The essential challenge confronting humanistic and cultural studies in this age of globalization is how to reconcile the conflict between cultural nationalism and cultural universalism. As the integration of world cultures continues in earnest, so also are we witnessing the affirmation of identities in the many cultural systems of the world. This paradox of the affirmation of identity in the face of cultural homogeneity of globalization deserves serious attention particularly because of its potential for degenerating into crisis. African discourse, particularly in the humanistic disciplines for so long has been dominated by the demand for the affirmation of African cultural identity. This aspiration, for a unique African culture and unity to challenge not only the ethnocentrism of the West, but also its effort to assimilate other cultures for the purpose of subjugation has been conceptualised as pan-Africanism. It is this cultural identity employed to assert the uniformity and uniqueness of the African world that has manifested in many intellectual disciplines such as history, literature, philosophy and anthropology. In this respect, it has been possible to conceive of African philosophy, literature, history, e.t.c as distinct from the Western variants of all these disciplines. While the Western variants of these disciplines that are presented as the universal form, are conceived to reflect the inferiority, the disorganisation and the irrationality of the African cultural mindset, the African variant is essentially out to deny and disclaim these false impressions. It is this entire nationalistic scholarship that Anthony Appiah's classical book: In my Father's House is out to question and totally discourage. The essentially purpose of this proposed essay is to make a critical interrogation of this classical work.

Anthony Appiah’s classical work: In my Father’s House is a seminal book not only in the discourse of African Philosophy, but also in the entire African intellectual discourses. The work is considered of an epochal value because it critically interrogates the entire idea of African identity and regard all its manifestations in all African discourses, literature history, anthropology e.t.c as being based on a racist and racialist ideology that is not only false but misleading. The liability of this nationalistic intellectual project as Appiah considers it is that it will create the impression of fundamental differences, which can undermine the very African people that the project of African nationalism set out to liberate.

Intellectual disciplines, particularly African culture, without any doubt has benefited immensely from the rigorous discourse of the cultural tension and the imperative of global unity in Appiah’s celebrated book: In My Father’s House: Africa
in the Philosophy of Culture. The theme of this book on philosophy of culture from an African perspective is the interface between the phenomena of modernity, post-colonialism and the prevalent reality or necessity of globalisation in today’s world. Appiah’s project in philosophy of culture can be summarised as a desire to articulate and think through the multidimensional challenges of modernity to the post-colonial peoples. This needs to be done in order to formulate an identity and agenda that will foster the transformation of such societies as part of the unit of the globalised world.

The underlying presumption behind Appiah’s philosophy needs to be appreciated in order to have a clearer understanding of his entire project. Appiah operates with the assumption that human problems are not resolved but complicated by the forging of identities and divisions among peoples of the world. The various cleavages and classifications to him, are disabling and they should be confronted, particularly the fabrications and fictions that produced them. The project of demystification of the myth of identities and the enterprise of reconstructing a new order that will consider social problems as confronting all humans, rather than a particular region of the world is the primary motive behind Appiah’s engagement with African culture. It is this project and the underlying premises informing it that we set out to interrogate.

The fundamental challenge confronting the modern man, as we said earlier is that of how to reconcile the tension between the fragmentation of the world society and the imperative for the integration of the world cultures. In this respect the defining paradox of modernity can be seen as the tension between the divisions it generated and the anxiety of the modern man for the integration of these multiple cultural values pulling him apart. The tension between the traditional identities and the imperative of global integration is the theme of Ian Clark’s book with the apt title: Globalization and Fragmentation: International Relations in the Twentieth Century. The discussion in this text is basically on why divisions and identities are becoming prominent in the face of the globalisation process taking place today. This age of extremes and contrast demands for a reconciliation of the tension between cultural identities and the need for cultural syncretism.

The essential challenge for any discourse of culture then is that of how to reconcile this conflict and forge out of the numerous cultures, an idea of culture as a universal human heritage. Philosophy of culture is a reaction to this challenge. It is indeed this that is at the base of Appiah’s philosophy of culture. Appiah’s concern in the discourse of culture is precisely to deconstruct the numerous identities that stand in the way of the humanistic project that has been conceptualised today as globalisation. Realising that the intermingling of cultures can not produce an integrated peaceful order, Appiah aims at confronting the foundation of this impediment, which to him is the idea of race and its various manifestations.

The discourse of race and the extraordinary attention given to it by Appiah may create the impression that he is merely interested in the deconstruction of race. To assume this is to belief that the clearing of the weed, before planting is the end rather than the means to a worthwhile end. Race, racism and racialism can not but be confronted
headlong because of the subtle but effective way in which these fabrications have undermined the various effort to realise the universal human culture. The idea of racial identities is to Appiah, the Archilles heel of the entire project of modernity, which can only be put right after a proper deconstruction of race.

Why is modernity becoming associated with crisis rather than its very essence as a mode of transformation? How did it become notorious as to engender colonialism and the subjugation of the non-Western peoples and cultures? The reason is nor farfetched. Modernity as a Western project developed as an exclusive Western project with a racist and ethnocentric assumptions that the feature of rationality could only manifest and be fully projected within Western culture. The assumption then was that other society could only become civilised if they abandon their cultures and embrace the Western ethos. The idea of the “White man’s burden” and the need to socialise the other into the rational culture of the West was employed as a reason for colonialism. But behind this lies a strong idea of racism. The crisis of modernity is essentially due to the racism behind it. This racism manifested in many forms and also became the underlying ideology behind the enslavement and subjugation of the non-Western peoples.

Appiah, throughout this text concentrates on the deconstruction of race. But the attention devoted to unfolding the racism behind the argument for African solidarity became the surprising aspect of his enterprise. The basis of solidarity in Africa, he contends should not be the idea of race, but the overwhelming experience of subjugation by the West. Africa as a unit, he will like to affirm is a product of the European gaze. All the manifestations of racial solidarity and cultural unity manifested by the divergent peoples since the advent of colonialism, Appiah finds repugnant. The explanation is simply that human culture rather than African culture should be the concern of all those interested in the genuine transformation of Africa. The linkage of racism with African solidarity is to him a burdensome legacy. (Appiah 1992:5)

Burdensome and problematic as the racial inclination of pan-Africanism may be, the question is whether it is expected that the people who have been seen as the complete other should not be brought together by the very factor employed to isolate them. The issue is not contested whether race is a fiction or a reality, the point is that for so long a group of people has been denied assess to humanity for the reason of their biological difference and this has been taken for granted. Do we need to blame the victim for responding back by affirming their difference? Appiah’s suggestion is that the idea of race should be rejected. Africans, he feels can still sustain their unity on the basis of their common exploitation by their oppressors. But this type of appeal would always fall on the dead ears of a suppressed people.

In retrospect the proposed essay is aimed at revisiting the idea of cultural identity in the canonical work of Appiah. It is expedient for us to investigate whether or not it is still desirable to affirm a Pan-Africanist identity in the globalised world in which we live. The proposed paper is a critical analysis of the various dimensions of cultural universalism as Appiah presented them. Essentially, it is the interest of this paper to see
whether or not Appiah's project will foster the quick resolution of the African crisis or further complicate it.