

https://dspace.org/

Hountondji unanimism and the possibility of a communal mind

Edwin Etieyibo

https://hdl.handle.net/10539/47541
DOAJ

Downloaded from a DSpace repository. https://dspace.org/

HOUNTONDJI, UNANIMISM, AND THE POSSIBILITY OF A COMMUNAL MIND

https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/ajct.v5i1.3

Submission: January 31, 2025 Accepted: July 7, 2025

Edwin ETIEYIBO
Department of Philosophy
University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa
Email: edwin.etieyibo@wits.ac.za
ORCID No: 0000-0003-1801-4593

Abstract

What is wrong with *unanimism*? And relatedly, we can ask: What is wrong with a *communal mind*? Both questions, I think, form the fulcrum of many years of Paulin Jidenu Hountondji's work and his criticism of ethnophilosophy. In this paper, I build on some earlier work in defence of the plausibility of ethnophilosophy as a way of arguing for why ethnophilosophy should be taken seriously. I do this by demonstrating, on the one hand, that the question of *unanimism* and *communal mind*, and thus by extension ethnophilosophy, turns on a particular understanding of philosophy and rationality, and on the other hand, how a proper analysis of this understanding provides a ground for conceptualizing the viability of ethnophilosophy. This particular notion of philosophy and rationality, as I will discuss, is central to Hountondji's criticism, proscription, or argument against ethnophilosophy.

Keywords: *Unanimism*, *Communal mind*, Paulin Jidenu Hountondji, Ethnophilosophy, African philosophy.

Introduction

Hountondji is a staunch critic of ethnophilosophy. Indeed, one can say that he is best known for his criticism, proscription, or argument against ethnophilosophy. In this paper, I take on this criticism by arguing for the plausibility of ethnophilosophy, which builds on some of my earlier work in defence of ethnophilosophy (See IMAFIDON 2019; ETIEYIBO 2022b). My argument takes as its

point of departure the nature and possibility of a *communal mind*. In general, my position suggests that, at the end of the day, the rejection or acceptance of ethnophilosophy turns on a particular understanding of philosophy and rationality.

To demonstrate that a *communal mind* is possible, it is important to comprehend the particular understanding of philosophy and rationality that undergirds Hountondji's philosophical work. This conception is as follows (which we shall call Argument A):

1. Philosophy is a purely rational activity or rationality (P = R)
2. Rationality is a property of an individuated or individual mind (R = I)
3. Therefore, philosophy is a property of an individuated or individual mind (P = I)

Based on this argument, the conclusion is drawn that ethnophilosophy (as the unanimity of thought, beliefs, and consciousness) is not plausible. The suggestion here is that ethnophilosophy is not possible because it is undermined by its commitment to unanimity, where unanimity ascribes to a group certain mental activity, namely, philosophical activity that ought to be ascribed to individuals. The idea is that if philosophy—just like mental states—ought to be ascribed to individuals, then it is fallacious to ascribe them to a people or group by suggesting a unity or harmony of mental states.

If ethnophilosophy is doomed to fail because (a) philosophy is a purely individualistic activity and (b) ethnophilosophy trades on a notion of unanimity *qua communal mind*, then the question I think that we should focus on is whether there is a way to conceive of or make a case of rationality that extends beyond the individual. That is what I want to do in this paper. I engage with Argument A by raising doubt for premise 2, which yields the following argument (which we shall call Argument B):

1ª. Philosophy is a purely rational activity or rationality (P = R)
2ª. Rationality is both a property of an individual and communal mind (R = I&C)
3ª. Therefore, philosophy is a property of an individual and communal mind (P = I&C)

My Encounters and Interactions with Hountondji

I do not know Hountondji as well as some others, but I think I know him well enough to say a few things about him. In my mind, he's one of the greatest philosophers to have emerged from the African continent. Besides being an awesome philosopher, I will say he is a very good, kind, and lovely person. He wrote one of the endorsements for my edited volume, *Substance, Method, and the Future of African Philosophy*. This is what he wrote:

> This is an outstanding and brilliant book; one of the most important collections on African philosophy that has recently been published. The book excellently engages with a number of important themes in philosophy and thereby makes a substantial contribution to the field. The editor, as well as the authors—both prominent and rising scholars in African philosophy—should be commended for bringing together this volume. (HOUNTONDJI 2018, N.P)[1]

His endorsement was partly a consequence of our first meeting at the 2nd Biennial African Philosophy World Conference in Calabar.[2] The Local Organising Committee, of which I was a member, invited him as one of the keynote speakers. There were many memorable moments throughout the three-day conference. He delivered a very engaging keynote, one in which he appears to revise some ideas he had previously expressed in his sustained criticism of ethnophilosophy. I cannot forget the time we spent together in the hotel (we were lodged in the same hotel), including assisting him with an important phone call that he had to make to someone back home in Cotonou, Bénin Republic. Since we stayed in the same hotel, it afforded us many opportunities not just for close

[1] The anthology was published in 2018 by Palgrave. Hountondji signed off the endorsement as follows: Paulin J. Hountondji, Université Nationale du Bénin, Cotonou, Republic of Benin,

[2] The conference, which was organized by the African Philosophy Society for which I am the Secretary, took place at the University of Calabar, Nigeria on October 12-14, 2017.

interactions, but also for discussions of his work and my current research.

I recall one of those evenings in the hotel. A few colleagues had issues with cash and needed to figure out where to get some Nigerian currency, while some needed to find a restaurant that served some local Nigerian food. Hountondji stood there, smiling, and said: "Young men, you mean you can't fast?" The comment about our failure to master the art of fasting came across as quite humorous because earlier at the conference, he had remarked that there was so much food and urged us to eat until we were full.

After the conference, I left for Lagos from Calabar, where I was to stay for a few days before heading to Johannesburg, South Africa. As it turns out, Hountondji and Helen Lauer (from the University of Dar es Salaam, and who also gave a keynote address) happened to be on the same flight from Calabar to Lagos. We continued our chit-chat while waiting to board our flight and, on the plane, since we sat close together. We talked throughout the one-hour flight. When we arrived in Lagos, we got into the same taxi, which took him to his hotel (where he was to get some rest while waiting for his driver to come from Cotonou to take him back home), and Lauer to her hotel, and me to mainland Lagos. While in the taxi, we continued our discussion. One thread of our discussion throughout the flight and in the taxi was on the status of ethnophilosophy in philosophy, generally, and African philosophy, in particular. I say a bit more about this below. It was after our first encounter that my regular correspondence with him via email started.

My second in-person meeting with him was at the 3rd Biennial African Philosophy World Conference in Dar es Salaam.[3] Even though our interactions were not as close as they were two years ago in 2017, we shared many happy moments, including visiting the book display room together and discussing how encouraging it is that many books on African philosophy are being published. He congratulated me on my book, for which he wrote an endorsement, while at the same time joking and teasing me about my position on

[3] The conference, which was organized by the African Philosophy Society, took place at the University of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania on October 28-30, 2019.

ethnophilosophy. He said that I am strong-headed about my views on African philosophy, and he liked that, but he is not quite sure he agrees with my take on ethnophilosophy. I told him that I took after him in my strong-headedness. I also mentioned that my refusal to accept his views on African philosophy and ethnophilosophy stems from my belief that dismissing the entirety of ethnophilosophy is problematic. Since most of our conversations in 2017 during the flight from Calabar to Lagos and the taxi ride from Lagos airport to his hotel were on ethnophilosophy and his views on it, I thought he would be exhausted by now in continuing a conversation around the topic. But apparently, he was not. Although he had now acknowledged a shift in his view on ethnophilosophy, he was quick to point out that the shift is not in the way some people think. Of course, I didn't tell him that he was wrong (I couldn't do that, never will I do that to an elder—now ancestor—of African philosophy). What I told him was that I want it to shift a bit more to accommodate the possibility of a *communal mind* and to think of *unanimism* or *unanimity* as a good and positive thing. The possibility of a *communal mind* and the sense of it and *unanimism* being something positive is what I will be focusing on in the rest of the paper. However, before I do this, let me spend a bit of time saying a couple of things about the man Hountondji and his work.

Hountondji: The Man and His Work

Hountondji is a man of many parts: an academic, a philosopher, a socio-political critic, and a politician. He was born on April 11, 1942, in Treichville, now part of Abidjan in the Ivory Coast,[4] and passed on at the age of eighty-one on February 2, 2024, at his home in Cotonou. He was the first African to be admitted as a philosophy student to the École Normale Supérieure in Paris, one of the most prestigious schools and leading higher education institutions in France. He graduated in 1966. After graduating, he did his doctorate in 1970 and wrote his dissertation on the Austrian-German philosopher, phenomenologist, and mathematician Edmund Husserl.

[4] Hountondji did tell me a bit about when he was growing up with his parents, Marguerite (Dovoedo) Hountondji (his mother), and Paul Hountondji (his father), who was a pastor in the Methodist Church.

One must note that while Husserl has a profound influence on Hountondji, it is essential not to overlook the impact that Louis Althusser had on him. As Zeyad El Nabolsy has remarked:

> The two most influential philosophers on Hountondji's conception of the relationship between science and philosophy, Edmund Husserl and Louis Althusser, would both have assented to the claim that philosophy is fundamentally a *Wissenschaftslehre*. However, they each adhered to different (and indeed contradictory) understandings of this claim. While Hountondji explicitly recognizes the dual influence of Husserl and Althusser on his conception of philosophy as a theory of science, he does not attempt to resolve the contradictions between Husserl's understanding of the relationship between philosophy and science and Althusser's conception of that relationship. (NABOLSY 2022, 34)

As many of us know, and Hountondji himself has acknowledged, the influence, particularly of Husserl, on his understanding of philosophy as well as his criticism of ethnophilosophy is patently evident.

As an academic, Hountondji taught in several places, first (for two years) in Besançon, France, and Kinshasa and Lubumbashi (in the Democratic Republic of the Congo), and then at the Université Nationale du Bénin in Cotonou, where he taught for a long time as a professor of philosophy. In politics, he is known for being a prominent critic of the military dictatorship in the Benin Republic and his involvement in his country's return to democracy in 1992. Once Benin attained democracy, he served in the government as Minister of Education and Minister for Culture and Communications until 1994, when he resigned and returned to academic life in the university. As a philosopher, Hountondji worked in phenomenology and African philosophy, developing a critique of ethnophilosophy, for which he is best known.

Hountondji's importance in African philosophy and intellectual thought cannot be overstated and this can be seen from

the following remarks. In an interview, Souleymane Bachir Diagne described Hountondji's work as very important and liberating. In his "Preface" to the book *Paulin Hountondji: Leçons de Philosophie Africaine*,[5] Diagne called him "the most influential figure in philosophy in Africa" (DIAGNE 2022, i). Pascah Mungwini, in his 2022 book, *African Philosophy: Emancipation and Practice,* called Hountondji's critique of ethnophilosophy as a philosophical masterpiece, one that he says, "enjoys canonical status in contemporary African philosophy" (MUNGWINI 2022, 26). Some may quibble, and rightly so, with some of the status conferred here on Hountondji because one might think that there are other "great" or "greater" African philosophers (like Barry Hallen, Ifeanyi Menkiti, Kwame Gyekye, Kwasi Wiredu, etc.). I am not going to wade into this debate or a comparison between and among the "African Greats" since that is not my interest in this paper. But one thing one cannot deny is that Hountondji's contribution to African philosophy is both significant and revolutionary.

Hountondji and Ethnophilosophy

Hountondji takes ethnophilosophy to be a concoction of Europeans, which misrepresents the thoughts and intellectual abilities of Africans. His criticism of ethnophilosophy is best understood within the corpus of his work and the influence that Husserl had on him, particularly his derivation of central concepts, including his conception of philosophy and universality. I do want to set aside for now this influence and focus on what I consider to be some of the motivations behind Hountondji's rejections of ethnophilosophy. To understand these motivations, it is important to keep in mind that his principal target or line of attack seems to be Placide Tempels'[6] book *Bantu Philosophy* (published in 1945), or the ideas in the book, or his general take on the nature of Bantu philosophy. By targeting Tempels, Hountondji is, by extension, attacking the French anthropologist Marcel Griaule, who in 1965 published *Conversations with Ogotemmêli: An Introduction to Dogon Religious Ideas*. Recall that Tempels was arguing against the

[5] The book is by Bado Ndoye and published in 2022 but not yet translated into English.

[6] A Belgian missionary.

dominant and current thinking and paradigm at the time—that there is no philosophy on the African continent or within the colonised world—a thinking associated primarily with people like the French anthropologist Lucien Lévy-Bruhl.

The first motivation is philosophical, and this is directed against the idea of *unanimism*. The central thesis for Tempels's *Bantu Philosophy* is that for the "Bantu," or African, "being" means "force" or "power" and "force" means "being." Hountondji's disagreement with Tempels is not so much about whether it is the case that there is something that can be said about being, or force, or being as force in African cultural or traditional worldview, but the very fact that Tempels presents this as philosophy or African philosophy or the philosophy of Africans. For Hountondji, the whole approach of Tempels was flawed. He argues that philosophy cannot emanate from a group but rather must be the responsibility of individual philosophers. He points to the problems in Tempels' thinking or ideas and generalisation in a 1997 memoir, *Combats Pour le Sens: Un Itineraire Africain* (published in English in 2002 as *The Struggle for Meaning: Reflections on Philosophy, Culture and Democracy in Africa*). He says; "[Tempels' view is a] construction, as a norm for all Africans, past, present and future, of a form of thinking, a system of beliefs, which could at best only correspond to an already determined stage of the intellectual journey of Black peoples"(quoted from NOSSITER 2024, N.P) He adds; "[W]hat was thus presented as 'Bantu philosophy' was not really the philosophy of the Bantu, but of Tempels, and engaged only the responsibility of the Belgian missionary, having become, for the occasion, the analyst of the ways and customs of the Bantu" (quoted from NOSSITER 2024, N.P) [7]

The second motivation is intellectual. Here, Hountondji's motivations are twofold. First, he wants to free African thinkers from a long-established set of beliefs to which European thinkers

[7] That Hountondji takes the threat of Tempels's work seriously can be seen from the fact that he devoted a series of essays starting in 1969 to engaging with the Belgian missionary's ethnographic musings in *Bantu Philosophy*. These essays where later collected in the book *African Philosophy: Myth and Reality,* which was published in 1976 in French and in 1983 in English.

like Tempels and Griaule had chained them. Second, he was interested in the non-contamination of ideas and beliefs, or what can be said to be the purity of African ideas and beliefs. To accomplish this goal of the purity of ideas, he had to divorce those ideas and beliefs from anthropological trappings and groundings. In a 2022 Radio France Internationale interview, Hountondji remarks; "What the Belgian Franciscan was offering was really a system of collective thought[8], which was supposedly a positive African attribute…This is not the sense of the word 'philosophy'" (HOUNTONDJI 2022, N.P).

And the third is political and pragmatic. For Hountondji, it is important to reject *unanimism* in African thought as these can and have been used to justify dictatorship and human rights violations in Africa. This view is one that Hountondji probably came to following his firsthand experience when, in the early 1970s, he taught in Kinshasa and Lubumbashi during the reign of Mobutu Sese Seko (who has been called the strongman of Congo). According to Hountondji (1997/2002), the danger of "traditional philosophy" or *unanimism* is that it has been used and was used by people like Sese Seko "to justify or hide the worst excesses, the most atrocious human rights violations" (quoted from NOSSITER 2024, N.P).

In a nutshell, the unanimist or unanimity message or view or the notion that Africans all spoke in unity or with one voice is problematic not just for dictatorship in Africa (as exemplified by Sese Seko in the Democratic Republic of Congo or elsewhere in Africa), but in the intellectual work of people like Tempels and Griaule who contributed to chaining African thinkers to European thinking, thereby denying Africans the possibility of both the singularity or individuality and purity of ideas and beliefs.

The Possibility of a Communal Mind and Ethnophilosophy

My discussion in this section will mostly engage with the first and second motivations: The philosophical and the intellectual. I will touch briefly on the political and pragmatic motivations in the conclusion. As I engage with these motivations, we should keep in mind Argument B.

[8] Collective thought = *unanimism* or *communal mind*.

1[a]. Philosophy is a purely rational activity or rationality (P = R)
2[a]. Rationality is both a property of an individual and communal mind (R = I&C)
3[a]. Therefore, philosophy is a property of an individual and communal mind (P = I&C)

Ultimately, I disagree with premise 2 of Argument A.

1. Philosophy is a purely rational activity or rationality (P = R)
2. Rationality is a property of an individuated or individual mind (R = I)
3. Therefore, philosophy is a property of an individuated or individual mind (P = I)

In my engagement with the first two motivations, I will attempt to show that a *communal mind* seems possible in virtue of an understanding of *rationality* that takes into account the theses or ideas of *extended mind*, *group mind*, and *collective intentionality*. The idea is to make the case that if rationality or the mind can be said to be extended beyond the individual to the communal, then we can understand philosophy not strictly as a product of individual minds (of philosophers), but also of communal minds and communal philosophy. By rationality, I should be understood to be talking broadly about reason, thought, or thinking, and logic. That is, rationality is the quality or state of being rational or having clear thought and reason, or whereby one's thought is in accordance with reason or logic. Thus, rationality, in this sense, refers to the fact that one is rational and one is rational when one's thought or mental state is agreeable to reason. The claim I make is that rationality can be understood as a product of both individual and communal minds, as seen in discussions of the *extended mind, group mind,* and *collective intentionality*.[9]

[9] For some of the most sustained discussions of these concepts and the issues around them (see CLARK 2008; ROWLANDS 2010; WILSON and FOGLIA 2013; SHAPIRO and SPAULDING 2025).

In the philosophy of mind or cognitive science, there is a discussion of the extended mind, which posits that the mind extends beyond the individual and into the physical world, rather than being confined solely to the brain or the body. This is exemplified by, for example, the argument for *active externalism* that Clark and Chalmers defend (1998), according to which the environment plays an active role in driving cognitive processes. The idea is that the physical world here includes some objects in the external environment, such as computers, tablets, phones, written calculations, a diary, etc., or other objects that store information and which form part of a cognitive process and in that way function as extensions of the mind itself or the mind as housed in a physical body. There are several ways of thinking of cognitive processes. One way is provided by Adams and Aizawa (2010), which builds on the idea of cognitive states involving intrinsic and non-derived content.

The point about taking cognition more broadly is that the mind is not just about the skull, head, and body of an individual being. It is bigger than that; it extends beyond that. If the mind, which is the seat of rationality, is extended, then I think that rationality itself can be said to be extended beyond the individual. In a nutshell, the idea undergirding the concept of *extended mind* is the claim that aids that supplement the mind as in memory, etc., are not just integral parts of what we call the mind or cognition but the "mind", which is now extended and that what we call the mind in the traditional sense of the mind being in the skull is not warranted and that the mind is both what we take to be in the skull plus the aids.

As for *group mind, the idea is that beliefs and desires are ascribed not to individual minds, but to group mind, namely, the* beliefs and desires common to a social group as a whole or the collective consciousness of a group of individuals. In a sense, then, group mind is collective consciousness or psychic unity shared by a group of people. Stated differently, for a group mind, we are referring to collective minds or minds composed of two or more individual minds, whereby the content or state is not individuated but ascribed to the collective or group, thereby forming a kind of unity of mental states.

And regarding *collective intentionality*, which may also refer to shared intentionality, the idea is that the mind is referred to in such a way as to suggest that mental entities or thoughts are held communally.[10] That is to say that collective intentionality refers to the power of minds to be jointly or collectively "directed at objects, matters of fact, states of affairs, goals, or values" (SCHWEIKARD and SCHMID 2021, N.P). In this sense, then, collective intentionality can be understood to come "in a variety of modes, including shared intention, joint attention, shared belief, collective acceptance, and collective emotion" (SCHWEIKARD and SCHMID 2021, N.P). The empirical intervention of Danilov and Mihailova (2023), which presents psychophysiological research on shared intentionality and four factors' domains that contribute to shared intentionality, provides some evidence of what Schweikard and Schmid are talking about.

From the above, it is clear that *extended mind, group mind,* and *collective intentionality* are related concepts insofar as they (a) diverge from the standard account of individualism about minds, according to which minds are singular, individual, and cannot be divided, and (b) broadly speak to the notion and nature of *group* or *communal cognition* or to the psychological processes, states, and capacities of collective minds. Perhaps the following two examples can be used to illustrate *group cognition*. The first is when one says that "the crowd is mad." In this example, 'the crowd is mad' does suggest some psychological or emotive state of a group of individuals that we call the crowd. The second is "the people have decided." In this example, the people have decided to demonstrate a group decision or move to follow a particular course of action. In both examples, there is the suggestion of *unanimity,* but only insofar as some *psychological* state is attributed to the crowd, and *decisions* are attributed to the group. However, in this ascription, the suggestion is not that everyone in the group or crowd has the same

[10] See Tollefsen and Friedlaender for a related understanding of collective intentionality as: "a growing area of intradisciplinary and interdisciplinary research that studies the ways in which individuals share mental states such as belief, knowledge, and intention, and the possibility that groups themselves are the bearers of mental states" (2017, N.P).

psychological state (is emotional or carries the same emotion), or that everyone among the people agrees with the decision.

What we see from the above regarding *group cognition* (*extended mind*, *group mind*, and *collective intentionality*) is that the mistake that critics of *unanimism* make is that they assume, I think wrongly, (1) that *unanimism* effaces individuality, and (2) *unanimism* means there must be complete agreement, say in the case of the group *deciding*. This is not so. The idea of group decision-making or agreement, which does not efface individuality, has been well articulated by Kwasi Wiredu in his presentation of consensual democracy. In Wiredu's consensual democracy, he discusses unanimity of decisions as agreement in action, rather than necessarily agreement in and of belief. In other words, for Wiredu, when we (understood as a group) make decisions in the context of consensual democracy, we must suspend our beliefs or, more simply, put them in abeyance in order to reach a decision and follow through on it. That we have a decision means there is unanimity, but that there is unanimity does not mean that individual beliefs are not percolating in the background. It just means that because of *the agreement in action,* they are not visible. If you like, call them *dormant individual beliefs*.

So, take proverbs as an example. Proverbs, as we know, are a very key component or source of ethnophilosophy in African philosophy. Proverbs are one-line statements or propositions that convey a great deal about reality, values, and beliefs. Proverbs, according to Campbell Shittu Momoh (2000a), entail some metaphysical principle. By this, he means a principle that comprehensively and critically helps us to understand the values of the community or Africans by articulating aspects of reality. This idea of an overarching significance of proverbs is sensible and understandable, given that we are here talking of traditional African societies that had no writing and used proverbs as one of their sources of expressing values, beliefs, and capturing or recording reality.

Beyond expressing metaphysical principles of reality, proverbs, like other aspects of orality, serve as a vehicle for knowledge and moral compass (ETIEYIBO 2024). Are proverbs an example of unanimity of decision with respect to some ideas, values,

or beliefs? Yes, I think so. Because proverbs do not fall from the sky but come into being or existence through some process in the community, and as such are representative of a definite way of thinking about issues and reality, as Etieyibo (2022b) has demonstrated. In fact, within a community, there may be competing proverbs, which may suggest the tension between different voices and thinking in that community, and this, as I have argued elsewhere, may suggest the tension between different voices and thinking in such community (ETIEYIBO 2016).

Eurocentrism and the Issue of African Cultures and Values

Since issues of ethnophilosophy often turn on questions about African cultures and values, it is important to keep in mind that what counts as African cultures and values is debatable due mostly to the various misconceptions and distortions of African cultures and values by Euroscepticism or Eurocentric scholars. There have been several engagements with these misconceptions and distortions.

For example, Cheik Anta Diop has discussed the misconceptions and distortions in his examination of patriarchy in Africa (DIOP 1987) and in his analyses of the different lineage systems on the continent (DIOP 1989 and 1991). Diop's insightful point is that there are many societies in Africa that were matriarchal and those that were patriarchal often differ significantly from the patriarchy that one finds in Europe or the West.

Picking up on Diop's discussions, Ify Amadiume (2005) has shown that the distortions of the lineage systems in Africa seem to be motivated partly because Eurocentric scholars were focused on trying to fit the ideas of women and men in African traditional societies into those of Europe. She notes:

> By dismissing the link between gender and a particular type of descent, specifically the possibilities of authority and power for women in matriliny (Schneider and Gough, 1961; Fox, 1967; Schlegel, 1972), I believe that European anthropologists were misled by their own ethnocentrism into insisting on a general theory of male dominance in all types of descent systems.

> However, it is on the structural analysis of the metaphorical symbolism of matriliny (biological connection between generations or motherhood) and the matriarchal ideological construct generated from this symbolism that Eurocentric scholarship has failed African Studies. (AMADIUME 2005, 90-91)

Expanding on this, I have shown how the misconceptions and distortions play out on the issue of the place of women and what count as seniority in traditional African societies within the contexts of matrilineal and patrilineal systems (ETIEYIBO 2021a; 2021b). One of my central claims is that the failure of Eurocentrism is probably due to what Momoh calls the failure of the ethnographic data of Eurocentric scholars to "make distinctions where distinctions are clearly necessary… [and where] such ethnographic data fail to go the whole way in viewing the status and role of women as part of a complex totality of traditional custom and social values" (MOMOH 2000, 277-278). And within contemporary discourse of gender and African and Western feminisms, Ajiboro and Etieyibo (2023) have examined the implications that these distortions have for discussions of gender issues and understanding of the different phases of Western feminism.

Conclusion

My discussion so far has demonstrated that the question of whether ethnophilosophy can be defended as philosophy hinges on a certain understanding of philosophy and rationality. If one takes philosophy to be a purely rational activity (or rationality) and if one holds rationality to be a property of an individuated or individual mind (as Hountondji seems to hold), then one is likely to subscribe to the following conclusion: *philosophy is a property of an individuated or individual mind (P = I),* as articulated in Argument A, and accordingly, proscribe *unanimism* and the possibility of a *communal mind*. However, if one does not take rationality as *solely* a property of an individuated or individual mind (and even if one takes philosophy to be a purely rational activity), then one is likely to make allowance for *unanimism* and the possibility of communal thinking or a *communal mind*, as we see in the conclusion of

Argument B: *philosophy is a property of an individual and communal mind (P = I&C)*.

Let me now briefly touch on the political and pragmatic motivations that I mentioned I would revisit in the conclusion. Recall that on this motivation, the reason for the rejection of *unanimism* (by Hountondji) in African thought *qua* ethnophilosophy is that it can and has been used to justify dictatorship and human rights violations in Africa, as in the case of Sese Seko in the Democratic Republic of Congo. On this issue, I have two things to say.

First, if people use traditional 'philosophy' to rationalise their behaviour or circumvent human rights violations, as Hountondji argues, then perhaps the first thing to ask is whether the content of what these people parade as traditional philosophy is really traditional African philosophy or a distorted version of African philosophy. This point is important, considering what I have said above that Eurocentric scholars have distorted a lot of what currently counts as African cultures and values. With such distortions of African cultures and values, it is not highly unlikely that what has often been paraded as traditional African thought and philosophy carries with it such distortions.

Second, suppose that we reject traditional African philosophy for the reason that Hountondji wants us to, it is not clear to me that such rejection will make a difference to people who want to sidestep human rights since they can simply do that via some other means and mechanisms, perhaps through the notion of African traditions or cultures (supposing of course, that my first point does not hold). Unless Hountondji is saying that there is nothing like African traditions or cultures. This is because accepting that there is something like 'African traditions' or 'African cultures' does, in some way, mean that there is some form of *unanimism* in African traditions and cultures. By this I mean that once we accept the view that there is so and so culture or tradition, say the Adja, Bariba, or Fulani or Fula People or Fulɓe cultures (in Benin Republic), or the Zulu and Xhosa cultures (in South Africa), or the Urhobo, Yoruba, and Igbo cultures (in Nigeria) or the Akan and Mole-Dagbon cultures (in Ghana) one has invariably accepted that such culture is a *group thing* or is *unanimous* in virtue of the fact that it refers to

every individual member of that culture, or everyone that identifies with it, or designated by the culture (notwithstanding the fact that there may be disagreement, or some or many in such a culture do not agree with the culture or everything about it).

So, if one says that there is Urhobo culture, one has thereby admitted assenting to the idea that every Urhobo person is held together by that culture, tradition, and values. Whether the individual or everyone agrees with the culture or follows it is a different argument entirely. I do think that most of us will find it very troubling and problematic to claim that there are no African traditions or cultures, since there can't be *unanimity* in African traditions and cultures. However, once one accepts that there is something called African traditions and cultures one has, at the same time, (a) bought into some notion of the *unanimity* of such traditions and cultures and (b) accepted such traditions and cultures as binding on everyone from that traditions and cultures whether one agrees with those traditions and cultures or follows every aspect of the traditions and cultures. Stated differently, it will be deeply disturbing and completely unintelligible to say that one cannot hold the view that there is African cultures or this African culture or that so and so culture exists because to do so will imply that one is thereby endorsing the further claim that Africans or the Africans in question cannot be individuated or are of a *unanimous* or *one* voice.

Relevant Literature

1. ADAMS, Fred and AIZAWA, Ken. "Defending the Bounds of Cognition," [*The Extended Mind*, Richard Menary Ed.], pp67–80, 2010. MIT Press: Cambridge.Doi:10.7551/mitpress/9780262014038.003.0004.
2. AJIBORO, Aderonke and ETIEYIBO, Edwin. "Indigenous Culture and the Decolonisation of Feminist Thought in Africa," [*South African Journal of Philosophy*], pp165-175, 2023. Vol 42. No3.
3. AMADIUME, Ifi. "Theorising, Matriarchy in Africa: Kinship Ideologies and Systems in Africa and Europe," [*African Gender Studies: A Reader*, Oyeronke OYĚWUMÍ

Ed.], pp83–98, 2005. Palgrave Macmillan: New York, Doi:10.1007/978-1-137-09009-6_5.

4. CLARK, Andy. [*Supersizing the Mind: Embodiment, Action, and Cognitive Extension*], 2008. Oxford University Press: Oxford.
5. CLARK, Andy and CHALMERS, David J., "The Extended Mind," [*Analysis*], pp7-19, 1998. Vol 58. No1. Doi:10.1093/analys/58.1.7. JSTOR 3328150. This has been reprinted as: CLARK, Andy and CHALMERS, David J., "The Extended Mind, [*The Extended Mind*, Richard MENARY Ed.], pp27-42, 2010. MIT Press: Cambridge.
6. DANILOV, Val Igor and MIHAILOVA, Sandra. "Empirical Evidence of Shared Intentionality: Towards Bioengineering Systems Development," [*OBM Neurobiology]*, 2023. Vol 7. No2. Doi:10.21926/obm.neurobiol.2302167, https://www.lidsen.com/journals/neurobiology/neurobiology-07-02-167.
7. DIAGNE, Souleymane Bachir. "Preface," Bado NDOYE, *Paulin Hountondji: Leçons de Philosophie Africaine*, 2022. Riveneuve: Paris.
8. DIOP, Cheikh Anta. [Precolonial Black Africa: A Comparative Study of the Political and Social Systems of Europe and Black Africa, from Antiquity to the Formation of Modern States], 1987. Lawrence Hill & Co.: Westport, Connecticut.
9. _____. [*The Cultural Unity of Black Africa: The Domains of Matriarchy and Patriarchy in Classical Antiquity*], 1989. Karnak House: London.
10. _____. [*Civilisation or Barbarism: An Authentic Anthropology*], 1991. Lawrence Hill Books: New York.
11. ETIEYIBO, Edwin. "African Philosophy and Proverbs: The Case of Logic in Urhobo Proverbs," [*Philosophia Africana*], pp21-39, 2016. Vol 18. No1.
12. _____. "Gender Relations and Eldership in an African Cultural Worldview," [*African Philosophy and the Struggle for Gender and Sexual Equality,* Second Winter School in African], August 18, 2021a, Philosophy, Part I, Virtual on Zoom.

13. _____. "African Studies, Eurocentrism and the Africa that was," [Centre of African Studies, University of Edinburgh, Scotland], November 3, 2021b, Virtual on Zoom.
14. _____. "Beyond Placide Tempels' Bantu Philosophy and in Defense of the Philosophical Viability of Ethnophilosophy," [*Ethnophilosophy and the Search for the Wellspring of African Philosophy*, Ada AGADA Ed.], pp87-103, 2022a. Springer Nature: London.
15. _____. "African Proverbs," [*African Ethics: A Guide to Key Ideas*, Jonathan O. CHIMAKONAM and Luis CORDEIRO-RODRIGUES Eds.], pp31-49, 2022b. Bloomsbury: London.
16. _____. "African Moral Theory," [*Understanding Business and Ethics in the South African Context*," second edition, Mark RATHBONE Ed.], pp.171-196, 2024. Van Schaik Publishers: Pretoria.
17. GRIAULE, Marcel. [*Conversations with Ogotemmêli: An Introduction to Dogon Religious Ideas*], 1965. Oxford University Press: London.
18. HOUNTONDJI, Paulin. [The Struggle for Meaning: Reflections on Philosophy, Culture and Democracy in Africa], 1997/2002. Ohio University Press: Athens, Ohio.
19. _____. [African Philosophy: Myth and Reality, second edition]. Indiana University Press: Bloomington.
20. _____. Radio France Internationale Interview, Philosophes D'afrique, Penseurs du Monde: Paulin Hountondji, la Modernité d'un père Fondateur, 2022. Retrieved from: https://www.rfi.fr/fr/podcasts/philosophes-d-afrique-penseurs-du-monde/20220710-paulin-hountondji-la-modernit%C3%A9-d-un-p%C3%A8re-fondateur, published July 10, 2022 at 09:08am.
21. IMAFIDON, Elvis et. al. "Are We Finished with the Ethnophilosophy Debate? A Multi-Perspective Conversation," [*Filosofia Theoretical: Journal of African Philosophy, Culture and Religions*], pp111-137, 2019. Reprinted in IMAFIDON, Elvis (2019), "Are We Finished with the Ethnophilosophy Debate? A Multi-perspective Conversation," [*Ethnophilosophy and the Search for the*

Wellspring of African Philosophy, Ada AGADA Ed.], pp299-323, 2022. London: Springer Nature.

22. MOMOH, Campbell Shittu. "Philosophy in African Proverbs," [*The Substance of African Philosophy*, second edition], pp359–376, 2000a. African Philosophy Project: Auch.
23. _____ "The Function of Eldership in African Marriages," [*The Substance of African Philosophy*, second edition], pp276-287, 2000b. African Philosophy Project: Auchi.
24.
25. MUNGWINI, Pascah, [*African Philosophy: Emancipation and Practice*], 2022. Bloomsbury: London.
26. NABOLSY, Zeyad El. "Paulin J. Hountondji on Philosophy, Science, and Technology: From Husserl and Althusser to a Synthesis of the Hessen-Grossmann Thesis and Dependency Theory," [*Africana Studies: Theoretical Futures*, Grant Farred Ed.], pp34-64, 2022. Temple University Press: Philadelphia.
27. NOSSITER, Adam (2014) Paulin Hountondji, Revolutionary African Philosopher, Dies at 81," [*The New York Times*], https://www.nytimes.com/2024/03/19/world/africa/paulin-hountondji-dead.html, (Accessed April 3, 2024).
28. ROWLANDS, Mark. [*New Science of the Mind: From Extended Mind to Embodied Phenomenology*], MIT Press: Cambridge.
29. SCHWEIKARD, David P. and SCHMID, Hans Bernhard . "Collective Intentionality," [*The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Fall 2021 Edition, Edward N. Zalta Ed.], 2021. https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2021/entries/collective-intentionality.
30. SHAPIRO, Lawrence and SPAULDING, Shannon, "Embodied Cognition," [*The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Edward N. Zalta & Uri Nodelman Eds.], forthcoming (Summer 2025 Edition), URL = https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2025/entries/embodied-cognition/.

31. TEMPELS, Placide. [*Bantu Philosophy*], 1945. Présence Africaine: Paris.
32. TOLLEFSEN, Deborah and FRIEDLAENDER, Christina, "Collective Intentionality," [*Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*], 2017, https://www.rep.routledge.com/articles/thematic/collective-intentionality/v-1
33. WILSON, Robert A. "Collective Memory, Group Minds, and the Extended Mind Thesis," [*Cognitive Processing*], pp227-36, 2005. Vol 6. No4. Doi: 10.1007/s10339-005-0012-z.
34. WILSON, Robert A. and FOGLIA, Lucia, "Embodied Cognition," [*Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Cognitive Science*], pp319-325, 2013. Vol 4. No3. Doi: 10.1002/wcs.1226.