

Eurocentric Pitfalls in the Practice of African Philosophy: Reflections on African Universities

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Abstract

We argue that African philosophy scholars are sometimes blinded by Eurocentric tendencies in the practice of African philosophy, and that it is important to identify and overcome these problems. The research gap we intend to fill is that the route of self-examination, self-criticism and self-evaluation has been underexplored in the practice of African philosophy at universities in Africa. The self-understanding of African philosophy is necessary for the reconstruction of indigenous elements for the purpose of African development. Firstly, African philosophy is divided along Eurocentric lines of analytic and continental philosophy. We argue that such a dualism closes other approaches to African philosophy. Secondly, the practice of African philosophy is done in the language of the colonisers; however, concepts from indigenous African languages remain largely unexplored. Thirdly, the Eurocentric approach of making philosophy “universal” and “transcultural,” results in African scholars seeking a general African philosophy that fails to accommodate the diversity and richness of African cultures. Fourthly, African philosophy, as practised in African universities, tends to disregard African culture as the basis of philosophical thought in trying to make philosophy scientific and objective. We argue for decolonial thinking as a means of making African philosophy more genuine.

Keywords: African philosophy; Eurocentrism; Universalism; culture; language; decolonisation

Introduction

The practice of African philosophy in contemporary African Anglophone universities tends to follow two dominant trends. The first trend sees African philosophy as the same



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as Eurocentric philosophy in terms of methodology and outcome. According to Oyewumi (1997), African philosophy tends to place emphasis on sameness with Eurocentric philosophy. African philosophers accept and identify so much with European philosophy, that they have created African versions of Eurocentric philosophy. They seem to think that the European mind-set is universal and that, therefore, since Europeans have discovered the way the world works and have laid the foundations of thought, all that Africans need to do is to add their own “burnt” bricks on top of the foundation. As such, Eurocentric theories become tools of hegemony as they are applied universally, on the assumption that European experiences define what is human (Etieyibo 2017; Mawere 2015; Okere 2005; Oyewumi 1997).

The second approach sees the need to ground African philosophy on an authentic African foundation that stands independently of Eurocentric thinking. This view maintains that African philosophy should develop its own methodology, content and form so that it warrants the adjective “African.” It is a reflective and critical effort to rethink the indigenised African situation beyond the confines of Eurocentric concepts and categories (Serequeberhan 1997, 43). Going beyond the confines of Eurocentric thinking entails an interrogation of the African condition and identity as the basis of philosophical arguments. African philosophy should not mirror Eurocentric philosophy and it should develop its own path by using concepts, theories, categories and principles that are grounded in African thought. African philosophy ought to reflect on the African experience, articulate African worldviews and accommodate African culture without necessarily implying either fragmentation or ethnocentric thinking. It must be pointed out that, just because one rejects universalism in favour of particularism, it does not mean that the particularist is a cultural relativist. A particularist could in some way be a pluralist (Serequeberhan 1997, 3). Pluralism means embracing several African cultures by way of: 1) drawing comparisons; 2) deducing common elements; and 3) using the elements for both philosophical reflection and reconstruction.

Our contribution to African philosophy scholarship is that, while African philosophy has a lot to share with other philosophies across the world, African philosophy should stand as an autonomous discipline that is capable of addressing African realities and experiences without using Eurocentric philosophy as a standard. While previous work is focused more on the actual practice of African philosophy through teaching and research, our focus is to make African philosophy self-reflective, self-critical and self-examining in line with the Socratic dictum, “know thyself.” The potential significance of the self-reflection is that African philosophy can be more fruitful if its theories, categories and concepts are fully decolonised. Our main argument is that African philosophy must be decolonised from Eurocentric tendencies so that it can become authentically African. We use the term “authentic” to mean a combination of the following traits: 1) using African culture as a basis for both philosophical reflection and reconstruction; 2) providing a critique of Eurocentric philosophy using African cultural resources; 3) reflecting on the experiences and situations of Africans; and 4) projecting into the future using African cultural conceptual schemes. We argue that it is important

for any society that wants to proceed meaningfully in philosophical reflection to, first of all, take stock of its own identity by discovering its epistemological paradigm, which is the lifeblood for any human community (Heleta 2016; Kaphagawani and Malherbe 1998; Makumba 2007; Mignolo 2009). It is only when the epistemological paradigm is identified that supplementary (or Eurocentric) epistemological frameworks can be incorporated into the creation of a solid epistemic structure that can critique philosophical issues relating to Africa. The opposite is reckless; one cannot make Eurocentric epistemology the basis of his/her knowledge foundation, only to incorporate in it worthy home-grown epistemology as a supplement. It is better to begin with knowledge that is relevant to the person and community and then allow the possibilities to be enriched from outside so that epistemology becomes the basis of African philosophy.

To exemplify our position, we draw experiences of universities in Africa from Great Zimbabwe University and the University of Johannesburg (South Africa), where both authors have been engaged in teaching and research. These experiences are also shared in Anglophone universities in Africa, as evidenced by publications and conference papers. While we may not have first-hand experience of teaching at other universities in Africa (outside Zimbabwe and South Africa), it is safe to conclude that the Eurocentric pitfalls expressed in publications and conference presentations are likely to filter into the lecture rooms where the teaching of African philosophy is done.

The paper begins with our quest for a better understanding of African philosophy and two broad conceptions about defining African philosophy. Secondly, we focus on defining Eurocentrism. Thirdly, we examine the impact of the Eurocentric division of analytic and continental philosophy on the academic practice of African philosophy in African universities. The fourth section explores the use of European languages in African philosophy and the domination of European languages in researching, teaching and writing about African philosophy. The limited use of African languages in academic African philosophy results in failure to develop African languages into philosophical languages. The fifth section considers universalist tendencies in the practice of African philosophy and the influence thereof in the context of drawing weak inductive arguments due to overgeneralisations about African culture. We argue for a cultural standpoint which draws elements from both philosophical reflection and reconstruction without necessarily implying relativism, fragmentation or reductionism, as some critics would assume. In the sixth section, with the emphasis on a tendency to disregard indigenous philosophies, we argue that African philosophical commitments to both global and multi-cultural concerns are baseless if they cannot accommodate African cultural views. For anything to attain a global appeal, it has to pass a test within a specific culture. In the last section, we explore the way forward through decolonisation as a means to get rid of Eurocentric tendencies, so as to liberate the concepts, methods, trends and outcomes of African philosophy as practised in African universities today.

Understanding African Philosophy

Following the trends seen in the practice of African philosophy, two broad conceptions about defining African philosophy are evident from scholarly work. The first category of definitions sees African philosophy as a scientific, universal, objective and rigorous enterprise. Philosophers who follow this line of thought are Appiah (1989), Bodunrin (1985), Hountondji (1983; 1985; 1996; 2017), Oladipo (1989), Oruka (1990), and Wiredu (1996). They argue that African philosophy is irreducible to African worldviews. Their argument exploits the distinction between philosophy in the cultural sense and philosophy in the academic sense (Higgs 2003). In the former sense, philosophy is regarded as being concerned with traditional African worldviews, whereas, in an academic sense, philosophy is a theoretical discipline like, for example, physics, algebra and linguistics, with its own distinctive problems and methods (Higgs 2003). Evidence of such views is also seen in specific definitions of African philosophy that align with the universalist school. A representative of this school is Hountondji (1983), who argues that African philosophy should be understood quite simply as “philosophy done by Africans” (Hountondji 2017, 1). This re-definition of the concept had huge implications for African philosophy in African universities. Among other effects, it made it possible and legitimate again for an African philosopher to investigate non-African as well as African traditions of thought, to deal with universal issues and problems instead of being limited to just reconstructing his/her indigenous thought. The critique of ethno-philosophy allowed a kind of intellectual liberation and opening up of the intellectual horizon (Hountondji 2017; Ocholla 2007).

Contrary to the universalist school above, the particularistic school maintains that African indigenous cultures constitute a solid philosophical foundation of African philosophy. These philosophers include Anyanwu (1989), Gyekye (1997; 2013), Kaphagawani and Malherbe (1998), Kwame (1992), Mbiti (1999), More (1996), and Motshega (1999). These thinkers argue that the definition of African philosophy must be broad enough to accommodate indigenous cultural worldviews. Gyekye (1997) pays attention to the problem of language in African thought. It is the job of the African philosopher to explicate, reflect on and interpret the concepts in African thought. Language suggests a philosophical perspective. Modern African philosophy needs to have its roots in African experience, cultural values and thought categories and reflect these; only then can it be called African philosophy (Gyekye 1997). If a philosophy produced by a modern African has no basis in the culture and experience of African peoples, then it cannot appropriately claim to be an African philosophy, even though it was created by an African philosopher (Gyekye 1997). Oyeshille (2008, 62) argues: “For anything to be philosophical it has to do with the reflection on the experience of a society, group or an individual.” This implies that the content of African philosophy should focus on past and present experience of Africans with a view to drawing directions for the future. “Such reflection must be critical and logical” (Oyeshille 2008, 62). Anthony (2014, 93) identifies two essential ingredients that constitute African philosophy. First, African philosophy “must speak to African problems and situations”

(Anthony 2014, 93) and secondly, “it must be drawn from African experience” (Anthony 2014, 93). African philosophy is the philosophical reflection on, and analysis of, African conceptual systems and social realities as undertaken by contemporary professional philosophers (Kanu 2014, 91).

Eurocentrism Defined

Serequeberhan (1997, 64) views Eurocentrism as the pervasive bias located in modernity’s self-consciousness of itself. Within this bias, there is a model that connects the assumptions, perspectives and theories related to knowledge perspectives that can be identified as the Eurocentric epistemological paradigm. For Serequeberhan, Eurocentrism is represented by Descartes, Locke, Hume, Kant and Hegel. Western European values and culture are the standard through which humanity is measured. The assumption is that Western European values, culture and philosophy are qualitatively superior to all non-Western philosophical values and culture.

Mbembe (2015) identifies four characteristics that are jointly necessary and sufficient when defining Eurocentrism. Firstly, the Eurocentric canon is a canon that attributes truth only to the Western way of knowledge production. It is a canon that disregards other epistemic traditions. The implication of this view is that African indigenous traditions are excluded from truth and this creates a very difficult task for African philosophy. African philosophy must be a critique of this Eurocentric assumption for it to progress coherently. Secondly, it is a “canon that tries to portray colonialism as a normal form of social relations between human beings rather than a system of exploitation and oppression” (Mbembe 2015, 9). Epistemic colonialism is justified as a consequence of this thinking, resulting in African philosophy being excluded from genuine knowledge. Thirdly, Eurocentric epistemic traditions are traditions that claim detachment of the known from the knower. They rest on a division between mind and world, or between reason and nature as an ontological a priori (Mbembe 2015, 9). Detachment of the knower results in the knower being detached from his or her own environment, culture, identity and even from her own self in the name of philosophising. Fourthly, they are traditions in which the knowing subject is enclosed in itself and peeks out at a world of objects and produces supposedly objective knowledge of those objects. The knowing subject is thus able, we are told, to know the world without being part of that world (Mbembe 2015). This kind of thinking allows African philosophy to be done without due regard for African conditions and identity, since the model under use is the Cartesian reasoning process that disregards sense perception. Eurocentric thinking, by all accounts, is able to produce knowledge that is supposed to be universal and independent of context (Mbembe 2015; Meko 2005; Oyeshile 2008). We now turn to the Eurocentric pitfalls in the practice of African philosophy.

Analytic versus Continental Philosophy in the Context of African Philosophy

African philosophy, as practised in African universities today, tends to be aligned with the analytic-continental division in philosophy. In this section we are going to clarify the distinction between analytic and continental philosophy, show the main tenets of each, indicate how African philosophers align themselves to each of these philosophical trends, and examine the limitations of such a tendency. The heart of the analytic-continental opposition is most evident in methodology, that is, in a focus on analysis or on synthesis. Analytic philosophers typically try to solve fairly delineated philosophical problems by reducing them to their parts and to the relations between these parts. “Continental philosophers typically address large questions in a synthetic or integrative way, and consider particular issues to be ‘parts of the larger unities’ and as properly understood and dealt with only when fitted into those unities” (Prado 2003, 10). Chase and Reynolds (2014, 7) identify six key concerns that mark analytic philosophy commitments to the linguistic turn: 1) the rejection of metaphysics; 2) the claim that philosophy is continuous with science; 3) a reductive approach to analysis; 4) the employment of formal logic; 5) a focus on argument; and 6) a concern for clarity. On the other hand, the continental tradition appears to include such matters as: a wariness about aligning philosophical method with common sense; a “temporal turn” that encompasses both ontological issues and an emphasis on the historical presuppositions of concepts and theoretical frameworks; an interest in thematising inter-subjectivity; an anti-representationalism about the mind; an investment in transcendental arguments, and, more generally, transcendental reasoning; a concern with the relation between style and content; a critical attitude to science; and an “anti-theoretical” attitude to ethico-political matters (Chase and Reynolds 2014, 8).

Using the philosophical figures approach, analytic philosophy refers to a style of doing philosophy with an emphasis on argument, logical analysis, and language. Analytic philosophers argue that the philosophy of language is the foundation for all the rest of philosophy. The task of philosophy is the analysis of the structure of thought. The only proper method for analysing thought consists in the analysis of language. Examples of these thinkers include Gottlob Frege, Bertrand Russell, Ludwig Wittgenstein, J.L. Austin and Alfred Tarski. Continental philosophy, the name deriving from the fact that its leading figures have been German or French thinkers, is seen as a more discursive, even polemical, way of doing philosophy, often characterised by being not exactly an extremely transparent way of exposing one’s ideas, and being more concerned with social issues than its analytic counterpart. Continental philosophers include Henri Bergson, Martin Heidegger, Edmund Husserl, Karl Jaspers and Fredrick Nietzsche.

African universities that house African philosophy in their departments tend to slant towards either analytic or continental philosophy. The general slant also influences the way African philosophy is practised. This means that African philosophy can be done using the analytic approach, where concepts of African philosophy are neatly divided

and analysed, premises are broken down into parts and arguments are evaluated. Philosophy departments that follow the continental way are often critical towards science, focus on historical issues, construct theoretical frameworks, draw social implications and digest transcendental arguments. The two approaches appear contradictory and they seem difficult to reconcile. African philosophy is caught in this dilemma and Eurocentric thought appears to influence African philosophy along this dichotomy.

We argue that the analytic-continental division creates contradictions and dilemmas that African philosophers should avoid in the African university. There is no reasonable justification for an African university to cling to the analytic or continental model of doing philosophy. The contradiction is a Eurocentric problem that African philosophy should avoid. The consequence of this division is that African philosophers are being divided along lines that have nothing to do with Africa. As seen from the discussion before, the division is along methodological lines and African philosophers can come up with their own methods of philosophising independently of the divisions. Wiredu (1996, 114) argues that “all philosophizing involves assertion, explanation, and justification.” Philosophical claims can be made in African philosophy without mimicking Eurocentric views of doing philosophy. Furthermore, the dichotomy created is false and misleading. It is false because it assumes that these are the only legitimate ways of doing philosophy, yet the history of philosophy itself has shown other approaches such as the dialogical approach, critical analysis, system building and the reflective approach. The falsity lies in the sense of a false dichotomy where two camps are assumed to be the only possibilities, yet a third alternative may be available. The approach is misleading because it directs African philosophy into an academic war which is foreign in origin. African philosophers must critically reflect on this problem and find authentic approaches that do not mirror Eurocentric thinking. A neglected but fruitful approach is cultural philosophy, where African cultures can be the basis of philosophical reflections.

Use of European Languages in African Philosophy

In this section, we shall examine the debate on teaching and researching African philosophy in European language, and we argue for the need to develop African indigenous languages for purposes of doing African philosophy in African universities. African philosophy has relied mainly on Eurocentric languages such as English, French and Portuguese (Bongasu 2001) for teaching and research. The use of African languages in African philosophy ranges from zero to limited use. Zero usage refers to a situation where African philosophy is done exclusively in English, French and Portuguese, and all African words are translated into Eurocentric language despite any ambiguity and vagueness that may be encountered. Limited use of African languages involves throwing in one or two words from indigenous languages that may be difficult to translate such as *ubuntu* or *ukama*. Limited use may also involve throwing in some proverbs or wise sayings from indigenous African languages that are hurriedly

translated into a European language. Wiredu (1996) suggests the use of African languages in African philosophy and argues that African philosophers might bring an added dimension to their theoretical consideration by taking philosophical cognisance of their indigenous languages. Wiredu's suggestion has resulted in a debate between defenders of the use of African languages in African philosophy and their critics. Defenders of the use of African languages are of the view that, given that research and teaching in African philosophy today is predominantly conducted in foreign languages, some scholars think that to avoid conceptual distortions arising from the use of alien languages—and the false representations of African knowledge systems in African (and non-African) philosophical meditations, texts and conceptual frameworks—African indigenous languages must be adopted. Keita (1999) has named this the “phenomenological” approach. The advocates of this approach, as Keita (1999, 28) states, “believe that a post-colonial Africa should seek to restore its identity by reverting to its indigenous languages for both written and speech purposes.” The key point of the defenders' argument is that all aspects of a colonial legacy which are inimical to the development of the African people, should be removed. The word “all” expresses a universal affirmative statement that includes language within the issues that retard African development in general and African philosophy in particular.

Critics of the use of African languages in African philosophy, such as Bello (1987), argue that the use of African languages in African philosophy is problematic. For instance, “the use of vernaculars for all philosophical activity will mar philosophical communication not only between Africans and the rest of the world, but also among Africans themselves” (Bello 1987, 10). This view is based on the fact that Africa has over two thousand indigenous languages and the use of these languages in doing philosophy makes philosophy fragmentary and relative, thereby undermining objectivity and universality. This is because “Africa does not yet have a *lingua franca* and not all Africans understand or speak other indigenous African languages” (Bello 1987, 10). To illustrate this point, “only an Akan-speaking philosopher could meaningfully have contributed to, or arbitrated in the debate between Wiredu and Bedu-Addo on the concept of truth in Akan language” (Bello 1987, 9). Makinde (1988) is another critic whose viewpoint is worth reflecting on when discussing the language problem in African philosophy. Makinde (1988) agrees with the Wittgensteinian view that the limit of a people's language is the limit of their world, and he adds that language has an important influence on a people's understanding of culture, reality and philosophy. The knowledge of a language induces reality in a way quite similar to the culture whose language it is. Indeed, for Makinde, the best way to propagate a people's philosophy and culture is through their language. However, in the African context, Makinde thinks that there is a lack of a developed language capable of communicating scientific ideas and philosophical erudition. In his words: “At present, none of the African languages is satisfactory enough to be adopted as a continental language, rich enough for analytic philosophy and science.” Most of the advanced countries of the world have succeeded in spreading their ideas and cultures, especially by means of their philosophy of science and religion, to other parts of the world through their well-

developed language. The poverty of African languages has led to the poverty of scientific ideas and meaningful contributions to the development of philosophy, science and technology.

Having exposed the debate between defenders and critics of the use of African languages in doing African philosophy, it can still be argued that African philosophy largely relies on the language of the colonisers and hence fails to advance African languages into fully developed philosophical languages. The history of colonialism has side-lined African languages because it has seen them as less theoretical, technical and academic (Fayemi 2013).

On the other hand, the conclusion of such arguments suggests that African philosophers should also use African languages in their academic work. This will not only add to the depth and quality of philosophical reflection in Africa, but also to its responsiveness to its context. The non-use of African languages has retarded scholarship on indigenous African languages as medium of expressing African philosophy. Very few Europeans are fluent in indigenous African languages and this has affected Western scholarship about Africa. The linguistic hegemony of English, French and Portuguese has dominated the media of expression in African philosophy. What is problematic is that the hegemonic tendency of Eurocentric thinking has become entrenched and invisible among Africans themselves (Hountondji 2003; Masolo 2010; Ngugi 1996). The use of European languages as lenses to study African philosophy, therefore, retards the authentic development of African philosophy. The linguistic limitations of using foreign languages are always present in the practice of African philosophy.

However, the paradox is that, by using English as the language of instruction, the expression of African concepts becomes vague, ambiguous and indeterminate, since translation loses original meaning. The concept of *vadzimu*, for example, is vaguely translated into “the living dead.” This gives a contradiction in terms that are unknown in the Shona language. The other term used in trying to capture *vadzimu* is “ancestors.” The term “ancestor” is also problematic, since it suggests a mere descendant, yet the Shona term requires one to qualify for the status of *vadzimu* due to one’s moral standing during earthly life. This is just one example of an attempt to use a foreign language for a concept in another language. Instead of “opening up” meaning, the use of English actually closes up the philosophical content of African languages.

Then what of Wiredu’s position concerning “theoretical,” “technical” or “academic” philosophy in the African cultural context? This is where his work with regard to the role of Africa’s indigenous languages in African philosophy becomes of crucial importance. Africans cannot undo the past and erase the cultural consequences of European colonialism, but they certainly can come to terms with them. First, they need to remind themselves of the very limited number of Europeans who became truly fluent in an African language, and the profound consequences that this European ignorance—which also affected Western scholarship about Africa—had for communication with

and hence comprehension and appreciation of the African intellect. Secondly, they need to recognise the intrinsic instrumental value of some of the more technical varieties of information and methods of reflection, such as the scientific method that the colonial experience has put at their disposal. Thirdly, such relatively culturally neutral and instrumentally useful elements can be adapted by Africans and used to develop their own interests.

Universalist Tendencies in the Practice of African Philosophy

The definition of philosophy as an objective, scientific, universal and neutral discipline results in the attempt to seek universality in African philosophy. Universality is evident in the tendency to generalise. Hurley (2012) views an inductive generalisation as an argument that draws a conclusion about all members of a group from evidence that pertains to a selected sample. The fallacy of hasty generalisation occurs when there is a reasonable likelihood that the sample is not representative of the group. “Such a likelihood may arise if the sample is either too small or not randomly selected” (Hurley 2012, 142). This fallacy is seen in the practice of African philosophy today where there is a tendency to generalise and come up with common issues in African philosophy. The most extreme forms of the fallacy involve proceeding from *one* individual to *all* members of a group. In examining the relationship between the premises and conclusion of inductive reasoning, we shall focus on three levels of induction.

The first level consists of continental generalisations about African philosophy’s attempt to extract elements that are applicable to the whole of Africa through some kind of inductive reasoning. This reasoning builds some degree of probability that is established when one builds from the particular to the general. Second-order or sub-regional generalisation allows scholars to pick elements from one or a few cultures and then apply them across the sub-region. Third-order generalisation occurs within a cultural grouping, is more focused and it yields fruitful results, since there is no room for a mismatch between the content of the premises and the content of the conclusion. The exactness obtained in the conclusion allows the researcher to generalise more accurately within the culture under investigation.

Inductive generalisations give rise to “lies, illusions and mystifications about Africa” (Ajei 2007, 227). Furthermore, Africa is treated differently from other parts of the third world, that is, South East Asia and Latin America. Africa is seen by the West as the most primitive and the most underdeveloped, the most miserable and the most incapable, and the continent with the least culture (Palmberg 2001, 198). Africa is a continent with “54 countries, nearly 2 000 languages and more than 750 million people” (Palmberg 2001, 198). Cultural variety varies from the nomads in semi-arid lands to those permanently settled in the cities (Palmberg 2001, 98). Customs and habits vary from Tunisia in the north to KwaZulu-Natal in south eastern South Africa (Palmberg 2001). Africa is talked about as if its parts are interchangeable. Although one must concede that generalisations sometimes have to be made, neither the standards of language nor the need to summarise and be brief can be used to defend the sweeping

generalisations about Africa (Palmberg 2001, 198). Europeans saw sameness in Africa, yet Africans saw it as all difference. If the concept of Africa is not dissolved into smaller parts, it will be difficult to encounter culture in Africa. Generalisations are to the extent that “one African is all Africans” (Palmberg 2001, 199). Such a sweeping generalisation is not only logically untenable, but it is also false. A picture is sketched of one Africa stands for all Africans with neither name nor place differentiation (Palmberg 2001, 199). Such a generalisation is sweeping and misleading.

The root causes of generalisations are, firstly, the attempt to seek essential features. Generalisations are used in order to pick up essential features that are common in African philosophy. These essential features are used as the foundation and building blocks of a uniquely African philosophy. Secondly, the attempt to make a distinction between Western or Eurocentric approaches (Serequeberhan 1997) results in the tendency to contrast it with “African philosophy” and is one reason why generalisations are made in African philosophy. African philosophy is informed by the African epistemological paradigm as opposed to the Eurocentric epistemological paradigm (Akena 2012; Gyekye 1997; Nkoane, 2006; Nyamnjoh, 2012; Nyanchoga, 2014). The third reason is colonial mentality as shown in Tempels (1969), who is the father of generalisations in African philosophy. Writing from central Africa, Tempels generalised his philosophy across the continent without taking appropriate care. The same mistake was followed by Mbiti (1999) when he claimed that Africans have no concept of “future time.” Our contention is that a strong inductive argument should be based on facts and the conclusion should follow from given premises with high probability. African philosophy should be based on accurate facts, for its arguments—even if philosophy—do not necessarily deal with facts but with arguments.

Tendency to Disregard Indigenous Philosophies

In this section, we shall examine arguments for and against the use of African indigenous culture as a philosophical foundation for reconstruction. We defend the view that genuine African philosophy should use African indigenous knowledge as its philosophical resources.

Horsthemke (2004) proceeds from the conceptual analysis of the criteria for knowledge to argue that the term “indigenous knowledge” is logically inadmissible. Whatever its origins, knowledge has to meet the criteria of belief, justifiability and truth; if it is in fact knowledge and not something else such as opinion. The qualification of knowledge as “indigenous” is, therefore, redundant. Horsthemke (2004) sees the attempt to ground philosophy on indigenous knowledge as fragmentary and retrogressive, resulting in relativism and spiritualism. As a direct consequence of universalism, philosophy is viewed as transcultural and it should reflect global rather than local concerns. Hountondji (2017) attacks ethnophilosophy on the basis of the view that philosophy should be universal, scientific, critical and objective, and this also becomes the basis of dismissing indigenous philosophies. Attempts to ground philosophy on culture are seen as both fragmentary and retrogressive (see Horsthemke 2004). Cultural philosophy is

regarded as a contradiction in terms and, therefore, unsuitable as a philosophy. African philosophy tends to reflect on global concerns and hence it disregards the philosophy of its own communities as ethnophilosophy.

The rejection of African indigenous knowledge is based on the universalistic view of knowledge. Santos (2014) argues that the primacy of science as a universal body of knowledge with no limits and boundaries, and as capable of producing knowledge, gives no room for transforming possibilities. The monopoly of science disregards, silences and eliminates other forms of knowledge from the spaces it controls. In the context of philosophy, African philosophy should follow the Eurocentric standards of philosophy that characterise philosophy as “universal” and “scientific.” Santos identifies this way of thinking as epistemicide and identifies it as cognitive injustice. It is injustice, because it involves unjustified lack of equity between different ways of knowing and different forms of knowledge. The net effect of epistemic injustice is that it undermines social justice. For Santos, “there is no global justice without global cognitive justice” (Santos 2014, 237). This entails cognitive justice becoming a condition for global justice. Cognitive injustice cannot be remedied unless scientific knowledge is recognised as being one of the forms of knowledge.

African philosophy disregards the wellspring of indigenous culture while drawing from global and transcultural concerns to fit with Hountondji’s view that African philosophy is “philosophy done in Africa.” Equitable conditions should be available for the development of other forms of knowledge. The uneven level of epistemic resources is seen when the Eurocentric source is given a higher status and privilege, even in African contexts. A typical example of “philosophy in Africa” is an analysis of African issues using Eurocentric thought, where Kant, Locke, Hume or Hegel are used as providing the philosophical theory of an issue that is African. The hegemony of science extends to other disciplines in terms of methodologies and disciplinary links. Humanities have often used scientific methods and they have tended to collaborate with science to develop disciplines such as “history of science”; “philosophy of science”; and “science education” among others. There is a need for dialogue among the diverse forms of knowledge, but there is a problem when the dominant force is unwilling to dialogue. Dialogue helps to extend the horizon of possibilities.

The purpose of questing for epistemic justice is twofold. First, it aims at giving a more satisfactory account of knowledge that avoids exclusivist and hegemonic tendencies. Secondly, it guards against claims of knowledge that extend beyond their proper limits without amounting to relativism and scepticism. Finally, for epistemic justice to be obtained, science should be interpreted as one component of the “ecology of forms of knowledge” (Santos 2014, 189). Ecology is important in relating knowledge forms because it gives diversity and interdependence of knowledge forms. However, such an ecology is absent in the African university, as seen in the next section.

A moderate view on the use of African indigenous culture as a basis of African philosophy is expressed by Oladipo (1995), who argues for a cultural synthesis of elements from both the African past and ideas from Eurocentric culture. A selection of elements is a critical exercise since it takes positive aspects while putting aside negative views. While it is important to admit that it is no longer possible to rely entirely on ideas of the cultural past, it is important to consider that it is not possible to reject this culture entirely. Africa today is in a state of development and this requires changes in the physical environment and the mental outlook of the people (Oladipo 1995, 34). It should be noted that the realisation that change is inevitable does not entail the belief that a total break with the past is possible, or that the road to freedom in Africa lies in the assimilation of African culture into Western culture (Oladipo 1995, 34). Certain aspects of the cultural past require modification as we participate in the quest for development, and the past has a role in this quest (Oladipo 1995, 35). Development is a process of social reconstruction in which the past survives in the present, though in modified form (Oladipo 1995, 35). Our origin defines the essence of our being, which can be modified under the impact of various influences, but which remains part of our being and which we cannot outgrow or leave behind (Oladipo 1995, 35).

However, we argue alongside Panikkar (1997) who maintains that no culture is universal, so philosophy should not be seen as universal but located and situational. The view that philosophy is trans-cultural and that it should reflect global rather than local concerns, is misguided since what is global starts with local concerns. Basing philosophy on culture can be consistent with global issues. After all, only specific cultural values can be globalised based on their desirability and applicability. This rejects the view that philosophy based on culture is both fragmentary and retrogressive. Producing knowledge in Africa reveals a deep concern for indigenous knowledge systems as the basis of a legitimate concept of development that is historically relevant, socially meaningful, and responsive to need (Masolo 2010, 27).

The Way Forward: Decolonisation of African Philosophy

Having discussed Eurocentric tendencies in the previous sections, we now defend the decolonisation of African philosophy as a way of emancipating it. African philosophy must be necessarily political and critical for it to dislodge the assumptions of Eurocentric epistemology. Wiredu (1996, 29) defines decolonisation as “divesting African philosophical thinking of all undue influences emanating from our colonial past.” Wiredu, through “conceptual decolonisation” advocates a re-examination of current African epistemic formations in order to accomplish two aims. First, he wishes to subvert unsavoury aspects of tribal culture embedded in modern African thought, so as to make that thought more viable. Second, he intends to dislodge unnecessary Eurocentric epistemologies that are to be found in African philosophical practices (Osha 2005; 2017). Wiredu’s observation fits very well with this study because the epistemological domination that springs from the colonial past is still an undue influence. Decolonisation becomes a critique of epistemology, mindsets and concepts.

A critique of epistemology questions the assumptions and reasons for disregarding the African epistemological paradigm.

African philosophy should also clarify how some contextual conditions are rendered relevant to the question of justification, while other contextual conditions are rendered completely irrelevant. And in this way it might push through to a more comprehensive and truer understanding of what knowledge and truth are, and to a broader set of epistemic options that can epistemically evaluate interpretive frames and justificatory procedures. Clearly, African philosophy requires a strongly normative and substantive notion of truth against which we can judge the inadequacy of existing claims of knowledge (Alcoff, 2011; Grosfoguel, 2011; Heleta, 2016). The process of decolonisation is incomplete until knowledge systems that shape people's identities, linguistic capabilities, and intellectual capital—including their socio-economic progress—have been decolonised (Maringe 2017). Maringe's position is important for this study because African philosophy faces dilemmas in its identity, linguistic resources and epistemic standing.

The identities, linguistic capabilities and intellectual capital of Africans are indeed shaped by their epistemological framework. This calls for a decolonisation of the mindset in order to obtain a full awareness of the being and reality of Africa. African philosophy should, therefore, be decolonised from European tendencies. African philosophy is seen as harbouring aspirations of becoming a local incarnation of an imperialist academic model based on a Eurocentric epistemic standard, which discounts and represses other epistemic traditions. What is dangerous is the repression of African epistemic traditions that should provide the foundation of African philosophy. African philosophy as an institution must undergo a process of decolonisation to deal with the false universalism of Eurocentric/modernist theorising. African philosophy needs to overcome Eurocentric messianic and paternalistic complexes and open itself to other genealogies of thought that have been historically subalternised and illegitimately considered barren by the West (Gathii 1998; Gordo 2011; Makhubela 2016; Mgqwashu, 2016).

We draw from Grosfoguel's distinction between colonisation and coloniality. For Grosfoguel (2011, 13), colonisation allows us to think of the continuity of other forms of domination after colonial administration. Coloniality addresses present forms of situations in racist culture and the ideological strategies used by Western Europe (Grosfoguel, 2012). It involves rethinking the modern colonial world from the colonial difference point of view. Thinking from a colonial difference point of view is necessary for African philosophy so that it can validate African concepts and categories. This enables African philosophy to be genuine and authentic in its approaches. Thinking from a colonial difference point of view allows African philosophy to modify important assumptions of its paradigms. Instead of basing itself on the Cartesian "I", African philosophy can embrace the relational "we" (Le Grange 2004).

In addition, Grosfoguel's line of thought gives room to rebut the false assumptions of Eurocentric thinking and validate and legitimise African philosophy as an autonomous field of study. African philosophers should decolonise African philosophy epistemically. Alcoff (2007) argues that the epistemic impact of Eurocentric thinking is the "most damaging, far-reaching and least understood" (Alcoff 2007, 80). The damaging effect is seen in the destruction of mindsets, denial of one's own culture, uncertainties and contradictions that characterise the academic practice of African philosophy. The epistemic effects of colonialism are said to be far-reaching because they displace one's epistemological paradigm to the extent of disregarding one's indigenous forms of knowledge and thinking like the Eurocentric philosophers. The epistemic effects of colonialism are least understood because of the brainwashing and victimisation created by Eurocentric epistemology among African philosophers.

Zea's critique of Eurocentric thinking aims at the restoration of rationality through a decolonial process. "The rationality and the very humanity of the people of the conquered world were put on trial and judged by the jury of its conquerors" (Zea 1998, 36). Thus, African philosophy should necessarily provide a critique of Eurocentric epistemology in order to expose the false assumptions about Africa. The judgement was made, not on the basis of reasoned research and evidence, but merely on prejudice (Zea 1998, 36). Logically this is a fallacious procedure whose conclusions are both hasty and baseless. Paradoxically, Africans were not considered to be in a position to present their own epistemic credentials, much less to judge the Western European ones. As a result, there was no uniform epistemological platform but a one-sided analysis of the conquered by the conqueror—and this indicates epistemic injustice. Although claims to objectivity were made by the Eurocentric thinkers, they used ethnic and racialised identity to judge the epistemic status of the indigenous people of Africa. This shows inconsistency in the claims of Eurocentric thinkers.

African philosophy should aim at moving away from a situation of epistemic dependency (Morreira 2015). It has a practical aim: epistemic liberation. In very general terms, African philosophy defines itself as a counter-philosophical discourse, whether it be as a critique of colonialism, imperialism, globalisation, racism, and sexism. This is articulated from out of the experience of exploitation, destitution, alienation and reification, in the name of the projects of liberation, autonomy and authenticity. African philosophy has presented itself as an "epistemic rupture" that aims to critique and challenge not only basic assumptions and themes of Eurocentric philosophy, but also to make philosophy more responsible for the communities in which it always finds itself. Thus, by "counter-philosophical discourse" African philosophers do not mean to emphasise a heightened degree of reflexivity or self-awareness in their theorising. African philosophy affirms cultural diversity, critique, commitment, engagement, and epistemic emancipation. As a critique of all forms of philosophical dependency and inauthenticity, African philosophy is thus, among other things, a view about what counts as philosophy and how it should be pursued.

Conclusion

Following the Socratic dictum “Know thyself,” African philosophers should critically examine their own thinking and reject Eurocentric tendencies in the academic practice of African philosophy. A politics of the university’s future must necessarily begin from a premise of self-critique (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2016, 7). A university without the political mission of interrogating its own ontologies—that is, a mission of radical self-transformation—is a university of no “use,” and is indeed a useless “idea” (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2016, 7). African philosophy must get rid of Eurocentric pitfalls so that it can become authentic and truly African. We have argued that African philosophy should think outside the Eurocentric divisions of analytic and continental philosophy to avoid a dichotomy whose origin and purpose have nothing to do with Africa. African philosophers should be critical of their own practices so that they can address the language problem that side-lines African indigenous languages within the academic practice of African philosophy. The use of Eurocentric languages suppresses the philosophical potential and development of African indigenous languages. The tendency to universalise, results in the attempt to search for a unified view of African philosophy that results in arguments which range from weakly probable to fallacious. African philosophers should ground African philosophy in specific African cultures so that the richness and diversity of African cultures are realised in the practice of African philosophy. Furthermore, African philosophy should avoid the Eurocentric pitfall of disregarding African culture because the practice contradicts the very foundation upon which African philosophy must be constructed. Grounding African philosophy in African indigenous culture makes African philosophy relevant and meaningful in the African cultural context. We have proposed decolonisation of African philosophy in African universities so that it critiques Eurocentric assumptions, concepts and theories that tend to retard the authentic practice of African philosophy.

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