

**EXPANDING THE LITERATURE ON PHILOSOPHICAL
COUNSELLING THROUGH AFRICAN HERMENEUTIC
PHILOSOPHY AND CONVERSATIONALISM**

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Abstract

Philosophical counselling, a contemporary movement in practical philosophy, continually expands its discourse by introducing novel philosophical ideas and different traditions. Nevertheless, a conspicuous silence persists regarding the introduction of African philosophies in its discourse. This issue becomes apparent when the question “How might one live?”—a fundamental question that the philosophical counsellor deals with—is adequately investigated. However, its current formulation suffers greatly from a much-needed nuance concerning temporal and contextual awareness. To address and transcend this shortcoming, I turn to two distinct African philosophies, namely, the hermeneutic philosophy of Tsenay Serequeberhan and the conversational method of philosophising advocated by Jonathan O. Chimakonam. By incorporating these philosophies, my aim is twofold: first, to promote an interpretative actualisation situated within a conversational framework that might lead to the creation of new concepts and/or the disclosing of different ways of being/becoming, and second, to draw attention to an underlying assumption that might maintain the neglect of philosophical traditions beyond Western philosophy.

Keywords: Philosophical counselling, African hermeneutic philosophy, Conversationalism, Tsenay Serequeberhan, Jonathan O. Chimakonam.

Introduction¹

The introduction of new philosophical concepts and traditions contributes to the ongoing development of the philosophical counselling discourse. Certain special issues of philosophical counselling journals, such as *Philosophical Practice* published by the American Philosophical Practitioners Association, have dedicated attention to the practice of philosophical counselling in the context of the global South.² Nevertheless, a discernible gap in the discourse persists regarding the introduction of African philosophies.³ The references to African philosophies in the context of philosophical counselling remain sparse, with only a limited number of publications discussing their possible integration and use. Furthermore, few philosophical practitioners' approaches showcase any evident incorporation of African philosophical praxes. The prevailing neglect becomes most evident with the interrogation of the question "How might one live?". I contend that this is one of the most important questions the philosophical counsellor should engage with as it possibly discloses different ways of being/becoming to the counselee. In engaging with the question, the philosophical counsellor attempts to offer "what philosophy itself was to offer: freedom from the preconceived, the ill-conceived, the prejudiced, and the unconscious" (SCHUSTER 1992, 598).

This question, however, lacks the much-needed nuance to account for situational and contextual factors. Concealed within this question lies a problematic assumption that potentially perpetuates the disregard for diverse philosophical traditions beyond Western philosophy. When philosophical counsellors integrate and apply these philosophies, they often divorce them from their original context,

¹ An earlier draft of this paper was presented at the 1st Post Graduate Symposium at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) on the 17th of July 2023.

² See, for example, the March 2021 special issue on philosophical counselling in India (MARINOFF 2021).

³ It is important to be cognisant of two problems regarding the notion of "African philosophy". Firstly, it might signify a homogenous and coherent school of thought. This is not the case, as there are multiple schools of thought and various understandings of its practice. Secondly, authors such as Mogobe Ramose (2005) use the term "Africa(n)" under protest or under erasure as it is a term invented and imposed on Africa from the outside. In using "African philosophy/philosophies" I am cognisant of these two remarks/problems.

neatly packaging them for application in the counselee's daily life. This neglect of platial, i.e., socio-economic-political and historical, factors, results in the uncritical application of these varied philosophies in counselling practices.

In addressing this identified shortcoming, I turn to the philosophical contributions of two African philosophers: the hermeneutic philosopher Tsenay Serequeberhan and the conversational philosopher Jonathan Chimakonam. My focus centres on engendering an interpretive actualisation, or a *hermeneutical happening*,⁴ embedded within a conversational framework. Through the incorporation of these philosophies, I critically challenge the notion of employing philosophical ideas in a quasi-universal or value-neutral manner, recognising and honouring their highly situated nature. With this turn, the imperative question of "How might one live?" is expansively rephrased as "How might one live, *here, today?*". This expanded formulation seeks to disclose different ways of being/becoming while facilitating an environment needed for concept creation rooted in the present context. It also allows me to acknowledge the problematic assumption that has contributed to the silence surrounding, inter alia, African philosophies in the discourse of philosophical counselling.

I structured the paper in the following way. In the first section, I aim to briefly offer an understanding of philosophical counselling despite the numerous understandings of its practice. I also introduce the significance of the question "How might one live?" and its shortcomings regarding contextual and temporal awareness. The second section addresses the dearth of African philosophies in the philosophical counselling discourse, especially in a (Southern) African context. I also discuss two important figures in philosophical counselling to showcase how the assumption is at work in their practices. I then turn to section three, where I discuss at length the

⁴ The concept of a *hermeneutical happening* is used by, inter alia, Shlomit Schuster (1999) who underscores the undetermined interpretation following a philosophical counselling session in which no predefined theory is used to understand the counselee's situation or problem/question. Instead, situated in a philosophical framework, a fresh insight is given regarding the problem/question. I use the concept similarly; however, I emphasise the reciprocal element embedded in it, especially in a conversational framework in which the counselee plays an indispensable role in philosophising.

preferred notion of African philosophy focusing on its interpretive nature situated in a critical and dynamic conversation. And lastly, I bring into focus what I call *African philosophical counselling*, a provisional understanding of a practice that concretises the interpretative actualisation via a dynamic and critical conversation.

Philosophical Counselling and its Relation to the Question “How Might One Live?”

The discourse on philosophical counselling offers an array of different approaches and understandings, with some claiming it is a “nonclinical approach to well-being” (SCHUSTER 1999, 4), others claiming it is the philosophical self-examination of everyday dilemmas and questions (LAHAV 1996), and yet others claiming that it is similar to cognitive behavioural approaches, resulting in the philosophical counselling variant called Logic-Based Therapy (COHEN 2003). Additionally, attempts have been made to systematise these varying practices, with a particular focus on both the different types of definitions found in the literature (LOUW 2013), and the goals and outcomes of different philosophical practices (SIVIL & CLARE 2018). It is thus generally accepted that there are as many renditions of philosophical counselling as there are practitioners (MARINOFF 1999; RAABE 2001; TILLMANN 2005; cf. SCHUSTER 2004). Finding a singular defining characteristic for its practice seems counterproductive, especially regarding the complex nature of philosophy itself. Nonetheless, providing a minimal understanding or description of its practice becomes necessary. This step is crucial for two reasons. Firstly, it acknowledges the various definitions of philosophical counselling, resulting from the diverse perspectives and inputs of its practitioners, and thereby avoids causing undue confusion. Secondly, the working definition draws attention to the problematic silence regarding the incorporation of different philosophical traditions in such a way as to accentuate the need to rectify it. Doing so creates a space where concrete actions can be taken to foster the necessary change.

Attempting to provide a minimal understanding of its practice, I utilise two important ideas gained from philosophical counsellors Shlomit Schuster (1992; 1999) and Peter Raabe (2000), that being (i) the liminal space in which philosophical counselling functions and (ii) the quintessential undetermined hermeneutical happening that

follows. In this instance, I take philosophical counselling *to be a collaborative philosophising between the philosophical counsellor and the counselee*. The ensuing philosophical conversation takes its point of departure from the counselee's problem/question with the aim to disclose and explore various possible ways of being/becoming; however, there are no predefined theories or philosophies that guide this journey. The philosophical counsellor, therefore, claims a certain kind of ignorance; they shall proceed as if they know where the journey might lead but they in fact do not know (SWAZO 2000). I briefly explicate these ideas.

Firstly, the philosophical counsellor, as described by Schuster (1999), can be conceptualised as a nomadic figure who inhabits what she refers to as a “no-man’s land”. This metaphorical space exists within the liminal or in-between space that transcends or goes beyond the scope of various disciplines, including the sciences and humanities. Within this understanding, the philosophical counsellor occupies a distinct position in relation to their own practice, enabling them to critique both the practice of philosophy and philosophical counselling itself. This idea is concretised by Schuster (1999), who incorporates what she calls “de-analysing” and/or “de-diagnosis” into her practice. She provides an “undoing” and reinterpretation of, for example, psychological/psychoanalytic diagnosis in a philosophical framework, thereby going beyond mere philosophising as such. This locates her practice outside of pure philosophising and other disciplines but located in their liminal or in-between spaces. In this instance, philosophical counselling is understood to be an open-ended and unrestricted inquiry situated within a philosophical framework (SCHUSTER 1999).

Secondly, arising from this unique position, the philosophical counsellor is invariably implicated in their own practice.⁵ This implication arises from taking seriously Jacques Derrida's (1995, 376) assertion that “[a]ll philosophical discussions carry within them the question: What is philosophy? Where does it begin, where does it end? What is the limit?” Consequently, the philosophical counsellor is confronted with at least two parallel metaphilosophical questions: “What is philosophy?” and “What is philosophical counselling?” By

⁵ Serequeberhan (1994, 2), for example, writes that “philosophy has the peculiar characteristic of always being implicated in its own conceptions and formulations.”

engaging with these questions, the philosophical counsellor and counselee embark on an epistemic journey on essentially uncertain grounds; there are no stock answers to these questions. This highlights a fundamental principle of philosophical counselling articulated by Raabe (2000) and Schuster (1992; 1999) in that its practice is inherently a *hermeneutical happening*. Emphasis is placed on the dynamic and active nature of this interpretive and creative undertaking. Concretised in a philosophical counselling session, the philosophical counsellor becomes united with the counselee's problem/question by not imposing her own understandings and theories onto them. Rather, the focus is on imparting fresh insights and interpretations stemming from an open engagement with the counselee's problem(s)/question(s). Philosophical counsellors following these ideas withhold judgment regarding final and fixed meanings, underscoring the need to keep the inquisitive nature of philosophical counselling alive (ACHENBACH 1995).

In this regard, the philosophical counsellor is constantly shaped by their practice and the "interruptions/disruptions" of the counselee, while simultaneously shaping their practice and the philosophical frameworks they employ in response to the concrete needs of the counselee.⁶ Interruptions/disruptions because the philosophical counsellor can merely attempt to adequately prepare for the counselee's arrival. But this arrival is characterised by two significant and uncertain factors, namely, (i) the philosophical counsellor cannot determine when the counselee will arrive. In accordance with genuine hospitality, the counselee may arrive unexpectedly at any given time, catching the philosophical counsellor off guard, i.e., an absolute surprise.⁷ (ii) No matter how extensively the philosophical counsellor prepares for the counselee's arrival, the counselee will always bring something new, potentially challenging, and dangerous. The arrival of the counselee is thus marked by both an

⁶ Drawing inspiration from Gilles Deleuze's discussion of the nomad, Bruce Janz (2001, 395) notes that "[t]he nomad continually deterritorializes, in that this person re-produces the environment at the same time as he or she is produced by it." This is an important element to understand the philosophical counsellor as a nomadic figure.

⁷ The image of Derrida's "genuine hospitality" leads to a potential "absolute surprise". See, for example, Bob Plant (2006) discussing Derrida's *perhaps* in relation to the last mentioned two ideas.

element of absolute surprise and the constant need for the philosophical counsellor to adapt their practice and to address the unique situation of the counselee. When responding to the specific requirements of the counselee or addressing the metaphilosophical questions concerning their practice, the philosophical counsellor cannot simply rely on previous responses. Instead, their practice is characterised by a fundamental transformative process and a continuous reinterpretation of the past, always oriented towards the present problem at hand.

Neri Pollastri (2006) concretised this approach in his method of *improvisation*, underscoring the need to improvise continually and seamlessly at the moment. This improvisation or continual renewal necessitates a special kind of *context sensitivity* in which the philosophical counsellor controls various methods (SVARE 2006). An indispensable feature of philosophical counselling is, consequently, to expose the counselee to all that philosophy has to offer, i.e., a wide range of different philosophies and philosophers (RAABE 2001; LAHAV 1996; SCHUSTER 1995). The philosophical counsellor, in effect, helps the counselee identify the potential to live differently from her current ways of living. This gives way to another question—one that is also invariably hermeneutical—namely, “How might one live?”⁸ This is one of the most important questions the philosophical counsellor must grapple with, whether explicitly or implicitly (LOUW 2022). The reason for this is rather simple. The counselee seeks guidance from the philosophical counsellor precisely because they perceive a problem with their present way of being or living. The philosophical counsellor adequately responds to the counselee’s needs by engaging in a collaborative journey navigating the sometimes-challenging terrains. By doing so, they explore various alternative ways of being/becoming using the counselee’s problem/question as a point of departure for the ensuing session (ALLEN 2002; LOUW 2021b).

However, it is evident that the question of “How might one live?” currently lacks a crucial nuance when it comes to considering situational factors (LOUW 2022). It fails to incorporate a temporal or historical and geographical awareness, neglecting to inquire about

⁸ The specific formulation of this question stems from Todd May’s (2005) reading of Deleuze’s philosophy.

how one might live *here* and *today*. Recognising this lack of nuance, the philosophical counsellor cannot effectively create an environment conducive to addressing the question of “How might one live, here, today?” through the sole reliance on a single philosophical tradition. Even though prominent philosophical counsellors, such as Schuster (1995) and Raabe (2001), argue against the reliance on single philosophers for one’s philosophical practice, they fail to take their argument further. That is, they fail to chastise the reliance on singular philosophical traditions. An inherent issue within philosophical counselling emerges as one examines the attempt to extend a singular philosophical tradition across diverse environments and contexts. That being the omission of temporal and geographic, i.e., situational, factors, which lead to the occlusion and marginalisation of radically different ways of being/becoming not encompassed by the philosophical counsellor’s chosen philosophies. This issue will become more evident as I introduce the reading of African philosophy below. But before turning to this reading, I briefly showcase the almost absolute neglect of African philosophy in the discourse of philosophical counselling.

The Dearth of African Philosophy in Philosophical Counselling Discourse

The recent publication by Avital Pilpel and Shahar Gindi (2019) stands out as the first to acknowledge the absence of African philosophy in the philosophical counselling discourse. The authors introduce Ubuntu and sage philosophy as African philosophies possessing “the most obvious therapeutic potential” (PILPEL & GINDI 2019, 73). However, being one of the first of its kind, their article lacks much-needed nuance. For example, the authors do not mention the complexities of utilising Ubuntu philosophy in a Western framework that may disregard the metaphysical and linguistic considerations necessary for a more contextually aware understanding of this philosophy.⁹ Furthermore, the authors do not mention any of

⁹ See, for example, the discussion of Ubuntu in Ndumiso Dladla (2020). He states that “most of these ‘Ubuntus’ which taken hold are curiously ‘Ubuntus’ without *abantu* [and] ‘Ubuntus’ without or *isintu*” (DLADLA 2020, 45). It is worth noting that this critique boils down to the neglect of situational and contextual factors by various philosophers, especially philosophers who write from the “outside” or from a different context/lifeworld/horizon.

the relevant critiques of sage philosophy as have been discussed multiple times in the literature which might have led to a more nuanced discussion.¹⁰ It is crucial to clarify that the intention here is not to critique the authors' attempt but rather to extend an invitation for more nuanced conversations. By foreshadowing the forthcoming discussion, an understanding is required that acknowledges and addresses the specific needs, questions, and issues that emerge from the contemporary African context or horizon.

The contribution by Pilpel and Gindi is one of the few that links African philosophy with philosophical counselling. For example, turning to philosophical counselling as practised and theorised from the South African lifeworld or horizon the same neglect is found. From what I could attain from universities' scholarly repositories, a total of five dissertations or theses on philosophical counselling have been published at South African institutions.¹¹ Sparse, if any, mention of African philosophy is found in these works. This same neglect is found in turning to journal publications. And lastly, the websites and online profiles of several philosophical counsellors practising in South Africa provide no immediate indication of the inclusion of African philosophies in their practices.¹²

Considering the limited academic contributions in the discourse of philosophical counselling, one might raise the question: Is there a need for philosophical counselling in the African context? I concur with Bellarmine Nneji's (2013, 6) affirmative response, who asserts that "in many African settings... *there is a serious need for philosophical counselling*" (emphasis added). However, it is noteworthy that Nneji, rather than first turning to African philosophers and African philosophies, looks exclusively towards Western philosophy and Western philosophical counsellors as a starting point for introducing philosophical counselling in the African context.

Exploring contemporary African philosophical literature, one readily encounters statements such as Uchenna Okeja's (2018, 112)

¹⁰ See, for example, the critique by Serequeberhan (1996) who states that sage philosophy in many instances upholds and utilises Western frameworks that subordinate African philosophy.

¹¹ See Dirk Louw (2009), Shawn Stützner (2015), Richard Sivil (2019), Jaco Louw (2021a), and Pieter Oosthuizen (2022).

¹² See Helen Douglas (2019), David Pittaway (2021), Guy Du Plessis (2020), Dean Chapman (2021), and Barbara Norman (2010).

regarding curricula changes, which suggests that “[t]here is little need to keep educating young minds in Africa about Plato’s world of forms.” By extrapolating this sentiment to philosophical counselling, one can argue that the exclusive dependence on Western philosophies in its practice restricts and inhibits the potential for valuable and enriching contributions to occur. While it may be contended that the initial introduction and discussion of Western philosophy and philosophical counsellors in the African context may not seem problematic, this approach presents a significant challenge when juxtaposed with the conspicuous silence and absence of African philosophies within the discourse of philosophical counselling. In line with this observation, the aim is not a total rejection of Western philosophy. Rather, it involves contextualising Western philosophies alongside African philosophies and subsequently introducing and utilising works that are most responsive to the contemporary situation and its specific needs. To showcase this pervasive problem—that of using decontextualised philosophies—I briefly discuss two examples from the philosophical counselling discourse.

Ran Lahav (2016) curiously suggests in a recent work that delving beneath the “theoretical clothing” of an argument is crucial to grasp its “essential body”. Within the framework of his philosophical counselling practice, Lahav identifies the essential and underlying “call for transformation” present in various philosophies throughout the history of Western thought. Regardless of their “theoretical clothing”, Lahav asserts that all these philosophies share a singular call for individuals to transcend their current way of being in search of something “better”, i.e., stepping out of Plato’s cave (which is also the title of his book). Lahav (2016, 11) states accordingly that “[w]e come here to the heart of *every* philosophical approach that can be called transformational: At the center of *every* such approach is a call” (emphasis added). Contextual and situational factors are thus disregarded to isolate a central meaning, which can easily be *translated* (read: packaged) for the counselee to, inter alia, apply in her daily life. The implication is, especially for Lahav’s philosophical practice, that most philosophies, irrespective of their highly contextual nature, will be read through this reductionist lens. Consequently, the focus of philosophising is shifted from a dynamic creative endeavour to a reflective endeavour with a rather singular aim, viz., escaping the clutches of unreflective life.

Turning to Lou Marinoff, ample “case studies” are provided to showcase the transformative capabilities of philosophy. They are usually provided in the form of *Counselee P resolved problem x [insert problem] by incorporating the philosophy of philosopher y [insert philosopher]*. Marinoff (2003, 120-121) provides the case of Ruth, who, “[w]ith assistance from the Socratic method of philosophical midwifery, ... finally faced the fact that she had prevented herself from being a writer and had used her circumstances as an excuse.” The philosophy of Socrates, if we borrow Lahav’s terminology, is stripped of its theoretical “clothes” leaving behind an oversimplified “core”. Ruth seems to grasp this oversimplified “philosophy” with ease, resulting in the desired change in her way of living. One might rightly understand the critique of Roger Scruton (1998), who likened this way of practising philosophical counselling to modern-day Sophism and charlatanism. Perceived from these “case studies” is a glaring lack of, amongst others, philosophical rigour, critical conversations, and diversity of philosophical approaches.

I contend that the fundamental issue with these instances of philosophical counselling lies in the utilisation of philosophy. It is suggested that highly contextual philosophies can be easily extracted from their original and embedded contexts, subsequently discussed, applied, or presented without the situated factors contributing to their formulation. The resulting application occurs within a supposedly value-neutral framework, which might prove inadequate for exploring ways of being/becoming emerging from a particular lifeworld and limits the creation of contextually aware concepts situated in a specific horizon. This situation can be better understood by considering the metaphor provided by Dismas Masolo (1981, 73) that likens philosophy to an ecosystem where “[p]eople living in a specific ecological area are expected to possess a comprehensive understanding of the system in which they are intimately immersed, as well as an awareness of visible changes occurring within that ecosystem.” Considering this metaphor, those who originate from a particular lifeworld are better positioned to address the questions arising from that lifeworld rather than attempting to apply a philosophy that originated from a different lifeworld and era in response to different sets of questions.

One might argue against this understanding of philosophy by stating that it promotes a kind of incommensurability between

different traditions, especially regarding the use thereof in a philosophical counselling session. But this should not be the case. Rather, the argument posits that contributions arising and emerging from a specific lifeworld are more adept at addressing the needs of a counselee. This can happen in, inter alia, two ways. Firstly, following Serequeberhan (1994), one can “indigenise” and “organically appropriate” Western philosophy from a dehegemonised position within the African context so that it serves the purpose of understanding and transforming the present situation. Or, secondly, one can understand philosophy in such a way that it cannot but emerge and originate in and through what is referred to as a philosophical *place*. Philosophy practised in this manner recognises and honours the situational and contextual factors (read: horizon) that give rise to specific questions and answers (read: discourse). Characterised by its unique particularity yet encompassing universal aspirations, this idea of philosophy revolves around understanding what it is to philosophise from and within a distinct lifeworld (JANZ 2001).

As a response to these considerations, I now turn to an understanding of African philosophy that embodies these ideas. I aim to address the shortcomings in philosophical counselling as discussed above and to transcend them in the hope of inspiring, inter alia, a dynamic conversation.

A Notion of African Philosophy: A Critical Hermeneutic in Conversation

Substantiating these observations and laying the groundwork for the expansion of the discourse of philosophical counselling, I turn to two African philosophers, namely, the hermeneutical philosopher Serequeberhan and the conversational philosopher Chimakonam. By engaging with their work, I aim to cultivate¹³ a conception of African philosophy that emphasises the importance of contextually aware responses to questions and problems emerging from a concrete lifeworld. This entails embracing a dynamic and collaborative conversation as a means of engagement. Drawing from Serequeberhan’s insights, I incorporate the notion of a radical

¹³ Cf. “production”. I subscribe to this preference following Zondi (2021) who argues that “knowledge production” might still harbour individualist capitalist/colonial sentiments of “extraction”.

hermeneutic, which involves actively interpreting what it means to live within and respond to a specific lifeworld. Additionally, with the guidance of Chimakonam, I aim to solidify the concept of a conversational response facilitated by conversational partners who are situated and contextually aware.

As a point of entry to the complexities of Serequeberhan's writings, it is necessary to briefly elucidate what he terms the contemporary African neo-colonial situation. This is important as Serequeberhan (1994, 7) states; "[C]ontemporary African philosophy is concretely oriented toward thinking the problems and concerns that arise from the lived actuality of post-colonial 'independent' Africa." According to Serequeberhan, the notion of an "independent" Africa is paradoxical and problematic due to the persisting neo-colonial situation experienced by the formerly colonised. This neo-colonial situation is characterised by a state of in-betweenness, a gap, or liminality that shapes the (non-) identity of post-colonial societies (SEREQUEBERHAN 2000; 2009). The emergence of this (non-) identity can be attributed to the violent imposition of colonialism, which forcefully imposed its own history while suppressing and obstructing indigenous histories and ways of life (SEREQUEBERHAN 1994; 2000). This imposition was rooted in a specific metaphysical assumption or myth, which continues to exert influence and shape the very fabric of life in the postcolonial present (SEREQUEBERHAN 2009). In fact, as Serequeberhan (2015) asserts, the neo-colonial situation is essentially the continued Western hegemonic rule disguised merely under new guises or codewords.

The underlying metaphysical assumption, referred to as the ideology of universalism, serves as the foundation of the neo-colonial situation. This assumption uncritically asserts that "European existence is, properly speaking, true human existence per se" (SEREQUEBERHAN 1997, 144). In response to this claim, Serequeberhan's approach involves a complex interplay of various ideas. I will focus on two key aspects: the return to the source and the double task of African philosophy. These concepts provide us with an insightful and contextually aware understanding of African philosophy as a response to the concrete needs arising from the African lifeworld.

According to Serequeberhan, the double task of African philosophy encompasses a critical, negative, and de-structive element,

as well as a creative, positive, and constructive element. Drawing inspiration from Martin Heidegger, Serequeberhan (1997) employs de-struction¹⁴ to emphasise the need to expose the underlying mechanisms of a text. This process aims to uncover problematic assumptions that the author may have held during the production of the text. By doing so, one can discern how these assumptions contribute to maintaining the problematic idea of Western superiority or hegemony. Subsequently, these assumptions can be rectified or discarded through the concept of return to the source. The notion of return might denote a cultural filtration and fertilisation (SEREQUEBERHAN 1994) or a sifting and sieving process (SEREQUEBERHAN 2021) of indigenous as well as hybrid/synthesised/Western ideas. In short, it attempts to remove the residue of Western superiority and anything that hinders the liberation process. The constructive and creative objective is to achieve a new synthesis that involves the above, viz., (i) critiquing hegemonised Western-centric ideas to particularise them and (ii) subsequently discarding anything that hinders the liberation process (SEREQUEBERHAN 1994; 2021). Furthermore, the source to which the African philosopher should return is not a static and untouched pre-colonial past. Rather, it entails a return to the “vigor, vitality (life), and ebullience of African existence” to continue the ongoing hard work¹⁵ required to attain the ideal of liberation, and in doing so transcending the neo-colonial liminal situation (SEREQUEBERHAN 1994, 126).

At this stage, I can more substantially problematise the conspicuous silence of African philosophy in the philosophical counselling discourse. Serequeberhan accentuates the need to (re-) focus our attention on philosophies emerging from and pertaining to the contemporary situation as a more relevant and contextually aware response. Moreover, by not giving a voice to these more relevant philosophies, neo-colonialism is perpetuated in a philosophical

¹⁴ Cf. destruction which entails total eradication or elimination.

¹⁵ Serequeberhan (2010) notes that the deplorable liminal neo-colonial situation is, in part, due to when the “hard work” stopped at the moment of decolonisation (as an event). He writes that the formerly colonised “reclaimed the ‘lands that belong to them’” but they have not yet purged their minds of coloniality, nor have they regained control over their “historical existence” (SEREQUEBERHAN 2010, 32).

counselling framework by preferring either philosophies responding to a different set of questions or by viewing unique sets of questions as universally the same—when in fact this universalism mirrors Western ways of being. Serequeberhan, therefore, serves as a crucial turning point through which the exclusion of African philosophy can be problematised and potentially improved. Directing attention to Serequeberhan’s double task of African philosophy, the current study can instantiate the critical, negative, and de-structive element. I illustrated this by identifying the dearth of African philosophy in the philosophical counselling discourse and the subsequent preference by philosophical counsellors for philosophical practices that subordinates Africans by placing them at the periphery. Different ways of living can thus not be fully encompassed and explored. The second task of African philosophy, following Fanon, is thus to “[turn] over a new leaf” and to “[work] out new concepts” (as quoted by SEREQUEBERHAN 1994, 9). This task alone can improve the neglect of African philosophy in the philosophical counselling discourse by either creating relevant concepts for the contemporary situation or by returning to a contextually aware philosophy, comprised of the synthesis between indigenous philosophical knowledge systems and appropriated and indigenised Western philosophies.

At this point, I introduce the conversational philosophy of Chimakonam as a further means of concretising Serequeberhan’s creative and constructive element, but also to supplement certain limitations. It is thus worth noting in brief two potential limits in the work of Serequeberhan. Firstly, there is a conspicuous deficiency regarding a critical relational element. That is, the importance of a living and dynamic conversational partner is not emphasised enough, especially regarding the collaborative nature of philosophising. This leads to the second shortcoming, identified by Bruce Janz (1997), that Serequeberhan utilises enclosed concepts of, inter alia, violence (and counter-violence) and Westernised and non-Westernised Africans. In short, it stifles the potential ensuing conversations and interpretations that might have taken place because it presupposes the answers/solutions to questions. For example, Janz (1997) contends that Serequeberhan’s use of counter-violence as the *only* solution to colonial violence is predicated on his specific understanding of violence and the neo-colonial situation. In the ensuing discussion, I

supplement these shortcomings with my reading of conversationalism.

From the start, conversationalism in its methodisation and systematisation of a specific interpretation of “relationship”, deeply embedded within the Igbo language, underscores the importance of an epistemic encounter characterised by its critical nature aimed at creating new concepts and opening new ways of thinking (CHIMAKONAM 2017a; 2017b). This critical, dynamic, and creative relationship can further be traced to the translation of the Igbo notion of “arumarū-ūka,” understood as either “engaging in a relationship of doubt” (EGBAI & CHIMAKONAM 2019, 181) or “engaging in critical and creative conversation” (CHIMAKONAM 2017a, 120). The two embedded positions within this idea of conversation, viz., *nwa-nsa* or the defender of a position and *nwa-nju* or the opponent or doubter of a position, are the driving force behind the conversation (CHIMAKONAM 2017b). Unlike dialectical relationships characterised by a type of fusion of horizons when a synthesis is reached, Chimakonam (2017a) articulates a perspective that labels yielding to the demands of synthesis as a creative *surrender*¹⁶ as opposed to a creative *struggle*. In this case, a creative struggle refers to the dynamic interplay and outcome between *nwa-nsa* and *nwa-nju* in which both parties retain their original positions but are positively transformed. With no immediate end in sight, a creative yet continuous disagreement is promoted from which new concepts might be born (CHIMAKONAM 2017a).

With the aim of these “struggles” being a continuous refreshment and reinvigoration of the *nwa-nsa* position, higher levels of discourse are actively reached through a sustained conversation. This concept is captured in Chimakonam’s (2017b) assertion that *nwa-nsa* possesses a “transgenerational life span” as opposed to synthesis, which may only have a generational life span indicating that the dialogue essentially concludes after synthesis. The objective of conversationalism, therefore, is to maintain an ongoing and dynamic conversation that continually seeks to generate and disclose new concepts, without a predetermined ending (CHIMAKONAM 2017a). Additionally, it endeavours to revise old concepts that may no longer

¹⁶ Surrender in this context merely refers to the conclusion of a dialogue.

be as applicable or beneficial within the contemporary situation. Captured within the idea of a creative struggle is the tension and interplay between the conversation tending towards a conclusion and the aim to continually revitalise it. This tension can be maintained by the opponent's incessant critique and questioning.

By acknowledging the lack of African philosophy within the philosophical counselling discourse, one can fully appreciate the importance of the tenets of conversationalism regarding this issue. To facilitate an open and creative conversation, the ongoing neglect cannot be maintained as this will restrict but also neglect voices speaking from an embedded lifeworld, thus severely impoverishing the ensuing conversation. Conversationalism counters this problem by necessitating different voices entering the continually revitalised conversation. The addition of different philosophical traditions in the philosophical counselling discourse becomes necessary to facilitate an open and creative conversation but also to invigorate and inject it with fresh inputs. Those from beyond the African lifeworld can also thus benefit from its philosophical contributions as the discourse will necessarily be broadened to incorporate multiple voices. However, this can only happen effectively if the metaphorical playing fields remain equal and everyone has a chance to enter the conversation. I briefly elaborate on this idea by referring to what I call *African philosophical counselling*.

African Philosophical Counselling in Focus

Drawing inspiration from the conception of African philosophy as explicated above, I emphasise two important elements to trouble the adoption of philosophies lacking contextual and situational considerations and awareness. Concurrently, I aim to transcend these shortcomings in the search for a novel perspective, which I refer to as *African philosophical counselling*. These elements include Serequeberhan's situated hermeneutic investigation actualised from and as a response to a concrete lifeworld and Chimakonam's conversational approach that honours the embodied presence and living voices of its participants situated in a dynamic, critical, and creative struggle/conversation. By adopting these perspectives in a philosophical counselling framework, a more nuanced response to the needs of the counselee can be facilitated.

Taking seriously the implications derived from Serequeberhan's philosophy, the utilisation of exclusively Western philosophies within one's philosophical practice becomes suspect. This scepticism arises from recognising that these philosophies may not offer the most appropriate response to the needs of a counselee stemming from the contemporary African context. Such concerns can be examined at two distinct levels.

Firstly, numerous Western philosophical approaches continue to embody a hegemonic status, either explicitly or through their exclusionary tendencies. Consequently, these approaches tend to be regarded as the norm, thereby marginalising African philosophy and other philosophical perspectives. It remains a stark reality that African philosophical approaches are still perceived as peripheral, as Serequeberhan (2021) recently underscored, portraying Africa's role as a "willing victim" and a "servile appendage" in perpetuating Western hegemony. Siphamandla Zondi (2021, 236) accords this by stating that "Africa is said to import 95 per cent of the knowledge it uses, and exports next to nothing, because the post-colonial Africa exists after the destruction and discrediting of all its indigenous knowledges." Such a situation disrupts the continuous exchange and flow of knowledge and philosophies, fostering a perception that Africa lacks the capacity to generate intellectual discourses based on their own indigenous knowledge.

Secondly, it reinforces a tendency to prioritise the importation of knowledge rather than cultivating it from the very soil where these questions and issues originate. In the realm of philosophical counselling, this phenomenon manifests itself in the preference for Western philosophies and philosophical counsellors, rather than turning towards the lifeworld or conceptual framework from which the needs of the counselee emerge. Consequently, voices that emanate from this specific context, which could have potentially enriched and contributed significantly to the philosophical counselling discourse, find themselves marginalised, occluded and/or excluded from the conversation. Interpretations of African philosophies that may perpetuate Western hegemony are often uncritically reproduced and favoured over those that genuinely attend to the needs and concerns of individuals within the African lifeworld.

Taking Chimakonam's conversationalism seriously engenders a recognition of the indispensability of collaboration within the

process of philosophising and philosophical counselling. By embracing the practical implementation of Serequeberhan's creative and constructive element, the ongoing conversation between conversational partners assumes a vital role in sifting, sieving, filtering, and fertilising philosophies that may hinder the emergence of novel concepts or the disclosing of different ways of being/becoming. Moreover, this conversational approach actively discourages uncritical reproductions of philosophical ideas due to the inherent critical nature of the opponent, who bears the responsibility and duty to challenge the proponent. As a result, the proponent is not only compelled to address and fill the gaps and deficiencies exposed by the opponent through the creative struggle and intellectual exchange of ideas but also to uphold and rejuvenate the conversation.

The implications of this understanding for philosophical counselling are manifold. Firstly, both the counselee and the philosophical counsellor enter a conversational framework that demands active participation, fostering a climate conducive to "knowledge growth and intellectual progress" (CHIMAKONAM 2017b, 122). Several noteworthy observations can be made when considering the dynamic relationship between the philosophical counsellor and counselee situated within this framework. Both the philosophical counsellor and the counselee can instantiate and enter the *nwa-nsa* and *nwa-nju* positions to challenge the other's responses. In conjunction with the notion of creative struggle, this might be seen as, on the one hand, interruptions/disruptions, but, on the other hand, as the hermeneutical happening concretised. In the philosophical counselling discourse, a hermeneutical happening is often perceived as a one-sided activity, wherein the philosophical counsellor becomes intimately entwined and enmeshed with the counselee's problem (RAABE 2001; SCHUSTER 1992; 1999). Situated within a conversational framework, however, the practice takes on a collaborative nature wherein the counselee also becomes engaged with the philosophical counsellor's responses. The counselee does not passively accept the philosophical counsellor's response. Analogous to *nwa-nju*, it becomes imperative that she critiques the philosophical counsellor in such a way as to facilitate the progress of the conversation. Nevertheless, the counselee's status as a layperson may prohibit her from responding in the required fashion. However, vast amounts of philosophical counselling literature are reserved to

emphasise the necessity of equipping the counselee, at the very least, with a rudimentary philosophical vocabulary as a prerequisite for a meaningful encounter (e.g., RAABE 2001; SCHUSTER 1999).

And secondly, adopting a conversational approach within philosophical counselling actively prevents the reliance on mere reproductions of philosophy devoid of situational factors, which is comparable to merely the “prescription of philosophical texts” (SIVIL 2009, 207). In its endeavour to either create new concepts or to revise and revitalise old concepts, the mere uncritical reproduction of concepts/philosophies is problematised and rectified. This is a byproduct of the continually ensuing conversation, which cannot be maintained with stagnant or rigid concepts. In some sense, this echoes the founder of the contemporary philosophical counselling movement, Gerd Achenbach (1995, 73), who states that taking something as “right, settled, conclusive, indubitable” stifles further questioning or conversation. Consequently, the disclosing of new ways of being/becoming is cut off and the creation of new concepts cannot adequately be facilitated. Again, a limitation worth mentioning pertains to the counselee’s capacity to engage in this dynamic relationship and creative conversation. Reinhard Dußel (1996, 337), for example, observes an inherent tension in philosophical counselling regarding philosophical counsellors’ commitments to their philosophies when he states that the counselee “might have left in the meantime, ... not much happier than before, but not unhappy either.” The counselee might not share the same commitment to the idea of maintaining the transgenerational life-span of the conversation as the philosophical counsellor situated within a conversational framework. Nevertheless, this should be regarded as a productive tension rather than a problem necessitating resolution, as the role of the philosophical counsellor does not entail prescribing specific philosophical texts.

African philosophical counselling thus instantiates the return to a hermeneutical approach, i.e., an interpretative actualisation, that takes seriously the contextual background of the counselee through the utilisation of indigenous philosophical knowledge systems relevant to her situation. Moreover, this understanding is situated in a conversational framework that honours the embedded voices speaking from a concrete lifeworld. This understanding of African philosophical counselling is not meant to be applied universally and

uncritically, as this will perpetuate the very logic problematised in this study. Instead, it is up to the philosophical counsellor to expose herself *and* the counselee to numerous contextually relevant philosophies in contrast to merely uncritically reproducing philosophical works responding to a different set of questions. Moreover, in this understanding the counselee does not passively receive philosophical soundbites akin to receiving medication, which somehow changes her perspective or answers her question(s). Instead, the counselee actively participates in the counselling session by, *inter alia*, challenging the philosophical counsellor to respond with contextual awareness, to revitalise the conversation by actively and genuinely engaging with the counselee's problem/question, and to explore alternative but relevant ways of being/becoming.

Conclusion

This paper addressed the prevalent issue of uncritically reproducing philosophies that either subordinate African philosophies or neglect the significance of situational and contextual factors, within the discourse of philosophical counselling. In response, I introduced a specific interpretation of the hermeneutical philosopher Serequeberhan and the conversational philosopher Chimakonam. Drawing from these philosophical perspectives, an understanding of philosophical counselling that is contextually aware and situated was deemed more suitable to address the contemporary African context. This choice is motivated by two key reasons. Firstly, it acknowledges and embraces Serequeberhan's philosophy, which underscores the importance of responding to questions emerging from and pertaining to a concrete lifeworld. Secondly, it embraces Chimakonam's philosophy, which prioritises critical relationality within a conversational framework that values the embodied presence and authentic voices of all participants involved.

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