Introduction: Themes and discourses in African philosophy

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More recent discussions in African philosophy have focused on substantive issues than the largely meta-philosophical discussions that African philosophers engaged in between the 1960s and 1990s. This makes this special issue very important. Collectively the articles in the issue, among others, explore contemporary topics in African philosophy and studies in the area of the political philosophy of need, oral tradition in philosophy, majoritarian democracy and decolonisation, biomedical and relational conceptions of the body, an identity-driven approach to African studies, Plato's crucible and contemporary African understandings of leadership and the metaphysical underpinnings in existing discourses on disability in Africa.

Preamble

As far back as one desires to look, human society has been fraught, in varying degrees, with both negative and positive realities. These realities have beckoned and continue to beckon to human societies to respond in ways that promote the positives and minimise or even eradicate the negatives. The ability of humans to respond to these realities and their agency is underscored by the idea of social integration developed by Emile Durkheim, according to which people's beliefs, norms and values make up a shared consciousness, or a collective way of understanding and behaving in the world, and bind individuals together and create social integration or society. While the collective consciousness of individuals does exert an influence on society in terms of social integration, society in turn also exerts a powerful force on individuals by helping to shape the direction of such consciousness (see Durkheim [1897] 1951; Alpert 1939; 1940/1941). The 26th International Society for African Philosophy and Studies (ISAPS) conference of 2021, comprising academics from various fields and based around the world, focused on themes around ways in which we can properly respond to some of these social realities from the perspective of Africa.[1] These themes are both existential and theoretical and this special issue of the *South African Journal of Philosophy* presents what emerge as "Contemporary issues in African philosophy and studies".

Among the many contributions that were presented at the 2021 conference are: biomedical and relational conceptions of the body and how these relate to the meaning of illness and care; the political philosophy of need, the various ways that needs are conceptualised in African societies and the implications of these conceptualisations on the way needs are articulated in Africa; and the role of oral tradition in philosophy, focusing on the one hand on philosophy and the written text and, on the other, philosophy and praxis. Drawing on African political philosophical viewpoints, one contribution explores how decolonising power requires a critique of majoritarian democracy in Africa, while another questions the very basis of an identity-driven approach to African studies that looks to define what is characteristically special about Africa or African conceptualisations. Another chapter explores the metaphysical underpinnings in existing discourses on disability in

1 The 26th ISAPS conference was hosted by the Philosophy Department, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa as an online conference from 15–16 July 2021. The conference was initially scheduled to hold from 19–20 May 19-20 as a contact conference, but was postponed due to the global COVID-19 pandemic.

Africa. Lastly, a contribution with reference to Plato's crucible engages with contemporary African understandings of leadership and the need for soul-sharing.

This introduction seeks to further explore the aforementioned contributions with the hope of engaging the themes, propose alternative paths, justify existing positions and possibly raise new questions that emerge from the various arguments. In what follows, we engage the positions advanced in the arguments presented in the contributions of this special issue. This is in the form of a synopsis that captures the key positions, their strengths and weaknesses and the questions that these new lenses evoke. This introduction is divided into three sections. In the first section, we engage with the challenge of defining and defending certain methodologies in African studies and philosophy. For instance, a large part of African studies proceeds by seeking to present characteristically "African" theorisations or practices. Such an identity-driven approach is potentially counterproductive to development concerns. Yet, at the same time, by exploring characteristically African methodologies such as the place of the oral tradition in African philosophy, we may be able to highlight the advantages of infusing philosophy in practical existential realities. Discussion of oral traditions leads us into considering philosophy as practice, giving rise to the question of whether it is possible to move philosophy away from the ivory towers of abstraction into an incarnated lived experience. We take up issues of incarnation and embodiment in the second section, where we engage with the underlying metaphysical principles that inform discourses on disability and examine how relational conceptions of the body that bring together the body, the social and the supernatural impact views of care. The third section takes a closer look at majoritarian democracy, conceptions of need and how these attract a new disposition for the idea of leadership in Africa. This section will also explore the role of migration politics in promoting the growth that Africa desires.

Challenging perspectives on methodologies

Long-standing topics and debates in African studies centre on what African studies can contribute to broader disciplines by identifying characteristically "African" features, methods and concepts making up systems and methods of knowledge. Recognising that African systems and methods of knowledge may differ from colonial systems and methods that tend to dominate academic discourse, scholars have for decades sought to identify and define what a genuinely "African" practice might entail. For instance, if knowledge has traditionally been transmitted by primarily oral methods in many African cultures, orality could play an important role in a field like African philosophy. If so, it is crucial to interrogate whether philosophical thought and knowledge are indeed the kinds of thing that can be compatible with an oral tradition, and therefore to unpack what implications that might have for philosophical methodologies. However, before exploring what insights such an approach can bring – as one of the contributions in this special issue does – we might question the value of adopting an identity-driven African studies which seeks to identify characteristically "African" features, methods and concepts in the first place.

Anthony Chinaemerem Ajah and Josephine Ngozi Akah, in "Developmental consequences of identity-driven African studies", argue against the trend in African studies, especially in African philosophy and cultural studies, that turns to African traditions, heritage, or identity to define concepts and systems of knowledge. By "identity-driven", they mean that the fields are driven by a programme of, on the one hand, identifying how Africa is "uniquely different" to elsewhere in the world and, on the other hand, arguing that Africa has been subject to different kinds of violence in having those differences overlooked or suppressed. Identity-driven African studies, then, aims to look at the unique elements in African cultures to decolonise knowledge systems in the face of the epistemic violence of practices such as colonialism. According to Ajah and Akah, however, such an approach problematically "inhibit[s] agentic reflections and actions in response to contemporary developmental demands of African societies".

Ajah and Akah present both a negative argument and a positive proposal. Negatively, they identify an identity-driven African studies as responding to a diagnosis of the injustice of epistemic violence as arising from when "humans from the Global North concluded that others from the Global South are less human". A form of an identity-driven response to epistemic violence is then to promote the existence of unique and different epistemologies in the Global South that have been suppressed or

devastated by dominant colonial epistemologies, putting forward the claim that "[t]he content of knowledge and processes of acquiring and producing knowledge in the Global South are essentially different from what obtain in the Global North". However, Ajah and Akah argue that such an approach is tantamount to accepting the necessity of the idea that "humans differ essentially across continents and regions" because "[t]hey need to be essentially different before what and how they can know varies". Ajah and Akah continue, saying that by confirming human difference in this way, we fail to recognise and promote our common humanity and even risk enforcing the problematic attitude that the dehumanisation of others by the suppression of their epistemologies was at least coherent.

Not only is the attitude underscoring an identity-driven approach just a different side of the same problematic coin for Ajah and Akah, but it also has deep consequences for the humanities and social sciences in Africa. In particular, the authors contend that imaginative and intellectual energies are spent not on improving understanding and cooperation, but instead on "creating even more powerful, livening images of what it means to be different". This has anti-development consequences, where one such consequence is that it inhibits agentic reflections and actions because "it focuses on crafting the basis for Africa's difference and how Africa suffered from Euro-Americans" and "pays no attention to their agency in concrete terms of what they are doing and what they can do".

This gives rise to Ajah and Akah's positive proposal. Noting that an identity-driven approach inhibits agentic reflections, they propose an alternative approach that is grounded on agentic self-efficacy, understood as agents having the capacity to effect change on the reality around them. Following such a route would require a change in focus in the kinds of questions that are asked in African studies. Rather than asking questions about what is particularly "African" against a negative framing of Africa and Africans as victims of various forms of violence – "what is being done by the rest of the world to short-change Africans?" as the authors put it – we should ask a positive question: "What are Africans doing to improve their lot?".

Now, Ajah and Akah's negative argument requires accepting that arguing for different epistemologies, as per an identity-driven approach, involves the condition that "humans differ essentially across continents and regions". It is by accepting this condition that we end up with the claim that they attribute to proponents of an identity-driven approach, namely that "[t]he content of knowledge and processes of acquiring and producing knowledge in the Global South are essentially different from what obtain in the Global North". However, it is necessary to question whether those adopting an identity-driven approach explicitly or implicitly accept such a condition and, crucially, whether the viability of their projects relies on it. Indeed, a weaker and non-essentialising condition is potentially more plausible, namely that the contexts in which humans find themselves differ across continents and regions. If so, then the content of knowledge and the processes of acquiring and producing knowledge are dependent not on some essential feature of the person, but rather on relational features that hold between the person and their context.

At the level of content, this weaker claim does not require that "reality" be different in the Global South, but rather that the contents of knowledge – the things that can be known – are tied to a context. If that is the case, then context-specific content may not be fit for purpose in another context (see, for instance, Posholi 2020). At the level of knowledge acquisition, in turn, the claim would be that features of our context, such as cultural particulars like language, impact how we gain knowledge even while we may share our essential human characteristics (in this regard, see Wiredu 1998). If we adopt a weaker condition that does not essentialise human difference, would an identity-driven African studies still run into the problems of essentialising racial differences that Ajah and Akah identify?

Regardless of the answer, Ajah and Akah's positive proposal of grounding African studies in agentive self-efficacy draws important critical attention to the question of what form we want the future of African studies to take. And here, another contribution potentially gives us an example of what African studies thus grounded could look like – asking not what the world has done to Africa, but what Africa can do for the world.

In "The status of oral traditions in the history of philosophy: Methodological considerations", Anke Graness looks critically at what the implications are for the historiography of philosophy if

it considers both written and oral sources in the reconstruction of the history of philosophy. The methodology of a European model of a history of philosophy that focuses on written traditions, Graness proposes, is inadequate for tracing the development of philosophical traditions on a global scale. This is because some of those traditions occur in contexts that have had colonial experiences that have obscured other systems of knowledge, and with knowledge that has been transmitted through primarily oral methods. When we recognise that there are oral traditions around the world, we can mine those traditions for philosophical insights – and this is true not just of oral traditions in Africa. However, Graness argues that we should also question what gets lost in a move from the oral to the textual, where we can challenge current practices in the historiography of philosophy.

The idea that philosophical thought can be transmitted orally is controversial. Scholars like Paulin Hountondji ([1976] 1983) argue that philosophy requires critical reflection, but oral traditions that require memorisation do not enable such critical reflection. Nevertheless, by adopting a Derridean understanding of a text as "a trace that is read in an infinite context of references", Graness argues that orality is not inherently uncritical. She draws on Souleymane Bachir Diagne (2016) to describe how orality can involve intertextuality, and intertextuality allows for critical reflection. In particular, orality involves putting a text in relation to another text "by citing it, making allusion to it, imitating it, miming it, subverting it, treating it at times with derision" (Diagne 2016, 54; quoted in Graness). As such, simply being part of an oral tradition does not exclude a knowledge system from being philosophical, as the important textual and intertextual elements that allow critical reflection can still be present.

Even though oral traditions are often understood as a communal system of thought, another important and closely related feature of a philosophical form of knowledge, for Graness, is that there is authorship. Authorship helps to tie philosophy to contexts of origin, where answers to what may be eternal questions (what is the nature of the world, say) are "not only regionally, culturally and linguistically determined, but also historically, socially and politically determined". Abandoning authorship entirely also risks overlooking how there can be intra-community criticism and divergent ideas. Again, the idea of text as "a trace that is read in an infinite context of references" allows that the trace can take on different forms and stand in comparative and critical relations to other texts.

Once we allow that a philosophical form of knowledge can be transmitted orally, further questions arise, such as how to determine criteria and methods for including an oral philosophical tradition in the history of philosophy. However, if we allow that philosophical "text" is not only written text, then it is necessary to also question the so-called "linguistic turn" in philosophy, according to which "language is an inescapable condition of thought". As Graness argues, such a focus limits us to looking at philosophy as words, overlooking how philosophy also exists as practice: as a way of life, such as with the Ancient Greeks, or even expressed in elements like dance, as found in philosophical traditions like those of the Maori.

Of course, how oral and practical traditions can be captured in writing, as the history of philosophy would typically call for, raises a host of methodological challenges. In the transition from orality to writing, for instance, we lose the embodied elements of communication, "the physical presence of the speaker as well as the verbal and non-verbal connotations of a speech situation, which include gestures, facial expressions and the rhythm of the language". As such, Graness concludes that "philosophy and the historiography of philosophy must be open to the use of media other than writing, both as a source material and as media for their own expression".

Now, Graness' approach could fall foul of being identity-driven and run into the problems that Ajah and Akah think accrue to such an approach. However, if we are asking questions about agentive self-efficacy – what can Africa give to the world? – Graness' challenge to the role of written text draws attention to the different ways in which we communicate knowledge. As she notes, the challenge is not just in the history of philosophy because, even today, new media presents new ways of communication, such as phenomena like TikTok. Tackling the different forms of knowledge communication can help to develop agency for effecting the contemporary realities one finds oneself in.

Nevertheless, other important challenges and questions arise. For instance, where do Graness' arguments leave the prospects of communicating philosophical knowledge? If translation from one

media into another inherently loses something, then we may be severely constrained in recording and sharing knowledge at all. Even a video recording, say, loses the physical presence of the performer: how vital is the physical presence, then, for the content of the knowledge being shared? In turn, if we are able to identify what loss is permissible for the transmission of knowledge and what is not, then we may have a means to keep with written text and not need to turn to new media for the history of philosophy. After all, one of the advantages of translating thought into written text is that it is recorded and easily shared.

Incarnated lived experiences

Above, we have seen that Graness draws attention to the relation between philosophy and practice, which in turn emphasises the role that incarnation and embodiment can play in philosophical methodology. However, questions of incarnation and embodiment are not limited to methodology. The body can also infuse philosophical content, as two more contributions to this special issue explore. While one of the articles discusses the body in the sphere of medicine and shows the relationship between the body and the philosophical, the other article demonstrates the sense in which the body extends beyond the physical such that one can meaningfully talk about the connections between lived bodily experience and metaphysical and supernatural considerations.

For instance (and regarding the latter issues), Edwin Etieyibo, in his article “African metaphysics and disabilities”, presents what one might consider a lived-experience conception of philosophy. He does this from the viewpoint of disability. Amid the very philosophical and abstract nature of metaphysics, Etieyibo maintains that this abstraction can be experienced in the conception of disability in an African cultural framework. In his rendition, the understanding of metaphysics as ontology (becoming, reality, existence) is important as a necessary point of departure. For Etieyibo, the understanding of metaphysics as that which goes beyond the physical, although valid, does not really do justice to the idea of disability. Referring to Teffo and Roux (1998), Etieyibo maintains that African metaphysics is conceived as both physical and non-physical realities. These are interconnected and close together in a way that any internal change in any of these aspects influences the general structure. The consequence of this interconnected relation between the spiritual and the physical is that the spiritual is believed to be responsible for not only good outcomes, but also evil outcomes. Etieyibo and Omiegbe (2017, 17–18) write that “[t]he witch with perversely strong will power always operates psychologically to cause, first, psychical and then physical disasters”. This means that things are caused and events do not merely occur for no particular reason. Etieyibo draws on examples from various African countries like Nigeria, Ghana, Sierra Leone, the Democratic Republic of Congo, South Africa and Zaira to buttress his point.

Good, as it is the case with evil, is also believed to be caused by various gods or spirits. Etieyibo, while referring to South Africa, observes that the Zulu people appeal to ancestorial spirits when there is a need for mediation between the living and the dead. The intent here is informed by the belief that the supernatural is more knowledgeable than the natural and the supernatural is better positioned to attend to the needs and desires of those in the physical realm. There are designated spiritual gatekeepers, mostly old relatives in the family or shamans, who make the connection and communication between the physical and supernatural world possible.

In view of this background, Etieyibo goes on to define disability as comprising both the physical and mental. He writes that

> by physical disability, I mean disability that is corporal or material and that is confined to the body as opposed to the mind. And by mental disability, I am referring to disability that is quasi-material or physical (psychological or cognitive or that is confined to the mind as opposed to the body).

Etieyibo observes the existence of two main models of understanding disability: the medical (focusing mainly on the physical features of the individual) and the social model (context, usually in the form of responses towards the physical features of the individual). He goes on to add that disability has a spiritual component, which he refers to as a “holistic notion of disability” consisting of psycho-mental and metaphysical disability. By alluding to Godwin Sogolo’s (2003) conceptions

of causes (primary and secondary), Etieyibo further justifies how there is a correlation between his holistic notion of disability and the arguments around causes by Sogolo. In Etieyibo's conclusion, he maintains that the idea of humanity should not advance or promote forms of existence that introduce concepts such as "abnormal", "normal", etc. He goes on to claim that discrimination based on these notions of disability is flawed.

While Etieyibo's conclusion necessarily follows from his arguments and sheds light on the need for a new disposition towards disability, new questions emerge which are worthy of some attention. We consider two of these questions in this introduction. First, the closed nature of the human relationship between the metaphysical (in this case, spirits and ancestors), as presented in Etieyibo's article, shows a socially influenced conception of human existence. This existence informs who and what features are supposedly "normal", "abnormal", "abled" and "disabled". To promote the humanity that Etieyibo proposes, it is important to return to the foundation of African metaphysical and physical socialisation and theorisation that drives these kinds of exclusion and marginalisation conceptions. Lastly, it is important to rethink or reconceptualise the word "disability" by thinking more in terms of what might be referred to as degrees of capability. For instance, the inability to carry out a task does not necessarily mean that one is disabled, but incapable. With capability, structures and things could be put in place to ensure that an individual is capable of carrying out tasks that they would ordinarily be incapable of doing. This way human beings are seen and come to terms with their own incapability, because we all are incapable to varying degrees.

Questions of ability, disability and capability and normal and abnormal are also reflected in how we conceive of health, illness and disease, with implications not only for metaphysics, but for applied topics. For instance, adopting holistic understandings of the body can cast a new light on health care and quality of care, a topic that Mbih Jerome Tosam addresses in this issue in "The biomedical and the relational model of the body, the meaning of illness, and quality of care: A comparative analysis". Tosam argues that a relational model of the body can complement more mainstream models, such as the biomedical, in enhancing quality of care in medicine.

The two models of the body that Tosam contrasts in his comparative analysis are a biomedical model involving a reductionist conception of health that reduces the patient to a body, which is dominant in contemporary medicine, and a relational model, on which "health is considered as the harmonious balance between the natural, supernatural and social realms, and disease is the disruption of this cosmic equilibrium". Health is made up of more than the patient's body and psychology, but also interconnected relations between the natural and supernatural realms.

By contrasting these different models, Tosam argues that the different models give rise to different understandings of the role of the healer, which has implications for the quality of care that is then offered. As Tosam argues, a biomedical model, by centring a view of the body as a mechanised system, or even when extended to include psychosocial elements, views the patient "as a passive recipient of treatment from an expert or physician whose concern is to fix the broken part of the body without any concern about how the patient feels or perceives their illness". This impacts quality of care as the patient's suffering can be sidelined and, by separating the patient from their lived context, their voice is overlooked. While a successful model for medicine, therefore, the biomedical model nevertheless can be seen to give rise to gaps in quality of care.

A relational model found in indigenous sub-Saharan Africa, in contrast, views the human body "as a unified and interconnected entity which consists of embodied non-material parts and is implicated in a web of relationships with the natural and supernatural realms". Such a model promotes viewing the person as part of a community, where the health of the one is part of the health of the other. Where, with the biomedical model, the health care practitioner as a physician is seen as someone who can help repair a body, on the relational model, the health care practitioner, as a healer, is seen as a mediator who can help "to re-establish a broken relationship".

The relationship between a physician and a patient is necessarily one with an epistemic imbalance, where the physician has complex medical knowledge of the mechanics of the body that the patient lacks. The relationship between a healer and a patient, in contrast, is more equal. Tosam writes that "[b]ecause the healer and the patient do not perceive disease from disparate and completely opposing angles, there exists, therefore, no gap between the patient's experience of illness and

the healer's perception of it". As a result, "the personhood of the patient is seen as shared with a complex set of relationships, with the support of the patient's family and community and the universe around them". This allows for an enhanced quality of care.

Tosam accepts that the biomedical model of the body is a strong model, one that has great power in the advances of the medical sciences. So, by drawing attention to its limitations in the physician-patient relationship, he is not arguing that it has no place. Rather, he argues that such a model should be complemented with other models. This is not only because other models like a relational model allow us to reconceptualise what care involves, but also because in our multicultural world it is increasingly the case that people from different cultures and with different understandings of the body and health enter into the medical system. Respecting their personhood requires recognising the variability in those understandings. We live in a multicultural world where a good physician is not simply "a health professional who is merely skilled in medical technology, but one who combines their expertise and critical thinking with a good knowledge of different cultural perspectives on disease, health and medicine.

Tosam offers an in-depth comparison of these two models, their conceptions of health and disease, the physician/healer-patient relationship and the implications for quality of care. By teasing out differences in quality of care, Tosam allows that we can maintain the scientific aspects of a biomedical model even while questioning its suitability in a practice. For instance, we can recognise the strength and dominance of a biomedical model in one application, such as medical research, but allow for cultural and contextual variation in models in another application, such as in caring for patients.

Nevertheless, we might question whether the kind of complementarity for which Tosam advocates, where "medical traditions are not mutually exclusive, they can reciprocally learn from each other for improved health care across medical systems", is trying to have one's cake and eat it. These models of the body are based on conceptions of the body that are at odds with one another at key stages – for instance, in understandings of whether supernatural entities can have causal impact in a physical world (for discussion, see Sogolo 2003). While maybe not mutually exclusive when put to different applications such as using a biomedical model primarily in research and a relational model in health care delivery, we may nevertheless end up with confusing and contradictory claims of the body when we take a step back to review medicine and health care as a whole. Does that matter, however, if we are concerned with only one of those applications, such as quality of care?

Majoritarianism, African politics and migration

In this section, three important themes are merged not only to show how pertinent they are in an African context, but also to reveal the inherent connection that exists between them. One of these themes is the idea of decolonisation, and the others are needs and migration. The need for decolonisation has raised various philosophical questions about what needs to be decolonised and why and by whom should this decolonisation be done? Focusing on majoritarian democracy in Africa, Oladele Abiodun Balogun alerts Africans to the urgency with which decolonisation should be addressed, especially as it pertains to political power in his article "Decolonizing power: A critique of majoritarian democracy in Africa". Balogun highlights the systemic marginalisation of precolonial African political systems and the introduction of majoritarian democracy by colonialism. He argues that majoritarian democracy is a contributing cause of the social, political and economic challenges and problems in most African countries. He introduces an interesting twist to the problem with democracy in Africa by referring to political leaders as handlers of democracy and how these African political leaders are the problem.

In an attempt to problematise the reality of poor governance in Africa, Balogun identifies two main theoretical models: a universalist model and a traditional model. Referring to the universalist model, Balogun draws from the work of Sophie Oluwole (2003, 420) who writes that

> democracy is a theory that sets some basic [sociopolitical] principles according to which a good government, whatever its form, must be run. Such principles include: justice, freedom, equity, accountability, rule of law and liberty.

In view of these principles, Balogun argues that the universalist model should be replaced and insights should be drawn from an African traditional model of democracy. He notes that democracy is not a political system unique to the West; it is a political system that already existed in a precolonial African polis. However, the nature of democracy in Africa is one driven by colonial epistemic oppression, mental colonisation and ideological manipulation.

Using the Yoruba precolonial political structure, Balogun unpacks the power dynamics in indigenous African societies. He argues that decolonising power, indigenous African political structures would aid in promoting peace, political stability and effective development, among others. According to Balogun, the concept of family (*Ebi* in the Yoruba language) is used in the political sphere. This political structure was seen at the time as an extended family structure. The idea of leadership and power was driven by a commitment to the family and there were oaths and rites to reinforce this commitment to the people and covenant to the gods. Western political ideologies erode this sacred nature of leadership by limiting politics to the secular and undermining the sacred aspect of politics. Thus, without real spiritual consequences, contemporary leaders are not committed to the people.

Balogun presents a very plausible justification for decolonisation in contemporary African societies. However, a few issues emerge from his account. We hope that this promotes further engagement with some of the arguments espoused in Balogun's article. Colonial encounters had varying effects on people in Africa in general and Nigeria in particular. This encounter meant political, social and economic advantages for some and disadvantages for others in postcolonial Africa. Balogun does not address the complex nature of the colonial experiences and how these experiences cannot be conceptualised from a homogenous point of view. Another point that is worth noting is that colonialism amplified ethnic differences and arbitrarily merged ethnic groups through careless border divisions and allocations. In the case of Nigeria, with three "major" ethnic groups and over 100 "minority" ethnic groups, the promotion of ethnic hegemony is an attempt to impose or formulate a political structure around ethnic grouping. These complexities are brought to the fore in Balogun's article and he provides a starting point for addressing the problem of power and politics in contemporary African societies.

Different from Balogun, John Sanni, in his article "Moderate communitarianism and the prospect of an African political philosophy of needs", proposes a conception of needs that is informed by a moderate communitarian notion of needs as a possible solution to the reality of weak states in Africa. He notes that a moderate conception of needs does accord an explicit category to the concept of needs when compared to a communitarian version of needs. Moderate communitarianism, according to Sanni, promotes not only the collective understanding or gives primacy to the collective at the expense of the individual, but the individual is also given or accorded the space to articulate their conception of understanding of needs. Sanni's ideas are based on a critique of Lawrence Hamilton's position that African political philosophy and theory does not explicitly present a conception of needs. Sanni not only formulates a conception of needs, but he also identifies in Kwame Gyekye's philosophy a starting point for the conceptualisation of the idea or category of needs in an African political episteme.

Focusing on migration, Martin Asiegbu's article "Migration narrative: Towards a possible alternative for Africa in the 21st century" addresses the reality of Africa-Europe migration and the increasing challenges experienced by Africans. Asiegbu proposes an understanding of migration that is driven by the regeneration of Africa. In light of Asiegbu's task, he proposes a "pan-African philosophy of migration" in addition to the dominant strands of migration, namely statism and cosmopolitanism. Putting pan-African philosophy of migration in conversation with the statist and cosmopolitan strands of migration, Asiegbu favours a cosmopolitan disposition to migration. However, he observes that there is a weakness in the cosmopolitan worldview that he rectifies in his proposed pan-African philosophy of migration. He claims that migration laws and policies are driven by the understanding of borders. While the statist believes that the state should close its borders, cosmopolitanism advocates for open borders. There is a caveat that is worth noting in cosmopolitanism and this pertains to the conditions for preventing open borders. This caveat pertains to the right that the state has to prevent people from migrating. Different from cosmopolitanism,

especially as it pertains to the rights of the state to close or open its borders to particular people, pan-African philosophy of migration, argues Asiegbu, sees migration as tied to the human being and not the state or citizenship.

The last of the articles in the special issue is that of Enoch Aboi who introduces an overarching dimension to the themes in Africa, one that is not found in Sanni's and Asiegbu's accounts. Aboi's article, "No justice, no progress: Contemporary African leadership and society in Plato's crucible", addresses the challenges of leadership in Nigeria. Through the philosophical framework of Plato, Aboi argues that there is a major challenge in the attempt to response to the questions that emerge from the "human crisis of self and public governance". Aboi suggests that we explore and engage the state of the soul as opposed to other aspects like race and class, among other social categories. Aboi's builds his argument from Plato's position that a person is better just than unjust. An understanding of Plato's position informs Aboi's definition of "soul-searching", which he presents on the one hand as an introspection that focuses on justice in the soul of the individual and, on the other hand, as an introspection that justifies self-critique in African politics. What is seen here is that Aboi applies Plato to the African modern state. Aboi proposes a shift away from an ideological obsession with colonialism and neo-colonialism to a self-critique of the challenges that plague the soul of the individual in African leadership. This entails a new kind of responsibility and accountability on the part of African leaders.

Conclusion

The importance of this special issue with eight contributions from the 26th ISAPS conference held in 2021 that bring together a range of contemporary themes and issues in African philosophy and studies, shedding light on the realities in African societies, cannot be overemphasised. Its importance is not limited to its diverse but related themes, but also to the fact that the themes are existential and timely to primordial issues on the continent. The themes we have indicated range from fresh and challenging perspectives on methodologies and fields of African philosophy and studies as a whole, through to contributions in metaphysics, biomedical ethics and political philosophy. In this introduction, we have explored these different themes with the aim of highlighting the alternative paths and questions that arise from these contributions, both by themselves and in conversation with one another. We see a tripartite engagement with these realities. How do we engage the present, what should be our disposition to the past, and what kind of future should we envisage as a continent? The special issue reflects both the debates and discussions defining African philosophy and studies at the present time, and it opens up these themes in a way that provokes further engagement and reflection.

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