

TRANSMITTING PHILOSOPHIC KNOWLEDGE WITHOUT WRITING: THE EKITI YORUBA PHILOSOPHIC SAGACITY EXPERIENCE*

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Abstract

Based on recent field research among the Ekiti, South West Nigeria, this paper explores the question of philosophic sages. It attempts to find traditional experts, possessing the capacity for critical and rigorous thought, as required by philosophy, but without the ability to write. Two key questions arise: Do experts in philosophic thought exist among the Ekiti Yoruba, and if so, do they match, if not surpass, the well-known philosophers of the West? ; Do Ekiti Yoruba 'philosophers' qualify as philosophers in the conventional sense considering that their thinking and ideas have not been disseminated through the generally expected means of writing? These and other related issues are discussed in the paper.

Introduction

The Yoruba people are generally acknowledged for the richness in their culture, thought, religion, art, proverbs, wise sayings and oral tradition. However, proverbs wise sayings, etc. cannot pass muster as philosophy. Indeed, one of the reasons why a few scholars have denied the existence of African Philosophy is the attempt by some philosophers, in Africa and beyond, to dress culture in the garment

of philosophy. Besides, the idea of African Philosophy has often been challenged with the phrase '*show me the African philosophers and what they have written.*' This, therefore, raises the question of the mode of knowledge transmission, significant for the social construction of expertise and necessary for the emergence of a philosophical tradition in Africa. The primary goals of this paper are to:

1. Examine the role of language and writing in the transmission of philosophic knowledge from one generation to the other.
2. Show that there are traditional Africans who examine communal issues with the rigour required by philosophy.
3. Address the problems associated with transmitting philosophic knowledge through some other means (other than writing) and via some other language (other than western languages)

This last goal, initially tangential to the research, is the center point of this paper as preliminary objections to the research report indicate that without the sages themselves writing down their own ideas, those who do so for them do it in vain. In this paper, I have therefore addressed the question of the problems associated with transmitting philosophic knowledge through some other means, other than writing and via some other language, other than western.

Philosophic Sagacity: The Standard and the not so Standard Objections

Peter Bodunrin first raised the issue of writing as a draw back to the method of philosophic sagacity, in his article 'The Question of African Philosophy'¹. However, before taking Bodunrin's objection to heart, I shall first address other objections to the method of sagacity.

Professional philosophers have charged sage philosophy with really being ethno philosophy in disguise. Ethno philosophy is also adjudged to be rudimentary and relatively uninteresting². Others suspect that the reliance on Western-trained researchers in philosophy means that there is more of the West in the project than it may seem on the surface³. In addition, some object to the primary descriptive nature of the project⁴. At the heart of the standard objection to sage philosophy is that philosophy must be based on written texts or proceed with written texts, sage philosophy fails on this account.⁵

The not so standard objections to sage philosophy come from Henry Odera Orika himself⁶. In attempting to distinguish between the kinds of sage philosophy carried out by him and his colleagues at the Nairobi University, Kenya, Orika objects to those kinds of sage philosophies that did not distinguish between a folk sage and a didactic sage. Put simply, Orika's objection against other forms of sagacity runs like this:

The folk sage is versed in the commonplace culture, customs and beliefs of his people. He can recite or describe them with much competence. However, he is not unable to raise any critical question about them, nor is he able to observe the inherent contradictions. The philosophic sage, like the folk sage, may equally be versed in the beliefs and values of his society. His main task is to make critical assessment of them and recommend, as far as the communal pressure allows, only those beliefs and values that pass his rational scrutiny. The folk sage is identifiable by his consistent inability to isolate his own opinions from the beliefs of the community and his ready inclination to take refuge behind the popular unexamined wisdom wherever he is intellectually challenged. The philosophic sage, on the other hand, is clearly able to isolate the given beliefs of the community from his own evaluation, rationalization and

even criticism of those beliefs. He is also able to enjoy a dialectical game with the interviewer.⁷

While defending his own kind of sagacity from the challenges posed by the standard objections to sage philosophy, Oruka ended up raising not so standard objections against other forms of sagacity, especially on the grounds indicated by the just ended quotation.

However, Peter Bodunrin's objections to the method of philosophic sagacity strike the heart of our discussion in this paper. Bodunrin identifies some possible objections to the method of philosophic sagacity. First, he asks to know whose philosophy is produced as a result of the interaction between the sage and the trained philosopher. He also wanted to know if the method of going out quite literally into the market place or the villages could be equated with what we are told Plato and his peers did at the Athenian *Agora*. While this paper will neither elaborate on Bodunrin's first two criticisms nor respond to them, I agree with him that philosophy is a conscious creation. Hear him:

One cannot be said to have a philosophy in the strict sense of the word until one has consciously reflected on one's beliefs. It is unlikely that such conscious reflection did not take place in traditional Africa; it is however left to research to show to what extent it has....However, this social-anthropologist's method of field inquiry seems to be an implicit admission that an African philosophical tradition is yet in the making⁸

Beyond the agreement that philosophy is a conscious creation, I disagree with Bodunrin that the social-anthropologist's method of field inquiry is an admission (implicit or explicit) that an African philosophical tradition is yet in the making. I think, contrary to Bodunrin's submission, only the anthropologist's method of fieldwork can uncover the extent of conscious reflection that took place (still takes place) in traditional Africa. Uncovering the extent

of conscious didactic reflection that took place in Africa is tied largely to the method of anthropology mainly because the ability to philosophize is not necessarily tied to literacy. It is therefore the duty of the trained philosopher to find an acceptable academic/philosophic platform to anchor the non-literary procedure involved in the method of philosophic sagacity. It is my thinking that in this enterprise, the *trained philosopher* gives the *form, style* and *taxonomy* while the *sage* gives the *content*.

The content provided by the sage, in whatever shape, precedes the form, style etc provided by the trained philosopher. Precisely, it is the content provided by the sage, and the eventual form emanating from the philosopher, that has generated heat. Can we trust the philosopher to provide the exact content of his interview with the sage? Is it possible to determine the point at which the content provided by the sage is modified or tampered with by the prejudices and preconceptions of the trained philosopher? Is there a way we can hear the sage directly without recurs to a 'middleman' such as the trained philosopher? Put succinctly, is there a way we can transmit philosophic knowledge from the traditional expert for universal consumption without the writing skill of an intermediary.?

Transmitting Philosophic Knowledge: The *Orukan* Example

Professor Henry Odera Oruka and his colleagues at the Nairobi University, Kenya popularized the method of philosophic sagacity, following their field research among the Luos of the Siaya District in Kenya. One basic issue that confronted Oruka's effort at reconstructing a philosophical tradition from his interview with Luo sages was the question of writing. Convinced that the Luos were not exactly late starters to the enterprise of philosophy, Oruka submits that:

To argue that Africa is having a late start in philosophy just because there are no written records of past philosophical

activities is, wrongly, to limit the sources from which one could detect traces of such activities⁹

Consequently, in sage philosophy, Oruka sets for himself the task of showing how it is absurd to reason that traditional Africa cannot have positive influence in the development of philosophy - one that is authentically philosophical - in modern Africa. Africans must be indifferent to traditional Africa. They must, to refine their philosophical ability and understanding, be uninfluenced or unguided by the languages and thoughts developed in traditional Africa¹⁰. The objective of sage philosophy of the *Orukan* kind is to get an *expert* understanding and explanation of the ways and means sages among the Luo of Kenya have addressed the above stated concerns.

The principal method used by the Kenyan sagacity school, as in most other sagacity projects is the method of conversation. "Oruka intends that the conversation be a cooperative process; the sage may not have thought about some issues until the interviewer raises them. The conversation, therefore, is a kind of midwifery..."¹¹. In this sense, stated by Oruka here, conversation is the tool used to uncover philosophy. The method of conversation is not entirely strange to philosophy. Indeed, a large part of Greek philosophy was based almost entirely on the conversation method. Is there anything wrong with conversation as a midwife of philosophy? My immediate reaction is that the method provides a raw material upon which philosophy can be built. The method is also useful when concrete information or opinions must be conveyed in primarily one direction. The method is equally useful when trying to draw out a repository of wisdom or knowledge from someone. It is this final sense that comes closest to the *Orukan* understanding of the task of conversation.

The conversation method has rendered the *Orukan* sagacity vulnerable to criticism. Bruce Janz takes up the gauntlet here. In his words:

Question and answer sessions do not tend to be good at two-way communication. They assume that questions can be asked in a relatively uncontroversial way (indeed, 'loaded' questions are seen as a defect of the method), which may not be the case... The question and answer interview tends to work better at identifying beliefs, communicating information, and establishing identity, than inquiring into meaning. It is not a conversation of peers, but presupposes an unequal power relationship.¹²

We are therefore reminded that the *Orukan* question and answer method is not a Socratic dialogue. The reason for this is because both the sage and the trained philosopher are not intellectual peers and that one does not get the sense that the dialogue partners are working cooperatively toward the truth.¹³ However, the point to be made here is that conversation as a method of uncovering knowledge does give knowledge. It is a way of transmitting knowledge. Janz is not calling conversation *per se* into question here; rather it is the validity and efficacy of the method that is being challenged. There is clear evidence of conversation as the process of communicating information from those who have it to those who do not. The argument is that conversation, as the very basis of transmitting philosophic knowledge from the sage must be free of encumbrances, especially when such encumbrances obscure our appreciation of the original ideas of the sage.

The principal encumbrance in the *Orukan* style of conversation in sage philosophy is that it is just a method. It does not allow anything more than the most basic exchange of information. Usually, the information is couched in a horizon of meanings, which are never investigated. Referring to the beliefs of the culture does not exhaust this horizon; indeed, this reference barely begins to inquire about the meaning of the positions expressed by the sage. The question of their meaning has to be raised, and the inequality of

power had to be raised and addressed before we can truly prepare sage philosophy for the task of setting a new agenda for transmitting philosophic knowledge.

My model of “conversation and transmission of knowledge” among the sages of Ekiti Yoruba is prompted by the attempt at rejuvenating the “question and answer style in conversation.”

Re-Modeling ‘Conversation’ for Sage Philosophy

At the risk of derailing from philosophy to social anthropology, I flirted with several methods of extracting ‘wisdom’ from traditional sages among the Ekiti Yoruba and communicating same, for philosophical consumption and appreciation. I was convinced I would find traditional people who were not just peddlers of popular wisdom, but who were equally capable of transcending the first order thought to create a didactic order from common sense beliefs. Although I do not agree with the distinction made by Oruka between a popular sage and a didactic sage,¹⁴ I adopted the classification for pedagogical reason, the same reason Oruka retroactively claimed he made the classification.¹⁵ The next task was to design a method of dialogue that would be free of the encumbrances associated with the *Orukan* sage philosophy. Oruka, in his criticism of Marcel Griaule’s *Conversation with Ogotemelli* and Hallen-Sodipo’s *Onisegun* had alluded to the fact that the conversation between the professional philosopher and the expert was lopsided in favor of the professional philosopher. On this score, the responses of the sages (experts) showed signs of timidity and inconsistencies. On the strength of this and other reasons, Oruka rejects the findings of Griaule and Hallen-Sodipo as truly representative of the process of transmitting philosophic knowledge.

One would have expected Oruka’s method to be different from those he criticized. Indeed, he intended it to be different. The role of the professional philosopher, according to Oruka is to act as the provocateur to the sage. The interviewer is expected to use the tape recorder to record everything discussed. The sage is also expected

to discuss freely and sometimes, go outside the immediate scope of the question asked. As much as possible, the sage is to be encouraged to think independently and even challenge the basic assumptions of the interviewer. The autonomy of thought Oruka gives to his sages was suppose to lead the way for a conversation between peers, lacking in the conversations conducted by Griuale and Hallen-Sodipo.

Oruka's intention is clear. The sage does the thinking; the philosopher is a second party, merely channeling the direction of the thought process. The promise of the *Orukan* method of ensuring freedom in the conversation with his sages did not exactly lead to a method that totally avoids the pitfalls identified with the methods adopted by Griulle and Hallen-Sodipo. Nothing changed in the relationship between the professional philosopher and the expert (sage). It remained a conversation between two unequal partners, with the interviewer (Oruka) acting in a paternalistic manner, the sage still did not have the freedom to discuss freely, he could not use his own concepts and terms, he was not allowed to determine what he wanted to discuss, as the interviewer always introduced the subject of discussion. Rarely did the sage ask the interviewer his own questions, in a truly dialectical fashion. The sage never truly enjoyed a dialectical or intellectual game with the interviewer.

Even if the sage has a fulfilled dialectical discussion with the interviewer, it does not obliterate the basic issue of this paper. We still have to rely entirely on the report of the professional philosopher for our knowledge of the 'wisdom' of the sage in question. Odera Oruka identifies his father, Oruka Rang'inya as one of the sages whose views on numerous issues are recorded on tape and transmitted to us, after a transcription and translation by his son, Odera, as truly belonging to the father and not to the son. For me, the greatest challenge to the method of philosophic sagacity is neither the philosophical quality of the ideas expressed by the sages nor the process of identifying and selecting a sage, but with the mode of transmission of the ideas expressed by the sages. It would be a

wonderful idea to hear the sages directly, without the luxury of an 'interpreter'. It would be equally enthralling to leave the ideas of the sages in the languages in which they were expressed, without the luxury of translation. If you wanted to learn the wisdom in the ideas of Oruka Rang'inya, for example, you first have to learn the Luo language, the same way you have to learn German to get at the heart of the philosophy of Immanuel Kant. If the sages in traditional Africa must lay claim to didactic wisdom and if the professional philosopher must help to midwife this process, then Oruka's method of conversation and transmission of knowledge from the sage to the world needs rejuvenation.

In spite of Oruka's effort to refine and modify the previous method of conversation and presentation of the views of sages, we are still confronted with the basic problems of philosophic sagacity. It is therefore necessary to reflect on the method of sagacity, especially as it relates to the methodology for recognizing, engaging with, understanding and describing expert knowledge as a manifestation that often exceeds language and writing. I am attempting to do this with my own research findings among the Ekiti Yoruba, South West Nigeria.

The Ekiti Yoruba Experience

I speak the Yoruba language quite fluently. However, I do not regard myself as an expert in the language. I also do not consider myself properly schooled in the nuances of the people. I therefore entered the research knowing full well my limitations. To make up for this inadequacy, I engaged the services of a research associate whom I consider an expert in Yoruba language, having taught the language at the university level for over a decade. Because of the various dialects in Yoruba language, I specifically made sure that my associate was from that part of Yoruba land covered by my research. I was to be responsible for the form and direction of the interview, the sage, the content, the research associate, the medium of communication.

I designed the focus of conversation in such a way that I would play minimal part in the conversation. I did not design questions, but topics.¹⁶ I also did not make any formal appointment with the sages, this was necessary as not to make the sage over-elaborate on issues that demanded spontaneous reflection. I was looking for sages who were capable of second order thought and whose views would be transmitted without the dilution of a trained philosopher. In this regard, I also avoided the overt display of my tape recorder. The recorder was well hidden away from the sage. To the uninitiated, my conversation could well have passed as an informal discussion between two friends, except that the issues under discussion were of philosophical significance. I am of the opinion that had Socrates been aware that his views were being recorded at the Athenian Agora, he would probably have thought in another direction different from what has been ascribed to him. The tape recorder, overtly displayed, reduces the sage's freedom to think and express him/herself freely. In a funny way, too, writing may diminish the freedom of expression of philosophical ideas thought to be contrary to the prevailing pattern of thought. My experience among the sages in Ekitiland is such that they were often apologetic about expressing views different from the consensus in the community. With the tape recorder present conspicuously, the sages would most likely have toed the line of communal consensus.

I did not think I would find very many sages, worthy of the title. And I did not. I was more interested with getting the ideas expressed by the sages transmitted in such a way that it would remain those of the sage and the sage alone. No one quarrels with the fact that philosophy grows as a response to challenges posed by the environment or as a reaction to preceding ideas. The sage is not immune to events in his community, therefore, the raw material for him to reflect and philosophize about are immediately present to him. He may not be literate; hence, he may not have access to preceding philosophical ideas as contained in written texts. The trained philosopher provides this, sometimes unwittingly in the way

he formulates his question (in the case of Oruka) and topics (in the case of this writer). Whichever of the two is responsible for stimulating the sage's philosophical reflection, the sage can claim ownership of the views expressed. However, his claim to sole ownership of the views expressed is diminished by the post interview activities of the trained philosopher. Let us consider this example. To prove this point, I deliberately asked a direct question from sage Omodara, who incidentally was a chief, the Asamo of Are-Afao, a small town 30kms north of Ado Ekiti, the State capital.

Question: What do you think about death? Is it a good thing?

Sage Omodara: Death is very good. It is very good because it gives life its meaning. Without death, life itself is meaningless. It also makes life interesting because it creates suspense and mystery about living.

Question: Is death the absolute end of life; is there life after death?

Sage Omodara: We just say what we feel like saying. Nobody has gone and come back to recount the experiences. My own belief is that death is the end of everything.¹⁷

What we see from the response of chief Omodara is direct answers to direct questions. The elaboration of a well thought-out reflection on the question of death is not present. We can then contrast this with the response to of sage Ilori, a 70-year-old sage from the town of Orin Ekiti also in Ekiti State, South west Nigeria. The topic was "Death."

Sage Ilori: Death has always been a major mystery confronting man. Sometimes I ask myself the question: why was man created to go through the hazards of life only to die, sometimes, at the prime of one's life. It probably means that man has no ultimate purpose here on earth. It can also mean that man is serving a punishment he committed before he was born. The very idea of death may also mean that God

wishes man to lack some of his own qualities, especially immortality. If man was really created in the image of God, as the bible says, one expects him to share some of His attributes. It is therefore either God did not create man or that He was scared to let man into the secret of everlasting life. However, if man were to live forever, he would be evil. Death, in some ways curtails the evil in man. Man is afraid of what he would become after life. This may after all be a useful purpose served by death.¹⁸

From two responses, it is clear that sage Omodara was constrained in his response by the need to answer the questions posed directly, without expatiating on the reasons for reaching his conclusion. On the other hand, sage Ilori had the latitude to explore and dilate the concept of death, simply because he had ‘a blank cheque’ to reflect on and clarify his ideas.

While it serves a useful purpose to show the differences in the response of sages to questions posed directly and to topics freely introduced, the purpose of citing these examples is not entirely aimed at that goal. The more important issue for me is that of the ownership of the ideas peddled by both sages. Both sages were recorded on tape (without their knowing it) and both were talking about the concept of death. Weeks after the conversation with both sages, the texts were transcribed from tape in written form, into Yoruba language. Days after, the Yoruba transcription was translated into English language.

In the process of preparing this paper and my final research report, I had good reasons to compare the original text on tape with the transcription and translation. In more cases than one, I had cause to disagree with not just the translation but also with the transcription. My research associate and I had endless arguments about the proper meaning and function of certain Yoruba words and terms that the sages employed. In most of the cases where we had disagreements about words and terms, we settled for my interpretation. One such

example is in the meaning (contextual or otherwise) of the words: “Ogbon”, “Oye”, and “Imo”. Sometimes these words are used as synonyms. The sages sometimes used them interchangeably. The truth, however, is that the words convey meanings that, if interpreted differently, would obscure the original idea of the sage.

I am not sure the sages would agree with some of the interpretations I have subjected their ideas to.¹⁹ I suspect some of them would reject entirely my interpretation of their original ideas as contained in the tape-recorded text. The professional philosopher, sometimes, unwittingly dresses up the response of the sage in the nuances of western philosophy, in an effort to make it intelligible to the western audience and in the process, becoming a part owner of the ideas ascribed to the sage. I am convinced Odera Oruka and Ochieng-Odhiambo are guilty of this, especially as it relates to their interview with sages Oruka Rang’inya and Rose Ondhewe Odhiambo respectively. Odhiambo’s interview with sage Ondhewe particularly raises some doubts about the sage’s sole ownership of the ideas ascribed to him. Let us consider this example:

Ochieng-Odhiambo... There are however some people who think that only change is a reality, and others who hold that it is only permanence which is a reality. What do you have to say on the two positions?

Sage Ondhewe Odhiambo: They are both wrong. If change was the only reality how would one ever know anything. If I was ever changing then at no point would I ever be myself. Knowledge of something assumes that that thing has some inherent characteristics (*kido na oklokre*) that make it what it is and nothing else. It is difficult to conceptualize a word where everything was changing every time. Such a position would be false.²⁰

It would be interesting to hear the original version of the interview conducted on tape, between Ochieng Odhiambo and the

sage. My suspicion is that either Ochieng was putting words in the 'mouth' of the sage or the sage was sufficiently literate to have read the works of Heraclitus and Parmenides. I am not in any way doubting the ability of the sage to reflect as critically as Heraclitus and Parmenides, even more so. What I doubt is if indeed, these were the thought of the sage in question.

The doubt about the originality of the ideas of the sages, the loss of the true meaning of the ideas and words employed by sages during the process of transcription and translation, the question of true ownership of the ideas so ascribed to the sages are indeed, some of the real problems confronting the method of philosophic sagacity. Having found the sages, interviewed them and pedagogically distinguished between the folk sage and the didactic sage, the real challenge would then be ensuring the sages are actually the people doing the philosophizing. Therein lies the problem of transmission of philosophic knowledge from the oral text to an acceptable medium of academic acceptability and respectability.

The Way Forward

Bruce Janz did a scathing critique of sage philosophy in his 'Hermeneutical Basis of Sage Philosophy'²¹. In spite of his pungent critique of the entire method of philosophic sagacity, he ended on a note of optimism. He says, '... a critique of the methodology of sage philosophy should not be taken as a disparagement of the project in general. This is a call to think deeper about the process, rather than a call to abandon it'²². The method has overcome some of the problems associated with African philosophy. It has responded quite adequately to the challenge of producing individual Africans who are capable of didactic wisdom, in the mould of western philosophers. In another way, it has also responded to the attempt foster western theories and concepts on Africa. However, in the manner of trial and error, while solving some of the problems confronting African philosophy, it ended up creating new ones. Our task is to keep rethinking the method of sagacity in order to guarantee

the outcome of the enterprise as truly philosophical. One aspect of the rethinking is to appreciate the fact that philosophic sagacity need not always depend on oral tradition. Sages can also be found in literate traditions. Were sages only to be restricted to non-literate traditions, they would all too soon be extinct as more and more traditional societies become literate. I agree with most writers on philosophic sagacity that illiteracy is not a necessary condition for sagacity. There is a possibility for sagacity both in pre-literate and literate societies.²³

The simple solution of educating the sages in the western literary tradition, to enable them read and write has often been suggested. The proponents of this solution have reasoned that this will enable the sages communicate directly, avoiding the often maligned role of the trained philosopher in the midwifery process. The thinking is that once the sage can write down his own ideas, unencumbered by the process of transcription and translation, the entire enterprise of doubting the ownership of the ideas put forward by a sage would cease.

True, many may no longer doubt the owner of the idea so ascribed to a sage, but many more would doubt if what the sage puts forward is truly African philosophy. The tragedy of this is that while the solution seems to overcome the problem of ownership, it actually perpetuates others. The entire purpose of finding sages in their natural habitat would be defeated if they were to be first exposed to western literary tradition before discussing philosophy. Exposing the sage to western literary tradition creates another kind of tussle for the ownership of the philosophy propounded by the sage. This time, it would not only be a tussle between the sage and the trained philosopher (who acts as a provocateur), but between ideas in the western philosophical tradition and those that are African. This procedure also strengthens the argument of those who say philosophy began in Africa only when Europe introduced western form of literacy to the continent. It also supports the erroneous position that writing is necessary for philosophy to take place.

I have already discussed in some detail, the problems associated with the tape recorder method of philosophic sagacity. For many practitioners of philosophic sagacity, the tape recorder is an essential companion. I equally used it extensively in my fieldwork among the Ekiti sages. However, I had a joker I planned to test.

After an intensive review of my interview with sage Ilori at Orin Ekiti, I found his ideas sufficiently didactic that I wanted him to speak directly to the world about basic and fundamental issues I consider philosophical. I therefore went back to Orin Ekiti, this time armed with a video camera. Again, the camera was concealed as much as possible from the sage²⁴. Sage Ilori and I engaged in one of the longest philosophical discussions I have ever had with a non-professional philosopher. With tape rolling, sage Ilori expounded ideas that some of the acclaimed western philosophers would envy.

I need to emphasize here again that it is not the ideas of sage Ilori that really enthralled me, but the fact that the sage could now be heard and seen directly, in his own language, in his own natural setting. Anyone who wants to know the philosophy of sage Ilori can simply ask for the tape, watch and listen to him speak, criticize him, if need be, subject his thought to the rigorous scrutiny as required by philosophy. Watching and listening to the tape leaves no one in doubt as to the ownership of the ideas expressed. It also makes the ideas available to the world of philosophy for philosophical criticism and scrutiny.

If you must understand sage Ilori, you have to learn to read and may be speak Yoruba. The same way some of us had to learn some German to understand Kant and some French to appreciate Rousseau.

Notes and References

¹Peter Bodunrin, 'The Question of African Philosophy' in H.O Oruka (ed) *Sage Philosophy: Indigenous Thinkers and Modern Debate on African Philosophy* (Nairobi: African Center for Technology Studies, 1991) pp163-177

² Lansana Keita, 'Contemporary African Philosophy: The Search for a Method' in *African Philosophy: The Essential Readings* Serequeberhan, T (ed) (New York: Paragon House, 1991) pp132-155

³Peter Bodunrin, op cit p.165

⁴Jay Van Hook, 'Kenyan Sage Philosophy: A Review and Critique', *The Philosophical Forum* 27 1995. pp 54-55

⁵Paulin Hountondji, *African Philosophy: Myth and Reality* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996) p.56

⁶Henry Oruka distinguishes between two kinds of sages, the sage as a peddler of popular wisdom and the sage as a second order thinker. Oruka's objection to other kinds of sagacity stems mainly from the fact that others did not make any distinction between the two kinds of sages. In the process, the other kinds of sagacity did little or nothing to purge the method philosophic sagacity from the charge of being ethno philosophy in disguise.

⁷Odera Oruka (ed), *Sage Philosophy: Indigenous Thinkers and Modern Debate on African Philosophy* (Nairobi: African Center for Technology Studies, 1991) p.23

⁸Peter Bodunrin, op.cit p.169

⁹Odera Oruka, op.cit p.54

¹⁰ ibid, p.54

¹¹ Bruce Janz, 'Thinking Wisdom: The Hermeneutical Basis of Sage Philosophy' in Emmanuel Eze (ed) *African Philosophy* Vol 11 Number 1 June 1998. p.66

¹² ibid, p.68

¹³ ibid, p.68

¹⁴ Muiyiwa Falaiye, 'Popular Wisdom vs. Didactic Wisdom: Some

comments on Oruka's Philosophic Sagacity' in Anke Grannes and Kai Kresse (eds), *Sagacious Reasoning H. Oruka in Memoriam* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang Publishers, 1997) pp 163-170

¹⁵Presumably in a response to my article, 'Popular wisdom...' Oruka explains the purpose for which a pedagogical classification of sages was necessary. See Kai Kresse's interview with Odera Oruka in the Epilogue of *Sagacious Reasoning H. Oruka in Memoriam* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang Publishers, 1997)

¹⁶The topics discussed by the sages include the following: God and divinities, marriage, purpose and goal of humans on earth, freedom and determinism, the notion of truth, death and dying, poverty, democracy and equality, female circumcision etc. Some of the sages also freely raised and discussed, in some detail, the question of witchcraft and ancestral worship.

¹⁷A detailed transcript of the conversation with sage Omodara is available on audiotape.

¹⁸Conversation with sage Ilori is available on both audio and videotapes. There are plans to put the videotapes on VCD and DVD.

¹⁹One unsung problem with the method of philosophic sagacity is that researchers hardly ever go back to the sages for their approval of the final product of the conversation. In most cases, the sages do not know what happens after the researcher leaves the venue of the conversation. When the sages were told I was going to publish my conversation with them, some of them insisted on a preview of the conversation before publication. I hope to oblige.

²⁰For details of this interview see F. Ochieng Odhiambo in *Sagacious Reasoning H. Oruka in Memoriam* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang Publishers, 1997) p. 175

²¹Bruce Janz, op.cit p.70

²²ibid, p.70

²³Odera Oruka (ed), op.cit, p.36

²⁴Concealing the video camera was a tough task. The cinematographer hid on top of a hill and relied on the zoom lens to

get a focus. The quality of the picture is not Hollywood standard. However, it served our purpose.

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