
Pursuing the agenda of Africanising philosophy in Africa: Some possibilities

Munamoto Chemhuru

The question about the existence or non-existence of African philosophy has almost died a natural death in the past few years. It is now a question of African and non-African thinkers putting their attention on actually *doing* African philosophy instead of “flogging the dead horse” by continuing to grapple with the question about whether African philosophy exists or not. However, in that quest for doing African philosophy, only recently has there been some growing consensus on the thinking that the content and curriculum of philosophy in Africa ought to be transformed and Africanised. In this article, I critically interrogate the question of what Africanising philosophy ought to reasonably entail. Much of the discussion on Africanisation eventually leads towards somewhat anthropological and ethno-philosophical interpretations of African cultural heritage. However, I transcend these interpretations as I seek to critically situate African philosophical thinking within universal philosophical discourse. Although I admit the danger of romanticising African indigenous value systems in the pursuit of the agenda of Africanisation of the philosophy curriculum, I seek to argue that the idea of Africanising philosophy ought to be understood as being compatible with, and consistent with, the requirement of philosophy as a critical discourse. Also, I argue that an Africanised philosophy curriculum must be relevant to the African condition. Overall, I propose some possibilities and ways by which the agenda of Africanising the current philosophy curriculum in Africa could be pursued.

Introduction

The question of what ought an Africanised education curriculum to look like in Africa remains central to current discourse on African philosophy and the quest for Africanisation of philosophy in Africa. According to Thaddeus Metz, “there is as yet in the literature no comprehensive discussion of whether, why and how to Africanise norms in higher education, that is, no thorough account of the forms it could take, the competing rationales for them or their strengths and weaknesses” (Metz 2015, 202). I attempt to explore the chances, problems and possibilities of Africanising the philosophy curriculum in Africa.

From an analysis of the recent *#Rhodes Must Fall* and later the *#Fees Must Fall* euphoria in the past few months in South Africa, it is clear to perhaps most academics that there is some problem with the education curriculum in Africa. As a result, the view that education in Africa is in need of transformation and that it ought to be Africanised cannot be ignored. This explains why the notions of “transformation” and “Africanisation” of philosophy in Africa are the buzzwords at most African philosophy conferences and workshops nowadays.¹ This renewed interest in the transformation and

¹ Some of the conferences and workshops where the ideas of transforming and Africanising the philosophy curriculum in Africa have been explicit include the following: The *International Society for African Philosophy and Studies* (ISAPS) conference held at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa from 16–19 April 2012. The *African Philosophy: Past, Present and Future* Conference held at the University of Witwatersrand from 9–11 September 2015. *Africanising the Philosophy Curriculum in Universities* Workshop held at the University of Witwatersrand on 16 September 2015. Also, at the University of Cape Town, there are currently weekly series of academic research seminars on *Philosophy in Africa: Africa in Philosophy* that are being hosted jointly by the Centre for African Studies and the Department of Philosophy.

Africanisation of philosophy in Africa needs to be critically articulated as an agenda in terms of problems, prospects and possibilities.

In this article, I particularly focus on the philosophy curriculum in Africa and advance a new grounding of how the philosophy curriculum could be Africanised in African institutions of higher learning that teach philosophy. I critically interrogate the question of the agenda of Africanisation in the light of some of the social and political developments that are still on-going, particularly in South Africa and Zimbabwe. The agenda of Africanising philosophy in Africa is in itself a paradox. It is absurd to think of Africanising philosophy, particularly African philosophy, because if such philosophy exists, then it becomes absurd to think of Africanising it in the first place. At the same time, the reality of the philosophy curriculum in Africa suggests otherwise (see also Moulder 1988, 2). However, notwithstanding the irony of the Africanisation of philosophy in Africa, I provide strong reasons why I think that the notion itself remains reasonable considering the background from which philosophy comes in Africa (see Tempels 1959), as well as its current status in most philosophy curricula in Africa.

Most recent views on transformation and Africanisation of the curriculum in Africa have shown that education in Africa needs to be transformed. Kudakwashe Tapfumaneyi avers that “this dependence [on Western philosophical paradigms] has led to ever-increasing calls from some academics to ‘de-Westernise’ or ‘Africanise’ education curriculums in Africa so as to make education relevant to the African context” (Tapfumaneyi 2013, 536). Although I am not so much focused on the education curriculum broadly conceptualised, like what Tapfumaneyi does, I take a similar approach and, in particular, present plausible alternative arguments on how the philosophy curriculum in Africa ought to be Africanised. As I take the inference that the problem which the current philosophy curriculum faces in Africa is that it is still based on, and premised on, the Western philosophical standpoint, I seek to establish novel ways in which philosophy could be examined in the light of the extent to which it could be relevant to the African environment. For example, Kwasi Wiredu (1998, 17), Mogobe Ramose (1998, 1) Pascah Mungwini (2014, 88–108) all see the need to transform and decolonise the post-independence African epistemological paradigm. As I observe that the philosophy curriculum in institutions of higher learning in Africa ought to be reflective of African existential realities, I seek to go further than the quest for transformation and Africanisation. I seek to establish that the process of decolonising philosophy and Africanising it should go beyond the African reality and practically transform it. By this, I contend that the process of transformation, which I see to be embedded in the process of Africanisation, must ultimately take philosophy and lead it towards the development of Africa and not just end at decolonising its curriculum.

As I explore the potential of Africanising the philosophy curriculum in Africa, I am at the same time cautious about the overtones which the process of Africanisation may entail. This is why Molebatsi Milton Nkoane argues that “for some opposed to [Africanisation], it is a form of insolent and misguided provocation—*philosophy is philosophy*—while for those supporting it, it is a flag around which to rally” (Nkoane 2006, 52; emphasis added). While I critically examine both arguments for and against the idea of Africanisation, I come to the conclusion that the philosophy curriculum ought to be Africanised. However, what remains to be addressed is the question of how such curriculum could be really Africanised. For me, the process ought to involve putting African epistemology, and other critical philosophical problems emanating from Africa, at the centre of the philosophy curriculum in Africa. This idea is based on a number of premises and observations that I will proceed to discuss shortly despite the political implications implicit in the idea of Africanisation.

Overall, I seek to propose how the philosophy curriculum in Africa, broadly conceptualised, ought to be Africanised. First, I attempt to place African philosophy within its *place* in philosophy. I then proceed to analyse the current status of philosophy in Africa. It is here where I argue for the idea of Africanisation by focusing on the question of how the philosophy curriculum ought to be Africanised, considering what it currently is like.

The place of African philosophy in philosophy

The question about the Africanisation of philosophy in Africa obviously invites us to a discussion of the relationship between philosophy and African philosophy. Before I venture into the discussion

of the Africanisation of the philosophy curriculum in Africa, I see it as useful to consider such relationship by first defining “philosophy” and “African philosophy”, respectively. In defining these commonly used terms, I intend to come up with my working definitions of these terms, and to proceed to demonstrate the way in which African philosophy ought to be understood as being part of the mainstay of philosophy. This is contrary to some relativist views about philosophy which see African philosophy as being more of an expression of a people’s culture (Gyekye 1997, 9; see also Sesanti 2015, 351). This limited view, which Hountondji (1996) criticises, can easily lead us into the misinterpretation of the idea of Africanisation to imply some particularisation and culturalisation of African philosophy. It also leads into the mistake of assuming that African philosophy is a discourse that is distinct from universal philosophy, and perhaps a second-order philosophy.

The word “philosophy” is a word that can be used to mean different things to different people (see also Etieyibo 2014, 71). In its general and common-place understanding, the word could be used to simply refer to a way of life or a way of doing certain things. The word “philosophy” is sometimes loosely used to refer to people’s ideas, beliefs, attitudes, thinking and values. One can therefore talk of a football team’s philosophy, a people’s philosophy, a church’s philosophy, a politician’s, or a political party’s philosophy, from this loose understanding of the word “philosophy”. However, a more detailed understanding of the term is informed by its etymological analysis, which traces it back to the Greek words, *philos* and *Sophia* meaning “love” and “wisdom”, respectively. This is how philosophy has come to be accepted and understood more seriously, as the love or quest for knowledge and wisdom. Sometimes the words “knowledge” and “wisdom” are used interchangeably in this understanding of philosophy. However, wisdom is more qualitative than knowledge. For example, in the African context, while all individuals could possess knowledge, wisdom remains a preserve of a few sages or wise men and women who have a deft understanding of their society (see Oruka 1997, 61).

Understood in the first sense, one observation that could be made from this kind of “universal” view of philosophy is that philosophy knows no boundaries in terms of person and “place”, as opposed to the second sense in which philosophy is restricted to be an enterprise of the African sages alone. The question of person and “place” is very critical because in the universalist view of philosophy; it is not prescribed as to who ought to philosophise, and where philosophy should take place. This is why I argue that philosophy knows no personal or geographic boundaries, although its “place” ought to shape its character and outlook. According to Abraham Olivier, the idea of “place must be understood as referring to the “world of living...that is, positions and situations in which we are socially involved” (Olivier 2014, 90). In the process of transforming and Africanising philosophy in Africa therefore, the appeal to philosophic sagacity becomes partly a limited view because of its emphasis on the particular (the few sages) rather than the universal (all individuals).

While, on the one hand I take the universalist view of philosophy to be compatible with the way philosophy ought to be approached in Africa, on the other hand, African philosophy is also understood differently by different people. Loosely, “African philosophy” could be broadly understood as referring to questions that focus on the African way of life and worldviews, traditions, belief systems, conceptions of reality and approaches to knowledge and wisdom. While this view of African philosophy is what attracts African philosophers to the need for transformation and Africanisation, it also has the temptation to compel one to accept everything in African culture and heritage as constitutive of philosophy. Although it is more focused on the particular elements of African cultural thinking, this is a broader and ordinary understanding of African philosophy which is propagated by thinkers such as Placide Tempels, John Mbiti and partly by Henry Odera Oruka.

Also, another generally accepted view of African philosophy, despite being rigid, exclusive and restrictive in nature, is that which considers African philosophy to be strictly an activity for and by Africans (Hountondji 1996, 33). Hountondji for example, would want African philosophy to be understood as “a set of texts, specifically the set of texts written by Africans and described as philosophical by their authors themselves” (Hountondji 1996, 33). Vincent Mudimbe also supports this argument that “the notion of African philosophy refers to the contributions of Africans practising philosophy within the defined framework of the discipline and its historical tradition” (Mudimbe 1988, 9). These definitions of African philosophy construe African philosophy to be an exclusively

African affair and, as a result, they have been adopted by thinkers such as Asante (1996, 4) and Ramose (1998, 1–9) who advocate for a very strong form of Afrocentric thinking.

Although Mudimbe (1988), Hountondji (1996), Asante (1996) and Ramose (1998) would like African philosophy to be understood as strictly entailing the contributions of Africans practising philosophy within the defined framework of the discipline and its historical tradition and culture, I take a slightly different dimension. I will use the term “African philosophy” with an elastic meaning and understanding it to refer to a body of knowledge and such contributions from African scholars and even non-African thinkers who would want to contribute towards the development of African ideas, knowledge, culture and thought systems. In this regard, my understanding of African philosophy will not be exclusive and closed to the extent of excluding the contributions of other non-African thinkers who are sympathetic to and who would like to either contribute to or critique African philosophy.

African philosophy as I will understand it here, remains an attempt and the contributions by philosophers (both African and non-African) who would like to assess the contribution that African ideas about epistemology, ontology, ethics, aesthetics and logic could contribute to their well-being. Rather than relying on Hountondji’s limited understanding of African philosophy, which Bell looks at as a prohibitive understanding (Bell 2002, 03), I argue that African philosophy should be universalised and approached from a professional philosophical perspective and not from a geo-ethnic perspective. One justification for taking this view is a consideration of the extent to which some non-African thinkers contribute to the development of African philosophy. For example, some non-African thinkers such as Bell and Metz are not only sympathetic to African philosophy, but actually contribute towards its critical appreciation and development through their various constructive works on African philosophy.

I defend the non geo-ethnic approach to African philosophy because I also see it as being compatible with the need for transforming and Africanising philosophy in Africa so that it occupies what Bruce Janz calls a “place” in the universal discourse of philosophy. According to Janz, “the history of African philosophy has been the history of struggle to find a place, or to claim a place, or to assert the entitlement to a place, in the face of those who have claimed that it has no place” (Janz 2009, 1). Accordingly, the process of Africanisation also offers philosophy in Africa the opportunity to first occupy this place in philosophy. So, finding a place for African philosophy, as well as placing it in universal philosophical discourse becomes one major step in addressing the question of how philosophy in Africa ought to be Africanised.

Philosophy in Africa and the quest for Africanisation

In the attempt to critically understand the issues surrounding the quest for the need to Africanise the content of the philosophy curriculum in African universities, I came across the following interesting exposé from Kwasi Wiredu:

Compare how things stand or might stand in, say, the study of British philosophy. In fact, there may be no such course in the given British university for the good reason that there may be no need for it. It would be a great day for African philosophy when the same becomes true of an African university, for it would mean that African insights have become fully integrated into the principal branches of philosophy. Surely, it would be more than mildly idiosyncratic for a British teacher of philosophy in a British university to propose, in his teaching of, Metaphysics, for example, to hold in abeyance all metaphysical insights deriving from British sources until s/he has the occasion to teach a course on British philosophy (Wiredu 1998, 19).

In my view, the transformation and Africanisation of philosophy in Africa is a very noble enterprise that should start by critically defining African philosophy, placing it and situating it within the broader discourse of philosophy in general in order for it to be understood as an independent but authentic philosophy. In this way, philosophy could then be examined in the light of the extent to which it could be relevant to the African environment. This working conception is the view which I take to be different from attempts at trying to comprehend African philosophy as being

separate and second-order from mainstream philosophy, a common-place understanding of the idea of transformation and Africanisation that is implicitly informed by Henry Odera Oruka's idea of ethno-philosophy (1997) and Paulin Hountondji's (1996, 33) exclusivist and closed understanding of African philosophy as being some sort of cultural anthropology that is mainly confined to itself and its authors who also need to match up to Western philosophical standards and thinking. In opposing this kind of thinking, I therefore take as reasonable Lebakeng, Phalane and Dalindjebo's (2006) argument. These thinkers propose "a reversal of epistemicide through inscription of indigenous African epistemology and warn that to deny the existence of African philosophy as a basis of African education on the grounds of maintaining standards is to perpetuate epistemological injustice"(Lebakeng, Phalane and Dalindjebo 2006, 74). I also see this kind of epistemological injustice with regard to philosophy in Africa as being in need of redress through affirming the importance of African epistemology.

Although the process of transformation is not synonymous with Africanisation, there is a strong sense in which I see transformation as being implicit and embedded in the process of Africanisation. This is why, in this article, I am less interested in transformation while being more focused on Africanisation. If the philosophy curriculum is Africanised, then it follows that it would have been transformed. So, in this article, I will speak more about Africanisation than transformation as I presume that transformation is implicit in Africanisation.

The question of what Africanising entails in the first place is very important. It is the kind of question that one ought to approach in terms of the background from which it is coming from as it raises a myriad other questions that also remain unanswered. These are questions such as: Who is seeing the need for Africanising philosophy in Africa? What is the problem with philosophy as it is being studied and taught in Africa in the first place? What is the idea of Africanising philosophy in Africa likely to yield? Can something philosophical or even African be Africanised, and how?

These questions come to mind because it is only until recently that there have been such serious calls for the transformation and Africanisation of philosophy and its curriculum, particularly in institutions of higher learning. To confirm this new agenda and slant in African philosophy, Simphiwe Sesanti, for one, echoes the following sentiments:

In the not-so-distant past, colonial European scholarship denied the existence of African philosophy. In reaction, indigenous African scholars assiduously strove to prove its existence. While Africans succeeded in demonstrating the existence of African philosophy, another denial—deliberate or otherwise—manifested and continues to manifest itself in the non-existence or peripheral existence of African philosophy in institutions of higher learning (Sesanti 2015, 346).

While I do not directly focus on the denial of the existence of African philosophy as Sesanti does, I mainly focus on the idea of Africanisation of the philosophy curriculum in institutions of higher learning without being particular to the problem of the existence of African philosophy, since that debate has already been settled. At the same time, I accept some of the conclusions that Sesanti makes about the current status of African philosophy and the need for its transformation and Africanisation. However, I seek to go further in the quest for decolonisation, transformation and Africanisation as I propose some of the ways in which these could be achieved. I argue that a decolonised, transformed and Africanised philosophy curriculum ought to be understood and taken as the basis for the development of Africa since it is independent from any colonial prejudices.

My first step and response to the idea of Africanisation would be that it can be addressed by first decolonising the minds of African and non-African thinkers who continue to see philosophy as being superior to the African condition such that nothing philosophical could be studied and taught from Africa. So, this is the first major step towards Africanisation of the philosophy curriculum in Africa. That process involves what Wiredu sees as "divesting African philosophical thinking of all undue influences emanating from our colonial past" (Wiredu 1998, 17). The result of this process is that "non-Western indigenous systems of knowledge should have prima facie integrity and thereby equal representation and status in the global intellectual marketplace" (Hallen 2010, 84). Understood this way therefore, although no one really doubts the existence of African philosophy these days, the

process of Africanising the philosophy curriculum in Africa becomes a foundation for the epistemic legitimacy of African philosophy.

Molefe Kete Asante is one Afrocentric thinker who could be credited for championing the agenda of Africanising knowledge in the early 1970s. Although I do not take the radical view of Afrocentric thinking that is implicit in Asante, I credit him for having kick-started a project that could be useful towards transforming and Africanising the philosophy curriculum in Africa. Recently, Ramose has also argued for the decolonisation of thinking in the process of Africanisation (Ramose 1998, 1). According to Ramose,

[f]or centuries, discourses on Africa have been dominated by non-Africans. Many reasons account for this state of affairs and, not least, the unjustified violence of colonisation. Since colonisation, Africans have had almost an infinity of spokespersons. These claimed unilaterally the right to speak on behalf of the Africans and to define the meaning of experience and truth for them. Thus Africans were reduced to silence even about themselves. On the face of it, decolonisation removed this problem. However, on closer analysis it is clear that decolonisation was an important catalyst in the breaking of the silence about the Africans. It is still necessary to assert and uphold the right of Africans to define the meaning of experience and truth in their own right. In order to achieve this, one of the requirements is that Africans should take the opportunity to speak for and about themselves and in that way construct an authentic and truly African discourse about Africa (Ramose 1998, 1).

From Ramose's sentiments it is clear that the first step towards the transformation and Africanisation of philosophy in Africa should involve being sympathetic to the background from which African philosophy is coming from. That background is characterised by denial, colonisation and suppression. I also agree with Ramose on the need for the decolonisation of African philosophy. To that end, the process of Africanising philosophy in Africa should start with the decolonisation of philosophy and its curriculum so that it becomes what Ramose and others see as a "truly African discourse". However, that "truly African discourse" should not be understood as being parallel to the demands and standards of a philosophy, universally conceptualised.

The process of Africanising the philosophy curriculum in Africa is part of the grand project on decolonising and Africanising the university in Africa, as well as Africanising education in general. This is why Moletsi Milton Nkoane thinks that "Afrocentric education is a process or vehicle for defining, interpreting, promoting and transmitting African thought, philosophy, identity and culture" (Nkoane 2006, 50). Although he sees some limitations with reference to the idea of Africanisation in general, Horsthemke gives us the following useful understanding of what the process of Africanisation involves:

Africanisation is generally seen to signal a (renewed) focus on Africa, on reclamation of what has been taken from Africa, and, as such, it forms part of post-colonialist, anti-racist discourse. With regard to knowledge, it comprises a focus on indigenous African knowledge and concerns simultaneously "legitimation" and "protection from exploitation" of this knowledge. With regard to education, the focus is on Africanisation of institutions, curricula, syllabi and criteria for excellence (in research, performance, etc.) (Horsthemke 2004, 571).

Similarly, Africanisation of the philosophy curriculum in Africa involves also refocusing the way philosophy is being approached in Africa so that the quest for knowledge and wisdom becomes centred on values and approaches that take into consideration the contribution of the African experience. Such kind of an approach is also free from some colonial prejudices that have traditionally characterised the content and direction of philosophy in Africa. At the same time, the process of Africanisation should not be overly taken to imply that it entails taking everything Africa as being philosophical. Africanisation should therefore be compatible with the understanding of African philosophy as "a critical philosophy [and] not a descriptive record of traditional beliefs" (Oladipo 2006, 9).

That there is a problem with regard to the way philosophy is construed and approached in Africa is plain to see. For example, one would expect that philosophy in Africa is learnt, taught and expressed

in common African indigenous languages such as Shona, Ndebele, Tswana, Zulu, Xhosa, Venda, Tsonga, Akan, Yoruba, Igbo and Swahili, among others. The fact that philosophy in Africa and its curriculum are in fact designed in languages that are foreign to Africa means that it is difficult for such languages to clearly express the philosophical contributions of Africans. On the other hand, because of that precedence, African thinkers or philosophers are being forced to philosophise and express themselves in languages that are alien to them and their immediate reality. For example, Kwasi Wiredu looks at the problem of language as a medium of communicating philosophy, particularly African philosophy and comes to the conclusion that

...a language, most assuredly, is not conceptually neutral; syntax and vocabulary are apt to suggest definite modes of conceptualisation. [Hence]...the African who has learned philosophy in English, for example, has most likely become conceptually Westernised to a larger extent not by choice but by the force of historical circumstances. To that same extent he [or she] may have become de-Africanised (Wiredu 1998, 17).

In that regard, the process of Africanising the philosophy curriculum should also take into consideration the problem of the exclusion of African indigenous languages in the teaching and documentation of philosophy in Africa. Similarly, although Pascah Mungwini looks at African languages as some kind of “inventions” by the missionaries in Africa, he also sees the centrality of indigenous languages in the transmitting of indigenous knowledge and philosophy. According to Mungwini,

[t]he reality is that without restoring African languages to their rightful place in the academy there is no attaining “education for all” and without “education for all” there is, by extension, no African renaissance. There is no need to emphasise that foreign languages constitute barriers to the attainment of knowledge by the majority in Africa. If Africa is to transform itself from a consumer to a generator of knowledge, then strengthening its indigenous languages is not negotiable (Mungwini2014, 103).

In the same way, if the idea of transformation of philosophy in African institutions of higher learning is to be realised, there is a serious need to revisit indigenous African languages and integrate them into the philosophy curriculum as media for communication. This issue boils down to the problem of language policies that were, and continue to be, adopted by institutions of education in Africa which are still reflective of the colonial legacy. As Murove and Mazibuko see it “a symbiotic relationship exists between colonialism and Eurocentric knowledge”(Murove and Mazibuko 2008, 101). If such kind of colonial and Eurocentric knowledge is not quickly decolonised and reconstructed, it can still have influence on the postcolonial condition. In South Africa and Zimbabwe, for example, despite the constitutions of the two respective countries accepting the local languages as the medium of communication, philosophy is still being taught mostly in English in most institutions of higher learning that teach philosophy.

Also, the other justification for transforming the philosophy curriculum in Africa is that it is mainly based on the teaching of ancient Greek philosophers such as Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, Aquinas and other Western philosophers such as Hegel, Kant, Russell and Wittgenstein, as well as American philosophers such as Charles Sanders Peirce, William James, and John Dewey, among others. This explains why Murove and Mazibuko argue that “...African universities and their academics are mostly Western-oriented in their modus operandi, and that consequently the knowledge that is produced does not serve the needs of the post-colonial African society” (Murove and Mazibuko 2008, 102). In the light of this kind of predicament, Thaddeus Metz asks us the following question to do with the curriculum: “[W]ith respect to curriculum, are students being taught characteristically African perspectives and approaches, as well as texts written by Africans?...Is a philosophy department instructing sub-Saharan thinkers?” (Metz 2015, 246). Here, the conclusion that I seek to draw is that part of achieving the agenda of Africanising philosophy in Africa would be to teach ancient African philosophy in place of ancient Greek philosophy so that such philosophy becomes relevant to the history and development of African philosophy and the development of Africa at large.

Although he looks at education, broadly conceptualised, Tapfumaneyi sees a failure to respond to the above questions in the affirmative as a problem resulting from Eurocentric biases. For him, “it has been hypothesised that Eurocentric-biased curriculums are the major reasons why education [particularly philosophy] has failed to make an impact in developing the continent” (Tapfumaneyi 2013, 536). In this light, I therefore maintain that the pursuit of a Eurocentric philosophy curriculum like what is characteristic of the current situation limits the extent to which philosophy ought to go towards addressing the existential realities facing African communities. A Eurocentric-based curriculum cannot transform and address African realities and experiences. Just like Western philosophy, African philosophy ought to critically draw from its indigenous experiences and historical circumstances for it to be a truly African philosophy. Lebakeng, Phalane and Dalindjebo argue that “from the perspective of the sociology of indigenous knowledge, the assumptions which constructed Western thought, literature and traditions are not universal, but are derived from specific and discreet Western experiences prescribed by specific historical levels of economic and industrial development” (Lebakeng, Phalane and Dalindjebo 2006, 74). Accordingly, if for example, medical, environmental and business ethics are to be understood within the African philosophical landscape, there is a need to critically consider what African thinkers or philosophers such as Henry Odera Oruka, Kwame Gyekye, Kwasi Wiredu, Mogobe Ramose, Munyaradzi Felix Murove, Pascah Mungwini and others say about these applied disciplines, instead of exclusively relying on what, for example, Lynn White, Tom Regan, Peter Singer, Judith Javis Thompson and Marry Anne Warren say about these applied ethical disciplines from Western philosophical standpoints while doing philosophy in Africa.

These problems are also compacted by the fact that very few universities in Africa teach African philosophy seriously. While he is broadly focused on the Africanisation of institutional culture in South African institutions of higher learning, Metz admits that in his own area of philosophy “African philosophy continues to be (nearly) entirely eclipsed by the presentation of Anglo-American and continental perspectives in most major departments” (Metz 2015, 247). Of the few that teach it, they teach it as just a course or some kind of an “afterthought course”. This is what prompts Sesanti to conclude that “the status of African philosophy...reveals that African philosophy still exists on the periphery on South African soil” (Sesanti 2015, 349).

In Zimbabwe, for example, out of the sixteen state and private universities in the country, only two of them, the University of Zimbabwe and Great Zimbabwe University teach philosophy as an optional subject area for students in the humanities only. Of these two universities that teach philosophy, the curriculum is modelled in such a way that the introductory courses in philosophy are modelled around ancient Greek philosophers such as Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. There is no attempt in such philosophy courses to consider the contribution of ancient African philosophy from Egyptian civilisation to the development of itself and other philosophies like ancient Greek philosophy (see also James[1954]2009). Also, in these two universities, African philosophy is even taught as an optional course to students at their second or third year of study and not as a stand-alone discipline.

Also, very few African students in African universities are willing to take up philosophy as a subject, course or degree programme at university level where philosophy is taught. This general reluctance by African students to take up philosophy is mainly attributed to the lack of practical benefits that one realises from the study of philosophy. More often, when attempting to register for a course in philosophy, students ask questions like: What is philosophy all about? What will I do with philosophy after university? Can philosophy put food on my table? Such questions arise because they see philosophy as some discipline that is divorced from their existential realities.

There is also a sense in which the philosophy curriculum in Africa is gender insensitive. For example, considering the number of female academics and students in philosophy departments across universities in Africa, it is clear that philosophy as it is being taught in Africa needs to be re-examined. Perhaps this is attributable to the curriculum that does not take into consideration the need to be sensitive to gender. Philosophy, properly understood, does not authenticate academic boundaries or the quest for knowledge on the basis of sex. So, if it is properly Africanised, it

must not be like what philosophy is currently like in Africa where it seems to be a preserve of the purportedly *dominant* sex.

Although Sesanti attributes the *peripheral existence* of African philosophy in the philosophy curriculum in Africa to the historical denial of African philosophy (2015, 349), I take a different dimension and argue that it is a result of the colonial hangover that continues to haunt the current philosophy curriculum in African universities and colleges that teach philosophy. For example, all the teacher-training colleges in Zimbabwe offer philosophy of education as a course for student-teachers. However, that particular philosophy of education course revolves around non-African classical philosophers such as Pestalozzi, Froebel, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle and John Dewey. This is why there is a serious need for the Africanisation of the philosophy curriculum presently.

From another angle, the attempts to Africanise the philosophy curriculum in Africa should not be understood to imply the prescription of certain ways of approaching African philosophy that are in tangent with the way philosophy ought to be done. While the idea of Africanisation must be premised on the acceptance of the view that cultures are diverse, and therefore ought to be approached differently, either from any of the approaches one may find to be attractive, philosophy remains a universal discipline that cuts across these varied cultures. There should not be a problem in using and accepting varied approaches to different cultures and ways of life, but ultimately philosophy should be philosophy. This is what makes the process of Africanisation possible and compatible with what philosophy ought to be.

Sometimes the particularistic approach to philosophy that is implicit in the idea of Africanisation may be judged for attempting to “venture into continent generalisations about African philosophy” (Wiredu 1998, 23). The quest for Africanising philosophy is in itself, a particularist approach to philosophy which may be somewhat suspect in the universal discourse on philosophy as it is thought to lead philosophy in Africa into some relativist epistemology. However, implicit in the view of transformation and Africanisation of philosophy in Africa which I have in mind is the view that something universal about African philosophy ought to be included in the general philosophy curriculum.

Also, Africanising philosophy and its curriculum in Africa should not be understood to mean separating philosophy in Africa or African philosophy from the mainstream of philosophy since philosophy is a universal discipline that cuts across cultures, societies, nations and people. According to Wiredu, “it is a colonial mentality that regards African philosophy as something that should be kept apart from the mainstream of philosophical thinking” (Wiredu 1998, 19). For example, in social and political philosophy Asante considers the possibility and potential of Kwame Nkrumah’s vision for the promotion of world peace, although such vision is rooted in African philosophy. According to Asante,

[t]he prospects and possibilities of world peace were inherent in Nkrumah’s vision of a United States of Africa. In effect, an Africa, freed from the vestiges of colonialism in all its dimensions, economic, philosophical, and cultural, would bring stability to the continent and remove Africa, especially in its fragmented reality as nation-states from being a hotly contested region for international political and economic manoeuvres. Nkrumah’s vision was political but also more than political; it was also cultural and philosophical, hence, Afrocentric (Asante 2013, 1–2).

This goes to show the potential of Africanising not only philosophy, but various institutions in Africa’s postcolonial era. Overall, the philosophy curriculum in Africa should be centred on the teaching of indigenous African knowledge, or what others would like to call indigenous knowledge. Indigenous knowledge is the kind of knowledge or wisdom that is unique and peculiar to a certain kind of culture or community (see also Tapfumaneyi 2013, 536). Ultimately, revisiting African indigenous knowledge in the quest for Africanisation of philosophy in Africa will lead to the geography of philosophy in Africa being clearly mapped out. The geography of philosophy in Africa ought to be clearly marked out in philosophy especially with regard to how philosophy is being done in Africa (Janz 2009, 2).

Conclusion

In this paper, I seek to conclude that the content of the curriculum of philosophy in Africa needs to be seriously relooked at, if in any way current calls for the transformation and Africanisation of the philosophy curriculum are to be realised. This view is also alluded to by Murove and Mazibuko in their work on *Academic Freedom Discourse in Post-Colonial Africa* (2008). Although they are not more focused on the transformation and Africanisation of the philosophy curriculum in Africa, they raise a very pertinent argument for the future of Africa's knowledge economy and its curriculum. For them, "...it is imperative that transformation is on the basis of the quality of knowledge that is disseminated in African universities" (Murove and Mazibuko 2008, 101). While also contributing to *The Shaping of the Future of African Philosophy*, Bernard Matolino comes to the conclusion that it is the responsibility of philosophers in Africa to take Africa seriously and to be sensitive to the contribution of African philosophy to philosophy in general instead of focusing on the history of its own nature and encounter with Western philosophy (Matolino 2015, conference paper presentation). This view is in line with the idea of Africanising philosophy in Africa, which I have examined here.

While there is a real danger of accepting everything African as being philosophical in the name of Africanisation since Africanisation could be loosely interpreted to suggest essentialism (Metz 2015, 243), the current philosophy curriculum in Africa remains in need of serious transformation and Africanisation. If Africanisation is properly understood as a process that involves putting African epistemology at the core of philosophy in Africa, instead of cultural anthropology, and continuing to accuse Western philosophy for its predicament, then the agenda of Africanisation can be achievable. At the same time, Africanisation should not be understood to imply that philosophy in Africa is parallel to the universal philosophical discourse. Against all this background therefore, I conclude and maintain that the notion of philosophy transformation in Africa remains inevitable if the challenges and prospects facing Africa's development are to be critically understood from an African philosophical perspective.

Acknowledgement

I wrote this article during the time I was doing my Doctoral studies with the University of Johannesburg under the supervision of Prof. Thad Metz. I first presented ideas contained in this article at a colloquium that was organised by the University of Johannesburg's Department of Philosophy on 17 February 2016 while on contact visit at UJ. I wish to thank UJ's Department of Philosophy for the constructive suggestions towards shaping the development of this article.

References

- Asante, M. K. 1996. "Afrocentricity and Culture." In: *African Culture: The Rhythms of Unity*, edited by M. K. Asante and K. W. Asante, 3–12. Trenton: Africa World Press.
- Asante, M. K. 2013. *Afrocentricity and an Approach to Peace in the World*. www.unisa.ac.za/news/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/Molefi-Asante-article1.pdf.
- Bell, R. H. 2002. *Understanding African Philosophy: A Cross Cultural Approach to Classical and Contemporary Issues*. New York: Routledge.
- Etieyibo, E. 2014. "Post-Modern Thinking and African Philosophy." *Filosofia Theoretica: A Journal of Philosophy, Culture and Religion* 3 (1): 67–82.
- Gyekye, K. 1997. *An Essay on African Philosophical Thought: The Akan Conceptual Scheme*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hallen, B. 2010. "'Ethnophilosophy' Redefined?" *Thought and Practice: A Journal of the Philosophical Association of Kenya* 2 (1): 73–85.
- Horsthemke, K. 2004. "Knowledge, Education and the Limits of Africanisation." *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 38 (4): 570–587.
- Hountondji, P. 1996. *African philosophy: Myth and Reality*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- James, G. G. M. (1954) 2009. *Stolen Legacy: Greek Philosophy is Stolen Egyptian Philosophy*. The Journal of Pan African Studies: eBook.
- Janz, B. B. 2009. *Philosophy in an African Place*. Lanham: Lexington Books.

-
- Lebakeng, J. T., M. M. Phalane, and N. Dalindjebo. 2006. "Epistemicide, Institutional Cultures and the Imperative for the Africanisation of Universities in South Africa." *Alternation (Durban)* 13 (1): 70–87.
- Matolino, B. 2015. "The Shaping of the Future of African Philosophy." *African Philosophy: Past, Present and Future Conference*. University of the Witwatersrand, 9–11 September.
- Metz, T. 2015. "Africanising Institutional Culture: What is Possible and what is Plausible." In: *Being at Home: Race, Institutional Culture and Transformation at South African Higher Educational Institutions*, edited by P. Tabensky and S. Matthews, 242–272. Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press.
- Moulder, J. 1988. "'Africanising' our Universities: Some Ideas for a Debate." *Theoria* 72: 1–15.
- Mudimbe, V. Y. 1988. *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy and the Order of Knowledge*. Bloomington, Indianapolis: Indiana University press.
- Mungwini, P. 2014. "The African Renaissance and the Quest for Epistemic Liberation." *Australian Review of African Studies* 35 (2): 88–108.
- Murove, M. F., and F. Mazibuko. 2008. "Academic Freedom Discourse in Post-Colonial Africa: A Quest for Transformation and Appropriation of Relevant Knowledge in Higher Education." *Africa Insight* 38 (2): 101–114.
- Nkoane, M. M. 2006. "The Africanisation of the University in Africa." *Alternation (Durban)* 13 (1): 49–69.
- Oladipo, O. 2006. "Issues in the Definition of African Philosophy." In: *Core Issues in African Philosophy*, edited by O. Oladipo, 9–20. Ibadan: Hope Publications.
- Olivier, A. 2014. "On being an African." *Quest: An African Journal of Philosophy* 25 (1-2): 77–102.
- Oruka, H. O. 1997. "Essays by H. Odera Oruka." In: *Sagacious Reasoning: Henry Odera Oruka in Memoriam*, edited by A. Graness and K. Kresse, 23–138. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang.
- Ramose, M. B. 1998. "The Struggle for Reason in Africa." In: *The African Philosophy Reader*, edited by P. H. Coetzee and A. P. J. Roux, 1–9. London: Routledge.
- Sesanti, S. 2015. "Teaching African Philosophy in African Institutions of Higher Learning: The Implications for African Renaissance." *South African Journal of Philosophy* 34 (3): 346–357. doi:10.1080/02580136.2015.1072451.
- Tapfumaneyi, K. D. K. 2013. "Reordering African Education-Potential Benefits and Challenges: Africanising the Education Curriculum." *International Journal of Advanced Research* (4): 536–542.
- Tempels, P. 1959. *Bantu Philosophy*. Trans. Rev. Collin King. Paris: Présence Africaine.
- Wiredu, K. 1998. "Toward Decolonising African Philosophy and Religion." *African Studies Quarterly* 1 (4): 17–44.