

Indigenous Philosophy



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APA NEWSLETTER ON

Indigenous Philosophy

AGNES B. CURRY, EDITOR

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FROM THE EDITOR

Starting Differently

Agnes Curry

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This edition of the *APA Newsletter on Indigenous Philosophy* features some of the papers presented at the special panel, sponsored by the Committee on Indigenous Philosophers, on *Listening to Ourselves: A Multilingual Anthology of African Philosophy*, edited by Chike Jeffers, held January 6, 2017, at the APA Eastern Division meeting in Baltimore.

Four panelists spoke: Albert Mosley, Professor of Philosophy at Smith College; Joseph Osei, Professor of Philosophy and Religion at Fayetteville State University/UNC; Gail Presbey, Professor of Philosophy at University of Detroit Mercy; and Betty Wambui, Assistant Professor, Africana and Latino Studies and Women's and Gender Studies, SUNY Oneonta. Two of the panelists' papers, those by Osei and Presbey, are featured here, along with some remarks by Jeffers, looking back after the book's publication. We hope to publish the remaining papers in a future edition of the newsletter.

While Jeffers' groundbreaking anthology was published in 2013, the volume had its genesis back in 2005, the same year that Anne Waters and I proposed that SUNY Press start a series exploring the fact that indigenous philosophy, in the Americas and globally, remains a *living* enterprise. Anne and I remain most grateful to then-acquisitions editor Jane Bunker for her vision, and to Andrew Kenyon and SUNY Press for their continued support.

According to Jeffers, it was Professor Kwasi Wiredu who suggested that he contact Waters and myself, and my correspondence stretching at least as far back as August 2006 traverses countries, continents, challenges, dilemmas, and victories. The typographical challenges are perhaps just the tip of the iceberg; the list of participants and translators shifted through the years. And, of course, we lost contributor Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze himself mid-stream, a loss that also touched me personally as he had been my brilliant and kind classmate in graduate school at Fordham. But there were other challenges worth noting. I wish to focus on the fact that in his remarks included in this edition, Jeffers observes that some philosophers he approached to include as contributors declined or dropped out, not because they thought the project lacked worth, but because they were too daunted by the prospect of writing philosophy in their mother tongue.

Bridging the gaps—conceptual and existential—between the language of one's academic training and professional identity, and one's "home" language, seems formidable. I don't know this personally; rather, I speak as a Xicana who never adequately learned her mother's tongue of Spanish—but who was once told by one of my philosophy professors that nothing of philosophical merit had been written in Spanish. I was told that the language itself, while emotionally expressive, was not conducive to the articulation of rational thought. And that's the European language! Let's not even broach considering the forgotten great-great-great grandmother's tongue, buried under a family history of baptism, shame, and a certain overcompensation. Obviously, so much of vital importance for living together in a more fully shared, less colonized world persists, and will continue to persist, within the gaps. In a time of perhaps unprecedented challenge to the profession as a whole, and to academia, the gaps I speak of also mean that for some of our students, philosophy presents itself as a difficult yet real path, while for others, it's neither possible nor desirable. These gaps need to be excavated and built within, with bridges constructed within and without, for the sake of shared survival. This book continues this excavation/building project.

I hope it's possible to deny credence to any perspective that denies rationality to entire languages while at the same time recognizing that languages, insofar as they are related to forms of life, can offer interestingly different possibilities for expressing voice and style—and thus agency and value. Jeffers notes in his remarks that one of his most interestingly satisfying experiences in the aftermath of the book is the reception of the stylistic differences as positive possibilities, for example, between Wiredu's English prose versus his prose rendered in Akan. For the Akan readers Chike described, Wiredu's sophistication and precision remain apparent, but in a different "key," so to speak. Jeffers notes, of Wiredu writing in Akan: "This person, who has sometimes struck many as overly Westernized, especially in some of his critiques of tradition and of certain approaches to tradition in his early work, struck the readers I asked to read his essay as the consummate Akan elder" projecting an alternative *philosophical* image, "rooted completely in the non-Westernized context inhabited by the keepers of Akan tradition, rather than the British or Anglo-American form of philosophical sophistication that one might associate with Wiredu's style, even in those times when what he is pursuing in English is *conceptual decolonization*." This gap, between the sort of conceptual decolonization that is possible in English, which remains in the final analysis an abstract description, versus the *enactment* possible in

the alternative language, seems to me the most important and also, possibly, most dangerous gap.

To illustrate, I'll talk about the fact that in one of the turns along its road to publication, Jeffers had to respond to concerns raised by one of his anonymous readers, about moments in the essays that can, from a dominant perspective, seem "insufficiently critical" of traditional inheritances, including social mores and religious ideas. On one hand, the critique was extended in all good spirit, and I think it made the volume better. But on the other, it perhaps missed the most important and most radical element of the volume. In his introduction to the volume, crafted in some response to the concern, Jeffers sketches how "deference" to tradition is not unthinking submission, but is rather a necessary first step of "deep respect that commits one to giving at least the first word to the object of deference, if not always the last word."¹ He continues: "This is entirely appropriate for an anthology motivated by the goal of demonstrating how philosophy looks and sounds when articulated in indigenous African languages, the tongues within which African traditions appear and gain shape most naturally not as caricatured barbarisms or exotic curiosities but as the necessary background and grounding for habitual forms of thought, expression, and action."² As the volume illustrates, the methodology proceeding from this starting point of deep respect then includes steps of sifting, with an aim to "praise and keep what's best while criticizing and rejecting that which is unacceptable."³

This *method* is intertwined with what Russell Dale of Lehman College interprets in his January 2016 review as the overarching *topic* of the volume.⁴ Dale claims that "there is a clearly discernible topic in this collection which Europeans don't really have a name for: how to dialectically process traditional life with foreign impositions from a dominating power and its culture. This process is not something that Europeans have a historical self-consciousness of, so there is no simple European-sounding term for this."⁵ Because there's no name in the master tongues, it falls into the gaps. Dale makes an attempt to name, and in the process hones in on the issue of critique and criticality: "Perhaps *critical philosophy* captures something of the idea: scrutinizing any alleged givenness."⁶ But insofar as there are obvious "serious historical differences"⁷ between European and African experience (which Dale envelops under the term "domination by capital"⁸) it bears repeating that what may be the *most* radical and critical step of all—the taking of Indigenous selves, languages, and forms of life *seriously*—can almost altogether drop from sight as insufficiently critical.

In that respect, I'll recall a moment in the journey to publication. In a letter, Jeffers described some of the changes to the volume in response to the anonymous Reader's critiques:

After discussions with my contributors, which confirmed their and my desire to keep the essays substantially the same, I have extended the introduction by adding a thorough discussion of the way that writing in an indigenous language has encouraged the philosophers in this anthology to

take up a type of perspective that some may find jarring at first in its distance from the approach to religion, tradition, and racial difference generally found in European-language philosophy. I have emphasized that this distance does not amount to an abdication of the critical perspective that is integral to work in philosophy, but rather a *different starting point*.⁹

To me, as both a philosopher and a teacher, a vast and possibly more humane and wisdom-bearing terrain becomes visible when proceeding from that different starting point. I want to thank Chike, the contributors and their translators, commentators and reviewers, SUNY Press, and everyone involved in this project for their work toward making that starting point a more viable place from which to stand. And now let us continue the journey.

NOTES

1. Chike Jeffers, "Introduction," *Listening to Ourselves: A Multilingual Anthology of African Philosophy* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2013), xvii.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., xviii.
4. Russell Dale, Review of *Listening to Ourselves: A Multilingual Anthology of African Philosophy*, "Science and Society," 80, no. 1 (Jan 2016): 135–37.
5. Ibid., 136.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
9. Chike Jeffers, letter to Andrew Kenyon, SUNY Press, July 4, 2011.

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

We invite you to submit your work for consideration for publication in the fall 2017 newsletter. We welcome comments and responses to work published in this or past issues. We also welcome work that speaks to philosophical, professional, and community concerns regarding indigenous philosophers and philosophers of all global indigenous nations. Editors do not limit the format of what can be submitted; we accept a range of submission formats, including and not limited to papers, opinion editorials, transcribed dialogue interviews, book reviews, poetry, links to oral and video resources, cartoons, artwork, satire, parody, and other diverse formats.

In all cases, however, any references should follow the *Chicago Manual of Style* and include endnotes rather than in-text citations except for extensive reference to a single source. For further information, please see the Guidelines for Authors available on the APA website.

The submission deadline for the fall 2017 newsletter is June 15, 2017. Please submit copies electronically to Agnes Curry at acurry@usj.edu.

ARTICLES

On Listening to Ourselves

Chike Jeffers

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The idea behind *Listening to Ourselves: A Multilingual Anthology of African Philosophy* can be described most simply as a matter of moving African philosophy from talk to action, although that is perhaps simple but misleading, because the action here is precisely a form of talk, that is, communicating in African languages. What I wanted to see was African philosophy move from talking about what it might mean to do philosophy in African languages to actually doing it. As someone who has always been fascinated by language, the debate about the importance of using African languages in African philosophy fascinated me as soon as I learned about it. I remember reading Samuel Imbo's helpful discussion of the topic in his *Introduction to African Philosophy* (Rowman & Littlefield, 1998). I remember being very impressed by Kwasi Wiredu's discussions of the relationship between the use of indigenous languages in philosophy and the accomplishment of decolonization at a conceptual level. I think, however, that it may have been an interview with Wiredu by Kai Kresse that really helped to crystallize the idea for the anthology in my mind.

In this interview, which I quote in the introduction to the anthology, Kresse says to Wiredu, "Ngugi, of course, concluded that he would, as a consequence of his critique of the colonized mentality, stop writing in English and write in Gikuyu only. This he does, and his works are translated into English and other languages. Now, if that is a sound conclusion, why are you not going a similar way and philosophizing in Akan?"¹ What Kresse does here, I think, is point out how Ngugi, in his famous decision to stop writing at least his artistic work in English, moved from talk to action with regard to the question of using African languages. So what does Wiredu say in response to this question about why he had apparently not followed suit? Well, he begins by displaying what I took to be a very virtuous but nevertheless misguided humility: "I fear that I am not as important as Ngugi, so that if I wrote texts in Akan I do not think anybody would be going to translate them."² I take it that the existence of this book and the great work of Joseph Osei in translating Wiredu's essay is sufficient to have invalidated this worry. But he goes on to raise more substantial concerns: "apart from that, Ghana alone has 46 languages. So, if I were to teach philosophy at the University of Ghana, Legon, in Akan, that would be a real problem. The idea is just not practicable at this point. Even if Ghana had only one language, what about Bodunrin in Nigeria and Odera Orika . . . in Kenya? What would happen, between me and them? So, it is just not practicable now for us to work exclusively in our own languages."³

I believe what hit me all those years back reading that sentence is the question of what happens when we remove the term "exclusively." I agreed with Wiredu that we need to avoid setting up, as I put it in the anthology's introduction, "intellectual walls of division, forcing African

philosophers to write only for the tiny audiences that would result from working *exclusively* in their own languages."⁴ But it seemed to me that if the move to exclusivity could be viewed as a kind of imprisonment, so too could we view as imprisonment or unfreedom the treatment of the pragmatic reasons for using European languages as a kind of standing negation of the imperative to write in African languages. A freer, better future, then, at least in my view, would be one in which it remains common that African philosophers use French and English and even other European languages like German and Italian, but in which it becomes equally common that they produce some of their work in languages like Wolof, Akan, Luo, Amharic, Gikuyu, and Igbo. The only way for such a future world to come into being, though, is for African philosophers now to begin showing that it can and should be normal and common to produce some of your work in your mother tongue or in an African lingua franca like Swahili. This was the motivation behind the anthology: to begin showing that it can be done, that it ought to be done, and that it ought to become normal.

In the book's acknowledgments, I recount the story of encountering the late Emmanuel Eze at a conference while I was in my first year of graduate school, back in 2005, after I had first developed the idea for the anthology in my mind. I thought of how he had edited important anthologies of African philosophy in the past and was excited to tell him about my idea, because at that time, I had not given any thought whatsoever to the idea that I might bring this project to fruition myself. My hope was that Eze, as an actual active scholar, might like the idea and take on the task of making it a reality. He listened to me describe the project, told me he liked it, and then told me I should do it. It was one of those moments where someone unlocks potential in you didn't know you had. I am forever grateful to him and it was, of course, without question that the anthology would be dedicated to his memory.

Now, between 2005 and 2013, when the book finally came out, is eight years, so clearly the project took a long time to complete. Besides being an initial inspiration for the project and participating in it, I have to acknowledge Kwasi Wiredu for having led me to pitch the project to the editors of the special series in which the book was published: SUNY Press' *Living Indigenous Philosophies* series. It was important to me that a respected academic press publish the book because it shows that publishing work in African languages does not automatically mean avoiding the venues for publication that garner credit for tenure and other forms of academic review.

There were interesting challenges in bringing the anthology together, of course. The one I feel it is most important to note is how many people declined, not because they were busy and certainly not because they didn't find the project interesting but simply because of how extremely tough the prospect of writing in their mother tongue seemed to them. For those of us whose mother tongue is English or German or other such languages, the idea that writing in one's mother tongue could present insurmountable difficulties is difficult to understand, but it is an important reality. To write philosophy in an African language, even for those who not only continue to speak but even read some material in the

African language they are familiar with, involves breaking with one's entire philosophical training, as all professional African philosophers have been trained to read and write philosophy in European languages.

One of the fascinating discoveries that came out of the process of making the book for me was learning the significance of how one's literary voice may change when writing in an African rather than European language. It is well known, for example, that Wiredu is one of the greatest living African philosophers and that part of his brilliance lies in his sophisticated yet always clear and precise prose, a style that has always led me, and many others, I assume, to think of his philosophical style as closely identified with the image of the ideal professional philosopher. One might wonder, then, how this image will come across in Akan. Well, from sharing his essay with Akan-speaking individuals, I have found that, while it remains the case that they perceive his writing as sophisticated and precise, it is a completely different kind of sophistication and precision. This person, who has sometimes struck many as overly Westernized, especially in some of his critiques of tradition and of certain approaches to tradition in his early work, struck the readers I asked to read his essay as the consummate Akan elder. Love Ghunney, a young woman who helped edit his essay in order to put in the special characters of Akan where they needed to be, told me how he sounded like her grandfather. Another friend told me it felt like listening to wise old people in the village. Wiredu therefore projected to them a philosophical image, but one rooted completely in the non-Westernized context inhabited by the keepers of Akan tradition, rather than the British or Anglo-American form of philosophical sophistication that one might associate with Wiredu's style, even in those times when what he is pursuing in English is *conceptual decolonization*. These reactions, which I found deeply satisfying to encounter, remind us of the exciting possibilities of African-language work in philosophy and the way such work has, of course, always been the logical endpoint of the project of conceptual decolonization.

NOTES

1. "Language Matters! Decolonization, Multilingualism, and African Languages in the Making of African Philosophy: Kwasi Wiredu in Dialogue with Kai Kresse," *Polylog: Forum for Intercultural Philosophy* 2 (2000). Available at <http://them.polylog.org/2/dwk-en.htm>
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Chike Jeffers, "Introduction," in *Listening to Ourselves: A Multilingual Anthology of African Philosophy*, ed. Chike Jeffers (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2013), xiv-xv.

The Philosophical Significance of Listening to Ourselves

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INTRODUCTION

My comments are aimed at stimulating discussion on why listening to ourselves is philosophically significant by focusing mostly on Wiredu's contribution on "Good and Evil" and briefly on those of Professor Ochieng-Odhiambo, the philosophical significance of Naming in Luo, and the late Professor E. C. Eze's contribution on "Word and Mind" from the Igbo worldview. The focus on Wiredu is not merely the result of our common Akan identity but primarily because of my familiarity with his argument, being his former student, as well as the translator of his ethics chapter, "Good and Evil" from English to Akan.

A. SUMMARY OF PROFESSOR KWASI WIREDU'S CONTRIBUTION, "PAPA NE BONE," OR "GOOD AND EVIL"

By way of thought experiment, Professor Kwasi Wiredu defines "good" and "evil" in terms of the consequences and intentions of actions for self and others. Finding neither approach nor their synthesis adequate for defining morality, he makes a case for supplementing both of them with customary practices, using examples from the Akan traditional culture of Ghana.

While agreeing with J. S. Mill that maximizing consequences in terms of happiness or well-being is important for morality, Wiredu does not agree that it is (always) necessary or sufficient.¹ As a case in point, he cites the Akan custom of mutual help labor or *nnoboa*, which is morally good for the Akan who understands and appreciates it as a form of moral reciprocity, but not wrong or evil on the part of an English car dealer in London who fails to use it for his business. To show that avoiding pain is not necessarily a good measure of right doing, he cites the case of a sick child who needs a painful injection to get well. As painful as it might be, the parent does a good thing in choosing the injection on the child's behalf since it is necessary for the child's well-being, under the given circumstance. Wiredu also shows that an action with a bad consequence is not necessarily judged as bad or evil if it has a good motive or intent behind it.² He illustrates this in the case of a person who had the good intention of rescuing a child in distress, about to fall off a rock, but ended up killing the child by a terrible mistake.

Similarly, while agreeing with Kant that a good intention is important for morality, he does not think it is (always) necessary or sufficient. Despite this reservation, he maintains Kant's maxim, which he terms "First Law," should be used as the first test of every moral thought or action. By Kant's principle in this context, he is referring to the principle of universalizability, which is often compared with the Golden Rule. An indigenous Akan version of

this is well known and frequently applied in dealing with injustice or *kwasiabuo* in Akan. To underscore his thesis that customs help in determining right and wrong, he cites several examples of customs that are right in some places but wrong in others, such as different patterns of marriage, including polyandry, polygamy, or monogamy.

In sum, an action that aims at maximizing the well-being of one's self as well as the well-being of others in a way that is consistent with the (Universal) First Law is more likely to be good than any others.

B: SIX REASONS WHY LISTENING TO OURSELVES IS PHILOSOPHICALLY SIGNIFICANT

Listening to ourselves as philosophers can begin as an inter-ethnic practice within a common linguistic community and expanded, eventually, to an intra-ethnic exercise among Africana philosophers as well as the inter-cultural or global level utilizing various contemporary means of translation and communication, including print and digital media. The benefits, when the initial dynamic circles are made maximally inclusive by gradual expansion, can be numerous and highly impactful in at least seven different ways:

- 1) By listening to ourselves, as Continental and Diaspora Africans and non-Africans, we sense awareness of concrete examples of authentic and indigenous African philosophers at work (including some of our illiterate wise elders and ancestors); and we thereby affirm the ontological proposition that the existence of African Philosophy as an intellectual discipline or discourse is real, and not an illusion.
- 2) Therefore, by listening to ourselves we challenge and refute the skeptical or rejectionist views associated with Aristotle, Hume, Kant, Hegel, and others who doubted or still doubt the intellectual ability or rationality of the African, or the so-called "Other" to philosophize by utilizing logic in reasoning and argumentation.³
- 3) By listening to ourselves, we demonstrate to those who believe that African philosophy does not constitute philosophy proper—because it is not analytic, critical, or reflective, or that it is the product of Western mental conditioning through colonization—that professional African philosophers are not only capable of independent and critical thinking, but are also actively engaged in philosophical decolonization and liberation while also contributing to the global philosophical discourse and problem-solving.
- 4) Listening to ourselves as African and Western philosophers, Eastern philosophers, Native American, or non-native Americans affirms not only the universality of philosophy as a discipline, but also our common rationality and, for that matter, our common humanity and ontological equality. While nothing can convince the dogmatic racist

about his or her racist beliefs towards the African, including African Americans, the non-dogmatic racist might finally give up his or her opposition to racial equality after listening to these and other African philosophers doing philosophy in their native, non-Western tongues. He might finally come to appreciate Black Lives Matter, the new Civil Rights Movement born out of struggle at the beginning of the twenty-first century in response to police brutality against unarmed black youth or what the late Professor Akwasi Agyemang of the University of Ghana rightly termed "official lawlessness."⁴

- 5) By listening to ourselves we begin to appreciate the widespread similarities of our African beliefs and customs that affirm our common identity based on our common culture and worldview in terms of Wittgenstein's Family Resemblance Theory.

For example, there are four levels of Naming among Luos (of Kenya, East Africa) compared with Akan naming (in Ghana, West Africa), and we can compare their philosophical significance. The levels are as follows:

Level I: Naming at Birth, depending on day, time of day, season, war, peace, famine/harvest, place, for example, near a tree, river, etc.

Level II: Naming after parents, grandparents, ancestors. Significant for genetic, historic, and moral continuity.

Level III: Naming to reflect dreams and ancestors/kinship. Significant for genetic, historic, and nationalist identity/ideology

Level IV: Naming as reflecting praise by others and as boasting by self.⁵

- 6) By listening to ourselves, we discover more similarities in thought and linguistic devices or genres, as in considering "Word and Mind" by the late Professor Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze. For example, we encounter a remarkable similarity about an Igbo fable and an Akan fable on the origin and spread of human knowledge and wisdom. The main character in the Igbo version is Tortoise, whereas in the Akan version it is Ananse, the Spider (featured in the forthcoming Oxford University Project on the philosophy of animals).
 - a) Common Source Theory and Aesop: Support for Osei's Black Hypothesis?⁶
 - b) Herodotus' Testimony on Fables (as Egyptian slave in Greece) and its implications
 - c) Plato's Testimony on Socrates' use of Aesop's fables while in prison.⁷

- 7) By listening to ourselves, we also realize that African philosophers born and bred within the same cultural worldview, such as Akan or Igbo, do not necessarily agree on key philosophical issues such as belief in God, taboos, and the role of religion in morality. Areas within religion and morality Wiredu and Osei (his former student and a fellow Akan) disagree include the following that seem to warrant further discussion in some detail.

C. DETAILED DISCUSSION: WIREDU AND OSEI ON RELIGION AND MORALITY

1. On Custom and Morality: Can custom be an ultimate determinant of right and wrong?

Professor Wiredu thinks that custom is the determinant of right and wrong in Akan ethics when it comes to marriage and *nnoboa*, etc.

My response is as follows. First, if this reference to custom is taken as an empirical observation from an anthropological standpoint, he is right. However, to avoid the *is-ought* fallacy one has to ask whether custom ought to be the determinant and, especially, the ultimate determinant of right or wrong. For the Utilitarian philosopher, the answer would be “No,” since he would argue that the principle justifying the choice of these customs is utility. In other words, the preference for polygamy, monogamy, or polyandry in each of these cultures in question is premised on the belief that these patterns maximize utility or make most people happy in that inter-tribal relationships, especially in the past, or epidemics could distort the male-female ratio in given contexts. The *nnoboa* can likewise be justified as utility-maximizing for all or most of the stakeholders in the cocoa industry and similar endeavors requiring more hands on deck at a time.

Second, the temptation to justify cultural practices in the name of customs without asking for the moral justification for the customs should also be resisted because they lead us into the fallacy of Begging the Question.⁸ For philosophers would like to know why the Akans or any other society prefer custom X but not Y or Z.

Third, if we (as philosophers) tolerate justifying moral actions simply because they are part of traditional customs or cultures, we would be consciously or otherwise encouraging Nazis and Neo-Nazis, Al Qaeda, ISIS, Boko Haram, and other Islamic terrorists and ritual murderers into trying to justify or rationalize their horrible acts of genocide, terrorism, and mass murder, etc., in the name of custom or cultural ethical relativism.

2. Is Religion Necessary for Morality?

According to Wiredu, Akan religion is not a revealed religion; therefore, Akan ethics, while using religious language, cannot be said to be derived from religion. In other words, religion in Akan may be useful but not (logically) necessary for morality. For example, Akans use of *Asase Yaa*, the name of the earth goddess, in oaths to deter or induce fear against bush-rape.⁹ Evidently, such practical uses of

the name can be effective whether or not *Asase Yaa* or God is real. Therefore, Wiredu argues, the use of religious language in Akan ethics does not constitute proof of belief in God’s existence in Akan worldview. Further, he argues that the use of religious language in ethics does not prove Akans believe in *mmusuo* or taboos since the elders in their wisdom offer rational explanations for the prohibitions in chambers after offering the ostensive spiritual or personal explanations to the (naïve) public.

My response is as follows: Granted that religion is not logically necessary for morality, Wiredu’s argument does prove that religion is not practically necessary for morality given the urgent need to provide as many resources as one can gather as grounds for moral objectivity, moral motivation, moral guidance, and moral transformation given the overwhelming moral evils in our world. To illustrate, while the presence of door B in addition to door A makes none of them logically necessary, they both become practically necessary in case of a fire emergency and the urgent need to get out of the burning room. The urgency for promoting morality today seems to render any talk of logical necessity idle talk, compared with practical necessity.

While use of religious language does not prove Akan belief in God as Wiredu maintains, neither does it prove their unbelief in God. The pervasive use of religious language in all their customs and practices as in the swearing of oaths to install chiefs, proclaim taboos, resolve conflict, and to commemorate the dead and ancestors, etc., rather make it more likely than not that most Akans believe in God as the Supreme Being among other supernatural beings. To be fair, this does not mean all Africans are religious or “incurably religious” as J. S. Mbiti observed in the 1970s.¹⁰ For there are such admonitions as *Di asempa na mbisa woti*. That is, if you want to succeed in life, it is better to pursue the virtues than divination, inquiring one’s fate by going from one god to another. By the same token, while some Akan elders might be religious skeptics, it does not imply that all or most of them are religious skeptics.

Error Theory: Professor Wiredu’s eagerness to deny the role of religion in Akan morality, their belief in God, appears to be more of a function of his prior commitment to metaphysical materialism than a function of his empirical observation of Akan traditions and customs.

3. Wiredu on Akan Taboos

Wiredu denies the existence of taboos in Akan worldview since all taboos (at least in principle) have rational (logical, moral, or scientific) explanations as opposed to supernatural or personal explanations.¹¹ For example, the taboos or prohibitions against incest is not because the gods or ancestral spirits will bring death or epidemic on those who indulge in incest, but because the elders have observed that families that indulge in incest often acquire several ailments and genetic disorders such as hemophilia and infertility.

My response is that first, there are hundreds of taboos in Akan worldview. All or most of them are cast in religious

terms as having supernatural or personal (or intentional) explanations. One can agree with Wiredu that, at least in principle, they have rational explanations. But does that imply that taboos don't exist? If that were true, we would have to say that the fact that clouds can be explained in terms of water vapor implies that clouds are not real or clouds don't exist. Shortly after being made a chief in a town near Kumasi in Ashanti Region of Ghana, Nana Boakye-Boateng, a former professor of the African Studies Department, instituted taboos prohibiting the impregnation of teenagers so he could minimize the school dropout rate and increase retention and graduation rates among middle school girls in his traditional area.¹² Instead of attempting to deny the obvious, our traditional societies would be better served if as indigenous philosophers we help to provide the rational explanations and appropriate moral guidance in the creation, modification, and application or interpretation of the taboos to ensure that they are deployed in ways that promote such desirable virtues as education, wisdom, peace, and development.

CONCLUSION

The foregoing seven inferences from *Listening to Ourselves* are by no means exhaustive. There is room for other inferences that could also reflect the philosophical significance of this reflexive practice. Hopefully, this brief reflection has inspired you to continue the discussion with other academics, students, and intellectuals. Meanwhile, join me in extending hearty congratulations to the author of this pioneer multilingual anthology in African philosophy, our colleague Chike Jeffers, by saying in the Akan language: *Ayikoo! Ayikoo!*

NOTES

1. Kwasi Wiredu, "Papa ne Bone," *Listening to Ourselves: A Multilingual Anthology of African Philosophy*, ed. Chike Jeffers (Albany: SUNY Press, 2014), 159.
2. Ibid.
3. Tsenay Serequeberhan, "Introduction," *African Philosophy: The Essential Readings* (St. Paul, Minnesota: Paragon House, 1991).
4. Akwasi Agyemang, "Official Lawlessness," in *Philosophy and Politics: Discourse on Values, Politics, and Power in Africa*, ed. Maduabuchi Dukor (Lagos State, Nigeria: Malthouse Press, 2003).
5. Frederick Ochieng-Odhiambo, "What Is In a Name?" in Jeffers, *Listening to Ourselves*, 52–89.
6. Joseph Osei, "Who Were the First Philosophers? Ancient Greeks or Ancient Black Africans?" *Legon Journal of the Humanities* 8 (1995): 13–35.
7. Christos A. Zafiroopoulos, "A Few Notes on Plato's Portrayal of the Arch-Philosopher," *Greco-Latina Brunensia* 16, no. 2 (2011): 203–16.
8. J. S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*. African Writers Series (London: Heinemann, [1969] 1990).
9. Wiredu, "Papa ne Bone," 171.
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The Best of Both Worlds: Philosophy in African Languages and English Translation

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This book begins a daring exercise, novel in our current context, as it challenges a group of contemporary philosophy scholars originally from Africa (but who have in their years in academia become accustomed to reading and writing in English) to philosophize in their own African language, on a topic of their choice, to see what happens. I have already written and published a book review elsewhere that surveyed all the contributions to this book.¹ For purposes of this paper, I want to focus in a more in-depth way on a few of the contributions. First, I want to look at the Jeffers, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, and Eze entries insofar as they are most reflective about the process and the goals of philosophizing in their own languages. Then I want to turn to the three Kenyan articles, by F. Ochieng'-Odhiambo, D. A. Masolo, and Betty Wambui, to follow their careful analysis of the meanings of words, names, proverbs, and concepts in their languages, and to begin to look at how their insights expressed here fit with philosophy books and essays that they have previously written in English. What do we, the readers, gain by reading the English translations of these articles that we would not find in articles by the same authors written originally in English? If I had more time and space, I would no doubt enjoy doing the same with the other three chapters I am neglecting here, but it is not possible to do all of the chapters to the depth that I propose, and I am more familiar with the works of the three Kenyans than the other scholars.

Chike Jeffers, the editor, explained that he was inspired by Ngugi wa Thiong'o who explained in *Moving the Center* that there was a dire need for creative and intellectual works in African languages to counter the colonizing of African

ideas and expressions. He worried that ideas expressed in European languages might be stuck in a Eurocentric worldview. Indeed, as Ngugi writes in the introduction to this book, he is pleased with this first effort. Ngugi goes as far as to call Africans philosophizing in English an “absurdity” and suggests that only by philosophizing in their own languages can Africans add something with originality to world knowledge and scholarship (ix).² Chances are the book’s contributors and even its editor do not go that far, since each has since in other venues presented and/or published their ideas in English. Indeed, at our panel on this book at the American Philosophical Association’s 2017 Eastern Division meeting, contributors described the great effort it took to write in their mother tongues, and so it might be a challenge to do so all the time. But at least for the occasion of this book, it was done as an exercise. What were their reasons?

In a chapter in this book, Emmanuel Eze suggests that Igbo philosophers should begin to discuss philosophical issues with each other in the Igbo language, and that’s the kind of activity he imagines when he thinks of the phrase “listening to ourselves” (129). Eze also acknowledges the influence of Kwasi Wiredu’s “Conceptual Decolonization in African Philosophy” on his desire to begin this conversation in his language, Igbo (131). I don’t know whether the chapters in this book are the fruit of this personal conversation among those who speak the same language, as Eze describes. Perhaps the conversations Eze mentioned happened at home, among friends, as a background to each individual writing his or her chapter. Or, perhaps, instead this book will inspire future conversations, as in having a conversation via writing with an audience in the future, as is the case of most intellectual influence via publication. This might be the case if speakers of each African language represented in the book get ahold of the chapter that is written in their language. However, given the current distribution system of publications, this might not be easy. While the book has been added to 600 libraries internationally, it may be difficult to find each chapter in the local area in Africa where the language is spoken. Still, since the Igbos are spread out in academia all around the world, other Igbo scholars in England, South Africa, or Australia could get this book and read the essay in its Igbo version and think about the ideas there, and perhaps respond in kind. Who knows where the experiment might lead.

The chapter that most directly address the topic of the role of African languages in doing African philosophy is Emmanuel Eze’s. Eze is most self-reflective about his own experience of philosophizing in the Igbo language and how language impacts both the shape and content of thought as well as of identity. He also describes the experience of being multi-lingual and of philosophizing in more than one language. A reader might prefer to begin with Eze since he provides a context for the project realized by the contributions of the other authors. These articles plunge into their topics with just enough meta-philosophical discussion (in the introduction and in Eze’s article) to provide a context. Eze describes his project as follows. He clearly stipulates that he is interested in Igbo philosophy, by which he means the philosophy held by the Igbo people, based on a study of Igbo culture. But any person—ideally, a person familiar

with the Igbo language—when they write down or share their insights into the Igbo philosophy, is writing *their own* philosophy as well, because interpretation is *personal*. In addition, they may be sharing their original analysis or judgments (129). By focusing on culture philosophy, Eze says, “philosophy can help culture listen to itself” (131).

By studying the Igbo language, Eze shows how Igbos have an idea of “core soul” or mind that is a spirit which unified thoughts. But multiplicity is important as well. The spirit of everyone, since each person has ideas, is both one and many (149). Philosophy involves dialogue with others, and love of culture does not only mean love of my own culture, but also of *other* cultures, countries, and traditions as well. Eze says, “There are many ways of *being* an Igbo person and also many ways of *knowing* the Igbo (147, italics in the original): and hence the strategy of philosophizing in Igbo, and having it translated into other languages as well. Philosophizing in one’s own language is not an exercise in ethnic or national chauvinism. We can love exploring our own culture, learning more about it, creatively expanding it, while being in interaction with each other in a mutual exploration of perspectives.

Eze provided a glossary of terms at the end of his section, which is helpful in our learning a bit of philosophical Igbo terminology. Still, there is a challenge in understanding the fine points of another language, as we see in the glossary multiple terms with close meanings. For example, “isi” means mind, brain, or head; “Isi-Oma” means intelligence, analytical, or discerning mind; “obi” means soul; and “Mmuo” means spirit. Given these myriad terms, I find myself struggling to understand what Eze means by “core soul” or mind being a spirit which unifies. Perhaps this point is clearer to those who know the language well. The challenges of terminology are a reminder to thank the translators, who for the most part are also philosophy scholars from Africa who often write in English such as Oriare Nyarwath, Joseph Osei, and Stephen Omondi Owino (see 179–82). Surely, the philosophical conversations in African languages no doubt happened in the exchanges between author and translator in the making of this book.

While Jeffers himself admitted that the word “ethnophilosophical” had a bad connotation for decades in the history of African philosophy, he nevertheless unabashedly calls the articles in this collection ethnophilosophical. Insofar as basically all the authors address an aspect of the cultural beliefs and values of the community in Africa that speaks the language in which they are writing, then it is true that the essays are exploring the philosophy of an African ethnic group. But Paulin Hountondji had earlier charged ethnophilosophy with being an extraverted discourse, aimed at outsiders. Jeffers hopes that having African authors write first in their own languages better ensures that their primary audience is within Africa itself (xix). Of course, extraversion was not the only “sin” or fault of ethnophilosophy. Hountondji also said it engaged in mere description without rigorous evaluation.³ Of course, it is also important to note that Hountondji has explained that he was misunderstood to be against all explorations of a philosophy of culture, and he wants to clarify that he does, in fact, support of such

studies. As he said in his book *The Struggle for Meaning*, he considered “unproductive” one of the results of his critique of ethnophilosophy, insofar as it caused some researchers out of excess caution to refrain from “exercising on African culture and experience their talents as analysts and philosophers.”⁴ Since then Hountondji himself has supported philosophical explorations of a philosophy of culture.⁵ Those who would rather not rehabilitate the word “ethnophilosophy” could still appreciate this collection by calling it a philosophy of culture, or maybe even works in philosophy of language. Jeffers himself calls it a project of “excavating the philosophical content of [African] traditional cultures” (ix).

Do the essays included here address external audiences, or do they primarily address African audiences? And do they engage in critical evaluation? It is interesting to note that Ochieng'-Odhiambo's essay particularly notes that it is addressed to both a Luo and a non-Luo (which would mean extraverted) audience. For example, he says he writes so that non-Luos can understand Luo traditions of naming (53). But he addresses his two audiences differently. He seems quite preachy toward the Luos, accusing them of going down the wrong path, adopting customs of white people. Ochieng'-Odhiambo is championing Luo values and traditions regarding naming children and suggesting that reigning practices among white communities are not as good. Clearly, he wants Luos to take new pride in their traditions and so continue them rather than capitulate to foreign practices (83, 85). But perhaps he addresses a foreign audience to encourage them to rethink their practices in light of the Luo example.

This project of becoming familiar with one's own tradition is one that Ochieng'-Odhiambo long advocated. In publications written in English (we must note that in Kenya, as well as in Barbados where he has been teaching for many years, university education is taught in English) he promoted cultural literacy as well as skepticism toward imported practices and values. An advocate and practitioner of Odera Orika's project of interviewing rural Kenyan sages, called at times sage philosophy and at other times philosophic sagacity, Ochieng'-Odhiambo explained the rationale for the project in his 1997 and 2006 articles. As he said in 1997, part of the goal of the project is to educate Kenyan children, many of whom were now growing up in Nairobi (a cosmopolitan city) about the culture heritage that they all might have known better had they been raised back in Nyanza near the older generation of family members. Schools were not able, with the curriculum they had at the time, to fill this gap, and yet the need was great.⁶ In a 2006 article, “The Tripartite in Sagacity,” he elaborates further. One of the goals of studying sages is to search for the philosophical ideas underlying cultural practices (and this can be done among the many ethnic groups of Kenya so that a comparative study could bring further insight). Additionally, a key aim of the project was to preserve and champion certain select practices of the past that were in danger of being discarded by the current generation. Here in 2006, he expresses his concern that the youth are discarding their own practices and unthinkingly embracing Western ideas as more popular when they might not be better.⁷ While in this book currently under study we are not

engaging in interviewing sages, one can see why Ochieng'-Odhiambo would want to take up this kind of practice and address the topic as he did, since he has a longstanding interest in counteracting colonizing thought and practices in Kenya. And he may also agree to participate in a book purported by its editor to be ethnophilosophy (rather than philosophic sagacity, understood earlier as a competitor to ethnophilosophy), because back in 2003 Ochieng'-Odhiambo had reiterated that ethnophilosophy is one of the branches of African philosophy and ought not to be excluded.⁸

Here we are treated to an extended analysis of the meaning of names from the perspective of the Luo community. However, there is the further question, does Ochieng'-Odhiambo understand “white” traditions? It's a relevant question because he compares and contrasts Luo practices to white practices. My concern is this: maybe there are places where, currently, Euro-Americans have forgotten their ethnic traditions, but this does not mean that there were no traditions. Ochieng'-Odhiambo quotes Julia Stewart, who drew advice from Leonard Ashley's book, “What's in a Name?” that suggested that names should be short and easy to pronounce and write (83). Clearly, that's not an accurate summary of all “white” naming practices (although I will admit that personally, such an aesthetic judgment played a role in my own parents naming me “Gail” rather than another close contender—“Penelope,” according to my parents' account). It's a bit of a “straw man” argument to insist that there are no deeper traditions of choosing names by their deeper meanings in Europe or other countries populated by those who are racially white. Albert Mosley, in an earlier review of the book and this particular essay, noted that European names were not “mere indexicals” since names like “Carpenter” or “Smith” carried information about a family's profession.⁹ Also, thinking of several white South African philosophers (and also Dutch philosophers) who have the prefix “van der” as part of their family names, it is clear that their names are a geographical marker of the family's origin. For example, the name “van der Merwe” means from the region of the Merwede, the “wide water” of the Rhine-Meuse delta back in the Netherlands.¹⁰ This may bear some similarity to Luo practices of names reflecting a community's “territory and where one's kindred grew up,” for example, a man called “Jakondiek (a man from Kondeik)” or “wuod nam (son of or a man from the lake)” (75).

Still, we can learn much from studying how Luo names are chosen, by realizing that there is a system of value behind the choices of names. The book by Paul Mbuya Akoko, *Luo Kitgi gi Timbegi*, describes the circumstances, times, and places that influence a name choice, and Ochieng'-Odhiambo cites it at length (60-67). As far as I know (although I do not claim to be an expert), there is not a similarly circumstantial list of names in European communities connoting time of day of the birth, the position of the child when being born, the weather or season at the moment of birth, or the nearness of trees, roadsides, or other geographical markers at the time of birth. I would like to see Ochieng'-Odhiambo reflect at more length as to why the Luo people think these details of the circumstances of birth should be highlighted by use of a name that will always bring such circumstances

to mind again throughout life. For example, a child may be named Akoko (girl) or Okoko (boy) if they are born during conflict (63) or Ajwang' (girl) or Ojwang' (boy) if his or her parent dies while he or she is in the womb or an infant. Why do the Luo give a child a lifelong name based on this early tragedy?

Ochieng'-Odhiambo goes on to note other sources of names in Luo tradition. Dreams are also an important source of names, and they often intersect with ancestral names, since sometimes a person may dream that a deceased relative has asked for the child to be named after him or herself (69). Clearly, this practice of naming points to beliefs in the continued existence and agency of the dead after they pass from this world (the living-dead, as they are sometimes called). Some names connote relationships between people. Ochieng'-Odhiambo shows his keen sense of observation when he notices that "white people" use "Mrs." differently than Luo people use the prefix "chi" ("wife of"). Luos more consistently use prefixes that explain the relationship between people. He takes that as evidence that Luos highly prize relationships and the value of community (75). Ochieng'-Odhiambo doesn't only describe traditions, but he also shows how they are applied in contemporary Kenyan politics. For example, the process of praise naming was used recently by the practice of calling political leader Raila Odinga "Agwambo" meaning "mysterious." It meant to draw attention to his wit and intelligence. Odinga left KANU and organized the opposition, starting a new party, ODM-Orange Democratic Movement. In a long footnote, Ochieng'-Odhiambo talks about Odinga's role in politics. While nicknames of either praise or disparagement can be found among all races of people, we can learn about Luo values from reading Ochieng'-Odhiambo's account of how Odinga received his praise name.

While Ochieng'-Odhiambo, Messay Kebede, and Emmanuel Eze wrote their articles using references to many published sources such as other philosophers' texts and general reference material (as is common in scholarly articles), several of the authors (Diagne, Masolo, Wiredu, and Wambui) wrote their inclusions without references to other published works. Clearly, each of these authors has written many publications with many references (and sometimes even addressed the same topic in other works of theirs already in English), so the question is, why, when writing in their respective African languages, did they forego using outside sources? Why did they write afresh as if it were a new topic to them, without reference to their own earlier work? Did they think they had been tasked with such a project? Or was it somewhat akin to Jomo Kenyatta's book, *Facing Mount Kenya*,¹¹ which was written based on his experience of being "the grandson of a medicine man," as the book's back cover explains?

Take the case of D. A. Masolo's chapter on Luo proverbs. What do we learn from reading Masolo's account of proverbs written in Dhuluo (and then translated) that we do not learn from his several previously published works that contain this topic written in English? In Jeffers' book we find Masolo saying that the meaning of proverbs is not meant to be literal; it should not be understood as a proposition, and therefore can't be true or false. For

example, a proverb that compares a person to a bird is not intended to state "a factual similarity between persons and birds" but nevertheless finds some worthwhile analogy between persons and birds (47). Masolo goes as far as to say that a proverb is not a truth, and can't be a lie either, since it is an opinion (47). He does concede, however, that some proverbs can have "shades of truth" as accurate descriptions of persons or their deeds (49). After these brief methodological allusions, he puts forward an explanation of proverbs as sayings that help persons understand and guide human conduct (39). He lauds Luo elders for having a deep understanding of human psychology which shows in the proverbs (47). The majority of his article recounts Luo proverbs on moral behavior, as Masolo gives his understanding of the meaning or message of each one since, as he explains, proverbs are usually so short that they do not explain themselves (39).

While Masolo is to be commended for knowing so many Luo proverbs and their meanings, the methodological issues in studying proverbs do not do justice to Professor Masolo's own treatments of the topic in his earlier publications in English. In his book *African Philosophy in Search of Identity*, he explained the debate over including proverb analysis as philosophy. Hountondji challenged written works that analyzed "cultural elements (stories, proverbs, poems, language structures, and institutions) that constitute Weltanschauungen or worldviews,"¹² suggesting that these works do not deserve the title of African philosophy. Instead, they are ethnology with philosophical pretensions, and he therefore coined the term "ethnophilosophy" to describe them, intending it to be pejorative and not a legitimate branch of philosophy since proverbs do not have a philosophical agenda and scientific rigor.¹³ But others, like A. B. C. Ochollo-Ayayo, used proverbs to try to describe "basic premises which control or guide his society's thinking" (192).¹⁴ Masolo quoted six of Ochollo-Ayayo's Dhuluo proverbs used to describe philosophical concepts, such as "Ok timore nono; ginmoro ema nitie, pok noneye," which means "All events are caused and interrelated; nothing happens by chance."¹⁵ But Masolo complained that Ochollo-Ayayo did not explain the contexts in which the above proverbs were used or to whom they were addressed. Rather than general principles of knowledge, Masolo explained there that if proverbs were approached with a "situational analysis," it would become apparent that they were used as means of social control or possibly social rebellion.¹⁶

In another place in his earlier book, Masolo analyzed two Dhuluo proverbs to gain philosophical insight into Luo conceptions of time. The proverb "Oru wuod aming'a" means "duration, the endless alternation between day and night, often brings about change even to the most stubborn situations."¹⁷ Another proverb with a closely related meaning is "Aming'a piny nene ochiego apindi e thim," meaning "the [endless] endurance of the world forces even the stubborn apindi (*Vangueria acutiloba*) to ripen."¹⁸ The apindi fruit can take even ten years to mature, and so it is used as an example in the proverb. Masolo then follows these translations and interpretations with an account of how the proverbs are used in daily discourse. They are used, he explains, to counsel against complacency and

pride, since the prideful erroneously think they can know or control the future.¹⁹ Here, Masolo began discussion of these proverbs by suggesting they might reveal a Luo philosophy of time, but he concluded by focusing instead on the proverb's counsel for character traits and wise action. While I don't doubt that the majority of proverbs are crafted to express moral guidance, nevertheless, many of them (for example, these two proverbs on time) can also have metaphysical or epistemological meanings.

In his review of *Listening to Ourselves*, Albert Mosley noted some frustration with Masolo's treatments of proverbs. He thinks that Masolo has not paid attention to the epistemic role of proverbs. Mosley counsels: "I suggest we view proverbs and parables as analogical models establishing classes of similar situations, similar problems, and similar solutions, but encountered in different circumstances."²⁰ Similarly, Claude Sumner, in his large studies of Oromo proverbs of Ethiopia, explained that proverbs have what he calls figurative logic. Figurative reasoning, according to Sumner, starts with a known situation used as an example. The proverb, using figurative logic, conveys the insight that there is a new situation in which the insight or truth from the first examples also applies to it (the new situation) as well. A particular situation is capable of giving meaning to another situation, and that is what Sumner identifies as figurative logic. When there is a passage from a known truth to a disclosed truth, there is reasoning. Sumner contrasts figurative logic to what he calls conceptual logic, where known concepts or laws are a starting point from which reason then ascertains further concepts or laws. Additionally, Kwasi Wiredu referred to an Akan proverb which, in conversation, intended to function as a Principle of Non-contradiction.²¹

Both Mosley and Sumner, I suggest, would be uncomfortable referring to all proverbs as "opinion" rather than knowledge. They can contain real insight about our world based on sound reasoning. But there is one sense in which Sumner might agree with Masolo's refraining from giving proverbs "truth" status, but it is a very nuanced point. Sumner gives the example of a proverb, and how the proverb could be treated through conceptual reasoning and deduction to be stating a universal truth. However, while the proverb might have much truth to it, there may always be some situation to which it does not apply. Sumner explains that the peasants who use proverbs know that stating their truths as proverbs rather than universal statements means that they can't be falsified by one counter-example. They make their suggestion and then let it go, leaving it up to the hearer to decide to apply it or not. There is some humility to the proverb not found in other forms of logic, and Sumner thinks that's epistemologically appropriate.²²

Despite this possible slighting of all that could be said methodologically about the role of proverbs in expressing philosophy, is there not a benefit to discussing Luo proverbs in the Dhuluo language? Of course, even when writing in English for an English-speaking readership, most texts indulge in quoting the original proverb in Dhuluo. They would not presume that giving English translation alone, without the original, would be adequate, because they know that it is difficult to capture the proverb's meaning

easily in a translation. But is there a benefit to discussing the Luo proverb in Dhuluo rather than in English?

In his 2010 book, *Self and Community in a Changing World*, Masolo discussed the question of writing African philosophy in African languages at length. He noted that cultural nationalists such as Okot p'Bitek often dramatized how European colonizers made conceptual errors based on misunderstandings of African languages. But Masolo clarifies that p'Bitek was careful to sort out when misunderstandings were due to careless translations and when they were instead due to "the incongruity or incommensurability of the conception fields."²³ Masolo takes stock of p'Bitek, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, and Wiredu, and each's version of counsel in favor of the use of African languages. For the first two, the motivation is primarily political, Masolo notes. For Wiredu, his emphasis is that language conveys concepts. Masolo then expresses some skepticism that concepts will be clearer if only they are expressed in one's native tongue. He refers to many philosophical concepts which he shares with his students in English-speaking classrooms, using English words, and notices that the concepts (such as "phenomenology," for example) need to be explained at length in order to be clarified, because concepts in general are difficult to convey because they are not as simple as objects. While he admits that some concepts do not have easy translations into another language, he thinks that meaning can still be conveyed from one language into another. Therefore, he is confident that African meanings can be conveyed in English or French. Whether or not one should continue to use European languages or not would be a political decision. He realizes that people worry about "Whether we can preserve the core of our cultural integrity, our conceptual or theoretical representations of the world—when we use other languages."²⁴ But he agrees with Wiredu's optimistic assessment that "language is an elastic phenomenon that we can bend, twist, weave, and stretch in any direction and to any lengths in order to accommodate or to communicate the concepts we have in our minds."²⁵

Despite the possibility of translation, the use of some words in particular contexts make translation suddenly difficult, and Masolo's book is filled with examples of contexts in which a Dhuluo word which would usually mean one thing would mean something else in a particular context.²⁶ While Masolo concludes by saying that for practical reasons he is glad that works in African philosophy are translated into European languages (so that he can access them if they were originally written in a language he does not know), he nevertheless wants to encourage writing African philosophy in vernacular languages so that local debate about the meaning of indigenous concepts can continue, and so that scholars can "preserve these thought expressions in their original renditions."²⁷ One would therefore conclude that Masolo must be particularly happy to have Jeffers' volume include the best of both worlds, that is, a collection of essays written in vernacular, while also including English translations of them all.

The question of tradition's role in philosophy, particularly in the context of African philosophy, was addressed by Bruce Janz in his recent book, *Philosophy in an African*

Place. While Janz's book is not the immediate topic of this panel, let me introduce one theme of his and then turn back to Jeffers' book and see how the theme is addressed in the works there. He identifies tradition as having to do with "meanings and value as coded in ritual and story."²⁸ Of course, Janz himself is surveying a range of African authors, such as Kwame Gyekye who, in his book *Tradition and Modernity*, notes that traditions change, just perhaps a bit slowly. So the tension between enduring practices and static practices is always felt in a culture. Are traditions upheld with gusto or repeated habitually and mechanically? Janz explores whether traditions in general are useful. Traditions can aid continuity, but they can also be conservative and be used to curb change when change is needed. If something is traditional, it means that for now, one (or a community) is not engaged in questioning it.²⁹ However, traditions change, as we noted; transmission of traditions "is more like reenactment," Janz says,³⁰ which means that all we have is a "traditioning process" that is open to "ceaseless contestation."³¹

Some of the chapters read mostly like exposition of African traditions, giving the rationale behind certain practices or values. But certain authors deeply explore certain practices, both critiquing and defending various aspects of the traditions. It was an excellent idea to include an African woman philosopher, Betty Wambui, who directly studies questions of gender and power in African communities. Wambui introduces us to examples of gender role-bending among the Gikuyu and reflects on their implications for power. Her essay is called "Conversations: Women, Children, Goats, Land" and described family relations including raising children as were practiced among the Gikuyu of Kenya. Her focus was on how certain practices demonstrate and illustrate certain important values of the society. She argues that while boys and girls/men and women were given different roles in Gikuyu society, it would be superficially true but perhaps too hasty to conclude that men were valued more than women. She then engages in a delicate and two-sided analysis of the ways in which women were subservient to men, and yet had agency. She also points out the constraints that were on men that complicate the presumption that they were in charge and had to be obeyed.

She has a big challenge ahead of her because she admits that men's roles included "presiding over wives and children at home" (99), and that men could marry more than one wife while the reverse is not true (101), which, she concedes, is used by others to critique the claim that women are treated equally. But she counters that, nevertheless, "marriage and childbearing were as important to young men and male elders as they were to their female counterparts" (99). In other words, a man would not have any status in his society if he could not succeed with his family. She goes as far as to say, "a man without children would be treated more harshly than a woman in a similar situation" (101).

Since Betty Wambui's article is included in this collection, having been written first in the Gikuyu language and only secondarily translated, it is no wonder that she explores the meaning of certain words in the Gikuyu language. She herself notes that the word for a married woman was

"atumia," related to the word "tumia" which (along with words closely related to it) has the connotation of silence or not speaking one's mind (even if one is offended) (101–03). Gikuyu society considers humility to be a virtue for women. The word for adult men is "Guthera," which means "to select" and has the connotations of being a choice or decision-maker who exercises agency (103). She takes stock of this linguistic situation and notes that these words and associated values played a role in women's diminishment. However, to counterbalance that assessment, she noted that both men and women would be judged by how well they did in marriage and parenting.

The article goes on to investigate certain practices and issues of sexual morality and how they impact the question of women's equality. She even investigates practices such as in polygamy, the first wife has the right to shave her husband's head. She notes that while contemporary feminists decry polygamy as male privilege, it must nevertheless be pointed out that a man's choice in marriage is always limited. First, his first wife is chosen for him by his parents; secondly, any possible additional wives must first get the consent and approval of the first wife. She also notes that, since bearing a child was so important to women (in addition to the warmth and love of family life with children, there is also the role the child will take in the future of caring for the elderly parent, and being steward of their property, and of continuing life in the next generation with the possibility of rebirth into future children), that a barren woman could marry another woman who would bear children for her. Even if the woman who married another woman was already married to a husband, the new wife would be under the authority of the woman who married her, not her husband. While these practices are quite complex, Dr. Wambui explains them all with detail to the levels of power and powerlessness (or constraint) in any interaction. (Those interested further might want to read the Njambi and O'Brien essay on the topic.³² These scholars interview several woman-woman couples to get a sense of the reasons for their choosing such a marriage, and they find these couples to be happy together.)

I have to say that in this article Dr. Wambui shows her unique positioning, as a philosopher very familiar with Kikuyu practices, to be able to reflect upon these situations, and her skills in thinking and observation have helped her to describe the situation with insight and fair-mindedness.

In another article of Wambui's published in English in a journal, "The Challenge of Provenance: Myth, Histories, and the Negotiation of Socio-Political Space," she shares the myth of the Mumbi and Gikuyu, the ancestors of the Gikuyu people, which is often orally recited as an art form. Mogai, the divider of the universe, had a conversation with Gikuyu, the founder of the Gikuyu people (who was, by the way, not created by Mogai). Mogai gave Gikuyu some land and provided him with a wife. Gikuyu named his wife Moombi, which means creator. With her, he had nine daughters. He worried about not having a male heir, but Mogai told him not to worry because there would be nine male suitors for his daughters. The nine men agreed to settle with Gikuyu's daughter and create matriarchal families. However, over time the women ruled cruelly, practicing polyandry and

punishing men with death if they were adulterous. The men planned a revolt and decided that the only time they could successfully overthrow the women was if they were incapacitated by pregnancy. The men planned and impregnated their wives around the same time and then had their revolt. They established polygamy instead of polyandry and “changed the name of the social group which had until this time been known as Nyumba ya Mumbi to Mbari ya Gikuyu.”³³ When they threatened to change the names of the clans as well, women threatened to not have sex with them and to kill any offspring. With this serious threat, men backed off from changing the names of the clans. While women lost political power, they still had the power to create life.

Wambui argues that the story describes power as something very important, but that it needs a context of trust. Power is easily abused, and its abuse is open to censure and challenge. Humans are shown as impatient to change society’s rules. Additionally, this story portrays women as potentially destructive to society and in need of controlling. But it also portrays women as equal to men, for example, just as strong as men, so that their subordination is not natural but conventional. About this genre of expression, Wambui explains that these stories (nganos) “are not only mere reports or rationalizations of current order. They are also powerful interpretations of events and reinforcements of perspectives.”³⁴ A storyteller can tell the story because he or she has a certain agenda, or because he or she wants to make a particular critique of contemporary society. It seems to me that in either language, English or Kikuyu, Wambui is able to focus on power relations as conveyed in stories, in language choices, or in practices.

In general, many of the contributions of the book have helped deepen our understanding of African traditions, practices, and values. The authors are clearly able to express themselves philosophically both in English and in their own African languages. But in this volume we are treated to the best of both worlds. We have the accessibility of multiple languages carefully translated into English, and at the same time, we have the careful and purposeful work of African scholars engaging in philosophical thinking and writing in their own African languages, building upon and recording a tradition of conceptual exploration and expression of African philosophical ideas. Perhaps the main help of the book was to serve as an impetus to the authors to cover in depth a topic from a perspective that they had not considered before when writing straight into English. The book is therefore a valuable contribution to our field.

NOTES

1. Gail Presbey, Book review of Chike Jeffers (ed.), *Listening to Ourselves: A Multilingual Anthology of African Philosophy* (SUNY Press, 2013), in *Dialogue: Canadian Philosophical Review*, 53, no. 4 (December 2014): 767–69.
2. Chike Jeffers (ed.), *Listening to Ourselves: A Multilingual Anthology of African Philosophy* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2013). Note: Any parenthetical references to a text’s page numbers in the body of the text are to this book.
3. Paulin Hountondji, *The Struggle for Meaning: Reflections on Philosophy, Culture, and Democracy in Africa*, trans. John Conteh-Morgan (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2002), 91–92, 128, 187–89.

4. Hountondji, *The Struggle for Meaning*, xviii.
5. See his edited collection: Paul Hountondji (ed.), *Endogenous Knowledge: Research Trails* (CODESRIA, 1999).
6. F. Ochieng’-Odhiambo, “Philosophic Sagacity Revisited,” in *Sagacious Reasoning: Henry Odera Oruka in Memoriam*, eds. Kai Kresse and Anke Graness (New York: Peter Lang, 1997), 178.
7. F. Ochieng’-Odhiambo, “The Tripartite in Sagacity,” *Philosophia Africana* 9, no. 1 (March 2006): 20–23.
8. F. Ochieng’-Odhiambo, book review of Ivan Karp and D. A. Masolo, ed., *African Philosophy as Cultural Inquiry*. In *Philosophia Africana*, 6, no. 2 (2003): 90.
9. Albert Mosley, book review of Chike Jeffers (ed.), *Listening to Ourselves: A Multilingual Anthology of African Philosophy* (SUNY Press, 2013), in *Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews*, January 25, 2014, <http://ndpr.nd.edu/news/45831-listening-to-ourselves-a-multilingual-anthology-of-african-philosophy/>
10. Wikipedia, “Van Der Merwe,” https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Van_der_Merwe Accessed January 26, 2017.
11. Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya* (New York: Vintage, 1962).
12. D. A. Masolo, *African Philosophy in Search of Identity* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994), 195.
13. *Ibid.*, 196–97.
14. *Ibid.*, 192.
15. *Ibid.*, 193.
16. *Ibid.*
17. *Ibid.*, 118.
18. *Ibid.*
19. *Ibid.*
20. Mosley, Review of *Listening to Ourselves*.
21. Claude Sumner, *Oromo Wisdom Literature, Volume 1: Proverbs, Collection and Analysis* (Addis Ababa: Gudina Tumsa Foundation, 1995), 376–78, 393. Kwasi Wiredu, *Cultural Universals and Particulars: An African Perspective* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996), 63.
22. Sumner, *Oromo Wisdom Literature, Volume 1*, 378.
23. D. A. Masolo, *Self and Community in a Changing World* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2010), 37.
24. *Ibid.*, 40.
25. *Ibid.*, 41.
26. *Ibid.*, 42–43.
27. *Ibid.*, 44.
28. Bruce Janz, *Philosophy In an African Place* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2009), 43.
29. *Ibid.*, 60.
30. *Ibid.*, 55.
31. *Ibid.*, 56.
32. Wairimu Ngaruiya Njambi and Willam E. O’Brien, “Revisiting ‘Woman-Woman Marriage’: Notes on Gikuyu Women,” in *African Gender Studies: A Reader*, ed. Oyèrónké Oyèwùmí (New York: Palgrave/MacMillan, 2005), 145–63.
33. Betty Wambui, “The Challenge of Provenance: Myth, Histories, and the Negotiation of Socio-Political Space,” *Phoebé* 19, no. 2 (Fall 2007): 5.
34. *Ibid.*, 7.

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BOOK REVIEW

Therapeutic Nations: Healing in an Age of Indigenous Human Rights

Dian Million (The University of Arizona Press, 2013). 240 pp. ISBN 978-0-8165-3018-2.

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Trauma and healing are commonly wielded concepts in conversations within and about Indigenous communities. In *Therapeutic Nations*, Dian Million complicates the pathologizing of Indigenous communities by tracking the ways in which trauma narratives are invoked and their relationship to Western neoliberal ideologies. In Million's own words, her work in *Therapeutic Nations* weaves a cautionary tale and "suggests that witnessing truth to power is a convoluted undertaking" (3). Million illustrates the deep connection between violence against Indigenous women and self-determination, noting that self-determination is difficult for Indigenous communities to achieve without an analysis of gendered colonial violence against Indigenous

women. Million also suggests that there is an affective, felt component of our knowledges about our experiences of colonial violence that must be acknowledged and engaged in the pursuit of self-determination and healing.

In "An Introduction to Healing in an Age of Indigenous Human Rights," Million describes her Indigenous feminist methodological commitments. Of her methodology, Million writes,

I do not seek synthesis. I don't force anything into agreement. . . . I have stopped thinking in terms of an internal struggle and now work relaxed into the sociality of working toward a more expansive idea of community that I see as an Indigenous feminist one articulated and emerging from struggle, where in love and honor we can hold in light open embrace difference and an expansive number of alliances with others whose goal is for generative life and not death. (30)

Million builds a bridge between herself and her research, noting that she is not positioning herself as an unattached, neutral observer; rather, she identifies herself as part of a community deeply entangled in the complicated story she is trying to tell. Million is up front about her privileging of an Indigenist agenda, noting that though she cannot speak for all Indigenous peoples, she speaks as an Indigenous woman with an investment in the future of her communities. Million practices an Indigenous feminist methodology in that she works toward expansion, building relations, and respect, rather than toward forced agreement and synthesis.

In addition to detailing her methodological commitments, Million introduces her core technical terminology: sociopolitical imaginaries, affective or felt knowledges, and logics of trauma. Sociopolitical imaginaries are "moralized discourse and embodied practices" that constitute what is known about a group, an event, an experience, etc. (6). These sociopolitical imaginaries are "moral spaces" that comprise the contemporary shaping or frameworks of presumptions pertaining to Indigenous peoples and imposed upon them (46). Sociopolitical imaginaries, according to Million, have propositional content like "racialized, sexualized, and gendered discourses," as well as unspoken, affective content: felt knowledge, embodied practices (6). To illustrate how sociopolitical imaginaries pertaining to Indigenous peoples are both discursive as well as felt, Million describes observations offered to Richard King in his investigations of residential schools in the 1960s. In one observation, a residential school teacher says, "We'd see them often—maybe a drunken Indian asleep in the back of a bus—and you'd think, 'Oh, Indian,' like you think lamppost, or tree, or dog" (47, quoting a quote offered to Richard King). Million highlights the affective, felt component of this teacher's statement, writing:

But in fact the speaker was not deeply *ignorant*. The Indian in the back of the bus was asleep—but that he was drunk was felt common knowledge, perhaps informed by disgust or boredom . . . while what nonhuman category the Indian is in may be in

question . . . there is no question that he is drunk.
(47)

The presumption of the onlookers about the drunkenness of the Indian man in the example does not spring from mere ignorance; rather, it is felt common knowledge, something the speaker in the example feels to be true, based on a complex fabric of sociopolitical imaginaries she has inherited from the settler community around her. Felt knowledge informs an unspoken, commonly held, "affectively understood," sociopolitical imaginary that imposes drunkenness onto Indigenous peoples, alongside other racialized, gendered, and sexualized presumptions (42-3). Felt knowledge is commonly unrecognized, Million argues, and dismissed by Western academics in favor of the discursive content of Rationality. The sociopolitical imaginaries imposed upon Indigenous peoples, render, through discursive and affective means, Indigenous peoples as drunk, violent, deprived, wounded, tragically unassimilable, sexualized objects. Sociopolitical imaginaries, as Million conceives of them, function metaphorically like a normative "moral fabric," woven from affective, felt knowledges and propositional racialized, gendered, and sexualized discursive content.

Million argues that Western, neoliberal arenas like the Truth and Reconciliation Commission that focus on notions of human rights are constituted by logics of trauma that focus on "healing" Indigenous peoples instead of promoting self-determination. Logics of trauma require narratives that cast Indigenous peoples in the role of "the wounded," informed by the gendered, moral discourses and embodied practices imposed on Indigenous peoples. As Million explains, trauma narratives are invoked by politicians, delegates, and wellness programming in arenas where Indigenous people are expected to articulate their wounds to oppressors. It is only when the oppressors already have a toolset full of psy-tools (psychology, psychotherapy, psychoanalysis) that they seek to examine our and our communities' pain (149). Million writes:

In the same arena Indigenous peoples seek to define terms of self-determination, outcomes of prior colonization are measured and diagnosed as trauma. This creates a site for our healing, our reconstruction and its management. This is actually a dangerous position. . . . The space of our medicalized diagnosis as victims of trauma is not a site wherein self-determination is practiced or defined. (150)

The terms of the discussion in this arena are already set; in these pre-defined terms of trauma, self-determination cannot be practiced because Indigenous communities are preconceived as wounded bio-specimens to be healed by the state. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission is an example of a neoliberal arena in which Indigenous peoples are expected to "witness their truth to power," but only within the framework of a trauma narrative that undermines attempts at truth-sharing.

In the second chapter, "Gendered Racialized Sexuality: The Formation of States," Million describes the affective,

gendered heterosexuality that functions as a sociocultural imaginary and normative foundation of the Canadian nation-state. Million details the affective components of the boarding school era and of sexual violence against Indigenous women and sexual minorities. She argues that the gendered racialized violence against Indigenous women is constitutive of the nation-states of Canada and the United States. Indigenous women, Million notes, are centers of their communities with the power to speak to and bring about the future. The nation-state's attempts to control Indigenous women's bodies and sexualities through boarding schools, through the legal kidnapping of Indigenous children, through legislation, policing, and incarceration, is an attempt to render inert the futures of Indigenous communities. This controlling of life itself is the biopower of the settler nation-state. The settler nation-state exerts much of its control over Indigenous peoples through affective means, constructing the felt knowledge pertaining to Indigenous bodies, deeming Indigenous bodies as sexually depraved, drunk, and dependent. Violent state practices like residential schools are justified by the felt knowledge inherited by settlers, yet these detrimental felt knowledges are not the focus of investigation. Million argues that the felt knowledge is necessary for an analysis of politics of the nation-state because the gendered racialized violence constitutive thereof has powerful unspoken affective components.

In chapter three, "Felt Theory," Million describes the effects of the narratives and testimonies of First Nations and Métis women offered in the reports from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. In describing their abuse, boarding school experiences, and experiences of gendered colonial violence, Million writes, "First Nations women in Canada changed the actual conditions for what *could* be said about the poverty and discrimination that were their daily fare" (56). Here, Million also expands her account of felt knowledges. Felt knowledges, according to Million, are a limit to white academics. The felt aspects of Indigenous women's testimonies are inaccessible to white male academics, who, Million suggests, are inundated with a competing felt knowledge pertaining to Indigenous women from the settler nation-state that leads them to act as gatekeepers against affect. White male academics are oblivious to their own unspoken affective attachments to empire, "development," and capitalism. In this chapter, Million focuses largely on the prowess and desire-based navigation exhibited by the Indigenous women who told their stories, who changed "Canada's idea of itself" (77).

In "'Indian Problem': Anomie and Its Discontents," Million builds a genealogy, tracing the concepts of anomie and victimology of the 1960s through their transformation into the concept of trauma of the 1980s. According to Million, the human rights paradigm allows for this transformation. Though Million details the potential that trauma narratives contain for undermining self-determination, she consistently reminds readers that Indigenous activists, in the political acts of their testimony of residential school experiences, often inherit, navigate, and mobilize these trauma narratives into a public, international forum. Million writes, however, that these fora usually "become about health rather than justice" (78). In the 1960s, "anomie"

was used to describe the natural outcome of being Indian in a white world. Million writes, “anomie is a concept that allowed Canadians an analysis of Indian malady without attributing it specifically to their Indian policy . . . [Indigenous peoples’] anomie is a natural outcome, their racial inability or cultural inability to adapt to encroaching white society” (84). Anomie segues into victimhood and deviance in the late 70s, as the social sciences pick up the topic and “frame the revitalization of Canadian aboriginal cultures as therapeutic but not necessarily political” (84). Million tracks the transition of anomie into victimology into trauma, noting that nation-states like Canada ignored many recommendations about the self-determination and justice for Indigenous peoples and prioritized one: “to establish institutions and programs in the name of *healing*” (101). Million emphasizes that, like anomie and victimhood, trauma and healing leave the settler nation-state’s responsibility for and tendency to reiterate violence conveniently out of focus. The focus on healing sets up inevitable relationships of dependency with the settler nation-state and invisibilizes projects of justice.

In chapters five and six, “Therapeutic Nations” and “What Will Our Nations Be?,” respectively, Million contrasts two different approaches to constructing and healing self-determined nations. The first approach to building self-determined Indigenous governance, profiled in chapter five, relies on human development discourse and results inevitably in a diagnosis of intergenerational trauma. In chapter six, Million profiles the second approach to constructing self-determined Indigenous governance, which relies on Indigenous women’s critique of patriarchal Aboriginal Nationalism. Million describes that gendered components of the 1876 Indian Act, the central document pertaining to federal Indigenous law in Canada, imbued with Western heteropatriarchal values, subverted the gender equity of traditional Indigenous communities and gave substantial power over Indigenous women to Indigenous men. These heteropatriarchal impositions on Indigenous women resulted in the fracturing of Indigenous communities, or what Million calls a “split in vision that has not been reconciled,” because they subvert the non-patriarchal organization of traditional Indigenous communities (127). After describing the deep conflicts between Indigenous men’s visions of nation (visions seemingly loyal to human rights arguments, Canadian legal language, and the patriarchal order of the Indian Act), and Indigenous women’s visions of nation, (visions committed to community wellness) Million notes that Indigenous men’s platform prevailed, while the women’s position “has been more or less deferred to the now more medicalized realms of ‘healing’” (127). Million writes, “Women’s vision encapsulated nations in which integral respectful reciprocal relations between persons regardless of gender, their families, and by extension all life forms informs a communal governance” (129). Women’s visions of a healing nation were forced into the language of Canadian legal rights, which undermined their vision. Million concludes chapter six emphasizing the importance of the question, “What will our nation be?” Importantly, the affective component of women’s role in governance is deeply contrasted in this chapter with that depicted by the settler nation-state; the powerful models of Indigenous polity according to

Indigenous women’s visions focuses on women in the affective role as the hearts of Indigenous communities.

In the final chapter, “(Un)Making the Biopolitical Citizen,” Million contrasts the modes of governance in a biopolitical state with the differently imagined, dreamt, and performed Indigenous nations that exist beyond the constraints of neoliberalism. Million argues here that the healing promoted by psy-tools (psychology, psychotherapy, psychoanalysis) are tools designed for the “self,” so “important to the development of a citizen-subject of neoliberalism” (145). Healing that exceeds neoliberalism exists in spite of neoliberalism, “utiliz[ing] the interstices and cracks in neoliberalism’s biopolitical ‘great society’” (145). Million profiles several Indigenous healing projects she sees as self-determined and self-governed that exist in the in-betweens of neoliberalism. Million writes,

Indigenism contains seed for imagining what else our nations might be. And while that is a dark star to peer at, it is also exactly why many Indigenous have so tenaciously opted to continue to fight in belief and action that our lifeways may pose something other than illness and death. What would our governance be if they already assumed that all life, all life’s “vibrant matter,” rather than such an impossibly universal subject, formed their primary responsibility? (179)

Million concludes that it is crucial that Indigenous peoples continue their intense dreaming about what else our nations might be.

Million does not point to the tension between Indigenous self-determination and the avenues through which Indigenous communities attempt to define it for the sake of criticizing Indigenous-led programming. Rather, Million points to this tension in order to highlight the multi-faceted dimensions of settler colonialism, to describe the felt, affective components of its existence, and to tell a cautionary tale about the way trauma narratives have the potential to undermine self-determination. Million enacts an Indigenous feminist methodology that subverts criticism-for-criticism’s-sake and instead focuses on relationship-building and generation. In this same spirit, I’m not interested here in synthesis or criticism; rather, I’m interested in expansion. Million gifts readers with several useful and philosophically interesting insights, two of which I will highlight below.

Million’s important work in *Therapeutic Nations* emphasizes that commonly wielded frameworks, like human rights discourse or biopoliticized narratives of trauma and healing, can seem neutral, while importing discursive and felt sociopolitical imaginaries that undermine the sovereignty and self-determination of Indigenous peoples. Million calls herself a genealogist, which seems fitting since much of her work is tracking the history, progeny, effects, and the often hidden or taken-for-granted affective facets of a particular conceptual framework.

I believe this important argument generates a profound lesson for theorists: the theoretical tools we inherit, when

taken for granted, may have the potential to undermine the social-justice projects we aim our loyalties toward. It is only with careful genealogical tracking that we can uncover the (often intentionally) hidden origins and affective components of our theoretical tools. It would be interesting to explore what other domains Million's analyses can shed light on. For example, many Indigenous language revitalization programs, culture revitalization programs, sobriety and wellness projects, aid initiatives, and research utilizing intergenerational trauma as an explanatory tool seem to rely on similar conceptions of Indigenous peoples' trauma that might be complicated by a Million-esque analysis. If, as Million suggests, the conception of trauma at the heart of many of these projects reiterates a narrative that creates inescapable dependency relationships between Indigenous communities and states, the projects may have the potential to undermine themselves.

Million's epistemological project is also important. Million mentions the discursive, linguistic, articulable component of knowledge, but focuses on affective content: felt knowledge and embodied practices. Million notes that felt knowledge is feminized and dismissed by the Western obsession with Rationality, but shows how it is the affective component of knowledge that exerts so much power over how Indigenous peoples are constructed and abused. In the aforementioned example about the Indian man in the back of the truck and his pre-supposed drunkenness, Million attributes the presupposition to the onlooker's felt knowledge, not to ignorance. On Million's account, raced, sexualized presuppositions about reality do not come from an individual's ignorance or lack of knowledge; rather, they come from a deep and unaccounted-for type of knowledge that is constructed systemically through sociopolitical imaginaries. If racism and gender-based violence are rooted in affective or felt knowledges, analyses that circumvent or

dismiss this component of knowledges are likely to miss part of the story.

As Million notes, Indigenous women have in some cases taken up the frameworks of human rights and trauma, despite their potential to undermine self-determination by reiterating neoliberal ideologies and creating relationships of dependency with the settler state. By calling our attention to felt affective knowledge, Million shows how the seemingly detrimental move of picking up human rights language and trauma narratives is actually a strategy on the part of Indigenous women. While the affective component of knowledge exerts power over how Indigenous peoples are constructed and abused, it is also the knowledge through which relationships and communities are built. Analyses that circumvent or dismiss felt knowledge have the potential to mischaracterize political acts like testimony, as Million shows occurs in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. It would be interesting to see how Million's conception of felt knowledge can complicate accounts of injustice that rely heavily on ignorance and ignorance-production.

My recommendation of this text is, of course, to all learners, though I believe this cautionary tale will be of particular importance to philosophers and public policy scholars who find themselves inundated with and prone to invoking the language of "trauma" and "healing" with regard to oppressed groups. I also believe Indigenous readers who, like myself, have found their own and their communities' identities pre-constructed by outsiders as inescapably wounded and dependent will find *Therapeutic Nations* to be a wonderful tool in dreaming intensely of alternatives to the sociopolitical imaginaries imposed upon us by settler colonial nation-states.