

African Philosophy and the Challenge from Hegemonic Philosophy

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Abstract

The position defended in this article is that African philosophy has the potential to grow into a philosophy that could eventually attain a significant place in the philosophy curriculum in Africa. This could be attained if those who are genuinely concerned with its present demotion to an inferior philosophy also actively participate in its development and dissemination. This is an admission that there might be something wrong with the way African philosophy has been received and treated in the academy even in present times. This is a difficult position whereby some indigenous people of Africa and others consider African philosophy to be somewhat inferior to Western philosophy. One might be tempted to think that since most of the people who end up studying and writing on African philosophy would have been, first and foremost, initiated into Western philosophy, the temptation might be to judge it using Western categories. The result might be a philosophy which is, by definition, a proxy of Western philosophy. Yet, as argued in the present article, authentic African philosophy ought to grow and flourish within the existential situations and terms of the indigenous people of Africa without appeal to external categories.

Keywords: African philosophy; Western philosophy; transformation; curriculum; education; Africa

Introduction

It is important to note that various cultures arrive at an understanding of the world around them through philosophies that are fundamentally peculiar to them and that speak to their different existential situations (Dladla 2017, 351; Ramose 2002, 5). Yet, through the



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passage of time, one paradigm of philosophy, Western philosophy, has through cultural imperialism been foisted upon and presented as superior to other paradigms of philosophy such as African philosophy (Taiwo 1998, 4). The result has been epistemicide or the suppression of the paradigm of thought of the dominated people to the extent that it has remained largely sidelined from the philosophy curriculum in higher education in Africa. As a result of this epistemicide, Western philosophy has enjoyed questionable and unjust dominance in the philosophy curriculum in Africa. This injustice perpetrated against African philosophy and its agents could be situated within the context of Western cultural imperialism, which has historically tended to take its own testimony as having transcultural relevance and application. This is quite consistent with the structural hegemonic posture that the Eurocentric paradigm has presented to the world. African philosophy has not been spared from this Eurocentric imperial narrative (see Mafeje 2011, 31–2). Nevertheless, it is possible for African philosophy to emerge from this situation and claim its space in the philosophy curriculum in Africa.

The purpose of this article is, therefore, to argue that African philosophy has the potential to grow into a philosophy that would eventually reclaim a significant place in the philosophy curriculum in Africa. The reason for the focus on incorporating or improving the presence of African philosophy in the philosophy curriculum stems from the fact that it is now commonly thought that the question of the existence of African philosophy has been settled, with authoritative sources testifying to its existence (Bell 1989, 363; Masolo 2010, 1–5; Oladipo 1995, 27). However, the struggle for self-assertion and respect for the contribution of the indigenous people of Africa to the philosophical canon is yet to be conclusively recognised by the dominant culture.

It might thus be premature to celebrate African philosophy's acceptance as a philosophy among other philosophies given its current absence or low status in the philosophy curriculum in some African countries and elsewhere. The new challenge to African philosophy is in respect to its acceptance as a canon that can equally compete with the dominant philosophy in Africa and elsewhere (Bernasconi 1997, 188; Masolo 2010, 3). As Lamola (2015, 89) argues, "the Western philosophical inventory hegemonistically sets the rules on what passes as philosophy proper, what constitutes legitimate or classical sources of philosophical education, and who is to be accorded the title of 'a philosopher.'" The tendency could be to take that paradigm of thought which belongs to a particular segment of the human race as superior to others and deserving transcultural dominance (Serequeberhan 1997, 142).¹ However, for Serequeberhan (1997, 142), such Eurocentric colonial asymmetries are no longer tenable and ought to be rejected. In fact, they have never been rationally defensible.

In this light, it may no longer be acceptable to pretend that the absence or peripheral presence of African philosophy in the curriculum could be maintained merely on the grounds of continuing the way things are or for other contested reasons. The

¹ Serequeberhan (1997, 142) has undertaken to critique such a Eurocentric fallacy.

responsibility to include or improve the presence of African philosophy in the philosophy curriculum may not be defined by geography, ethnicity or race. Perhaps anyone committed to this task may assist in introducing or improving its presence in the philosophy curriculum. This might sound somewhat idealistic, but it is a possible and necessary starting point that might lead to a just world that appreciates and accepts philosophies in their diversities and differences. The novel contribution of this article to the fledgling debate on the need for the inclusion or increased presence of African philosophy in the philosophy curriculum in Africa pertains to its thesis that African philosophy has the potential to increase its stake in the philosophy curriculum in Africa if those who are genuinely concerned with its present demotion to an inferior philosophy actively participate in its development and dissemination. As Dladla (2017, 356) argues, African philosophy ought to be seen as a philosophy of liberation which is meant to both liberate itself and the dominated people who identify with it from the contestable narrative from the West: a narrative that is intentionally intended to invent a superior–inferior dichotomy between peoples from different geopolitical centres.

In the first section of this article, the current perception of African philosophy in the academy in Africa is discussed. At some point, the article appeals to the current status of philosophy in the educational curriculum in South Africa and Zimbabwe in order to draw lessons from the plight of African philosophy when compared to Western philosophy. The idea is to support the argument that African philosophy is still considered a philosophy that may not be placed on a position of parity with Western philosophy. In the second section, the author submits that there is a need for a fundamental change to the present situation whereby African philosophy is largely sidelined in the philosophy curriculum. In the next section, the discussion focuses on the necessity for African philosophy to claim a significant stake in the philosophy curriculum in Africa and elsewhere. Even though there may be some challenges that are likely to be met in attaining this objective, this article argues that it is enriching to students if they learn various philosophies including those drawn from their respective cultural experiences. Yet, for this to be possible, and for African philosophy to become authentically African, it has to grow and flourish within the existential situations and terms of the indigenous people of Africa without appeal to external Western categories (Yai 1977, 3).² As substantiated later in this article, this is necessary if it is to reclaim its place as the principal paradigm that defines the lives of the indigenous people of Africa.

2 A good example could be the language of philosophising. The use of African languages in constructing, documenting and analysing such a philosophy could also assist in reducing the chances of misrepresentation which often come with using alien languages (Yai 1977, 8). As some would say, “language is not a philosophically neutral medium of expression” (Olúwolé 1997, 76). For the above reason, it becomes imperative for African philosophy to be also constructed and written using indigenous languages if it is to evade the problem that comes with philosophising and writing it in non-indigenous languages.

Perceptions of African Philosophy

It is almost becoming a tradition that whenever there is talk of African philosophy, it is talked of in such a way as to assert its authentic self-existence. This might be considered necessary especially in the light of the fact that the reclamation of African philosophy, to some significant extent, is an answer to some doubts pertaining to its existence and perhaps status of parity with Western philosophy. So, in a way, there is that incessant quest for African philosophy to justify its very existence and its competence or suitability as the basis of constructing the lives of its adherents (Janz 1997, 221–22; Yai 1977, 6). Yet the dominant philosophy (Western philosophy) has not faced such questions of being and authenticity and in fact has been accepted without critical review and contestation by scholars in Africa and abroad.

Doubts pertaining to the existence of African philosophy are rationally inappropriate and may end up consuming the discipline with attempts at justifying its self-existence at the expense of dealing with substantive issues that define it as a philosophy. This is especially worth considering given that many such questions emanate from Western philosophy and some indigenous people of Africa who have taken what some people from Western tradition consider African philosophy to be or what it ought to be as the official and authoritative position. Such questions are not posed by those who have, from time immemorial, not doubted the existence of a philosophy among the indigenous people of Africa.

The questioning of the existence of African philosophy might not be a purely academic endeavour to know, in a disinterested manner, whether indeed the indigenous people of Africa have a philosophy or not—it is more of an expression of doubt of their humanity and, by extension, their capacity to reason (Dladla 2017, 5; Marimba 1994, 334, 445; Sesanti 2015, 346). More so, this questioning is anchored in the Western epistemological paradigm: something that the indigenous people of Africa may need to overcome if they are to genuinely construct an African philosophy on their own terms (Amato 1997, 73–4; Mudimbe 1988, 10). As Yai (1997, 6) argues, such questions are asked from a position of superiority. It could be a question inspired by some deliberate confession of ignorance (Mills 2007, 29)³ since knowledge, thought and reason, themselves key elements of a philosophy, are constitutive of the humanity of any group of people in this world. This could make sense if there are some human beings who lack humanity and the attributes that are constitutive of this status.

³ Mills (2007, 15) characterises this ignorance as “White ignorance.” It is deliberately cultivated ignorance, perhaps with the intention to confuse and distort the status of the dominated people. As Mills (2007, 26) argues, “Whiteness is originally coextensive with full humanity, so that the nonwhite Other is grasped through a historic array of concepts whose common denominator is their subjects’ location on a lower ontological and moral rung.”

However, this is logically unsound. In fact, it is no longer viable to doubt the historical contribution of the indigenous people of Africa to the philosophical canon and their capacity to reason (Dladla 2017, 6; Flikschuh 2014, 5), especially in the light of evidence that much of what is claimed as “Western” philosophy originated in and was borrowed from Africa (James 1954, 6–27). In the light of this evidence, it might be difficult to continue on this path of denial. As a result, the debate seems to have shifted from questioning the very existence of African philosophy to questioning whether African philosophy can stand its ground with Western philosophy and perhaps prove to be good enough to deserve some significant stake in the philosophy curriculum in Africa.

In this connection, African philosophy has received some renewed attention (Chemhuru 2016; Chimakonam 2016; Etieyibo 2016a; 2016b; Metz 2016; Mungwini, 2016; Mweshi 2016; Okeja 2012; Ramose 2016; Sesanti 2016). The main focus has been on the necessity of incorporating African philosophy in the official educational curriculum. A key distraction to the need to incorporate African philosophy in the curriculum is the ongoing side debate about the necessity of such a change, that is, if there is a need to include it in the curriculum in Africa.

A case in point is that of a 2016 special issue titled “The Task of Africanising the Philosophy Curriculum in Universities in Africa,” guest edited by Edwin Etieyibo and published in the *South African Journal of Philosophy*. Commenting on the input and focus of the articles in the special issue, Etieyibo (2016a, 382) states that “as the editor of this special issue, I have no doubt that the collection of articles in this issue pushes further the discussions and debates about the need, urgency, reasons, justifications, why and how, problems and challenges of Africanising the philosophy curriculum in universities in Africa.” One could say, more importantly, one lesson that might be drawn from the focus of this special issue and the articles contained therein is the awareness of the constitution of the philosophy curriculum across the African continent generally and the need to engage in debate that may lead to considerations of philosophies from which it may draw its content.

In highlighting the increasing attention that has been given to the absence, and, in some cases, limited presence of African philosophy in the philosophy curriculum in universities in Africa, it is necessary to refer to the critical discussions that ensued after the Philosophical Society of Southern Africa (PSSA) conference that was held at Rhodes University, South Africa, from the 16th to the 18th of January 2017. Though the conference had no focused theme, there were contestations pertaining to race representation and relations among participants at the conference, which reflected some strained relations between races. As a result of the ensuing debate, one major point of discussion during the post-conference debates was the need to have a relook into the philosophy curriculum, particularly in South Africa. The same call for a re-examination of the philosophy curriculum could be necessary in other African countries in similar circumstances. Nevertheless, the point that can be drawn from these discussions and

which this present article intends to focus on pertains to the absence of African philosophy from or its marginal presence in the philosophy curriculum more generally in educational institutions in Africa.

These efforts aimed at interrogating the present status of African philosophy in the education curricula, particularly the university curriculum in Africa, could be seen as an attempt to challenge its rather contestable denigration when compared with other philosophies. Here, one can have in mind the philosophy from the West. The reason for specifically focusing on Western philosophy, and not other philosophies from some other geopolitical centres, stems from the fact that it has, since the conquest of Africa, been in constant contact with the indigenous people of Africa in ways that have influenced their lives and thought systems: contact that basically thrived on hegemonic prescription of this philosophy as the philosophy of choice.

The tendency has been to consider African philosophy as not a philosophy at all or as a philosophy that is inferior to Western philosophy (Hountondji 1990, 7; Masolo 2010, 3–4; Oyěwùmí 1997, 19; see also Okere 2005, 28). In addition, it has tended to be accepted that it is unnecessary and inappropriate to even think of a scenario whereby African philosophy will, at some point, have a significant stake in the philosophy curriculum in Africa. The trend has been to regard the present situation as undeserving of a fundamental change. This position has gained currency within the Western philosophical tradition. However, what remains to be established is the rational basis of such a contestable claim. Yet, the prejudicial thesis pertaining to the appropriateness of allowing African philosophy to be included or to claim a significant stake in the philosophy curriculum at universities in Africa continues to hold its own even in the face of open challenges to its legitimacy.

The impression that the indigenous people of Africa ought to be *thought about* and *of* might incline some to thinking that they cannot think *for* and *of* themselves (Flikschuh 2014, 4). Hence the contentious thesis that they might not have a philosophy that fits the definition of philosophy *qua* philosophy as prescribed and understood within the Western philosophical tradition. Commenting on the general assumption in the Western tradition that Africans do not think, Flikschuh (2014, 4) argues that

these are innocuous assumptions: no morally respectable person today professes the belief that Africans, for example, don't or can't think. The legacies of that once standard assumption nonetheless run deep. Until recently, the belief that Africans can't or don't think was widely accepted. Even today, popular misconceptions abound about Africa's perennial intellectual underdevelopment. In academic circles, too, an implicit presumption continues to hold sway that Africans don't think philosophically—or, at any rate, that they lack a *tradition* of philosophical thinking.

Yet, if one accepts that the world is constituted by a number of groups of people who have significant differences in terms of cultures and lived circumstances, pretty much as

they have similarities, then perhaps it might be plausible to accept that there are bound to be philosophies that fundamentally speak to their respective cultural and lived experiences. It might turn out to be flawed logic to think that there is one philosophy that deserves the title “philosophy” and at the same time accept that there are different groups of human beings in this world (see Taiwo 1998, 4). This flawed logic might lead to the thinking that there are some human beings who are *more* human than others. When the title of “humans proper” is limited to some specific gender and race, it becomes contestable (Ramose 1999, 1). Yet, claims to know better than the “distant others” may prove to be a barrier to intellectual engagement in a non-hegemonic way (Flikschuh 2014, 3). This can turn out to be the case when some philosophy from some particular geopolitical centre is, without sufficient justification, granted superiority over others.

The tendency to grade philosophies or to consider some philosophies as different in terms of how they reflect philosophy *qua* philosophy, though objectionable, might lead some into thinking that there are some philosophies that are more authentic or superior to others. This may not imply that anyone who does this is intent on grading philosophies in terms of their supposed levels of sophistication. However, chances are that such attempts may be misconstrued to mean that one is trying to uplift some philosophies to positions of superiority while demeaning others.

Kwame Appiah’s (2003, 340) comparison of what he calls “formal philosophy” and “folk philosophy” might fall into this category. As Appiah (2003, 339) argues, though it is acceptable to use the term “philosophy” to refer to some of the beliefs that people across the world hold about the central questions of human life, some of these philosophies are more inquisitive than others. In this respect, though all societies in this world can be credited for having a philosophy of some kind, these philosophies differ in terms of their level of sophistication and depth of inquiry. Appiah (2003, 340) regards Western philosophy as different from “folk” philosophy by virtue of its “adversarial” character when compared to philosophies of other cultures which he considers as “accommodative.”

Western philosophy is regarded as “adversarial” because it is thought that any belief held in this philosophy ought to be subjected to thoroughgoing interrogation and warranted (Appiah 2003, 341–42). On the other hand, cultures whose philosophy is regarded as “accommodative” are, for instance, thought to be averse to questioning the internal inconsistencies of their belief systems as well as between their beliefs and those of others (Appiah 2003, 342). It is contestable that there could be human beings who are able to create a body of beliefs but are not gifted with the skills of questioning the same. It might be left to conjecture whether such human beings deserve to be called as such. However, it might turn out that the reasons why human societies improve and progress is because they put to question the systems in existence with the objective of improving their lives and the way things are done. It might be contestable to deny this attribute to thinking beings whatever their geopolitical location is. Yet, the failure to identify in other cultures what

one regards as the defining characteristics of “formal” philosophy may not at all relegate such philosophies to an inferior status when compared to *the* philosophy. The problem with such a perspective pertains to the possibility of its manipulation in order to defend the persisting morally questionable dominance of one philosophy at the expense of the indigenous one in the educational curriculum in Africa.

Any discipline or any of its segments may have their own strengths and limitations when exposed to thoroughgoing analysis. This is true of any paradigm of philosophy including so-called “formal” philosophy. One might argue that these attributes make it necessary and interesting to study and interrogate a particular discipline or any of its segments. However, when it comes to African philosophy, it appears that the identification of some of its limitations or that of some its segments automatically lead to expressions of doubt concerning its mettle to qualify as a philosophy comparable to other philosophies, such as Western philosophy.

Quite significantly, African philosophy’s possibility of attaining a significant stake in the philosophy curriculum where it has peripheral presence, or alternatively inclusion into the curriculum where it is yet to be included, becomes limited. Yet, African philosophy ought to be studied on its own terms (Amato 1997, 73). Commenting on some demands that African philosophers are expected to meet if their philosophy is to be considered as philosophy *qua* philosophy, Amato (1997, 73) asserts that “they need not accept that only by conforming to the central methodological tenets of Western philosophy do they earn the right to philosophize.” The overreliance on non-indigenous paradigms of thought as one seeks to establish whether African philosophy is an authentic philosophy or not may lead to some distortions of its very nature as a discipline.

It is no longer viable to judge African philosophy from the vantage point of another philosophy and then to pretend to be authoritative on what it is and what it is not (Amato 1997, 73). This is not to say that it cannot be questioned and brought into comparison with other philosophies, such as Western philosophy for that matter. Be that as it may, there might be need for caution in doing so because of the possibility of distortions and biased assessments given the hegemonic relations between these philosophical traditions. What is being questioned here is the somewhat deliberate failure to acknowledge that if one is to have a better understanding and appreciation of any philosophy for that matter, one needs to appeal to the existential situation that gives rise to it and how it is understood from that vantage point (Nkrumah 1964, 5).

Even though the opinions of others can be sought in terms of the import of a given philosophy, whether African or Western, an authoritative opinion can best be given by its authentic adherents who are speaking from within the geo-epistemic centre that gives rise to it. At this point, it is necessary to make reference to Masolo’s (1981, 73) thesis that

we may compare philosophy to an ecosystem. People living in a certain ecological area can be expected to have a good knowledge of the system of which they are an intimate

part and also an awareness of visible changes that take place in such an ecosystem. This would provide information for research and a source of knowledge that may provide a good starting point in developing a system of thought and even a philosophy that will better suit the local situation and the local people. Such an approach is a prerequisite in order to get any participatory research by the local people. It is only in this way that we will be able to initiate a serious and specifically African philosophy. An African philosopher, because his reflections are based on his own personal view and understanding of the experience he shares with those of his group, must take as his first class audience those from within his own area of experience. It is his duty to interpret particular experience into universal.

This seems not to be the case with African philosophy. It appears that those who are best disposed to talk and make judgements about African philosophy's import have been largely relegated to perpetual and helpless onlookers as pertains to its status as a philosophy *qua* philosophy and its suitability to be included in the educational curriculum (see Amadiume 1997, 2).

Under such circumstances, it might turn out to be challenging to enable the significant co-existence of African philosophy and other philosophies in the philosophy curriculum in Africa. Even though some African governments have taken measures to transform the educational curriculum so that it incorporates indigenous paradigms, the presence of African philosophy in the university philosophy curriculum in some African countries is limited to its treatment as merely one course. It is not treated as a subject that can be dissected into teachable courses as is the case with, for example, Western philosophy.

A case in point is that of the philosophy curriculum at universities in Zimbabwe. The current presence of African philosophy in the educational curriculum in Zimbabwe may be considered as barely marginal. It is important to state that of the universities in Zimbabwe both public and private, only University of Zimbabwe and Great Zimbabwe University teach philosophy as a discipline. However, in these two universities, African philosophy is taught as an optional course in the humanities departments (Chemhuru 2016, 425). In order to ensure that every student is introduced to African philosophy, Great Zimbabwe University has included, since 2013, a university-wide course called African Philosophy and Thought, which every student who undertakes studies at this university is supposed to take. Though such efforts by these universities are commendable, it remains worrying that African philosophy continues to be treated as a course and not as a subject, at least in terms of the manner in which it is treated in the philosophy curriculum at some universities in Zimbabwe and Africa in general (see Okeja 2012, 666).

One might argue that anyone who is concerned with the continued dominance of one philosophy, that is, Western philosophy, and does wish to see that things are transformed so that there is fair co-existence of such a philosophy and that of the indigenous people of Africa might help in such a transformative agenda. This is not an issue to do with one's

ethnicity or race. This clarification is important here because many a times some misconceive the agenda of transforming the structures of injustice as exclusively the mandate of those who are affected in the negative sense, thus excluding the beneficiaries or those privileged by such a system.⁴ As Asante (1992, 22) argues, “perspective” is not at all a biological issue. Indeed, there could be some among the people who are sympathetic to the hegemonic Western philosophy that are genuinely keen to see justice prevail and to see African philosophy growing and attaining a significant stake in the philosophy curriculum in educational institutions in Africa (see Eze 1997, 2).

Yet, there could also be some within the indigenous people of Africa who are content with the way things are in terms of the monofocal content of the philosophy curriculum in Africa and might not be concerned with the agenda of introducing African philosophy to academic institutions where it is yet to grace their philosophy curriculum or increasing its stake where it still has marginal presence. It is something to do with one’s belief system and, in this case, one’s regard for African philosophy. Connected to this thesis, one might argue that it is now inappropriate to continue to solely blame some people for maintaining the dominance of one paradigm of philosophy in the philosophy curriculum in Africa (Okeja 2012, 666). This appears to be a viable stance when one considers that African countries have attained “independence” and the indigenous people are now dominant numerically in university administration and student population in some universities in Africa. This may not be true of all African countries or universities in Africa (see Vorster and Quinn 2017, 6).

However, in the case of Zimbabwe, universities are predominantly administered by the indigenous people, and the student population is also predominantly indigenous. Yet, African philosophy still retains a peripheral presence in the university curriculum. Who then is to blame for its continued perverse treatment? It becomes curious that the philosophy curriculum has not been fundamentally changed such that it significantly incorporates African philosophy. This is despite the external signs of “independence” that African countries and, to some extent, universities in Africa seem to exhibit. Nevertheless, is it not being too expectant to consider the indigenous people of Africa who are deeply educated in Western philosophy to be the primary architects of such a fundamental change?

⁴ However, the beneficiaries of the present hegemonic structures of power may, through actions and deeds, exhibit a false sense of commitment to establish genuine parity between themselves and the dominated people (Biko 1987, 19–27). This is quite possible. Though it is still reasonable to argue that those bearing the brunt of oppression and injustice ought to define themselves and be their own liberators (Mafeje 2011, 33), there is a sense in which the struggle for liberation that would usher in an authentic, just society ought also to involve all its segments if the transformed society is still to accommodate those who, previously, have been instigators and defenders of oppression of whatever kind.

Okeja's (2012, 667) insights pertaining to Africa's challenge of moving away from exclusive dependency on Western philosophy⁵ might be helpful here. In reference to the plight of African philosophy in the educational curriculum, Okeja (2012, 667) argues that one cannot give what one does not have:

So, since those saddled with philosophy education in universities in Africa were themselves educated in the Western tradition of philosophy, they can only be expected to give what they have to their students, which means, educating them squarely in the Western tradition of philosophy that they received themselves.

On the face of it, this is a convincing thesis, especially when one considers the lip service given to African philosophy in the educational curriculum despite the fact that African countries have attained "independence" and seem to be in control of the educational institutions.

Yet one might differ with Okeja (2012, 667) on this point and argue that one may indeed give what one has been taught *not* to "have." The point here is that the education that one receives, even though alien to one's lived experiences, might spur one to see things differently and depart from what one has been taught to "have." Here, one may have in mind prominent African philosophers who, it is possible, could have been, first and foremost, initiated into Western philosophy but have become the dominant voices up to the present time on the necessity of changing the educational curriculum in Africa. Names such as Kenyatta (1961), Busia (1964), Nkrumah (1964), Fafunwa (1967), Adams (1975), Mazrui (2002) and Ramose (1999) come to mind. So, in a way, those who have borne the brunt of being educated along the lines of the Western epistemological paradigm can as well fight for their own liberation and the liberation of others facing similar situations. The article now returns to the imperative for the inclusion or increasing the stake of African philosophy in the educational curriculum in Africa.

The inclusion of African philosophy in the philosophy curriculum ought not to be seen as in need of compliance for compliance's sake. This is important to note given the political pressure that universities are facing to transform and to ensure that part of the content that is taught is derived from the philosophy of the indigenous people of Africa; the tendency might project an external but cosmetic show of compliance.

5 In similar fashion, Serequeberhan (2012, 11) articulates the problem of Africa's dependency on the imperial Western modes of thought when he avers that "to be a Westernized African in today's post-colonial Africa means ultimately to be marked/branded—in one way or another—by the historical experience of European colonialism." However, Africa is yet to fully emerge from the spectre of colonial domination to the extent that it can be considered as authentically existing in the "post-colonial" era. So, the term "postcolonial" ought to be used with caution partly because discipleship to Western philosophy in constructing African philosophy, by conscription and less by choice, is still very much alive in present times (Yai 1977, 3).

As a result, the noble call for the transformation of the philosophy curriculum in Africa may simply give in to political pressure and lead to changes that lack the seriousness that is required to enable the authentic co-existence of Western philosophy and African philosophy. In this light, it is reasonable to argue that the education system that has been used to create and sustain the hegemonic relations between philosophies might need to be transformed if ultimately the transformation of the philosophy curriculum is to realistically enable the co-existence of philosophies (see Ramose 2016, 551). This may help to deconstruct the kind of thinking that has led some people into thinking that African philosophy is inferior when compared to Western philosophy. Conscious of the fact that education can be used to produce two diametrically opposed outcomes, that is to oppress and to liberate, a worthy suggestion could be that, in the case of countries in Africa, the philosophy curricula ought to be transformed so that they educate the learners about the reality that there are some other philosophies besides Western philosophy and that these philosophies are authentic and real in their own right. This discussion is pursued below.

Contesting the Dominance of Western Philosophy

The current low regard for African philosophy in terms of its assumed lack of quality to deserve a significant stake in the philosophy curriculum in Africa might demand a change of a fundamental nature, not only in terms of the philosophy curriculum, but also of the thinking of the people entrusted with the design and administration of the educational curriculum as well the institutions of learning. So, basically, two points of discussion are identified here. One is the need to refocus the perception of people in terms of how they regard African philosophy in comparison to other philosophies, such as Western philosophy. Two, is the need to drastically change the philosophy curriculum in Africa so that African philosophy constitutes a fair share of the curriculum content. The need to change perceptions engrained in people's minds might appear farfetched and difficult. Be that as it may, it is reasonable to think that this is an important and fundamental step in changing perceptions pertaining to the assumed incompetence of the indigenous people of Africa to produce paradigms of thought that can compete with those produced elsewhere on equal footing. But, how can this be done?

The suggestion could be that instruction on the historical contribution of the indigenous people of Africa to the philosophical canon may assist people in realising the problem with the current constitution of the philosophy curriculum in Africa that appears to sideline African philosophy as if it is non-existent or of insufficient quality to merit a significant stake in the curriculum. Indeed, this requires changing educational systems that retain Western philosophy as their organising paradigm. Thought-provoking academic works that show evidence of the existence of philosophy from indigenous African sources, since time immemorial, have and are being published (Bell 1989, 363; Masolo 2010, 1–5; Oladipo 1995, 27). An objective reading of these works might help in deconstructing untested claims that the indigenous people of Africa do not have a philosophy, and if they do, it is inferior to Western philosophy.

However, one can argue that the existence of such academic works on its own may not translate into the acceptance of the claims or the conclusions that they make, and eventually a change in the way people think about African philosophy when it is compared to Western philosophy. Even if such an option has its own flaws, it might help people to know that the idea that Africa lacks the intellectual ability to fashion a philosophy from within itself is, and has always been, rationally indefensible and may not be the viable basis for sidelining African philosophy from the philosophy curriculum. Perhaps a change of the philosophy curriculum in Africa so that it incorporates African philosophy or increases its presence may be of help in this endeavour.

A fairly large corpus of literature on African philosophy is already in existence (Masolo 2010, 5–6). It is quite promising that some works on African philosophy, especially from indigenous African philosophers, continue to be produced. Nevertheless, the clarion call remains for the continued research and production of research materials that genuinely speak to African philosophy. In other words, there is a need to ensure that these works published on African philosophy are written from within the terms of the indigenous people of Africa. African philosophy ought to proceed on its own terms (see Eze 2015, 413).

This is not an attempt to prevent other paradigms of philosophy from commenting on or entering into dialogue with African philosophy, but it is a submission that if African philosophy is to retain its character as distinct from others in some respects, it ought to be written and understood on its own terms (Hountondji 2009, 1). This requirement may not be limited to African philosophy alone. Indeed, the best people to write about, for example, Indian philosophy, are its adherents. The same can surely be said of African philosophy or Western philosophy. It might be taken as generally unacceptable if the indigenous people of Africa were to become the dominant voice on the import of Western philosophy, with people from this geopolitical centre taking a peripheral role. The same can be true of African philosophy. It becomes unexpected for people from elsewhere to pretend to be the authentic voice on what African philosophy is or ought to be.

The reason for insisting that the indigenous people of Africa ought to be at the forefront of speaking about African philosophy largely stems from the history of attempts by people from elsewhere to speak authoritatively about African philosophy in terms of what it is or what it ought to be. Biases and distortions are likely to creep in if one speaks of a system of thought of a particular people that one seeks to dominate and perhaps demean. This might be true of the way African philosophy has been or continues to be conceived of, especially from within the Western tradition. The tendency is to portray it in such a way that it appears to be of inferior quality albeit on alien terms. It is on these grounds that the representation of what African philosophy is or ought to be may not be entrusted to those who are not its adherents. With this point in mind, one would concur with Mungwini (2016, 397) that

philosophy is grounded in human experiences, and experiences are always bound to time and place. The human ability to apprehend different realities differently is at the centre of the whole question surrounding the quest for identity in philosophy. To ignore the cultural location and historical exigencies out of which philosophies arise is to pay lip service to the very idea and meaning of philosophy.

This position may be stretched a little bit further to argue that the acceptance of the reality that there are different philosophies which originate from correspondingly diverse cultural locations (Okeja 2012, 665) ought to translate to the acceptance of the fact that there are different sets of people who can be entrusted to speak authoritatively about these respective philosophies. The quest for the indigenous people of Africa to speak of African philosophy on their terms is basically intended to create conditions that may ultimately lead to its liberation from the dominance of the narrative from Western philosophy. However, by this claim, the article is not denying the fact that a philosophy originating from a particular geo-epistemic centre may, though the passage of time, attain some level of transcultural relevance (Okeja 2012, 665).

It may not be an overstatement to say that African philosophy has endured the problem of being judged and understood using an alien paradigm of philosophy. Its liberation may surely require a change of paradigm upon which it is constructed and understood. This change entails abandoning the habit of constructing and judging African philosophy on non-indigenous or alien terms. In this light, the liberation of African philosophy may be incomplete without ensuring that African philosophy speaks on its own terms. This is actually an expression of doubt that African philosophy that is constructed and understood on alien terms would qualify as authentic African philosophy. As Yai (1977, 17) suggests, African philosophers ought to abandon the speculative or abstract and elitist character of doing philosophy, which some of them have internalised through training at Western universities, and seek to construct an African philosophy which derives from and resonates with the aspirations of the masses. In other words, African philosophy ought to be grounded on “the spontaneous philosophy of the masses” (Yai 1977, 11). The reasoning here is that dependency on alien paradigms of thought will not deliver authentic liberation in matters of knowledge production to the indigenous people of Africa (Mazrui 2002, 70–1). The article now proceeds to consider the possibility of the co-existence of Western philosophy and African philosophy in the philosophy curriculum in Africa.

“Claiming a Stake in the Philosophy Curriculum”

It is necessary as a starting point here to make reference to Ramose’s (2003, 140) submission that the curriculum is an important terrain in the struggle for the transformation of the educational paradigm in Africa. The point that Ramose (2003, 140) raises here is important in defending the necessity for including African philosophy in the philosophy curriculum in educational institutions in Africa or increasing its stake where it already has a marginal presence. The curriculum has remained a site of contestation in

some African countries, especially as they try to come to terms with the fate of their philosophies, which, since conquest, have remained largely on the sidelines.

As Apple (1993, 222) argues, “the curriculum is never simply a neutral assemblage of knowledge, somehow appearing in the texts and classrooms of a nation. It is always part of a selective tradition, someone’s selection, some group’s vision of legitimate knowledge.” It is largely uncontested that the educational curriculum in African countries has remained predominantly an avenue to disseminate alien modes of thought (Ramosé 2016, 552). The ones who have the exclusive power to manage the educational curriculum surely may, through their own discretion or that of their principals, determine what ought to be included in it and the sources of such content. Normally, the content of the curriculum is disposed to promote a certain agenda: the agenda of those in power or perhaps those who control the educational system, that is, the hegemonic Western world.

It might not be expected of those who control the educational curriculum to design it in such a way that it undermines their present and future privileges (see Mills 1998, 101; Vice 2010, 325). By this, the reference is to those people who feel that the present philosophy curriculum in universities in Africa seems to best serve their interests. One such privilege could be the fact that when one has studied Western philosophy, it enables one to be recognised and accepted in and outside Africa as a philosopher *qua* philosopher for the purposes of employment and some intellectual engagements. This is true because this philosophy has attained planetary acclaim by means that have, at times, been subject to contestation.

The lure of employment as a philosopher across the world might even tempt those African countries that have attained some level of “independence” to retain the way things are for the reason that this philosophy makes their citizens somewhat “global” citizens. However, the interest here is not with how a certain philosophy assures its adherents of employment opportunities across this world. The interest concerns the problem of maintaining the hegemony of one philosophy in the educational curriculum in Africa. Though it might sound fashionable to claim, for example, that it is in keeping with the virtues of standardisation to portray one philosophy as deserving planetary acceptance (see Janz 1997, 222), one might be inclined to think that it is realistically in keeping with the virtue of justice for the historical contribution of the indigenous people of Africa to the philosophical canon to be recognised and accepted by way of including African philosophy or increasing its stake in the educational curriculum in Africa.

The overt and covert denial of the authenticity of African philosophy as philosophy *qua* philosophy that deserves inclusion or a significant stake in the philosophy curriculum in Africa might hinder efforts to correct some misconceptions that have sustained morally objectionable hegemonic relations between peoples. Yet, the present situation demands the authentic liberation of the philosophy of the indigenous people of Africa so that it can

speak on its own terms and without hegemonic prescription from elsewhere on what it is or how it ought to be understood.

In the spirit of authentic liberation of the philosophy curriculum in Africa, it is necessary to ensure that the liberated African philosophy then co-exists with other philosophies such as Western philosophy. In other words, as an exigency of justice, the co-existence of the liberated African philosophy and Western philosophy, for example, would then constitute authentic transformation which this article defends. This could be taken as a bold step towards changing the philosophy curriculum in Africa that continues to celebrate Western philosophy as the basis of constructing the educational systems of countries in Africa at the expense of their own paradigm of philosophy. However, one may argue that the challenge that African philosophy faces in present times may not only be confined to ensuring that it is constructed on indigenous paradigms of thought. Even when this is corrected by way of liberating African philosophy, there is still the challenge that the validation of what qualifies as a philosophy worth noting and studying at academic institutions seems to remain the preserve of those sympathetic to the dominant Western philosophical paradigm.

This is expected especially in the light of the fact that some of the people entrusted to transform the philosophy curriculum in Africa so that it enables the significant presence of African philosophy in the philosophy curriculum, would have first and foremost studied Western philosophy in formal educational institutions (see Anthony 2014, 86). The temptation might be to then fashion and understand African philosophy on the terms of Western philosophy (Okeja 2012, 667). The reason being that what defines them as philosophers is the fact that they would have studied Western philosophy, perhaps with the belief that it is the only authentic one in existence. This is especially true given the character of the dominant educational paradigm in Africa, and Zimbabwe in particular, that seems to celebrate the assumed superiority of Western philosophy at the expense of African philosophy. In this light, some may not see the need to change the present situation.

Here, reference is made both to some among the indigenous people of Africa and some people from within the Western tradition who may have some doubts about the status of African philosophy as a philosophy that deserves to be treated with due respect as one among other philosophies. Yet, the authentic liberation of the philosophy curriculum in Africa that is defended in this article ought to lead to a just state of affairs whereby African philosophy is included and becomes a significant part of the philosophy curriculum. In fact, it appears viable to allow the co-existence of African philosophy and Western philosophy in the philosophy curriculum in Africa (Metz 2016, 490). It might turn out to be an enriching educational experience for the learners if they are educated on the philosophy they consider their “own” and other philosophies from elsewhere. This could be a possibility that is yearning for realistic actualisation.

However, this might become a realistic success if those who are sympathetic to African philosophy's present predicament and the necessity for it to grow and attain significant presence in the philosophy curriculum also play an active role to turn its fortunes. This is especially urgent given that in the present world order, institutions of learning are receiving learners from diverse cultures and geopolitical centres. For that reason, it would be in line with the exigency of justice for the philosophy curriculum in Africa and elsewhere to allow the co-existence of diverse philosophies from diverse cultures of this world.

Concluding Remarks

In the light of the foregoing, it can be concluded that African philosophy has the potential to grow into a philosophy that could eventually attain a significant place in the philosophy curricula in Africa if those who are genuinely concerned with its present demotion to an inferior philosophy actively participate in its development and dissemination through the educational curriculum. Here, one might have in mind those people who genuinely want to see African philosophy reclaim its status as the principal philosophy that informs the lives of the indigenous people of Africa, and to become a significant part of the philosophy curriculum in Africa. This is necessary because, now, it would appear as if African philosophy is treated as a perverse philosophy and the promise of its inclusion in the philosophy curriculum arouses some feelings of disapproval within certain segments of the human race. This is despite efforts that are being made to increase the stock of literature on African philosophy. However, as stated earlier, African philosophy ought to grow and flourish within the existential situations of the indigenous people of Africa without appeal to external categories. This is necessary if this philosophy is to retain its character as African philosophy. If the transformation of the philosophy curriculum in Africa is to encompass a change of a fundamental nature, then the liberated philosophy of the indigenous people of Africa ought to co-exist with Western philosophy and others.

It would appear convincing that a liberated philosophy of the indigenous people of Africa deserves a significant place in the transformed philosophy curriculum. Judging by the somewhat general acceptance of the need to increase the presence of African philosophy in the philosophy curriculum or to introduce it in universities where it is yet to be taught, one would be tempted to think that this is a foregone conclusion. Yet, thought and practice might turn out to be two different worlds altogether. Indeed, patronising statements pertaining to the commitment to include African philosophy or to increase its stake in the philosophy curriculum might be quite common in institutions of learning. In reality, not much may be done to put this noble idea into practice. Perhaps it is necessary to have some committed people within the structures of learning institutions who are prepared to assist in including or increasing the presence of African philosophy in the philosophy curriculum. However, this is only possible if there are some, especially in the academic institutions in Africa, who consider African philosophy as a philosophy which finally has to claim a significant place in the philosophy curriculum in Africa. The overall

purpose would be to establish an impartial philosophy curriculum that gives, in its content and focus, space to diverse philosophies including African philosophy.

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