

The Traditional Conception of Africans in the Perception of Serequeberhan

Etuse Yawo Assedi, Dr. John Muhenda, Dr. Sabas Kimani

The Catholic University of Eastern Africa (CUEA), P.O Box 62157-00200 Nairobi, Kenya

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Abstract: The article focuses on exploring the possibilities of philosophic discourse in the present postcolonial African situation. As indicated, it will begin by exploring and laying out Traditional Conception of Africans in the Perspective of Serequeberhan, the character of philosophy as a discipline. It will then broadly examine Africa's present situation, a historico-political situation which has prevailed since the end of formal colonialism. Consequent to the two expositive presentations, the article will then indicate the role philosophy can and should play in this situation. The aim is to explore the possible beyond the demise of colonialism in the hope of catching sight of a truly postcolonial future. Thus, the article concisely articulates the hermeneutical stance in contemporary African philosophy.

Keywords: African, Conception, Traditional, Perception

Introduction

In Africa, philosophy has never been concerned with 'the interesting' and/or 'the exotic' but with the concrete problems or exigencies of its time. In other words, for example, if Socrates was obsessed with piety, courage, justice, and similar value-terms, it was because the Peloponnesian War (431–404 BCE), among other things, spearheaded by the conflict between Athens and Sparta, rendered established usages and accepted notions questionable. This was the basic exigency that stimulated his dialogical efforts, focused on 'the manner of one's life' in critical relation with the wisdom of his past (i.e., Simonides), confronting the folly of his present and in view of a desirable possibility. This article will critically evaluate the Postcolonial African Beings, focusing on Serequeberhan's perspective.

2.2 Tsenay Serequeberhan's history.

Serequeberhan is an associate professor of philosophy at Baltimore's Morgan State University. Among his many publications are *The Hermeneutics of African Philosophy: Horizon and Discourse*, a ground-breaking work, and *African Philosophy: The Essential Readings*, a significant text that invites Africans to examine critically their being-in-the-world, in terms of self-emancipation.

Serequeberhan is one of the hermeneutists who believes that any philosophy must be "situated." Thus, African philosophical experiences are inextricably linked to African culture and history. "Situatedness" functions as a horizon for philosophy. The contents of philosophy are always specific and contextual.¹ Thus, the diverse particularities within which a philosophic discourse is articulated constrain this general essence of philosophy. Accordingly, Serequeberhan views African philosophy as applying Africans' intellectual pursuit within our particular lived concern and historical framework. So, our lived concern as Africans in this postcolonial context, which is the horizon that defines us, is more on political issues. This is the reason why Serequeberhan says that:

For us (Africans), the question of our existence, of our "to be," is an inherently political question. When we ask or reflect on our humanity, when we examine the actuality, the substance of our existence as human beings, we are confronted by an internalized indigenosity.²

¹ Tsenay Serequeberhan, *The Hermeneutics of African Philosophy: Horizon and Discourse*, (New York/London: Routledge, 1994), 7-8

² Serequeberhan, *The Hermeneutics of African philosophy: horizon and discourse*, (New York: Routledge), 1994

So, for Serequeberhan, our *postcolonial condition is very critical*: that is why he asked even how to purge the colonial residue that still controls, from “inside us,” the actuality of the present. Therefore, Serequeberhan reflects on Africans' self-realization and self-emancipation from Western cultural imperialism through his philosophical activity. For us Africans, however, rather than overcoming the imperialized ideology (which is our heritage), Serequeberhan accepts it as part and parcel of his and others' African heritage. And it is about actively passing through it and, in the process, changing our present and our future through a positive revolution that will affirm our existence.

Consequently, we must quickly understand Serequeberhan's conception of existence, which he develops and forms inside his hermeneutics, to set the phase for our research. Even though he thinks Gadamer is a step up from Heidegger's conception of being-in-the-world, Serequeberhan acknowledges that Gadamer has appropriated Heidegger's concept of existence." In this way, Serequeberhan's dual conceptions of existence and heritage uphold Heidegger's commitment to the world while utilizing Gadamer's hermeneutics to interpret our world, which is our horizons.³

2.3 Serequeberhan and Hermeneutical Perspective

It is essential to mention that Serequeberhan's contemporary analysis of Africans' place in the world is influenced by colonialism, which he considered as Africans' heritage. Hermeneutics becomes the way of dealing with Africans realities. Etymologically, the term hermeneutics is derived from the Greek word (hermenein) *hermeneutic*, which means to explain, translate, and interpret.⁴ The word hermeneutics is usually associated with the wing-footed messenger of god in Greek mythology, *Hermes*. Hermes was considered a mediator between the gods and mankind. In addition to this, Hermes was also regarded as the creator and discoverer of language, speech, writing, and others. These discoveries are indispensable instruments that enable humans to comprehend meaning and inform others. These numerous functions make Hermes the nominal representative of Hermeneutics.⁵

It is the application of the principles of hermeneutics in bringing out the meaning of any writing (context) that might otherwise be difficult to understand. ⁶ So, for Serequeberhan, our understanding of our being and the world can never be dissociated from our history, tradition, or daily concerns. That is why he asserts that:

A self-consciously explicit appreciation of the fact that we all find ourselves in the world as products of specific historical, cultural, and intellectual contexts. Hermeneutics as interpretation” can certainly promote understanding of the nature of those contexts, and our self-understanding, as well, of course, but always still as beings who have no choice but to continue to exist, to learn, to understand, and perhaps even to struggle against or to overcome within those contexts.⁷

We can say that the science of interpretation is generally known as hermeneutics. Its field of application comprises all those situations in which we encounter meanings that are not immediately understandable but require interpretive effort. The earliest situations in which principles of interpretation were worked out were encounters with religious texts whose meanings were obscure or whose import was no longer acceptable unless they could be harmonized with the tenets of the faith.

After these cursory views on modern hermeneutical theories, we will turn to another theory of hermeneutics: African philosophical hermeneutics. European imperialism and colonialism violently dislocated Africa's cultural, social, and political endurance via the realm of philosophy. Since Odera Oruka, many African philosophers have used a hermeneutical approach to understand and then to overcome European violence. The famous proponents of this theory are Tsenay Serequeberhan, Okonda Okolo, Theophilus Okere, and Lucius Outlaw, among others. The starting point of African hermeneutics is the lived experience of Africans, and this is what they shared.

2.3.2. Serequeberhan Conception of Being African in Post-colonial Africa

³ Serequeberhan, *The Hermeneutics of African Philosophy: Horizon and Discourse*, (New York/London: Routledge, 1994),7-8.

⁴ LINGUŠ, J, *Biblická hermeneutika*. (Banská Bystrica: Trian, 2002), 18.

⁵ Ancient Greek Letters Writing, A cultural history, Oxford University Press: UK, 2013

⁶ D.R. Dungan, *Hermeneutics*, (Arkansas: Gospel Light Publishing Company Delight, 1888), 1.

⁷ Barry Hallen, *A Short History of African Philosophy*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 59.

Tsenay Serequeberhan argues about what exactly humanity means in this context. In this regard, he took his cue from Martin Heidegger's ontological and phenomenological formulation, that "the substance of man is existence,⁸ or put differently, the essence (*wesen*) of this entity lies in its "to be" (*zu-sein*).⁹ His formulation of Being (*sein*) of human being is grounded in the particular ontological specificity of the temporalizing ecstatic phenomenality of human existence.¹⁰ Serequeberhan supports the idea of Heidegger that human reality (*Dasein*) is not a present-at-hand substance or entity, but the lived fluidity/actuality of its own existence.¹¹

The interpretive nature of modern African reality is highlighted in Tsenay Serequeberhan's book *The Hermeneutics of African Philosophy: Horizon and Discourse*. He said that post-colonial independent Africa misunderstood itself today, unlike in the recent past. This is because we, the former colonial subjects of this *Ge-stell*, suffer from it. However, we see the continuation of neocolonialism as the encroachment of European hegemony into modern-day Africa as the means by which this enframing position is mediated, institutionalized, and imposed. Beyond the overt brutality of colonialism and in a far more effective way, this hegemony reproduces and maintains our subordinate existence in the modern world by establishing itself from the inside. This indicates that the subjection of European neocolonialism is linked to our historical identity.

Neocolonialism is characterized by its internal replication of past externally imposed ideologies through the explicit and exclusive use of violence. It tries to replicate and impose on us a model of life that uproots us from our real life. This is facilitated by our own leaders who just adopt and implement politics of colonizer. That is why, we can say, for us, the question of our existence—or rather, the question of how to be—is fundamentally political.¹² When we look at the reality, the essence of our existence as human beings, and consider our own humanity, we find and we are confronted by an internalized, imperiously dominant Europe over the contradictory remnants of our own subject and impoverished indigenism. Therefore, to be rational, intellectual, and civilized means to accept and operate inside the logic and reasoning of neo-colonialist systems.¹³ On the same point, Serequeberhan affirms that, the colonized is not only a defeated person, he is also resentful, since he is forced to accept the illegitimate power of the colonizer. The colonialist is everything, and the native (African) is forced to accept this in silent.¹⁴

The mysterious and paradoxical legacy of African "independence" is Africa's current state of affairs. Africa becomes a vast field of trading and exploitation without much interest to its population. The "independence" did not bring the real liberation for Africans but has brought another form of slavery and colonialism in sophisticated way. In his groundbreaking book, Cheik Hamidou Kane describes our African situation as an "ambiguous adventure."

Antonio Gramsci supports the above idea by saying that:

The beginning of a critical elaboration is the awareness of that which is, that is to say, a "knowing of one's self" as a product of the process of history that has unfolded thus far and which has left in you an infinity of traces collected without the benefit of an inventory. It is necessary initially to undertake such an inventory.¹⁵

Africans are haunted by their colonial past and the colonial principles carried forward by assimilationist policies. As a result, they constantly find themselves in conflict, divided between two identities and two belongings, and live in a political and existential contradiction.

2.3.3 Prospect and Individuality

Serequeberhan pursued a hermeneutics of African identity in its historicalness. His conception of 'horizon' has elicited a deeper understanding of the African identity, which can now be used in dealing with problems of identity

⁸ Martin Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism," in *Basic Writings*, (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), 209.

⁹ Martin Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism," 67.

¹⁰ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 377

¹¹ Serequeberhan, *Our Heritage*, 20.

¹² Serequeberhan, *The Hermeneutics of African philosophy: horizon and discourse*, (New York: Routledge, 1994), 21.

¹³ Serequeberhan, *The Hermeneutics of African philosophy: horizon and discourse*, 69.

¹⁴ Serequeberhan, 71.

¹⁵ Antonio Gramsci, *Quaderni Del Carcere*, vol.2, (Torino: Giulio Einaudi, 1975), 1376-7, my own translation

work in an African urban environment. The works of Tsenay Serequeberhan, as it concerns horizon, have probably been applied in understanding the identity of African persons in an urban environment, for critical attention should be paid to it as it presents a theoretical opportunity to understand the identities of the African urban personality. This work seeks to move this debate forward by demonstrating the theoretical potential for the idea of the horizon in understanding the work of identity in African organizations.

Central to Serequeberhan's conception of horizon is the designation of the historico-hermeneutical and politico-cultural milieu within and out of which specific discourses are articulated. According to Serequeberhan, it is the overall existential space within and out of which specific discourses occur. In other words, horizons entail 'discourse' of the person's lived experience in the complex and changing environment which is constantly emerging into a new becoming.' Serequeberhan went on to submit that 'discourse refers to the articulated concerns interior to the concrete conditions-of-existence made possible by a native of a specific horizon. This means that horizon and discourse are mutually exclusive.¹⁶

To better articulate the African postcolonial conditions, which are the African horizon, Serequeberhan looks at African humanity as such to show the contradiction between the African person and the lived experiences of postcolonial Africans, which in turn gives rise to the modern African person. Serequeberhan's concerns center on understanding the African's being and what constitutes its ontic immanence.¹⁷ He turned to the works of Martin Heidegger to show how the African horizon is and is becoming post-colonial. In other words, the essence of a human being is really and properly in his ontological apprehension of reality as it presents itself to him.¹⁸ Serequeberhan points out that Heidegger's articulation of the being of man must be seen as focusing on his own personal political issues and Eurocentric anti-semitic views, but which does not limit his discourses or being (Sein).

Serequeberhan also suggests that in Heidegger's restructuring reading of the traditions of European metaphysics, starting from the lived ecstatic phenomenality of human life, human reality (Dasein) is not a present-at-hand substance or entity, but a lived fluidity/actuality of its existence. On that line, Heidegger explores the 'to be' of European modernity through a destructive hermeneutic critique of its metaphysics of being, which used to be caught in the snare of the Ge-stell (en-framing) of modern technology. In other words, according to Serequeberhan, Heidegger's mission was to free Europe from this Ge-stell and orient it towards striving to prepare for the possibility of a transformed abode of man in the world.

Serequeberhan points out that the African person suffers from this Ge-stell, which in our case is Europe itself as it muscled itself in Africa through the neocolonial project. But this muscling is now mediated and imposed through the persistence of neocolonialism by the continued intrusion of European hegemony in today's Africa. So, to understand African identity today, the neocolonial Ge-Stell must be apprehended to pave the way for a grounded understanding of African identity.

The African identity is a poignant struggle to break free from the en-framing (Ge-stell) of colonialism and neocolonialism while striving to become a genuinely African person in a modern city. This struggle, characterized by the dualistic nature of the antagonism between the rulers and the ruled in the colonial situation, should be seen as historically contingent and transient, evoking a sense of empathy and engagement.

It is evident that the people who had adopted the primitive Manichaeism (dualistic nature) of the settler-Blacks and Whites, we mean westernized Africans who are whiter than White people, have not done better than the colonizers after independence. The fact of having a national flag and the hope of an independent nation does not always tempt certain strata of the population to give up their selfish interests and privileges This discovery is unpleasant, bitter, and sickening, and yet everything seemed to be so simple before the wrong people were on one side, and the good on the other. The joy of beginning a new life was followed by a semi-darkness that bewilders the senses.¹⁹ In other words, the enjoyment that independence brought was turned into bitter pills for Africans.

¹⁶ Obuku Ejowwomu and Malachy Igwilo, *Challenges of Identity Work in Africa's Temporary Organisation: Developing Tsenay Serequeberhan's Horizons*, The University of Manchester, United Kingdom, 2019, 13.

¹⁷ Obuku Ejowwomu and Malachy Igwilo, *Challenges of Identity Work in Africa's Temporary Organisation: Developing Tsenay Serequeberhan's Horizons*, The University of Manchester, United Kingdom, 2019, 14.

¹⁸ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, (Sunny: Press, 2010), 31–32

¹⁹ Fanon, *Wretched*, 115

Serequeberhan says that 'to overcome the indigene of our Indigenous political and historical existence, created and perpetuated by European Colonialism and Neocolonialism, is the basic and most fundamental historical task of the African struggle for freedom.'²⁰ Thus, to be true to oneself, the struggle for African freedom has to begin by undermining and restructuring the historical ground on which the political discourse of the European colonialists unfolds. African identity has suffered violence since the intrusion of Westerners into Africa. Still, this identity constantly emerges from a violent past into a 'to be,' a being in the process.

The implications of Serequeberhan's horizon are the concrete fact of the pervasive presence of colonialism and neocolonialism on the African personality, which shaped everything to be learned about the African personality. The violence of colonialism and the new violence of neocolonialism constantly color the African person everywhere, mainly in the urban environment. This horizon of violence engenders a paradox that Fanon articulated.²¹ Consequently, the African horizon and its child, African identity, is that of ambivalence, a paradox that has no being since the being is in process, always emerging.

Therefore, African identity always seems to center on a return to the original, to the source. These debates berate the standards and standardization of the African with its consequent cultural bastardization and political domination, and so call for a recovery of the authentic African identity, which should stand in sharp contrast with the identity imposed by Eurocentrism. This intellectual limitation and political domination account for what Serequeberhan calls horizon, as it is situated in any discourse about Africa. In the study of African cities and their existences, there is a need to incorporate Serequeberhan's horizon to properly understand, first and foremost, who Africans have become in the form of process metaphysics.

2.4 Serequeberhan's Horizon and African Identity

The conception of 'horizon' has elicited a deeper understanding of the African identity, which can now be used in dealing with problems of identity work in an African urban environment. Although the works of Serequeberhan, as they concern Africans' horizons, have probably not only been applied in understanding the identity of African persons in an urban situation, but critical attention has been paid to it as it undeniably presents a theoretical opportunity to understand the identity of the African personality.²² This section seeks to move this debate forward by demonstrating the theoretical potential for the idea of the horizon in understanding identity work in the African definition of being.

Before the arrival of colonial powers, different religions such as Christianity and Islam had come, established, and influenced African ways of living and thought.²³ Besides the influence of other religions, the colonial powers have also employed political tools to manipulate African Indigenous knowledge, modes of thought, and social structure. Following their arrival, the colonial powers allowed different social scientists to bring and impose various Western ways of thinking at the expense of indigenous sources of knowledge that belonged to African peoples. They were developing their files on the assumption of converting Africans' social and cultural lives into a new science. In this scenario, as we shall see, many Western' countries were responsible for bringing their self-described universal civilization and giving an alleged right direction for how Africans were supposed to act in their home place. Unfortunately, they were trying to study Africans through the lenses provided by their own cultures. European anthropologists, missionaries, and authoritative bodies were the leading influential producers of the thought that Africans lived in primitive conditions where their thought system and social organization were considered rudimentary by European standards.

²⁰ Tsenay Serequeberhan, Tsenay. *Our heritage: The past in the present of African-American and African existence*, (Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), 13.

²¹ Obuks Ejohwomu and Malachy Igwilo, *Challenges of Identity Work in Africa's Temporary Organisation: Developing Tsenay Serequeberhan's Horizons*, 14.

²² Obuks Ejohwomu and Malachy Igwilo, *Challenges of Identity Work in Africa's Temporary Organisations: Developing Tsenay Serequeberhan's Horizons*, in ResearchGate, The University of Manchester, 2019,4.
<https://www.researchgate.net/publication/334448307>

²³ Masolo, D. A, "Africanizing Philosophy: Wiredu, Hountondji, and Mudimbe." In *The Palgrave handbook of African philosophy*, (Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2017), 61-73

Therefore, the fundamental to Serequeberhan's conception of the horizon is the designation of the historico-hermeneutical and politico-cultural milieu within and out of which specific discourses are articulated. According to Serequeberhan, it is the overall existential space within and out of which they occur. In other words, horizons entail 'discourse' of the person's lived experience in the complex and changing environment, constantly emerging into a new becoming.' Serequeberhan went on to submit that 'discourse refers to the articulated concerns interior to the concrete conditions-of-existence made possible by an internal to a specific horizon.'²⁴

To better articulate the African postcolonial conditions, which are African horizon, Serequeberhan looks at African humanity to show the discord between the African person and the lived experiences of postcolonial Africans, giving rise to the modern African person. Serequeberhan's concerns are centered on understanding the being of the African and what constitutes its ontic immanence.

According to Serequeberhan, Heidegger interprets the traditions of European metaphysics by focusing on human reality (Dasein) as the lived actuality of existence rather than a static entity. Heidegger critiques European modernity by dismantling its metaphysics of being, aiming to free Europe from the trappings of modern knowledge and guide it toward preparing for a transformed human existence. Serequeberhan also notes that African people are affected by the same issues identified by Heidegger.²⁵

2.5 Difficult actualization and free Africa

The above discussion helps to understand that, for Serequeberhan, Africans still carry in their being a kind of dilemma of being themselves and also what the colonization did to them. He expressed this in this way:

on the one hand, you have the colonizer, and on the other, the colonized. These two groups-one of human beings in the process of extending and globalizing their cultural and historical actuality, and the other of *thingified* entities frozen in time and degraded beyond belief-exist as an organic whole in subordination.²⁶

In all of the above, we understand that Africa and the world beyond Europe are inhabited by a lower-grade/segment of humanity.²⁷ Thus, according to Serequeberhan, the hybrid relics of the pre-and colonial past and various forms of struggle directed at realizing the dream of an independent and free Africa combine to generate the realities of modern-day Africa.

It would be unexpected if this weren't the case, given the scientific community's intellectual development is inextricably linked to a systematic process that values Europe and devalues Africa. In this regard, it is ironic that educational scholarships, for instance, seem to maintain the very reliance they are meant to eradicate intentionally.

The conflict and tension between Africans and Europeans during colonialism cannot be hidden, as we mentioned it above. Fanon noted not too long ago that when a student returns, the natives in the Antilles and even in Africa say, "It's a European who comes back."²⁸ Here, we can notice that it is imperative to see that the Occident globalized itself and subjugated the world at a time in its history. Serequeberhan can conclude on this issue that The normal and peaceful existence of the colonizer is grounded on the abnormal and subhuman existence of the colonized. Colonialism is established in the non-European world by violence and destruction, the subordination of indigenous histories and cultures, and the dominion of European history and culture.²⁹ This situation does not give a serious possibility for Africans' actualization.

²⁴ Max Scheler, *The Human Place in the Cosmos*, (Northwest University Press, 2009), 5.

²⁵ Tsenay Serequeberhan, *The Hermeneutics of African Philosophy, Philosophy and Post-colonial Africa*, Routledge: New York, 1994, 20

²⁶ Serequeberhan, *The hermeneutics of African philosophy: horizon and discourse*, 68.

²⁷ L. Eiseley, *Darwin's Century*, (New York: Anchor Books, 1961), 26-24

²⁸ Fanon, *Peau noire, masques blancs*, (Paris : Editions du Seuil), 31.

²⁹ Tsenay Serequeberhan, *The African Liberation Struggle: A Hermeneutic Exploration of an African Historical-Political Horizon*, (Hampshire College: Amherst, MA, 1991), 49

2.6 The Climax of African situatedness

According to Serequeberhan, as he will never tire of upholding it, our problem is mainly political. He addressed this case regarding the continuation of colonial practices in post-independence Africa. Colonizers have never left Africa, but their domination is still felt in many areas in Africa. Serequeberhan allusions that, this is why the expatriate personnel, meaning the neo-colonialists, from imperialist countries, are more at ease in these national African state structures, functioning as if they were made by, and for, that personnel, than are the majority of the natives who have to bear and support these structures' repressive hierarchical weight.³⁰ Definitely, it shows the failure of us, Africans to reclaim ourselves over our territories, in our continent, to affirm ourselves, and take complete control of our being in our own continent. The independence created new forms of oppression rather than leading to historical dialectics, which were a prerequisite for the complete liberation of the suffering Africans. We could say ironically with Fanon that "the colonized have moved from a model of life to another and not from one life to another."³¹ The political class's ambivalence, which swings between political conservatism (colonialism) and nationalist rhetoric (independence), is the issue that Africa is facing. That issue in Africa is so severe, in our opinion, that a significant shift in awareness is necessary. For that, Serequeberhan invites political leaders to revolutionize all social structures and alienating political institutions.

It is essential to underline that Neocolonialism is an essentially economic issue. The colonists only sought to create and maintain a Western bourgeoisie. In the same book, *Our Heritage*, Serequeberhan claims that in this manner, the technocratic *Ge-stell* of European modernity (compounded by and in the form of political, economic, cultural, and historical dominance) is imposed on us, the ex-colonial subject of imperial Europe. In the name and the guise of technological and scientific assistance, Europe imposes on us its hegemonic political and cultural control.³² This explains itself, especially some of the Europeanized Africans, who are manipulated to serve well the cause of former colonizers, even sometimes against their own people.

The local bourgeoisie's plans for expansion and development are bound to fail. Fanon is correct that the national bourgeoisie is inappropriate for the capitalist growth model since it is neither inventive nor creative. This local bourgeoisie lives and maintains a system copied from the former colonizers. Economic policy and available human and technological resources are not aligned. We have arrived at a dead end: for Africa to survive, its bourgeoisie must rely on outside capital and expertise.

2.7 Problematic Wellness of Being African and Western

The Western impact on traditional Africa and the resulting clash of cultures has significantly affected the current material and spiritual way of life. Serequeberhan emphasized this point. Africans have always been impacted by political domination and cultural subjugation from colonizing and neo-colonizing forces. These realities have shaped a new identity that continues to evolve as the effects of their world are continually experienced in their lives.³³

In the same way, Tsenay Serequeberhan is not rejecting the values that can be helpful for Africans' well-being from the West but is showing the contradiction that is holding one's self-being to blossoming very well. Shortly, he does not want to submit to Africa with colonial logic; the Africans must produce another model of existence. This should be a stage of historicization to assert oneself as self-awareness. We have to freely appreciate African traditions and adopt only those that enable us to reach our objective: liberation from neocolonialism and resumption of historical African being.³⁴

2.8 Confronting the infinity traces left by colonialism

³⁰ Serequeberhan, *Philosophy and Post-colonial Africa*, 21.

³¹ Fanon, *Les Damnés de la terre*, op.cit., p. 178.

³² Serequeberhan, *Our Heritage*, 21

³³ Serequeberhan, *The African Liberation Struggle: A Hermeneutic Exploration of an African Historical-Political Horizon*, (Hampshire College: Amherst, MA, 1991), 48.

³⁴ Louis-Dominique Biakolo Komo, *The Hermeneutical Paradigm in African Philosophy Genesis, Evolution and Issues*, (Ottawa: Institute of African Studies Carleton University, 6, 2017), 101.

According to Serequeberhan, when we look back, we see not only outstanding achievements but also, equally, great disappointments. When we look at our recent history, we see the formerly colonized being re-colonized under various guises. For they have indeed reclaimed the “lands that belong to them” in large measure. However, the formerly colonized have failed to reclaim and control their own historical existence.³⁵ This statement is a claim that Africans are not themselves even in this period they are living. It can express an imposed life, a hidden enslavement that is rampant in the psychology and life of Africans. Serequeberhan mentions that situation in the postcolonial period in this sense: In our present postcolonial condition, it is imperative to note that the former colonizers, the Western powers, occupy a dominant position not merely through “the force” of their “weapons” but, much more importantly, through the “‘models’ of growth and development” that, they have created, and that “are today adopted everywhere.”³⁶ We can still emphasize this point of view that Post-colonialism is seen as Western metaphysical violence underpinned by the processes of imperialism, which continue even after the formal dissolution of the oppressor’s empire in Africa. Serequeberhan argued against this notion, stating that the colonized can only prove to both the colonizer and himself that he is human by launching a self-redeeming counterclaim which, given the realities of colonialism and neocolonialism, can only take the form of counter-violence.

Serequeberhan says that today, the post-colonial “independent” Africa misunderstands itself. And for Elungu³⁷ we consider with Marcien Towa that Africa will not attain its human maturity as long as it does not elevate itself firmly to a profound thinking of its essential problems, that is to say, to philosophical reflection.³⁸ This is a call for Africans to work on their concept of being in the world. In so doing, we, Africans, have to invent a concrete actuality of our own existence. In this sense, Serequeberhan is advocating for every African in the guise of introducing the “maturity” in the modern age that European colonialism imposed on Africa.

Serequeberhan recommends above all those philosophers we recently talked about, that for the colonized, violence is the avenue through which freedom and humanity are reclaimed.³⁹ This means that overcoming such situation is all about hard work to change the legacy heritage from our colonial past. Amilcar Cabral refers to this as “a selective examination of the values of the culture within the agenda” of our needs and exigencies.⁴⁰ It is in this way that we can properly engage our contemporary situation and further advance the ongoing decolonization of Africa. The aim in all of this is not to reject the West, nor merely to embrace our indigenism, but to cultivate and develop a concrete synthesis, in view of the needs of our lived present. In this, the aim is to bypass the residue of our colonial past, the “models of growth and development” that perpetuate Western hegemony and are the core of our postcolonial condition.

2.10 Consequences of our Heritage on our African Beings

Over the past centuries, African societies have certainly come into contact with the material and cultural underpinnings of a colonial and capitalist modernity, and this has had a decisive causal impact on their historical evolution. Through a critical look at the Western influence on Africans shows both good and bad influences. This has made much of African native culture give way to the European culture. Either by design or accident, Africans have imbibed the Western culture and have appropriated it so much that it now becomes almost part and parcel of their lives.⁴¹ We argue that the colonization of Africa has shown the image of the colonial masters’ (more vital partner) exploitation of African colonies, the exploitation of the resources to strengthen and enrich the economies of Western nations.

Colonialism has settled what we can call colonial legacies on the continent because of its indirect impacts on the political, social, economic, and cultural life of colonized. We admit that the reason which explains colonialism start

³⁵ Tsenay Serequeberhan, Africa in a changing world: An inventory, *Monthly Review*, (New York, vol. 61, no 8, 2010), 26.

<https://monthlyreview.org/2010/01/01/africa-in-a-changing-world-an-inventory/>

³⁶ Cornelius Castoriadis, *Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 200-01.

³⁷ Elungu, "La philosophie, condition du developpement en Afrique aujourd'hui," p. 8, my own translation.

³⁸ Marcien Towa, "Conditions for the Affirmation of a Modern African Philosophical Thought," in *African Philosophy: The Essential Readings*, ed. Tsenay Serequeberhan (New York: Paragon House, 1991), p. 187.

³⁹ Serequeberhan, 79

⁴⁰ Amilcar Cabral, *Return to the Source: Selected Speeches* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1973), 52.

⁴¹ Dr Clifford Meesua Sibani, *Impact of Western Culture on Traditional Africans Society: Problems and Prospects*, (Cotonou: Department of Religions, University of Benin, 2018), 57.

with economic interest. We can say that African social problems emanated from Western influence, such as one-crop economies, pervasive corruption, spiraling inflation, massive unemployment, over-crowded cities, and destitute villages. Obviously, the culture of African people is still undergoing contacts and conflicts, which results in a healthier life of the society, resulting in an improved social system.⁴² Alongside the economic imbalance (Western profit at the detriment of the weak: Africa) resulting from colonialism, the social, cultural and political lives of the people and societies in Africa were greatly interrupted and transformed by the policies applied by the colonial masters during the colonial period. An instrument of this transformation on the social and cultural life style of the African people was the policy of Assimilation.⁴³ We can observe a failure in the economic and political field to bring up unity and identity. On the contrary, it brought social inequality and created a gap between the rich and the poor, who constitute a large part of the population. This was the practice during colonialism, where few people ruled over the majority and had all the riches for them alone. In the end, the colonial system has never succeeded in implementing development in Africa.

2.11 Self-emancipation and Re-definition of Being African

According to Serequeberhan, violence is the answer to the brutality of the Westerners who came and settled in Africa and who also abused African humanity. On that, he said that:

The settler, to experience the violence of poverty in Europe, where he is the victim of the socio-economic dialectic of modern European society, migrates to a foreign land and, by force and violence, makes others victims. The sheer egoism and inhumanity of this position is astounding. This is more so because, as we noted earlier, the colonizer is duped by his own myths to such a point that he sees himself as the benefactor of those he victimizes. In observing the settler's inhuman conduct and demeanor, the colonized learns that he can recover his freedom only by unleashing a counter-violence of his own.⁴⁴

We can see that the consequences of our colonial situation drive us to anticipate a reflection on the role of human beings in society in terms of gaining ourselves. Like Serequeberhan's thinking, the contemporary Western tradition has reflected on the place of Man in the world interweaves tightly with historical and philosophical thinking and, first of all, with the reinterpretation of historical, anthropological concerns developed by modern-day periods and debated philosophical problems. We can bring in Blaise Pascal, who paid attention to the antimonial nature of human beings and their involvement in transforming world history.⁴⁵

We understand that humans live to realize their aim and mission in the Universe and constantly identify their unique place in the Cosmos. Man conceives themselves on the ground of comparison and separation from the other parts of reality and is aware of their belonging to wholeness, i.e. the Universe. It means that human beings need to think about their being-in-the-world and create their world for their own understanding. The animals have no existential reflection because all the species lack self-consciousness. Only *Man*, possessing mind, self-consciousness, and reason, can produce science for himself.⁴⁶

There is no other way to correct this wrong say of Hegel: In Negro life, the characteristic point is that consciousness has not yet attained the realization of any substantial objective existence as, for example, God or Law in which the interest of man's volition is involved and in which he realizes his own being. This distinction between himself as an individual and the universality of his essential being, the African in the uniform, undeveloped oneness of his existence, has not yet been attained, so that the knowledge of an absolute Being, an Other, and a Higher than

⁴² Rodee, C. C., *Introduction to political science*, (Japan: McGraw-Hill Book Company), 1983.

⁴³ Joy Asongazoh Alemazung, *PostColonial Colonialism: An Analysis of International Factors and Actors Marring African SocioEconomic and Political Development*. In *The Journal of Pan African Studies*, vol.3, no.10, Bremen, Germany: Hochschule Bremen (University of Applied Sciences) School of International Business September 2010, 63.

⁴⁴ Serequeberhan, *The Hermeneutics of African Philosophy: Horizon and Discourse*, 79.

⁴⁵ Martin Buber, *The Philosophical Anthropology of Max Scheler, Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, in *International Phenomenological Society*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (Dec., 1945), 307. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2102887>

⁴⁶ Scheler, *The Human Place in the Cosmos*, 34

his individual self, is entirely wanting. The Negro, as already observed, exhibits the natural man in his completely wild and untamed state.⁴⁷

This can only call for a revolution, a necessary change to exist, and to do one's own history since we know that colonial power was generally based on centralized authority and that practices developed during colonialism reflected neither Western values nor African ones.

Africa faced such difficulties because the colonizers had not planned to promote human beings on this continent but to use and make the continent serve their interests first. In fact, even the idea of 'Africa' comes from Europe, and the conception that underlies Africa is the notion of the 'Dark Continent'. In this way, Africa exists as an invention not only in the scramble for Africa but as an invention of the West's imagination.⁴⁸ Ashcroft argues that this idea of Africa continues to dominate and haunt all discussion of Africa.⁴⁹

In this sense, Serequeberhan advocates for every African under the guise of introducing the "maturity" in the modern age that European colonialism imposed on Africa. Thus, to transcend the deplorable situation, we contemporary Africans need to confront the question of our "maturity" at its most fundamental level.⁵⁰ We are talking here about philosophical reflection. By doing this we will see that philosophy, African or otherwise, is a situated critical and systematic interpretation of our lived historical cultural actuality.

Conclusion:

The debates about African Being always seem to center on a return to the original, to the source. These debates berate the standards and political domination and so call for a recovery of the authentic African identity. However, in our dissertation, we understand that every human existence is conditioned by the situation that one is living in. And for us Africans, colonization, through its politique that has undermined Africans, has left a considerable impact on our existence. This political domination accounts for what Serequebarhan calls horizon. In the study of African cities and their existences, there is a need to incorporate Serequebarhan's horizon to properly understand, first and foremost, who Africans have become, the understanding of their being in the postcolonial context. The concept of Being is always associated with a philosophy elaborating on it. The case of the Postcolonial of Africa is also one of the critical and systematic reflections on the lived experiences of contemporary Africans. Given today's postcolonial realities, it is imperative to admit that African identity, authentically so-called, has disappeared; its remnants are now mixed with modernity crafted from the standardization world views that define the African urban existence.

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⁴⁷ G. W. F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, trans. J. H. Clarke (New York: Dover, 1956), 93

⁴⁸ Mudimbe, V. Y., *The invention of Africa: Gnosis, philosophy, and the order of knowledge*. Lulu Press, Inc, 2020, 47.

⁴⁹ Paul Ahluwalia, *Politics and Post-Colonial Theory, African Inflections*, (London and New York: published in the Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2001), 13.

⁵⁰ Serequeberhan, *The Hermeneutics of African Philosophy, Horizon and Discourse*, (Routledge: New York, 1994), 14.

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