

## The Philosophical Essence of *GÈLÈDÈ*

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### Abstract

It has been an age-old hot debate, debunking the misconception by the Europeans, out of their Eurocentric gaze on the African continent, that the continents did not have that idea labelled “philosophy.” This paper shows that no people can truly survive, flourish, and qualify to be accorded the full status of possessing a ‘culture’ without having their philosophies and philosophers. Africans are not exempted in this case. Copious evidence has been presented by different African philosophers from different African cultures that the traditional Africans have what is ‘philosophical’ in their archives. With the aid of expository and critical analysis methodological approaches, this paper draws a line of continuum with the preexisting African philosophers, by presenting Yorùbá arts and aesthetics performance named *Gèlèdè* as one of the ways through which Africans express their philosophy. Being aware of the distinction made that there is the ‘loose’ as opposed to the ‘strict’ sense of philosophy, the paper presents *Gèlèdè* as not merely qualified as philosophy in the loose sense of it but argues that it is systematic enough to be qualified as philosophy in the strict sense of it. This, the paper does by exposing some elements and essences of *Gèlèdè* to engender a clear look into how it participates in some of the essential philosophical universalities enough to be accorded as being philosophical in the strict sense of it, in the one hand, and that it contains enough peculiarities about it that should accord it a distinct class in philosophy, on the other hand.

**Keywords:** *èlèdè, Èkà, Èjè, Èlèfè, Ògèdè, Onídojòyí, Èbè*, African Philosophy.

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### Introduction

According to the written history that is available to us, the earliest encounter between the African continent and the Western part of the world was harmonious. This was dated back to 1400SE. It was reported that Africans and the West were exchanging ideas and commerce as equals. What is more, they were also exchanging political ideas with each other. The West got in touch with some parts of the African continents which include Ashante, Dahomey, and Benin among others (Makumba 34-43). At that point of reference, the West never saw Africans as inferior to them in any way. The history also reveals that many Greek societies had relations with Africans especially Egypt and they learnt many things from them. The first Greek garrison in Egypt was said to have been occupied by Milesians where the pioneering of Western philosophy actually took place and the fact that many of the so-called pioneers of Western philosophy visited and learnt from gifted Egyptians at one time or another is also a standing witness to the important roles the Africa, as a continent, played in philosophy. Thales and Pythagoras' visit to Egypt for the acquisition of much of their knowledge, which includes Mathematics, Astronomy, and, perhaps, Philosophy from the gifted Egyptians of the time underscores this fact.

However, with the adoption of a capitalist system following Adam Smith's theory of Division of Labour and the like, the rule of the game changed. As a result, the privileged few were able to syphon

the wealth, leaving a large number of Europeans in abject poverty and hunger. At this point, the exchange rate of the raw materials they got from Africans was, first of all, marginalised brutally. As if that was not enough, the discovery of the American continent by the Europeans made them desperately look for cheap labourers who would work on the virgin and fertile soil so that they could feed their hungry poor (Eze 6). In an attempt to justify their act of slave trade in Africa, their intelligentsias began inter-textual derogatory remarks on the African continent claiming that Africans are illogical, barbaric, primitive, and not part of the absolute spirit. This is spelt out in the works of G. W. F. Hegel (191), Immanuel Kant, David Hume, and Lucien Levy-Bruhl, just to mention a few. This makes the Europeans feel more than justified to proceed in the adventure of exploiting Africa. It was at a time, experienced in the form of imperialism. The Berlin Conference of 1884-1885 saw the balkanisation and colonisation of African continents among the powerful European countries. The Europeans succeeded in their mission by fire by force! Some greedy African leaders sold their people to them, cheaply. Some others were deceived to relinquish the power to them while a few others among the African leaders of the time, who had a deep insight and so refused to reach a compromise with them, were silenced by force to the extent that some were expatriated out of their fathers' land while others were shot like a dog. In short, this was how the mutual contact between the European and African continents changed into a series but successive marginalisation, imperialism, balkanisation, and colonisation of Africa.

How does this then lead to the emergence of African philosophy? Europeans, having succeeded in their mission, began to be ruling on African people by colonising them. The first privileged set of Africans who were able to acquire Western education eventually became enlightened and were just on their way to returning from abroad. This enlightenment created a sense of awareness of their rights. This can be traced back to the 1920s. Having experienced terrible racism and discrimination at the hands of the West who saw them as nothing but; mere descendants of the slaves; people from the slave colony, sub-humans, and so on, they began to experience the same maltreatment and alienation on their native lands from the colonial officials. Gotten frustrated, they began to look for a weapon with which they could fight the oppression and they sought that in philosophy. This, at the early stage, briefly came as a quest towards the introduction of African idiosyncrasy into the foreign religion (Christianity) and then into nationalism which was aimed at political independence from the colonial masters. This nationalist argument, according to Serequeberhan “is thus a properly philosophical and historical task, since the critical examination and exploration of these texts promises the possibility of developing an African philosophical discourse on politics” (20). It later matured into its full state as an ideological theorisation in the 1970s which manifests in many philosophy departments of African Universities as a course in its own right. The first wave of ideological theorisation takes the responsibility for what we can refer to as “soul searching”. Wiredu rightly captured it this way:

A principal driving force in postcolonial African philosophy has been a quest for self-definition. It was therefore quite appropriate that Masolo entitled his history of contemporary African philosophy, the first full-length history of the discipline in English, *African philosophy in Search of Identity*. This search is part of a general postcolonial soul searching in Africa. Because the colonialists and related personnel perceived African culture as inferior in at least some important respects, colonialism included a systematic program of de-Africanisation (1).

In the course of doing this, the African scholars, in this case, the traditionalists also took an extreme opposite end of the continuum, taking a stance that Oguejiofor calls “back to Egypt” arguing that philosophy began in Africa. These African scholars also buttress this claim with the result of the theory

of evolution to say that the full status of *Homo sapiens*, was, first of all, attained in Africa. They argued further that Imhotep (2,800 BC), and his brethren from Egypt, were the pioneers of philosophy, from whom other cultures kindle their fire of philosophising. To cap it all, referring to Egyptian hieroglyphs, these African scholars claim that writing, without which, according to the European claims, philosophy cannot be systematised, originated from Africa (Afolayan 32-33). This account of the emergence of African philosophy, as it is hereby presented, is a form of Afrocentric claim, an ethnocentric counterpart of Eurocentrism, and also, in a way, a submission to the claim that African philosophy grows out of frustration. But is this truly the case?

This paper aims to reawaken the age-old controversy on the existence of philosophical tradition in Africa from antiquity and to argue that *Gẹ̀lẹ̀dẹ̀* is a better candidate to make the case. What is more, *Gẹ̀lẹ̀dẹ̀* does not only qualify as philosophy in the 'loose' but in the 'strict' sense of it. Hence, with expository and critical analysis approaches, the next session shall look into what gave birth to philosophising according to Socrates. Doing this becomes sacrosanct to pave the ground for the relevance of this paper despite the assumption that the last nail has been put into the coffin of the controversy. After that, with an analytic approach, the session that follows shall be sold to the conceptualisation of the subject matter which includes *Gẹ̀lẹ̀dẹ̀*, *Èkà*, *Èjẹ̀*, *Bọ̀lọ̀jọ̀ Elérò* and other related concepts. There, literature shall be reviewed concisely to show how the relevant concepts of this paper have been analysed in the previous literature, their strengths and weaknesses after which a working definition shall be composed of the *Gẹ̀lẹ̀dẹ̀*. In the session that follows, the paper shall employ the expository approach to expose the practice of *Gẹ̀lẹ̀dẹ̀* with the aid of some selected *Gẹ̀lẹ̀dẹ̀* songs and practices. Taking a comparative analysis approach, this paper shall conclude by highlighting what *Gẹ̀lẹ̀dẹ̀* has about Western philosophy that gives it a class in philosophy and what it has to contribute to the philosophical enterprise as a methodology of doing philosophy.

### **Did the Traditional Africans Have Something Labelled 'Philosophy'?**

In Plato's *Theaetetus*, Socrates suggests that philosophy begins with wonder. Aristotle also corroborates this view. However, looking into what wonder is, recent research shows that there may be different subsets to wonder. Probing this further, we come to the realisation that wonders can be classified into three main types; *thaumazeine*, *miraculum*, and *onuma* which can be interpreted as 'awe', 'curiosity', and 'frustration' respectively. From this classification of wonder which is said to be the 'mother' of philosophy, it is more adequate to say that the above account of the origination of African philosophy, which can be regarded as a Westernised form of African philosophy, born out of *onuma* (frustration). But is this an attempt to say that Africans have not been philosophising before this frustration set in and prompted them into philosophising? In an attempt to answer this, we got to realise that the other two subsets of wonder, that is *Thaumazeine* and *miraculum*, must have manifested in African places as well from antiquity. Is it to say that Africans never assess issues in their experiences rationally? This opinion must be a mistaken one. Africans, nevertheless, look into things first of all from the rational point of view. It only takes their smartness to realise that reality is multifaceted and multidimensional. Realising this, it is only where rationality does not take them deep down to the root of the matter that they employ mythological tools to capture reality.

According to Tangwa, there are two main senses of philosophy. The first sense is differently referred to as loose, general, popular, or mild as against the second sense which is regarded as strict, particular, special, or rigorous senses consecutively. The first sense, according to him, "refers to a set or system of fundamental beliefs and convictions which are usually reflected in action" (22). We can easily see that for any person or group of persons to live, survive, and flourish, he/she/they must have a

philosophy at least in this sense of it. Tangwa opines that having philosophy in this loose sense does not necessarily translate to having philosophers or being a philosopher as the case may be. The second sense of philosophy, according to Tangwa's classification, "refers, in the first instance, to a consciously articulate and critical discourse (verbal or written) that is necessarily individual in origin, and secondarily to a corpus or system of such discourses together with the supporting structures in which they are symbolically encoded" (22).

Using these two senses as a yardstick for measuring what we earlier presented, we come to realise that every 'fragment or piecemeal philosophies' in the form of proverbs and Ifá renditions only qualifies in its own right as philosophy in the first sense of it. It only graduates to philosophy in the second sense when it becomes articulated consciously, critically, and systematically by an individual philosopher. We are admitting, in this regard, that the traditional Africans only had philosophies before the colonial adventure of the Europeans onto African soil. They, nevertheless, lacked philosophy in the second sense of it. Hence, philosophy in the second sense of it, admittedly, is exclusively a colonial heritage. But is this allegation actually true of traditional Africa? Probing into the concept of 'philosophy' and seeing whether the traditional Africans have their equivalent could be of help at this junction.

Let us look at it from this angle. Either in African languages in general or in Yorùbá specifically, which is very relevant to this research, do we have concepts, that can exactly translate to philosophy? The word 'philosophy' is a compound noun that derived its origin from two Greek words viz: *Philo* and *Sophia* which connote 'love' and 'wisdom' respectively. To push the argument that every culture must have had a concept of wisdom from antiquity could be one of the simplest arguments. Of course, to deny a set of people of processing wisdom is tantamount to denying them of being human in the first place and, by extension, of having a culture. Coming back to Yorùbá in this regard, we can see concepts like *èkò*, *ìmò*, *ogbón*, and *òye*, relating to the concept 'wisdom' in varying degrees and dimensions. *Èkò* connotes 'education or learning'. *Ìmò* connotes 'knowledge, know-how or skill'. *Ogbón* could be said to connote 'wisdom' while we can rightly say *òye* connotes 'understanding or intelligence'. We can also rightly say that the possessor of these qualities can be referred to as *elèkò*, *olùmò*/*abìmò*, *ològbón*/*òjògbón*, and *olóye*/*amòye* accordingly. All these concepts relate in the sense that; *èkò* (education, training or learning) could make one possess *ìmò* (knowledge, know-how, or skill) and which could, over time, boil down to *ogbón* (wisdom) of a kind. A good experience in the application of wisdom over time plus one inherent potential could brew *òye* (intelligence or understanding). With the aid of a diagram, Falaye analyses the interconnectivity and transformative links among these attitudes (Falaye 218-43).

Of all these, we cannot see a word exactly equivalent to the Greek compound name 'philosophy' even though, we can have a word equivalent to the Greek word *sophia*. Adegbindin argues that a philosopher can be rightly referred to in Yorùbá as *ològbón*, *òjògbón*, *olóye* or *amòye* (Adegbindin 323). Can any of these be metamorphosing to captivate, adequately, the word 'philosophy'? I have problems with this position. My first contention is this; Is a philosopher synonymous with a professor? I don't think so. Meanwhile, each of these concepts is rightly employable to connote professor. Another problem is that, if *ològbón*, *òjògbón*, *olóye* or *amòye* connote a philosopher as Adegbindin wants to have us believe, is *ogbón* or *òye* interpretable, correctly, to philosophy? This is repugnant.

The Greek compound word 'philosophy' may be captured in a hyphenated compound word *ifé-òye* which does not only sound horrible in Yorùbá day-to-day use of words but also sounds odd.

Interestingly, the absence of a word that can accurately be an equivalent of philosophy is not, just like many other European languages and Arabic, detrimental to Africa's claim of having philosophy for, as Sophie Oluwole points out: "the fact that most European languages and Arabic have continued to use the term 'philosophy' in its original form suggests that such languages have no indigenous terms which convey the meaning of philosophy as it was conceived in ancient Greece" (79).

Even at that, what is the problem in attempting to prove to the biased Europeans that there is philosophy in traditional Africa? Must Africans have a philosophy that the Europeans claim to be their 'trademark of quality' before Africans can lay a claim to a meaningful living? Is it not wise enough and relatively easier to push, if the White men are jealously proud of having hot tea and Africans simply ask them their goals with the hot tea? Rather than attempting to claim to them that Africans have hot tea which might be controversial to prove, why not, simply, show them that Africans have *ẹ̀kọ- gbígbóná* (a Yoruba dish that is made from processed maize. It is either served hot paste as drink or condensed cold to be eaten with stew)<sup>1</sup> which Europeans also lack, and with which Africans accomplish the same benefit they derive from their hot tea with the addition of some other values which their hot tea may lack?

This is parallel with Okere's parable that goes thus: "Why we must eat to survive, is a question of nature. Why some Nigerians fulfil this duty with cassava and okwuru, and the English man with bread and tea, is a matter of culture" (28-29). The point is that they both eat food. What I am trying to say is that it will be wiser to ask the Whites what their goal with philosophy is, holding, in abeyance, that we don't have an equivalent concept for the label as they claim. Knowing this will help Africans to look inward and find whether the traditional Africans also accomplished these goals and, if yes, what they accomplished. Then, this can easily be presented as Africans' equivalent of philosophy which the Europeans might also lack. Presenting this, it should not be minded, whether their label of 'philosophy' is admitted to be accorded to it or not.

At this point, we shall allude to Moody's questions; "Does philosophy, in general, have a goal—and if so, what is it?" (35). This is necessary to know and therefore make a decision whether it is a goalless enterprise that needs to be discarded or an enterprise with goals that are worthy to be pursued. With his *Theory of Perennial Problems*, John Kekes' answer to Moody's question is affirmative. According to Keke, the goal of philosophy is to proffer solutions to human perennial problems that exist perpetually because, as Afolayan and Falola paraphrase him, "they are essentially concerned with our desire to come to terms with the human condition" (10). These perennial problems, according to Kekes, have two parts: the problem of life and the problem of reflection of which the difference between them is based on whether or not they are theory-generated. The problem of life is the one that bears direct reference to human existential needs, which include "the satisfaction of various physiological needs, health, shelter, and protection; ...one's relations with humanity; [and] people's attitude to themselves" (Kekes 33). These problems occur, according to him, arise because:

[T]he species has evolved in a particular way and because the environment is what it is... If *problems of life* are not solved, the agent is damaged. The damage may be fatal, or merely destructive. At any rate, solving *problems of life* is required by what a person regards as his well-being. *Problems of life* are common to most members of the species, but their solutions are extremely varied (emphasis mine) (Afolayan and Falola 10).

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<sup>1</sup> *Ekọ* is a Yoruba dish that is made from processed maize. It is either served hot paste as drink or condensed cold to be eaten with stew. But here, it is strictly used to mean the hot drink form.

Solving the problem of life necessarily leads to multiple, different, and sometimes conflicting solutions or theories. As a result, there calls for a judicious and wise choice among the plethora of theories hence the problem of reflection sets. In other words, “the fundamental *problem of reflection* is to find a method of choosing the most suitable of several ways of solving *problems of life* without actually trying out the rival solutions in practice. The point of reflection is to minimise the risks involved in acting inappropriately” (emphasis mine). (Afolayan and Falola 10). What we are trying to say here is that for every problem of life, there is a corresponding problem of reflection. If we agree with Kekes, this philosophy, which the Whites exclusively claim to be theirs, is mainly to generate a solution to perennial problems which are mainly the problem of life and problem of reflection as we have explicated above, is it believable that a society can never evolve and survive without necessarily coming to term with the problem of life or without it (the problem of life) leading them to the corresponding problem of reflection? This is practically impossible! It is now left to contemporary Africans to look inward within the traditional African ways of life and trace whether there are ‘tools’ with which they come to terms with what Kekes refers to as ‘perennial problems. In my search, I came to realise that the traditional Africans also have ways of addressing their perennial problems. *Gèlèdè* is not just one of them, but a very prominent element for that matter.

### **Does Writing Make Philosophy?**

It is also germane to look into another objection that poses doubt to the existence of traditional African philosophy. This is the claim of the professional philosophers, more specifically, the Universalists, among whom, Hountondji and Oruka are strong advocates, that, as Sophie Oluwole cites their accusation: “‘strict’ philosophy can never exist in oral text.” The adversarial style which philosophy promotes, they argue further; “cannot be adequately formulated, developed and transmitted in the oral. It is only through writing an adversarial style necessary for the existence of strict philosophy can truly exist” (Oluwole 68). Unfortunately, many advocates of African philosophy danced to this tone. All they did was that they were finding every means to claim that traditional Africans also had a writing culture on their right before their contact with the European world. Worthy of note is Adegbindin’s attempt to present *Ifá* calligraphic printing as a traditional African way of writing. In his Faculty Lecture in 2016 titled *Ifá Kà'wé*, he argues that there are many but different styles adopted by different cultures across the globe up till today either; left to right, right to left, or from top to down, as it is evident in English, Arabic and Chinese writing respectively. He argues further that the only thing that matters is the comprehensibility and intelligibility of the writing system of which no writing is more intelligible outside the confine of those who have a shared understanding of the system. From this ground, he concludes that *Ifá* calligraphic printing (*odù*) qualifies as writing regardless that a novice cannot understand what it symbolises since the expertise can comprehend it intelligibly (Adegbindin).<sup>2</sup>

However, I disagree with him. Firstly, *Ifá* calligraphic printing does not fully qualify as a writing system because it is a ‘circumscribed’ graphic style. *Ifá* is only 256 printing possibilities for that matter, which documents a set of thoughts that has been recorded over time. Although, there is an argument on its dynamicity, elasticity and flexibility, no matter how, it cannot be proven to be systematic enough to record new individual line of thought that endlessly arises just like alphabetical writings could do. Another worthwhile criticism is that this system of calligraphic printing is not exclusively peculiar to Yorùbá’s *Ifá*, as we find this same printing system among other cultures too, such as the Arabic world,

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<sup>2</sup> *Eko* is a Yoruba dish that is made from processed maize. It is either served hot paste as drink or condensed cold to be eaten with stew. But here, it is strictly used to mean the hot drink form.

in the form of *Khatu Ramli*,<sup>3</sup> and still this does not stop the Arabic world from having an alphabetical system of writing. Of course, the Arabic world might have discovered its inexhaustibility. My third line of disagreement is that no amount of research, no matter how dedicated we are, could surely unravel that there occurs in every language we have in traditional Africa, a system of writing, without committing genetic fallacy by tracing culture to the tract we cannot get to. Eventually, it would lead us to admit that other traditional African cultures, in which we could not successfully unravel a writing culture in the old tradition, lack philosophy. This assumption would be on the basis that they lacked writing culture in their past, taking for granted that we can successfully prove that some traditional African cultures had a system of writing on their own before their contact with the European world and so they had philosophy. This is nothing less than a surrender to defeat! This made me ask whether writing is a necessary condition for philosophy. If writing is a necessary condition for philosophy, hence, most of the Pre-Socratic philosophers and Socrates left no philosophy, only that, their contemporaries made philosophy out of their works. Sophie Oluwole puts it succinctly this way:

It is not the lecturer's analysis and explanation which, for instance, makes 'Thales' proposal that 'everything is water' a piece of philosophy. If every attempt to explain an oral or written text is what makes the piece philosophy, then we must agree that it is professional philosophers alone who make philosophy out of Plato, Machiavelli, and Schopenhauer (77).

Does writing make philosophy? Writing plays no role in philosophising more than to preserve and transmit the reflection intact across generations with the name of the originator of the thought. However, we don't need to blame the Europeans too much. After all, fortunately, and/or unfortunately for them, the art of writing has been flourishing in the Western part of the world for a very long time. They have been so glued to it and jealously romanced it so much so that they can hardly ever imagine the expansive power of human memory beyond the limitations they believe it has. The only difference may be the limitation of human memory to always reproduce verbatim. Nevertheless, does this pose a crucial problem to philosophy? After all, as Oluwole raises it: "a lot of what commentators write in the attempt to explain written philosophical texts never occurs in the original texts. What is essential is to demonstrate that the interpretations are, at least, implicitly contained in the texts themselves" (77). Several Western-trained African intellectuals of today are also victims of this problem to the effect that they find it difficult to meditate consistently without necessarily committing their successive line of thought into writing which this problem was alien to traditional Africans. No wonder the traditionalist accuses the literates more often that "*ogbón aláàkòwé n'ínú gègè l'ó wá*" all the literate men's wisdom exists only in their pens. The point is that; writing does not make philosophy.

### ***Gèlèdè* as a Philosophy in the 'Strict' Sense**

More interestingly, Tangwa, in his classificatory attempt, presents the characteristics that philosophy in the strict sense of it should possess as we have explicated earlier in this paper. For better understanding, let us refresh our memory on that. According to him, philosophy in the second sense of it, must be; consciously articulated, critically discussed, and necessarily individualistic in origin but could be either verbal or written (Tangwa 22). *Gèlèdè*, as a traditional cultural practice, also passes all these stated criteria. It is consciously articulated making use of wise sayings, well-established facts,

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<sup>3</sup> *Khatu ramli* literally means; writing of the sound. It is very similar in printing with *odu ifa* only that the order is different such that a fashion of it is opened with *Kaosaji* and ended with *Jamah*, which are named as *Irete* and *Oyeku* occupying 14th and 2nd respectively in ifa.

widely held beliefs, and well-thought-out pieces of evidence to address the issues at hand. It is critically discussed such that its conclusions are always drawn, justifiably, from the well-stated premises that support it. It, at times, requires that the proponents establish extra premises, referred to as *èkà*, to make the position more robust. It is individualistic because every *èkà* is attributed to a person who establishes it, giving it its individualistic image. Even though it is not committed to writing it still combines the advantage of writing in its system as it is committed to rhyme songs to engender its easy recollection. The individualistic nature of *Gẹ̀lẹ̀dẹ̀* gives it an edge over proverbs, *Ifá* rendition, folklores, and many other traditional African philosophical elements that have been presented so far, their commonality posture makes their success qualified as philosophy in the strict sense of it so chimaera. Rather, they only got a place as being referred to as philosophy in a loose sense of it. Contrary to this, *Gẹ̀lẹ̀dẹ̀* is an individualistic practice, but it nevertheless employs these “traditional African philosophies in the loose sense of it” as fragments with which it builds its arguments.

Given these reasons and many more to be explicated later, it should not be considered hifalutin or over-romanticisation of traditional African past or reading too much meaning into the same, if it is argued that *Gẹ̀lẹ̀dẹ̀* does not only qualify to be presented as an equivalent of what the Western worlds are venerating, named as philosophy but it is a better and more efficient way of proffering solution to human perennial problems. What I mean to say here is that it is high time for Africans, rather than mimicking the Western style of philosophy, to address our problem with our home-grown formula rather than employing the Western styles that we, more often than not, end up producing what only becomes a ‘decoration of library’. We should imbibe the style of our fathers that easily reaches out to both elites and *hoi polloi*. Hence, by extension, we can recommend the style for the whole world to embrace and imitate. What is *Gẹ̀lẹ̀dẹ̀* all about?

### Conceptualizing *Gẹ̀lẹ̀dẹ̀*

According to D. L. Klein, “*Gẹ̀lẹ̀dẹ̀* is a typical Yorùbá ritual and art performance that has gotten its influence beyond its traditional abode in the Yorùbá communities in Nigeria and West Africa to reach Latin America, parts of Europe, Australia, and the Black world at large”. Drawing a line of a continuum with Klein, Kwasi Wiredu posits that *Gẹ̀lẹ̀dẹ̀* has “expanded from localised street performance in which members of a community gathered in the town squares, market squares or typically under the big tree arrangement to disseminate information, deliberate and ensuring social harmony in the community” (page number). As important and interesting as it is, as Babatunde Lawal also commented, very few works have been specifically carried out on *Gẹ̀lẹ̀dẹ̀* (xiv), especially when it is measured based on its availability. Cyril-Mary Pius Olatunji and Mojalefa Lehlohonolo Johannes Koenane highlight that these works include the ones that were carried out by non-indigenous scholars such as Frank Speed in 1968 and the ones that were being carried out by indigenous scholars such as Anthony Ashiwaju (1975) and Benedict Ibitokun (1987). It is noteworthy that all these writers researched the sociological, musical, and historical perspective of *Gẹ̀lẹ̀dẹ̀*, but none of them looked into its philosophical implications. Thomson, in his book published in 1971, tried to look into it from a philosophical perspective but he ended up describing the aesthetic component of *Gẹ̀lẹ̀dẹ̀* costume without delving into the philosophical component of the song for that matter. Lawal also tried to look into it from a philosophical point of view in 1996, the work upon which Olatunji and Koenane (43-51) build. However, I need to point out that they just ‘danced’ around it and took out the feminism implication of the musical performance with little or no emphasis on the philosophical relevance of *ẹ̀jẹ̀* itself.

This paper is taking a new dimension into the study of *Gẹ̀lẹ̀dẹ́*, taking a critical look into its performance to present it as philosophical. To accomplish this aim, it is pertinent to, first of all, do a sort of conceptual analysis of some of the important concepts that are to be employed in this discussion. The word *Gẹ̀lẹ̀dẹ́* is a Yorùbá noun, though, the word is not initiated with a vowel sound as a common characteristic of Yorùbá nouns. It is rare though but it is not entirely out of place. Of course, we can mention some other Yorùbá words such as; *bàtá*, *kàṅga*, and *yànmìyánmú*, among others. Morphologically operating this word, is made up of three meaningful words; *gẹ̀*, *ẹ̀lẹ̀* and *dẹ́*. According to Olatunji and Koenane, *gẹ̀* means “to pet, to adorn or to care,” *ẹ̀lẹ̀* means “carefulness, or a Creole adaptation of the French *elle* which became part of the urban language in many Yorùbá cities till today”<sup>4</sup> and *dẹ́* which means “to relax”. They infer from the meaning of the fragments to the possible meaning of the combination as “adorn carefully to appease her or adore the lady carefully to mollify her” (Olatunji and Koenane 48). As a matter of fact, Olatunji and Koenane use this etymological trace as a basis for gender implication as well as connotation of *Gẹ̀lẹ̀dẹ́*. Feminist implication of *Gẹ̀lẹ̀dẹ́* is out of the scope of this paper, anyway.

*Èjẹ̀* is literarily translated as ‘joke’ or ‘fun’. *Gẹ̀lẹ̀dẹ́* performance is otherwise referred to as *ẹ̀jẹ̀* mainly because it involves concerts which could be performed in either day or night time and also involve dance, togetherness, celebration, subtlety, or diplomacy. The performer of the *ẹ̀jẹ̀* is also sometimes referred to as *ẹ̀jẹ̀* as a distorted form of *ẹ̀lẹ̀jẹ̀*, someone who produces *ẹ̀jẹ̀*. *Bòlòjò* is the kind of dance that is exclusively performed during *Gẹ̀lẹ̀dẹ́*. According to Olatunji and Koenane, *Bòlòjò* is “a type of dance which is characterised by simultaneously twisting and swaying the torso very slowly and taking short forward and backward steps giving the distinct impression of a gracefully moving corpulent body” (48). *Elérò*, morphologically, composed of *oni+e+ro* literarily means the thinker or more appropriately the philosopher, since *rò* means ‘to philosophise’. *Elérò* is the sage who philosophises on what is going on currently and its implication on the individual, community, and human fate on earth either in the nearest future or on the unborn generation. The *Elérò* could be a male, female, young or old alike since the person possesses the required wisdom to philosophise deeply and it does not matter whether he/she combines the talent of producing it out him/herself as a song for he/she could only produce the thought just for a proficient *ẹ̀lẹ̀jẹ̀* to sing it out. Equally important is *ẹ̀kà*. *Èkà* is a Yoruba concept formulated from *ẹ̀+kà* literarily meaning something that is read. This is a prolonged line of argument that the singer establishes as preambles to produce a ground for his/her song. It is usually produced in rhymes and always made to be as critical as possible. This becomes the yardstick employed for measuring the level of wisdom and proficiency of the performer.

Regarding the historical background on the origin of *Gẹ̀lẹ̀dẹ́*, there is multiplicity and sometimes conflicting collection of narrations as far as its origin is concerned. Some of them have mythological undertones while others are not scientific as they lack actual dates of origin. Olatunji and Koenane capture this point thus:

There is numerous and sometimes conflicting information regarding the origin of *Gẹ̀lẹ̀dẹ́*. Historical notes are usually in two forms. Some come from the mytho-religious tradition and others from historical sources. The two traditions nevertheless are not perceived as conflicting in the metaphysics of the Yoruba because it is believed that reality is a combination of complements, hence the saying *tí'bi tí're l'a dá 'lé ayé* (The

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<sup>4</sup> Olatunji and Koenane did not back up their claim to the French origin of the concept with evidence and so I have reservation for it.

world is created good and bad). The mythical origin only explains the ultimate cause and the historical tradition also complements the instrumental or material cause of the same entity in Aristotelian terms (44).

More so, in practice, there are so many rituals, traditions, sacrifices as well as religious rites attached to it. These include the annual *Gẹ̀lẹ̀dẹ̀* festival which is referred to as *Ẹ̀bẹ̀*. During this festival, the concerned people would prepare and submit a special portion of their porridge, usually yam porridge or, at times, bean porridge, without the addition of salt, into a big clay pot at the *Onídòfọ̀yí* shrine. The collection of it would be carried to the final shrine, referred to as *Pópó*, by a chief (usually a woman) in procession. It also includes the use of *Ọ̀gèdè*. The Yorùbá concept of “*Ọ̀gèdè*” is homonymous. On the one hand, it means a powerful interrelation of words, analogous to the English concept of incantation, that is purposefully employed for spiritual invocation either for benevolent or malevolent purposes. On the other hand, it also denotes a wood-cast mask that is specifically used on the *Onídòfọ̀yí* Anniversary. The adherents of this practice in the Yorùbá tradition do observe some taboos and restrictions. More important among them is the restriction from eating snakes, among others (Mr Dauda). The crust of this paper is neither to trace the origin of the practice nor to expose the ritual and religious practices that surround *Gẹ̀lẹ̀dẹ̀* practice but to expose and critically look into the component of the song to see whether it could be qualified as philosophy.

*Gẹ̀lẹ̀dẹ̀* is an art performance that is exhibited by the Yorùbá people, the dominant culture in the southwest of Nigeria and one of the largest tribes in Africa. This performance is occasioned by the *Onídòfọ̀yí* Anniversary. This anniversary occurs once in every blue moon because of its huge financial demands. In this night concert, many towns would be invited and it always requires that the *Ẹ̀jẹ̀* performer usually climb the roof to its apex accompanied by a sage who will be feeding him with the next line of thought throughout the night and followed by a day procession. It is also occasioned by the annual *Ẹ̀bẹ̀* Anniversary such that after the usual sacrifices as earlier explained; the procession will follow and be led by an *Ẹ̀jẹ̀* and a congregation which includes males, females, young and adult alike. Some *Ẹ̀jẹ̀* are mature and self-sufficient in combining the task of reasoning out together with song production while others always seek the assistance of sages that will be reasoning for them. Apart from the performance occasioned by the anniversaries, people, at times, do invite them to stage a performance at ceremonial gatherings such as the final burial ceremony and the like. In these cases, night concerts and day processions are performed whereby the *Ẹ̀jẹ̀* will be singing different songs mirroring the occurrences at that particular time and a particular place. This always goes in collaboration with percussions; *agogo*, *ṣẹ̀kẹ̀rẹ̀* and drums. The drums employed vary across places but prominent among the drums include *gán-gan*, *bàtá* and *àpèsìn*. Olatunji and Koene capture this concert thus:

The night concert usually involves a masked jester or humourist employing satire to create a lot of fun, mimicking any immoral actions and utterances made by some members of the community during the period under review and employing and reciting poems (*oríkì*, *ọ̀gèdè* and *ewé*) warning against the consequences of such actions especially on the individual, society, women and future generations in a tactful manner that does not incite violence: a blend of ritual and artistic spectacle, while at the same time honouring women (46).

I want to quickly clarify some things that are contained in the above citation. It is thereby stated that “the night concert usually involves a masked jester.” I do not agree with this. Even though the jester could be masked, this is not a usual or necessary thing as the jester could perform with or without

being masked. I also need to add that *oríkè* is an ancestral and personal eulogy or praise poetry, *ògèdè* is like incantation while *enì* is like a poem. This is not all, it also employs *owe*, (proverbs), and other parables, mythological narrations, fables, and wise sayings. All these are employed to achieve a target. Hence, the author hereby defines *Gẹ̀lẹ̀dẹ́* as a typical traditional Yoruba performance that makes a good blend of ritual, artistic and aesthetic spectacles. It is essentially a song system but nevertheless has some religious undertones. It usually involves one or more masked or unmasked jesters referred to as *ẹ̀jẹ̀*, employing satire, comics and songs that are well-thought-out by sages referred to as *elérò*, to eventually create a lot of fun and ‘spiced it up’ with different musical instruments and anaesthetic dance known as *bọ̀lọ̀jọ́* but intentionally reflecting or mirroring actions, utterances, practices, occurrences and generally any problem of human concern in the immediate community under review or human community at large, by a great deal of articulating well-known proverbs, wise sayings, generally held myth narratives, fables, *ifà* renditions, *et cetera*, in a condensed memorable rhyme, to praise, warn, broadcast news, foretell future, call for retreatment or otherwise and citing the consequence on the individual, community or future generation in a tactful non-violence manner.

According to this definition, *Gẹ̀lẹ̀dẹ́* is traditional to Yorùbá in the sense that it originated in antiquity, unlike many other Yorùbá musical performances such as *Fuji*, *Juju*, *Àpàlà* and the likes who have their origin in the recent past. It is essentially a song system. It also involves ritual practices as I have explained above. The reason for the dual nature of *Gẹ̀lẹ̀dẹ́* is not farfetched; Traditional Yorùbá people are utterly religious and at the same time, as Olatunji and Koenane put it, “are naturally fun-loving people who often never miss an opportunity to create fun from almost every event” (45), so much so that there hardly was ever a traditional African event that do not have some elements of both, however trivial it may be. But this does not make them form the core of the events. Hence, we can talk of; drumming, farming, fishing, blacksmith, hunting, pottery, *et cetera*, each of which have a fun as well as ritual/religious undertone peculiar to them and I do not think these necessarily form their main concern but a peripheral one. So, placing it side by side with other traditional Yorùbá arts performances, *Gẹ̀lẹ̀dẹ́* is different from *Egúngún* and *Orò* in that the latter are essentially ritual/religious practices even though they have some fun/aesthetic components, they do not form their core meanwhile, for the former, reverse is the case. It is on this ground that this would focus more on the artistic performances of *Gẹ̀lẹ̀dẹ́* here with little reference to the ritual/religious component. This is not to throw away the other components too, anyway.

### Towards the Practice of *Gẹ̀lẹ̀dẹ́*

Having clarified the concepts and stated some features of *Gẹ̀lẹ̀dẹ́* together with a brief historical origin of the practice, it will suffice to expose and analyse some of their songs to show how it is practised. Like many other Yoruba song systems, after a series of *Ẹ̀kà* (we shall talk more on this later), *Ẹ̀jẹ̀* is usually kick-started by a kind of welcome song and, at times, a self-eulogy. Let us look into this song:

*Oyún orin òbẹ ní kùn mi nwò màì bú, (2 times)*  
*Ání mo ẹ̀jẹ̀ kọ díẹ̀ ní bẹ́*  
*Enu mà tí òyún mi ò*  
*Oyún orin òbẹ ní kùn mi nwò màì bú (Mrs Nihmotullah Dauda).*

### Translation

I am impregnated with songs undelivered  
 I want to sing some of them out

My mouth is itching me  
I am impregnated with songs undelivered

It is not a necessity to be born in the family lineage of those who engage in this performance before you can perform *Gẹ̀lẹ̀dẹ́*. The performance is open to everybody since the person is interested and he/she has what it takes to do it. However, like many other traditional African vocations such as blacksmith, wood-calving, iron-bending, fishing and even farming, *Gẹ̀lẹ̀dẹ́* is majorly comprised of people who have taken it to be their family heritage. The reason for this is not farfetched. In traditional African settings, children are socialised with what is best obtainable in their immediate family. They seldom send their children out to acquire new knowledge at a tender age. Even, if it becomes necessary to do so, the child must have acquired and exhausted what is obtainable at home first before sourcing further elsewhere. This is the case for *Gẹ̀lẹ̀dẹ́* also as it majorly comprises those who are born into families that engage in it with relatively few external bodies who are keen to join them. The internal bodies include both males and females who have paternal, maternal as well as marital relationships with the families that spearhead the practice. This is illustrated in the following songs:

*Gẹ̀lẹ̀dẹ́ wá ti dī'ran,* (2 times)  
*Bí baba d'àgbà tta omo á gbà á*  
*Gẹ̀lẹ̀dẹ́ wá ti dī'ran,*  
*Şe b'áwa l'agb'óri ilé s'òyìnbó*  
*Níşe ló mà n gbogò sù* (Mrs Nihmotullah Dauda).

### Translation

*Gẹ̀lẹ̀dẹ́* has turned to our family heritage  
When the father retires in old age, his child takes over  
*Gẹ̀lẹ̀dẹ́* has turned to our family heritage  
We are the ones who speak grammar on the roof  
We are advancing on it by the day.

The above song states how children take over from their father when their father retires in old age. As I have said earlier, it is not exclusively peculiar to the children that were born into the lineage but also, the wife married into the family also does engage in it since they have the 'can' and the 'will' it requires. Let us hear one of their wives out:

*Íran ni Gẹ̀lẹ̀dẹ́ fún'wa,* (2 times)  
*T'okọ wa bá pèé gbèrè*  
*Kí ş'àwọn sá'ré p'egbè* (Mrs Nihmotullah Dauda).

### Translation

*Gẹ̀lẹ̀dẹ́* is a family inheritance to us  
Whenever our husband starts (we reciprocate instantly)  
We never go ether-skater searching for it

Just like the Western philosophy, criticism, either positive or negative appraisal of an act or agent that perpetuates it, is central to the practice of *Gẹ̀lẹ̀dẹ́*. However, what makes the *Gẹ̀lẹ̀dẹ́* stance of criticism better than the Western-oriented philosophy is that it is reflexive before transitive. What I mean is that it is traditional for the main performer to start by criticising or lampooning himself or herself first

and even his or her parents, where necessary for criticising or lampooning an external person. This goes in tandem with the saying that; one should press himself or herself with the fire to know-how it feels before pressing it on others. Let me instantiate this claim in a *Gẹ̀lẹ̀dẹ́* song presented by a jester on occasion to lampoon his parents in stage performance as it goes thus:

*Baba re ko da'ye jade 2x*  
*E ba'mi ba Kekere s'oro*  
*K'o je'yami o ba mi gbe.*

### Translation

Your father did not chase your mother away  
Help me talk to Kekere (the name of the jest performer's father)  
To allow my mother to leave with me.

Then, he also elucidates the reason why her mother was, unavoidably, chased away by his father, after he saw the root cause of his father's action, better, thus:

*Mo ri'di oro ojohun 2x*  
*O-f'oko-si'le-re'le-ale*  
*A se'yami l'o l'asesa.*

### Translation

I have gotten to the root of the matter of the other day.  
Leaving-a-husband-at-home-to-visit-a-concubine.  
It was my mother that was guilty.

Apart from creating fun with the aid of *Gẹ̀lẹ̀dẹ́* performances to douse both the physical as well as the psychological stress, they also sing, which is what they see as their main task of course, to mirror what is going on. This is engendered by, not only their daring heart but also, the privilege society confers on them. They can lampoon, even the king despite how majestically African kings are regarded since he does wrong. This fact is stated clearly in this song:

*Orí ti d'òwò ní'lé wa, (2 times)*  
*Àwà l'ává òdà'rin bú'jòye*  
*Kòsì nkan tí ò şe wa (Mrs Nihmotullah Dauda).*

### Translation

Singing has become a business in our home  
We are the ones that sing to lampoon the chiefs  
Nothing (catastrophic) will befall us.

Owing to the responsibility they are charged with, they quickly react to the atrocities committed by any person, group of persons or even government as the case may be. At a time when the problem ensued between the two parties that bear the chieftaincy on the Central Mosque, Igboora, *Gẹ̀lẹ̀dẹ́* performers came in to warn them. Here is one of their songs:

*Alálúfáà k'e jẹ́ s'agbéjẹ́ m'ó'wó (2 times)*

*Àwọ̀n Onígbàgbọ́ níf'ayọ̀ s'ọ̀dún*  
*E ti Jímọ́ọ́ pa kòmàda*  
*Alúlufáà k'ẹ́ jẹ́ s'agbéjẹ́ mọ́'wó* (Mr. Ridwan Lanlege).

### Translation

The Islamic scholars should allow peace to reign  
The Christians are celebrating their fiesta with joy  
You lock up the Central Mosque which is wrong.

On another occasion, *Gẹ̀lẹ̀dẹ́* echoed the corrupt practices of the government of the day whereby the construction contractors were using materials of low quality on road construction. In mimicking this, a song was sung thus:

*Omi lẹ̀ ńrọ́ lu títì ẹ̀ ò d'òdà sí, (2 times)*  
*Ogbón ti dé'lé ayé nìni*  
*Ìjọba mà ti d'adọgbón sí,*  
*Omi lẹ̀ ńrọ́ lu títì ẹ̀ ò d'òdà sí* (Mr. Jamiu Dauda).

### Translation

You are wetting the road with water in the name of tarring it.  
Corruption has invaded the world  
And governance so becomes sly

Unlike ordinary songs, *Gẹ̀lẹ̀dẹ́* songs, because they aimed to establish critical bases for the position, call for robust argument which may not be said in the chorus. For this reason, *ẹ̀kà* is normally employed. Interrogating Laisi Adéogún,<sup>5</sup> aka Agbégijó on what *ẹ̀kà* is all about, he used an illustration to explain it. According to him; “When we talk about a house unfamiliar to the people, we would need an adequate description of the route to the place so that the person will have a firm understanding of the house we are talking about, starting from the well familiar houses to the audience then relates the unknown from the well-known or describing the unfamiliar from the familiar.” In this illustration, *ẹ̀jẹ̀* is the ‘unfamiliar house’ we want to establish which sounds very similar to what Western-type philosophy refers to as ‘conclusion’ while the description of the route to the house by making references to the familiar houses along the route, is technically referred to as *ẹ̀kà* in the realm of *Gẹ̀lẹ̀dẹ́* which is akin to premise(s) in Western-type philosophy. While we are establishing *ẹ̀kà*, he says further, we shall be describing how we come by the inference so that the inference will have bases and become meaningful rather than being like ordinary ranting whose premises are missing. *Ẹ̀kà* can last for several minutes meanwhile, in the course of its recitation, there calls for decorum so that the people will have a firm understanding of where the *ẹ̀jẹ̀* is coming from, even though, the beats can gently be going underground but with relatively low acoustics (Mr. Laisi Adeogun).

To buttress this point, it is necessary to present a short but typical example of what *ẹ̀kà* looks like. In one of Agbégijó's performances, he establishes *ẹ̀kà* to illustrate his position which is translated as thus:

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<sup>5</sup> Laisi Adeogun, popularly known as Agbegijo, is a prominent practitioner of *Gelede* in Igbora, who has produced many *Gelede* records.

Why are we suffering in Nigeria? I need to ponder about it. We that have natural resources are suffering, but those countries that are not as rich in natural resources as we are, are well better off. The first time I bought a car in this country some time ago, whenever I wanted to buy fuel and I had twenty-five kobo, I did fill up the tank of my car to its brim. We work days and nights with little to show. You still recently inflated the price of fuel. You who are farmers should reason together to sort a solution to Nigeria's problem from an agro-economic perspective. Nigerians are suffering too much. We voted for representatives into the parliaments as you instructed. No one is benefiting from these representatives. The constituency allowances they are being given almost every week always sink into their houses... (Mr. Laisi Adeogun).

He then makes his position in the following *ẹ̀jẹ̀*, drawing an inference from the *ẹ̀kà* as thus:

*Oun tí'jọba gbé l'ọ̀wọ́, ó tó wọ̀n ọ́ s'ọ̀rọ̀, Oun tí'jọba gbé l'ọ̀wọ́,  
Awọ̀n tí wọ̀n ńs'è̀tò fúnma l'ó ńsèrú o,  
E wòó tí aṣọ́ ńyẹ̀gẹ̀ l'ọ̀rùn mi  
Oun tí'jọba gbé l'ọ̀wọ́ (Mr. Laisi Adeogun).*

### Translation

What the government has, as its resources, is sufficient for our wealth  
But those who are at the helm of the affairs are corrupt  
This is evident in the way clothes could not fit onto my shoulders.

In this way, *ẹ̀kà* is the local equivalent of what the Western philosophers refer to as 'premises'. As Africans believe in the efficacy of prayer, *Gẹ̀lẹ̀dẹ̀* also pray for their fans. A good example of this is illustrated in the following song:

*Àdúrà l'ẹ̀jẹ̀ mi yó sẹ, (2 times)  
Ojú t'ẹ̀ fí ńrí'ran r'álàgbà  
K'ọ̀jú ọ̀hún ma'e re'lé (Mrs. Nihmotullah Dauda).*

### Translation

*Ẹ̀jẹ̀* is here to pray for you  
The eyes with which you gaze at me  
May the sight not bid you bye.

### Conclusion: In Recognition of the Philosophical Essence of *Gẹ̀lẹ̀dẹ̀*

So far, a concise but critical historical origin of African philosophy has been presented and purposefully, made open-ended as against the seeming conclusion of the debate. A distinction is made between the two forms of philosophy with their features stated and how *Gẹ̀lẹ̀dẹ̀* fits into the strict sense of it. We also conceptualised *Gẹ̀lẹ̀dẹ̀* with its characteristics and ended it up with a copious *Gẹ̀lẹ̀dẹ̀* song and *ẹ̀kà* to show how they relate in essences and existences with the Western-type philosophy. We also highlighted some peculiarities. From the above, we could rightly evaluate that if philosophy is a critical and reflective human exercise, *Gẹ̀lẹ̀dẹ̀* is, as it is practised in traditional African culture, a critical and reflective exercise. If the task of philosophy is to mediate into human perennial

problems which are mainly problems of life and problems of reflection, as Kekes put it, then, *Gẹ̀lẹ̀dẹ̀* equally does the same. If philosophy is an individual rational exercise to mimic nature, *Gẹ̀lẹ̀dẹ̀* as well is individualistic in this same way. If philosophy is committed to writing for documentation and easy retrieval's sake, *Gẹ̀lẹ̀dẹ̀* also achieves the same, employing the retrievability tendency endowed in songs and rhymes. If philosophy is made up of arguments that are mainly two components, the premise(s) and the conclusion, *Gẹ̀lẹ̀dẹ̀* is also made of the same which is labelled as *ẹ̀kà* and *ẹ̀jẹ̀* as they were illustrated above. If being 'critical' and 'criticism' is considered central to Western philosophy, *Gẹ̀lẹ̀dẹ̀* is also characterised by this in its peculiar ways. On this plethora of grounds, we can, therefore, rightly conclude that *Gẹ̀lẹ̀dẹ̀* is qualified not only as African philosophy but also as philosophy in a universalistic sense of it.

More interestingly, Charles Taylor sees philosophy as involving a great deal of articulation of what is initially unarticulated (18). I agree. In this regard, I argue that African proverbs, fables, mythological narrations, wise sayings, *et cetera*, might be individualistically qualified as philosophy in the loose sense of it, following from Tangwa's classification of philosophy into; the strict and the loose sense. Meanwhile, *Gẹ̀lẹ̀dẹ̀* is said to have involved itself with a great articulation of this "fragment philosophies" called philosophy in the loose sense of it. For *Gẹ̀lẹ̀dẹ̀* to have consciously done this, it is arguable that the philosophical status of *Gẹ̀lẹ̀dẹ̀* should not remain the same; it supposes to have graduated to a philosophical status higher than its component philosophies which could not be denied as being philosophy in the strict sense of it. So, it is inferred, that *Gẹ̀lẹ̀dẹ̀* qualifies as philosophy in the strict sense of it.

I am aware that a critic may object to this position because; despite all the commensurabilities between *Gẹ̀lẹ̀dẹ̀* and Western-type philosophy, it remains incommensurable in several ways. Yes, I agree. But incommensurability is not sufficient grounds to deprive *Gẹ̀lẹ̀dẹ̀* a philosophical status in the strict sense of it. Here are my defences; taking an individualistic assessment, how Socrates philosophised is appreciably different from the way, say, Friedrich Nietzsche philosophised. The sense in which Augustine Comte was a philosopher is far different from the sense in which St. Augustine was a philosopher, just to mention but few. Meanwhile, every one of these scholars qualifies as a philosopher in his own right. Or, looking into it from its types, Hegelian-type rationalistic philosophy is quite different from Cartesian-type foundationalism, just to mention but a few, and every one of these is a philosophy in its own right. To cap it all, taking a generic perspective, what metaphysicians consider philosophy to be is quite opposing to what ethicists consider philosophy to be. In the same manner, Logic is not philosophy in the same way comparative philosophy is. They are all philosophy only in the sense that they participate in philosophical "universalities" some of which have been argued earlier in this paper that *Gẹ̀lẹ̀dẹ̀* also shares too. This is more reason why there cannot be an all-encompassing and univocal definition of philosophy because any attempt to provide such a definition will always end up to cater for an orientation or at most a branch of philosophy. In this regard, we can simply admit *Gẹ̀lẹ̀dẹ̀* as a typical philosophy in its own right, sufficiently different from others to be regarded as a unique style of philosophy and still sufficiently participating in the "ideals" of philosophy to be accorded a *bona fide* membership of philosophy in the strict sense of it.

Be that as it may, parallel to Nyamnjho's *Incompleteness* (1), one *Ifá* verse known as *Òtúrúpòn-Méjì* otherwise called *Ifá Ọlọgbón-Méjì* is on the point as one of its cantos goes thus:

*Ìnọ́ gbón, èmí gbón,  
Ọgbón inú ẹ̀ kò tó tẹ̀mí*

*A d'ía fún Alábabun  
Èyí tí ní òun òkó ọgbón rẹ orí ọpẹ rẹ kó sí  
Akèrègbè rìgùdù yí i s'èyìn.*

### Translation

I am wise, you are also wise.  
But my wisdom is superior to yours.  
This becomes the case for the tortoise.  
On its way to hoard humans' wisdom  
He was advised to turn the gourd to his back.

The mythological fable narration that surrounds this verse has it that the tortoise, as a purportedly cunning animal, wanted to claim a monopoly of wisdom and so he attempted to pack all the earthly wisdom inside a gourd and embarked on a journey inside a forest to hoard the wisdom on a palm tree. On getting there, he had futile repeated attempts to climb the tree until a snail passing by, having seen the tortoise struggling to climb the tree without realising the hindrance in the attempt, draws its attention to turn the gourd to his back rather than placing it against its chest. Tortoise heeded the advice and it becomes easy for it to climb. It was then that it got to realise that despite its attempt to pack all the wisdom into the gourd and place it out of reach of others, it is obvious now that the attempt was futile because, at least as it is so glaring to the tortoise, some others are still possessing wisdom. Here is where I am driving at; nobody can legitimately claim the absoluteness and monopoly of wisdom. From this standpoint, it calls for the Western-type philosophy and the *Gẹ̀lẹ̀dẹ̀*, as an African-type philosophy to exchange the beneficial elements that are peculiar to each. Meanwhile, we need to remind ourselves that doing that calls for charity from both the participating parties so as not to commit what John Bewaji terms epistemicide (269-312).

In this regard, we can see that *Gẹ̀lẹ̀dẹ̀* does not only qualify as philosophy in the strict sense of it but also has some crucial elements to contribute to the philosophical enterprise. One of them is the method it employs to make its thought reach out to people rather than being a philosophical playfulness that ends up becoming ornaments of the library. Come to think about it. Socrates is one of the most influential Greek philosophers of the ancient time, if not the most influential of them all. Despite his impacts, did he commit his thoughts to writing? No, he did not. Rather, he was a peripatetic philosopher who reached out to people from place to place and in the meantime, he was able to influence not only the elites but the lower castes as well. Does this stance make him a quasi-philosopher? What is the essence of a rigorous philosophy if all it can achieve is being an ornament of the library and raw materials for further research work? Was Socrates the pioneer of this style in the history of Western philosophy? No. Socrates adapted the style from his immediate predecessors, the Sophists, who were the itinerant teachers of corruption. We can see that the thought of these two sets of people easily went viral and effectively compared to their ancestors who kept on abstract reasoning and ostracised wisdom that was mainly for the consumption of those who are regarded by societies to be 'out of touch with reality'. Another idea we can extract from this is that both 'good' and 'bad' philosophies can affect people's lives if accessibility is put into consideration as is evidenced in Sophistic and Socratic philosophy.

As a matter of fact, as good as writing is, more than average of the human population does not read. To worsen it, the languages employed by the philosophers in the course of the philosophical exercises

are too dense and boring that they become exclusively consumable by a few “die-hard philosophers”<sup>6</sup>, to borrow words from Staniland (6). This may call for a probe in seemingly silly but rightly thus; Is philosophy a prize in the library? If not, then, why can’t you break your rich philosophies into consumable ones? I think that is wickedness or craziness on the side of philosophical enterprises handed down by the Western philosophical legacy! In this regard, we can also talk of movies, novels, and plays but the most volatile of them is music. It will reach out to those who consciously and subconsciously listen to it. As a result, it will begin to have an impact on their lives.

This is where the style embedded in *Gèlèdè* becomes a useful recommendation for the philosophical enterprise at large. African philosophers should learn a good lesson from this. *Gèlèdè* has shown us the way that; it is not until you have what it takes to sing. One can engage in rigorous thought as is the case of *Elérò-gèlèdè*, and supply it to those who have what it takes to sing it out. I would suspect that some Nigerian singers have realised this fact, and seized its advantage. Fela Anikulapo, a popular Nigerian Afrobeat singer, was, in this way, easily regarded as a philosopher whose philosophical impacts influenced the Nigerian government and the African government at large. This is the same reason why people easily refer to Saheed Osupa, another Nigerian popular Fuji music singer, as a philosopher for his philosophies reach out not only to the elites but also the *boi polloi* while our professional philosophers whose philosophies are richer remain relegated to libraries, exclusively for academic uses. Nigerian government realises this fact which underlies the reason why they pay a leap service to the intellectuals’ ‘ranting’ more specifically philosophers and they could easily summon or arrest, as the case may be, such a person like Fela Anikulapo, Idris Abdul-Kareem, a Nigerian Hip-Hop music singer, and the likes, for just one album released, for they know the implication of their songs to the society if allowed to go viral.

So, here is where I consider Afolayan and Falola’s advice to the African philosophers to become relevant and useful: There is a need for African philosophers to get on the street and get their theories dirtied by the predicament on the continent (Afolayan and Falola 12). By so doing, African philosophers would need, just like the peripatetic Socrates, to give more priority to the issues that bear more relevance to their environment in the same way *Gèlèdè* is practised and break its philosophy down to the consumable tastes of the targeted audiences. This would be more impactful than reflecting on Cartesian Duality Theory, David Hume’s Problem of Induction, Edmund Gettier’s Worries, Thomas Hobbes’ Leviathan and the like, which do not bear direct relevance to contemporary African predicaments. The “African Socrates” have abandoned the stage for the “African Sophists.” By the “African Socrates,” I mean the trained professional thinkers who understand African problems and could easily proffer enlightened solutions to them. Rather than reflecting on issues that bear us direct references, they are consumed by abstract and brainstorming discussions. Even, in some cases where they try to domesticate their thought, they rather commit them in dense languages that make the works relegated to the library thereby ending up achieving nothing. The “African Sophists”, on the other hand, are mostly negative, non-professional thinkers who make their thoughts reachable to the people, majorly in the form of Hip-Hop songs and theatre arts performances. Hence, they corrupt the minds of the people of the society by their negative thoughts which promote atrocities including the veneration of internet fraud, propagation and legitimisation of prostitution, veneration of smuggling and drug pushing, brutalisation of African values, and promotion of immorality among others. It is high time for professional philosophers to fully come on board and hijack the stage like never before.

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