

Jonathan O Chimakonam:
Intellectual biography of an African philosopher.

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Abbreviations

UNICAL: University of Calabar

UKZN: University of Kwazulu-Natal

NYSC: National Youth Service Corps

CSP: Conversational School of Philosophy.

BCM: Black Consciousness Movement

ANC: African National Congress

Abstract

This dissertation studies the life and work of Nigerian-born philosopher and logician Jonathan Okeke Chimakonam, who is currently a Professor in South Africa, and is considered a direct heir of the concepts and ideas of the debates that took place from the 1970s to 1990s on whether or not African philosophy existed. This dissertation studies that debate and tracks how the ideas and concepts from it shaped Chimakonam's philosophical outlook. When a young Chimakonam joined the academia, he decided to focus on one existential problem: 'Where is the African mind?' This dissertation reads Chimakonam's search for the African mind as the direct influence of the debate on the existence of African philosophy.

As this dissertation shows, Chimakonam has argued that the greatest threat faced by Africa today is the vitiation of African thought systems along with their logic. He believes that one of the consequences of this decline is that some African leaders commit crimes and atrocities because they use Western logic. This may have been avoided if they used an African logic. To Chimakonam there was always a mismatch between African and Western logic such that anything an African does on the bedrock of Western logic will be tainted, inauthentic, and unoriginal. If Africans are seeking originality, they should base their ideas on African logic.

Since Chimakonam saw this as a matter of urgency, he constructed a logic from which African systems of thought could emanate. He called the prototype of that logic Ezumezu logic. This newly drawn logic needed a methodology that explained it, and Chimakonam proposed conversational thinking, a method of philosophizing that comes from Ezumezu logic; it is a concrete way of applying Ezumezu logic.

This dissertation tracks the development of Chimakonam's idea of African philosophy which is situated in the broader debate on the rationality of Africans. It further argues that Chimakonam's ideas on African logic can be understood to be progressing from radical relativism, which is a belief that there is a peculiar African logic inaccessible to other cultures, to a measured relativism, which is a belief that though logic may be relative it can also be universalizable.

Dedication

To Jonathan Chimakonam. For the courage to attempt to lead African Philosophy to a new epoch.

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Chapter One

Introduction

Few universities in the world offer African Philosophy as a course. The lack of courses is especially striking in the case of African universities where, today, out of 1 225 universities on the continent, fewer than thirty offer courses in African philosophy.¹ Those universities that offer courses on African philosophy do so as a part of the Western canon. This deficiency in teaching African Philosophy is surprising when one considers that African Philosophy, after all, is more than a century old, and teaching materials are abundant.² For example, as early as 1956, Rwandan Philosopher Alexis Kagame (d. 1981) published his famous *Philosophie Bantu-Rwandaise DeL'Etre*, generally regarded as marking the beginnings of written African Philosophy.³ Ghanaian philosopher, William Abraham, published his brilliant work, *The Mind of Africa*, in 1962, while Kenyan scholar, John Mbiti, published *African Religions and Philosophy* in 1970. In the past half-century, scores of books have been published that, one may argue, constitute worthy teaching material.

Given the availability of teaching materials, this begs the question: why are so few universities teaching African philosophy?

¹ Edwin Etieyibo (eds). *Method, Substance, and the future of African philosophy* (Switzerland, Springer. 2018). 44-46

² Some scholars argue that parts of Africa such Egypt, Ethiopia and Eritrea are part of the African tradition and when that tradition is added in our history, we realize that African philosophy is older than Greek philosophy. See the three-volume book by Martin Bernal titled *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization*, published in 1987, 1991, and 2006 respectively; George James (1954) *Stolen Legacy*. There are also critics to these scholars such as Mary Lefkowitz in her book *Not Out of Africa: How "Afrocentrism" Became an Excuse to Teach Myth As History* (New Republic Book). She writes a polemic against these authors saying they have dropped academic standards in defence of Afrocentrism. I do not agree with her views. However, the debate is beyond the scope of this research.

³ With the exception of earlier thinkers like Zera Yacob, a 17th century Ethiopian philosopher who wrote his treatise in 1667 in Ge'ez language. Yacob wrote a treatise known as a Hatata in which he criticizes ideas that would later be associated with his contemporary David Hume. His student Walda Haywat, also called Mitku, who wrote an epilogue to Yacob's autobiography and added his own treatise to Yacob's collection. Anton Wilhelm Amo from Ghana who is best known for his critique of Rene Descartes idea of the mind.

African Philosophy means different things to different philosophers. How one defines African philosophy is itself a philosophical position, and the definition of African philosophy has spawned decades of debates among philosophers. For the Beninese French Philosopher Paulin J. Hountondji, it is work produced by someone in Africa or anywhere in the world who thinks about African issues and identifies the work as such.⁴ This definition generated heated arguments from African Philosophers. The subject of this study, Jonathan Chimakonam, called it self-contradictory in his book *Ezumezu; A system of Logic for African philosophy and sundry studies*. He warned that if the criterion were too broad, it would be meaningless because any work could be regarded as 'African philosophy' if it was identified as such, and because it was by an African or on an African issue.⁵ For example, the work of an American working on American pragmatism may count as African philosophy if we take Hountondji's criteria to its natural conclusion. That is what Chimakonam meant when he described Hountondji's criteria as self-contradictory.

For this dissertation, African Philosophy is taken to mean a philosophical tradition inspired by African systems of thought.

The absence of African Philosophy from the university syllabi in Africa may partly be due to the development of African Philosophy, which began from a position of weakness, as a response to Westerners' characterization of Africans as 'primitive,' 'ahistorical,' and 'illogical'.⁶ Such caricatures painted by erstwhile colonizers prompted responses from African scholars such as Martiniquan poet and politician Aimé Césaire, (1955), Léopold Senghor of Senegal (1959), and the Ghanaian philosopher Kwasi Wiredu (1980). Some Western philosophers denied that Africans could have a Philosophy since Philosophy was viewed as the manifestation or expression of reason and Africans were portrayed as lacking the capacity to think, that is, reason⁷.

⁴ Barry Hallen. *A Short History of African Philosophy*. (Indiana: Indiana University Press. 2002) 17

⁵ Jonathan Chimakonam. *Ezumezu: A system of logic for African philosophy and sundry studies*. (Switzerland, Springer publishers, 2019). 48

⁶ Dumas. A Masolo. *African philosophy in search of identity: African systems of thought*. (Indiana: Indiana University Press. 1994). 16.

⁷ Emmanuel. C. Eze. *Achieving our humanity: an idea of a post racial future*. (Cambridge. Blackwell. 2011). 22. see Also, Masolo. *African philosophy in search of identity*, 45.

Western thinkers who thought Africans had the capacity to reason thought that Africans reasoned differently from their Western counterparts, and it was the duty of the Africans' erstwhile colonizers to systematize Africans' thought system for them. This was the position of Belgian priest Placide Tempels in his 1945 work *La philosophie bantou* (Bantu Philosophy)⁸. We will encounter his work in later chapters but let it suffice for now to point out that his work is arguably the first to argue that the Bantu people of Southern Africa had an implicit philosophy and seeks to explain the core elements of a distinctive African philosophy.

This dissertation examines the history, evolution, importance, and relevance of African Philosophy through a study of the life and work of Igbo philosopher Jonathan Okeke Chimakonam, who was born on 10 May 1983 in Oba town in Eastern Nigeria. He completed his BA (Hons) at Ebony State University, and the MA and PhD degrees at the University of Calabar in Eastern Nigeria. For his master's degree, Chimakonam majored in the History of Logic while his PhD was in Mathematical Logic. He subsequently taught at the University of Calabar before moving to the University of Pretoria in South Africa. He taught at Calabar for ten years, beginning in 2008, before moving to the University of Pretoria in 2018 where he is still based.⁹

It was as an undergraduate student that I first came across Jonathan Chimakonam. How did I get to be studying Philosophy in the first place? I was born in January 1998 at the Saint Mary's Hospital in Marianhill, just outside Pinetown in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) in a picturesque area of the province known as the Valley of a Thousand Hills. This government-aided Catholic hospital was built by Trappist monks in 1927 and handed over to the KZN Department of Health in 2017. A stone's throw away from the hospital is the secondary school that renowned anti-apartheid activist and founder of the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) in South Africa, Steve Bantu Biko, attended in the 1960s. When Biko attended Saint Mary's, Tshelimnyama, where I grew up, was still a vast forest and it would be almost two decades before my grandmother, Doris Mchunu, a traditional healer, decided to build a home in the heart of the forest.

⁸ Placide Francis Tempels. *Bantu philosophy*. (Paris, Présence Africaine, 1949).

⁹ Interview with Jonathan Chimakonam, 23 August 2021.

I grew up in my grandmother's home which had fourteen people living in it, thirteen adults and myself. Given that my grandmother was a traditional healer, her house was always visited by numerous strangers who came seeking her help. The numbers grew each year until, when I was in grade six, my grandmother enlisted my help with bookkeeping. I attended the Kwacutshwayo Primary School, named after the great Cetshwayo ka Mpande, king of the Zulu people from 1873 to 1879, who led them during the Anglo-Zulu War of 1879 and was subsequently banished.¹⁰ He remains a hero to many Zulu people to the present day for standing up to the British colonial power. The school was four kilometres away from home, a distance that I covered by foot daily. I could see my home when standing in the school yard and sometimes felt that I never actually left home.

I left my grandmother's home in 2009 when my mother received an RDP house, a government house built as part of the African National Congress' (ANC) Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP). She was allocated a home in Verulam, Parkgate, on the north coast of KZN. Verulam was a good sixty kilometres away from where I grew up and it was a major readjustment for me. I attended the Mountview Secondary School in Verulam which was also walking distance from home, and matriculated in 2015.

In 2016, I enrolled at University of KwaZulu Natal (UKZN) where I majored in Philosophy, History and Psychology. I made the decision to study philosophy around 2013 when I lost an argument to a friend of mine from primary school who dared me to prove that God exists. I failed to provide convincing arguments. Though a staunch and practicing Christian, it was impossible to argue against someone armed with the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche's 1895 book *The Antichrist*, which claimed that Christianity was based on the exaltation of paganism in its worst form.¹¹

In a desperate search for a definitive argument for the existence of God, I joined the Verulam library and began borrowing books on the 'God question'. While perusing the library, a book caught my eye simply because it was by the same author that my friend quoted from during our debate. I picked it up and read the strange title *Human, All Too Human*, in which Nietzsche

¹⁰ Charles Binns, *The last Zulu king: the life and death of Cetshwayo*. (London, Longmans, 1963).

¹¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*. (New York, Prometheus, 2000).

viewed the emergence of Science as crucial in freeing up the human spirit.¹² Reading the book was a bitter-sweet experience; at some places I was in awe of the mind-blowing philosophical musings that I kept misunderstanding due to the aphoristic style of writing that Nietzsche is renowned for. Nonetheless, what I read there sparked a desire in me to search for ‘truth’, a search that has not been quenched.

After graduating with my honours degree in philosophy, I never set out to be a philosopher in a formal sense. Indeed, I still do not consider myself one. I always thought of myself as a collector of stories about the past. When I was just three years old, my mother became very ill and was bedridden for a good part of my childhood. Being the only child in the home, I never really had playmates so most of my time was spent sitting beside my mother who kept me engaged with stories of her childhood and our family history. The Oral tradition is central to Zulu culture, including my household, which consisted of poetry and songs, folktales, family history, and wisdom in the form of proverbs, riddles, and songs

By the time I was six years old, I could tell my family's entire history and my mother's detailed biographical account of her life. My mother had worked as a maid, nowadays referred to as a domestic helper, before I was born, and she saw her 'madam' read books to her young child. This was an act, she said, she loved so much because it seemed to create a bond between mother and child while also engaging the child. She decided to try this practice with me. She alternated between my family history and reading to me isiZulu novels.

Although I do not remember most of them, I do remember one of a Zulu prince who had magical powers. I remember this particular story because I always wished to be like that Prince. Though I did not think of it then, telling this story now reminds me that my heroes were Black and Zulu, which may perhaps explain why I am not readily startled by associating blackness with power or all that is good. While not consciously, but perhaps unconsciously, my grandmother's work as a traditional healer may have subconsciously instilled in me an appreciation of African indigenous knowledge systems, traditional medical practices that were used to heal the ill, and perhaps by extension African philosophy too.

¹² Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, all too human*, (Stanford, Stanford University press, 2012).

The books and the stories from my mother instilled in me a deep interest in history. So much so that I chose to study history in high school as one of my core subjects. It did help that my history teacher Dr A.P Narain was one of the best teachers I ever had. He taught history in the most enthralling way. I could not pick out one thing as a reason for why I chose to study philosophy, specifically, African philosophy. But I do suspect it has to do with the love I had for stories of African heroes. My work attempts to bring to the world stories of unsung heroes so that kids can grow up with heroes that look like them.

It is with this background that I return to Jonathan Chimakonam and my first encounter with him. I was attending a seminar sometime in 2018 on the debate between communitarianism and individualism and during the presentation, one of the speakers prefaced his paper by stating that he would be using the conversationalist method of Jonathan Chimakonam. I had not heard of Chimakonam or the conversationalist method and the mention of his name led me to reading some of Chimakonam's work.

I grew up in a setting where one had to find a way to live with African spirituality and Christianity, which were sometimes at odds with each other. I was always in awe of how my grandmother managed to pray to Jesus and consult her ancestors without any feeling of contradiction. Also, what really impressed me was how harmoniously she managed to alternate between African and Western medicine. At times she would flatly tell her clients to check in at a hospital, and at other times she would say that the problem needed to be dealt with traditionally. When I read Chimakonam and found that there was an entire movement dedicated to studying seemingly opposed variables, I was intrigued and wanted to learn more.

This study is borne out of that desire to understand the intersections of seemingly opposed cultures and practices. That I have had to grow up negotiating between as a kid. Although at the time of reading Chimakonam, I was beyond the problem of reconciling African spirituality and Christian religiosity, I still cared a great deal about intercultural philosophy, which is a coming together of different cultures.

When I started this project, I had not met Chimakonam personally, but I was familiar with his work. However, during the write up of this project I finally got to meet him at a decolonial workshop held in Pretoria in 2021. It is sometimes said that it is not a good idea for someone to meet their favourite authors as the experience may be deflating. In my case, however, I was

not disappointed in any way. Of course, it could be argued that Chimakonam had an interest in me viewing him favourably. That said, from what I could tell he was a funny, talkative person, who always had people around him. He has a good sense of humour for someone with serious philosophy in his writings. He is also prone to random lectures at the dinner table about the African predicament and the epistemic justice done on Africa. He weaves his stories with an impressive balance of good oratory and coherence. I found him engaging and it seems to me that some of his peers and even ardent supporters sometimes tend to miss the mark when explaining his ideas. This is a phenomenon that I will deal with in the later chapters.

To come back to my interest in Chimakonam's work, how did Jonathan Chimakonam come up with such a peculiar idea, I wondered? My interest in Chimakonam's work was further stimulated when I read his article '*African studies through language-based techniques*'.¹³ It was a comprehensive and thoroughly researched essay, a testament to the wide scope and erudition of the scholar, Chimakonam challenged some of the best-known intellectuals in African philosophy. More than challenging these intellectuals, he argued that African philosophy would be nothing more than a footnote to Western philosophy until it found its own methodology, which had to take root in African Logic; otherwise, African philosophy would never produce anything authentic.¹⁴

To an untrained ear there may have been nothing strange about such a claim. However, to a young student of Philosophy, it seemed that this proposal, if carried out, would undermine the very foundations of the discipline. It seemed that what Chimakonam was proposing was heresy! His thesis of African Logic that undergirds methodology in African Logic is the very framework from which Chimakonam looks at the world. This and his theory of conversationalism, which states that the purpose of a philosophical debate should not be to find a definite solution but rather to have a sustained conversation in order to generate new concepts and ways of seeing the world¹⁵. These are the roots of Chimakonam's ideas, from which his other works emanate.

¹³ Jonathan Chimakonam, Ndubuisi Osuagwu. 'African studies through language-based techniques. *Filosofia theoretica: journal of African philosophy, culture, and religions*. vol.7 no 1. (2018): 33-45

¹⁴ Jonathan Chimakonam. Ezumazu: *A system of logic for African philosophy and studies* (Switzerland. Springer, 2019). 18.

¹⁵ Jonathan Chimakonam. 'Conversationalism as an Emerging Method of Thinking in and Beyond African Philosophy'. *Acta-Academica*. Vol 29 No 2. (2017): 11–33.

Chimakonam intends his work to be a contribution to African Philosophy and sundry studies. It is impossible to appreciate his contribution to African Philosophy without first understanding the state of African philosophy when Chimakonam began his academic life. It is equally important to locate the central concerns of his work in the context of debates within African Philosophy, and to assess the impact of his work on the direction of African Philosophy.

Preliminary literature study and reasons for choosing topic:

African Philosophy has a relatively short history, being around a century old, whereas its Indian, Asian, and Western counterparts have centuries of documented philosophical traditions. The historiography of African philosophy is fairly new and is often written by non-historians who tend to ask philosophically oriented questions¹⁶, rather than pure historical ones though there are some historical works.¹⁷ Masolo has written one of the earliest comprehensive historical engagements of African Philosophy with a laser focus on trends in African philosophy¹⁸.

Chimakonam and fellow Nigerian Fayemi Ademola Kazeem have made notable contributions to the history of African philosophy. Chimakonam sought to periodise African philosophy in a way that did not ape Western periodisation.¹⁹ Fayemi argued that African philosophy must begin its history with Egyptian History²⁰. The few histories of African philosophy comprise a narrative that is essentially descriptive, a recounting, chronologically, of trends in African

¹⁶ See, for example, Emmanuel Eze. *Achieving our humanity: an idea of a post-racial future* (Cambridge, Blackwell.2011); Emmanuel Eze. *On reason: rationality in a world of cultural conflict and racism*. (Durham. Duke University Press, 2008); Charles Okoro, *African Philosophy: Question and Debate, A Historical Study*. (Enugu: Paqon Press, 2004).

¹⁷ This includes *a Short History of African Philosophy* by Barry Hallen (2002); and the work of Edwin Etieyibo- *Method, Substance, and the Future of African Philosophy* (2018). D.A Masolo (1994) *African philosophy in search of identity* and Emmanuel Eze's (2011) *Achieving our humanity* to name a few

¹⁸ Masolo, *African systems of thought*,15.

¹⁹ Jonathan Chimakonam. 'History of African philosophy.' *The internet encyclopaedia of philosophy*. 2019, ISSN 2161-0002, <https://iep.utm.edu/>.

²⁰ Ademola Fayemi. 'African philosophy in search of historiography. *Institute of African studies*. (2017) :298- 331

philosophy²¹. Alena Retova and Anke Graness show that though Anglophone and Francophone philosophical traditions seem to be well documented, the Lusophone tradition has been largely abandoned and thus gotten little attention from mainstream history of African philosophy.²² Therefore, Retova investigates the ways the Lusophone tradition of philosophy in Rwanda has been largely influenced by the Genocide and shows how the philosophy was born out of massacres.

Graness has argued that there is need for a causal approach that theorizes the nature of phenomena or realities, seeking an understanding of how and why these take the form they do²³. This is what this dissertation seeks to do and in doing so, contribute to furthering the study African Philosophy. The Guyanese historian George James, in his 1954 study, traced the beginnings of African philosophy to Ancient Egypt and argued that Western philosophers 'stole' from the African-Egyptians.²⁴ Anke Graness points to Anton-Wilhelm, an eighteenth-century thinker, and Yacob, an Ethiopian seventeenth century thinker, as founders of African philosophy²⁵. Chimakonam stated that while there were such thinkers, systematized African philosophy began in the 1920s, not out of wonder or curiosity but out of the frustrations of western-educated African thinkers.²⁶ There are, however, no monographs interrogating the history of individual movements, schools or discourses in African philosophy and their impact on the tapestry of African philosophy.

According to Fayemi, an in-depth history of African philosophy will help to elevate African Philosophy as a discipline. The aim of such a study would be to create and recreate the events surrounding the development of African philosophy from the ancient period in order to solidify

²¹ See for example the work of Abanuka, Batholomew. *A History of African Philosophy*. (Enugu: Snaap Press, 2011). In this work he is concerned with trends and movements in African philosophy. There is no engagement with the literature he is collecting.

²² See Alena Rettova 'Post Genocide, Post-Apartheid: The shifting landscapes of African Philosophy, 1994-2019'. *Modern Africa: Politics, History and Society*. Vol.9. No1. (2021): 11-58.

²³ Anke Graness. 'Writing The History of Philosophy in Africa, where to begin?' *Journal of African Cultural Studies*. Vol 28. No 2, (2016): 132-146.

²⁴ Damas Masolo. *African philosophy in search of identity: African systems of thought*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992) 23.

²⁵ Graness, 'where to begin?' 138.

²⁶ Chimakonam. 'History of African philosophy'

its knowledge in the present, and trace its continuous movement, and making it a guideline for future inquiry²⁷.

Research problems and objectives

Academics are sometimes looked down by 'revolutionaries' for cosying up in their academic ivory towers.²⁸ Their work in fighting oppressive structures is not given recognition or seen to inspire change, and most biographies on African change makers tend to focus on well-known militant revolutionaries.²⁹ This study analyses the impact that intellectuals can have in changing the status quo. By studying the life and work of one academic and intellectual, this study aims to map out his thoughts and ideas, and interrogate the crucial impact that intellectuals can have in changing the thinking of members of a society.

Some of the key questions to be investigated by this research are:

- What are the biographical details of Jonathan Chimakonam's life and what insights can we gain into his work from his background?
- What is the larger context in which to situate Jonathan Chimakonam's work?
- What is the core of Jonathan Chimakonam's intellectual and creative work and what is its significance?
- Is Jonathan Chimakonam a pioneer in the field? Is he part of an intellectual 'school' or cultural movement and what is his intellectual legacy?
- Why is Jonathan Chimakonam's work important - because it represents something bigger, or because it is utterly unique, or because he is making a contribution at a crucial moment in time in terms of calls for decolonising education, or for some other reason?

Some of the broader issues that are investigated in this study, include:

- Why are the contributions of African philosophers not included in the Philosophical canon on the whole? What are some of the historical and contemporary reasons for this?

²⁷ Fayemi. 'African philosophy', 298.

²⁸ Sanya Osha. *Kwasi Wiredu and Beyond: The Text, Writing and Thought in Africa*. (Dakar, Codesria. 2005). 10.

²⁹ Ian Campbell. 'Writing Imperial Lives: Biography, Autobiography, and Microhistory,' *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, Vol 18 No 11 (2017): 151-164 (Review).

- Why is it so difficult to find African philosophy courses taught at African universities? What does the omission of these courses tell us about the colonisation of African education systems and the need to redress the situation?
- To what extent is Jonathan Chimakonam pushing the frontiers of African knowledge? And can his work be considered as ushering a new era in the periodization of African philosophy?
- Do biographies of intellectuals serve any purpose? Does knowing about an author's life help us understand his or her works any better? Do personal factors contain details that help to unlock an understanding of the author's work?

Theoretical framework:

The turn to Social History from the 1960s, influenced by the magisterial work of E.P. Thompson on the English working class, aimed to capture the lived experiences of previously marginalised and unheralded peoples.³⁰ According to Charles Tilly, the social historian aims to 'document large structural changes; reconstruct the experiences of ordinary people in the course of those changes; and connect the two.'³¹ In focusing on an important but largely unheralded philosopher in an international sense, and on the personal, this study hopefully contributes to this genre of historical enquiry and writing. Jonathan Chimakonam's life and work is situated within the broader field of study while also analysing the dialectical relationship between his life and work.

Though biographies are extremely popular in the contemporary period there is a great deal of debate about their authenticity and possibilities. Their popularity is likely due to the fact that they can relate to the audience in a direct way and in a style that more general histories sometimes fail to do. According to Campbell, biographies 'connect with the reader in a way that, perhaps, more hermetic or abstract approaches do not'.³² Biographies do have weaknesses. Laporte has criticised biographies for perpetuating the 'great-man theories of history' or at least

³⁰ See Miles Fairburn, *Social History: Problems, Strategies and Methods*. (New York: St. Martin's. 1999).

³¹ Charles Tilly, 'The Old New Social History and the New Old Social History,' *Review*. 7, 3 (1984): 363-406, 365.

³² Ian W. Campbell, 'Writing Imperial Lives: Biography, Autobiography, and Microhistory,' *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*. 18,1 (2017): 151-164 (Review). 152

focusing on 'subjects worthy of biographies.'³³ This dissertation can be accused of doing both since it is focusing on a male intellectual. However, as will emerge in subsequent chapters, it is a worthy and important project given the intellectual subject explored, namely, the overlooked African thought systems and their philosophy that tends to be marginalized from the canon.

Ciraj Rasool, historian at the University of the Western Cape, is critical of biographies that present their subject's lives in an ordered sequence, and individuals as stable and autonomous persons who exercise rational choice.³⁴ Rasool describes this as a 'biographical illusion' since human lives are fragmentary rather than ordered, and all studies should reflect the 'multiple narrations intersecting and cross-cutting each other, contradicting each other'³⁵. An attempt has been made to heed the lesson from Rasool though it is not directly relevant since this study focuses more on the subject's intellectual project.

There is some discussion about exactly what differentiates a biography from an intellectual biography. According to Hadfield, a biography of the intellectual is aimed at understanding the work of the individual, 'which is what really matters, not the life itself', since one's life always has a bearing on one's work.³⁶ Another perspective is that an intellectual biographer focuses on an individual's mind, thoughts, and ideas' as a means toward illuminating the subject's life, personality, and character'.³⁷ As understood here, what is meant by intellectual biography in the context of this study is that it seeks to both construct the life of Jonathan Chimakonam as well as engage with his work, in order to understand the relationship between the life and the work.

Biography 'creates the possibility of a broader understanding of the interplay between an individual and social forces beyond one's ability to control.' This study does take cognizance

³³ Jill Lepore, 'Historians Who Love Too Much: Reflections on Microhistory and Biography,' *The Journal of American History*. 88, 1 (2001): 129-144, 141.

³⁴ Ciraj Rasool, 'The challenges of rethinking South African Political Biography: a reply to Jonathan Hyslop,' *South African Review of Sociology* 41, 2 (2010): 116-120. 117

³⁵ Rasool, 'Challenges of rethinking South African Political Biography,' *South African Review of Sociology*. 119.

³⁶ Andrew Hadfield, 'Why Does Literary Biography Matter?', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 65,4 (2014): 371-378, 376,

³⁷ Paul Korshin, 'The development of intellectual biography in the Eighteenth Century.' *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*. Vol 73. No 4.5 (1974): 15-21.

of the fact that 'to write a social biography demands a disciplinary rigor and thorough research effort that treats equally seriously both the subject and the context that shapes that life'.³⁸

Who is an intellectual? Scholars have offered many different definitions of who an intellectual is, ranging from some who refer to them as a small elite group in society that actively seek to change minds, to others who believe that everyone is an intellectual. For the purposes of this study, we rely on the definition provided by the Palestinian academic / activist Edward Said who spoke of an 'organic intellectual' as an enlightened person who advocates for change in society, especially over human rights issues, governance, culture, and various other human rights concerns.

I want to insist that the intellectual is an individual with a specific public role in society that cannot be reduced simply to being a faceless professional, a competent member of a class just going about her/his business. The central fact for me is, I think, that the intellectual is an individual endowed with a faculty for representing, embodying, articulating a message, a view, an attitude, philosophy or opinion to, as well as for, a public. And this role has an edge to it, and cannot be played without a sense of being someone whose place it is publicly to raise embarrassing questions, to confront orthodoxy and dogma (rather than to produce them), to be someone who cannot easily be co-opted by governments or corporations, and whose *raison d'être* is to represent all those people and issues that are routinely forgotten or swept under the rug. The intellectual does so on the basis of universal principles: that all human beings are entitled to expect decent standards of behaviour concerning freedom and justice from worldly powers or nations, and that deliberate or inadvertent violations of these standards need to be testified and fought against courageously.³⁹

In a more recent 2019 study, Fetson A. Kalua, argued that the role of African intellectuals has always shifted with the changing times, from colonial to post-colonial, and hence the dilemmas she or he has encountered in the process. The two contrasting dilemmas the African intellectual has faced have to do with either co-option or rejection by the ruling elites. While some intellectuals chose to be complicit with some political elites

³⁸ Nick Salvatore, 'Biography and Social History: An Intimate Relationship', *Labour History*. No. 87, (2004):187-192.

³⁹ Edward W. Said, 'Representations of the Intellectual. THE 1993 REITH LECTURES,' New York: Vintage Books, 1996, 11-12
<https://cbs.asu.edu/sites/default/files/PDFS/Said%20Representations%20of%20the%20Intellectual.pdf>. Accessed 30 May 2020.

in thwarting the dreams of the majority of people in post-colonial societies, those (intellectuals) who were seen to stand up for people's rights and freedoms were either incarcerated or hounded into exile by their governments. Otherwise, most celebrated intellectuals ended up leaving their countries for the West because the political elites would not brook any criticism from them, no matter how constructive it was.⁴⁰

Chimakonam, as this study will show, fits in with Edward Said's notion of an intellectual, in that he is seeking to change people's way of thinking and seeking things. And in contrast to the intellectuals mentioned by Kalua, he is not complicit with African leaders, nor is he one in political opposition to a corrupt regime, but he did leave this homeland, not for the west, but southwards, to South Africa.

Research methodology and methods:

This study relies on qualitative research, which includes virtual oral interviews and analysis of published work. Chimakonam is an individual situated in a broader society and the political, institutional, and structural background is critical. This study utilises two qualitative methods, textual analysis, which involved a critical analysis of the corpus of Chimakonam's published work, and oral history, where several virtual interviews were conducted with Chimakonam. These were used to weave a coherent narrative that illuminates the social realities of African philosophers.

The interview schedule was semi-structured so that I could get key biographical information, while allowing the professor to tell his story in a way that he found comfortable. I sought to probe what shaped Chimakonam's intellectual life and inspired him to take the journey he took, how he shaped the field, and the reaction of fellow philosophers. This study also drew on interviews done by others with Chimakonam, articles on him, and sites like Google Scholar, Academia, and Research Gate, where Chimakonam's works appear, with feedback, some of which is critical.

The coronavirus pandemic that swept the world in 2020 and resulted in a lockdown in South Africa in March 2020, and continues to deeply impact on our lives, altered the way I did the

⁴⁰ Fetson A. Kalua, *African Intellectuals in the Post-colonial World*. (London: Routledge, 2019) 33.

fieldwork for this study. Ideally, I would have liked to have interviewed Doctor Chimakonam in person, but this was prohibited by our institution's new regulations for contact research during the pandemic. These regulations did change as we moved between waves but in view of the uncertainty and sudden changes in regulations, I had to proceed as if face-to-face contact was prohibited.

Initially, I used Zoom and Teams but that did not work too well as I was at home because of the lockdown and had problems with internet access and stability. In the end, found that the most fruitful method was for me to send questions in writing to Chimakonam, and I did. I sent questions in written form to Chimakonam in December 2020 to which he responded timely. Fortunately, I was allowed access back to campus and set up an interview with Chimakonam on zoom on 23 August 2021. I also contacted other members of the conversational school who were gracious enough to be interviewed by me via Zoom. These included Dr Aribia Attoe and Dr Lucky Uchenna Ogbonnaya but others were unfortunately unavailable due to time constraints and internet issues.

Oral history is an important tool in research. I have used this methodology previously and employed it carefully as it is subjective.⁴¹ Memory, for example, does not mean to simply 'recall past events and experiences in an unproblematic way. It is rather a process of remembering ... that is shaped at least in part by our social and cultural context.'⁴² The recall of the past is influenced by one's desire to portray oneself in a good light or even increase one's contribution to an event. The same could apply to written responses.

An important segment of my work included a systematic review of secondary sources (mainly books and journal articles), which were accessed online. 'Desktop Research' was not compromised by the lockdown and this in turn meant that this study itself was not compromised.

Qualitative research required me to take the raw data (interviews and secondary materials) and divide it into themes to construct the story. Inevitably, this meant that one had to pick and

⁴¹ See B. Allen and W.L. Montell, *From Memory to History: Using Oral Sources in Local Historical Research* (American Association for State and Local History, Nashville, 1981); and R. Perks and A. Thomson (eds), *The oral history reader* (Routledge, New York, 2006).

⁴² See Abrams, 'Oral History Theory', 78-79.

choose which ideas were important and which were allegedly 'making the history up'.⁴³ Bias has been identified as another shortcoming, with the 'closeness' (not in the sense of my knowing the subject of this study personally but rather being an admirer of his work) between the subject, Chimakonam, and the researcher, likely to cloud my judgement,⁴⁴ but I do believe that I avoided this through the objective analysis of the interview material and written work.

Structure of dissertation:

This dissertation is made up of six chapters. Chapter One, the Introduction, sets out the motivation for the study, and background, Literature review, theoretical framework, and methodology, and outline of chapters. Following this introductory chapter, Chapter Two discusses the 'Great Debate' and all its key protagonists who had an influence on Chimakonam. It shows that concepts such as African philosophy, Afrocentrism, and African Logic first emerged during this era. Further, this chapter show how Chimakonam invented new ways of thinking about the problems he inherited from these debates. The third chapter will focus on the life of Chimakonam, including his early childhood and schooling, life growing up, and transition from high school to university. This chapter will utilize interviews with Chimakonam and other close associates. Chapter Four examines Chimakonam's crystallization of the theory of the Africanness of African philosophy. The fifth and final chapter focuses in detail on his Philosophy of Logic. Chapter Six summarizes the key findings of this study.

This intellectual biography makes an important contribution to the field of African philosophy. It resembles the work done, for example, on Paulin Hountondji by Dübgen and Skupien in 2019,⁴⁵ the difference being that the authors of that work focus largely on a single idea propounded by Hountondji, that is, his critique of ethnophilosophy. Thus, the work is mostly a monograph of Hountondji's idea rather than a composite intellectual biography, though there is a chapter on Hountondji as a public intellectual and his political life. This study attempts to replicate a similar study on Doctor Jonathan Chimakonam but includes his biography.

⁴³Hadfield, 'Why does literary biography matter?', 17.

⁴⁴ Campbell, 'Writing imperial lives', 151.

⁴⁵ Franziska Dübgen and Stefan Skupien, *Paulin Hountondji. African Philosophy as Critical Universalism*. (London: Palgrave, 2019).

Chapter Two

Enlightenment, Colonialism, Scientific Racism and the rise of African Philosophy

Some of the greatest modern philosophers held racist views. John Locke (1632-1704), David Hume (1711-76), Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), G.W.F. Hegel (1770-1831) and many others believed that Black and Indigenous peoples the world over were savage, inferior and in need of correction by European enlightenment.... Hegel [is] arguably the creator of the most systematic philosophy in modern thought. Hegel certainly was an explicit racist. He believed, for example, that Black Africans were a ‘race of children that remain immersed in a state of naiveté’. He further wrote that Indigenous peoples lived in ‘a condition of savagery and unfreedom’. And in *The Philosophy of Right* (1821), he argued that there is a ‘right of heroes’ to colonise these people in order to bring them into a progress of European enlightenment.

- Avram Alpert ⁴⁶

In order to appreciate and locate the work of Jonathan Chimakonam, this chapter examines the emergence and development of systemic racism within the discipline of Philosophy and the subsequent rise of African Philosophy as a discipline in the twentieth-century. Included in this chapter are the key debates within that discipline, which include whether the concept of ‘African Philosophy’ is valid, and if so, when it originated, its periodization, and concepts like African Logic and Afrocentricity. As background, this chapter examines the emergence of Enlightenment thinking, colonisation, and the development of racist thinking which, in its extreme version, questioned whether Africans were actually human. The broader aim of this chapter is to introduce key concepts and how those evolved within African philosophy, and how they form the basis of Chimakonam’s discourse.

Enlightenment, Colonialism and Racist thinking

Colonization had both literal and figurative meanings. Speaking of the period since the seventeenth century, it refers to the fact that European colonialists literally began to inhabit the lands of Americans, Asians, and Africans, farm it, cultivate it, and generally design it to be

⁴⁶ Alpert, Avram. ‘Philosophy’s systemic racism,’ *Aeon*, 21 September 2020. <https://aeon.co/essays/racism-is-baked-into-the-structure-of-dialectical-philosophy>. Accessed 5 May 2021.

what they wanted it to be as they exploited it. They built cities and houses that looked like those they left behind in Europe. When Prince Albert, the son of Belgian King Leopold II, saw missionary homes in Congo it is said that he exclaimed that they looked just like those in Europe.⁴⁷

In order to build those cities, they had to dispossess Africans of their lands, demolish existing African structures, and erase their histories. The latter, figurative meaning of colonization, speaks also to how the colonist designed African identity and conceptual schemes into their own (colonist) image. From this emerged what V.Y. Mudimbe, the Congolese- French philosopher, termed in his landmark book *Invention of Africa*, the three complementary hypotheses: 'the domination of physical space, the reformation of natives' minds, and the integration of local economic histories into the Western perspective'.⁴⁸

The domination of space was to enable the colonialists to build their own worlds that were an expression of their thought and will. The reformation of the 'natives' minds also meant redefining Africans to reflect the idea that the colonial masters had of him or her, however perverse that might be, and they were undoubtedly perverse. The consequence of the integration of local economic histories has been well documented, by, amongst others, Guyanese historian Walter Rodney in his brilliant and pathbreaking work, *How Europe underdeveloped Africa*.⁴⁹

According to South African Magobo Ramose, a professor of Philosophy at the University of South Africa who has done much to popularise African philosophy, discourses on Africa have been dominated and led by Europeans and Americans. Ramose sees this as the product of violent colonization that saw non-Africans claim, 'unilaterally the right to speak on behalf of the Africans and to define the meaning of experience and truth for them'.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Nancy Rose Hunt, 'Colonial Fairy Tales and the knife and fork doctrine in the heart of Africa', in *African Encounters with Domesticity*. (New Jersey. Rutgers university press. 1992) 22.

⁴⁸ Valentine-Yves Mudimbe. *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988.)12

⁴⁹ Walter Rodney, *How Europe underdeveloped Africa*. (London, Bogle-L'Ouverture Publications.1973.)

⁵⁰ Magobe Ramose 'Discourses on Africa', in *The African Philosophy reader* ed. Pieter Hendriks Coetzee and Abraham Roux. (London. Routledge. 2002) 22

This violent imposition by erstwhile colonizers has historically been justified by referring to the Aristotelean definition of humanity- ‘Man is a rational animal.’⁵¹ Simply defined, this means that the only distinguishing feature of humanity is the capacity to reason, imagine, reflect, and make rational choices. It is this that sets humans apart from animals. The so-called founding ‘fathers’ of Modern philosophy all placed an emphasis on one thing as the essence of personhood: the capacity to reason. Consider the following quote from one of the most influential modern philosophers, the German Immanuel Kant:

The fact that man can have the idea ‘I’ raises him infinitely above all the other beings living on earth... *he is a person ... a being altogether different in rank and dignity from things, such as irrational animals, which we can dispose of as we please* (italics mine).⁵²

The sixteenth-century French Philosopher Rene Descartes likewise wrote:

I noticed that, during the time I wanted to think that everything was false, it was necessary that I, who thought thus, be something. And noticing that this truth—I think therefore I am—was so firm and so certain that the most extravagant suppositions of the skeptics were unable to shake it, I judged that I could accept it without scruple as the first principle of the philosophy I was seeking.⁵³

The foregoing shows that early philosophers considered rationality or reason as being at the core of personhood. The Scottish philosopher David Hume, a renowned intellectual who is regarded as one of the most important philosophers of the eighteenth century, wrote in *A treatise of human nature*, that to study science was to study human nature⁵⁴.

Thus, for these philosophers, if one lacked the capacity to reason, it meant that one was subhuman, devoid of all the liberties afforded to humans. This emphasis on the ability to reason as a condition to being accepted in the human race leads to the flip side of the conversation on rationality. That is, if you do not have the capacity to reason, you cannot be accepted as a member of the human race. And if you are not a member of the human race, the liberties

⁵¹ Gerald, J, Hughes. *The Routledge guidebook to Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics*. (London. Routledge. 2013). 244

⁵² Emmanuel Eze. *Achieving our humanity: The idea of a post-racial future*. (London. Routledge, 2001).13.

⁵³ Rene Descartes. *Meditations of first philosophy*, (Cambridge, Heckert publishers, 1651.) 12

⁵⁴ Ramose, discourses on Africa, 23

afforded to humans would be denied to you. This is the rationalization that emerges when one reads the enlightenment philosophers who had to justify why it was morally acceptable to enslave some humans but morally unacceptable to enslave others. From these, the colonialists moved to say that Africans were not rational, nor did they have free will which was seen as a product of reason. It was therefore not immoral to enslave Africans since they were regarded as subhuman.

In fact, Kant would write that '[w]hole continents, Africa and the Orient, have never had this idea [of freedom] and are still without it', and that 'No absolute injustice is done to those who remain servants, for whoever lacks the courage to risk his life in order to obtain freedom deserves to remain a slave.'⁵⁵ The identity of Africans was left to the European to decide; it was they who were to map out the contours and the limitations of Black rationality.

It should come as no surprise then that in 1910 Lucien Levy-Bruhl, a well-known French Anthropologist, could publish a book titled *Les fonctions mentales dans les societies inferieures*, which translates to 'How Natives Think.'⁵⁶ Levy-Bruhul's audacious assumption that he, an outsider, could know how an entire continent thought is not a new development in that period, and it could be argued that that line of thinking continues into the present. This is an argument that I merely hint at here, as it is beyond the scope of this dissertation.

This line of thinking dates back to the Enlightenment period. One prime example is Lewis Henry Morgan's 1870 work, *Systems of consanguinity and affinity of the human family*. Morgan argues in this book cultures had seven stages of development—Lower Savagery, Middle Savagery, Upper Savagery, Lower Barbarism, Middle Barbarism, Upper Barbarism and Civilization. These stages corresponded with existing societies in the world with the Euro-American society at the helm as it has reached the status of civilization, 'typified by the possession of writing and especially of the phonetic alphabet'.⁵⁷

Another example to consider is what the enlightenment philosopher David Hume stated:

⁵⁵ Darrel Moellendorf, 'Racism And Rationality In Hegel's Philosophy Of Subjective Spirit,' *History of Political Thought*, 13.2 (1992): 248.

⁵⁶ Lucien Levy-Bruhl, *How Natives think* (Paris, Martino fine books, 2015).

⁵⁷ Ramose, 'discourses on Africa', 33

There never was civilized nation of any other complexion than white, nor even any individual eminent in action or speculation. No ingenious manufacturer among them, no arts, no sciences... Such a uniform and constant difference could not happen, in so many countries and ages, if nature had not made an original distinction betwixt these breeds of men⁵⁸.

Or what another important historian and philosopher, G.W. Hegel wrote:

The characteristic feature of the negroes is that their consciousness has not yet reached an awareness of any substantial objectivity—for example, of God or the law—in which will of man could participate and in which he could become aware of his own being. The African, in his undifferentiated and concentrated unity, has not yet succeeded in making this distinction between himself as an individual and his essential universality, to that he knows nothing of an absolute being which is other and higher than his own self.⁵⁹

As Alpert argues, Hegel believed that indigenous peoples were trapped ‘in a state of nature’ until they were ‘rescued’ by Europeans:

Hegel believes that Black and Indigenous peoples have a ‘dormant’ dialectic, are stuck in nature, and thus cannot begin the dialectical process toward self-conscious freedom. This is why he says there is a ‘right of heroes’ to colonise – it is only through colonisation by Europe that others can become part of the march of human freedom.⁶⁰

A similar sentiment was shared by Immanuel Kant:

The race of the Negroes, one could say, is completely the opposite of the Americans; they are full of affect and passion, very lively, talkative, and vain. They can be educated but only as servants (slaves), that is they allow themselves to be trained. They have many motivating forces, are also sensitive, are afraid of blows and do much out of a sense of honor.⁶¹

⁵⁸ David Hume. *Of National Characters*. (London, Routledge, 1748.) 196

⁵⁹ Eze, achieving our humanity. 25

⁶⁰ Alpert, Avram. ‘Philosophy’s systemic racism,’ Aeon, 21 September 2020. *Aeon*. <https://aeon.co/essays/racism-is-baked-into-the-structure-of-dialectical-philosophy>. Accessed 5 May 2021.

⁶¹ Immanuel Kant. *Anthropology from a pragmatic point of view*. (Germany, University of Königsberg. 1798.) 169

The most glaring component of the quotes above is the clear bifurcation of savage/barbarian vs civilized European. These polar opposites were pitted against each other with the supposed illogicality of the ‘savage’ used as a justification for his enslavement. This is most clear when one reads Immanuel Kant who, in his time, was regarded as the foremost moral philosopher. His work in moral philosophy was the most passed around text in Germany and Western European. Kant wrote in *Groundwork of Metaphysic of Morals* that men ought not to be treated as a means to an end; rather they should be treated as an end to themselves⁶². What that meant was that one must not use another for personal gain but instead show respect for the intrinsic value of another person’s life. Thus, when he was confronted with the question of slaves who were clearly being used as means to an end, Kant supported a pro-slavery text and critiqued the proposal to free Black slaves by arguing that Blacks were unable to work on their own unless they were coerced.⁶³

Bryan W. Van Norden, a Professor of Sociology, described Kant as being a ‘notoriously racist’ individual who placed races ‘in a hierarchical order’:

1. ‘The race of the whites contains all talents and motives in itself.’
2. ‘The Hindus ... have a strong degree of calm, and all look like philosophers. That notwithstanding, they are much inclined to anger and love. They thus are educable in the highest degree, but only to the arts and not to the sciences. They will never achieve abstract concepts. [Kant ranks the Chinese with East Indians and claims that they are] static ... for their history books show that they do not know more now than they have long known.’
3. ‘The race of Negroes ... [is] full of affect and passion, very lively, chatty and vain. It can be educated, but only to the education of servants, ie, they can be trained.’

⁶² Immanuel Kant. *Groundwork of the metaphysics of morals*, trans Mary Gregor (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press. 1998)

⁶³ Kleingeld, Pauline. ‘Kant’s Second Thoughts on Race.’ *The Philosophical Quarterly* (1950-) 57, no. 229 (2007): 573-92. Accessed August 14, 2021. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4543266>. Also, it is important to note that Kleingeld, argues, in the same paper, that Kant changes his views with time. He discards his views of racial hierarchies and adopts an ‘egalitarian’ conception of race in line with his ethics. I will not engage this argument here since it does not make a difference for our argument whether Kant changed his views or not, our argument here is how such views were prevalent within philosophy and how they festered into the worst systems of colonialism and slavery in Africa.

4. 'The [Indigenous] American people are uneducable; for they lack affect and passion. They are not amorous, and so are not fertile. They speak hardly at all, ... care for nothing and are lazy.'⁶⁴

Kant was clear that 'the Chinese, Indians, Africans and the Indigenous peoples of the Americas are congenitally incapable of philosophy.'⁶⁵

Peter Parks has argued that notwithstanding various differences between the founding European philosophers, the ideas of people like Kant and Hegel were crucially shaped by a racialised philosophical anthropology that has its roots in the work of Christoph Meiners (1747-1810), the German historian and philosopher who believed in the polygenist theory of human origins which states that each 'race' had a different origin.⁶⁶

The result, as George Stocking points out in his study of nineteenth-century anthropology, European intellectuals wrote of the 'inferiority' of dark-skinned people and of the need for 'civilized' societies to infiltrate such societies:

Civilizing efforts on behalf of dark-skinned savages could, over time, eliminate savagery from the world, not by destroying savage populations, but by modifying their hereditary incapacity. In the meantime — which might be shorter or longer depending on the weight one gave to present as opposed to cumulative past experience — it was both scientifically and morally respectable for civilized Europeans to take up the white man's burden.⁶⁷

This was precisely the argument that the Palestinian intellectual Edward Said made in his highly influential 1970s book, *Orientalism*, in which he wrote that for European colonialists and academics

The Oriental is irrational, - depraved (fallen), childlike, 'different'; thus the European is rational, virtuous, mature, 'normal.' What gave the Oriental's world its intelligibility and identity was not the result of his own efforts but rather the whole complex series of

⁶⁴ Van Norten, Bryan W. 'Western philosophy is racist,' *Aeon*, 31 October 2017. <https://aeon.co/essays/why-the-western-philosophical-canon-is-xenophobic-and-racist/>. Accessed 30 April 2021.

⁶⁵ Van Norten, Bryan W. 'Western philosophy is racist, 10

⁶⁶ Park, Peter K.J. *Africa, Asia, and the History of Philosophy: Racism in the Formation of the Philosophical Canon*. (New York: SUNY Press, 2014).

⁶⁷ George W. Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology*. (New York, Free Press, 1987,) 237.

knowledgeable manipulations by which the Orient was identified by the West. Knowledge of the Orient, because generated out of strength, in a sense creates the Orient, the Oriental and his world.... So far as the West was concerned during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, an assumption had been made that the Orient and everything in it was, if not patently inferior to, then in need of corrective study by the West.... Cromer and Balfour [British colonial officials] inherited from a century of modern Western Orientalism: knowledge about and knowledge of Orientals, their race, character, culture, history, traditions, society, and possibilities. This knowledge was effective: Cromer believed he had put it to use in governing Egypt. Moreover, it was tested and unchanging knowledge, since 'Orientals' for all practical purposes were a Platonic essence, which any Orientalist (or ruler of Orientals) might examine, understand, and expose. Thus, in the thirty - fourth chapter of his two-volume work *Modern Egypt*, the magisterial record of his experience and achievement, Cromer puts down a sort of personal canon of Orientalist wisdom: Sir Alfred Lyall once said to me: 'Accuracy is abhorrent to the Oriental mind. Every Anglo - Indian should always remember, that maxim.'.... The European is a close reasoner; his statements of fact are devoid of any ambiguity; he is a natural logician, albeit he may not have studied logic; he is by nature sceptical and requires proof before he can accept the truth of any proposition; his trained intelligence works like a piece of mechanism. The mind of the Oriental, on the other hand, like his picturesque streets, is eminently wanting in symmetry. His reasoning is of the most slipshod description. Although the ancient Arabs acquired in a somewhat higher degree the science of dialectics, their descendants are singularly deficient in the logical faculty. They are often incapable of drawing the most obvious conclusions from any simple premises of which they may admit the truth.⁶⁸

Van Norden concludes in strong terms:

European intellectuals increasingly accepted and systematised views of white racial superiority that entailed that no non-Caucasian group *could* develop philosophy. The exclusion of non-European philosophy from the canon was a *decision*, not something that people have always believed, and it was a decision based not on a reasoned argument, but rather on polemical considerations involving the pro-Kantian faction in European

⁶⁸ Edward Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient*. (London: Penguin, 1977), 17-18.

philosophy, as well as views about race that are both scientifically unsound and morally heinous.⁶⁹

African response and the birth of African Philosophy.

The frustrations of African intellectuals began with the concept of reason. They had to take on a humiliating task of ‘proving’ to Europeans that Africans did indeed possess reason. Since philosophy is an exercise of reason, the denial of African philosophy was in essence the denial of African people’s capacity to reason which, as we saw above, is tantamount to denying their humanity. The battle then was, as African philosopher Immanuel Eze’s book title alluded, *Achieving our Humanity*.⁷⁰

Anthropologists and philosophers of the global North relentlessly provided ‘scientific’ reasons as to why philosophical thought could not be present among the indigenous peoples of Africa. Africans’ system of belief lacked objectivity and critical rigour that undergird the creation of philosophy. All, as Barry Hallen sarcastically put, ‘1000+’ of them lacked conceptual and cultural tools for philosophy, All 1000+ of them.⁷¹

According to Hallen, African philosophers such as William Abraham, V.Y. Mudimbe, Paulin Hountondji, and Kwasi Wiredu argued strongly that it was their duty to challenge and reverse these unpleasant lies. He argued that African philosophers ‘recognize that a core strategy underlying and lending support to these controversial narratives is their intent to establish the inferior nature of rationality or reasoning in the African cultural context’.⁷²

This placed the debate entirely on rationality which, after all, is the business of philosophy. As such, debate about rationality became a debate about what philosophy in the context of Africa should look like. The most important development in the 1990s was that, for the first time, a

⁶⁹ Van Norten, Bryan W. ‘Western philosophy is racist,’ *Aeon*, 31 October 2017. <https://aeon.co/essays/why-the-western-philosophical-canon-is-xenophobic-and-racist/>. Accessed 30 April 2021.

⁷⁰ Immanuel Eze. *Achieving our humanity: an idea of a post racial future*. (London, Routledge, 2011).

⁷¹ Barry Hallen. *A short History of African Philosophy*. (Indiana, Indiana University press. 2002) 23

⁷² Hallen, *A short history of African philosophy*, 33

truly pan-African project began as philosophers from literally all over Africa began an intra-national conversation.

Theorists like William Abraham (Ghana), Peter Bodunrin (Nigeria), Cheikh Anta Diop (Senegal), Paulin Hountondji (Dahomey/ Republic of Benin), Alexis Kagame (Rwanda-Burundi), John Mbiti (Uganda), Valentine-Yves Mudimbe (Democratic Republic of the Congo), Odera Oruka (Kenya), Leopold Senghor (Senegal), J. Olubi Sodipo (Nigeria), and Kwasi Wiredu (Ghana).⁷³

In the 1960s and 1970s various intellectuals / academics began attempting to systematically define black rationality and by extension black philosophy. They also criticised and responded to the parochial colonial views of the Western philosophers, drawing heavily on the work that scholars / activists of African ancestry in the diaspora, such as Franz Fanon and Aimé Césaire, who, in turn, were inspired by the African-American Harlem renaissance writers like the poet Langstone Hughes and Sociologist W.E.B. Dubois, amongst others. But these poets and philosophers were equally influenced by Hegel. As Alpert points out:

After the Second World War, the philosopher, poet and long-time leading politician of Martinique, Aimé Césaire (1913-2008), sat down to read Hegel's philosophical masterpiece, *The Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807). Upon finishing it, he enthusiastically showed it to his friend Léopold Senghor (1906-2001) – also a philosopher and poet, and the long-time leader of Senegal: 'Listen to what Hegel says, Léopold: to arrive at the Universal, one must immerse oneself in the Particular!' In Hegel's abstract philosophy, Césaire had found a philosophical accomplice in the project of Négritude, the movement of championing of Black thought and aesthetics that Senghor and Césaire had helped to found in Paris in the 1930s. Hegel's philosophy made the same point they had been making: that their embrace of Blackness was part of the movement of universal human advance, not a capitulation to a narrow identity. Césaire and Senghor were not alone among anticolonial thinkers in finding

⁷³ William Abraham's notable works include, *African philosophy: its proto-history and future* (1987), *the mind of Africa* (1962). Peter Bodunrin: *Philosophy in Africa: contemporary perspectives* (1985). Cheikh Anta Diop: *The African origin of civilization*. Paulin Hountondji: *The struggle for meaning* (2002). Alexis Kagame: *La philosophie Bantu*. John Mbiti: *African religions and philosophy* (1969). Yves-Mudimbe: *The invention of Africa* (1988). Henry Odera Oruka: *Trends in contemporary African philosophy*. Leopold Senghor: *Nocturnes* (1969). Olubi Sodipo: *Knowledge, belief, and witchcraft: analytic experiments in African philosophy* (1986); Barry Hallen, *a short history of African philosophy* (2002).

meaning in Hegel's work, and especially this dialectical philosophy, in which seeming opposites – such as 'universal' and 'particular' – could find their common ground through a new synthesis. The revolutionary leaders and writers Frantz Fanon (1925-61), C.L.R. James (1901-89) and Amílcar Cabral (1924-73) would all also find meaning in Hegel's work.⁷⁴

The scope of this chapter does not allow us to survey in detail all the influences of African philosophers and this discussion is restricted to a few key points.

The birth of African philosophy, according to Masolo, was a result of two developments: European conceptions of Africans and African responses to those.⁷⁵ The first half of the chapter discussed European conceptions of Africa and Africans; we now examine the latter, African responses, which was in part what the 'great debate' was about. Chimakonam concurs with this view of the beginnings of African philosophy, and he thinks that while Western philosophy began with curiosity, African philosophy began out of frustration and as a response to Western philosophy.⁷⁶ We have shown above that the debate about Africans usually took place among 'non-European' peoples and that at the centre of this debate is the concept of reason, a value which is believed to stand as the great divide between the civilized and the uncivilized, the logical the mystical.⁷⁷

According to Masolo, Black peoples wanted to 'reaffirm their culture, nearly destroyed by slavery and colonialism. The Black race had to heed to a re-finding, redefinition, and reproclamation of itself'.⁷⁸ Masolo believes that these concepts were first introduced by Aime Césaire in 1929 through his philosophy of Negritude which conceptualises the dignity, personhood, and humanity of Black people.

⁷⁴ Alpert, Avram. 'Philosophy's systemic racism,' *Aeon*, 21 September 2020. Aeon. <https://aeon.co/essays/racism-is-baked-into-the-structure-of-dialectical-philosophy>. Accessed 5 May 2021.

⁷⁵ Dasmas Masolo. *African philosophy in search of identity: African Systems of Thought*. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1988).22.

⁷⁶ Jonathan Chimakonam, 'History of African philosophy'. *Internet encyclopaedia of philosophy*. 2019 2019, ISSN 2161-0002, <https://iep.utm.edu/>.

⁷⁷ Masolo, *African systems of thought*, 23.

⁷⁸ Masolo, *African systems of thought*, 22.

Alpert makes the key point that whereas Hegel had assumed that Black people needed European intervention to be dialectical,

Senghor, Césaire and Fanon insist that dialectics, properly conceived, can begin only if we understand the internal complexity of all peoples. Once that is achieved, we can move from the colonial logic of cultural difference to what Césaire and Senghor called the ‘[rendez-vous] of giving and receiving’ between cultures... Instead of a dialectical process that can be brought only from Europe to elsewhere, this alternative model enables a richer and ever-evolving set of possibilities for how to arrange human life. Slavery, racism and hatred in this system are never justified, but the dialectical progress toward ever-greater freedom and equality is preserved.⁷⁹

The nuances of the Negritude movement are beyond the scope of this dissertation. For now, though, it is important to note that philosophy in the Global North was divided into two major groups, the Analytic and Continental groups, and these were imported to Africa. The Analytic group is mostly found in Anglophone countries such as the United Kingdom and the United States, and to a lesser extent Germany. The Continental school is typically found in Francophone and Lusophone countries. Kile Jones explains the difference between these rival schools very succinctly: ‘Analytic philosophy is concerned with analysis of thought, language, logic, knowledge, mind etc; whereas continental philosophy is concerned with history, individuals with society and speculation with application.’⁸⁰ The point is that there are methodological differences that come to bear when one considers the difference between analytic and continental philosophy.

The two schools have major methodological differences and have been at ‘war’ for a long time. African philosophers fell into both camps, depending on the country that colonized them. The countries that were colonized by France, such as Cameroon, Gabon, Senegal, and Martinique, were of the Continental bend. Those like South Africa, Ghana, and Nigeria, who were colonized by Anglophone countries, were Analytical philosophers. This dissertation leans heavily on the Anglophone history of African philosophy, partly because the scope of this

⁷⁹ Alpert, Avram. ‘Philosophy’s systemic racism,’ Aeon, 21 September 2020. *Aeon*. <https://aeon.co/essays/racism-is-baked-into-the-structure-of-dialectical-philosophy>. Accessed 5 May 2021.

⁸⁰ Kile Jones. ‘Analytic versus continental philosophy’. *Philosophy now magazine of ideas*. 78. (2009): 8-11.

dissertation does not allow for a thorough representation of both schools and, more importantly because Jonathan Chimakonam hails from Nigeria, which was a British colony, and studied at Calabar University, which is an Anglophone university with a tradition of Analytic philosophy.

The Great Debate: Can Africans reason?

African philosophers followed closely on the project of the redemption of the humanity of Africans. This is the context from which African philosophy arose and consequently the great debate about reason. There were different faces of the same question: Can Africans reason? If yes, are their principles of reasoning the same as the principles of Western reasoning?

There have been many debates and trends within African philosophy but the most significant was what was dubbed by T. Nwala (1993) as ‘the great debate’ which raged from the 1970s to the 1990s.⁸¹ It was a cross continental debate under themes like ‘Does African philosophy exist?’ This debate is important for this dissertation for two reasons. First, African philosophy took its shape and form during this debate, which brought to the fore many of the most prominent African philosophers in the field. Second, this debate had a profound influence on Chimakonam as some of the main champions of this debate were his teachers and mentors.

The main preoccupation of the debate was what made a discourse African philosophy, and, by extension, who counted as an African philosopher.⁸² The key protagonists in the debate wanted to find out what rubric could be used to ascertain whether their work constituted African philosophy or not. However, as will become clear below, this led to further questions, the most enduring of which was, ‘Can African philosophy exist,’ and subsequently, ‘Is philosophy particular or universal’?

The issues of this debate are the main preoccupations of this work for it was within this debate that concepts emerged that Chimakonam used as bedrock for his work, such as, for example, ‘African logic.’ This concept was first expounded by a Nigerian Philosopher Udo Etuk in his

⁸¹ Uzodinma.T. Nwala, *The critical review of the great on African philosophy (1970-1990)*. (Nsukka, University of Nsukka, 1992).

⁸² See Arinze C. Agbanusi, ‘Revisiting the Seeming Unanimous Verdict on the Great Debate on African Philosophy,’ *African Research Review. An International Multi-Disciplinary Journal, Ethiopia*. 10(4), Serial No.43 (2016): 170-186, 170-171.

article titled ‘The possibility of African Logic’⁸³. These debates led to the emergence of schools of thought within African philosophy such as, for example, the Ife School, Nsukka School, Ibadan School, Lagos School, and Calabar School. Chimakonam was a member of the latter school. The names of these schools of Philosophy come from the names of their universities and signifies the type of African philosophy practiced by the philosophers in that particular institution. The founders of the Calabar School influenced Chimakonam, who embraced their ideas, attitudes, and style to begin his own school of thought, which came to be known as Conversationalism.⁸⁴

To best capture the ethos of the time, one needs only look at the books and journal articles published, as well as schools of thought that convened in some African universities. An incredible number of books were published on these questions, journals were established to debate the existence of African philosophy, while philosophers travelled throughout Africa attending symposiums and conferences to discuss these issues.⁸⁵

There were two broad sides to the debate. One argued that African philosophy was a different tradition of philosophy based on the thought system of African people. This group came to be known as ‘particularists’, also known as ‘Ethno-philosophy’ or ‘Nationalist-ideological philosophy’. The champions of this school included Kwame Gyekye, Uzodinma Nwala, Sophie Oluwole, Campbell S. Momoh, Sodipo, Godwin. Sogolo, J.I. Omoregbo, and Innocent Onyenwuenyi⁸⁶. This group saw culture as forming the background from which individuals thought about specific issues. African culture did not constitute the philosophy, but these cultures gave rise to philosophies. It was also a philosophy shaped by the African experience. According to van den Berg:

⁸³ Edu Etuk. ‘The possibility of an African logic’. In Olugunsun Oladipo (ed), *The third way in African philosophy: essays in honor of Kwasi Wiredu*. (Ibadan, Hope publications, 2002)

⁸⁴ Email correspondence with Chimakonam. December 29, 2020

⁸⁵ E.g. works of Kwasi Wiredu’s (1980) philosophy and African cultures, Valentine -Yves Mudimbe (1988) invention of Africa, Pauline Hountondji (1977), struggle for meaning, and African philosophy: Myth or reality; Peter Bodunrin’s article- the question of African philosophy; Kwame Appiah (1992) In My Father’s House; K.C Anyanwu (1990) the problem of method in African philosophy; Kwame Gyekye’s An Essay on African philosophical thought: the Akan conceptual scheme; Robin Horton’s African thought and western science; T.U Nwala’s ‘Igbo philosophy’ and ‘The Ontological Mandate’;

⁸⁶ Ademola Fayemi, ‘African philosophy in search of historiography’. *Institute of African studies*. 2017. 22.

African philosophy is not accidental: it is a philosophy born of struggle and born of different historical and cultural spaces. There are thus historical, cultural and political-economic reasons for blocking the advancement of philosophy in Africa. The contemporary debate on and in African philosophy and the quest for the identity of African philosophy were inspired by a reaction to the distortion of African culture through stereotyping, cognitive paradigms, colonial imperialism and continued (post)colonial impositions.⁸⁷

The other grouping, which came to be known as ‘universalists’, held the view that African philosophy did not constitute a separate tradition, but that debates were part of the broader debates within philosophy. ‘Universalists’ included the likes of Kwasi Wiredu, W.A. Hart, Henry Odera Oruka, T.I. Okere, Paulin Hountondji, and Peter Bodunrin.⁸⁸ During the late 1970s and early 1980s a view emerged that seemed to defeat any claims of the existence of African philosophy.

The proponents of this view argued that most work under ‘African philosophy’ had no business calling itself philosophy, owing to the fact that it showed no sensitivity to ‘proper’ philosophical methods. Here they meant the critical analytical rigour associated with philosophy, in particular the strict observance of the rules of Aristotelian logic. At best, the work should be regarded as anthropological. Since the few works that applied proper philosophical methods were no different from works produced in the West, why should their work deserve a special suffix?⁸⁹

Is there an African philosophy?

The question, ‘Is there an African philosophy’ was first posed by Professor E.A. Ruch in 1974 in an article published in the *Second Order* journal⁹⁰. This question spawned different responses and the great debate is typically associated with this question.⁹¹ Most of the

⁸⁷ Martin Van den Berg, ‘On historicity, context and the existence of African philosophy,’ *South African Journal of Philosophy*, 22:3 (2003), 281.

⁸⁸ Ademola Fayemi, ‘African philosophy in search of historiography’. *Institute of African studies*. 2017. 22.

⁸⁹ Jonathan Chimakonam. *Ezumezu: A system of logic for African philosophy and sundry studies*. (Switzerland, Springer, 2019). 2

⁹⁰ Uzodinma Nwala, *critical review of the great debate, 1970-1990*, (Nsukka, Nsukka University press, 1992.) 3

⁹¹ Nwala, *Great Debate*, 16

disputants of the great debate were trained in Western universities in Europe, America, and the United Kingdom. Those who were not trained in Western universities were trained in African universities that aped the Western curriculum. The first university, globally, to introduce an African philosophy course was Nsukka University in Nigeria in the 1971/72 academic year.⁹²

The courses were 'Phil 320- African philosophy I' and 'Phil 420- African philosophy II'. They were introduced and taught by Professor T.U. Nwala. This was such a strange and peculiar occurrence that the now famous Nigerian philosopher Peter Bodunrin who, at the time, was teaching in Western Germany, sent a letter asking for further clarity on the matter and the Bibliography to the course content. Other philosophers, according to Nwala, across the world sent letters showing great suspicion as to the nature of African Philosophy. It seems that they found it unnatural that the words 'Africa' and 'philosophy' could be linked without problem.⁹³

The great debate began in the philosophy department at the University of Ife, led by Professor J.O. Sodipo. The major platform for this debate was the famous journal *Second Order: An African Journal of Philosophy*. In January 1972, the vice-chancellor of the University of Ife, Professor H.A Oluwansanmi, wrote in the 'Foreword' to the inaugural issue of the journal:

The exploration of the conceptual structure of traditional African thought, the examination of the role or point of religion in human culture and the attempt to understand the nature of science whose absence from the traditional African schemes of thought seems very significant.⁹⁴

Six articles were published in this inaugural issue. Four of them dealt on Robin Horton's 'Western scientific thought and African traditional thought' which was published in the journal *AFRICA*.⁹⁵ In his 1967 article Horton contrasted the logic of the 'essentially religious' African thought and that of Science. African philosophers responded to Horton's argument in the first issue of the journal. T. Nwala argued that Horton had a great influence of the conception and direction of the great debate.⁹⁶ It was this that prompted Chimakonam to argue that African

⁹² Nwala, *Great Debate*, 33

⁹³ Nwala, *Great Debate*, 33. Professor Uzodinma did not wish to disclose in his book all the names of the philosophers who contacted him.

⁹⁴ Nwala, *Great Debate*, 17.

⁹⁵ Robin Horton 'African Traditional Thought and Western Science. Part I. From Tradition to Science', *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*. Vol. 37, No. 1 (1967):50-71.

⁹⁶ Nwala. *Great Debate*, 33

philosophy lacked originality as, from its very conception, it was reacting and responding to racist texts and thereby playing at racists hand by tacitly accepting Western logic.⁹⁷

The second issue of the same journal saw Ghanaian Kwasi Wiredu publish ‘On African orientation in Philosophy’ in which he contrasted the views of ‘Nationalists’ and ‘Universalists’⁹⁸. He argued that the universalists used what he called the ‘generally accepted techniques of philosophizing’ based on Western philosophy and which may thus be seen as universal, while Nationalists were hampered by folk philosophies handed down through tradition in Africa.⁹⁹ Wiredu was not alone in his sharp criticism of the ‘nationalists’¹⁰⁰.

The most vehement blow came from one of Wiredu’s contemporaries and fellow Analytic philosopher, Paulin Hountondji, who stated there were a

deluge of essays which aimed to reconstruct a particular *Weltanschauung*, a specific worldview commonly attributed to all Africans, abstracted from history and change and, moreover, philosophical, through an interpretation of the customs and traditions, proverbs and institutions - in short, various data - concerning the cultural life of African peoples.¹⁰¹

It is important to note that both the so-called universalists and particularists agreed that the Western idea of Africans was erroneous but took different routes in attempt to show it. The universalists tended to argue that Africans had the same power of reason as Europeans and the rest of the world, while the particularists tended to argue that Africans did have the power to reason but that they reasoned differently to Westerners. Whatever the argument both parties accepted the terms of the debate which were that there existed racial differences and that reason was the very thing that made one human. The earliest and crudest version of the argument that Africans reasoned differently was made by one of the leaders of the Negritude movement, Leopold Senghor, who famously said, ‘Emotion is Negro, as reason is Hellenic’ (*L’émotion*

⁹⁷ Email correspondence with the Chimakonam, December 29, 2020

⁹⁸ Kwasi Wiredu. ‘On African orientation in philosophy. *Second order Journal*. Vol 1. No 2. (1972):

⁹⁹ Email correspondence with Chimakonam. August 23, 2021.

¹⁰⁰ See for example, Paulin Hountondji’s scathing criticism of ethnophilosophy in *African philosophy: myth and reality*. 1983. Also, Anthony Appiah: *In my father’s house*. 1996.

¹⁰¹ Paulin Hountondji, *African philosophy: Myth and Reality*. (London, Hutchinson, 1983).23.

est nègre, comme la raison hellène').¹⁰² This view was criticized by scholars like Kwasi Wiredu as accepting the assumptions of European colonisers.¹⁰³

From the January 1977 issue (Vol. VI, No. I) of *Second Order*, there was a distinct shift in direction. Previously, authors had focused on how traditional African thought lacked the critical skills of Western reasoning, that it was folk wisdom, while others deferred and claimed the Egyptian origin of African philosophy. The 1977 issue saw the introduction of a new idea which markedly changed that line of thinking. This is Logic. Horton returned to argue that unlike Western thought African thought was not philosophical because it had not developed its logic or epistemology. Without logic and epistemology there can be no philosophy, he argued, and the task of emerging African philosophy departments was to develop philosophy through an emphasis on Logic and Epistemology.¹⁰⁴

When arguing why African philosophers should look outside Africa for philosophy, Kwasi Wiredu stated that an African would sound preposterous if she or he tried to translate first order Logic from English to an African language.¹⁰⁵ This was sufficient proof for him of the universality of African philosophy. Philosophers like Wiredu and Bondrin saw Logic as the arbiter of authenticity of discourse as philosophy. They held that the only thing that separated philosophy from other disciplines is the systematic study of Logic. This view would be taken a rung deeper by Chimakonam who would argue that the very thing that made African philosophy both philosophical and African was African Logic.

According to Nwala, the concept of Afrocentricity emerged during the great debate. Afrocentrism was a movement that sought to look at the world from the perspective of Africans. It has been largely associated with the group of thinkers who argue that most African intellectual history has been blurred and buried by Westerners in fear that Africans would discover their heritage of western thought. Bluntly, these thinkers argue that Philosophy and Mathematics owe their origins in Africa, that is, that the ideas were derived from Africa.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰² Leopold Sedar Senghor, 'On Negrohood: Psychology of the African Negro.' *Diogenes*. 10, no.37 (1962):1–15

¹⁰³ Kwasi Wiredu, *Cultural universals and particulars*, (Indiana, Indiana university press. 1996)138.

¹⁰⁴ Nwala, *Great Debate*, 39.

¹⁰⁵ Wiredu, *Cultural universals and particulars*, 139

¹⁰⁶ Nwala. *Great Debate*,49

Some of the key actors in this debate (James 1954; Yoses Ben-Jochannan 1994; Diop 1974; Obenga 1995)¹⁰⁷ argued that the negligence of Egypt as part of Africa had left Africa in a state of confusion about its identity. They claimed that the writing of Egyptians such as Ptahhotep's moral teachings, had an influence on philosophers like Aristotle. From this movement emerged authors who argued that Africa must use its own conceptual tools.¹⁰⁸

According to Nwala, a major contribution during the great debate in the Second Order journal was by Edward Philips' who argued for the Egyptian origin of Philosophy, and the debt that Greece owed to Africa.¹⁰⁹ Nwala states that this article was unfortunately largely ignored by the very philosophers who published in the Second Order journal. Though this was the first ever article in this journal that took Afrocentrism seriously, none of the philosophers paid attention to it. Chimakonam is, as will be shown later, highly critical of this school of thought. Some of the most prominent philosophers in Africa did not engage in this debate. One such philosopher, Akin Makinde, put it this way:

Unfortunately, these philosophers spent most of their time debating whether or not there was African Philosophy.... The central issue in subsequent debate on African Philosophy was the thinking that African Philosophy was ethno-philosophy or group mind without any philosophical method as known to Western philosophers. More than a decade was devoted to this controversy. However, the present writer who started his career as a philosophy teacher at Ife in December 1974, did not join in the debate because he was not impressed by a situation where we had to teach and write African Philosophy by just debating its existence or non-existence. If there is African Philosophy, do it rather than talk endlessly about it, or even talk about talks about it. If there were no African Philosophy, then there was nothing to debate or talk about.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ Yosef Ben-Joachanan. *Africa: mother of Western civilization*. (Baltimore. Black classic press.1988); Theophile Obenga. *African philosophy: The pharaonic period: 2780-330BC*. (Per Ankh.2004). George James. *Stolen legacy: Greek philosophy is stolen Egyptian philosophy*. (New York, Africa world press.1993)

¹⁰⁸ See Kwasi Wiredu, *cultural universals and particulars*, Antony Appiah, *in my father's house*.

¹⁰⁹ Nwala, *Great Debate*. 45.

¹¹⁰ Moses Akin Makinde. 'Whither Philosophy in Africa?', Paper presented at the Twentieth World Congress of Philosophy, Boston, Massachusetts, USA, 10-15 August 1998. <https://www.bu.edu/wcp/Papers/Afri/AfriMaki.htm>. Accessed 15 July 2021.

Periodisation: When did African philosophy begin?

An important question that emerged during the great debate was ‘when did African philosophy begin?’ There were two sides to this debate. However, the position that one takes on this question was partly influenced by the broader question of whether African philosophy was considered particular or universal. The question of the history of African philosophy is intimately tied to the question of what counts as African philosophy. In simple terms the question reads: when did Africans begin doing philosophy? This is a terribly loaded question that needs one to tackle a few problems before addressing it.

One, who is an African? This is, as will be apparent, a challenging question. The second question that arises from this is, what kind of discourse counts as philosophy?

This is a challenging question because there are thinkers like Barry Hallen, Anke Graness, and Uzodinma Nwala who argue that Egypt is part of Africa, and to exclude Egypt in African intellectual history is to miss a huge part of African history.¹¹¹ Others ask, what of African-American writers like W.E.B Du Bois who died in Africa? Does their work count as African philosophy or American philosophy? Chimakonam does not believe that it does any good to African philosophy to search for her roots all the way back to Ancient Egypt. He believes that African philosophy began in the 1920s when Western-tutored Africans returned to Africa and trained disciples.¹¹²

The question of the periodization of African history is incredibly important and hotly contested. Scholars with a universalist bent, such as Okolo (1987), Bodunrin (2004), and Hountondji (1977), put African philosophy’s beginnings alongside those of literacy and formal education in Africa.¹¹³ For them, pre-colonial philosophy is not a philosophical period, it is equivalent to the dark ages of the West. African philosophers of the particularist bent dispute this

¹¹¹ Anke Graness, ‘writing the history of philosophy in African: where to begin?’ *Journal of African Cultural Studies*. 28:2, (2017): 132-146.

¹¹² Email correspondence with Chimakonam, 29 December 2020.

¹¹³ Peter Bondurin ‘Introduction’ in *Philosophy in Africa: Trends and Perspectives*. (Ife, Ife university press, 1985). See also, Peter Bondurin. ‘The question of African philosophy ’in Richard Wright (ed), *African philosophy: an introduction, third edition*, (New York, New York university press, 1984).

periodization. Scholars like Oruka (1991), Momoh (1989), Oluwole (1999), and Wiredu (2004) state that we cannot ignore or sidestep years of oral and undocumented philosophical history.¹¹⁴

Thus, when it came to the periodization of African history, others suggest that there were only three periods or epochs: pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial.¹¹⁵ For universalists, there was no philosophy in the pre-colonial period. African philosophy begins in the colonial period with the growing number of literate Africans. Though others point out that thinkers like Anton Wilhelm Amo (1703-1759), born in present-day Ghana of Akan ethnicity, studied and taught philosophy in German in Germany, and would not, by that account, count as an African philosopher.¹¹⁶

Chimakonam pitched his tent with the view that philosophy began in the 1920s, with the return of the first eleven.¹¹⁷ By this he means African philosophers who went to study in the West. It seems he understands them to have a total of eleven philosophers who returned. Though in his writings he only gives six names: Julius Nyerere, Aime Cesaire, Kwame Nkrumah, William Abraham, John Mbiti, and Leopold Senghor. Most of these philosophers, however, were only born in the 1920s, for example Julius Nyerere, and those that studied around the 1920s, (Kwame Nkrumah, only returned to African mid-30s going to 40s. Perhaps Chimakonam means that they returned around the period that began in the 1920s.

However, he wrote extensively on the historiographical inadequacies in African philosophy, arguing that there was no convincing pattern of history and periodisation for the discipline. African philosophers adopted the structure in western philosophy such as ancient, medieval, modern, and contemporary periods, which was incongruent to the history of African philosophy as a nascent discipline (Chimakonam, 2014a, 2015b, 2016). He sought to not only draw attention to this lacuna but proposed a different structure that he felt was compatible with the history of the discipline namely, pre-systematic epoch (c. before 1900) and systematic epoch (c. 1900 to date).¹¹⁸

¹¹⁴ Graness, 'where to begin?', 12

¹¹⁵ Granes, 'where to begin?', 13

¹¹⁶ See Goodwin Sogolo, 'Options in African philosophy'. *Philosophy*. Vol. 65 No 251. 1990.

¹¹⁷ Jonathan Chimakonam 'History of African philosophy' *The internet encyclopaedia of philosophy*, 2019. ISSN 21610002.

¹¹⁸ Email Correspondence with Jonathan Chimakonam. December 29, 2020.

Chimakonam further divided the systematic epoch into four periods: Early (1920s-1960s); Middle (1960s-1980s); Later (1980s-1990s); and Contemporary (1990s-date). This structure is different from what is in the extant literature. The existing models for periodising the history of African philosophy, according to him, were either copied or adapted from the Western historiographical model (Ancient, Medieval, Modern, and Contemporary). Chimakonam posits that this approach is not just incorrect but that it was also ‘bastardising’ the history of African philosophy as a discipline.¹¹⁹

Concluding remarks

By the 1990s the debate about whether there was such a thing as African philosophy had petered out. Those who engaged in African philosophy defended their discipline and widened its definition. As Teodros Kiros argued in his introduction to a special 1999 issue on African Philosophy in the journal *New Political Science*:

By African philosophy, I understand a set of written texts, when available, as well as orally transmitted texts, that deal with the human condition in Africa on which Africans and non-Africans reflect. Any philosopher can reflect on the human condition in Africa with care, imagination and critical commitment to the analysis of subjects that affect human beings on the continent of Africa.... The articles in this issue demonstrate the richness of African philosophy. These philosophers address perennial cultural, political and ethical problems that plague the human condition in Africa. African philosophy can serve African people as a moral activity guided by the principles of practical reason in addressing problems of the basic structures of African social, political and economic institutions.¹²⁰

If evidence was required to point to the progression in the field, then certainly the anthologies in African philosophy were proof of this.¹²¹

¹¹⁹ Chimakonam, *Ezumezu*, 122

¹²⁰ Teodos Kiros, ‘Introduction: African philosophy—a critical/moral practice,’ *New Political Science*, 21:1 (1999), 5.

¹²¹ Coetzee, P.H. and Roux, A.P.J. (eds): *The African Philosophy Reader*. London: Routledge, 1998; Coetzee, P.H. and Roux, A.P.J. (eds): *Philosophy From Africa*, 2nd edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press; S. Kwame, (ed). *Readings in African philosophy: an Akan collection*. New York: University Press of America, 1995; Albert Mosley, *African philosophy: selected readings*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1995; Tsenay Serequeberhan, *African philosophy: the essential readings*(New York: Paragon House, 1991;

As van den Berg stressed in 2003, ‘a negation of the existence of African philosophy results from monolithic, ahistorical and decontextualized thinking about Africa and about philosophy.’

There remained a key challenge for African philosophers, however:

The roots and development of African philosophy are inseparably bound up with the continent’s historical, political, cultural and economic complexities. The challenge facing African philosophers is twofold: deconstructing the notion of philosophy as constructed and conceived by the West; and reconstructing the history of African philosophy.¹²²

These are issues that are probed in this dissertation. Before doing so, the next chapter provides a short biography of Jonathan Chimakonam and his making as a philosopher, while subsequent chapters will engage with some of the key debates in the field.

¹²² Martin. Van den Berg, ‘On historicity, context and the existence of African philosophy,’ *South African Journal of Philosophy*. 22:3 (2003), 277,

Chapter Three

Jonathan Okeke Chimakonam: The making of a Philosopher

Early life and Childhood

Jonathan Okeke Chimakonam was born on 10 May 1983 in a well-known government hospital, Nnamdi Azikiwe Teaching Hospital, commonly known as Mhuri. He was registered as Jonathan Chimakonam Okeke as Okeke is his last name (family name or surname). However, one his early publishers made a mistake and thought that Chimakonam was his surname and Okeke his middle name. Chimakonam liked the sound of Jonathan Okeke Chimakonam and so legalized Chimakonam as his last name.¹²³.

This name change seems to me to be in keeping with his earlier philosophy of identity which argues that you are what people see you as¹²⁴. He asked us to imagine that a student swapped bodies with his professor, it does not matter how many times the student tries to say he is stuck in his professor's body, people will think he is the professor and treat him as such. Therefore, for Chmakonam , it does not matter how you identify yourself, your identity lies with what your community views you as. Chimakonam also took his own philosophy to use and identified as Chimakonam that some of his readers already knew him as. He is of Igbo ethnicity from the town of Oba, in Anambra State, Eastern Nigeria. The name Oba is an anglicised version of 'Omambala', which was the original name of Anambra River, a tributary of the River Niger. The state's official theme is 'Light of the Nation', and Chimakonam is, one may say, the light of Oba.

The Igbo make up virtually the entire population of Anambra State, which is one of the most densely populated states in Nigeria. The Igbo are the third largest ethnic group in Nigeria, numerically slightly smaller than the Northern Hausa-Fulani and Yoruba. Nigeria, Africa's most populous country and one of the world largest oil producers, has a complex history which has made its postcolonial journey a difficult and contradictory one in terms of regional and ethnic identity and the forging of nationhood.

¹²³ Interview with Jonathan Chimakonam, December 29, 2021.

¹²⁴ Jonathan Chimakonam, 'Mental Surgery: Another Look at The Identity Problem'. *filosofia theoretica: Journal of philosophy, culture and religions*. Vol 1 No1. (2011): 11-24

Lagos was formally occupied by the British in 1865 and Nigeria became a British protectorate in 1901 and an independent country in 1960. While Nigeria became a republic in 1963, the country's deep ethnic, regional, religious, and class divides, as well as economic problems, led to long periods of political instability which resulted in military rule, beginning in 1966; a civil war from 1967 to 1970 when the Republic of Biafra demanded independence; and a fourth republic came into being in 1999, after more than three decades of military rule. The country is still struggling to come to terms with its colonial past and statehood, with the most recent trouble being provided by the rise of the Islamist group, the Boko Haram and its insurgency.¹²⁵

Chimakonam comes from the family of Okeke-mpi, in the lineage of Ezeneche, from the clan of Umudimengo in Okuzu. Both his parents were Igbo. His father Aniegboka G. Okeke was a prince from Oba who had several wives. Chimakonam's mother Obiageli from Nnobi, around twenty kilometres from Oba, was Okeke's last wife. Chimakonam's father was a businessman who was involved in the import and export of goods and was a major distributor for an oil company, but it was his mother who shouldered the responsibility of raising him due to his father's untimely death in 1986 when Chimakonam was barely three years old. Tragically, she passed on in 2012 when Chimakonam was on the verge of completing his doctorate. Chimakonam always got his awards and accomplishments, he said, for his mother and his Phd, arguably his biggest achievement to that point, was also meant for his mother. Her passing before he could complete his dissertation, understandably, tore Chimakonam apart. In his own words, he said:

I was just about to defend my doctorate when my mother passed on and I can tell you that it was not easy for me because all of a sudden, I discovered that my life had been built around this woman and who was I going to school to impress, and now she was gone. Why should I continue on that path was an existential question and a tough existential question. I recall that after her funeral I remained in my hometown and would not go back to school to defend my doctorate. I remained in my town. There seemed to be no point. It was such an existential moment in my life where you ask yourself, 'what is the point of it all?' and nothing had any meaning for me. And if I were to abandon schooling what else would I do?

¹²⁵ See, for example, Toyin Falola and Matthew M. Heaton, *A History of Nigeria*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008; Max Siollun, *What Britain Did to Nigeria: A Short History of Conquest and Rule*. London: Hurst, 2021; and Richard Bourne, *Nigeria: A New History of a Turbulent Century*. London: Zed Books, 2015, for a discussion of some of these issues.

Nothing made any sense to me anymore. It was such a dark time. I was in such a dark place.¹²⁶

As dark and confusing as this time was for Chimakonam, he realised that he could not give up. After spending a few weeks at home, he made up his mind to finish what he had started. He left very early one morning for campus and announced that he was available to defend his dissertation. There are not many people who could claim to have succeeded in pulling themselves out of a state of nihilism, especially when they have a valid reason for self-pity. This period was not an easy one for Chimakonam and the fact that he survived it underscores his tenacity. That tenacity shines through when one reads the touching dedication and acknowledgement page of his PhD dissertation in which he states:

To my beloved mother, Lady Elizabeth Obiageli Okeke (née Ogbuioji) 1960-2012 who gave me life and who transformed me into an institution, for your unparalleled sacrifices to me and humanity; for teaching me that there no vision in eternity; for teaching me the audacity of home, the power of belief, the spirit of contentment, the dignity of labour, the path to heaven and the joy of love, industry and dedication, I dedicate this work to you with immense gratitude. Though we now see through a glass darkly, we shall meet to part no more on that glorious morning.¹²⁷

In the acknowledgements section, Chimakonam wrote another touching message of gratitude to his mother:

I am eternally grateful to my kind mother Lady Lizzy Oby Okeke (Mrs) who resolved to stand by me and to give me a very bright future. Against all odds, she accomplished this task, far surpassing what her peers did for their own children. Good things don't last, they say, hence you rejoined your maker on Monday the 9th of January 2012 empty, having given your all to humanity. I shall do my best mother, to be the man you always imagined me in

¹²⁶ My interview with Chimakonam, 23 August 2021

¹²⁷ Jonathan Chimakonam, '*proof in Alonzo Church's and Alan Turing's Mathematical logic: undecidability of first order logic*'. (Phd dissertation, University of Calabar, 2012.)

your thoughts... the best of our kind! You have shown in my life and in the community that one person can make a difference. Thank you, sweetest mum!¹²⁸

Though one can read the sense of loss and grief in the above words, there is also enormous gratitude and hopefulness. Moreover, one sees that Chimakonam and his mother had a very special relationship. The clue to this is how Chimakonam's mother raised him.

Chimakonam revered his mother because of the great sacrifices she made to raise him and his brother, and the way in which she served as a role model, he not only has a deep respect for her, but has come to appreciate all women for the heavy load they carry in sustaining communities. Chimakonam remembers his mother as a 'careful, calculated and intelligent woman'.¹²⁹ Working as an accountant, she virtually oversaw Chimakonam from kindergarten to his doctorate. He said that one of the key qualities she instilled in him was a sense of independence and encouraging him to take care of himself from a young age.¹³⁰

Chimakonam recounted one particular lesson that he got as a kid. His father was a well-off businessman and had left the (extended) family in a comfortable position at the time of his premature death. However, following his death, his mother declined to seek redress for her share of the inheritance. Instead, the wealth was left to his uncles and cousins who did as they saw fit with the inheritance. This did not sit well with young Chimakonam who angrily blamed his mother for not demanding her share of the inheritance. He reacted in this way because she could not afford to get him a new bicycle as he had outgrown his old one. He explains what happened next:

My mother gave me a timeline when I would get the bike, but I wanted it immediately. Disappointingly, she said she could not afford it immediately. Schools had resumed, and she had cleared our fees. I was discharged from the hospital only the previous week where she cleared the bill from two weeks' admission. She explained all that to me and reminded me that she was the sole breadwinner of the home. Angrily, I blamed her for not fighting for our share in my father's wealth. But later that night, she called me to a meeting and told me, among other things, that my father inherited nothing from his own father. I should focus on

¹²⁸ Jonathan Chimakonam, '*Church's and Alan Turing's Mathematical proof in Alonzo logic: undecidability of first order logic*'. (Phd dissertation, University of Calabar, 2012.)

¹²⁹ Interview with Jonathan Chimakonam. 29 December 2020

¹³⁰ My interview with Jonathan Chimakonam, 29 December 2020.

my own destiny. The lesson was that I could be even more successful than my father and be proud that I achieved it on my own. That was the last time I protested about fighting over my father's wealth. I grew up with a laser-sharp focus, being hardworking, determined, calculated, and chiselled out of a fine parental guidance timber.¹³¹

In some ways we should not be surprised at the role that Chimakonam's mother played in his life. I am reminded of Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958).¹³² Achebe, a titled Igbo chief, writes about Igbo people and their traditions, as well as the synergy and clash between European and African values. The book is usually read to see the impact of Europeans on African society, but in the context of what Chimakonam had to say about his mother, it resonates with how Achebe portrays Igbo and the role of gender in that society.

Similarly, Buchi Emecheta, another celebrated writer, reflects in her book *The Joys of motherhood* (1979)¹³³ about the how Nigerian women typically struggle, resiliently, in raising their children. Men and women had different economic roles in that society. Women were also valued for their childbirth and were expected to do the cooking, but what really stood out was the traditional and primary role that women played in the education of their children from childbirth while socialising them into the norms, beliefs and practices of Igbo life. In the polygamous family setup, children were primarily in the care of mothers. Chimakonam's mother, likewise, played a crucial role in providing care and seeing to her children's education.

Chimakonam's childhood was not that of an average Igbo child. On the surface, he may have looked like any other child, describing himself as 'athletic' and a 'gifted footballer'. His football skills earned him the nickname 'Diego' after the famous Argentinian footballing legend Diego Maradona. With those football skills he also had a mind of his own. His father had a library filled with books that his older-half siblings had used and he himself made full use of the collection.¹³⁴

Being meticulous, each book had his father's name stamped on it, and this is a practice young Jonathan embraced. He spent considerable time in his childhood collecting and reading those books. He recalled reading *Mine Boy* by Peter Abraham (1946)¹³⁵, which was one of his favourites and left a great impression on him, he says, as it is the story of migrant labour in

¹³¹ Interview with Jonathan Chimakonam, 29 December 2020.

¹³² Chinua Achebe, *Things fall apart*. (London, Heinemann publishers, 1958)

¹³³ Buchi Emecheta, *Joys of motherhood*. (London, Allison and Bugby, 1979).

¹³⁴ Interview with Jonathan Chimakonam, December 29, 2020.

¹³⁵ Peter Abrahams, *Mine Boy*. (Johannesburg, Heinemann Publishers, 1946).

Johannesburg, South Africa. This story of the movement of a young boy to the city, illicit beer brewing, mine labour, violence and racism, he reflected, was really the story of large parts of Africa under colonial rule.

Chimakonam read a lot of books about history and philosophy that, he said, mentioned the ideas of Greek philosophers like Socrates and Plato. He took a liking to these books from a young age. This reading set him apart from his peers and made him the ‘odd kid’, the nerd that people loved to mock. In one interview he said:

Growing up, I had a problem with many things which most of my peers took for granted. I can't tell you how much that frustrated me to always be the odd kid. That mindset created a lot of troubles for me. As an adult, it made a lot of enemies for me. It is one thing to be odd, it is a different animal altogether to be 'terrifically odd'. Although it constituted a heavy mental burden for me as a kid, I grew up to appreciate my mind better. But as a kid, it was not always so. You don't want to be that kid whose words and actions are quickly greeted with the expression: ‘we knew that yours would be different!’¹³⁶

It was not all bad though. Some adults, especially his mother, appreciated his prodigious and enquiring mind. When Chimakonam was little, his mother would recount to him a particular incident when he and his mother went to a doctor for a short consultation session. The young Jonathan asked the doctor numerous questions about many things and when his mother cautioned him to stop distracting the doctor, the doctor told her not to discourage the little boy but to allow his curious mind to develop. His mother heeded the doctor’s advice and, in fact, when Jonathan was a teenager, she would always seek his opinion on different matters. His ability to see things differently, which made him unpopular among his friends, was the very thing that made his mother seek his counsel.¹³⁷

Education

Chimakonam attended the Christ the King Nursery School, a Catholic school at Nnewi. His mother was a devout Catholic and Chimakonam was raised as a Catholic. However, he stated, as he grew into adulthood, he began to question aspects of Christianity and Catholicism and was ‘disillusioned’ by the time he was doing his honours degree. He kept his views to himself and only told his mother later in life because he knew that it would upset her.¹³⁸ That said,

¹³⁶ Interview with Jonathan Chimakonam, December 29, 2020.

¹³⁷ Interview with Jonathan Chimakonam, December 29, 2020.

¹³⁸ Interview with Jonathan Chimakonam, August 23, 2021.

there is a tinge of religiosity in his writings, such as in his doctorate where he thanked God for assisting him to complete his dissertation:

I'm grateful to God almighty, who is my light in pitch darkness, my hope in the midst of desperation and who is always roundabout to sway the tide in my favour, and of course to Demiurge my divine inspirer, I pray thee to continue to do your best upon your ward for I know nothing!¹³⁹

This suggests that while Chimakonam may have been disillusioned with his faith he had not fully parted with it.

Chimakonam attended the United Primary School in his hometown for the most part of six years, although he had brief stints at St Kevin's and Ezike primary schools at Nnobi, his maternal town. For secondary schooling, he attended the Merchants of Light Secondary School, completing in 2000. This historic school was opened in 1946 by physicist Dr Enoch Oli who returned to his country from studying abroad, and remains one of the most highly regarded individuals in Nigeria.

The school placed emphasis on academics and its alumni include such luminaries as Chief Emeka Anyaoku, who went on to become Secretary-General of the Commonwealth; Dr Benedict Oramah, President of the African Export-Import Bank; and Peter Onwualu, former Director-General of the Raw Materials Research and Development Council. One of the teachers at the school in the 1950s was the famed author Chinua Achebe who taught English at the school. Professor J.O.C. Ezeilo, another teacher at the school, went on to become vice-chancellor of the University of Nigeria.

Chimakonam fared particularly well in subjects like Commerce, Literature and Government. After completing his schooling with excellent results, in 2001 he was admitted to study Philosophy at the recently opened Ebonyi State University (ESBU), which is located in Abakaliki, the capital of Ebonyi State in Eastern Nigeria. Chimakoanm believes that he was fortunate to attend ESBU as he was met with a 'fervent philosophical atmosphere' and outstanding scholars who were influential to his formation as a philosopher. He had many talented classmates who were 'equally hungry for knowledge and relentless in their pursuit of it'¹⁴⁰. They would gather around in classrooms and hallways to discuss and debate

¹³⁹ Jonathan Chimakonam, *'proof in Alonzo Church's and Alan Turing's Mathematical logic: undecidability of first order logic'*. (Phd dissertation, University of Calabar, 2012.) 2

¹⁴⁰ Interview with Jonathan Chimakonam, December 29, 2020.

philosophical ideas and the ideas of favourite authors, all of which added to his making as a rigorous academic.

Professor Uduma Oji Uduma, a logician, was scheduled to teach one of their classes. Chimakonam explained that he was a larger-than-life figure in the Department of Philosophy. When they learned that he was to teach their class there were a lot of ‘expectations and some trepidation.’ Chimakonam recounted that the situation was made worse by the fact that Professor Uduma prolonged their suspense when he skipped the first class and there was ‘immense tension’ when he eventually showed up. While some students were ‘scared to death’, or ‘too excited’, Chimakonam says he was occupied with ‘trying to discern what made the man think’. The qualities that stood out for Chimakonam were ‘inspiring confidence’ and ‘challenging arrogance’.¹⁴¹

Professor Uduma’s publications includes such articles as ‘Can there be an African Logic?’, ‘The question of the ‘African’ in African philosophy: in search of a criterion for the Africanness of Philosophy’, and ‘The Logic Question in African Philosophy. Between the Horns of Irredentism and Jingoism.’ Chimakonam found Professor Uduma’s classes highly stimulating and always engaging, and he himself initially focused on Logic.¹⁴²

Professor Uduma was not the only ‘rock star’ in the Philosophy department. Another ‘vibrant’ academic was Dr Joseph Agbo, a Marxist who, according to Chimakonam, ‘had a great influence on me even if he did not make me a Marxist.’ It was exposure to these two academics that gave Chimakonam a clear idea of the qualities of the ideal academic:

While Uduma challenged me the most, Agbo was the one who *inspired* me the most. The influences from these two were basic in my formation as a scholar. I have come to realise that a good scholar must have a tincture of confidence and arrogance; confidence to inspire students and arrogance to challenge them. The humble and timid scholar, no matter how brilliant, neither inspires nor challenges anyone and that makes them a bad scholar as far as I am concerned. The academe is no place for timidity, or the idea of humility bandied around nowadays. Humility is a concept that is terribly misunderstood and misinterpreted, especially in the African academe rift with jealousy, fat egos and mediocrity. The idea of academic modesty or humility encourages peers not to brag about their accomplishments in ways that would rub

¹⁴¹ Jonathan Chimakonam ‘breaking new ground in African philosophy’, Interview by Richard Bright, interlia online magazine, April 2019.

¹⁴² Interview with Jonathan Chimakonam, December 29, 2021.

others' failures or under-achievements in their faces. It does not discourage inspiring confidence and challenging arrogance. A certain level of cockiness is important in the academia. Unfortunately, fat ego mediocres in the African academe waste valuable research time castigating and plotting the downfall of their more aspiring peers who represent the true spirit of the academe, that of inspiring confidence, challenging arrogance, charisma and charm, all of which my two teachers above possessed.¹⁴³

Chimakonam came across as a forthright person not willing to mince his words. Reflecting on these words and their tone, one gets the sense of underlying frustration, perhaps emanating from his experiences at tertiary level in Nigeria.

Other figures at ESBUS who had an important influence on Chimakonam included Dr Kanu Macaulay, a Liberal-Marxist, who supervised Chimakonam's Honours project and recommended that he go to study for his master's degree at the University of Calabar; Ideyi Nwabuiro; Dr Michael Okoro, who was one of the first to expose Chimakonam to African Philosophy; Albert Ogoko, and the now deceased Nwokereke Eze.¹⁴⁴ Thus his foundation for philosophical development was laid at ESBUS.

Upon graduating in 2005, Chimakonam had to do a year of national service, a program set up by the Nigerian government to involve its graduates in nation building, and more generally, the development of the country. The program is called the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) and is compulsory for all graduates under the age of thirty.¹⁴⁵ Chimakonam was conscripted to the programme as the Administration clerk at the Local Government Secretariat. While he was there, he volunteered to teach English, literature, and Christian religious studies at the local public school. When asked what he thought of the programme, Chimakonam replied that he had mixed feelings: 'It is a worthwhile idea, but you know that sometimes we have very wonderful ideas that usually do not live up to the expectations, you know, that those who crafted them had in mind. I think it is just one of those ideas'¹⁴⁶

This may not seem like a very helpful response but there is a reason why Chimakonam thinks what he thinks about the programme. He is looking at it from the historical horizon from which

¹⁴³ Chimakonam, interview.

¹⁴⁴ Chimakonam, interview.

¹⁴⁵ Marenin, Otwin (1990). 'Implementing Deployment Policies in the National Youth Service Corps of Nigeria'. *Comparative Political Studies*. 22 (4): 397–436

¹⁴⁶ Interview with Chimakonam, August 23, 2021.

the programme emerged and what it had intended to fix, which he admits was not fixed. He puts it thus:

In the 1970s, after the Biafra and Nigerian war, which was a brutal and unjust war ... at the end of that war, there was a program aimed to find a way to unite the country once again, not only geographically but mentally and create some form of national orientation consciousness if you like, and the NYC was one of such programs.¹⁴⁷

Chimakonam believes that such efforts had the potential to bring about cross-cultural friendships and even marriages, because the programmes do cross-cultural deployments to foster mutual understanding, but he doubts that the programme would succeed because the people at the helm of the project, he believes, ‘are high on politics and self-centeredness.’¹⁴⁸

Upon completing his service, Chimakonam went to study at the University of Calabar (UNICAL) where he completed his master’s and Doctorate. UNICAL was what is known in Nigeria as a ‘second-generation’ university in reference to those universities built from the 1970s. The first-generation universities, built between 1948 and 1963, include the universities of Ibadan, Ife, Lagos, Ahmadu Bello, Nigeria, and Nsukka. UNICAL was opened in 1975.

Chimakonam’s interest was to delve deeper into Logic and UNICAL was a sensible choice because of the presence of experts in the field, such as Professor Princewill Alozie, Chris Ijiomah, Andrew Uduigwomen, and Dorothy Ucheaga, while both Professor Uduma and Dr. Kanu Macaulay had received part of their training at UNICAL. Chris Ijiomah and Andrew Uduigwomen supervised Chimakonam’s Masters and Doctoral dissertations on Mathematical Logic. His Masters dissertation was titled ‘Logic in Transition: An Historiographic Study of The Development Of Symbolic Logic’. He argued that there was a transition from syllogistic logic to symbolic logic, he moved to show their differences as well as the factors and circumstances that motivated this transition. The abstract provides a summary of the study:

The syllogistic logic, which has to do with subject/predicate demarcation, mood, figure and analysis of terms, was largely developed by Aristotle. Others, such as the Stoics and the medieval, equally made some contributions. Thereafter, logic was thought to be a complete science by logic historians. For years, logicians seemed to accept this position until the collapse of the papacy gave rise to free thinking and science.

¹⁴⁷ Interview with Chimakonam, August 23, 2021.

¹⁴⁸ Interview with Chimakonam, August 23, 2021.

It is in the light of this new intellectual atmosphere that fresh insights began to emerge in logic, the syllogistic logic had been limited in some respects, namely; it does not involve the rigor of analysis of the truth value of statements; it does not analyze the full import of predicates; the ordinary language which it uses leads to ambiguity; it does not bind propositions with appropriate quantifiers; it has no formal language with richer logical operators; it does not carry out relational application of predicates to individuals; it does not have the capacity of reducing propositions into propositional functions; and above all, its proof systems are complex, and at the same time shallow.

Some of these limitations became fundamental and apparent in the enlightenment period, thereby necessitating a transition to a new brand of logic instead of enriching the old one. This work, therefore, established that there was a transition from syllogistic logic to symbolic logic; showed their differences as well as the factors and circumstances that motivated this transition.¹⁴⁹

The above quoted abstract shows a very important detail about Jonathan Chimakonam's philosophy of logic. His criticism of the inadequacy of Aristotelean syllogistic- which he argued brought about the necessity for a new brand of logic-, laid the groundwork for his introduction a new brand of logic that survives the pit falls he identified with syllogistic logic.

Chimakonam's doctoral dissertation, titled '*Proof in Alonzo Church's and Alan Turing's Mathematical Logic: Undecidability of First-Order Logic*,' attempted to solve a century old mathematical problem that was first presented in 1900 by the German Mathematician David Hilbert in his address in at the meeting of the 2nd International Congress of Mathematicians in Paris. Hilbert presented ten mathematical problems that have since baffled the minds of many great mathematicians.¹⁵⁰ In fulfilment of his PhD Chimakonam offered to find the solution to the problems that were first attempted by Alan Turing, an English mathematician who is credited for inspiring of modern computing and producing seminal insights into artificial intelligence¹⁵¹, and Alonzo Church, a renowned American mathematician who developed the

¹⁴⁹ Chimakonam was gracious enough to procure the abstract for me and send it to me in an email, 2021.

¹⁵⁰ David Hilbert 'Mathematical problems,' *Bulletin of the American Mathematical Society, Bull. Amer. Math. Soc.* 8(10), (1909): 437-479.

¹⁵¹ Alan Cowell, 'Overlooked No More: Alan Turing, Condemned Code Breaker and Computer Visionary'. The New York Times, 2019. Accessed in October 2021.

field of mathematical logic.¹⁵² The details of Chimakonam's doctoral dissertation are too broad and complex to summarise here. It is not clear, however, whether or not the attempt to solve these problems succeeded. If it did, Chimakonam may by now have gained acclaim to the level of Alan Turing and Alonzo, or perhaps the jury is still out.

Although Chimakonam had taken classes at undergraduate level in African philosophy at Ebonyi State, it was during his time as a postgraduate at UNICAL that he began an impassioned and close study of African philosophy. He read voraciously the work of one of the faculty members at UNICAL, Innocent Asouzu, especially his metaphysical system called 'ibuanidanda ontology'. Recounting his UNICAL experience in 2019, Chimakonam would say:

Even though I conducted my master's and doctoral research in the field of logic, moderated by Uduigwomen and Ijiomah, I did a lot of personal studies in African philosophy. It was in African philosophy that I became heavily influenced as a researcher by the trio of Innocent Asouzu, whose thinking style I adopted; Pantaleon Iroegbu, whose writing style I adopted; and Campbell S. Momoh, whose radical style I adopted. Today, I am probably known in the academia more as an African philosopher than as a logician. My contributions to knowledge in the folds of conversational thinking, conversational philosophy and Ezumazu logic have been shaped by influences from these three African philosophers.¹⁵³

The extent and meaning of that influence will be thoroughly interrogated in chapters that follow. For now, it is important to understand that Chimakonam's philosophical outlook was deeply inspired by the UNICAL staff that taught him and those whose books he read at UNICAL.

Settling on being a philosopher

Chimakonam was an excellent soccer player and as a young boy had harboured hopes of playing as a professional. By the age of seven he was already traveling around the country with his soccer team. However, his mother and other senior women in the village feared that he was playing too much football and would eventually turn into a 'loafer'. His mother therefore talked him out of his soccer ambition. He loved his mother and did not want to disappoint her, so he

¹⁵² Deutsch, Harry and Oliver Marshall, 'Alonzo Church', *The Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2021 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), forthcoming URL = <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2021/entries/church/>>.

¹⁵³ Jonathan Chimakonam, 'breaking new ground in African philosophy', interview by Richard Bright. *interlia online magazine*, April, 2019.

abandoned hopes of being a soccer player. His mother harboured hopes of being a professional, ideally a professor. He took it upon himself to achieve the dream for her. Chimakonam moved on to a few career choices before settling down to being an academic philosopher. It took a few speeches from real life philosophers in high school for him to settle upon attempting to become a philosopher; reading Plato and Socrates as a teen also helped.¹⁵⁴

Chimakonam started preparing to be a philosopher. As a student at Merchants of Light Secondary School, there was an annual Career Day programme. It was a day set aside each year when the school invited successful professionals from different walks of life to address students. In his second year at the school, the students were addressed by a philosopher. Something ‘clicked’ in young Jonathan as the philosopher said a lot of things that he found interesting. The guest quoted Plato and Socrates extensively, passages that he was familiar with. Chimakonam was intrigued but that impression did not last, and he was leaning towards becoming a lawyer. The ‘magic’, he recounted, happened in his fifth year, when another philosopher came to address the students on Career Day. ‘There and then, I made up my mind that I would be a philosopher,’ he said.¹⁵⁵

What is interesting in this recounting is the importance of Philosophy in the community. In our societies for example, we would be addressed by teachers, accountants, lawyers, architects, and other professionals, never philosophers. Even when I chose to study philosophy at university, friends and families were aghast at my ‘strange’ choice which did not prepare one for a ‘real’ career.

The philosopher’s address convinced Chimakonam to pursue this career path and the forget Law which seemed an apt career given his sharp mind and excellent oratorical and written skills. His teachers seemed to think that Chimakonam would be great as a lawyer. He flowed with the tide and was so excited about becoming a lawyer that he had a drawing of a lawyer on the inside back page of his notebook, and he used the descriptor ‘Esq’ for esquire for his name. This is the title usually placed after an attorney’s name. Chimakonam’s love for law is also not unconnected to the fact that he comes from a family of lawyers as some of his uncles are high court judges and one of his uncles is a chief justice for the supreme court of Nigeria. It is not hard to see how a young boy may look up to his family. The charm of philosophy, however, proved stronger than that of the legal profession.

¹⁵⁴ Interview with Jonathan Chimakonam, 23 August 2021.

¹⁵⁵ Notes from my interview with Jonathan. 29 December 2020

Before that momentous day Chimakonam had even dreamed of becoming a polyglot like his bombastic school principal, Alex Iyiegbu. This thought had prevailed in his mind in his third and fourth years in high school. He recounted Iyiegbu's charm:

Mr. Iyiegbu had an enormous influence on me in those years. I looked forward to the Assembly session every morning because, at the end of it, Mr. Iyiegbu, galloping like a stallion, with a walking stick, dignified in learning, would appear on the veranda of the first floor in the Administration Building. It was an old Gothic structure. Oh, I always cherished every moment of his display. Most students did. He would begin his address in the Igbo language, switch to English like a mad, yet exciting professor, and then to French, before ending in Latin. Oh, dear me, he was a god of knowledge. Little wonder, I decided I was going to study languages and become a polyglot like my stellar principal, Chief Iyiegbu. So strong was this dream that it regularly conflicted with a more noteworthy potential as a lawyer.¹⁵⁶

But these two strong influences were swept aside by the attraction of philosophy. His mother wanted him to be an academic and passion for knowledge and books compounded by the philosopher's address, resulted in Chimakonam following the academic stream.

Work

Whilst still a postgraduate student, Chimakonam began teaching Philosophy and Logic at the Centre for General Studies at the University of Calabar in 2008. He held that position for five years before getting a permanent position in 2013 in the Department of Philosophy at UNICAL. In 2016 he became a Senior Lecturer. He joined the University of Pretoria, South Africa in 2018 as a Senior Lecturer where he still teaches. His stellar academic career includes the supervision of nine honours thesis, nine doctoral dissertations, and five master's dissertations. Chimakonam stressed in our interviews that just as he was mentored by senior and distinguished academics, he sees mentoring as a crucial part of his work, and he is not one to shy away from mentoring students who need academic help. This is reflected in the more than twenty students that Chimakonam has mentored. He has also taken his students to various countries for exposure, sometimes at his expense, including Hong Kong, Germany, South

¹⁵⁶ Email correspondence with Jonathan Chimakonam 29 December, 2020.

Africa, Tanzania, and Nigeria. He has also helped some of his students secure scholarships. He values his students and emphasises that despite his heavy schedule he is always prompt in reading his students' work and providing feedback.¹⁵⁷ Reflecting on his mentoring track record Chimakonam, 'I consider my mentoring programme to be my proudest career contribution to knowledge and society. This is because it is a veritable way to groom successors, especially in Africa. I give more time to mentoring than my social life and research combined.'¹⁵⁸ This is an admirable quality.

Chimakonam's journey from Nigerian to the South African philosophy department is an interesting one. Beginning as early as 2013, Chimakonam was offered an opportunity, twice, to teach at a South African university but declined the offer on both occasions. In the young Chimakonam's mind, taking up a teaching position in South Africa would have been betraying his country and he had sworn not to do that. When Chimakonam was in secondary school, in his Government class (Government is a high school subject in Nigeria) he learned of a terrifying phenomenon called 'the brain drain'.¹⁵⁹ This was when the best minds of Africa leave the country of their birth to work in overseas countries, to the detriment of the African countries. When Chimakonam learned of this phenomenon he swore to never leave Nigeria, even to another fellow African country.

Interestingly, as I was completing this draft, Adam Habib, a political scientist and current director of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, who was previously vice-chancellor of the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) in Johannesburg, South Africa, told a reporter for the *Guardian* newspaper:

We aren't looking at the consequences of taking the best people from developing countries or weakening their institutions. British universities tell themselves that they are educating people who will take their new skills home. In reality, many will fall in love, have families, get jobs, and end up staying. Prof Abdoulaye Gueye, from the University of Ottawa, showed that historically 83% of students from India and 90% of those from China did not return

¹⁵⁷ I have refrained from naming the students by name as I have failed to get clearance from them to use their names, there are those who have allowed me to, those are Dr Arribiah Attoe who was recently appointed lecturer of philosophy of the university of Witwatersrand. Attoe has also co-authored a book with Chimakonam titled '*New conversations on the problem of the identity and mind*' and Dr Lucky Ogbonnaya Uchenna who has written a couple of books with Chimakonam

¹⁵⁸ Chimakonam's Curriculum Vitae, 2021.

¹⁵⁹ Interview with Chimakonam, 23 August, 2021.

home after studying abroad. Data on Africa would tell a similar story. By accelerating the brain drain in Africa and Asia we are weakening their institutional capacities. It means places like hospitals and universities won't be able to deal with these huge challenges like pandemics and climate change and inequality.¹⁶⁰

Chimakonam eventually made his way to South Africa. It was only after another colleague, a Pan-Africanist, convinced him that going to another African country should not be defined as part of the 'brain drain' that he was open to leaving Nigeria. Why did he eventually leave Nigeria?

I had been at Calabar as a master's and then a PhD student and then as a lecturer. I started teaching at Calabar from 2008 and in 2018 it seemed quite like a decade was just too long and I had become too familiar with the environment. I was afraid of losing interest in what I was doing. I needed a new challenge¹⁶¹.

Beyond familiarity, Chimakonam had risen to fame due to his contribution to the formation of the Conversational school and creation of Ezumazu logic and having mentored a number of students it seemed to him that after a decade of hard work, he had accomplished all he needed to do in Nigeria¹⁶². He needed something new and so left in 2018 to take up a new challenge in South Africa. It was not hard for him to fit-in because South African philosophers already knew who he was. There was no need, he felt, to prove himself to anyone.

Teaching to South African students, Chimakonam was pleased that most of the students readily welcomed his ideas on curriculum transformation, a call to Africanize the curriculum and ground it on African logic. The resonance came from the conscientization that students had gotten from the 'Fees Must Fall' movement which started in March 2015 as 'Rhodes Must Fall' at the University of Cape Town where students demanded the removal of the statue of Cecil John Rhodes from the grounds of the university. This mutated into a movement to remove colonial statues from all public spaces in South Africa, a wider demand to 'decolonise' education in South Africa, expose institutional racism at universities in South Africa, as well

¹⁶⁰ Anna Fazackerley, 'Interview: Adam Habib of SOAS,' *Guardian*, 8 January 2022. <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2022/jan/08/adam-habib-of-soas-uk-universities-must-stop-taking-other-countries-best-people>. Accessed 8 January 2022.

¹⁶¹ Interview with Chimakonam, 2021.

¹⁶² Interview with Chimakonam, 2021.

as a call for free university education for deserving students. Students at the University of Pretoria fully embraced Chimakonam's ideas, just as his Nigerian students had done. The difference that Chimakonam met was that the students in South Africa were not as naturally attuned as their Nigerian counterparts to the idea of an African driven philosophy.¹⁶³ Perhaps this could be connected to the fact that most South African universities hardly teach African philosophy a phenomenon Chimakonam decries in his writings.

As a lecturer Chimakonam seems to elicit mixed responses amongst students. Some students regard him a laid-back individual who has a good sense of humour, is very talkative, and a good storyteller, whilst others regard him as a strict lecturer who is very demanding of his students and requires them to be prepared to work hard at all times. One of his students quoted him as saying, 'when you read and feel as though you are tired of reading, read some more'. The student continued 'He gives you scores of books to read, so if you work with him, you must be prepared to work.'¹⁶⁴ Another colleague of his described him as a friendly and embracing person to his students, who took out time after classes to sit under a tree with his students and facilitate philosophical discussions by asking probing questions. This act of holding philosophical discussions with students is one of the main reasons behind the formation of the conversational method of philosophizing, which is discussed later in this study.

Writing

Chimakonam is, arguably, one of the most prolific writers on the continent. He started publishing academically in 2011 while still a doctoral student. At the time of completing this study (January 2022) he had published 54 peer reviewed articles in journals, many of them being international journals and 29 chapters in books. It is impossible to summarize the themes covered in all his articles here, suffice to say that we can group his works in several themes. He has published on epistemology, global politics, domestic politics, poverty, cognitive science, logic, metaphysics, philosophy of mind, identity, intercultural philosophy, and Marxism. He has also published thirteen books, with a further nine manuscripts either being completed or under consideration by publishers. Chimakonam has presented papers at many conferences across the globe, including the Czech Republic, China, United Arab Emirates

¹⁶³ Interview with Jonathan Chimakonam, 23 August 2021

¹⁶⁴ Interview with Chimakonam's former student, September 30, 2021. As per ethics rules, I am not at liberty to reveal other students' names.

Germany, Austria and several African countries, and has co/organized eleven conferences and workshops.

It will prove futile to try and pin down one major theme of Chimakonam's work. As noted above he has published on a variety of issues. When one reads his work, it seems as though he writes on topical issues that spike his interest at a particular time, or something he feels strongly about an issue and writes on it, such as his work on women's and gay rights in Nigeria.

We can track his early publishing because it mirrors all his subsequent work. Some of the themes covered in 2011 are constant in his writing, even when he is not writing within the tradition of African philosophy. The first thing that stands out in Chimakonam's writing is his versatility. We have shown above that Chimakonam's primary training is in logic, specifically mathematical logic.

However, he has always had an eclectic approach to his writing. For example, the fact that his first article published in the very first issue of *filosofia theoretica*, his brain child, in 2011 is, interestingly, titled 'An Investigation into the Nature of Mathematical Meaning'. This is interesting because it is not an essay dedicated specifically to African philosophy or problems peculiar to African philosophy, underscoring the fact that his initial interest was not in developing the field of African Philosophy per se but Logic. In this article Chimakonam surveyed the evolution of the meaning of numbers and how the lack of a clear understanding of it had implications for mathematical understanding. He samples works, in keeping with his eclectic style of writing, a trait he took from his predecessor Innocent Asouzu, the work of authors such as John Locke, William Berkeley, Gotlob Frege, John Mills, and Gottfried Leibniz.

After showing that the current concepts of numbers were inadequate, he concludes by posing a question. 'If we could not as little as grasp the meaning of our mathematical objects, how could we reasonably talk of mathematical understanding?'¹⁶⁵ Although Chimakonam does look into the Igbo concept of numbers, his contribution is to the philosophy of mathematics. He does not employ Ezumazu logic or use conversational thinking, and the article provides an insightful window into his mind before conversationalism.

¹⁶⁵ Jonathan Chimakonam, 'an investigation into the nature of mathematical meaning' *filosofia theoretica: Journal of philosophy, culture and religions*. Vol 1 No1. (2011): 32

Chimakonam's second publication, in that same issue, titled 'Mental surgery: another look at the identity problem,' is as a tribute to Professor Campbell Shittu Momoh, and deals with the question of personal identity. Campbell Momoh was a professor of African philosophy at the University of Lagos. He was an ardent defender of African philosophy as an independent tradition that should develop its own logic. Though Chimakonam's arguments in the article are interesting we will not focus on them here but what is interesting is that he said nothing of African philosophy in a journal of African philosophy that he had started. He argues against some of the well-established philosophies in the West but not from a peculiarly African point of view. This was before conversational thinking or Ezumazu logic where, perhaps in an unexpected twist given the previous trajectory of this work, he unleashed an unprecedented radicalism one could not have anticipated if one read his early work.¹⁶⁶

In 2012, while Chimakonam continued to publish on various themes he did not cover African philosophy. He co-authored an article with Asira Enya Asira titled 'Genetic Engineering and the false claim to feed the world' which argued against the application of genetic engineering to mainstream agriculture. Their position was that the motive behind the drive towards genetic modification was financial gain and this raised ethical and health concerns. They conclude by calling for caution and censorship in the application of biotechnology to food crop production.¹⁶⁷ This is one of many articles that show that it is very hard to call Chimakonam only a logician or metaphysician as he touches on a variety of topics. During the 2011-2012 period he published largely outside African philosophy.

Consider another article titled 'The woes of scientific realism', as an example. Co-authored with Ikehukwu Kan, they investigated the disagreement between Realists and Anti-realists on the observable and unobservable distinction in scientific practice. Realists were those who claimed that 'machines and gadgets can simulate the human act of perception thereby making all realities under the screen of science observable,' while the anti-realists 'insist that what cannot be observed with the human senses even if detected with gadgets are not observable.'¹⁶⁸ He continued writing on scientific realism and published another article concerned with the

¹⁶⁶ Jonathan Chimakonam, 'Mental surgery: another look at the identity problem' *filosofia theoretica: Journal of philosophy, culture and religions*. Vol 1 No 1 (2011) 11.

¹⁶⁷ Jonathan Chimakonam and Asira Enya Asira. 'Genetic Engineering and the false claim to feed the world'. *Journal of Biology, Agriculture, and healthcare*. Vol 2, No 8. (2012):

¹⁶⁸ Jonathan C Okeke, Ikehukwu Anthony Kan. 'The Woes of Scientific Realism'. *AFRREV STECH: An International Journal of Science and Technology*, Vol 1, No 2. (2012): 32-44

existence of a conflict in therapeutics between what are called the Empirical and the Rationalist philosophies.¹⁶⁹

One thing is certain. Chimakonam sacrificed his personal life for a very long time in pursuit of education and ideas. He was so passionate about his research that he did not have the time for a normal social life that young students typically have, at least from my experience as a student. Speaking of his life as a student and young adult, Chimakonam said:

It is difficult to do all those things and still maintain a healthy, very regular form of social life. I cannot boast that I had; I was able to maintain that. Because you know what is involved in doing postgraduate research. It takes virtually all of your life and at the same time you are pursuing other things. You have very little time left for your social life and that was my case actually. But it would be wrong to say I was conscious that time was passing, and I was not having my social life as a growing boy should have. I was not conscious of that at all. I think somehow I was so passionate about what I was doing and what I was pursuing that I lost track of some other things that also matter in life. It took me a couple of years down the line, around 2016/2017, to begin to understand that I had not had a great social life and then I tried to do rollback [...] I think I was so obsessed with some ideas... typically I am an idealist and I got so carried away but I do not regret it, you know. But if given the chance I think I would do some things a little bit differently though I am also proud of what I have achieved.¹⁷⁰

Chimakonam got married in 2016 and now has two young children. It seems then that what or rather whoever woke him up to his social life also led to a better balance between his social and academic life. I say this because Chimakonam has not declined in his output although he now has family responsibility. When Chimakonam speaks of a lack of social life, he does not mean that he lacked an ability to socialize. In fact, he is a very sociable person, as indicated by friends and former students, and was never in want of anything to talk about.

¹⁶⁹ Ikechukwu Anthony Kanu, Jonathan C Okeke. 'Empiricism Verses Rationalism: Matters Arising in Medical Practice'. *AFRREV STECH: An International Journal of Science and Technology*. Vol 1, No3. (2012):1-40

¹⁷⁰ Interview with Chimakonam, August 23, 2021

Chimakonam's consistent output is testified not only by his many books and book chapters but also by the ratings and awards in recognition of his contribution. In 2021 he was rated for the first time by the National Research Foundation (NRF) and was rated C1. Chimakonam says that the award letter describes C1 category as:

All of the reviewers are firmly convinced that the applicant is an established researcher as described and who, on the basis of the high quality and impact of his/her recent research is regarded by some reviewers as already enjoying considerable international recognition.... A scholar ... at a nationally leading level [who] has substantially advanced knowledge and understanding in the field by contributing to new thinking, a new direction and/or a new paradigm.¹⁷¹

Also, in 2021 Chimakonam was awarded R45000 as an 'Exceptional Young Researcher' He was also the Jens Jacobsen Prize Award winner for Outstanding Research in Philosophy, [2014- 2016] presented by the International Society for Universal Dialogue (ISUD), located at The Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Polish Academy of Sciences, the University of Warsaw, and the Philosophy for Dialogue Foundation. Chimakonam's co-edited book, *Existence and Consolation: Reinventing Ontology, Gnosis and Values in African Philosophy*, with its focus on a philosophy grounded in the African experience, won CHOICE Outstanding Academic Title Award for 2015 by American Library Association (ALA).¹⁷² There has been a steady academic engagement with Chimakonam's work, including Honours theses as well as

¹⁷¹ Jonathan Chimakonam, Curriculum Vitae.2021

¹⁷² Ada Agada, *Existence and consolation: reinvention ontology, gnosis, and values in African philosophy*, ed Jonathan Chimakonam (Minnesota, Paragon house, 2015).

33 book reviews and rejoinders.¹⁷³ This study will offer critical engagements in later chapters.¹⁷⁴ There have been conferences and colloquiums on Chimakonam's work¹⁷⁵

By the 1980s, at the height of the great debate, Nigerian universities had a very high concentration of talented philosophers in African Philosophy who got their fame as participants in the great debate.¹⁷⁶ While philosophy was taught at universities in most regions of Africa, Nigeria led the way as it had thirty-seven universities by the late 1980s, comprising a quarter of all the universities in Africa. There were departments of philosophy at both Federal and State universities:¹⁷⁷ The strength of philosophy in Nigeria is reflected in the fact that Professor Olupi Sodipo founded a Nigerian Philosophical Association in 1975, which became dormant by the 1990s.

At the University of Ife, now the Obafemi Awolowo University, was Olubi Sodipo, the first Nigerian professor of African philosophy and author of the seminal work *Knowledge, Belief and Witchcraft: Analytic experiments in African Philosophy*¹⁷⁸, whose ideas laid the foundation for many scholars in African philosophy. With him were two other highly regarded and path-

¹⁷³ I will attach the list of those works in the annexures.

International Colloquium on 'Applications of Chimakonam's Conversational Thinking', (May 13-14, 2021). Organised and hosted by the Center for Interdisciplinary and Intercultural Studies, The University of Tübingen, Germany.

2. International Round Table on 'Jonathan O Chimakonam's Conversational thinking', (April 9, 2021). Organised and hosted by the Center for Leadership Ethics in Africa (CLEA), University of Fort Hare, South Africa.

3. A Colloquium on 'Global Conversations on the Journey of Logic in African Philosophy: From C. S. Momoh to J. O. Chimakonam', (May 10, 2019). Central Language Laboratory (CCL), Faculty of Arts, Lagos State University, Nigeria.

4. A Conference on 'Ezumezu' and 'African Philosophy as Critical Universalism': Engaging African Intuitions for Normative Theory in a Pluriverse', (May 27-29, 2019). Ebonyi State University, Nigeria

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¹⁷⁶ There were, of course, great philosophers of African origin outside of Nigeria as well, such as Pauline Hountondji of Benin Republic, Kwasi Wiredu of Ghana, and Odera Oruka of Kenya.

¹⁷⁷ There were departments of philosophy at the Federal Universities of Ibadan, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, University of Lagos, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, University of Port-Harcourt, University of Calabar, University of Benin and University of Uyo, while the following State universities also had departments of philosophy: Bendel State University, Ekpoma, Ondo State University, Ado-Ekiti, Ogun State University, Ago-Iwoye and Lagos State University, Ojoo, Lagos. Moses Akin Makinde, 'Whither Philosophy in Africa?', Paper presented at the Twentieth World Congress of Philosophy, Boston, Massachusetts, USA, 10-15 August 1998. <https://www.bu.edu/wcp/Papers/Afri/AfriMaki.htm>. Accessed 15 July 2021.

¹⁷⁸ See footnote 37

breaking philosophers, Akin Makinde author of *African philosophy, culture and traditional medicine* and Barry Hallen, author of *A short history of African philosophy*.¹⁷⁹

The renowned Social Anthropologist and Philosopher Robin Horton also came to Ife University for a brief stint. Horton heavily influenced the direction of African philosophy and in the great debate, he compared African traditional thought to Western Scientific thought.¹⁸⁰ This is possibly the most cited and engaged with work in African philosophy. It was not until the Ghanaian philosopher Kwasi Wiredu landed a heavy blow in 1984 to Horton in an aptly titled essay, 'How not to compare traditional African thought and Western Scientific Thought', that Horton began to lose his shine.¹⁸¹

Ibadan had some giants of African philosophy, such as Peter Bodunrin, Godwin Sogolo, and Olusegun Oladipo. At Nsukka were the likes of T. Uzodinma Nwala, who was the first to develop and teach courses in African philosophy globally. The Nsukka School had arguably the highest concentration of philosophy talent in the 1970s, which included the likes of Innocent Onyewuenyi, Chukwudum Okolo, Fidelis Okafor, and Chukwuemeka Nze. The likes of C.S. Momoh and Sophie Oluwole were the most prominent from the Lagos School. Momoh's essay defending African Logic is important in this dissertation. Chris Iiomah, Chimakonam's doctoral supervisor, and Innocent Asouzu were important figures at Calabar University, shaping direction of the Calabar School of African Philosophy which would later metamorphose into the Conversational School of Philosophy.

As a doctoral student, Chimakonam observed that the few journals of African philosophy that had been established, had either stopped publishing or were in decline. He was also concerned that most of the articles being published in African philosophy were meta-philosophical, that is, they were still concerned with questions like 'what makes philosophy African?' and 'who is an African philosopher?', questions that he felt had long been settled. In his view, there were few original ideas aimed at building new philosophical systems and this led him to start the journal *Filosofia Theoretica: Journal of African Philosophy, Culture and Religions* in 2011. This journal is accredited by the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) which

¹⁷⁹ Akin Makinde, *African philosophy, culture and traditional medicine* (Ohio, Ohio University center for intercultural studies, 1998). Barry Hallen, *A short history of African philosophy* (Indiana, Indiana University press, 2002).

¹⁸⁰ Robin Horton, African Traditional Thought and Western Science. Part I. From Tradition to Science *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*. Vol. 37, No. 1 (1967): 50-71

¹⁸¹ Kwasi Wiredu, *Cultural particulars and universals*. (Indiana, Indiana university press, 1992).

attests to its quality. Chimakonam has been the journal's editor-in-chief since 2013. The editorial board includes luminaries of African philosophy, such as Dr. Mesembe I. Edet, (University of Calabar), Dr. Michael Onyebuchi Eze (University of Cambridge), Dr. Idom T. Inyabri (University of Calabar), Ada Agada (University of Nigeria), and Aribiah Attoe (University of Calabar). All are members of the conversational school of philosophy and through the journal play a key role in defining the field.¹⁸²

Chimakonam wanted, he said, a journal dedicated to promoting system-building in Africa. By this he meant that the journal should be dedicated to using philosophical methods to solve real life problems that Africans face. Since 2011 when the first issue was published, many young and gifted African philosophers have used the journal as a platform to share their ideas. This, Chimakonam, stressed, is also important for the world to get to know African philosophers and their ideas. Afterall, the works of Western philosophers are known to the world because they are in print and accessible. In time, the work of African philosophers too would become known globally, he hoped. Additionally, for African Philosophy to be a vibrant discipline, there was a need to a comprehensive body of knowledge to use for teaching.

The founding of this journal was especially important given the lack of funding for the Humanities at African universities from the 1990s due to economic problems and the shifting focus on technology, and the decline and even closure of founding journals in the field, such as *Second Order* at Ife, Nigeria; *Universitas* at Legon, Accra, Ghana; the East African Journal of Philosophy, *Thought and Practice* in Nairobi, Kenya; and *Presence Africaine*.¹⁸³

This chapter explored Jonathan Chimakonam's biographical details, including the pivotal role of his mother in shaping the young Chimakonam and the various intellectual influences on his life and his own academic trajectory. The next chapter examines in greater detail some of Chimakonam's key ideas, beginning with the Conversational Method.

¹⁸² Interview with Lucky Ogbonnaya Uchenna, 10 October 2021.

¹⁸³ Makinde, Moses Akin. 'Whither Philosophy in Africa?', Paper presented at the Twentieth World Congress of Philosophy, Boston, Massachusetts, USA, 10-15 August 1998. <https://www.bu.edu/wcp/Papers/Afri/AfriMaki.htm>. Accessed 15 July 2021.

Chapter 4

New Directions in African Philosophy: Conversational Method

I am one of those who believe that the distinguishing factors in the African philosophical tradition, and indeed, any other philosophical traditions can be found in their *methods* and background *logic*. These two factors constitute nuances from one tradition to another. You cannot say, as some colleagues are saying, that you are doing African philosophy where the methods and logic undergirding your enterprise are all western developed.¹⁸⁴

- (Italics mine)

This chapter analyses one of the concepts postulated by Chimakonam, the conversational method, its contribution to the field of Philosophy, and the reaction to his ideas. At the risk of sounding reductive, Chimakonam's work can be understood as two pronged: firstly, as an attempt to delineate and crystalize African philosophy's difference as an independent tradition; and, secondly, as an attempt to develop mechanisms through which African philosophy, as an independent tradition, can contribute to the global expansion of thought.¹⁸⁵ In doing so, Chimakonam aimed to respond to the clarion call sounded by his predecessors.

Concerning the delineation of African philosophy's difference as an independent tradition, Chimakonam's focus was on building an Africa-inspired logic that would ground African ways of being and thought that have been contaminated and marginalized by the Global North.¹⁸⁶ With regards to mechanisms through which African philosophy can participate and contribute to the global expansion of thought, he offers conversational philosophy both as a theory and method of cross-cultural, intra-cultural and intercultural dialogue. As a theory, it offers insights to the uneven power relations of cross-cultural dialogue. It also discourages the obsession with

¹⁸⁴ Interview with Jonathan Chimakonam, August 23, 2021.

¹⁸⁵ Jonathan Chimakonam, *Ezumezu: a system of logic for African philosophy and sundry studies*. (Switzerland, Springer, 2019). 97

¹⁸⁶ See his works such as: Jonathan Chimakonam, , 'Conversationalism as an Emerging Method of Thinking in and Beyond African Philosophy'. *Acta-Academica*. 49 (2), (2017a). 11–33. <http://doi.org/10.18820/24150479/aa49i2.1>; Chimakonam, (2017b). 'African Philosophy and Global Epistemic Injustice. *Journal of Global Ethics*, 13 (2), 120–137. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17449626.2017.1364660>. Jonathan Chimakonam (2017c.) What is Conversational Philosophy? A Prescription of a New Theory and Method of Philosophizing in and Beyond African Philosophy *Phronimon*, 18, 115–130. 186

attempts at finding one answer for all cultures, instead promoting complementarity as a more viable solution.

As a method, African Philosophy attempts to resist the hegemony of Western philosophical methods that pose as universal and timeless. Chimakonam seeks to unpick ways in which Western methods betray the context from which they arise and the problems that arise for African philosophers when they blindly use these methods. Conversational method is pushed forth as a culture-neutral method that can be used when two or more cultures interact, ultimately giving Africa an equal footing with the rest of the world in philosophy. The focus of this chapter is to show how Chimakonam got around to doing these things.

The logic question is given little attention here as it will be investigated thoroughly in the next chapter. What will be discussed is the development of conversational thinking, the contexts from which it emerged, philosophies and thinkers that inspired it, and what all these mean for African philosophy. The tasks that Chimakonam set are not original to him, as pointed above, but were argued for and attempted by his predecessors. He was in a sense working on ploughed land. This is not to say that there is nothing creative and new about Chimakonam's work, but it is to underline that others walked so he could run and it is crucial to situate his work in a long philosophical tradition and to show how he built on that. And to show how he contributed to the African philosophical canon.

The Calabar School of philosophy

The Great Debate had ended, and everyone was now talking about system building as the next important project in African philosophy.¹⁸⁷ As I have been emphasising, it was no longer worthwhile to question the existence of African philosophy, that debate had ended, and proponents of African philosophy had won. This disillusionment with the great debate bore a huge hole in the discourse. What was to follow? We now know that African philosophy exists. What is distinctive about it? How do we go about doing it? The problem was best captured by the celebrated Nigerian novelist and first Nobel Laureate from Africa, Wole Soyinka, who stated:

¹⁸⁷ Though I will argue in the following chapters that the great debate had not ended but it still continues, what has changed were the concepts of the debate.

A tiger does not proclaim his tigritude, he pounces. In other words: a tiger does not stand in the forest and say: 'I am a tiger'. When you pass where the tiger has walked before, you see the skeleton of the duiker, you know that some tigritude has been emanated here.¹⁸⁸

It was time for African philosophy to stop proclaiming its 'philosophiness' and start doing it. But, as Wiredu often said, it was one thing to talk about philosophy, doing it was a different animal altogether.¹⁸⁹ Pouncing was proving particularly difficult for this tiger.

Who were some of the key figures in the Calabar School of Philosophy?

Key figures in the Calabar School of Philosophy

Pantaleon Osondu Iroegbu

An important individual in the development of African philosophy was Pantaleon Osondu Iroegbu, philosopher, educationist and theologian, also known as Fada Kpim, who was born in 1951 in Imo State, Nigeria, studied at the University of Louvain-laNeuve, Belgium, and returned to Nigeria in 1991 after completing two master's degrees and a doctorate. He was appointed as a lecturer at the Seat of Wisdom Seminary, Owerri and a visiting lecturer at the Missionary of St Paul, Abuja, Nigeria.¹⁹⁰

Iroegbu was one of the first to philosophise using home-grown concepts and theories. He put forth a theory of being, that is, what it means to be a thing or a person - 'uwa ontology' - alongside a flurry of new concepts nowadays characterised in his classic formulation of the 'kpim' idea. It was an African philosopher thinking through African reality by drawing from African ways of seeing. It will become apparent soon why this is an important event.

Iroegbu presented his idea of Kpiim as a debate on personhood. For example, he criticized Western Philosophy's tendency to think that there only one thing made a person a person, that

¹⁸⁸ I first heard this quote from Proffessor Edwin Etieyibo, in 2021 at a conference on African Logic.

¹⁸⁹ Kwasi Wiredu. 'Conceptual decolonization as an imperative in contemporary African philosophy: some personal reflections' *DANS Rue Descartes*. 36(2), (2002): 1-53

¹⁹⁰ Peter, B and Okikiola, O. 'An exploration of Pantaleon Iroegbu's pedagogy of Nkuziology for contemporary Africa'. *Tansian University*, 2020. Footnote2.

is, the soul. He instead held that three things made a person complete, but more importantly, it was a mistake to try and limit personhood to a definition. He said:

In a summary form, our analysis above brings out this clear fact – we cannot discuss community without individuality, and we cannot define individuality without community. There is a co-existential dynamic between these two aspects of the human reality. Let us call this communal dialectics. Communal dialectics means that the individual is in the community and the community is in the individual. While there is no community without individuals, there is also no individual without community. Each is inextricably involved in the other. With this as background, our inquiry can now proceed to develop a new definition of the human person. In what lies the core or quintessence (kpim) of personality? Is it the community or the individual? Perhaps both. We are looking for a definition of the human person that is focused on both the community and the individual – a communal definition¹⁹¹

Here one can read the emphasis on complementarity or inter-reliability, which was a distinguishing feature of the Calabar school of philosophy. The idea is that all reality needs other reality, all things are interdependent. Ireogbu argues for a new way of looking at the person and in effect of doing philosophy:

We can now bring together the three constitutive elements of personality. The communal element is the origin of the being of the person. Immediately, its other side is the self-hood that, in combination with other selves, make up the community. In the communal and selfhood, there is what we can describe as a being-with and a being-apart. At times they come into tension with each other. This must be resolved in a dialogical process'

Chimakonam would later adopt this way of looking at the world, that is, variables may at times come into tension with each other, but they can be resolved through a dialogical process. This is at the heart of conversationalism - the idea that two seemingly opposed variables may complement each other and that their tension can be resolved through dialogue.¹⁹²

The host of concepts produced by Ireogbu were instrumental in the formation and direction of the Calabar school of philosophy. With him were others like Innocent Asouzu (Ibuanyidanda philosophy, Complementary reflection, and Complementary logic), Chris Ijiomah

¹⁹¹ Pantaleon Ireogbu. *Kpim of personality: treatise on human person* (Owerri, Eustele publications. 2000), 85-90.

¹⁹² Ireogbu, *Kpim of personality*, 89.

(Harmonious Monism and Humanistic Epistemology), Godfrey Ozumba (Integrative humanism with different labyrinthine), and Andrew Uduigwomen (eclecticism) from the University of Calabar. Both institutions were in Eastern Nigeria. Calabar was, in addition, a coastal city, and from indications, a university town providing an ideal setting for scholarly research. The style of philosophising was analogous and because of the connection Iroegbu had with Calabar, he was more or less regarded as a member of the Calabar School. Unfortunately, he died at an early age before he could fully develop his ideas.

The emergence of the Calabar School was heralded by what Chimakonam calls the flurry of new systems and concepts in African philosophy.¹⁹³ A common thread in all of the philosophers mentioned is their loyalty to the idea of complementarity and interdependence of reality, which would become the conversationalists' main philosophical stance. Moreover, their insistence on a creation of philosophical systems and the expansion of conceptual vocabularies.¹⁹⁴ What is distinctive about their way of philosophizing is that their vast number of concepts and theories have Igbo names, sometimes there are compound words that join Igbo and English, Latin and Greek.¹⁹⁵ For example, Arumaristics is an Anglicized version of an Igbo word Arumaruka, which means a relationship of doubt.

Innocent Asouzu

Another prominent member of the Calabar school whose work deserves a brief exploration is Innocent Izuchukwu Asouzua, an Igbo Catholic Priest and philosopher who was born in 1952 and completed his doctorate at the University of Innsbruck in Austria. Upon returning to Nigeria in 1986 he worked briefly in his diocese, Aba, before taking a permanent teaching appointment at the University of Calabar in 1988, where he has been based for the past four decades. His research concerns the theoretical preconditions of mutual coexistence between units within any given framework. This gave rise to his Ibuanyidanda philosophy, which is taken from a Nigerian proverb that translates to 'no task is insurmountable for the danda (ants)',

¹⁹³ Interview with Chimakonam, December 29, 2020.

¹⁹⁴ Alena Rettova 'Post Genocide, Post-Apartheid: The shifting landscapes of African Philosophy, 1994-2019. *Modern Africa: Politics, History and Society*. Vol.9. No1 (2021):11-58.

¹⁹⁵ Rettova, 'Post Genocide, Post- Apartheid', 30.

which articulates an interdependence of philosophies and a philosophical need for complementarity, or the harmony of opposites.¹⁹⁶

Asouzu was among the first to articulate an Africa-inspired method and theory in Africa philosophy. He claimed that the world is double fold; however, this doubleness eludes us because of the influence of Aristotle's insistence that all things have a single substance. For example, the substance of the person is the soul. Asouzu argues that things that are in our interest are as useful as things we do not think are in our interest.¹⁹⁷

Godfrey Ozumba

Innocent Asouzu's theory of Ibunya'idanda inspired other works, including that of Godfrey Ozumba who formulated his own theory called Integrative Humanism. The theories were so similar that Ozumba had a great number of students and colleagues asking him in what way his theory was different to that of Asouzu. Ozumba initially reacted angrily and suspected that he was being accused of plagiarism but conceded that there could be others who were genuinely confused by the similarity in theories, so he published an article in *filosofia theoretica* to clarify the differences between them.¹⁹⁸

The key takeaway from Integrative Humanism is that it does not deny the possibility of other equally consistent and coherent views about reality. The difference, however, is that Ozumba tried to find ways of integrating and harmonizing them with the aim of achieving higher, deeper, more profound and more comprehensive picture of reality. Ozumba explained this in five points: every theory has something to offer; no theory is rejected; all theories must not be applied simultaneously; each theory is applied where it fits; and a theory which fails in one context may apply in another.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁶ Innocent Asouzu. *The Method and Principles of Complementary*, (Calabar, Calabar University Press, 2004). 313

¹⁹⁷ Innocent Asouzu. 'ibunya'idanda' and the philosophy of essence 1'. *Filosofia theoretica: Journal of philosophy, culture and religions*. Vol. 1 No. 1(2011): 79

¹⁹⁸ Godfrey Ozumba. 'Integrative Humanism and Complementary Reflection: a comparative analysis'. *filosofia theoretica: Journal of philosophy, culture and religions*. Vol 1 No. 1 (2011): 157

¹⁹⁹ Ozumba. 'Integrative humanism', 157.

The logical foundation of Integrative Humanism does not follow the Aristotelian typology of two valued logic of either true or false, but a three valued logic where the third value is undecided. The logic question is further explored later in this study. What makes this theory of Integrative Humanism is its loyalty to the philosophy of complementarity and integration as a way of studying reality. Ozumba thinks that he and Asouzu both believe in complementarity because they subscribe to Igbo ontology.

Other thinkers like Chris Ijiomah, Uduma Orji Uduma, and Godwin Sogolo have contributed to the development of the Calabar school. These are the first-generation philosophers of the Calabar school who trained the second generation, one of whom was Jonathan Chimakonam. Many ideas of the first generation Calabar school anticipated the second generation. Which mean that they were to be further developed by the second-generation members of the Calabar school. Chimakonam joined the Calabar school and became a member for a while before developing his own school and movement. Their influence on Chimakonam can be appreciated when one reads the acknowledgement in his 2019 book, *Ezumezu: a system of logic for African philosophy and sundry studies*.²⁰⁰ He begins by thanking members of the conversational school of philosophy and then he says: ‘ I thank in a special way all authors I have cited and drawn inspiration from, most especially Boaventura Santos, C. S. Momoh, Meinrad Hebga, Leopold Senghor and Innocent Asouzu, to name but a few ‘²⁰¹

One does not read very far in the above-mentioned philosopher’s work to see how they influenced Chimakonam’s conversational thinking. To understand the relationship between first generation Calabar school members and Chimakonam it is necessary to briefly consider the early beginnings of conversational thinking.

Transformation of a philosopher

Even though at Ebonyi State University, where he studied from 2001 to 2005, Chimakonam had taken some courses in African philosophy taught by C.M. Okoro, it was during his time as a postgraduate student at Calabar, he maintained, that he ‘began to grow a deeper interest in African philosophy.’ While he studied and cultivated his skills in logic, he took the time to

²⁰⁰ Jonathan Chimakonam, *Ezumezu: A system of logic for African philosophy and sundry studies* (Switzerland, Springer, 2019) 2

²⁰¹ Chimakonam, *Ezumezu*, 2

study the work of Professor Innocent Asouzu who, at the time, had already built a reputation for his well-known ‘Ibuanyidanda ontology’²⁰².

Although Chimakonam did not take any of the professor’s classes he was captivated by his ideas. Chimakonam’s work was anticipated by his predecessors who argued that there was something such as African culture that was different from other cultures; therefore, the philosophy that emerges would be peculiar to Africans. These earlier philosophers thought that complementary thinking and reason was what separated African philosophy from philosophy in other parts of the world, complementary thinking was how Africans saw the world. The young Chimakonam, then a master’s student, read all these works with a passion that would later shine through to the world in hitherto unprecedented ways. What emerged was a radical way of doing philosophy that would make many in the West, and some Africans, restless in their enclaves.

The first decisive act of Chimakonam was his decision in 2011, whilst still a doctoral student, to start a philosophy journal. What makes this a ‘radical’, bold, and even brave decision is that at this formative time of his career Chimakonam had not published much, was virtually unknown and set out on a bold quest to establish a journal. This was a big call. Why did he do this? Studying the direction and the progress of the journal will be instrumental in understanding Chimakonam’s development as a philosopher and his idea of what African philosophy should look like. In his own words:

As a PhD student, I observed that what few journals of African philosophy were available had either stopped publishing or were in decline. Also, I observed that most of the articles being published in African philosophy were meta-philosophical. There were very few original ideas aimed at building new systems. I founded *Filosofia Theoretica: Journal of African Philosophy, Culture and Religions* to cover the lacuna. More importantly, I wanted the journal to lead the programme of system building in African philosophy. Again, because conventional journals in philosophy out there promoted Western philosophy and would often be gatekeepers or distort original ideas in African philosophy, I wanted *Filosofia Theoretica* to serve as a platform where talented African philosophers could publish their original ideas without distortions.²⁰³

²⁰² Interview with Jonathan Chimakonam, December 29, 2020

²⁰³ Email correspondence with Chimakonam, December 29, 2020.

What is particularly telling from the above quote is what Chimakonam calls ‘Meta-philosophical articles. What this means is that articles that were published were philosophizing about philosophy. For example, what is ‘African’ about African philosophy? These types of questions find African philosophy looking at itself. Chimakonam found the endeavour myopic and suggested system building which meant things like developing a logic and method that would undergird the project of African philosophy.

The very first issue of *Filosofia Theoretica* was published in December 2011 and contained ten articles. Some of the ‘big’ names in African philosophy who published in the first issue included Chris Ijiomah, Innocent Asouzu, Godfrey Ozumba, and Udobata Onunwa, with other submissions by doctoral students who were supervised by these academics. It was not easy to get these professors to publish, given their heavy schedules, so it was quite an achievement by this young graduate student to get their contributions. The idea was that these ‘big’ names would ensure a wider readership, especially across the continent, which would boost the image and reputation of the journal.

The articles in the first issue, for the most part, aimed to establish African philosophy as a different tradition and doing African philosophy from that position. They employed different methods within African philosophy, such as Harmonism and the method of missing links. There was, however, not a single coherent method under the same banner of African philosophy but multiple such that if one was in favour of a certain method one would end up criticizing another philosopher’s work because it did not employ the same method. Chimakonam did offer a single method that was based on trivalent logic to avoid needless falsification of various methods.²⁰⁴

Chimakonam eventually insisted on the need for home-grown or Africa-developed methods of philosophising. His subsequent work developed and strengthened a new method called ‘Conversational Thinking’ which can be applied in all areas in the Humanities.²⁰⁵ He explained it thus:

²⁰⁴ Jonathan Chimakonam. ‘Conversationalism as an Emerging Method of Thinking in and Beyond African Philosophy’. *Acta-Academica*. 49 (2), (2017) 11–33.

²⁰⁵ Chimakonam, ‘conversationalism’, 12.

As a result of the robust intellectual engagement that greeted African philosophy scholarship in the twentieth-century, African philosophers who were not yet identified as such, and who were trained in the West, employed western-developed methods, such as those employed in analytic and continental traditions which not only shaped their thinking, but determined the structure of their research²⁰⁶.

To address the problem of originality and show the distinction between African and western philosophical traditions, an African culture-inspired procedure was needed, and this was what led Chimakonam to the formulation of Conversational Thinking which was at once African in origin and universal in application.

Inaugurating the Conversational Order in African Philosophy

In 2015 Chimakonam established a mentoring club where students gathered under a tree or classroom, had drinks, and spoke about philosophical problems. The setting was relaxed, and the conversations flowed easily yet the result was rigorous philosophizing.²⁰⁷ These philosophical conversations and mentoring club soon morphed into a system of philosophizing which Chimakonam formalized. The beginnings of conversational philosophy do not seem to be something that Chimakonam anticipated in his writings, although some of his mentees, like Dr Lucky and Aribiah Attoe, argue that Chimakonam had always planned for the heights conversationalism took.²⁰⁸ Members of conversationalism described their beginnings thus:

Few years ago at the University of Calabar, Nigeria, J.O. Chimakonam, who was becoming a scholar of note recruited Samuel Segun into his academic mentoring club who within months pressed his mentor to also recruit Aribiah Attoe, his friend from their undergraduate days. The duo joined an existing list of mentees which included Victor Nweke, L. Uchenna Ogbonnaya, Umezurike J. Ezugwu and Chukwueloka Uduagwu, to name just a few. Chimakonam's mentoring club originally called The Calabar School of Philosophy and later The Conversational School of Philosophy was to prove highly resourceful in producing academic talents. No one had seen anything as productive as the club in this part of the world. It did not take long for those of us around to suspect that it was going to be a big deal in the future. Somehow, Chimakonam had managed to build an institution within an institution. An impressive collection of students both undergraduates and postgraduates

²⁰⁶ Email correspondence with Chimakonam 2020 December, 29.

²⁰⁷ Casual conversations with members of Conversational philosophy, September 23 2021

²⁰⁸ Interview with Lucky Ogbonnaya (20 October, 2021) and casual conversation with one of the members of CSP, September 23, 2021.

drilled in reading, writing and presenting philosophical talks with a perk in leadership skills. Soon, Chimakonam's prodigies or disciples as folks called them began to show class that set them apart from the rest.²⁰⁹

Aribiah Attie corroborates the above story and says he had been looking for a forum where he could engage on philosophical conversations, and even attempted to start an online forum for a year until Samuel Segun, a friend of his and Chimakonam's mentee, recruited him.²¹⁰ Chimakonam was then the founding president of the Graduate Research Forum (GRF) where students came in to discuss their PhDs and published papers.²¹¹ It is this programme that brought about *filosofia theoretica*, Chimakonam's brainchild.

The organization has six founding members named above and the two additions made what was called a Council of 8 which takes decisions about the organization.²¹²

In a 2015 article, 'Interrogatory theory,' Chimakonam reflected that a New Era in African philosophy began in the late 1990s and took definite shape in the early 2000s. He called this philosophy Conversational Philosophy:

By conversational philosophy I mean the rigorous engagement of individual African philosophers in the creation of critical narratives through the fusion of relevant elements of tradition and modernity for the construction of future. There is also critical conversation among practitioners, critical synthesis, theoretic evaluation, re-enforcements and purifications of the thoughts of other African philosophers in ways that upgrade them to metanarrative of African philosophy. These also make such thoughts universalizable although with the primary purpose of solving African problems. In this era, the synthesis of the later period evolves into critical synthesis and the degraded critical analysis returns in full force.²¹³

²⁰⁹ Jonathan O. Chimakonam, Uti Ojah Egbai, Samuel T. Segun, Aribiah D. Attie. *New Conversations on the Problems of Identity, Consciousness and Mind*. (Switzerland. Springer, 2019). 3

²¹⁰ Interview with Aribiah Attie, 20 October 2021.

²¹¹ Interview with Dr Lucky, 20 October 2021.

²¹² Interview with Dr Lucky, 20 October 2021.

²¹³ Jonathan Chimakonam, 'Interrogatory theory: patterns of social deconstruction, reconstruction and the conversational order in African philosophy.' *filosofia theoretica: Journal of philosophy, culture and religions*. Vol 3 No 1(2014):10

This arguably marks a break between the Calabar school and Chimakonam. When I say ‘break’ I do not mean that Chimakonam disavowed the Calabar school. I only mean that Chimakonam’s style of philosophy left the corridors of Calabar to other parts of the world. Here, Chimakonam starts to talk about the ‘conversational order’ which is not aimed primarily at fault finding but reconstruction through criticism. At this point the theory is not clearly defined. Chimakonam takes us back to the authors of the school of Calabar, particularly Iroegbu.

Iroegbu, in his [*Metaphysics: The Kpim of Philosophy*] inaugurated reconstructive and conversational approach in African philosophy. He engaged previous writers in a critical conversation out of which he produced his own thought (Uwa ontology), bearing the stain of African tradition and thought system but remarkably different in approach and method from ethnophilosophy. I regard him as the father of conversationalism.²¹⁴

The idea that conversation brings forth a creation of concepts seems to be taking shape here if one follows closely the argument Chimakonam makes that Iroegbu’s conversation with other scholars gave rise to his idea of Uwa Ontology. Chimakonam does not yet fully flesh out the theory of conversationalism that he speaks of. On the one hand, it sounded like he was saying that his theory is integrative humanism; on the other hand, he points it to Asouzu’s Ibuadanda. It may sound harsh to say that at this stage his ideas lacked clarity, possibly because he still viewed his work as part of the Calabar school of philosophy, but as I show, his work is markedly different from it and this difference, ironically, is explained by an article in the same issue of the journal.

Chimakonam still thinks that his conversational philosophy is part of the Calabar School and that what he had done was to systemize the work of his predecessors. However, conversationalism quickly transcended Nigerian borders and indeed even African borders and crossed oceans to distant lands where it was refashioned in ways the Calabar school and Chimakonam could not have anticipated. And so, it is now not strictly restricted to Africa, perhaps it never was. To the best of my knowledge, it is the only philosophical theory out of Africa to enjoy universal applicability.

²¹⁴ Jonathan Chimakonam, ‘Interrogatory theory: patterns of social deconstruction, reconstruction and the conversational order in African philosophy’. *filosofia theoretica: journal of African philosophy and culture*. Vol 3 No 1. (2014): 19.

Uduma Orji Uduma, a Nigerian logician and Chimakonam's doctoral supervisor, published an article in the 2014 issue of *Filosofia Theoretica*, in which he stated that despite the 'intellectual disquiet of racist Eurocentric scholars, it is generally accepted that there is a distinctive formal study called African philosophy'²¹⁵ Yet, many philosophers, mainly European but some African as well, insist: 'yes, we agree there is African philosophy, but what makes that philosophy African?'²¹⁶

Uduma called this the 'African' question, one that set Chimakonam on his new path and one that distinguishes his philosophy from the rest of the Calabar school. It is a question that Chimakonam attempts to answer in almost all his works. Uduma rightly warns that unless one could 'specify the traits or principles or features that make a philosophical work African, it will be difficult to separate African philosophy from other philosophies such as Western philosophy and Oriental philosophy.' Failure to define features of African philosophy would 'negate the existence of African philosophy as a regional philosophy that is distinct and independent of Western philosophy'²¹⁷,

Uduma calls the question of the criterion for African philosophy a crisis inflicted upon Africans by colonialists. And thus begins the clarion call which Chimakonam sought to answer.

Chimakonam's introduction to the 2015 issue of *Filosofia Theoretica* provides an acute analysis of the problem of authenticity for African philosophy:

One of the most intrusive mistakes of classical philosophy is the supposition that philosophy of any color and taste that is worth the honor of philosophy must be done through the eye and vantage point of Western philosophy. This systemic idea funneling has to a very large extent silenced the African voice and where there is a little succor, it has led to transliteration, copycatism and philosophy of commentary.²¹⁸

This statement has in its subtext the question, what makes a philosophy African? Of special note is that Chimakonam states categorically that the journal was dedicated to promoting

²¹⁵ Uduma O Uduma 'The question of 'African' in African philosophy: in search of a criterion for the Africanness of a philosophy. *Filosofia theoretica: Journal of African philosophy, culture and religions*. Vol 3. No1. (2014). 117.

²¹⁶ Uduma, 'the question of 'Africanness', 129.

²¹⁷ Uduma, 'the question of Africanness', 149.

conversational philosophy. In a one page 'article' titled 'Conversational Philosophy', Chimakonam presents a detailed explanation of what he means by conversational philosophy and, of special note is that he uses the term 'Conversational School' to distinguish this philosophy from the other Schools then in existence in Africa. Chimakonam explains Conversational Philosophy as follows:

To converse or hold a conversation literally means to have an informal exchange of ideas or information. Here, we employ the term in a slightly more technical sense. Philosophical conversation for us is not a mere informal exchange of ideas or a simple informal dialogue between two interlocutors; it is rather a strictly formal intellectual exercise propelled by philosophical reasoning in which critical and rigorous questioning creatively unveils new concepts from old ones. By conversational philosophy we mean that sort of philosophical engagement between individual thinkers with one another; on phenomenological issues of concern; or on one another's thoughts where thoughts are unfolded from concepts, or from concept of concepts. By concept of concepts, I mean further interesting ideas or notions inspired by the discussion of particular concepts. Conversational philosophy thus is more than a dialogue; it is an encounter between proponents and opponents, or a proponent and an opponent engaged in contestations and protestations of thoughts in place and in space.²¹⁹

The conversational method was proposed as an African method of philosophizing that did not place value on a synthesis. It was seen as a formal conversation committed to the formation of new concepts and opening new vistas for thought. This conversation aimed at keeping the conversation going.²²⁰ In a philosophical debate, there is the defender who comes with a notion, called thesis, an example being 'there should be African philosophy'. This has a counter by another philosopher, who presents an opposing idea - called the antithesis, for example, 'there should not be a separate African philosophy'. From this debate emerges what is called the syntheses, where both sides are wrong, or one of them is wrong, or components of both sides are adopted. What I explained above a rudimentary explanation of Hegelian dialectics. Chimakonam proposed a method that veered from this setting. He argued that there should be a defender who holds up a position, and a doubter who questions this position, not to find a definitive answer but rather to create new concepts from the debate and have deeper

²¹⁹ Jonathan Chimakonam, *filosofia theoretica: Journal of philosophy, culture and religions*, 2015, editor's note.

²²⁰ Chimakonam, 2015, editor's note.

understanding of the position of the defender.²²¹ Conversational thinking is different from Hegelian dialectic in that the dialectic forms a synthesis from the thesis and antithesis. Conversationalism discourages synthesis.

On the question of demarcating conversational philosophy as a School, Chimakonam explained:

A conversational school therefore would be any circle of likeminded philosophers who adopt this approach in their practice of philosophy. For me, this should now define not only the new era of African philosophy but the practice of philosophy generally in our age.²²²

Conversational thinking as a criterion for African philosophy

Chimakonam argues in most of his works for a methodological development in African philosophy. He seeks to free African philosophy from the spell of 'Aristotle and Plato' and one of the ways to do that is by new methods in African philosophy.²²³ What makes African philosophy, for Chimakonam, different from say Asian philosophy is the methods that practitioners use. He argues that adopting someone else's method eradicates the authenticity of one's own philosophy. While Chimakonam submits that we cannot define what African philosophy is, he thinks we can delineate its difference from other traditions such that when students pick up a book, they are able to say 'this is African philosophy and this is not' ²²⁴

Elsewhere he says:

Without method, difference in philosophical thinking cannot be established. Without difference, unity of ideas cannot be asserted. Two variables, A and B, were first different before they became similar. No two different though similar variables are identical. Universality is something obtained or created from diversity and not the other way round. In other words, diversity is necessary for universality. It is from the particulars that the

²²¹ Jonathan Chimakonam, 'Conversationalism as an Emerging Method of Thinking in and Beyond African Philosophy'. *Acta-Academica*. 49 (2), (2017): 11

²²² Jonathan Chimakonam, editor's note, *filosofia theoretica*, 2015 vol 4 No1.

²²³ Jonathan Chimakonam, *Ezumezu: A system of logic for African philosophy and sundry studies*. (Switzerland, springer, 2019). 78.

²²⁴ Chimakonam, *Ezumezu*, 80.

universal is created. The idea that philosophy is one big intellectual culture tracing its genealogy to ancient Greece, found commonly in Western intellectual history, is false.²²⁵

What this shows is that Chimakonam has been preoccupied for a long time with delineating African philosophy's difference as an independent tradition. While it is impossible to explore all his writings on conversational thinking one thing is clear: conversational thinking is offered as a method of doing African philosophy to avoid Eurocentrism. Chimakonam takes seriously the authenticity of African philosophy, and he thinks that When an African philosopher uses Western logic and a Western developed method of philosophizing, the work cannot be considered African. Conversational thinking is a method developed from an under-explored Igbo notion of relationship and is therefore Africa-inspired. An African philosopher who uses it is not wallowing in Eurocentrism.

Chimakonam moves beyond African philosophy and argues that Conversational thinking can be a neutral method used for intercultural philosophy. Using conversational thinking avoids the hegemony of Western methods that sees Western philosophers discard African philosopher's theories because they did not (the Africans) use Western-developed methods. Conversational thinking is supposed to ensure against that in that everyone engaged in intercultural dialogue will momentarily discard their own culture and use conversational method to avoid hegemony.

The reception of conversationalism

Conversationalism has 'taken Africa philosophy by storm', according to Bernard Matolino who went on to say, 'It is not an exaggeration to say that no one working in African philosophy, today, can say they are unaware of the so-called conversational Society of Philosophy (CSP). Equally, I doubt if anyone working in the field could ever say they are not aware of the name Jonathan Chimakonam.'²²⁶ These words, seemingly, of admiration come from an article that is critical of Chimakonam's conversational thinking. This shows that while the Conversational thinking is well known among philosophers, especially, African philosophers, there are still some who are critical of it.

²²⁵ Chimakonam, *Ezumezu*, 1.

²²⁶ Bernard Matolino. 'A strange conversation'. *Arumaruka: Journal of conversational thinking*. Vol 1 No 2. (2021): 132.

Although there is not much literature critical of conversationalism due to the fact that it is still a nascent movement there are, however, some who take issue with Chimakonam's work. US philosopher Bruce Janz, for example, was critical in an article published in the *Journal of World Philosophies* in 2016.²²⁷ Ironically, this underscores the universal reach that Conversational thinking is beginning to enjoy. Janz published this article as a rejoinder to Chimakonam's article in which he discussed Janz's treatment of philosophy of space.

In response to Chimakonam's exploration of the concept of conversational thinking Janz demands more details from Chimakonam about his conception of conversation and poses several questions: What happens if not everyone cares to enter into conversation? Is conversation a prerequisite to philosophy or a part of philosophy? How does wonder fit into conversation in and about place?²²⁸ According to Janz:

I would like to ask in more specific terms what his concept of conversation looks like. He has given an extensive discussion of it in this essay, and also elsewhere, but it seems to me that there are still some unanswered questions. Dialogue, as I have argued, stands as both an object of investigation in philosophy and also as a prerequisite to philosophy. Does conversation also occupy the same conflicted position? Are we assuming a ground that itself needs analyzing, but in order to analyze it we have to assume that it exists and functions? Are there specific forms in which dialogue happens, or is this just a general category of conceptual engagement? Does it matter that dialogue has been worked out in mostly textual forms in the West? Does literal conversation count as philosophical labor, or does it need to be textualized to count? And what about the other side of conversation, listening? When we usually think of conversation, we think of speaking, that is, putting forward positions and opinions. Do we have a phenomenology of listening to go along with this? In what sense can silence also be philosophical labor, or is it? And can we avoid the trap of 'comparative philosophy,' which is that we end up simply listing similarities and differences between positions and do not actually work towards any new concepts (this, I take it, is Deleuze and Guattari's concern, at least in part).²²⁹

²²⁷ Bruce Janz 'Conversation in Place and About Place: Response to Chimakonam, 'Conversational Philosophy as a New School of Thought in African Philosophy: A Conversation with Bruce Janz on the Concept of 'Philosophical Space'. *Journal of World Philosophies*, Vol1(1). (2016):43

²²⁸ Janz, 'Conversation in place', 43.

²²⁹ Janz, 'Conversation in place', 44

Janz believes that Chimakonam has not sufficiently engaged with the concept of conversation and what it entails. What is ironic about the questions that Janz asks is a participation to conversational thinking. By posing questions that doubt the efficacy of Chimakonam's ideas he is playing the role of the Nwa-nsa and Chimakonam will then have to respond as the Nwa-nsu, which he did. That is the crux of conversationalism.

Janz published another article in the *Arumaruka journal* in 2021 which was from a roundtable held in April 2021 on Conversational thinking. It was headed by Chimakonam's former student, Aribiah Attoe. It is in a sense a continuation of the conversation that started in 2015 between Chimakonam and Janz. In the spirit of conversationalism Janz argues he does not wish to do a mere comparative philosophy but rather to 'sharpen focus and to define questions that allow [us] to move forward'²³⁰ Janz states that he wanted

to examine three issues: logic, meaning, and conversation itself. I have more than one goal in this. First, I would like to probe the use of these concepts within this approach to philosophy. Second, I would like to explore the question of whether conversationalism is meant to advance the way to philosophize in Africa and beyond, or a way to do so, and if it is the second, how it can coexist with other approaches. And third, I would like to ask how this approach is African (or, indeed, whether it needs to be seen as such).²³¹

Janz's first problematization of the concept of logic leads him to a claim that perhaps what we need is a logic of questions and not a logic of propositions, which is a lot more nuanced than I make it sound here. Chimakonam believes that Janz's error is thinking that Ezumezu logic was custom made for the conversational method.²³² Therefore, Janz's exploration of Ezumezu logic is only important to us in so far as it highlights his understanding of the relationship between Ezumezu logic and conversational method. Chimakonam agrees that Ezumezu was inspired by the need to axiomatize the trivalent demanding nature of conversational method. However, Ezumezu is not limited to that task. Since Ezumezu is a tool of reasoning it can be used to ground other methods. On the relationship between logic, ontology and method. Chimakonam

²³⁰ Bruce Janz 'Conversational Thinking, Logic, And the Making of Meaning'. *Arumaruka: Journal of conversational thinking*. Vol 1 No 2. (2021) :111

²³¹ Janz, 'conversational thinking', 112

²³² Jonathan Chimakonam. 'What is this thing called the system of conversational thinking: A reply to critics. *Arumaruka: Journal of conversational thinking*. Vol 1. No 2. (2021): 162.

thinks that in a system there a foundation which is occupied by logic and ontology and then on top of that foundation there is method. Therefore, conversationalism is one of many methods, that can be grounded by Ezumezu logic²³³

The second concept, however, is much more interesting to us, as Janz gives a much more accessible explanation of meaning-making. He first explains that meaning has been a point of contention between philosophers of the continental versus analytic bend. He picks a continental philosophy's explanation of meaning which is that meaning comes before truth, which essentially means that humans come into the world that is already meaningful. For example, a growling stomach already means hunger before we can assign it meaning. Janz moves on to talk about Chimakonam's conception of meaning thus:

'Conversationalism as Chimakonam describes it assumes that meaning is internal and personal. It is private. We hold meanings, but we cannot be sure that what we hold is the same as what others hold. And so, we have to make shared meanings, and this is a task rather than a presumption we can make'.²³⁴

Janz calls Chimakonam's understand of meaning-making assertion and not a demonstrated position because he thinks it is possible that we hold meanings within our shared experience.

'Is it not possible that we are both creating meaning and discovering existing meaning, the meaning we share as part of our cognitive development that makes it possible for us to have community at all as a primordial form of being human? If this is true, then the ties between conversationalism and hermeneutics might be stronger than it seems.'²³⁵

Chimakonam did offer a response which is quoted at length.

Meaning is never discovered; it is never out there for all to see; it does not inhere in objects or propositions; it is made from ideas that inhere in objects and propositions! Meaning is made through creative struggle in its ever-changing and ongoing private, collective and contextual folds. The existence of family units, groups or communities with symbols, beliefs, and norms, may seem like proof that a bunch of meaning about such groups and their ways of life have long been created and now rests in store for common appropriation.

In this way, a new member of a group may simply come to discover those meanings that

²³³ Chimakonam. 'Reply to critics', 162.

²³⁴ Janz, 'Conversational Thinking', 111

²³⁵ Janz, 'Conversational thinking', 111

define life in such a group, or a newborn may simply grow to discover such stockpile of communal legacies in their laws, values, totems and symbols. But this is incorrect. It is simply not how the world works, and certainly not what our concept of conversation portends. The SCT sets out the basic building blocks of the concept of conversation and meaning, beginning with the concept of ‘sign’ that can be broken down to signifier (words, symbols, legacies); signified (ideas carried by the signifier), and ultimately significist (the epistemic agents involved). Meaning is not created from nothing; it always and only has to come from something – a bearer of ideas. Whatever meaning is created from is a signifier. Whether that be a set of norms or laws, or values, or symbols of a group or community, it is a signifier. And when meaning created from it eventually is transmitted, it is transmitted as signified (mere ideas). So, in the minds of individual members of such a community who appropriate such communal legacies are varied ideas. No two members of such a community, not even the two oldest custodians of those legacies, have exactly the same meaning of those legacies.²³⁶

This important intervention facilitates a clearer understanding of what Chimakonam understands the internal structure and the *raison d’être* of conversational thinking to be.

Benard Matolino, a starling professor of African philosophy and a leading scholar in Afro-communitarianism, also offered a criticism of conversational thinking.²³⁷ He is critical for two reasons: he finds Chimakonam’s insistence to use what Matolino calls very ‘strange language’ to be an odd thing that goes against Chimakonam’s goal of conversation as it obscures meaning.²³⁸ Matolino states that the point of any conversation is for people to understand each other, and the purpose of conversation is defeated when one creates new concepts whose meaning is unclear. Matolino analyses Chimakonam’s 45-page monograph *Arumaruka Journal* that was meant to explain conversational thinking. Matolino contends that Chimakonam’s descriptions of concepts like meaning-making and metaphysics of absence are unclear and do not advance conversations because they are hazy. Matolino thinks that Chimakonam’s ‘strange

²³⁶ Chimakonam. ‘A reply to critics’, 162.

²³⁷ Benard Matolino’s work include books: ‘personhood in African philosophy’, ‘Afro-Communitarian Democracy’ and, ‘Consensus as Democracy in Africa’. This includes a host of other articles dedicated to various topics. All this is to say, Matolino is no small figure in African philosophy and his attention to Conversational thinking is not insignificant.

²³⁸ Benard Matolino. ‘A strange conversation’. *Arumaruka: Journal of conversational thinking*. Vol 1 No 2. (2021) 132

reference and very strange usage of terms’ to explain, what in his view, are sometimes rather simple phenomenon hinders the goal of conversation²³⁹.

Matolino’s second objection, if read properly, denies the very existence of conversationalism. He quotes Chimakonam’s explanation that ‘the aim of the conversationalist is to sustain the process of meaning-making while their goal is make-meaning.’²⁴⁰ Matolino states that ‘if this is what conversational thinking is about, then I am led to think it is not distinct from what philosophy has always been about.’²⁴¹ Matolino argues that when African philosophers were defending the existence or non-existence of African philosophy, they were engaged in meaning-making, so ‘what does the addition of conversational philosophy really do?’²⁴² Matolino holds that Chimakonam was advocating a philosophical tradition that was already established and was giving a new name to something that had been done for many years. According to Matolino, Emmanuel Eze laid the foundation for what Chimakonam was aspiring towards and that there was nothing novel about Chimakonam’s conversational thinking and he should stop calling it conversationalism. Matolino does not explain in detail why Eze’s work was superior to that of Chimakonam but his insistence that Chimakonam was a disciple of Eze strikes me as a put down.

Chimakonam responded in the same issue of the *Arumaruka Journal* to his three critics, Bruce Janz, Chris Chad, Benard Matolino. He argued that they ignored the way he used certain concepts, like conversation, and they instead criticized their own understanding of those words even though his ideas do not correspond to those words:

I begin by noting that all those who strive to understand the SCT must first abandon convention about what the word ‘conversation’ literally implies; what meaning is; what meaningful things are; and where meaning inheres. Matolino, pretty much like Janz earlier, comes to the table of SCT with the conventional literal understanding of the word ‘conversation’. On the basis of this error, he finds my own usage ‘strange’, ‘unusual’ and ‘odd’. But there is a distinction between word and concept. My use of ‘conversation’, and this is an explanation I had made profusely, is not in keeping with the everyday

²³⁹ Matolino. ‘a strange conversation’, 131

²⁴⁰ Jonathan Chimakonam. ‘On the system of conversational thinking: An overview’. *Arumaruka : journal of conversational thinking* .Vol 1 No1(2021) :33

²⁴¹ Matolino. ‘A strange conversation’,134.

²⁴² Matolino, ‘A strange conversation’, 134.

understanding of the word, but as a pure concept. One would expect critics to meet me on my terrain and engage with me on the very stipulated definition I had given to the concept. This mistake is not limited to Matolino alone, Janz is equally guilty of it, as would many others even after the publication of this clarification.²⁴³

Chimakonam argued that his critics were criticizing not what he had said but what he is supposed to have said:²⁴⁴

‘Matolino incorrectly attributed [claims] to me to justify his criticism of my concept of metaphysics of absence and the originality of my method. Matolino began his criticism by assuming the above, and ... criticized me for what I never said. I have no doubt that with these observations, Matolino would realise that he lost me at the point at which he implied his own cherished conventional interpretations of the concepts I employed.’²⁴⁵

Chimakonam is clear that Matolino’s charge that his theory of conversationalism is unoriginal is wrong as it was based on an erroneous understand of Chimakonam use of certain concepts.

Like Matolino, Alena Rettová, a philosopher from the Czech Republic who is a professor at the University of London, objected to the creation of concepts by Chimakonam as many of them are never used by anybody, not even the author. She said that a

‘New African philosophy cannot be projected simply by introducing Igbo words, while failing to do the hard philosophical labour of critiquing existing positions. The proliferation of ontological theories, without properly relating them to similar or identical theories, results in mere renaming of earlier anthropological, theological and philosophical work. What is the difference between ‘Harmonious Monism’ and the metaphysical theory of John S. Mbiti? How is ‘Complementary Reflection’ different from Tempels’ ontology of vital forces? How is ‘Consolationism’ distinct from existentialism? Concepts adopted from Western philosophy appear to be rebranded with Igbo words or words that integrate Igbo roots. ‘Structural ratiosusuism,’ from the Latin ratio and asusu, ‘language’ in Igbo, is defined as ‘inseparability of language and rationality’ (Chimakonam 2018b: 14). What then is the difference between ‘structural ratiosusuism’ and ‘linguistic relativity hypothesis’? How is ‘Ezumezu logic’

²⁴³ Chimakonam. ‘A reply to critics’, 162.

²⁴⁴ Chimakonam. ‘A reply to critics’, 164

²⁴⁵ Chimakonam. ‘A reply to critics’, 165

(Chimakona m 2014, 2019) distinct from the number of existing non-Aristotelian logics?’²⁴⁶

It is unclear whether Rettová accuses the Calabar school of plagiarism or simply unoriginality. Either would prove equally hard to take for Chimakonam whose entire philosophical enterprise is aimed at promoting originality and authenticity and shows a disdain for the uncritical adoption of Western theories. This, however, seems to be what Rettová accuses them of. That and their stinginess in explicating the ways in which their theories are different from other similar theories, which is also what Matolino accused Chimakonam of.

While I have not found any response to Rettová’s criticism from Chimakonam, it is not hard to imagine what he would say. I am sure Chimakonam would take exception to the idea that the SCP creates Igbo words without putting in the hard labour of criticizing existing theories. I suspect he may point to his criticisms of modernism²⁴⁷, his criticism of hermeneutics²⁴⁸, his criticism of the works of Frege, Mills, and others on meaning and how, to establish conversationalism, he points that it was inspired by the likes of Innocent Asouzu’s *Ibunyiidanda*, and Ijiomah’s Harmonism, and how despite the inspiration he found them lacking, and thus the need for conversationalism.²⁴⁹

Conversationalism’s commitment to the creation of concepts is a welcome innovation. It is the very lifeline Africa had needed all along. If Africa is to stop being a perpetual student of the Word (especially) the Global North, we need a creation of Africa-developed concepts that emanate from the African experience, which is shaped by our history of forceful land dispossession. I, therefore, am not puzzled as to why conversationalists feel the need to create a host of concepts with every conversation we have. I also have a great deal of sympathy for conversationalists bemoan of unequal power relations that occur when different cultures of the world meet to converse. I doubt however, that conversational method has the expressive power that Chimakonam assumes it has. I do not think that conversational thinking can be a neutral method that different cultures of the world use without the risk of cultural hegemony.

²⁴⁶ Rettová, ‘Post Genocide, Post Apartheid’, 31

²⁴⁷ Jonathan Chimakonam, *Ezumezu: a system of logic for African philosophy and Sundry studies*. (Switzerland, Springer. 2019). 129

²⁴⁸ Jonathan Chimakonam. ‘On the system of conversational thinking: An overview’. *Arumaruka : journal of conversational thinking*. Vol1 No1 (2021) 18

²⁴⁹ Chimakonam, *Ezumezu*, 13

Conversationalism comes from African concepts. It is a method for African philosophy, universalizing it will dilute it of its expressive power, or force it to unnecessarily overshadow other methods of philosophizing.

Concluding Remarks

This chapter tracked the beginnings of conversational thinking in the Calabar school and showed how it metamorphosed into something different and became a movement in its own right. It further moved to show the deeper implications of conversational thinking by exploring conversationalists' critics. The next chapter analyses Chimakonam's work on Logic.

Chapter Five

History of Logic in Africa

Chapter Two presented the ‘Great Debate’ as the medium of contestation regarding the existence of African philosophy. The third chapter traced Chimakonam’s biographical details. Chapter four, broken into sections, began by firstly showing that once the debate over the existence of African philosophy had been settled, it became necessary to ask, ‘what’s next?’ The chapter then traced efforts by philosophers (specifically, members of the Calabar School) to show the ‘philosophiness’ of African philosophy by doing African philosophy²⁵⁰. This gave rise in the late 1990s and early 2000s to articles giving an ‘African’ perspective on philosophical matters.

There were, for example, ‘An African view of the philosophy of mind, African ethics, African solution to Descartes’s problem of the mind’. These philosophers were taking Western philosophical problems and giving it an African twist. It was a popular way of doing African philosophy until a new generation of African philosophers questioned how African philosophy was different from Western philosophy if the questions being asked were the same, as were the method and the logic that they use. What, in other words, made African philosophy African? Enter Chimakonam.

The focus of this chapter is the ‘Africanness’ of African philosophy and Chimakonam’s contributions to this debate, in particular his development of the idea of Ezumezu logic and its implications for the issues raised in the previous chapters. It will be necessary to spend more time here on this issue than we did in previous chapters as this is more than an outline of Chimakonam’s thought; it is Africa’s intellectual history, a sadly neglected undertaking. Ideally, one would like to begin with the history of Logic from its roots in Ancient Greece and refer to the readings of Aristotle, who is credited with formalizing the study of logic. However, the aim of this project is to be Africa-centered. Thus, it will suffice to give but a cursory outline of the Western history of Logic.

²⁵⁰ This study focuses on the Calabar School only because it is most relevant to understanding Chimakonam’s work. It does not mean that members of the Calabar School were the only contributors to the debate. See chapter two for a full discussion of the different contributors. This dissertation, being on Chimakonam, views the world of philosophy through his eyes.

Chimakonam's work on Logic can be divided into two parts. The first part is his philosophy of logic, that is, the theory of logic. This is a field that deals with questions like, is there a single universal logic or are there multiple logics? This became critical once African philosophers said that a distinct African philosophy existed, and that philosophy was not one big universal enterprise that started in the West. Whether one was a universalist or not, there was one question that all philosophers had to contend with. Was logic universal or not, that is to say, were there cultures without logic? If yes, with whom does the fault lie? With those cultures or did they have something else different from logic, that works like logic?

Négritude movement scholars pushed for emotivism. Stating that Africans did not use a dispassionate logic but instead they used rhythm and emotions.²⁵¹ Placide Tempels, Belgian Franciscan Missionary who wrote a book on Bantu Philosophy, concurred by saying that African thinking was mythical and lacked logical coherence.²⁵² This response was contested by thinkers like Hontoundji, Wiredu, and Appiah, who pushed back hard against this claim. Wiredu claimed that there are cognitive universals by which means there were certain laws of reasoning that were universal by virtue of them being built into the human brain. It was therefore absurd to say that Africans did not have logic. Wiredu thought that logic as a formal discipline was not developed in Africa but that this in itself was not a reflection of a lack of capability.²⁵³ Chimakonam offered something in the philosophy of logic from the African tradition. He wanted to go beyond the critics and the apologists. The second wing of Chimakonam's work is the construction of logic, He builds, like no other African philosopher before, a prototype of an African logic. We will not be spending much time on his system of logic, as it is too big a project and highly complex, to undertake in a master's degree.

Brief outline of Western Logic

Our excursion begins with Aristotle, who is credited with having started systematic logic.²⁵⁴ By the time Aristotle began working on Logic, interest in things like rules of inference,

²⁵¹ Senghor, Léopold Sédar, 'On Negrohood: Psychology of the African Negro.' *Diogenes*. 10, no. 37 (1962): 1–15.

²⁵² Placide Tempels, *Bantu Philosophy* (Paris. Presence Africaine, 1949).

²⁵³ Kwasi Wiredu, *Cultural universals and particulars* (Indiana, Indiana university press, 1996) 138.

²⁵⁴ According to a certain version of Greek tradition, Parmenides is said to have started Logic while sitting on a rock. This is highly contested but the excesses of legend around it makes it hard to ascertain whether it is true or not. Zeno has also been said to have been the man who

language analysis, attention to the internal structure of a sentence, and most importantly, an emphasis on defending a position using argument, had already taken form in Greece. Sophists, like Protagoras and Prodicus, had kindled an interest that gave ‘argument’ a considerably important place in Greece culture. The most important works on logic by Aristotle were six books compiled and named *Organon*, which translates to ‘tool’.²⁵⁵

While Aristotle thought that different sciences existed, they all used logic as a tool of conducting their sciences. According to Groarke, Aristotle ‘does not believe that the purpose of logic is to prove that human beings can have knowledge. (He dismisses excessive scepticism.) The aim of logic is the elaboration of a coherent system that allows us to investigate, classify, and evaluate good and bad forms of reasoning’²⁵⁶. Chimakonam, as will become apparent, does not quarrel with that view of logic but endorses it.

At this juncture, we must sketch out a working definition of logic. Some scholars say that logic is a ‘field of inquiry which investigates how we reason correctly (and, by extension, how we reason incorrectly)’.²⁵⁷ From this definition it is clear that a logician is someone who studies the rules and techniques of reasoning. This can be criticized for being too simplistic. For example, the very word ‘logic’ comes from Greek *logos*, a concept that has too many variations of definitions and senses. *Logos* can be translated as a ‘sentence,’ ‘ratio,’ ‘word,’ ‘discourse,’

invented or discovered the logical tool ‘reductio ad absurdum’ which translates to reducing to absurdity, where an arguer reduces her opponents argument to its logical, absurd, conclusion. For a more comprehensive history of logic see William Kneale(1962) ‘ *the development of Logic*’; John Woods and Dov, M. Gabbay (2004), *Handbook of the History of Logic*, Volume 3 : The rise of Modern Logic : From Leibniz to Frege; Bonchenski(1961, *A History of Formal Logic*. *Internet encyclopedia of philosophy, Britannica*

²⁵⁵ These works are, as they appear in the Britannica section on History of Logic, *Categories*, which discusses Aristotle’s 10 basic kinds of entities: substance, quantity, quality, relation, place, time, position, state, action, and passion. Although the *Categories* is always included in the *Organon*, it has little to do with logic in the modern sense. *De interpretatione* (*On Interpretation*), which includes a statement of Aristotle’s semantics, along with a study of the structure of certain basic kinds of propositions and their interrelation *Prior Analytics* (two books), containing the theory of syllogistic reasoning. *Posterior Analytics* (two books), presenting Aristotle’s theory of ‘scientific demonstration’ in his special sense. This is Aristotle’s account of the philosophy of science or scientific methodology. *Topics* (eight books), an early work, which contains a study of nondemonstrative reasoning. It is a miscellany of how to conduct a good argument. *Sophistic Refutations*, a discussion of various kinds of fallacies. It was originally intended as a ninth book of the *Topics*.

²⁵⁶ Louis F. Groarke. ‘Aristotle: Logic’ *Internet Encyclopaedia of philosophy*, 2019. ISSN 2161-0002. <https://iep.utm.edu/2021>.

²⁵⁷ Groarke. ‘Aristotle’, 2019.

‘rule,’ ‘reason,’ ‘ratio,’ or ‘definition.’²⁵⁸ Hintikka argues that the sheer number of senses of the word ‘logos’ contributes to the difficulty of pinning down what logic is.

Additionally, there is Aristotelian logic; paraconsistent logic, concerned with handling contradictions in a discriminating way; fuzzy logic, which deals with degrees of truth as opposed to true / false dichotomy; second order logic, an extension of propositional logic; mathematical logic, the study of logic within mathematics; Asian logic, and many-valued logic. The history of logic is a long and complex one that has taken many volumes to document. The above will, for the purposes of this dissertation, suffice as a history of logic in the West. The key takeaway is that the study of logic had been considered sacrosanct for some time. At one point, the eighteenth-century German philosopher Immanuel Kant argued that after Aristotle no one could add to the study of logic.²⁵⁹ From this perspective logic was complete. He said:

Logic, by the way, has not gained much in content since Aristotle’s times and indeed it cannot, due to its nature ...in present times there has been no famous logician, and we do not need any new inventions in logic because it contains merely the form of thinking.²⁶⁰

Kant was wrong, as most of the ‘classical logic’²⁶¹ taught at universities is not Aristotelian logic but logic developed in the twentieth-century by thinkers like Gottlob Frege, Bertrand Russell, and Kurt Godel.

Let us move away from Western logic and track the development and study of logic and how it shaped the direction and the pace of African philosophy, and the role that Chimakonam played in the logic debate, the evolution of his ideas on logic, and origin of the controversy on logic.

²⁵⁸ Jaako Hintikka, ‘Philosophy of logic’. Encyclopedia Britannica, 25 Jan. 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/philosophy-of-logic>. Accessed 10 August 2021.

²⁵⁹ Lu-Adler, Huaping. ‘Kant on Proving Aristotle’s Logic as Complete.’ *Kantian Review* 21, no 1 (2016): 1–26. doi:10.1017/S136941541500028X.

²⁶⁰ Hauping, Kant on Logic, 22.

²⁶¹ I place classical logic on inverted commas because Chimakonam has argued, and I think successfully, that the periodization or categorization of Western logic as Classical others the other traditions who develop logic and places Western logic as a default from which others have evolved.

Logic reaches Africa

In 1933, the Belgian missionary Placide Frans Tempels began his missionary work in Central Africa. He stayed among the Shaba Baluba Katanga people of Zaire, (now the Democratic Republic of Congo), learning their customs, language and cultural background.²⁶² After more than a decade of living among the Luba Katanga people, Tempels published his monumental book *La Philosophie Bantoue*.²⁶³ The central aim of the book can be gleaned from the Preface written by his friend Emile Possoz, who was author of *Elements of Negro customary law*.

In a correspondence between him and Tempels, Possoz had asked Tempels ‘what then do you regard as the African way of synthesizing ideas?’²⁶⁴ Tempels later stated that it was this question that birthed in him the idea to write about the synthesis of African ideas, by which is meant the underlying logic that explained African ways of life. As shown in chapter two, from the Enlightenment period most anthropologists, philosophers and historians had denied that Africans had any form of abstract thinking. They argued that Africans were primitive and generally lacking in logical thinking. Tempels’ book was in part a reaction to those despicable racist views about Africans. He wanted to show that there was a distinct African way of reasoning that was logically coherent if viewed from an African perspective. He argued that understanding the African thought system would help ‘good’ colonialists and Christians expedite their soul-saving mission on the African continent. There have been many books and articles explaining, defending, and even criticising Tempels’ views on Bantu philosophy²⁶⁵.

Our aim here is not to study Tempels but rather to contextualize the pace and direction of African philosophy that some African philosophers inherited from him. One distinctive supposition that Tempels made was that there was something distinctive that existed that could be an African ontology and African logic. That idea was very revolutionary for the time that

²⁶² Valentine-Yves Mudimbe, ‘African Philosophy as an Ideological Practice: The Case of French-Speaking Africa.’ *African Studies Review*. 26, no. 3/4 (1983): 133–54. <https://doi.org/10.2307/524166>.

²⁶³ Mudimbe, ‘African Philosophy as an Ideological Practice’, 55.

²⁶⁴ Placide Frans Tempels. *Bantu philosophy*. (Paris.Présence Africaine,1949) ix

²⁶⁵ For more on Tempels, see Kwasi Wiredu (1992) ‘*cultural particulars and universals*’; Dasmas Masolo (1994) ‘*African philosophy in search of identity*’; Barry Hallen (2002) ‘*A short history of African philosophy*’, Benard Matolino (2011), ‘Tempels philosophical racialism’

Tempels was writing in as most people accepted that Africans had no logic. He was the first to put the words 'logic' and 'African' next to each other in a positive sense.

Damas Masolo wrote in his book *African philosophy in search of identity*, that 'according to Tempels, anybody working among the Bantu needs to understand their ontology, because even their logic depends on it'.²⁶⁶ This ontology that Tempels spoke of was the belief of Africans that all beings have or are forces, and that there was constant interaction between them.²⁶⁷ This is the first mention by a Westerner of an African logic that was distinct from Western logic. Of course, Tempels modified this by arguing that it was a logic that Africans themselves could not articulate; they needed Westerners to construct and articulate this logic back to Africans. Tempels has been criticized for providing arguments in support of colonialism. It is not fruitful for us to go through those arguments, given that we spent a great deal of time in chapter two explaining African responses to Western views of Africa. Tempels was one of those Westerners to whom Africans responded passionately.

While Tempels spoke of an African logic or African way of thinking, he accepted the categories of his time, specifically the classifications of humans that dominated anthropology. Tempels held that there were fundamental differences between human 'races', with the white (Caucasian) race was the pinnacle of civilization. That is why he held that European thinkers had to explain African logic to Africans. This is important because the history of the idea of African logic has been short, albeit tumultuous.

Africans have responded in different ways to Tempels. As discussed below, some have denied that Africans had a peculiar way of thinking, arguing that Africans were human and by virtue of their membership of the human race, had a logic. Others accepted that Africans had logic but argued that Africans had something else that was as good as, if not better, than Western reason. Another view is that Africans had a capacity to reason but used a different logic. It seems to me that none of these Africans problematized the racial classifications of humans in the first instance²⁶⁸. They accepted that there existed something called 'Africa'. Accepting this

²⁶⁶ Damas Masolo, *African philosophy in search of identity*, (Indiana, Indiana University Press, 1994) 47.

²⁶⁷ Masolo, *African philosophy in search of identity*, 54.

²⁶⁸ With the exception of Immanuel Eze who warned that African philosophers have not thoroughly investigated the concept of race and how it shaped philosophy, see Immanuel Eze,

fact uncritically has spawned many years of debate that could have been used instead for developing African philosophy.

Crucial for this study is to analyse whether Chimakonam's work falls in the similar pit of trying to escape colonialism while working with, and implicitly accepting, colonial terms. I will move to show how the concept of reason and logic shaped the history of African philosophy.

One of the earliest African proponents of a peculiarly African way of thinking was Leopold Senghor, the former president of Senegal. Senghor was one of the founding fathers of the famous anti-colonial Négritude movement that started in France in the 1930s. Some philosophers, like Masolo, credit the Négritude movement as marking the start of the African philosophical movement,²⁶⁹ while other philosophers, like Anke Graness, point its beginnings to Ancient Egypt.²⁷⁰ Whether or not African philosophy began with Négritude is, for now, not important but what is relevant is the influence that Négritude has had on African philosophy.²⁷¹

Influenced by the Harlem renaissance writers such as W.E.B Dubois, Langston Hughes, and Marcus Garvey, Senghor argued for a basis of a new '*African personality*' that came from a harmonious integration of black and white values.²⁷² This African personality grew out of an 'African culture', which was *peculiar to Africans*, 'of feeling, thinking, expressing and acting.'²⁷³ This is a result of an amalgamation of Africa's geographical, historical, *racial* and ethnic determinants that make cultures differ from each other (emphasis mine).²⁷⁴ These ontological differences, according to Senghor, lead to different forms of reasons. African reason, according to him, is emotive while Western reason is Logocentric. Thus, his infamous

Achieving our humanity: an idea of a post racial future, see also Anthony Appiah, *in my Father's house*, and to some extent V.Y Mudimbe's work problematizes the concept of Africa.

²⁶⁹ Dasmás Masolo, '*African Philosophy in search of Identity*' (Indiana, Indiana University press, 1994).²⁴

²⁷⁰ Anke Graness. 'Writing The History of Philosophy in Africa, where to begin?' *Journal of African Cultural Studies*. Vol 28. No 2, (2016): 132-146.

²⁷¹ I will not dwell here on the broader history of Négritude, but simply unpick Senghor's epistemology. For a more critical engagement with Négritude, see D.A Masolo's '*African philosophy in search of identity* (1994); Barry Hallen's '*A short history of African philosophy* (2002)', Immanuel Eze '*Achieving our humanity: an idea of a post racial future*'. *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Négritude'.

²⁷² Masolo, *African systems of thought*, 25

²⁷³ Masolo, *African systems of thought*, 27.

²⁷⁴ Masolo. *African systems of thought*, 29.

‘Emotion is Black and Reason is Greek’²⁷⁵ In another essay, Senghor argued that he did not mean that African people did not possess reason but that they had a different way of knowing, one that was, unlike that of the West, sympathetic and intuitive.’²⁷⁶

Senghor and Tempels wrote their works at around the same time, though it is not known whether they were familiar with each other’s work. However, their goals appear to be similar, which was to defend the idea that Africans possessed logic, but that it was a logic different from that of Westerners. Although their goals were similar, their motivations were different. Senghor wanted to defend and liberate Africans and help them construct a new African personality. Tempels, on the other hand, wanted to help ‘good’ colonialists and missionaries to better understand Africans in order to enable them to undertake their great civilizing mission.

However, their works, respectively, laid the groundwork for what was to become the most contested notion in the history of African philosophy, namely, Did Africans possess the same ‘reason’ as that of Europeans or was it a different form of reason? If it is different, what kind of reason is it? And is it philosophical? The debate on African logic was situated within the broader discussion on the question of rationality. In other words, it is a broader question on whether or not Africans can use reason and rational thinking.

In 1958, more than a decade after the publication of Tempels’ book, Cameroonian philosopher Meinrad Hegba (1928-2008) emerged on the scene to vigorously defend the idea of an African logic. Though a Christian priest, he dedicated his life to the defence of the rationality of witchcraft. He was also greatly influenced by Négritude writers as well as Tempels, and published articles incorporating Négritude thinking. He published articles with titles like ‘Christianity and Négritude’ and ‘African personality and Catholicism’.²⁷⁷ A great deal of Hegba’s vocabulary came from Négritude. He pushed back strongly against what he called ‘mental imperialism’ and argued that there existed a peculiarly African logic that had value independently of its resemblance or lack thereof, to the West.²⁷⁸ Hegba’s arguments were

²⁷⁵ Senghor, Léopold Sédar, ‘On Negrohood: Psychology of the African Negro.’ *Diogenes*. 10, no. 37 (1962): 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.1177/039219216201003701>.

²⁷⁶ See collection of seminal essays on logic by Jonathan Chimakonam, titled: *Logic in Africa: seminal essays* (Sitzlerland, Springer, 2021)

²⁷⁷ Meinrad Hegba, ‘Philosophie et anthropologie: actes’ International colloquium held in 9-10 March 2009. Paris, Université de Younde,

²⁷⁸ Meinrad Hegba ‘Logic in Africa.’ *Philosophy today* 2(4), (1958): 221-229

much more philosophically technical, in the sense that he focused his criticisms using philosophical arguments on the inadequacy of Western logic in explaining African forms of life. He drew on philosophical works within the Western tradition, as has always been advised by Senghor who spoke of the harmonious integration of ideas from different traditions. Hegba began his essay on logic on a very bold note, claiming that ‘dogma of one standard and of one all-embracing prototype for civilization and culture is losing its backers right along.’²⁷⁹

Hegba launched what is arguably the first technical criticism of Western logic from Africa. Senghor’s technical essays on logic were published later even though he (Senghor) spoke of African logic. It was, in fact, Hegba who first made the philosophical arguments for African logic. Hegba argued that the third law of Aristotelian logic called ‘Law of non-contradiction’, which claims that one thing cannot be true and false at same time, does not have ‘an unlimited and absolute application.’²⁸⁰ This is an Idea that Chimakonam leaned on heavily in his support of Ezumazu logic. He argues that within African cultures there are instances, such as witchcraft, in which contradictory things are both true at the same time. The African way of life necessitates a logic that axiomatizes that life and it is from this that there is a need to accept an African logic.

The criticisms that Hegba laid down in support of many logics comprise an important segment of Chimakonam’s work. For instance, Chimakonam, drawing from Hegba, argued against the absoluteness of Western logic. He also held that logic is inspired by the cultural background of philosophers. These and some ideas of Chimakonam were inspired by Hegba. Surprisingly, there does not seem to be much work that engages with Hegba’s before Chimakonam; indeed, there is still not that much engagement with his ideas on African logic. This may partly have been due to the fact that what was the more pressing issue for Africans at the time was the very existence of African philosophy. Hegba seems to have taken for granted as his argument for many logics, including African logic, suggests that African philosophy existed for him, and he even took it a step further to claim the existence of an African logic.

²⁷⁹ Hegba, *Logic in Africa*, 219.

²⁸⁰ Hegba, *Logic in Africa*, 218

The notion of African logic seems to have been subsumed by the great debate, which was preoccupied with the existence of African philosophy²⁸¹. The discourse on African logic was sidestepped and pushed into the peripheries. The authors who argued for logic in Africa were much more concerned with proving that African thought possessed logic that conformed to that of the West, mainly to justify the existence of philosophy in Africa. Kwasi Wiredu, for example, wrote a book in 1980, titled *Philosophy and an African culture*, in which he wrote a series of essays dedicated to showing instances where traditional Akan societies showed sensitivity or an adherence to the traditional laws of Western logic.

By late 1990s, the question of the existence of African philosophy was no longer an issue. When the debate on the existence of African philosophy came to a halt, it became important to understand what kind of beast African philosophy was and who could count as an African philosopher. It was these questions that re-kindled the spark on African logic debate.

The second leg of the Great Debate: African Logic

Most philosophers, as shown in chapter two, accept that the great debate ended in the late 1990s when there was a seemingly unanimous agreement that African philosophy existed.²⁸² I argue that the decision to view the great debate as over, emanates from a conflation between a verdict about an issue within the debate and ending the debate. What I mean here is that within the great debate were several parallel debates; the debate on whether or not African philosophy existed may have been solved but the debate on ‘what makes philosophy *African*’ raged on.

I argue that, technically, the great debate has not ended but is still raging though some issues raised within it have been solved, such as the existence of African philosophy. When the long and tedious debate on the existence, or lack thereof, of African Philosophy petered out, the question of African logic came to the forefront. It was a 2002 article by Nigerian philosopher

²⁸¹ Apart from a paper by Campbell Momoh in the 1989 titled ‘the question of African logic’ in which he argued for a peculiarly African philosophy. It did not gain much reception as well. Chris Ijiomah also published an article in 1995 arguing that If African philosophy is culture bound then logic is ipso facto culture bound. These respective articles were not the most passed around books. Despite their, arguably, potential genius.

²⁸² Agbanusi Arinze. ‘Revisiting the seeming unanimous verdict on the great debate on African philosophy’. *African Research Review: an international multi-disciplinary journal, Ethiopia*. Vol 10. No 43. (2016):170-186.

Edu Etuk, titled ‘The possibility of an African logic’, that set the ball rolling. Etuk’s main argument was that given that there was agreement that African philosophy existed, it must be recognised that philosophy had many branches, such as Ethics, Metaphysics, Law, Logic and Epistemology. Therefore, if the existence African philosophy was accepted, are philosophers prepared to accept African logic? His intention, he wrote, was to ‘stir the hornet’s nest’, that is, start a debate on the possibility of an African logic²⁸³. Etuk inspired the currently running debate on whether or not logic can be regionalized, such that we can have an African logic.

The debate of course, runs along the old universalist / particularist line discussed earlier²⁸⁴. Universalists such as Kwasi Wiredu, Bondirin, Uduma O Uduma deny the existence of a peculiarly African philosophy. Particularists can be divided into two: the likes of Fayemi Ademola and Chris Ijiomah argue for a peculiarly African logic, while those like Chimakonam argue for an Africa-inspired logic that can be universalized. The nuances between these positions are elaborated further below.

This chapter’s key concern is how Chimakonam sharpened his views on logic against the minds of this debate on African logic. It tracks how he moved from the regionalized and closed off view of logic into the view that logic is only culture inspired.

The Evolution of Chimakonam’s Logic in Africa

The first philosopher to pick up on the debate on African logic was Chimakonam’s former lecturer in Nigeria, Professor Uduma Oji Uduma who was against the idea that there was an African logic. Chimakonam calls his group of philosophers ‘polemicists’.²⁸⁵ In a 2007 article ‘Can there be an African logic?’, Professor Uduma launched an attack on philosophers who claimed there was an African logic. He did not mince his words in his attack on African logic:

The tragedy, however, is that African philosophy and with it, the quest for African logic is not inspired, like the origin of philosophy in intellectual history, by curiosity; it is inspired by frustration. This chapter, going beyond the leveraged consensus of the existence of African Philosophy, explores the motivation for a peculiar African (regional) logic. While accepting that there are peculiar socio-cultural African experiences, it nevertheless seeks to

²⁸³ Edu Etuk. ‘The possibility of an African logic’. In Olugunsun Oladipo (ed), *The third way in African philosophy: essays in honor of Kwasi Wiredu*. (Ibadan, Hope publications, 2002) 102.

²⁸⁴ For a comprehensive explanation on the particularist vs universalist debate see chapter 2

²⁸⁵ These include Kwasi Wiredu, Paulin Hontoundji, Peter Bondurin.

demonstrate the need to rise above cultural identity and frustration to realize that logic is universal; that there is no cultural or regional logic and that the call for African logic is thus only tendentious. It canvasses that, for sure, the ideals and goals of the African cultural identity are legitimate, and there is a need to highlight what we perceive to be our unique logical heritage. Still, all these do not and cannot support the repudiation of universal thought (logical) processes.²⁸⁶

Uduma placed the talk of philosophy at the feet of colonial discourse. He held that the racist and dehumanizing views of European philosophers like Immanuel Kant, David Hume, F.W Hegel frustrated Africans to a point of reaction. In fact, he thought that African philosophy did not emanate out of curiosity but out of frustration.²⁸⁷ The view that African philosophy began out of frustration is a view that Chimakomam espoused for some time but later abandoned. Uduma agrees that Africans had to reclaim their authentic identity but doubts the source of their attempt to do so. That is, he accepted that it was important for Africans to define for themselves what it meant to be African. However, he believed that the source of the need to reclaim African identity was tainted. Consider this line:

In a sense, the motivation for the attachment of the adjective ‘African’ to philosophy is emotively, rather than philosophically, inspired²⁸⁸

Uduma subsequently continued to argue that Africans were are merely trying to prove a point when they argued for the existence of African logic.

Indeed, African philosophy is an issue of identity with widespread ramifications. Thus, when African philosophy addresses the issue of African identity the issue of an African logic is wont to feature and, in this context, the remark by Robin Horton, already highlighted above, exasperates the need for the desire to argue for an African logic as a way of showing that Africans are capable of exacting and rigorous intellectual display.²⁸⁹

²⁸⁶ Uduma Oji Uduma. ‘Can there be an African logic?’ in *Logic and African philosophy: seminal essays on African systems of thought*. Ed Jonathan Chimakonam,(Delaware, Vernon press, 2021). 225

²⁸⁷The racist views Uduma explores are all the ones we spoke about in chapter 2. Therefore, I will not rehash them here.

²⁸⁸ Uduma, ‘can there be an African logic?’, 231

²⁸⁹ Uduma. ‘Can there be an African Logic?’,233

Uduma, however, insisted that he did not lean on the ill-founded motivation of the idea of African logic to help formulate the argument to dismiss it. He did so because those who argued for African logic, did so by saying that Philosophy was culture-bound, that is, different cultures must have different philosophies and therefore logic was culture-bound, meaning that different cultures had different logics. Uduma argued that:

Logic as a discipline is concerned with the structures or principles of thought; these structures of thought have no continental boundaries. We, for sure, can apply the principles of logic to different socio-cultural situations, but we have no peculiar regional thought processes. The point here is that in deducing the enculturation of logic from the enculturation of philosophy, we must realize that the enculturation of philosophy does not reduce philosophy to culture.²⁹⁰

What Uduma meant is that logic is a *tool* for explaining and defending philosophical ideas and is not itself philosophy. As he put it,

Logic by its propaedeutic role is not native to philosophy alone; indeed, all the various specialized disciplines rely on and do indeed apply logic for their research objectives, assumptions, proceedings, and conclusions²⁹¹.

The upshot of Uduma's arguments were that logic was a universal tool of reasoning that cut across cultures and disciplines and could not be regionalized. Any attempt to regionalize it comes from accepting colonial education and/or was a desperate attempt to prove a point to colonials. Or, worse still, it emanated from a gross misunderstanding of what logic was. To Uduma logic was like mathematics or physics and to claim that there was African logic was as absurd as claiming that there existed African mathematics.

Chimakonam, in keeping with Uduma's theme, also identifies colonialism as the root cause of Africa's identity problem. While Uduma saw colonization's vices in so far as they sparked the frustrated responses of African philosophers which led to them making arguments for African logic, Chimakonam reaches the opposite conclusion. He thinks the denial of African logic, and by extension accepting the idea that only Westerners created logic, is the very manifestation of colonized minds. He likens it to cocks crowing in the jungle. When one cock is used to crowing

²⁹⁰ Uduma, 'can there be an African logic?', 232.

²⁹¹ Uduma, 'can there be an African logic', 233.

alone, when others crow, he is shocked and angered by this. It is because the first cock does not deny that these other cocks can crow, he just does not want them to.²⁹²

For Chimakonam, the idea of African logic is not dismissed because of its merit or demerit but rather because of prejudice, and it is only when those prejudices are confronted that deniers of African logic begin to point to the supposed demerits of the idea of African logic²⁹³ Uduma thinks that affirming African logic is a sign of colonialism while Chimakonam believes that denying African logic is equally a sign of colonialization. One sees two opposite conclusions from the same intellectual horizon, to use Tseberekuan- esque language.

Why Can't There Be An African Logic?

Chimakonam wrote in 2011, 'It is my candid opinion that logic like philosophy is an offshoot of a people's peculiar cultural framework.'²⁹⁴ He moves from this to say:

'If philosophy consists of the ingredients which make up a people's problem-solving methods and principles, then logic to me is the tool kit of thought systems in each cultural framework.'²⁹⁵

What Chimakonam did here was to draw a link between African cultural framework, which he took for granted as existing, and from that infer or assume the existence of a logic that must ground the African framework. He thought logic must necessarily follow from a cultural thought system. Consider the quote below.

I have also contended that western logic was not invented but discovered. As a peculiar tool kit it marks the way the west reason. As an instrument that distinguishes correct from incorrect reasoning, it protects the standard of western thought system. Such a standard is however, not the same as those of China, India and Africa. What forms the standard of correct reasoning in Africa, China, India and the West are naturally immanent in each peoples' thought system. To systematize and compile it into a subject of study only requires

²⁹² Jonathan Chimakonam, 'Outline of African logic for the development of thought, science and technology in Africa'. *Book of proceedings*. Vol 6. No 12. (2011): 83

²⁹³ Chimakonam, 'Outline of African logic', 112

²⁹⁴ Jonathan Chimakonam 'Why can't there be an African logic.' *Journal of Integrative humanism*. Vol1 No1(2011): 143-152.

²⁹⁵ Chimakonam, 'African logic', 144

discovery and not invention. Just the same way the magnetic and the wave fields were discovered by science, Aristotle discovered the principles of western logic. It is when we reach this resolve that western logic as of other logics could not have been invented that we may enter the road to accurate explanation concerning the instrumental and universal conceptions of logic. African logic, therefore, can only be said not to exist in theory but never in principle. For once it is systematized and compiled into a subject of study, it will exist like the western, the Indian and the Chinese logics. And this, I think is the ultimate goal of this debate.²⁹⁶

Chimakonam was arguing here that African logic, or Customary logic as he called it then, existed because there was a different and peculiar African culture; if African logic did not exist, then African culture did not exist either. This argument puts up a bifurcation that may need unpacking for a moment. Chimakonam was saying essentially that either African logic existed, or culture did not exist. If one did not want to say that African culture does not exist, then one must accept that logic exists, because every culture must have an underlying logic. This false dichotomy that Chimakonam puts up stands on quicksand and he himself admitted as much when he in his later work he said:

It is not enough to say that Africa has a culture therefore it has a logic...; so many faulty arguments could be raised in this format. As a result, more than a statement of claim and compelling evidence of philosophies of stolen legacy is required. Africans have to systematize their logic, philosophy, science etc., through the raw, combined instrumentality of their fist and mind.²⁹⁷

One questions that arises when one thinks through Chimakonam's line of reasoning is that while it may be true that every culture must have logic, does it follow that each culture must have its own peculiar logic? This must have been a concern for Chimakonam too, for he moved

²⁹⁶ Chimakonam, outline of African logic, 103

²⁹⁷ Jonathan Chimakonam, 'Principles of principles of indigenous igbo-african logic: toward Africa's development and restoration of African identity' Paper presented at the 19th Annual Conference of International Society for African Philosophy and Studies [ISAPS], '50 Years of OAU/AU: Revisiting the Questions of African Unity, Identity and Development'. Department of Philosophy, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Anambra State. 27th – 29th May, 2013

from radical relativism to a measured relativism. Before his measured relativism, though, he was very radical on his ideas of African logic.

Chimakonam's earlier Philosophy of Logic

At a conference in Nigeria in September 2011, a young Chimakonam presented a paper titled 'Outline of African logic.'²⁹⁸ This was just months before the publication of his article 'Why can't there be an African logic?', which was a response to Uduma's article. Chimakonam presented what would be a recurring theme in his work, namely, that African intellectuals were 'trapped' intellectually from producing original work. It is unclear what Chimakonam meant by 'originality', but he seems to think something was lost when Africans used Western logic. Chimakonam introduced this issue by saying:

The years following colonialism were an era of severe intellectual repression for the African. He was told not only that he could not think but his freedom to do so was forcefully taken from him. He was through the instrumentality of school and church forced to think within the standard ways of the westerner, a system that not only stifled his originality but killed off his genius. It was relatively easy to learn and understand the reasoning pattern of the west but to think within it was almost impossible for the African, for such was alien to him.²⁹⁹

Consider yet another bold statement by Chimakonam:

The marriage between the mock renaissance and the western thought system had created mules out of African elites, seemingly strong and capable but totally unproductive. A mule can plough acres of land in its lifetime but can it reproduce offspring to continue the work? Similarly, African elite can criticize any theory, any technology, any invention but can he produce one? He cannot, because the system within which he thinks is alien to him, he could never see reality through it. He could never connect his thought with his action or reality for even when he thinks like the westerner, he still sees like an African. And between western thought and African perception, there can be no harmony.³⁰⁰

²⁹⁸ This was a paper that Chimakonam delivered at an International Conference of World Congress on Research and Development, University of Port Harcourt, Nigeria. October 25-28, 2011. Which was later to be published on Book of Proceedings vol. 6. No. 12, pp. 83-104.

²⁹⁹ Chimakonam, 'Outline of African logic', 90

³⁰⁰ Chimakonam 'Outline of African logic', 102.

Chimakonam has never had trouble accepting that Africans can understand Western logic or that Westerners can understand African logic. This is an extreme form of relativism which states that two distinct thought systems cannot understand each other, and they should not attempt to do so as their attempts would be futile.³⁰¹ What Chimakonam believed to be impossible was for Africans to produce ‘authentic’ work using Western logic since there was a mismatch between African and Western logic. One had to either use African or Western logic. African thought could not be carried out using Western logic. This view is at odds with the idea of a universal logic since the argument was that different thought systems needed different logics.

This view led Chimakonam to argue for African numeric systems and African science. If Africans used African logic to undergird their scientific enquiry surely their results will open hitherto unexplored vistas of thought within science, Chimakonam argued. Therefore, the problem of an authentically African foundation for African thought has always preoccupied Chimakonam. He wanted to herald a return to the authentic African foundation, and what thematically sounded like one of Négritude’s core preoccupations, return.

According to Chimakonam, ‘the crusade for Africa’s great return which I champion here is not a physical return to the pre-Berlin 1885 Africa but a psychological return to the African ways of pre-Berlin 1885. African ways here refer to reasoning pattern or thought system, the very thing that makes us Africans’³⁰² The ‘very thing’ that made Africans African was African logic. It is not surprising that he later developed the view that what made African philosophy African was a uniquely African logic. What Chimakonam emphasised was a peculiarly African logic that Westerners would come to respect and know that Africans reasoned differently but not wrongly.

To understand Chimakonam’s logical relativism of 2011, we must heed to what he understood to be the role of African logic in African thought systems. This is best exemplified by his theory of African science. He wrote:

African environment like its western counterpart technically, will engender a different science from the point of their ontological and fundamental differences. The common

³⁰¹ This view is often credited to the philosopher V. O Quine. For a more detailed breakdown of this view, see Kwasi Wiredu (1992) ‘Cultural particulars and universals’

³⁰² Chimakonam, ‘Outline of African logic’, 98.

indices, however, will be that each squares in well with the challenges of their peculiar environments, and environment is mirrored by a people's system of thought³⁰³.

Chimakonam thought that there was a peculiar African logic that was fundamentally different from the Western logic. He reiterated:

I turn now to the logic of African Science. I have attempted in bits the elementary foundation of *peculiar* African logic in some of my early writings and only recently undertaken a rigorous systematization of same in *Outline of African Logic and Numeric System*. The principles which characterize that logic are what I wish to employ here as the logic of African Science characterized by a peculiar African thought system. (italics for emphasis are mine)³⁰⁴

Chimakonam was clear that there was something peculiar about African logic. As he put it:

Like the pot sitter resting on three stands which many African women use in cooking their meals, African Logic rests on three values. This is not to suppose that there is no way pot sitters can be constructed to rest in say two stands but Africans simply do not know how to construct such pot sitters. This follows from the peculiar way Africans reason. It is absurd to the African Logician how statements can be judged to be true and false alone while he can within moments create scenarios where statements can be both true and false at the same time. The African simply cannot reason within a two-valued system. It is important to note here that three-valued logic is not a type of logic in African thought system as it is in the west; it is the very character of African Logic.³⁰⁵

This shows that Chimakonam's early views on logic were much radical in the sense that he thought, unlike his more recent writings, that Africans had a peculiar way of logicizing, and that the Western way of logicizing was so foreign to African thought systems that there was nothing original that an African could produce from using Western logic.

It is apparent from an analysis of his writings that Chimakonam subsequently modified his views. The question is why he changed his views on African logic from radical peculiar logic to a much more measured one of a universalizable logic. Philosophical thinking is, as Hannah

³⁰³ Chimakonam, 'Outline of African logic', 90

³⁰⁴ Chimakonam, 'Outline of African logic', 96

³⁰⁵ Chimakonam. 'Outline of African logic', 86.

Arendt put it, Penelope's veil: it undoes in the morning what it did at night.³⁰⁶ It is my view that we should expect philosophers to reconsider their views when presented with compelling arguments. Much the same happened with Chimakonam.

Of more interest than this is the fact that Chimakonam placed logic at the centre of all his work, and when he changed his views on African logic, he does not seem to have made many changes in his other works that rested on his view of logic. This may be because he is such a prolific writer with numerous theories and ideas and going back to all of them may take time, I argue that this put a strain on some of his ideas, a point illustrated below.

A universalizable logic: measured relativism

In the Universalists versus Relativists debate, Chimakonam identified as a relativist, at least as far as the question of African logic is concerned. However, he distinguished between two types of relativists. The first are those he calls 'radical' in reference to those philosophers who argue for a regional logic, and the second is the measured relativists, the group that he belongs to, those who argue for a multiplicity of logics but also think that all logics can be universalizable.

Chimakonam describes relativists thus:

Thinkers like B. N. Eboh, I. B. Francis, O. I. Francis and its contemporary champion Ijiomah. It is the position that since philosophy springs from culture, logic, which undergirds it, should, therefore, be regional and culture-bound. I have described this camp earlier as the culture-bound relativists or indigenizing camp³⁰⁷.

The position that Chimakonam describes above has a large following. It leans on a very sketchy syllogism, which is that if African Philosophy is culture-bound, and Logic is a component of philosophy, then logic is culture-bound. This means that what is true of the whole must be true of its constituents. For example, if a cake has too much salt, the last slice will also have too much salt. This view is easy to espouse if one thinks that logic is a part of philosophy. This is

³⁰⁶ Hannah Arendt 'Thinking and moral considerations: A lecture'. *Social Research*. Vol.38 (1971):417-446.

³⁰⁷ Chimakonam 'African logic', 23.

the view that Uduma took great care to argue against. He is not alone in denouncing this group of relativists.

Chimakonam also pushed back against the views of the radical relativists very strongly on grounds that it can lead to uncritical academic and intellectual laxness. The relativism that Chimakonam ascribes to is a logical *relativity* and not logical *relativism*. It is important to note the difference because it is at the heart of Chimakonam's later philosophy of logic. He means by logical relativity that all logic traditions differ in nuances. It is a collection of different logical variants coming together under one umbrella of Logic.

To take an example, imagine if different trade unions, such as the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) and the South Africa Democratic Teachers Union (SADTU), met at one conference. Although they are different in the sense that one is for teachers and other for general workers, these are differences in nuances since the ultimate aim of both is the welfare of workers.

Aristotelean logic is universal in a sense that an African can use it some instances, but it is not absolute in a sense that there are instances of African life that Aristotelean logic cannot explain. That is why there is a need for an African logic. This African cultural influence in the formulation of the principles of African logic is what makes it relativity. What makes it African is that it is inspired by an African way of life. On the other hand, the possibility of the cross-cultural application of African logic makes it universal.

I would like to call this view Chimakonam's measured relativism to contrast it with his earlier relativism which was more radical.

When Chimakonam speaks of universality he means the following:

The universality of the concept of logic is an abstract idea or generic concept to be employed strictly as such and to which different logical traditions participate. What this means is that though different logical traditions are relative for the fact of originating from a particular culture with varying legal nuances, they are nonetheless universal because as instruments of reasoning, they are supposed to cut across cultures. But we must admit that even the universalizable systems suffer limitations in some context.... African logic is relative in the

positive sense of being African culture-inspired and universal in the sense of being applicable in relevant contexts anywhere in the world.³⁰⁸

Why African Logic?

It may be appropriate at this juncture to ask, why all the fuss? If Western logic works for Africans why is there a need for a ‘new’ logic as it were? It is here that Chimakonam puts down a very firm foot and, arguably, reveals the very core of his life’s purpose as an academic. He wants to anchor down the ‘African’ in African philosophy.

Chimakonam decries the mental servitude of Africans brought about by colonialism. He thinks the African philosophers who claim that philosophy is universal and cannot be regionalized, are ‘evolues’, who unwittingly play the colonizers hand. They eulogize things Western and criticize anything African yet, try as they may, they could never be fully European, nor can they be African. Chimakonam thinks that because of this, these Africans will never be able to produce anything original. He says:

For the loss of this native African creative originality, many tutored Africans could not theorize neither could they invent. This is because the Western thought system which they adopted was not genial to them. This, to their great undoing, gives them a terrible critical mind toward anything that is naturally African but robs them of any creative originality. A verifiable fact of this claim is that no member of the universalist school has been able to erect theoretic structures to replace the ones they deconstructed. It is not only that they could not create new ideas in African philosophy; they now stand against those who attempt to do so. It is this gauntlet mounted by the presence of the évolués that we must now valiantly confront and destroy, and the field of African logic is now the last frontier.³⁰⁹

Chimakonam had echoed similar views in an earlier work:

Since colonial times, many African intellectuals have made remarkable additions to the world knowledge economy but are not recognised as contributions from Africa because their African authors have used methods that are grounded in Aristotelian logic regarded as a Western rational framework. So, whatever these Africans created was not new; they

³⁰⁸ Jonathan Chimakonam. *Ezumezu; A system of logic for African philosophy and studies*. (Springer, Switzerland.2019).36

³⁰⁹ Jonathan Chimakonam (ed), *Logic in Africa: seminal essays on African logic*.: ‘Why can’t there be an African logic?’ revised version 2021.

proceeded from methods set up by Westerners and are traceable to the logical foundation laid by the West. They become footnotes to Western originality and are therefore quickly swallowed up in the Western intellectual legacy. With this condition, the fate of Africans appear to have been sealed—a sort of ‘intellectual entrapment’—they will never, not in a hundred years, not in a thousand years and certainly not in a million years, make original contribution to world history and civilisation insofar as they continue to use Western-developed approaches and intellectual framework in their research; anything they create would be another effort in Western intellectual hegemony’.³¹⁰

From the preceding it is clear that if one adopts Chimakonam’s criteria of authenticity, a great deal of philosophical work from the African tradition would be disqualified as being authentically African by Chimakonam. Moreover, Chimakonam seems to think that logic is the alchemist stone that transforms foreign (Western) work to African work.

We have noted that Chimakonam wanted to answer the question, ‘What makes a philosophy African?’ or simply ‘Who counts as an African philosopher?’. It is a question that has occupied many great philosophers within the African tradition. Chimakonam engaged some of the philosophers who have tried to answer these questions, which we discussed in detail in chapter two. They included the likes of Paulin Hountondji, Odera Oruka, Uzodimma Nwala, Sophia Oluwale, Chukwudum B. Okolo, Peter Bodunrin, Kwasi Wiredu, John Mbiti, Ifeanyi Menkiti, Innocent Onyewuenyi, and Uduma O. Uduma.³¹¹ On the whole, Chimakonam found their responses to the criteria for African philosophy wanting. He suggested logic as the appropriate criteria for African philosophy. He explains his logic criterion thus:

Any discourse that treats African or non-African issues whether produced by an African or non-African versed in African cultural and intellectual life but is capable of universal application can qualify as African philosophy insofar as it is produced with African culture-inspired methods grounded in the logic of African ontology or the instrument of logic tradition in Africa which is arumaristic in structure.³¹²

Two things are worth noting here. First, Chimakonam thinks that the way a philosophy could be African has nothing to do with the philosopher’s origin but rather that the philosopher should

³¹⁰ Chimakonam, *Ezumezu*, xvii

³¹¹ Chimakonam, *Ezumezu*, 34.

³¹² Chimakonam, *Ezumezu*, 34.

be using African logic and that logic must be arumaristic in structure, that is, when mutually exclusive categories meet, the result is not necessarily synthesis. Secondly, he believes that the work, and the logic, must have universal applicability. This is an awkward caveat. It is understandable why Chimakonam needs the logic to be universalizable, but it is unclear to me why the discourse also needs to be universalizable.

Suppose, for example, that a piece of work is analysing the material consequences of the 1884 Berlin conference on Africa. Why should it matter that that work be universalizable? It may be suggested that Chimakonam's insistence on the 'universal' is putting an unnecessary strain on his work. He speaks of the Africanness of logic by which he means:

It is imperative to clarify that when a body of knowledge is called 'African,' as in the case of 'African logic,' we may not mean an existing system approved by all African cultures. In affixing 'African' to an enterprise, the intention may be (a) to produce a 'cultural or philosophical model by sifting elements that are common in many African worldviews, and/or (b) to adopt and project others which may not be common but which are nonetheless in agreement with the basic notions and structures in African ontology. We do this bearing in mind that this is one of the ways knowledge areas can be improved upon and modified to acquire a universal appeal³¹³

On the one hand Chimakonam says:

Ezumezu does not describe how Africans reason that is similar or different from how the rest of humanity reasons; it takes inspiration from the arumaristical model of thought common to African cultures (specifically undergirding the well-known communitarian ontology of the African tradition) to devise an alternative system of logic that could drive philosophising in Africa.'³¹⁴

What makes African philosophy African is its background logic, which means the logic must be undeniably African. The Africanness that Chimakonam ascribes to his logic is, in my humble view, insufficient to Africanize philosophy. What I mean here is that Chimakonam acknowledges first that not all African cultures follow 'arumaristic' reasoning. One example would be Ghanaians, who, Kwasi Wiredu argued, have a strong sense of respect for the law of

³¹³ Chimakonam, *Ezumezu*, 34

³¹⁴ Chimakonam, *Ezumezu*, 34.

non-contradiction.³¹⁵ Chimakonam also says that this logic does not describe how Africans think. It takes inspiration from the arumaristic model of thought that he admits is not common to all African cultures. Chimakonam also does not define how much inspiration he is really talking about. Moreover, he also says it must be universalizable, that is, even Chinese and Arabs can use this logic. This leads to a key question, If Africans using Western logic kills the authenticity of their philosophy, why would Asians or Arab authenticity not be destroyed by using Ezumezu logic? If the answer is that it would kill their authenticity, then what is the point of universalizing Ezumezu logic, or indeed any logic. Herein lies the paradox of authenticity.

Chimakonam's logic criterion only works if the logic is peculiarly African. Therefore, his earlier versions of African logic fitted his arguments of the authenticity of African philosophy resting on a peculiarly African logic. When he crossed over to the universalist tent and began to universalize his logic, he made an immense contribution to world philosophy. However, if it is a universal philosophy, it is too weak to be the ingredient that makes African philosophy African.

Chimakonam's earlier philosophy of logic argued that the African thought system breaks down if carried by Western logic, which necessitates an African logic. It would therefore make sense to argue that African philosophy loses authenticity if based on Western logic. However, Chimakonam's recently acquired measured relativism blurs the lines between Western and African logic making it harder to justify why African philosophy gains Africanness if based on African logic. Consider this claim:

Relativists do not doubt that the traditional laws of thought apply in all cultures, what they claim is that the traditional laws of thought do not apply in all contexts of logical evaluations. As a result, supplementary laws of thought come in demand for those contexts in which the traditional laws succumb. But even the supplementary laws are limited because no set of laws of thought can actually apply in all contexts of logical evaluation³¹⁶.

The above shows Chimakonam setting up a marriage between traditional Aristotelian laws which are law of identity, law of excluded middle, and law of deduction, and Ezumezu complementary laws which are njikoka, nmekoka and onona-etiti. This marriage vitiates

³¹⁵ Wiredu, *Cultural particulars*, 138.

³¹⁶ Chimakonam. *Ezumezu* ,49.

Chimakonam's argument that African thoughts, if they are to remain authentically African, cannot be successfully carried by Aristotelean laws since he now admits they are also as universal as Ezumezu.

The system of Ezumezu Logic.

This takes us to a very brief exploration of the system of Ezumezu logic. It will be brief because it is impossible to capture the idea of Ezumezu logic in its entirety in a chapter. It took Chimakonam a book-length attempt and he still could do not fully do justice to Ezumezu logic and its attendant possibilities, as it can also be discussed as a formal system and a methodology. This being a master's dissertation covering a number of issues, I hope my decision to eschew an in-depth discussion of Ezumezu logic will be forgiven.

Chimakonam explains ezumezu thus:

The Ezumezu system is three-valued consisting of ezu, izu and ezumezu. The latter is the third and middle value from which the system derives its name Ezumezu spelt with capital 'E'. Symbolically, the three values are represented with letters 'T', 'F' and 'C'. Ezumezu is trivalent as opposed to the bivalent structure of the two-valued logic. The difference between them is that Ezumezu represents an extension of two-valued logic where the laws of identity, contradiction and excluded-middle were relaxed to formulate the supplementary laws of njikoka, nmekoka and onona-etiti respectively.³¹⁷

Chimakonam describes Ezumezu logic as a flexible and dynamic system, the reason for this is that it is based on an African ontology. When Chimakonam speaks of African ontology, he means the idea that reality could be viewed or interpreted from three perspectives namely, the physical, the non-physical, and a combination of the two. This view comes largely from Calabar school thinkers like Innocent Asouzu and Godfrey Ozumba. This is why African logic has to embrace complementarity.

The word Ezumezu is an Igbo word that means 'the collective, the aggregate or the totality of all that is most viable, most potent and most powerful',³¹⁸

³¹⁷ Chimakonam. *Ezumezu*,36

³¹⁸ Chimakonam *Ezumezu*,94.

Chimakonam explained the three supplementary laws as follows:

1. Njikoka: An arumaristic proposition is true if and only if it is true in a given context and can be false in another context. $(T) Ax \downarrow [(T) Ax \mid \rightarrow (F) Ax]$, which reads that Ax is true in a given context if and only if Ax is true in that context wedges that Ax is false in another. The notation wedged arrow functions only as a context indicator here.
2. Nmekoka: If an arumaristic proposition is true in a given context, then it cannot be false in the same context. $(T) Ax \mid \rightarrow \sim(F) Ax$, which reads that if Ax is true in a given context, then Ax cannot be false in the same context. The notation wedged-arrow functions both as a material implication and a context indicator here.
3. Onona-etiti: An ohakaristic proposition is both true and false in a complementary mode of thought $[(T) Ax \wedge (F) Ax] \downarrow (C) (Ax \wedge \sim Ax)$, which reads that Ax is true and Ax is false if and only if Ax and not Ax are complements.

Based on the above, Chimakonam argues for two forms of inferences: Arumaristic and ohakaristic. He explained Arumaristic inference as:

Premise 1: Momoh is immortal

Premise 2: Momoh is an African

Conclusion: Therefore, all Africans are immortal

In the conclusion, we have a species of a synthetic proposition, the value of which can vary from one context to another.

An example of ohakaristic:

Premise 1: All Africans are immortal

Premise 2: Momoh is an African

Conclusion: Therefore, Momoh is immortal.

The important feature of Ezumezu logic is that is trivalent, which is that it consists of three values namely truth (ezu), falsity (izu), and ezumezu with small letter 'e' (complemented). A bivalent system of logic only studies two values, truth and falsity. Esther provides a detailed explanation of Ezumezu logic:

Ezumezu logic is built on the structures which are trivalent, with features such as sub-contrary valuations, complementary and contextual inferential modes, supplementary laws

of thought, and wedge implication. For one, the trivalent structure is built on the metaphysical world-view of the African people that holds that reality is physical, non-physical and both at the same time. Following this line of thought, Chimakonam maps out the internal structure of Ezumezu logic as involving ezu (truth), izu (false) and ezumezu (complemented). The contextual principle involves two sub-contrary variables which could both hold in the intermediate context (the complementary mode) and the complimentary principle states the complementarity of 'both and' and 'both not'. At this complementary stage, he argues that two sub-contrary variables are not contradictories and in the complemented variable do not lose their identities. They are rather in a 'tentative mode' that disintegrates through the means of 'creative struggle' to re-instate each to their contextual modes. He succinctly explains further that Ezumezu logic operates under three 'supplementary laws of thought' drawn from African life-world. The supplementary laws of thought, he cautions, complement the laws of identity, noncontradiction and excluded middle in Aristotelian logic. In a similar way, the use of wedge-implication does not displace material implication rather it strengthens it. The role of wedge-implication then is to 'introduce context analysis in-between an antecedent and its consequent.'³¹⁹

It is impossible to squeeze all the important details of Ezumezu in this overview. In any event, the structure of Ezumezu is not important to the project at hand, which is to track the evolution of Chimakonam's thought and his defence of the idea of African logic. The explanation here suffices as an explanation of the system of Chimakonam's logic.

Conclusion

The Journey of African philosophy, as presented here, has been in search of identity.³²⁰ The subject matter of logic is thought or thinking. It is not only concerned with the capacity of humans to exercise their faculty and conjure up thoughts in their minds, but the process of the development of that thought. The basic assumption is that there are correct ways of formulating a thought as there are incorrect ways. Logic is understood as the litmus test for thought. This

³¹⁹ Amara Esther. 'The Methodological Significance Of Chimakonam's Ezumezu Logic.' *Filosofia Theoretica: Journal of African Philosophy, Culture and Religions*. Vol. 8. No. 2. (2019): 90

³²⁰ Damas Masolo, *African philosophy in search of identity: African systems of thought*. (Indiana, Indiana university press. 1995).

chapter tracked this journey in African philosophy and how Jonathan Chimakonam joined the debate and developed his ideas. The conclusion summarises the key findings of this study.

Chapter Six

Conclusion

This study has been tracking the intellectual journey of Jonathan Chimakonam and has shown that for the entirety of his fifteen-year academic career, he has been in search for the foundations of an African identity, probing what he calls an unanswered question: ‘Where is the African mind?’¹ Chimakonam saw the greatest threat faced by Africa to be the vitiation of African thought systems along with their logic. He believes that one of the consequences of this vitiation is that some African leaders commit unspeakable crimes because they use Western logic. This may have been avoided if they used an African logic. According to Chimakonam there was always a mismatch between African logic and Western logic such that anything an African does on the bedrock of Western logic will be tainted, inauthentic, and unoriginal. If Africans are seeking originality and authenticity, they must base their ideas on African logic.

Since Chimakonam saw this as a matter of urgency, he soon moved to construct a logic from which African systems of thought could emanate. He called the prototype of that logic Ezumezu logic. This newly drawn logic needed a methodology that explained it, and Chimakonam proposed conversational thinking. This is a method of philosophizing that comes from Ezumezu logic; it is a concrete way of using Ezumezu logic. Whatever one may think of Chimakonam’s work and his ideas, and he does have his critics, it is hard, at least for me, not to admire the consistency with which he has worked, the originality of his ideas, and his daring courage to propose them, even in the face of criticism.

Chimakonam’s life’s work has been an attempt at restoring African identity through excavating African thought systems and formulating from those an African logic. For him, the only way out of the predicaments facing thinkers in Africa is for Africans to go back their original African thought systems and their logic.

¹ Jonathan Chmakonam ‘Principles of an Igbo-African logic: Toward Africa’s Development and Restoration of African Identity’. Paper presented at the 19th Annual Conference of International Society for African Philosophy and Studies [ISAPS], ‘50 Years of OAU/AU: Revisiting the Questions of African Unity, Identity and Development’. Department of Philosophy, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Anambra State. 27th – 29th May, 2013

If I am allowed to be bold, and not appear arrogant, I can say that I have summarized in the above sentence Chimakonam's core philosophy, that is, the foundation of all his ideas. As a philosopher, Chimakonam believes that philosophy must pay its debts to society, by which he means that philosophy must answer the questions it raises in society. To him a philosophy is not truly philosophy if it cannot help solve the problems of culture from which it (the philosophy) emanates. Thus, Chimakonam believes that if African philosophers are to find solutions to African problems, they must first make sure that their philosophies are truly African. The only way to guarantee that their philosophies are African is if they are using an African logic. Ezumazu logic Africanizes African philosophy. When philosophers finally begin philosophizing using African logic, the solutions they come up with will be originally and authentically African, and this in turn will ensure that they will go to the heart of African problems. One of the ways for African philosophers to express African logic, is to use a method that is compatible with African logic, that is why Chimakonam formulated conversational method of philosophizing. This, in a nutshell is my interpretation of Chimakonam's life's work.

The problem of authenticity in African philosophy has been a problem that plagued me since I first came across African philosophy. I have always wondered 'what makes this philosophy, especially African? Of course, I could not find the answer. However, it did bother me to a point that I typically conducted a thought experiment in my head which went something like this:

If two philosophers, one British and one African, sat to write an exam on any topic in the world, except those that reveal the country of their origin, and they philosophized without revealing their identity, how would I know which of the essays is by an African philosopher?

It could not be their methods because most philosophers in the world, I thought then as a student, use the same methods. It could not be merely thematic since philosophers may write on similar subjects. Perhaps, I felt, the best way to work this out would be if they dealt with problems of colonialism and imperialism. This seemed to be too short a criterion since European philosophers like Sartre also wrote on these issues. I could not figure it out, though I felt there must be something that made African philosophy different from Western philosophy. This problem lived rent-free in my head until I read the work of Chimakonam who offered the first real steps towards thinking about this problem when he gestured towards logic as the true litmus test of an African philosophy.

This meant that if one could identify the logic of the philosopher to be African one could tell that the work was African philosophy. Chimakonam also pointed out that philosophy that used foreign philosophical methods also adopted foreign philosophical logic because any philosophical method must have an underlying logic. If an African philosopher thought through Robert Nozick's thought experiment using Western-developed method and its underlying logic, in what sense would the work be African? Why was I worried about the right criteria for an authentic African philosophy to begin with?

I come from humble beginnings. Like Chimakonam, I was raised by a single parent. My father passed away when I was eight years old and the duty of raising me fell on my mother. When we moved to Verulam in 2009, it was only me and my mom living in our house. I had to learn to be 'the man of the house' very early. My mother only earned forty Rands a day from her domestic work and she only worked for three days in a week. Therefore, if a pipe was burst or an electric wire tripped, I had to try to fix it myself. This is the case to this day since we cannot afford any form of hired help. Now that I am a grown man, I still believe I must fix any problem that comes up at home. This time the problems need critical thinking, problem solving skills or philosophical insight. The question that bugged me for a long time as an undergraduate student of philosophy, was 'in what way is the philosophy I learn at school equipping me for the problems my home faces?'. How do I fit Immanuel Kant's ideas into the looming 'Black tax' that I have to pay? Black tax means the financial help that most Black professionals have to provide to their homes. It could be in the form of building a house, helping out with sibling's fees, or buying groceries every month for the family. It is called a Black tax because more Black people than other races have these obligations because their lives were brutally repressed by the draconian Apartheid system.

How do I think through my family problems using Western philosophy that I learn in school? The solution seemed to be that I must do African philosophy, but alas, African philosophy was not 'African'. Thus was I stuck in the horns of the dilemma. That is, until I began reading Chimakonam's work. This biography has not been a praise song for Chimakonam. His ideas came at a critical time for those philosophers and historians such as myself, who were drifting in an ocean of uncertainty. His was a voice of certainty.

Chimakonam's view is that students like me who find themselves trapped in the aforementioned predicament have no way of escaping it. This is because the curriculum they study at school is a foreign invasion. He says:

The curriculum of education in Africa has two fundamental problems namely, it is colonial and thus stifles the creative originality of a child, and it is fitted with alien background logic which estranges and condemns its victim to a life time of imitation. To transform this colonial curriculum and construct a new one on the basis of African logic thus becomes the most urgent task.²

How then do I solve my problem of Black tax using Western philosophy that I learn at university? In light of the above quote, it seems Chimakonam thinks that I cannot produce any original solution to African problems. I will be confined to copycatism until I abandon Western logic and use African logic. It is not so much the content of my philosophy that is a problem, according to the above quote, it is the logic that undergirds it that stifles original thinking since it is misfitted to African thought systems. The great injustice, for Chimakonam, is not that we are learning German idealism; it is that we are taught to look at this from a foreign logic and this blocks any seed of originality. If I may use a biblical analogy. The ideas we learn will be likened to seeds that grow to bear fruits, and our minds will be likened to Earth from which the seeds grows. For Chimakonam, foreign logic on an African mind hardens the ground such that no seed planted on it will bear any fruits. The mind of an African philosopher without African logic is barren. There will never be any fruits from it.

How do we come out of this? Chimakonam suggests radical curriculum transformation. He suggests two strategies for curriculum change. First, he proposes decolonization of the curriculum. This is when we purge out European content that denigrates, and de-humanizes the African from the curriculum and replace it with an Africa-centred content. Second, he proposes Africanization. Africanization occurs after decolonization, and it is when we displace Western logic and place African logic as the background of the transformed curriculum.³ It is only when the curriculum has satisfied the two strategies that it can inspire originality, authenticity, and creativity in African students. Chimakonam seems to suggest that authenticity will give rise to creativity. *So, know thyself, student, only then can ye be original.* If I were to create an

² Jonathan Chimakonam, *Ezumezu: A system of Logic for African Philosophy and Sundry Studies*. (Switzerland, Springer. 2019). 181.

³ Chimakonam, *Ezumezu*, 183.

aphorism for Chimakonam I would say: ‘It is only from authenticity that creativity arises.’ This is far from a mockery of Chimakonam; rather it is an attempt to succinctly put across what his work and life has been about.

Chimakonam’s musings on Curriculum change are not just ramblings of an armchair philosopher who wags his finger to students demanding they do an impossible task of resisting a foreign logic without yet knowing the African logic. He, along with Innocent Asouzu in 2013 at the University of Calabar, began the bold move of Africanizing the curriculum by creating an independent African Philosophy Department. African philosophy was subsumed under general philosophy as is currently the case in most universities in Africa. I do not know of any university that has a separate African Philosophy Department. The project was unfortunately stumped and could not proceed. He explains it thus:

Unfortunately, internal politics has trapped the white paper generated by the committee at the faculty curriculum committee for nearly 5 years now. The committee that sits every month is yet to deliberate on the department of African philosophy proposal submitted to it in 2015 despite constant reminders from me. This programme was to be the first of its kind in the world to the best of knowledge and it was to serve as a model for others to copy from. A number of colleagues from elsewhere in Nigeria and beyond still ask me questions. This reminds us that colonialism may have done great evils to Africa but the havoc which the postcolonial mindset is doing to Africa might be worse.⁴

Though Chimakonam’s programme to Africanize the curriculum did not come to fruition in Nigeria, I, along many of his young readers, have heard the clarion call and are ready to pick up the mantle. The very last line of Chimakonam’s 2019 book titled *Ezumezu: A system of logic for African philosophy and sundry studie*, reads ‘Ogwu, go, now let the conversation begin!’⁵ The 2015 #Rhodesmustfall movement was just the beginning. We, the students, took to the street to voice out our grievances against a curriculum that is both colonial and inadequate. We now know fully well that ‘the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house.’⁶ Chimakonam, in his measured view, though realizing that African creativity is stifled by the fact that their ontology is maladjusted to the Western one, seeks to argue it out with the

⁴ Chimakonam. *Ezumezu*, 187.

⁵ Chimakonam, *Ezumezu*. 210

⁶ Audre Lorde. *The Master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house*. (London, Penguin random house. 2017).

Westerners ad nauseum. Chimakonam uses Western logic to point to them that there is an African logic. If the previous chapter's exposition of Temples is anything to go by, then it is clear that Westerners knew all along that we Africans have a logic. In the same way that a slaver knew that God does not exist but begged that their slaves were not told, lest they kill him in his sleep.⁷ Ours is not to convince Westerners but to begin thinking out our problems using African logic. Therefore, it is time for Chimakonam to begin writing using African logic since he has never done so. If he fears that Westerners (and even some Africans) will not understand his logic, I would like to remind him that any logical system can be learned. In the same way that he learned and mastered Western logic, Westerners, if they want to, will also learn African logic. If he does not do so, then his ideas will fall by the wayside and his efforts be in vain. As the saying goes, one needs to walk the walk and back his writing with concrete actions.

This dissertation rested as heavily on textual analysis as it did Oral history. Oral history, as the name suggests, deals with speech, and dialogue. It is not just speech that is important in Oral history, but dialogue has a very special place in Oral history. It is the very substance of Oral history. If there is no dialogue between the historian and the interviewee, we can hardly call it Oral history. I am stating what may seem to be obvious because I am trying to underscore the importance of dialogue in both Oral history and Conversational thinking. I found that conversational thinking fares better when both participants of the conversation, are geared towards the similar goal of creation of concepts. Likewise, Oral history fares better when both the historian and the interviewee are geared towards a similar goal.

I had the tremendous honour of interviewing Jonathan Chimakonam, who was more than willing to give out answer the questions that I posed. This in turn birthed in me new ideas and ways of seeing either historical events or new historical insights. The more questions I asked of him, and he gave answers and from those answers new questions arose, and he was kind enough to answer them all. One of the interviews lasted more than three hours, after Chimakonam assured me that we can go as long as I needed to. The thing is, the questions came up out of the interview, and I had exhausted the ones I had prepared before the interview. All this is to say. One can draw a parallel between Oral history and conversational thinking.

⁷ Yuval Noah Harari. *A brief history of humankind*. (London. Penguin Random House, 2015). 320

Historical questions bring out responses that in turn lead to more questions, all the while leading to a creation of new concepts and ideas. It was very clear to me that the philosopher was humble and heart and had a desire to lead and guide young people like myself.

To conclude, writing this dissertation has been a truly beautiful experience, as I learnt so much about Chimakonam and his search for the African mind. The African mind would in turn birth in the African a new identity, an identity of authenticity. It is only when the African is authentic can she or he can create something original. Chimakonam thinks the stamp of originality is African logic. That is the lesson I take and one that I will strive to implement as I move forward in life, hopefully in the academic sphere where issues of decolonization and curriculum change have remained for too long on the backburner.

Perhaps all is not lost. As I was writing these final lines, I came across a blurb for a new book, titled *Born in Blackness: Africa, Africans, and the Making of the Modern World, 1471 to the Second World War*, by Howard French. The book, according to one report, ‘demands an account of modernity that reckons with Africa as central to the making of the modern world. The book’s main aim is to restore those key chapters which articulate Africa’s significance to our common narrative of modernity to their proper place of prominence.’ I hope that I am able to contribute to this long-term project.

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Appendices

One: Interview with Jonathan O Chimakonam, 20 December 2020.

Conducted by Lindokuhle Shabane

Question Guide:

- 1) Where and when were you born?
- 2) Who were your parents and what was your family like? How would you describe your upbringing and neighbourhood? What did your parents do? Were you exposed to books and other intellectual influences as a child? What were these?
- 3) Schooling? Which schools did you attend? Private or Public? Which subjects did you enjoy and what were the major intellectual influences?
- 4) Which university did you attend for your undergraduate work?
- 5) What led you to study Philosophy?
- 6) Graduate studies? Who inspired your philosophy? Which thinker did you find most stimulating? Whose work did you most disagree with?
- 7) Which teachers / lecturers did you enjoy? How did they shape your own academic career?
- 8) Tell me a bit about your academic career? Places where you worked? Positions held?
- 9) You are a prolific academic, having written five books, and numerous book chapters and journal articles. What, according to you, is African philosophy?
- 10) Briefly describe the trajectory of your work.
- 11) You have written a lot on three broad topics: History of African philosophy, Methodological issues - put differently, Meta Philosophy, and Logic. Do you think these topics feed into each other? Why do you regard these as important issues to pay attention to?
- 12) What is Ezumezu logic? What sets it apart from other Africa-inspired logics?
- 13) You mentioned in the Preface of your book (Ezumezu: a system of African logic, that came out in 2019) that in 2010 an entire manuscript of your book went missing.
- 14) What are some of the other challenges that you have faced in writing or having your work published and read?

15) You started a movement and a school of thought called Conversationilism. Can you explain what you mean by that? What inspired you to do that? Do you think the current methods in African philosophy are wrong or inadequate?

16) The Emergence of the Conversational School in relation to how it shaped your philosophy. And how and why it metamorphosed into conversational school?

16) You founded a publishing, peer reviewed Journal of African philosophy called Filosofia theoretica. What led to the formation of this journal and what are its objectives? What were the problems with existing journals in the field that you felt the need to start a new journal? What has this journal achieved? What have you learnt from the experience?

17) What role do you think philosophy should play in the decolonisation of the curriculum?

18) Why in your opinion are African philosophers still struggling to i) have their work taught in the university syllabi; ii) to have African philosophy included in the syllabi. What can be done to remedy this? Have you noticed changes in the time that you have been in the academy?

19) Do you teach African logic in your courses? How much of your work are you able to teach? How do you teach African philosophy?

20) I was just reading some of your work and it occurred to me. I've never seen in your work any mention of the Continental v Analytic divide. Do you think it is now irrelevant? I ask because it seems to have a bearing on the question of methodology in African philosophy. It had a lot of influence on the actors of what you call 'the great debate'. What are your views on the continental v Analytic divide in Western (European?) Philosophy that was also forced on African philosophy? Do you think it has any bearing on your work?

21) What in your view has been your greatest achievement and /or personal contribution in philosophy?

22) How would you like to see the field of African Philosophy move forward?

Two: Second interview with Dr Jonathan Chimakonam, 23 August 2021.

Conducted by Lindokuhle Shabane

Question Guide: Time in Nigeria

- 1) In 2011 you published 4 articles, on quite different topics and you still, I am sure, had to do your PhD thesis. On top of which you started your own Journal called '*fiolosofia theoretica: an African journal of philosophy*'. And you have pretty much maintained a consistent output in various fields, how does that happen? There is being productive, prolific and then there is you. What is your secret?
- 2) If I may ask a personal question: Are you married, and do you have any kids?
- 3) In 2011 You started a journal, were you alone or did you start it with someone? What was it like? Did you get support from your peers and lecturers?
- 4) In 2012, you published 5 articles and a book. And something tragic happened, you lost your mother, how did you manage to pull yourself together and maintain your strong output. Others would just shatter and wallow in self-pity not you.
- 5) You wrote that after you completed your first degree you went to join the mandatory 1-year program (the military youth service corps). What sort of duties did you have in your service in the NYSC? Did you enjoy your time in the program? What do you think of the program? Is it beneficial to young people? Has your time in the service contributed to your philosophical outlook?

Question Guide: Period outside Nigeria

- 6) You have moved in 2018 from the Calabar University and accepted a post as a senior lecturer at the University of Pretoria.
- 7) Given that Nigeria is, one may say, taking lead in the global scholarship of African philosophy in terms of knowledge production. It has one of the strongest concentrations of talents, a group in which you fit in so perfectly. Why did you leave Nigeria? And why South Africa, specifically? Could it have been anywhere else or is there a specific reason for your accepting a teaching position in South Africa?

- 8) What is your impression of South African politics? South African academic culture- students and lecturers- what are some of the similarities and differences these have with Nigeria?
- 9) Is there an attitudinal difference between Nigerian students and South African students when hearing of African logic? If Yes, what is the source of those differences and vice versa?

Question guide: Philosophical questions

- 10) There are almost no biographies of African philosophers, as an African philosopher and someone who has worked on historiography, can you postulate as to why there are no biographies of African philosophers, is it because African philosophers, feel they are (biographies) not important or there just isn't enough interest?
- 11) You have dedicated a lot of your work on what you call 'system building'. Please briefly what do you mean by this? And why do you think it is important.
- 12) One of your greatest contribution is conversationalism, which is a three pronged project. There is the theoretical, the logical and the methodological. Could you briefly explain how these three prongs of your project feed into each other?
- 13) Now it seems as though, although it is from African thought, it isn't for African philosophy. I mean here, it is not meant just for African philosophy, it is meant to have a universal outreach, is that correct?
- 14) You say that conversational method, can marshal African philosophy to intercultural philosophy which you believe is the goal of philosophy. Briefly explain what you mean by this? I am confused, does that not lead to universalism? But I think you did say that you promote a universalism that is a collection of particulars?
- 15) You have argued that your work on Ezumazu logic is based on postmodernist thinking but you also criticize postmodernism for harbouring some remnants of logocentrism. Would you say, notwithstanding your criticism that you are a postmodernist?

- 16) Is it a correct assumption to make that you have not yet used Ezumezu Logic in your writings? That is, you have not yet written and pushed back against an argument because it does not follow the rules of Ezumezu logic? If yes, do you find there is an added difficulty accessing wide readership because of the scarcity of talents in African logic?
- 17) Were you always suspicious of Western Logic or was it something developed in you with an encounter with certain voices of resistance in university?
- 18) Complementary thinking. Was it always something you were inclined towards? For example, when I was in High School, I always had a rudimentary view of hedonism, I of course did not know then it was Hedonism, but I was a utilitarian- hedonist. I only found in University when introduced to the writings of J.S Mill what it was that was developing. Is that the same thing that happened to you or is it something different?
- 19) For most of your books you use the pronoun “he” to refer to the general person and gender-neutral concepts. Given the development within feminism, the use of gendered language has been criticized as promoting or enabling Patriarchal notions of gender. Are you not worried you could be accused of doing this? Do you use the gendered language consciously?
- 20) What would you consider Africa’s greatest problems?
- 21) What is African philosophy’s most difficult challenge?
- 22) What advise do you have for young, up and coming philosophers, such as my self?

Three: Interview with Dr Aribiah Attuo, 19 October, 2021.

Conducted by Lindokuhle Shabane

- 1) Could you please, very briefly, give your biographical details. Your names, where you were born, which university you went to, and where you teach now.
- 2) In your time as a university student did you ever take any of Jonathan Chimakonam's classes? If yes, what were they?
- 3) What was your first impression of Jonathan? Was there anything about him that stood out from other lecturers you knew?
- 4) What kind of a lecturer is he? Was the strict type, mountains of assignments etc, or laid back?
- 5) When did you first encounter Jonathan's work? What did you think of it when you first read it? Did any of your first impressions (of his work) change with time?
- 6) If you know, what did students at UNICAL, generally think of Chimakonam and his work?
- 7) When did you first Join CSP?
- 8) What attracted you to it as opposed to other schools? What was distinctive about it. Was it already popular in UNICAL when you joined?
- 9) What are some of the memories you have of the debates you had at your meetings with other members of conversational school?
- 10) Do you know when and how conversational school of philosophy started?
- 11) The movement is now international, with thinkers from different countries and disciplines experimenting with conversationalism in different ways. Both as its member and a philosopher, what in your opinion are some of the reasons the conversationalist movement successfully gained much following?
- 12) Do you use or subscribe to Ezumazu logic?
- 13) Do you use conversational methods in your writing?
- 14) Do you teach any of Jonathan's ideas?

- 15) What are some of the challenges you face as a researcher working within conversational thinking?
- 16) Does your association with the conversational movement negatively or positively affect your reviews as a writer?

Four: Interview with Dr Lucky Ogonnaya, 20 October 2021.

Conducted by Lindokuhle Shabane

Question Guide:

- 1) Could you please, very briefly, give your biographical details. Your names, where you were born, which university you went to, and where you teach now.
- 2) In your time as a university student did you ever take any of Jonathan Chimakonam's classes? If yes, what were they?
- 3) What was your first impression of Jonathan? Was there anything about him that stood out from other lecturers you knew?
- 4) What kind of a lecturer is he? Was the strict type, mountains of assignments etc, or laid back?
- 5) When did you first encounter Jonathan's work? What did you think of it when you first read it? Did any of your first impressions (of his work) change with time?
- 6) If you know, what did students at UNICAL, generally think of Chimakonam and his work?
- 7) When did you first Join CSP?
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- 9) What are some of the memories you have of the debates you had at your meetings with other members of conversational school?
- 10) Do you know when and how conversational school of philosophy started?
- 11) The movement is now international, with thinkers from different countries and disciplines experimenting with conversationalism in different ways. Both as its member and a philosopher, what in your opinion are some of the reasons the conversationalist movement successfully gained much following?
- 12) Do you use or subscribe to Ezumazu logic?
- 13) Do you use conversational methods in your writing?
- 14) What are some of the challenges you face as a postdoc researcher, working within conversational thinking?
- 15) Does your association with the conversational movement negatively or positively affect your reviews as a writer?