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## Thought and practice in African philosophy

### **Thought and practice in African philosophy.**

Gail Presbey, Daniel Smith, Pamela Abuya & Oriare Nyarwath (eds.). Nairobi: Konrad Adenauer Foundation. 2002. xxv + 324 pp. ISSN 1681-589.

This book is a compendium of twenty-five articles chosen to reflect various aspects of African philosophy. It is comprehensive in its nature as if it seeks to exhaust all that can be said about African philosophy. The articles are grouped into five broad categories, namely: (a) approaches and methodologies, six articles; (b) problems of missionary and colonialist thinking, five articles; (c) gender and culture in Africa, three articles; (d) sage philosophy, four articles; and (e) philosophy, ethics and politics, seven articles. The editors have drawn their contributors from diverse localities, from inside and outside of Africa. While the contribution of Africans to African philosophy is crucial and irreplaceable, it is important that African philosophy should draw philosophers from outside of Africa as well. This is a sign of its maturity. We share the same argument as Kwasi Wiredu (1991: 93) when he criticised Paulin Hountondji in his insistence that for any work to be part of African philosophy, its author must be an "African."<sup>1</sup> In other words, we are of the view that "Africanists," i.e. African philosophy practitioners from outside the African continent, can be legitimate African philosophers.<sup>2</sup> Thus, from the point of view of authorship of the essays in this book, African philosophy is definitely an intercontinental enterprise.

The book is entitled *Thought and practice in African philosophy*. Judging by the contents of the articles, the title of the book seems to be making a statement about the goal that African philosophy gives itself, namely that "philosophy" ought to think and act at the same time. Gail Presbey echoes this in the introduction, "philosophy should be relevant to people's lives, and not merely abstract reflections, unrelated to daily life" (xi). The book lives up to its title as it deals with (philosophi-

cal) "thoughts," as well as "practices" of various African peoples, in the pre- and post-colonial periods. This shows that African philosophy is as old as Africa herself. For example, in the article "Paradigmatic constraints and Africa's quest for identity" Joseph Situmo is critical of thoughts advanced by Africans and non-Africans alike, which express paradigms and discourses about Africa (100-101). According to Situmo these paradigms and discourses are Eurocentric and hence prejudiced against African ways of being. He argues that Africa must (re)discover her own unique way of being and doing. Thus, Situmo calls for an Afrocentric paradigm in which, as Molefi Asante (1991: 172) once pointed out, Africa must be seen as "asserting itself intellectually, psychologically, breaking the bonds of Western domination in the mind as an analogue for breaking these bonds in every other field."

G.E.M. Ogotu in his article "African Renaissance: A third millennium challenge to the thought and practice of African philosophy" belabours the same point: "The new perspective in the Third Millennium is African Renaissance. The society has every right to look to the men and women of genius at our universities to provide the theoretical framework. The men of genius are the Lovers of Wisdom, the Philosophers, men and women of ideas and whose discourses revolve around *Thought and practice in African philosophy*" (10). In other words, to borrow Ama Mazama's (2003: 5) words, African must "systematically displace European ways of thinking, being, feeling, etc., and consciously replace them with ways that are germane to our own African cultural experience." Furthermore, the book, through the article of Claude Sumner, also searches for African (philosophic) thought in Ethiopian sapiential and philosophical literature in order to (re)discover more philosophic wisdom regarding the status of women in Ethiopia.

Philosophers in this book do not only look at abstract "thoughts" of Africans. They also research and criticise practices of some Africans and Europeans in Africa. For example, neo-colonialism and continuing imperialism in Rwanda, as exposed by Shannon Shea, in "The role of imperialism in Rwanda: Is colonialism dead?" Solomon Monyenye, in "Rites of passage, old and new: indigenous initiation ceremonies and the modern education system, with reference to the Abagusii community of south-western Kenya". Thus, the book reflects in a critical way some thoughts and practices of Africans and non-Africans in Africa. In this way, it bears an apposite title.

Next, we look at the selected articles in each of the book's six main sections.

### **Approaches and methodologies**

The articles in this section of the book call for new and fresh approaches and methodologies in discourses on Africa. They argue for the need for an interdisciplinary approach in dealing with thoughts and practices in African discourses. For instance, Kai Kresse in his article, "Towards an anthropology of philosophy: Four turns, with reference to the African context," shows how anthropology, religion and history, can cooperate with philosophy to produce well and balanced insights about Africa (32-33). In such cooperation, Anthropology, Religion and History can provide the material for philosophising. He maintains that such insights can be broadly categorised as anthropology of philosophies (36). The strength of such anthropology, according to Kresse, is that it gives cross-cultural theories of the person and accordingly a globally applicable understanding of philosophical knowledge (36).

The articles in this section generally emphasise the significance of cultural exchange of thoughts and practices. This is seen as the "exchange of gifts" (W.E.B. DuBois cited by Crawford, 18). Jeffrey Crawford in his article, "Africana philosophy, civilisation of the universal and the giving of gifts" argues that such an exchange will lead us to "knowing more about each other, about our respective hopes, problems, and aspirations to work towards the building of a human community in which all of us help overcome ideological racism" (26). Cultural exchange in itself is invaluable. However, care must be taken that such an exchange does not translate into cultural diffusion in which one (dominant) culture absorbs all others. Also, to be avoided is the cultural integration in which there is a blending of all cultures into one melting pot.

For this reason we want to look more closely at Ogutu's article, "African Renaissance: A third millennium challenge to the thought and practice of African philosophy" (3-11). He observes that the slave trade, imperial conquest, resource despoliation and economic marginalization are attributed to the despair and wretchedness among Africans. As a result "our historical memory has been destroyed and replaced by the conquerors' vision" (3). Ogutu argues that the way forward required a "self designed road," search for "our lost glory" and redefinition of "where we come from" (3). In other words, socio-economic development alone is not enough. Africa needs also cultural emancipation (3). In this way, Ogutu is in accord with Mahmood Mandani (1999) that "cultural" (and not only socio-political) renaissance is necessary for Africa. Ogutu then gives an overview of the "Eu-

ropean renaissance"; its origins in Florence, Western Italy and other parts of Europe. The intensified classical scholarship and scientific and geographical discoveries by intellectual geniuses of Europe brought its success (5). Ogotu, like Mandani who shows the critical role of the "intelligentsia" then calls for African thinkers and intellectuals – men and women of genius – to "search the histories of antiquity for precedents that will guide them as they propel the African people to the truth." He also urges them to reflect on the "Burnt-Down libraries of Africa" (5-6). By this he means that when an elder person dies, the wealth of knowledge he had, dies with him or her. So the wise elders must impart their knowledge before they die. But it is also the case that part of the library of ancient Alexandria was burnt down. He argues that there is a lot of archaeological evidence that shows the ingenuity of Africa. We note with disapproval that in Ogotu's article, the words 'African Renaissance' with capital "R" and African renaissance with small letter "r", are used interchangeably. According to Ramose, there was only one "Renaissance" – the European Renaissance. Therefore, Ramose (2002b: 601) contends, "Renaissance is a historical concept signifying a specific period in the history of Europe." Using once more the capital letter "R" in reference to a period in contemporary African history reflects historical insensitivity. It is also an indication of a dearth of historical imagination. It is evidently the refusal to dissolve the bond of subservience to the erstwhile colonial master. As Ramose (2002b: 601) sarcastically suggests, "there is something unnatural about the natural environment of Africa such that the history of Africa cannot be described and defined by concepts originally from Africa." Thus, the usage of "Renaissance" to describe African renewal of some kind poses, for Ramose both a "methodological and historical problem". He proposes a new concept *Mokoko/Hungwe*<sup>3</sup> as signifying a period of awakening and beginning of a new life. He argues that *Mokoko/Hungwe*:

It is the period of the birds. It is the hour to assert and reaffirm the dignity of the African precisely by seizing the initiative to remedy historical injustice with historical justice. It is the season of the return of the land to its original rightful owners; the period of reversion to unmodified and unencumbered sovereignty. It is the age of restitution and reparation to Africa. It is the age of African memory functioning as the critique of history (Ramose, 2002b: 608).

In this way, the use of concepts from the African experience marks the departure from what Ramose calls, a northbound gaze.

### **Problems of missionaries and colonialist thinking**

There are five papers presented in this part of the book. All of them are critical of colonialism and missionary activities in Africa. The five authors maintain that colonialists and missionaries left a legacy that Africans must still contend with if they are to be the determinants of their own destiny. They concur with one another that to date discourses on Africa and Africans, whether espoused by Africans or Europeans, are still coloured largely by Eurocentric methodologies and paradigms.

This section of the book opens with Situmo's paper, "Paradigmatic constraints and Africa's quest for identity" which clearly shows the problem of Africa's identity. Situmo maintains that the exploitative and menacing relationship that Africa had with Europe has led to the destruction of the former. Even today, Situmo continues, Africa understands itself in terms of its slavish relationship with Europe and the USA. Situmo notes that contemporary Africa still uses Eurocentric paradigms and discourses, which, in the author's terms, are "self-centred", "inward-looking" and have tendencies to "entrench themselves and annihilate other discourses" (97). Situmo draws on Mudimbe and Ngugi wa Thiong'o, who are also critical of Western discourses in their tendency to claim a totalizing perspective on their view of issues. He cautioned Africa to become aware of the constraints of European discourses. However, without overshadowing the strengths of this paper, it is puzzling to note Situmo's claim that only colonialism awakened Africa's quest for identity or self-definition (99). While one can admit that it is only when a people who have a common identity are on the verge of being annihilated, that the issue of identity becomes poignant, one would still want to maintain that the quest for identity is not only induced from outside by foreigners. The "otherness" of nature can also induce this quest.

The second and third papers exhort African philosophy to maintain its own identity and independence. Duvenage in his well-researched paper, "Is there a South African philosophical tradition?", gives a brief and yet comprehensive overview of the history of "academic" philosophy in South Africa. He points out that one of the reasons why there is no philosophical tradition (even though there is a philosophical approach) is that South Africa did not make a clear and clean break with its colonial past (107). Because of this, South Africa has inherited philosophical traditions that do not help to solve its social problems, such as cross-cultural communication and contextualization (113).

Owakah in his short, but well-timed and pointed critique observed that Western discourses continue to dominate African philosophy. Af-

rican philosophy whether written by Africans or Westerners, is “never meant for Africans but Europeans”. In some cases, African philosophy (especially ethno-philosophy) is not critical of African culture and as such degenerates into cultural anthropology (121). Nevertheless, Owakah hastens to point out that some shift from a culturally based philosophy to African philosophical thought is already underway. He cites, among others, the works of Hountondji.

Hecht, in “The impact of non-African religions, philosophies, and systems of thought on African life,” a short paper written in a storytelling narrative style, continues to show the negative impact that non-African religions and philosophies, had on African life and philosophies. For example, the tendency of western discourses to make watertight distinctions between, say, religion and philosophy (134). The author is critical of this tendency in the works of western-trained African philosophers. Part III concludes with Shea’s historically oriented “The role of imperialism in Rwanda: Is colonialism dead?” This paper gives overwhelming evidence of the continual presence (though not necessarily physical) of colonialism in Africa, most especially in Rwanda. It is this presence, argues Shea, that eventually led to the 1994 genocide. In this paper, the author shows some of the repercussions of destroying the life-giving traditional structures of Africa.

The five papers in part III explore salient features of colonialism and missionary activities in Africa. They challenge African philosophy to be original and to escape the trappings and constraints of Western discourses. It must be relevant to its social context. Certainly, this section should not be missed if one is to reflect critically on African philosophy.

### **Gender and culture in Africa**

Three papers appear in part IV. Two of them deal with issues pertaining to women and the third one discusses the critical role played by indigenous initiation ceremonies in the education of individuals in society.

The first article, “Feminist philosophy: An African perspective”, by Oduk, is a timely contribution to African philosophy. Its thrust is that African philosophy is incomplete unless it takes into account African feminist philosophy – a long neglected area of study, by both African and Western philosophy. Oduk proposes that African feminist philosophy is a new area of study, which can be undertaken by both males and females, and that it can be modelled on Black feminist philosophy. She unfortunately assumes some background from the reader as to the tenets of Black feminist philosophy. It would have been more helpful

had she outlined some of the major features of Black feminist philosophy. Nevertheless, she situates African philosophy within Western feminist philosophy. She then identified herself with some of the criticisms which Western feminist philosophy directs at Western philosophy, for example, its underlying male chauvinistic tendencies. She discerns the limitation of Western feminist philosophy, which is its exclusion of other feminist philosophies from its domain and in particular, African feminist philosophy (163). Oduki differentiates African feminist philosophy from Western feminist philosophy in that the former focuses on the situation of women, the majority of which are illiterate, poor, isolated, passive, submissive, afraid and lonely, and are to be found in rural areas (166). She then outlines a programme on how to help these marginalized women (167). She hastens to point out that African feminist philosophy is not only committed to a pragmatic programme, but that its vision is to ensure that “women (will) be placed at the centre not only of events but of the thinking of the world” (167). Thus, African Feminist Philosophy is committed to *thought* and *practice*.

The author is silent on “African(a) Womanism”, a tradition that is critical of feminism in general, including African feminism. According to Clenora Hudson-Weems, in her attempt to distinguish between an African(a) womanist and a feminist

The Africana womanist, on the other hand, is significantly different from the mainstream feminist, particularly in her perspective on and approach to issues in society. This is to be expected, for obviously their historical realities and present stance in society are not the same (...) Neither an outgrowth nor an addendum to feminism, *Africana womanism is not* black feminism, African feminism (...) *Africana womanism* is an ideology created and designed for all women of African descent. It is grounded on the African culture and, therefore, it necessarily focuses on the unique experiences, struggles, needs, and desires of African women (Hudson-Weems, 2003: 157-158, original emphasis; see Oyeronke, 1997 for a similar view).

This distinction has a direct bearing on understanding and interpreting specific experiences of African women in Africa and the Diaspora. Describing an experience as womanist or feminist defines the philosophical position of the describer. There is potential for controversy arising from such descriptions.

Sumner’s paper, “The status of women in Ethiopian sapiential and philosophical literature: information and critique”, complements Oduki’s

article on "African feminism". He gives a comprehensive review of Ethiopian sapiential and philosophical literature. He reveals how chauvinistic and degrading to women this tradition of literature is. Drawing on other traditions of Ethiopian literature and women philosophers such as Gail Presbey, he disputes the widely held opinion that such literature is said to embody Ethiopian wisdom (172). This positive contribution to African philosophy seeks to uncover and challenge deeply held preconceptions and prejudices embedded in some of the sapiential and philosophical literature of Ethiopia. Since many of these prejudices are apparent in the cultural practices of Africa, Sumner concludes by calling on Philosophy to be critical of culture and traditions.

Monyenye's paper, "Rites of passage, old and new: Indigenous initiation ceremonies and the modern education system, with special reference to the Abagusii community of south-western Kenya", completes part IV of the book. It stands apart, in that it appraises indigenous initiation ceremonies. Viewed against the background of African womanist philosophy, this is a deliberately provocative paper. The paper, based on a case study of the Abagusii community, argues that such ceremonies are positive contributions to the education of young people. While he is emphatic about the continuance of these initiation rites, he displays remarkable sensitivity and sensibility regarding some rites pertaining to women, for example, clitoridectomy. He makes the case for the modification of this practice, as it has outlived its usefulness and relevance (192).

His argument is flawed in that it omits to explore whether clitoridectomy is a faithful translation from the vernacular of the people involved in the practice. The vernacular term referring to the practice might not be translated correctly as "clitoridectomy". If this is the case then "clitoridectomy" is inappropriate and irrelevant. Again, it would be odd to place clitoridectomy on par with other medical terms such as hysterectomy and tracheotomy. This is because of the invalid assumption that the practitioners of "clitoridectomy" are "primitive" and, therefore, have no medical science. Furthermore, if tracheotomy and hysterectomy do not immediately raise moral questions, why should "clitoridectomy" do? To insist upon the primacy of the ethical over the scientific when it comes only to "clitoridectomy" is arbitrary. It is to undermine its scientific character. It is also the manifestation of supercilious but blind moralism. Against this background Monyene has adopted Western feminism uncritically and imposed moral judgement upon a practice whose morality he is yet to explain.



Describing “clitoridecotomy” as a “feminist issue” might be consistent with Western feminism. It does not necessarily follow that it is consistent with African womanism. On the whole, the author firmly believes that rites of passage inculcate significant values in individuals, values, which are important for the organisation and maintenance of our modern societies (202).

The three papers discussed above, offer balanced views of indigenous culture. The first and second papers treat culture as a suspect, because it is often used in the oppression and degradation to women. In the last paper, a specific cultural practice is appraised. The appraisal is assailable if one takes seriously the distinction between African feminism and womanism.

### **Sage philosophy**

Part V contains four papers, which underline the importance of sage philosophy in resolving conflicts in Africa, as well as sustaining family security and other human values that were eroded by colonialism.

In “The role of sagacity in resolving conflicts peacefully” Gutema briefly defines sagacity or sage philosophy. He draws on proponents of sage philosophy such as Odera Oruka, Ochieng-Odhiambo and Oseghae. He adopts Oruka’s distinction between a sage (someone who has the ability to recount folk and communal ideas of his people) and a philosophic sage (a sage who is able to transcend the communal ideas of their respective communities in order to espouse a personal and critical philosophy) (207). His main thesis, in accessible language is that African conflicts may be resolved by applying some of Africa’s sagacity, rather than importing Western models of solution to the continent’s problems (208-9). However, the paper overall does not aid easy comprehension, as it does not use reader-assisting devices such as titles and /or subtitles. The paper demonstrates the urgency for the need to end conflicts as these contribute to the underdevelopment of the continent. Although the subject of this paper is the problematic of conflicts, he mentions in passing other factors contributing to underdevelopment such as the “failure of democracy and democratisation”. In his view, democracy, as applied in Africa was not made to work in harmony with “the previously established tradition and culture” (209). The very idea of democracy, he suggests in a passing observation, is its implantation in Africa. His argument could have been more persuasive had he expanded on this view and explore the poverty of our contemporary democracies in denying our traditional leaders meaningful roles.

In order to resolve some of Africa's problems, he proposes two African traditional solutions: consensus as opposed to the majoritarian rule of Western societies (209) and the mediation of the elders in communities (212). He regards elders as sages who are imbued with wisdom and knowledge and are regarded as non-partisan. Gutema concludes by warning that the failure of African philosophy (through sagacity) to resolve conflicts will render it irrelevant in the future.

Not only can sagacity help resolve societal conflicts, but can also help to cure cultural defects and confusions found in the African societies. Barasa advances this claim in a case study on the "modern Kenyan family unit" (127) in "Narrowing the gap between past practices and future thoughts in a transitional Kenyan culture model for sustainable family livelihood security (FLS)." Subsequent to uncovering problems and difficulties experienced by "modern" Kenyan units, as a result of Western influences on traditional culture and practices, he proposes philosophic sagacity as a cure for, what we can loosely call, "social schizophrenia". Barasa views the "modern" Kenyan family unit as a "two-headed snake," or a unit "torn between two directions" (220), namely, tradition and modernity. He sees the role of sagacity as the maintenance of balance or equilibrium between these two poles, tradition and modernity. He refers to this state of equilibrium, which Africa desperately needs, as "cultural family livelihood security" (217). This paper raises hopes in its promise of the efficacy of sagacity to cure many of the family ills of "modern Kenyan society". In our view, because of its brevity, the paper does not live up to its promise; a factor that the author is well aware of since he promises to expand on this notion in a future version of his paper (220). Furthermore, Basara does not show exactly how sage philosophy can play this mediating role or can effect "cultural family livelihood security".

Moore's paper entitled, "Philosophic sagacity in the Blues music of W[illiam] C[hristopher] Handy", is of unusual interest because it points out that philosophic sagacity can be found in music libraries. Moore contends that there is philosophical reflection and wisdom, embedded in African music, especially Blues music of America, which, is missed in the commerce of the Western world. After a thorough assessment of Handy's music, the author concludes that this musician, known as the father of the Blues, is a philosophical sage (227). This is so, because in his music, he gives a third order reflection on the socio-political situation of African people in the USA (230). For Moore the Blues-African music continuum expresses the values of Africa. This music has the

ability to unify a global African community and to effect psychological healing (236).

The last paper of part V written by Onyango, "A continuing study on sage philosophy: emphasis on Jaramogi Oginga Odinga", contributes to the expansion of the library on philosophical sagacity. The author uncovers yet another philosopher whom he would like to sell to the reader, as a philosophic sage. Jaramogi Oginga Odinga, the first vice-president of independent Kenya, passed away in 1994. The author reviewed some of Odinga's thoughts on Kenyan politics in which he demonstrates his didactic wisdom, especially a reinforcement of the truism that "traditional Africans were capable of logical and methodical reasoning" (239). This paper is the shortest of them all and yet most persuasive in its proclamation of Oginga Odinga as a philosophic sage.

The four papers in part V collectively stake a forceful claim for the importance and relevance of philosophic sagacity to "modern" life. When applied with thoughtfulness, sagacity can bridge the gap between tradition and modernity.

### **Philosophy, ethics and politics**

The articles in this part present various perspectives on African philosophy's concern with the African condition. The African condition constitutes the "pre-text" from which philosophical reflection takes place. It is a condition of *miserability* from which a philosopher, especially the African philosopher, if he/she is to be taken seriously, cannot disentangle herself/himself. For instance, Cletus Chukwu in his essay, "African philosophy: The task of philosophy addressing contemporary social problems", shows that African philosophy is involved with the African condition. Daniel Smith in "Pragmatic vs. ideological development in Africa", identifies some of these problems as ideological. He calls on the African philosopher to evaluate critically the implicit ideological orientation concealed within the dominant discourse of development. Other problems are identified as moral ignorance and corruption (Nyarwath in "Moral ignorance and corruption") and racism and ethnic wrangling which pose a challenge to nation building (see Teffo in "Racism, ethnicity and nation building in contemporary South Africa"). These essays also raise other issues that for reasons of space we cannot discuss here.

We want to focus more closely on Gail Presbey's essay, "The African philosopher on global wealth distribution." It depicts a pointed message, and epitomizes in clear terms what it means for African philoso-

phy to show interest in contemporary socio-economic problems. Presbey cites Odera Oruka on the need for a dialogue between philosophers and economists. She notes that the high levels of poverty and suffering on the African continent call for critical reflection by philosophers. The Kenyan philosopher, Oruka and the Nigerian, Segun Gbagedesin among others, are Presbey's primary examples of philosophers engaged with Africa's socio-economic issues. These philosophers have also reached the conclusion that suffering in Africa is a result of historical conditions and they call for the restructuring of international economic relations. Presbey quotes Oruka on the deconstruction of a fallacy that represents economics as a science which is about "what is" and not "what ought to be" (284). She maintains that "humans make economies, so they can change them" (296). When economics is regarded as a "sacred cow", then philosophers are paralysed and hence powerless in correcting any prevailing dehumanising ethics caused by such economics. For Oruka, we need moral and social philosophy that apply "rigorous analytical and synthetic reasoning to the moral problems of the day" (288). George Soros (1998: xvi), an American billionaire executive, makes essentially the same point in his critique of the capitalist system: that market forces are not self-correcting as many people think. People must consciously decide what economic system ought to prevail in a given society.

According to Presbey, we are all under the moral obligation to assist in the alleviation of poverty; failure to do so, translates into complicity with injustice (286). She advances the need for the redistribution of wealth. She challenges people in the rich northern hemisphere to adopt a simpler life style so as to devote excess funds to poverty alleviation (287). The need to help one another is close to the heart of Wiredu. In his essay, "The moral foundations of an African culture", he describes life for the Akan as "one continuous drama of mutual aid" (293). Presbey also points out that geographical boundaries should not be an excuse to limit our moral responsibility. Implied in this observation is that historically, it was easier for "powerful" nations to cross the boundaries of the now poor nations in order to exploit them. Equally, today, it must be easy to cross those boundaries, but this time in order to provide redress.

Presbey also invokes the Lockean proviso, which places an imperative on us to leave the planet as good as we found it, and to leave enough resources for subsequent generations (287). In order to drive home the point about the need for equitable wealth redistribution, she

also draws on papal encyclicals, for example, *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931) of Pope Pius XI. This teaching emphasises the right of all people to use the goods of the earth (287), and *Mater et Magistra* (1961) of Pope John XXIII in which the Pope supports state intervention in carrying out property redistribution. Presbey also refers to *Populorum Progressio* (1967) of Pope Paul VI which was critical of the international neo-colonial situation brought about by the so-called “free trade” (287). Even if “free trade” is a term in contemporary “globalisation”, it remains problematic with particular reference to economic globalisation. The latter is the continuation and intensification of neo-colonialism. As such it is subject to the same criticisms contained in the papal encyclicals. Resort to the papal encyclicals might be ironic in view of the historical role of the Catholic church in promoting and supporting the injustice of colonisation. It is equally ironic that the same church contributed, intentionally and inadvertently, to the liberation of the colonised peoples. This double irony of the role of the church justifies resort to its social teaching. Presbey omits one of the most celebrated papal social documents, namely, *Rerum Novarum* (1891) in which Pope Leo XIII underlined, among others, the dignity of human labour and the rights of workers (see O’Brien & Shannon, 1995: 12-39). However, Presbey covers some of the issues reflected in this papal document in her discussion of Segun Gbadegesin, who argues, among others, for the need to redistribute employment opportunities (291).

Presbey is emphatic in her call for the restructuring of economic relations. She notes that in the present economic relations people are expendable commodities. Thus, our present economic system with its laws, lacks a human face, it lacks *ubuntu*. Presbey is not a lone voice in the exposition of the unethical nature of our present economic system. Ramose (2002a) argues for a more humane economic relationship, in the Sesotho aphorism – “Feta kgomo o tshware motho” – which he explains as follows:

This means that if and when one is faced with a decisive choice between wealth and the preservation of the life of another human being then one should choose to preserve the life of another human being. The central meaning here is that mutual care for one another as human beings precedes concern for the accumulation and safeguarding of wealth as though such a concern were an end in itself. While we see that *motho* is once again the primary reality in traditional African culture, here we have also the principle of sharing as the regulative element of social organisation. This is the principle

animating the much talked about African communalism (Ramose, 2002a: 114-115).

There is therefore an alternative to the present international economic relations between the poor and the rich nations. In other words, the social condition of Africa can be changed for the better. African philosophy, in its commitment to *thought* and *practice*, must continue to keep all of us on our toes by calling us to moral responsibility to the "Other".

*Thought and practice in African philosophy* is an insightful book. It exposes the reader to a vast number of ideas, discourses and practices in and about Africa. It addresses a wide range of topics, all of which are interesting and useful, especially for those who would like to contribute to the "reconstruction" of Africa and its people. The editors employ a multi-disciplinary approach to the problems and "virtues" of Africa, and this accordingly, makes the book accessible to a wide range of readers. We have no doubt that this book belongs on the critical reader's bookshelf.

#### Notes

1. In his essay, "On defining African philosophy," Wiredu writes, "But from our point of view, the difficulty with Hountondji's requirement is not due to its racial character as such; for, after all, what we are trying to define is a philosophy of a people or race, and it seems obvious that the larger part of any literary corpus that could be appropriately called 'African Philosophy' would have to have emanated from Africans. The problem, rather, is that the requirement seems to ignore the possibility that the work of an alien might come to have an organic relationship with the philosophical tradition of a given people and thus become an integral part of it." Thus, for Wiredu, some non-Africans can also do African philosophy.
2. We concur with Jeffrey W. Crawford, in the book under review, who defines "Africanists" as "persons who may be neither African nor African American but who recognize the legitimacy of African and African American philosophy and who contribute to its efforts" (13).
3. Ramose (2002b: 607) defines *Mokoko* as "the Sotho language term for a cock. It is also the title of the book by Makgoba. The title [*Mokoko*] is apposite because in many cultures the crow of a cock carries the significance of a warning or a fulfilment of a prophecy." Further, *Hungwe* is "the Shona name for the bird regarded as sacred among the Shona. It is to the indigenous Zimbabwean what the cross is to a Christian. The *Hungwe* is an indispensable point of contact with the ancestral gods: the gods who gave the land to the indigenous Zimbabweans from time immemorial. The land and sovereignty over it were lost at conquest based on lawlessness, inhumanity, and amorality (...) They [gods] instructed the *Hungwe* to sing from the national flag of Zimbabwe. It sang from all other places and sites where it was perched. The song was, "the gods shall never sleep until the return of the land to its original and rightful owners." Neither the government nor the indigenous Zimbabweans could ignore this song" (Ramose, 2002: 608).

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UITNODIGING

om deel te neem aan die

## **DERDE SWART AFRIKAANSE SKRYWERSIMPOSIUM**

BIBLIOTEEKOUDITORIUM,  
UNIVERSITEIT VAN WES-KAAPLAND  
20-22 OKTOBER 2005

Die Derde Swart Afrikaanse Skrywersimposium vind vanaf 20 tot 22 Oktober 2005 plaas by die Universiteit van Wes-Kaapland. Soos tydens die vorige twee simposia in 1985 en 1995 wil ons geleentheid gee vir skrywers en letterkundiges om te reflekteer oor swart Afrikaanse skryfwerk. Die hoofitems van die simposium sal bestaan uit 'n aantal vakkundige referate oor aspekte van swart Afrikaanse skryfwerk en paneelbesprekings oor kwessies rakende die stand en toekoms van hierdie korpus.

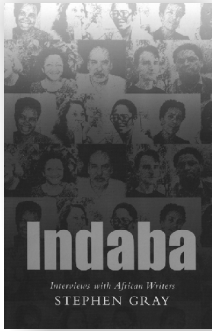
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Die organiseerders (Steward van Wyk en Janine Pekeur)  
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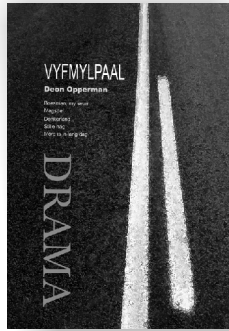
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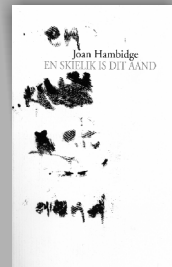
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