

AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY POST-1994: IN CONVERSATION WITH ALENA RETTOVÁ

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Abstract: The present article aims to initiate a conversation with Alena Rettová on her article “Post-Genocide, Post-Apartheid: The Shifting Landscapes of African Philosophy, 1994-2019” that was published in *Modern Africa* in the Summer of 2021. We identify several issues in her historical account of African philosophical thoughts that need polyphonic engagement in order to ensure that Africa’s pluralistic intellectual heritage is not reduced to a monophonic one. We are intentional at being Rettová’s intellectual dialogical partner on the reading of African philosophy, while bearing in mind that the ideologies of apartheid and genocide are still active. While we explore some key aspects of her work, we also acknowledge that African philosophy is constantly in the making and it would be problematic to use the yardstick of one context, in this case, the Western context, as a benchmark in order to account for the progression of philosophical thoughts in other philosophical contexts (Africa) without taking into account the historical peculiarities of each context.

Keywords: *Apartheid, coloniality, decoloniality, the Calabar School, the Conversational Society of Philosophy, the politics of language*

Introduction

The relevance of having conversations in philosophy leads to sieving of ideas. This practice has shown to develop more distinct and clear ideas, helping scholars to refine their thoughts on the basis of logical coherence. A glance at Alena Rettová’s article shows how she engages African philosophical thoughts in a way that spurs relevant conversations and reshaping of ideas. A reading of Rettová’s article demonstrates how vast she engages with the discourse on African philosophy, thereby propelling scholars of the discipline to re-examine their thoughts. Beyond that, there are aspects of her work that need critical engagement. If at all, there is something to be

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said about discourses of the other, “other” being individuals or communities of persons with difference either in colour, sex, gender, language and so on. It is a fact that generalisations reduce all that the other embodies into single narratives; it reduces alterity to simple expressions. At best, the other is always a footnote in the literary acknowledgement of the other. In Rettová’s essay, one notices a categorisation of African philosophical traditions in a manner that employs a particular intellectual positionality as the foundation for a genuine critique of African philosophical expressions.

Rettová’s positionality paid attention to the epistemologies of the Western world when it pertains to knowledge production, or what can be categorised as “true knowledge” within the domain of philosophy. Our work offers a response to some insights explored by Rettová in her essay. To begin with, our response situates the intention behind our replacement of post-apartheid/genocide with post-1994. We argue that the ideology behind genocide and apartheid is still alive. Next follows a response to her view of African philosophy and we do this by posing the question: how does Rettová reach her conclusion that African philosophical thoughts inherent in some philosophical concepts originating from African linguistic heritage are themselves products of the European intellectual tradition? At the end of the day, this response to Rettová’s work offers an opening for an elaborate dialogue with her so that we can appreciate new ways of nuances and dynamism that shape African people and their ways of producing knowledge. We are grateful to Rettová for her elaborate engagement with African philosophical thoughts. Though we see the need to engage her work, it does not delegitimise the fact that she has offered relevant insights that will foster a critical reflection by scholars whose works fall within the domain of African philosophy. Our response aims to shed light only on those aspects of her essay we believe need further clarification.

Why Post-1994?

During the 2020 Decolonial Summer School at the University of KwaZulu Natal, Saleem Badat highlighted that one of the grievances of a post-apartheid South Africa is the fact that, in practice, there is no South Africa post-apartheid, but a post-1994 South Africa. This is because the former term gives the impression that apartheid is dead and that South Africa has entered a new regime where the failures that led to racial discrimination had been addressed. Studying South African society closely, one notices that it only takes a conversation to reveal that people still live with traumas,

grudges, and sympathies for the apartheid regime. A reason these traumas, grudges, and sympathies endure stems from the fact that after over twenty-five years of the proclamation of the end to apartheid in South Africa, there is still much left to be achieved in terms of changing attitudes on race-based biases, and economic exploitations.

When we go through recent developments where there had been claims of the abolition of some negative events, apartheid moves in the same direction with them. For instance, there is the claim of an end to colonialism that gave birth to the concept of post-colonialism. But time and events have shown that we probably moved from the era of colonialism to neo-colonialism (Nkrumah 1965). Recently, there has also been an attempt to apply the same notions to racism to the effect that we are in a post-racial world (Negedu 2021). However, unfolding events show that racism has not ended but mutated. Therefore, it appears that negative events that were systematised do not really end if they have powerful beneficiaries; they are merely reviewed into more sophisticated forms that are less detectable.

Apartheid as a concept means separateness or apartness. This separateness could be on racial, economic, or geographical terms. So, apartheid can exist in the absence of different racial groups in a region. Rettová was more concerned with the end of apartheid as contained in various documents that made separateness legal. Beyond the presence of documents, Margaret Roberts (1994: 53–64) made an attempt to respond to the question of the end of apartheid. Can we say apartheid has ended simply because documents that established it have been abolished? Like Roberts, we also claim that the inequalities that fuelled the existence of apartheid still endure. Beginning from residential areas that were and still are geographically marked along racial lines, to access to education, particularly the imbalance that existed in the presence of native South Africans in some schools from elementary to tertiary levels, to access to economic opportunities; all these are still evident in South Africa. The grievances also stem from the fact that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) had no provision for restorative justice, especially in terms of reparation. As such, there is no template for compensation and reparation that would lead to bridging the inequality gap.

On the definition of genocide, there are various meanings of the concept, but all meanings are tied to the fact that there is a person or a group serving as the oppressor(s) and another representing the victim(s). The gradual annihilation of a people or their heritage is the main aim of genocide. The problem with this definition is what counts as heritage. It is a problem

because people have the ability to choose what exactly fits into genocidal definitions. Basically, oppressors want to have this power to define in order to absorb themselves of responsibility. Genocide is not simply the direct killing of a people. There could be acts of genocide that are unnoticeable at first glance. That is why genocide is either the destruction of the patterns of an oppressed group, or the imposition of the ways of the oppressor. Beyond the destruction of a people, it also has in mind the determination to replace. Causing serious bodily or mental harm is a fundamental aspect in the conceptualisation of genocide (Jones 2006: 11, 13). So, when Rettová uses the term post-genocide and post-apartheid, we understand it in terms of the ideological end of these events, not their actual end. This kind of separateness of idea and workability resonates in a conceptualisation of African philosophy that expects conformity while sometimes neglecting the experiences of people with different identities.

Africa in Western Imagination: A Case for Polyphonic Narratives

Many Africans and other scholars from the global south have always greeted with suspicion the conceptualisation of western scholarship as the normative marker for judging sources of knowledge not within the domain of the western intellectual world. This suspicion is not baseless. Most western scholarly discourses on Africa prior, during, and most often, after colonialism, have always presented the African continent as a monolithic reality. Reduction of a people with complex experiences and realities into one narrative is a strategic tool for controlling a people and their narratives of themselves. This was the central motif behind the agenda of colonialism that was used to subjugate Africans by European colonial agents. Some Africans have also contributed to this narrative of self-erasure that denies Africa's claim to complex narratives and experiences. Their embrace of such a process of self-erasure is itself a form of coloniality of imagination.

Coloniality of imagination operates by creating in the subject an erasure of memories of the past that do not meet the logic of the new realities being experienced by the subject. After all, colonialism has legitimacy by always negating the histories, cultures, social systems and economies of the people being colonised. The coloniser has a legitimacy in the places traditionally occupied by the colonised only by showing how the colonised is existentially dependent on the benevolence of the coloniser. Albert Memmi stated this well when he wrote: "Just as the bourgeoisie proposes an image of the proletariat, the existence of the colonizer requires that an image of the colonized be suggested. These images

become excuses without which the presence and conduct of a colonizer, and that of a bourgeois, would seem shocking. But the favored image becomes a myth precisely because it suits them too well” (Memmi 1967: 79).

Furthermore, the mapping of Africa during the Scramble for Africa by European colonialists of the nineteenth century brought about the simplification and the eradication of cognitive complexity needed to understand the vast continent and its civilisations and cultures (Herbst 2000: 66). The question thus arises, what is Africa in the European mind? In his research into the political dynamics that played out in the Berlin Conference of 1884–1885, Jeffrey Herbst pointed to the fact that the agenda of cost-effective administrative control over the territories that the Europeans were interested in controlling in Africa, defined and shaped the approach of the colonialists towards the cultures and civilisations found on the African continent. The European colonialists were not interested in studying closely the cultural identity markers of the peoples and cultures that make up the continent. Rather, they wanted to harvest all they could from the continent, while maintaining absolute control over their new protectorates and colonies. It is worth noting that

The [Berlin] conference never dealt explicitly with the interior of Africa. Quickly, the “hinterland theory” was promulgated. Under this theory, any power occupying coastal territory was entitled to claim political influence over an indefinite amount of inland area (Herbst 2000: 72).

Furthermore,

where local treaties were not adequate for territorial division, the Europeans relied on arbitrary lines based on latitude and longitude. As a result, about 44 percent of African boundaries are straight lines that either correspond to an astrologic measurement, or are parallel to some other set of lines (Herbst 2000: 75).

Though many of the European colonialists would refer to their African territories either as “overseas Provinces” or “protectorates,” one immediately notices that “these (rather preposterous) pretences could be so readily accepted, given how detached” the European countries

were from many of the decisions their colonial governors were taking, much less what was happening on the ground, demonstrates the profound effect that the particular

international regime constructed for conquering Africa had on imagined relations between Europe and the African periphery (Herbst 2000: 76).

In her work, Rettová offers the following critique of African philosophies: “The proliferation of ontological theories, without properly relating them to similar or identical theories, results in mere renaming of earlier anthropological, theological and philosophical work” (Rettová 2021: 32). A clarifying question that Rettová’s comments evokes is this: Who is the audience, as she seems to ignore some subtle differences of thought defining contemporary African philosophical thoughts? Is it the African audience who sometimes knows what those nuances are, or the western one that has been historically conditioned through the colonial narrative on Africa to see the continent and its intellectual heritage as a monolithic reality? Perhaps, it is relevant to restate the insights of Edward W. Said when he wrote about the nuances inherent in a text, one that can be appropriated in dealing with the respective philosophical concepts that define African philosophies. In his words, “Each text has its own particular genius, as does each geographical region of the world, with its own overlapping experiences and interdependent histories of conflict. As far as the cultural work is concerned, a distinction between particularity and sovereignty (or hermetic exclusiveness) can usefully be made. Obviously no reading should try to generalize so much as to efface the identity of a particular text, author, or movement” (Said 1993: 67).

In her critique of the different philosophical thoughts being given voice by African philosophers that ought to be critiqued, Rettová makes the assumption that African linguistic traditions are themselves monolithic. Consequently, how a Zulu person expresses Zulu philosophical thoughts in South Africa is the same as those of an Igbo person in West Africa. Philosophy is radically defined by one’s linguistic tradition and cultural wisdom. African cultures and societies are not monolithic. Thus, it is proper to speak of the different philosophical traditions while acknowledging their cultural loci of origin. This approach is lacking in Rettová’s work. Likewise, Rettová did not state that early philosophical writers from whom many traditions were drawn, as acknowledged by herself, never had the continent of Africa in mind. At best, the conceptualisation of Africa occurred in an objectified form that should be studied and not engaged with.

On the Conversational Society of Philosophy

In the following we use the Conversational Society of Philosophy (CSP) instead of the Calabar School of Philosophy because, although the latter was foundational in the formation of a group of scholars where the school of thought was born and nurtured, the society keeps expanding its frontiers to include several other scholars who share tenets of conversational philosophy. However, where the Calabar School and the Conversational Society are used in this article, they mean the same thing. Alena Rettová began her critique of the Conversational Society of Philosophy by suggesting that the CSP claimed that Emmanuel Eze, Mogobe Ramose, Thaddeus Metz and so on, all derived their style of philosophising from the CSP (2021: 30). She oversimplified the comments made by Chimakonam without contextualising them. By doing this, her engagement with Chimakonam's work is not richly engaged in a critical manner. Some of the philosophers mentioned have been in the task of philosophising before the existence of the CSP. The concern with Rettová's approach is that Eze, Ramose, Metz and so on, whose ideas predate the formation of the CSP would eventually fall under the Conversational Society of Philosophy. Conversational philosophy existed long before the formation of the Conversational Society of Philosophy. However, CSP claims the systematisation of the school of thought. It is in this same regard that ancient philosophers were said to engage in conversational philosophy albeit with a difference. In order to justify her critique of the CSP, it is helpful that Rettová demonstrates that most insights that come from the CSP cannot withstand rigorous critique. Rettová's description of Ezumezu logic as "shallow" calls for relevant arguments showing how she reached that conclusion (Rettová 2021: 34). In a fashion, to be shallow in this regard could mean a lack in the capacity for mental depth. It would mean that from the moment of the conceptualisation of an idea on it is already adjudged porous. Therefore, there is no reason to engage in this school of thought. This kind of thinking creates a vacuum in scholars of any discipline, especially one that is seen as the mother of all disciplines. The relevance of philosophy lies in the fact that it is boundless in the allowance of a variety of ideas without insistence on a closed debate.

Furthermore, Rettová makes the following claim that ought to be critiqued as well: "The Calabar School has produced a great number of concepts, and it sees this as a major virtue (cf. Chimakonam 2016). Yet, this practice should be viewed critically. The concepts do not always correspond to a clear need for conceptualization. Many of these concepts are introduced, never to be used by anybody else, not even by the author him/herself" (Rettová 2021: 32). Not only did Rettová offer no justification for such a claim, one

wonders how she reached this conclusion when there is ample evidence that these African philosophies, whether schools of thoughts or philosophical concepts, are used to articulate scholarly works being read both in the global south and north. That Rettová did not engage these works does not mean they are not being produced, and these concepts appropriated or engaged by their readers. In principle, we may not like a position but the criteria of philosophy require us to engage as objectively as possible, nonetheless. To think that the contours of philosophy ought to be expressed or packed in a familiar style of thinking is itself revelatory of a scarce imagination. By scarce imagination, we mean the inability to see the nuances in complex discourses and to reduce them to a monologic discourse.

On another note, Rettová writes, “A ‘new African philosophy’ cannot be projected simply by introducing Igbo words, while failing to do the hard philosophical labour of critiquing existing positions” (Ibid). Here, her claim is somewhat problematic because she assumes that members of the CSP do not engage in criticisms of one another and of the existing theories. To address Rettová’s comments, we offer the following bibliographical information of a few critical literatures by members of the Calabar School engaging among themselves and with existing theories. In *Kpim of Metaphysics* (1995), Pantaleon Iroegbu engaged with existing theories en route to constructing a theory of Uwa ontology. Similarly, Innocent Asouzu (2004), Chris Ijiomah (2006, 2014), Godfrey Ozumba (2010), Godfrey Ozumba and Jonathan Chimakonam (2014), Ada Agada (2015), Jonathan Chimakonam (2019), Jonathan Chimakonam and L. Uchenna Ogbonnaya (2021) and Aribiah Attoe (2022) engaged with various philosophers and theories before postulating their own views. On conversational thinking specifically, we can refer to Victor Nweke (2015, 2016a, 2016b), Jonathan Chimakonam and Mesembe Edet (2014), L. Uchenna Ogbonnaya (2022), Maduka Enyimba (2021a, 2021b) and many others.

Philosophers are cautioned against the notion of “conceptual envelopment” by such comments by Rettová.¹ Having acknowledged that the Conversational Society of Philosophy has built a system, with numerous publications in peer-reviewed journals, Rettová should not at the same time speak of the “shallowness” of the foundation that conceptualised the system. System building is a product of a coherent act of reflection, which tends to

1 This term was used by Jonathan Chimakonam in his book *Ezumezu* (2019) to refer to the scenario in which an individual/group treat concepts as if they were exclusive reserve to same people and are superior to any other concepts that exist, or would exist in the future (cf. Chimakonam, *Ezumezu*, 2019:10-11).

produce results. The publications emanating from the CSP are a testament to such system building, not really because they go through peer-review process, some of which are discountenanced after review, but the fact that every research on conversational philosophy is a progression of previous ones. However, it ought also to be acknowledged that no school of thought, including the CSP, is free from relevant critique; our response to Rettová's work does not discount this fact. Our response also does not deny the fact that Rettová has opened up a much-needed space for ongoing reflection by all who embrace African philosophical thoughts.

Furthermore, Rettová seems to reach the erroneous conclusion that members of the CSP do not engage in self-criticism of their works. Some of their work was written as a result of dissatisfactions, or perceived errors in the ideas of various members of the CSP (Nweke 2016; Enyimba 2021a; Enyimba 2021b); or rigorous analysis in a bid to situating/justifying the thought of CSP members within particular contexts (Ofuasia 2022: 271–285). From one generation to another, and from one school of thought to another, scholarship grows when researchers engage the ideas of each other in order to sieve perceived errors and provide better alternatives for the growth of knowledge and wholesome development of society. This development of thought through criticism is at the heart of conversational thinking. Rettová uses the very prized characteristic of conversational philosophy in order to advocate an end to the school of thought. As part of her reason for submitting her article, Rettová claims that most of the words or concepts developed by CSP members are “Igbo-derived words that may never be used again” (Rettová 2021: 32). While we are not clear on whether Rettová's concern is with her claim that deep analysis is not done on the Igbo words used, or with the fact that Igbo as a language is used at all, we think that the background of her comments indicates that Igbo words are in use. This is clear from her submission that a new African philosophy cannot be introduced by recourse to Igbo words, without critiquing existing theories (*ibid.*).

However, Rettová opens up an enduring dialogue in post-colonial Africa as to the relevance of presenting African epistemologies in foreign languages introduced to the continent by European colonisers; return to the mother tongues of African societies; or embrace a both/and approach by appropriating both the colonial languages and the African indigenous languages for conveying ideas and concepts that one of the languages may not be able to convey properly, especially when the audience needs to be introduced to the hermeneutic spaces created by the worldview that the language facilitates. Scholars such as Ngugi Wa Thiong'o have raised a

pertinent question that engages head-on the different options presented above. Wa Thiong'o asks: "Why, we may ask, should an African writer, or any writer, become so obsessed by taking from his mother-tongue to enrich other tongues?" (1986: 8). In response to this question, Wa Thiong'o offered a nuanced answer that reveals the enduring problem with language as a tool for subjugation. In his words: "Take language as communication. Imposing a foreign language, and suppressing the native languages as spoken and written, were already breaking the harmony previously existing between the African child and the three aspects of language [real life; speech; written signs]" (ibid. 16). In attempting to restore this broken harmony between the African child and their ancestral languages brought about by colonial languages, Wa Thiong'o concluded that he was abandoning foreign languages and returning to his own Gikũyũ language of Kenya (ibid. 28–30).

Chinua Achebe offers a different opinion that is also worth repeating. He wrote: "I feel that the English language will be able to carry the weight of my African experience. But it will have to be a new English, still in full communion with its ancestral home but altered to suit new African surroundings" (Achebe 1975: 103). Achebe was aware of the post-colonial realities defining African imagination and knowledge production. To discount the effect of colonialism on the African context is to do injustice to what has befallen the continent and its people. Thus, Achebe attempted to work with the language of the coloniser while intentionally upending its colonial agenda. This enduring dialogue on the politics of language in the production of knowledge in the African context is not lost to contemporary African scholars, some of whose works Rettová has critiqued in her own work. One can conclude that these scholars are attempting to embrace the both/and approach that attempts to bridge the two linguistic tools and the worlds that they convey – the world of the coloniser and the world of the colonised; hence, the relevance of interculturality.

We agree that Rettová makes a legitimate critique in calling attention to the bridging of two languages. Criticisms are crucial to the growth of ideas. But to be able to offer constructive critique demands a deeper understanding of the subject matter; being versed in the cultural worldview from which the ideas being criticised originate; and a demonstrated ability to understand that one is always motivated by one's own epistemic biases, be they religious, cultural, linguistic, and so on. Rettová's work and conclusions on African philosophy portray some misrepresentations of African cultural worldviews.

Philosophy in Conversation

African philosophy is constantly in the making. In an attempt to build and nurture different systems, it takes inspiration from several other philosophers across regions. This is important because no culture, or nation should close its borders against ideological transfer. Western philosophy is no longer “the” philosophy that can be absolutised, but a regional philosophy just like African, Asian or other sub-regional philosophies, yet with universalisable characteristics. The claim of universalisability is one of the tenets of conversational philosophy (Chimakonam 2019: xvii, 47). This is different from a search for a universalised hegemonic system. It is the mindset of hegemony to think that a new theory cannot be conceptualised without former theories. Part of the logic behind this kind of thinking is that the new theorist has no capacity for independent thought. It is actually this mindset that led Martin Heidegger to inform Victor Farias that Spanish is not a language of philosophy. This led to the remark of José Ortega y Gasset that he was a philosopher in the region of infidels (Dabashi 2015). Is Rettová repeating Heidegger’s claims in the context of African languages and of philosophical concepts being postulated in African philosophical discourses?

Throughout the history of philosophy, the main purpose of ideas is to solve local problems before they become glocal. For this reason, there is also an intention to make ideas universalisable. This process is gradual and cannot be achieved under the guise of absolutism and democracy to which the world has been coerced into. Philosophies from the global north are culture-inspired against what Rettová’s article implies. People think of solving local problems emanating from their various places of philosophising before conceptualising global implications. Even when foreign policies are made, nations engage in dialogue to first of all win the best deal, not for the world, but for their nations. We do not at this point deny the ethno-philosophic components in ideas of the African place; we rather justify it because to make an idea meaningful, it has to first of all be meaningful to a people. Philosophies that come from other places, whether German, American, French, and so on, have ethno-philosophic components embedded in them. The problem is not that ethno-philosophy is a lesser form of philosophising, but that it has been defined within hegemonic circles in order to exclude a place from professional philosophy. If Igbo, or Bantu philosophy is ethno-philosophy, it is first of all because the suffix (philosophy) makes it possible to engage in critical outlook about the prefix (ethno), which characterises the worldview of a people. The problem is therefore not in the meaning of the concept, but in a people who have arrogated to themselves the

power to define and expect everyone to be bound by such definitions.

The mere fact that African philosophers are giving voice to African philosophical heritage is itself a critique of the hegemony of the western intellectual tradition that the colonial narrative of knowledge production has delegitimised. The starting point of Rettová's work is itself problematic. African intellectual thoughts cannot be reduced to an era of response to the two events that Rettová locates her research on – the Rwandan Genocide and Post-Apartheid realities in Africa. There was thinking and knowledge production going on in the continent before these events. In fact, these events must be critiqued through the lens of decoloniality to help showcase the trauma brought upon the African psyche by colonialism. How events playing out in Africa are discussed and analysed in the Western mind demands its own elaborate critique to allow for multiple prisms for seeing such events. This is most urgent because of the customary binary approach to looking at things that make everything that is spoken of to have a moral valuation of good and evil. To address this binary approach, an embrace of a polyphonic discourse is most needed. Reality is never binary and does not play out in the realm of either/or. Rather, it is within the world of complexity that reality defines and expresses itself.

Rettová did not mention a basic fact that shapes African philosophies. African philosophy is both a continuity of African intellectual traditions; even though western colonial agents imagined they had destroyed them by introducing and replacing them with European intellectualism; be it Francophone, Anglophone, and Lusophone; and a response to the pathology inherent in the sense of self-produced within the matrix of colonialism experienced by the African people. In order to understand this, we offer insights from Franz Fanon in his work entitled *Black Skin, White Masks*. Fanon offers a keen observation of African intelligentsias shaped intentionally by the western hegemonic intellectual tradition to be agents of western colonising ideologies in Africa through the system of knowledge production. But in this case, it is really not knowledge production within the socio-cultural realities of Africa; rather, a continuation of the coloniality of imagination by the hegemonic structures of colonialism operating in the western turn towards the African continent and its cultures (Fanon 2008: 1–23).

Returning to the politics of language that Rettová brought up in their critique of African philosophy, the priority on African philosophical concepts through African languages ought to be taken seriously. This stance is shaped by further insights explored by Wa Thiong'o in dialogue with other African

scholars. For example, Wa Thiong'o engaged Cheikh Hamidou Kane, who wrote the following in *Ambiguous Adventure*:

On the Black Continent, one began to understand that their real power resided not at all in the cannons of the first morning but in what followed the cannons. Therefore behind the cannons was the new school. The new school had the nature of both the cannon and the magnet. From the cannon it took the efficiency of a fighting weapon. But better than the cannon it made the conquest permanent. The cannon forces the body and the school fascinates the soul (quoted in Wa Thiong'o 1986: 9).

In response to Kane, Wa Thiong'o argued that "... language was the most important vehicle through which that power fascinated and held the soul prisoner. The *bullet* was the means of the psychical subjugation. Language was the means of the spiritual subjugation" (ibid.).

Rettová forgets that all philosophies, whether from western schools of thoughts or of African origins, have their hermeneutic appeals from the domain of language. Thus, when Rettová makes the following claim, "Often, concepts adopted from Western philosophy are rebranded with Igbo words or words that integrate Igbo roots" (Rettová 2021: 32-33), one wonders whether she is ignoring the fact that all philosophical concepts derive their unique hermeneutic nuances from their languages of origin.

Similarity does not equate to sameness; this nuance seems to be missing in Rettová's work as she offers her critique of African philosophy. In response to what is missing in her work, we argue that it is important that one refers to the insights of Wa Thiong'o on the relevance of language as a conveyor of meaning and vehicle of knowledge production. He wrote: "Language, any language, has a dual character: it is both a means of communication and a carrier of culture. Take English. It is spoken in Britain and in Sweden and Denmark. But for Swedish and Danish people English is only a means of communication with non-Scandinavians. It is not a carrier of their culture" (Wa Thiong'o 1986: 13). The point made by Wa Thiong'o is captured in the following lines from the work of Amos Tutuola: "When I saw that there was no palm-wine for me again, and nobody could tap it for me, then I thought within myself that old people were saying that the whole people who had died in this world, did not go to heaven directly, but they were living in one place somewhere in this world. ... One fine morning, I took all my native juju and also my father's juju with me and I left my father's hometown to find out whereabouts was my tapster who had died" (Tutuola 1980: 9).

Reading Tutuola's work closely, James Snead offers a credible analysis of the hermeneutic limitations that play out among persons from different cultural contexts who engage a text, one that Rettová seems to have ignored in her essay. Snead argues that "in his astute and humorous mixing of African and European reference points – such as linking 'juju' with that all too English cliché 'one fine morning' – Tutuola both plays with and against the expectations of African and European readers" (Snead 1990: 240).

The fact that some African philosophers appropriate concepts from European languages in their hermeneutic engagement with African linguistic concepts does not erase the originality of African epistemology neither in content nor in meaning. At the same time, scholars should be courageous to give credit when there is an importation from traditions other than indigenous ones, since true globalisation has made encounters of cultures possible and therefore it is difficult to speak of a pure culture anywhere in the world. Concepts derive their meaning from the breadth of the dynamics shaping the cultural contexts that give birth to the language from which the concepts originate. If one would remove the concept from the language and its inherent cultural roots, the concept would lose some of its meaning. Also, what Snead describes shows how the proximity of concepts or words, as in the example from Tutuola's work, allows for one to see the dynamism inherent in the fluidity of language. Language is not static. Its usage and its proximity to other cultures and linguistic traditions allows for the appropriation and recasting of meanings that go beyond the intended meaning in the past. If there is only one way of doing philosophy, then why should we embrace the assumption that the production of knowledge is always a continuum? Or is Rettová arguing that there is nothing new to learn outside of what has been taught in the past? Even if this is the case, which we believe is not, whose past ought we appropriate, the European past or the African past?

Again, African philosophical concepts speak to Africa's social imagination. The content of imagination comes from one's ability to reflect upon one's social location. This point is beautifully stated by Mark Charles and Soong-Chan Rah in their words:

The formation of the imagination emerges from the way individuals and communities process social reality and how they are shaped by social reality. The social imagination helps us to make sense of the world around us and allows us to consider possibilities in the systems and structures where we dwell (Charles and Rah 2019: 27).

Conclusion

We do not live in doubt about the progression of knowledge. The gradual unfolding of history also leads us to this point of discourse where we can speak of knowledge decentralisation, plurality/particularity. The debate is not about who should control knowledge production/dissemination in the world as if we can speak of a uniform system. We can now speak of the relevance of knowledge to a people. As such, there is little or no usefulness in knowledge without local encounters. African philosophy/scholarship in general may be similar because of their unique experiences of history, but does not translate into a monolithic reality. With such similar, yet particularistic experiences, coupled with differentials in culture, African philosophers will continue to interrogate themselves in order to make life more meaningful for themselves, and at the same time with the consciousness of the existence of other realities outside of the African continent. The real danger in Rettová's work lies in the misinterpretation of facts therein, which may mislead the readers. Criticism is crucial to philosophical growth, yet if materials critiqued are not done holistically, the process can gradually lead to incomplete narratives.

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