the "regime of truth" (Heleta, 2018: 48). One must note that this 'Truth', or system of belief serves to devalue all that differs from the 'white'-centric Western perspective and justify the destruction, devaluation and exploitation of 'others'. In this sense, Western philosophy is deeply complicit in these actions. This leads one to realise that the thing that calls itself Western philosophy has not only produced, but is severely underlined by, Western universalism which shares implicit assumptions with, and produces similar results to, white supremacy. White supremacy here refers to the ideology that "works in favour of and supports the prosperity of white people to the detriment of other culturally constructed 'races'" (Crockford, 2018: 229). White supremacy is visible throughout the application of Western philosophy, as has been shown here. It is visible in the justifications for centuries of

colonial expansion and exploitation. Visible in its justification of slavery. Visible in the constant usage of colonial logic, devaluation of cultural difference, the exclusion of marginalised voices, and in the usage of necessary adjectives. It is the unnamed value system which has shaped the world, has shaped Western philosophy, and now continues to shape the current global philosophical discourse, among other things. This omission cannot be accidental, but rather the product of normative, 'white-centric' thought which fails to recognise its domination as problematic. Furthermore, it fails to see it as domination (Allias, 2016: 541; Freter, 2018: 246).

The problematisation of the Western tradition and the deconstruction of its inherent white supremacist ideals is deeply relevant to our pursuit of a decolonised African philosophy. This is because marginalised voices cannot expect to be heard in a system that, by its very structure, devalues their experiences, philosophies and existence. This deconstruction is specifically relevant to African philosophy due to the widespread decimation of Africa by this ideology. Western philosophy is undeniably complicit in the systems of colonisation, slavery and Apartheid imposed upon Africans historically and in the present day. Furthermore, it is responsible for current domination of Africa, and its philosophies. Thus, it must be excised.

However, despite the deeply problematic nature of Western philosophy, we cannot excise it in its entirety. I argue that rejecting Western philosophy would not serve our greater goal of decolonisation for five key reasons. First among these reasons, is that such a rejection would only perpetuate the exclusion of marginalised voices within Western philosophy (Allias, 2016: 540). Secondly, wholesale rejection would not serve to deconstruct the problematic thought systems underlying the current structure of philosophy. Dismissing the problematic thought systems within Western philosophy will only allow their effects to persist. Thirdly, the wholesale rejection of Western philosophy would be a mistake, as to reject it entirely would grant Western philosophy too much. It would

be granted proprietary ownership of ideas to which it has no claim. Furthermore, the historic and modern myths, assumptions and exclusions within Western philosophy would not be addressed and deconstructed (Allias, 2016: 544). This would be particularly problematic, as the systems of exploitation they have caused would be left standing. The continuation of such morally contemptible neocolonial systems would be unacceptable. Finally, such a rejection would only perpetuate inequality within philosophy by reversing the binary of colonial logic. The perpetuation of colonial logic is harmful to philosophy, diversity, and to human expression of experience as a whole, and is therefore utterly unacceptable.

Thus, I stand with Allias in the belief that, instead of turning our gaze away from Western philosophy, we should instead examine it more deeply. In order to decolonise African philosophy, it will need to turn the current dynamic on the West by forcing it to engage with the question: "What is 'Western' philosophy?". I mean this in the sense of deconstruction and problematisation of Western philosophy, and the Western perspective within African philosophical literature and curricula, with decolonisation of African philosophy as the goal. Doing so will be a complex process that will need to critically engage with Western philosophy on multiple levels. Firstly, the conception of Western philosophy must be recognised as an arbitrary categorisation based upon colonial logic. Secondly, we must acknowledge the Western perspective as one that is heavily situated geographically, culturally, and within the 'white' perspective. Thirdly, the problematic aspects of Western philosophy must be exposed and deconstructed, both in African philosophy curricula and in global philosophical discourse. Finally, it must be made clear that this is an ideology that is still alive and well in the modern day which requires vocal opposition. This will require critical engagement with the effects of both white supremacy and colonial logic on the creation and reproduction of hierarchical categories within philosophy. Thus, the white supremacist ideals and colonial logic underpinning the structure of our current global (philosophical) discourse must be

made visible. This may be done in the curriculum by making students aware of the intellectual context from which Western philosophers speak. For example, the racist ideologies of philosophers such as Hegel, Kant and Hume – among others – must, rather than being erased, be critically engaged with. If not, the assumptions held by Western philosophers will continue to be uncritically perpetuated by new generations of philosophers (Allias, 2016: 544; Freter, 2018: 246-247).

Furthermore, decolonisation cannot be entirely deconstructive in nature. Rather, this deconstruction must be accompanied by a process of acknowledging and affirming epistemes denied by global dominance structures (Mignolo, 2000: 326). Thus, the marginalised philosophies previously excluded by Western philosophy must be brought into focus in both our curricula, and philosophical discourse. If equality is to prevail in philosophy, these marginalised voices must be considered and examined, not rejected as they have been historically (Allias, 2016: 540). A Western focus is clearly visible in African tertiary philosophy curricula. Here we see Western philosophical traditions, history and philosophers being espoused uncritically whilst there is very little engagement with African philosophical traditions. As an example, from my own philosophy education at an African university, I was uncritically taught only Western philosophy for a majority of my undergraduate degree. Furthermore, I was taught the Enlightenment lie of a Western origin to philosophy. African philosophy, however, when taught, was treated as an afterthought: a single PowerPoint slide in the last lecture set aside for it, if mentioned in the course at all. There was no opportunity to truly engage with African philosophy until an optional course on it in my third year. Unfortunately, this is still the norm in many African universities. Such Eurocentric focus only results in Eurocentric values and worldviews being uncritically promoted and imposed. This comes at the cost of erasing and subjugating indigenous memories, knowledge, and worldviews (Heleta, 2018: 50). This is not a new criticism, but one that has existed for decades, with a multitude of decolonial voices having

called for such a shift. Yet, Western epistemes still dominate philosophy education in African universities (Moyo & Hadebe, 2018: 82). This dynamic *needs* to change, otherwise we risk perpetuating harmful Western hegemonic dominance through our curriculum. More focus on African philosophy needs to be brought into African university philosophy curricula, and the West, when addressed, should be approached critically and with a deconstructive lens. No amount of deconstruction can bring about decolonisation of philosophy if we consistently reproduce colonial logic through education in the post-colony.

The final aspect we must inspect is that of 'bordered' philosophical thinking. Through Mignolo's (2000) concept of "border thinking" he illustrates how physical, epistemic, and psychological borders divide and unite modernity and coloniality. These borders can be observed in the necessary adjectives which divide philosophies. The borders established between philosophies by necessary adjectives have separated philosophy into multiple, distinct ethno-philosophies, and have discouraged engagement across these borders. Not only are the current borders problematic due to their reductive nature and basis in colonial logic, but any borders established will be mostly arbitrary. One cannot partition Africa, or the world into a set of isolated segments. This is particularly true of Africa, in which there are so many rich overlapping cultures, beliefs and experiences. To delineate them by strict borders is to imply that what is valid for one area is not valid for the others (Bachir, 2016: 4). Furthermore, to establish 'hard' borders is to deny the long history of cultural exchange between many of these cultures. This is undoubtedly harmful to philosophical discourse, as it limits the scope and reach of valuable cultural concepts. If we wish to have a global philosophical discourse that includes and values all voices equally, the borders established between philosophies must be de-emphasised. This would seem to necessitate "aiming for redundancy" as argued by Ratele. However, as discussed previously, the removal of necessary adjectives this entails would only render racist assumptions invisible again. Furthermore, one cannot

deny the usefulness of necessary adjectives for situating philosophy within context. If we wish to avoid the uncritical rise of another possibly harmful ideal – as we see with white supremacy and decontextualised Western philosophy – we must make the contextual situatedness of our philosophising clear. However, necessary adjectives cannot be used as we currently know them.

Chakrabarty (2000) argues that this problem seems to necessitate a dialogical approach, whilst Mignolo (2000) advocates for border thinking to be challenged by thought grounded within the perspective of specific territories. I would agree that both are necessary, as they encourage engagement across, and thus de-emphasise, contextual borders. Such an approach to philosophy is already embodied well by the conversationalist philosophy espoused by Chimakonam (2015). However, within this dialogue there still arises the problem of necessary adjectives, and of essentialising elements of contextual philosophies in this dialogue. To solve this, it is possible to envision an approach in which individual philosophers exercise reflexivity, making their situatedness clear in their works, rather than using necessary adjectives as strict borders delineating types of philosophies. Under such an approach, context and situating factors may be described by an author within their work. The author must situate themselves, as well as the concepts they use. This allows a connection to their contextual tradition without binding them to it. For example, by situating themselves individually within their context, and utilising cultural concepts which arise from their own subjective experience of their contextual lifeworld. This would allow philosophers to ground their work on their subjective, contextual experiences, drawing on concepts and ideas that are embedded in their cultural context, and engage with thought from outside of their context. This would prevent decontextualisation, and would allow 'othered' philosophies, such as African philosophy to escape the task of definition they have been preoccupied with. Furthermore,

philosophical engagement across these de-emphasised borders must be encouraged to enable a rich philosophical discourse between philosophies to occur. Philosophical borders de-emphasised in this way could allow for such a discourse to develop, as it acknowledges no hard borders for conceptual engagement. Thus, a healthy discourse between philosophers speaking from different places could develop, as philosophical concepts may be exchanged, and engaged with across platial borders.

In review, we find that necessary adjectives are indeed not value neutral tools for the contextualisation of distinct philosophies. Instead, they are terms with connotations deeply rooted in white supremacy and racist systems of colonial logic. Necessary adjectives have been used by the West to marginalise and exclude 'othered' philosophies from the global philosophical discourse. The result of this exclusion has been the domination of global discourse by the West and its episteme. The subjugation of the world to this episteme has allowed for the West to engage in horrific practices of exploitation and destruction, some of which continue to this day. Furthermore, the exclusion of African and 'othered' perspectives from Western philosophy has drastically limited the scope and diversity of philosophical discourse and contributed to a limited understanding of the world and human experience. It has also limited the growth of African philosophy by occupying it with pointless tasks of definition and mapping. Thus, new methods for contextualising philosophies must be explored. Furthermore, for African philosophy to escape the colonial domination of the West, it must turn a critical eye back upon the West. Its intertwinement with white supremacy must be made clear, and the very conception of the West as it currently exists must be problematised. Simultaneously, we must affirm indigenous and excluded modes of knowledge through education and publication. Only then can we begin to achieve a decolonised world, and a decolonised philosophy.

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