



Gazes in the post-colony: an analysis of African philosophies using Legitimation Code Theory

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ABSTRACT

This article reports on an analysis undertaken in the field of African philosophies using selected conceptual tools from Maton's Legitimation Code Theory (LCT). In response to calls by South African students for 'decolonising' the Humanities curriculum, the practical purpose of the analysis was to generate theoretically-informed guidelines for developing a curriculum for an undergraduate course in a new African Studies major. The field of African philosophies is of theoretical interest because historically it has been premised on responding to and challenging dominant, Western ideas imposed on African intellectuals through processes of colonization and modernization. LCT was employed to uncover principles that legitimate knowledge claims in this field – with a view to determining what content should be selected, recontextualized and pedagogized for the new curriculum. The analysis includes the author's meta-reflections on the affordances and limitations of LCT for working with knowledge in the South.

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Introduction

After almost half a century under the apartheid regime, South Africa belatedly joined the rest of independent post-colonial Africa – a generation after most of colonized Africa had liberated itself from colonial rule. However, it is only recently, a generation after the political transition in 1994 that 'born-free', black South African students have protested against the 'coloniality' and Eurocentricism of inherited curricula, particularly on historically white university campuses. As part of a cultural movement asserting black identities and black pain, students have called for the 'decolonization of the university curriculum'. Colonialism is understood as an epistemic (as well as military, political and socio-cultural) event with structurally enduring effects – termed 'coloniality' – that the student movement wants erased from the curriculum, particularly in the Human and Social Sciences (here termed the Humanities).

In response to this call, a new major in African Studies was proposed at the University of Cape Town, a historically white South African university.¹ The analysis and reflections presented in this article emerged from a reading group (of which the author was a

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member) established to work on designing a new third-year undergraduate course on African philosophies and intellectual traditions.² The author is neither a philosopher nor a member of the African Studies staff; I am a white sociologist of education located in an education development unit. In this capacity I was invited to bring curriculum development expertise to the team developing the new major in African Studies. In much of my previously published work, I have drawn uncritically on the social realist tradition of sociology of education and unproblematically applied concepts developed in Northern contexts to those in a post-colony. The experience of the reading group shifted my own position in this regard. Although based on this very specific experience, I hope this article will appeal to a wider audience in the way that it shows up the affordances and the limitations of Legitimation Code Theory (LCT), based in the social realist tradition, when applied to a field that has been constituted to counter the Western episteme – particularly because the latter is incapable of accounting for the existential problems faced by a (post) colonial subject.

The challenge currently facing the Humanities in post-colonial contexts is that Western thought is historically entangled in the inseparable processes of coloniality and modernity. The association of Western knowledge production with the colonial ‘civilization project’ and the effects of the geo-politics of knowledge production (its epistemic and distributive logics), mean that other forms of thought, especially those of colonized groups, have been negated and often destroyed. Historically in colonized societies, indigenous intellectual traditions tend to have been enunciated from outside the academy in less formalised contexts and forms; often from within anti-colonial political and social movements. The challenge for the ‘knower codes’ of the Humanities (where knower identities and subjectivities are strongly implicated in knowledge claims) is to denaturalize Western thought as universal and recover and recontextualize other intellectual traditions for teaching and learning in the academy. How this is to be done is hotly contested – and nowhere more so than in the field of African philosophies where African intellectuals have struggled to counter the universal knowledge claims of Western thought and particularly Anglo-American analytic philosophy. As we will see, some African intellectuals argue for a place within the old knower hierarchies, while others want to overthrow it altogether, change the rules of the game and gain control of the field.

Drawing on Bourdieu’s field theory, Maton (2014) notes that each field has its own distinctive resources, forms of status and ways of working. Within each field actors will cooperate and struggle to control the criteria of achievement, through strategies that maximize their own relative positions. Maton terms these competing claims to legitimacy in a field ‘languages of legitimation’ and it is the organizing principles that underlie these languages – their dispositions and practices – that this analysis highlights.

The article is structured as follows: first, the conceptual tools used in the analysis are set out. Second, the field of African philosophies is described. Third, three traditions of African philosophy are identified and discussed, based on Hallen (2009): ethno- and sage philosophy, socialist and Marxist philosophies and professional philosophy (split into the analytic and hermeneutic traditions). Given that readers may not be familiar with the field, exemplars of works by key intellectuals are provided to illustrate the application of LCT concepts. This in turn leads to reflections on how these works might be recontextualized for an undergraduate curriculum as well as critically assessing the affordances of LCT’s conceptual tools.

Conceptual framework

Legitimation Code Theory (LCT) is located in the social realist tradition of the sociology of education (Muller 2000; Young 2008; Moore 2009; Maton and Moore 2010; Wheelahan 2010) that has critiqued the ‘knowledge blindness’, judgmental relativism and subjectivist doxa of constructivist and post-structuralist theories of education. Asserting a commitment to a realist ontology and judgmental rationality, these sociologists of education call for a theory of knowledge to underpin processes of curriculum reform. While agreeing with the constructivists that all epistemology is socially constructed and thus inescapably socially and historically conditioned, Maton asserts that knowledge practices and truth claims are emergent from but irreducible to their contexts of production (2014, 11). He claims that LCT synthesizes Bourdieu’s field theory and Bernstein’s code theory into an operationalizable middle-range explanatory framework that allows one to analyse the knowledge claims and practices of intellectual fields.

In LCT (Specialization) Maton identifies two analytically distinct relations that specialize and legitimate knowledge practices in symbolic fields: ‘epistemic relations’ between a knowledge claim and its object, focus and methods; and ‘social relations’ between a knowledge claim and its subject, author or actor (2014, 29). ‘Knowledge codes’ are those knowledge practices where the object and method of study are strongly bounded and controlled by the field while the identity and attributes of the knower remain relatively unimportant. ‘Knowledge codes’ are contrasted with ‘knower codes’ where knowledge claims are based on unique attributes and dispositions of the knower.

‘Knower codes’ typify the Humanities where there are hierarchies of knowers whose texts and theories are juxtaposed and compete in particular fields; new knowers typically offer new theories rather than building on old ones (Maton 2014, 92). Consequently there is fierce contestation around canons and curricula and about the means of debate itself. Only some discourses get selected and recontextualized into curriculum knowledge, privileging some knowers’ ‘gazes’ over others. Building on Bernstein’s (1999) assertion that in the Humanities the ‘ideal knower’ must possess a ‘privileged gaze’, Maton defines a gaze as ‘a canon introjected’, based on a ‘shared library’ or ‘invisible tribunal’ of knowers that becomes the basis for inter-subjective debate within a community of knowers (2014, 99). Regarding pedagogy, a privileged gaze tends to be acquired tacitly, which depends on access to the sociality and interactional relations of a community of legitimated knowers. Maton claims that the Humanities progress through strong sociality, through building knowers rather than building knowledge cumulatively. Consequently, it is in the Humanities *par excellence*, that the distributive logics of unequal societies will constrain access to legitimated gazes and to the means of determining their legitimation.

Maton (2014) makes a further distinction between kinds of knowers – those that emphasise subjective relations (SubR+) (based on the attributes of the ideal knower); and those that emphasise interactional relations (IR+) or knowing practices (based on ways of knowing and interacting with significant others). This enables him to identify four gazes (see diagram below) each with a different basis of legitimation: biological or genetic inheritance (a born gaze); social status or position (a social gaze); a ‘cultivated disposition’ (a cultivated gaze) and a ‘trained/ blank gaze’ where neither subjective relations nor interactional relations are considered important. The diagram below illustrates the legitimation codes of the four gazes. It anticipates the discussion to come by plotting

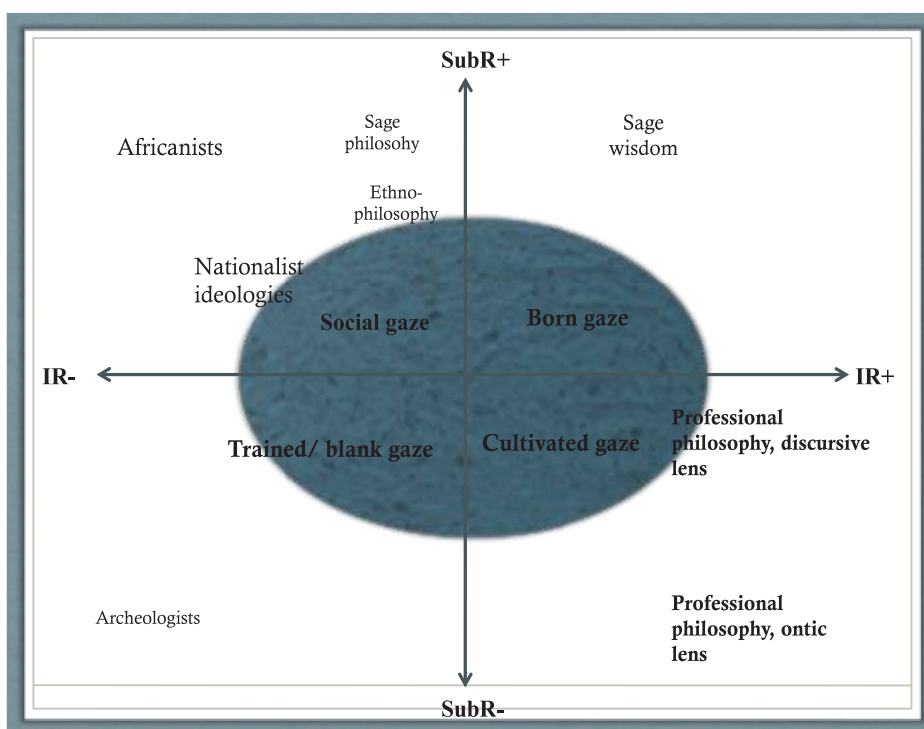


Figure 1. The field of African philosophies mapped onto LCT's social plane of the four gazes (adapted from Maton 2014, 186).

various intellectual traditions in the field of African philosophies relationally in terms of their gazes (Figure 1).

The analysis that follows focuses on knowledge production and practices (epistemic logics) in the field of African philosophies. It seeks to identify the bases of legitimation of different 'gazes' in the field. It also shows how the 'distributive logics' of power structures and unequal social relations in colonized societies at large have constrained who gets access to intellectual fields and to the capacity to generate and legitimate new knowledge. The analysis involves asking the following kinds of questions: 'who are the legitimate knowers who wield symbolic power and control in this field?', 'on what basis are they legitimated?', 'what are the rules of the game and who defines these?', 'how do some knowers and practices come to gain high status in the field?', 'what is the effect of particular social and historical contexts on knowledge production?' and 'to what extent do the answers to these questions close down or restrict access to knowledge production and the community of knowers in this field?'

African philosophies as a field³

Philosophy as a transcultural enterprise is without universality, unity and a canon. (Outlaw 1996, 72 cited in Hallen 2009, 92)

It is impossible to analyse African philosophies as a field without first locating it in the history of colonialism and understanding its epistemic logic as working in a dialectical

and critical relation to dominant Western intellectual traditions. African intellectuals have long called on the West to problematize its theory of identity and acknowledge race as a foundational category that continues to haunt modern thought. This is captured by Mbembe,

Colonization was a project of universalization. Its purpose was to inscribe the colonized in the space of modernity. But its vulgarity, its often casual brutality and its bad faith all made it a perfect example of anti-liberalism. (2017, 97)

Mbembe (2017) shows how Western racism essentialized difference and set up a racial hierarchy in which the West was portrayed as the pinnacle of reason and civilization and the 'Black Man' as an absence, an exclusion, a sub-human object lacking in reason. In response, African philosophies initially developed as attempts by African intellectuals to assert their rationality, reclaim their identity, autonomy and historical agency. The intellectual impetus for African philosophies is often located in social and political struggles outside of the academy and the approach is by definition comparative and dialectical – that is, constituted as a challenge to Western intellectual traditions. Thus despite the fact that African philosophy is now an established sub-discipline within philosophy, it is hardly surprising that relations between African and Western philosophies – their ideal knowers, objects and methods of study – are contested and unresolved – including the very meaning of the terms 'African' and 'philosophy'.

Perhaps the single foundational and most widely shared idea across African philosophies is their critique of Western philosophies. The critiques are wide-ranging and include the privileging of a cognitive subject (an individualistic 'I') over objects, body, emotion, spirit, others and nature. The accusation is that this reductionist empiricism and lack of ontological depth has led to a false abstract universalism, object-object relations and reification and dehumanisation instead of solidarity. A lack of reflexivity, exclusion of alterity, absence and change, means that Western intellectual traditions stand accused of setting up untenable dualisms such as subject/ object; reason/ emotion; fact/ value; primitive/ civilized; pre-modern/ modern, male/ female and so on – leading to a failure to achieve a unified identity theory and common ground of being. This has led to the normalization of a unilinear story of European progress by which all societies are judged.

In LCT terms, the critique by many African intellectuals would be that historically colonial power relations permitted the knower codes ('social' and even 'born gazes') of European philosophies to be imposed as universal knowledge codes. When post-Enlightenment European philosophers such as Hegel did historicize the discipline, they viewed it as a great Greco-European teleological adventure. In the Anglo-American analytical tradition, key knowers and sacred texts in a narrative from Plato, through Kant to the logical positivists were accorded canonical status. Since the early twentieth century, a pre-occupation with scientific or naturalistic epistemologies and the project to develop a stronger grammar has been accorded knowledge code status. In contrast, the Continental hermeneutic tradition – from neo-Kantian German idealism, the critique of ontological metaphysics, phenomenology, existentialism and hermeneutics to French structuralism and post-structuralism – would be identified in LCT as a series of knower codes – but in this tradition too, the universal status and applicability of its great knowers to all knowledge production, regardless of history and context, has also been assumed. Thus a

Table 1. The field of African philosophies showing how the Gazes of LCT map onto Hallen's epistemological categories.

| Periodization | Hallen's categories | Key thinkers | LCT gazes |
|-----------------|---|--|-----------------------------|
| 1940s – 1970s | Ethnophilosophy | Tempels (1949), Griaule (1965), Abraham (1962), Senghor (1964), Mbiti (1970) | Born |
| 1960s – present | Sage philosophy | Oruka (1990), Gyekye (1995), Kalumba (2006) | Social |
| 1960s – 1980s | Socialist & Marxist philosophies | Nkrumah (1970), Nyere (1968), Cabral (1969), Rodney (1982), Fanon (2008), Biko (2010) | Social |
| | Professional philosophers | | |
| 1970s – present | Analytic philosophers: Cultural universalists Cultural relativists | Bodunrin (1981), Wiredu (1980, 1996), Hountondji (1997), Appiah (1992) Sogolo (1993), | Cultivated, ontic lens |
| 1980s – present | Hermeneutic philosophers | Okere (1983), Mudimbe (1988), Serequerberhan (1994), Outlaw (1996), Gordon (2000), Mbembe (2017) | Cultivated, discursive lens |

common point of departure for African philosophies is to downgrade European philosophies from knowledge to knower codes, through critiquing and contesting their hegemonic, colonial and racist stand-points (see for example Mudimbe 1988; Serequerberhan 1997; Mbembe 2017).

Following Hallen (2009), the field of African philosophies has identified for itself three broad epistemological traditions that roughly follow its historical development and potentially map onto Maton's gazes for knower codes described above. Table 1 below summarises Hallen's (2009) epistemological categories for the field – their periodization, key thinkers and the LCT gazes that I suggest capture their contending principles of legitimation.

In the next section I take each of Hallen's traditions in turn describing what doing philosophy means for this group of philosophers. I also assign to each the LCT gaze that I suggest best captures its basis for legitimation in the field. Thirdly, I reflect on the implications of the LCT analysis for curriculum design.

Born gazes: ethno-philosophy and sage philosophy

In LCT a born gaze is legitimated on the basis of innate, usually embodied, biological or genetic attributes of its ideal knowers. The field strongly controls both the knowers – usually born into the community – and their ways of knowing – usually prescribed by tradition and/ or belief systems. Membership is thus highly restricted and denied to anyone not born into the community or lineage.

Ironically, the earliest ethno-philosophy on Africa was written by a Belgian missionary, Placide Tempels, whose 'Bantu Philosophy' was published in French in 1949. He claimed that Africans live in a pre-critical, ritualized and symbolic world, perceiving all forms of life as expressions of 'vital forces' that constitute the very nature of being. Although his work was based on ethnographic data obtained while living with the Baluda people of the Congo, Tempels claimed to present the world-view of all Africans. He was one of the first Europeans to have asserted that African traditional cultures carry their own forms of rationality, but he also claimed, that in order to be recognizable, these had to be mediated by educated Europeans.⁴

The work of Leopold Senghor (1964, 1997), a founder of the negritude movement, should be viewed as a reaction to claims by early European anthropologists, such as

Levy-Bruhl, that Africans were non-rational and pre-critical and incapable of abstract thought. Contra to European thought that separates reason from emotion, he asserted the integrity of distinctively African forms of cognition and personality, claiming that Africans come to know experientially, through feeling and sensing the other (Hallen 2009, 49).

Thus although LCT would classify the knowledge produced by this group of early ethnophilosophers as legitimated by a ‘born gaze’, because African forms of rationality, culture and belief systems are claimed to be innate and applicable by definition to all Africans, they were in fact, reacting to the ‘born gaze’ imposed on African tribes by early European anthropologists. As Mbembe puts it, black intellectuals have been haunted by ‘Western consciousness of Blackness’ and by the need to ‘exorcise the demon of race’ (2017, 29). Ethno-philosophy was attacked within the field by professional African philosophers, notably Hountondji (1997, 2002), Wiredu (1980) and Appiah (1992, 1997) who questioned the legitimacy of these works as truly philosophical, suggesting that they properly belong to the fields of ethnology, ethnography or ‘folk wisdom’. They were further critiqued for reproducing an essentialist and racist colonial narrative about primitive societies.

Since the 1960s, but still in reaction to the colonial European view that traditional African societies were pre-rational and therefore sub-human, professional African philosophers sought to recover the wisdom of African sages for modern audiences. This involves locating and interviewing traditional African sages who are still immersed in traditional African culture and language, unspoiled by Western culture, and regarded by their communities as exceptionally wise and ethical (Oruka 1990; Kalumba 2006).

Oruka (1990), a Kenyan sagacity researcher, takes the debate further by distinguishing between ‘folk sages’ whose thought does not transcend their traditional cultural context and ‘philosophic sages’ who critically evaluate traditional thought, accepting only that which meets rational criteria. Oruka claims that the latter type of sage is indeed doing philosophy (Kalumba 2006). Philosophers such as Oruka, use the concepts and ideas of traditional sages as raw data for philosophical reflection on contemporary issues. These more recent works mediate between sage wisdom and Western philosophy, attempting to make African wisdom accessible to the West. In LCT terminology this would constitute a ‘code shift’ from a born to a cultivated gaze.

What is significant about these works of ethno-philosophy and sage philosophy for curriculum development is to note that they developed historically in reaction to the born or social gazes of the European imagination. It was in reaction to the imposition of a European born gaze that essentialized difference and used it to justify the exclusion of the colonized from full human citizenship. The motivation of these African intellectuals was to prove to the ‘civilized’ West that pre-colonial African societies had their own forms of rationality and morality. This point is key for their recontextualization into a curriculum in which students should be offered conceptual tools to critique their essentialist assumptions and to properly appreciate their historical motivations.

Social gazes: socialist and Marxist philosophies

In LCT a social gaze is legitimated by the social position and identity of its knower, whereas ways of knowing are weakly controlled by the field. Social gazes in the field of African philosophies are legitimated by strongly classified and controlled subjective

relations that give epistemic privilege to the voices of Africans, blacks, colonized and/or oppressed classes. The voices of colonized knowers are by definition legitimate; they already possess the desired gaze by virtue of their social location and political commitment to the struggle for liberation. Social gazes in this category tend to be highly axiologically charged, capturing the desire of oppressed people for autonomy and sovereignty. In response to the ontological impoverishment and degradation of those subjected to colonialism, there was a need for ‘the Black man to come to know himself, to redefine blackness and to ‘hold himself in the world’ (Mbembe 2017, 79).

Early African socialist and Marxist thinkers wrote in contexts of anti-colonial political and military struggles, while others continued this tradition in neo-colonial contexts – protesting against the corrupt rule of culturally alienated African elites. Typically, these were anti-colonial activists or ‘statesmen philosophers’ committed to praxis for the liberation of African states. Most uncritically embraced modernist teleologies; some viewed democracy in Africa as ‘progress’ while others sought alternatives in Western socialist thought. Most drew eclectically from traditional African culture and European thought – particularly Marxism and socialism. These intellectuals recognized the importance of re-capturing control of African identity formation and reconstituting colonized social identities as pre-condition for political resistance. They re-read the Hegelian dialectic of history challenging old knower hierarchies and building new identities to over-throw the ‘slave consciousness’ of their people, especially that of the ‘non-whites’, ‘evolues’ or ‘assimilados’.

Early examples of this school are Nkrumah’s (1970) ‘African Consciencism’ and Nyerere’s (1968) ‘African Socialism’ as well as Cabral (1969). Fanon (2008) is one of the most sophisticated thinkers in this category, extending the methodologies of the Hegelian dialectic and of psychoanalysis to describe the psychological damage caused by colonial racist ideologies – ‘not only must the black man be black; he must be black in relation to the white man’ (2008, 83). Fanon wrote autobiographically to show the impossibility of the colonized subject establishing a coherent identity. He also provided a scathing critique of the African national bourgeoisie whom he described as ‘a tyrannical, dependent, and Westernized elite’ who ‘lacking in proper self-knowledge’ had created a ‘depraved actuality’ for the African masses. He believed a ‘new humanism’ would be realized only through revolution by the African masses that would finally cleanse Africa from Western imperialism.

Biko (2010), the founder of Black Consciousness in South Africa, drew heavily on Fanon’s works. Like Fanon, he asserted a new positive identity for ‘the black man’, rejecting apartheid’s social gaze, he redefined ‘black’ as a socio-political category that would rally together black people committed to opposing racial oppression.

Black people – real black people – are those who can manage to hold their heads high in defiance rather than willingly surrender their souls to the white man. (Biko 2010, 49)

Biko wanted to build a ‘national consciousness’ based on African ‘values, standards and outlook on life’ (2010, 72). He was a fierce advocate of black self-determination and rejected cooperation with white liberals in the anti-apartheid struggle, although he did embrace a vision of a non-racial humanist society as the end-goal of that struggle. However, as with all social gazes in this field, he constructed a racialized subject as the basis for political and moral solidarity.

Africanists

Africanist philosophies set out to recover and rehabilitate African identities and cultures, rejecting the ‘master-slave consciousness’ of Western thought and redeploing the colonial concept of cultural difference in order to affirm African identities and serve the struggle for self-determination (Oruka 2002). But in so doing they too failed to overcome the Western fiction of racial subjects (Mbembe 2017, 89).

Africanist writers such as Wole Soyinka and Ngugi wa Thiong’o assert that all thought comes with cultural and linguistic baggage. They want Africa to re-define itself without reference to any alien culture. In their writings, they seek out authentic ‘African voices’ to be found in non-formal contexts and discursive practices of African communities. In order to capture African authenticity and make his work accessible to ordinary Kenyans, Ngugi writes in his native Gikuyu but permits his work to be translated into English. Mogobe Ramose of South Africa has developed ‘ubuntu’ philosophy – a distinctively African concept that he claims defines African ontology as well as culture (it includes the living, the dead, the yet-to-be-born and carries a view of morality that ensures cosmic harmony). Thus authentic personhood (umuntu) entails serving the community and upholding communal virtues (Hallen 2009).

Regarding the recontextualisation of African philosophies based on a social gaze, we determined that these must be included in the curriculum as significant cultural and political works. Students should understand the contexts of their writing, often by organic intellectuals engaged in political struggles outside the academy. Furthermore, students should understand their advocacy for race-based segregation, autonomy and self-determination as politically strategic. However, students should also face the challenge that much philosophizing around authentically African concepts is imbued with ‘essentialist tensions’ (Mudimbe 1988). They should grapple with Mbembe’s argument that their reclamation of African humanity and dignity is based on ‘fictionalized claims about the African race, history, culture and custom’ (2017, 89).

Cultivated gazes

Professional philosophers (cultivated gaze – ontic lens)

In LCT the cultivated gaze means that the identity or category of the knower is less important than ways of interacting with significant knowers in the field. This means that the gaze is teachable and learnable – new kinds of actors may gain entry to the field through the inculcation of legitimate dispositions. The ‘cultivated gaze – ontic lens’ bases its specialization on the mastery of canonical works. The process of ‘cultivation’ is engendered through immersion in canonical works and long apprenticeships. There are two groups of African philosophers who adopt a cultivated gaze – ontic lens, the ‘universalists’ whose work assumes universal rationality; and the ‘particularists’ who assert that, whilst retaining a rigorous methodology, African philosophy must deal exclusively with African topics, themes and concepts – shifting towards a more restricted focus and a more strongly socialized gaze.

One of the early universalists, Bodunrin (1981), insisted that philosophy is a specialized critical discourse that transcends culture through its rigorous methods of criticism and argument. Along similar lines, Wiredu argues that all philosophizing must involve ‘assertion, explanation and justification’ and be based on universal canons of thought and action

(1996, 114). He argues that all cultures carry unsystematized ‘folk philosophy’ that do not qualify as philosophy. However, Wiredu also encourages African philosophers to undertake serious and critical study of African culture to make a unique contribution to the universal canon – ‘for Africa the remedy does not lie in adjuring inter-culturalism, but in cultivating it with eyes more widely open’ (Wiredu 1996, 153). Wiredu understands truth as ‘considered opinion’ that must be warranted through ‘reasoned debate’, regardless of culture. Similar to Maton’s formulation of the cultivated gaze, ontic lens, he argues that the guarantee of truth is to be based on inter-subjective shared canons of rational inquiry (Wiredu 1996).

Paulin Hountondji, an outspoken critic of ethno-philosophy, adopts a position similar to Wiredu’s. He argues that African philosophy, as a disciplinary practice, should constitute a professional, critical, dynamic and plastic canon of universal value which can be used to ‘enrich’ human intellectualism for all, and cultivate further knowers. He wants the field to become a space for African thinkers to engage in rigorous debate so that their works acquire ‘universal value’ and enrich ‘the common intellectual heritage of human thought’ (Hountondji 1997, 391).

Appiah (1991, 1992) adopts a more sophisticated version of a cultivated gaze, ontic lens. Holding the universally human in tension with the culturally relative, he argues that post-modernism provides a new way of ‘clearing oneself a space’, of ‘allowing in the realm of theory the same multiplication of distinctions we see in the cultures it seeks to understand’ (Appiah 1992, 144). However, he also counters African essentialism and exceptionalism,

We will only solve our problems if we see them as human problems arising out of a special situation, we shall not solve them if we see them as African problems, generated by our being somehow unlike others. (Appiah 1992, 55–56)

Unsurprisingly, this group of universalist professional African philosophers, who have been trained in analytic philosophy, are critical of ethno- and sage philosophy which they dismiss as ‘folk philosophy’ that needs to be subjected to critical analysis (Hallen 2009). Thus they advocate extending the universal canon to include African philosophical concepts, while retaining rigorous methods for doing philosophy.

However, as Maton warns, the cultivated gaze – ontic lens ‘can naturalize an ossified canonic list of significant others, alienating new potential knowers’ (2014, 191). The Eurocentricism of the supposedly universal canon has led other professional African philosophers, the ‘particularists’, to adopt a more culturally relative position. Also trained in analytic methods, this group insist that the content of their work should only be African – for example the Luo concept of God, the Akan concept of truth, the Bantu meaning of being-in-community (ubuntu), etc. Some go further arguing that Africans have their own ways of knowing, different to Western ways. For example, Sogolo argues that while rationality is universal, it manifests through different cultures that condition its form,

an intelligible analysis of African thought demands an affiliation to its own universe of discourse, its own logic and its own criteria of rationality. (Sogolo 1993, 74 cited in Hallen 2009, 58)

In LCT terms Sogolo strengthens the subjective relation to a point where he shifts the code to a social gaze. While other particularists, such as Okere (1983) deploy African concepts

to build a culturally pluralist philosophy. Thus even amongst professional philosophers trained in the analytic method, the problem of how to deal with difference, with the universal and the particular, remains unresolved.

Professional philosophers (cultivated gaze – discursive lens)

Post the ‘linguistic’ or ‘discursive turn’ of the 1980s, Maton (2014) notes that a new ‘lens’ within the cultivated gaze emerged in the Humanities. This new lens continues to be legitimated by strongly classified interactional relations, but whereas the earlier ontic lens is based on knowing and appreciating great cultural works, the new discursive lens is legitimated by interacting with the studies or theories of significant knowers about culture and about great cultural works. In the field of African philosophies this code shift manifests between professional philosophers cultivated in the Anglo-American analytical tradition, who claim to be actually doing philosophy proper (see the ‘universalists’ above) and those who engage in debates about what doing philosophy in/ for Africa entails – adopting a discursive lens. Maton (2014) notes further that the discursive lens is typically characterized by strong axiological and normative stances, where possession of the gaze means that the knower is ‘capable of recognizing and realizing ostensibly ‘virtuous’ or ‘radical’ stances’ (Maton 2014, 189).

Space permits discussing only Mudimbe (1988), one of earliest and most influential of intellectuals in this category and Serequerberhan (1994) who offers one of the most searing critiques of the Western cultivated gaze: ontic lens. In ‘The Invention of Africa’, Mudimbe (1988) draws on Foucault, Bourdieu and Derrida to deconstruct the Western *gnosis* that invented Africa. He argues that Western scholarship about Africa is no more than a social gaze. He critiques the historicism and essentialism of colonizing thought and modernist epistemes derived from Christian eschatology and Hegelian ideas about evolution, progress and white supremacy.⁵ He also critiques the works of the early Africanists (born and social gazes) who he suggests work within the discursive norms of a colonial consciousness, presenting Africa as no more than an idealized counter-image of the European gaze.

Serequerberhan (1994) is an African philosopher who draws on the phenomenological and hermeneutic traditions to critique the very idea of universal rationality. Drawing on Heidegger, he claims that the possibilities of human experience are structured and historicized by particular spatio-temporal relations that characterize the different existential worlds into which we are thrown. Contra the critical realists and the universalists above, he refuses to separate epistemology from ontology, asserting that rationality itself is contextually constituted by, in this case, the historicity of the lived African experience. This ‘horizon of possibilities’ is historically determined and constrains a person’s projection of meaning. He views Western thought as ‘universalized particularism’ that has robbed Africans of their cultural resources, historical essence and future possibilities,

It is this ge-stell of European dominance, manifested as the ‘neutrality’ and ‘objectivity’ of science, that Africa must overcome in order to reclaim and carve out existential, historical and political space to carve freedom. (Serequerberhan 1994, 40)

For Serequerberhan, the only solution is to undo these relations of domination through violent confrontation. An irruption of a lived horizon of violence and degradation must precede any possibility of meaning-making, knowledge production and cultural work.

For these intellectuals the very idea of assimilation into a universal cultivated gaze is untenable because in their view the gaze is premised on oppressive social relations that deny Africans agency and empty out meaning. These intellectuals want to disrupt the field and close down the conversation; they want discontinuity and ‘epistemic disobedience’. They believe they have no option but to begin a new discourse because the old conversation is based on an inherently problematic discursive formation.

In discussing the implications of the new discursive lens for a field, Maton remains agnostic. He wonders whether this development is just an ‘idealist retreat’ or whether it will in fact open up the field for new kinds of knowers and an expansion of the canon (2014, 192). From a critical realist position these works demonstrate high levels of reflexivity and moral reasoning with a focus on experience and difference. However, according to Bhaskar, this can lead to judgmental relativism and what he calls ‘ontological flux’ (2016, 197) – jettisoning analyses of ontological depth and stratification and thus removing the possibility of working for structural change through human agency.

This analysis using LCT has shown that the question of how to respond to the hegemonic and flawed nature of Western philosophy, the methodological dominance of the Anglo-American analytic tradition, and its failure historically to embrace other forms of thought, remains a source of contention and fragmentation amongst professional philosophers in this field. What is salient about the LCT analysis for curriculum design is the important distinction between the ontic and discursive lenses, which we decided should be the focus of debate in a course on African philosophy. A curriculum true to this field would select texts that construct a new canon, reflecting the debates within professional African philosophy. In so doing, the course should also engage with the lived experience of black students in the class providing them with analytical and theoretical tools to critically theorize their experience.

Conclusion

Maton’s assertion that all knowledge structures have both epistemic and social relations is an important contribution to the social realist sociology of education and for the analysis of fields of symbolic power. His concepts in LCT (Specialization) proved to be useful tools for differentiating knowledge practices in a complex, contested field and gave us a ‘first cut’ on the kinds of knowledge we were dealing with. The LCT analysis informed our selection of content and recontextualising decisions for designing the curriculum. It was particularly useful for pointing out the epistemic limitations of the ‘born’ and ‘social gazes’ in which knowers are defined in exclusive ways that essentialize difference (although professional philosophers in the field have already made similar critiques).

That said I found Maton’s conceptualization of the ‘cultivated gaze’, and the ontic and discursive lenses within it, limited for this field. Three issues arose in this regard. First, the importance of context and history: without a proper understanding of the historical contexts and epistemological dialectics into which African philosophers were and are thrown, it is impossible to appreciate their works. I suspect that knower codes build knowledge dialectically, through contestation, as much as through ‘sociality’ as claimed by Maton (2014) and other social realists of education.

Second, while agreeing with LCT’s privileging of ‘ways of interacting’ and ‘sociality’ for building knowledge cumulatively in a field, this conceptualization seems inadequate for

knower codes. The rules for ‘interactional relations’ are not neutral and in LCT appear to be premised on a modernist narrative with assimilationist assumptions – such that ‘others’, once socialized into the ‘cultivated gaze’, will gratefully join in ‘global conversations’ on terms set by those already in control of the epistemic-pedagogic device. Intellectuals in the field of African philosophies view western educational projects with some suspicion – as a means of ‘domesticating the natives’ and ‘co-opting them into the space of modernity’ where they finally become fit for citizenship (Mbembe 2017, 87). Most of the intellectuals categorized here as adopting a discursive lens are no longer interested in being assimilated into Western ways of doing philosophy. They want to wrest control of the epistemic-pedagogic device, change the rules of the game and at the very least share symbolic power in a ‘pluri-verse’ that caters for ‘epistemic diversity’.

Third, and related to the first point about the importance of context, is that of the moral order. Those African philosophers taking up a discursive lens are likely to continue to ‘talk about doing philosophy’, (rather than doing it on the terms set out by established knowers) until they believe justice has been done and the field of formal philosophy shows greater capacity for self-reflexivity. These intellectuals are consumed by the ‘dialectic of freedom’, a desire to first have issues of social justice and unequal ‘distributive and epistemic logics’ addressed. To simply label this desire as ‘axiological condensation’ feels rather cold and detached, an illicit splitting of fact from value (Bhaskar 2016, 134). Bhaskar asserts that the moral order is as much an objective intransitive property of the world (as are the objects of knowledge). I suspect that particularly in fields legitimated by knower codes, the desired ‘sociality’ for knowledge to progress will not emerge until ‘ways of interacting’ are built on relations of social justice and solidarity that correct the absence of recognition and autonomy for subjected and colonized knowers. Following Bhaskar (2016) again, this requires a richer theory of identity that moves beyond subject-object dualities and abstract universality to one that can realize diversity in unity and the universal in all particulars.

Notes

1. The need for an undergraduate major in African Studies at UCT was championed by the first black Dean of the Faculty of Humanities.
2. Sadly, at the time of writing, the offering of the course has been delayed by the shortage of permanent staff in the department.
3. Note this article focuses on the ‘canon’ for African philosophies in English – it does not address African philosophies in the Francophone, Latin American or Africana (including the African diaspora) ‘canons’.
4. Tempels pioneered the approach adopted by early European anthropologists who took up the self-appointed task of inferring the rationales behind the African rituals, symbols and kinship systems that they observed.
5. Mudimbe points out that the etymological root for the terms colony, colonialism, etc. is *colere*, Latin for ‘to design or cultivate’. Thus he and others in this field would find Maton’s use of the term ‘cultivated’ highly problematic.

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