CONVERSATIONAL THINKING AS A METHOD OF CONCEPTUAL DECOLONIZATION

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Abstract
In this paper I seek to reinvigorate the theory of conceptual decolonization within African philosophy that has, over the years, succumbed to inertia. I argue that Wiredu's conceptual decolonization must be grounded on conversational thinking to avoid becoming obsolete. Conceptual decolonization is a double-pronged project with a negative and positive aspect. On the negative, it means using one's native language as a tool for a critical appraisal of the philosophical concepts one uses in order to dislodge any colonial concepts they may have been uncritically assimilated into our thought systems. On the positive side, it means an engagement with concepts, ideas and theories from other philosophical traditions to ascertain whether they can, if necessary, be supplemented to one's tradition. The project has to contend with two important challenges. First, when one investigates a foreign concept in one's native language and finds it to be wanting, how does one know to whom the fault lies? Secondly, what happens when two cultures have two opposing theories about the same concept? Kwasi Wiredu's solution to the challenges was what he termed 'independent grounds'. In this paper I seek to offer a solution to the two challenges above. I agree that a part of the solution is 'independent grounds' as Kwasi Wiredu maintains. However, 'independent' grounds will truly be independent if grounded on the conversational concept of relationship called Arumaristics. I show how adopting the conversational theoretic framework avoids the pitfalls that previously made conceptual decolonization untenable and thus obsolete.
Keywords: Conversational method, conceptual decolonization, complementarity, independent grounds, method, colonialism.

Introduction

How does African philosophy retain its Africanness while at the same time becoming a universal philosophy? A different version of this question was posed by Jonathan Chimakonam, thus: What makes a discourse philosophy, and what makes a philosophy African? (CHIMAKONAM 2019, 33). The first question that asks how African philosophy retains its Africanness while at the same time moving towards universalism, is a question that Kwasi Wiredu grappled with for almost his entire academic career. Chimakonam also picked up the gauntlet and has published scores of articles dedicated to answering it. Wiredu thought that once a philosopher has gone through the process of conceptual decolonization, the work she produces will be regarded as authentically African, and philosophical. Chimakonam on the other hand, argues that once the philosopher adopts African logic, and uses African-developed methods, only then can her work be both authentically African and philosophical. Therefore, respectively, both Wiredu and Chimakonam offer conceptual decolonization and conversationalism as that which gives African philosophy its legitimacy as both African and philosophical.

The solutions offered above may seem straightforward and simple, perhaps the question they answer may also seem simple and uninteresting. However, that would be too hasty a judgement as the historical trajectory of Africa and, African philosophy has made this question urgent and important. As Wiredu pointed out, intellectually, Africans are brought up in Western-style educational institutions. As a result, everything they learn in these institutions points back to Western sources (WIREDU 2002, 6). There is nothing intrinsically wrong with getting a Western-style education, what is wrong is the way we got our education. It was through the violence of colonialism that Africans found themselves in Western-styled classrooms learning about the great Western heroes who came to save Africa. It is true that colonialism has ended and Africa has achieved its independence. However, the effects of colonialism are still strongly felt in most countries in Africa. One of colonialism's undying institutions is education. One of the ways that colonialism clings on to African minds, according to Wiredu, is through education (1996, 136). Through education, Africans pick up Western conceptual schemes, ways of seeing and sometimes customs.

Moreover, they are taught in foreign languages be it French, English or Spanish. As a consequence, Wiredu posits, these are the languages they think or philosophize in. And to philosophize in a certain language means that one is prone to the suggestiveness of that language. This means they are taken in by the metaphysical assumptions of the language they philosophize in (WIREDU 1998,136). The building blocks of thought are concepts and language. One cannot think of concepts excepts through language. Therefore, when one controls your language they control your thought. When erstwhile colonizers taught students in foreign languages, they imposed on them foreign conceptual framework. There is an example of how that happens.

The first example is given by Mary Carman (2016) in her reading of Kwasi Wiredu. She employs an example of a classroom to show how a conceptual scheme and concepts are assimilated through habit, instruction and thought (CARMAN 2016, 237). If a teacher wants to teach the concept of a neutron, she will use language to explain what she is talking about. She will transfer, through description and instruction, the concept of a neutron to students. Because there is a word for the concept 'neutron', it will be shareable and communicable (CARMAN 2016, 327-328). Communication involves "the transference of a thought content from one person to another", and language is "the vehicle of this transference" (WIREDU 1996, 23). Carman moves on to say that because thought content is made up of concepts, it is clear how language has an influence on "our conceptual schemes and on how we think" (CARMAN 2016, 238). The fact that we share a language implies that we share a conceptual scheme. This means that speakers of different languages have different conceptual schemes (CARMAN 2016). What happens then when an African attends a school where she is taught in English? The answer is conceptual colonization. She will be using conceptual frameworks that may be vastly different from her own. She will be articulating concepts and ideas that may not make sense in her worldview. These are the result of the violent imposition of colonial education.

Another instance of conceptual colonisation is provided by Wiredu when he argued that when Descartes speaks of certainty, he is referring to an impossibility of error. Wiredu argued that Descartes is

making a conflation that a native Akan speaker would not make. Descartes is conflating certainty with infallibility. In the Akan language to say 'I am certain' is to say 'I see very clearly' and to say 'it is certain' in Akan means 'it is so'. Wiredu argues that it is hard for an Akan to conflate certainty with infallibility (WIREDU 1996, 146). The Twi speaker may, according to Wiredu, miss this conflation if they are speaking and thinking in English. This is because they would be taken in by the metaphysical assumption of the English language. This is how African scholars who are educated in Western languages are conceptually colonized. So, a speaker who learns Descartes work in English may immediately assimilate the concept of certainty into their conceptual scheme and use it in the same erroneous way Descartes used it because they read, thought and philosophized in English.

To be clear there are other concepts that African philosophers have inherited from other Africans that are equally problematic. For instance, Appiah argues that Crummel, one of the fathers of Pan-Africanism, based his Pan-Africanism on a conception of race inherited from the Western discourse (APPIAH 1992, 8). Pan-Africanism uses a concept of racial solidarity that is based on the Western conceptuality of race. Pan-Africanists have assimilated Western notions of race, and an entire discourse of Pan-Africanism revolves around it (APPIAH 1992, 5). Perhaps some Pan-Africanists have since then challenged Crummel's conception of Africa but the point remains that we can inherit from within the African tradition concepts that originate from a colonial source even if we learned them from an African disourse. It is from these facts of colonialism that Wiredu bitterly asked "Given all this…in what sense may we call any philosophies emerging from such an intellectual milieu *African?*" (WIREDU 2002, 12).

This essay first looks at Wiredu's project of conceptual decolonization. Using conversational thinking, I poke holes in the theory of conceptual decolonization. I then move on to give a brief description of conversationalism. Following the description of conversationalism, I offer arguments for why there is a need for a methodic shift in conceptual decolonization. I argue that conversationalism is the method best suited for conceptual decolonization. I move on to show how conceptual decolonization may benefit if it is grounded on conversationalism.

The Project of Conceptual Decolonization

Conceptual decolonization is, according to Wiredu, "the attempt to dislodge ideas, conceptual frameworks, and concepts that have been uncritically assimilated into our modern African thought" (WIREDU 1996,8). This is a double-pronged project that consists of a negative aspect and a positive aspect. On the negative aspect, we need to critically assess concepts and ways of seeing that have been uncritically assimilated into our modern African thought. On the positive aspect, we need to appropriate as much as is judicious, concepts, ideas and ways of conceptualizing from philosophies of different cultures. The key point here is that whatever we do, we must be critical not only of western concepts but of African concepts as well.

How exactly do we go about dislodging ideas or concepts from our conceptual schemes? On many occasions Wiredu has said "try to argue in your own African language and, on the basis of the results, review the intelligibility of the associated problems or the plausibility of the apparent solutions that have tempted you when you have pondered them in some metropolitan language" (WIREDU 1996, 137). This approach has been called the language-based approach (see paper by CHIMAKONAM and OSUAGAU, 2018). Wiredu has argued, for example, that there is no blanket concept for punishment in Akan culture. He says that reaction to wrongdoing varies from the literal ear-pulling reserved for children, compensation for a minor offense and sometimes exile. He thinks this is a good thing because it avoids the Western problem of how we should justify punishment (WIREDU 1996, 95). Wiredu also argues that thinking in our native languages avoids many problems that may not be as urgent in our native languages. He takes the Western problem of fact vs truth and states that in Akan truth is fact. The requirement that something must be true if it corresponds to the way things are (the fact), does not arise in the Akan philosophical context. In this theory, we define truth by means of assertions such as "p" is true (where "p" stands for a proposition) means "p" corresponds to a fact. In Akan, one expresses "p" is true saying "p" *te saa*," which means, "p" is so. The English word, fact, is expressed in Akan as "*nea ete saa*", which means, that which is so. Then, the correspondence theory of truth becomes a tautology in Akan: "p" *te saa* means "p" *te saa* (WIREDU 1996, 103).

Wiredu argues that this problem of fact vs truth is a genuine problem in the West but does not arise in Akan. The upshot is that when we philosophize in our native languages, we avoid many of problems that may arise in the West and turn out to be unintelligible in African conceptual schemes. This is how we reverse the colonial imposition of conceptual frameworks. The general idea is that the source of our confusion is the fact that we used a foreign language and that language had concepts and ideas that are alien to our conceptual schemes. The solution has to be linguistic, if the problem is linguistic, therefore, thinking in our languages will help us find the concepts that have colonized our minds. This raises an important question; when a concept that makes sense in English but does not make sense in Akan, to whom does the fault lie?

Wiredu states that "the recourse to the African vernacular is not sufficient on its own to tell us anything about concepts" (WIREDU 1996, 104). It may be the case that when we philosophize in our African vernacular, we will find that a concept that previously made sense in English does not make sense. This could be as a result of an insufficiency of the African language or a defect in the conceptualization of the foreign language (1996). How do we determine which is the case? Wiredu answers by saying that "The only way, I suggest, is to try to reason out the matter on *independent grounds*" (1996, 138). By this, he means in a manner that would be intelligible in both the African and the foreign language concerned. Wiredu recognized that it is not enough to merely point out the fact that a certain concept does not make sense in one's language. In addition, one has to argue in a philosophically justifiable way or at least in a way that can be clearly followed by the person you want to convince. Elsewhere Wiredu posited that:

> If a notion in English, for instance, cannot be expressed in Akan, the Englishman who has mastered Akan or the Akan who has mastered English can investigate in English why that is so… It may turn out that the notion in question needs to be introduced into Akan. In the alternative, arguments intelligible in English can and will have to be given for debunking such a notion (WIREDU 1996, 104).

When Wiredu criticized Descartes's skepticism he did not think the basis for resisting it was that it does not make sense in Twi. Instead, he says the essential reason is that it involves "a fallacy, namely, that of confusing certainty and infallibility which all judicious thinking should steer clear" (WIREDU 1996, 140). This can be understood as what Wiredu means by independent grounds. He is arguing that Descartes's conception of certainty is wrong not because it is unintelligible in the Akan's conceptual scheme but because it is philosophically unjustifiable, irrespective of one's language or culture. In his later article Wiredu responds to critics by saying that he has not (as they often accused him) merely said that certain Western concepts are wrong because they are unintelligible in the Akan language (2002). For example, he says when he criticized Descartes' idea of the mind as a substance, it is not only because in Akan the mind is a capacity. He says he also argued on independent grounds, that is, in a manner that is not dependent on the peculiarities of language (WIREDU 2002, 10). Wiredu says that his theory of mind has affinities with functionalism, a computer-inspired, theory of mind in Anglo-American philosophy. According to this theory, the mind is not an entity but is a pattern of inputs, internal changes, and outputs. Wiredu explains this theory at length and argues at the end of his paper that it is similar to the Akan conception of mind (2002, 13). This is to say that Wiredu does not think that Descartes's theory of the mind is wrong because it is inexpressible in Akan, but he thinks it is wrong because of independent philosophical considerations.

Conversationalism

Before addressing the shortfalls of conceptual decolonization and how conversationalism should be the method that drives it. I will give a brief explanation of conversationalism. To say that I will give a brief account means that I will only explain aspects that will be relevant to my discussion. Conversationalism as a philosophy has been only around for approximately a decade. And, as it is expected of a budding philosophy, there have been quite a handful of papers explaining what it is, elucidating and distilling its difference to other philosophies. I think it is time we put it to a test. I want to move beyond those who promote or reject conversationalism. I will not pay attention to broader

criticisms of conversational thinking or conversationalism, just as I did with conceptual decolonization, I will take for granted that it is a worthwhile theory on its own. My labour will be to show that it works for conceptual decolonization, not whether or not, outside conceptual decolonization, it is a good theory. I will attempt, throughout the paper, to use conversational methods. I am not looking for differences or similarities between Wiredu and Chimakonam, I am holding a conversation with Wiredu using Chimakonam's vocabulary in an attempt to understand ways conceptual decolonization can remain a viable project. In this instance, it is a strange conversation because I am, in a way, assuming the roles of both the *Nwa-nsa (proponent)* and *Nwa-nju (opponent)*. I am the doubter and the defender. I interpreted Wiredu's work and placed him as a proponent. After providing questions about his views, I looked to Chimakonam for solutions and interpreted his work in an attempt to find them. Therefore, at the end of the paper, true to conversationalism, I will not be looking for a consensus between the authors, nor will I attempt to find a synthesis between their views. I will, however, try to show how, through a creative struggle, conceptual decolonization can adopt new concepts and new ways of thinking. These concepts help better the position of conceptual decolonialists.

Chimakonam believes that philosophy should be a borderless activity.[1] To say it must be a borderless activity does not mean he wants to underplay or ignore the 'cultural inspiration' that always undergird the emergence of all philosophy traditions (CHIMAKONAM 2017c, 117). The fact that all philosophy comes from a particular place makes it, according to Chimakonam, hard to disentangle it from its cultural roots. Philosophy must come from a place, and whenever different philosophers from different places meet at what he calls the 'agora', they bring all their biases and assumptions, and it is only through a creative struggle that their particularity is 'purified' (CHIMAKONAM 2017c, 117). Chimakonam aims to provide a mechanism through which different cultures can meet and hold a conversation that allows them (the

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[1] Uti Ojah Egbai & Jonathan O. Chimakonam (2019) Why Conversational Thinking Could be an Alternative Method for Intercultural Philosophy, Journal of Intercultural Studies. 172

cultures) to retain their authenticity but also one that does not allow their differences to: A) hinder mutual understanding; B) force one culture to live by or accept a dominant culture's worldview. Conversationalism is a way of ensuring that multiple voices come together and each one of them is allowed space for expression. Chimakonam thinks there is a specific way that intercultural dialogue must be done in order to avoid hegemony. He calls it "rules of engagement" (2019, 183). These are guidelines that everyone who is interested in intercultural dialogue ought to follow.

Conversational thinking is a strategy of exchange that is inspired by an under-explored Igbo notion of relationship.[2] The idea is that reality exists as "a network in which everything depends on everything else" (CHIMAKONAM 2019, 172). Chimakonam uses that view of relationship to explain conversationalism as a relationship of creative and critical struggle of two epistemic agents called *Nwa-nsa* (defender) and *Nwa-nju* (doubter) (CHIMAKONAM 2017b, 16). "As a method, conversationalism is a formal procedure for assessing the relationships of opposed variables in which thoughts are shuffled through disjunctive and conjunctive modes to constantly recreate a fresh thesis and antithesis each time at a higher level of discourse without the expectation of the synthesis" (CHIMAKONAM 2019, 172). In more concrete terms, conversationalism is a mechanism that guides an encounter between two philosophers from rival schools (CHIMAKONAM 2017a). The *nwa-nsa* brings forth a position and the doubter questions the accuracy of the position. The questioning and answering are called a struggle because they are a struggle between opposing variables. They are critical because the philosophers are applying reason and rigorous philosophical skills in either questioning or defending their positions. They are creative because they are not intended to end the conversation by either forming a synthesis or proving one thesis superior to the other.

A Need for a Methodic Shift

Some philosophers have given reasons why conversation should be considered a philosophical method (JAHNZ, 2016). Chimakonam has

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[2] Egbai and Chimakonam, 2019. Conversational thinking. 170

been specifically defending the thesis that conversationalism should be a philosophical method for African philosophy. I go to a much narrower focus: why conversationalism should be a philosophical method for the project of conceptual decolonization in African philosophy. The growth of African philosophy would be stifled if we keep A) tossing out concepts, B) taking concepts from other traditions. The creation of new concepts from within Africa is necessary for the growth of a healthy African tradition of philosophy. The creation of concepts that leaves existing concepts that have a colonial source untouched is reckless. The creation of new concepts must go hand in hand with decolonization of old ones. The point is not to merely describe to the world how Africans see things. The point is to find new ways of seeing.

The linguistic analysis of conceptual decolonization, merely describes how Africans understand a certain concept, that is not a creation of a new concept. Moreover, providing independent argument for a particular concept is not creation of a new concept. Of course, Wiredu argued that we can adopt a concept from another tradition if we do not have one or ours is inadequate for the task we need it for, but that is not a creation of a new concept. Perhaps one may say, it is because we did not need to create a new concept. That means we will forever be forced to look elsewhere for the growth of concepts. What I mean here is that if, for instance, we adopt a Chinese concept of "charity", when the Chinese develop a new concept of charity it means we must also think of updating ours in line with theirs. While there is nothing wrong with changing one's conception of something if one is presented with a better understanding of it, and there is also nothing wrong with looking to other traditions for insight, there is everything wrong with one culture becoming perpetual students of another culture. This is what will happen to African philosophy if it keeps domesticating foreign concepts without creating new concepts from within the tradition. It is important to note that we are not taking concepts because there are studied by big philosophers in other traditions, we take concepts because they are relevant in our tradition as well. This is the same with the creation of concepts. It is not merely for the sake of proving a point but rather because it is necessary for our African tradition. Conceptual decolonization begins by taking one's concepts and measuring them against other's concepts. From there you determine whether you keep yours or adopt

someone else's. To add or create a new concept altogether is equally important.

Wiredu argued that when one considers the amount of work cut out for philosophers who seek to find the best way to do African philosophy, it becomes apparent that the need for methodological reflection in African philosophy is urgent (WIREDU 2002, 5). Concerning philosophical methods, Wiredu argued that there is no generally accepted method of doing philosophy. Therefore, when one uncritically picks one culture's technique over the other, one is unthinkingly submitting "himself to instruction in the philosophies of other cultures" (WIREDU 1980, 27). He clarifies this by saying that it is not possible to separate method, in any absolute manner, from doctrine. He says, for example, it would be hard to separate Kant's method of transcendental analysis from the content of his critical philosophy (WIREDU 1980, 27). It is clear that Wiredu is aware that philosophical methods betray the contexts from which they emanate, a fact he tried to circumvent by proposing that African philosophers must acquaint themselves with scientific methods. He says this:

> The habits of exactness and rigour in thinking, the pursuit of systematic coherence and the experimental approach so characteristic of science are attributes of mind which we in Africa urgently need to cultivate not because they are themselves intellectual virtues but because they are necessary. (WIREDU 1980, 32)

Wiredu did not provide the correct method of doing philosophy because, as pointed above, he does not believe there is one correct method of doing philosophy. However, he described the *characteristics* of the methods that African philosophy needs, and the above quotation describes them. This means that any method an African philosopher adopts must be "rigorous, coherent, and be implemented with exactness" (WIREDU 1980, 32). These are some of the characteristics that conversationalism upholds. Chimakonam defines conversationalism as "a strictly formal intellectual exercise propelled by philosophical reasoning in which critical and rigorous questioning creatively unveils new concepts from old ones" (CHIMAKONAM 2015, 19). Therefore, conversationalism fits

Wiredu's criteria of the method African philosophers need. It is not a big leap from here to showing that conceptual decolonization also needs conversationalism. Before making the leap, let us consider more arguments for a methodic shift for conceptual decolonization. We take this long excursion because it is possible that an objector may say that it is not enough to simply say "Wiredu prescribed what a method in African philosophy should look like and this is the method we will use". It may seem, at best, like an insufficient argument, and at worst, like an appeal to authority. To the former objection, I concede and will provide more arguments in support of why we need a methodic shift in conceptual decolonization. To the latter objection, Wiredu provided convincing arguments for why African philosophy specifically needs methods that are scientific in approach. I do not need to recount them to make my point here, therefore, I am not appealing to authority. Instead, I see no need in re-inventing the wheel by arguing in defence of an argument already defended. I think my efforts are best suited for defending a new position.

Wiredu rightly pointed out that when one philosophizes in a foreign language one is tempted by the metaphysical assumptions of that language (WIREDU 1998, 2004). Chimakonam adds that methods, like language, emerge out of a place and context, uncritically adopting foreign philosophical methods bedevils one's philosophy. As he puts it: "Method is everything!" (CHIMAKONAM 2019, 117). Descartes put it thus: "it is far better never to contemplate investigating the truth about any matter than to do so without a method" (cited in NEWMAN 2019, N.P). It is, thus, obvious that any philosophical project that does not take the methods used in going about that project seriously runs the risk of methodological hegemony. African philosophers have, over the years, begun arguing about the question of methodology in African philosophy (WIREDU 1980, 22). Chimakonam is one of the actors in the debate. He believes that African philosophy will never be a truly distinctive tradition if it does not have an African method of philosophizing (CHIMAKONAM 2015). He contends that a truly decolonial philosophy cannot blindly rely on foreign philosophical methods. This is because Chimakonam thinks that every philosophical method is branded by the context from which it emerges (2017a, 132). Thus, using that particular method would lead one into measuring an African phenomenon with the wrong tool. This is what Chimakonam means by the dearth of African

philosophical methods. The alternative is Africans carrying the methods that were used in philosophy's corroboration with the colonial enterprise. There were analytic philosophers who were slaveholders as there were continentalists who were Nazi supporters. With all its rigour, philosophy has been complicit in the enslavement of Africans. It stood by during the holocaust, and Apartheid policies were eagerly defended in some South African philosophy departments, an African philosopher must never take that fact for granted. If one must use the same concepts of reason, morality and personhood and the same methods that defenders of her unfreedom used, one needs to be doubly critical. I am not saying there were no philosophers who used these tools of philosophy for a good cause, there are many who did. The point is that they (the methods), along with philosophy, are not incorruptible and they must be demanded to evolve with time. In simple terms, when a philosopher teaches an African philosopher a "proper philosophical method" and gives her a Western-developed method. The philosopher is not only universalizing a particular method; she is also committing an epistemicide.

The debate on philosophical methods even within the West has been raging on for years due to the difficulty of deciding which method is the correct philosophical method. My main preoccupation in this paper is not to defend conversationalism as a proper method for the broader tradition of African philosophy. Therefore, while I agree with the broader arguments for adopting conversationalism within African philosophy, my focus is narrower than that. It is to argue that insights from conversationalism take conceptual decolonization to its desired end. Conversationalists' diagnoses of, and close attention to, the problems of intercultural philosophy would help broaden the horizon of conceptual decolonization. Also, the conversationalists' solutions would help pull conceptual decolonization out of seemingly inescapable pitfalls. One important instance is the sharp critique of philosophical methods and the insistence that African philosophy must develop its own methods. Conceptual decolonization is a theory within African philosophy that seeks to solve an African problem, it needs to rely on a method developed within African philosophy. I argue here that conversationalism is instrumental to a project of conceptual decolonization because of its insightful attention to

relationships between seemingly opposed variables and their commitment to the constant creation of concepts and vistas of thought.

Wiredu argued that in addition to linguistic differences, philosophers must offer independent arguments in intercultural dialogue because he envisioned an intercultural dialogue not hindered by cultural and linguistic differences. He did not subscribe to a culture-specific philosophy that cannot be understood or be accessible in some way to other cultures. He thought that, as shown above, reason is a biological universal that ensures intercultural intelligibility and the ability to critically argue with each other on universal concepts (he believes there are concepts that are universal and those that are not). So, when an African meets an Asian to discuss personhood, for instance, they may first use a language they both understand, like Mandarin, and using philosophical criticism to lay out their arguments in a way that does not violate the laws of logic - especially the three laws that Wiredu thinks are universal. In this way, they are engaging with the positive part of conceptual decolonization. This is when different cultures meet each other and borrow or discard different concepts from different traditions. It is important to note that Wiredu intended this to be critical and not encyclopaedic. Both Wiredu and Chimakonam believe that the goal of philosophy should be intercultural philosophy.[3] Chimakonam does not think that sitting at the table with foreign cultures and laying out logical arguments is sufficient. He asks: "When philosophers from different traditions cross borders, what do they take with them? Do they take their basic ethical, epistemological, metaphysical and methodological assumptions with them?"[4] What this question points to is the different ways that Western or (foreign) hegemonies may establish themselves.

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[3] See lecture by Kwasi Wiredu at University of South Florida on the role of African philosophy in intercultural philosophy. See also, Chimakonam's and Ugbai's essay titled "Why Conversational Thinking Could be an Alternative Method for Intercultural Philosophy " published in 2019, journal of intercultural studies.

[4] Jonathan Chimakonam: What Is Conversational Philosophy? A Prescription of a New Theory and Method of Philosophising, in and Beyond African Philosophy. (Unisa press journals, 2017) 116. Chimakonam also has an insightful conversation with Bruce Jahnz about concepts Space and Place. I am not going to touch on that debate, though it is interesting.

For Chimakonam, different methods presuppose different ethical, epistemological and metaphysical assumptions. Therefore, he posits that when a philosopher uses her tradition's method to evaluate another tradition's position—articulated with a different method—it leads to what he calls "the falsification of another's assumption, or the falsification of another's method" (CHIMAKONAM 2019, 118). These are, for Chimakonam, cultural impositions. That is, either the philosopher says "your philosophy is wrong" or they say "your method is wrong".

      To be clear, intercultural dialogue is about seeing one's culture through the conceptual schemes of the other cultures. It is not about seeking a universal consensus or a comparative quest with no real direction (CHIMAKONAM 2021, 33). A true intercultural dialogue must be divested of cultural centrism (CHIMAKONAM 2019). What this means is that when an American philosopher reads the work of an African Sagist philosopher and shuns it because it does not measure up to her logical positivist methodological requirements, she is exercising the methodological hegemony Chimakonam spoke of. This would be a true but uninteresting statement if all it says is that when you use a different method from the person you are arguing with, you might get different results. When you do get different results, do not force them to adopt your method. However, what makes it interesting is that Chimakonam argues for a universal method of intercultural philosophy that insures against methodological hegemony and cultural centrism. He says that a synthesis of all methods "is a bad logical idea" CHIMAKONAM 2019, 118). I agree that we must find ways to avoid methodological hegemony and cultural centrism. I find Chimakonam's attempt to offer a universal method for intercultural dialogue interesting but unconvincing. Firstly, it is unclear why we ought not to have multiple methods when we can avoid methodological hegemony by not allowing methodological difference to be the sole reason for the rejection of a thesis – the same way we did for linguistic difference. The solution to methodological hegemony must be allowing multiple methods to coexist; it cannot be advocating for a single method. Secondly, the conversational method comes from a certain place, it comes from an African context, it relies on African concepts of relationships. It, like all other methods, is culturally inspired. Chimakonam, of course, thinks otherwise, he says;

"[C]onversational philosophy, which promotes the ideals of intercultural discourse, may have been born outside Europe but it is by no means Afrocentrist" (CHIMAKONAM 2019, 123). There is always a danger when a culture-bound particular claims to be a universal. An insight Chimakonam laboured to put across throughout his work. While I do not think that conversationalism is a universal method, I do think it is an important method for conceptual decolonization and conceptual decolonialists must take it seriously. Chimakonam's warning against taking for granted the meeting point of intercultural dialogue is paramount. Moreover, his attempts to create rules of engagement is exactly what a decolonial project needs.

Chimakonam provides an important insight into the meeting place Wiredu calls independent grounds:

> This equality, this horizontal relationship, is not a given; it is something that has to be constructed. Most theorists in intercultural philosophy... tend to take it for granted that an intercultural discourse is guaranteed once a quorum of cultures is formed. Note, however, that this is incorrect. There can be an encounter between or amongst different cultures of philosophy without an intercultural discourse occurring. To obtain a true intercultural discourse, certain conditions must be met. CHIMAKONAM 2019, 126).

The conditions Chimakonam speaks of are meant to guarantee that when different cultures meet, one culture does not lord over others. Conceptual decolonization will not run its natural course when it keeps getting interrupted by unequal power relations in dialogue. A truly inclusive dialogue is not hopeless relativism, it is an allowance for different philosophical expressions to find a voice. What happens when a philosopher insists on breaking conversational philosophy's rules, not out of malice but because breaking conversational conventions is the philosophical method of their culture? Would a conversationalist not find herself falsifying that philosopher's method, which is what Chimakonam meant by measuring a foreign culture with a wrong method? I do not see how he insured against falling in the same pit as those he criticised. However, Wiredu was correct when he simply left it at "independent grounds" as a manner intelligible to both cultures. Chimakonam is correct in pushing it further than mere

intelligibility and insisting that there must be rules that safeguard against hegemony. To assume the role, as Chimakonam does, of making those rules is a grave injustice to all those who will be involved in a conversation with you. The old political philosophy dictum comes to mind: "*Nihil de nobis, sine nobis*" (nothing about us without us).[5] It is a fact that Wiredu took for granted the power relations that come into play in decolonization and intercultural dialogue. It is also a fact that there is an urgent need for a critical appraisal of the power relations that make intercultural dialogue "a pseudo intercultural philosophy[6], which leads to foreign 'pseudo problems'[7] burdening the African thought system. However, this is as far as conversationalists should take us. The role of rulemaking is the responsibility of every stakeholder in the dialogue, anything less is an injustice.

So, what am I saying? I am saying that Chimakonam's insights into the insufficiency of intelligibility as a criterion for independent grounds is invaluable. Insistence on rules that safeguard against Western hegemony is also important. The only point I quarrel with is the fact that Chimakonam attempted to provide those rules. I think the best way is to include everyone who will be part of the conversation in the making of those rules. Chimakonam admitted that much when he criticized the West for assuming the role of arguing for global justice without including other voices from the global south. He argued that the talk of global justice is a case of epistemic injustice because it marginalized African philosophy, which has made valuable contributions to concepts of justice and fairness (CHIMAKONAM 2017c, 118).

How do we include everyone in the rule-making process? (CHIMAKONAM 2017c). When we attempt to include everyone, we will realize that pertinent questions arise, that intercultural philosophy must contend with. What are the conditions for inclusion in intercultural philosophy? What conditions are there for a discourse to be understood as philosophy? I do not claim to know the how but it is a question open to philosophers of intercultural philosophy. To say I

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[5] Though this is a folk dictum, I first learnt of the English translation by James Charlton's book titled on disability aptly titled: nothing about us without us.

[6] J. Chimakonam, what is conversational philosophy? pp118.

[7] K. Wiredu cultural particulars and universals

do not have the answer to how everyone is to be included in rule-making does not make my criticism of Chimakonam any less important.

It is a truism at this point that there is no one size fits all method in philosophy. Each discourse has to have a method best suited or bespoke to it. While Chimakonam did not offer the conversational method with Wiredu in mind, it is best suited for it. I will argue this point further in the following paragraphs. Wiredu only insisted on obedience to the laws of logic in one's analysis of conceptual colonization. He never specified that analytic philosophy is the *only* way to do conceptual decolonization. He personally preferred it because he was trained in analytic philosophy. It does not stop any philosopher from picking the project up using any method from whichever tradition she comes from. However, the limit for Wiredu was strict adherence to the laws of logic, specifically, the three Aristotelian principles, and that the method must be scientific in *character*. One of the laws of logic (non-contradiction) the conversational method relaxes through the promotion of complementarity. Wiredu, then, would have objected to the conversational method's displacement of the law of non-contradiction. However, Chimakonam (2019) argues that he does not object to the universality of the law of non-contradiction. While he accepts that every culture has a sensitivity or adherence to the law of non-contradiction, there are instances in those cultures, including African culture, that violates the law of non-contradiction. This requires a logic that axiomatizes those instances instead of dismissing them as illogical. Chimakonam uses centuries-long debates and attacks from within and without the West on the immortality and indubitability of the law of non-contradiction to produce an Africa-inspired variant of trivalent logic called Ezumezu to ground conversational thinking.

I am not overly concerned about the proper logic for conceptual decolonization. This is because while both Ezumezu logic and Aristotelean logic claim universality, they both have laws that do not apply at all times to all cultures. I seek to humbly leave to the practitioner of conceptual decolonization to decide at that time which logic to use. For instance, if that philosopher is Asian, she may fall into the Asian tradition that also criticizes Western logic and argues for a variant of logic that is Asia-inspired and not Ezumezu. It would

be too limiting and unwise to promote a singular logic for conceptual decolonization. I am, of course, not promoting logical relativism, I am simply avoiding the logic debate. I am aware that conversationalists do not think that the logic question is a trivial one and neither do I. But, I do not think any harm will come to the conceptual decolonization project if I avoid it here. Perhaps a philosopher who feels logic should also be included in the attempt to obtain a horizontal relationship in intercultural dialogue may criticize my decision. They may argue that logic is about the right way of reasoning and if African cultures are forced to use the Western way of reasoning, they will end up uncritically falsifying African thought as illogical when it is merely a different logic that the Western philosopher refuses to accept. This is a very rudimentary interpretation of the argument Chimakonam (2019) makes in support of the logic-based criterion in African philosophy and his offer of Ezumezu as a prototype. Nonetheless, while I am inclined to agree with him, I do not think it matters much here for the purposes of the project at hand. That is, providing a mechanism for conceptual decolonization that promotes epistemic justice. Also, while Chimakonam brings forth the foundation of conversational thinking as Ezumezu logic, which means that, as one objector pointed out to me, if one uses conversationalism one is using its logic, whether implicitly or explicitly. Therefore, when I propose conversationalism for conceptual decolonization I am, implicitly, promoting Ezumezu logic as well. I simply want to respond to this objection by asking two questions: Does Chimakonam intend for everyone in intercultural philosophy to use the conversational method? Does using it also entail employing Ezumezu logic? How does Chimakonam justify to an Asian philosopher, why she should drop Asian logic and adopt Ezumezu?

I now wish to move on to a less thought about problem in all discourses of decolonization: time. How long should a project of decolonization take, and how long should it last? We obviously have to get to a point where we no longer *need* to decolonize. If we cannot reach that point then what is the point of decolonization? We also cannot take forever to decolonize because while we are decolonizing we are lagging behind in the market of knowledge. Moreover, decolonization tends to look for colonial aspects of thought in African thought, which is a reactionary philosophy. We must begin to do

African philosophy that is beyond reactionism. Therefore, time is an integral part of conversations on decolonization. It should be an integral part of the conversations on conceptual decolonization as well.

Wiredu spent his entire career engaged in the project of conceptual decolonization. However, since Wiredu, there have been a staggeringly low number of papers published on conceptual decolonization, and this is worrying for a project as important as this. I argue that the project takes too long when we have to go at it concept by concept. There are a plethora of concepts and their attendant assumptions have infiltrated the African thought system. I could be using most of them as I write this essay. What makes this worse is the fact that some of those concepts have been forced on us through colonialism. These are concepts like race, morality, legality, right, man, woman, sex etc. These concepts, specifically, have entered African thought systems through legislations, bulldozers, and guns. To be clear, most pre-colonial African countries had these concepts. It is what they mean and who got to decide that changed. If I want to reverse all of them as Wiredu proposes, it will take an entire lifetime (perhaps a few more, provided I come back a philosopher). It took Wiredu more than 40 years, and he only reviewed no more than 30 concepts.[8]

I will explain this problem using the same analogy that the French philosopher Rene Descartes used. He was faced with a problem related to mine; he knew that most of his ideas were questionable, simply because of their source. Descartes found out he had been plagued by erroneous ideas since childhood. In a quest to find 'pure knowledge,' he adopted methodic doubt. Where he doubted

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[8] Here are some of the concepts Wiredu suggested for conceptual decolonization. Reality, being, Existence, Object, Entity, Substance, Property, Quality; Truth, Fact, Opinion, Belief, Knowledge, Faith, Doubt, Certainty; Statement, Proposition, Sentence, Idea; Mind, Soul, Spirit, Thought, Sensation, Matter, Ego, Self, Person, Individuality, Community; Subjectivity, Objectivity ; Cause, Chance ; Reason, Explanation, Meaning ; Freedom, Responsibility, Punishment, Democracy, Justice; God, World, Universe, Nature, Supernature ; Space, Time, Nothingness, Creation; Life, Death, Afterlife, Morality, Religion. Although Wiredu suggested these concepts, he always stated he did not review them all. See, Kwasi Wiredu. "Conceptual decolonization as an imperative in contemporary African philosophy: some personal reflections". 2002

everything, he obtained through the sense. (Newman 2019, N.P). We know that most of our concepts have been assimilated through the violence of colonialism, be it physical or epistemic.

Moreover, it has been a deep cutting and all-encompassing violence, and we cannot easily distinguish which ones were assimilated through violence and which ones were not. Concepts interact with our already existing concepts and synthesize into new concepts, which makes it harder to trace them back to colonial sources (OSHA 2005). The difficulty to trace them back to colonial sources does not mean the sources are not colonial. The precision required to pluck out individual concepts from our conceptual schemes is impossible, and even if possible, will take generations, which is a luxury we do not have. However, as Descartes discovered, although we cannot pick concepts one by one from their baskets (he used apples), what we need is to turn the entire basket upside down (NEWMAN 2019, N.P). Kwasi Wiredu provided theoretical guidelines for a concept-by-concept project; his theory cannot accommodate a broader project. This is where conversationalism comes in. It comes in for two reasons. Firstly, we need to start creating concepts as much as we toss them out. This needs to be a consistent project that occurs at a continuous, yet fast, pace. It is only a rigorous, critical and *creative* philosophical engagement directed specifically at creating new concepts that can undergird conceptual decolonization. Secondly, conceptual decolonization is a project that relies heavily on intercultural dialogue, and conversationalism has the most advanced technology for intercultural dialogue coming from African philosophy. This is because it pays very close attention to mechanisms of holding intercultural dialogue.

The older generation of African philosophers really needed to search for the needle in the haystack. We now can either bring a magnet or burn the haystack, or even make a new needle. The point is that it does not need to take us a lifetime anymore. As pointed above, Wiredu laid out the blueprints for conceptual decolonization and I do not wish to veer off them completely but simply to expand it. If we cannot search for concepts individually we need a system that regenerates all concepts all the time such that every philosophical engagement is a step towards either the dying of an old concept or the birth of a new one.

This is what conversationalism promises. I must point out that I follow Wiredu in arguing for the importance of linguistic analysis, that is, using language to root out languagedependent problems. I also agree with him that there must be something beyond linguistic analysis, which he calls independent grounds. I argue that linguistic analysis would need to broaden its scope by adopting a system of analysis that can analyze all concepts, even ones that are not linguistically assimilated. The site of argumentation is not democratic if there are no rules of engagement or attempts at levelling the playfield. Conversationalism has considered ways or at least showed us that there could be ways to ensure cultures hold a truly equal dialogue, and this the goal of conceptual decolonization.

Conversationalism as a Methodological Foundation for Conceptual Decolonization

It may seem like an insignificant argument to say that conceptual decolonization takes too long but not when one considers that African philosophy is lagging behind on many things, including the urgent need for the creation of concepts. At the time of his (Wiredu) writing, the African tradition of philosophy was still in infancy, him being one of the early contributors to the field. Now the field has since grown such that there is a rich tradition for us, young philosophers to draw from, which makes looking to other traditions for insight less urgent and less necessary.

Conversationalism, like conceptual decolonization, adopts African modes of thought in its analysis as relevant traditions.[9] What this means is that they both take from African tradition only that which is relevant to modern philosophy. This, for Wiredu, helps avoid anachronism[10], or myopism for Chimakonam. Chimakonam's insistence on a critical relationship with tradition helps avoid Appiah's criticism of Pan-Africanists who adopted outdated concepts from their Africanists tradition. Conceptual decolonialists could benefit from this insight because it forces them to not only be critical of foreign

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[9]Jonathan Chimakonam. Conversational Philosophy as a New School of Thought in African Philosophy: A Conversation with Bruce Janz on the Concept of Philosophical Space (2015)

[10] Kwasi Wiredu. Cultural particulars and universals: an African perspective.

concepts or African concepts but of all concepts since their duty is that of constant doubt.

Wiredu argues that conceptual decolonization does not mean a wholesale adoption of Western thought [11], something, again, Chimakonam also agrees with. This is where their agreements end, their *benoke* point in the conversation, if you will. Their point of divergence begins with a question that I choose to paraphrase: what are we to do with concepts inherited from colonial miseducation? Wiredu argues that we need to think them through in our indigenous languages and, if found wanting, throw them away as philosophical deadwood. That is, we must stop using them or abandon them. For example, when he argues that the concept of punishment does not exist in Akan culture or that of fact vs truth, he states these are errors "all judicious thinking should stay clear off" (WIREDU 1998, 138). As pointed out in the first section of this essay, it is obvious that Wiredu thinks these concepts were assimilated through the use of foreign languages during education. Conceptual decolonization is easy when a culture has an alternative concept readily available to plug this leak caused by dislodging another concept. But what happens when a culture does not have a concept like that, to begin with? Take the concept of God, for instance. In isiZulu, what can be closest to the concept of God is '*mvelingqangi*' which simply translates to 'the one who came first or showed up first'. It is unclear whether he/she was worshipped as a God.[12] There are no Zulu rituals of worship of Mvelingqangi, there are no rules that I know of given by Mvelingqangi to Nguni people to live by, which are things normally associated with a God. This means that if, following Wiredu, we discover that the concept of God that we inherited from the West is an error that "all judicious thinking should steer clear of", simply ignoring it and going about our business will leave a vacuum that must be closed or even lead to unexpected confusions. To exacerbate the problem, the concept of a God, especially a Christian God, brought along a host of other concepts: sin, confession, church, tithes, pastor, worship, soul-saving etc. All these concepts have bounced off each other, mixing with pre-existing concepts, evolving into new ones such

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[11]Wiredu, cultural particulars and universals, 1996.

[12] I use he/she because isiZulu does not have gender identifying pronouns. So, it could have been a woman.

that pulling off one will upset the entire thought system in ways we cannot manage. We may have lopsided conceptual schemes filled with inexplicable concepts because we pulled one that gave sense to the one that is left[13]. Imagine pulling out the concept of a Christian God and leaving untouched the concept of resurrection, not only a backbone to Christianity but also a concept that never existed before in our (Zulu) conceptual schemes. By the time we realize that Manichaeism is also a borrowed concept, we would be too old to do anything about it. Not only is a concept-by-concept approach too slow, but it also creates confusion we cannot afford to have. I agree with Wiredu that we must get rid of Africa foreign concepts and all the philosophical problems that come with them. However, I think that the problems are usually interlinked as are concepts. We need a more systematic approach, one that will evaluate all concepts, all the time. A philosophical approach that has an inbuilt relationship of critical engagements and regeneration of concepts all the time. Conversationalism champions the creation of new concepts; in fact, conversations are held precisely for unveiling new concepts from old ones (CHIMAKONAM 2015). I am referring to the concept of "aṛumaṛu-ụka," which explains "the mechanism" for engaging in critical and creative conversation. The word describes a form of critical and creative relationship between or among parties (CHIMAKONAM 2015).

This approach to the deletion of concepts does not leave conceptual schemes lopsided. Chimakonam explains it as "[w]e must find ways to compel the existing concepts to bear witness against themselves rather than attempting to silence them – a form of an inbuilt termination mechanism; and we must aim at making the concepts come alive, not at deactivating them" (Chimakonam 2015, 27). This approach recognizes the connectedness of concepts and argues that we must find a way of a constant critical stance with concepts. Wiredu's method of thinking in our indigenous language is necessary but nowhere near sufficient. He himself alluded to this fact, which is why he promoted arguing on independent grounds as the

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[13] I am aware that what I am saying resembles, in some sense, the philosophy of foundationalism. I do not know enough about that tradition to determine how much similarity there is and what the differences are. I do know that some proponents of the philosophy argue that some beliefs are primary while others are secondary. I am not sure what their views on concepts are.

second step. When we think through a concept in our indigenous language and adopt a conversational notion of relationship that promotes interconnectedness, we may find that that conept does not make sense in our language. However, the notion of *arumaristics* forces us to constantly question all other concepts that come with this concept and concepts that come from our analysis of those concepts. This mechanism keeps us thinking in our indigenous language as Wiredu wanted and keeps us thinking through multiple concepts all the time, since the job of a conversationalist is to question and create concepts all the time.

The second prong of conceptual decolonization is the reconstructive project. It is not as problematic as the deconstructive side. One only needs to have succeeded on the negative side to begin the positive side. Wiredu argued that one must domesticate foreign ideas and concepts from other traditions. Like the negative side of conceptual decolonization, this part of the project also needs to look to conversationalism for a proper mechanism of reconstruction.

> ...These tools of textual criticism, rigor, analysis, and the sundry modern philosophical tools we employ have been Africanized such that in applying them, we designate an African mode of thought. For example, critical analysis in African philosophy does not only imply fault-finding in order to deepen understanding, but in addition, it implies the idea of reconstruction. In other words, when we employ critical analysis in African philosophy, we aim in the final lap of the exercise to reconstruct faulty areas, not just to identify them. This is because the edifice of African episteme has yet to form a mountain, hence any part that is destroyed must be rebuilt. (Chimakonam 2015, 21).

Wiredu would agree with this statement, this is why his project is double-pronged. It has a deconstructive and a constructive side. The difference, as will be shown below, is that Wiredu suggested domesticating foreign ideas that we may find beneficial, concepts as well. The reason for this, Wiredu argued, was that we needed to domesticate foreign ideas because the African tradition of philosophy was not, at the time of his writing in 1980, developed. However, since

then African philosophy has seen a lot of talents who have worked fervently to develop the tradition, we are no longer short of a tradition to draw from. Therefore, when we look to other traditions, it is a matter of good philosophizing rather a lack of an indigenous tradition to draw from. This means that since the African will now be a participant in a rule guided intercultural creative struggle, she will have brought their particular perspective to engage with different perspectives. Through a creative struggle with these different perspectives, different concepts and ideas will emerge, and since everyone contributed to these creations, everyone could domesticate these ideas. It will be a product of a collective effort. Instead of strictly domesticating foreign ideas that have emerged out of a different context in a different time. Concepts will have a limited lifespan or at least they will not stay for generations unchallenged, a creation of new concepts is a step towards a just society. For example, when feminist thinkers created the concept of sexual assault, it helped them better articulate their abuse. This is similar to the creation of a concept of intersectionality. African philosophers, especially decolonialists, urgently need new concepts to help articulate their past and current state of being. Our African economic conditions need thinkers committed to creating concepts and ideas that help understand and alleviate the situation. We cannot afford to wait until we have reviewed all colonial concepts to begin creating new concepts for understanding the African condition.

Conclusion

 I have been arguing that conceptual decolonization, though an important project, has succumbed to inertia. The practitioners of African philosophy have left it to dormancy. I have attempted in this essay to pick the project up and find ways it can remain relevant in discourses within African philosophy. Using conversational thinking, I have attempted to investigate the project of conceptual decolonialization, as articulated by Kwasi Wiredu, and found ways to overcome its pitfalls. One of the biggest pitfalls being the tendency to take for granted the equality of the independent grounds; the very thing that legitimized conceptual decolonization. I have suggested that adopting the conversational method will allow practitioners of conceptual decolonization to be participants in drawing rules that

make inter-cultural dialogue just. The conversational method's focus on studying seemingly opposed variables and creating concepts is exactly what a project, like conceptual decolonization, that is dedicated to studying concepts needs.

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