

**“IS AFRICAN STUDIES AFRAID OF AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY?” A REPLY TO MUYIWA  
FALAIYE**

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**Abstract**

*In a recently published article, “Is African Studies Afraid of African Philosophy?”, Muyiwa Falaiye defends the necessity of African Philosophy for the development of a broadened, objective and authentic African Studies whose content and force would considerably impact and transform Africa. African Philosophy, Falaiye argues, is expected to be the grundnorm of African Studies, shaping and determining its intellectual trajectory. This article offers a framework that challenges some philosophical assumptions on which Falaiye canvasses a pragmatic and authentic knowledge production in African Studies. It delineates the arguments between the ‘interior and exterior orientations’ in African Studies. Falaiye belongs to the former that seeks institutional framing of an autonomous tradition of knowledge production that is generated by Africans, addressing African rooted problems, for the purpose of meeting the theoretical fidelity of African Studies research and the existential needs of global Africa. He argues against the exterior orientation that defends an exogenous knowledge production on Africa with international dissemination in favour of non-African readership and designed primarily for meeting Global North’s needs. This paper seeks a ‘third-way’ that construes African Studies as a field which needs to outlive the defects in both the interior and exterior orientations through the adoption of digital humanities research tools and methods. The ‘third-way’ is promising in invigorating epistemic production, interrogating, disseminating, and sharing of African and global ideas for Africa’s transformation. Contra Falaiye, this paper shows that not only is his defense of the necessity and sufficiency of African Philosophy to the survival and flourishing of African Studies exaggerated, the discipline of African Philosophy, as methodically constituted, loathes squaring within the more promising interdisciplinary vantage of African Studies.*

**Keywords:** *African Philosophy; African Studies; Muyiwa Falaiye; Interior Orientation; Exterior Orientation*

## Introduction

In recent years, there have been increasing scholarly interests in the field of African studies with the growing literature and professional associations of African Studies in different parts of the globe: Africa, Great Britain, United States of America, Canada, Europe, Australia and the Pacific, Middle East and the Caribbean. Amidst the growing interests, rapid developments and academic recognition of the field, African Studies is still confronted with many theoretical and practical challenges. Muyiwa Falaiye,<sup>1</sup> in his recent article, "Is African studies afraid of African Philosophy," pointed out some of the pertinent theoretical concerns confronting the field.

Essentially, some of the questions plaguing African Studies include, but are not limited to: What is the impetus and mission of African Studies, especially in the Global North and Asia? What is the appropriate methodology for understanding Africa inside out? "Can African studies be an epistemic framework for *understanding* Africa? What roles should non-African scholars play in African Studies (Falaiye, 2017, p. 143)?" Is African Studies in need of a new foundation, and what is the justification, thereof? While there are overlaps in some of these theoretical challenges, Falaiye's primary interest is in the foundational question upon which contemporary theorising on Africa can be grounded.

Unequivocally, Falaiye defends the thesis that African Studies is due for weaning its foundation grounded on anthropology since its emergence (Thesis 1). As an alternative, he proposes that African Philosophy serves as the *grundnorm* of future African Studies (Thesis 2). Inferentially, in Falaiye's framing, African Studies is afraid of being stripped from its unduly anthropological impositions by African Philosophy. African Philosophy, for him, is a better and an imminent candidate for providing the needed "foundation for pragmatic-realist approaches to the academic discipline of African studies" (Falaiye, 2017, p. 148).

This paper refutes some basic assumptions and positions of Falaiye on the place African Philosophy should occupy in African Studies intellectual space. The main claim is that while the search for a *grundnorm* of African Studies is justifiable, Falaiye's defence of African Philosophy as the only cogent option and best disciplinary candidate appears somewhat exaggerated and perhaps untenable. Rather than construe African studies as needing an ultimate and supra-foundation, as Falaiye has done, this paper argues for pluriverse foundations for African Studies.

To support the above, this paper classifies Falaiye among the 'interior orientation' scholars in African Studies. This orientation claims that knowledge production and dissemination on Africa is ideally most epistemic and pragmatically beneficial when done in Africa by African-centered scholars. Rivalry to the interior orientation is the exterior intellectual tradition, which studies and understands Africa not necessarily from within Africa and by African intellectuals; it holds that originality and ownership of African studies scholarship for Africa's transformation can be cogently conducted by Africanists and institutions outside Africa. Questioning the efflorescence and dominance of the extravertive orientation in African Studies, Arseneault, D'Adamo, Strauss, and Wright raise concern African Studies as:

a knowledge capitalism that has been institutionally and epistemologically shaped by *the norms and structures of whiteness*. This is a proprietary problem of the archive as well as a practical problem of study: who is African Cultural Studies for, who participates in its worldliness, and how can its projects of knowledge be accessed? Both problems persist in the theoretical and curatorial work of doing African Cultural Studies, which is often situated administratively in the Global North (2016, pp. 6-7).

As a reaction to the externally oriented vision of African Studies that is "intended first and foremost to meet the theoretical and practical needs of Northern societies" (Hountondji 2009, p. 1), the interiorist call is "a set of new ambitions for research by Africans in Africa" (Hountondji, 2009, p. 1) for responsible and responsive knowledge production with Africa as the primary spatial foci, whether in terms of dissemination, audience and relevance. Revealing the inadequacies of the two orientations, this paper offers a 'third-way' that construes African Studies

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as a field that needs to transcend the traditional ‘authoritative and authenticity’ concerns implicit in the interior and exterior orientations through the adoption of digital interdisciplinary humanities research tools for epistemic production and interrogation of African and global ideas for Africa’s transformation.

This paper is structured into four sections. Following this introduction, is a synopsis of Falaiye’s views on the problems of African Studies. Next, this paper evaluates Falaiye’s claims bringing to fore both the salient aspects and the fallacious components implicit in his views on the subject-matter. In the third section, this paper sketches a more viable future of African Studies, not in the discipline of African Philosophy as its foundation which loathes in the face of interdisciplinary vantage of African Studies, but in cross-disciplinary foundations guided by the evolving digitised research methods and tools. The paper identifies, in the conclusion, some of the challenges of this new proposal while also reiterating the crux of the paper. Without attenuating the identified challenges, this concludes that a pluriverse foundation guided by digitised research mechanisms is worth courting in African Studies.

### **A Conspectus of Muyiwa Falaiye’s Positions**

Falaiye’s piece is an attempt to explain the state of African Studies today in relation to what African Philosophy can offer. In doing so, he pointed out the historical emergence of African Studies, the major problems confronting it and the imperativeness of African Philosophy towards confronting some of the pertinent challenges in the field. By African Studies, Falaiye meant “an interdisciplinary inquiry whose subject matter concerns the culture, social institutions and reactions to the basic assumptions about the African experience” (Falaiye, 2017, p. 141).

Mapping the core problems in African Studies, Falaiye identifies: (1) the question of understanding the “intellectual or cultural mission” of the field and the kind of “political, social, professional, or intellectual commitment required by such mission” (Falaiye, 2017, p. 145); (2) the conceptual question of ownership and having much to do with “who should be, or not be, engaged in African Studies enquiry”; (3) the originality and fidelity question of epistemic validity of research outputs or what he calls the “ontological integrity” on research carried out on African experiences, social institutions, cultures and worldview; and (4) the foundational question expressly understood as the theoretical basis upon which to build the field of African Studies. As burning as these challenges are, Falaiye thinks the most fundamental of all and of specific interest to him is how to address “the need for a foundation on which such an academic inquiry [like African Studies] should be built” (Falaiye, 2017, p. 142). Thus, his article is geared towards addressing the foundational question in African Studies.

Falaiye defended the potentiality and instrumentality of African Philosophy in helping African Studies achieve the goal of making “meaning out of the African universe of experience” (Falaiye, 2017, p. 141). His conception of African Philosophy is two-prong. On the one hand, it is the “response of the philosopher to the different experiences of the African, and her interpretation of such experience.” On the other, “African Philosophy is also the answer to universal questions about the African experience and *weltanschauung*” (Falaiye, 2017, p. 150). There tends to be a tension between Falaiye’s universalist understanding of African Philosophy and his intellectual leaning in the interior orientation in African studies. While this shall be expatiated in the next section, it is apposite pointing out, in the main, some contrasts Falaiye made between African Studies and African Philosophy.

Essentially, “African Philosophy seeks to justify the ultimate basis for the African to embark upon any sort of inquiry in his own right,” while “African studies is a complex of perspectives engaged in African-centered interrogation of traditional disciplines” (Falaiye, 2017, p. 144). The contrast here is in terms of scope and methodology and not essentially subject-matter variation as both have Africa as their locus. Whereas African Philosophy is a discipline, African Studies is a field. Method wise, “the typical Africanist, whether as an African romanticist or an acolyte of the Western imperialist intelligentsia, is essentially interested in the descriptive analysis of the African experience. [However, African] Philosophy is much more concerned with the big meta-questions than the inquiries of the typical Africanist scholar” (Falaiye, 2017, p. 149). Though Falaiye did not clearly expatiate differences in the methodological tools employed in both intellectual engagements and the differences in history, he minces no word in showing the common denominator in African Studies and African Philosophy. According to him, “both disciplines purport to have mental decolonization as a motivator in their

resolve to understand Africa and its peoples; each of them is rooted in an episteme that calls its intellectual mission to question” (Falaiye, 2017, p. 144).

At the level of history, the circumstances leading to the emergence of both intellectual inquiries differ considerably. “African Studies as an interdisciplinary field of intellectual inquiry is a product of Western academy that grew out of the concept of area studies, emerging as one of the legacies of WWII and the cold war” (Owoahene-Acheampong & Gordon, 2015a, p. 2). The invention of African Studies by the West after the World War II was as a result of the “tremendous impetus in the Western world to understand the newly independent nations in Africa” (Waliaula, 2012, p. 222). But this is not to suggest that prior to this period, Africa had not been studied from outside. Eurocentric scholarships on Africa abound before with imperialistic missions. While the “African Studies that emerged in the 1960s and 1970s was characterised by corrective and rehabilitative scholarships about Africa’s image on the global scene” (Waliaula, 2012, p. 222), there are still resounding scepticisms about the intellectual mission of African Studies supposedly driven by humanistic desires for cross-cultural understandings.

In the case of African Philosophy, while the question about when and where it emerged remains debatable and unresolved (Fayemi, 2018), a broader consensus is that it was invented in Africa and by Africans as a consequence of the frustrations occasioned by legacies of slavery, racialism, eurocentrism, colonialism and eurocentric construction of Africans as rationally inept leading to indelible identity crisis in Africa. The foregoing frustrations “eventually led to angry questions and reactions out of which African Philosophy emerged, first in the form of nationalisms and then in the form ideological theorizations” (Chimakonam, 2014). The intellectual mission of African Philosophy, therefore, is shifting from a cluster of “reactions to millennia of Eurocentrism to critical analysis of ideas Africans live by, and to hermeneutical exploration of cultural experiences as well as ratiocinative scrutiny of postcolonial experience” (Falaiye, 2017, p.143).

Whether in African Philosophy or African Studies, there is the problem of nature, method, scope and authenticity in the process of interrogating African lived experiences. In view of the overlaps between African Philosophy and African Studies as intellectual vanguard purveyor of understanding Africa’s political, social, spiritual, cultural, environmental, economic, ethical, and geographical realities, re-engaging her historic experiences and serving as avant-gardes of transformative Africa, Falaiye expresses a serious concern about the relationship between both. This concern has to do with how “scholars in African Studies have been shying away from embracing African Philosophy within the scope of their interdisciplinary quest” (Falaiye, 2017, p. 144). He bemoans how African Studies has been anchored on anthropology, rather than African Philosophy, for theoretical underpinning and ‘intellectual guidance’. To quote Falaiye:

*African Studies needs to be weaned off the colonial intellectual surrogacy carried out by dubious anthropological studies... [which focused more on Sub-Sahara Africa and less on North Africa and the Africans in the Diaspora]. African Studies would have to be retrieved from a colonial science that has re-created the African experience and life-worlds according to the intellectual standpoint of Western ethnocentrism (2017, p. 149).*

The main problem Falaiye sees in anthropology is the mission, which he construes as cultural expropriation. On cultural appropriation as the ultimate mission of anthropology, Falaiye writes:

*Anthropological research, upon which African studies has relied for intellectual guidance, undeniably have colonization as a mission...Anthropology’s objective of domination and control is visible as a form of cultural expropriation. Cultural expropriation involves a reinterpretation, through commissioned research, of a colonized culture by a dominating culture, which reinterpretation is then documented in such a manner that in order to carry out acceptable research about the underdeveloped world, especially Africa, a researcher must source his information from the great Western institution where this research is archived (2017, p. 146).*

The rejection of an anthropological rooting of African Studies by Falaiye is hinged, among other things, on the imminent implications of widening imperialists’ interests of controlling and manipulating Africa and her peoples. His concern also borders on the epistemic fidelity of African-centered researches especially when the financing, sourcing, archiving and dissemination of sources are all domiciled in the West. It is no surprise, then,

that scholars in African studies still rely on the European methodology, conceptions and tools of research. Such intellectual engagements hinder African Studies from arriving at a true appraisal of African culture, traditions and experiences. The epistemic validity of intellectual infidelity stimulated by Western anthropological designs and interests in African Studies is a fundamental challenge in the field. Indeed, questioning the intellectual mission of African Studies, in the context of cultural appropriation which Anthropology evinces, Falaiye claims:

*While it may be possible to pursue a study of the sciences and some other Western concerns purely on some objective criteria, and even this is doubtful, “studying the African worldview with the same set of criteria would yield results that may be depressing to the uninitiated; this is where the problem of African studies lies (2017, p. 145)*

With strong optimism, Falaiye thinks the above situation can be overcome on the desideratum that African Philosophy is adopted as a foundation in African Studies. It is worth considering the justifications Falaiye posits for what he calls ‘African Philosophy as a *grundnorm* of African Studies’.

“African Studies can enrich its intellectual dynamics by premising it within the context of African Philosophy, which can provide the ontological and epistemological frameworks that can orient genuine research on Africa” (Falaiye, 2017, p. 150). Ontology, as the study of being, is only within the province of philosophy. African ontology is key to understanding African realities. As a consequence, “scholars in African studies can only attain a proper understanding and interpretation of the history, economics, and other aspects of contemporary African experience by first being acquainted with the basic assumptions about the nature of reality in Africa, which only African Philosophy can provide” (Falaiye, 2017, p. 149).

At the epistemic level, for African Studies to overcome the problem of ‘epistemic infidelity’ and embrace African culture, values and ideas rooted in African worldview, it needs to accept the “recommendations and epistemological bearing provided by African philosophers” (Falaiye, 2017, p. 142). African intellectuals in African studies, according to Falaiye (2017, p. 148), “seem to have also turned the field to a fact-gathering zone and deploy Western paradigms for the evaluation of observed phenomena,” thus resulting in an entrapment in Western epistemic paradigms’. A way out of this morass is to resort to a new foundation in African Philosophy, because for Falaiye, African philosophers have thoroughly researched indigenous African epistemic paradigms with promising intellectual liberation for African Studies. He believes that just as some philosophers have defended oral traditions which contain the ideas and thought of Africans, and direct their research to an African oriented content, African studies should take this insight further from African Philosophy and endeavour to carry out studies having Africa and her peoples as the subjects and not objects. African Studies’ parameters for rationality need to evolve from the experiences and ideologies within the African culture.

Just as African Philosophy has carved out an authentic identity and successfully turned away from the undue influences of European mentality and conceptual constructs, Falaiye argues that African Philosophy becomes a necessary building block for its counterpart, African Studies. Through engaging in Afrocentric oriented researches, scholars in African Philosophy have succeeded in developing and transforming African values, creating an African Philosophy authentic to the African worldview. In the words of Falaiye (2017, p. 149), “authentic African Philosophy, which critically examines the ideas by which Africans live, provides the basis for ... [genuinely telling and engaging true African story and ideas evident] in the proverbs, wise-sayings, and literary corpora.”

Providing Africa’s self-understanding is one of the principal goals of African Studies. Though African Studies have been straddled with the purpose of redefining African culture and experiences, from the African lens, it has failed to liberate itself from adopting approaches and methods of inquiry from the West. This, perhaps, accounts for the fruitlessness of African Studies researches. In order to meaningfully impact the African condition, African Studies scholars must create an authentic African story (Falaiye, 2017, p. 150). Through the foundational role of African Philosophy as the *grundnorm*, “African Studies can be detached from colonial intellectual surrogacy.” In other words, “African Philosophy can strip African Studies of impositions that unduly delimit its boundaries of research, and imbue it with “a foundation for pragmatic-realist approaches to the academic discipline of African Studies” (Falaiye, 2017, p. 148). In view of the African-centered direction of African Philosophy, Falaiye posits that “African philosophers are indispensable amidst the unfolding of political and economic”

crises in the continent. As think tanks and avant-gardes of their societies, they provide “critical reflection, as well as serious analytic and logical connection of facts that outline directions and pathways to development” (Falaiye, 2017, p. 150).

In concluding his argument, Falaiye (2017, p. 148) insists that in order to solve the problem of relevance of their theoretical vocation, African Studies scholars should use African Philosophy as a *grundnorm*. The crux of Falaiye’s proposal is to provide African Studies with the epistemological, ontological and methodical tools for researching African lived experiences based on African philosophical constructs. His arguments, though point-proving, raises some theoretical concerns, which shall be discussed in the next section.

### “Is African Studies Afraid of African Philosophy?” – A Reply to Falaiye

Deducible from the above Falaiye’s defense of African Philosophy as a new *grundnorm* for African Studies is an intimation that the latter is afraid of the former in an imminent change of foundational baton. There is a high temptation of engaging in a counter discourse that will argue the converse of Falaiye’s stimulating article title, thereby defending that African Philosophy is panicky of African Studies. This converse reasoning of the title is fallacious involving a circumstantial *ad hominem*. My interest in this section is to attempt a reply to some problematic aspects of Falaiye’s main claims and not to defend a counter claim that African Philosophy is afraid of African Studies.

To be guided in my critical reply, some pertinent questions are in order: Will the proposal of making African Philosophy a necessary *grundnorm* for African studies not result in over-assuming intellectual paternalism? If ‘cultural expropriation’, as Falaiye calls it, is the ‘sin’ of anthropology making it unworthy of providing intellectual guidance for African Studies, one wonders if African philosophical scholarship is immune from all the tendencies and incentives of cultural expropriations in Western academy and intellectual history? If African Philosophy is to be African Studies’ *grundnorm*, can the existing methods in African philosophical scholarship efficiently meet the research concerns in other disciplines of African Studies? And, how cogent is the interior orientation, which Falaiye defends, in African Studies?

Falaiye can be justifiably classified as a proponent of the interior tradition in African Studies. Given the western origin and invention of African Studies, this tradition, among other things, defends the claim that the mission, vision, method, and ends of producing, disseminating, preserving and implementing knowledge in African Studies must be restructured to reflect purely African concerns. Charles Ambler (2011, p. 2), re-echoing Edward Blyden’s words in his speech to the African Society in London, 1903, noted that Blyden expresses the interior position in African Studies and being the first to do so, when he said “African societies and history must be understood from the inside out and that African experience must be expressed in an African vocabulary—not in relationship to Europe or in terms of European concepts.” Paulin Hountondji (1996), also, underscores the interior orientation when he eloquently urges that:

*... given the fact that African Studies were invented by Europeans, Africans today should not merely carry on these disciplines as shaped in Europe. Africans must reinvent them. Such reinvention implies a sharply critical awareness of the ideological limits and the theoretical and methodological shortcomings of former practices (Hountondji, 1996, p. xix).*

Falaiye (2017, pp. 147-148) shares the above conviction too by advocating that “scholars in African Studies should direct their research attention to Africa and Africans, and not to Europe or European audiences; ... they should endeavor to carry out studies in Africa and allow their parameters for rationality to evolve from experiences and ideologies within the African culture.” Because “African Studies is immersed in the contexts and configurations of the western epistemological order” (Zezeza 1997: 55), interiorists are seeking a rehabilitation of how African Studies is done by advocating the telling of African narratives from ‘inside out’, relying on African epistemic and ontological principles. The interior orientation is a defense of African Studies that produces and disseminates knowledge about Africa to Africans for their transformation and development (Owoahene-Acheampong & Gordon, 2015b). It is about the Africanisation of African of knowledge in different disciplines and institutions in Africa and African Diaspora (Falola & Jennings 2002). The school is focused on reconstructing African history against the long-dated series of Eurocentric distortions of African culture,

personality and institutions; disseminating indigenous and inside-true narratives about Africa and the Diaspora; and applying ideas generated in African Studies to policy issues for social re-engineering and transformation in Africa and the African Diaspora.

A major false assumption implicit in the interior orientation is that every endogenously produced and disseminated knowledge would be socially transformative, epistemically valid and pragmatically beneficial. No symmetrical relations exist between agents and place of knowledge production; much as endogenously produced knowledge does not guarantee an efficient application for the common existential good of African societies. Unlike the interior school, the exterior orientation sees nothing untoward in understanding Africa from an external gaze; narrating African stories, experiences and problems from the outside (i.e. outside African space) with interest in providing external solutions that will transform Africa. At the outset, African Studies started under the gamut of the exterior orientation as a creation of Western academy. Just like other area studies, the 'exterior orientation' is an exogenous knowledge production on Africa with international dissemination and preservation mechanisms on knowledge about Africa. Broader in scope, the exterior orientation's construction of African Studies is essentially comparative by not study only experiences of Africans in Continental Africa but comparing African experiences in the African Diaspora with Continental Africans.

The exteriorists consist of Africanists writing about Africa from outside Africa, archiving produced knowledge about Africa outside the continent and prioritising the dissemination of knowledge about Africa in international academic outlets and repositories rather than within African societies where such knowledge is generated. "Institutions of local higher education [in Africa inadvertently lend credence to the exterior orientation by the way they] continue to give preference to mainly prestigious forums abroad in their recognition of knowledge production" (Melber, 2016, p. 348). Thus, in African Studies scholarship, African authors consider foreign accredited journals as their first choice even when local accessibility to the journals' content is inequitably limited.

Though concerned with understanding African intellectual history, socialization, institutions and beliefs, the exterior orientation in African Studies has been charged of Eurocentric biases in a new subtle guise (Arowosegbe, 2014). A major problem with the exterior tradition, as pointed out by Arowosegbe (2014, p. 318), is that "it is not only inimical to the construction of an Africa-centred scholarship and endogenous knowledge systems but also detrimental to the developmental needs of the continent." This orientation, though purports to widen the internalization of knowledge about Africa, arguably, it creates some further inequitable knowledge hierarchies and divide between the North and the South in accessibility to published knowledge on Africa in the global epistemic order. In view of the foregoing as well as the sometimes-discrete motivational bias and purpose of studying Africa from outside, which is difficult if not impossible to distill, I would be proposing another orientation in African Studies – the 'Third-way'.

Contra to the interior and exterior orientations, I seek a 'third-way' that construes African Studies as a field which needs to outlive the defects in both the interior and exterior orientations. While shedding off the defects of the two orientations, the third-way is eclectic in that it supports the invigoration of knowledge production, interrogation, dissemination and sharing of African and global ideas for Africa's transformation. The focus of the third-way is not on the agent or place of knowledge production about Africans. Hountondji hinted at the third-way, even when he did not tag it that, when he opines that:

*The evolution of African scholarship on Africa is encouraging and should be accelerated. However, it should by no means be considered an end in itself. It is not enough to have Africans doing African Studies. One real question is how the scientific achievements of African as well as non-African scholars can be made to serve African countries, and through what channels the knowledge accumulated can be mastered, capitalized, developed, and occasionally applied by African societies to the solution of their problems and the improvement of their quality of life (Hountondji, 1996, pp. xix–xx).*

The teleology of the third-way in African Studies is using ideas, irrespective of its provenance, for the transformation of Africa through the adoption of disciplinary methodological and foundational diversity guided by digital research tools. In this approach, African Studies becomes a multi-disciplinary field, with pluriverse

foundations, devoted to the study of continental and Diaspora African transformation using inter-disciplinary methodologies fortified by digital research innovation. While I will return to a substantiation of the digitalised African Studies in the next section, in the main, I shall provide further arguments deflating the strengths of Falaiye's positions on African Philosophy as a *grundnorm*. Contra Falaiye, I show that not only is his claim for the necessity and sufficiency of African Philosophy to the survival and flourishing of African Studies exaggerated, the discipline of African Philosophy, as methodically constituted, loathes squaring within the more promising interdisciplinary vantage of African Studies. Falaiye has driven home his point in a way that invites other orientations in African Studies to react to the question of foundation of the field. Therefore, I shall advance a third-way argument as a complementary and constructive approach to advancing the field of African Studies through digitalizing the epistemic and axiological demands of future African Studies and its practices.

Deducible from Falaiye's article and thesis on African Philosophy as the foundation of African Studies are two fundamental discussion threads: one the one hand is the promotion of African school of interior orientation, which he thought as the best way of interpreting the holism of African experience; and on the other, is the deconstruction of the disciplinary foundational of African Studies. My critical evaluation of Falaiye's position shall systematically flow from five sub-themes: epistemic infidelity, methodological dilemma, anthropology as cultural expropriation, nexus between African Philosophy and African Studies; and the foundational fallacy.

On epistemic infidelity, Falaiye argues the imperativeness of an African Studies that will be able to produce authentic knowledge in tandem with the ontological realities and experiences of the Africans. African narrative has more epistemic status when presented by an epistemic agent from within the African space. A logical sequence deducible from this argument is that Africans in African Studies produce more epistemically sound knowledge of Africa than the Africanists. Africanist is understood here to mean non-Africans by point of origin but who share mentally, psychologically and emotionally African concerns with some scholarly commitments. The fallacy involved in the ideas of 'epistemic fidelity' and 'ontological integrity' explicit in the interior orientation is that no symmetrical relations exist between agents and place of knowledge production and the cogency of research findings. Africanists, guided by the ethics of research, might produce and disseminate far reaching endogenous knowledge on Africa and pragmatically beneficial to Africa and the Diaspora than say a die-hard African essentialist would produce. Besides, the idea of Africanness, which is central to African epistemic fidelity in the interior orientation, is nebulous.

On methodological dilemma, Falaiye's thesis that African Studies is due for weaning its foundation grounded on anthropology calls to question, the intellectual force of the claim, and, how this charge can be best achieved. Falaiye, having taken us through the historico-conceptual revisionism of African Studies, attempts a reconstructive discussion of the peculiar African methodology of enquiry, by disapproving anthropologism, sociologism and anthropo-sociologism as tools to generate research objectives in the discussions of African societies. The question is what method is next for cogent African Studies research? Falaiye, with his defense of African Philosophy, believes in the suitability of known methodologies in African Philosophy for African Studies. However, pertinent is the question of how sufficient and adequate African Philosophy's methodologies are to serve as the *grundnorm* of African Studies. There is skepticism about the extent to which some of the existing methods in African philosophy can efficiently meet the research concerns in other disciplines of African Studies. As there are many methods in African Philosophy today with no consensus on the most plausible way of researching the discipline, such as the free stylist method, ethno-philosophy, conceptual analytic approach, cultural thematic approach, philosophical sagacity, universal method, method of relevance, method of cultural-reconstructionism, conversational method, and the hermeneutic method, the question is how foundational can African Philosophy be with her current methodological crises?

For epistemic and axiological positioning that would be foundational to African Studies, African Philosophy must boast of distinct, universally binding methodologies. Communicating African ideas and understanding, and by extension, interpreting African experiences through the ontological prisms of the African philosophers are not enough. If we must allow African Philosophy to serve as the *grundnorm* of African Studies, it must finally put to rest the dogged unrest of methodology enquiry in African Philosophy. But currently, there is no one single method universally accepted as authentic method of doing African Philosophy. Making African Philosophy the



foundation of African Studies without a resolution of the methodological controversies in African Philosophy would only complicate further the methodological question in African Studies.

On Anthropology as cultural expropriation strategy, Falaiye thinks African Studies must do away with the cultural expropriation associated, necessarily, with Anthropology. Crucifying anthropology with such research guilt, without sparing the discipline or some of its finest minds even in Africa, suggests that anthropology as an intellectual practice couldn't have been in existent in Africa. Cultural expropriation is a systemic issue of hegemonic dominance and not necessarily immanent in the disciplinary of Anthropology. No discipline, whether in the Humanities, Social Sciences or Natural Sciences is immune from all the tendencies of Western intellectual, institutional and cultural expropriators so long as there is dearth of financial investment in research on Africa by African States. A serious weakness with Falaiye's argument on anthropology is that it is too sweeping to imply that anthropology is the root of Eurocentric scholarship on Africa, without separating anthropology in itself from anthropology as tool under the selfish use and control of white capitalist and racist monopoly.

On the nexus between African Studies and African Philosophy, there are some conceptual antinomies in Falaiye's view as a proponent of the interior orientation in African Studies and as an exponent of universalism in African Philosophy. Interior orientation is a home grown, particularist point of view. It is about how African Studies should be African-centered, and not how Africa can be seen through an external lens and examination. The orientation, as earlier argued, doesn't believe that Africa can be studied neutrally by non-African agents without epistemic or ideological or imperialist bias. However, when it comes to African Philosophy, Falaiye abandons this particularist posture for a universalist stance. His universalist orientation can be seen in both his conception of African Philosophy and his embrace of what he calls the 'conceptual-analytic approach' in African Philosophy (Falaiye, 1996/97). While he sees African Philosophy as an attempt to provide "answers to universal questions about the African experience and *weltanschauung*" (Falaiye, 2017: 150), he construes his favoured method in African Philosophy as "the application of rigour, analysis and reason to specific African *Weltanschauung*" (Falaiye, 1996/97: 51). Falaiye's posture as an African philosopher in African Studies might have been far more convincing had there been consistency in his adopted method and orientation.

When one critically takes cognizance of the seeming inconsistency in Falaiye's interior orientation in African Studies and conceptual analytic approach in African Philosophy, the parochialism in his thesis of African Philosophy as African Studies' *grundnorm* becomes evident. Falaiye's (2017, p. 141) conception of African Studies as an inquiry focused on knowledge production on "the culture, social institutions, and ... the African experiences" is limited. African Studies, today, is much broader in scope than Falaiye presented it. It is not merely a field concerned with the research and production of knowledge about Africa and her varied experiences; it does also involve innovative development of pedagogy for disseminating produced knowledge and the application of such knowledge to policy formulations for Africa's transformation. Taking cognizance of this tripod dimension of African Studies in the light of Falaiye's defense of African Philosophy as the *grundnorm* of African Studies, questions can be raised not only about the methodological competence of African Philosophy for multidisciplinary knowledge production on Africa but also about what foundational support African Philosophy has to offer to the flowering of the pedagogical and policy dimensions of African Studies.

Moreover, if the interior orientation by Falaiye must be maintained, against the exterior orientation, there should be features that differentiate African scholars from non-African scholars in African Studies. Falaiye's position intimates some difference between the features of an African philosopher and the general features of an African Studies scholars. According to him, the African philosopher is essentially a thinker of ideas. Whether she is a political philosopher, an ontologist, or an expert in epistemology, her major task is to embark on critical reflection that culminates in the prescription of the ideal (Falaiye, 2017). However, a typical scholar of African Studies is a descriptivist interested in describing and interrogating African experiences. Despite the desire to clear-cut the African philosopher from the African scholars, Falaiye's distinction is enmeshed in western conceptual scheme which is open to both interior orientated scholars and African philosophers in African Studies: abstractness, descriptivism, romanticism, imperialism, etc.

While distinguishing between African Philosophy and African Studies, Falaiye appears over ambitious in its claim by monopolizing the labelling of philosophers as 'thinkers of ideas'; thereby, giving the impression that professionals in some other disciplines can't idealize. Such labelling projects some sort of epistemic paternalism

that is an aberration in a post-modern world. Epistemic paternalism is here construed to mean interfering in uprooting the foundation of African Studies scholarship for more productive and authentic African Studies without negotiating the African Philosophy's overthrow of the foundational status of the field among the different disciplinary stakeholders. Regardless of the aim of deconstructing and re-erecting the foundation of African Studies, "the interference and non-consultation conditions necessarily involved in epistemic paternalism" (Ahlstrom-Vij, 2013, p. 39) by African Philosophy makes it problematic. It is high time philosophy, and African Philosophy, shifted the superintending *explanans* such as 'ideation', 'wisdomization', 'ultimate justification', purveyor of 'disciplinary *grundnorm*', etc., to a more inclusive, collaborative and collegial lexical in the patrimony of knowledge production which African Studies represents.

Lastly, on the foundational fallacy, it can be argued that Falaiye's prescription that African Philosophy should be made the *grundnorm* of African Studies is unnecessary. Ostracizing African Philosophy as an independent discipline in order to allow it to define and direct how African studies should operate is a redundant attempt bound to lead to the fallacy of composition. This fallacy is occasioned by defining the whole with its part. By *grundnorm*, Falaiye, presumably, meant the fundamental underlying principles for African Studies. Just as philosophy provides the foundational principles to other disciplines, Falaiye thinks as well that in the African context, African Philosophy can serve as the theoretical basis of African Studies. But what is a *grundnorm*?

According to Kelsen (1963, p. 821), "*grundnorm* is defined as a hypothetical or fundamental norm presumed to be at the basis of a legal system (constituting its logical source [*grund*] of validity)." In Hans Kelsen's sense where the coinage of the word '*grundnorm*' is rooted in his pure theory of law, there is no monolithic conception of the word as there are symbolic and hypothetical senses of the *grundnorm*. In Kelsen's sense, the *grundnorm* is the highest norm and it presupposes some other lower norms whose competent authority can only be objectively validated and logically deduced based on what the *grundnorm* dictates. Thus, the *grundnorm* presupposes legitimation, and ultra-justification with some subtlety of paternalism.

While the nature of the *grundnorm* is not clearly articulated by Falaiye, it would have been more enlightening knowing what kind of relationship - hierarchical, superiority or complementarity - would be existing between African Philosophy and other cognate disciplines in the field of African Studies if the former is to be the *grundnorm*. If it is hierarchical, then it will involve grading some disciplines as superior or inferior. This, at the long run, will be inhibitory to the realization of the transformative research goal of African Studies. Rather than engage in a quixotic quest for a *grundnorm*, an ultra-foundation for the field of African Studies, it is more apt looking in the direction of pluriverse foundations. From the foregoing critical appraisal of Falaiye's these, the important question to raise is: what is the future of African Studies when anchored on pluriverse foundations?

### **Digitalizing African Studies**

Without hesitation, it is apt to state that a more viable future of African Studies can hardly be realized when premised on the discipline of African Philosophy as its foundation. This is particularly the case because African Philosophy, as argued in preceding section, loathes both in the face of the interdisciplinary vantage of African Studies and in the cross-disciplinary foundations guided by the evolving digitised research methods and tools. While agreeing with the interior orientation on the need to re-invent African Studies, foundation wise for instance, in doing so pluriverse foundations would be most plausible to a *grundnorm*. Pluriversalism is a constructed foundation of African Studies in the third-way orientation. Pluriversalism expresses the idea of multiple worlds of knowledge with interconnected vision but with "different histories, different worldviews, different ontologies and epistemologies that define the contours of lived realities and future imaginations" (Ehrnstrom-Fuentes, 2016, p. 1) of a sustainable transformative society. Collaborations rather than competition, inclusive ownership by all disciplines rather than 'we-we-hierarchical and paternalistic' ownership, complementary methods rather than traditionally defined disciplinary method(s) are terms of scholarship engagement in pluriverse foundations of African Studies.

While not undermining the contributions of African Philosophy to African Studies, the third-way dimension in African Studies is against making African Philosophy assume an epistemic paternalistic posture of deciding, shaping and configuring the scope, method and content of African Studies. Methodically, the third-way orientation is not antagonistic of subsisting approaches to doing African Studies. Its claim is that while one

method should not overwhelmingly overshadow the other, all existing approaches should strive towards adopting digital interdisciplinary humanities research tools, as a complement and not replacement of disciplinary methods of studying Africa. At the core of a pluriverse foundation of African Studies is digital research resources and tools.

Digital African Studies is a constructed intellectual space revealing the intersections between the digital and African Studies. The use of digital platforms and tools in African Studies is an imperative in the digital age. While digital humanities or e-humanities is a popular term referring to the use of digital tools and software for finding, collecting, processing, storing, analyzing and representing both conceptual and empirical data in the Humanities, it is delimiting; reducing e-African Studies to e-humanities. This is because African Studies is not just about the disciplines in the Humanities; it includes as well, STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics), “public health, education, peace and security, economic development, foreign affairs, food production, nationalism, archaeology, medicine, arts, geography and resources, religion, music and dance, economics, psychology, films and theatre, philosophy, etc.” (Owoahene-Acheampong & Gordon, 2015b, p. 100). The digitization of African Studies involves integrating new methodological tools with traditional ones in the collection, archiving, analysis, dissemination, utilization and connection of research data and findings.

### Conclusion

This paper has given an account of Falaiye’s attempt of replacing anthropology with African Philosophy as the *grundnorm* of African studies. Falaiye situates the emergence of African studies in anthropological researches and argues against the strains of cultural expropriation implicit in Anthropology. This paper set out to critique aspects of Falaiye’s positions on and justification of African Philosophy as an indispensable foundation for a pragmatic and authentic African Studies. I evaluated Falaiye’s position under five interrelated sub-themes: epistemic infidelity, methodological dilemma, anthropology as cultural expropriation, nexus between African Philosophy and African Studies; and the foundational fallacy. The significant conclusion that emerged from such critical exercise is that Falaiye’s interior leaning in African Studies and his arguments on the necessity and sufficiency of African Philosophy to the survival and future of African Studies appear exaggerated and weak. I, thereafter, made a case for a third way in African Studies scholarship. Rather than defending an omniscient, *grundnorm* for African Philosophy, the third way provides reasons for the plausibility of pluriverse foundations in African Studies. Digitizing African Studies is key component of the third way.

While digitizing African Studies is an evolving space, it no doubt portends some challenges. Arguably, it can reinforce the digital divide resulting from the political and economic inequality between the global North and South” in fundamental matters concerning the configuration of the form and content of digital repositories; the accessibility to data about Africa in Africa; politics of research dissemination and publication in outlets outside Africa; and the issue of best practices in digital revolution age in African Studies scholarship. “African Studies is influenced by wider developments in the digital environment” (Barringer, Damen, Limb & Wallace, 2014: 3) and answers to these and other related challenges might be of further interest in future studies in the field. While the challenges are not insurmountable given heavy internal investments in African Studies by African States and African Union with intensive research by stakeholders on realizing the tripod dimensions of African Studies, I conclude that a pluriverse foundation guided by digitised research mechanisms is worth courting in African Studies.

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