

## THE INTERCULTURAL DIMENSION OF AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY

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**ABSTRACT** African philosophy assumes that philosophy is a field of knowledge in which humans think about their very being and their place in nature, and that it is the province of humanity at large rather than of some segment thereof. Questions such as “Does African philosophy exist?” and “What is African philosophy?” have elicited protracted debates on the nature of philosophy and of rationality in general. This debate has yielded important texts in the field of African philosophy. Intercultural philosophy is a new orientation that assumes that philosophy originated in different cultures and at different times. It claims that Eurocentric assumptions about the origin and nature of philosophy are incorrect. Instead, it argues that there are different philosophies and that it is important for proponents of these philosophies to engage in dialogues or, ideally, polylogues. The ability to comprehend humanity’s problems in a global age requires that representatives of different cultures and philosophies understand one another. This can be productive if it is approached from hermeneutic and intercultural perspectives. This article highlights intercultural elements in African philosophy that exemplify and derive from the indispensability of an intercultural perspective and recommends that a genuine philosophy that is able to serve humanity in a global age must be able to function interculturally.

**Key Words:** African philosophy; Intercultural philosophy; Dialogue/Polylogue; Deconstruction; Reconstruction.

### INTRODUCTION

Philosophy, which has evolved and developed in many cultures, is considered to be a form of self-consciousness of a given culture because it examines the culture and tries to rationally address fundamental questions. It is what is presented as a given that philosophy attempts to explain rationally. Philosophy tries to examine what culture takes for granted and in that sense we can call it the self-consciousness of a culture. The question of the existence and nature of African philosophy has been debated among African philosophers since the second half of the 20th century. The debate has not only demonstrated the existence of African philosophy but it has also produced a considerable body of philosophical texts.

African philosophy refers to a diverse series of philosophical texts spanning centuries. Historians of African philosophy claim that the history of African philosophy is constituted by, among other discourses, ancient Egyptian philosophy, the philosophies of the centers of Islamic learning in West Africa (e.g., Timbuktu, Songhai, etc.), and philosophers such as Anton Wilhelm Amo and Zara Yacob, who emerged at the beginning of the modern era. Postcolonial African philosophy is constituted by a wide range of philosophical texts in domains such as ethnophi-

losophy, philosophic sagacity, and social and political philosophy.

This article focuses primarily on postcolonial African philosophy, which has evolved from the debates of the 1970s and 1980s. In this context, “African philosophy” is used in the tradition of naming philosophies after their geographic, cultural, and ethnic origin (Eze, 1997a). As there is no culturally homogeneous Africa, African philosophy is culturally diverse.

Intercultural philosophy is a new orientation in philosophy that attempts to broaden the horizon of this field by challenging the Eurocentric assumption that there is just one philosophy for the whole of humanity.

African philosophical texts have shown the need to engage in philosophical thinking from an intercultural perspective, and this paper outlines the ideas that constitute African and intercultural philosophy showing that many African philosophers have directly or indirectly addressed the notion of interculturality. The paper concludes by suggesting that, in a globalizing world, a genuine philosophy must strive to achieve a hermeneutic understanding. Understanding and being understood are inextricably linked. Those practicing philosophy must realize the importance of interculturality because their field strives to understand and be understood. A hermeneutic approach strives to understand both sides of issues rather than only one.

## WHAT IS AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY?

African philosophy has been evolving as a discipline that addresses pertinent philosophical issues. Indeed, its recognition as an academic field took a long time, and some scholars remain uncomfortable with the term “African philosophy”. Those who know what happened following the publication of P. Temples’ book, “Bantu Philosophy”, in 1945, may already be familiar with this issue. However, a brief summary is necessary for those who are unaware of this history.

Before proceeding with that discussion, I will explain the sense in which “African philosophy” is used in this paper. This term is used in accordance with a long-established tradition of naming philosophies after their geographic, cultural, ethnic, linguistic, and other types of origin. All philosophies are embedded in the culture from which they emerge and are considered to constitute a form of self-consciousness of their culture. Thus, we use terms such as “Indian philosophy”, “Chinese philosophy”, or “European philosophy”. The expression “Indian philosophy” is a collective label for philosophies such as Buddhism, Jainism, and so on but is not intended to obscure the differences among them. The same thing is true for European philosophy; it is a collective name for the range of philosophies from rationalism to empiricism and from continental philosophy to analytic philosophy. Although each one of these philosophies has a wide variety of unique characteristics, they all try to address issues of ontology, epistemology, moral philosophy, and so on from a rationally critical point of view.

The same is true when we use the expression “African philosophy”, as it does not imply the existence of only one philosophy for a continent that contains a wide variety of cultures. Hence, it is an expression that represents philosophical

thinking on and about the continent of Africa, both ancient and modern. It is philosophy because it raises cosmological, ontological, epistemological, and ethical questions and tries to answer these questions philosophically. Thus, the expression does not suggest that Africa has only one philosophical system. This is not a uniquely African phenomenon. Indeed, just as Chinese philosophy is associated with Confucianism, Daoism, and so on, African philosophy is associated with ethnophilosophy, sage philosophy, or ancient Egyptian philosophy. These philosophies or schools of philosophy are not only different but they are also, at times, fundamentally opposed to each other. Hence, “African philosophy” should not be construed as suggesting homogeneity either among African cultures or African philosophies.

It was after the writings of P. Temples, J. S. Mbiti, and A. Kagame that the issue of the existence and nature of African philosophy became important. Individuals who had the opportunity to encounter those involved in the debate took the issue seriously.

The major focus of this debate was a kind of daily academic routine that took everything at face value. That is, the domain of academia, particularly the realm of philosophy, was very quiet. Indeed, the field focused on the same questions that had been addressed for two millennia, and the only culture that produced philosophy that was considered “entitled” to be considered a bona fide academic discipline was Euro-American. Eurocentric thinkers believed that non-European cultures and peoples, such as the Japanese, Chinese, and Indians, had not developed philosophy as such. According to them, writings from these areas were characterized as Japanese, Indian, or Chinese “thought”. It was also said that these traditions were not really concerned with “pure” philosophical issues but, rather, with ethical or religious issues. It was in this context, in which philosophy was suffering from complacency and ostensibly characterized by “normalcy”, that something “abnormal” occurred and awoke many from their “dogmatic slumber”.

There is now a robust understanding of philosophy that recognizes the existence of philosophy in many cultures. The Eurocentric thinkers of the 19th and early 20th centuries thought that philosophy was a European phenomenon. When the idea of an African philosophy was raised after the publication in 1945 of P. Temples’ book, it was a shock to those who had been educated and brought up on the idea that the only genuine philosophy was European philosophy. There is no doubt, however, that India, China, and Japan have long traditions of philosophical reflection.

Many individuals, both African and non-African, were awakened from a dogmatic slumber. Indeed, the titles of articles written during this period reflect the foregoing in their emphasis on the following: Does African philosophy exist? What is African philosophy? Those and similar questions seemed to indicate that Africa, African cultures, and Africans themselves lacked the dispositions that are presumably essential for philosophy. Some of these writings were based on the views of Eurocentric thinkers such as L. L. Bruhl and others who thought that African philosophy could not exist, because the African mind lacks the attributes that are essential for philosophy. Bruhl coined the idea of the “prim-

itive mentality” of the “savage”, and Senghor echoed this sentiment by claiming “reason is Hellenistic while emotion is black”. There were many Africans who were ready to endorse such denigrating assertions. The debate about whether African philosophy existed occurred in the context of these assumptions. Thus, for some, the very expression itself was offensive, because it appeared that one was talking about something that did not exist because philosophy was exclusively European.

This debate spanned a long period of time, and it is impossible to underestimate the importance of the debate itself and its outcome. It was not acceptable to react to the denigrating discourse, which denied rationality to Africans, with silence. The debate accomplished two purposes. It elicited several insightful reactions to the denial of reason to Africans, which, in itself, demonstrated that debating about the existence and nature of philosophy is also “doing” philosophy. It also provided a response to those who complained about wasting time debating whether an African philosophy exists instead of actually doing philosophy. The point here was to identify the dividing line between doing philosophy and debating about whether a philosophy exists or about the nature of such a philosophy. On the one hand, the debate showed the injustice and irrationality of denying that Africans have the capacity to engage in reasoning. On the other hand, the materials that the debate produced became philosophical texts that addressed important philosophical concepts. As H. O. Oruka wrote, “Much ink and energy has been spent in debating this issue. What emerges in the 1990s are two basic points that are the direct result of the debate: first, we have not agreed on one common definition of the subject and secondly the mere fact of the debate has demonstrated the existence of the subject” (Oruka, 1997: 104).

The 1990s have ushered in the end of an era in the history of African philosophy: the era in which questions about whether African philosophy exists could seem credible. Indeed, African philosophers try in earnest to tackle important philosophical issues. Reflecting on how and why African philosophers passionately engaged in the debate, viz. that it was to gain legitimacy from Western philosophers, P. Amato noted,

... African philosophers need not ask non-African Westerners’ permission to be deemed legitimately modern or legitimately philosophical. They need not accept that only by conforming to the central methodological tenets of Western philosophy do they earn the right to philosophize. The intellectual culture of a people expresses its substantive concerns, which cannot legitimately be reduced to their form or method of thematization. It is not and has never been through the use of a particular method either in the West or anywhere else that “philosophy” has earned whatever right it may claim to speak for and to humanity. It is rather philosophy’s connection to central human concerns that legitimizes any such claims, and in each case this connection takes the form of a set of modalities, methods, or genres of discourse (Amato, 1997: 73–74).

To be deemed legitimately philosophical, one has to actually do philosophy.

One need not have been born or live in a specific region of the world. Reason is a universal human trait that has different *gestalts* depending on where and in what contexts it is put to use. It is puzzling that, particularly starting with modernity and the Enlightenment, reasoning has been thought to be the attribute of only a certain segment of humanity. It is this phenomenon that inspired many philosophers to engage in the debate. The debate was not in vain because it produced numerous useful philosophical texts. Indeed, the significance of these debates should not be underestimated with regard to their contribution to building the confidence of Africans to both overcome the imperializing of knowledge and produce new knowledge. It is this phenomenon that decisively motivated African philosophers to create philosophical texts that addressed specific philosophical themes. In this regard, the three books edited by E. C. Eze between 1996 and 1998 should be noted. These books treat a wide range of issues. For example, in “African Philosophy’s Challenge to Continental Philosophy”, R. Bernasconi addressed the issue of whether African philosophy is just like any other philosophy or whether it is unique. He pondered the implications of answering the question one way or the other and eventually underscored that African philosophy has both deconstructive and reconstructive tasks. Through its deconstructive tasks African philosophy points out the contradictions within the texts of continental philosophy. He noted,

If continental philosophers would open themselves to critique from African philosophy and thereby learn more about their own tradition seen from “the outside” they would find that the hegemonic concept of reason had been displaced, and they would be better placed to learn to respect other traditions, including those that are not African (Bernasconi, 1997: 192).

Bernasconi pointed to an important deconstructive task of African philosophy in this regard, highlighting a crucial intercultural phenomenon without mentioning it by name. By referring to how African philosophy is denied or excluded from the philosophy of humankind, he was noting that one of the points that deconstruction could discuss is the exclusion itself. The question of whether Greek philosophy owes a debt to Egyptian philosophy is important. Why has the indebtedness of Greece to Egypt, which was acknowledged by earlier Greek sources, been denied since the dawn of the modern age? What is the contribution of deconstruction to the contemporary dialogue between Western philosophy and African philosophy? Although Bernasconi does not refer to them by name, these are elements of intercultural encounters.

Therefore, according to Bernasconi, African philosophy has both deconstructive and reconstructive tasks. The deconstructive task is concerned with,

... the unmasking and undoing of the Eurocentric residue inherited from colonialism. The unmasking aims at the grounding parameters and cultural codes inscribed in these (Eurocentric) political, economic, educational and social organizations that still remain oriented by colonial and European condescending attitudes. What deserves mentioning in this regard is the

task of an African(a) philosophy engaged in exposing the racism of Western philosophy (Bernasconi, 1997: 190).

The reconstructive task of African philosophy involves what it can add to continental philosophy or even to the philosophy of humankind in general. This is an appropriately intercultural practice that involves offering, from an African perspective, concepts, insights, methods, and other contributions that can enrich those who encounter them.

The books authored by Eze and others in the second half of the 1990s and the first decade of the 21st century demonstrate that African philosophers were convinced about the need for philosophy that focused on African cultures and African experiences. Indeed, Eze's book refers to a wide variety of issues discussed above. For example, in the debate between K. Wiredu and Eze on the idea of democracy, Wiredu focused on pre-colonial African politics and political decision-making processes. Referring to some of Africa's important political leaders and thinkers, such as J. Nyerere, K. Kaunda, and others, Wiredu argued that political decision making in Africa is based on consensus, a complex practice that emerged from African grass roots, which requires both understanding and compromise. It differs significantly from Western democracy, well known for its idea of majority rule. Wiredu understood the idea of majority rule as a violation of the human rights of those who disagree with the opinion of the majority. In this context, justice is not an issue of numbers, and majority rule in which the winner "takes all" is not appropriate to the African cultures and experiences of the past. Thus, he suggested that one of the reasons that so-called democratization processes could not plant deep roots in Africa, despite the numerous attempts to do so, may be because they were efforts to "fix" something in a different cultural milieu. Without suggesting how consensual democracy could work in today's societies, he recommended that we seriously consider the application of consensual decision making in Africa.

Wiredu recommended a consensual "non-party polity" rather than the earlier one-party system or the Western multiparty system. The success of this recommendation will depend on how such a system will be structured and the manner in which it will be implemented. From the perspective of this paper, the main point of this discussion is that African philosophy tries to grapple with real issues.

Eze advanced an opposite opinion on this issue, challenging Wiredu's arguments as follows:

Democracy is one of the several sorts of social framework that a people adopt in order to mediate the struggles and the conflicts that necessarily arise from the necessarily competitive nature of individuated identities and desires. A democracy's *raison d'être* is the legitimation—and "management" of this always already competitive (i.e., inherently political) condition of relativized desires. In this sense, "consensus" or "unanimity" of substantive decisions cannot be the ultimate goal of democracy, but only one of its moments. Democracy as a political institution is a social compact that says,

“we will agree, or agree to disagree,” and these are the established mechanisms or rules according to which we shall secure and maintain as long as necessary each of these possibilities (Eze, 1997b: 320–321).

Two points should be noted in this context. The first is how African philosophers engage with the idea of democracy from their own perspectives, enriching it by invoking related African ideas and practices. We may agree or disagree with one or another of the ideas, but these texts provide a response to those who say that African philosophy and philosophers do not do philosophy but only lament the lack of philosophy or their victimization by colonialism. Second, the texts cited above constitute contributions by African cultures and experiences to the idea of philosophy in general and, in this case, to the idea of democracy. They are also examples of intercultural philosophizing, despite the fact that neither Wiredu nor Eze labeled them as such. However, in my opinion, these texts show the unavoidability of interculturality given that relationships among cultures always involve mutual influence.

Eze’s three books and P. H. Coetzee and A. P. J. Roux’s works are among the major texts in the domain of African philosophy produced in the 1990s. It is already evident in these works that philosophers have decisively moved away from issues related to the definition of African philosophy and the question of its very existence. Indeed, they reflect a systematic study of concepts categorized into metaphysics, epistemology, moral philosophy, and other branches of philosophy. African philosophers have gone beyond the earlier seemingly intractable issues and have tried to contribute to philosophy from an African perspective.

The 21st century has probably helped to promote these events in important ways. Evidence for this position can be found in the conferences and the themes of the conferences on African philosophy as well as in the journal articles and books that have been published since the turn of the century. Associations such as the International Society for African Philosophy and Studies (ISAPS) and others have played important roles in this progression.

ISAPS conferences have become an important feature of the philosophical landscape of Africa. ISAPS papers are evidence that the authors are trying to cultivate an African tradition of philosophy. They demonstrate that African philosophers have the advantage of working from cultural and educational backgrounds that could be characterized as intercultural. Whether they have studied in Africa or overseas, African philosophers have a background in Western education due to the Western curricula that have structured their education. On the other hand, the cultural background into which they were born and in which they were brought up is also important to consider. Some of these thinkers used methods that they appropriated while studying European philosophy to interpret African epistemological, moral, and other issues. I believe that this can be seen as an act of intercultural philosophical practice in which one can work comparatively and identify concepts that may be common to different traditions. It also provides a good example of how methods or concepts that have been developed in a different tradition (European) can be useful in another (African)

tradition. This may be seen as a form of intercultural practice that aims not only at criticizing but also at learning and appropriating from a tradition that is outside one's own.

Of the works published during the first decade of the 21st century, those of T. Kiros, P. Hountondji, M. Kebede, M. B. Ramose, and Eze are particularly worth mentioning.

Teodros Kiros' edited book (2001), "Explorations in African Political Philosophy", brings together the works of important thinkers in African philosophy, such as Wiredu, D. A. Masolo, K. A. Appiah, A. Mazrui, C. Sumner, and others, who have tried to reflect on important issues in this domain. The topics discussed include democracy, sagacity, ethnic identity, politics, and so on. It represents the practice of African philosophizing as it relates to issues that were of primary concern to Africa at the turn of the century.

Kiros' introductory chapter sets the tone of the book. The title of the Introduction is "African Philosophy: A Critical/Moral Practice", and Kiros addressed the themes that warrant philosophical reflection. He stated that, despite our recognition of the topics that are considered to deserve serious philosophical discussion according to "mainstream" philosophy, we should not hide ourselves behind the abstract quest for knowledge. He also pointed out that it is unnecessary "to seek a totalizing narrative that captures the essential nature of African philosophy ... African philosophers should not shy away from taking positions on urgent moral and political matters". The range of issues that philosophers should treat critically include: "ethnic cleansing, superfluous and expensive wars, HIV/AIDS, hunger, poverty, inequalities of wealth, and asymmetrical relationships of power. These must be topics that serious philosophy tackles" (Kiros, 2001: 1).

He also developed what he called principles that should guide African philosophy as a critical/moral practice: "The first principle is the recognition of food, health, shelter and clothing as inalienable human rights ... The second principle is a demand for the absolutely necessary duty humans may have in the recognition of the importance of freedom for those who think and feel that they are unfree" (Kiros, 2001: 3)

Given the particular situation of Africa, he argued that philosophy must be a critical/moral practice. Although he did not disregard the other branches of philosophy, he suggested that the topics that require the application of philosophical thought as a critical/moral practice primarily involve epistemological, moral, and socio-political issues. He referred to what he called the tragedies of history, the situations that Africa has faced over the years, including the slave trade, colonialism, and the internal problems of dictatorships, the failure to meet the aspirations of independence, and many other internal problems.

On the other hand, in his book "Africa's Quest for a Philosophy of Decolonization", Messay Kebede (2004) tackled a number of issues, particularly those involving the status of Africa in the eyes of European thinkers and how Africa should draw on its own resources to complete the process of decolonization. Among the points that Kebede discussed at the beginning of his book is "The Invention of the White Man". This topic is reminiscent of Mudimbe's book, "The Invention of Africa", which tried to show that the idea of Africa is not the true idea of

Africa but the Africa that the Europeans want and that they invented through their own discourse. Kebede seemed to be completing what Mudimbe started when he noted that the white man fabricates ideas about Africa and the Africans. However, that was not the only point: the white man also fabricates ideas (false) about himself as well. In fact, according to Kebede, the white man must believe many false things about himself before he starts to believe false things about others. This underscores that a substantial portion of the Eurocentric discourse about Africa associated with the likes of Bruhl is unfounded. Indeed, these unfounded ideas about Africa and the Africans were based on other unfounded ideas that Bruhl and his ilk had about themselves.

He further noted that the characterization of the white man as rational and the non-white (African) as irrational is wrong. Kebede also noted irrationality among thinkers who are taken to be at the forefront of rationality. In Western philosophy, Plato is a giant who is credited with the development of important concepts that have inspired long and enduring discussions. However, people often forget the mystical and irrational elements in his system and overemphasize the rational; yet, both are to be found in his system. His examples include Plato's idea of the intelligible world and Freud's interpretation of dreams, and his point is that the West created an inaccurate dichotomy between rationality and irrationality, science and mysticism, modernity and tradition, and so on. Furthermore, it is, in fact, difficult to draw hard and fast lines between these positions. Hence, progress should not involve condemning the past or criticizing ethnophilosophy but, rather, it should involve embracing and harnessing it to rationality.

The late Eze's "On Reason: Rationality in a World of Cultural Conflict and Racism", is another important text produced in the first decade of this century. As reflected in its title, the main focus of the book is reason. The author understood reason as a human disposition situated in experience (i.e., in particular cultural contexts). This point is especially crucial given that reason has been construed as the main dividing line between Europeans and non-Europeans. Indeed, the debate on rationality is one of the fundamental issues that African philosophy has been trying to address. Thus, Eze began with the point that reason is not a thing. It is a human disposition. It is not something overarching. It is situated in specific cultural experiences. Hence, it would be unrealistic to think of reason outside of the realities of cultural diversity. Eze answered the question of whether rationality has any meaning beyond the realities of cultural differences as follows:

... above all, it is my hope that, taken together, the various practical intuitions, interpretations and explanations, and justifications will constitute different examples of reasoning-in-action. These exemplars of rationality-in-action reveal the grounds of reason's abstract principles as well as the relations of these principles to the practical interests of individuals, institutions, and cultures. I thereby hope to discover how to test not just the claims of individuals to rationality but also the rationality of cultural practices and other kinds of events that claim to be productive of reason. My methodology, in deed provides proof of the truth of the statement: rationality, like a work of art is best appreciated from multiple points of view (Eze, 2008: xiii).

His discussion of the varieties of rational experience is a detailed and insightful treatment of the forms that rationality can adopt at different times and places, thereby showing the situatedness of reason. He said,

First, there is neither in the purest conceptions of human rationality nor in the language of any cultures evidence that reason or language escapes time and sociality. This inescapability of historical fate by any rationality is ... entirely due to the character of experience. And it is only in experience that we can come to know what it is rationality must look like if it is to be considered an essential attribute of humanity (Eze, 2008: 125–126).

His profound discussion and understanding of rationality demonstrates that rationality is at work when humans try to make sense of a given situation. Rationality cannot escape time and space. In other words, rationality has no meaning beyond the culture in which it is embedded. Rationality takes its specific form (calculative, empirical, phenomenological, etc.) in a specific cultural context. We know from intercultural philosophy that the cultural context is not a pure context because there is no pure culture.

The number of books being produced in the area of African philosophy is increasing. In addition to those mentioned earlier, other books have been written on African philosophy during the first decade of this century. It is not possible for me to list them all or to highlight the ideas contained in these books in this paper. However, mention must be made of Wiredu's "A Companion to African Philosophy", Ramose's "African Philosophy through Ubuntu", and R. Bell's "Understanding African Philosophy: A Cross-Cultural Approach to Classical and Contemporary Issues".

Wiredu's book brings together numerous essays grouped according to the branch of philosophy to which it belongs. It shows the length to which African philosophers have gone to articulate the problematics of an African philosophy. Its importance for teaching and research should not be underestimated.

After pondering the issue of rationality that has been central to the debate on African philosophy and discussing the role of African philosophy in Africa's genuine liberation, Ramose's "African Philosophy through Ubuntu" explored how ubuntu relates to African philosophy in general and to the ideas of religion, law, politics, and so on. Ubuntu, which means humanity and concerns how the individual relates to the community, constitutes the basis of the belief systems of various African cultures; it was summarized by Mbiti as follows: "I am because we are". According to ubuntu, we should treat each other from a position of universal humanity. Hence, Ramose underscores the point that the basis of African philosophy must be the idea of ubuntu.

As its title suggests, Bell's book is particularly important for the project of intercultural philosophy. It address how one (a non-African) should put oneself in the place of the other (an African) to understand the other. That is, due to the particular history of Africa, African philosophy must embrace an intercultural Gestalt. He wrote,

... Africans and their philosophical reflections have been brought into dialogue with others who have longer histories of philosophy. This cross-cultural dialogue is itself central to understanding African philosophy. The cross-cultural nature of understanding its philosophy is of particular importance because of the radical—one might say even traumatic—interface that Africa has had with European culture and with Western modernity (Bell, 2002: x).

Although each tackles philosophical issues from the perspective of Africa, it is clear that, knowingly or unknowingly, they could not avoid interculturality or cross-culturality, as Bell said.

I acknowledge that my discussion has been very schematic. In concluding this portion of the paper, I refer to A. Graness' book, which appeared in 2011 (Graness, 2011). By discussing one of the important and new trends in African philosophy, viz. O. Oruka's sage philosophy, she explored a number of important ideas. Her work reflects the fecundity of the field and how discussions of important concepts such as global justice shed new light on issues. More importantly, she showed the importance of interculturality, addressing how philosophies from different cultural backgrounds could address problems such as global justice, poverty, and so on. She focused especially on the idea of the "human minimum", an idea used by Oruka long before others started talking about global justice. Can we talk of a morally responsible person without the fulfillment of the "human minimum"? Can a philosophy rooted in just one specific culture address the issue of global justice? Graness' position is that, in a globalizing world, solving problems that are crucial to humanity requires the philosophical resources of the whole of humanity (i.e., interculturality).

It would be unfair to end this part of my paper without mentioning African women and non-African women philosophers engaged in African philosophy. The imbalance with regard to gender that we see in other fields of study is present in philosophy as well, as there are fewer female than male philosophers. However, this should not be construed to mean that no women philosophers engage in African philosophy. Indeed, observations of publications and conference participants make it clear a number of African and non-African female philosophers deal with the different themes of African philosophy. For example, the 6th Annual Conference of ISAPS in Nairobi in 2000 included Helen Oduk and Pamela Abuya, both Kenyans, and a number of philosophers, such as Gail Presbey, Irene Danysh, and others, as participants. Many female philosophers attended the 7th Annual Conference in Addis Ababa the next year.

In this connection, it is essential to introduce the Nigerian philosopher Sophie B. Oluwole, who has authored a number of publications. One of her books, "Philosophy and Oral Tradition" (Oluwole, 1999), deals with a number of central issues, including those related to writing and method. Questions of method are important issues in African and in any philosophy, and Oluwole devoted serious thought to these issues. On the other hand, in contrast to the views of Hountondji and a few others, Oluwole argued that the question of writing, though important, is not the decisive issue. Writing is important for any philosophy in that it makes

that text available for easy reference, analysis, and critique. However, there are also other ways, such as orality, in which reason can express itself.

In the same text, she addressed another important issue, accommodativeness versus an adversarial approach to philosophical issues, which has been considered by certain philosophers to be vital to the doing of philosophy. Oluwole disagreed with this point, arguing that an accommodative approach does not entail the absence of a clear philosophical position. Instead, it may be the sign of a healthy skepticism that allows one to listen to a different position. She has noted that, "Accommodativeness entails the intellectual modesty of not being necessarily condescending or unnecessarily aggressive in dialogue". Such an approach avoids a fanatical or fundamentalist commitment to one's position or method. Indeed, the history of Western philosophy demonstrates that specific ideas that have been taken as absolutely true by a certain philosopher(s) are used to undermine other ideas. Oluwole's position favors an intercultural approach. Ideas that claim absolute certainty for themselves can easily lead to a monologue. In this particular case, she does not use the concept of interculturality, but accommodativeness basically refers to an epistemological modesty that is inconsistent with unilateral declarations of positions as absolutely correct. She frequently referred to rules (the equality of the partners in a dialogue, the openness of the outcome of a dialogue, etc.) that need to be considered when engaging in dia-polylogical encounters. With this background, we can proceed to a discussion of intercultural philosophy.

## INTERCULTURAL PHILOSOPHY

Intercultural philosophy is not a new system or branch of philosophy. Instead, it is a new philosophical orientation and attitude that assumes that no philosophy is the philosophy for humankind.

Hence, intercultural philosophy was founded by philosophers such as F. M. Wimmer, R. A. Mall, H. Kimmerle, and others with the conviction that philosophy and the history of philosophy have been Eurocentric, which has had at least two important results or implications. First, the assumption that philosophy is European/Greek relegates philosophies embedded in other cultures to a second-class status. European philosophy's exclusive claim to rationality and hence to philosophy has no rational or empirical justification. Second, the practical implications of such an understanding and the behavior it involves are not helpful to humankind because Europe's exclusive claim to rationality and philosophy denies the philosophies embedded in other cultures. In other words, it denies the experiences of a huge segment of humanity. Yet, we can learn an enormous amount from the philosophies, experiences, and knowledge of other parts of the world. In fact, the latter point renders interculturality necessary. The denial of the rationality of others cannot occur without the infliction of injury on oneself because denying the rationality of the other is tantamount to denying both one's own contribution to others and that one has been influenced, or even enriched, by others.

The goal of intercultural philosophy in this regard is to attempt to broaden the horizons of philosophy. It is an effort to go beyond the limitations placed on

philosophy for unphilosophical reasons. In actual fact, European philosophy is a product of a culture and experiences enriched by mutual and multilateral relationships; hence, philosophers' claim that only European culture could produce such thoughts is not justifiable. This perspective constitutes a denial of the real conditions under which ideas (philosophical or otherwise) come into being, and it limits the horizons of philosophy in ways that have both theoretical and practical implications. Intercultural philosophy's attempt to broaden the horizons of philosophy is an attempt to overcome this problem.

As a founder of intercultural philosophy, Wimmer was inspired by, among other factors, the fact that a globalizing world requires mutual understanding and, if possible, reciprocal enlightenment and enrichment among the different cultures that comprise humanity. The real situation involving cultures and philosophies demands an intercultural approach if philosophy is to be meaningful to humankind. Although the Eurocentric tradition tries to deny or gloss over the relationships among cultures and philosophies, we encounter scholars, including those from different disciplines, whose research reveals the relationships between cultures as a matter of course. The work of S. Harding is not directly related to intercultural philosophy. However, one of her essays, "Is Modern Science an Ethno Science? Rethinking Epistemological Assumptions", underscored the fact that cultures have been interacting since the beginning of recorded history:

Two facts of the flowering of postcolonial, single-stream history conflict with the history of science most of us learned. These accounts tell the history of Europeans as part of the history of peoples of the Americas, Africa, Asia, and the rest of the world and vice versa. Moreover, these accounts do not restrict their perspective to the way such histories tend to appear from the dominant European discourses. They start off their accounts from the lives of peoples whom Europeans encountered, and from their histories prior to the arrival of the Europeans on their shores. In doing so, they are able to provide more balanced, less Eurocentric accounts of encounters and interminglings of peoples throughout human history. From the beginnings of recorded history, they report, cultures have been interacting with each other ... (Harding, 1997: 53).

Such insights from scholars who did not intend to directly address intercultural philosophical issues but were concerned with matters indirectly related to the issue of interculturality shed important light on this domain. Indeed, if cultures have been interacting from the beginning of recorded history, then the issue of mutual influence and enlightenment among cultures, or what is termed as the "give and take ethos" among cultures, must be taken seriously. If one wants to understand the real nature of cultures, and of the philosophies embedded in these cultures, dealing with such interaction is indispensable. It is in this way that we can get the fuller picture of a culture and its philosophy.

D. Ingram's book, "Group Rights: Reconciling Equality and Difference", is concerned with the politico-philosophical issues of group rights. It also offers an insight that is helpful for intercultural philosophy: "It is virtually impossible (if

not desirable) for any culture to so completely differentiate itself from other cultures that communication and contamination are precluded. Cultures survive and adapt by absorbing (learning from) other cultures” (Ingram, 2000: 254).

The arguments that Wimmer and others involved in intercultural philosophy have advanced hold that, in the absence of pure cultures, it is not only important but also necessary to do philosophy interculturally. This point is echoed in other disciplines as well because interculturality is a real element in the cultural interactions and human values that determine our lives. It is important to note that those who want to advance one or the other form of centrism do it at the peril of making their philosophy one-sided. The reason why it might seem desirable to advance an ethnocentric position is both unclear and unrealistic because one can advance an exclusive ethnocentric argument merely by denying the knowledge, norms and values appropriated from other centers. All centers/centrisms have learned something from other centers. Fear, pleasure, sorrow, the need for survival, and the like are some of the drives that largely determine how we act. Humanity evolves and develops the values by means of which it deals with these drives. This process obviously involves humans learning from one another. It is the recognition of this fact that demands that philosophical issues be approached interculturally. As Wimmer said, “Wherever possible, look for transcultural overlapping of philosophical concepts and theories, since it is probable that well-founded theories have developed in more than one cultural tradition” (Wimmer, 2002: 33).

I will now turn to the issue of how and to what extent African philosophy is trying to be intercultural. In terms of its origin, intercultural philosophy is definitely limited to Austria and Germany. However, one should not neglect the work of philosophers from other parts of the world, particularly India, or the “Chennai Journal of Intercultural philosophy”.

Nonetheless, intercultural philosophy was founded in German-speaking countries, and numerous materials on the subject have been written in German, which has limited the number of people with access to ideas in this field. Although some individuals may have encountered these ideas by chance, others have not had the opportunity to learn of even the very existence of this discipline. In my opinion, this may be one of the reasons why intercultural philosophy has not flourished in African universities.

Previous and current conferences include very few topics that directly deal with intercultural philosophy. However, the late Claude Sumner and I have made some efforts in this regard. The 2001 Annual Conference of ISAPS included papers that dealt with interculturality: Professor Sumner’s paper (2005) was titled, “Inter-African Cultural Impact: Egypt Ethiopia” and mine (Gutema, 2005) was titled, “The Need for an Intercultural Approach in African Philosophy”. Both papers were published in the Proceedings of the Conference. As a member of the Department of Philosophy at Addis Ababa University, I have introduced two courses on intercultural philosophy, one at the undergraduate and another at the graduate level. Some of my graduate students have understood the importance of this area, and a few have completed M. A. theses related to intercultural philosophy. For example, interculturality and the ideas of liberation philosophy and transmodernity play

central roles in Wegene Mengistu's M. A. thesis, "Cultural Hybridization or Cultural Homogenization: The Resistance of the Other", which was completed in 2011. These instances are indicators that interculturality in philosophy in general, and in African philosophy in particular, is somehow taking root, however slowly.

## CONCLUSION

In my opinion, African philosophy during the past two decades clearly bears the stamp of interculturality. This is because we cannot avoid interculturality, given that it is the reality of our lives. It is ironic that the very element that is pervasive in many of our writings, because of the reality of the intercultural nature of cultures and philosophies, is not openly recognized by many. Indeed, many practice it without openly declaring that they are doing so. This said, many philosophers in both Anglophone and Francophone countries have very limited access to materials produced in the German language. Additionally, one needs to understand German to read some of the important writings on intercultural philosophy, whether by Wimmer, Mall, or others. *Polylog*, the *Journal of Intercultural Philosophizing*, which is published by the Viennese Society for Intercultural Philosophy, is a good example of this situation. It is the most important avenue through which the ideas of intercultural philosophy are being advanced, but one needs to understand German to read it.

Despite its importance and reception in certain areas, intercultural philosophy faces barriers such as language and the intransigence of longstanding relationships. Indeed, Anglophone countries engage in intensive communication with Britain or the US because of a common language and history, and the Francophone countries have strong relationships with France for the same reasons. However, intercultural philosophy is proliferating in areas in which German is spoken, a situation that simultaneously renders language among the barriers that must be overcome, and underscores the need for intercultural philosophy. As Wimmer wrote,

There are good reasons to hold that philosophy today and in the future will have serious shortcomings if it continues to discuss global questions only within the framework of concepts and methods derived from occidental lore. If philosophy will not surpass its "Occidentalism" by going forward to a true globalization, it will fail to give answers to humankind in the future. So there are reasons to accept the view that philosophy in a general sense has several—and perhaps many—origins (Wimmer, 2002: 8).

Although intercultural philosophy is taking root, an intercultural approach to African philosophy has not yet progressed as far as it should have. The contemporary importance of intercultural philosophy renders the use of an intercultural approach both necessary and fruitful. It is incumbent on philosophers to create an atmosphere in which both teaching and research related to intercultural philosophy can flourish.

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