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How Not to Do African Epistemology

Abstract

African epistemology is a discourse of culture philosophy; and culture philosophy, in turn, is a discourse of a people's conception and perception of reality. To this extent, it reflects on the conceptualisation of a people's lived-world. In this vein, the content, method and tools for analysis of culture philosophy are largely inclusive of materials that are indicative of a people's worldview (what is here referred to as "culture specifics") that are the markers of the identity of a culture. In doing culture philosophy, say, African epistemology, therefore, it is the "culture specifics" that marks a particular philosophical reflection as belonging to the discourse of African epistemology. In explicating what it considers to be the method of doing African epistemology, the paper first articulates the nature, character and method of culture philosophy, and then engages a number of published works on African epistemology, with the intent of appraising the method(s) usually deployed to examine the subject-matter of African epistemology (as evident from engaging selected published works on African epistemology). Having engaged selected published works on African epistemology vis-à-vis the analysis of the nature, character and method of culture philosophy, the paper draws attention to the fractures between the method(s) deployed in the analysis of African epistemology, on the one hand, and the requirements of the method for doing African epistemology as culture philosophy, on the other. The paper concludes with a proposal of a method for doing African epistemology, which may be made to bear on African philosophy in general.

Keywords

African epistemology, African philosophy, culture philosophy, culture specifics, method

Introduction

As culture philosophy, African epistemology is a discourse of the knowledge attitudes of Africans in terms of their cognitive relations with the world around them, which is influenced by their broader understanding or conception of reality. It reflects on the conceptualisations of their lived-worlds.¹ To

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The expression "it reflects on the conceptualizations of the lived-worlds of Africans" is in recognition that reality is conceived in different and varied ways by Africans, even though, as has been pointed out by not a few writers, that the difference in the worldviews of Africans is not in structure, but in content and details of such views. For instance, how Africans conceive of the ontological structure of reality is said to be similar, albeit with differences in the details of such ontology. And so, while the assumption that there are certain

cultural similarities among the various cultures of Africa that often explain expressions such as "African philosophy", "African traditional religion", and even "African epistemology" (as in this paper), that assumption is not unaware of the many aspects of the cultures of Africans where there are sharp differences in practices, beliefs, and norms. The use of 'African' in the above expressions, for instance, is connotative, rather than denotative. It connotes *that* that may be seen to provide for some semblance in culture among Africans,



this extent, culture philosophy is understood to be the examination of the philosophy or philosophical content within a culture. It is a conversation whose subject-matter is the philosophy embedded in the cultural practices and beliefs, customs and precepts of the culture in focus. That is, the discourse of culture philosophy involves, among other concerns, the interrogation of, and conversation with, the assumptions and suppositions that drive the belief system and practices of such culture. It may be added here that this runs differently from the philosophy of culture that refers to the use of the tools of philosophy, such as conceptual and critical analyses, to critically reflect on the beliefs and precepts, suppositions and assumptions, of a culture. In brief, while in the philosophy of culture, philosophy is seen as a second-order discipline, in culture philosophy, philosophy is substantive.

An issue that, however, arises in this regard concerns how the conception of ‘philosophy’ in the context of the preceding exposition of culture philosophy may be defended. This is given that it has been claimed that it is incorrect to say that the cultural practices and beliefs of a people amount to philosophy, since a distinctive feature of philosophy is that it is a critical reflection of individuals and not the commonly held beliefs of a people; hence, the non-identification of such individuals with particular belief-claims makes such claims unphilosophical. Henry Odera Oruka’s position on the understanding of culture philosophy comes to mind. For Oruka, culture philosophy, because it is rather simply explanatory and descriptive, and not reflective and individual, could not be taken as philosophy. Indeed, the question that Oruka posed in this regard was “whether a system of communal beliefs, a people’s myths about themselves and nature (a culture philosophy) can even be ‘reflective’ and ‘theoretically attuned’ without some sympathetic midwife helping and causing it to be so”.² And so, for Oruka, any attempt to present culture philosophy as philosophical amounts to “philosophication” – “the attempt to dress beliefs which are otherwise non-philosophical with the ornament of philosophy, and then claim that such beliefs constitute a philosophy”.³

Now, while the claim that what is philosophical need be critical is a valid one, the addition that such critical reflections be those of individuals need not be seen as a requirement to make a claim philosophical: it is enough that a claim is judged to be critical to qualify it as philosophical.⁴ Otherwise, there is the risk of assuming that since particular claims are not usually identified with particular individuals as in cultural settings, there were no such critical and reflective individuals, and as such, the cultural practices and belief systems of any such people are unphilosophical. This is not to however say that all cultural practices and beliefs necessarily qualify as philosophy; rather, it is that aside a people’s myths and stories of origin, there are communal beliefs that have come about, and have sometimes be modified, through the insights of, perhaps, an individual or groups of individuals, who, at some point, considered such beliefs and/or practices out of place and no longer beneficial to the life of the community.⁵

With the preceding providing some rationale for culture philosophy, it may be added here that key to understanding and engaging the philosophy of a particular culture is what may be referred to as “culture specifics”. “Culture specifics”, for some clarity, are the markers of the identity of a culture; they refer to those specificities in the belief systems, the customs and practices, the precepts and norms that regulate the life of the individuals of a particular culture: they are the media through which a culture’s philosophy is expressed. In

doing African epistemology as culture philosophy, therefore, it is the “culture specifics”, the peculiar way or ways that the African conceives of knowledge that marks such philosophical reflection as African epistemology.

Having made some remarks on culture philosophy, and African epistemology as culture philosophy, we turn attention to two notions considered key to the discourse of method in the paper. For clarity and convenience, these will be referred to as: (i) the conflation issue, and (ii) the method/subject-matter nexus. While an examination of the former shall follow immediately, the discussion of the later shall be left for the latter part of the paper. This is because what is to be said regarding it (the method/subject-matter nexus) relates much with the comments to be made regarding the place of method in discourse as the concern of the present paper, which, of course, relates to research in general.

Method understood as a ‘way’ of investigating a phenomenon may be taken to essentially refer to the steps (procedure) for such investigation. In this vein, the method describes the procedure to be taken to achieve some desired result(s). But there is another aspect of method is as descriptive of method as the procedure aspect. This may be referred to as the underlying conceptual framework that represents what is known about the subject-matter under investigation. As regards the conflation issue, therefore, method includes two aspects: the procedure and the conceptual framework. The point in talking about the conflation issue is the need to draw attention to the somewhat usual practice where discourses on method conflate the procedure aspect of method with the underlying conceptual framework. An illustration will suffice to explicate what is meant here. When a researcher is to investigate a phenomenon, which from observation has shown the limits of extant or existing explanatory model(s), she begins with some hypothetical statements that are in the main, the tentative explanations, and is to be subjected to repeated tests to ascertain its appropriateness for explaining the observed phenomenon. The researcher then goes on from the hypothesis that she has formulated (or conjectured) to designing an experiment that is meant to tests the hypothesis’ ex-

just as it does for among those referred to as Europeans of Asians. See: Godfrey O. Ozumba, “Methodology and African Philosophy”, in: Andrew F. Uduigwomen (ed.), *Footmarks on African Philosophy*, Obaroh & Ogbinaka Publishers Ltd, Ikeja-Lagos 1995, pp. 17–25.

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Henry Odera Oruka, “Sagacity in African Philosophy”, in: Sophie Bosede Oluwole (ed.), *Readings in African Philosophy*, Ikeja Masstech Publishers, Lagos 1991, p. 181.

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Ibid.

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The ‘individual requirement’ added to the requirement that a claim be reflective and critical to make such claim philosophical, seems to be grounded on the thinking that it is only at the individual level that a deviation from communally held beliefs can take place. That is, it is only individuals who are usually able to make the reflective and critical shift from claims held communally. But if it sometimes occur that an anomaly may cause a group or

groups of persons to modify aspects of their practices and belief system, as it has sometimes been seen to happen in the scientific community, and as Thomas Kuhn pointed out, then it is not incorrect to think that while it is obvious that it is individuals of a particular community who may first observe the anomaly, it is often at the community level (as a people) that the reflection and modification of such beliefs and practices take place.

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It is enough to recall the activities of the members of the Vienna Circle, who, as a group, were intent on providing the basis for demarcating science from pseudo-science. And as such, met in several meetings to discuss what could be accepted as the criterion for the demarcation of science from pseudo-science. To the extent that they met to discuss the said criterion, the reflective activity that is held to characterise philosophy was carried out as a group. So, the reflective shift that is held to characterise philosophy may happen at the level of the community or group.

planatory capacity. As the researcher engages in repeated experimentations, she is guided by certain assumptions that are the conceptual framework of the experimentations. Indeed, it is the conceptual framework that informs how the researcher carries her experimentations. The method of the researcher, in our illustration, therefore includes the procedure that goes from observation to hypothesis formulation to experimentation and to theory construction, on the one hand, and, on the other, the conceptual framework that informs how the researcher structures the experimentations towards achieving the intended result(s).

An instructive consideration that emerges here is that proposal(s) of method ought to be clear about the aspect(s) of a method that is/are the focus of such proposal(s). This is important as a conflation of these aspects of method often leaves proposals unclear about what is addressed. For instance, C. S. Momoh's discourse of method in "African Philosophy ... Does it Exist?" and "Issues in African Philosophy" put together the proposals of Paul Radin,⁶ Gordon Hunnings,⁷ Robin Horton⁸ and William Abraham,⁹ as methodological recommendations for engaging research in African philosophy. But, whereas Radin's proposals is that scholars of African philosophy should identify individuals who, in traditional societies, occupy themselves with similar problems as we find in professional philosophy, and William Abraham's proposal, much like that of Radin's, is that discourses of African philosophy should avoid blanket and general statements, by noting the distinction between claims that are individual's from those that are of the community, Hunnings' proposal is that researchers of African philosophy need to do some synthesis of ideas, after critical analyses, since synthesis gives the scholar some room for creative philosophising. As it appears, while the proposals of Radin and William Abraham are on the underlying conceptual assumption of method, that of Hunnings is more on the procedure of method to be deployed by researchers of African philosophy. And so, it could be said that Momoh seems to have conflated the aspects of method identified above. With this said, and the understanding that the debate on a method for African philosophy essentially straddles both aspects that have been mentioned here, attention will now be turned to examine what has come to be described as the problem of method in African philosophy.

African Philosophy and the Problem of Method¹⁰

It appears the question of the authenticity and validity of a particular research enterprise is to be provided for, among other means, by the method employed. This seems especially true for African philosophy, whose existence and nature was, for a while, the focus of intense debate. Of course, what happens to be true for African philosophy, in this sense, spirals to African epistemology or the discourse of knowledge in an African thought system. Perhaps, a useful point for beginning an examination of the problem of method in African philosophy, therefore, is the debate over the existence and nature of African philosophy that was the focus of philosophers of African descent as well as those from outside the continent in the latter half of the twentieth century. To briefly recap, the debate was essentially whether there was anything as philosophy or African philosophy in indigenous Africa. In this vein, G. O. Ozumba was apt when he declared that "the controversy that clouds the question of the existence of a corpus of work that can rightly be called African philosophy suggests a focus on 'methodology and African philosophy'".¹¹

Thinking in the same vein, Joseph Ike Asike, writing in 1992, noted that a debate on methodology with respect to African philosophy emerged from the attempt by philosophers of African descent (and their sympathizers) to respond to the accusations by Europeans, especially, that since Africans had no form of writing, “no respectable sign of the workings of reason could exist. And by the poverty of reasoning, without memory or mind, no history could exist, without history no humanity”.¹²

It is in the context of claims as those of Ozumba and Asike above that the debate over the existence and nature of African philosophy at the latter half of the twentieth-century has been described as a debate over the methodology for African philosophy, and has generated the problem of method in African philosophy. Simply put, the problem of method in African philosophy may be stated as the search for an appropriate way for doing African philosophy. As it becomes obvious, this search implicates knowledge of what African philosophy is. This explains why it is correct to say that the debate over the existence and nature of African philosophy is also the debate over the methodology for African philosophy.

With the preceding said, the four trends, by which Henry Odera Oruka provided a description and categorisation of what had been said regarding the existence and nature of African philosophy at the time, may be considered to represent attempts at proposals in response to the problem of method in African philosophy. Viewed as methodological proposals, therefore, the four trends – Ethnophilosophy, Philosophic sagacity, Nationalist-ideological philosophy, and Professional philosophy – may be seen to be concerned with delineating what is to be included and excluded as method for African philosophy by responding to the question of whether it (African philosophy) exists. In effect, it is taken that in the same attempt at responding to the question of the existence of African philosophy, proponents or advocates of the four trends could be read to have proposed methods for African philosophy that are in agreement with the response to whether there was African philosophy among indigenous Africans or not.

And so, what becomes obvious is that in the claims of ethnophilosophers, who hold that indigenous Africans had philosophy expressed through their belief systems, practices, proverbs and sayings, the method for doing African

6 Paul Radin, *Primitive Man as Philosopher*, Dover, New York 1957.

7 Gordon Hunnings, “Logic, Language and Culture”, *Second Order* IV (1975) 1, pp. 3–13.

8 Robin Horton, “African Tradition Thought and the Emerging African Philosophy Department: A Comment on the Current Debate”, *Second Order* VI (1977) 1.

9 William Emmanuel Abraham, *The Mind of Africa*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1962.

10 Godwin Azenabor presents quite an extensive list of early proposals of methods in African

philosophy, as well as offering critical comments on the proposals presented, in his 2002 publication, *Understanding the Problem in African Philosophy*. The proposals examined in the section are informed by the understanding that they represent the initial attempt by researchers to provide some statement regarding method in African philosophy.

11 G. O. Ozumba, “Methodology and African Philosophy”, p. 17.

12 Joseph Ike Asike, “Contemporary African Philosophy: The Search for a Method or Rediscovery of its Content?”, *Indian Philosophical Quarterly* XIX (1992) 1, pp. 23–39, p. 26.

philosophy includes a description, rediscovery of, and acquaintance with the culture of Africans. This explains why Placid Tempels thinks that scholars and researchers need to employ participant observation in carrying out researches in African philosophy, particularly, since there are not so many literatures about African philosophy to engage in. For the supporters of Sage philosophy, who also hold that indigenous Africans had a philosophy, albeit, in the wisdom and thoughts of those referred to as Sages, the method of doing philosophy would be to seek out, and engage such sages in critical discourse on important issues with the intent of documenting such discourses. This is evident in Marcel Griaule's *Conversations with Ogotemmel: An Introduction to Dogon Religious Idea*. Taken philosophy to be a universal discipline having the same meaning in all cultures and places, as well as the denial of the existence of philosophy among indigenous Africans, the method championed by proponents of the professional trend is premised on features of philosophy, such as analysis, logicality and critical reflection. And since these are supposed to be activities carried out at the individual level, and not at the level of the community, African beliefs, proverbs and sayings could not be seen as philosophical, since they were held by the community and not the product of individual reflection.¹³ It may be added that in much as the debate over the existence of African philosophy ended with little agreements amongst the different camps, so also the question of a method for African philosophy.

Be the foregoing as it may, it may be added that the proposals of the trends regarding the existence and nature of African philosophy may be seen to have metamorphosed into what is now represented as the divide between the traditionalist and the modernist regarding African philosophy. In brief, whereas the traditionalists define African philosophy as “the collective worldview of Africans concerning man, nature and society (...) embedded in the proverbs, myths, folktales, in short, oral traditions”,¹⁴ asserting that to develop an authentic philosophical tradition would require the investigation, record and analysis of the materials from these sources; the modernists, in reaction, suppose that the definition of African philosophy by traditionalists grants it (African philosophy) a status that “forecloses the possibility of a critical engagement that would allow for the emergence of a new synthesis, which would be relevant to contemporary African life”.¹⁵ And so, Oladipo adds that it is on account of the view of traditionalists regarding African philosophy that those he referred to as modernist (Anthony Appiah, Peter Bodunrin, Paulin Hountondji, Henry Odera Oruka and Kwasi Wiredu) “insist that a mere reportage of traditional conceptions cannot be a fulfilment of the philosopher’s task in Africa”.¹⁶ Concerning the foregoing insistence of the modernist that a mere reportage of traditional conceptions cannot be taken as philosophy and the philosopher’s task in Africa, it would be said here that this represents a valid claim. However, this is not to say that what could be described as philosophical was absent in indigenous African cultures. What needs to be done, as such, is to enter into a conversation, a dialogue with indigenous African cultures, not with the intent of philosophically reconstructing the beliefs and practices contained therein (this would imply that the beliefs and practices had no philosophy); rather, it should be with the intent of uncovering the pattern of thought and rationality of the indigenous African. Further discussion of this would be done in the next section of this paper.

There have been other considerations worthy of note regarding the question of method in African philosophy, such as whether the question of the method

need to occupy the interest of the philosopher. Indeed, not a few scholars opine that the talk about the relevance of the method in African philosophy is unnecessary. One philosopher who sees things this way is Joseph Ike Asike. For him, the efforts spent on debating the nature and content of African philosophy was ill-warranted. He sees the early debate regarding the existence and nature of African philosophy as an unhealthy one as the “energy and time dissipated on the debate should have been channelled into reconstructing the African past”.¹⁷ Another philosopher who thinks in a similar light is K. C. Anyanwu. In his stead, the authenticity of African philosophy is determined by the examination of the life and experiences of Africans, as well as the appropriate formulation of the problem(s) to be examined. This is why he held that what is needed as a method for philosophy is to engage the subject-matter of philosophy via the interpretation and analyses of the thoughts, myths, proverbs and cultures of Africans.¹⁸ In particular, he says that

“... philosophical insight and creative vision do not depend on methods but several factors, like personal sensitivity and commitment to central problems of experience. And furthermore, it is the subject-matter that determines its method.”¹⁹

G. E. Azenabor, however, makes a valid point when he says that Anyanwu’s claim regarding method misses an important consideration in the formulation of a problem; this is that a particular method is required and eventually employed in conceptualising any such philosophical problems.²⁰

On the Method for Doing African Epistemology

In examining the method for doing African epistemology, with the intent to bring to the fore what is considered inclusive to the method for doing African epistemology, the paper, in this section, begins by identifying some strategies that have been deployed by studies in African epistemology. This is done with the intent to note what is exclusive of the method(s) for doing African epistemology. It is pertinent to note, as such, that while some of the studies reviewed have their methods read out from how they engaged the discourse of

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The consideration of what could be seen as the various methods of the four trends of African philosophy presented here has not included the Nationalist-ideological trend. This is on the assumption that the trend focuses more on providing some theoretical foundation for development in Africa; rather than the debate on the nature and existence of African philosophy. Even at that, though, the trend proposes a return to indigenous ways of living – to what it conceives as the ideas of familyhood and African socialism – as the means to mental decolonization of the African mind. Thus, again, it is a favouring of the indigenous culture of Africans.

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Olusegun Oladipo, “Issues in the Definition of African Philosophy,” in: Olusegun Oladipo (ed.), *Core Issues in African Philosophy*, Hope Publications, Ibadan 2006, p. 12.

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O. Oladipo, “Issues in the Definition of African Philosophy,” p. 14.

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Ibid.

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J. I. Asike, “Contemporary African Philosophy”, p. 27.

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See K. Chukwulozie Anyanwu, “The Problem of Method in African Philosophy”, in: Campbell S. Momoh (ed.), *The Substance of African Philosophy*, African Philosophy Projects Publications, Auchi 1989, pp. 126–149.

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Ibid., p. 135.

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Godwin E. Azenabor, *Understanding the Problems of African Philosophy*, First Academic Publishers, Lagos 2002, p. 90.

African epistemology,²¹ the methods employed by others, though not explicitly stated, are quite obvious from, say, the title of the study.²² Without attempting to recast the content of the papers examined, what becomes obvious is that in extant studies in African epistemology, at least, two strategies, employed by researchers of African epistemology, are discernible. These strategies, for convenience, have been tagged: (i) the comparative strategy, and (ii) the concept-import/export strategy. Whereas in the comparative strategy, much as the tag implies, the analysis of the knowledge practices of African cultures are put side-by-side those of, especially, the West; in the concept-import/export strategy, issues and problematic are addressed by drawing from the store of conceptual analyses, again, especially from the West. An understanding of the motivation for such approaches may provide some clarity of the strategies.

In the light of the preceding, and noting that the same intent that motivates researches that employ the comparative strategies may also motivate those that take to the concept-import strategies, an observable motivation is an objective to aid the understanding of a rather less known cultural system, idea, belief or practice. An illustration of this can be seen in the paper, “Shona Epistemology and Plato’s Divided Line”,²³ where the intention of the authors is to “compare and contrast Plato’s theory of knowledge as represented by the divided line with Shona conceptions of knowledge as found in Shona traditional utterances”, with the intent to make evident the “synergies and nuances between the two philosophically rich traditions”. Another usual goal is to show some similarity or sameness in the rationality of beliefs or claims in one culture with another (usually the culture seen to possess such rational beliefs and practices). This may be done by either attempting to show how the application of cultural beliefs or practices help explicate issues and/or problems that, from historical record, emerged in, say, the West, as in the paper, “An African Epistemological Approach to Epistemic Certitude and Scepticism”; or by examining knowledge practices in Africa by employing concepts and categories that do not emerge from within the particular knowledge practice or similar one, as in the paper, “Towards an Internalist Conception of Justification in African Epistemology”.

The point here is neither to suppose that concepts and categories developed within a particular cultural experience or philosophical tradition cannot be deployed to examine some phenomena in another, nor deny the benefits of clarity that may be gained by elucidating a concept or idea or belief in a particular cultural system by comparing it with another in a second system. Rather, it is to emphasise and bring attention to the misconceptions of the very same cultural beliefs and practices whose understanding the use of the comparative approach seeks to bring about. It is about the translation of meaning. That is, in the comparative strategy, it is the assumption that meaning within one’s own cultural/linguistic space may be accessed and made evident through meaning in other cultural/linguistic settings that are taken to provide some equivalence in meanings. But since “every translation is an interpretation” that is usually the result of the extent of the horizon of one’s world, then it is possible that interpretations can miss an intended meaning. On the part of the concept-import/export strategy, there is a noticeable philosophical untidiness generated by unconcern for the peculiarities associated with how knowledge in the African space is conceived and understood.

It is useful at this point to note that in examining what is inclusive and/or exclusive to a method for African epistemology, there is the need to provide some understanding for what is taken as African epistemology. This is important on the premise that what (subject-matter) is to be investigated informs how (method) it is to be investigated. Simply put, the subject-matter of investigation informs the method of investigation. African epistemology does not refer

to an entirely separate and exclusive conceptualisation of knowledge from, say, how knowledge has been and is conceptualised in philosophical discussions in the West. What it indicates, however, is a domestication of the general (and universal) characterisation of what it means to know in the African context. Thus, while African epistemology refers to a knowledge-content that is autochthonous to the African, on the one hand, it describes, on the other, the universal features of what is implied in the discourse of epistemology. This distinction between the knowledge-content of African epistemology and what characterises the discipline of epistemology is important, as a method, in the context of this paper, is much informed by a consideration of the former than the latter. This is premised on the claim that the decision about the appropriate method(s) to be deployed for examining a particular phenomenon is determined, first, by a consideration of the nature and character of what is to be examined, and then by, say, the nature of the discipline within which it is to be investigated. In terms of the knowledge-content, therefore, African epistemology refers to knowledge practices that have their roots in the experiences of the African.

Given the understanding that African epistemology examines the knowledge practices of the African as its subject matter, the proposal for method (procedure aspect of method), in this study, is informed by the assumption (the conceptual aspect of method) that present in indigenous African cultural practices and belief systems are not just materials for developing a philosophy that is African (and by extension, an epistemology that is African), but insights and reflections that pass for philosophy understood as critical reflection and examination of the ideas by which we live.²⁴ An instance of this that readily comes to mind is the communally accepted assertion that “what an elder sees while sitting, a child will not see even if he climbs an Iroko tree”. An assertion as this carries a meaning that goes beyond what has been plainly expressed; thus, showing some profundity in thinking that requires unpacking to reveal its meaning. For instance, the “elder” is conceptual, and refers not simply to a man well in age, but also one whose integrity and wisdom in particular matters is known to the community. Indeed, it is the possession of these that is part of what qualifies the “elder” to become an ancestor when he transits to the after-life. Indeed, the ‘elder’ will qualify as one of Oruka’s sages. Now, given that it is asserted that contained in indigenous African belief systems and practices is philosophy, the method (procedure) for doing African epistemology would be the retrieval of indigenous knowledge practices. This retrieval is not to be understood as the reconstruction of the belief systems and practices of indigenous Africans, as, for instance, proposed by G. O. Ozumba.

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Felix A. Airoboman, Anthony Afe Asekauno, “Is there an ‘African’ Epistemology?” *Jorind* 10 (2012) 3, pp. 13–17; Amaechi Udefi, “Rationale for an African Epistemology: A Critical Examination of the Igbo views on Knowledge, Belief, and Justification”, *Canadian Social Science* 10 (2014) 3, pp. 108–117, doi: <https://doi.org/10.3968/4445>; Anselm Kole Jimoh, John Thomas, “An African Epistemological Approach to Epistemic Certitude and Scepticism”, *Research in Humanities and Sciences* 5 (2015) 11, pp. 54–61.

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Fainos Mangena, Maxwell Mukova, “Shona Epistemology and Plato’s Divided Line”, *The Journal of Pan African Studies* 3 (2010) 9, pp.

64–77; Adebayo A. Ogungbure, “Towards an Internalist Conception of Justification in African Epistemology”, *Thought and Practice: A Journal of the Philosophical Association of Kenya* 6 (2014) 2, pp. 39–54.

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F. Mangena, M. Mukova, “Shona Epistemology and Plato’s Divided Line”, p. 64.

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It was H. S. Staniland who defined *philosophy* as “the criticism of the ideas we live by”. See: H. S. Staniland, “What is Philosophy?”, *Second Order: An African Journal of Philosophy* VIII (1978) 1–2, pp. 3–10.

In a chapter-contribution to A. F. Uduigwomen,²⁵ Ozumba has an interesting understanding of the method for African philosophy: interesting because he addresses both aspects of method – the conceptual aspect and the procedure aspect. On the side of the conceptual framework, Ozumba, while appearing to suggest what he refers to as the “integrativists”²⁶ approach to method, opines that it is most important that any philosophical piece deserving intellectual acceptance, whether that piece be African philosophy or otherwise, need be systematic, coherent, logical, consistent, clear, and critical. These are, for Ozumba, the defining features of philosophical writing and, in the understanding of method as presented in this paper, the underlying conceptual framework for what beliefs or claims would qualify as philosophy. In speaking to the procedure aspect of method, Ozumba takes it that since traditional African thought is akin to the Greek age of mythology, the first step to be taken by philosophers is to get to “the root of African cultural existence to find out what symbolisms and behavioural patterns have given birth to the emergence of the contemporary African personality”.²⁷ The point in saying this is that, for him, anthropological accounts of the African past cannot count as philosophy; rather, it serves to provide the foundation on which African philosophy can be hinged. As such, for him, African philosophy begins with a reconstruction of the African past. What should follow next, according to Ozumba, “is a systematic collation of works that evinced African perspective in their approaches to issues”.²⁸

As can be seen, the proposal for method by Ozumba goes from retrieving, to systematically collating what has been retrieved. Indeed, his proposal portrays an understanding of what needs to be done in terms of conceptualising African perspective to issues. But the proposal misses the point in assuming that the retrieval that needs to be done is simply to harvest materials from culture for developing African philosophy. That is, in proposing that what should follow the retrieval should be a systematic collation, the proposal assumes that it at that point of systematically collating what has been retrieved that the materials retrieved are reconstructed as African philosophy. In effect, Ozumba understands the retrieval that needs to be done as regards method in African philosophy to be one that merely helps to get ‘raw’ materials from culture for philosophy. In contrast to this, the understanding of retrieval in this paper, as noted earlier, is that what is to be retrieved are not just the belief systems and cultural practices of Africans, but the underlying assumptions and patterns of reason that explain such beliefs and cultural practices. This is because such patterns would reveal the inner workings and logics of the mind of the African.

Concluding Remarks

The concluding remarks to be made will begin by noting the main thrust of the concern of the study, which is to proffer method for engaging in studies in African epistemology. To this extent, the study canvasses for a procedure of method that is essentially retrieval, understood to imply the exposition of the belief systems and cultural practices of indigenous Africans, through critical conversation and dialogue with cultural practices and belief systems. The retrieval, in this sense, is to uncover the reflective nature and character of the belief systems and practices of Africans by portraying the underlying patterns of reasoning and logic that ground such belief systems and practices. Of importance, and to be noted, is the underlying assumption that drives the method proposed. This is that there is present in indigenous African cultural practices and belief systems

suppositions, assumptions and claims about knowledge, and what it means to know, that pass as philosophy understood as a critical and reflective discipline. A justification that may be given for the choice of the method proposed may be seen to come from the intricate relation between the method deployed in research and the nature of the subject-matter to be investigated. Indeed, it is on this intricate relation that the importance of method is premised. It is the intricate relation that exists between the method and the subject-matter being examined that has been referred to as the method/subject-matter nexus. As such, the method/subject-matter nexus indicates the importance of understanding the intrinsic relation between method to be employed in research, and the nature of the subject-matter to be investigated. In fact, the nature of the subject-matter is what informs the sort of conceptual framework that underlies and guides the procedure aspect of method; such that, in talking about method, what is to be considered is not only the steps to be taken, as indicated by the procedure suggested, but the conceptual framework that is usually assumed to describe the nature of the phenomenon under investigation. This is such that what is discovered and discoverable about a particular phenomenon is with due regards to the method employed. This has been alluded to by a number of scholars; among them are Richard Tarnas in *Cosmos and Psyche*, and Paul K. Feyerabend in *Conquest of Abundance*.

Peter Aloysius Ikhane

Kako se afričkom epistemologijom ne valja baviti

Sažetak

Afrička je epistemologija diskurs filozofije kulture, a filozofija kulture je, uzvratno, diskurs ljudske koncepcije i percepcije zbilje. Odražava konceptualizaciju čovjekova živog svijeta. U tom smislu, sadržaj, metoda i alati za analizu filozofije kulture podrazumijevaju materiju indikativnu za ljudski svjetonazor (na što se u radu referiram s pojmom »kulturna specifičnost«), a što su označitelji identiteta kulture. Baveći se filozofijom kulture, primjerice, afričkom epistemologijom, »kulturne specifičnosti« ono su što obilježava filozofijsko promišljanje kao pripadajuće afričkoj epistemologiji. Objašnjavajući što bi bila metoda bavljenja afričkom epistemologijom, rad najprije artikulira prirodu, karakter i metodu filozofije kulture, a zatim se bavi s određenim brojem radova iz područja afričke epistemologije, s namjerom procjenjivanja metoda koje se uobičajeno primjenjuju pri ispitivanju predmeta u afričkoj epistemologiji. Po rezultatima, rad svraća pozornost na prijelome između metode primijenjene u analizi afričke epistemologije i uvjeta za primjenu metode pri bavljenju afričkom epistemologijom kao filozofijom kulture. Rad se zaključuje prijedlogom korištenja metode za afričku epistemologiju, a koja može poslužiti općenito za afričku filozofiju.

Ključne riječi

afrička epistemologija, afrička filozofija, filozofija kulture, kulturna specifičnost, metoda

25

G. O. Ozumba, "Methodology and African Philosophy". Ozumba, along with presenting his ideas about method in African philosophy, provided a list of four broad headings of his classification of method that describe the suggestions of method by philosophers, in the mid to late twentieth-century, as Odera Oruka, P. O. Bodurin, C. S. Momoh, B. Oluwole, K. C. Anyanwu, and a host of others. This list includes (i) free style methodology, (ii) the methodology of logical analysis, (iii) the methodology of conceptual analysis, and (iv) integrative methodology.

26

The "integrativist" approach was examined by Ozumba in the same chapter-contribution to A. F. Uduigwomen's edited book. Essentially, the integrative method canvasses for a blend of approaches since the task of philosophy is assumed to be multi-faceted, and involving a wide spectrum of considerations.

27

G. O. Ozumba, "Methodology and African Philosophy", p. 22.

28

Ibid., p. 23.

Peter Aloysius Ikhane

Wie afrikanische Epistemologie nicht geführt werden sollte

Zusammenfassung

Die afrikanische Epistemologie ist ein Diskurs der Kulturphilosophie, und die Kulturphilosophie ist andersherum ein Diskurs der menschlichen Wirklichkeitskonzeption und -perzeption. Sie spiegelt die Konzeptualisierung der menschlichen Lebenswelt wider. In diesem Sinne implizieren Inhalt, Methode und Werkzeuge zur Analyse der Kulturphilosophie eine für die menschliche Weltanschauung indikative Materie (worauf ich in der Arbeit mit dem Begriff „kulturelle Spezifität“ referiere), was Signifikanten der Kulturidentität sind. In Anbetracht der Kulturphilosophie, zum Beispiel der afrikanischen Epistemologie, sind die „kulturellen Spezifitäten“ jener Faktor, der das philosophische Nachdenken als der afrikanischen Epistemologie zugehörndes Nachdenken illustriert. Durch die Darlegung der Methode der Beschäftigung mit der afrikanischen Epistemologie artikuliert die Arbeit zunächst die Natur, den Charakter und die Methode der Kulturphilosophie, wonach sie sich mit einer gewissen Zahl von Arbeiten aus dem Bereich der afrikanischen Epistemologie befasst, mit der Intention, die Methoden zu begutachten, die bei der Untersuchung der Gegenstände in der afrikanischen Epistemologie geläufig angewandt werden. Den Ergebnissen zufolge lenkt die Arbeit die Aufmerksamkeit auf die Brüche zwischen der innerhalb der Analyse der afrikanischen Epistemologie eingesetzten Methode und den Bedingungen für die Anwendung der Methode bei der Beschäftigung mit der afrikanischen Epistemologie als Kulturphilosophie. Die Arbeit schließt mit dem Vorschlag, die Methode an die afrikanische Epistemologie anzuwenden, und die ja auch im Allgemeinen für die afrikanische Philosophie vorteilhaft sein kann.

Schlüsselwörter

afrikanische Epistemologie, afrikanische Philosophie, Kulturphilosophie, kulturelle Spezifität, Methode

Peter Aloysius Ikhane

Comment l'épistémologie africaine ne devrait pas être faite

Résumé

L'épistémologie africaine constitue un discours de la philosophie de la culture, et la philosophie de la culture est, en retour, un discours de conception humaine et de perception de la réalité. Ce discours reflète la manière dont l'homme conceptualise le monde vivant. En ce sens, le contenu, la méthode et les outils pour analyser la philosophie de la culture supposent des éléments indicatifs pour la vision du monde humain (sur quoi je me réfère dans ce travail par le terme de « spécificité culturelle »), et sont les signifiants de l'identité de la culture. En m'intéressant à la philosophie de la culture, à l'exemple de l'épistémologie africaine, je remarque que les « spécificités culturelles » sont ce qui caractérise les réflexions philosophiques en tant qu'appartenant à l'épistémologie africaine. En expliquant ce que serait une méthode qui traite de l'épistémologie africaine, ce travail énonce d'abord la nature, le caractère et la méthode de la philosophie de la culture, et se penche ensuite sur un nombre déterminé de travaux issus du domaine de l'épistémologie africaine, dans l'intention d'évaluer les méthodes appliquées de manière générale lors de recherches sur l'objet dans l'épistémologie africaine. Sur la base des résultats, ce travail attire l'attention sur les fractures existantes entre les méthodes appliquées dans l'analyse de l'épistémologie africaine et les conditions de leur application lors de recherches sur l'épistémologie africaine en tant que philosophie de la culture. En conclusion, ce travail propose l'utilisation d'une méthode pour l'épistémologie africaine qui peut, de manière générale, servir à la philosophie africaine.

Mots-clés

épistémologie africaine, philosophie africaine, philosophie de la culture, spécificité culturelle, méthode