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15. C.S. Momoh, "The God of Morality Vs The God of Religion" in Momoh et. al. (eds.), p.83. Before I made this point, I pointed out that "The respective original founders of the different religions claimed direct contact of the Almighty. Yet the way their followers bandy and flaunt these claims show clearly that one founder may in fact have seen only God's hand, the second only God's leg, and the third may have seen only God's head. Of course, the problems of interpreting and expressing the divine and the spiritual, in human language, of what is a personal, local and perspectival experiences are hardly addressed", p.82.

16. J.U. Ohaeri, "The Supreme Being in Spiritual Groups" in Momoh et. al (eds.), *Nigerian Studies in Religious Tolerances;* Vol.1: *Religions and Their Doctrines,* p.64.

17. Quoted in Grunebaum, p.351. It is only in this respect that we agree with Braithwaite. Other religious positions concerning God, His nature and Essence, omnipresence, omnipotence, etc., heaven, hell, judgement day, far from being stories, are real in our sense of reality. The question of the existence of a thing that is real sinks into insignificance.

18. Ade Dopamu, "Religious Tolerance and Peaceful Coexsitence: The Case of African Religion in Nigeria" in C.S. Momoh et. al. (eds.), *Nigerian Studies in Religious Tolerances:* Vol.IV: *Philosophy of Religious Tolerance,* p.60.

19. H.B. Haruna, "A History of Religions in Etsako: A Case Study in Religious Conflict and Resolution" in C.S. Momoh et. al. (eds.), *Nigerian Studies in Religious Tolerance:* Vol.III: *Religion and Nation Building,* pp.173-179.

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AFRICAN SAGE-PHILOSOPHERS IN ACTION: H. ODERA ORUKA'S CHALLENGES TO THE NARROWLY ACADEMIC ROLE OF THE PHILOSOPHER

By Gail M. Presby

The History of a Debate: Are Sages Philosophers?

H. Odera Oruka, up to his recent death on the 9th of December, 1995, was involved in a major project of interviewing rural African sages to record their oral wisdom for the benefit of the wider philosophical community. Both folk sages and philosophical sages, as Odera Oruka categorized them, played an active role in their communities, by guiding the community in troubled times and offering advice to individuals in moral dilemmas. In his works, Odera Oruka often compared the profundity of the philosophical sages to that of Socrates, Plato, Descartes, and other pillars of the Western tradition of philosophy; he insisted they deserved the title "philosophical" rather than "folk" sages because of their reflective ability to be critical of the beliefs upheld by their various traditions.

One of the main problems facing Odera Oruka's sage philosophy project is the question of whether the sages are philosophers; indeed, many authors have criticized the sayings of the sages as being less than profound.[1] It could very well be that the problem here lies with the too-narrow conception of "philosopher" as it is presently seen by academia. Today philosophy as a discipline is clearly delineated from other disciplines, and all academic disciplines, as theory, are clearly separated from practice. It is therefore hard to think of a contemporary person being called, or more specifically considered qualified, to be a philosopher without the academic credentials, and a life devoted primarily to academics or at least intellectual life. Once someone becomes too active and involved in the community, we're bound to start thinking of them as part-time philosophers, or as primarily something else but also philosophers.

Some philosophers like Sartre and Whitehead would object to the emphasis on the noun "philosopher." Human beings are processes, and to pretend that we are things is to live in bad faith. One moment we may be philosophizing, the next minute dogmatizing. How much of one's time must one spend in philosophizing, in order to deserve the noun title "philosopher?" By emphasizing the ways in which one can go about "doing" philosophy, we can focus on the thoughts and actions of the sages, and take the focus away from whether or not they possess degrees, read books or write books.

Just what do we presume when we think of "philosophers?" Leonard Harris insightfully elucidates this point by scrutinizing the masthead of the Society for the Advancement of American Philosophy Newsletter. Here he sees the figures of Emerson, Thoreau, Peirce, James, Dewey, Royce, Whitehead, Santayana, Suckiel and Dooley. Why, he wonders, are African-Americans Equiano, Walker, Crummel and Locke not included as part of the tradition of American philosophy? Alain Locke even holds his doctorate in the field. Harris concludes that it is because the archetype of American philosophers are pictured as "fairly gentle, contemplative, raucous, cantankerous intellectuals and public activists." But there are limits built into what someone can do while still counting as philosophers; in this way a culturally-constructed

definition of "philosopher" serves to marginalize activists.[2]

Could it be that sages who are too involved and caring about the well-being of their communities, and too directly involved in implementing improvements, lose their status as pensive philosophical types?

Joseph Osei, a Ghanian philosopher, explains that there are certain reasons why people tend to equate philosophy with an academic enterprise removed from practicality. First, Aristotle said that philosophy should be studied for its own sake. He saw the contemplative, philosophical life both as different and better than a life dedicated to the political goal of securing justice for the community and practicing virtue in one's own personal actions. Secondly, the criticism of logical positivists suggested that all of philosophy was pseudo-knowledge, due to the generation of unreal problems. Thirdly, there are contemporary analytic definitions of philosophy which uphold the field as seeking clarity for the sake of clarity. Because of these perceptions, the idea that philosophy was removed from the daily problems of life was reinforced. In addition to defining the philosopher as the "contemplative," such views also tended to convince Africans that such a study was a luxury that Africa could not afford.[3]

Also stressing the detached nature of philosophy, Odera Oruka's colleague, Dismas Masolo, in his book *African Philosophy in Search of Identity* explains that philosophy in a second order sense means commitment to inquiry, not commitment to certain opinions. This commitment to inquiry is necessarily an academic enterprise.[4] He finds Odera Oruka's sages to be clever, and even "gifted in various forms of intellectual alertness, with extraordinary capability of dealing with various types of problems," but he does not find that possessing these attributes in themselves are satisfactory enough criteria to being called a philosopher. One must develop one's insights with "greater elaboration and technical sophistication." Similarly, Masolo reasons, just as a scientist might have been spurred to enter the profession by an original curiosity about how things in the world work, the original curiosity alone does not make him a scientist.[5] Is Masolo implying that people are not scientists until they have earned their degrees? Could it be, therefore, that sages who feel called to commit themselves to the bettering of their society err on the side of either amateurism, or dogmatic activism? This might be an accurate description of some cases, but not most of Odera Oruka's favourites. Genuine sages avoid dogmatism and reformist campaigns. In fact, it was this concernwith the need to be reflective that led Odera Oruka to categorize only some sages as philosophic. And as for amateurism, many sages have devoted decades of their lives to the near constant discussion of a myriad of problems in applied and social ethics. If the few sentences included from Odera Oruka's interviews does not reflect this wealth of experience, a closer look at the sage's life would reveal seasoned and in-depth perspective on many issues.

I suggest that the sages Odera Oruka finds most impressive are committed to society's betterment. By challenging individuals to improve themselves morally they hope to improve society. They daily engage in what has been called by some as "philosophical counselling." Masolo's emphasis of philosophy as "academics" may be too narrow an approach. While Masolo is right insofar that in philosophy, there is a need to step back from the bustle of life long enough to think deeply about a problem, there is also a need to step back into action and

try to implement one's ideas. Likewise Joseph Osei argues that philosophy has both intrinsic and extrinsic values. While philosophy can't be reduced to mere instrumentality, it possesses certain useful attributes like the cultivating of creativity, critical thinking, capacities for sensitivity, flexibility and originality, and broadening of understanding beyond narrow self-interests. It can also serve as the conscience of society. In all these ways, philosophy can be practical and indeed crucial to society's well-being.[6] By especially examining the sages' roles in their societies, this paper hopes to shed light on the more general topic of the social role of the philosopher.

THE SAGES: RESPECTED JUDGES AND AUTHORITY FIGURES

In his book, *Sage Philosophy: Indigenous Thinkers and Modern Debate on African Philosophy*, Odera Oruka precedes each transcript of an interview with a short biography of the sage. There are obvious patterns in the social roles of the sages which seem to go unnoticed, or uncommented upon, by Odera Oruka himself. In another philosophical project of interviewing sages from Western Africa, Hallen and Sodipo went straight to the Yoruba *Onisegun* or medicine men, out of the conviction that such men were most articulate in conveying the traditional beliefs of their culture as well as the most interested in debating the meaning of words.[7] Perhaps due to the influence of contemporary analytic philosophy, many now think of philosophy as having to do with debating the definitions of words. In striking contrast, only one of the sages out of the twelve in Odera Oruka's book were identified by their social role as medicine men. In contrast, almost all of the philosophic sages and half of the folk sages were identified as judges and community arbiters. Their role ranged from informal advisors to Paramount Chief. Since Odera Oruka relied on local people to lead him to the wise members of their communities, this must mean that in the popular culture of rural Kenya, wisdom is associated with the ability to make a sound judgment. (This also may mean that people associate wisdom with being male, for only one of the seventeen sages mentioned in his book were female).

Abel M'Nkabui served on various elder's governing councils, and today is often consulted during communal issues.[8] Okemba Simiyu Chaungo became Bukasa (village headman) and later sub-chief. He described his greatest hobby as "work aimed at the progress of society." In his retired life he still had a significant say in his constituency's elections. Villagers paid him visits for advice and counsel.[9] Ali Mwitani Masero, although the only one described in the book as a traditional medicine man, in person described himself to the author (in addition to his healing mission) as one untiringly devoted to the betterment of the community. He actively sought out all disputes and problems in the area, and his counsel was respected.[10] Oruka Rang' inya served as Locational Councillor and Chairman of the traditional courts on land and marriages, and was an advisor to the chiefs.[11] Stephen M'Mukindia Kithanje is described as an authority on Meru tradition and is sought after for guidance.[12] Paul Mboya Akoko served as Paramount Chief and was a member of the East African legislative assembly. At his death he was Ker (ultimate moral or spiritual leader) of the Luo.[13]

Odera Oruka outlined the different kinds of great leaders in the Luo tradition to which he belongs. There are the prophets, successful and generous men, sages or thinkers, councilors, kings, spiritual leaders, and fighting heroes. Those who he singles out specifically as sages, the "japaro" or thinkers, were those who were consulted by the people "on various complicated and

delicate matters" and were professional advisors, more competent than most councilors, the latter of whom were appointed to positions.[14]

Many sages are called upon to arbitrate in community matters and decide who is right or wrong in a dispute, and what to do about it. The dispute may be between husband and wife, father and son, neighbours, or community factions. They will often be called upon especially because they are familiar with the traditions, laws, and social conventions of their community. The decision the sage gives is often described as an interpretation of the tradition, its application to the present difficulty at hand. However, the decision is preceded by their silent reflection, or dialogue and debate with peers or the parties involved. The sage's authority, based on his reputation, is respected. Stubborn parties who would not listen to similar advice given from their friends and family will take such advice seriously if put forward by such an esteemed community member.

This social context is not quite the same as, for example, Socrates' role in Athens. Euthyphro did not seek Socrates out to ask his advice as to whether he should turn in his own father for the murder of a servant. When Socrates imposes himself into the situation, it is not to offer clear advice but to muddy the situation by calling into question the definition of goodness. Although Socrates was called to hear the case of the ten generals who did not bury the dead, this was not because of his reputation for being a fair judge, but rather because it was his turn in a democracy where all citizens had their eventual opportunity to judge. However, it is this lack of particular testing of the Athenian citizen-judges regarding their wisdom and ability to make sound judgment that was one of Socrates', and Plato's, complaints about democracy.[15]

Therefore, although we could say that Socrates was not called upon as a revered elder to solve Athens' problems, in this way differing greatly from the African sages, nevertheless there is some warrant in saying that both Socrates and Plato wished that Socrates were treated in suh a manner, and complained of his neglect. In the *Republic*, Plato puts philosopher-kings in charge of the ideal government, and it is speculated among scholars that he does so to compensate for his disappointment at the Athenian's treatment of Socrates. Socrates is metaphorically the neglected navigator of the ship; Plato complains that the people do not seek out the philosopher as ardently as they seek out the doctor when suffering from illness. But it seems that the African people have more sense than the ancient Athenians, because they do indeed track down their wise sages and beg them to solve their interpersonal and community problems. Their navigators and similar star-gazers are not neglected; if one comments on the future, their words are heeded. In fact, drawing on the same metaphor found in Plato's *Republic*, Dere Omolo argues that he should not have to go to the people, they should come to him and seek him out, in a way similar to how they seek a doctor when they are ill. And he suggests that members of his community do indeed seek his counsel.[16] This phenomena leads Odera Oruka to suggest that sages are fulfilling the function of psychiatrists, however not in the western sense. Rather, the sages are consulted on issues affecting the moral and psychological attitudes and judgments of the various individuals in the community.[17]

There has been a recent movement among some philosophers to advocate philosophical counselling as an alternative to psychological counselling. Thinkers including Ger Achenbach, Ran Lahav, Alexander Dill and Ad Hoogendijk. They argue that psychological attempts to categorize people into various psychological illnesses is unfair to the person, who should instead play a role in seeking self-understanding. Through a Socratic or maieutic form of discourse, people's latent ideas are laid bare so that having been made self-aware, they can change.[18] Such projects seek to create a role for the academic philosopher similar to the role of the Kenyan sages in Oruka's study.

Socrates himself, in his speech in the *Apology*, suggests that his appropriate punishment/reward for his service to his fellow Athenians would be room and board at the Town Hall (an honuor usually reserved for the winner of chariot races). Socrates would therefore probably be satisfied with the respect and good treatment he would receive in the African context. Although sages are not usually bathed in opulence, neither are they usually scorned and persecuted (although some have suffered at the hands of colonial authorities). A skeptic could argue that this good treatment is a sign that the sages had not been critical enough of their own societies; that if they had been proper gadflies like Socrates they would have invited similar persecution. In contrast, sages I interviewed (who had been part of Odera Oruka's project) described a difficult, trying time being accepted early in their life before they had proven themselves to the community. With age and experience, the sages reach a point where resistance to their mission breaks down and they are accepted and revered.[19] Nevertheless this warm embrace by the community was not experienced by all. Nyando Ayoo, although obviously popular in the town of Sega (which he founded in the 30's) as witnessed by the large crowd that came to listen to his being interviewed complained that no one in Sega had ever taken his philosophy of life seriously and tried to copy his actions.[20] Some sages like Ayoo and Omolo complained that the younger generation no longer saw the relevance of their wise counsels; but other sages like Wanyonyi Manguliechi and Ali Mwitani Masero claimed to still being sought out vigorously by young and old alike.

ROOTED IN COMMUNITY

Ernest Wamba-dia-Wamba describes the role of a *Nzonzi* or rural leader as one of a Socratic midwife, helping others in their community come to wide conclusions through clarifying speech. "They are very able detectors of the divisive 'bad word' - and stimulators of the palaver, they help assure that it does not degenerate into violent antagonism. They know how to make severe criticisms without offending or silencing the one criticized."[21] Through this process, the community progresses morally and harmoniously.

Such a role can be played by women as well as men. Jones Lozenja Makindu of Maragoli, Western Kenya, explained that she preached a message of love to her community members. Wherever there was a problem, she showed up to reconcile the warring sides. She insisted that one should not isolate the person who promotes hate. Rather, bring them close to you, and then find out the source of their problem. Was it fear? - hunger? - jealousy? Only in such a way can true reconciliation be found. In addition to many community-wide problems solved (for example, the successful aceptance and settling of hundreds of Ugandan refugees in her community of Maragoli in the mid 1970's), she also healed many a troubled marriage, and husbands took her advice seriously. Her technique was to consult both sides and listen to their

grievances. She also counsels women to respect themselves, for often their low opinion of themselves exacerbates marital problems.[22]

The same devotion to solving community problems can be found in West Africa as in East Africa. Nana Ama Adobea II, Queen Mother of Aseseso in Ghana, explained that there are about one thousand women in her community and she is in charge of all their affairs. She had to go through a ceremony in which she dressed in clothes of mourning, and promised her community that she would serve them selflessly until her death. She oversees the marketplace, all ceremonies with women (rites of passage for young women, marriages), and every weekend she hears cases. Women bring their marital problems to her court. She consults with husbands, wives, and other family members, to either resolve the dispute or to suggest favourable and fair terms for divorse But she says in 90% of the cases, the disputes are resolved. When asked what was the secret of her success with the marital problems, shw said it has to do with being human and making human decisions, not just technically sticking to "the letter of the law."[23]

It is perhaps the dream of a philosophy teacher to have a profound effect upon the life of a student. One can hope that those brief hours of instruction during a semester will have some kind of impact upon someone's life. But the context makes a deep impression difficult. In Confucius's school for young men, Confucius aimed at improving the moral virtues of his students by individually challenging them to strengthen their weaknesses. In the American context, it would be pressumptuous to test and challenge students on their perfection of moral virtue; ethics is usually an intellectual exercise. Other than rules against plagiarism and rudeness in the classroom, students are left to be their own moral guides. The lucky, charismatic philosophy academic can hope to inspire through his or her "presence" in the classroom, in a way similar to Socrates. And gifted writers may find a way to convey their presence through the written word. Nevertheless, with most students coming and going in a few weeks, one can only hope that some impression has been made.

Some philosophers in an attempt to be "universal" lose contact with any community-perhaps even being aloof from fellow faculty and students at their own institutions. However not all professional philosophers are other-wordly; Oruka cites the case of Bertrand Russell, who in addition to searching for knowledge lived a life full of compassion for the suffering of mankind.[24]

I suggest that a sage is rooted in a location and has connections to the community. The rural African sage, in contrast to the contemporary academic philosopher whose colleagues are the world community of philosophic scholars, is in a context more closely related to Socrates' context in ancient Athens. In Africa, the community is more stable; most people are there for life. The sage knows several generations of the same family. The community members know him or her for many years. This closeness in living together and knowing each other generates a philosophy of particular interest to the community as a whole. Philosophy in this context is not marginalized to the ivory tower.

As Sage Ali Mwitani Masero explains in his own case, he feels so driven to solve problems of people in his community out of his compassion. Those who did not care would not feel so committed to focus on finding a solution. Masero took into his home and raised a little girl,

whose mother died at childbirth, when no one else was willing to do so. He attributes his compassion to an inheritance from his parents, who would take in destitutes and bring them up and then even give them land. His family and neighbours and bring them up and then even give them land. His family and neighbours witnessed to his attribute of caring.[25] Although Socrates expressed his concern for Athens mostly through his ardent questioning, he was not cold. Note that Masero did not only express his compassion through acts of kindness, but also through deep thinking, discernment, as well as difficult negotiation and arbitration. Through his decisions and advice in times of trouble he hoped to instruct individuals in his community regarding right action and moral improvement.

Likewise, Stephen Makoha who insists that the especially close communication with God "ran in his family", further explained that his compassion for others nurtured this ability that would have otherwise remained dormant.[26] Nyando Ayoo described his life as being focused upon helping others in need of his community agreed with the portrait.[27]

SAGES AS ROLE MODELS FOR ACADEMIC PHILOSOPHERS

This paper wants to suggest that African sages can pose a challenge to academic philosophers. The challenge is not to become exactly like sages, since the context of academia is quite different than rural Africa. This is also not to suggest, like some philosophers have worried, that this paper advocates academic philosophers inviting students to confide in their personal problems, so that the philosopher can try to resolve the various disputes between room-mates, parents and students, etc.[28] Rather let us look to Odera Oruka's own works to see what he infers should be the role of the academic philosopher as related to the African sage.

Odera Oruka refers to Richard Bernstein who refers to Agnes Heller's remark that the "utopian spirit is the spirit of all genuine philosophy", and that the philosopher "seeks to defend a rational utopia." Certainly a world like the one Jones Makindu describes, where people love each other and live in harmony, is such a utopia. As Odera Oruka explains,

> Many of the sages... look at the world and at their own society and the structure of life in it. There they get some inspiration to philosophize, i.e., to speculate with boldness on what there is and what were otherwise to be. And although we ourselves (observers) may use our great learning in logic or science to ridicule their sayings, the sayings are such that one can always find a rationally defensible principle to back them up.[29]

In other words, although some might think of Jones Makindu's philosophy of love as being too simplistic, there is some realism to her proposed solutions, as contemporary practices in mediation and conflict resolution will testify.

His references to Heller suggest that he sees philosophy as wedded to the idea of a better world. Such commitment to thinking about, and bringing into being through action, a better world,can be seen as a theme running through most of Odera Oruka's essays. For example, in "The Philosophy of Foreign Aid: The Right to a Human Minimum", he talks about global justice as a future ideal.[30] Likewise, in "Achievements of Philosophy and One Current Practical Necessity for Mankind", he argues that "to complete its function, philosophy must extend its functions to the ethics of human life and the conditions for the improvement of the world for

human existence."[31] In his autobiographical essay, "My Strange Way to Philosophy", he explains that his work's goal is to clear current and future obstacles to wisdom and human justice. Through philosophy, he is dedicated to fighting socio-economic deprivation, cultural-racial mythologies, and the illusions of appearance.[32]

In his essay, "Philosophy and Humanism in Africa", he asserts that philosophy must concern itself with improving people's quality and security of life. When asked concretely what can philosophers do to prevent a reign such as ARID (African Republic of Inhumanity and Death), he suggests that philosophers must postulate alternatives to the current prevailing and dehumanizing ethics of might.[33] Odera Oruka claims that the philosopher has a deeper responsibility than most to "warn his people" - for society to understand the implications of their actions.[34] Indeed in this way the academic philosopher would have a role similar to the African sage. As Odera Oruka described the sages in an interview, "they act like a gadfly of their communities, they subject the community to critique from time to time and make the people have second thoughts about their beliefs and their practices."[35]

To return to the example of Jones Makindu, not only did she consult married couples on how to love each other, but when a community of Ugandan refugees that had flooded her town of Marigoli were coming into conflict with the local chief, she was instrumental in reconciling the two parties. She helped to gain acceptance for the refugees in her community, and helped to settle ninety parents and four hundred children in housing constructed especially for them, through the aid of the entire community.[36] Issues concerning political refugees are ever-present both in Africa, and in the U.S. and other countries. It would certainly be appropriate for philosophers to address such crises in their scholarly work. Then, they might even go one step further, if they are inspired by sages like Jones Makindu, and try to do something concrete about the issues when they are found in their own communities.

PHILOSOPHER OR POLITICIAN?

Odera Oruka himself provides an interesting example of two people dedicated to being philosophical gadflies in their communities, when he introduces Oginga Odinga through a comparison to Bertrand Russell. Russell claimed that three main things governed his life: the search for knowledge; the search for love, and "the unbearable pity for the suffering of mankind." Oruka finds in Oginga Odinga's life the following three main concerns: the love of truth, the will for independence, and the deepest sympathy with the suffering masses.[37] Was only the first of the three categories for both men the one that is philosophical, while their other interests were unrelated to philosophy? We could argue, and we have seen Odera Oruka argue, that the best philosophers are those who combine their quest for truth with their concern for the moral well-being of their communities. Russell is considered a great man because in addition to his academic pursuits, he (particularly with reference to the dangers of modern warfare) was an outspoken voice of conscience to England and the world community. The same could be said of Thoreau, who has found his way onto the masthead along with other American philosophers. He was an outspoken resister of the practice of slavery and against the aggressive expansionist war with Mexico, and he was put in jail for it. At what point does one become so committed that one becomes an activist instead of a philosopher? When he was asked by his Alma Mater, Harvard, to describe his occupation ten years after graduation, Thoreau's list included house

painter, pencil maker, and poetaster - yet none of these labourious occupations disqualified him from being a philosopher - just as laying bricks did not disqualify Socrates from being a philosopher.

Claude Sumner, in his foreword to Oruka's book on Odinga, expresses his own reservations about whether Odinga is primarily a philosopher. He considers Odinga a "political figure;" after all, Odinga was former vice President of Kenya, and had attempted to register his own political party many times before finally succeeding, and expressed his wish to run for President. Sumner states right from the start: "I believe in the separation of philosophy and active involvement in politics in order to safeguard the freedom of the academician."[38] It should be noted, however, that Sumner himself did not insulate himself in quietistic contemplation, but joined other academics in Ethiopia to alleviate the famine plaguing the country in the mid-eighties.[39] However, we could ask if Sumner's insistence on the separation of philosophy and politics is descriptive of the parameters of philosophy, or merely prudential advice. After all, Socrates was a critic of Athenian democracy, and suffered for it; Boethius was an incorruptible member of the Roman Senate, and was exiled and killed for it; Stoics like Munsonius Rufus fell out of favour with Nero and were executed. Most of these cases were those of "gadflies" who were killed because the peskiness or their criticisms was too irritating to the powers that be. Rather than becoming philosopher-kings, they take the Kantian or Confucian role of consulting the King in hopes of swaying the power to do what is right, or in less kingly versions, in criticizing the King in hopes that he responds to the stings of criticism with a change of heart and/or policy.

I suggest that Oginga Odinga's problems with being more widely recognized as a philosopher have to do with the fact that his actions were more of note to the memory and imaginations of the majority of his contemporaries than his ideas were. When people think of Oginga Odinga, they first remember all the things he's ever done and tried to do. Nevertheless it's obvious that he is a thinker as well as a doer insofar as his actions did not exactly fit the mould of politics at his time. He was an innovator, who also pondered deeply the moral principles implicit in any action he might take. It may be that some philosophers are most noted for their thought because they did not have lives active in other dimensions which competed for the attention of their contemporaries. Or it may be that their fame as philosophers only begins once their reputations as Statesmen or businessmen fades through time. It was therefore important that Oruka capture the innovative thought and reflections of this man, focussing on the ideas that inspired Oginga Odinga to his more famous actions.

While it can be argued that Oginga Odinga was philosophical, Oginga's case differs greatly from that of the other sages in Oruka's study. Oginga is an international figure, and although in his early life he may have been rooted in his smaller community, playing the role of Luo Ker and functioning as an advisor, he later outgrew, or enlarged, that role. His devotion came to be to the entire country of Kenya, not just his home community. And with his literacy skills and his writing of many books, Oginga goes beyond the oral tradition. That's why it's curious that Oruka calls Odinga a sage philosopher, and mentions in an interview that his book on Oginga Odinga is the first of a foreseen series that would highlight various individual philosophic sages.[40] According to his own now famous "Four Trends" criteria, it would seem that Odinga belonged to the "Nationalist-Ideological Philosophy" trend, in the company of Nkrumah, Nyerere, Senghor and others, where "politicians or statesmen" set themselves the task of

16. Interview by the author of Nicholas Dere Omolo, 19 November 1995, in his home near Kisumu. Odera Oruka participated in the interview, which was conducted in England. The interview exists on tape, in possession of the author.

17. H. Odera Oruka, "Traditions and Modernity in the Scramble for Africa", included in H. Odera Oruka, *Practical Philosophy: In Search of an Ethnical Minimum*, Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, forthcoming, chapter 26.

18. See Jonathan Percale, "Philosophical Counselling: An Exposition", unpublished paper, Rand Afrikaans University.

19. See, for example, interview by the author, of Wanyonyi Manguliechi, 7 October 1995; translated from Bukusu to English on site by Chaungo Barasa, later transcribed by Shadrack Wanjala Nasong'o. The interview exists on tape, and both tape and transcript are in possession of the author.

20. Interview by the author of Nyando Ayoo, 19 November 1995, in Sega. Translated on site by H. Odera Oruka, who participated in the interview. Transcript by Oriare Nyarwath. The interview exists on tape; both it and the transcript are in possession of the author. Interviews of Omolo, Manguliechi, and Masero as cited above.

21. Ernest Wamba-dia-Wamba, quoted in Richard Bell, "Narratives in African Philosophy", in *Philosophy*, vol. 64, 1989, p. 374. Bell quotes from Wamba-dia-Wamba's unpublished paper "Experience and Democracy in Africa: Reflections on Practices of Communalist Palaver as a Social Method of Resolving Contradictions Among the People." A French version of this paper is published in *Journal of African Marxists*, No. 7, 1985.

22. Interview by the author with Jones Lozenja Makindu, in Maragoli, Western Kenya, on May 12, 1996. Assisted in interview, and translated by, Chaungo Barasa.

23. Interview by the author with Nana Ama Adobea II, in Aburi, Ghana, 25 May 1996.

24. Oruka, *Oginga Odinga*, p. 3.

25. A.M. Masero, interview.

26. Interview with Stephen Makoha Mwasame, 9 October 1995; translated from Bukusu to English on site by Chaungo Barasa, later transcribed by Shadrack Wanjala Nasong'o. This interview exists on tape, in possession of the author.

27. Interview with Nyando Ayoo. Testimony corroborated by interviews with Martine Outa, Barasa Nyango, and Dor Kanyanda, all from Sega, on 19 November 1995. Translated on site by H. Odera Oruka, later translated and transcribed by Oriare Nyarwath. Tape and transcript in possession of the author.

28. One faculty member at University of Western Cape, South Africa, was particularly concerned that such a parallel might be inferred by my criticisms. Remark during a reading of an earlier related paper, on 20 March 1996.

29. Odera Oruka, *Practical Philosophy*, chapter 20: "Cultural Fundamentals in Philosophy: Obstacles in Philosophical Dialogue." Earlier published in *Quest*, Vol. IV No. 2, December 1990, pp. 20-37.

30. Odera Oruka, *Practical Philosophy*, Chapter 8.

31. Ibid., chapter 9.

32. Ibid., chapter 29.

33. Ibid., chapter 13.

34. Ibid., chapter 21. Interview by Kai Kresse, 27 October 1993.

35. Kai Kresse, "Philosophy has to be made sagacious: An interview with Prof. Henry Odera Oruka, 16th August 1995 at the University of Nairobi." Published in *Issues in Contemporary Culture and Aesthetics*, No. 3, April 1996, Jan van Eyck Akademie, Maastricht, The Netherlands.

36. Jones Makindu, "Interview."

37. H. Odera Oruka, *Oginga Odinga: His Philosophy and Beliefs*. Nairobi: Initiatives Publishers, 1992, p. 3.

38. Claude Sumner, Introduction to H. Odera Oruka, *Oginga Odinga: His Philosophy and Beliefs*. Nairobi: Initiatives Publishers, 1992, p. xiii.

39. For example, see Negussay Ayele and Claude Sumner, eds., *Books for Life*. Addis Ababa: Relief and Rehabilitation Commission, 1991.

40. Kai Kresse, op. cit.

41. H. Odera Oruka, *Trends in Contemporary African Philosophy*. Nairobi: Shirikon Publishers, 1990, p.18.

42. Chaungo Barasa, "The Elder's Complex: The Myth of Age and Learning as Wisdom." Unpublished paper, p. 2.

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solving issues of "national and individual freedom."[41]

Nevertheless, Oginga Odinga serves as a kind of bridge between the rural sages and the academic philosophers. Himself a former Luo Ker, but later dedicated to the well-being of a nation, he becomes a model of a life dedicated to a reflective utopian vision, that involves both reflection and action. He is somewhere in the middle, encouraging academic philosophers, not necessarily to take up a political career directly, but to reflect upon the troubled political times with an aim of sighting a possible solution. As his last major work on a sage, Odera Oruka's book on Oginga Odinga points the way for future sage philosophy projects, which will be restricted not only to the mostly illiterate rural population, but to thinkers in all areas of African society.

CONCLUSION

Is it the role of the philosopher as understood by the world community today, to put forward practical advice in situations of moral dilemma? As Masolo states philosophy is a commitment to inquiry, not to the conclusions themselves. Sages ~~insofar~~ as they are the "answer men," do not demonstrate the love of inquiry we require in a philosopher. But as sage philosopher Chaungo Barasa points out, the best informants were not those who "had the answers" so to speak, but those who enjoyed discussing the questions. The ability to enjoy the pondering and debate that later led to conclusions ready for action was an ability found rarely but still present in several of the sages the interviewers met.[42]

Sage Alli Mwitani Masero describes that "...once there is a problem, I feel listless and disturbed until I find a solution..." This listless searching for a practical solution to moral dilemmas roots the sages in ponderous thought connected to concrete action. Masero insisted that once he has come up with a solution accepted by the parties involved, he continues to check up on the situation to make sure that the improvements are implemented. If only our academic philosophers would be so committed to realizing their suggested improvements for society!

Philosophy today suffers a crisis of meaning in Europe and North America, where it is marginalized, and most wonder about its usefulness. In addition, the emphasis on individualism means that people don't like to be "preached at" and told what to do by others. The sages in this rural African context do not have to deal with these sociological problems. Because of the cultural tradition in this context, sages are still free to offer advice and be taken seriously by members of their community, who would respect their wisdom. In contrast we have the contemporary context of technological society, where philosophers are in an academic ghetto communicating to each others through academic journals and e mail. The written text replaces the personal witness, and while the number of people reached in this way can increase, the extent to which they are affected by the message may be reduced because of lack of contact with the message bearer. The personal touch of the sages may make more of an impact upon individuals than would reading an article or book. Regarding the ability to radically influence how others choose to live their lives, we may find that philosophy is flourishing in rural Africa in a way that it is not in Western academia.

ENDNOTES

1. See Peter Bodunrin, "The Question of African Philosophy", in H. Odera Oruka, ed., *Sage Philosophy: Indigenous Thinkers and Modern Debate on African Philosophy* Nairobi: ACTS Press. Also see Dismas Masolo, *African Philosophy in Search of Identity*, Bloomington, In: Indiana University Press, 1994., pp. 236-241. Here I am only treating the critics within the African Philosophy movement itself, while ignoring scoffers and critics throughout the centuries who declared that Africans were incapable of philosophizing.

2. Leonard Harris, "The Horror of Tradition or How To Burn Babylon and Build Benin While Reading "A Preface to Twenty-Volume Suicide Note, in *The Philosophical Forum, Vol. XXIV*, Nos. 1-3, 1992-3, pp.113, 110.

3. Joseph Osei, "Contemporary African Philosophy and Development: An Asset or a Liability?" Ph.D. Dissertation, Ohio State University, 1991, pp. 35-36.

4. Masolo, *African Philosophy in Search of Identity*, p.60.

5. Ibid., pp.237-38.

6. Osei, op. cit., pp. 40-50.

7. Barry Hallen and J.O. Sodipo, *Knowledge, Belief, and Witchcraft: Analytical Experiments in African Philosophy*. London: Ethnographica, 1986.

8. H. Odera Oruka, *Sage Philosophy: Indigenous Thinkers and Modern Debate on African Philosophy*. Nairobi: ACTS Press, 19991, p.87. See also the same title published by Brill Publishers, Leiden, The Netherlands, 1990.

9. Ibid., p.110

10. Interview with Ali Mwitani Masero, 6 October 1995; translated from Bukusu to English on site by Chaungo Barasa, later transcribed by Shadrack Wanjala Nasong'o. This interview exists on tape, in possession of the author.

11. Odera Oruka, *op. cit.*, p. 118.

12. *Ibid.*, p.128

13. *Ibid.*, p.134.

14. H. Odera Oruka, *Oginga Odinga: His Philosophy and Beliefs*. Nairobi: Initiatives Publishers, 1992, pp.22-24.

15. See I.F. Stone, *The Trial of Socrates*, Boston, Little, Brown and Co., 1988.