

**ARCHIE MAFEJE AND THE LIBERATION OF PHILOSOPHY AND SOCIAL SCIENCES IN AFRICA**

By

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis articulates a conception of philosophy and the social sciences which understands reality on its own terms. It is an intervention in the practice of philosophy and the social sciences in South Africa, which owe their existence to the colonial heritage and continue to neglect the unjust and divisive social reality that defines South Africa. The argument defended by this thesis is that such continuity is indicative of outstanding liberation on the part of the indigenous people conquered in the unjust wars of colonisation. This thesis draws on the work of Archie Mafeje to elaborate and defend his account of African Philosophy and liberatory social science practice, as a historically specific expression of the liberatory struggle of Africans against unjust Euro-centric colonial domination. Basically, this research focuses on Archie Mafeje's thought and practice on the issues concerning epistemic decolonisation and authentic liberation of the social sciences and philosophy in the continent, a discourse that engulfed the African academy since post-independence circa 1960. Mafeje was a constitutive part of that particular historical unfolding and participated in the debates that shaped the practice of the social sciences and philosophical discourses in varying intellectual circles in the post-independence era. That he was exiled from South Africa speaks of the outstanding liberation on that part of the African continent which he also laboured to achieve. Mafeje's work represents an instantiation of a liberatory practice of philosophy and the social science in Africa generally, and with particular reference to South Africa.

Keywords: Archie Mafeje, Philosophy, Social Sciences, Conquest, Colonialism, South Africa, Liberation, African Philosophy, Azanian Philosophical Tradition, Historiography

## DECLARATION

Student number: 57646678

I declare that *ARCHIE MAFEJE AND THE LIBERATION OF PHILOSOPHY AND THE SOCIAL SCIENCES IN AFRICA* is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

I further declare that I submitted the thesis to originality checking software and that it falls within the accepted requirements for originality.

I further declare that I have not previously submitted this work for examination at Unisa for another qualification or at any other higher education institution.

TS DLADLA

SIGNATURE

26 November 2025

DATE

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“Every thought of society and of history itself belongs to society and to history” proclaims the Greek-French philosopher Cornelius Castoriadis in the pages of his magnum opus *The Imaginary Institution of Society*. One cannot agree more with Castoriadis on this point precisely because thinking is conditioned by society and history, i.e., it is part of socio-historical *doing*. So too are the thoughts presented here in this thesis; they are not a product of individual manoeuvres, but an outcome of collective thought processes that define the community of which I am a part. To be sure, I am one of the founding members of the AZANIAN PHILOSOPHICAL SOCIETY (<https://www.theaps.org/>), which is a community of intellectuals and scholar activists from different disciplines in the Humanities and Social Sciences, as well as Legal Studies. It is to this community that I would like to begin by expressing my appreciation. I would like to extend my gratitude to our elder, Professor Mogobe Bernard Ramose, for his love and support throughout this turbulent journey that spans over a decade of my intellectual life. His support speaks to his commitment to Ubu-Ntu expressed in the Sesotho adage: *Feta kgomo otshware motho*. I would also like to express my deepest gratitude to elder Malesela Steve Lebelo, Bra Steve as we affectionately call him, for his commitment to elucidating the living histories of conquest and resistance to it. Your

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## INTRODUCTION: RE-MEMBERING<sup>1</sup> ARCHIE MAFEJE IN THE DIALOGUE TO DECOLONISE

“For we are not seeking to be praised, but to be understood in our own terms”  
(Mafeje, 1991: iv)

### Introduction

To understand the dialogue to decolonise knowledge in the South African academy in the post 1994/post-apartheid period requires one to have an appreciation of the context in which such a discourse finds meaning and articulation. The history of the creation of South Africa is one defined by violent incursions by European conquerors of both Dutch and English descent in the quest to extend their dominance on ‘newly’ found or discovered lands. I deal with the problem of South Africa in detail below but suffice it to summarise it here that South Africa is a creation of two contending European powers who came to reconcile and unite their spoils of loot in the quest to create a united polity under the banner of ‘whiteness’. So was South Africa established in 1910 after violent conflicts between contending European invaders against the indigenous people of the land. The Union government that ran from 1910- 1948 was dominated by the British who were overthrown in 1948 by the National Party of predominantly Afrikaners. It is in 1948 that the segregationist system known as apartheid was introduced which consolidated white power and accentuated the segregationist policies that defined the formation of South Africa as a union of the British and Dutch-Afrikaner against the Africans.

To be sure, Apartheid was preceded by years of violent dispossession of the indigenous people of their land and cattle which it came to formalise and legislate. Many struggles were waged by the indigenous people since contact with their erstwhile colonisers against being turned subjects to European domination. Unfortunately, the Europeans were triumphant but

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<sup>1</sup> Following Mungwini (2012:121).*Re-membering Socrates in dialogue with Africa*. “We employ the term (re)membering written in this way to capture the two different but interrelated ideas of remembering and re-membering respectively, which signify the combined act of reclaiming memory as well as the quest to undo or reverse the process of dismembering”.

the conquered people would continue to wage their struggles using other methods including those acquired through European education. According to Ntongela Masilela (2010:1) The New African intellectuals who had received their education under the missionaries' tutelage were resentful and ultimately opposed their assimilation into Europeanism and Eurocentricism, despite their deep gratitude for the education. This resistance involved a difficult process of embracing European modernity with the goal of converting it into African modernity while rejecting Europeanism, which was essentially white control and dominance. While always conversing with African tradition, this African modernism will transcend it. The question of whether it was possible to accept European modernity while opposing its dominant forms, which manifested themselves through colonialism and imperialism, became a major historical dilemma for the New African intellectuals.

It is from this context that modern African struggles against domination came to be conceptualised and actioned, and it is from this heritage that the struggle against legislative apartheid was waged in the early 1910's to the mid 1950's and towards the transition in 1990-1994. To be sure this is the tradition that gave birth to the South African Native National Congress (SANNC) in 1912 which was renamed the African National Congress (ANC) in 1923. This tradition sought accommodation in the already established colonial order of things which elides the history of conquest and colonialism. I discuss in detail the history and philosophy of this tradition in chapter 5 (The end of South Africa and the rise of Azania). Suffice it to say that it was the ANC that negotiated South Africa's transition from Apartheid to Post-apartheid officially assuming state power in 1994 through a transitional government of national unity. The transition from apartheid to post-apartheid never questioned the legitimacy of the South African state that was a result of conquest and colonialism, which is why the discourse to decolonise only found prominence with the student protests of 2015 (Rhodes Must Fall & Fees Must Fall) that began to question the foundations of South Africa and the transition to a post-apartheid polity.

Conquest and colonialism as structural realities that came to define and shape the African continent at various historical conjectures has impacted social and historico-political imaginations of African social realities. Out of necessity African social and historico-political imagination of African social reality has had to contend with the fact and impact of conquest and colonialism. This is to say any truthful meaningful social and political theorisations of

African reality has had to address itself to the history and present of the conditions of domination that manifests itself in different spheres of social existence. However, it is not all social and political theorisations that are committed to truth as an ethical imperative. It could be the case of a conflicting and contested understanding of truth and ethics that other theorisations may be considered to be ethical or unethical, truthful or untruthful. Such a conflict and contest of meaning reveals the divide in society between those that wield power and those subject to it. And in the case of Africa it is impossible to ignore the effects of undue uneven power relations between those that came to conquer and colonise and those subjected to such a reality of being dominated.

According to Karl Marx and Frederick Engels (1973:51), “The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas: i.e., the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling *intellectual force*” (Emphasis in the original). The class that came to dominate and rule over Africans through conquest and colonialism perfunctorily became the ruling intellectual force of the conquered and colonised territories. Moreover, the conquest and domination of Africans by Europeans was predicated on an unethical doubt concerning the humanity of the Africans and thereby acted as a justification for the violence and terror meted out against them because it was done to lesser or sub-humans. The doubt concerning the humanity of Africans as well as the violent conquest, slavery and colonialism that Africans had to endure informs many studies on race and the liberation of Africa from European domination that had been the preoccupation of many African revolutionaries and intellectuals since contact with Europeans until the anticolonial struggles that were waged in the twentieth century.

Archie Mafeje<sup>2</sup> was one such a revolutionary and a pioneering intellectual and social scientist ‘ahead of his time’ as Bongani Nyoka (2020) has aptly designated. His engagement with discourses to decolonise social scientific practice from its Eurocentric presuppositions and predilections dates back to the late 1960’s and was informed by his political commitment to liberation at the material and intellectual levels<sup>3</sup>. Archie Mafeje was born on the 30<sup>th</sup> of March

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<sup>2</sup> “Archibald Boyce Monwabisi Mafeje (he would be known to many as Archie) was born in Gubenxa in the Engcobo District on 30 March 1936...He was born to Bennett Mafeje and Frances Lydia Mafeje (née Qambata) who were married in Cape Town in 1934” (Nyoka, 2017:26).

<sup>3</sup> Mafeje was a member of the Non-European Unity movement, a Trotskyist socialist organisation established in the early 1940’s, and actively participated in their political programs. Mafeje was also a student of social anthropology at the University of Cape Town where his early development as an intellectual would gestate.

1936 in the village of Engcobo in the then Cape province (Nyoka, 2020: xii). He was a student at the University of Cape Town (UCT) from 1957 to 1963 in the studies of social anthropology before pursuing his doctoral studies at the University of Cambridge in 1964 (ibid). He completed his doctoral studies in 1968 after which he held several positions in Europe and the African continent while exiled from South Africa, returning only in 2002 until his untimely death in 2007. His intellectual contribution can be characterised as a revolutionary approach to the study of African societies and theory development.

Nyoka (2019, 2020) details the vast corpus that defines Archie Mafeje's intellectual biography which has proved quite useful in cataloguing and thematising his rich intellectual contribution from his early days, as a student at UCT, to his later days as a Professor of Social Anthropology and senior researcher. The themes Nyoka (2020) identifies relate to the chronology of his life and the different schools of thought which informed the studies of his society at different stages of his life, from early 'functionalist' anthropology position, to his Marxist social scientist position, to his later 'Africanist' position. What ties all of the identified phases in his life can be shown by his preoccupation with representing reality as it is: going beyond the received theoretical prescription and uncovering material reality in its own terms. Through a review of the thematised characterisation of Mafeje's corpus by Nyoka (2020) and through a review of the primary readings by Mafeje, this thesis aims to illustrate the evolution of Mafeje's theoretical perspective that is essential for the decolonisation of philosophy and the social sciences in Africa.

However, the discourse about the decolonisation of the university curriculum only gained prominence in the South African academy since student protests of 2015 and part of the reasons for this state of affairs is that the struggle against conquest and colonialism in South Africa was aborted in its infancy and a more accommodationist civil rights struggle adopted (This point shall be elucidated in Chapter 1 under the subtitle "The Problem with South Africa").

There have been many ambiguities about the method and meaning of decolonisation partly because South Africa and its academy are still fashioned along colonial lines, whereas such discourses have been subject of debate since the 1960s in the rest of the African continent to which Mafeje was a part. Nyoka (2020) cursorily defines decolonisation as an active engagement with the African archive, which has been marginal in the South African university

practice of social science and the humanities, if not to say silenced. Such a definition of decolonisation clears the indistinctness, not to mention its abuses to continue the colonial project, that which the concept has suffered in the South African academy.

This thesis seeks to re-member Mafeje as a worthwhile ancestor in Africa's struggle for reason and locates his contribution to knowledge in the prevailing discourses. This is done to show how he was far advanced in relation to the prevailing discourses and how his work is relevant and should serve as grounds for some of the conversations concerning transformation/ Africanisation/ decolonisation of knowledge. It should be noted that Mafeje's theoretical contribution could only be made sense of when one considers post-independence thought that defines the African archive since the early 1960s, where he is firmly rooted. An engagement with Mafeje is, at the same time, an engagement of the African archive, particularly the post-independence moment that sought to redefine the disciplines as received from the colonial tradition. The quest to gain freedom is at the same time, a call to philosophise. No doubt, such a critical posture is not a product of the philosophical training that was on offer but a product of the African struggle articulated through African nationalism and pan-Africanism. This was the beginning of a properly philosophical debate: to think about the prevailing reality in its own terms and a question of the disciplines as they exist to facilitate a move beyond disciplinary entanglements and Eurocentric negations.

This thesis articulates a liberatory conception of philosophy and the social sciences which construes reality on its own terms. It aims to intervene in the practice of philosophy and social sciences in South Africa, which have continued undisturbed along colonial lines which finds articulation in the marginality of African social science and philosophical contributions up to the present coupled with the general neglect of the unjust and divisive social reality that defines South Africa. The argument defended by this thesis is that such continuity is indicative of outstanding liberation on the part of the indigenous people conquered in the unjust wars of colonisation. This thesis is therefore a contribution to the struggle for liberation at the philosophical level inspired by Archie Mafeje's outstanding intellectual contribution. Through an examination of his intellectual works and life as a revolutionary intellectual this thesis elucidates his contribution as an instance of a liberatory practice of philosophy and social sciences in Africa. I draw on the work of Archie Mafeje to elaborate and defend his account of African Philosophy and liberatory social science practice, as a historically specific

expression of the liberatory struggle of Africans against unjust Euro-centric colonial domination.

Mafeje's thought and practice on the issues concerning epistemic decolonisation and authentic liberation of the social sciences and philosophy in Africa, is this study's main preoccupation. In pursuing the task of thinking about the liberation of social sciences and philosophy from colonial presuppositions and Eurocentrism, it is not quite necessary to review all the materials that discuss this issue despite some in the South African academy who may be working under the assumption that the subject of decolonising the disciplines is a new one, hence the supposed novelty of 'decoloniality' (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2010). However, when one closely examines the African archive and the debates that ensued from post-independence Africa, one would not be so eager to rely on the Latin Americans to think about such possibilities. An examination of Mafeje's writings from the 70s for example, demonstrates that Africans on the continent have long been preoccupied with the subject matter of their freedom from all colonial impositions including those embedded in European inspired Social Science and philosophical practices. Therefore, for the purposes of this research and in the true spirit of Mafeje, I shall limit myself to both the primary readings written by Mafeje, direct commentaries on them as well as those engaged in the subject matter of decolonising knowledge without the risk of biting more than what one can chew.

In the first instance, the thesis proceeds to provide context into the problem of colonially constituted philosophy and social sciences in South Africa and the challenge to decolonise. Chapter Two then provides an analysis of the problem of decolonisation faced by the South African academy since the students' protests of 2015 and thereafter, Chapter Three contextualises philosophy and the social sciences in South Africa and outlines the primary preoccupation of such disciplines as mimesis and extraversion. Chapter Four provides a detailed analysis of the necessarily liberatory conception of African philosophy, while Chapter Five provides an account of Mafeje's liberatory conception of philosophy and social sciences in Africa in general. The conclusion to be drawn from this labour is that, Mafeje is relevant for the current discussion concerning the decolonisation of the curriculum and that his works contain an indispensable liberatory element essential for decolonising philosophy and the social sciences in Africa. In this introductory chapter, various themes concerning the gist of

Mafeje's thinking are outlined in re-remembrance of Archie Mafeje and in addressing the guiding research questions:

1. How does the marginalisation of African Philosophy and African social science discourses facilitate epistemic domination?
2. What essential criteria and conditions for African Philosophy and liberatory social science practice does Mafeje identify?
3. What are Mafeje's specific contribution to the social science practices in Africa to move the field beyond regurgitation and protest?

The aim is to present and defend an interpretation of Archie Mafeje's account of African philosophy and Social Sciences as an intrinsically historically and politically reflexive liberatory discourse.

### **Against Eurocentric Negations: The Call to Decolonise**

Like Karl Marx foreseeing the meteoric rise of the working classes under the banner of communism, to which he cautions his readers in the first lines of the Communist Manifesto, Nyoka (2020:xi) warns us of a "spectre haunting the South African academy, the spectre of knowledge decolonisation". However, the afore cited points out that what may be perceived as brilliant is not necessarily new, and what may be perceived as new is not necessarily brilliant. To this, Nyoka (ibid) outlines the great lineage of thought by Africans which can be surmised as addressing the questions concerning current decolonisation discourses while lamenting the direction that the current decolonisation discourses have taken: 'talking about decolonisation without actually doing the work of decolonising'. It is in this regard that he offers us a working definition of what knowledge decolonisation in his understanding refers to: an engagement with the works of African scholars and nurturing "ontological discourses and narratives of African people" (Nyoka, 2020).

The fact of colonialism and its justification through western philosophy is based firmly in the belief that a segment of human population do not belong to the family of human beings properly constituted precisely because of a lack in 'reason'. A defect in their humanity is that although they may resemble human beings, they are to be reconciled to the domain of animals. Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze (1997) has demonstrated the racial foundations of western

philosophy's project through a reading of Immanuel Kant's anthropology and the views of many of the founding fathers of the modern western philosophy project as racist and Eurocentric. African philosophers such as Mogobe Ramose, Theophilus Okere, Nkiru Nzegwu and Tsenay Serequeberhan, to mention just a few, have laboured tirelessly to dispel the foundational myths of western philosophy that sought to negate Africans from the realm of history and humanity. In effect the task of an African philosophy is to properly constitute African reality on its own terms and critically negate Eurocentrism in its various manifestations. That the debate about an African Philosophy finds momentum in the post-independence era, circa 60s, speaks of its confluence, if not its origination, with African nationalism and movements of an African personality. This is a clear demonstration that the call to gain freedom is inextricably a call to philosophise. The same period is recorded to have influenced the social sciences broadly construed, including the sciences. The ferment in the social sciences saw the birth of distinctly African orientations in these fields. The Ibadan School of History and the Dar es Salaam School of Political Economy come to mind. Although a Western influence cannot be denied, in effect, it is what was battled against. The battle against Eurocentrism, or overdetermination from without, constitutes a properly African philosophical discourse which goes beyond the boundaries of the disciplines colonially constituted and instituted.

At this moment, it is important to dispel the core myth that has governed philosophical and social scientific enquiry to date, particularly in the South African academy, and this is the myth of objectivity. This is the assumption that it is possible for one to divorce themselves from the enquiry which they wish to undertake i.e., to have an account of social reality without understanding oneself as immersed in that social reality. This is the myth that I argue has its origins in Western philosophy and has acted as an impediment to real thinking about society and history, I will deal with this idea in the later parts of this thesis. This thesis seeks to articulate a liberatory conception of philosophy and social sciences in Africa through a thoroughgoing reading and engagement with Archie Mafeje's corpus, as well as those elucidatory works that encapsulate his theoretical contribution. Through an engagement with Mafeje's readings, a liberatory conception of philosophy and the social sciences is articulated in direct response to the call to decolonise knowledge that has defined the South African academy since 2015.

<sup>4</sup>In his 1971 landmark essay *The Ideology of Tribalism*, Mafeje vehemently argues against European epistemological presuppositions in studying African societies as inherently tribal. Such an ideology was brought by the colonial authorities and was aided by their anthropologists as Mafeje (1971:254) shows by using the case of South Africa: “In South Africa the indigenous population has no word for ‘tribe’; only for ‘nation’, ‘clan’ and ‘lineage’ and, traditionally, people were identified by territory- ‘Whose [which Chief’s] land do you come from?’”. This aptly demonstrates that the notion of tribes is an imposition from the outside and not how people recognize themselves. To drive his point home Mafeje (ibid) mobilises Marx’s conceptualisation of relationships of domination in his 1845 *German Ideology*:

The class which has the means of production at its disposal has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it (Marx, 1845).

Indeed, the colonial domination of Africa by Europe did not articulate itself in material terms solely but also in intellectual terms. According to Thandika Mkandawire (2005:5), “One task of ideas in both the enslavement and colonisation of Africa was to dehumanise the enslaved and the colonised by denying their history and denigrating their achievements and capacities”, which was done through the colonisers’ claim to universality for their culture and values while relegating African values and culture to parochial particularities. Such disproportionate views were met with resistance and became the springboard of African intellectual endeavours which were coterminous with movements of African nationalism and anti-colonialism (Ramose, 1999; Mkandawire, 2005; Adesina, 2010).

Such movements for epistemological liberation circa 1960’s, which were inspired by the movements for decolonisation and African nationalism against colonial rule, became the basis of rethinking the categories which have heretofore incarcerated African social ontologies to the European epistemological paradigm and became the basis for African Philosophy and African social science discourses. Archie Mafeje, as Nyoka (2012, 2017) has pertinently demonstrated, is located within this tradition against theoretical extraversion and alterity in the pursuit of endogeneity (Adesina, 2008). The quest of endogenous knowledges about

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<sup>4</sup> This section contains sections from my research proposal that were mistakenly submitted to the University of Limpopo’s Turnitin portal. It is acknowledged that indeed this is the authors own work.

Africa is still an ongoing task that African intellectuals are still engaged in precisely because: “Societies that have experienced colonisation have suffered many ill effects, some psychological, some linguistic, and some intellectual. Be that as it may, none have perhaps been less studied than how colonisation subjugates knowledge and marginalises local epistemes” (Oyewumi, 2015:1). According to Oyeronke Oyewumi (1997: ix), European colonialism occasioned an epistemological shift and imposed European categories like gender, in understanding African social realities. Such superimpositions in understanding African social realities have continued to create, in discourses about Africa, non-existent realities precisely because of their imported categories. In both her ground-breaking works *The Invention of Women* (1997) and *What Gender is Motherhood?* (2015), Oyewumi challenges European gender categories in understanding Oyo Yoruba society by articulating an endogenous understanding of that African society against extroversion.

Oyewumi is not alone in this struggle and stands on shoulders of giants such as Ifi Amadiume who has also challenged western patrilineal understandings of African societies (Adesina, 2010). European imperialism has continued and been maintained by some Africans who sought to speak for Africa but not for Africans instead, for their European audiences. Nkiru Nzegwu’s (1996) *Questions of Identity and Inheritance: A Critical Review of Kwame Anthony Appiah's "In My Father's House"*, has shown in the case of Kwame Appiah’s claiming a patrilineage in an inherently matrilineal Asante society. This forms the bedrock of African intellectual activity as a critique of Eurocentrism as identified by Tsenay Serequebehan’s ‘The critique of Eurocentrism and the practice of African philosophy’. This is to say that part of African philosophical and intellectual activity involves this critical negative project of disarticulating misconceptions about Africa.

No doubt such a predilection is continuation of the African freedom struggle that invoked African nationalism when the Europeans sought to reduce them to mere tribes. The Ideology of tribalism as described by Mafeje (1971) is a product of European colonialism that was useful to colonial administrators in the project to divide and rule but also to European social scientists to rationalise colonialism in Africa and explaining resultant conflicts. African nationalism as articulated by many of its proponents sought to overcome such a designation and fought to unite all the conquered under its banner. According to one such proponent Anton Lembede (1947) “African nationalism will sweep away all vestiges of tribalism and unify

all Africans". Lembede became the first president of the newly formed ANC youth league in 1944 that sought to radicalise the ANC that had since been a movement of the elites and petty bourgeoisie since its inception in 1912 (Lodge, 1983:1). To demonstrate this point, it may be useful to refer to a petition by the SANNC to the King George V dated 20 June 1914 (Gerhart & Johns 2015:183):

That petitioners are descendants of a race which, when their forebears were conquered by Your Majesty's might, and their land taken from them, their laws and customs mangled and their military and other institutions brought to nought, loyally and cheerfully submitted to Your Majesty's sway in the full belief that they would be allowed to possess their land as British subjects, and would be given the full benefits of British rule like all other British subjects.

Understandably the politics that precede the formation of the SANNC were focused on the electoral politics in the Cape colony. In the Cape colony blacks with the property and had educational qualifications could vote and stand for office (Lodge, 1983:1). According to Lodge (1983:1) the African voice in the politics unfolding in the Cape was significant as they constituted half of the electorate in five constituencies which they believed could be used to elect men who could advance African aspirations. However, those hopes of the extension of the Cape franchise throughout the country, including the Boer republics, were betrayed when the British and the Afrikaner sought to reconcile and unite under whiteness after the two Anglo-Boer wars of 1880-81 and 1899-1902 that saw them as contenders to what would become South Africa.

Following the treaty of Vereeniging of 1902 that resolved the conflict between the two contending parties African aspirations for enfranchisement were betrayed by the British government which was preoccupied with uniting the whites. And finally in 1909 through a British act of parliament the Union of South Africa was to be established. This act deprived even the enfranchised blacks to be elected in parliamentary seats and also provided for the removal of the franchise from African voters. This is among the reasons that led to the formation of the SANNC in 1912 which sought to be the voice primarily of the disenfranchised blacks and not the African majority in particular. To demonstrate this point about the character of the Africans who were at the forefront of the formation of the ANC, Lodge (1983:2) adduces a testimony to the South African Native Affairs Commission by one John

Makue who makes the distinction between the civilised native and “the raw man who comes from the kraals” and claiming that the former cannot be treated as the latter as the former is well acquainted with European values and standards, and also saw themselves as subjects to the British crown.

However, the formation of the ANC Youth League in 1944 saw a radical challenge to the conservatism of the ANC since its inception and sought to invoke African nationalism and an assertion of African sovereignty in their land. It is with the youth league that the ANC would be open to the majority of the African people to be active participants in the movement towards the realisation of African liberation. Although this was to be short-lived within the ANC with the breakaway of the Africanist in 1958 to form Pan Africanist Congress. The Africanists are the ideological heirs to the African nationalism articulated by the founders of the ANC Youth League. However, there were other formations that deliberated on the problem of oppression and imperialism in South Africa and sought to remedy the situation through the unity of the oppressed groups. Such was the Non-European Unity Movement (NEUM) which Mafeje was a member.

The NEUM was formed in 1943 as a unification of the All African Convention (AAC) and the Anti-Coloured Affairs Department (Anti-CAD) federations (Nyoka, 2019:11). The NEUM comprised mainly of Marxist intellectuals and revolutionaries who had defined their mission summarised as the Ten-Point Programme which advocated for full democratic rights for all oppressed people while avowing to non-collaboration with the oppressor. According to the programme the goal of the Non-European Unity Movement is to end the National Oppression of Non-Europeans in South Africa, which means that all restrictions and disabilities based on race and colour will be eliminated, and Non-Europeans will gain all the rights currently enjoyed by the European population. Democracy is the rule of the people, by the people, for the people, in contrast to earlier historical societies founded on slavery and serfdom. However, democracy cannot exist if a portion of the population is enslaved, and justice cannot exist without democracy (Karis & Johns, 2015:286).

According to Nyoka (2019:11) the NEUM saw the restoration of the land as a major rallying point in the South African liberation struggle and sought to unite the workers and the peasants as the requisite for a revolution in South Africa. Although this position was not accepted by all in the organisation it would nonetheless remain foundational to Mafeje’s

revolutionary outlook (Nyoka, 2019:11). Livingstone Mqotsi who was one of the leaders, and a mentor to Mafeje, was not convinced of the revolutionary potential of the peasantry as was Leon Trotsky which the NEUM is said to have been protégés. Although the NEUM can be said to have been Trotskyite Nyoka (2019:13) contends that Mafeje was not, but upheld Lenin and Mao in terms of his revolutionary outlook in their valorisation of the peasants as revolutionary subjects while Trotsky was ambiguous about their ability to take up an independent political role. However, the NEUM was referred to as a Trotskyite more because of its adherence to the theory of permanent revolution (Nyoka, 2019:14). Mafeje's revolutionary theory and politics geminated from his training in the NEUM although he would be critical of it later on in his life.

### **Re-membering Archie Mafeje and the South African Discourse on Decolonisation**

Bongani Nyoka (2011, 2013, 2017, 2019, 2020) has been one of the foremost readers and interpreters of Archie Mafeje's *Social and Political philosophy*, defending Mafeje against misreadings as well as misappropriations. In Nyoka's hands, Mafeje ceases to be a protest intellectual that is *combative* with Eurocentrism or just a critic of Anthropology that those engaged in protest scholarship are likely to appropriate Mafeje for. Nyoka (2017) calls for *Authentic interlocution* with regard to *proper* theoretical interventions and political contribution. In a similar vein, this research aims to think through the categories set forth by Nyoka (2020) as distinctive of Mafeje's contribution to social scientific and philosophical thought: (i) a critique of the social sciences (particularly the Eurocentrism undergirding them), (ii) the agrarian question and finally, (iii) revolutionary theory and politics.

The distinctive contribution of this study will be to *elucidate* and demonstrate the connections and intersections of the set categories. Moreover, this research aims to emphasise an engagement with the African archive, which Archie Mafeje contributed towards constructing for the project of decolonising the university against what Nyoka (2017) terms epistemic posturing: talking about decolonisation without decolonising in such a way that the concept assumes a life of its own. This has been what many universities and academics have been engaged with since the student movement circa 2015 which was organised around #RhodesMustFall, a protest against colonial artefacts and colonialism symbolised by the

statue of Cecil John Rhodes<sup>5</sup>. Furthermore, this research seeks to demonstrate the rich and novel contribution of African intellectuals towards this project of decolonisation against the decoloniality paradigm organised around Latin American intellectual traditions and overlooks the African origins of such a pursuit<sup>6</sup> and in turn, turns decolonisation into a metaphor. Tuck and Yang (2012:3) warn that when metaphor encroaches on decolonisation, it destroys the entire prospect of decolonisation; it extends innocence to the settler, resettles theory, recentres whiteness, and entertains a settler future. Decolonise (a verb) and decolonisation (a noun) are difficult to apply to pre-existing discourses or frameworks, regardless of whether they are critical, anti-racist, or justice oriented.

It is in line with the above-cited that, the present study fundamentally aims to think through Mafeje's contribution towards the decolonisation of Philosophy and the Social Sciences in Africa through an examination of his works. This is done to offer an interpretation that aims to transcend some of the limitations in his thinking, particularly the entanglements with those ontological discourses that do not particularly serve the project of indigeneity. Such transcendence will be aided by a materialist ontology as demonstration of the grounded nature of thinking itself and of the inventiveness of thought.

In line with Nyoka's (2017) view, this study establishes Mafeje as an African Philosopher following Ramose's argument (1999:33) that being trained in the professional discipline called philosophy as an African does not automatically translate to one being an African philosopher. To be an African philosopher for Ramose (ibid), requires one to think from the position of the culture and experience of African peoples which would in turn demand "the liberation of African philosophy from the yoke of dominance and enslavement under the European (Western) epistemological paradigm".

Even though Ramose's (1999) qualification for doing African philosophy properly addresses professional philosophy or the professional philosopher, it is imperative to expand our scope of discussion to include those theoretical offerings that do not necessarily reside within

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<sup>5</sup> This moment shall be reflected upon as it is recognised as a moment which sparked the conversations around decolonisation that have had reverberations outside the university space into the broader South African society.

<sup>6</sup> Enrique Dussel, who is one of the progenitors and inspiration for the decoloniality paradigm, for instance, acknowledges Kwame Nkrumah in his philosophy of liberation (1981) as one theorist who conceptualised the structure of colonialism in his neo-colonialism which demonstrates the rich heritage of African intellectual predilections.

philosophy as a discipline like those of Mafeje that this research aims to elucidate. Following Adeshina Afolayan's (2018:1) insight that "The significance of expanding the African philosophical discourse creates the possibility for a *transdisciplinary* space that allows for a multifaceted confrontation of the African predicament around the discipline of philosophy" (my emphasis), this research endeavours to move beyond the confined space that is professional philosophy for the purposes of cross-fertilisation.

In light of the fore-going, my interest lies in the work of the great savant Archie Mafeje. It is arguable that in his case, some reliable work has at least been done by a few African scholars. Bongani Nyoka (2012, 2013) and Jimi Adesina (2008) for example, have noted the significance of Mafeje's methods for decolonising sociology in South Africa and the pursuit of endogeneity, please see a discussion of Nyoka's (2020) recent book length contribution below. Dani Wadada Nabudere (2007) has also discussed the significance of Mafeje's intellectual activism for decolonisation of the social sciences. Mafeje's contributions to African philosophy have on the other hand not been treated to serious scholarly study. It is here that the specific value and contribution of this proposed work lies. It proposes to study the philosophical and meta-philosophical aspect of Mafeje's work around the nature of what philosophy is and what should constitute a properly African philosophical practice. Moreover, this research also aims to elucidate the contribution of Mafeje to social science discourses beyond the confines of disciplines which contributes to the much needed cross-fertilization mentioned above. Such a move is identified in this research as moving beyond *epistemology*<sup>7</sup>; the concern with knowledges and its production, towards *ontological* discourses and their implications for what we know and how we come to know.

It is from this vantage point that this thesis aims to elucidate a liberatory praxis of the social sciences and philosophy following Mafeje as a torchbearer. To be sure the modern practice of philosophy and the birth and development of the social sciences in the same era constituted and facilitated the expansion of Europe that led to colonial conquest and slavery.

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<sup>7</sup> Mills (1998:8) speaks of the need to move beyond the traditional concerns of epistemology as defined narrowly in western philosophy such as "the Cartesian plight which represents as an allegedly universal predicament, and the foundationalist solution of knowledge of one's own existence thus become emblematic, a kind of pivotal scene for a whole way of doing philosophy and one that involves a whole program of assumptions about the world and (taken-for-granted) normative claims about what is philosophically important".

The establishment of the European order through violence had to be maintained through legitimating processes that included instituting a European educational practice that emulated traditions of the mother country. In the case of South Africa the traditions of both the British and the Dutch became the organising order and constituted what became the University. The transition in 1994 from apartheid to 'post- apartheid' did not constitutively challenge the composition of the university curriculum. The focus was on representation in the then make up of the institutions and not much on the content. The ' protests of 2015<sup>8</sup>, #Rhodesmustfall #Feesmustfall #Decolonisetheuniversity, brought to light the continuities of the colonial project through the maintenance of colonial symbols and curriculum. It is from that backdrop that the conversation on decolonisation finds meaning which this thesis aims to elucidate through an engagement with the intellectual contribution of Archie Mafeje.

## **Conclusion**

The following chapters aim to contextualise and elucidate a liberatory vision for philosophy and the social sciences in South Africa through a reading of South African history that envelops it. History is the possibility condition for any existence, and it is the history that brings South Africa about that also conditions the development of thought and praxis of what would constitute philosophy and the social sciences in their varying instantiations. Moreover, it is also that history of oppression on the side of the conquered that invokes thoughts and praxis of liberation, which is to say liberation would have no meaning without a prior understanding of the conditions that prohibited it. It is in that regard that African Philosophy is elucidated as a philosophy concerned with liberation from Eurocentric conceptual binds representative of the post-independence drive of African intellectuals inspired by movements of African nationalism in their varying instances. Archie Mafeje was a constitutive part of that particular historical unfolding and participated in the debates that shaped the practice of the social sciences and philosophical discourses in varying intellectual circles in the post-independence era. That he was exiled from South Africa speaks of the outstanding liberation on that part of the African continent which he also laboured to achieve. Mafeje's work represents an instantiation of a liberatory practice of philosophy and the social science in Africa generally, and with particular reference to South Africa. Since 2015 South African academics and intellectuals began to vocalise the vision to decolonise the university and

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<sup>8</sup><https://www.sahistory.org.za/article/student-protests-democratic-south-africa>

curriculum. This took many forms however still neglected the rich archive and heritage of African intellectual contributions which remain marginal. It is the task of this thesis to centre African intellectual contributions and the rich heritage of resistance with Archie Mafeje as representative.

## CHAPTER 1: ON SOUTH AFRICA AND THE PROBLÉMATIQUE OF DECOLONISATION

### 1.1 Introduction

South Africa comes into being a polity as a result of a reconciliatory pact between the Dutch/Afrikaner settlers and their erstwhile counterparts, the British, after violent confrontations known as the two Anglo-Boer wars or what has recently been referred to as ‘the South African war’/‘the war for South Africa’. South Africa then, is a child of the 1909 act of the British parliament, which created the Union of South Africa from the British colonies of Natal and the Cape of Good Hope together with the two Afrikaner republics: the Transvaal and the Orange Free State. The indigenous people conquered in the unjust wars of colonisation were considered to be no significant actors and were relegated to the status of ‘non-beings’ in such a political formation. It is no surprise then that South Africa exists in the minds of the indigenous people always as a philosophical problem: as an existence that fundamentally denies their Being as humans second to none and as Africans in this territory of theirs which has become ‘the white man’s land’.

This Chapter<sup>9</sup> grapples with this philosophical problem from the perspective of the indigenous people and articulates a liberatory philosophy following the interventions by Mogobe Ramose, Ndumiso Dladla and Joel Modiri. It is important to note that these reflections transpire during a time when South African academics and the academy at large are grappling with the ‘decolonisation’ of the curriculum or knowledge production, which has reduced decolonisation to the diversification of knowledge production at the expense of addressing the colonial problem that is South Africa. This Chapter elucidates an Azanian social and political philosophy to counteract such discourses that have diluted decolonisation as a radical project aimed at undoing the colonial order of things. To do this, I treat the history that brings South Africa about and the resultant historiographical and ideological debates that emanate from such discourses, particularly the issue of sovereign title to territory which remains a hotly contested issue to date. Secondly, attention is turned to those movements of the indigenous conquered people that resisted colonial imposition and that articulated a liberatory politics and their historical representation or misrepresentation. Finally, I thereby

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<sup>9</sup> Some of the materials in the chapter were previously presented at the Rhodes University seminar hosted by the Department of Politics and International Studies in September 2022.

turn to deal with those discourses about decolonisation that remain ignorant of the politics and history of South Africa and the underlying contestations.

What I refer to here as the problematique of decolonisation in the South African academy is that which was spurred by the student protests of 2015, particularly the #RhodesMustFall (#RMF) movement. This is because the #RMF called into question the very existence of South Africa and the negotiated settlement, which, although can be characterised as ‘post’ apartheid<sup>10</sup>, but is ultimately not post-conquest (Webster, 2017; Modiri, 2019; Dladla, 2021). It has been common (reference) to homogenise the #MustFall movement, in other words, to speak of the two distinct moments of early 2015 with those of later that year which saw the birth of the #FeesMustFall movement. While it is not deniable that the insurgent fervour that characterises these movements can lead one to conclude that they are one movement, the core of their demands is however, distinct.

The distinct nature of the abovementioned demands borders along the historical contentions of what is the nature of the antagonism in South Africa<sup>11</sup>, the race and class debate which more than once consumed the South African intellectual space. In this chapter, I shall discuss the nature and impact of the 2015 protests and how they inspired the decolonisation problematique that South African intellectuals and academics are presently engaged with. Moreover, I shall discuss this problematique in light of the Latin American influences and the parroting of such voices in the South African academy by the so called ‘Decoloniality’ school. Finally, this chapter excavates African voices/archive that have dealt with such a problem since the early 60’s (Adesina, 2022). This is done to show how misguided and ungrounded the

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<sup>10</sup> According to Ndumiso Dladla (2019) “The emphasis upon Apartheid in South African historical thinking and by extension all the social sciences is a result of Whiteness of academic historiography and the social sciences in general. Apartheid is merely a political administrative and juridical episode in a more fundamental and continuous historical condition of conquest of the indigenous people in the unjust wars of colonisation. The achievement of liberation (epistemic and then political and economic) will in part require the over-coming of apartheid. That is the recognition that the cardinal pillars of historical injustice are the conquest of the indigenous people in the unjust wars of colonisation and the disseizing of their sovereign title to territory. These pillars predate Apartheid by more than two centuries and have outlived it by more than two decades” ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dDpX\\_VdA2HE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dDpX_VdA2HE))

<sup>11</sup>

discussion has been, and to ground it in the African experience of colonisation to which South Africa is no exception, but model to paraphrase Mamdani (1996).<sup>12</sup>

In this regard, I shall begin by dealing with the problem of/with South Africa as a philosophical problem for the indigenous people conquered in the unjust wars of colonisation and then proceed to discuss how the #RMF movement brought this discussion to light. Moreover, I shall proceed to demonstrate how the #FeesMustFall movement was an attempt to obfuscate what the #RMF had brought to bear on, and how it assured settler futurity and facilitated the ‘settlers move to innocence’. I shall then proceed to a discussion of ‘decoloniality’, particularly how it attempted to respond to the problems of decolonisation that the student movement had agitated but without ground. Finally, I shall offer an African understanding of decolonisation, which proceeds from the Africans struggle for liberation against colonial rule. This is to demonstrate how the Decoloniality School is not offering anything new in the African experience of colonisation.

## 1.2 The Problem with South Africa

[For] one cannot escape the fact that the culture shared by the majority group in any given society must ultimately determine the broad direction taken by the joint culture of that society. This need not cramp the style of those who feel differently but on the whole, a country in Africa, in which the majority of the people are African must inevitably exhibit African values and be truly African in style (Stephen Bantubonke Biko, 2001).

Conquest of the indigenous people in the unjust wars of colonisation is foundational to the formation of the polity that is identified as South Africa today. That racism, white supremacy/European expansionism and slavery are grounded in the belief that some populations of people are not properly constituted to be considered as part of the human race that would necessitate and justify the brutalities visited among them can be demonstrated through early articulations of the colonial project in the 13th century: the *romanus pontifex*. According to Eric Williams (2021:1), the ‘discovery’ of the New World by

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<sup>12</sup>The core argument that Mamdani (1996) made was to erase the specificity of settler colonialism—which is distinct from other forms of colonialism in much of Africa. It is that the forms of apartheid governmentally, i.e., ‘decentralised despotism’, is a mirror of late-colonialism generally. The homelands were a variation on indirect rule.

Christopher Columbus, under the authority of the Spanish monarchy, set “the long and bitter international rivalry over colonial possessions for which... no solution has been found”. The Portuguese according to Williams, initiated the movement for colonial expansions aggrandised by the papal bull of 1493 that gave her authority to “reduce to servitude all infidel peoples” (ibid). The two contending powers, the Spanish and the Portuguese, sought arbitration from the Papacy, as both were Catholics. The response by the Pope was an issuing from 1493 a series of papal bulls which established a line of demarcation between the colonial possessions of the two states thus: The east was given to Portugal and the west to Spain. History records that such a demarcation was to be contested among the contending parties and other European equals who felt they had to be included in the loot.

According to Ramose (2007:313) the theological and philosophical basis of conquest were already in place in Western Europe from the thirteenth century, the divine right of conquest, and would be the basis for the conquest of the new world. Thirteenth century Pope Innocent IV was among the leading proponents of the divine right of conquest and successive popes would reaffirm this principle, Ramose (2007:314) elaborates:

The bulls of Pope Nicholas V *Dum Diversas* (1452) and *Romanus Pontifex* (1455) gave the kings of Portugal the right to dispossess and enslave Mahometans and pagans. *Dum Diversas* clearly specifies the right to invade, conquer, expel and fight (*invadendi, conquirendi, expugnandi, debellandi*) Muslims, pagans and other enemies of Christ (*saracenos ac paganos, aliosque Christi inimicos*), wherever they may be. Christian kings could thus occupy pagan kingdoms, principalities, lordships, possessions (*regna, principatus, Dominia, possessiones*) and dispossess them of their personal property, land and whatever they might have (*et mobilia et immobilia bona quaecumque per eosdetenta ac possessa*). They also were given the right to put these peoples into perpetual slavery (*subjugandi illorumque personas in perpetuam servitute*). Following upon the footsteps of his predecessor, Pope Alexander VI issued the bull *Inter caetera divinae* (4 May 1494), authorising the overthrow of paganism and the establishment of the christian faith in all pagan nations.

These declarations became the justification for the European expansionism in pursuit of world dominance as divinely ordained. The aspiration to dominate was not limited to spreading the Christian message and converting the world to the belief in the Christian god but also in the

fields of trade and commerce. The Portuguese navigation of the Cape Coast in the fifteenth century in supposedly in search of new routes to India was not free from imperialistic and colonial aspirations (Terreblanche, 2002:153). However, their attempts at annexing the Cape Coast which also included some disputes over trade were met with resistance by the Khoi such as the 1503 incident where a Portuguese fleet commander Antonio de Saldanha was wounded after an attempt to swindle the Khoi in attempts to barter (SAHO: Internet)<sup>13</sup>

In 1510 Francis de Almeida the first viceroy of Portuguese Indies also sailed into the Table Bay with a fleet in search of fresh water. His crew visited a Khoi settlement along the Salt River to trade for cattle and sheep. However, the sailors attempted to kidnap two Khoi children and cattle, and an armed conflict arose and the sailors were driven back to their ships, and the Khoikhoi emerged victorious (SAHO, Ibid). De Almeida was vengeful and sought to avenge his man by organising an expedition of about 150 men. De Almedia's expedition set fire to Khoikhoi huts and a conflict ensued as they were surrounded by a band of Khoikhoi armed with arrows and assegais. The Portuguese force was defeated and 67 of their men dead including de Almeida and the Portuguese avoided Table Bay for some time to come (Thompson, 2006:32).

Maritime trade would intensify with time around the world and many European nations wanted a stake in the trade, and the Cape became a significant stop for many European ships travelling towards India or East Africa. The English East India Company also made efforts to barter with Khoikhoi and sought to convert some into their intermediaries to better facilitate their trade. One such intermediary whom the British kidnapped was a Khoi named Coree who was taken to England in 1613 and returned 1614 (SAHO, NP). In June 1614, Coree was deported back to the Cape because he disliked his time in England and livestock trade became much more challenging for Europeans because of his hatred of the British treatment of him. Later, Coree encouraged Europeans to fight Khoikhoi rivals and expand his flocks and herds to further his own agenda. The Dutch allegedly killed Coree in 1626 because he refused to provide them with food. Trade between Europeans and Khoikhoi became even more challenging after Coree's death.

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<sup>13</sup><https://www.sahistory.org.za/article/early-struggles-contact-and-conflict-cape-colony>

Coree was succeeded in his role as intermediary by another native named Authumato who would continue assisting the British and the Dutch who later had him confined to Robben Island on accusations of murder and stealing the cattle of the Dutch East India Company of Jan Van Riebeeck (Terreblanche, 2002:154; Joja, 2021:172). The Dutch East India Company was established in 1602 and was at the time the world's greatest trading corporation with its merchants being the most successful business people in Europe. According to Thompson (2006:32), the Dutch East India Company had sovereign rights from the Dutch government over the Cape of Good Hope and would become the dominant European maritime power in Southeast Asia. It was the Dutch republic's valuable asset that launched the Dutch republic into its Golden Age, which was the seventeenth century (Terreblanche, 2002:153). According to Thompson (2006:33) South Africa is a byproduct of the enterprise of Dutch merchants, Jan van Riebeeck was sent to occupy Table Bay to serve the function of facilitating a link between the Netherlands and the empire they had in the east that was centred on Batavia Java.

It is claimed that the company had no intention of expanding and playing a role in the annexation of the territory, as they only sought to build a refuelling station for their fleets from and to Batavia. However, the Cape station would flourish in terms of revenue and profitability such that it would become autonomous. According to Thompson (2006:33), the company granted some of its workers land with the status of "free burghers" and released them from their contracts. Second, the firm brought slaves to the Cape and put them to work under Dutch supervision building the colony's fundamental infrastructure, including a fort, a pier, roads, orchards, vegetable gardens and arable fields. Third, the local pastoralists suffered as the Dutch settlement gradually spread from Table Bay's shore, engulfing and enclosing area for farming.

Terreblanche (2002:154) claims that the Dutch East India Company issued strict policies to Van Riebeeck with regard to how they should maintain their relationship with the Khoikhoi with respect and to ensure not to disturb "their cultural integrity and socio-economic stability". However, the expansion of the Dutch settlement and the enclosure of some land would eventually lead to conflict. In 1659, a war of plunder broke out between the Khoi and the Dutch company and led to the arrest of the Khoi leader Autshumao who was banished to Robben Island. In 1660, Autshumao was brought back from the island to be part of negotiations between the company and his people. Van Riebeeck argued that there was not

enough grazing land for the cattle of the colonists and the Khoikhoi, to which Authumao retorted with a question: "If the country is too small, who has the greater right: the true owner, or the foreign intruder?". Van Riebeeck's rejoinder was noted in his diary thus: "We have won this country in a just manner through a defensive war, and it is our intention to keep it" (Terreblanche, 2002:154).

The argument propounded by Van Riebeeck would stand as justification for the process of violent land seizure that was to ensue and would lead to the formation of South Africa. The argument is no doubt predicated on the divine right of conquest as alluded to above. According to Terreblanche (2002:179), the British would begin the process of taking over the Cape from the Dutch in 1795 for the purpose of safeguarding their trade with India. The Netherlands was at the time an outpost of the French during the Napoleonic wars and the British sought to mitigate the same happening to the Cape. Britain would take control of the Cape from the Netherlands in 1806. It would also encourage British immigration to the territory for purposes similar to that of their predecessors the Dutch (Johns & Gerhart, 2016:3). However, Terreblanche (2002:179) notes that the Cape would be in a transitional period between 1795 and 1814 as control would alternate between the Dutch and the British until 1814 when the Dutch ceded it to Britain.

South Africa is then a by-product of the above outlined colonial processes by the Dutch and the British who would later come to a clash over the discovery of minerals and fought to maintain dominance over one another against the indigenous populations. Mafeje (1986:105) asserts:

The conquest of African societies in South Africa was carried out by both the Boers (later Afrikaners) and the British for different reasons. Having escaped from British colonialism in the Cape, the Boers were looking for a free territory to settle. There was vacant land but no free territory. Whatever territory they traversed or coveted turned out to be the domain of one African tribe or another. Because they would not accept the authority of the African tribes in the way any supplicant group was expected, the Boers had to live by the gun which ultimately delivered to them the Boer Republics of the Orange Free State and the Transvaal. It was here that they carved out big estates (averaging 3 000 morgen each) for themselves and set up independent administrations. For all this, they had neither labour nor capital. For the latter, they

turned to the vanquished Africans whom they used as labour tenants (there was forced labour as well but fear of British intervention kept it in check).

Such was the conquest of the indigenous peoples in the unjust wars of colonisation. Autshumao's question to Van Riebeeck and his men adduces the indigenous peoples understanding of their sovereign right to their territory which was now under siege from the Dutch. Van Riebeeck alluded that they had won the territory in a defensive war and they had intentions to keep it. However, a question would arise as to what defensive war was Van Riebeeck waging and what justified it. A simple answer to the question is that this was the right of conquest which was bequeathed to European nations since the fifteenth century and would be the basis for the justification of the colonisation of the world. The territory that was to become South Africa was indeed victim to such power machinations and the colonialist would ensure the negation of the existence of the indigenous people.

The issue of colonial conquest in South Africa has been one that was elided by historical accounts as well as public discourses following the transition in 1994. That may be attributable to the fact that the liberation movements that centred conquest in their articulation of what the problem in South Africa were marginal in the years leading to the transition and the ANC was the designate negotiator on behalf of those victim to the apartheid system of oppression. The negotiated settlement that resulted allowed Africans to participate in the electoral processes, among other things, to which they were heretofore excluded. I have outlined above the predilection of the SANNC and ANC as being comprised of the African middle classes who were seeking inclusion in the body polity that is the Union of South Africa as was the Cape franchise. However, with the advent of the ANC youth league in 1944 an Africanist nationalist vision was forged which would be later betrayed with the adoption of the Freedom Charter in 1955 by the Congress Alliance to which the ANC was a part among the white Congress of Democrats and the Indian congresses.

The Africanists within the ANC at the time objected to the first clause of the Freedom Charter which declared that "South Africa belongs to all who live in it Black and White"<sup>14</sup>. The Africanists objections were predicated on the historical experience of conquest that Africans had to endure and that their land cannot rightfully belong to both Black and White. However,

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<sup>14</sup><https://www.anc1912.org.za/the-freedom-charter-2/>

historians constructing the liberation struggle narrative exalt the Freedom Charter while disparaging the black radical tradition (Lebelo, 2015: NP)<sup>15</sup>. Moreover, the transition to a post-apartheid South Africa in 1994 and the adoption of the constitution in 1996 was centred on the freedom charter and the values of multiracialism it promotes under the guise of non-racialism (Dladla, 2017)<sup>16</sup>. No doubt the post-apartheid South African society defined itself as a rainbow nation (Thawane, 2009: 1), which emphasised reconciliation and “inclusive humanity which transcends the barriers of race, class, tribe, ethnicity, religion and other forms of sectarianism”.

According to Sing (2014:131) South Africa’s transition in 1994 from apartheid to democracy is one of the most analysed, lauded and respected political transitions largely because of its presumed peaceful nature with emphasis on political dialogue and negotiation. However, Sing (2014:132) argues that there were numerous issues of a structural and systematic nature that were not adequately addressed during the years of transition from apartheid to post-apartheid. This then would lead to a re-emergence and politicisation of race betraying the spirit and commitment to non-racialism that can be characterised as a colour-blind. Moreover, the rising levels of poverty and income inequality would also bring the race question into focus.

It is against this backdrop that the students’ movement of 2015 would find meaning and articulation. According to Sheperd (2022: NP)<sup>17</sup> on the 09<sup>th</sup> of March 2015 at the University of Cape Town (UCT) protest action ensued centred around the removal of the colonialist statue of Cecil John Rhodes<sup>18</sup> located at the main pedestrian entrance to the university’s upper campus. Chumani Maxwele in an act of boldness threw human faeces<sup>19</sup> at the statue of

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<sup>15</sup><https://mg.co.za/article/2015-07-02-imprisoned-by-the-freedom-charter/>

<sup>16</sup> According to Dladla (2017: 104) “The dominant conception of non-racialism which appears to prevail in South Africa is conceptually akin to what philosopher of race Theo David Goldberg (2009) has called anti-racialism (which is to be distinguished from anti-racism). Anti-racialism in effect gives rise to a phenomenon which has been called ‘racism without races’ (Balibar 2015)”

<sup>17</sup><https://items.ssrc.org/where-heritage-meets-violence/rhodesmustfall-the-university-of-cape-town-and-the-deep-inscription-of-colonialism/>

<sup>18</sup>Cecil John Rhodes was a notorious British imperialist and white supremacist who served as prime minister of the Cape Colony, which covered parts of today’s South Africa, from 1890 until 1896 and repeatedly referred to Africa’s native population as ‘barbaric,’ exploited Black people as cheap labour, and extracted wealth from their land for the British empire and himself through the British South African Company (Cabe, 2023: Internet). <https://newint.org/features/2023/08/21/how-rhodes-must-fall-amplified-calls-decolonize>

<sup>19</sup>Shepard (2022) and Cabe (2023) trace the history of such protests to the service delivery protests that characterise the Western cape poor particularly those located in informal settlements.

Rhodes and signalled the beginning of the month-long protests then at the University of Cape Town organised around the hashtag RhodesMustFall, Shepard (2022:NP) continues:

Maxwele's action led to a month-long protest and the formation of the student-led social movement #RhodesMustFall (#RMF). Initially calling for the removal of the Rhodes statue, *the protest broadened to encompass the legacies of colonialism and institutional racism at the University of Cape Town, and the call to decolonize higher education*. In the weeks that followed, #RMF protesters marched, picketed, and held mass meetings. Numerous protest actions focused on the statue itself, which was graffitied, covered over with black plastic bags, and became the site of spontaneous acts of defiance. On March 20, #RMF activists occupied the main administrative building of the university—Bremner Building—the site of the vice chancellor's office, which they renamed Azania House. On March 27, the university's Senate voted in favour of removing the Rhodes statue. A few days later, the Council of the University of Cape Town, the university's highest decision-making body, confirmed this decision. Finally, on April 9, 2015, exactly one month after Maxwele's poo protest, the statue was removed from the university campus. (My emphasis)

The protests at the UCT reverberated in campuses around the country notably at Rhodes University<sup>20</sup> at the then Grahamstown also experienced similar kind of protest action which sought to have the university renamed as well as targeting colonial memorabilia on campus as well as curriculum (Adebajo, 2020:19). The protest also extended to Stellenbosch University where it articulated itself through the protest against Afrikaans as a medium of instruction as well as the ingrained Afrikanerdom at that institution. Several other institutions including North West University would follow similar protest action targeting Afrikaans and its historical legacies. It is important to note that the impact of the protests did not only resonate with those sections of the populations at institutions of higher learning but also had a resounding influence on South African society as a whole. This is signified by many other

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<sup>20</sup>Cabe (2023, Internet) in an interview with the historian Zikhona Valela from the institution had the following to express: "Our university had the name Rhodes,'what does it mean to find yourself in this historical moment in a landmark that bears this person's name? Students were thinking: What does the decolonization conversation mean for such a university".

similar protests throughout the country which targeted colonial statues as well the living legacies of colonialism in South African society<sup>21</sup>.

These struggles challenged the core narratives that have held South African society together since the transition from apartheid to post-apartheid in 1994 and revealed the colonial continuities despite claims of freedom. No doubt such unravelling can be attributed to the rising economic inequalities that are representative of a disproportionate distribution of resources and had become the rallying point of the then newly emerged Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) in 2013. Although discourses on land restoration and economic sovereignty were common cause among the Africanists and the Black Consciousness Movement, however, in the years leading to the transition and beyond they were marginal. It was in such a context and political climate that the ANC Youth League led by Julius Sello Malema as president came to articulate the message of economic freedom and land restoration<sup>22</sup> in 2010. Malema would be expelled from the ANC in 2012<sup>23</sup> following disciplinary action by the party after Malema pronounced that there should be regime change in Botswana. This then led to the formation of the EFF in 2013 as a political party grounded in the politics of protest which articulated a vision for economic emancipation as well as land restoration.

The #RhodesMustFall movement signified a deepening of a critique against South Africa and the continued colonial structure of South African society to which the EFF were alluding and the #RhodesMustFall fortified by invoking an Azanian tradition<sup>24</sup> of struggle called into question the existence of South Africa. However, such a predilection would soon be undermined with the rise of the #FeesMustFall movement that gained prominence late 2015<sup>25</sup> and reframed the discussion away from the symbolic ideological one, to one about fees. While important the issue concerning fee hikes and financial exclusions by universities at the time served to overshadow the important debate about colonial continuities in South Africa. However, the discourse concerning decolonisation that was articulated by the

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<sup>21</sup><https://www.gov.za/news/media-statements/minister-nathi-mthethwa-defacing-and-violent-removal-colonial-statues-08-apr>

<sup>22</sup><https://www.politicsweb.co.za/politics/why-we-must-nationalise-the-mines--ancyl>

<sup>23</sup><https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-17215155>

<sup>24</sup>According to Sheperd (2022,Internet) “#RMF activists occupied the main administrative building of the university—Bremner Building—the site of the vice chancellor’s office, which they renamed Azania House”

<sup>25</sup>[https://issuu.com/witsalumnirelations/docs/witsreview\\_december\\_2016\\_issuu/s/15977](https://issuu.com/witsalumnirelations/docs/witsreview_december_2016_issuu/s/15977)

#RhodesMustFall movement would continue to inspire public and intellectual discourses that called for radical change in South African society and the academy.

### **1.3 Resistance Politics in South Africa and Contending Historiographies**

*The settler and the native are old acquaintances. In fact, the settler is right when he speaks of knowing "them" well. For it is the settler who has brought the native into existence and who perpetuates his existence. The settler owes the fact of his very existence, that is to say, his property, to the colonial system (Fanon, 1963:35).*

The resistance to settler colonialism is old as settler colonialism itself. This is to say that the people conquered in the unjust wars of colonisation did resist the colonial incursion but were ultimately defeated by the might of the European invaders. As we have noted above, the early resistance by the Khoikhoi against the Portuguese, as well as their encounter with the Dutch, who emerged victorious against them. The Dutch lost their control of the Cape at the behest of the British which would lead to a series of confrontations between them which would result in the Groottrek, the establishment of the Orange Free State and the Transvaal as well as the Anglo-Boer wars. The native populations were displaced from their lands and would soon be subject of the two contending colonial forces, which they came to resist. However, the colonialists prevailed over any such attempts by native populations at resistance; this is duly attributable to the military might of the colonial forces. The Dutch and the British had different approaches to the native question with the Dutch leaning towards an eliminativist approach while the British approach would be assimilationist. This is evinced by the repression of the natives in the Boer republics and an attempt at extending the franchise to the natives in the Cape.

In the Cape Colony Blacks with property and with a European education were permitted to partake in the political processes albeit with limits (Lodge, 1983:1). The Cape model had Africans hoping that it could be extended throughout the country as a model that would allow African middle class participation in the political issues of the day. It is important to note that the African middle classes of the time made a concerted effort not to be regarded as the lower class of Africans who had no access to education or who were at odds with the European system that was imposed on them. African assimilation into the European order of things was

the preoccupation of those that came to acquire the middle class status which has since become the symbol of African resistance by colonial historiographies. According to Gehart (1978:39) organised African politics were centred around the activities and sentiments of the African middle classes who were themselves byproducts of mission training and desired integration. This in turn would be the norm of organised African politics.

Repelled by the developments following the second Anglo-Boer war, signalled by the signing of the Treaty of Vereeniging in 1902, and the British commitment to building white unity, represented by the Union Act of 1909 which advocated for the establishment of the Union of South Africa which was achieved in 1910, the African middle classes felt betrayed by the British and sought to reconstitute themselves as a voice of the Africans as a whole. This was the backdrop of the formation in 1912 of the South African Native National Congress (SANNC) by “prominent African citizens: professional men, chieftains, ministers, teachers, clerks, interpreters, landholders, businessman, journalists, estate agents, building contractors and labour agents”(Lodge, 1983:1). Although Lodge (1983:1) concedes that it was not the first African political formation it did however signify a break with past political practices particularly the Cape tradition in that it was Africans voicing their views themselves as opposed to through intermediaries as was the practice in the Cape.

According to Gerhart (1978:12) the earliest manifestation of African nationalism in South Africa can be traced to the founding of the African National Congress although its idea of nationalism was not the commonly understood as seeking to create a state based on their prospective nation. The ANC sought accommodation of Africans within the established white state in a similar vein to the qualified Cape Franchise of the earlier period of trusteeship and liberalism. The orthodox articulation of African nationalism defines the territory mapped as South Africa as a country belonging to Africans by right of first possession and constitute a great majority of the population. In this orthodox rendering the white man is a “guest in the African house and should be permitted to remain in Africa only on terms set down by his indigenous hosts” (Gerhart, 1978:12).

Such a representation of the SANNC as an African nationalist movement and as the first political formation representing African people misconstrues African nationalism and erases the contributions of those Africans who were not middle class and refused assimilation as having articulated a resistance politics. This is to say the accentuation of the formation of the

Congress elides struggles by Africans that did not accede to the European order of things. Such an accentuation places the congress tradition and its politics as the norm of African articulations of resistance and orthodox African nationalism and its predilections as deviant. Gail Gerhart's (1978:39) characterisation of the 'realists' and 'rebels' performs this function as it places the trusteeship model that was practised in the Cape as the norm of African responses. According to Gerhart (1978:40), those educated Africans:

Considered it *realistic* to think of Africans as a whole progressing gradually and in step-by-step evolutionary stages, and they saw no reason to question the right of the white "trustees" to define the criteria of merit by which African progress was to be measured. To accept this conception of change was simply to accept "*reality*"; to wish for the rapid Europeanization of all Africans or for the instant acceptance of racial equality by whites was simply to wish for the impossible. Politics too, for the African realist, was the art of the possible. (My emphasis)

The 'rebel', on the other hand, rejected the standards of the white man and any collaboration or participation in his processes to achieve the desired freedom. According to Gerhart (1978:41), in the 'rebel' tradition, an element of the peasant's perspective was present: South Africa was the black man's land in which the white was an unwelcome intruder". It is interesting that this tradition of struggle is represented as an aberration to a supposed norm that is particularly constituted of middle classes. The so-called peasant classes constituted the majority of the population and did wage resistance against colonial imposition in ways that have been elided by colonial historiographical representation as millenarian or apocalyptic<sup>26</sup>. Such representations take away the inherently political posture of such articulations, although expressed in a medium that may be considered 'religious'. The Garvey movement of the 1920's-40's as represented by Pirio (1987) and Vinson (2012, 7) often articulated itself through the prism of religion, or what has been characterised as prophetic Christianity. However, according to Gerhart (1978: 26), scholars of South African history "dispute whether African independent churches should be considered manifestations of proto-nationalism or of an escapist tendency among Africans".

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<sup>26</sup>Gerhart (1978:14) describes what she terms FanonescueApocalypse thus: "anti-colonial revolution in which the colonized seek to put into practice, through cathartic violence, the precept that "the last shall be first and first last."

Such a rendering of African political expression as escapist fails to understand the Ethiopianist inspirations of African nationalism as described by Shepperson <sup>27</sup>(1953:9). According to Shepperson (1953:9), Ethiopianism in South Africa dates back to the 1870s and earlier. The movement was prompted by the Colour bar in white religious establishments that alienated the growing populations of educated Africans who were ambitious about their prospects and inhibited nationalist inspirations. These educated Africans achieved some partial independence from the white religious establishments with the establishment of their independent churches. Nehemiah Tile who was a Tembu Wesleyan minister facilitated the first breakaway from white religious establishments, the Wesleyans, and established a tribal church in 1884. The Ethiopian Church was established in 1892 and symbolised a peak in the independent church movements (Shepperson, 1953:9).

Similar developments of independent African churches with an Ethiopianist inclination were occurring in the Natal area and would be the bedrock of the Bhambatha rebellion of 1906<sup>28</sup>. No doubt these movements were separatist in posture and would become fertile ground for the Garvey movement which became prominent in the 1920's. The Garvey movement flourished on South African soil and was reported to have the second largest number of branches throughout the world. The Jamaican born, American based, Marcus Garvey founded the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) which was "the largest black-led movement in world history, with over a thousand divisions in forty-three countries and more than a million followers around the globe"(Vinson, 2012:1).

However, the movement would adapt itself to local circumstances and its liberatory potentialities would stretch with local figures. One such leader of the indigenised Garvey movement was Wellington Buthelezi, who was born in Natal but pretended to be of American origin, and is also a medical practitioner. Dr Wellington as he came to be known would soon become the most prominent leader of the Garvey movement in South Africa with his influence reaching the Transkei and beyond (Vinson, 2012:108). According to Vinson (ibid) Wellington was successful in mobilising his followers because his prophecies were framed

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<sup>27</sup>Shepperson, G. (1953). *Ethiopianism and African Nationalism. Phylon (1940-1956), 14(1), 9.*

<sup>28</sup><https://www.sahistory.org.za/article/aftermath-bhambatha-rebellion-1906>

along African religious conceptions of the colonial state. Africans thus believed that Europeans “possessed powerful materials for sorcery... all *ubuthi* (magical substances)”: “They are the real *amagqwira*[witches]. Wellington, a respected herbalist with reputed magical powers, promised that the *impundulu* (supernatural power) of African Americans would overwhelm the Europeans (Vinson, 2012:108).

Such powerful conceptions would have reverberating effects in fuelling African resistance to colonial domination, yet historians would characterise such articulations as escapist. The message articulated by Wellington and the South African branches of the UNIA was self-reliance. It was championed through the setting up and control of independent African churches and schools. According to Vinson (ibid) Wellington’s followers established about 180 schools and 200 independent churches. Wellington established his own African Christian Church and preached a liberationist Christianity, and most of his followers pledged allegiance to Marcus Garvey and not the South African government, which they saw as a white institution reaffirming white supremacy and conditioning Africans for subservience. The influence of the movement would continue long after the Garvey movement ceased to exist in the United States and would be the philosophy that was behind the Bullhoek massacre<sup>29</sup>. Edward Zibi who served as deputy to Wellington Eastern Cape UNIA division was also designated as headman. Zibi was dedicated to UNIA activities and had dedicated his kraal as a meeting place for UNIA meetings and programs and defied colonial authorities (Vinson, 2012:120). The message of Dr Wellington was so powerful that in the Herschel district of the Eastern Cape a group of women known as *Amafelandawonye*(loosely translated as those who die in one place) organised boycotts of government schools and proceeded to form about eighteen separatist schools (Vinson, 2012:108).

That these movements are elided in South African historiography speaks of the marginality of African philosophy and historiography. Delpont (2021:137) postulates that articulations of African Nationalism by predominant historians of the conqueror South Africa are not able to apprehend the inherent liberatory element within African Nationalism. For Delpont (ibid) “conqueror South Africa, and the historiography that supports it, is one in which the fact of conquest and title to territory is obfuscated”. According to Dladla (2018:425) the obfuscation

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<sup>29</sup><https://www.sahistory.org.za/article/history-bulhoek-massacre>

of the conquest of the indigenous people in the unjust wars of colonisation was done through the representation of the conquered in the history as those 'without reason and history', those 'without land', without rights, without freedom. On the other hand the conqueror are represented as those with "surplus reason" which confers upon them the "title of landowners, rights bearers and exclusive bearers of freedom".

A reading of South African history from an African philosophical position illustrates that the " 'de-situation' and displacement, as well as the de-historicisation of the indigenous peoples conquered in the unjust wars of colonisation, were essential to the invention of its complementary fiction of whiteness" (Dladla, *ibid*). The creation of South Africa as a white man's country is predicated on the disfigurement of the history of the indigenous peoples conquered in the unjust wars of colonisation. Dladla (2018: 427-435) delineates the different schools of South African historiography thus: (1) The conservative school, (2) The English pluralist-liberal school and (3) the neo-Marxist/radical school.

The conservative school is characterised by a mobilisation of Afrikaner nationalist sentiments in history writing. According to Dladla (*ibid*) the Afrikaner interpretation of history was of a struggle for survival amidst adversities, which includes surviving a hostile environment inhabited by 'dangerous savages'. Moreover, the Afrikaner's struggle for survival would also be shaped by the antagonist relationship with the British which began their occupation of the land by 1806 and would inspire their struggle for self-determination. For Dladla (*ibid*) the Afrikaners developed an Anglophobia that would play a central role in their historical representations as the English were also understood to be oppressors and enemies who are also sympathisers with the savage blacks. The conservative school unquestioningly accepts the right of conquest and treats the settler occupation as a natural occurrence and justifiable because the territory was supposedly unoccupied. Other versions also from this school represent the Bantu and the Dutch as having arrived at the same time with the objective of displacing the Khoikhoi who are conceived to be the indigenous people (Roux, 1948:1).

The English liberal-pluralist school of historiographers were led by Eric Walker, WM Macmillan and CW de Kiewiet (Dladla, 2018:431). According to Dladla (2018:432) "these liberal historians were followed by a generation of historians as well as other social scientists who 'consolidated this liberal-pluralist orthodoxy of the period between approximately the 1920s and the 1970s'; among those he counts Edgar Brookes, Leonard Thomson, Leo

Marquard, Monica Wilson and Rodney Davenport". The liberal pluralists posited themselves against the conservatives<sup>30</sup> as having better means to resolve the native question but they too did not question the existence of whites and blacks in this territory which is a consequence of conquest. According to Dladla (2018:432) while the conservative tradition maintained that black people are not equally human as the Europeans and are incapable of achieving full humanity which justified their subjugation and segregation the liberals on the other hand are credited with "bringing African people on to the stage of 'History'". According to Dladla (ibid) the liberals believed that black people could in fact attain full humanity if they could assimilate culturally and religiously. Unlike the conservatives who conceived of black inferiority as a biological reality the liberals conceived of it as a civilisational problem that could be ameliorated if blacks could attain some level of western education and if they could become Christians. Liberal historiography therefore was preoccupied with the inclusion of black people into a historicity and sociality already predetermined.

The neo-Marxist/Radical school are that school of South African history that deployed the Marxist tools of analysis in an attempt to understand the fundamental problem in South Africa. They privileged a class analysis in the articulation of the unfolding of South African history and that the primary problem in South African was capitalism and not white domination (Magubane, 2007:271). Some were members of the Communist Party of South Africa like Eddie Roux and the Simonds. They also presumed a radical posture as a critique of liberal historiography as well as the conservative school. However, they were also unified with these schools insofar as they also participated in the downplaying of conquest as the foundational problem with South African society.

#### **1.4 Against Decoloniality**

The discourse on decolonisation particularly in the hands of the Decoloniality School, has tended to take a life of its own instead of effecting the undoing of colonial traditions and an engagement with the varying histories of colonialism and African responses to it (Nyoka, 2020; Adesina, 2022). The discourse on decolonisation prompted by the students protests would soon give prominence to the Decoloniality School as represented by Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013, 2015) and institutionally backed by the University of South Africa's (UNISA)

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<sup>30</sup> One of the central political and ethical implications of their work, even before the beginning of infamous apartheid, was that the Afrikaners were to blame for the racial problems of South Africa (Dladla, ibid).

African Decoloniality Research Network (ADERN) which organised its first summer school in January 2014. According to Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2015:488):

Decoloniality is different from anti-colonialism that dominated the 20th century. Anticolonialism was largely an elite-driven project in which elites mobilized peasants and workers as foot soldiers in a struggle to replace direct colonial administrators. African anti-colonial struggles of the 20th century did not produce a genuine 'postcolonial' dispensation... Decoloniality names a cocktail of insurrectionist-liberatory projects and critical thoughts emerging from the ex-colonized epistemic sites like Latin America, Caribbean, Asia, Middle East, and Africa; it seeks to make sense of the position of ex-colonized peoples within the Euro-America-centric, Christian-centric, patriarchal, capitalist, hetero-normative, racially hierarchized, and modern world system that came into being in the 15th century.

Such a characterisation of anticolonial movements as elitist formations fails to capture the intricate history of the resistance to colonisation led by African revolutionary leaders. Moreover, the "cocktail" that decoloniality claims to be privileges other experiences and conceptualisations of colonialism while the African experience and conceptualisation is relegated into insignificance while appropriating some elements from it. For instance, Ndlovu-Gatsheni (ibid) presents Decoloniality as birthed from the realisation that the modern world was coterminous with colonialism and this was also facilitated by pedagogies and epistemologies that are alienating to Africans. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (ibid) presents decoloniality as premised on three concepts or units of analysis: The coloniality of power, the coloniality of knowledge and the coloniality of being. The coloniality of power characterises the world as constructed based on "Euro-American centric, Christian-centric, patriarchal, capitalist, hetero-normative, hegemonic asymmetrical and modern power structure" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, ibid). The coloniality of knowledge focuses on teasing out epistemological issues particularly related to knowledge production while the coloniality of being concerns itself with issues of human ontology and subjectivity.

What decoloniality presents as a realisation here is not a new phenomenon to African intellectuals and statesman like Kwame Nkrumah whose 1965 *Neo-colonialism: The last stage of imperialism* provides a conceptualisation of what decoloniality claims as its novelty: "Decoloniality consistently reminds decolonial thinkers of 'the unfinished and incomplete

twentieth century dream of decolonization” (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, *Ibid*). Moreover, the units of analysis that it provides constitute a compartmentalisation of a colonial process that African intellectuals like Julius Nyerere, Kwame Nkrumah and Leopold Senghor already identified (Adesina, 2022:32). Indeed, the discourse on decoloniality flattens not only African intellectual contributions but also the actual histories and agency of African people by presenting as novel ideas which are constitutive of African liberatory thought.

According to Adesina (2022:33), the claim by decoloniality through its scholars that decolonisation is an illusion and that colonialism persists, disregards the contributions by African intellectuals on the nature of imperialism and neo-colonialism “without suggesting that both conditions are the same”. According to Adesina (2022: 32) while decoloniality claims affinity to Anibal Quijano’s revolutionary conceptions of the coloniality of power, however its North American instantiation is more a variation of European ‘critical theory’ located in the north American academy. According to Adesina (*ibid*) concepts like ‘the coloniality of being’ developed by Nelson Maldonado Torres is grounded in Martin Heidegger’s ontology and overstates the psycho-cultural effects of colonialism. Such a conception is totalising and is unable to make sense of resistance to colonialism. Undeniably, the discourse on decoloniality flattens not only African intellectual contributions but also the actual histories and agency of African people. Olufemi Taiwo (2022) also expresses doubt about the value of decoloniality in helping us understand our present reality. The issue again, is that it neglects African agency and is rooted in Latin American discourses which have found way through the American academy to dominate the discourse around decolonisation.

While philosophy and the social sciences in South Africa are a product of the colonial imagination, it is however important to distinguish between the variants on colonialism and how they articulated themselves in the formation of the Universities and their predilections. I deal with the histories and varying philosophical orientations in formal philosophy and in the social sciences broadly construed, in the next chapter (On South African Philosophy and Social science Practice). However, suffice it to say that there exist Dutch-Afrikaner institutions modelled in the continental European traditions and there exist British-English Universities modelled in the traditions of Oxford and Cambridge. The political-intellectual line of the Afrikaners was clearer in its views with regard to the indigenous conquered people that they

are in fact not human as they were and had to be exterminated<sup>31</sup>, or subdued to servile labour<sup>32</sup>.

The British on the other hand believed that although Africans are less human, through the acquisition of the master's language and way of doing things, it is possible to transcend the native's barbarity. It is the English that have had influence in what the historiography recognises as African political responses to colonialism, that would eventually accentuate the petitionist traditions (itself a product of British trusteeship) that would later see the formation of the ANC in 1912. What such a narrative is invested in advancing, is the view that what counts as political action is that which can be recognised as advancing a political goal so defined by colonial order. However, those movements that articulated themselves outside the colonial imagination are silenced.

Decoloniality projects itself as (and perhaps it has to) both a reflection on post-emancipation South Africa and a polemical engagement with preceding paradigms that generated and sustained the illusion of "the radical" in intellectual and academic discourses. In respect of the latter claim, decoloniality has to demonstrate its engagement with Marxism's<sup>33</sup> historical materialism as it manifests in and dominated intellectual and academic discourse in the quarter of a century following the Soweto insurrection. Marx's historical materialism adapted to South African conditions, was on the ascendancy during a historical moment when the struggle was led and inspired by the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) based on Steve Biko's Black Consciousness (BC) philosophy. Ideally, BC, as a variant of black radicalism, should have been the mainstream paradigm in the construction of and reflections on the social engineering programme, styled as Total Strategy. Designed to deepen and fortify white supremacy as a response to the threat of the "black peril" or "die swartgevaar" of the 1970s,

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<sup>31</sup>The logic of extermination emanating from their expansionist drive into the South African hinterland after their conflict with the British. As Patrick Wolfe (2006: 387) alludes "Land is life—or, at least, land is necessary for life. Thus, contests for land can be— indeed, often are—contests for life".

<sup>32</sup>The Great Trek was a landmark in an era of expansionism and bloodshed, of land seizure and labour coercion. Taking the form of a mass migration into the interior of southern Africa, this was a search by dissatisfied Dutch-speaking colonists for a promised land where they would be 'free and independent people' in a 'free and independent state'(South African History Online <https://www.sahistory.org.za/article/great-trek-1835-1846>).

<sup>33</sup>Marxism has had an impact in the African intellectual heritage and struggle for liberation, and has inspired a liberatory conception of history and society away from liberal and conservative mystifications (Nkrumah, 1970, Mboya, 1975, Magubane, 2007 & Soudien, 2019). This is to say African liberatory thought percolated through various instantiations of the Marxist thought. However, it has been with limitations particularly understanding Black/African realities (Robinson, 1983 & Mills, 2001). I deal with the impact of Marxism in Archie Mafeje's liberatory thought and how he was overcoming Marxist limitations in Chapter 4.

Total Strategy's thrust was the construction of an anti-black public sphere which should have prompted an academic and intellectual discourse framed in and inspired by a black radical tradition. Yet, it was Marxism-Revisionism<sup>34</sup> that seized the public intellectual and academic terrain to foster its brand of radicalism as a counter-orthodoxy to the white supremacist ideology of apartheid hegemony. In doing so, Marxism-Revisionism displaced liberalism as a critic of apartheid.

Marxism-Revisionism insisted historical relations of domination and subordination in South Africa have been an articulation of capital accumulation enabled by racial domination. So, racial domination was merely a function and an obfuscation of a more sinister exploitation of the labour and material resources of colonised societies. What is understood in black radical intellectual paradigm as moments of conquest and imposition of colonial regimes on indigenous African populations, is theorised as an articulation of modes of production. The collapse of independent African polities at the end of the 19th century and the accompanying mining revolution following the discovery of gold, have a bearing on relations of production and reproduction in moments of the colonial penetration of the South African hinterland. It is at this moment, Marxists-Revisionists argue, that Capitalist Relations of Production (CRP) determined and defined social relations (Beinart, 1987:307). Relations generated by the colonial domination of African polities was a reality that, with the development and evolution of capitalism, was secondary. Capitalist penetration of the South African hinterland is presented as having more fundamental and defining outcomes than the colonial imposition that enabled it (Keegan, 1982:195).

Given the above-discussed, if 20<sup>th</sup> century South Africa was developing as a model of a capitalist society in colonised settings, then Marxism-Revisionism was more than adequately equipped to construct a scientific reflection and critic of the system. Relations of colonial

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<sup>34</sup> What is referred to as Marxism revisionism here is what Bozzolli and Dillius (1990: 13) refer to as "a new, radical, South African historiography over the past twenty years". Magubane (2007:269) has made similar reference to this school as "Marxist", "Neo-Marxist", or "radical revisionist" school of history ... developed in the 1970s by students and professors, who had lost their role as interlocutors between the powers that be and helpless Africans". According to Magubane (2007:269) "Some of them, who had been members of the student organization, NUSAS, had felt the pain of rejection by the Black Consciousness Movement and its demand for black power". Indeed, the appropriation of a class based analysis and understanding of the contradictions in South African society was a direct response to the rejection by the Black consciousness movement of white participation in African politics and the primacy of race in understanding oppression (Barchiesi, 2018, Wilderson, 2008 & Ally, 2008).

domination and subordination were either ignored or, where acknowledged as a significant factor, relegated to the realm of the superstructure. In terms of this approach, in the last quarter of the 19th century and throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the core or primary contradiction in South Africa was only intelligible when explained as a tension between the owners of the means of production and disposed classes evolving into industrial working classes and rural labourers vainly trying to sustain a peasant existence. Capitalist Relations of Production were further accelerated and accentuated by the emergence of a manufacturing sector in the 1930s. This created an ever-growing number of urban working classes that Marxism-Revisionism has defined as the repositories of revolutionary agency.

The Second World War did not only accelerate the growth of South Africa's capitalist economy, but also consolidated South Africa's position as a maturing capitalist political economy. It is against this backdrop that in 1948, apartheid was instituted in what appeared to have been the accentuation of "race" to the realm of a primary contradiction. Despite the salience of "race" throughout apartheid's lifespan between 1948 and 1994, Marxism-Revisionism was unwavering in the "belief" that capitalist accumulation plus exploitation, and not colonial domination and subordination, was at the primary contradiction (Bozolli&Dilius, 1990:19). This understanding of apartheid South Africa informed the form and character of the liberation struggle meant to bring it to an end. Armed struggle undertaken by the African National Congress (ANC) targeted economic infrastructure to cripple big business and state functionaries because the state was understood as an instrument of capital accumulation. Reflections on the black experience in the period under consideration is not limited to the Marxist-Revisionist paradigm.

The history of Marxism and socialism in South Africa is a legacy of British immigrant workers in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century (Magubane, 2007; The Africanists, 1975). Marxism was itself a critic of Afrikaner nationalist and English liberal traditions and paradigms (Roux, 1948 & Simons, 1968). Later, it had to wrestle with African nationalism that characterised the "class of 1944"<sup>35</sup>. The "class of 1944" instituted an intellectual paradigm that was designed to counter

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<sup>35</sup> "A resolution at the ANC's annual conference in Kimberley in December 1943 had urged the establishment of a Congress Youth League... A core of organizers coalesced in early 1944, and with Dr. Xuma's cautious approval, the League was formally launched at a meeting held Easter Sunday, 1944, at the Bantu Men's Social Centre in Johannesburg" (Gerhart, 1978:50). Proponents of the league included: Anton Lembede (who became its first president), Ashby Mda, Jordan Ngubane, Oliver Tambo, Walter Sisulu and Nelson Mandela to mention just these (Karis and Johns (2015:31), Edgar and Msumza (eds) (1996:29), Gehart (1978:51).

Marxism-Revisionism as a Western construct. It paid scant attention to Afrikaner nationalist and English liberal paradigms in the formulation of a philosophical and intellectual evaluation of whiteness. The Africanist intellectual tradition associated with the class of 1944 sought to counter Marxism-Revisionism both as an intellectual paradigm and a blueprint for African emancipation. In their reflections on the totality of African responses to colonial domination, the class of 1944 relied on the literary accounts of late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup>-century chroniclers celebrating and romanticising the history of anti-colonial wars of resistance<sup>36</sup>. This is the tendency that Ndumiso Dladla (2021:1) characterises as the Azanian ‘faith’ within the broad church of the congress tradition. According to Dladla (2021:1) the name Azania was suggested by Nkrumah at the All African People’s Conference of 1958 which was duly attended by the Africanists, even before the founding of the Pan Africanist Congress of Azania (PAC). What can be characterised as the Azanian tendency in ‘South African’ history can be argued to have long existed from the earliest times of resistance by the indigenous people against the unjust wars of colonisation. It is a political tendency traceable throughout the history of ‘South Africa’ characterised by a principal ethical and political refusal to accommodate the new colonial reality.

According to Dladla (2018:3), Azanians understand the objective of the liberation struggle as “the recovery of unencumbered sovereign title to territory complemented by the attainment of civil and political rights”. What is characteristic of the Azanians is their insistence that the title to territory itself belongs exclusively to the indigenous people conquered in the unjust wars of colonisation against prevailing claims that it belongs to both conqueror and conquered or “black and white” as claimed by the Freedom Charter. This is one of the ways Tuck and Yang (2012:10) have identified as settler attempts to move into innocence by claiming settler nativism. In the context of South Africa such an attempt by settlers to move to innocence by claiming a native status has been theorised by the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA) and later South African Communist Party (SACP) theoreticians as “internal colonialism” or “Colonialism of a Special Type” simply because “the colonising and colonised nations occupy the same territory” (Hudson, 1986:6, Wolpe, 1975:105). In the United States “settlers locate or invent a long-lost ancestor who is

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<sup>36</sup> A.M Lembede, 1946. Policy of the Congress Youth League. *Inkundlayabantu*. In Edgar and Msumza (eds) (1996:138).

rumored to have had “Indian blood,” and they use this claim to mark themselves as blameless in the attempted eradications of Indigenous peoples”(Tuck and Yang 2012:10).

Modiri (2018:5) adumbrating Patrick Wolfe, proclaims that colonialism should not be understood as an event but a structure: “Conquest must be understood as an order of constitutive physical, structural and symbolic violence that serves as the foundation for the very coherence of South Africa as a territory, polity and community”. This centring of conquest can be mobilised, and is mobilised, as the basis for a counter-history and counter discourse. Yves Winter (2012: NP) demonstrates how stories of conquest can act as a counter history in that they challenge the official representations of the state and the law by characterising society as composed of the binary division of the conquerors and the conquered. Such a representation of the existing division in society can help contest the hegemonic historical representations and generate a critique of official history. This is to say stories of conquest can help develop a history from below that could justify rebellion and insubordination. Indeed, the Azanian tradition fortifies the stories of conquest as foundational to the creation of South Africa as a white man’s country that is exclusionary to the peoples conquered in the unjust wars of colonisation. Part of the preoccupation of the Azanian tradition has been to uncover the hidden histories of early African civilisation in South Africa so as to deal with the conquerors historiography that attempts to erase traces of African settlement in this territory to buttress the empty lands thesis which is a colonial justification for the conquest of the indigenous people as alluded by Van Riebeeck in his response to Authumao as outlined above that they have won the country through a defensive war and they intend to keep it. Decoloniality’s claim at radicalism fall short because of the lack of engagement with the ‘radical’ paradigm and its failure to elucidate the history of conquest in South Africa.

### **1.5 Conclusion**

This chapter has examined the colonial character that is South Africa and its negation of the indigenous people including their knowledges. That the university curriculum is still colonial speaks of the unchanged political situation albeit a transition to a post-apartheid South Africa in the early 1990’s which the students’ protests of 2015 organised under the banner #RHodesMustFall came to reveal. Moreover, the history of the coming into being of South Africa through conquest was elucidated. Also, the history of Black resistance and the

contending historiographical representations explored. Finally, the discourses around decolonisation were put into perspective given the colonial history and present that is South Africa. These discourses were understood as obfuscatory albeit presented in a language that assumes to be radical.

## CHAPTER 2: ON SOUTH AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY AND SOCIAL SCIENCE PRACTICE: A DIALECTIC OF MIMESIS AND EXTRAVERSION

### 2.1 Introduction

South African social science and philosophy practice is a by-product of the colonial conquest of the indigenous populations who occupied the territory from time immemorial in the unjust wars of colonisation. As a consequence, social science teaching and philosophy served as tools to justify and solidify the conquest and ensure settler futurity through a legitimisation of the conquest. An example can be easily given from the origins of the Study of Anthropology, as the study of the 'other', and the fabrication of history to provide justification for the injustice of conquest. The argument defended by this thesis is that South Africa is a colonial creation through the conquest of the indigenous peoples in the unjust wars of colonisation by both the Dutch and the English, which saw the territory which was to be named South Africa in 1910, divided into segments controlled by either English or Dutch. Moreover, this political situation also translated into the building of institutions of higher learning along colonial lines modelled according to the specifications of the mother country as a source of true culture and civilisation. The supposed transition to democratic rule in 1994 left the situation undisturbed in terms of the continuity of the colonial paradigm and practice, except for the demand for the inclusion of the previously excluded. Although there was a significant shift in terms of the demographic makeup of the institutions, there was nonetheless epistemological and ontological continuity with the supposed past until the events of protest in 2015 with the demand for the decolonisation of the curriculum and society. This chapter details the history of the practice of philosophy and the social sciences in the South African academy, unmasking their Eurocentric foundations and north-bounded<sup>37</sup> gaze. It is argued that the practice of these disciplines has been engaged in mimicry of what the European continental tradition has been preoccupied with in terms of the Afrikaner conqueror class and that of the Anglo-Saxon traditions, which is definitive of the English conqueror class. In turn, the discourses emanating from these disciplines continue to be extraverted and not reflective of the experience of the

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<sup>37</sup>Mogobe Ramose (2000) cautions against the tendency to deny Africa the right to choose from her experience how to interpret history and politics in the case of the African Renaissance as propounded by former President Thabo Mbeki. For Ramose (ibid), the appropriation of 'renaissance' is made possible by a north-bounded gaze that treats the West as a site for legitimisation. It is in this sense that we appropriate the conception of the northbound gaze as entailing the fixation with Europe as a site for justifiability.

position from which they are located. This is presented to demonstrate the relevance of engaging the African archive of knowledge and scholarly traditions as a basis to decolonise the disciplines and move them away from their north-bounded gaze. This shall be done by examining the history and colonial foundations of the disciplines from the Dutch-Afrikaner to the English traditions rooted in a combination of doubt, ignorance, and power. An assessment of the pre-2015 academic offerings and attempts post-2015 to decolonise shall be examined. And finally, an exposition of an engagement with the African archive, through the readings of Archie Mafeje and related African intellectuals, is elucidated as a liberatory practice of both philosophy and the broader social sciences. Such an approach speaks of the nature of African philosophy, which reflects the African situation and demand for justice.

## **2.2 A Short History of Philosophy in South Africa<sup>38</sup>**

In this section we detail the history of institutional philosophy in South Africa. Such a history is embedded in the history of the coming to being of such a polity, which we have discussed above as emanating from colonial conquest facilitated by both the Dutch and the English at the exclusion of the indigenous people. Likewise, institutionalised philosophy in South Africa begins with the transplantation of the traditions of the mother country, and so the Dutch-Afrikaner tradition would preoccupy itself with the traditions of continental Europe while the English were preoccupied with mimicking what their colleagues were doing in England. The underlying theme that defines institutional philosophy in South Africa is that of mimesis and complicity in the oppression of the indigenous peoples either by being explicitly on the side of power or by “staying out of politics” (More, 2004). In the years following the transition from formal apartheid in 1994, South African philosophy continued along the defined colonial lines, with the exception of UNISA, which offered courses in African philosophy. We have outlined the hegemonic character of whiteness in South African philosophy (Dladla, 2019) relying on the contributions by More (2014) and Dladla (2016) whose representations outline the complicity and neutrality with established power.

The origins of the Afrikaans institutionalized philosophical tradition begin with the theological school in Stellenbosch where there were course offerings in the history of philosophy (More, 2004:151). Following Stellenbosch there emerged numerous Afrikaans-medium universities

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<sup>38</sup>Some parts of this section are drawn from an article titled “Wrestling with the whiteness of South African philosophy: Ndumiso Dladla’s Here is a Table” by the author and appear here with some revision.

in the Orange Free State, Johannesburg and Pretoria properly drawing inspiration from “the cultural and religious traditions of the Afrikaner people with distinct Calvinist and neo-Fichtean philosophy especially at Potchefstroom University” (Dladla, 2019:25). Its proponents were students in European universities under luminary philosophers of the continental European tradition like “Schelling, Herder Fichte, Kant, Kierkegaard, Husserl, Abraham Kuyper, etc. – mostly German and Dutch philosophers” (Dladla, 2019:26). According to More (2004) the tradition that dominated most Afrikaans universities was influenced by a “Kuyperian neo-Calvinism combined with neo-Fichtean nationalism, both of which provided the bases for the apartheid system”<sup>39</sup>.

According to Dladla (2018:36) the growth and development of Afrikaner institutionalised philosophy comprised by a combination of protestant theology and continental philosophy and was buttressed by the power of the Dutch Reformed Church. According to Dladla (2018:36) conquest and racial domination was justifiable under the doctrine of predestination and divine election as a social ideology of Calvinism. The social ideology of Calvinism was buttressed by philosophical concepts from the continental tradition like the concept of nature from Fichte which was invoked to justify the ideology of racial separation and this would be explicitly defended by philosophers from most Afrikaans universities.

Moreover, other traditions within the continental tradition would be found useful and serviceable to justify the prevailing reality. On the other hand the tradition of the English medium universities was preoccupied with the British philosophical traditions, including empiricism and an investment in the philosophies of pioneer figures such as Locke, Hume, Mill, Russell etc., with an ideological orientation which was undoubtedly liberal as Dladla (2018) has so aptly demonstrated. R. F. A. Hoernlé was one of the major figures in the intellectual formulation of the English tradition and South African liberalism from the South African College, which was later renamed the University of Cape Town.

In his inaugural address as professor of philosophy at the University of the Witwatersrand (WITS) Hoernlé “stressed the significance of liberalism in a multiracial society such as South Africa which echoed a text he authored in 1939 with the title South African Native Policy and

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<sup>39</sup> According to More (ibid) One of the characteristic tenets of Calvinism is “the election by predestination of the few through grace to glorify God...and the damnation of the rest of mankind, also to the glory of God.”

the Liberal Spirit, argued for racial separation as opposed to assimilation or parallelism” (Dladla, 2018:41 and More, 2004:153). According to More (2004:154) at English speaking universities the philosophy curriculum became widely associated with analytic philosophy. The analytic philosophical approach to the study of philosophy was consistent with the liberal spirit and prided itself with neutrality with regards to the social and political issues of the day. For More (2004:154) the analytic conception of philosophy was that of a second order activity concerned with an analysis of concepts and providing clarity of the logic of concepts and their meanings. This is to say that social and political concerns are not central to the philosophical project but may concern the philosopher as a citizen. More (2004:154) adduces Ronald Aronson’s characterisation of these analytic philosophers as those “professionally indifferent to what goes on in South Africa today. Whatever their personal commitments, professionally they have no difficulty staying out of politics.”

Staying out of politics in a situation of oppression can be seen as complicity with that oppression. This is to say that the decision of the English-speaking whites to stay out of politics was, in effect, a political statement of being complicit with the prevailing oppressive order. The Nationalist Party government enjoyed enormous support from white society including those who postured as being opposed to established power. It is interesting to note that philosophy in the English-speaking universities was not part of the politicisation processes that were the case for the social sciences, particularly at Wits in the late 1970s to the 1980s. The determination to stay out of politics also relates to the suspension of the teaching of the history of philosophy in the Ox-Bridge tradition and the prevailing empiricism-positivist philosophy. The duty of philosophy was to be non-interventionist and primarily concerned with analysis.

Ramose (2002:4) laments the decontextualised character of the teaching of Western philosophy in South Africa and its aversion of the concrete historical experience of racism albeit the Western philosophers relied upon were contextual in their approach to social and philosophical enquiry. For Ramose (ibid):

The mimetic and the decontextualized character of the teaching of Western philosophy in Africa calls for a radical overhaul of the whole epistemological paradigm underlying the current educational system. To evade this duty is to condone racism—which is a form of injustice. The injustice is apparent in the recognition that there is

neither a moral basis nor pedagogical justification for the Western epistemological paradigm to retain primacy and dominance in decolonized Africa. The independent review and construction of knowledge in the light of the unfolding African experience is not only a vital goal—it is also an act of liberation.

No doubt for the descendants of the indigenous conquered people such instantiations of the outlined colonial philosophical traditions are bound to breed feelings of alienation. The lack of engagement with the prevailing issues and the abstraction that is prevalent in most philosophy offerings makes one wonder whether philosophy is about real issues at all and what is its value to present day society. As a black student of philosophy in the post-apartheid era at a previously Afrikaner institution that was undergoing transformation there was no sense that philosophy concerned itself with reality and was willing to learn or derive its subject matter from it. This is to say, a feeling of alienation was inevitable, which speaks to the undisturbed hegemony of whiteness, albeit claims to transformation. The students' protests of 2015 have been instrumental in putting at the centre the issues concerning African epistemologies and experiences as relevant for philosophising. However, it would appear that extraversion is the reigning order of the day with African experience interpreted as mere data while relying on European theoretical frameworks extending their concerns to address racial issues.

### **2.3 A Brief History of Social Science Education in South Africa**

That the social sciences were a handmaiden of colonialism is amplified by the form that they took in South Africa, given the two traditions outlined above, of the conquering nations that colonised what was to be South Africa: the Dutch and the English. While the two traditions attempted to demonstrate their unique points of departure as different from each other, they were unified with regard to the position of whiteness, which was solidified after the wars they engaged in and the creation of the Union of South Africa in relation to the conquered people. This section outlines the Dutch-Afrikaner tradition of the social sciences, particularly Anthropology/Social Anthropology/Volkekunde and its attendant historiography. Moreover, the English tradition will also be elucidated, particularly its attempts to distinguish it from the former and how its historiography ultimately consolidates the unity of whiteness under conquest. To do this, I follow Bangani Tabata (1959), Anjuli Webster (2017, 2018, 2020, 2021), John Sharp (1981), Shireen Ally (2005), Ndumiso Dladla (2018) and Nyoka (2012), who outline

at length the history of social science education in South Africa from both the Dutch and English traditions. This is done to demonstrate the epistemic consistencies between the disciplines organised under the banner of Social Sciences and how they facilitated the solidification of conquest and its invisibilisation. Ultimately, the point about the liberation of these disciplines from the dominant Eurocentric paradigm and conqueror posterity will be understood as necessary for the liberation of the broader society from white supremacy and European dominance, which was Archie Mafeje's predilection.

Indeed, the development of South African social sciences was predicated on the superiority of European existence, which justified the colonial project. However, the Dutch-Afrikaner approach can be described as genocidal in its impetus, seeking to wipe away the indigenous populations in pursuit of the idea of being a chosen people and this country their promised land. The English approach can be described as more of a civilising mission, seeking to upgrade the natives from their innate barbarism and introduce them to an advanced civilisation, which is Western/European. While the two approaches can be seen as radically incommensurable, with the Dutch-Afrikaner appearing more brutal and the English more humane, they were nonetheless committed to preserving the territory as a white man's land. This can be seen with the Treaty of Vereeniging, which led to the formation of the Union of South Africa under one unified white identity. It is interesting to note that the roots of non-racialism are to be traced in this process of Afrikaner-English reconciliation and the working towards establishing whiteness as a category for rulership over and above the native populations (Soske 2015 & Dladla 2017). Moreover, even the dreaded ideas of separate development, which came to be understood as 'apartheid', have been shown to originate on the English side of the spectrum pioneered by University of Witwatersrand philosopher Alfred Hoernle's *"South African Native Policy and the Liberal Spirit: Being the Phelps-Stokes Lectures, Delivered before the University of Cape Town, May, 1939"*. This goes to show that what may have appeared as radical differences between the two powers was a facade and that the two are unified in the project of white supremacism.

Sharp (1981) addresses the discrepancy in South African academic thinking in the social sciences about the perceived differences between colleagues in English-speaking universities and those in Afrikaans-speaking universities. The perceived differences may have been facilitated by the attachment that English-speaking universities had with prestigious

institutions abroad, mainly in Britain and America, at the time when there was international condemnation of apartheid, which was largely associated with Afrikaans. According to Sharp (1981:17) It is simplistic to conclude that volkekunde was a result of an Afrikaans outlook on life while social anthropology was the preserve of the English speakers. Volkekunde only began to be taught in the 1920s at one Afrikaans university spreading widely in the 1940s and before its establishment there were substantive overlaps in analyses between both English and Afrikaans speakers particularly those academics working from departments such as "Bantu Studies, African life and Languages" (Sharp, 1981:17).

The differences in approach between volkekunde and social anthropology for instance, can be attributed to the preoccupation by volkekundiges in bounded cultures, and ask the descriptive questions "how", "where", "when" and "what" rather than the sociological "why". The inability to address the 'why' question is attributable to the theoretical adherence by many volkekundiges to the stultifying concept of 'ethnos', which is said to be derived from the work of German anthropologists of the pre-war period.

Ethnos theory starts with the proposition that mankind is divided into volke (nations, peoples) and that each volke has its own particular culture, which may change but always remains authentic to the group in question. The entity comprising a group and its culture is an ethnos, which, viewed over time and in relation to its physical and social environment, forms a life-process within which individuals exist. An individual is born into a particular volk; its members are socialized into its attendant culture; therefore, they acquire a volkspersoonlikheid (a volk-personality). It follows that the most important influence on an individual's behaviour in any social context is his ethnos membership (Sharp 1981:18).

No doubt, this ideology was the bedrock of apartheid and facilitated the divisions and reduction of the native populations into tribes and orchestrated the creation of the various Bantustans and their designated leadership in the service of the ruling elite. Although such a project came to be resisted, it has had a lasting effect on the psyche of the conquered people. To be sure, it was the project of African nationalism that sought to repudiate this subdivision of the native populations into smaller groups for guaranteed control and sought to create a history of them as not indigenous to the land. According to Tabata (1959:3), before Bantu Education was introduced, Blacks were subjected to 'Native Education', which translated to

“inferior institutions, poor conditions and low budget allocations”. Nevertheless, according to Tabata (ibid), from secondary school to tertiary level, the syllabi were the same as those of Whites. However, the possibility of a few natives who managed to acquire university education “despite all the obstacles placed on their path” was a cause for concern for the racist regime. The antipathy was attributable to the anxiety that those students who had been introduced to “a system of education that eulogises the concepts of rights, equality and freedom-weapons that capitalism employed in its fight against feudalism” could be utilised to fight against the oppressive conditions they lived under. For South Africa, such an education threatened the maintenance of the myth of the White man’s superiority which had sustained it. Such ideas can be said to be definitive of the Afrikaner paradigm in the social sciences and sought to reify conquest against any concept of integration as can be attested to by University of Pretoria Head of Department of Volkekunde, PJ Coertze (as quoted by Sharp 1981:1):

It is necessary for us to take all measures to ensure the diversity and the separate development of different ethnic groups in the future. All factors which may still exist to foster a growing-together and an integration into a greater unity in this country must be systematically removed, otherwise we shall not avoid a process of fusion. The Whites still have a great calling in South Africa. There are millions of underdeveloped people of different ethnic groups in the country who are dependent on the help and guidance of the Whites. But we can only give this if we see to it ourselves that we do not descend into the sewer of integration.

While the Afrikaner paradigm can be described by its separatist postures, the English/Liberal paradigm distinguished itself by seeking to integrate the native into the Western civilisation with the necessary education and the adoption of European values as one’s own. While the roots of separatism can be traced to the English/liberal tradition, they nonetheless went along to pursue a policy of trusteeship, which was integrationist. Such attempts at integration were explicitly rejected by the African nationalists as well as the Black Consciousness Movement of Steve Biko. They have been described as the Friends of the Native (Dladla, 2015)<sup>40</sup>.

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<sup>40</sup> FRIENDS OF THE NATIVES: THE INCONVENIENT PAST OF SOUTH AFRICAN LIBERALISM BY EDDY MALOKA  
Reviewed by Ndumiso Dladla

According to Webster (2021:117), in 1921, Alfred Reginald Radcliffe-Brown was appointed as the first chair of Social Anthropology at the University of Cape Town following “a transnational correspondence between British anthropologist A. C. Haddon, General Jan Smuts, and Sir J. C. Beattie, principal of the University, and on the African continent”. The appointment was necessitated by the recognition of the British Commonwealth and the South African scientific community since the early days of the twentieth century<sup>41</sup>. The establishment of university departments in the colony had an impact on the intellectual developments in the metropole and across the empire. According to Webster (ibid) the developments of the founding of the School of African Life and Languages at the University of Cape Town (UCT) in 1922 which were followed by the establishment of the Bantu Studies Department at the University of the Witwatersrand in 1923 had an influence in the meteoric rise of British structural functionalism and the so-called Golden Age of ethnographic monographs across southern Africa. The mobility of White scholars across the global spheres of empire. Their mobility also meant the transposability of their methods, theories, and intellectual projects more broadly are representative of the reach of social science as a field of study to support administrative integration in the late colonial period.

Positivism and functionalism were the reigning paradigms at the turn of the twentieth century. They were to be deposed by the advent of Marxism-revisionism, which saw the English/Liberal tradition turn towards Marxism and oppositional intellectual practices to the apartheid state<sup>42</sup>. The disciplines in the Social Sciences produced different objects of study, in particular ‘the Other’ as “primitive and collectivist, the Same as advanced/civilised and individualist”. Nevertheless, these objects of study were informed by a Eurocentric Humanist conception of the world and being, which is consistent with the prevalent Hegelian conception of the evolution of World History with Europe as the centre and the Other represented as inferior, backward, irrational, and less than fully human (Nyoka 2012, &

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<sup>41</sup> According to Webster (2021:117) The South African Association for the Advancement of Science, founded in 1902, recognised ‘Anthropology and Ethnography’ as areas of research concern. By 1907, Henri Junod, Sir Leander Starr Jameson of the Jameson raid, and the Royal Anthropological Institute of England all advocated for the establishment of an ‘Ethnographical Bureau’

<sup>42</sup> According to Ally (2005) “This radical Marxist social science overtook the existing sociologies at English-medium universities, reconstructing the relationship between sociologists and the apartheid state. Forging direct and revolutionary links with the emerging social movements, sociologists became agents of revolutionary change. The vibrant and engaged ‘public sociology’ that resulted has garnered much valorising attention lately, inspiring Burawoy to a reflexive re-engagement with mainstream sociological practice in the United States”.

Webster 2021). According to Webster (2017), South African social sciences, as can be demonstrated by their historical development, were and continue to be a central mechanism of conqueror South Africa in facilitating the silences about the outstanding historical injustice of conquest. Shireen Ally (2005) notes that in the 1970s, sociologists in English-speaking universities' relationship to the political and social order, witnessed a change wherein intellectualism was overtaken and replaced by a dramatically different, oppositional Marxist sociology pioneered by luminaries like Harold Wolpe, Martin Legassick, and other historians who propelled a critique of apartheid through a thorough revisionist history of South Africa. According to Ally (2005:3) these intellectuals were ardently Marxist and theorised racial discrimination as byproduct to the machinations of the capitalist economy. Moreover, they were spread across the disciplines of the social sciences like history, political studies, anthropology, and sociology as researchers and teachers duly shaping the intellectual futures of their students to an embrace of Marxism introduced to them by their teachers.

In *Whose History? Whose Memory?* Magubane (2001) laments how these historical debates that are inspired by Marxism failed to engage the problem in South Africa from the position of the colonised. As Ally (2005) attests, such oppositional intellectualism was actually a reflection of power and not a rejection of it. To be sure, Black Consciousness provided a devastating critique of white liberalism, particularly white magnanimity and philanthropy, through participation in Black struggles and directing them in their favour. The crucible of Black consciousness lied not in its critique of apartheid but focused more on white participation in Black struggles, as can be attested in Steve Biko's essay *Black Souls in White Skins?* According to Franco Barchiesi (2016:154), structuralist Marxism and the trade unionism of the 1970s helped to polarise the 'race-class debate' into an opposition between liberal idealism and Marxist historical materialism. Barchiesi (ibid) laments the suppression of Biko's theorisation of antiblackness in this opposition between liberal idealism and Marxist historical materialism posed by the white Marxist intellectuals. According to Barchiesi (2016:154) these white Marxist intellectuals' influence was not limited to the classrooms which they taught but extended to their participation in labour unions as leaders. Their participation in these unions that were composed of majority black members gave these intellectuals an opportunity to utilise their knowledge of academic Marxism to help shape a

proletarian consciousness in these members and to help them understand the experience of racism as subsidiary to class machinations.

The impact of this moment and how it shaped the outcomes of the political struggles of the 1980s and the interpretation of the history as well as politics, is yet to be appreciated. Especially when coupled with the white communist takeover of the ANC in the 1950s and the reinterpretation of the historical problem and the silencing of conquest as expressed in the Freedom Charter of the Congress Alliance stating that 'South Africa belongs to all who live in it, Black and White'. It is interesting to note that the PAC slogan 'izwelethu' is a direct response to that document, which is the inspiration of the 1996 constitution of South Africa, which is a supreme law.

## **2.4 Conclusion**

This chapter has discussed the history of philosophy and social sciences in South Africa as articulating with the two traditions of colonialism in this country: the Dutch and the English. The mimetic nature of the practice of philosophy in South Africa was also discussed as expressive of a north-bound gaze, which we have identified as Eurocentrism. Although separate, the two traditions of both the Afrikaner- and the English-speaking were united in the conquest of the indigenous people in the unjust wars of colonialism. This is expressed with the formation of the Union of South Africa after the two Anglo-Boer wars, where the white identity was solidified as expressed in the first use of non-racialism. It has been argued that despite the transition to a post-apartheid, which is not post-conquest, there is much continuity with the supposed past than a break with it expressed through the commitment to Euro-American models of philosophical justifiability and aversion to our immediate reality. This chapter, through a historical exposition of the institutionalised practice of philosophy and the social sciences, was thus, an attempt at showing the Eurocentric and colonial character of South African philosophy and social science practice to display the need of liberating philosophy and the social sciences from the pervasive condition of the north-bound gaze.

## CHAPTER 3: AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY AS EMANCIPATORY PRACTICE

### 3.1 Introduction

African Philosophy has been marked by a resounding doubt concerning its possibility and meaning. Such doubt, I have argued elsewhere (Dladla 2021, 2017), is none other than the same that facilitated and justified the conquest and enslavement of African people on the basis of the doubt concerning their equal humanity to their enslavers and conquerors. Such a perspective would later be accentuated by philosophers like Hegel and the positing of Africa as existing outside history (Wolf, 1997). It is doubtful that a people that are lacking in rationality, and have no history, could ever have a philosophy. Even if that opportunity is 'granted', it would have to be constricted to a framework outside its own making to grant it some legitimacy and justifiability. Such has been the journey into the enquiry concerning African philosophy from Tempels' *Bantu Philosophy* to Hountondji's *African Philosophy: Myth and Reality*. The debate concerning the nature of African philosophy can be said to emanate from the liberationist drive post-independence that sought to assert African nationalism and Pan Africanism. African Philosophy according to Mungwini (2022:2), has an emancipative thrust and historical imperative which can be summed up in two words: "liberation and self-(re) discovery".

No doubt, this informs the critical negative project of African Philosophy as described by Tsenay Serequeberhan (1996) and Lucious Outlaw (1999). This chapter elucidates the emancipatory character of African philosophy through (1) an analysis of the question concerning its existence and implications, (2) the history of African philosophy since circa 1960's and the struggle against western epistemic domination and finally, (3) an outline of the liberatory approach to philosophical enquiry and an elucidation of African philosophy as a necessarily emancipative undertaking. Indeed, the culture and experience of African people should inform our theory-building initiatives to combat the extraversion that has defined African philosophical and social science enquiries. This was Archie Mafeje's predilection which situates his work and theoretical practice as African philosophy properly defined, as an emancipative practice away from Eurocentric domination and negation.

### 3.2 The Question Concerning the (non) Existence of African Philosophy<sup>43</sup>

The doubt about the possibility of an African philosophy is predicated on the supposed universality of western philosophy whose relevance is regarded timeless. In this way Africans have to prove whether their thoughts and lived experiences accrue to western philosophy's concerns and standards in order for those thoughts and experiences to be judged as having any elements of what can be called philosophy. The debate concerning the possibility of an African philosophy emerges from the already outlined context of western philosophy's assumed universality and would be an instantiation of the modern modality of African philosophy (Dladla, 2017, 2021). African philosophy in this way emerges as a philosophy born of the struggle against European supremacy in thought, and was inspired by the struggle against European supremacy in action that was the struggle for independence circa 1960s. In this section I proceed to outline the foundations of the question concerning the (non-) existence of African philosophy and the discourses it gave rise to. This is done to uncover the Eurocentric foundations of such questioning with pretences to a genuine philosophical undertaking. According to Ramose (2002:2) 'African Philosophy' continues to be contested, the term tends to revive innate scepticism on the one hand, and to stimulate ingrained condescension on the other. The sceptic is simply indifferent of any possibility, let alone the probability, of African philosophy while the condescendor is often ready to entertain the probability of African philosophy provided the judgement pertaining to the experience, knowledge, and truth about African philosophy is recognized as the sole and exclusive right of the condescendor.

The right through which the condescendor relies derives its support from material power designed to defend and sustain the superstition that Africa is incapable of producing knowledge. This is reminiscent of the unethical doubt concerning the full humanity of the African which were conceived in the western scheme of things as beings without reason. Ramose (2002:1) argues that this would begin Africa's struggle for reason, the struggle to self-determine and construct meaning and truth for oneself which was denied by colonialism. Indeed, beings who were considered to be below the human level of rationality cannot on their own be said to be capable of philosophising as Ramose (2002:2) continues:

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<sup>43</sup>Some parts of this section are taken from an article titled "African Philosophy? Questioning the unquestioned" from *Phronimon* by the author.

The self-appointed heirs to the right to reason have thus established themselves as the producers of all knowledge and the only holders of the truth. In these circumstances, the right to knowledge in relation to the African is measured and determined by passive as well as uncritical assimilation, coupled with faithful implementation of knowledge defined and produced from outside Africa.

Indeed, the question concerning the existence of an African philosophy does not originate from Africans themselves but can only be initiated from outside the parameters of African thought and experience. Doubt, as Ramose (2003) has shown, is impossible without its object, which one has to take as existing before one can proceed doubting which in relation to the doubt concerning the existence of African philosophy, one must acknowledge its existence first hence, his chosen title *I doubt therefore African Philosophy exists*. Furthermore, that such doubt persists is a function of what Mills (2007) identifies as white ignorance, which is the intentional cultivation and protection of ignorance, not a lack of knowledge but a practice of conditioned and intentioned not-knowing. In the case of South Africa the ignorance is conditioned by the dominance and the presupposed superiority of European and or Anglo-Saxon models of rationality.

Linda Martin Alcoff (2007:49) argues that Mills's argument on white ignorance is founded on a depiction of whiteness as a socio-political concept rather than it being an ethnic category. In this way whiteness carries with it a "cognitive model that precludes self-transparency and genuine understanding of all social realities," ensuring a "racial fantasyland, [or] a 'consensual hallucination,'" safeguarded by a "cognitive and moral economy psychically required for conquest, colonization, and enslavement" (Mills as cited by Alcoff, 2007:49). These insights by Mills and Alcoff helps us comprehend the South African situation in South Africa as a settler colonial society founded on conquest which is itself predicated on the doubt of the humanity of the indigenous people, including their epistemic practices. Alcoff (2007:49) elaborate that ignorance in this regard "is not primarily understood as a lack—a lack of motivation or experience as the result of social location—but as a substantive epistemic practice that differentiates the dominant group."

The establishment and maintainance of European settler dominance in African societies is a by-product of colonial conquest that was achieved through the violent seizure of territory and the resultant marginalisation of the indigenous people conquered in the unjust wars of

colonisation. Such violence found justification in the belief that Africans are lacking in terms of properly human qualities like rationality (Ramosé, 1999:5). The question concerning African philosophy's existence serves to reify the western paradigm as a site for legitimation as noted by Olabiyi Yai (1977:6) that the question [does an African philosophy exist?] "Is but an ill-disguised affirmation or, in other words, the affirmed negation of African Philosophy". According to Lucius Outlaw (2002:137), the queries pertaining to the existence of African philosophy might appear to be benign, rooted in the quest "to initiate and frame legitimate intellectual inquiry and discourse". However, for Outlaw (ibid) such enquiries "convey the putrid stench of a wretchedness that fertilised the soil from which they grow"<sup>44</sup>. As I have argued elsewhere (Dladla, 2017:3) the question concerning the existence of African philosophy contains with it a preconceived idea of what philosophy is and those capable of philosophising. This in turn questions the humanity of the African and forecloses any possibility of the African's prerogative to explain or define what philosophy might be from her perspective and meaningful experience, as others have done. Understood in this manner then, it can be said that the question seeks to coerce the African to respond to terms other than African ones deriving from a point of origin alien to Africa – and thus one necessarily extroverted in its stance.

According to Ramosé (2002:4), the question and debate concerning the existence of African philosophy "seems endless even though strong arguments have been advanced to demonstrate the actual existence of African philosophy". Ramosé (ibid) continues "Non-Africans are the principal initiators of this question. They remain the ones who continue to keep the question alive". The investment to keep the question alive speaks of the resounding and continuous racism Africa endures albeit the achievement of independence. This is to say that there is a continued doubt about the quality of the humanity of the African. According to Ramosé (ibid) the question is primarily about the ability of Africans to think philosophically. To put it another way, it seems unlikely that Africans are capable of philosophy, Africans could not handle the demands of philosophy if they were exposed to it. This is because Africans are inherently incapable of studying philosophy. In this way, the question takes an ontological

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<sup>44</sup>Outlaw (ibid) laments: "is there (such a thing as) an African philosophy?' 'Did (or do) traditional Africans have a philosophy?' 'Can there be (such a thing as) an African philosophy?' .....Why have such questions been asked? Why is the matter of African philosophy nothing more than a simple truism... who initiated such questioning? And to what end?"

character: it puts into question the humanity of the African. Thus, the query is another way of expressing the scepticism that Africans are fully and completely human. Most non-Africans still select the response that Africans are not fully and completely human.

Indeed, the question is premised on an established understanding of what constitutes a philosophy which is doubtful whether Africans are capable of such a critical reflexive rational venture. However, Ramose (2003:113) adducing St Augustine's methodic doubt demonstrates the existence and philosophy of Africans. According to Ramose (ibid) "Doubting then is impossible without at the same time acknowledging that the one who doubts, recognizes himself or herself as existing", and therefore doubt concerning the existence of an African philosophy have to first acknowledge its existence, hence Ramose's title "I doubt therefore African Philosophy exists". No doubt the question concerning the existence of African philosophy initiated a debate that gave birth to the modern modality of its articulation, arising as it does from a western vantage point although it is sometimes in opposition to it. However, for reasons political and historical it has been the case that African philosophy finds expression through a western medium and conceptual scheme. This is to say that the conditions of possibility for such questioning are western dominance of Africa that was initiated through conquest and the enslavement of African people. Such domination saw an undermining of African values and ways of being in the world which simultaneously meant an accentuation of western values.

According to Mudimbe (1988:185), African thought systems in the modern era can be said to be a product of the west precisely because of the West's dominance especially in the education sector where even the categories are western inventions. For Mudimbe (ibid) "The conceptual framework of African thinking has been both a mirror and a consequence of the experience of European hegemony<sup>45</sup>". It is European hegemony that prompted Africa's struggle for liberation, and the discourse about African philosophy draws inspiration from that struggle. As a result of that realisation the critical negative project of African philosophy becomes most important: to disentangle African ontological discourses from European

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<sup>45</sup>Mudimbe (ibid) adduces Gramsci's notion of hegemony thus: "the dominance of one social bloc over another, not simply by means of force or wealth, but by a social authority whose ultimate sanction and expression is a profound cultural supremacy".

conceptual binds and creating the conditions of possibility for an articulation of an African philosophy.

### **3.3 African Philosophy: a Short History**

Enquiries pertaining to social and historical experience cannot escape being part of society and history, in other words as preconditions or condition possibility that shapes such an enquiry, which thereby denies any possibility of them assuming an objective character. According to Modiri (2021:46), interventions in the study of the sociology and politics of knowledge have ultimately countered the notion of an objective, neutral, and perspective-less researcher. The idea of an objective, neutral and perspective-less is one which had sustained academic research in the social sciences which ultimately posited a distinction or distance between researchers and their research techniques and findings. For Modiri (ibid) It is no longer controversial to argue that race and whiteness (and class, gender, and other significant markers of social positioning) “are not merely objects of analysis and investigation but also structural factors that shape the approach, methods, conceptual vision, style, and conclusions of the researcher”.

This is to say that context is a vital element in the shaping of any enquiry pertaining to the reality as perceived by the researcher. That the teaching and practice of philosophy and the social sciences in South Africa relied, and still rely, on the uncritical assimilation of the western canon of thought and intellectual traditions “born from and shaped by the cultural perspective and historical experience of colonial and imperial Europe” speaks of an outstanding liberation of both philosophy and the social sciences, not to mention the academy at large, in South Africa (Modiri, 2021:46). The liberation of philosophy and the social sciences from Eurocentric conceptual binds, needs to begin with an assessment of the reality that colonial practices in philosophy and the social sciences sought to obscure in their preoccupation with mimicry and ignorance.

The short historical account of what I designate as African philosophy here is simply the modern modality of its expression particularly circa independence. This is to say precolonial African philosophy will not be the subject of discussion albeit its erasure from historical accounts of early instantiations of philosophical thought has been subject of dispute and informs the modern practice of African philosophy. The ahistorical rendering of African thought suggesting doubt about the existence of such sophistication in their culture and

civilisation has provoked discourses seeking to adumbrate the distinct character of African thought and its contribution to world civilisation (Hallen, 2009:7). Much of what has existed so far as African philosophy has been subject to constraints under a western derived paradigm of thought and has been the mission of African philosophers to disentangle themselves and their discourses from the ideological binds of the western episteme.

According to Mudimbe (1988:135) notions of 'primitive philosophy' which were propagated by anthropologists such as Levy-Bruhl in the 1920's-30's functioned to propagate a view of indigenous populations as radically different and underdeveloped than the west. The west is characterised as emanating from a history of intellectual and spiritual reasoning while the 'primitives' thinking and worldview was considered to be uncommon to that of the west. Mudimbe (ibid) elucidates that a theory of two distinct types of mentality then emerges which characterises the one as rational and "functioning according to principles of logic and enquiring into causal determinations and relations". The other mentality is characterised as prelogical and appears to be dominated by mysticism and collective representations. The Westerners effectively participate in logical thought while "such peoples as the Chinese included with Polynesians, Melanesians, Negroes, American Indians, and Australian Blackfellows" participated the prelogical and symbolic.

While not all who wrote on "primitive organisations" were disciples of Levy-Bruhl in positing a dichotomy between the primitive and the civilised, however all "were concerned with the discrepancy between Europe and the black continent and wished to describe this difference and possibly classify it into taxonomic grid of human cultures" (Mudimbe, 1988:136). Placide Tempels would be of similar persuasion duly committed to the civilising mission: "that of leading the black person (to whom he did not yet give the status of being a complete human) along the road to civilisation, knowledge, and true religion" (Mudimbe, Ibid). Therefore, his attempts at systematising the beliefs and thought systems of the Bantu were predicated on the belief that they were not capable of developing a systematic philosophical account themselves and it was thereby his duty to develop one for them. However, this would not be an altruistic vocation for the Bantu but for his European counterparts:

Folklore alone and superficial descriptions of strange customs cannot enable us to discover and understand primitive man. Ethnology, linguistics, psycho-analysis, jurisprudence, sociology and the study of religions are able to yield definitive results

only after the philosophy and the ontology of a primitive people have been thoroughly studied and written up. (Tempels, 1959:23, as cited in Mudimbe (1988: 138).

It is apparent that Tempels' audience is not the primitive societies he is writing about but colonial administrators and other missionaries (Deacon, 2002:104) for the purposes of civilising them and rendering them comprehensible for better management. By necessity Africans had to respond to such conceptions of their societies as primitive and in need of the civilising mission, and this provoked the debate that constituted the modern modality of African philosophy.

Mafeje (1992:4) outlines the challenges concerning the authenticity of African philosophical discourses. According to Mafeje (ibid), it is generally agreed that the foundational work that prompted modern African philosophical discourse is attributable to the work of Father Placide Tempels, *Bantu Philosophy* (1946) followed that of Alexis Kagame's *The Bantu-Rwandaise Philosophy of Being* (1953), which was a great inspiration to what became the first generation of philosophers<sup>46</sup>. The early anthropological works and perspectives negatively represented Africa and Africans, and it was a necessary duty for African intellectuals to contest their legitimacy. However, such contestations often tended to be vindicationist: "which is an extraverted attempt to justify ourselves to a purely European audience, and on terms best understood by them" (Mafeje, 2008:107, Hountondji 1983:37). However, the negative representations constitute an important aspect of African philosophy as a critical negative project (Mafeje 2008 & Serequeberhan 1997). According to Mafeje (1992:4), what remains to be resolved by this philosophical discourse, that is conditioned by the present, is "a) the philosophical status of ethno-philosophy or folk philosophy; b) the universality of the western criteria for judging whether or not a given discourse is philosophy; and c) whether there could be an equivalence between European and African philosophical status". Indeed, these are concerns of the modern practice of African philosophy given Henry Odera Oruka's (1981) characterisation of the four trends in African philosophy: ethno-philosophy, Sagacity, national-ideological, and professional philosophy.

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<sup>46</sup> What is important to note is that Mafeje is here referring to the modern instantiation of African philosophical articulation, conditioned as it is by the circumstances of a history of European colonialism and the institutions it gave rise to and the reigning episteme. Osuagwu (1999) has delineated an ancient history of philosophy in North Africa, Cheick Anta Diop (1974), Theophile Obenga (2004) also portray the early foundations and articulations of African philosophy.

Professional philosophy's dominance and institutional standing have tended to overshadow ethno-philosophy and philosophical sagacity, characterising them as collective philosophies and bereft of any philosophicality. Hountondji's (1983:34) critique of ethnophilosophy gave it a pejorative meaning while the idea of an ethnophilosophy was already articulated by Kwame Nkrumah in the 1940's in an unpublished Doctorate he did at the University of Pennsylvania (Ajei 2013:131). Moreover, Hountondji's (1983) uncomplimentary views on ethnophilosophy seem to have overshadowed Nkrumah's somewhat neutral use. However, Hountondji's (1983) pejorative understanding of the concept was a reaction to anthropological portrayals of African societies and beliefs as static. Hountondji's (1983) critique was directed at works like Father Placide Tempels' *Bantu Philosophy*, which he characterises as "ethnological works with philosophic pretensions" addressed to Europeans<sup>47</sup>.

Tempels' *Bantu Philosophy* can be read as a reaction to early anthropologists like Lucien Levy-Bruhl who sought to demonstrate the fundamental difference between the European conceptions of the world and what he designated as 'primitive mentality' attributable to non-Western peoples and cultures (Irele, 1983:12). However, the reaction by Tempels' is itself still beholden to the ethnological methods and its preconceptions which attributes to the Bantu people a conception of philosophy that is inferior to the western understanding (Hountondji, 1983:36). This is to say what Levy-Bruhl designated as 'primitive' Tempels substituted it with 'Bantu' and what the former designated as mentality the latter substituted it as philosophy, which leaves unaddressed the possibilities of African philosophy. According to Hountondji (1983:45) the discourse of the African ethnophilosopher is not curated for African audiences and was not produced for their benefit but for the Europeans. Thus, for Hountondji (ibid) African ethnophilosophy is a western expression of what African and Africans are. The African ethnophilosopher was thus the self-appointed spokesman of "All-Africa facing All-Europe at the imaginary rendezvous of give and take". For Hountondji (ibid) Africanist particularisms are abstract universalisms because the African intellectual who adopts it thereby expounds it, over the heads of his own people, in a mythical dialogue with his European colleagues, for the constitution of a 'civilisation of the universal'.

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<sup>47</sup> "The black man continues to be the very opposite of an interlocutor; he remains a topic, a voiceless face under private investigation, an object to be defined and not the subject of a possible discourse" (Hountondji, 1983:34).

The extraverted nature of ethnophilosophy and its overreliance on the methods of anthropology appears to be Hountondji's (ibid) main concern that prevents it from being an authentic African philosophy. Furthermore, ethnophilosophy has been serviceable to African elites in their quest to legitimacy and a supposed "return to the past" which undermines the potentiality of what proper philosophy for Hountondji (1983:47) is and could be: a science. For Hountondji (1983:97), philosophy is a scientific endeavour due to its organic link in its development and fruition to the development of modern sciences as per Althusser's *Lenin and Philosophy* (as cited in Hountondji 1983:97);

Philosophy has not always existed; it has been observed only in places where there is also what is called a science or sciences- science in the strict sense of theoretical discipline, i.e. ideating and demonstrative, not an aggregate of empirical results..... for philosophy to be born or reborn, it is necessary that sciences be. That is why, perhaps, philosophy in the strict sense began only with Plato, goaded into being by the existence of Greek mathematics; was blown up by Descartes, roused into its modern revolution by Galilean physics; was recast by Kant, under the influence of the Newtonian discovery; was remodelled by Husserl, stung by the first axiomatic etc.

Such a view of philosophy no doubt glorifies a fairly Eurocentric genealogy of philosophy that neglects other traditions that predate the Greek civilisation and which Greek civilisation was also indebted to, but also pedestals an absolutely aristocratic conception of it which Marx sought to refute in the *German Ideology* although with little success, largely due to the preponderance and deterministic logic of *historical materialism*. To be sure Hountondji's (1983) view of African philosophy, in light of the above declarations, is a theoretical discipline which is the reserve of experts, much like other sciences require expertise. Furthermore, such a philosophy is purely literature as is the precondition for scientificity, or the mere existence of a science. Therefore, African philosophy is that literature produced by Africans and described as philosophy by their authors as Hountondji (1983:53-54) elaborates;

Admit then that our philosophy is yet to come... African philosophy like any other philosophy cannot possibly be a collective worldview. It can exist as a philosophy only in the form of a confrontation between individual thoughts, a discussion, a debate...The Africanness of our philosophy will not necessarily reside in the themes but will depend above all on the geographical origin of those who produce it and their

intellectual coming together. The best European Africanists remain Europeans, even (and above all) if they invent a Bantu 'philosophy', whereas the African philosophers who think in terms of Plato or Marx and confidently take over the theoretical heritage of Western philosophy, assimilating and transcending it, are producing authentic African work.

Although this definition of African philosophy seems to be directly opposed to those European Africanists who claim to produce work on Africa on behalf of Africans like Father Tempels, however its premise remains questionable. Can it really be argued that works in Western philosophy done by Africans cease to be Western philosophy because of the geographic origin of the authors? And what would be the authenticity criterion for them to be considered by Hountondji as "producing authentic African work"? Moreover, this geographic definition of African philosophy would seem to exclude work done in the African diaspora, and weaken attempts to achieve a thematic focus on realities facing the African continent and its people as Serequeberhan (2000:1) intervenes:

But if it is not "themes" that define the Africanness" of our philosophy, what does? Around what will the "intellectual coming together" of those who "produce it" occur? For philosophers (African or otherwise) are human beings and, like everybody else, congregate or "come together" around issues, concerns, or celebrations focused on a common theme and/or a cluster of themes. Indeed, Hountondji is well aware of this as it pertains to the development and practice of modern European philosophy. What, then, of African philosophy? Is Hountondji's geographic and nonthematic conception a different "special" type of philosophy for Africa? Is he vying with the ethnographic conception, whose critique he initiated, for a "special-status philosophy" for Africa?

Hountondji's (2001) *The Struggle for Meaning: Reflections on Philosophy, Culture and Democracy in Africa* reflects on the debate that ensued after the publication of his earlier text and provides clarity on some of the positions which have been misconstrued and perhaps taken out of context. According to Hountondji (2001:161), his earlier 1983 text meant to provide a critique of extraversion in discourses emanating from philosophy, which was reminiscent of the anthropological discourses on Africa and Africans: a European gaze on African social realities. For Hountondji (2001, 223) the discourse on Ethnophilosophy is addressed to a non-African public, and the African ethnophilosopher set himself up, without

great risk of being contradicted, as the spokesperson of the people in question. The exclusion of the latter from the potential public has clear and concrete results on the content of the discourse, the choice of themes and methods, the framing of and the ways of dealing with, the problems. Therefore, the earlier position of providing a rather geographic and somewhat individualist conception of African philosophy meant to mitigate against the identified extraversion where Africans are mere objects of discourses that do not emanate from them.

### 3.4 African Philosophy and the Emancipatory Mission

*...One man has the ability to develop a new skill but another to judge whether it will be a curse or blessing to its user. Now ... this invention (writing) will cause those who use it to lose the learning of their minds by neglecting their memories; since through this reliance on letters... they will lose the ability to recall things within themselves. You have invented not a medicine to strengthen memory but an inferior substitute for it. You are providing your students with a way of seeming wise without true wisdom: for they will appear to have learned without instruction: they will seem to know a good deal, while they are really ignorant of many things: and they will become nuisances. These men who look wise but lack wisdom. --Egyptian god Thamus (quoted from Oluwole 1997: blurb)*

Myth has it that Africans converted to christianity<sup>48</sup> because it is based on the written word and that African spiritualities lacked such a firm grounding. Not only does such a myth privilege preconceived western ideals, but also serves to obfuscate the reality behind such a conversion which needs to be understood historically, particularly since christianity has been a tool to further administer conquest as European expansionism. Yves Winter (2011:2) notes that European proselytising was protected by force such that any restrictions on the rights “of Europeans to preach the word” was enough basis for a just war. According to Ramose (1999:13) Christianity used Jesus Christ's command to "go ye and teach all nations" as justification for its dominance and eradication of native African religions. Thus, colonisation

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<sup>48</sup> I follow Ramose's protest, following Soyinka, against the capitalising C in christianity since many other religions are not afforded such a privilege.

and Christianity came to dominate epistemology, as evidenced by their unilaterally granted, if dubious, authority to interpret experience, knowledge, and truth on behalf of native Africans.

Colonisation and Christianisation facilitated the epistemological domination of Africa through the valorisation of European values and ways of being in the world at the expense of African ways. Such a marginalisation of African values provided the basis for the domination that was to ensue which rested on the problematic assumption that Africans are less of human than their European counterparts and that Africans ought to rely on them if they are to develop beyond their 'animal like' existence. Bereft of any resemblance of 'reason' it was then upon her European counterpart to "determine and define the meaning of experience, knowledge and truth on behalf of the indigenous African" (Ramose, *Ibid*). The result was a justified silencing of African voices and an accentuation of non-African ones even on issues concerning Africa, and the situation would continue undisturbed until Africans stood up to fight for their freedom and self-determination against the negative representation by others.

Indeed, the pursuit of endogeneity was Mafeje's preoccupation as an African intellectual against the epistemology of alterity – 'the othering of Africa and Africans' (Adesina, 2008:133). For Mafeje (2008:106), an African intellectual renaissance must entail a determined rebellion against negative conceptions of Africa derived from the western viewpoint, a 'negation of negations'. This is the critical negative project of African philosophy, to rid itself of the yoke of being overdetermined from without: an invention of Europe (Serequeberhan, 2002:66). This necessitates a struggle on the art of Africans to unshackle themselves from such conceptions as Mungwini (2020:2) elucidates:

The struggle for intellectual liberation is a critical component of the contemporary practice of philosophy in Africa; a struggle that is also in no way unique to philosophy, for it expresses itself in different forms and at many levels across the academy. Credit must go to Africa's own philosopher kings who, from the very onset, positioned African philosophy as not just another meta-philosophical endeavour but as a venture conditioned by explicit commitments to the pursuit of African liberation. In this way, philosophy could occupy the role of messenger pronouncing on the need for imminent change in the lives of its peoples.

The struggle for intellectual liberation is indeed an essential component of African philosophy emerging as it does from the European preposition that Africans are less human. According to Ramose (2002), the exclusionary nature of the western definition of a human being that excludes not only non-Europeans but also women is the basis for the struggle for self-definition for the excluded. Feminist thought and action that came to challenge the legitimacy of the western subject as uniquely male put into question the foundation of the western subject and how women subordination was justified. The rise of the Black power movement in the early 1960s, which coincided with the struggles for independence in the African continent, sought to repudiate the negative conceptions of Africa and Africans and chart a path to liberation that is self-definition. Frantz Fanon (1952) provides a useful analysis of the inferiority complexes that the colonial situation creates in its victims which they need to overcome. Fanon (ibid) elucidates:

As long as the black man is among his own, he will have no occasion, except in minor internal conflicts, to experience his being through others. There is of course the moment of “being for others,” of which Hegel speaks, but every ontology is made unattainable in a colonized and civilized society. It would seem that this fact has not been given sufficient attention by those who have discussed the question. In the *Weltanschauung* of a colonized people there is an impurity, a flaw that outlaws any ontological explanation.....Ontology—once it is finally admitted as leaving existence by the wayside—does not permit us to understand the being of the black man. For not only must the black man be black; he must be black in relation to the white man.

Indeed, the black must be black in relation to the white man who created them black through colonial violence and conquest (Dladla, 2023:27). Such a violent process that colonial conquest and enslavement are, creates necessarily the idea of whiteness as a standard of humanity which it's others are considered to be in the lack as Fanon (ibid) perceptively describes: “I am overdetermined from without. I am the slave not of the “idea” that the others have of me but of my own appearance”. According to Dladla (ibid) the conquest of the indigenous people in the unjust wars of colonisation constitutes a foundational moment of their creation as Black: subject to the white who is definitively the conqueror. According to Dladla (2023: 43), Blackness can be described as a phenomenon of a fictive ontology of social

being produced in “conditions of unnatural but systemised death for the conquered people”. Historically and from a western philosophical standpoint “conquest of people may result in either enslavement or the dispossession of property, or a combination of both”.

Colonial conquest and the enslavement of African people can thereby be considered as the conditions of possibility for the negation of the African sense or mode of being in the world which creates them as inferior beings. It is from that position of being considered lesser than which becomes the rallying point for an elucidation of a philosophy of freedom that is necessarily conditioned by history precisely because discourses on freedom are difficult to make sense of without an understanding of prior instances in which freedom was denied as Mafeje (2008:106) astutely points out:

[W]e would not be anti-racist if we had not been its victims; we would not proclaim Africanity, if it had not been denied or degraded; and we would not insist on Afrocentrism, if it had not been for Eurocentric negations.

The emancipatory mission of African philosophy is historically inscribed in Africa’s experience of struggle for liberation against European domination transmitted through colonial conquest and slavery. To be sure colonial conquest did not only mean the seizures of land and cattle from the indigenous people but also entailed a distortion of their history and cultural self-image. This was achieved through the education they came to offer through the various institutions they enacted. This was also achieved through the legislations that they would continually pass in the process of solidifying their claim to the territory through the divine right of conquest. It is the questioning of the distorted accounts of the historical experience that an African philosophy begins, propelled as it is by the drive to emancipate itself from a negative conception. An African philosophy cannot by design escape history as a horizon through which its discourse finds meaning and articulation. This is because the qualification ‘African’ to ‘philosophy’ already entails an existence of philosophy to which African philosophy is a variant and that question is rooted in history.

Moreover, the name Africa itself is subject to historical contestations regarding its origin. According to Ramose (2003:114) the name ‘Africa’ arose out the cultural interactions happening in the Mediterranean cultural space, the term "Africa" refers to the climate of the specific area as experienced by the Greeks and Romans, respectively. The people that live in

this area and their philosophy are not instantly and clearly mentioned. The Roman conquest of "north Africa" is the basis for this description. Therefore, it becomes sense to assume that the word Africa did not originate from the native people who were subjugated in the area, much less the entire continent.

This is to say the name is both a description and an imposition from an outsider perspective and not from the indigenous people themselves. According to Ramose (ibid), historical accounts about "Africa" are non-other than a narrative of the West European experience of "Africa" and only in rare instances is it a story of the peoples of the continent about themselves. The discourse concerning "African philosophy" would then find meaning and articulation after the attainment of independence by various countries in the continent. According to Ramose (ibid) the era of decolonisation presents an opportunity for a beginning of African philosophy in that it would be coming from the independent expression of African people themselves in their diversity.

Indeed, the struggle for independence and decolonisation sought to sever the ties that bound African history and society to European domination. African philosophy then cannot but be a philosophy of liberation; the liberation of philosophy from Eurocentrism and an articulation of African experience from the vantage point of the African. This is to say, African philosophy is propelled by the drive to emancipate itself from European conceptual and epistemological designs. Mafeje (2008:107) summons African scholars to rid themselves of the imposed negative images of Africa and begin to consider the "history and cultural underpinnings of contemporary African societies". Adesina (2008:134) identifies this compulsion in Mafeje's scholarship as targeted against an "epistemology of alterity", and affirms endogeneity as "a scholarship grounded in and driven by the affirmation of African experiences and ontological accounting for the self".

Indeed, Mafeje (2008:107) affirms that to combat foreign domination and forge an independent pan African identity, African scholars must develop theories and paradigms rooted in an understanding of African cultural underpinnings and experiences of African peoples. This is an affirmation of the emancipatory mission that defines African philosophy: the struggle against domination and being defined from the outside. This is what Serequeberhan (2000:3) refers to as the critical negative project of African philosophy: unshackling African social realities away from European conceptual designs. To be sure, the

emancipatory mission that defines African philosophy in the contemporary period is propelled and responsive to domination that Africa has come to endure at the hands of the imperialist west. African philosophy necessarily has to respond to the history that brings its possibility about as Mafeje (2008:107) cleverly paraphrasing of Marx posits:

[W]hile we are free to choose the role in which we cast ourselves as active agents of history, we do not put on the agenda the social issues to which we respond. These are imposed on us by history. For example, we would not talk of freedom, if there was no prior condition in which this was denied; we would not be anti-racism if we had not been its victims; we would not proclaim Africanity, if it had not been denied or degraded; and we would not insist on Afrocentrism, if it had not been for Eurocentric negations. Secondly, unlike, the illusory 'free-floating signifier', *it is the historical juncture which defines us socially and intellectually.* (My Emphasis)

Indeed, it is the historical juncture which gives birth to the present reality which necessarily defines us socially and intellectually as Mafeje posits above and dovetails with Veroli's (2001:17) understanding of philosophy as historical ontology. According to Veroli (ibid) historical ontology defines a materialist philosophy that is rooted in history as "a constitutive aspect of its being" as always an "unfinished project that can never claim the status of completed System because it is always practice as much as contemplation, intervention as much as speculation". Indeed, history is not an option which any philosophy seeking to derive concrete meanings about society can choose to ignore. As Mafeje(2008:107) posits that to evolve lasting meanings "we must be rooted in something" as opposed to the western idea of a free-floating signifier that pretends neutrality and assumed universality. African philosophy is a context-based philosophy with an emancipatory mission to define itself inspired as it were by the African struggle for independence and decolonisation. It is that historical conjecture that bestows upon African philosophy the emancipatory mission to self-define and to negate the negation.

### **3.5 Conclusion**

All thought about society and history is itself part of society and history, i.e. it is a form of socio-historical doing, which prevents it from acquiring the status of universality. That there

exist perspectives that proclaim themselves as universally applicable has been unmasked as a European ploy for establishing its expansionist drive and domination, dully established not through dialogue and consensus but through violent conquest. The quest to gain freedom from this bondage is, at the same time, the quest to philosophise precisely because philosophy is not about its reified self but about the reality that informs it and gives it substance. This chapter has established the emancipatory vision of African philosophy, its mission to disentangle itself from western ideological binds and is not limited to the colonially derived disciplines but is rather transdisciplinary/ interdisciplinary. This is because the doubt concerning the humanity of the Africans informs much of western discourses about Africa and its absence from the development of worldhood. The very same doubt is that concerning the possibility of an African philosophy. African philosophy in turn has the mission to overcome this doubt and assert itself and its historical mission which is ultimately liberation. Archie Mafeje in this instance, is an African philosopher properly defined.

## **Chapter 4: The Development of Authentic Discourses on African Ontological Narratives: Archie Mafeje's Contribution**

### **4.1 Introduction**

African philosophers and social scientists have battled against negative representation of African realities resulting from the prevailing discourses in the social sciences and philosophy about Africa (Mafeje, 1971; Magubane, 1973; Hountondji, 1983; Oyewumi, 1997; Ramose, 1999; Nzegwu, 2006 & Serequebehan, 2007). According to Ramose (2002:1), non-Africans have dominated discourses on Africa at the expense of the African, even on matters concerning the Africans themselves, that, "since colonisation, Africans have had almost an infinity of spokespersons. These claimed unilaterally the right to speak on behalf of the Africans and to *define the meaning of experience and truth for them.*" (My emphasis). African societies and modes of social organisation were also subject to negative representation in the prevailing discourses in anthropology and social sciences broadly as 'savage' or 'low brow' contraposed to European ones, which were deemed to be more 'advanced' or 'progressive' (Mafeje, 1971; Wolf, 1982). Mafeje (1971) argues against the reductionist representation of African societies as necessarily tribal, which he argues is a demonstration of a European ideology about Africa. According to Wolf (1982:7), the rise of the social sciences in the mid-nineteenth century Europe provided a justification for the resultant colonisation of the rest of the world by Europe, precisely because they were "the people without history".

Through an engagement with Mafeje's readings, a liberatory conception of philosophy and the social sciences is articulated in direct response to the call to decolonise knowledge that has defined the South African academy since 2015. This chapter seeks to respond to the call to decolonise knowledge that was issued through the 2015 student protests in their various manifestations, but which began and was propelled by the protest against the remnants of colonial apartheid through the statue of Cecil John Rhodes at the University of Cape Town. What had begun as a protest against a statue of a colonialist in a university campus extended beyond those confines, but sought to challenge the unchanged character of the South African society beyond 1994, which is conceived to be a defining moment for the birth of a new South Africa. The 2015 moment is identified as an important one, as it revitalised the conversation concerning liberation in the country and truly unmasked the unchanged colonial character of

South Africa, as shown in Chapter 1. This moment is important in that the university curriculum itself was put to scrutiny: teasing out the problematic colonial heritage and inspired discourses to move us away from such an impulse.

This chapter through an engagement with Mafeje's work, aims to demonstrate (1) Mafeje's confrontation with Eurocentrism through his critique of anthropology and the social sciences in Africa, (2) Mafeje's quest for authentic engagement with Africa which is related to his critique of negative representations of Africans in discourses emanating from the philosophy and the social sciences and, (3) Mafeje's commitment to a revolutionary theory of society demonstrated through his engagement with Marxist inspired theory and action that ultimately led him to an articulation of a liberatory praxis of the social sciences and philosophy in the African context. This is done to adumbrate his distinct contribution to the African archive of authentic discourses on Africa which the current discourse concerning decolonisation which has engulfed the South African academy since 2015 aims to denote.

#### **4.2 The Evolution of an African Intellectual**

Nyoka (2020:3) characterises Mafeje's early academic and intellectual existence as bifurcated: juggling between Marxism and other radical theories (as a member of the Non-European Unity Movement) and Liberal functionalist anthropology (as a student at UCT), which constituted his early writings as a postgraduate student as well as a research assistant for Monica Wilson which saw them co-author a study in 1963 on the township *Langa*. However, a synthesis of his political views with his professional academic work was witnessed in the publication in 1971 of his famous essay 'The ideology of Tribalism' that ruptured concepts and categories within the social sciences, as well as his works to follow. However, it can be argued that even in the earlier writings there is a preoccupation with correctly representing African phenomena as can be appreciated in one of his early writings "The role of the Bard in the Contemporary community", which we turn to appraise and to observe the preoccupation we have identified. This will be done along the commentary provided by Nyoka (2020) to elucidate on Mafeje's revolutionary outlook.

Mafeje (1967:193) contests the characterisation of traditional African bards as 'praise poets' or 'poet laureates' by various linguists since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Following Archiebald .Campbell Jordan's contention that "the institution of *imbongi* was not limited to the 'praising'

or the ‘adulation’ of the chief” but to organise and articulate social and political views. According to Jordan (1957), as quoted by Mafeje (1967: 193):

... It must not be thought that these bards were mere flatterers. While they drew attention mainly to the good and praiseworthy, they also had the licence to criticise the habits of their subjects. It is here that the bard found the greatest scope for his wit.

It is upon Jordan’s thesis that Mafeje (1967: 194) contends with Isaac Schapera’s (1965) publication *Praise Poems of Tswana Chiefs*, in particular the representation of the institution of the traditional bard as praise-poetry eliding the political function of the institution. Mafeje (ibid) identifies similarity of the traditional African institution with that of the European Celtic bards, precisely because of the limiting translation of the function and institution of *imbongi* as only ‘praise poet’. While Professor Schapera, according to Mafeje, was precise in his identification of the varying levels at which individuals compose praises either for their cows or for themselves or for those who are in the position of leadership. However, the political significance of such an institution appears to have been elided or uncritically ignored by Schapera and it is then Mafeje’s preoccupation to demonstrate the function of the institution through interviews and reviews of Melikhaya Mbuthuma’s poems and his role as the bard to the then abaTembu king Sabata Dalindyebo.

From his fieldwork and observation, Mafeje (1967:195) concludes that parallels can be drawn from the institution of the Celtic Bards (who enjoyed privileges of being exempt from taxes and military service), and whose primary function was to sing hymns of praise for their nation and celebrate victories, giving poetic expression to religious and political sentiments of their people. Although South African bards enjoyed no such privileges, Mafeje (ibid) contends that they gave expression to the political sentiments of their people and this largely relates to how they emerge to occupy such a status:

He [the Bard]? was self-appointed, and his success was determined by the response of the people to what he had to say. If the people felt that what he said was representative or reflective of their interests and aspirations, then he was generally accepted as the national poet or *imbongiyakomkhulu*(The poet of the main residence), or recently *Imbongiyesizwe* (the poet of the nation). It is, therefore, apparent that the

main function of the South African bard is to interpret public opinion and organise it (once he has been firmly established), failing that he does not achieve the status of national poet.

Such a legitimisation process speaks of the critical function of the institution and the role the general people play in the inaugurating of the bard which is identified as being representative of their sentiment. Such a characterisation unveils the meaning and role of the traditional bard as other than a 'praise poet'. This demonstrates Mafeje's commitment to represent African social reality from terms emanative from it. Nyoka (2020:7) concurs that indeed, Mafeje's (1967) article constitutes part of "his thematic critique of the anthropological anachronism that reduced African societies to tribes."

However, his earlier work co-authored with his Masters supervisor Monica Wilson, percolated through the liberal functionalist school characteristic of the times, which also became the starting point for Mafeje and many others to attempt to think about issues of society and social and anthropological theory (Nyoka 2020:4). The Study on *LANGA: A STUDY OF SOCIAL GROUPS IN AN AFRICAN TOWNSHIP* (Wilson & Mafeje, 1963) attempts to describe and categorise the different social groupings that resided in the first African township of Cape Town. However, in this attempt to explain the different categories of the various social groupings (when and why do they cohere, and when and why do they split or dissolve?) political questions were ignored. While the authors attribute the ignoring of the political questions to the political crisis of the 1960's (the banning of the ANC and the PAC), Nyoka (2020:5) contends it is untrue, but is, however, indicative of the key elements of liberal functionalist anthropology. According to Nyoka (ibid):

The theoretical objectivity (assumed neutrality) of liberal functionalist anthropology does not necessarily mean that its practitioners are apolitical. On the contrary, that anthropologists remain silent on matters political in favour of value free scientific enquiry is itself a political manoeuvre typical of liberal academics.....In anthropological writings certain questions – of slavery, conquest, land dispossession, exploitation and oppression – are hardly ever posed. When they are, they receive rather perfunctory treatment.

Questions of oppression and exploitation, however, are central to Marxism as oppositional intellectualism which Mafeje was well accustomed albeit, not in an academic setting. This is attributable to the domineering liberal ideas in the South African academy at the time.

Indeed, the 1971 article on the ideology of tribalism does signal a radical break with the liberal functionalism that had defined his earlier works, which thereby facilitated a synthesis of his political views as well as his academic professional life since he was already a member of the Marxist-Trotskyite group the NEUM. The insight from Marxism can be understood in Marxism's unmasking of the relationship between knowledge and power: "The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas: i.e. the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force" (Marx, 1845). Charles Mills (2003: xvi) notes the attractiveness of Marxian thought to intellectuals of colour in the 20<sup>th</sup> century although it would also be found limiting particularly to issues concerning race. However, the theoretical centering of oppression, the promise of liberation and the far ranging historical perspective proved to be useful for African intellectuals to move beyond ahistorical liberal representations of African social realities not to mentioned liberalisms assumed neutrality or objectivity.

In the 1981 review article of the collection of essays edited by Harold Wolpe entitled *The Articulation of modes of Production* Mafeje (1981:130) cautions against the misappropriation and the transplantation of theories with universalistic pretensions such as Marxism to understand local conditions: "To conduct class analysis we do not have to invent classes, but rather to be alert to possible mediations in the process of class formation". Indeed, in a later article reflecting on the South African state published 1986, *South Africa: The Dynamics of A Beleaguered State*, Mafeje elucidates on this position and distinguishes between 'universal' and vernacular languages in relation to the study of local histories as well as 'universal' histories. According to Mafeje (1986, 95), the symbols deployed to understand universal history need not be the same as those used to decipher local history, moreover, "In the context of domination, universal languages are a supreme instrument for indoctrination and in the context of liberation "vernacular" languages are a powerful instrument for self-assertion and self-discovery".

Indeed Mafeje (1986:95) demonstrates a critical reflective attitude in relation to those theories that have universalistic pretensions as a thinker preoccupied with domination and

more interested in the so called vernacular languages to decipher local realities. While Marxism may have broadened the theoretical scope of questions about society and history away from liberal abstractions, Mafeje (1986:96) remains cautious even about Marxism's universalistic pretensions:

Marxism has universalistic pretensions and yet is founded on European history at a particular juncture. Slogans about "Marxism-Leninism", appealing as they are, cannot be offered as an epistemological explanation. If Marxism is a universal scientific theory, how does it overcome its own syntactical as well as semantic limitations? In other words, methodologically, how does it relate to vernacular languages, understood in the analytical, political sense? Deep down, this might be the problem of every contemporary Marxist but some, out of dogmatism or intellectual opportunism, pretend otherwise.

Mafeje (ibid) adduces the history of the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA) later renamed the South African Communist Party (SACP), to demonstrate instances of a transplantation of a European theory and political organisation to the local conditions. This demonstrates Mafeje's critical outlook and concern with authentic representations.

Marxism provided a gateway for African intellectuals to think about their political and societal problems in historicised and politically engaged discourses. According to Mills (2003:xvi) the theoretical perspective of Marxism, at least in the twentieth century, was attractive to people of colour. The reasons for the attractiveness of Marxism are that of "its far-ranging historical perspective, its theoretical centering of oppression, and its promise of liberation" (Mills, ibid). This is to say Marxism's scepticism of established power and the extent of its reach in the sphere of ideas became an elementary support to theorise and imagine liberation from oppression for Africans faced with European oppression. Marxism's thoroughgoing critique of capitalism and bourgeois ideology as a mechanism to legitimate class rule proved distinct from the abstract liberal idealisms and presented Marxism as a philosophy of action concerned with reality. This can be appreciated from Marx and Engels' (1845) eleventh thesis on Feuerbach where they assert: "Philosophers have interpreted the world in various ways, the point however is to change it". Interpreting the world is what philosophers have done from their privileged position, the challenge Marxism posed was to take part in the change

that needed to happen in the world and for a people faced with a situation of oppression such a stance proved useful.

However, the Eurocentric foundations of Marxism proved to be an impediment in thinking about issues of concern to the racialised subjects of the modern world (Mills, 2003 & Robinson, 1983). Mafeje can be described as an Africanist African intellectual transitioning from European discourses which were formative of his training and political persuasion, to authentic representations of African societies and discourses. African philosophy in its modern modality cannot escape the hegemony Western philosophy has established itself as, precisely because of the socio-political history and economic reality that Africa finds itself in the modern world as a result of European conquest and colonialism as well as the enslavement of African people in the making of the modern world. This is to say a modern discourse of African philosophy necessarily has to begin with a critique of the Eurocentric philosophic paradigm that is hegemonic. This has been defined as the critical negative project of African philosophy (Serequeberhan, 2001, Outlaw, 2002).

#### **4.4 Affirming Affirmation through Negation<sup>49</sup>**

Mafeje's quest for authentic engagement with Africa that is intimately related to his critique of negations of Africans in discourses emanating from the philosophy and the social sciences that are originally western is what this subsection aims to elucidate. That philosophy and the social sciences are products of European colonial expansion, and domination of the world has been established (Wallerstein 1991; Mafeje 2007; Dladla 2017). The division of intellectual labour in the world has negatively affected discourses emanating from the social sciences and humanities in Africa. African scholars have had to struggle against discourses emanating from anthropology which are theoretically extraverted (Hountondji 1983; Adesina 2010). Immanuel Wallerstein (1991) proposes an *unthinking* of the social sciences that have their origin in the West since the nineteenth century and were transported throughout the world which now act as impediments in our social enquiries. According to Wallerstein (1991:1): "I believe we need to "unthink" nineteenth century social science because many of its presumptions<sup>50</sup>- which in my view are misleading and constrictive- still have far too long a

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<sup>49</sup>The phrasing is borrowed from Jared Sexton (<https://csalateral.org/issue/1/ante-anti-blackness-afterthoughts-sexton/>)

<sup>50</sup>Wallerstein makes reference to 'industrial revolution' and 'development' as some of the key problematic presumptions that aims to universalise a particular European experience to the entirety of the world. These

hold on our mentalities. These presumptions, once considered liberating of the spirit, serve today as the central intellectual barrier to useful analysis of the social world". Indeed, African intellectuals have been in a battle against the negations of the European epistemological paradigms and terms of reference.

Adesina (2006, 2010) has delineated three tendencies that define scholarship in the African social sciences thus: regurgitation, protest scholarship, and works of distinct epistemic significance. According to Adesina (2010:3) "scholarship as regurgitation imposes received categories (concepts, theories and paradigms) on local conditions. While the data and the sociologist may be local, the narrative and analysis function as extensions of Euro-American discourses". Such scholarship often results in a translation of the tenets of African culture to western academic terms, which reinforces "the terms of international division of intellectual labour" (Adesina 2010:3). Protest scholarship is focused in eliminating the negative effects of the international division of labour where Africa is only an object of study. According to Adesina (2010:4) while protest scholarship may generate a lot of materials, it does not "generate new *epistemic insights that match the distinctness of the local ethnographic data on which they stand*". On the other hand, *endogeneity*<sup>51</sup> requires a recognition of the way in which local data "instigate distinct epistemic insights or lead to epistemic rupture" (Adesina 2010:4).

No doubt Mafeje's own works would fall under Adesina's third category because of the epistemic rupture they facilitate not only in Anthropology but the entirety of the social sciences in Africa. In his 1971 article *The Ideology of Tribalism* Mafeje acknowledges the impact of colonialism in constructing narratives about African realities. According to Mafeje (1971:253):

European colonialism, like any epoch, brought with it certain ways of reconstructing the African reality. It regarded African societies as particularly tribal. *This approach produced certain blinkers or ideological pre-dispositions which made it difficult for*

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concepts have been subject to debate among African intellectuals precisely because of their negative senses of other experiences outside the European, similar to Hegels position that does not consider Africa as part of historical development of world spirit.

<sup>51</sup> According to Adesina (2011: 135) "Endogeneity ...refers to an intellectual standpoint derived from a rootedness in the African conditions; a centring of African ontological discourses and experiences as the basis of one's intellectual work".

*those associated with the system to view these societies in any other light.* Hence certain modes of thought among European scholars in Africa and their African counterparts have persisted, despite the many important economic and political changes that have occurred in the continent over the last 75 years. Therefore, if tribalism is thought of as peculiarly African, then the ideology itself is particularly European in origin.

Nyoka (2017, 2020) has argued against the minimisation of Mafeje's intellectual contribution by confining it to only a critique of anthropology which makes a reformist out of Mafeje. Rather, his work can best be understood as "criticising all of the social sciences for being Eurocentric and imperialist". Following Ramose's (1999:33) argument that African philosophy is first and foremost a philosophy aimed at disentangling African social reality from Eurocentric epistemological binds, Mafeje is undeniably an African philosopher.

Contrary to the view of earlier Hountondji (1983) that the Africanness of African philosophy resides not so much in themed discussions but from the geographical origin of the authors and their coming together, Mafeje's intellectual journey as an African intellectual opposed to Eurocentrism offers us an attractive picture of what African philosophy should be in our contemporary world: engagement with reality. However, in his later reflections, Hountondji (2002:79) clarifies the circumstances which led to some of his earlier positions, the geographic definition, especially in relation to a critique of ethnophilosophy that was reminiscent of extraverted discourses on Africa emanating from anthropology: the Western gaze on so-called primitive societies and had to demand an authentic representation of Africa from Africans themselves. The demand for authentic representation can be said to be a defining feature of Mafeje's intellectual career, as Adesina (2008:133) attests that he was "uncompromising" and averse to the 'epistemology of alterity' – the 'othering' of Africa and Africans. Mafeje, according to Adesina (ibid), laboured towards "the advancement of scholarship grounded in the centring of African ontological experiences".

Mafeje's (2008:59) commentary on the study of culture and development duly notes the indebtedness of such a problematic to the social sciences "which are largely the product of the West". In these traditions of the West, Mafeje (2008:59) identifies two traditions: idealism associated with liberalism and materialism with its association with Marxism. It was the dominance of idealism that had found articulation within Western social sciences while

materialism remained underdeveloped but however receiving renewed interest because of the economic crises immanent in the West. Moreover, according to Mafeje (ibid), the renewed interest in materialism in the West coincided with “Third World... questioning of Eurocentric social science which, in turn, is a reflection of the intensification of anti-imperialist struggles which are its antecedents”. This demonstrates the intimate relationship Marxism has with struggles in the so-called third world which could find expression through Marxist thought and struggles. Mafeje (2008:59) thereby asserts that a study of the phenomenon of culture and development from an African perspective needs to begin with an examination of the relevant schools of thought from the West which should not be seen as “*an affirmation...without negations*”.

#### **4.5 Archie Mafeje and a Liberation Discourse**

Mafeje’s commitment to a revolutionary theory of society is demonstrated through his engagement with Marxist inspired theory and action that ultimately led him to an articulation of a liberatory praxis of the social sciences and philosophy in the African context. This section, through an exposition of Mafeje’s writings, explores Archie Mafeje’s thoughts on African societies and the Eurocentric presuppositions that have defined such thinking that he was labouring to negate. This is done to demonstrate the inherently liberatory character of his persuasions and the interdisciplinary nature of knowledges concerning African realities and systems of thought that he was working to uncover. Indeed, the language of universalism has been dominant as part of the European colonial enterprise to legitimate Europe as the centre of the world while at the same time defining those not European outside of humanity. It was Mafeje’s persuasion and determination to combat Eurocentrism and the epistemology of alterity emanating from studies on Africa in the fields of social sciences particularly anthropology. Although Mafeje’s break with functionalist anthropology, that was distinctive of his training at UCT under the tutelage of Monica Wilson, would come later Mafeje was already involved in Marxian discourses in the political spaces he was involved in particularly the NEUM. His early work can be characterised as of a liberal functionalist framework although his analysis always sought to understand social phenomena in its own terms as evinced by his exposition of the role of the bard in African societies discussed above.

The publication in 1971 of *The Ideology of Tribalism* would mark a clear break from the liberal functionalist framework that had defined his work before, and would adopt a materialist

Marxist understanding and interpretation of social phenomena. Marxism's scepticism of established power and its radical promise for freedom rooted in an analysis of social reality from the perspective of the marginalised became an avenue for the expression of liberatory thought of various persuasions. African intellectuals and African freedom fighters were not an exception of those opposed to established power and sought to think their liberation through the prism of Marxism of various instantiations. And it is in that spirit that Mafeje would also adopt a historicist and materialist approach into understanding social phenomena. An understanding of power relations and their effect in shaping knowledge production in society was elucidated by Marx and Engels in their *German Ideology* to mean that those who are in control of the means of production in society are at the same time in control of the means of social production and reproduction so much that the dominant views in society are representative of their position.

The idea that African societies are inherently tribal is a function of a European ideology about African social realities. According to Mafeje (1971:253) if history was written by Africans themselves instead of European would it have deployed similar concepts as the Europeans or would it have informed us of a different reality, and what would account for this situation? "Are things what they are called, or do they have an existence which is independent of the nomenclature that attaches to them?" This is suggestive that Mafeje was critical of the conceptions of African social realities from the outside and suggests an authentic engagement with African social realities from terms emanative from them. Mafeje's argument can best be understood from a sociology of knowledge viewpoint in that "objective reality is not easily distinguishable from subjective disposition", which means that social scientific categories cannot be easily separated "from the ideological baggage of their peddlers" (Nyoka, 2020:10). Indeed, Mafeje (1991:2) in his study on the *Kingdoms of the Great lakes Region* labours to reconceptualise the "social phenomena and social relations in black Africa which had been looked at through the lenses of non-Africans" which inevitably would lead to misconceptions. The misconceptions Mafeje (ibid) attributes to the incongruence between the supposed "universal language" of the social sciences derived from the European historical experience, and the vernacular as understood by Africans themselves.

Mafeje (ibid) postulates that disciplines such as history, anthropology and economics in Africa, the social sciences broadly, have “failed to capture the totality of the social existence of the communities under study” Mafeje(1991:2) continues:

While their concepts were rigorously defined, they were so narrow and overladen with alien presuppositions..... A prime example is the concept of “tribe”. Were African social formations “tribal”? Was the history of pre-colonial Africa necessarily a history of “tribes”? Was there something called “tribal economy” or “communal property” in land?

To these interrogatives Mafeje (ibid) cautions social scientific enquiry about African society to be critical of their approach and conceptualisations of the social phenomena therein. An example Mafeje (1991:3) adduces is to question the applicability of concepts such as “caste, class, aristocracy and feudalism” in the study of African social realities and avers that concepts ought to be used in their specific historical context to avoid misapplication. Another example Mafeje (1991:103) adduces is that of African entrepreneurs often times forgo opportunities for value maximisation for leisure or kinship considerations unlike their European counterparts. In pre-colonial Buganda according to Mafeje (1991:108) landlord chiefs preferred political followers than mere servile labour. This is to say the same class category cannot behave the same way everywhere in the world.

The social sciences are therefore susceptible to their social and ideological environment although the natural sciences also operate within the orbit of society which thereby means that they are also susceptible as argued by philosophers of science like Thomas Kuhn (1962). Mafeje (1991:1) stands cautious against the proponents of the view of a self-correcting science and that intellectual crises can be resolved internally like Karl Popper (1959) and acknowledges the role of the social environment in conditioning scientific enquiry. This is a view promulgated by the Sociology of Knowledge viewpoint as exemplified Frankfurt school theoreticians who developed Marxist ideas and concepts which Mafeje (1991) has argued that they sometimes became obtusely abstract. For Mafeje (1991:2) durable thought categories are reflective of contemporary social existence, which is to say “social scientific questions are put on the agenda by current social struggles”. This means social enquiry must be reflective of social existence and derive categories from within.

In the article elucidating *Africanity as a combative ontology* Mafeje (2008:106) postulates that “it is the historical juncture which defines us socially and intellectually”, which means that history serves an important role in helping us understand contemporary social realities. According to Mafeje (ibid):

The fashionable ‘free-floating signifier’ is an illusion in a double sense. First, nobody can think and act outside historically determined circumstances and still hope to be a social signifier of any kind. In other words, while we are free to choose the role in which we cast ourselves as active agents of history, we do not put on the agenda the social issues to which we respond. These are imposed on us by history.

Indeed, history is a necessary complementary to study and understand social reality as Mafeje (ibid) attests: “ahistoricity is a greater risk than historicity. To evolve lasting meanings, we must be ‘rooted’ in something”. This is to dissuade the African social scientist from the lures of a deceitful language of universalism as propagated in the social science disciplines themselves. Mafeje (2001) postulates that his intellectual contribution as an African to the deconstruction of anthropology “was an attack on European ethnocentrism and a spontaneous call for indigenisation of social scientific concepts” (Mafeje, 2001:34). The indigenisation of social scientific concepts was Mafeje’s chief preoccupation in his attempts to labour towards the decolonisation of the social sciences particularly anthropology which was his primary training.

That anthropology was the handmaiden to colonialism or serviceable to it was unanimous in anthropology circles in the period after independence. This is attributable to the usability of anthropologists by colonial administrators and the subject of study being ultimately the other. This is to say anthropology was predicated on an epistemology of alterity and thereby was no longer seen as necessary of an independent African polities imbued with the values of African nationalism. The African nationalists were naturally at odds with colonial anthropologists who sought to view them and their societies as necessarily ‘tribal’, which they sought to overcome in their pursuits to build African nationalism and pan-Africanism. Mafeje (2001:55) himself was in support of the rejection of anthropology in the post-independence era, he posits:

In the 1960s I fully identified with the rejection of anthropology by the African nationalists. This was fully justified because we knew of no other anthropology, except colonial anthropology. The only way out of this dilemma was to participate in the

ideological, political and intellectual deconstruction of colonial anthropology. The latter was difficult to realise because we were not prepared for it, organisationally and intellectually. So, it was left to individuals to live up to their own convictions.

However, Mafeje (ibid) admits that his own preoccupation and predilection cannot be said to have been anthropological. This is primarily because in the 1960s' Cape Town there was no tribes to speak about and people had been imbued with the ideology of the Pan Africanist Congress. Therefore, in Mafeje's early studies largely pertained to a study of social groups and a study of power in various settings in South Africa among many of his other studies. An example of these is his study on the visit of Chief Mtirara of the aba-Thembu clan to Cape Town.

Mafeje (1963:88) details the varied attitudes people in Cape Town exuded to traditional authority from those who he refers to as *townspeople* and the migrant workers in the city. The townspeople had no regard for traditional authority and viewed it with suspicion as an extension of colonial authority and administration. The term the townspeople used to refer to traditional authority was *omantshingelane* (security guards). The migrant workers also shared a similar perspective but were bound to have some regard to traditional authority due to their non-permanent status in the city and with their families residing in the country. The 1961 visit to Cape Town by Chief Mtirara became quite a controversial occurrence with the broader community divided as to the purpose of the visit and the demands therein on the part of those who had to receive the chief:

After a prolonged discussion, a compromise was reached. It was decided that the chief should be received, but it should be made clear to him that the Thembu were surprised to see him in town because he, as a chief, knew best what was happening to the people, both in the town and the country. It was felt that he should be further told that "the people are starving and dwell in rivers here in town and have nothing to offer him". This is tantamount to saying that the chief should not come to town again. (Mafeje, 1961:90)

The heated debates and debacles related to the chief's visit demonstrated the dissatisfaction by the Thembu Cape Town community with traditional authority and its relationship to colonial government. It also demonstrated an overcoming of what could be represented as

'tribal ideology'. Mafeje's (ibid) detailing of the visit exposits his attempts to authentically represent the peoples understanding and struggle with established power as well as decoding social change in the urban setting as conducive to African nationalism. In his later work, Mafeje (2001) reflects on this period of the 1960s when he undertook fieldwork in the urban and rural areas of South Africa delineating his misgivings with categorisations emanative from colonial anthropology. According to Mafeje (ibid) there were no tribes to talk about in South Africa during that period just as there was no division between town and country duly facilitated by labour migration which began in the mineral revolution of the nineteenth century with the discovery of diamonds in 1867 and gold in 1884 as well as the expansion of the British colonial state to incorporate African societies. However, despite all the evidence to the contrary, such as the rise of Black Nationalism and Pan Africanism, all South African governments would continue to classify Africans according to "tribe".

Mafeje's historical approach to the study of social reality is indispensable precisely because social phenomena are a result of historical processes and developments that demand to be understood and appreciated thus. This is why in his critique of the *Ideology of Tribalism* in 1970 was a confrontation with a European ideology that necessarily characterises African societies as inherently tribal. This tribal ideology purports to read African social reality in an ahistorical manner that ignores any social change and is serviceable to the colonial administrators for their purposes of divide and rule. However, it was his initiative and that of his countryman Bernard Makhosezwe Magubane's (1971) article *A Critical Look at Indices Used in the Study of Social Change in Africa* that sought to question the legitimacy of the continuance of colonial categories in reading African social reality. According to Magubane (1971:420), the studies reviewed that sought to detail "acculturation" and social change happening in the urban areas. However, that urbanisation itself was an imposition and a result of colonial conquest was muted from the reviewed studies by Magubane and sought to treat that process as natural:

The indices they have found most indicative of both the process of acculturation and the formation of new status groups in the urban situation are "European" clothes, occupations, education, and income. The importance of "European" clothes among urban Africans has received greatest emphasis. In the choice of these indices, these anthropologists, instead of treating the colonial system as an essential dimension of

the new social structure, have tended to take it for granted, or to assume that its general characteristics are known. Attention has been focused on the behaviour and value systems of the Africans in towns the objects of investigation-as though they exercised free choice....We are presented with a situation in which there was a one-dimensional response, in which colonial values and psychology were accepted without question. The anthropologists implicitly believed not only in the inevitability, but also in the rightness of white conquest of the African. Hence, the colonization of the African personality that accompanied economic and political subjugation was assumed to be natural.

According to Mafeje (2001:34),he and Magubane were not so much preoccupied with the debates happening in the north about the demise of colonial anthropology but were concerned about the concrete situation in a colony: "They were a response to what we separately considered to be misconceptions of colonial anthropology from an *African perspective*".

Mafeje's critical adoption and use of Marxist categories to understand social reality was inspired by the critical outlook Marxism offers as a critique of established power and liberalism. Such an adoption was a result of the revolutionary promise in Marxism to overcome the limitations of established power and the insistence to interpret social reality from the perspective of the oppressed against what Marx and Engels referred to as bourgeois ideology. As Nyong'o (2001:4) appreciates: "The major achievement of Marxism is that it made scholars aware that there were no simple answers to complex questions". Indeed, Mafeje as a member of the Non-European Unity Movement (NEUM) was well aware of the regressive and colonial histories of Marxism in South Africa represented by the advent of the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA) which was later to be the South African Communist Party (SACP). According to Mafeje (1986:97):

It is known, but not often acknowledged out of political expediency, that the beginnings of Marxist theory and socialist politics in South Africa were a result of a total transplant of the twenty-one points laid down by the Third International or Comintern for fraternal organisations everywhere in the world. But in fact Lenin and his party had designed these especially for the leadership of the socialist movement in capitalist Europe, where schooled Marxists and an experienced working-class

existed. In contrast, in South Africa there was a dearth of both the Marxist tradition and working-class politics. Neither the Jewish Bund nor the International League, which were the precursors of the Communist Party of South Africa, could be looked upon as authentic local representatives. Not only did they look upon the African workers in the mines as "semi-savage" but also reflected none of the great debates in Russia concerning the future of the peasant commune, as against what happened in Western Europe. The same short-comings persisted after the foundation of the Communist Party of South Africa, as is evidenced by events during the 1922 miners' strike where some members of the CPSA went so far as to join white vigilantes to quell the "Black menace".

Indeed, according to Kelley (2014:248) "the first branch of the CPSA initially did not allow people of colour to become members", not only did it not allow black members but also mobilised against the inclusion of Africans into the workforce. The Rand Revolt of 1922 to which Mafeje (ibid) refers was a strike by white mine workers against the inclusion of Africans in the labour force in the mines. The white mine workers were aggrieved by Africans taking up positions which they understood to be the preserve of whites (Kelley, 2014:248).

Mining capital did not concede to the demands of the white workers, rendering the strike a failure. The reasons for capital not to accede to the demands that Africans be excluded are primarily that Africans provided cheap labour, which capital relied on for its profit maximisation motive. Considering the failure of the Rand Revolt, the CPSA was to reconsider extending its membership to Africans. The CPSA did and further conspired to position African communists in the leadership of the ANC as an attempt to control the ANC (Dube, 1983; The Africanists, 1975). However, the white leadership of the CPSA remained committed to their racist intents of undermining African self-determination as evinced by their disavowal of the comintern's "Theses on the Negro Question" which recognized black nationalism as inherently anti-imperialist. However, the leadership of the CPSA insisted upon rejecting all manifestations of nationalism (Kelley, Ibid).

Mafeje (1986:97) thereby demonstrates a critical uptake of Marxism cognisant of its underlying Eurocentric presuppositions. According to Mafeje (1986:97):

Marxism has universalistic pretensions and yet is founded on European history at a particular juncture. Slogans about "Marxism-Leninism", appealing as they are, cannot be offered as an epistemological explanation. If Marxism is a universal scientific theory, how does it overcome its own syntactical as well as semantic limitations? In other words, methodologically, how does it relate to vernacular languages, understood in the analytical, political sense?

While this does not necessarily imply a radical abandoning of Marxism, Mafeje (ibid) implies a critical uptake of its theoretical advantages and being critical in our application of some of the categories, duly aware of the history and context. According to Mafeje (1981:130) "To conduct class analysis we do not have to invent classes, but rather to be alert to possible mediations in the process of class formation". This duly demonstrates Mafeje's commitment to understanding African social phenomena in its own context without superimpositions, because the same class does not behave the same everywhere in the world as evinced by Mafeje's reference to African entrepreneurs and the Baganda landlord chiefs. This duly demonstrates Mafeje's commitment to a liberatory intellectual discourse in African social sciences and philosophy. It has been our argument that Mafeje is an African philosopher duly concerned with the liberation of philosophy and African social sciences from European epistemological conceptual binds towards authentic representations of African social realities and their ontological narratives. Mafeje's critique of the social sciences in Africa is predicated on the view that the social sciences are a product of European enlightenment which was responsible for the enslavement and colonisation of African people justified by the view that they are less human beings.

The presuppositions of western derived social sciences was to read African social realities based on preconceived European ideas and ideals to which Africans were an aberration. This is to say the social sciences were predicated on an epistemology of alterity (the 'othering' of Africa and Africans) (Adesina, 2008) and Mafeje was committed to overcoming of this through an indigenisation of intellectual discourse. According to Adesina (2008: 134) Mafeje's works contain an indispensable affirmation of endogeneity — "a scholarship grounded in and driven by the affirmation of African experiences and ontological accounting for the self". This is beyond what Adesina (ibid) has identified as protest scholarship discussed above as provides distinct epistemic insights.

Mafeje can thereby be understood as an African philosopher engaged in the critical negative project of African philosophy which entails a necessary critique of eurocentrism: an unshackling of African knowledges from European epistemological designs. Moreover, Mafeje is duly committed to the affirmation of African ontological narratives from the standpoint of Africans themselves. Which simply means that he was against the importation of theories to aid an understanding of African social realities as if Africans were not active agents duly capable of developing theories or theorisations from their specific situations.

#### **4.6 Africanity as a Combative Ontology**

Mafeje delineates the importance of Afrocentrism to facilitate epistemological decolonisation which constitutes a radical undoing of colonialism, an undoing of its *locus standi*. According to Mafeje (2008:106):

Afrocentrism can be regarded as methodological requirement for decolonising knowledge in Africa or as an antidote to Eurocentrism through which all knowledge about Africa has been filtered.....Afrocentrism is nothing more than a legitimate demand that African scholars study their society from inside and cease to be purveyors of alienated intellectual discourse. The underlying belief that this will issue in authentic representations. Indeed, it is only logical to suppose that when Africans speak for themselves, the world will hear the authentic voice, and will be forced to come to terms with it in the long-run.

The demand to study African societies from within can be described as Mafeje's ultimate predilection from his early works through to his more advanced studies. His preoccupation has been seeking to understand African social phenomena from terms emanative from it, a representation of the authentic African voice as opposed to the many voices that have sought to represent what Africa is from without. While Afrocentrism is necessary for Mafeje (*ibid*), it is however not sufficient to facilitate an African renaissance. What Mafeje designates as Africanity can be distinguished from Afrocentrism as he suggests that it has more ontological implications: it has an emotive force that seeks to be grounded in home soil. While Mafeje (*ibid*) appreciates the spearheading role played by African-Americans in shaping discourses concerning Africa and demanding authentic representations negating Eurocentrism in all its manifestations. However, for Mafeje (*ibid*) Afrocentrism made in America is a contradiction

in terms, and that while African Americans can be well intentioned they cannot authentically represent African social realities because of their alienation from Africa.

According to Mafeje (ibid) like all Americans African-Americans are Americans first, and whatever else they choose to be, and have contributed to the building of America in significant ways which has contributed to the shaping of their identities. Mafeje (ibid) cites examples of African American experiences of the continent post-independence and the Africans experience of them to state that they have ceased to be Africans, “unless we are talking biology”. For Mafeje (2008:108)

Culturally, socially, and historically the African-Americans and the West Indians have long ceased to be Africans unless we are talking biology, which itself is highly hybridised.....The historical and cultural heritage and contribution of the black Americans to the making of America is largely denied and grossly understudied by American standards. Like Africanity for the Africans, this is a provenance of Black Studies, correctly conceived. Irrespective of what they do, black Americans cannot hope to re-appropriate Africa. Any attempt to do so can only lead to intellectual confusion and conceptual distortions.

Mafeje (2008:108) presents as evidence, of the confusion and conceptual distortions, the case of Henry Louis Gates Jnr and his Afrocentric empire at Harvard, as well as that of Kwame Anthony Appiah as part of Gate’s ‘dream team’. This constitutes an appropriation of Africa that Olufemi Taiwo (1995:39), whom Mafeje (2008:108) adduces, contests. According to Taiwo (1995:39):

In recent times Africa has been a favourite quarry of American social scientists and humanities scholars. It has served Africanist scholars, mostly white, as a springboard for their eminently successful careers, as objects of study, and as cartographic points to which some of them could lay claim as theirs, trespass on which is often the equivalent of a capital offence in African Studies.

The appropriation of Africa by scholars in the United States and the form it takes varies. One example of such an appropriation is represented by the school of Afrocentrism whose proponents see in Africa and its history:

A source for narratives and forms of socio-political discourse to counter the racist denials of African contributions to global history and, more specifically, to the constitution of United States history and civilization. In this case, the appropriation serves an explicitly political purpose. And the desire to see the dominant pedagogies and curricula in the educational system altered is clearly and forcibly articulated (Taiwo, 1995:39).

However, there are other forms of appropriating Africa, exemplified by Gates and Appiah that Taiwo (1995) identifies as not having a well-defined political purpose and sometimes presents itself as an alternative to the polemical and separatist approach of the Afrocentrists. According to Taiwo (1995:39) this appropriation pretends not to be engaged in the kind of race-bound theorizing and politics that characterize Afrocentrism:

Such, I would argue, is the appropriation of Africa that is to be found in Henry Louis Gates's attempt to fashion a theory of literary discourse for African-American literature from the discourse concerning *Esu* in Yoruba metaphysics and religion. A different but related appropriation is that of Anthony Appiah. He tries to fashion for Pan-Africanist discourse and identity alternative foundations to those offered by earlier Pan-Africanists dominated by a preoccupation with racial identity in a late twentieth century world steeped in turmoil.

According to Mafeje (2008), Taiwo (1995) demonstrated that Gates had done less than full justice to his chosen texts relying on his greater command of Yoruba semiotics which gave Taiwo enough courage to tackle a black American celebrity such as Gates.

According to Mafeje (2008:108), Taiwo was able to provide a meaningful critique of the appropriation of Africa by Gates and Appiah was “the fact he was standing on home ground, the ultimate *firma terra*”. Mafeje (2008:108) stipulates that Afrocentrism made in America is a contradiction in terms, that Black Americans, albeit with good intentions, cannot make indigenous knowledge for Africans in the same way continental Africans cannot do the same for any length of time in America. According to Mafeje (2008:108) while it is possible for African-Americans to become ‘experts’ on Africa, however they cannot speak on behalf of Africans. Africanity insists that Africans think, speak and do things for themselves. This does not imply an unwillingness to learn from others but is a refusal to be hegemonized.

Mafeje (ibid) was here clearly speaking on the need for Africans on the continent to speak for themselves about issues concerning them without mediations by others. Mafeje's concern with African Americans appropriation of Africa often results in African voices being hegemonised by African American ones. Therefore, for a realisation of the much envisaged renaissance of Africa it is important for Africans on the continent to speak for themselves. According to Mafeje (ibid) outside of Africa, Africanity cannot be fostered. It is inextricably linked to the anticipated African rebirth as an ontology. It is a prerequisite for the second independence of African meta-nationalists and the proposed African renaissance.

An important elucidation of Africanity as a combative ontology that Mafeje (2008:109) articulates is the end of African studies in Africa. According to Mafeje (ibid), African studies was founded on the epistemology of alterity and were predominantly a foreign undertaking with the exception of South Africa. Mafeje (2008) cites the critical debate raised by Mamdani (1990) in his evaluation of "African Studies Made in the US". To study themselves, Africans do not need African studies, which is anomalous to the post-independence African drive to self-determine. For Mafeje (ibid), African studies replicates the colonial paradigm "wherein white subjects studied black objects" and "blacks were not allowed to study themselves, except as aides". According to Dladla (2016:33) while the existence of African studies in Europe and America is justified given that Africans are not the majority there, its existence in Africa is concerning since it is suggestive that those other disciplines not pre-fixed with "African" are not African. Such a predilection of African studies is opposed to the ontology of Africanity which Mafeje elucidates as combative against Eurocentrism and hegemonisation by others. It is imperative that Africans from the continent speak for and about themselves from their own lived socio-cultural political reality.

Mafeje's postulations about African Americans alienation from Africa sociologically, culturally and historically can be challenged from what Cedric Robinson has defined as the Black Radical Tradition. His Magnum opus *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* Robinson (1983) articulates continuities of African consciousness in the plantations of the new-world as breeding ground for an articulation of resistance to white domination. However, Mafeje's point appears to be more about the need for Africans to speak for themselves and African America's claim to the creation of America which remain understudied. What Mafeje is against is the appropriation of Africa by African American

scholars for nefarious purposes and the hegemonisation of their voices at the expense of Africans. However, it rather seems far-fetched to stipulate that it is because of culture and socio-history that they have ceased to be African. More appropriate would have been to insinuate that politically African Americans play the role similar to that of the Europeans in assuming the role of being the official spokespersons on African matters at the expense of African voices.

#### **4.7 Conclusion**

This chapter through a reading and appreciation of Mafeje's intellectual contribution duly places Mafeje as an African philosopher concerned with the liberation of philosophy and the social sciences in Africa from the Eurocentric conceptual binds. Mafeje's early works written through the prism of a functionalist anthropological approach were exposed to have been concerned with a representation of African social reality in its own terms albeit the limitations of the epistemological framework. Although Mafeje was involved in a Marxist movement in the form of the NEUM that influence came to be articulated in his later work in which he advances a critique of the social sciences particularly anthropology which was his primary training. Mafeje's appropriation of a Marxist framework was critical in nature and sought to overcome many of its limitations in the quest for authentic representation of African social phenomena. Therefore, Mafeje is appreciated as an African intellectual of the first generation that carried forth the fight against imperialism and domination in knowledge production about African societies. In Mafeje's (1991: iv) words: "for we are not asking to be praised but to be understood on our terms", thus Mafeje's contribution can be summed as being concerned with authentic representations of Africans and African social phenomena.

## CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION: THE END OF SOUTH AFRICA AND THE RISE OF AZANIA<sup>52</sup>

*By black here, I don't mean a particular skin color or identity, a certain vocal affectation, musical aesthetic, or capacity for rhythm (though I do mean all those things, too). Instead, I mean blackness as a radical refusal of the movement of reconciliation, and thus, of whiteness. To be black and to be made black is to take seriously the work of refusal, which is an antagonism, a thorn in the side of the sovereignty of whiteness. . . . To become black is to remain in instability, is to remain in solidarity together in instability. To become black is to be against the movement beyond sociality for the sake of becoming logical and reasonable. To become black is to refuse being made a something— to be and become nothing. Not because nothing is an absence or a lack of life, but precisely because nothing is the abundance and multiplicity out of which life is formed. —Amaryah Shaye, "Refusing to Reconcile, Part 2"*

I have discussed the philosophical problem that is 'South Africa' on the part of the people conquered in the unjust wars of colonisation and the resultant problematic of decolonisation emanating from the student protests of 2015 (Chapter 1). I have also adumbrated the history of philosophy and Social Sciences in South Africa as primarily preoccupied with mimicry of the traditions of the global North and theoretically extraverted (Chapter 2). An outline of the debates concerning the existence of African Philosophy and the particular liberatory mission that defines African philosophy were discussed to demonstrate its unbounded character (Chapter 3). Archie Mafeje's intellectual contribution to philosophy and Social Sciences in Africa was outlined by punctuating his distinct liberatory drive away from Eurocentric negations as characteristic of the post-independence era in the African continent (Chapter 4). In this concluding chapter, I focus on the liberatory practice defined as the Azanian philosophical tradition that has re-emerged as a critique of South Africa and its knowledges and has sought to re-imagine a liberated society in what is called South Africa and Africa at large. I outline the Azanian intellectual tradition as a counter the colonial and oppressive

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<sup>52</sup>This title is adopted from the book by David Dube (1983) entitled *The rise of Azania The fall of South Africa*. Daystar Publication Ltd. Lusaka, Zambia.

South Africa and the knowledges it privileges or gives rise to, and to articulate a liberatory post-conquest society that gives decolonisation its proper meaning. This is not to say Mafeje identified with such a tradition in his intellectual works, I am merely outlining the tradition as complementary to his thoughts on the liberation of philosophy and the social sciences in South Africa and Africa at large.

### **5.1 Conquest, Sub-personhood and the Challenge to Decolonise**

Ndumiso Dladla (2017) identifies racism as not so much a matter of a mental state of superiority by whites over their racial others but a material fact of the power they enjoy over their subjects, what Dladla (2017)<sup>53</sup> identifies as *historical power*. According to Dladla (ibid) historical power refers to: “the historical establishment and systemisation of political and existential synonymy between whiteness and humanity (and its correspondent rights)”. Moreover, beyond the Eurocentric cultural and social impositions white supremacy enforces its effects concern the very life chances and life expectancies of whites in the world versus their racial others. This is the burdensome life of the native/colonised that Frantz Fanon (1963:38) identifies as opposed to that of the settler, which can be distinguished as the zone of nonbeing (death) and the zone of being (life), respectively:

The zone where the natives live is not complementary to the zone inhabited by the settlers. The two zones are opposed, but not in the service of a higher unity. . . The settlers' town is a strongly built town, all made of stone and steel. It is a brightly lit town. . . The native town is a hungry town, starved of bread, of meat, of shoes, of coal, of light. The native town is a crouching village, a town on its knees, a town wallowing in the mire.

Indeed, the materiality of racism is indicative of uneven power relations between the coloniser and the colonised and speaks of outstanding liberation on the part of the colonised. Bernard Magubane (2007:252) asserts that it is to be expected that a state that is oppressively racist and colonial state as South Africa needs a racist historiography to legitimate itself, this is historical power as identified by Dladla (2017). Dladla (ibid) elucidates that white supremacy as a form of historical power is founded on the “enjoyment and exercise of social, economic

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<sup>53</sup> Dladla, N. 2017. *Blacks Could be racist: a note on historical power*. [https://www.huffingtonpost.co.za/ndumiso-dladla/blacks-could-be-racist-a-note-on-historical-power\\_a\\_22022517/](https://www.huffingtonpost.co.za/ndumiso-dladla/blacks-could-be-racist-a-note-on-historical-power_a_22022517/)

and political power collectively as a group, over a significant period of time” which inevitably would include the monopoly “over the very enterprise and discipline of *historical writing and representation itself*” including the dominance and control of institutions of historical production.

Magubane (2007:252) laments the elision of the colonised experience in the construction of historical accounts about South Africa. According to Magubane (ibid) “to be an African in South Africa, meant and still means to suffer privation, on a daily basis. Among South African historians however, it seems not to have been a very important issue”. According to Magubane (2007:252) the victors in the wars of colonisation in South Africa became the progenitors of South African history “as written by recognised historians”, precisely because the vocation into historical inquiry is itself not free from ideological presuppositions and is intimately tied with power relations (Magubane, 2007:253).

The fact of conquest being foundational to the construction of a South African polity and society is justified by the historiography emanating from the discipline of history. The presumed sub-human status of the indigenous people served as justification for the seizure of their territory that was to ensue. Adducing Bernard Magubane’s lament of the postulations by historian George McCall Theal that the Dutch and English were justified in their conquest because the Khoi were subhumans, Dladla (2023) relays the narrative of conquest and just war from the position of western political theory which informed the settlers’ impulses, as expressed by Theal “it was for the world’s good that they should make room for a higher race”. This would later inform historiographic attempts by the descendants of the Dutch to justify the seizure of territory under the distortions *terra nullius, res nullius* and *Filius nullius*<sup>54</sup>. Conquest is not reducible to force alone as Webster (2021:111) adducing Yves Winter outlines: “Its subsistence depends on the production of an epistemic and symbolic order and power over the representation of history”. The conquest of southern Africa included both military force and epistemic violence: the foundational violence of conquest was silenced, or erased, and a fictional memory of peaceful and benevolent arrival was constructed which would assure futurity of the settler colonial project. According to Webster (ibid), South African

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<sup>54</sup>terra nullius (a land belonging to nobody)  
res nullius (property belonging to no one)  
filius nullius (bastards or rightless people) (as quoted by Dladla 2023 from Pheko)

social science has been a central mechanism of conqueror South Africa to silence the outstanding historical injustice of conquest, and is at variance with the Azanian Philosophical Tradition<sup>55</sup>. According to Krenchaw et.al (2019: 6):

Every established discipline in the academy has an origin that entails engagement and complicity with white supremacy. In the age of conquest, colonisation, Indigenous dispossession, and empire, Europeans' vexed confrontations with peoples from Africa, Asia, and Latin America whom they perceived to be "other" gave rise to anthropology's interest in "primitive" civilizations and geography's impetus to map the world. Scholars of philosophy, history, sociology, political science, and economics turned to biology in explaining how and why European empires came to dominate the world, attributing that dominance to evolution and "the survival of the fittest" instead of systematically investigating the brutality of conquest and the cruelties of expropriation and exploitation.

This is to say that the western academy has been complicit in the conquest of the new world and the enslavement of African people justified by racist presuppositions about their supposed lack of humanity which ultimately places them outside of historical 'development'. While it had been previously acknowledged that Africa was the progenitor of western civilisation and philosophy, by the 18<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> century, the process of invisibilisation and erasure had ensued which privileged the European as the centre of the unfolding discourses. According to Krenchaw (2019:5) the social sciences originated as nomadic endeavours dedicated to identifying broad scientific principles regulating social organization and structure. The unified sum of social connections tended to be divided into separate and disconnected practices because of this search for general laws using specific and distinct methods of investigation. For instance, the binary antagonism between race and class assumes a class system that is not raced and a racial system that is not classed. Furthermore, only five countries—Germany, France, Italy, Great Britain, and the United States—were the focus of this search for "universal" principles in sociology, political science, history, and

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<sup>55</sup> According to Dube (1983:4): "Azania is the name that is used by a broad section of African revolutionaries and progressive forces who support the Azanian Revolution and are working for the overthrow of racist South Africa. Azania means a blackman's country. 'South Africa' on the contrary is the name that was given by white settlers to the southern tip of Africa to consolidate their political, economic and military oppression and suppression of the indigenous black population- the owners of the country- Azania".

economics, and the dominant practices there were deemed to be applicable to all of humanity.

## 5.2 The Azanian Antidote to Colonialism

We have discussed the philosophical problem that is South Africa in the imaginations of the conquered people precisely because it is a negation of their existence: South Africa is a European construct in the continent of Africa that is ultimately “The white man’s land” (Smuts), according to Modiri (2021:46):

The basic problem and fundamental injustice of ‘South Africa’ is thus not identified in its laws, practices, and excesses of discrimination, segregation, and violence but rather in its very founding as a European-created and European-dominated racial polity (Hallett 1974: 677) – a ‘white dominion’ or ‘white man’s country’. As a political construct, ‘South Africa’ was created without and against the conquered peoples within its political territory. The ‘native’ in this historical order was a ‘mere subject of conquest’, ‘under the state but not a party of it’

This is ultimately why Azanian<sup>56</sup> thought is predicated on the repudiation of South Africa because of its unjust and unethical formation that is axiomatically racist polity, predicated upon colonial conquest, slavery, and racial subjugation. According to Ndumiso Dladla (2021) it was Kwame Nkrumah at the All-African Peoples Conference of 1958, that was attended by the Africanist who were still to exit and form the PAC, that suggested the use of the name Azania as the name for a liberated polity. In the PAC’s understanding of the struggle the restoration of sovereign title to territory to the Africans is central as a renunciation of the conqueror’s sovereignty over ‘South Africa’, attending to the demands of economic and epistemic justice (Dladla, 2021:2). It is important to note that the invocation of Azania is not necessarily to merely replace the name of the territory that is currently mapped as South Africa.

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<sup>56</sup>“Azania marks the repudiation of the settler-colonial foundations of ‘South Africa’ and beckons a post-conquest rather than merely post-apartheid society. In historical terms, then, Azania is a placeholder for a long-standing emancipatory and abolitionist horizon first articulated by Africans through the waging of wars of resistance against colonial rule” (Modiri, 2021:46).

The Azanian tradition therefore functions within a continental Pan Africanist<sup>57</sup>, transnational, and internationalist orbit of ideas and praxes (Modiri, 2021:47). According to Modiri (ibid), Azanian thought can be characterised by the five key liberatory rudiments he outlines as:

(1) the continuation and elaboration of the struggle for liberation at the analytical, intellectual, and conceptual level; (2) the critique and negation of Western civilisation – which is to say the dismantling of (settler-) coloniality, white supremacy, and racial capitalism (and the social, sexual, cultural-symbolic, intellectual, and political systems they engender and reproduce); (3) resolute analytic focus and consciousness about the ongoing constitutive material and symbolic force of race and racialisation; (4) a long view historical memory of colonisation, apartheid, their enduring structural violence, and their persisting afterlives in the post-1994 period; and (5) the restoration and reaffirmation of the political and cultural integrity of African, indigenous, and Black experiences and consciousness.

Investigating and elucidating on Archie Mafeje’s intellectual contribution was inspired by this insight by the Azanian school, which is precisely the initiative to invoke a counter orthodox historical imagination that seeks to self-determine against mimicking European models of thinking and understandings of history and thought which Mafeje represents.

The insurrection against European epistemological paradigms emanative of the writings of Mafeje had the ability to inspire my rebellion against white philosophy in South Africa as a Black student and a descendant of the peoples conquered in the unjust wars of colonisation. The experience of studying philosophy in a previously white university was an alienating experience that in many instances called into question the quality of being of the African. This was represented by the disbelief that African philosophy has any legitimacy as a philosophy: is there an African philosophy? Or can African systems of thought be considered to be philosophy proper? Such questions although supposedly aimed at elucidating African thought prove rather to be demeaning precisely because of the assumed lack of agency to postulate what African philosophy is by Africans themselves. My first encounter with the thought and

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<sup>57</sup> “Whereas some scholars agree that the core of Azania was in East Africa modern, the geographical extent of Azania is in question. Archaeological, historical, and linguistic data have been used to suggest Azania extended from the coast of East Africa to the Great Lakes region, central Africa and South Africa. It is also argued that the people of Azania were Bantu speakers who were farming and smelting iron. It is therefore justifiable for the people of the larger region of South Africa to East Africa to name themselves Azanians” (Chami, 2021:12).

writing on Mafeje inspired me to think through the implications of his work for my present white academic philosophy curriculum<sup>58</sup>.

What is distinct about Mafeje's philosophical predilection is the insistence to begin from a position of reality in pondering reality as Enrique Dussel (1983:4) elucidates:

Distant thinkers, those who had to define themselves in the presence of an already established image of the human person and in the presence of uncivilised fellow humans, the newcomers, the ones who hope because they are always outside, these are the ones who have a clear mind for pondering reality. They have nothing to hide. How can they hide domination if they undergo it? How would their philosophy be an ideological ontology if their praxis is one of liberation from the centre they are opposing? *Philosophical intelligence is never so truthful, clean and precise as when it starts from oppression and does not have to defend any privileges, because it has none* (my emphasis).

Mafeje's intellectual work since the early years to his later life can be undoubtedly described as comprising a liberatory element in that it can be seen as an effort to describe African social reality in its own terms. Although his early work was articulated through the liberal functionalist school that was prevalent at the time his preoccupation and intellectual predilection remained consistent which we have described as an attempt to represent reality in its own terms. For example Mafeje's (1961:90) study of the 1961 visit to Cape Town by chief Mtirara of the *AbaThembu* attempts to represent how the broader community was divided as to the purpose of the visit and the demands therein on the part of those who had to receive the chief, which broadly demonstrated the dissatisfaction by the Thembu Cape Town community with traditional authority and its relationship to colonial government, a

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<sup>58</sup>This culminated into a publication in the South African Journal of Philosophy titled 'Archie Mafeje and the question of African Philosophy: A liberatory discourse'<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/02580136.2017.1301161>

This was after my proposal to do a study on Mafeje at the University of Johannesburg was considered not to fall within the realm of academic philosophy. There had been a series of exchanges between myself and some of the Professors in that institution at the time most notably Thaddeus Metz. It was in a Masters coursework module on Science and Society that we came to a clash when in an assignment question about African appeals to the invisible appealing to the consigns of western science was met with resistance and charged with extraversion. This led to me being expelled at that institution, but ultimately began my own personal struggle against white philosophy in South Africa <https://mg.co.za/article/2017-02-07-no-one-philosophical-about-demise-of-philosophical-society/>

demonstration of an overcoming of 'tribal ideology'. Mafeje's (ibid) detailing of the visit exposit his attempts to authentically represent the people's understanding and struggle with established power as well as decoding social change in the urban setting as conducive to African nationalism.

In his later work Mafeje (2001) reflects on this period of the 1960's when he undertook fieldwork in the urban and rural areas of South Africa delineating his misgivings with categorisations emanative from colonial anthropology. In his study of Langa, authored with his then supervisor Monica Wilson, Mafeje and Wilson (1963:88) detail the varied attitudes people in Cape Town exuded to traditional authority from those who he refers to as *townspeople* and the migrant workers in the city. The townspeople had no regard for traditional authority and viewed it with suspicion as an extension of colonial authority and administration. The term the townspeople used to refer to traditional authority was *omantshingelane*(security guards), the migrant workers also shared a similar perspective but were bound to have some regard to traditional authority due to their non-permanent status in the city and with their families residing in the country. The misgivings with the categories of colonial anthropology speaks to his liberatory intellectual predilection to representing reality in terms emanative from it.

To further demonstrate the point of the liberatory intellectual predilection of Mafeje a purview of his 1967 article titled '*The role of the Bard in a contemporary African community*' would further demonstrate this point. Mafeje's (1967:193) study of the institution of *IMBONGI* in African societies contests the characterisation of traditional African bards as 'praise poets' or 'poet lauretes' by various linguists since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Following A.C Jordan's contention that "the institution of *imbongi* was not limited to the 'praising' or the 'adulation' of the chief" but to organise and articulate social and political views as Jordan (1957) as quoted by Mafeje (1967: 193) postulates that the bards in African communities were not mere "flatterers", even though they did adulate "the good and praiseworthy" however they had the license to provide criticism of the habits of their subjects. From his fieldwork and observation Mafeje (1967:195) argues that parallels can be drawn from the institution of the Celtic Bards (who enjoyed privileges of being exempt from taxes and military service), and whose primary function was to sing hymns of praise for their nation and

celebrate victories, giving poetic expression to religious and political sentiments of their people and that of the bards in contemporary African communities.

Mafeje's approach to the study of social reality adduces a historical understanding of social phenomena and thus incorporates an insistence on providing categories that are emanative from the social reality itself. As has been demonstrated above in his representation of the visit by the Tembuchief Mtirara to the Cape Town Tembu community that the townspeople exuded a pan Africanist ideology away from the tribal ideology which is characteristic of colonial anthropological categorisations. This is why his critique of the *Ideology of Tribalism* was a confrontation with a European ideology that necessarily characterises African societies as inherently tribal. This tribal ideology purports to read African social reality in an ahistorical manner that ignores any social change and is serviceable to the colonial administrators for their purposes of divide and rule.

In the 1981 review article of the collection of essays edited by Harold Wolpe entitled *The Articulation of modes of Production* Mafeje (1981:130) cautions against the misappropriation and the transplantation of theories with universalistic pretensions such as Marxism to understand local conditions: "To conduct class analysis we do not have to invent classes, but rather to be alert to possible mediations in the process of class formation". Indeed, in a later article reflecting on the South African state published 1986 *South Africa: The Dynamics of a Beleaguered State* Mafeje elucidates on this position and distinguishes between 'universal' and vernacular languages in relation to the study of local histories as well as 'universal' histories. According to Mafeje (1986: 95) the symbols deployed to understand universal history need not be the same as those used to decipher local history, moreover, "In the context of domination, universal languages are a supreme instrument for indoctrination and in the context of liberation "vernacular" languages are a powerful instrument for self-assertion and self-rediscovery".

Although Mafeje's intellectual journey traverses through liberal functionalist anthropology to a radical Marxist insistence on understanding the relationship between power and knowledge it can be argued that he has been consistent in his insistence to represent African social reality from terms emanative from it. While his earlier work was articulated through liberal functionalist understandings he nonetheless sought to confront colonial categorisations of social reality. Marxist materialism functioned as a prism through which a liberated

perspective could be articulated. However, his appropriation of Marxism was critical and was understood from the social history that produced the thought. This is to say Mafeje has been an African intellectual concerned with the liberation of philosophy and the social sciences in Africa. His insistence on understanding African social realities from terms emanative from it, away from Eurocentric negations, speaks of an African intellectual duly concerned with liberation of African thought from European preconceptions.

Mafeje's critique of colonial anthropology and insistence on authentic representation of African social phenomena is traceable throughout his works and is more clearly articulated in his later work particularly his study of the *Kingdoms of the Great Lakes* where he postulates that "for we are not seeking to be praised, but to be understood in our own terms". An insistence that characterises his intellectual journey through the various schools of thought that defined his scholarship at various points. His insistence on a historical understanding of social phenomena precisely because *it is the historical juncture which defines us socially and intellectually* (Mafeje: 2008,107).

Mafeje's intellectual predilection dovetails with what defines the essence of what the Azanian Philosophical Society<sup>59</sup> represents: to repudiate South African knowledges that have sustained the continuation of settler colonialism and conquest. It is therefore the mission of an Azanian philosophy to contest and establish a philosophy and Social Science practice that speak to reality and can produce categories of interpretation from within it, instead of importing theory to understand local conditions because of the presumed legitimacy of the inherited categories which are products of European enlightenment, expansionism which ultimately led to the conquest and colonisation of many lands including what became South Africa. To contest the legitimacy of South Africa and its knowledges that have been sustained through a negation of African existence and an ahistorical understanding of African social realities is the ultimate project emanative of an Azanian Philosophy. Which is ultimately to

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<sup>59</sup> "The Azanian Philosophical Society (APS) is a multi-disciplinary social sciences and humanities association. The focus of this association are the methods, traditions, intellectual history, and philosophical foundations of the human and social sciences including questions regarding the South African project itself. The association was founded to advance critical scholarship in these areas and to usher in an agenda for social justice in the philosophical projects underpinning our academic and social institutions" (<https://www.theaps.org>).

provide a history of the becoming of South Africa that was a negation of African social existence.

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