

BOOK REVIEW:**AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY IN THE SEARCH OF
AUTHENTICITY AND THE CONDITION OF UNIVERSALITY**DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/ft.v6i1.6>

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Mosima's excellent work on Henry Odera Oruka and interculturality, *Philosophic Sagacity and Intercultural Philosophy: Beyond Henry Odera Oruka*, succinctly captures the dilemma of a philosophical tradition in the search for particularist authenticity and universal solidarity all at once. The philosophical tradition under study is, of course, African philosophy. Mosima commences his discourse with a three-fold classification of the various tendencies and schools in African philosophy for the sake of simplification: traditionalism with its particularizing perspective, universalism with its modernizing perspective, and the third way represented by the fast-developing intercultural perspective.

With the enduring question of the status of ethno-philosophy in African philosophy constantly hovering in his mind, Mosima proceeds eloquently with his critique of philosophic sagacity. He notes the ethnophilosophical dependency of Oruka's philosophic sagacity, as argued by Kaphagawani (see MOSIMA, 2016, 103–104; cf AGADA 2015, 247–249). The ethnophilosophical underpinning of philosophic sagacity is hardly a problem for Mosima. The main weakness he identifies in philosophic sagacity, and which is important for his cherished intercultural project in African philosophy, is what he recognizes as Oruka's subservience to the hegemonic intent and character of the Western epistemological framework. For Mosima, Oruka's recourse to the Western epistemological framework, which hoists its own particularist concerns and content as the standard of universality, rationality, and objectivity represents the capitulation to Western intellectual hegemony (MOSIMA 2016, 108).

Mosima can accuse Oruka of promoting the Western exclusivist claim to 'real' rationality because Oruka wholeheartedly embraces the Western epistemological method as the truly authentic method in his

elucidation of traditional knowledge-forms extracted from folk and philosophic sages. Consequently, it is easy to conclude, as Mosima does, that Oruka's sages did not have original views, their perspectives having been conditioned and coloured by modernism and the Western epistemological prism which Oruka set before the sages in the interviews he conducted (MOSIMA 2016, 117).

Having identified the major flaw in philosophic sagacity, Mosima charts the way forward for this philosophical tendency in particular and African philosophy in general. Mosima's radical course is the call for African philosophy to embrace the project of interculturality and go global. The adoption of philosophical globalization for Mosima is integral to the "counter-hegemonic" project of African philosophers in the 21st century. The Cameroonian philosopher writes, still thinking of the great flaw of philosophic sagacity:

When Oruka distinguishes the folk sage from the philosophic sages, is it not a subtle way of strengthening the very hegemony he sets out to challenge? His reaction is not counter-hegemonic enough but is based on a sameness with the West. This explains why he attempts to construct an African version of Western sagacity. (MOSIMA 2016, 109)

Inspired by the work of Wim van Binsbergen in intercultural philosophy from the African standpoint, Mosima's solution to the West's philosophical hegemony consists in the globalization of African philosophy in the context of intercultural philosophy. According to the Cameroonian thinker, intercultural philosophy fundamentally demands "dialogue with other dynamic, alternative logics than the North Atlantic one" (MOSIMA 2016, 137). Thus, he talks of the globalization of sagacity in the context of cultural exchange and mutual contribution to a universal pool of knowledge. Mosima (2016, 144) asserts confidently: "Since the world is becoming increasingly interconnected and interdependent, it makes sense to think of a globalized sagacity." Mosima soon goes into rhapsody for interculturality. On page 151 of his brilliant doctoral thesis, now published as a book, he writes: "Philosophy should not escape by searching for fixed, universal, and immutable truth. Rather, it should be a problem-solving, pragmatic exercise." On page 152, Mosima uses the universal embrace of denim jeans to illustrate the necessity of interculturality and globalization. Denims are produced in the West, but humans everywhere appreciate them. It is reasonable, therefore, for African philosophy to go beyond particularist preoccupations and impediments and be useful to non-African cultures.

Mosima is of the opinion that if Oruka had taken adequate notice of certain theories expounded in the 1960s and 1970s – notably the dynamic conception of culture by the Manchester School of Anthropology – he would have directed philosophic sagacity towards interculturality.

In *Philosophic Sagacity and Intercultural Philosophy: Beyond Henry Odera Oruka*, Pius Mosima has argued eloquently for the “universalizing, transcontinental” potentials of African philosophy, an optimistic perspective reminiscent of Jonathan Chimakonam’s idea of the Global Expansion of Thought (CHIMAKONAM 2015, 35). Mosima infectiously envisions an African philosophy in dialogue with other philosophical traditions at the global level where every particular knowledge tradition contributes to the universal reservoir of knowledge as the equal of other particular knowledge traditions, thereby discrediting all hegemonic intentions and pretensions.

But like every ambitious intellectual vision, Mosima’s idealism is not completely convincing, persuasive as it is. He accuses Oruka of not moving radically in an anti-hegemonic direction. This charge of subservience to the Western intellectual hegemony is a masterful stroke delivered by Mosima. For long, African philosophers have neglected the task of developing philosophical methodologies rooted in the African knowledge-universe, preferring to blindly follow either the analytic method or the methods adopted by continental philosophers. Mosima appears to be calling for greater intellectual independence, without which intercultural philosophy will end up a futile exercise, indistinguishable from a crude and biased attempt at comparative philosophy. Mosima seems to be saying that a total rejection of Western methods of philosophizing may be impossible and even undesirable but that the complete acceptance of Western methodologies constitutes an endorsement of the very hegemony that threatens to condemn African philosophy to irrelevance.

Nevertheless – and ironically – this very charge can be brought against Mosima to the extent that his globalist solution to the limitation of philosophic sagacity is not radical, not counter-hegemonic, enough. First, Mosima draws inspiration, and finds the justification for proposing the equality of divergent philosophical traditions, overwhelmingly from outside Africa – a paradox noticeable in Valentin-Yves Mudimbe’s works on the invention, or reinvention, of Africa. In other words, Mosima relies too heavily on philosophical theories and movements hatched by Western thinkers and in the Western world. I speak here of theories and movements like postmodernism and poststructuralism. Secondly, Mosima’s persistent call for a philosophy of globalization that paternalistically endorses the project of intercultural philosophy assumes

that African philosophy as it exists today can effectively compete with Western philosophy on the world stage. Not only has Western philosophy existed for over two thousand years as a written tradition but Western philosophy also continues to enjoy the kind of financial backing which African philosophy can only dream about. Consequently, the African tradition has continued to struggle for its life.

While it is true that intercultural philosophy regards divergent philosophical traditions as having an equal value, respect and acceptance cannot be imposed but can only be earned. There is nothing to indicate at this time that Western philosophers have embraced the African tradition as the equal of the Western tradition. The meeting of these two traditions on the global stage will not be a mutually respectful interactive meeting but rather a meeting of the strong and the weak, with the strong either crushing the weak or accommodating it with paternalistic condescension. This is another hegemony, exactly the fate Mosima is desperately trying to avoid.

Additionally, there is a clear possibility of intercultural philosophy degenerating into a mere meta-philosophical enterprise. To all intents and purposes, contemporary Western philosophy is largely analytical and metaphilosophical rather than synthetic. The project of synthesis has been completed by the great thinkers in the history of Western philosophy, such that contemporary Western philosophers have few original contributions to make to the Western tradition outside criticism. Thus, Western philosophy can afford to be essentially metaphilosophical. African philosophy cannot afford this luxury given that there is hardly any robust intellectual foundation on which meta-philosophy can thrive. Mosima seems to be untroubled by the danger of African intercultural philosophy degenerating into meta-philosophy, for he believes that the one great role of philosophy is problem-solving, in the pragmatist sense of impacting social and political life (MOSIMA 2016, 151). In other words, African philosophy should be oriented towards practical philosophy. Thus, African philosophy should ask questions about how philosophy can prevent or reduce conflicts, poverty, economic development, etc. Asking such questions is just as metaphilosophical as the debate over what constitutes African philosophy and what African logic is, to mention but a few polemics-generating talking points. These questions are important, but they should not constitute the heart of African philosophy at this time because the tradition still lacks a solid synthetic foundation. Very few African philosophers have made original and outstanding contributions to African philosophy. We have mostly had scholarship but not original systems and outstanding intuitions.

Mosima's advocacy for interculturality and globalization can gain more plausibility if his call for a counter-hegemonic movement in African philosophy is taken seriously. To take Mosima seriously, we must be ready to undermine Western theories and movements and find inspiration within Africa. Instead of relying substantially on the postmodernist thinkers of the West (and the methods of the Anglo-American analytic philosophers), we can embrace emergent African methodologies like complementary reflection, conversationalism, conceptual decolonization, etc. In this way African philosophy can become sufficiently "counter-hegemonic" as eloquently expounded by Mosima in this brilliant work that charts the way forward for a universally applicable African philosophy which yet retains its authenticity on the global stage.

Relevant Literature

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