PHILOSOPHICAL SAGACITY AS CONVERSATIONAL PHILOSOPHY AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE FOR THE QUESTION OF METHOD IN AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY

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Abstract
In this study, I aimed to carry out a comparative analysis of the methods of conversational philosophy and sage philosophy as contributions towards overcoming the problem of methodology in African philosophy. The purpose was to show their points of convergence and probably, if possible, their point of divergence as well. I did not intend to show that the method of one is superior or inferior to the other. The objective was to provide an analysis to show that the two methods are essentially the same with little variations. Thereafter, I highlighted their significance as methods of doing African philosophy and discussed their problems as well. I used the methods of analysis and hermeneutics. From the study, I concluded that conversational philosophy is an extension or a modified form of sage philosophy. The implication of this conclusion is that sage philosophy and conversational philosophy should overlap each other in research and purposes.
Keywords: Sage Philosophy, Conversational Philosophy, African Philosophy, Philosophical place, Philosophical space, Methodology.

Introduction

There is continuous search for method of doing philosophy globally. The search for philosophical method is significant for two reasons: one, philosophical method is an integral part of the philosophical tradition inventing it, and two, (deriving from the first) every philosophical method is itself limited by its very conception. Since philosophy always works towards overcoming any bias that limits it, the continuous search for method becomes very important to philosophers globally. Moreover, the method of doing philosophy is of crucial concern to students of philosophy in all traditions because the quality of the epistemological output of any philosophical inquiry depends largely on the method employed to conduct the inquiry. For example, an analytic method in its pure format will always produce analytic philosophy. To this extent, if a method is one dimensional it affects the quality of findings of such a philosophical enterprise. The problems in any given philosophy tradition can therefore be traced to the methods employed. The realization of this

fact has pushed philosophers to continue to search for a robust method of doing philosophy.

The concern for method has been observed about African philosophy as with other philosophies. The question of method as a problem in African philosophy was first raised by the early critics of African philosophy, particularly those who doubted the existence and/or veracity of African philosophy in comparison to Western philosophy. The question of method was at the basement of the old question "Does African philosophy exist?" Godfrey Ozumba holds that the question of method is a determinant of the question of African philosophy and its contingent disciplines (2009, 22). In attempting to answer the question "Is there a philosophical research method?"; J. A. Akinpelu argues that if there was no philosophical research methodology there would not have been a philosophy because without it, a researcher would not been able to research for philosophical knowledge and having found it would not have been able to validate it as such (2012, 13). It is the methodology that validates a philosophy. However, methodology does not only validate a philosophy but it gives identity to a philosophy – for it is by method that a philosophy is determined as either X or Y. Godwin Azenabor also maintains this line of thought that it is method – that is, how we investigate, formulate and present ideas – that validates a philosophy as authentic African philosophy (2002, 92).

Meanwhile, K. C. Anyanwu has argued that the claim that methodology is the determining element in African philosophy is not necessarily the case. According to him, "philosophical insight and creative vision do not depend on methods but on several factors like personal sensitivity and commitment to certain problems of experience" (ANYANWU 2000, 63). Furthermore, what is significant to determining African philosophy is problem formulation and having "definite knowledge of the basic assumptions, concepts, models, theories and worldview of the beliefs, judgments and values they claim to be analysing and criticizing" (ANYANWU 2000, 63). He argues that methodology would not save the philosopher from errors and invalid conclusions if she neglects to properly formulate the problem at task. Moreover, "it is the subject-matter that determines its own method" (ANYANWU 2000, 63). This means that there is no pre-arranged methodology for any philosophical engagement ahead of the actual philosophizing; for the problem would provide its own methods of engagement. What this seems to mean is that the method for solving a given problem is inherent in the very nature of the problem. That is to say, the problem itself holds the clue to its solution. But to understand the methods or the problem-solving clues that a given problem offers,

the problem itself must be appropriately and adequately understood, and properly formulated.

Azenabor has disputed Anyanwu's claim and maintains that methodology is indispensable to doing African philosophy. According to him, "what eludes Anyanwu is that in formulating a problem, a particular methodology would eventually be used in analyzing or in solving the problem; so we cannot really run away from the question of methodology" (AZENABOR 2002, 93). Although I agree with Azenabor that methodology is fundamentally important to analyzing any philosophy, I however insist, that that will apply to the extent that the philosopher is merely analyzing and criticizing some raw data already given. Methodology is equally important to enable another philosopher to understand, test and evaluate the validity of a given philosophical output within the axiomatic system of that philosophy. However, it does not mean that every philosophical engagement requires a methodological framework. Anyanwu is also right in claiming that a subject-matter is the determinant of its own methods. For example, there is no specific method for philosophical musing – whereby the philosopher in his transcendental loftiness climbs into the realm of intuition and genius, as it is usually experienced in meditative philosophizing, and begins to invent new ideas or discover new forms. Besides, I think, in going into understanding noumena or the thing-in-itself, no one really needs a method except the phenomenological method that allows him to see the thing as it is and describe it as such, without configuring it according to the form of certain methodology. Anyanwu seems to have misunderstood himself, for in renouncing method, he thought method equally applies to academic philosophy which is mainly criticisms of existing philosophy. Indeed, as Azenabor asserts, in doing academic philosophy the philosopher needs a method. But then even no method is itself a method – namely, *laissez-faire* and anarchism.

One of the oldest methods of doing philosophy globally has been the dialogue form. In the West, the method is called Socratic Method acronymized after the Greek sage and philosopher Socrates who pioneered that methodology for Western philosophy. In the East, the method is called Confucius Inquiry or Confucianism acronymized after the Chinese sage and philosopher Confucius who pioneered the method in Asia. In Africa, the method is called Philosophical Sagacity or Sage Philosophy (I prefer to also call it "Sage Method"); and was developed as a method of doing African philosophy by the Kenyan philosopher Henry Odera Oruka. The method of oral conversation in African philosophy was arbitrary criticized absentmindedly as inferior and un-philosophical by apologetics of Western analytic philosophical tradition.

The same critics celebrated similar oral method in the West and East, and they have continued to study it in the Dialogues of Plato and Confucius' Analects. However, this method has been recently reinvented in modified form as Conversational Method or Conversationalism for the Conversational School of Philosophy by Jonathan Chimakonam. The objective of this study is to analyze and show how sage philosophy interacts with conversational philosophy and vice versa; then map out their significance or otherwise as a method of inquiry in African philosophy. In addition, the study highlights and discusses the possible problems sage philosophy as conversational philosophy is likely to encounter as its progresses unto its ultimate purpose.

The Concept of Sage Philosophy

Sage philosophy is a method that originated with a Kenyan philosopher, Henry Odera Oruka, as a dialogical form of doing African philosophy. It is a philosophical paradigm in the Socratic tradition. (Anke Graness notes that Oruka himself many times referred to himself as situating in the Socratic tradition – see GRANESS 2012, 3). Sage philosophy is a process that midwives or abstracts and also describes those aspects of philosophy that are embedded in the thought(s) of African sages. Sage philosophy is also known as sagacious philosophy or philosophical sagacity; and the sage is called philosophic sage. Sometimes, scholars look upon sage philosophy as the actual body of thought, works, ideas and researches that Oruka conducted in the course of his studies in sage philosophy. I think that it is mistaken to try to tie sage philosophy to certain questions and notions Oruka worked on. Sometimes sage philosophy is looked upon as a philosophical doctrine as if it is a distinct system that contains concepts, notions, beliefs, and forms. Some scholars even think of it as a philosophical movement/school. Even if that may appear to be the case, it is not necessarily the case. Sage philosophy is rather basically a method of doing philosophy – particularly in Africa. It is for this reason I prefer to use the term "Sage Method" to interchange with sage philosophy.

Sage philosophy is a method of doing philosophy whereby the professional philosopher visits a traditional community to identify sages for the purpose of engaging them in philosophical dialogues in the form of oral conversations on any given philosophical subject in order to midwife the philosophical ideas embedded in their thoughts. The most important step to sage philosophy is identifying a sage. According to Oruka, a sage is "the person [who] is versed in the wisdoms and traditions of his people, and very often he is recognized by the people themselves as having this gift" (1991, 51). The sages are the most

solicitous custodians of the finest achievements of the past. However, a sage, as Oruka notes, may not be so recognized by his community. Meanwhile, being a sage may not necessarily make one a philosopher since some sages may be merely moralists, historians, or wise custodians of community traditions and conventions. Some of the sages may not be rigorous in understanding and solving the inconsistencies in their cultural forms in tandem with social change (ORUKA 1991, 51).

Philosophical sages are therefore persons who are not only endowed with communal wisdom, they are also individuals who are capable of rationally transcending communal wisdom to attain actual philosophical capacities (ORUKA 1998, 100). By rational transcendence Oruka means that the sage must not merely be spokes-person of her community but must be "rationally critical" of the communal wisdom and opt for only the aspects that satisfy her rational scrutiny (ORUKA 1991, 51). In addition, one is not necessarily born a sage; there are those who have become sages "having learnt from the wisdom of the wise" (ORUKA 1998, 101). Besides, since they may be pseudo-sages who had cajoled the people to believe her as sage; it is the duty of the professional philosopher to assess those who alleged to be sages in order to determine the authentic sages (ORUKA 1998, 101).

It is important to note that Oruka moulds the philosophic sage as a 'troubler of traditions' in the mould of Socrates who the Athenian elders described as 'corrupter of the youths and traditions'. There is significance for this characterisation. First, in order to be described as true "philosophy", sage philosophy is intended as a second order activity; hence the rebellious or critical attitude of the sage towards what she defines as irrational. Generally, what Oruka refers to as first order activity is what he calls "culture philosophy" which includes set of beliefs, taboos, customs, notions, religious rituals and the myths that provide justification for and to the culture philosophy (1991, 52). Second, sage philosophy is intended to avoid the pitfall of ethnophilosophy which Oruka describes as "folk philosophy" or "culture philosophy" which often requires communal consensus for its validity but which lacks logic, reason, or scientific curiosity as well as individuality (1991, 48). As Graness notes, "ethnophilosophy describes African philosophy mainly as traditional communal thinking as it can be found in proverbs, fables, special features of African languages, etc" (2012, 9). Oruka maintains that sage philosophy sets itself up against ethnophilosophy. He avers that sage philosophy is critical-reflexive activity sandwiched in logical *rigorousity* and tied always to individual thinker-sage. This is why he dismisses the crediting of Barry Hallen and J. O. Sodipo's [Knowledge, Belief and Witchcraft: Analytic Experiments in African Philosophy] (1997) and Marcel Griaule's

[Conversations with Ogotemmeli] (1965) as sage philosophy, since both works presented their findings as communal conventions and did not link it to any individual sage in the community that they studied (ORUKA 1998, 105-106). Philosophic sages are those sages that are critically rational in their wisdom; but then their wisdom must take departures from their cultural forms. Oruka did not believe that one can be a sage in another's cultural forms. Furthermore, the views and opinions of sages are expected to be tentative or offered in tentative manner.

Philosophic sage must possess the intrinsic capacity of critical reflection, that is, the ability to reconstruct the past creatively. This critical mental state cultured in the sage and the critical attitude to the past are some of the qualities that make him not to simply accept ideas of the past but critically rework and enrich them with new experiences. But then, internal state of the mind does not act alone or in isolation. Changes in the external environment do give impulses to the development of the internal contradictions necessary for philosophical leap but the direction of the development depends on the sage's ability to deploy reason philosophically. The probing questions of the academic philosopher (external influence) awaken the consciousness of the sage unto attempting to exceed the boundaries of what she had known. This leads her into questioning her own thought and beliefs. The sage's ratiocination depends on both external influence (the professional philosopher) and on the internal state of her mind (philosophical reason). The internal and external influences act on each other to bring forth critical reflection. Therefore, philosophical sagacity does not only lead reason to reflect on the received wisdom of the past but to re-imagine and recreate it philosophically.

One more thing to note when looking for a philosophic sage is to override the prejudice held by some intellectuals about traditional communities. Oruka avers that "there is general attitude harboured even in learned circles that a sage is one wise person in an illiterate or technologically underdeveloped community whose residents depend much on the oracular sayings of seers to keep up with the mysteries and surprises of life" (1998, 100). This view, as Oruka notes, seems to present technological advanced communities as barren of sages or having no need of one. Oruka himself had looked for sages in illiterate communities but he cautioned that he only did that to avoid Westernized communities (OCHIENG'-ODHIAMBO 2004, 4). He affirms that "sages exist in all cultures and classes no matter whether a culture is literate or non-literate and technologically advanced or technologically underdeveloped... there are no special area or community where we must look for sages; there are sages in all societies and in various

aspects and classes of society" (ORUKA 1998, 101). This implies that though the method of sage philosophy was invented for African philosophy, it is not to be limited to African philosophy; rather it can be applied even in technologically advanced Western and Westernized societies.

One other thing that should be noted is that sage philosophy is not limited to ratiocination of ancient wisdom, even most contemporary wisdom and ideas can be sieved from modern sages who ratiocinate on modern thought. Moreover, people educated in Western wisdom should be able to ratiocinate on contemporary paradigms of their societies. Of course, this happens every time on radio and television programmes when experts are invited to speak on issues; but the only thing that will make such exercise to produce sage philosophy is if such individuals are identified as sages by their societies where they hail from and if such dialogues are conducted by trained academic philosophers. The emphasis on professional philosophers is instructive because it only they who are trained to be able to formulate and pose a philosophic question in such a way that it elicits philosophic answers from the respondent-sage.

Fredrick Ochieng'-Odhiambo has identified three functions sage philosophy aimed to pursue. (As we shall see, these functions look like the objectives of conversational philosophy). The three functions include: academic, cultural-nationalist and epistemic functions respectively (2004, 4-9). The academic function of sage philosophy is to "bridge the gap between ethno-philosophy and the professional philosophy" (4). One can easily recall that the professional school argues that philosophy, at least by its methodological procedures (by that they mean logic, rigour, criticism, analysis, rationality, argumentation, and literation), is a universal venture that cannot be tied to any particular culture. On the other hand, ethnophilosophy school argues that philosophy is significantly an expression of the culture that produces it. Oruka maintains that "the existence of the sage-philosophy refutes both the view that African philosophy is only folk wisdom and the view that seeks to restrict philosophy only to written professional philosophy" (1990, 3). This means that, sage philosophy sets out to refute the one-sided methodological approaches of ethnophilosophy and academic professional philosophy. Sage philosophy is a bridge that enables interactions between culture and philosophy. Hence, in sage philosophy the professional philosopher is led to discover philosophy in cultural forms using its universal methodology of philosophizing. Ochieng'-Odhiambo avers that this function is now becoming less necessary (2004, 10). But I doubt if that is not a premature conclusion.

The cultural-nationalist function of sage philosophy is to help African states to ground themselves as harmonious nations by coming up with national culture (6). (Something that Julius Nyerere helped Tanzania to achieve in Ujamaa). To achieve this objective, professional philosophers are to help their countries to unearth cultural philosophies through the use of sages; then use the tools of philosophy to identify those fundamental principles that tie the different cultures together. (Something Asouzu has been able to achieve, theoretically, with Ibuanyidanda). According to Ochieng'-Odhiambo, Oruka saw natural culture as necessary first step to national unity therefore national development (2004, 7).

The epistemic function of sage philosophy "is to generate and sustain philosophical discussions with African themes"; and to enhance further discussions by expanding the scope of the audience (like moving those concepts from philosophy place to philosophy space), the thoughts of sages needed to be documented in written form in order to guarantee its availability for future discussions (8-9). Moreover, sage philosophy is meant to guarantee the availability of the thought(s) of sages to influence later generations with the least amount of distortions, after being subjected to critical analysis; just as the thoughts of ancient Greek sages, like Socrates, have done. Given the reality of globalisation, Ochieng'-Odhiambo argues that there is increasing need for familiarity with epistemological issues in Africa in order to understand how the foreign forms may be fitted in and used (2004, 10). Indeed, with the African place shrinking due to encroachment of the global space; sage philosophy will go a long way to prepare future African generations by documenting its epistemic forms.

Problems with Sage Philosophy

There are a number of critiques on sage philosophy but I want to look at the critiques advanced by Muyiwa Falaiye and Bruce Janz. Let us begin with Janz. He questions Oruka's process of distinguishing folk sage from philosophic sage.

> What is critique? Is it the process of finding fault? Does a sage have to disagree with tradition in order to be regarded as critical? Is a sage critical by definition, if he or she disagrees? Or could disagreement without critique happen? (JANZ 1998, 64)

Janz argues that these questions or issues arise primarily because Oruka did not ask the sages themselves about their conception of critique, critical or rational (1998, 65). He probably imposed Western conception

of "critical-rational" on the sages. Besides, Janz rightly argues that interpretation of critical or critique as divergence or disagreement or confrontation as seen in sage philosophy (and conversational philosophy) is Western style of philosophizing (1998, 65). If Asouzu (2007), Ozumba (2010), Ijiomah (2014) and Chimakonam (2015c) are correct in their postulations, then the African mode of thinking is generally more conciliatory than confrontational. (As we shall see later in this study, these questions and issues also apply to conversational philosophy).

Another problem I consider is that raised by Falaiye regarding the soundness of some aspects of the methodology of sage philosophy. Oruka had recommended that tape recorders be used in order to collect the views of the sages (1998, 107). But Falaiye argues that the use of tape recorder in collecting views of the sage "reduces the sage's freedom to think and express him/her self freely" and may cause him/her to become apologetic and toe the line of communal consensus (2005, 65). As a corollary, I think another problem that can impact on conversation with sages will be what I may call 'problem of disequilibrium'. By this I mean, on encountering a professor in conversation, the "illiterate" sage may become timid and shrink her thought in a manner apologetic towards the professor. For this reason, it may be necessary for the professor to disguise her social status in order to achieve parity with the "illiterate" sage. But then this may trigger ethical problem, namely: Is it right for a professor to disguise her identity while conversing with an illiterate? Most times, conversations between unequals may undermine conversation, by becoming impositional on the one side and apologetic on the other side. Conversational parity is therefore crucial to any type of conversational philosophy such as philosophical sagacity.

One other problem Falaiye identifies about sage philosophy lies with the presentation of findings. He admits that there is serious difficulty in presenting views of sages to the global audience. According to him, "the professional philosopher, sometimes, unwittingly dresses up the response of the sage in the nuances of Western audience... I am convinced Odera Oruka and Ochieng-Odhiambo are guilty of this" (FALAIYE 2005, 68). He also confesses to his own vulnerability to Western categories thus: "I am not sure the sages would agree with some of the interpretations I have subjected their ideas to; I suspect some of them would reject entirely my interpretation of their original ideas" (FALAIYE 2005, 68). This is very troubling; given the fact that Oruka wants the thoughts of the sages to be transmitted with the least amount of distortion. Falaiye avers that to overcome this hermeneutical problem, some have suggested the education of the sages in western

tradition to enable them communicate their own ideas to the global audience directly; he however has rejected that view as likely to westernize the sages and render their thoughts un-African (2005, 70). I think, rather than train the sages in Western categories; the professional philosophers involving in sage philosophy project should learn the language of the sages. That is what happened when some Western philosophers wanted to reconstruct ancient Greek philosophy.

Lastly, one of the most fundamental problems with sage philosophy is the ease with which the woman-sage is ignored. Oruka and all "Orukans" did not talk about the gender question of the sage. The Oruka system may be said to be patriarchal – it leaves little room for the female sages. In his [Sage philosophy] (1991, 87-160), Oruka interviews twelve sages, only one is a woman. Most projects that have been done using the sage philosophy strategy focus on male sages. Such works as– Griaule (1965), Hallen & Sodipo (1997), Ochieng-Odhiambo (2004), Falaiye (2005) – have not mentioned women who they actively or passively engaged with to midwife her of lofty ideas. That means that Orukans did not consider women rational enough to engage in critical discourse characterized with loftiness of thought. This seems to suggest that women are not capable of philosophical sagacity. This is a disparaging indictment of the woman's intellect in Africa. This is also very dangerous for gender development in African philosophy. One hopes that conversational philosophy will address this problem.

Climbing from Sage Philosophy unto Conversational Philosophy: The Significance

Philosophical sagacity bears serious significance for modern way of doing philosophy, particularly in Africa. It is a method that encourages intersubjectivity, and testing the veracity of ideas through intracultural method of philosophizing. This approach is very rich because it allows the sage to create, recreate or reintroduce concepts into the philosophical place and space, hence in the process redefining global philosophy in significant ways. The dialogical forms of philosophical sagacity bear similar marking as the newly inaugurated conversational philosophy; otherwise conversational philosophy is merely an extension of sage philosophy in a modified form. The significance of this possibility has prompted me to examine the method of conversational philosophy (conversationalism) in relation to the method of sage philosophy. And as we shall soon see, the method of conversational philosophy seems to be a continuation of the method of sage philosophy but in a disguised form. Already, Azenabor has asserted that "Oruka's methodology is otherwise known as the conversation method in African philosophy" (2009, 73). Let us now see a summary of conversational philosophy.

Conversational philosophy, in its now systematized form, should be credited to Jonathan Okeke-Mpi Chimakonam. Although the idea of conversations in philosophy has been variously discussed and practised by philosophers from time immemorial. In African philosophy, the conversational method had held sway during the Great Debate. Janz has noted that "dialogue has not been absent from African philosophy, but it has taken on a different valence" (2016, 42). Conversational philosophy, as defined by its progenitor, is a kind of philosophical method whereby individual thinkers engage philosophically with one another, "on phenomenological issues of concern, or on one another's thoughts where thoughts are unfolded from concepts or from concepts of concepts" (CHIMAKONAM 2015b, 19-20). Conversational philosophy is "not a mere exchange of ideas or a simple informal dialogue between two interlocutors; it is rather a strictly formal intellectual exercise propelled by philosophical reasoning in which critical and rigorous questioning creatively unveils new concepts from old ones" (CHIMAKONAM 2015b, 19). For this reason, Chimakonam maintains that conversational philosophy is more than a dialogue but it is philosophical engagements in contestations and protestations between philosophers holding opposing ideas and views (2015b, 20). It is more like what I may call '*warfare philosophy*', in which different thinkers, within and without a tradition, engage in battle of ideas. This kind of philosophical trend, now encouraged in conversational philosophy, was actually the case during the Great Debate, without actually taking up that label. Chimakonam further states that conversational philosophy does not aim to interpret traditional culture (2015b, 21). The emphasis is on individual thinkers engaging fellow thinkers, and not thinkers engaging communal worldviews, using textual criticism, rigor, analysis, and sundry modern philosophical tools.

In conversational philosophy, the purpose is to apply philosophical reasoning to any given culture "to critically analyze and to logically examine pertinent substantive issues in a culture" (CHIMAKONAM 2015e, 466). Bruce Janz and Jonathan Chimakonam rightly maintain that it is philosophical reason that makes a tradition philosophical. Oruka had similarly set such criteria for philosophical sagacity, whereby he says it is the employment of reason in discourse or demonstration of such that raises a sage to become philosophic sage (1991, 51). Interestingly, Chimakonam argues that it is questions that trigger reason into philosophical reasoning (2015e, 467). However, it should be noted that any kind of question does not stir philosophical reasoning but only philosophical questions. Questions produce answers identical to its nature – orthopaedic question produces orthopaedic answer, cartographical question produces cartographical answer, and

philosophical question produces philosophical answer and so on. (Maybe it was for this reason Oruka recommended that it should be a professional philosopher that should interrogate a sage). To trigger philosophical reasoning, conversational philosophy uses a dialectical process albeit non-Hegelian dialectic, which involves;

> Rigorous intellectual encounter between two sides called conversationalists; the one called *nwa-nju* or the inquirer who poses critical and confrontational questions to the other on the other's thoughts; and *nwa-nsa* or the responder who attempt to answer such questions either posed to him or to another or to all. (CHIMAKONAM 2015e, 463)

Chimakonam states that "the method of conversationalism is dialogical, involving written and sometimes oral interlocutors" (2015e, 469). This means that conversational philosophy "represents a midwifery machine that can help African philosopher deliver of their long overdue ideas and thoughts on phenomenological concerns" (CHIMAKONAM 2015a, 48). This looks like the method of sage philosophy but it is a more enriching method because while sage method is interview-styled of which one party is passive and the other active; conversational method (or conversationalism) is debate-styled of which both parties to are actively involving. Sage philosophy uses oral method, while conversational philosophy uses methods of both written and oral interlocutions. As Chimakonam further states, "the main aim of conversational method of thought is not to agree but to disagree; it not to produce a synthesis but to produce new concepts" (2015e, 469). In sage philosophy, the sage is expected to disagree with traditional forms.

The significance of this method of doing African philosophy has been aptly stated by Chimakonam. According to him:

> Conversationalism is not strictly interested in a supreme outcome or certitude of our knowledge claim. Rather, it is more interested in the efficiency and efficacy of the knowledge-acquisition procedure. How credible is it in minimising inconsistencies? How effective is it in decomposing thoughts and theories? How viable is it in establishing complementarities and unfolding new concepts and vistas? (CHIMAKONAM 2015d, 231-232)

Generally, what the dialogical form holds for African philosophy is to encourage intersubjectivity among African philosophers. This will help

to foster mental and intellectual integration and weaken tribal mindset among African scholars; particularly as Clement Victor Nweke asserts "as a method of conversational philosophy, conversationalism promotes the creative adaptation of the relevant postulations" of the different schools and traditions of African philosophy (2016, 58). In addition, by exposing one's ideas to conversation, the African thinker will develop a more robust concept that will be able to stand the cross-cultural test at the philosophical space. Nweke avers that:

> The significance of the method and canons of conversational philosophy lies in the fact that they necessarily promote incessant personal criticisms, counter-criticisms, creative emendations and articulate systematic reconstruction of established positions and institutions to inaugurate novel ideas, concepts, principles and other proposition in African philosophy. (2016, 68)

This is in alignment with the process and goal of philosophy. Indeed, without criticism philosophy will lose its character and therefore its relevance. Most importantly the relevance of conversational philosophy lies in its capacity to engender the African philosophical place to inaugurate "viable ideas, thoughts, principles, theories, and systems in African philosophy that can help humans in different societies across the globe to address specific challenges and meet their need" (NWEKE 2016, 56). This is very important because philosophy came into existence primarily to solve existential problems. This primary purpose of philosophy should be sustained. Mesembe Edet rightly avers that "if contemporary African philosophy must progress, practitioners necessarily have to engage in sustained conversations" (2017, 54). Conversational forms of philosophizing encourage critical interactions among philosophers. That is why conversational philosophy is a very promising way of doing philosophy.

Issues and Problems for Conversational Philosophy

Conversational philosophy, being a new form of sage philosophy, as I have shown, has inherited most of the problems identified with sage philosophy. However, there are a number of new issues that have been raised about conversational philosophy by Bruce Janz. The most important of these is the question of the conception of dialogue and dialectic in conversational philosophy. Janz seems to argue that the conception of dialogue in conversational philosophy is very narrow, and it seems to exclude some platial activities. He says, "dialogue, as I have

argued, stands as both an object of investigation in philosophy and also as a prerequisite to philosophy. Does conversation also occupy the same conflict position?" (JANZ 2016, 42). He scrutinizes further:

> And what about the other side of conversation, listening? When we usually think of conversation, we think of speaking, that is, putting forward positions and opinions. Do we have a phenomenology of listening to go along with this? In what sense can silence also be philosophical labor, or is it? (JANZ 2016, 42)

Janz tirade is quite thought-provoking and it calls our attention to investigate or conceptualize again what we usually hold to be conversation. This holds significant consequences for the growth of sage philosophy and conversational philosophy. Chimakonam has argued that conversational philosophy should employ confrontational tactic, probably to force out response from the other who seems to prefer philosophical apathy (2015e, 463). But this may not go down well with scholars, such as Olumuyiwa Falaiye and Godwin Azenabor, who are in the tradition of sage philosophy. As Janz notes, "Oruka intends that the conversation be a cooperative process" (1998, 68). Combative or confrontational conversation is characteristically un-African.

Indeed, silence has natural capacity to provoke response, stir thought or trigger idea, even in an active-passive conversation like sage philosophy. There are also non-verbal conversations which speech is characteristically absent, and such conversational situations also do generate concepts and conceptions. Presence alone has the capacity to prop up concepts and conceptions, even in the absence of speech. This possibility therefore provokes these questions: How does the presence of the conversationalists, impact on conversations both at the philosophical place and space? And isn't it possible for the moral character of the conversationalists to impact on the conversation negatively or positively? Shall it warrant introduction of 'veiled conversationalists' (whether under pseudonym or whatever form of physical veiling) to mitigate either moral hazards or boomerang effects? Chimakonam (2015b, 29-31) and Nweke (2016, 68-69) have observed that there are predator-professors who often appear hostile or even dangerous to other conversationalists. For this reason, Oruka had suggested that instead of a conversationalist suffering the Socrates' fate he should be silent if he suspects that by entering into conversation he will be exposed to danger (1991, 51). Isn't Oruka's philosophical silence a form of conversation in itself – say, for example, suggesting in his silent mood that all is not well with a concept or conversation? I think it is crucial for thinkers in

the tradition of conversational philosophy to investigate the phenomenon of silence and how it might impact on philosophical conversations generally.

Meanwhile, conversationalists hope to develop a trajectory of conversation that will move their discourse from philosophical place to philosophical space (CHIMAKONAM 2015e, 467). Janz rightly supports the aspiration that when concepts are developed in the philosophical place they should progress to philosophical space not to assert superiority over concepts from other traditions but to try them against those other concepts. However, he warned of possible danger in the attitude of Western thinkers at the philosophical space who are at withdrawn strength, as it seems to be the case, and seem to be doing their thing and not caring enough about what an African philosopher may have to say (2016, 45). Janz had suggested that when such occurs, African philosophers should follow the feminist example by returning to their philosophical place to continue the conversations which will build up to a well-spring of revolutionary thought and force out the recessive Western thinkers from their shells (2016, 45).

I think Janz's suggestion will make conversational philosophy to boomerang and defeat the ultimate purpose of taking African philosophy to the philosophical space. It is tantamount to endorsing the dangerous view of Edet (which I call '*kparapo philosophy*') that "as a method, conversational philosophy or conversationalism, enjoins African philosophers to read each other, criticize one another, comment on one another, cite one another, build on the thought of one another" (2017, 54). The views of Edet and that of Janz are capable of turning African philosophizing into clan (*kparapo*) thing; where philosophers or their concepts live in false security and unreckoned veracity, having not been questioned or tested for their claims perhaps by an unsympathetic reader from another tradition. This is similar to what Chimakonam calls "conceptual envelopment" (2015b, 39) which will retard the growth of African philosophy or any philosophy for that matter and defeat the ultimate goal of conversational philosophy. As Franz Wimmer is quoted to have said, a philosophical thesis should not be considered as well founded if it has been developed by a people of a single cultural tradition only (GRANESS 2012, 21). Even though absence of willing conversationalists is humiliating and embarrassing, African philosophers should force and establish their place at the philosophical space by holding their ground and refusing to retreat in the face of the humiliating silence. As Chimakonam urges African philosophers "not to give up or recoil inwards in despair" in the face of the conspiracy of silence between the West and East; but they should be "ceaselessly horning the message of African philosophy and stoking the fire of conversation

without season" (2016, v). Let it be a form of 'occupy Western and Eastern philosophical places'. However, let us again consider: Is silence a sort of listening, and does that constitute conversation?

The unwillingness of most Western and Eastern thinkers to come into conversations with African philosophers is a manifestation of the persistence of philosophical racialism at the philosophical space; and this should worry African philosophers, particularly those who want to take their concepts to the global marketplace. The continued distrust in Africans' ability to think (disguised at Editorial Boards of Western journals) should force African philosophers to re-strategize and regroup. It is for this reason I believe that it is premature claim to assert that African philosophy has significantly crossed the rubicon of meta-philosophy. African philosophy still has a lot of work to do to prove itself; and that is why conversational philosophy is tactically promising. But then African philosophers should not be in a haste to take their concepts to the global marketplace. Conversations at the African philosophical place should be self-examining, deep, intense and exhaustive; such that when it finally appears at the philosophy space, it does so at its best.

Janz also rightly notes, "concepts travel and in doing so enable new forms of knowledge and open new worlds" (2009, 186). But when concepts travel "they also change within cultural settings to respond to the imperative of time" (JANZ 2016, 44). This does not only justify the platial-spatial aspiration of conversational philosophy; it also justifies the sage philosophy project of going back into time, through the mind of sages, to reinvent concepts. At this juncture, I want to urge that conversations should not be without imagination. Imagination is important to both sage philosophy and conversational philosophy in their mission to generate concepts. Without imagination conversations in African philosophy will be another farce; a sort of dry tap. (This is the main reason ethnophilosophy failed). The point of conversation is the point of imagination. Actually, I think Chimakonam and Janz will agree with me, the aim of conversational philosophy is not to converse but to imagine. But then imagination cannot happen at the point of frustration but at the point of wonder. If conversational philosophy set forth from a model that African philosophy started with "frustration" and not "wonder", it may fail to achieve its goal of concepts production and end up as mere ethnophilosophy.

There is one more problem conversational philosophy is likely to face as it progresses from philosophical place to philosophical space. This problem is what I may call 'paradigm-crossing problem', occasioned by the radical difference in the ontological configuration of the philosophy space as compared with philosophy place. For me, this is

the most fundamental issue with conversational philosophy and it deals with the very foundation of its ultimate goal, namely, facilitating the participation of African concepts in the discourse at the philosophical space. Heraclitus has stated that things cannot step into the same water twice, for everything is in a state of flux (LAWHEAD 2002, 17). Janz has also said the same thing: concepts travel and when they travel they change within cultural setting as they cross the social ontology (2016, 44). That is to say, "violence occur when concepts travel – their historical references cannot be transported intact, and more importantly, their formative questions change from one place to the next" (JANZ 2009, 188).

What this means is that when African concepts cross into philosophical space in order to test their capacity against concepts from other jurisdictions, there is the likelihood of such concepts being radicalized and transformed in significant ways; such that they may either be assimilated or assimilate the character of alien concepts. This is likely to affect their identity in ways so significant that when they return to the African place they may no longer be recognized as African concepts. Chimakonam has developed a trivalent logic to insulate concepts when they travel (2015c, 115-121). But his logic framework, being integrativist, is largely Aristotelian; hence may lack the charisma to protect concepts from being negatively changed. Generally, when concepts cross ontological jurisdictions they cannot be the same again, even when they return to their original jurisdiction. On the basis of this fact, I question: what measures have the conversational system put in place to debrief and re-Africanize the affected concepts when they return to participate in conversations at the place? This issue is important as African philosophy sets to take its wares to the global marketplace.

Conclusion

Chimakonam has argued, in passing, that he is not employing conversational method in the same manner Oruka did (2015e, 469). He thinks that mode of conversation in sage philosophy was mere informal exchange of ideas; whereas conversational philosophy involves "a serious intellectual activity of a formal kind" (CHIMAKONAM 2015e, 469). I think Chimakonam is mistaken in his attempt to alienate conversational philosophy from sage philosophy. Like conversational philosophy, sage philosophy involves dialogical interactions between philosophers – the philosophic sage is a philosopher qua philosopher. Conversational philosophy and sage philosophy use Socratic-type dialogue form and both use the dialectical form but of a non-Helegian type. What both sage philosophy and conversational philosophy do in

combining dialogue and dialectics in their methodologies, is to re-imagine and re-create concepts in the light of reason. In this direction, we can say that there are conceptual and methodological evidences that there is a strong link between sage philosophy and conversational philosophy, to the extent that we can assert that conversational philosophy is an extension of sage philosophy at least in terms of methodology of inquiry and possible results. However, it should be granted that the purpose and intent of the two philosophical orientations differ: while sage philosophy purposed to affirm the existence of philosophy in traditional African setting, conversational philosophy aims to help African philosophy to birth more concepts towards the development of the philosophical place and space. (In the case of sage philosophy, this aim has changed over the course of time). But in the process of searching for philosophy in the traditional Africa, sage philosophy became involved in concepts generation which largely has contributed to whatever is today known as African philosophy. On the basis of these orientational similarities, sage philosophy and conversational philosophy should overlap each other in research and purposes. Sage philosophy is conversational philosophy and conversational philosophy is sage philosophy.

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