

PETER J. KING AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE PHILOSOPHICAL CANON: AN AFRICANIST APPRECIATION

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KEY CONCEPTS

African philosophy; canonicity; epistemology; Eurocentricism; universalism; transformation

ABSTRACT

From a perspective of an advocacy for a multi-culturally sensitive epistemology, as well as from the context of the politics of decision-making on which thinkers get inaugurated into a community of what is regarded as standard-bearers of what passes as philosophy, Peter King's *One hundred philosophers: The life and work of the world's greatest thinkers* (2004) is instructive. He creatively breaks the boundaries of the traditional canonical criteria of Western philosophy and installs into a singular chronological compendium thinkers from Asia, Africa, Europe and the Americas as philosophers whose works set the frontiers of philosophic erudition. Our critical observation is that King profoundly subverts the myth and challenges the doctrine of positing European thinkers as bulwarks of a universally superior epistemic system. Drawing from the amply documented protestation of African philosophy against the supremacist tendencies of the hegemonic Western academy, as well as from Walter Mignolo's critical framework on the proclivity of a colonial epistemology to masquerade as universal, this essay critically highlights the historico-cultural mechanisms whereby the Western philosophical tradition sets itself as the arbiter and universal measure of what passes as philosophy, or a philosopher. King's book is presented as a commendable negation of this tendency and as a demonstration of a culturally equitable and *pluriversal* (as opposed to the Eurocentric *universal*) approach to the recognition of philosophical genius. The essay is a contribution to the



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demands for the transformation of the conceptualisation of philosophy in the post-colonial academy.

INTRODUCTION

In the 1983 revised second edition of the *Dictionary of philosophy* (Flew, Speake [1979] 1983), an entry on “Indian philosophy” reads, in part:

Although Indian thought developed in an intellectual climate which in many ways was different from, and almost certainly not influenced by the ancient Greek world, abundant and often striking similarities with Western philosophical thought justify the application of the term ‘philosophy’ to it. (167)

This statement simultaneously implies and asserts that the measure on which any philosophical tradition or philosophical output of a given thinker is to be considered as “philosophy” is dependent on the degree at which such intellection is based on, derived from, or related to the Hellenistic tradition as appropriated in Western philosophy.

In addition to this culturally-biased tendency at determining what is acceptable as philosophy, in philosophy, like in all scientific disciplines, academic publishing has a profound effect on the establishment of the contours of a given academic discourse as well as a body of authorities, that is, on the formulation of a canon. What is to some degree peculiar to the discipline of philosophy, however, is that the publication of methodically compiled encyclopedic profiles of selected philosophers, as well as subjective accounts of the history of philosophy (all historical accounts are essentially subjective narrations), has an added defining impact on the validation of this canonicity. This essay is a polemical appreciation of one such deliberate assemblage of philosophers by Peter J. King in his 2004 *One hundred philosophers: The life and work of the world’s greatest thinkers* against the critical backdrop of a theoretical framework that questions the self-enthronement of the Western epistemic tradition as the universal norm of what passes for philosophy or what kind of thinker merits the title of “philosopher”.

Our polemic is inspired by King’s (2004) stance in breaching the ideological strictures and a cultural subjectivism that traditionally dictate that only academic thinkers from Europe and North America who excel in the idiom and agenda set by the Hellenistic tradition are affirmed as philosophers.¹ He installs into a single chronological compendium thinkers from Asia, Africa, Europe and the Americas as philosophers whose works set the frontiers of philosophic erudition. Our disquisition is thus about the politics of canonicity in modern philosophy, and being from a perspective that is focused on defending and promoting the cause of Africa, an

1 In a research correspondence with the author, Peter King confirmed that his “challenge to the accepted canon was a very conscious one” Email 2014/10/21.

Africanist perspective, it appreciates King's methodology as a creation of space, a bibliographical tradition, within which African thought may be encouraged to thrive.

King's (2004) publication inversely corroborates a standing critique from African philosophy which decries the fact that epistemic presuppositions and precepts stemming from the logic-centric Hellenistic tradition, whose hegemony is sponsored by a history of European colonial conquest, are set as the basis of authority and criteria on what constitutes the global canon on the academic philosophical curriculum, and on the accordance of the status of "philosopher" to thinkers in general. Thinkers from the non-Western intellectual milieu have forever to battle that the indigenous thought systems and cultural genres they need to employ to express themselves render them tolerated guests within an elite community of those anointed by the academy as philosophers. To fit in, one has to prove an affinity with, and proficiency in the European intellectual heritage, Western philosophical thought, as well as a religious fidelity to the established academic lingua franca.

It is worth noting that the infamous canonisation that shaped Christian dogma at the price of heretics being burnt at stake, and the ritualistic burning of books that lasted well into the seventeenth century, has its precedents in philosophy. The leitmotif of Plato's *Apology* (c. 490BCE) is canon, orthodoxy and persecution. Socrates was executed on a charge of being a member of the Sophist school of thought that had fallen foul of the orthodoxy of the hegemonic Athenian philosophy. About a hundred years earlier, the Crotonians had burnt the local Pythagorean School, and proponents of the wisdom of Pythagoras were declared heretics (Russell [1945] 1961: 50). Based on the amply documented critical observations on the treatment of African philosophy over the past three decades by the hegemonic Western academy (e.g. Okeja 2012: 664-673; Ramose, in Coetzee & Roux 2002:1-8), it is easy to sympathise with the tribulations of the Pythagoreans, Sophists, Pelagians, and the myriad of intellectual movements that have been persecuted and marginalised throughout the history of the evolution of the Western system of thought and ethics.

The point of departure of the theoretical framework of our polemic is a concern that the manner in which this European intellectual heritage is being promoted is calculated and deliberate, and as such, its claim of universal normativity is *aggressively* globalistic. By globalism we understand the self-imposition of a nationalistically specific cultural inventory that masquerades as being essentially global in character (James & Steger 2010: i-xv). Aggressive globalism is a further aberration when such cultural inventory or epistemic system does not only masquerade as essentially global and universal, but as the paragon and arbiter of what must be acceptable as good and proper for all humanity.

The anti-globalism perspective that underlies our appreciation of King's endeavour diverges, in particular, from Kwasi Wiredu's *Cultural universals and particulars: An African perspective* (1996). Wiredu is seized with the mission of seeking to isolate and demonstrate the modality of conceptual universals

that transcends all cultural particulars in the course of his argument that African traditional thought possesses some such universal philosophical forms (Wiredu 1996: 21-24, 34). The politico-historical genesis of the decision on the accordance of a universal status of these philosophic forms is not questioned. On this score, we are expected to be less perturbed at the preponderance of philosophical concepts from certain geo-ethnic centres on the grounds that what they seek to express has in its essence some universal form that covers our rationality as well. His analysis fails to emphasise, from “an African perspective”, the hostile and marginalising *status quo* wherein the particularity of European cultures, due to historical economic forces, has become dominant in the global knowledge industry. Beyond Wiredu’s attempts at constructing a case for some common ground, our standpoint is critical of – to use Barry Hallen’s words – “the West that ethnocentrically flaunts that culture’s philosophical priorities as things that should be universal” (Hallen 2009: 50).

Our argument will be that the colonial history of the whole of the European intellectual inventory (religion, philosophy) does not readily and necessarily make the latter the *conditio sine qua non* of a progressive and peaceful global community, as implied in Wiredu’s disquisition on human rights in Africa (1996: 64), based from his belief on “the possibility of universal canons of thought and action” (Wiredu 1996: 1). Westernism has historically been promoted, and continues to be promoted through the destruction, exclusion and marginalisation of other knowledge systems and cultural inventories. In Africa, the triumph of Eurocentricism has arguably amounted to what can only be described as the epistemicide of indigenous knowledge systems, both philosophic and scientific. From an epistemological standpoint, the imperialistic outreach of colonial cultural inventories is an intrinsically and intractably unjust project, at least, along the lines of Miranda Fricker’s exposition of *Epistemic injustice*, whereby non-Western intellectuals may, according to her scheme, be viewed as constant receivers of a “prejudicially deflated degree of credibility from [their Western] hearers” (2008:17).

The fulcrum of our claim on the globalistic proclivities of Western philosophy as expressed in the patterns of canon-setting academic publication, thus seeks to take the traditional critique of Eurocentricism in African philosophy a step further from the work of scholars such as Tsenay Serequeberhan (see Coetzee & Roux 2002:64-78) by drawing, in part, from the conceptual framework of the Argentine literary critic, Walter D. Mignolo. His work and that of his Latin American collaborators (cf. Dussel 1985; Grosfoguel 2007; Quinjani 2007) has patently demythologised the claims and assumption of the universality of Western thought forms, and exposed the latent political and culturo-epistemic consequences and intentions of these claims to universality and standard-bearer status (Mignolo 2011: 10-16; 2012: *ad passim*). In line with our conceptualisation of globalism, Mignolo accounts on how Western cultural inventories, that is, languages, religious and philosophical assumptions assume themselves not only to be superior, but as also inherently universalistic in

nature, to the extent that even in this era of a globalising world, the ethos accorded international conventionality by the mass-media and academia continue to be European and North American.²

Deriving from the foregoing largely Latin American critique, as well as an African academic experience, a counter-hegemonic conceptual framework as exemplified by the character of King's (2004) book, is advocated. We argue for epistemic plurality, inclusivity and equality. King's work is posited as an example of this transformational ethos.

THE ETHNIC ORTHODOXY OF WESTERN PHILOSOPHY

In the "preface" of the *Dictionary of philosophy*, referred to earlier, the editors (Flew, Speake 1983), given that this was the second edition of the publication, defend the original Eurocentric criteria on the selection of its entries with the following argument:

Very little attention is given to anything that is philosophical only in the more popular interpretation. This, and not European parochialism, is why the classics of Chinese philosophy get such short shrift. The *Analects* of Confucius and the *Book of Mencius* are both splendid of their kind. But neither sage shows much sign of interest in the sort of questions thrashed out in *Theaetetus* (xi).

The dialogue in Plato's *Theaetetus* is set as the standard-bearer against which Chinese agonies and achievements into the vagaries of human knowledge, which is Plato's focus in *Theaetetus*, are to be judged. The Western *episteme* is here posited as the paragon of philosophical content and epistemological erudition. In this justification of the preferential adoption of the epistemology of Plato's Socrates as the criterion for the canon on epistemology, in essence, Flew and Speake (1983) are claiming that the Western cultural *modus cogens* is more advanced than the Chinese one, and of a superior quality in deciphering, judging, and resolving the dilemmas of human life. This condescending universalism that views and judges the world against the putative superiority of European traditions is emblematic of the discipline of philosophy, and is generally much harsher in its judgment of African systems of thought. Flew and Speake (1983) sound like Immanuel Kant when he wrote in *Observations on the feeling of the beautiful and sublime* (1764) that:

If we cast a fleeting glance over the other parts of the world, we find the Arab the noblest man in the Orient...he is hospitable, generous and truthful...if the Arabs, so to speak are the Spaniards of the Orient, similarly the Persians are the French of Asia. They are good poets, courteous and of fairly fine taste...The Japanese could in a way be regarded as Englishmen

2 Mignolo [n.d.], in "Geopolitics of sensing and knowing: On (De)Coloniality, border thinking, and epistemic disobedience" (European Institute for Progressive Cultural Policies) www.epiccp.net.

of this part of the world, but hardly in any other quality than their resoluteness...The Negroes of Africa [on the other hand] have by nature no feeling that rises above the trifling (in Eze 1997: 54, 55).

The *Dictionary of philosophy's* (Flew, Speake 1983) bibliographical frame of evaluating epistemic cultures against the standard of Western sentimentalities, in the same tradition of Kantian social anthropology, is representative of the mainstream view in the dominant Euro-North American academic and publishing world. This frame, in turn, has had a profound impact on the question of whom and which works qualify to be titled “classic” and as indicators of a “world-class” philosophy curriculum. In the year 2012 two books were published in London with a quest of presenting a singular compendium of those identified as the thinkers who contemporary thinking humanity must regard as the producers of the most profound ideas that continue to shape our lives and world. The first of these canon-forming publications is Stephen Trombley’s (2012) *Fifty thinkers who shaped the modern world*. The second is Phillip Stokes’s (2012) *Philosophy: One hundred essential thinkers*, which according to its jacket promotion “introduces one hundred of the world’s greatest philosophers”.

Trombley’s fifty thinkers who shaped the modern world are led by Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) and have Julia Kristeva (1941-), the Bulgarian-French feminist philosopher on the fiftieth spot. According to Trombley’s (2012) selection, not a single mind outside of Europe and the United States of America merits a place in the top fifty that have shaped the modern world. On the other hand, Stokes’s (2012) *One hundred of the world’s greatest philosophers* who have produced “the ideas that have shaped our world”, predictably, starts off with Thales of Miletus, and ends with American logician, Willard Van Orman Quine (1908-2000). Without a declaration anywhere that the book’s self-prescribed scope is exclusively on the Western philosophical tradition and academy, thus maintaining a pretence of encyclopedic universality, Stokes could not in *Anno Domini* 2012 find any Chinese, Indian or African philosopher worthy of recognition for a contribution to the ideas that have shaped or are continuing to shape our world. Even Kwame Nkrumah, a published graduate philosopher who incarnated his ideas into the presidency of the first African nation to achieve freedom from colonial rule, setting-off a continental inspiration for the seismic philosophy of African nationalism that was to dominate the discourse of international politics for decades, is not recognised.

There is an undeclared tradition on the formation of philosophical orthodoxy. Orthodoxy is established relative to the accommodation of the various European cultural-philosophical tendencies: German, French (“Continental”) or English (Scottish? Welsh?). Based on some ill-defined criteria, whose only apologia is a claim of being rooted in the ancient Greek tradition (A.N Whitehead: “The safest general characterisation of the European philosophical tradition is that it consists

of a series of footnotes to Plato”³) an incipient authority then constructs what is tantamount to a canon of what is acceptable as academic philosophy and who is to be accorded the title of “philosopher”. Anything that does not meet this epistemic tradition of the West, is rejected, marginalised or just simply tolerated. Hence, the *Analects* of Confucius and any other form of non-logicentric philosophical reflection is dismissed as heterodoxia, “a sort of other thinking” (Denyer 1991: 111), not worthy of the accolades nor recognition of the Western academy.

The posthumously published work of Emmanuel Chuwudzi Eze, *On reason: Rationality in a world of cultural conflict and racism* (2008) grapples comprehensively with this grievance of African philosophical scholarship. Beyond his analytical demonstration of the possibility of the plurality of modalities of rationality, our interpretative challenge derived from this work is the scope it creates for the accommodation of “heterodoxical” forms of rationality within a globalising academy.

THE POLITICAL INSTALLATION OF A UNIVERSAL CANON

This ethnic Eurocentricism that masquerades as Hellenism and has established Euro-normativity as the standard for the determination of canonicity in philosophy is in fact a monumental corruption and distortion of history. Hellenism is historically not exclusively *sui generis* with Europeanism. To the degree that the Egyptian civilisation predates the Greek one, the Greek intellectual tradition has deep African roots, or in the least, was developed with the participation of ancient African scholarship (Diop [1954] 1974: *ad passim*). Of course, George James goes further in his *Stolen legacy: Greek philosophy is stolen Egyptian philosophy* (1954) to prove that it was during the invasion in 333BCE of Egypt by Alexander the Great (dubbed “the Destroyer”), who had Aristotle as his tutor, that African scholarship stored at the Royal Library at Alexandria and the Temples of Egypt was looted and later redacted into what became Aristotle’s School (1954: 83). Bar a judgment on the quality of the scholarship of James’s claim, subsequent work by Martin Bernal (1987) justifies the persistence of the question: How did this usurpation and appropriation of the Hellenic tradition by the colonial West as something that is assumed to be originally and exclusively theirs happen?

Colonial-to-be, pre-industrial Europe only discovered the wisdom of the Ancient Greeks when the works of the latter, translated into Latin by Arabian scholars, began to circulate during the “Dark Age” of Europe, hence the Renaissance (Hill 1969: 109f; Stern [1956] 1970: 40-44). Aristotle’s work was the building-block of Islamic philosophy (*Civilisation*) 500 years before Christian philosophy (*Civilisation*)

3 *Process and reality* (New York: Macmillan, 1929) p.63.

discovered him in the thirteenth century work of Thomas Aquinas (*apropos* Anicius Boethius). In the Renaissance of the sixteenth century the Hellenistic tradition of unfettered rationality was embraced as an inspiration of what became a European scientific and philosophical culture that spawned capitalistic industrialisation. This culture with its embedded epistemological architecture of individualised rationality and utilitarian humanism was then imposed through various forms of the violence of colonisation on Africa, in particular. In the process the ancient and indigenous intellectual heritage of Africa was denigrated, stifled and gradually obliterated.

Crucially, as part of this ascendancy of the European intellectual tradition a new historiography on the evolution of the human intellection started to emerge during the Enlightenment. Europe was posited as the Genesis and Eden of reason. Consequent to the widely-held Kantian conceptualisation of the development of reason as the natural purpose of humanity (Kant [1784] 1963: *ad passim*), as well as the concomitant Hegelian philosophy of history, a typical historical narrative of “the history of ideas” would start off from European history, and the latter would be made to read as the cosmological account of the evolution of the human intellect. This history is typically then potted, as matter of course, with selected individual thinkers who are crowned, with various esoteric qualifications, as philosophers, markers of milestones in this grand story of the emergence of Man from “self-incurred tutelage by others”⁴, if European, and “savagery”, if non-Western and of Negroid descent. This “philosophy of history”, in tandem with the global politico-economic dynamics of the industrialisation of Europe, is the root of the self-imposition of the Western philosophical tradition as the apex of the evolution of human reason, and as a corollary, the bell-weather standard of a universal epistemology and ethics.

Much more than Kant’s work on history and anthropology (Eze, in Coetzee & Roux 2002: 430-456), this Eurocentric conception of the human intellectual evolution sourced its theoretical justification from Hegel’s *Lectures on the philosophy of world history* [[1805] 1975: 06) and *The philosophy of history* ([1837] 1956). Hegel’s idea of philosophy as the “self-consciousness of reason” which is teleologically pursuing a universal goal that has evolved from the mind of the Greeks, and is ultimately fulfilled in European institutions (Hegel [1805] 1975: xii) has buttressed the aggressive attribute of the Euro-North American globalistic complex.

Mignolo poignantly summarised this historical process of a Euro-monologous philosophy and the struggle for non-Western cultural expressions thus:

Traditionally the world was polycentric but after [European colonial] conquest the world order entered into a process in which polycentrism began to be displaced by an emerging monocentric civilisation. Western civilisation emerged not just as another civilisation in the planetary concert, but as the civilisation destined to lead and save the rest of the world from the Devil, from barbarism and primitivism, from underdevelopment, from despotism, and to

4 Kant, 1784 “What is the Enlightenment?”

turn unhappiness into happiness for all and forever (Mignolo 2011: 29, quoted in Mungwini 2014: 12).

Notably, the graduation of Kantian anthropology into this *interpretatio hegeliana* is signified by the marginalisation of Africa in the history of world philosophy, as Hegel monumentally decided in the *Lectures* that “We shall therefore leave Africa at this point, and it need not be mentioned again because it is an unhistorical continent, with no [rationative] movement or development of its own” (Hegel 1975: 190). Pointedly, according to this thinking, Africans do not naturally exhibit any expressions of rationality as experienced by Europeans, nor do they seem able to exert themselves in reason as defined in the German Idealist appropriation of Hellenistic rationalism, a point countered by Eze (2008) in *On reason*.⁵ They are not part of the global movement or progressive institutional self-actualisation of *das Geist* (Hegel [1837] 1956: 99). It is no wonder that African philosophical constructs do not feature at all in Flew and Speake’s *Dictionary of philosophy* (1983), nor does any African thinker merit a place in Stokes’s *Philosophy: One hundred essential thinkers* (2012).

In his *One hundred philosophers*, King (2004), a member of the faculty of Pembroke College, Oxford goes against this *interpretatio hegeliana*.

KING’S PLURIVERSALISTIC ACHIEVEMENT

King’s (2014) selection of his one hundred philosophers is presented in a sequence that is only governed by their year of birth. In this way the tradition of presenting the history of philosophy in terms of its successive schools, the *interpretatio hegeliana*, is obviated. At the same time, through this structure the particularity of cultural categorisation is trumped by the universality of time. This birth date sequencing delivers a pantheon that starts off with Thales of Miletus, seamlessly gliding through K’Ung fu-zi (Confucius) and Lao Tzu, both Chinese philosophers, before it gets to Plato. This introduction of ancient sages is rounded off with the profile of the work and life of an *African* woman philosopher, Hypatia of Alexandria (c.370-415BCE). King’s compendium boasts a remarkable profiling of women thinkers, and draws attention to the injustice women have historically suffered and continue to endure in the Western philosophy academy.

In selecting a constellation of noteworthy thinkers during the period 500-1599CE, which in Western historiography is styled the Medieval Period, King endeavours to set these thinkers against a broader appreciation of global historical developments. They are for instance set against the background of the birth of the Prophet Muhammad PUN (570CE), and the appearance of the first printed book

5 A white former member of the South African Communist Party recently wrote: “Learning a black language was a disappointment ... as my command of the language grew I discovered blacks spoke the most uninteresting drivel about their everyday lives” (Ludi 2011. *The Communistisation of the ANC*, p. 33).

from China in 868CE. Ancius M.S Boethius of Rome (480-524) the martyred pioneering translator of ancient Greek philosophical works into Latin, and Adi Samkra of Kerala (781-820), the founder of the *adviata* school of Hindu philosophy, are introduced as equal pioneering thinkers at the start of this period. In a historical rendition that attempts to present a just procession of religious thought, the narration of the philosophical heritage of the Irish Church philosopher, John Scotus Eriguena (810-977) is placed after that of the Muslim philosopher Abu-Yusuf YaQub Ibn Ishuq of Baghdad (801-873).

Skipping to the modern period, in the interest of the demands for brevity in our demonstration of the cultural and epistemological plurality of King's (2004) philosophical canon, we note the exceptional gesture he makes in contributing to the uncovering of Anthony William Amo (1703-1784), the Ghanaian who graduated in philosophy at the University of Wittenberg in 1734, and proceeded to earn an appointment as philosophy professor at the University of Jena in 1740. Amo, who advanced critical reflection on Descartes, is perked between George Berkeley and Baron de Montesquieu as notable philosophers of the Early Modern Period of Western philosophy. King's presentation, which due to its chronological approach has to list Amo before David Hume (1711-1776) and Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), unwittingly exposes the ignorance of the latter two celebrated luminaries of the Western philosophical canon in their widely recorded views that there is no empirical proof of any genius "among the Negro"⁶. While Hume, then a government clerk, was battling with his 1739 *A treatise of human nature* (King 2004: 108), Professor Amo had just successfully published in 1738 his *Treatise on the art of philosophising soberly and accurately* (King 2004: 103).

King's treatment of twentieth century evolution of philosophy subverts the traditional reading of a linkage between the philosophies of Bertrand Russell and Ludwig Wittgenstein by inserting between them an account of the works of Servedipali Radhakrishnan (1888-1975), the most celebrated exponent of Indian philosophy who was elected a fellow of the British Academy in 1939, and of Sir Muhammad Iqbal Khan (1877-1938), the iconic philosopher of Islam, graduate of Russell's *alma mater*, Cambridge, who was knighted by King George V in 1922, at which time Russell was persecuted and ostracised for his beliefs in England.

King (2004) interrupts his presentation of the twentieth century notable philosophical minds with an editorial chapter titled, "Overview: African philosophy". This is one of 10 such topical insertions interspersed between his encyclopedic profiling of his selected philosophers. This overview lays the ground for his recognition of Kwasi Wiredu (1931-) as one of the world's one hundred greatest thinkers. Notwithstanding this recognition of only Wiredu and the introduction of Amo, he accords African philosophy a rare appearance on the stage of global

6 See excerpts from Hume's writings in, Eze (1997), *Race and the Enlightenment: A reader*, p, 29-30.

intellectual traditions. It is significant that the “Overview: African philosophy” (King 2004: 172) is simply a neat and cogent summation of Oruka’s famous paper “Four trends in current African philosophy” (in Coetzee & Roux 2002: 120-136). King seems to have taken seriously Oruka’s contention that:

Philosophy as a discipline that employs analytical, reflective, and ratiocative methodology is therefore not seen as a monopoly of Europe or any one race but as an activity for which every race or people has a potentiality (in Coetzee & Roux 2002: 120) .

KING, MIGNOLO AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF PHILOSOPHY

King’s (2004) work demonstrates the falsehood of “the view that only one segment of humanity has a prior and exclusive claim to reason” (Ramose, in Coetzee & Roux 2002: 7). He has done for philosophy what Jared Diamond has done for social anthropology with *The world until yesterday: What can we learn from traditional societies* (2012) .

From an analytical perspective, Mignolo’s (2009: 1-23) conceptual framework of a pluriversalism that is articulated with an anti-colonial expression that protests against *interpretatio hegeliana* is a cogent theoretical basis against which King’s (2004) work can best be appreciated. It is an apt corrective against the globalistic universalism of the West, wherein one epistemic tradition is venerated. *Pluriversalism*, whereby all knowledge systems as emerging from diverse geo-cultural regions of the world are accorded equal recognition and respect, is a critical transformative imperative for contemporary academic philosophy. This intellectual culture that encourages inclusivity and a pluralistic dialogue among ethnically diverse intellectual traditions, whilst remaining combative against the power matrix that underlies the epistemological *status quo*, is both a moral and pragmatic imperative in an epoch of an increasingly de-Westernising world and a *zeitgeist* of a global human community.

From an Africanist vantage point, this paradigm of a corrective epistemic inclusivity is strategically transformative in three respects. Firstly, it unsettles the yoke of the pervasive Eurocentricism that academic philosophy in Africa finds itself under. Secondly, it legitimises the putative “unorthodoxy” of African epistemology. Lastly and most importantly, it creates space for the sorely needed unfettered nurturing of African thought-forms. For the discipline of philosophy in general, this paradigm is instrumentally necessary as the polycentric production of knowledge ensures the enrichment of philosophy by an open cross-pollination of ideas and intellectual experiences from diverse geo-cultural perspectives.

As a work crafted on a sensibility of the plurality of epistemic traditions, King’s (2004) work is certainly an antidote against the myopic parochialism and globalism of the Euro-North America academy. In Ndlovu-Gatsheni’s (2014: 39) words, it can

certainly facilitate the “abandonment of the Western arrogance which breeds and perpetuates a feeling that Europe and North America have everything to teach non-Europeans and nothing to learn from other people and their civilisations”.

Against these pivotal observations, partly garnered from Mignolo (2009, 2011), we have found King’s (2004) *One hundred philosophers* ground-breaking and commendable. It stands in direct contrast, in particular, to Stokes’s *Philosophy: One hundred essential thinkers*. What is most remarkable is that the latter appeared eight years later but bears an ideological character that seems to have totally ignored the emergent *weltanschauung* that demands recognition of other geo-culturally formulated philosophical traditions that King has paid attention to in his work.

King’s (2004) work, which is a modicum of pluriversalistic presentation of world thinkers, serves as an antithetical demonstration that the self-enthronement of the Western philosophical milieu, the *grosso modo*, as the universal standard of what is acceptably philosophical is outdated in a world that is rapidly becoming cosmopolitan.⁷ As testament to how King’s (2004) book resonated with this *zeitgeist* of global cosmopolitanism, within two years in print it had editions in French, Estonian, Portuguese, Hungarian, Italian and Norwegian.

Besides what we highlighted polemically above, the book has two other striking transformational features. Firstly, it serves the mission for the “democratisation of knowledge”. It is written in a prose that is accessible to non-philosophers; each chapter is accompanied by historical photographs and poignant illustrations, rendering the book publishable in a form of a coffee-table book: it is not cast as a library book for the exclusive access of students of philosophy.

Secondly, the book takes on a conscious attempt to subvert the patriarchal mould of Western philosophy. Besides deliberate inclusion of women thinkers as contributors to the development of philosophy, King (2004) uses a language that consciously affirms the female readership of the book. An example is the following excerpt taken from his summary introduction of what philosophy is:

Someone might hold that nothing exists apart from matter and its arrangements. This may be because she’s thought about it, examined the arguments for or against it, and come down to one side of the debate. [Alternatively], she may subscribe to a particular belief because that’s what all her friends think. Only the first case counts as philosophy (2004: 9).

Viewed against the moral imperative for Western philosophy to deal with its kinship with Aristotelian anti-feminism, such linguistic affirmations of the presence of female readers in philosophy cannot be taken for granted. To underscore this point King (2004:40) presents a dedicated overview (essay) on “Women in philosophy”.

⁷ Another notable exception of treatment of non-Western philosophies since the 2004 publication of King’s work is Garfield and Edelglass 2011, *Oxford handbook of world philosophy*.

CONCLUSION

Informed of a critical framework that is derived from Mignolo's (2009, 2011) anti-colonial epistemological perspective and an urgency that stems from African philosophy's seminal demand for the transformation of the Eurocentric nature of the construction of the philosophical academy both in Africa and globally, in an increasingly cosmopolitan world, our primary objective has been to exhibit King's (2004) work as both a model of a culturally progressive approach to the philosophical canon, as well as a subversion of the prevailing tendency of the Western philosophical tradition to set itself as the universal norm for what passes as philosophy.

From a perspective that is seized with the discourses on the renaissance and promotion of indigenous African thought-forms and knowledge systems so that these can make their rightful contribution to the advance of both Africa and the wider human community, that is an Africanist concern, we found King's (2004) work worthy of an appreciation. Besides its respectful and judicious treatment of African philosophy, by virtue of its methodology, it has crafted and legitimised a historiographical genre in philosophy that accords an equitable status to all epistemic traditions. This very fact, and the critique of the prevalent supremacist Westernism that it inexorably generates, we contend, set King's work as transformative. It demonstrates that an extra-Western philosophy historical narrative of the diverse sprouts of human genius in a myriad of cultural settings is possible. Students of philosophy now have a gallant attempt at a multicultural and pluriversalistic source of the history of philosophy.⁸

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