Introduction: Yorùbá Philosophy and Contemporary Nigerian Realities

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Abstract

Beginning from Marx's understanding of the relationship between philosophy and reality, this Introduction to the special edition of the *Yoruba Studies Review* explores the inevitable but complex relationship that exists between philosophy and its place. Specifically, it is grounded on the urgency of interrogating Nigeria's postcolonial realities in the light of Yorùbá philosophical insights that, among other things, enable a rethinking of postcolonial social practices especially as sites of identity, agency, knowledge, objectivity, and even of resistance and power. Premised on the fundamental assumption that Yorùbá philosophy constitutes a fundamental site of scholarship within which the task of understanding and reinventing the Nigerian state and societies can be achieved, the Introduction weaves this assumption into the analysis of the fourteen essays that explores Nigeria's postcolonial realities ranging from overpopulation, public (im)morality, ethnic conflict, injustice, and democratic deficit to environmental degradation, disability, depersonalization, youth culture, and a glaring disconnection between educational theory and practice.

Keywords: Yorùbá philosophy, Social practices, Ethnophilosophy, Nigeria, Postcoloniality.

> Let me…re-affirm my faith in the capacity of the Yoruba culture to solve essentially existential problems and advance the cause of human civilisation.
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> —Ọba Lamidi Adeyẹmi, III.
> The Aláàfin of Ọ̀yọ́[1]

1 Oluseye Ojo (2018). "When Yoruba stakeholders gathered to rebuild broken walls," *The Sun*, 15 February. http://sunnewsonline.com/when-yoruba-stakeholders-gathered-to-rebuild-broken-walls/

Introduction

The Aláàfin of Ọ̀yọ́ made the statement in the epigraph recently at an international conference in 2018 that brought scholars together to explore and interrogate the theme "African Knowledges and Alternative Futures." The monarch declared the conference opened. His opening remark, quite unsurprisingly, was devoted to the cultural heritage and the political performances of the Yorùbá in contemporary Nigeria. In extolling the significance of Yorùbá culture, the Aláàfin remarked that the vast hegemonic reach of the Old Yorùbá political machinery over large areas was essentially due to "Ọ̀yọ́ Yorùbá political thought," as well as the success in designing a model of administration which facilitated political ascendancy. While acknowledging the Nigerian postcolonial predicament, and the current clamor for the restructuring of the Nigerian polity in a way that will enable national integration, Ọba Lamidi Adeyẹmi argues that

> The Nigerian case calls for the intellectual input of the Yoruba to re-define the nature and pattern of relationship among the diverse and seemingly disparate ethnic groups or nations in Nigeria. Scholars should lead other stakeholders and segments of society to provide intellectual response to restructuring the Nigerian federation. The African academia and intelligentsia should not concede leadership in this enterprise to indolent politicians and self-appointed opinion leaders whose stock in trade is soapbox grandstanding and parliamentary rhetoric. Our claim to being educated will only be meaningful, if we acquire knowledge, internalise its values and appropriate wisdom therefrom for finding solutions to the twin problems of underdevelopment and state collapse (ibid.).

This special edition of the *Yorùbá Studies Review* is a conscious reaction to the Aláàfin's understanding of the Nigerian political and developmental impasse, and the role of Yorùbá scholarship in redeeming the situation. The fact that the special edition of the journal was already underway before the Aláàfin made his clarion call to Yorùbá scholars attests to the cogent necessity of pursuing the project.

Optimism has often been manifested toward the role of the Yorùbá Southwest in the political and socioeconomic redemption of the Nigerian state. In the 60s and the 70s, Chief Obafemi Awolowo not only fought for the Yorùbá cause, but was also prominent in the conduct of the Nigerian Civil War and the crisis that threatened the unity of the Nigerian state. In fact, there are many who gave him credit for the eventual resolution of the crisis in favor of a united Nigeria. And after the commencement of Nigeria's democratic

dispensation in 1999, several Yorùbá political figures have played one crucial role or another in the continuing attempt to rehabilitate Nigeria. From Pa Abraham Adesanya, Gani Adams, and the Oodua Peoples Congress (OPC), to Asiwaju Bola Ahmed Tinubu, and even the late M. K. O. Abiola, we have political gladiators whose contributions have been refracted through the prism of Nigeria's sociopolitical dynamics. In the collective struggle to enthrone democratic governance in Nigeria after the long night of military adventures since 1966, the name of Bola Ahmed Tinubu rings out as a central political actor in the establishment of democracy as well as, for instance, the displacement of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) from power. The PDP had often boasted being the largest political party in Africa with the mandate to rule Nigeria for the next sixty years. Unfortunately, its rule was characterized by mindboggling corruption and frustrating listlessness that turned the Nigerian state into a classic example of a neo-patrimonial state brilliantly interrogated by Richard Joseph's (1987) idea of prebendalism.[2] This is where the political acumen of Bola Tinubu came to play. He has been vilified as an opportunist and has equally been praised as a master strategist who works with the vision of reinventing the Nigerian state through oppositional politics that now has the good fortune of capturing power.[3]

Yet, Ọba Lamidi Adéyẹmí castigated "indolent politicians and self-appointed opinion leaders whose stock in trade is soapbox grandstanding and parliamentary rhetoric," and turned to scholars who are able to ransack the intellectual storehouse of Yorùbá culture to "acquire knowledge, internalize its values and appropriate wisdom therefrom for finding solutions to the twin problems of underdevelopment and state collapse." In this context, Yorùbá philosophy denotes the fundamental site of scholarship within which the task of understanding and reinventing the Nigerian state and societies can be achieved. The essential question is the following: what can Yorùbá philosophical intellection contribute to the attempt to understand the Nigerian condition and proffer a way forward?

In the Eleventh Thesis on Feuerbach, Marx famously delivered a vote of no confidence on philosophy and philosophers: "philosophers have hitherto only *interpreted* the world in various ways; the point is to *change* it." This statement has a lot of inflectional possibilities that merit mentioning. First, Marx's point could be taken as a rejection of philosophical analysis for something

2 The significance of this work to the understanding of Nigeria's politics, beyond the second republic, was recently excavated and interrogated by Adebanwi and Obadare (2013).

3 The All Progressive Congress (APC), the political party Bola Ahmed Tinubu helped gave birth to, has been in power now since 2015. And it seems the chicken of political corruption and listlessness in governance has come home to roost!

more radical and transformational. For instance, the latter part of the Third Thesis says, "the coincidence of the changing of circumstances and of human activity or self-change…can be conceived and rationally understood only as revolutionary practice." On the other hand, the statement could be taken as a critical challenge to philosophers to up the ante by moving from analysis to action. This interpretation would therefore take the eleventh thesis not as dismissal but as a challenge. Marx's critique of Feuerbach was actually intended to be a critique, by association, of German idealism. The challenge therefore, according to the Eight Thesis, is to understand the implication of saying that "all social life is essentially practical." But there is a third possibility that rejects Marx's unjustified disjuncture between philosophical interpretation and transformational action. This possibility implies seeing the Eleventh thesis not as an epitaph for philosophy, but rather as a critique of philosophy's internal trajectory that ought to lead from analysis to practice. Thus, while idealism may have its place in philosophy, there must also be a significant attention paid to a politically relevant analysis of human reality.

This special edition is not just meant to perform a one-sided programmatic appraisal that deploys Yorùbá philosophical insights to the stark realities of underdevelopment in postcolonial Nigeria, fifty-eight years after independence. On the contrary, it provides a double critique that allows those indigenous philosophical insights to confront Nigeria's exigent realities while at the same time opening up those ideas and insights to dynamic criticisms.

Redirecting Ethnic Philosophies as Social Practice

There is no doubt that philosophy everywhere owes a debt of responsibility to its place, defined as the context within which philosophy derives its geographical, cultural and intellectual contents, and its engagement dynamics. These places are the "intellectual ecologies" where "concepts find their vitality" (Janz 2017, 162). These are the concepts and ideas we live by, according to Staniland (1979). These concepts and ideas serve fundamentally not only reflective purposes but also existential ones. They are the intellectual means by which people (re)orient their lives and communities. A philosophy that qualifies as "thinking in place" is one that pays critical and interdisciplinary attention to its places and its spaces. Janz argues that

> …philosophy is not from nowhere. Philosophy always comes from a place, and that place is never completely covered over by abstraction. It is never irrelevant, even if it has been ignored. Not that there is some necessary causal connection or geographical determinism, as if by figuring out the place from which philosophy comes, we can encapsulate it, know it, and

> need not attend to its actual content. Place is a far more complex notion than what can be contained in geography. Philosophy is not reducible to place; there is no genetic fallacy or geographical determinism here. Philosophy remains a reflection on its place, geographically, culturally, disciplinarily, and intellectually (2009, 6).

Place is significant because it is tied to the human condition and the human experience. It is through the understanding of place that we are able to unravel the dynamics of self, objectivity, and agency that make us unique humans as well as connect us to other humans across cultures and experiences. Janz concludes that if it is true that place matters in philosophy, then "reflecting on the place(s) that philosophy finds itself in might tell us something crucial about its possibilities" (ibid.).

However, unravelling these possibilities requires undermining the welter of historical and ideological circumstances and obstacles that African philosophy has had to confront since its inauguration in the 1960s and 1970s. In fact, as Janz rightly observes, the fascination with, and insistence on, spatial and platial imperatives by African philosophers derive from a traumatized mentality that requires African philosophy to keep justifying its identity and relevance in the comity of world philosophies. But right within African philosophy itself is an internal philosophical dynamic that circumscribes its very identity as a philosophical enterprise. The famous, and quite unfortunate, debate between the universalists and particularists in African philosophy can be read as a struggle over the intellectual mapping of the cultural content and dynamics of philosophy in its ethnic form.

There is a sense in which "African philosophy" is essentially a conglomeration of ethnic philosophies. Or to put it more elegantly, a significant part of what we call African philosophy is a series of reflections on—and interrogation of—ethnic themes and concepts. This is to the extent that African philosophers deploy ethnic concepts, insights, and ideas to the resolution of the postcolonial African predicament. Yet, there is an anti-ethnophilosophy intellectual establishment—Hountondji, Mbembe, Osha, Appiah, etc.—arrayed against ethnic philosophy. In fact, Janz argues that in the attempt at reconciling the universal and the particular, the weight of the effort is usually in favor of the universal (ibid, 7). On the contrary, however, it seems to make sense to consider the place of philosophy as the particular, and then to see how the particular instantiates the universal. To take the argument further, I would suppose that in order to be able to excavate the possibilities inherent in the thinking about the place of philosophy, we need more interrogation of not only ethnic philosophies, but also their insights into current and contemporary issues and problems. One starting point is to see how such philosophies

enable concerted reflections on the complexities of social practices. What is a social practice? And how does it intersect the possibilities that ethnic philosophies promise? Or, more specifically, how do we project an understanding of practice that enables us to engage contemporary problems from the perspectives of cultural philosophies?

Horsthemke uses ethnic philosophy interchangeably with ethnophilosophy. Thus, according to him, ethnic philosophy "consists of folkloric traditions, legends, stories, and myths [that survive] in the postcolonial period in both oral and, importantly, written forms" (2017, 687). I have however characterized ethnic philosophy differently. As I have defined it elsewhere, Yorùbá philosophy, for instance, is the "philosophical discourse—traditional and contemporary—regarding assumptions, principles, worldviews, and attitudes that have been developed, interrogated, and refined over millennia" (Afolayan 2016, 265). The contemporary dimension of this philosophical discourse I divided into three interrelated parts. The first is the philosophical interests, by Yorùbá and non-Yorùbá philosophers,[4] in the traditional thought system of the Yorùbá. The second refers to engagement with modern postcolonial realities from the perspectives of the Yorùbá cultural and philosophical frameworks. The third part has to do with the contributions of Yorùbá professional philosophers to philosophical reflections within the different branches of philosophy. The advantage of my description is that it not only challenges the bound of philosophical reflection itself, but most importantly, it constitutes a critical trajectory between past and present in a way that enables a significant and critical connection between these ethnic philosophies and contemporary concerns. Ethnic philosophies open a unique opportunity for a temporal dialogue between past and present. However, this dialogue is not unilinear, only allowing the past to speak to the present. On the contrary, the present also lends a critical voice to how the past could be understood and its insights deployed for contemporary exigencies. Thus, through the perspectives we have on the past, we are better able to orient our contemporary knowledge and action through a more rigorous interrogation of our social practices and social formations. In this way, we have a sufficient justification for the assessment and deployment of the philosophical insights afforded by ethnophilosophical reason.

But, in a larger context, we are confronted critically by the possibilities of philosophy enlarging our understanding of social practice as a worldmaking and nation-building dynamics in Nigeria. How, for instance, can our attention

4 Sometimes, as this special edition demonstrates, "philosophers" becomes a rubric that constrains the philosophical contributions from those we will ordinarily call "non-philosophers." The question therefore is what happens to our label when "non-philosophers" turn in philosophically sound contributions?

to ethnic philosophies become the stepping stone towards a theory of social practices, especially as sites of identity, agency, knowledge, objectivity, and even resistance and power? How can ethnophilosophical reason, in other words, become the platform for the (re)configuration of social practice as the reason and context for action in Nigeria? Social practices emerge from the undeniable fact about human sociality, and the consequent imperative of social coordination that such sociality demands from us. If, according to Sally Haslanger, social practices "are patterns of behavior that enable us to coordinate due to learned skills and locally transmitted information in response to resources that are interpreted and shaped by shared cultural schemas/social meanings, and whose performances are 'mutually accountable' by reference to those meanings" (2017, 4), how do they constitute social agency and social intervention?

Haslanger provides a schema that allows us to explore the role of consciousness and consciousness-raising in the constitution of the critique that speaks to our socioeconomic and political conditions and predicament. Consciousness is consolidated in the face of a complex reality that resists us all the time. It becomes all the more critical if that reality comes with an existential anguish, like what confronts the average citizen in postcolonial Nigeria. And that social world is constituted by social processes, practices, institutions, and rules that form a specific reality which hierarchizes social relations. But, individuals are not lost in the oppressive grip of coercive social practices essentially because these practices, however oppressive, are always subject to the collective action of enactment and re-enactment (Haslanger 2013, 7). Social practices are infiltrated by human agency, as a matter of necessity. This makes for the persistent possibility of social change. It is then consciousness about the social practice—consciousness from the perspectives of those that the practices oppress—that serves a disruptive function, and raises our awareness to the fact that "[on the one hand,] sometimes we have to act differently in order to think differently. On the other hand,…[s]ometimes we have to think differently in order to act differently" (ibid).[5]

What MacKinnon calls the "lived knowing" of the women who live under oppression unravels hegemonic social practices and their inadequacies in readiness for a reordering or a reconstitution of their meanings. The essence of lived knowing is to offer an alternative mode of knowing or seeing that enables us to shift the schema of reference. In summary, according to Haslanger, "consciousness raising has an experiential element, an unmasking element,

5 Haslanger deploys these insights about social practice, consciousness raising and critique to the understanding of oppression in feminism. See Haslanger 2007, 2010, and 2013.

a contingency element, and a new paradigm element" (ibid, 8). We should however note that consciousness-raising does not always lead inevitably to liberation:

> If what's claimed for consciousness raising, as a method, is that it leads to knowledge and liberation, one might raise concerns about several of these points. Women are not always reliable authorities about their own experience: we are as subject to self-deception, wishful thinking, faulty generalization, and impoverished concepts as anyone; living under oppressive conditions makes self-understanding, if anything, harder. And it is unclear what it means to shift a "reference point for truth" or the "definition of reality as such." Moreover, simply knowing that things can be different and changing how we think now does not guarantee that the alternative ways envisioned are better or more just (ibid.).

Since the goal of consciousness-raising is the critique of ideology, I would think that this is exactly where philosophy makes an entry in the whole process of intervening in the reconstitution of social reality. But the current state of academic philosophy in Nigeria breaks down this process of liberatory knowledge that challenges hegemonic social practices.

In *Philosophy and National Development in Nigeria* (2018), I rigorously reiterated a fundamental point that the philosophy of a people is much more than, and often different from, the academic understanding of what philosophy is. In most cases, and especially in Nigeria, academic philosophizing often outstrips ethnic philosophies and its insights. There could be several reasons for this. I have identified three such critical circumstances that have hampered a serious and productive relationship between real life philosophy and academic philosophy, and their *placement* in Nigeria—

> Nigeria's political economy (how the socioeconomic state of postcolonial Nigeria constrains the Nigerian philosophers' mandate to reflect on their context), African philosophical theorizing (how the exigencies of Africa's continental predicament has taken the attention of Nigerian philosophers more than Nigeria's own predicament), and the Western epistemological trap (how Nigerian philosophers, by reason of their philosophical trainings, have to struggle with foreign philosophical ideas, paradigms, models and dynamics sometimes at the expense of indigenous philosophies) (ibid, 2).

Within the context of these three circumstances, Nigerian philosophy, if there is anything like that, becomes grossly inadequate in engaging with, and changing culture. I argue, *inter alia*, that

> Philosophizing in Nigeria does not automatically translate into doing a socially relevant philosophy that injects a socially conscious philosophizing into Nigeria's postcolonial condition. The paradox is that while it is that condition that defines the place of philosophy to life at least in Nigeria, the same condition equally constrains philosophy's meaning and relevance (ibid.).

The essays in this special edition could be seen as a cogent step forward by which Nigerian philosophy could become true to its context.

Philosophy and Nigerian Realities

The original motivation for this special edition derives from Segun Gbadegesin's *African Philosophy: Traditional Yorùbá Philosophy and Contemporary African Realities*. It is immediately obvious that the title of this special edition is a significant play on the title of the groundbreaking work. In that 1991 work, Gbadegesin provides two central beliefs that justify the volume:

> My position in this book has been greatly influenced by two central beliefs, derived from my own experience of the social, economic and cultural dimensions of life in Africa, and reinforced by years of active teaching and research in philosophy. First, I am convinced of the reasonableness of the belief that, if philosophy as an academic discipline is to mean anything to Africa in the present situation of its existence, it has to be made relevant to the realities that confront Africans. Though I have not argued directly for this view here, it represents, for me, a foundation upon which a lasting structure of an African philosophical tradition can be built. Second, from the vantage point of research in the areas of social and political philosophy and ethics, it has become clear to me that no one can ignore the importance of the cultural dimensions of philosophical reflections. Indeed, the relationship between the two is one of mutual influence. Culture influences philosophy by providing it with the basic materials for reflection, while philosophy influences culture by posing a critique, in various ways, of its foundation. This connection between philosophy and culture is not confined to modern philosophizing alone. I am convinced that if we look well enough, we will find it in all ages and all contexts. The denial of

> philosophical reflection to traditional Africans therefore appears to me to be a "modernist" bias without an adequate justification (1991, xi).

Gbadegesin's assertion about the state of academic philosophy outside of its rigorous engagement with the existential realities of humans, Africans, hits the nail right on the head. This is an incontrovertible argument. Philosophers can only become relevant to the extent that they are able to deploy their philosophical tools to the understanding of human concerns. However, what is arguable is the extent to which one can "approach African philosophy rewardingly by looking at the presuppositions and foundations of traditional philosophy as well as posing a critique of the foundations of our contemporary realities" (ibid.).

Let me explain. What Gbadegesin intended was for African philosophers to "get on with the positive task of reconstructing an authentic African philosophy which will be distinctive in the contributions it makes towards the resolution of the crisis of African existence" (ibid, xii). I think this is a not-so-good way of making a very good point. Rather, I suspect that the methodological direction of deploying the philosophical insights in traditional ethnic philosophy is misplaced. Generally, I think the deployment of the Yorùbá traditional philosophy, which constitutes the first part of Gbadegesin's book, becomes too diffused when situated within the broad category of "African" in the second part of the book (never mind the idyllic and impossible task of "reconstructing an *authentic* African philosophy"[6]). "Contemporary African Realities" addressed what I have called the "big abstracts" of African studies—those ideas that can be regarded as floating signifiers without any rooted concreteness in specific cultures or nationalities: development, religion, colonialism, politics, culture, and even "African" (see Afolayan 2018, 110–113).

The essays collected in this special edition of the *Yorùbá Studies Review* have no such pretension about commitment to the "African." On the contrary, they are united in their foregrounding of Nigeria's postcolonial existential troubles as the basis for the deployment of Yorùbá philosophical insights. And the result, as should be expected of any work of philosophy, is a rigorous conceptual and critical dynamic of philosophy speaking to the predicament while also interrogating its own assumptions in interrogating the circumstances. Philosophers should not take themselves for granted. In fact,

6 The term "authentic" reminds us of the fruitless philosophical effort of the ethnophilosophers dedicated to excavating African cultural practices untainted by alien accretions. An allusion to an "authentic African philosophy" seems to forget that African philosophy is so irreversibly entangled with so many other traditions as to make any reference to authenticity meaningless. See Adeshina Afolayan and Toyin Falola (eds. 2017, part II).

the deployment of philosophical skills is always an opportunity for philosophy to reexamine its assumptions about itself. And this becomes even more critical in the case of a philosophical analysis of the Yorùbá culture assuming some cultural and philosophical advantages that could help reinvent the Nigerian state and societies.

Segun Gbadegesin's essay, "Anchored in Justice: Yorùbá Philosophy and the Politics of a Diverse State," opens this volume with what he calls "a *narrative discourse* of the role that justice plays in Yoruba politics both internally, in relation to their fellow ethnic-nationals, and externally, in relation to other ethnic-nationalities in the Nigerian state." This, I think, is a significant way to commence for two reasons. The first is that there is a sense in which the nature of the Nigerian state is critical to the understanding of contemporary Nigerian realities that this edition is concerned with interrogating. In wondering about the significance of state formation in India, Rajeev Bhargava raises some queries whose poignancy speaks to how we should wonder about postcolonial states in Africa:

> Do they really help us to understand our life-world? Do they illuminate our social and political reality? Or, by forcing upon us a way of looking at ourselves that is fundamentally different from the manner in which we do or should view ourselves, do they instead obstruct a proper understanding of it? Do they have a normative significance and, if they do, what is it? (2005, 13)

Essentially, these questions are not simply about significance alone; they also help us illuminate the dynamics involved in encountering the state anywhere we find its manifestations and apparatuses. Adebanwi and Obadare further situate the cogent relevance of the Nigerian state within a Foucaultian reading:

> If the state is constituted as the ultimate power in society, how…do we understand the processes by which this power itself also constitutes, or forms, its subjects, providing the very conditions of the existence of the subjects and the trajectories of their desires and aspirations? If the state as the ultimate power forms its subjects, then the state is not merely what is opposed by elements, say in civil or political society, but strongly what they also depend on to authorize and actualize their existence (2010, 2).

When Nigerian citizens encounter Nigeria or are encountered by its rules and apparatuses, several social, economic, political, and infrastructural dynamics are unleashed that circumscribe the existence of Nigerians.

This takes us to the second reason why Gbadegesin's essay is an important starting point for this edition. The citizens' reactions to the legitimacy and illegitimacy of the state are founded on the state's capacity to adjudicate the critical issue involved in the distribution of resources. This is the justice issue. In political philosophy, the idea of justice is taken to be a core matter in the interrogation of the legitimacy of the state. A legitimate state is one that has the capacity to distribute benefits and burdens in a just manner to its citizens. The lack of justice therefore serves as an aggravation of the postcolonial predicaments for Nigerians. One dimension of this predicament is the fractional ethnic politics that circumscribe the hope of national integration since independence. Gbadegesin's objective in the essay therefore becomes clear. If the quest for justice is intrinsic to Yorùbá social dynamics, how did it operate amongst them, and how has it been demonstrated in their complex relationship with non-Yorùbá others within the Nigerian polity? Gbadegesin deploys both historical and philosophical analysis to triangulate the link between the excoriation of Òrúnmìlà, the Yorùbá god of wisdom, who unjustly treated Ìwà, his dutiful wife; the rejection of royal and colonial highhandedness at the historical Okeho; and Kúrunmí's rebellion against Aláàfin Àtìbà's unjust trampling of the tradition that required his eldest son to die with him (rather than succeed him as king, as Àtìbà desired[7]).

The Yorùbá sense of justice, Gbadegesin argues, is founded on the ideas of metaphysical equality and social reciprocity. His further claim is that this notion of justice has played a significant role in Nigeria's pre- and post-independence politics, especially with regard to democratic consolidation and federalism in Nigeria. It could be, however, that Gbadegesin underestimates the extent to which the Yorùbá sense of justice has been compromised by their encounter with the Nigerian state and its complex framework of socioeconomic and political injustices. Metaphysical equality, we can argue, could equally be the basis for negative and unjust practices.

In Badru's "Contemporary Nigeria and the Deficit of Deliberative Democracy," Lawuyi's "The Depersonalized as Vanishing Hero and Heroine in Yorùbá Moral Placards," Dada's "Aristotle and the Omolúwàbí Ethos," Salami's "Asùwàdà Principle and Inter-Ethnic Conflict in Nigeria," Olajide's "Demographics and the Irony of Existential Profiling in Yorùbá Belief," Omotoso's "Political Communication and Nigeria's Democratic Experiment," and Adepoju's "Adapting Yorùbá Epistemology in Educational Theory and Practice in Nigeria," we have various philosophical attempts at engaging with the varied dynamics of Nigerian postcolonial realities. This ranges from ethnic tensions

7 It did not occur to Kúrunmí that Ògún's sense of justice could itself be counted upon to undermine a tradition that is unjust!

and conflict, population explosion, public (im)morality, godfatherism, the moral basis of political agency, and a glaring deliberative deficit in democratic processes. Badru attempts to derive a redemptive principle of *agbájọ ọwọ́* as a collegial framework for rehabilitating the deliberative component of Nigerian democracy that grossly undermined the essence of participation that is the core of democracy itself. He argues: "A fundamental deficit of democratic practice in contemporary Nigeria, I argue, is that electoral choices/candidates are largely disconnected with the spirit of vibrant deliberation/consideration on the part of the Nigerian *demos*. Rather, electoral choices/candidates are largely foisted on the people by a few influential members of the contesting political parties." *Agbájọ Ọwọ́*, a significant dimension of the *ọmọlúwàbí* persona, raises epistemic, social, moral, political, and ontological possibilities that could elevate the practice of democracy in Nigeria.

Omotoso adds a good complement to the deliberative element required to enhance Nigeria's democratic experiment. In her essay, political communication, or its critical absence, plays a huge role in aggravating not only the tensions involved in the national integration process, but also the miscommunication and doublespeak that undermine the social contract between Nigerians and the Nigerian government. Omotoso invites us to consider not only the deployment of various items in the traditional political communication of the Yorùbá, especially with regards to the use of *òwe*, *àrokò* and *ẹsẹ ifá*, but also the significance of traditional political communication dynamics in Yorùbáland for reorienting the compromised influence of the media in Nigeria's democratic dispensation. For instance, Omotoso notes the mediating role of the media in the traditional Yorùbá society through the town criers. She contends that "Although town criers/gong men were not accorded so much regard by the ruling class, citizens respected town criers and view them as the face of leadership. Remarkably, town criers had the moral capital to not only organize and re-organize messages, but also a moral duty not to distort or misinform citizens." However, according to her, "…unlike coded message bearers who often await and report responses of coded messages, town criers' roles in policom [political communication] was characterized by a one-way communication in which they are not permitted to bring back publics' views to leaders." What does this tell us about the role of the media as a component of "representative" political system in the indigenous Yorùbá society? What gave voice to the people's political aspirations apart from themselves, if the town criers were a one-way traffic? Omotoso did not pursue this line of inquiry in her essay, but it is worth pursuing as a means of shedding light on the power play involved in the dynamics of the social contract within the traditional Yorùbá society.

Much like Omotoso, Yunusa Salami explores the deep implications of the Yorùbá philosophical insights, but this time, what is available in the Àyájó Asùwàdà, made famous by Akinsola Akiwowo. In *Àjọbí and Àjọgbé* (1983), Akiwowo mined the depth of the Yorùbá incantatory poem (*àyájọ́*) as the basis for the understanding of human sociation and social harmony as the Yorùbá see it. Olódùmarè created everything in the universe as a unit of individuality, but ensured that their survival hinges on their àsùwà or bondedness into a harmonious whole:

> It was with the principle of àsùwà that the Heavens were established
> It was with the principle of àsùwà that the Earth was created
> In àsùwà forms all things descended upon the earth activated by purpose
> Complete and actuated for a purpose was ìwa at its first emanations
> It was by àsùwà the Orí was formed in order to be the Father of all
> …
> All goodness together formed an àsùwà
> When the assembly of hairs was complete
> They took over the head

According to Akiwowo, there is an ontological perspective, found in Odù Ìrosùn-Wòrì, which provides a humanist understanding of the founding of the human society. Akiwowo calls this perspective the "Orunmilaist view of society." According to this view, when Odùduwà's children gathered, it was èni*yàn* (human) that was chosen to convey goodness into the world. And this goodness, according to the *odù*, include complete knowledge, a state of undiminished happiness, harmonious existence devoid of fears of all types, hostilities, illnesses and diseases, poverty, and wants. While this may sound utopic, Akiwowo contends that the Orunmilaist humanist view "is an achievable state toward which a society must press the *agbára in*ú (inner will), *ìwà-rere* (beneficial comportment) and *ọgbọ́n* (insights derived from daily experience) of its people…" (1983, 12). There is a form of aggregation that is basic to all creature; they all *sùwàdà* (come together for the sake of coexistence). The àsùwà therefore only references the most basic and minimal of survivalist bonding. But the *asùwàdà* denotes a more purposive social aggregation which derives from "the free-willed response of one individual to another" (ibid, 16). The human society is therefore properly called the *asùwàdà èniyàn*.

The two primordial forms of the *asùwàdà èniyàn*, according to Akiwowo, are the *àjọbí* (consanguinity) and *àjọgbé* (co-residentship/cohabitation). From the Orunmilaist framework, there is the assumption that all human beings emerge from one primordial *alájọbí*. But despite this metaphysical assertion of universal lineal kinship, the bond of *alájọbí* is not immune to debilitation.

Several human acts and events have served as such a weakening and destruction of the *alájọbí* bond. In Africa, slavery and colonialism constitute such severing dynamics. The new forms of sociality therefore emerged and served as the basis of *àjọgbé*. This turned the *asùwàdà èniyàn* into a fragile relational framework that is afflicted by all forms of conflicts. This is the case with postcolonial Nigeria.

Salami brilliantly takes this *asùwàdà* principle forward as a significant philosophical template for injecting some sort of sanity into the ethnic tensions that define Nigeria's postcolonial predicament where everything is taken through the ethnic and religious prism, and where violence looms constantly on the horizon. The functionality of the *asùwàdà* principle of sociation becomes meaningful within the understanding of Nigeria as a postcolonial state in search of national integration that wields a solid civic nationality out of an intransigent ethnic nationality. According to Salami, "if, as human beings, we are *da* (created) to be àsùwà (beings who can only successfully as part of a human group with a purpose), then, with the complementary ideas of *alájọbí*, *alájọgbé*, and *ìfọgbọ́ntáyéṣe*, ethnic pluralism should not necessarily lead to ethnic antagonism or *conflict*." This is a sound deduction. Ethnic pluralism only leads to ethnicity and ethnic conflict because ethnic identities must necessarily relate within the context of a political community that is not always moved by the imperatives of justice, to allude back to Gbadegesin's essay. Within this competitive context, ethnic identities automatically raise the urgency of an umbrella national identity that could facilitate the transformation of the multiple ethnicities into a unified and united force for national development. National integration becomes problematic, according to Salami, "because citizens are usually classified as belonging to one ethnic group or the other and they seem to owe allegiance and loyalties toward the ethnic groups to which they belong. Since Nigeria is made up of different ethnic groups, which emphasise their ethnic nationalities, it seems problematic to talk of an identity in such a nation that is ethno-culturally pluralistic."

But something conceptual seems critically amiss in this essay. Salami rightly notes that "Nigeria is a hotchpotch of different ethnic nationalities. The people usually referred to as Nigerians are in different geo-political settings with their multifarious experiences about the world." "Hotchpotch" aptly serves as the lexical signifier of the political reality of ethnic dissonance in Nigeria. It is what makes national identity deeply problematic. Yet, Salami continues to insist in the essay that Nigeria is a *nation* rather than a *multinational* state. If we assume, as Salami does, that Nigeria is already a nation, then what use do we have again for the *asùwàdà* principle? The essay's critical intervention must therefore turn on the conceptual understanding of what makes a "hotchpotch of different ethnic nationalities" a nation, rather than

just a multinational state. Is the multinational state necessarily a nation-state? Is the concept of a "state" interchangeable with that of a "nation"?

While Salami employs the concept of *alájọbí* and *àjọgbé* as categories of co-existence in a state, it seems more useful to see the two concepts as qualitative forms of existing. To exist merely in cohabitation (*àjọgbé*) would seem to lead to more fractious social relations than when the cohabitation is founded on deeper ties, say, of blood or ancestry (consanguinity or *àjọbí*). It seems therefore more logical to see how *àjọbí* is what is lost in a multinational state, and why it is better suited to the idea of a nation wielded together by a form of belonging that goes beyond *àjọgbé*, or mere coexistence. Willy nilly, we land right back in the conceptual distinction between a (multinational) state and a nation (-state).

Dada's interest lies in a fundamental relationship between public morality and democratic consolidation in Nigeria. He provides a candid conceptual assessment of the relationship between the two:

> The significance of public morality lies in its ensuring that a leader's moral dynamics is sufficiently firm and commendable as to be suitable for the critical task of holding public office. The idea of public morality intersects that of democratic governance at the point of making sure that strong institutions are not wilfully undermined by degenerate politicians and other public office holders. Democratic governance is founded on strong institutions which are put in place to facilitate the mutually empowering relationship between the government and the governed. Political power, if not properly circumscribed, undermines the public good through the political manoeuvres of greedy and unscrupulous public officials and politicians. It is at this point that public policies become side-tracked in a way that benefits the representatives rather than, and even at the expense of, the represented.

This essay further unpacks Badru's worries about godfatherism and the deficit of deliberative democracy in Nigeria. But while Badru juggles with *àgbájọ ọwọ́* as a critical core of what it means to be an *ọmọlúwàbí*, Dada takes the *ọmọlúwàbí* moral dynamics further by weighing its relevance vis-à-vis Aristotle's virtue ethics that demonstrates how a virtuous character habituation can enable us think more about how morality serves as the end (*telos*) of politics in Aristotle's philosophical framework. In Aristotle's conjuncture of ethics and morality, according to Dada, "the task of politics is much more than the acquisition of political power or even the provision of what is necessary for the life of the community. The wellbeing of the community is not confined to economic security and internal and external peace. On the contrary, the

primary task of politics is to care for the citizens' acquisition of knowledge and their moral conditioning. Politics then becomes an application at a larger scale of what ethics tries to do at the individual level—institute and teach action that will bring happiness."

The idea of character habituation links Aristotle's concept of virtue to the Yorùbá understanding of an *ọmọlúwàbí*. And both, Dada argues, provide the template for the character requirement that could underscore the centrality of public morality to Nigeria's democratic experiment. The treatment of what Dada calls the "Ọmọlúwàbí ethos" produces a sinking feeling that the *ọmọlúwàbí* may just be a receding moral horizon which may be difficult for anyone, except angels, to achieve. This discourse about the analytical acceptability of the concept of the *ọmọlúwàbí* is one of the central arguments that Lawuyi deployed in his scintillating effort at injecting the idea of moral placards into our collective perception of not only Yorùbá heroes and heroines, but also Nigeria's national political figures. Lawuyi's essay is grounded on the philosophical implications of the Yorùbá proverb:

> *Ọjọ́ a bá kú là ń dère, èèyàn ò sunwọ̀n láàyè*
> (It is on the day one dies that one becomes an idol; no one is appreciated when alive) (Owomoyela 2005, 391).

This proverb, Lawuyi contends, enables us to attend to the dynamic logic of moral placards in Yorùbá society. In other words, this society "permits the co-existence and co-extensiveness of individual and public moral placards, the latter is not an entirely closed system, and so an otherwise depersonalized person can later become a hero/deity/ heroine. Basically, public moral placard can be revised to accommodate new values, give rise to new class of people and establish for them an enviable status." Thus, in Lawuyi's critical interrogation, *ìwà* and *ọmọlúwàbí* are both subjected to a new interpretation as moral placards that should be understood "in the evaluative-experiential sense [as signposting] the process of self/collective construction and reconstruction of morality in new direction."

If we are to revisit Gbadegesin's essay once again, the dynamics that led the Yorùbá to reject unjust acts, even from their gods and goddesses, are similar to what made them reject (or depersonalize) someone only to later accept such a person again as a hero or heroine. Depersonalization takes its root from the infringement of a moral code, "attributed to a defective self-constitution. The individual can be called *aláṣeju* (one prone to the extreme of thoughts and actions), *aláṣeṣẹ́* (one inclined to doing things that would violate public moral code to a point of embarrassment), *aláìnítìjú* (the individual that has no shame) or even *ẹranko* (animalistic), when doing the unimaginable, possibly

incomprehensible things outside cultural dictates." Ṣàngó, the Yorùbá god of thunder, provides a powerful example of the dynamics of the moral placard in Yorùbá ethical interpretation. He was an outsider to the extant moral placard, which he violated and was forced to commit suicide as a depersonalized being. But he was later deified. This understanding challenges us into rethinking the idea of *ọmọlúwàbí* not, Lawuyi insists, as "fixed by destiny or by biology, or that it is an imaginary that is left for the individual to compose. *Ọmọlúàbí* is recommended to each person as moral code, as he/she grapples with the existence dictated by his personhood." For Lawuyi, *ọmọlúwàbí* in the Yorùbá cultural studies literature is often taken as an "archetypal type" that does not change, and to which all must conform. But, Lawuyi counters, one could hardly imagine where such an individual might be found. How then do we begin to reinterpret the concept of *ọmọlúwàbí* in the light of the experience of depersonalization in Yorùbá cultural dynamics? Lawuyi has a tantalizing answer:

> [T]the issue of *ọmọlúàbí*, as character, can be approached from a statistical paradigm of set and sub-sets, which is itself an attempt to make sense of the verb phrase, "bi" in the coinage "*ọmọlúàbí*", which stands for creativity or act of bringing things about. The verb clearly puts the concept, ì*wà*, in the context of evaluative, progressive human relations, and emphasized the individual power to act, positively or negatively in a situation. What can birth ìwà, as being, and what can ìwà birth, as behavior, are two faces of the same coin. But as we have seen above, ìwà can bring repugnant or destructive things/acts; and it can be debased; which is how we think Yoruba actually want to look at the concept, *ọmọlúàbí*. With them there must be a positive evaluation; that is invariably determined by principles of the subsets on which the set is based as a descriptive and evaluative notion.

To set up a similar postcolonial moral placard that defines a set of heroes and heroines for Nigeria requires, according to Lawuyi, navigating three standards: (a) the sense of being different and acting within that context of difference, (b) the sense of self-sacrifice for a cause, and (c) a resurrection effect which brings the dead back to life and into the reckoning of society. In Nigeria's political dynamics, Lawuyi argues that only two personalities would qualify especially for the resurrection effect: Colonel Adekunle Fajuyi and the late M. K. O. Abiola. This should not be a surprising conclusion, given that our unphilosophical reflections about Nigeria's political elites already led us to this conclusion.

Between Michael Afolayan and Oluwatoyin Vincent Adepoju, we have a critical and deeply philosophical angst about the state of educational

development in Nigeria. Afolayan takes on Nigerian youth culture at the critical intersection of sociology, education, and Yorùbá cultural values. His objective is to explore the linguistic and philosophical implications of the Yorùbá proverb *ọmọ tí a kò kọ́ ni yóò gbé ilé ti a kọ́ ta* (the child that is not taught will eventually sell the house that is built). How does this proverb enable us to unravel an "indigenous epistemology [that serves] as a note of caution on Yorùbá education and its sociology of filial responsibilities"? For him, "the multi-layered, multi-semantic concept '*kọ́*'" is essentially "a meta-philosophical building block":

> This is because for the Yorùbá, the totality of the life experience of an individual is an unbreakable continuum that includes teaching, being taught, learning, building, being built, and anchoring one's self in the supra-sociological school of life. In this school, therefore, knowledge is taught, learned, built, and anchored on the human mind. This is a culturally choreographed social cycle that makes an individual whole and explains why the Yorùbá would always say that a child left untaught (*ọmọ tí a kò kọ́*) or untrained, or who refuses to be taught or trained or be anchored on, and to, the tutelage of life or learned from, or built into, the school of life would eventually sell off the house (a social and philosophical edifice) that is built.

In essence, the concept of "*kọ́*" enables us to focus critical attention away from a materialistic lifestyle, at both the individual and national levels, to a more intense investment in human capital for more productive endeavors.

Today's Nigerian youth have found themselves within modernizing dynamics that are devoid of the careful and critical attention given to communal and cultural components of training and education. One significant point of absence is the parents' abdication of responsibility that, for instance, ensures the transference of cultural education from themselves to their children. And since the child stands as the crucial focus in a tripod of support that include the parents, the community and the government, the responsibility of the government or its absence must also be factored into why Nigeria's youth culture can barely be counted upon as the solid basis for nation building efforts in Nigeria.

Adepoju takes us into a deeper and more philosophical reflection on the epistemological implication of a Yorùbá philosophy of perception for educational development in Nigeria. For Adepoju, "In a country torn between the possibility of self-transcendence in the name of the greater good and self-focus at the expense of the larger whole, Yorùbá philosophy's emphasis on values that rise above the pervasive and unavoidable degenerative character of mortality could inspire an appreciation of the need to live for principles that

surpass immediate and self-centered gratification." Drawing extensively from the works of Rowland Abiodun's and Babatunde Lawal's philosophical aesthetics, with complementary insights and arguments from Igbo cosmology and Zulu epistemology, Adepoju, with philosophical finesse, explores how a philosophy of perception grounded in Yorùbá aesthetics can enable us to outline a creative sensibility "through the cultivation of the full range of human faculties, from the ratiocinative to the supra-rational. This theory may be interpreted to indicate an emphasis on the senses as the primary platform through which knowledge is gained. From this foundation, greater degrees of penetration into the possibilities of the phenomena in question may be reached through a perceptual continuum ranging from critical thought to imagination, intuition, extra-sensory perception and witchcraft," as valid categories of knowledge. The larger objective is to see how such a philosophically grounded creativity could be deployed towards meeting the challenge of development through human capital and entrepreneurial investment.

Thus, from a masterly excavation of the metaphysical trajectory from *ojú òde* (biological eyes) to *ojú inú* (inner eye), and from *orí òde* (biological head) and *orí inú* (the inner head), Adepoju surmises that

> …the movement from *ojú òde* to *ojú inú*, from basic perception to entry into ontological depth, is ultimately grounded in a movement from *orí òde*, the biological identity represented by the human head to *orí inú*, the immaterial essence of self that integrates ultimate potential in relation to ultimate being. The *orí òde/orí inú* matrix may thus be understood as superordinate categories of human being and becoming, the framework within all which all other penetrative progressions, all motion from *ojú òde* to *ojú inú* take place, a breadth of understanding that is a central goal of education as a means of facilitating the cultivation of human potential in relation to the entire stream of living and its expression in engagements with particular bodies of knowledge and the demonstration of skill in use of distinctive forms of knowing.

All this demonstrates a unique understanding of education and knowledge as a dynamic template for the cross-fertilization of ideas and insights and creativity that enables learning from a lower "prescriptive" level to a higher "autonomous" level.

In Wale Olajide's essay, we find a rather startling and provocative existential profiling of Yorùbá procreative proclivity and the abject failure of the Nigerian government to curb the galloping population explosion that has further undermined Nigeria's chances of national development. In simple terms, unchecked and reckless procreation portends a demographic disaster for Nigeria.

And for Olajide, one way to come to terms with this incidence is to interrogate the existential consequences behind the largely illogical urge to bring children into a world that is absurd, empty, and meaningless, all three themselves existential themes coalescing in our understanding of Nigeria's postcolonial context. For Olajide, procreative acts must be subjected not only to rational deliberations but also to policy intervention from government. This is because "procreation goes beyond merely having the enabling biological instruments. It also certainly goes beyond cultural dictates and the social institution of marriage…. Once it is granted that procreation is a deliberate choice action it means that it is executed with the rational processes of thinking and reasoning, of deciding and choosing. No aspect of this, as long as humans remain rational, should therefore be blind, jaundiced or arbitrary."

No one in existence ever agreed to be born. This is because the act of procreation, that of bringing someone else into the world, is solely the preserve of the man and woman who made the decision, rational or irrational, to bring a baby into the world. Olajide contends that this procreative act is essentially a selfish one for which the agents should never hope to receive appreciation or gratitude. In fact, they rather ought to apologize for cruelly and recklessly bringing a baby into the world. This, for him, is essentially a disservice that has been done to the hapless baby. To take the argument further, and contrary to those who insist that being born is a gift, Olajide argues that all births constitute harm to the baby that is born:

> This is partly because whatever fate awaits the new born baby, be it pleasant or cruel, much of it would be influenced and determined by the environment into which he/she is born. Imagine the children born into conflict, raised in conflict, and who eventually, with no other possible living experience, die in it. Some still are born of parents fleeing from war torn regions only to live and die in refugee camps, severely ravaged by acute malnutrition and severe ill-health. Even in countries where some semblance of subsistence seems to exist, poor governance, deplorable infrastructures, abject underdevelopment, and derelict leadership postures often conspire and make existential flourishing simply hopeless.

To borrow a Heidegger's thought, when a human is born, he or she is immediately ready to die. But the trajectory from life to death is filled with all manner of existential horrors and tragedies that babies might likely have declined if there had been an occasion to ask them whether or not they wanted to be born. It therefore becomes worse because these newborns were not brought into the world for their own sake. Olajide contends that being born is essentially bad luck!

When applied to the Yorùbá procreative capacity in Nigeria, Olajide deploys both ends of Yorùbá philosophical wisdom about child bearing and child rearing to make the genuine point that an unchecked procreative license in Nigeria is a looming disaster for the Nigerian state. Of course, there are Yorùbá proverbs that laud the great cultural advantages of having children for social and ontological reasons. But the Yorùbá, being the pragmatic people they are, also recognize the immense senseless recklessness of procreating just for the sake of procreating. One fundamental demographic question raised by Olajide's essay is: is Nigeria densely populated or overpopulated? Any answer to this question still does not remove the danger of a population explosion which scholars like Paul Ehrlich have warned us about. In *The Population Bomb* (1968), the biologist argues that the world faces an overpopulation problem that is not just the result of the rapid growth rate of the underdeveloped countries like Nigeria, as overdeveloped countries also face the same overpopulation dilemma. Overpopulation is the consequence of birth rates exceeding death rates, and there are dwindling resources to sustain the growth rate. Ehrlich's solution, the source of the immense controversy generated by his notorious book, is simply that we must either find a way to reduce birth rates or increase death rates. Olajide chooses the former. He proposes a government intervention that regulates who can marry. This is because "Marriage ought not, with the benefit of existential hindsight, be an all comers game that is regulated by social expectations, religious injunctions, cultural imperatives." But then, this can only work if the federal government itself gives attention and political will to its own population policy, which lies unattended to, fourteen years after the last update was done in 2004.

The beauty of Bewaji's contribution to this special edition lies in his grasp of the value orientation attached to the relationship between the environment and a people's wellbeing. The essay enunciates what he calls a "Yorùbá ecosophy," derived at the critical juncture of Yorùbá ontology, epistemology, and axiology, and contrasted with the Judeo-Christian environmental anthropomorphism and its instrumental understanding of the non-human environment. Bewaji's conclusion is simple: "the Yorùbá value system is by far more advanced in being more eco-respecting, eco-friendly and geared toward sustainable human habitation in a world in which he/she constitutes one small fraction of sentience." The Yorùbá have an encompassing understanding of the environment, which is taken as "the aggregate of surrounding beings, things, conditions, or influences." In fact, the Yorùbá creation story shuns the creation-by-divine-fiat that is the core of Judeo-Christianity. On the contrary, the Yorùbá narrative of the origin of the universe appeals to different agencies: "the agency of Olódùmarè, the Supreme Being; those of the divinities; those of the animals; the contribution of the plants and all things in nature;

the way in which indigenous knowledge systems are generated; the position of all categories of humans—young, old, women, men, leaders, followers, abled, challenged, etc.—all conduce to a systemic appreciation of what constitute well-being of all beings." The inclusion of humans in the creation endeavor already implies a different dynamics. In other words, the Yorùbá ecosophy already takes a route that is not anthropomorphic. Rather, humans are immediately drawn into a more empathetic relationship with the non-human environment in a way that recognizes its intrinsic values. This appreciation of mutual survival, Bewaji argues, makes the Yorùbá environmental philosophy a conducive one that Nigeria can adopt as the basis of its environmental policy, which is presently in the grip of competing ontologies and incompatible axiologies.

Omotade Adegbindin's definitive essay takes on another dimension of the Nigerian postcolonial reality that is often lower down the ladder of development priorities. This is the disability issue. It should be immediately clear to all that Nigeria has a disability problem arising from its national disregard for the over twenty-two million Nigerians living with disabilities. The same argument for considering women as development partners can also be adduced for those living with disability. Unfortunately, the infrastructural deficit facing Nigeria affects them the most. Most depend on families and friends for assistance since they are practically grounded by bad highways and unfriendly physical infrastructures. This is in addition to the normalized ubiquitous stigmatization as well as the fact that they are discriminated against even when they possess what qualifies them for employment. The Disability Bill in Nigeria still remains mired in legislative technicalities.

Adegbindin supplies a philosophical reflection that is missing in most social science literature on the subject matter. In fact, his interrogation has the objective of recommending an alternative in Yorùbá cosmology/ontology that could serve as the basis of undermining the discrimination and stigmatization attached to disability, especially in Nigeria. The concept of *ẹni-òòṣà* (the companions of the gods) favors an inclusive perception of all humans in a way that undercuts the discrimination against those with disabilities. Adegbindin's extensive and careful interrogation of the extant literature in disability studies enabled him to set aside the readings that see disability either as biological pathology or as socio-cultural construction: "While the former is essentialist in rendering disability as a fixed condition and as an individual problem to be confronted with medical intervention, the latter identifies it as a social problem that requires social intervention. This intransigent relationship between the two models has led, especially, the advocates of the social model to articulate the means of untangling the causal relationship between impairment and disability." However, Adegbindin argues that both models have unwittingly

boxed themselves into a tight theoretical corner based on the incompatibility of the two models, and their intransigence on the relationship between impairment and disability.

The Yorùbá understanding of disabilities, according to him, "goes beyond the realm of human beings to involving the active participation of Yorùbá deities, especially Òrìṣà-ńlá or Ọbàtálá, a Yorùbá god of creation." In the Yorùbá pantheon, Òrìṣà-ńlá or Ọbàtálá (the Lord of the White Cloth) is the arch-divinity. Ọbàtálá is one of the three deities that have always co-existed with Olódùmarè in the cosmological order. The others are Èṣù and Ifá. In fact, the relationship of these three to Olódùmarè is a complex theological one. According to Abimbola (2006, 59–61), one could either understand the Yorùbá cosmological order in terms of existential or functional hierarchy. Since Olódùmarè, Ifá, Èṣù, and Obàtálá have always co-existed, they occupy the first level in the cosmos. They are followed, at the second level, by other divinities (*òrìṣà*), the anti-gods (*ajogun*), and the witches (*àjẹ́*). We have the humans as well as the animals and plants at third and fourth level, respectively.

However, in terms of functional hierarchy, Olódùmarè stands as the first with regard to political and administrative responsibilities of the cosmos. But, Abimbola contends, "[i]f the function we are interested in is that of the creation of the corporeal forms of physical entities, Ifá poems make it quite clear that Ọbàtálá is supreme to Olódùmarè. In issues of policing, morality and punishment, Èṣù…is supreme" (ibid, 61). Like Olódùmarè, Ọbàtálá is often regarded as being gender neutral. This, together with the deity's preference for white objects, makes it easy to read the arch-divinity as one that abjures partiality and discrimination, and takes all humanity—able and disabled—as one. As part of its function of creation and corporeality, Ọbàtálá also molds deformed bodies. Adegbindin rejects one mythic narrative which takes deformity as Obàtálá's means of punishing those who have defaulted. On the contrary, according to another mythic narrative, deformed physical bodies are testaments to Obàtálá's creative ingenuity. While the first narrative reinforces the thorny normality/abnormality distinction, the second enables us, claims Adegbindin, to dissolve this distinction, and to appreciate Ọbàtálá's pluralist understanding of what is normal. In other words, rather than see Obàtálá as molding "deformed" individuals, Adegbindin contends that we should rather see the deity as molding "*aesthetically* differing human forms according to his own fancy and to communicate his idea of normalcy in material terms." The implications of this for not only disability studies but also for policy in a context like Nigeria are profound. In fact, again to revisit Gbadegesin's essay, the *ẹni-òòṣà* philosophy provides a just template for dealing with those who are physically handicapped within an underdeveloped context like Nigeria.

The four other essays in this special edition are theoretically creative and intellectually stimulating attempts to extend the boundary of Yorùbá philosophy. In "*I am hated, therefore I am*: The Enemy in Yorùbá Imaginary," Abimbola Adelakun adroitly explores the consequences of the "enemy imaginary" for social relations and the understanding of what she calls "creative agency" among the Yorùbá of southwest Nigeria. Parodying Descartes' cogito formulation—I think, therefore I am—Adelakun's "I am hated, therefore I am" brilliantly relates how the enemy rhetoric in Yorùbáland forms a rich subtext for the constitution of identity and agency. She argues that

> …the very imagination—and perhaps, the reality—of having an enemy is an integral part of self-making, self-definition, and self-perception for the Yorùbá people. The ways they image their enemy, and use language as means of framing the actions and the schemes of those enemies, gives the supposed enemy—an intangible entity—a material texture that also makes them conquerable. The omnipresent enemy, in Yorùbá cosmology, is not always either readily identifiable or embodied, and thus people use language and imagination to turn that enemy into a being. While formulating the image of the enemy or enemies that are united in hatred against them, they also end up generating an enhanced image of themselves, which is principally because they conceive the enemy in relation to themselves.

The challenge of this brilliant paper, unattended by the author, is what implications this friend-enemy dynamic holds for social and ethnic relations in a plural Nigeria. It would have been instructive to, following Carl Schmitt, outline how this "enemy imaginary" could serve as a foundation for understanding the "friend-enemy" dynamics that Schmitt considers to be the essence of the political. Schmitt's (2007) concept of the political enables us to investigate (a) the distinction between "us" and "them" that grounds ethnic tension in a political context like Nigeria, (b) the constant possibility of violence in group conflicts around scarce resources, (c) the existential fallouts of such violence and conflicts if they were to break out, and (d) how other distinctions in the society—religious, economic, linguistic—can degenerate into the political. Schmitt's idea of the political would have served as the appropriate mean by which the Yorùbá "enemy imaginary" could interrogate the ethnic relation of the Yorùbá with other ethnic groups in Nigeria, and especially in the light of Gbadegesin's contention about the significance of the concept of justice in the Yoruba imaginary. How then should we relate the "enemy" imaginary with the Yoruba conception of justice?

Olayinka Oyeleye pursues a provocative interrogation of the Yorùbá moral dictum—*ìwà l'ẹ̀wà* (character is beauty)—as the starting point for

inaugurating a Yorùbá feminist ethics. Her angst derives from the implication of the semantic trajectory from *ìwà l'ẹwà* (character is beauty) to *ìwà l'ẹwà obìnrin* ("[good moral] character is a woman's beauty"). Her question borders on how the Yorùbá understanding of character, and especially the idea of the *ọmọlúàbí*, constitutes a template for female subordination. Through a brilliant narrative strategy, Oyeleye critically explores the philosophical and moral subtexts attached to issues of adultery, cultural transgression, the ontology of the fetus, moral semantics, rights and duties, aesthetics, etc. She deploys Yorùbá proverbs as subversive elements to ground her claim that what she calls gendered-relative morality (GRM) points at a Yorùbá cultural bias against women. The depth of that bias, according to her, suggests that women may in fact not be intended referents for the concept of *ọmọlúàbí*. Oyelele's essay, to reiterate Haslanger's elements of consciousness raising, has provided us with both an experiential and unmasking elements that seek to subvert a dimension of Yorùbá ethical thinking.

The last essay in this special edition is Babalola Balogun's "A Sartrean Approach to *ayé ṣíṣe* in Yoruba Existentialism." This is an exploratory essay that interestingly seeks to map Yorùbá existential thought to Sartre's existentialism. Balogun unravels the philosophical meaning of *ṣíṣe ayé* (literally, doing the world) and *gbígbé ayé* (living in the world) as the juncture for understanding the ideas of freedom, authenticity/inauthenticity, meaningfulness, temporality, finality, etc. Balogun contends that authentic existence derives from an active sense of *ṣíṣe ayé*. This essay has the potentials of not only contributing meaningfully to the understanding of existential thought in Yorùbá philosophy, but also further broadening our understanding of Sartre's existentialist contributions.

To conclude, I am compelled to revisit Haslanger's pessimism about the possible trajectory that could be expected from consciousness-raising to liberation, especially for those who are oppressed. According to her,

> If what's claimed for consciousness raising, as a method, is that it leads to knowledge and liberation, one might raise concerns about several of these points. Women are not always reliable authorities about their own experience: we are as subject to self-deception, wishful thinking, faulty generalization, and impoverished concepts as anyone; living under oppressive conditions makes self-understanding, if anything, harder. And it is unclear what it means to shift a "reference point for truth" or the "definition of reality as such." Moreover, simply knowing that things can be different and changing how we think now does not guarantee that the alternative ways envisioned are better or more just (2013, 8).

While this may be a realistic pessimism, it ought not to deter us from consciousness-raising in the first place. This is because liberatory knowledge that stands between this awareness and liberation constitutes a revolutionary standpoint that is not often achieved.

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