

African Musical Aesthetics

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**CAMBRIDGE
SCHOLARS**

P U B L I S H I N G

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by John Murungi

This book first published 2011

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

12 Back Chapman Street, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2XX, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN (10): 1-4438-2927-7, ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-2927-4

An African musician is a man or a woman of the people. It is from the people that he or she derives his or her Africanness and from whom he or she derives his or her musicality. In isolation from the people, he or she is not what he or she is, and is unintelligible. African musicality is the key to what he or she is.

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INTRODUCTION

AFRICAN MUSICAL AESTHETICS: PHILOSOPHICAL INTRODUCTION

The first thing that man heard after he came into being was music. When he opened his eyes he looked around to see what he had heard, and saw nothing. All his other senses directed him to nothing. Thus, he came to believe that nothing was the source of music and the source of everything else.

—An African myth of creation

To open this work with nothing as a background is to run the risk of having it devoured by nothing. Running the risk, however, is not to be always interpreted negatively. It can be a condition for the constitution and disclosure of elemental experience. It is this risk that we must take if we are to get to the neighborhood of what is essential about African musical aesthetics. Moreover, it is in this neighborhood that we are likely to be in the neighborhood of a philosophical introduction to Africa. If we can enter into the intersection of these neighborhoods, an intersection that is the home of nothing, we will be well on our way to what we are after. This work is a preparation for such an entrance. The key terms in it: Africa, music, aesthetics, and philosophy are located at this intersection and it is where they repose. To make sense of them, we too must be located there, and we are to find the sense of what we are therein. To be so located, is to allow nothing to embrace us and make us its own. Moreover, it is here where art derives its energy to be what it is, and also where what is normally not regarded as art comes to be what it is.

We start with what appears to be an enigma in order to preserve the essence of African musical aesthetics. As we try to make sense of African musical aesthetics, we are not going to move away from this enigma, for to move is to move into it. If what hereafter is taken to imply that we are moving away from the enigma, it should be clear that we are no longer in a course where we ought to be. The movement itself must be enigmatic. No one witnesses one's birth, for one would have to be before one is. Such witnessing would be witnessing to nothing. Yet this nothing must be there

and remain there. One is haunted by it till one's death, when nothing catches up with nothing.

An approach to African musical aesthetics must be time-sensitive and situational if it is to make sense. If such approach were made prior to fifteenth century, it would have been different from the way it is presented today, and centuries from today, it will be different from the way it is presented today. Moreover, it is important to bear in mind that time-sensitivity is not solely a matter of being sensitive to historical context. The sense of African musical aesthetics is also more narrowly time-sensitive. It cannot be presented or understood if time for it is not ripe. Ripeness cannot be determined a priori, and it cannot be imposed. If one tries to present it or to understand it when it is not ripe, it does not yield to presentation or to understanding. In either case, one runs the risk of being misunderstood, or one runs the risk of misunderstanding. One who is aware of either risk is better off being cautious. Even far better, one should find a way to stand in readiness for the moment that African musical aesthetics knocks at the door. One must do so in full awareness that finding a way to stand in readiness may be a complicated undertaking. For example, how is one to know whether what knocks at the door is truly African musical aesthetics or an imposter? Must one not be in a position to know how to distinguish the two? And how can this be the case without a pre-understanding of what constitutes genuine African musical aesthetics? Not everyone who knocks at the door will be allowed in by African musical aesthetics. This is not because there is someone standing on the way. African musical aesthetics lets in whoever it wants to let in. It cannot be compelled by anyone to let anyone in. This letting in is native to it, and is a part of what makes it be what it is.

Accessibility to the sense of African musical aesthetics today is complicated by European modernity. Beginning at the end of fifteenth century, European perception and interpretation of the African world of aesthetics took a historic turn. It was a part of European project of modernity to civilize Africa and Africans, and to replace what was perceived by Europeans as paganism or heathenism with Western civilization. The objective was to transform Africans into caricatures of Westerners. Central to this project was the enslavement and colonization of Africans. In the course of this violent project, a systematic project of denigrating and destroying the indigenous African aesthetic world was undertaken. In Europe, the worship of mind – a regime that was launched by Descartes became firmly rooted. Increasingly, the sensuous world was subjected to the regime of the mind. With Descartes, a sharp wedge is inserted in a unitary world, rupturing it into the sensuous and the non-

sensuous, and subordinating the former to the latter.

It may be argued that in the Western European imagination, this is not really new, apparently, because, in Plato, one can already see a separation of the intelligible realm from the sensible realm. Whether this is a correct or an incorrect interpretation of Plato, it cannot be denied that this perception has nourished and reinforced the Cartesian perception. In the eyes of Hegel, the sensuous realm was taken to be a realm of the mind in which mind was not fully conscious of itself. The aesthetic realm -the realm of fine art, was taken by him to be higher than the mere realm of nature. What mind saw in art, was itself in a sensuous form. This view was an outgrowth of Christianity- a religion that held that the spiritual realm was higher and more real than the sensuous realm. Although empirical science took the sensuous seriously, seriousness exhausted itself in construing the sensuous in materialistic sense. Thus, it was through religio-scientistic and intellectualistic lenses that European viewed the African musical aesthetic world. Differently stated, Western European civilization has been fueled by the worship of the mind -a worship that climaxed in German romanticism and German idealism. Even the material feature of this civilization was taken to be an accomplishment of the mind. Christian religion was the other pillar that supported and that still continue to support this civilization. With an incorporeal God as its center, a god who made man in his image, and who directed man to be the overlord of nature, Christianity declared war on the sensuous. This total war against the sensuous ended up being a war against the African musical aesthetics. Consequently, the renaissance of this aesthetic cannot but appear as an anti-Western European civilization and its Christian religiosity.

From indigenous African perspective these lenses had a distorting effect. The regime of mind had no place in African aesthetic world. This should not be taken to imply that Africans are mindless. The setting aside of the mind does not call for mindlessness. It is to recognize that mind is a product of European imagination that is removed from the reality of being European a reality that is no different from the reality of any other human being. It is a mystification of European humanity -a mystification that Europeans attempted to export to Africa with disastrous consequences to African self-perception and to the African perception of the world. It should also be noted that that materialistic science that Europeans introduced in Africa had no place in the African aesthetic world. The African aesthetic world -the world, in which African music has a place, is not only pre-modern; it is non-modern. It is inaccessible to the intellect, to Christianity, and to the science as understood by Europeans. To render it accessible to Europeans, it was transformed into what it was not. It was

this spirit of negation that has permeated European perception of the African aesthetic world, and to the extent that African embraced this negative perception, their perception of their own aesthetic world became mediated by European perception.

What has been said so far about African musical aesthetics calls attention to philosophy, for it is the task of philosophy to investigate and set the criteria –however provisional, to what is true. Thus, it is fitting to pay attention to philosophy as we investigate African musical aesthetics. Paying attention to philosophy will be fruitful if philosophy, in this case, is guided by African musical aesthetics. We are inevitably led to an investigation of African philosophy in our investigation of African musical aesthetics. Accordingly, a promising introduction to African musical aesthetics will inevitably lead us to a promising introduction to African philosophy. These inter-related introductions serve as the site where we must root ourselves if we are to understand and experience African musical aesthetics. These introductions are ways of exhibiting and experiencing Africa and her people's lives. They could be construed as independent or as parallel to each other, or they could be construed and experienced as mirrors of each other. It is this latter construction that serves as a guide in the following work.

In the approach to African musical aesthetics, there is a sense of Africa and a sense of Africans that I want convey - senses that were obscured when Africa languished in slavery and in colonialism, and that are still threatened by post-colonial environment. The identification and the elimination of this obscurity is not an easy undertaking. There is a danger of misidentification that could create a formidable obstruction in carrying this project. As a contemporary African philosopher has observed

By dint of trying to defend our civilizations at all costs, we have petrified, mummified them. We have betrayed our original cultures by showing them off, offering them as topics of myths for external consumption. I doing so we have unwittingly played Europe' game -the Europe against which we first claimed we were setting out to defend ourselves. And what do we find at the end of the road? The same subservience, the same display of wretchedness, the same tragic abandonment of thinking by ourselves for ourselves: slavery.¹

We are under enormous pressure to prove ourselves to the world –especially to the Western world. There is no question that a part of the paranoia occasioned by this pressure is self-induced. It is an overreaction to the trauma incurred in the experience of racial oppression but, unquestionably, the recovery of the obscured sense of Africa which is, in part, the project of both African philosophy and African music, is a formidable task once

what is at stake in this philosophy and in this music is understood.

Africa is not normally portrayed as a land of philosophy. This portrayal is not normally the work of Africans. It is the work of those in the West who have made it their profession to undertake the cartography of philosophy. Presupposed in this portrayal is a conception of philosophy that is essentially Western. Confronted with such a presupposition and with the manner in which Africa is portrayed, Africans have an obligation to defend Africa, and in such a defense, they also have an obligation to work out a conception of philosophy that facilitates this defense. In this undertaking, they face enormous difficulties, one of which is expressed by Hountondji in the passage quoted above. A defense that is not merely a reaction to the portrayal of Africa by Westerners calls for a candid philosophical examination of Africa by Africans. Inevitably, such an examination will be attended by a candid examination of the nature of philosophy from an African perspective. This work seeks to make a contribution to this undertaking.

An African who takes philosophical thinking truthfully and seriously cannot avoid reflecting on the historical context in which he or she thinks. Today, this thinking is taking place at a post-colonial/post-slavery period, a period when Africans are trying to come to terms with the consequences of slavery and colonialism. It is a period when Africans are attempting to come to terms with effects of racism on African thinking. It is also a period in which Africans are attempting to recover the pre-slavery/pre-colonial/pre-racist African past, while, at the same time, they attempt to escape enslavement in it. They find themselves in a situation where they have to re-learn or learn how to address one another without the mediation of Westerners. At the same time, they cannot ignore the philosophical discourses that have been produced and that are being produced by non-Africans, and this includes Western philosophical discourses.

The discourses that have been produced and that are produced by Westerners are particularly problematic to Africans. They are problematic to Africans in that they have been constructed by Westerners for Westerners. For centuries, these discourses have ill-prepared Africans for a just and truthful reflection on Africa. Africans have been systematically and deliberately excluded from them. Those who constructed them believed that the discourses were beyond the comprehension of Africans. In their view, Africans did not possess the philosophical ability to construct or to comprehend philosophical discourses.

Contemporary African philosophers are tight rope walkers. As they strive to articulate philosophy from an African perspective, they are forced to be on the defensive in response to what Western philosophers have or

have not said about Africa and Africans. In defending themselves against the onslaught of Western philosophers, they cannot overlook defending themselves from themselves in so far as they have internalized the negative views that Westerners have of Africans. In this defense, they find themselves faced by a Europe that is a quicksand. It is not only the means of self-defense that appear to be fashioned and provided by Europe, but the African self that Africans are defending appears to be manufactured in Europe. They appear to be seeking European legitimation of their struggle and of the African self-image that they are attempting to create. They have become accomplices in their own enslavement. And there is a Western subsidy in this effort. From the West, they are getting aid to facilitate their own destruction. When Westerners generate “philosophical” fashions in response to the internal crises in their tradition, Africans embrace them as if they are their very own. Just as Africans look up to Europeans for economic aid, they look up to them for aid in philosophical inspiration. The more aid they get, the more they become estranged from themselves.

Philosophical thinking in Africa has become shipwrecked. The proper and fundamental task today, then, is how Africans are to think without contributing to their own existential enslavement. As they engage in philosophical thinking, raising some fundamental questions is inevitable. How, for example, are Africans to free themselves from the tutelage that has been imposed on them, and think in a manner that liberates them from this imposition? How are they to think in such a way as not to perpetuate enslavement by Western thinking? How are they to be at home in a thinking that is truly liberating? How are they to engage in thinking that liberates Africa for Africans? These questions should grip every African who dare take up philosophy as a calling. To hear these questions, and have them take a visceral root in us, is the challenge that faces all those of us for whom being African is at stake.

In modern history, Europe has forced us to abandon the thinking that is proper to us. We appear to be engaging in thinking that nourishes self-abandonment. We no longer truly know who or what we are, and Africa, our home, is barely recognizable to us as our home. She has been fatefully transformed by Europeans in such a way as to become a home that is inhospitable to us, a homeless home for Africans.² Europeans have transformed Africa into a reservoir of natural resources, and her people into a reservoir of raw intellectual and physical labor. African musical aesthetics today must be an aesthetic or liberation – a liberation that seeks to return African to herself and to return Africans to their homeland. The “return” to the thinking that we have violently been forced to abandon is a “return” to ourselves; it is a “return” to an Africa that is the true home for

Africans. The “return” is a philosophical re-introduction to ourselves, which is at the same time, a philosophical re-introduction to Africa. And perhaps, without assuming that we were ever philosophically barren, the re-introduction is to be understood as an introduction. Every genuine philosophical re-introduction distinguishes itself as an introduction to philosophy.

The work is intended to be a philosophical introduction to African musical aesthetics. In its turn, African musical aesthetics is intended to present to us a philosophical introduction to Africa. This introduction of an introduction which, in turn, is itself an introduction of an introduction, takes us away from the normal expectation of an introduction. Although, in either case, it is Africa that is the center of focus, how she is introduced is also the center of focus. Neither center is peripheral to the other. It is at their intersection that each is what it is. Moreover, it is at this intersection where a philosophical introduction to Africa serves as an introduction to African philosophy.

Introductions are normally viewed as less important than what they introduce. Whereas this may be the case in other introductions, a philosophical introduction, as is the case with any other elemental introduction, is as important as what it introduces, and perhaps, even more so, since it contains what is essential in what it introduces. A philosophical introduction grounds what it introduces and, as is appropriate in every elemental grounding, it generates and sustains what rests on it. It is the soil that nourishes what grows on it. But the word “on” is not to be construed in the way we normally construe adverbs. What is grounded is not on top of the ground. The ground and what is grounded do not have an external relation with each other. They are grounded on each other. They have a reciprocal relation with each other. Each is the condition for the being and intelligibility of the other. As one moves from the ground to understand what is grounded, one must return to the ground to understand it, as a condition for understanding what is grounded. In a sense then, there is a paradox here. The ground is not a ground in the normal sense. One leaves and never leaves the ground. To abandon the ground is to abandon what is grounded. In this sense of the relation of the ground and the grounded, it is contrary to the way of philosophy to construe a philosophical ground as marginal to what rests on it. If we understand a ground as an introduction, then, those of us who go through a genuine introduction to a philosophical work in a hurry expecting to find what truly matters in what follows the introduction are likely to miss what is essential about a philosophical work. A genuine philosophical introduction is to be given as much attention as what follows it.

In constructing a philosophical introduction, it is essential that we do so philosophically. A part of the difficulty in doing so is that what a philosophical construction is is not only not self-evident, it is also never finished. The construction of an introduction continues in what is introduced. Moreover, those who seek to understand a philosophical introduction should seek to do so philosophically. Again, what such an understanding is is neither self-evident nor definitive. It is an ongoing process that comes to an end only when philosophizing comes to an end. Seeking to understand a philosophical introduction is not entirely distinguishable from constructing what one seeks to understand. Moreover, understanding a philosophical introduction, as is the case with understanding what such an introduction introduces, is not solely a passive undertaking. To understand a philosophical introduction, as is the case with the understanding what such an introduction introduces, is to do so creatively. In a sense, one constructs what one seeks to understand.

Whether in creating or in seeking to understand a philosophical introduction, our own being is implicated. In the introduction of what we introduce, we too are philosophically introduced. We philosophically matter not only in the introduction of what we introduce, but also in what the introduction introduces. That is, to the extent that what follows from an introduction is mirrored in the introduction, we are necessarily mirrored in what follows the introduction. The "I" that is implicated in the introduction, and in what the introduction introduces, is philosophically problematic in that what it stands for is indefinite. It should not be assumed that it stands for a well defined subject or for an isolated subject. In part, the "I" is, and is intelligible in the context of a particular tradition and in the context of a particular historical period. As a part of a particular tradition, it is deeply rooted in a particular tradition. As a part of a particular historical period, it is deeply rooted in a particular historical period. Every tradition, as is the case with every historical period, is never fully understood. The "I" then, in so far as it is a part of a tradition or a part of a historical period is never fully understood. Moreover, either as a part of tradition, or as a part of a historical period, the "I" is a socio-cultural phenomenon. It is an "I" as well as a "We". The "We" is not solely an aggregate of isolated subjects. It is a philosophical organic "We". This "I/We" is implicated in the construction of a philosophical introduction and in understanding a philosophical introduction. One constructs and understands a philosophical work with others for, in a sense, one is what one is by being with others in a socio-cultural situation. The language of construction, as is the case with the language of understanding, is a social language. To be sure, this state of affairs is not always explicit. It is

precisely because it is not so that, in constructing a philosophical work, one is not fully in command of what one is doing. Similarly, one never fully understands a philosophical work.

How one is to introduce a philosophical work on Africa, or how one is to introduce Africa philosophically is determinative of what is philosophically understood and philosophically said about Africa. It is equally the case that such an introduction is determinative of who and what we are. When one ignores the issue of one's philosophical status in approaching a philosophical Africa, one runs the risk of misunderstanding her. One who does not conduct a philosophical inquiry into oneself in the course of conducting a philosophical inquiry into Africa will fail in his or her attempt. This is not necessarily because Africa is a special case. It is because philosophical self-inquiry is implicated in every philosophical inquiry. Thus, in undertaking a philosophical inquiry into Africa, one inevitably undertakes an inquiry into oneself. Moreover, those who concern themselves with the manner or the result of this inquiry, will inevitably concern themselves with themselves. They will be undertaking a self-inquiry. To be sure, this is not self-evident. A good part of philosophizing consists in making what is not self-evident self-evident. This does not necessarily mean that it will succeed in doing so and, perhaps, if it were to succeed it would cease to exist as philosophizing. The pursuit of philosophizing is haunted, and inevitably so, by its own death.

In concerning oneself philosophically with Africa, one concerns oneself with oneself whether one is or is not African. When a philosophical Africa is at stake, one is not in every sense, privileged because one is African. A philosophical African has kinship with a philosophical non-African. He or she cannot take his or her African philosophical status for granted, and neither can he or she take his or her philosophical kinship with a non-African for granted. The kinship is essential not only for one's being but also for one's intelligibility. It is essential for a cross-tradition philosophical understanding and dialogue. Those who deny this kinship preclude a dialogue with those who come from traditions other than one's own, and from the standpoint of those belong to other traditions, the denial results in a monologue. That is, the restriction of a philosophical dialogue with any one tradition reduces such a dialogue to a monologue from the point of view of philosophers in other traditions. Such restriction undermines philosophical life, a life that exists and thrives only when and where there is a trans-tradition dialogue. To be sure, a tradition may exist in relative isolation from other traditions, and have within it a philosophical dialogue. But should members of such a tradition claim a

monopoly of philosophical dialogue and exclude philosophers from other traditions from participation in philosophical dialogue, the dialogue they take to be philosophical is a monologue, and as such, it is not a dialogue. A dialogue ceases to be philosophical when it is reduced to a monologue. Hence, a philosophical monologue is self-contradictory. When a genuine philosophical dialogue is taking place within one tradition, it is open to philosophers in other traditions, and it is open in an unpatronizing manner. Philosophers from other traditions should be able to participate in it without being estranged from their own philosophical traditions. Thus, a philosophical introduction to Africa involves a feature that is to be found in any other and in every other philosophical introduction. This feature is whatever makes a philosophical introduction philosophical. In a sense, it is a feature that is not subject to proof. If it were, the proof would be unintelligible, since the one to whom the proof would be directed would not be in a position to determine the success or the failure of the proof.

As we undertake a construction and understanding of this introduction, it is important to ask ourselves, who is the audience is to whom this introduction is directed? The audience that one has in view conditions how the introduction is to be constructed. The audience directs the construction of the introduction. It conditions the sense of the introduction. In determining one's audience one determines oneself. One belongs to one's audience. The question of one's audience is a philosophical question whose answer establishes not only one's philosophical identity but also what philosophizing is. It is a question that underlies all philosophical works although it is rarely explicitly raised by or in them. Who, then, is the audience to whom this introduction is directed? If the answer is provided in the light of the quote that opens this introduction, it is provided in the context of tight rope walking. I am a part of the audience that is indefinite. In a sense, I am introducing myself to myself. How can I introduce myself to myself as if I am not already familiar with myself? If I am truly introducing myself, which I am, being "already familiar" with myself should not be assumed to be already familiar with myself. In this familiarity, there is what is unfamiliar. Besides, if say I am an African, what does being African mean? Moreover, if I say I am a philosopher, what does being a philosopher mean? In so far as these are philosophical questions, the answers to them can only be open answers that are answers that embody further questions. They are also questions that are raised in a historical and cultural environment. As such, their answers and the questions embodied in these answers are equally in a historical and cultural environment. Where it is assumed, as it is generally is in the West, that introduction to philosophy is essentially introduction to Western

philosophy, clearly the audience is primarily Western.

For centuries, philosophical works in the West have been intended for Western audience, partly because the composers of these works did not believe that philosophy has an audience in other traditions. If there has been an audience in Non-western traditions, it has been a result of the Western missionaries of philosophy. These missionaries are driven by a faith, the faith that the West and only the West is truly philosophical.³ We in Africa and I specifically mean, we African philosophers, have become converts to this faith, and we have set out to do evangelical work among fellow Africans. We want fellow Africans to embrace this faith. By becoming converts of this faith and by propagating it among ourselves we have contributed to our own enslavement. It is this enslavement that Hountondji has associated with ethnophilosophy.⁴ It is a fact that, today, most professional African philosophers have been trained by Western Professors philosophy and have read mostly Western philosophical literature. Even when they are trained by African professors of philosophy, these professors have been trained by Western professors of philosophy and have been fed the diet of Western philosophical literature. Some of these professors have distinguished themselves as ethnophilosophers. Hountondji says that these ethnophilosophers “have chosen to address themselves primarily to a European public. Their objective has been to describe the main features of African civilization for the benefit of their European counterparts, to secure their respect for African cultural originality -but on Europe’s own terms”.⁵ This form of enslavement in philosophy must be recognized and eradicated if genuine philosophy is to come into relief. Recognition and destruction will not only pave the way for the emergence of genuine African philosophy but will also pave the way for the emergence of a rehabilitated Western philosophy.

As Hountondji has pointed out, “Today’s African philosophers must orient their discourse. They must write first and foremost for an African public, no longer a non-African public”.⁶ African philosophers must have an audience that is first and foremost, African and should philosophize with such audience in view. Thus, an introduction to a philosophical work by an African should target an African audience. This targeting however, may be mis-directed if the Africanness of the audience is not truthfully defined. To be also truly defined is what a philosophical introduction is and what a philosophical work is. Also it must not be forgotten that African audience is a human audience, and as such, what is addressed to it is also addressed to all human beings. One can benefit from the study of African philosophy whether one is or is not African. This is equally true of the study of African music. No human being is a stranger where being

human is at stake. It is precisely because of this state of affairs that many of us in Africa find what has hitherto passed as Western philosophy problematic. It has been affirmed at the expense of the humanity of Africans. To make sure that we do not compound this problem, it is essential that we affirm an African philosophy that is not affirmed at the expense of other human beings. In doing so, it is inevitable that we will challenge the prevailing regime of Western philosophy.

Today, an introduction to an African work of philosophy is inevitably a critique, though not solely a critique. A philosophy that is nothing more than a reaction is not truly philosophy. An African who is responding to a true call of philosophy must not only challenge the hegemonic and oppressive version of philosophy that is perpetrated in the West, but also challenge whatever threatens the life of philosophy in Africa. He or she has to embrace what is philosophy preserving in Africa, but also what is philosophy preserving in the West and in other traditions.

In modern history, the relationship between Africa and the West has been philosophically problematic. There has been no philosophical dialogue in this relationship. For centuries, the West has assumed that Africans are either pre-philosophical, or are yet to be fully philosophical, and hence, not worth having a philosophical dialogue with. What has passed as a philosophical dialogue in the West has largely consisted of the Westerners dialoguing among themselves. From an African standpoint this dialogue has been nothing more than a monologue. This monologue has been intensively cultivated for centuries and has become so deeply rooted that the possibility of a genuine philosophical dialogue between Africans and Westerners remains remote. The teaching of Western philosophy in Africa tends to reinforce this monologue. For the most part, African students of philosophy are exposed to Western philosophical literature. In the light of this exposure, an intra-African philosophical dialogue has been severely compromised. Unable to engage each other in a genuine African philosophical dialogue, African students of philosophy have been reduced to the status of parasites where they exist only to the extent that they are consumers of Western European philosophical literature, where they are relegated to the margins of intra-European philosophical dialogue. They are equally unable to engage other non-Western peoples in a genuine philosophical dialogue. For the most part, the politics of philosophical education in Africa is such that African students of philosophy are oriented away from Africa. This orientation impairs the attempt to present a philosophical introduction to Africa from an authentic African standpoint. An essential aspect of authenticity is reappropriating philosophy as a way of seeing the sensuous, as a way of listening to the

sensuous, and in general, as a way of experiencing the sensuous.

Philosophizing from an authentic African standpoint necessitates overcoming this impairment. This overcoming entails the wrestling of philosophy from confinement in the West. This does not mean appropriating philosophy as already constituted in the West. It must be appropriated in a manner that challenges what has hitherto been understood as philosophy in the West. It involves an elemental constitution or an elemental definition of philosophy. Such constitution and definition must be the work of humankind and not just the work of a particular group of people. Philosophy should be the voice of us all. Today, this is an essential task in philosophizing in Africa. It is the task of African musical aesthetics. The carrying out of this task has global implication. Philosophizing in Africa cannot take place in a global vacuum, and neither can philosophizing anywhere else. What is said about philosophy anywhere anytime implicates what is said about philosophy anywhere and at any time. What lies as a formidable obstacle on the path to genuine African philosophy is what has hitherto passed as philosophy in the West. For the African, what has conventionally passed as philosophy in the West is deeply bound to colonial experience and to Western barbarism in regard to philosophy. It is barbarism because it celebrates what is unphilosophical mistaking it for what is philosophical, and is oblivious of the violation of the philosophical status of Non-Westerners. It is a brute imposition of a parochial view on philosophy on all human beings. The entire history of philosophy as taught in the West, for the most part, has served the interest of the imperial West. The struggle against this imperialism is an indispensable feature of philosophical introduction to African today. The global philosophical landscape is such that, for African philosophy to come into relief, it has to contest for a space since Western philosophy tends to monopolize the entire landscape.

An African philosopher does not enjoy the luxury of philosophizing on an uncontested terrain. And although it may not be evident to the Western philosopher, he or she too can no longer continue to philosophize in an uncontested terrain. For a long time, he or she has been living under the delusion and the illusion that he or she can do so. An African philosopher who recognizes that contesting for a philosophical space on which to situate African philosophy is a central feature of African philosophizing may awaken his or her Western counter-part to the awareness that Western philosophy must equally contest for a place on which to situate itself. European philosophers can no longer continue to philosophize in the traditional way in which they have been philosophizing. They must ask themselves whether the philosophical life they profess to be leading is

truly a philosophical life. For an African philosopher, the same question applies: to what extent is the philosophical life he or she professes to be living truly philosophical? As a part of this question they are to ask themselves: what is African about the philosophical life they profess to be leading?

The manner in which I am implicated in philosophical introduction to Africa, or in what this introduction introduces can be clarified in part by taking note of my generation. The generation to which I belong, and the generations that come after suffer from the misfortune of being socialized into the acceptance of an Africa that is un- or anti-African. My generation and the generations that have come after it suffer from a colonial violence whose effect has been the impairment of African self-perception and self-understanding. Articulating and understanding this violence and the task of repairing this impairment are integral aspects of genuine African philosophizing today. To be sure, it is a distortion and an impoverishment of philosophizing in Africa today to view it to a mere reaction to the colonial or neo-colonial violence. It is an error to perceive philosophizing in Africa as a creature of colonial or post-colonial periods. It is precisely this error that the colonizers and their sympathizers attempted to impose on Africans and to non-Africans as if it were the truth. For example, it is not a surprise that African students of philosophy know little about African philosophy and even less about Non-Western Philosophy. This lack of knowledge is not a mere accident. Colonial experience has shaped and continues to shape African conception of philosophy. This is especially the case with academic philosophy where what is taught as philosophy is for the most part a copy of what is taught in the Western academic institutions.

African philosophizing has not only been distorted by colonialism and neo-colonialism; it has also been subjected to a false history. The falsehood consists in projecting African philosophy as a creature of colonial and post-colonial Africa, or solely, as a reaction to colonial and neo-colonial Africa. The falsification of the history of philosophizing in Africa must be exposed for what it is, as an essential step in clearing the way for the exposition of a true history of philosophizing in Africa. Those who fall prey to a false history of philosophizing in Africa are likely to fall prey to a false history of philosophizing in their own part of the world.

There was philosophizing in pre-colonial Africa and there will be philosophizing in post-colonial Africa. It is tempting to ask what evidence is there to prove that philosophizing took place in pre-colonial Africa. Those who ask this question are likely to be victims of an unphilosophical conception of philosophy, and fail to grasp the fact that demonstrating the

existence of philosophy in any cultural tradition presupposes an understanding of what philosophy. This understanding is never definitive for it is the nature of philosophy to never be definitive. Central to philosophizing in both pre-colonial and post-colonial Africa is the determination of how philosophizing is to be constituted and construed. To philosophize is to dwell in the openness of this determination. Those who deny the existence of pre-colonial African philosophizing, or those who dismiss it as mere fantasy, do so at the expense of this openness. It is likely that they introduce dogmatism in the realm of philosophy. Dogmatism is asserted at the expense of philosophy. It may be confused with philosophy when it is cleverly articulated by its advocates, but the two are irreconcilable foes.

In conversation with others about ourselves and about Africa we, Africans, run the risk of perpetuating self-misunderstanding or a misunderstanding of Africa. We can convey to others a false image of ourselves -an image that has been constructed by others, and more specifically, by Westerners. We can convey to others an Africa that is a fabrication of modern Europeans, an Africa that is not our very own. We can mimic philosophizing in other parts of the world and believe that we are doing genuine African philosophy. In so doing, we do an injustice not only to African philosophy but to philosophy itself. Doing genuine African philosophy cannot take place blindly. It proceeds by the way of constant self-examination and constant examination of Africa. And examination in either case has self-emancipation and emancipation of Africa as some of its goals.

Like many members of my generation, I was subjected to a colonial education in which colonial educators distinguished themselves by despising Africa and by denying, suppressing, or ignoring African philosophical work. Throughout my education in undergraduate and graduate levels nothing was mentioned about African philosophy in the lectures or in the literature that was assigned. It was not that professors ignored or deliberately excluded African philosophy. In their minds there was nothing to ignore or to exclude. The European philosophical tradition that had molded them had made them blind to the existence of African philosophy. It is not a miracle then that they could not perceive a philosophical Africa. This blindness became contagious and Africans were rendered temporarily philosophically blind. They were socialized into believing that they were what the colonizers thought they were: philosophically barren. The struggle to overcome this blindness is inseparable for the attempt to affirm a genuine African philosophy.

In post-independence Africa, Africans entered into a neo-colonial

phase - a phase that has been scrutinized from economic and political standpoints, but rarely from a philosophical standpoint. Neo-colonial philosophy entailed the indoctrination of Africans into a Eurocentric view of philosophy. Those Africans who demonstrated philosophical ability in areas controlled by the West were directed to the West to study philosophy. In the part of Africa that fell under the sway of the East (the so-called communist East), prospective African philosophers were directed to the East to study philosophy (Marxist-Leninist Philosophy). This partition of Africa by non- and anti-Africans in the neo-colonial Africa parallels the partition of Africa by colonial powers at the Berlin Conference in 1884. According to the architects of these partitions, between the West and the East, there was nothing/darkness, and Africa was the embodiment of this nothing/darkness. After the independence of African nations, the countries formerly colonized by the French were exposed to French Philosophy, and those formerly colonized by the English were exposed to English philosophy. Regardless of the colonizing power African students of philosophy were exposed to Greek, Roman, Medieval, Modern, and Contemporary philosophy as interpreted by Christianized Europeans. Later on Africans were also exposed to American philosophy. That Africa herself could be the site of philosophy was denied by both the West and the East. These two historic partitions must be taken into account in any genuine philosophical introduction to Africa today.

The inevitable question is, how does an African philosophize in the light of this cartography of philosophy? What is the place of African philosophizing in world philosophizing? It is indeed the case that after the end of Cold War and the emergence of People Republic of China the Manichean world of West and East, a relatively new world has come into being. But it must be asked, what does philosophizing demand of me and of other Africans in this circumstance? What kind of philosophical obligation do non-Africans have in regard to African philosophy and to philosophy in general in the light of the contemporary state of the world? What kind of dialogue must an African philosopher have with fellow Africans and with non-African philosophers? How is one to be philosophically introduced Africa given the distortion that Africa has suffered under anti-Africans? Should philosophizing in Africa exhaust itself by waging a crusade against anti-Africans and their anti-African philosophy? These are grave questions for any African who dare philosophize, and clearly, anyone who is interested in genuine African philosophy today ought to experience the inevitability of these questions. This is the burden that philosophy introduces as it ventures into the world

of African musical aesthetics. But it is also a burden that is already in place in contemporary world of African musical aesthetics. It is the burden that must be shouldered by African musicians.

The danger that a non-African faces in the light of this inevitability is to treat it abstractly, or as if it is experienced by others and not by oneself. Although it is undeniable that it is difficult and some would say, impossible, to experience what someone else experiences, what philosophy demands from one who dares philosophize is equally difficult. Non-African philosophers can ignore the questions that are raised by the situation of philosophy in Africa at their own philosophical risk. What compromises a philosophical undertaking anywhere compromises philosophy everywhere. In philosophizing we are accountable to all human beings.

As indicated above, for the African, African philosophy today must incorporate an emancipatory element. It must expose and eliminate whatever stands on the way of the African's affirmation of a liberated African self and whatever lies on the way of the affirmation of a liberated Africa. It must bring into perceptual relief the distinction between a genuine African self and the self the colonizers and the neo-colonizers sought to impose on Africans. By genuine self, it is not meant a frozen pre-colonial self. It is rather, a self that is in the process continuous self-constitution, a self that is what it is by preserving horizon as an essential element of its being. It is precisely such a self that was obscured by the colonial and the neo-colonial education. The message from the colonialists and neo-colonialists was and is that Africa and Africans could be philosophical only to the extent that Africa and Africans could be grafted onto European philosophy, a philosophy in which Europeans have distinguished themselves by talking to themselves and by ignoring or by silencing non-Europeans.

During the heyday of colonialism, there was no question about providing philosophical instruction to Africans. In the eyes of Europeans, Africans were too dumb to grasp such instruction. Africans were deemed to be so low in the evolution of human intellect to make it meaningful to provide them with philosophical instruction. That is, they did not have the mental capacity to appreciate let alone to generate philosophical works. They were particularly good for manual labor and for servitude. Their languages, to the extent that they possessed any, were totally inadequate to grasp philosophical concepts. Even in the area of religion -an area closely related to philosophy, Europeans were of the opinion that Africans were incapable of grasping the intricacies of Christian theology. Once it was agreed that Africans had souls, the most appropriate Christianity was that of faithful obedience -that of uncritical acceptance of whatever the

preachers said needed to be believed. Faith rather than critical appraisal of the Christian doctrines was emphasized. Other than the use of critical approach as a rationalization of the Christian dogma, Christian professors were antagonistic to the presuppositionless critical spirit that is the hallmark of philosophy. The affirmation of the Christian faith was attended by the suppression of the African religious beliefs. There was no tolerance of other non-Christians religious beliefs. Christian preachers attempted to block genuine philosophical investigation not only because such investigation could lead to atheism, but also because of their belief that Africans were incapable of philosophizing. Throughout the continent of Africa education was largely controlled by Europeans and this control played an important role in furthering European colonial interests. Even the part of Africa that was under the control of Islam inhibited African philosophical life. An effort was made to promote religious Islamic interests. Christianity, however, was the major factor in relieving Africans of their cultural and philosophical life and orienting them towards the West. The dogmatism that the Christian missionaries instituted continues to be a major stumbling block not only on critical religious life in Africa, but also continues to paralyze African critical powers in general.

The emphasis of other-worldliness by Christian missionaries dislodged Africans from this world, from the sensuous world. The earth, which was taken by Africans to be the home of human beings, and indeed, the home all beings was disparaged, debased and rendered illusory. Indigenous African religions were depicted as false religions and as mark of heathenism, and needed to be discarded. The Christian emphasis of the spiritual over the sensuous dislocated Africans from the sensuous. The integrity of African musical aesthetics was undermined. An attempt was made to rob African musical aesthetics of its earth- affirming aspect. Hymns and songs in praise of the earth were forbidden, and dancing was made to be the Devil's temptation that turned Africans from the path to Divine truth.

Critical development of philosophy in Africa has not only been hampered by Christian dogmatism. It has been hampered by the imposition of Western European philosophy as the only true philosophy. Since medieval Europe Western European philosophy is yet to fully emancipate itself from Christian dogmatism, and wherever it has found its way in the world, it has been attended by an undercurrent of this dogmatism. But even where this has not apparently been the case, the privileging of Western European philosophy continues to have a global sway. Africa has not been spared from this trend. The dominant Western European philosophy continues to be dogmatic to the extent that it fosters the belief

that it is the only true philosophy, to the extent that it fails to recognize the plurality of the traditions in which philosophy exhibits itself. This dogmatism is reinforced by the Christian dogmatism that continues to proclaim Christianity as the only true religion and the Christian god as the only true god. From the standpoint of philosophy, the Christianization of Europe had a disastrous consequence in that philosophy became Christianized. Philosophy lost its “pagan” status and was reduced to a handmaiden of Christianity. What the Greeks thought of as philosophy was eclipsed. In its place a Christian theosophy was instituted. European atheistic philosophers are bastards of this theosophy. It is in the context of this tragedy of philosophy that the so-called philosophy was introduced in Africa by European professors and by their African disciples. Today, for the most part, what passes as philosophy in African academic institutions continues to have a strong Christian influence or a strong influence of a Eurocentric philosophy. It is not a surprise that most of the philosophy programs in African universities were founded by European Christian religionists. The European/American expatriates who replaced these religionists took over the propagation of the Eurocentric thought.

In comparison to Africans in Africa, Africans in Diaspora have fared no better. They have been subjected and continue to be subjected to evangelical Eurocentric Christianity, a Christianity that plays an important role as an undercurrent in the way they philosophize. In the United States for example, Christianity has played a central role in shaping the thinking and the life of African Americans. In their relentless opposition to slavery and racism, Africans in America have yet to emancipate themselves from the stranglehold of Christianity and Euro-centered philosophy. Many of them suffer from a historic loss of memory, a loss that to some extent they share with their kin in Africa. Other than a genetic connection and geographic sense of origin, they can barely relate to a pre-slavery or pre-colonial African philosophy, or to a broader African self-consciousness. The prevailing self-consciousness is for the most part a product of American slave experience. This is the case even where and when Christianity and Euro-centered philosophy have been used as emancipatory tools. For example, African American theology of liberation is guided by Judeo-Christian concepts. These concepts serve as hermeneutic guidelines in interpreting African American experience. An effort is made to transform the Judeo-Christian concepts into Black concepts. The Judeo-Christian God is transformed into a Black God and Jesus is transformed into a Black Jesus, into a Black Messiah. White angels are painted Black. Similarly, concepts in Western European philosophy such as rationality, pragmatism, dialectics, existentialism, hermeneutics, deconstruction,

critical theory are colored Black, and an effort is made to transform them into weapons in the struggle against Eurocentric supremacy in philosophy. There appears to be widespread failure by the African American philosophers to come to terms with pre-slavery African philosophical thought. To a degree, this applies to African professional philosophers in Africa who, for the most part, continue to look to the West for philosophical inspiration and guidance, and who continue to seek legitimation by Western philosophical establishment.

What is happening in the thought of Africans in the Americas is a magnification of what is largely happening in the thought of Africans in Africa. In Africa too, there is a loss of memory. For many Africans in Africa, pre-colonial Africa is a *tabula rasa*. There is a systemic flight from the past. In a sense, for a people who are known for their concern with ancestors, ancestors do not matter anymore. What matters is the present, especially the future of the present. The perception and interpretation of the present and the future of the present relies heavily on Euro-centric guidance. The Euro-center acts as a magnet not only in regard to economics, science and technology but also in regard to philosophy. Post-colonial Africa has not brought about a re-orientation of African philosophers. African philosophers continue to wallow in dis-orientation. An African orientation to philosophy remains marginalized. African philosophical autonomy remains to be won. No matter how much transformation they undergo, tools that are largely provided by the oppressor can never fully lead to the emancipation of an oppressed people.

In Africa, there has been a futile attempt made by African religionists who believe that they can emancipate themselves from religious domination by Europeans by indigenizing Christianity, or by using Euro-centered philosophy for emancipation from European oppression in the domain of philosophy. African pastors or evangelists who are propagating Christianity among fellow Africans are perpetuating spiritual and religious violence against fellow Africans. Similarly, African professors of philosophy who are in the service of propagating European philosophy in its hegemonic sense are perpetuating philosophical violence among fellow Africans. Western version of Christian religion, particularly the Christian religion that Western missionaries have introduced in Africa has played an important role in wiping out African music and, by implication, in wiping out African musical aesthetics. The Christian missionaries assumed that African music was Devil's music and those who embraced it were Devil's children and, when ultimately God confines the Devil into eternal punishment in Hell they too will end there with him. Ecstatic African musical experience especially as exhibited sensually and sensuously was

sinful. It was possession by the Devil. This is a matter of faith, but Christian theologians and scholars provided a rationalization of this pernicious doctrine. On the so-called secular sphere there was reinforcement by Western philosophers, who tirelessly denounced the senses and the body as impediments to the quest for truth. Where there is not elemental appreciation of the senses and the body, there cannot be a true appreciation of music. Music is essentially and exhaustively sensuous. A philosophic-musical affirmation of the sensuous and of the body must be carried out if there is to be a renaissance of African musical aesthetics. It is not that Africans must seal themselves off in a cocoon in order to truly philosophize. It is a matter of recognizing the enormous difficulty of engaging themselves or engaging other people in a genuine philosophic-musical dialogue without removing historic obstacles that have been erected on the way.

An African cannot philosophize as if he or she were a European. For the African, genuine philosophizing must be a philosophizing from an African standpoint. It is from this standpoint that an African philosopher is to be seen and heard. It is a standpoint that needs to be struggled for. Moreover, it is a standpoint is not determined once and for all, for such determination has no place in philosophy. Philosophical determination is open-ended and rests on metastable standpoint. This standpoint, however, is not monadic. It opens to other standpoints as a way of being what it is. Thus, a philosophical introduction to Africa is open to other philosophical introductions, just as philosopher is open to other philosophers. A philosophical Africa is an open Africa. There are there, philosophical constant ingoings and outgoings. There is no sharp demarcation between ingoings and outgoings. In places where there are no sharp demarcations, one finds the home of philosophy. This is the essence of African music to render demarcations permeable.

Every introduction to philosophy is time/space-specific. There is no introduction to philosophy in general. Each introduction must take into consideration the historical and material conditions in which human beings are found. Even if there is a general introduction to philosophy, such an introduction is rooted in particular historical and material conditions of a particular people. Generally, Western instructors of philosophy have denied this and have presented their historical and material conditions as if they are universal conditions of all other peoples. Heidegger has spoken for them when he claims that philosophy constitutes the inner essence of European people.⁷ Heidegger is not the inventor of this view. He merely perpetuates and reinforces a widespread belief among European philosophers. It is a view that has done an enormous damage to European

by alienating them from the community of philosophers. European philosophers have gained remarkable mileage from propagating reason as a universal principle of philosophy. But the universality they have had in mind is largely nothing more than a partisan European principle that has played an ideological role of propagating Western European cultural chauvinism under the name of philosophy. It has been a Western propaganda ploy masquerading as a universal principle of philosophy. It is one of the most sophisticated forms of propaganda for Western cultural imperialism. It is an effective propaganda tool for unlike the political, economic or religious partisanships it is projected as embodying neutrality, and as devoid of any pretension to partisanship. Under this guise it is able to conceal its partisanship. A philosophical introduction to Africa can contribute to a global challenge to this propaganda and pave the way for a more genuine philosophical dialogue among Africans, between Africans and Westerners, while at the same time making it possible for Africans to dialogue more fruitfully with other non-Westerners.

As previously indicated, the impact of Western philosophy on Africa has made it difficult for Africans to dialogue with philosophers from non-Western traditions. For example, it is difficult to dialogue with Chinese, Native American philosophers, Indian, or Latin American philosophers because the West has given the erroneous impression that Africans have nothing indigenous to offer them. Just as Western Christian missionaries made sure that Africans would know nothing about Asian religions or Native American religions, Western philosophy professors in Africa made sure that Africans would know nothing about Asian philosophy or about Native American Philosophy. Their ignorance of Asian philosophy became contagious. Today, this ignorance is institutionalized in Africa. A truly African philosophical initiative must open up philosophical possibilities that have been suppressed by the West. At the same time, it must open up Africa philosophically, and do it in manner that does not isolate Africa from other regions of philosophy. African philosophy has a lot to offer in the rectification of the conventional conception of philosophy in the West.

Chauvinism has no place in philosophy anywhere and if a philosophical introduction to Africa can shed light on the chauvinistic aspect of Western philosophy, a way will be cleared whereby elimination of this chauvinism will become a possibility. With elimination, there may be an opportunity to constitute Western philosophy in a manner that makes it a healthy branch of philosophy. Students of philosophy in the West should study African philosophy not just to experience another branch of philosophy but also as a way of deepening their own understanding of