

Non-reviewed contribution

## Post-script to “Racism and the Marginal(isation) of African Philosophy”

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### Introduction

The journey to publish an article, “Racism and the Marginality of African Philosophy” (Dladla 2017, *Phronimon* volume 18) in South Africa—where I believe it should be read—proved to be a long struggle. This experience has deepened the research and understanding of issues treated in the article ever since it was written. It has given me practical experience in addition to what was explored in theoretical and historical terms in the article under discussion.

As if to corroborate the point of the article, to which this is a post-script, namely that African philosophy is not simply “marginal” but “marginalised” in South Africa, the article (Dladla 2017) was rejected no fewer than eight times. The rejections were by two journals, the only other English-speaking dedicated philosophy journals which are regularly published in South Africa. It is worth mentioning that both these journals claim to be “generalist” in orientation and scope.

We will now turn to the reasoning which was the basis for the paper’s rejection. The journals concerned are numbered chronologically in accordance with the priority of the rejections.

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UNISA   
university  
of south africa  
PRESS

Phronimon  
<https://upjournals.co.za/index.php/Phronimon>  
Volume 18 | 2017 | pp. 249-255

<https://doi.org/10.17159/2413-3086/3761>  
Online ISSN 2413-3086  
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## **Journal No. 1**

### **Reviewer 1**

The first rejection had its basis on two reviews. However, one of the reviewers of the manuscript did not submit any report detailing his/her reasoning at all (the editor did not provide any reason for this). Nevertheless, the reviewer rejected the article unconditionally.

### **Reviewer 2**

This reviewer cited as basis for rejection a spelling mistake of the word “disseizin” (which was indeed correct in this context); what is clear is that the reviewer did not bother to use an appropriate dictionary before arriving at this judgment. Cited as well was the author’s failure to define African philosophy. The author reasoned that this would be unnecessary—in keeping with the argument of the article—since a definition for the multiple use of Western philosophy was not required by the reviewer. Another reason given was the failure of the author to discuss the work of Oyèwùmì and others. The author, while having the greatest admiration for Oyèwùmì and her work, believed that a discussion of it would fall outside the scope of the article. The author was, therefore, doubtful if the reviewer who had been assigned was in fact adequately familiar with African philosophy and the Critical Philosophy of Race, which are two main subject components of the article.

## **Journal No. 2**

The other journal submitted the article to no less than seven reviewers (six delivered rejections). The reviewers cited a variety of factors including the un-philosophicality of the article (it was recommended for submission to either a journal of education, history or sociology). A reviewer objected to the “inappropriate moral high-ground of the author” and the apparent “gossipy nature of the article.” The author did, however, take care that any references to individuals or publications were corroborated by documentation or pre-existing and published studies. (The review reports are available at <https://unisa-za.academia.edu/NdumisoDladla>.)

The e-mail containing the review reports included reassurance from the editor that the majority of reviewers chosen were African (not African philosophers). He chose to ignore the author’s responding inquiry, since he had been so kind to disclose the racial identity credentials of my reviewers, about whether Asian reviewers were also sought by the journal

for Asian authors and European reviewers for European authors. Given the nature of the “review comments” received, my concern was more about the reviewers’ academic specialisation in the fields which they were tasked with reviewing.

The editor declined an invitation to explain the reason for disclosing that the “blind peer-reviewers” were majority Africans. This left the author to speculate about the answer independently. The author imagines the editor was trying to assure the author that there was not any racist motivation behind the review and rejection process. The effect of the editor’s intervention, however, could not have had a more different result.

In the section below I will cite and explore some amongst the most interesting review comments.

### **Reviewer 1**

The reviewer wrote that the article must be rejected outright and then provided the following reasons:

The Authors are unnecessarily quarrelsome. There is a difference between engaging in robust debate and seeking to pick up fights or to complain bitterly about what one considers to be injustice. The Authors (since they claim to be some “we”) are firmly of the latter brand. The style of writing with excessively combative rhetoric is hardly academic. This is after all an academic journal and in spite of the Authors’ deep seated complaints arguments still have greater weight than this annoying rhetoric.

As with all review comments, the author considered the reviewer’s comments thoroughly and sincerely. It is precisely given the reviewer’s charge that the tone of the author was excessively emotional, that an indication of the academic relevance of the “annoyingness” of the author’s purported rhetoric was sorely missed.

This reviewer was also clearly offended (on behalf of UCT philosophy) and appears to have found the author’s criticism of them too unkind; this despite its reliance on published historical research and its extensive analysis to corroborate my arguments regarding the ethical implications of some of the activities there. He wrote regarding this point:

Criticism must be restrained in order to retain moral authority. When criticism becomes so personalised as the concerted attack on UCT philosophy and some individuals in it, it has lost academic authority. It appears as if the Authors believe that they operate on some moral high ground that gives them the vantage point to be snotty about whoever fails to fit their paradigm.

This comment is derisory for all the academic reasons the reviewer pretends to reject the article on the basis of.

The reviewer's final comment is that a better version of this article belongs elsewhere but not in the self-identified generalist journal for which he is performing the review. He writes on this point:

... this paper does not belong to [name of journal]. A re-worked and decently argued paper would be commendable in some other journal of the history of philosophy or sociology or education. If the Authors want to keep their article as it is, they should look for those journals where snobbery and rhetoric are highly sought "academic traits."

### **Reviewer 2**

Reviewer 2 restricted his/her comments to the poor grammar and what was found to be a lack of coherence or quality argument in the manuscript.

### **Reviewer 3**

Reviewer 3, after saying that the paper should be rejected unconditionally, writes:

There is not much "philosophical" content and juice in the arguments presented by the author; the arguments he/she gives present themselves as more historical, political and sociological than philosophical. This probably suggests a different medium or forum for the paper. Perhaps, it will be more appropriate for a journal in politics, political theory or African studies than a journal in philosophy such as [name of the journal].

## Some Reflections Regarding the Review

It is noteworthy that despite the outright rejection within the South African philosophical community on the basis, amongst other things, of disciplinary unsuitability, a German version of the article in question was accepted without request for even the slightest revision after peer review by the well-respected Austrian philosophy journal *Polylog*. It was published as *Südafrikas Kolonialphilosophie. Rassismus und die Marginalisierung der Afrikanischen Philosophie* (Dladla and Delpont 2015).

In addition to the author's limited but pleasurable experience in European academic publishing, the author has attended a conference on African Philosophy in Europe since the advent of these reviews. What the author found was seriousness in the study of and research on African philosophy and a knowledgeable ability among colleagues there that is starkly different from what one is used to in most South African universities. The author sincerely appreciated the excellent questions and bringing to light new sources and developments by European researchers who are not simply attempting to comply with "transformation" and score government subsidies, but who take genuine intellectual interest in our discipline. It was surprising to learn that many even had a working command of some African languages in relation to their specific research interests.

The ignorance of white South Africa concerning all things African (except the Big Five and fauna) does not need much argument. It was, after all, at a time when white South Africans enjoyed greater juridical and political power than even now that they designated themselves "Europeans" by law. One can hardly find (even after four centuries) white South Africans who speak any indigenous languages. Where they are found it is considered such a rare and wondrous sight that television adverts and series are made to showcase this to the country. Why should anyone be surprised that these attitudes of a commitment to ignorance are not confined to the African languages at all?

What is most concerning is that, at least in the case of isiZulu or seSotho literature for instance, an ignoramus of the language and subject is not expected to teach it, review academic papers on it for publication and examine post-graduate dissertations on it. In the case of African philosophy, however, that is precisely what has happened and is happening. People who have shown no interest in the subject, who have not trained formally within it

and have not themselves been supervised or examined by African philosophers, are now supervising and deciding the fate of young researchers interested in the subject.

### **Conclusion: The Future of Philosophy in South Africa**

Upon receiving the seven reviewers' comments from the second journal, I shared them with a respected elder and colleague, who wisely counselled me:

I am delighted that you are now into the politics of publication. It is not free from bias, misinterpretation and even outright spitefulness. Of course, lots will make you smile and be cheerful, for example, the reviewer's unpardonable innocence that your use of "we" means that there is more than one author involved. Why did the reviewer not even suspect that you were using the academic we? Yes, some reviewers will read attentively and those deserve to be taken seriously. But such are few and far between. I found it strange that the editors found it necessary to state that the majority reviewers were "African." Seems the [name of institution] disease that "Africans" are better reviewed by "Africans" is rather widespread: a disease that can hardly escape the charge of racism since it leaves open the questions:

- i. Are Africans only competent to judge Africans, even though their competence is decided mainly by non-Africans who teach and examine them?
- ii. Is it fair that non-Africans judge Africans twice, first when they are students and, second when they are authors in their own right?
- iii. Who judges the non-Africans as authors?

It is precisely because of our conviction that the status quo in South African philosophy is unacceptable and cannot be allowed to continue that a number of younger philosophers from our generation—with the support of some elders—decided to take action. In January 2017 we withdrew our membership from the Philosophical Society of South Africa and in August of the same year inaugurated the new Azanian Philosophical Society. We hope in time the society will grow into a vehicle we may use to bring about the liberation of philosophy in this land. It is our hope that we can build a future for philosophy in South Africa which we can be proud to leave to our students and the world—not simply because it is good but because it is liberated and just.

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