

Kenyan Sages on Equality of the Sexes

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Abstract

This article traces the larger theme of egalitarianism within the context of equality of the sexes throughout H. Odera Oruka's interviews with Kenyan sages, whom he asked to share their views on the topic. Often, the sages asserted men's superiority to women. This paper analyses the sages' responses, as well as Odera Oruka's rejoinders to their comments. I have broadened my study to include five sages interviewed by Frederick Ochieng'-Odhiambo, included in his dissertation completed under Odera Oruka's supervision (1994). I find that the sages' arguments for women's inferiority were weak and flawed. Many contemporary Kenyans find fault with views similar to the sages'. The one sage who did elaborate on women's equality failed to acknowledge that men discourage women from taking action to improve their situation. This article does not reject sage philosophy as an approach to the topic but insists that further study, including women sages, is needed to address the shortcomings of the sage interviews included in Odera Oruka's *Sage Philosophy* (1991).

Key Words

Odera Oruka, Sage Philosophy, Feminism, Equality, Gender Justice, Ethics

I. Introduction

Odera Oruka established sage philosophy as a special field in African philosophy (Odera Oruka 1991). providing examples of indigenous African philosophical thinkers was his way of combating racism and Eurocentrism. He sought out rural Kenyan sages for their wisdom on a myriad of topics and transcribed their oral philosophizing, so that the larger world might know and benefit from their thoughts. He especially appreciated sages who were willing to be critical of the prevailing opinions of their societies. He liked free-thinkers who could put forward rational arguments for their views, and saw them as the best examples of philosophizing, although some critics have disputed whether he was using his own or Western criteria. Regardless of finding "critical" sages, some critics have suggested that Odera Oruka was not critical enough of what the sages said (Bodunrin 1991; Janz 2009, 104-115; Masolo 1994, 236, 245; Presbey 2002).

Odera Oruka's *Sage Philosophy: Indigenous Thinkers and Modern Debate on African Philosophy* (1991) reported interviews with rural Kenyan sages. Key aspects of the project involved challenging sages during their interviews and evaluating their arguments presented in the interviews (Odera Oruka 1991, 35-36; 1990, 16-17, 44, 53-55). However, most commentaries focus on evaluation of Odera Oruka's project, its stated goals and its methods, rather than the content of the sages' interviews. The commentators alone are not at fault, since even Odera Oruka only spent a few pages in *Sage Philosophy* giving a brief evaluation of the sages (1991, 4-5, 42). (His interviews with Oginga Odinga [1992, 3-5, 22-33], also part of the sage philosophy project, devoted more substantial space to evaluating the interviews.) While the interviews did include questions about gender equality, he did not comment upon or evaluate that topic (Odera Oruka 1991, 109-112). During an interview six months before his death, Odera Oruka told Kai Kresse that he intended to undertake an in-depth study of each sage as a next step in his project. He explained that as he taught courses on Sage Philosophy, he and the students "subjected a number of texts of these sages to critique and analysis" (Kresse 1997, 251-52). Given the sudden and unexpected nature of his death in 1995, he was unable to fulfill his intentions.

Only a few scholars have evaluated the sages' arguments, and these have not focused on the issue of men and women's equality (Oseghare in Odera Oruka 1991, 156-60; Gichohi 1996; Nyarwath 1999). Only D.A. Masolo has evaluated what one of the sages, Paul Mbuya Akoko, said on the topic (Masolo 1994, 236-37). In his book on African philosophy, Frederick Ochieng'-Odhiambo, a student and then colleague of Odera Oruka, repeats Odera Oruka's enthusiastic commentary on Akoko and Masolo's critique (Ochieng'-Odhiambo 2010, 136-37). The neglect of the topic of women sages or the sages' wisdom regarding equality of the sexes persists despite Odera Oruka's stock questions about equality of the sexes during the interviews.

Odera Oruka created his project of sage philosophy, not as a relic of the past to fill museums, but because he believed rural sages could make important contributions to the moral and cultural dilemmas facing contemporary Kenyans (Odera Oruka 1991, 3, 43-44; Kalumba 2002, 39-40). He wanted to counteract the marginalization of sages as important sources of wisdom in an age where academia had a monopoly on conferring authority. He wanted sages' thoughts to contribute to Kenyan, African, and global philosophy. He transcribed oral interviews to aid in both world-wide communication (Odera Oruka 1997, 215-16) and with

youth growing up in Nairobi, who were distanced from rural sources of wisdom (Ochieng'-Odhiambo 1999, 178).

Sophie Oluwole clarifies that Odera Oruka had not claimed to find sages completely untouched by modernity. Thus, that they show influences of Christianity or familiarity with modern technology does not mean that their interviews are of little worth or that Odera Oruka's project failed. Odera Oruka realized that wise elderly persons from Kenyan rural areas draw their wisdom from an array of sources. It is enough that they still remember and embrace African traditions without self-hatred, even if each creatively modifies the traditions on which they draw (Oluwole 1999, 155). However, if the sages do not have anything helpful to contribute to the larger global discussion on women's equality, or helpful perspectives to share with women struggling to improve their lives in Kenya today, then the success of Odera Oruka's project can be questioned. I contend that this small sample of interviews supplied by Odera Oruka is not helpful on either count.

The great contributions sages have to make to human wisdom in other areas notwithstanding (Presbey 1996a, 1996b, 1999a), I am particularly concerned about how the judgments of some men, otherwise known and applauded for their great insights into particularly troubling issues of their community, can unthinkingly support a patriarchal status quo that continues to relegate women to lesser status and unfair treatment in society. Skepticism toward supposed "wisdom" that presupposes a negative evaluation of women's nature is justifiable (Presbey, 1999b). Rather than abandon the project, however, I suggest broadening the scope of sage philosophy to include more interviews of women sages.

Is any philosopher able to give a fair analysis of the sages' views on any topic? Bruce Janz argues that recognizing wisdom happens in a culture-bound, intersubjective context to an extent not theorized by Odera Oruka. Janz says of Odera Oruka's approach, "We have no method of dealing with the wisdom that we cannot pre-cognize" (Janz 2009, 110). In other words, we often presuppose what we will consider wise and look for evidence to confirm our views. While Janz rightly notes that it is impossible to strike all positionality from investigation, we can remain vigilant about how it might affect our judgments (ibid).

Can I, a white American feminist, be able to understand the sages' responses to the question of women's equality well enough to objectively offer a critique of them? I have been

introduced to them with the preface that they are especially wise; thus, I start with high expectations. I also know, however, that they are men; thus, their views do not surprise me, but they do disappoint me, because I expect more from a sage. For my part, I will try to be fair in my listening to their arguments, and to put extra effort into understanding them, to avoid, as Ofelia Schutte cautions, rejecting their arguments before giving them a fair hearing (Schutte 2000, 56-59). Sage philosophy works best as a collaborative project, so I hope other Kenyans will join this dialogue so that mine will not be the only voice on this topic. Since I may not have “heard” the “unsaid” because I am not of their cultural context, I depend on them to offer a critique of the conclusions I draw.

I expect that trends in Kenya and around the world will repeatedly challenge the sages’ rationales for male superiority and dominance. While Odera Oruka’s study and critiques have not addressed the topic, many Kenyans’ popular cultural positions have addressed sentiments found in the sages’ arguments. Kenyan women and supportive men have organized politically to change the Kenyan constitution to reflect their beliefs. My current analysis intends to help the sage philosophy project catch up with actual changes in Kenyan culture and philosophy.

What if Odera Oruka only intended sages to be lauded but not criticized? He often said interviewers were to be “midwives” of the sages’ views. A midwife not only aids in birth, but also pronounces whether or not the new baby, or in this case the new philosophical idea, is viable. For example, Socrates often pointed out where his interlocutors’ arguments failed.

Apparently, Odera Oruka was reluctant to make such judgments (Presbey 2002). For example, about the sages he wrote:

They look at the world and at their own society and the structure of life in it. There they get some inspiration to philosophise— i.e. to speculate with boldness on what there is and what ought otherwise to be. And although we ourselves (observers) may use our great learning in logic or science to verify the sayings of the sages, we cannot consistently use logic or science to ridicule their sayings; the sayings are such that one can always find a rationally defensible principle to back them up. And this indeed is the case with all bold philosophies, whether they be traditional or modern, foundational or anti-foundational and modernist or postmodernist (Odera Oruka 1997, 209).

If this passage intends to suggest that ridicule is never appropriate in philosophy, I agree. But if it is intended to say that all philosophers have rationally defensible principles for all of their claims, that would be too broad an assertion. But for our purposes, we are more interested in whether or not Odera Oruka intends to suggest that observers of the sages will not be able to use logic or science to challenge what they claim. I suspect (drawing upon the larger context of the quote) he is speaking about philosophers describing their rational utopias in their quest for truth and goodness, using “intuitionist insight” to come up with philosophies that cannot be displaced by logic, but only by an alternative suggestion for a utopia. This alternative suggestion would be more of a Kuhnian paradigm shift than a rational critique within a system (Odera Oruka 1997, 209). Rejecting the sages’ views on women may entail a paradigm shift. This point will be revisited in my conclusion.

Before proceeding a couple of caveats are in order. Anything I say on the topic of women’s equality in Kenya could come across as arrogant because I am an outsider; this may be the case even if Kenyan women would agree with the substance of my argument (see Boni 2010, 225). Definitely I do not intend to communicate that my critique can be done best by any Western woman. Second, although I submit the sages’ comments to a critique as advocated in the field of philosophy, and although Odera Oruka and other African scholars have also offered critiques of the sages, critique may, nevertheless, be a kind of competitive “sport” that males in general enjoy more than females do.

Some feminist scholars have expressed concern about the way that philosophy, currently dominated by men, engages in sometimes searing criticisms that some women and people of color interpret as hostile, which drives them away from the field (Rooney 2010). In the African context, Campbell S. Momoh has noted that according to some sources of African wisdom, to argue means to be “sharp in the mouth” (Momoh 1985, 84). He advocates finding better projects rather than disputing the adequacy of others’ answers to philosophical questions (Momoh 1985, 95). I think these criticisms of philosophy’s usual practices are well-made. Perhaps to smooth social relationships, it would be better to pass over any opportunity for critique of the sages despite Odera Oruka’s invitation for us to do so. Nonetheless, I see this stage of refuting sages’ arguments as a task that when completed will clear the way for a more collaborative, inclusive, and future-oriented sage philosophy project.

Since Odera Oruka argued that a philosopher has a deeper social responsibility than people from other professionals to “use his philosophy to understand the implications of all actions in society, and try to warn his people when necessary” (Odera Oruka 1997, 217), those engaged in sage philosophy have a responsibility to offer critiques of prevalent societal attitudes, found in sages’ comments, that hinder women’s liberty and rights.

II. Sage Philosophy and the Question of Women’s Equality

Equality of the sexes and races greatly interested Odera Oruka, which is why he so often brought up the issue in his interviews with sages. A typical list of topics for interviews also included the existence and concept of God, the meaning of wisdom, and the possibility of life after death. Yet, all named student assistants are male (Odera Oruka 1991, Acknowledgements), and of twelve sages whose interviews are quoted at length in *Sage Philosophy*, only one is a woman. In an earlier part of the book, where Odera Oruka gives brief excerpts of interviews of eight sages, all of these are also men (Odera Oruka 1991, 37–40). Nine sages asked about equality of the sexes were all men. That Odera Oruka interviewed more than just the one woman included in his book is known because he mentions during his testimony at the S.M. Otieno Burial trial that he interviewed “a wise lady, Abiero Nyar Miyere, wife of Owidh Kohene and another lady, Randiga Nyar Ogut, wife of Ohomo of Ndere Clan, East Ugenya” (Odera Oruka 1991, 83). Transcripts of these interviews have been lost.

Ochieng’-Odhiambo, who wrote his dissertation on African philosophy under Odera Oruka’s direction (1994), included five sages. Of them, two men were asked the question, but the one woman sage was not asked. The irony here is obvious: Men, self-proclaimed to be interested in the equality of the sexes, excluded most women from their study and when they did include them, failed to ask questions relevant to the issue.

The sages frequently opined that women are inferior. Nevertheless, Odera Oruka seemed particularly pleased with the few who said that the sexes are equal and seemed apologetic about the extent to which the sages included in his book espoused women’s inferiority:

On the subject of man and woman, most folk sages are convinced of the superiority of man. This is a repetition of the belief of the cultural mass from

which the sages hail. The philosophic sages, however, make a qualification even where some of them are of the view of the inequality between man and woman. Mbuya Akoko sees no inequality between the genders and offers proof to discount any thesis for inequality. Oruka Rang'inya finds no inequality except in the use of intellect. Stephen Kithanje sees inequality only as a division of functions and the prevention of conflict between two people (man and woman) who are to live together. He thus assigns the husband the role of "chairman" and the wife the role of "secretary." Culture often has a profound influence on people whether or not they are sages or philosophers. Influenced by ancient Greek culture, Plato and Aristotle did not see slaves as having the worth of human beings. The seeming man-superior-to-woman attitude found in some of the sages in this book should be seen for what it is—a judgment dominated by the cultural myths of the surrounding culture. But this aside, the objective, reflective views of some of the sages on the subject command reasonable acceptance or appreciation (Odera Oruka 1991, 4–5).

Therefore, Odera Oruka apparently believes that the traditions regarding women's inferiority in Kenya are wrong. He likens the sages' assertion of inequality of the sexes to the mistake of those who justify slavery or racial discrimination. However, he suggests that because they think so about women should not encourage us to dismiss all of their valuable contributions, since we do not wholly dismiss the philosophies of Plato, Aristotle, Kant, Hegel, Schopenhauer, or Nietzsche. He applauds the sages insofar as they see through and rise above the mistaken notions of their societies. So, while in other contexts, Odera Oruka is famous for defending traditional ideas against what he considers to be "modern" or "Western" ideas (such as his testimony in the S.M. Otieno burial saga [1991, 67-83]; and Otieno [1998, 188-89]), on this issue he clearly sided with what might be considered modernist or foreign ideas, or "universal" moral judgments.

Odera Oruka seems to suggest that his distinction between "folk sages" (those who unthinkingly hold the views of their community) and "philosophical sages" (those who can be critical) is bolstered by the sages' treatment of the topic of equality of the sexes (Odera Oruka 1991, 4–5). However, of the seven folk sages included in *Sage Philosophy*, three think women are inferior, two think they are equal to men, and two were not asked the question. Of

the five philosophical sages included, three thought women were inferior, only one thought they were equal, and one was not asked. Rather than show any meaningful difference between folk and philosophical sages, this sample shows no significant differences between them.

Odera Oruka said that even when men hold to women's inequality, they do so in a nuanced, interesting, and insightful way (1991, 4–5). I disagree. I argue that the sages in late twentieth-century Kenya still defend male superiority based on arguments that have been staunchly criticized by feminist philosophers. Moreover, while a few of the sages were not opposed to changes that will help women, none offered any helpful insight or plan to push the project forward. These are factors to consider when evaluating Odera Oruka's project of restoring respect for the elder sages while upholding his commitment to egalitarianism.

The sages' stated reasons for women's inequality vary. Ali Mwitani Masero argues that women are inferior because they leave their place of birth like birds or migrants. Challenged by the interviewer that it might be good to be like a bird, Masero insisted it was worse. Challenged by the interviewer that a woman leaving her home is only a custom, Masero replied that those customs reflect women's inferiority (Odera Oruka 1991, 94-95). Similarly, Josiah Osuru argues that men proved their superiority by displaying superior courage on the battlefield. He also added that wives are not equal to their husbands because a man buys a woman with bride price and brings her to his house (Odera Oruka 1991, 103). But the fact that customs put men at an advantage over women does not in itself prove that women are inferior. If girls and women, traditionally denied socially structured chances to prove their courage are given the chance and incentive, they may do so. In addition, women surely show courage in ways other than battle.

Chesaina Ciarunji of the University of Nairobi has written about problems that stem from men paying dowry or bride price for their wives. She notes that because of this payment to the women's family, husbands often act as if they own their wives and can therefore mistreat them. If police are called in for domestic violence, they often dismiss the seriousness of the situation (Ciarunji 2005, 213-14). Kenyan society's prevalent conception of wives as "subordinate to their husbands ... makes it difficult for a woman to gain legal redress when she experiences mistreatment from her husband" (ibid.). Valerie Kibera cynically notes that men who engage in battering choose to call it "disciplining" their wives (Kibera 2005, 43).

While the problems about which Ciarunji complains are real and serious, Gerald Wanjohi claims that Kenyan men do not really consider themselves to be buying wives or selling their daughters, even if a literal translation of common Gikuyu phrases used to describe the traditions would result in “buy” and “sell”. He insists that families value their daughters, and that their daughters’ leaving to be with young men is a great loss to families; the bride price is a small token to compensate for their loss, not a payment (Wanjohi 2005, 48). Jesse Mugambi and Nicodemus Kirima suggest that “bridewealth” is a more accurate term (Mugambi and Kirima 1976, 48-49).

Of the philosophical sages, Okemba Simiyu Chaungo argues that a husband is given more energy by God because equal energy would bring friction into the home (Odera Oruka 1991, 113). Rang’inya argues that man is superior in intellect; women use their hearts, not their heads, although he admits there are exceptions to this generalization (Odera Oruka 1991, 121). Such arguments are similar to Western male chauvinism, and recent American feminists have addressed their local counterparts. For example, Ann Ferguson debunks the idea that male’s superior upper body strength results in domination of women. She notes that such differences only result in political and social disadvantage when human beings choose to allow it. Ferguson explains, “biological differences between men and women are only *conditions* which may be *used* against women by men in certain economic and political organizations in society and in social roles. They are like *tools* rather than mandates” (Ferguson 1995, 247).

Rang’inya’s assertion that women too easily succumb to emotion is a popular stereotype even supported by Aristotle in his political and moral theory, when he claimed that by nature women’s reason was not “authoritative” for her (*Politics* bk. 1, 1260a7–9). This position was reiterated by Thomas Aquinas when he claimed that women are often overwhelmed by their passions (*Summa Theologica* II.II.156.1 ad 1). However, Elizabeth Spelman successfully points out Aristotle’s factual errors and use of circular reasoning. Many of her criticisms would apply equally well to Rang’inya (see Spelman 1998, 74-82). Moreover, copious literature in the ethics of care argues that using one’s heart is indispensable for sound moral decision making (Held 1990, 321-334).

Of course, none of the sages had the opportunity to debate with Ferguson or Spelman, and the

interviewers who could have put such challenges to them during the interviews did not. But Kenyans might have previously challenged the sages' arguments of inequality. While Odera Oruka looked for his sages in the rural areas among those without formal schooling, Jay van Hook accurately points out that Kenya is a marketplace of ideas where old and new are constantly meeting. Interviews are replete with reference to radios, cars, white people, Christianity, and other aspects of society obviously not of indigenous origin (van Hook 1995, 54-65). Surely sages hold their views on women in contexts that make them aware of opposing viewpoints.

The most exhaustive list of arguments for woman's inferiority is offered by a highly respected sage philosopher, Stephen M'Mukindia Kithanje, co-author of a book on traditional Ameru culture, a Bantu group in the Meru region of Kenya, and clearly shows the influence of Western ideas. He notes in his *Sage Philosophy* interview:

As for the role of a man and a woman in marriage, I would equate the man to a chairman and the woman to a secretary, as we have in any organization. This is because a man will always be occupied with the different things outside the home. When he comes back home, the woman should give him a detailed report of what has been happening around home for the time he was away. This situation as it is today - women equating themselves to men - is very sad. This is something I believe can never be possible. Men are superior to women. This can be seen very clearly from such physical signs as beards, bald, etc., which are only found on men. They are signs of superiority. In a family, there can be harmony only if a man is the leader. A man has a direct relationship with God, the same way a woman has direct relationship with a man. If a woman wants to be the leader, maybe because she is learned, and yet the husband is naturally endowed with qualities of leadership, surely there will be problems. There cannot be two equals in a situation where important decisions are to be made. Such a family will obviously fail. Again, women are inferior to men because, as is the case in the whole of Africa, it is the man who chooses the woman he wants to marry. There is no time when the woman proposes marriage to the man! (Odera Oruka 1991, 132-133).

This passage comprises arguments in four categories:

- (1) The greater importance of public duties over private duties and the relegation of women to the private sphere.
- (2) Physical basis of superiority.
- (3) Harmony in the home based on rule of one partner (the man) and submission of the other.
- (4) Social customs surrounding marriage that advantage men's autonomy and choice.

Arguments in the first category parallel public-private distinctions advocated by Aristotle in ancient Greece and since considered problematic by feminist philosophers who argue that in many parts of the world, women are underrepresented in the public sphere of politics. While one goal of feminism can be for women to have a larger public role, another is to value the work of care and nurturance in the private household. Other feminists problematize a strict dividing line between the two realms, since public decisions affect the private realm (Prokhorovnik 1998). Kenyan scholar Maria Nzomo has consistently criticized women's underrepresentation in Kenyan politics. From her studies, she has concluded that the most important barrier to women's political participation is "the socio-cultural system of beliefs and myths" that shape early socialization and education such that it leads to a lack of confidence in women (Nzomo 1994, 204). Thus, any argument that intends to prove the naturalness of male superiority by appealing to current social conventions is circular: women are inferior because they hold fewer public positions; they hold fewer public positions based on their inferiority.

In the traditional political organization among the Luo of Kenya and Tanzania, women could not be at public gatherings, and men were coached to keep their discussions secret from women who would gossip (Nyandiga 1999). Adeofe Oyesakin notes the same dynamic in Nigeria among the Yoruba, and argues that women would not have to resort to extracting secrets and spreading gossip if they were given access to the same public channels of expression and decision-making power (Oyesakin 1985, 38-43). Rose Mwangi, in her analysis of Kikuyu folktales, found stories that justified male political rule, claiming that men were more level-headed and responsible, for example, "the fable where it is said that women once ruled the land and that as rulers they were hostile and aggressive until the men staged a coup and overthrew the women" (Mwangi 1982, 15).

This is not to deny the presence of counter-examples involving women warriors and political

leaders in some parts of Africa. Oginga Odinga gave the example of Grace Onyango, elected first woman mayor of Kisumu in the 1960s and later elected first woman member of Parliament, holding that seat from 1969-79 (Odera Oruka 1992, 111). But Kenya has a low rate of women holding political office. The United Nations Development Programme's *Human Development Index 2001* reported Kenyan Parliament representation by women at 3.6 per cent (United Nations Development Programme's *Human Development Index 2001*, 228). By 2011, it was only 9.8 percent, far below their percentage of the population, but reflecting good progress over ten years (United Nations Development Programme's *Human Development Index 2011*). Comparatively, the United States has 16.8 percent representation by women in Congress.

Perhaps attitudes like Kithenge's are partly responsible for Kenyan women's losing elections. Nevertheless, women do have the vote in Kenya, and Judith Abwunza, in her study of Maragoli women, says that male candidates for office know that they have to court the women's vote and that they expend time and energy in doing so. On the negative side, she notes that the women realize that they will be forgotten after the elections, and most promises of politicians will not be fulfilled (Abwunza 1997, 115-118).

Kithanje's allusion to "chairmen" and "secretary" suggests that he borrowed this distinction from Western ideas of patriarchy. But current Ameru practices of leadership and authority considered to be traditional are also dominated by men. Sicily Muriithi states that Ameru men deliberate without consulting the women who will be affected by their decisions. If men consult their wives, they are considered to be dominated by their wives (Muriithi 2008, 139). Justus Mbae agrees that among the Ameru, a man's ability to be a leader is judged by his ability to govern his family. An unmarried man could not be considered a leader (Mbae 2005, 54).

Other Kenyan pre-colonial societies have been described as consigning women to the private sphere. Kaj Arhem's study of the Maasai found them hiding women, children, and small animals in the safety of enclosed living spaces, where they could be protected from dangerous predators while the men go out of the home to conduct business, graze the animals, or fend off predators, as well as meet with each other to discuss community leadership (Arhem 1991, 51-80). However, Ulrike von Mitzlaff challenges this description. She opines that the public-private (political-domestic) distinction is misapplied to men and

women of the Parakuyo Maasai community. Men and women live for the most part in separate spheres, but women have public ritual duties to which they attend, often without the presence of men (Mitzlaff 1988, 161). This exemplifies how difficult it is to make generalizations that accurately capture the realities in different parts of the world.

Many studies of Kenya show the increasing absence of men from the rural household. Sometimes due to migrant labor or other causes, husbands and fathers leave the rural homes for long periods, leaving women in charge of rural households, greatly enlarging their roles (Maathai 2009, 276-77). Kithenje tells us that when the man is away from the homestead leaving the wife in charge, she owes him a report upon his return. In this context, the woman has a role quite beyond the usual understanding of “secretary”. Like executive secretaries who run businesses with the titular President as figurehead or rarely consulted authority, David William Cohen and E.S. Atieno-Odhiambo mention a popular song that praises a woman for building her own homestead (Cohen and Atieno-Odhiambo 1989, 86-87).

Kithenje’s claim that a woman’s relationship to God can only be indirect while men have direct relationships with him might seem presumptuous. But Muslim practices of men worshiping in public mosques while women worship at the back of the mosques or at home, exclusively male priesthood in Catholicism, or separation of the sexes in Jewish synagogues are all traditions that exemplify the same attitude. Similarly, Sicily Muriithi explains that traditional Ameru religious practices are overseen by men with the exception of girls’ initiation rites (Muriithi 2008, 132-33).

In the second category, reference to physical superiority of men can be found across cultures, but in that, there is no consistency in how physical attributes are valued. Interestingly, in Kithenge’s culture, beards and baldness are both considered signs of superiority (Odera Oruka 1991, 132-133). Those particular physical attributes could be considered either to be neutral or possibly negative in other cultures. For example, in the United States, loss of hair often resulted in lower self-esteem and sometimes diminished social standing, perhaps because youthful looks were so highly valued. Many men in the United States wore toupees or submitted to expensive surgery to conceal or remedy baldness (Cash 1999; Willett 2010, 36, 128-29).

Kithenje’s third category of arguments suggests that harmony in a marriage is only possible

when men make decisions for their wives and children. He espouses the idea that in a marriage, one person must always have the deciding vote. He believes that God gave leadership as a natural quality to men; education of women threatens to disrupt the natural situation (Odera Oruka 1991, 132-133).

Abel M'Nkabui also supports the voting/tie-breaking model, despite holding that men and women are equal. He explains that practicality dictates that in a marriage, one person should voluntarily step down so that the other can make decisions; The woman should be the one to step down because women have superior adaptability (Odera Oruka 1991, 100). This argument appears self-serving to me.

These sages appear to be unable to fathom other more egalitarian ways to solve this problem of the "tie vote". In a spirit of fairness, for example, couples could alternate decision making duties. The suffering involved in compromise would at least be evenly distributed.

Why do the sages fail to recognize alternatives? Rose Odhiambo, interviewed by Odera Oruka's student and colleague F. Ochieng'-Odhiambo, might shed some light on this topic. She notes that Luo society was polygamous: "One who had only one wife was seen as someone who was dominated over by the wife," and therefore the monogamous man couldn't be elected to leadership positions (Ochieng'-Odhiambo 1994, 266). It seems, therefore, that equality would require monogamy (one man, one wife), and monogamy was interpreted as weakness. Leadership was demonstrated by one's ability to rule over several women simultaneously. In such a social context, one's social reputation is at stake. Cooperating with a woman is not a viable option; men must demonstrate that they are in charge. While Odhiambo's statements offer evidence of the existence of powerful women, it also shows how men are taught to particularly guard themselves against such power.

Chesaina Ciarunji explains how the tradition of men making decisions for the household is now under stress. While traditionally men were the providers, this is not necessarily the case in contemporary Kenya. Women often provide the family's sustenance and sometimes they manage the cash crops as well:

In Kenyan society it has been assumed that it is normal for the woman to struggle to produce required family resources, but leave the area of decision

making to the man. This is based ... upon a prevailing negative attitude towards women as intellectually inferior to men. This self-contradictory view holds that women have the mental capacity to manage a farm but not enough intelligence to decide on how the money gained should be spent. Faced with this kind of situation, women are forced to do one of two things: either to relinquish their rights to decision-making for the sake of peace in the home or to engage in domestic warfare if the sustenance of the family is threatened (Ciarunji 2005, 211-212).

This issue of “rule” in marriage was addressed by Aristotle, who suggested that the relationship between husband and wife was like a “constitutional” rule in the political sphere, but with important qualifications. Whereas equal citizens “rule and are ruled by turns,” between the husband and wife, due to the lesser nature of the woman, there is a permanent inequality. Therefore, the man rules the household, but he does delegate authority to the wife over certain spheres of activity and decision making. Importantly, he admits there may be “exceptions to the order of nature”, but in general, “the male is by nature fitter for command than the female” (*Politics* Book I, Part XII, 2009, 16). The wife’s inferiority is shown, according to Aristotle, by the fact that she is the beneficiary and the husband is the benefactor. While she cannot give as much as he to the household and so is in his debt, she can compensate by honoring and loving her husband more than he loves and honors her. This leads Prudence Allen to note:

Aristotle's theory of sex polarity laid a metaphysical foundation for an imbalanced exchange of love between husband and wife. Since the husband could confer more on the relationship, he could love less. In this development of a perpetuation of an essential inequality within the household, Aristotle defended a devaluation of the gifts and person of a woman to a degree not previously thought of in philosophy (Allen 1997, 117).

While one might hope that contemporary Kenyan sages would uphold a more egalitarian power and decision-making sharing scenario in the home, the fact that most want men to be in charge of the family's decisions is not peculiarly Kenyan. Allen argues that Aristotle's influence has been widespread in the thousands of years since he wrote, influencing not only Christianity but also Islam (Allen 1997, 342). When sages articulate such ubiquitous views, it is hard to trace the genealogy of their ideas.

Colleen McCluskey contends that Aquinas contradicted himself when he argued that husbands should wield authority and rule over their wives. Aquinas based men's rule on their superior rationality. But he did mention that there may be exceptions when women more soundly reason than their husbands. Also, since Aquinas mentions that men with varying degrees of rationality are found in the public realm (not to mention different heights and weights, talents and abilities) who are still considered equal to each other and not under each other's rule, McCluskey argues that superior rationality does not entail the necessity of rule (McCluskey 2007, 13).

Nashon Oduor, interviewed in Ochieng'-Odhiambo's study, asserted women's inferiority with this to say: "The women are fighting a battle they cannot win. No individual in his proper and sane senses can accord women equal status and opportunities to men. Women are naturally inferior to men both in physical and mental strength" (Ochieng'-Odhiambo 1994, 240). More than ignoring alternatives, Oduor considers his the only "sane" possibility. When Ochieng'-Odhiambo challenges Oduor, saying that since Oduor is a Christian and Christians believe that God treats everyone equally, that Oduor should also treat women as equal to men, Oduor responds that just because God treats people equally that doesn't mean that they

really are equal (Ochieng'-Odhiambo 1994, 242).

A second sage, James Oluoch, disagrees with Paul Mbuya Akoka's statement, which Ochieng'-Odhiambo quotes from *Sage Philosophy* (Odera Oruka 1991, 49-50), that men and women are equal because while men excel in running faster than women, women can bear children while men cannot. Oluoch argues that it is unfair to compare the abilities of men and women regarding childbearing, since God created men in such a way that they cannot bear children. Rather, it is only fair to compare them on some activity that both could do, and in those cases, he is certain that men would succeed over women (Ochieng'-Odhiambo 1994, 251).

Oluoch's statement is a clever response to the challenge evident in Akoko's claim. However, alternatively, one could argue that because only women can bear children is proof that God made women naturally better than men. Elsewhere, reference to natural differences between the sexes has been offered as proof that men are superior (for example, Kithanje's reference to beards, baldness, and "natural" leadership abilities given only to them).

The sages are feisty: they don't just give in to the aggressive questioning of the interviewers. But is this a sign of their philosophical sensitivity or their ideological tenacity? Even if not convinced by any of their arguments, one can perhaps be impressed, as Odera Oruka no doubt was, by the vast range of arguments, some quite innovative, that the sages can put forth when questioned. No sage answered in rote fashion ("it has always been our tradition ..."). However, it might be that the sages themselves were not aware of the extent to which their unique insights were still tradition-bound and conforming to the reigning ideology.

That the sages' views were not unique for their time can be illustrated by looking at their larger legal context. In the Kenyan Constitution (Section 82.3) at the time, there were legal protections against discrimination based on race, tribe, place of origin or residence, political connection, color, or creed. Notably, discrimination on the basis of sex was not included. In 1985, when lawmakers tried to pass a progressive Marriage Bill giving equal rights to both spouses concerning divorce, custody of children and division of matrimonial property, it failed to pass due to opposition. Some men were concerned that it would interfere with their ability to chastise their wives (Kabeberi-Macharia 1995, 2).

What about the arguments in favor of women's equality? Zacharia Nyandere argues that all inequalities are imagined, are stereotypes. But he does not have a chance to elaborate on the issue of sexual equality because he devotes all his time to racial equality (Odera Oruka 1991, 98). Akoko argues that today women are not equal to men, but that the situation is due to their lack of opportunities up to this point (Odera Oruka 1991, 140). This insight that the denial of opportunities hinders growth is one which I very much appreciate. Earlier egalitarians such as Musonius Rufus (first century CE) (Lutz 1947) and feminists such as Mary Wollstonecraft (1891), made similar points.

Akoko implied that women are potentially equal, and eventually, women will become equal to men. However, he cautions, "women still need many more years before reaching the level of their men folk. It is only after many more years of education and orientation that this equality will come. It ought not be forced. But if the people take it hastily, the result will be problems, avoidable problems" (Odera Oruka 1991, 140).

On Akoko's insights regarding women, Masolo judges that this sage has made an intelligent statement based on common sense and keen observation of his community, but that he has not delved into the topic or given an elaborate exposition, leading him to consider it weak support of Odera Oruka's contention that Akoko is a philosopher (Masolo 1994, 236-38). Masolo's discussion continues with further elucidation of his main theme regarding philosophy without further addressing the question of women's equality.

I think the critique of Akoko should be taken further. While promising, this is a gradualist argument, akin to the one Martin Luther King Jr. rejected in the equal races parallel espoused in his *Why We Can't Wait* (1964). There, in his famous "Letter from a Birmingham Jail", he noted that sympathetic white clergy agreed with his Civil Rights movement's insistence on racial equality, but not with his timing, since they thought change must happen slowly. He accused them of delaying and suggested that such delays were hypocritical.

In Akoko's case, we have insufficient information to know whether he engaged in meaningful and timely advancement of women's education and rights in his community, since he recited here only his warning and not his plan for change. But I do notice that he attributes the problem of inequality to women's slowness in being educated. In addition, he mentions that women have internalized ideas of their own inferiority. He mentions that some

women are lazy and want preferential treatment based on their weakness. He also mentions the need for equal opportunity, but he fails to elaborate on what might be the stumbling block toward more opportunities for women. Importantly, he makes no mention of other relevant factors, such as resistance from men, which might be a major contributing factor to the slowness of change (Odera Oruka 1991, 140).

Hostility of men toward women's betterment is mentioned by Abwunza in the context of her study of women in Maragoli, western Kenya. She notes that women's attempts to gather in women's groups to better their society and themselves is met with hostile skepticism by their husbands (Abwunza 1997, 164). It is important to admit that both men and women share responsibility for reproducing a social system that results in women's subordination. Chesaina Ciarunji notes that women often raise their children in a way that reinforces gender stereotypes (Ciarunji 2005, 212-13). Sicily Muriithi finds patriarchal traditions and customs to be (only) one of five causes of women's vulnerability. One of the others is the internalization of low esteem by women (Muriithi 2008). While these are important points, I find it unsatisfactory that Akoko cites only the ways in which women could be blamed for their own low status while not mentioning at all that men may play a role in the low position of women. From the limits of this interview, it is not clear that he has taken upon himself the project of recruiting men to push for these changes.

So, of the three sages in Odera Oruka's study who support women's equality, one has no chance to elaborate, one says women (while equal to men) should defer to men because of their superior abilities in adaptability, and the third says women should not be in a rush to gain equality. I conclude, therefore, that the sages have not been very enlightening on the issue of women's equality. Misinformation and defensive arguments greatly outweigh the few modest insights into women's status and abilities. Considering Odera Oruka's stated commitment to women's equality, one would expect him to decry the inadequacies of the sages' comments on this topic. Instead, he is only mildly apologetic and still defensive of the sages' arguments.

III. The Meaning of "Equality of the Sexes"

One reason for the divergence between the sages' insights into equality between the sexes and universal egalitarianism may be that sages base their analysis on observation of their

concrete situation. In contrast, the liberal notion of equality is an abstraction that purposely, for better or worse, ignores distinctions of social status. It may be that in designing the questions to be used during sage interviews, the subtle and diverse possible meanings of gender equality were not discussed or clarified. After all, no two objects are ever equal in all respects. A claim that two objects, persons, etc. are equal is always a case of arguing that they are equal in one or more relevant ways. When it comes to arguments for equality among human beings, claims for equality never insist two human beings or human groups are equal in all respects, but rather equal in important respects that make differential treatment unwarranted or indefensible (Benn 1972, 38-42).

Stanley Benn surveys the history of the term “equality”. He argues that the Stoics (early third century BCE) were the first to propose a generalized equality in the sense of equal consideration for all men based on their possession of rationality and their capacity for virtue. However, he admits that the choice of focusing on equality among human beings and sidelining equality with other living beings was a widespread presupposition of that era (Benn 1972, 39).

Therefore, we might want to expand Benn’s history of equality to go back to the sixth century BCE, when Jainism held that all living beings are equal in important respects, and that they should be spared violence so that their life could be preserved. Vilas Adinath Sangave notes that Jains’ belief in equal treatment of all human beings eschewed social discrimination against Shudras (the lowest caste) and women, espoused that all people should have equal roles in religious life and rituals, and extended sacredness to all living beings (Sangave 2001, 18-21). Clearly, Jains recognized that all living beings are not equal in every sense, but the Jains argued that they were equal in a relevant sense that meant that differential treatment could not be morally justified.

Despite these precursors to modern conceptions of equality, historians often argue that modern egalitarianism was born in the seventeenth century. They point to the Calvinists or the Levellers during the English civil war, who both argued that legitimate authority, the right to command over others, is based on the voluntary submission of equals who must give their consent to be governed (Benn 1972, 39). This meaning is relevant to our topic here in two senses: whether women should be treated as equals in the public sphere, and whether they should be considered equal partners in marriage with men.

The sages' responses to questions about equality of men and women indicate that they were responding mostly based upon observations of women's social roles that they had actually observed, and evaluating women's worth, the social esteem women deserve, based on how society values women's roles. Masero's analogy of women to birds (Odera Oruka 1991, 94-95), mentioned in the previous section, illustrates this view. Arguments that such roles are based on convention were met with insistence that roles were first formed in accordance with women's nature, but proof was not forthcoming. This means that these positions were normative, suggesting that the way things are is the way they ought to be.

Consider this passage:

A. [Ali Mwitani Masero]: A woman leaves her place of birth, like a bird of the bush, to go to a man's home. She is a migrant. How then can she be equal to the *host*, the man?

Q. [Chaungo Barasa]: But can we not interpret that more positively? For a person to leave her mother, people, and land to begin a new life with a new people, does that in itself not imply great sacrifice, broad-mindedness and fortitude - qualities which should be rated as superior?

A. Maybe. That is how you think. But me, I wouldn't call it superiority. Our people do not call it that either. I think it is weakness; to be swayed and swept from your roots into the wilderness. Why can't a woman be principled and say "If a man wants us to be partners, let him come to my father's home and I will build him a house there!"? (Odera Oruka 1991, 95).

Here, Masero blames women for allowing their own subjugation. He takes the fact that they go along with traditions that put them at the disadvantage as further proof of their weakness and hence, lack of equality.

While Masero puts a lot of emphasis on social role as determinant of women's status, thus concluding that they are not equal to men, that does not mean that he is incapable of abstracting or universalizing. In fact, he does sort out social role from the more abstract

notion of equality. He realizes that all people are equal in the sense that they all have thought; but he goes on to state that some human beings (particularly men and women) are not equal, because of attributes in addition to their possessing thought (Odera Oruka 1991, 95).

Could the sages distinguish abstract equality from social roles if asked to do so? Clearly they could. Okemba Simiyu Chaungo prefaced his remarks about God giving more energy to men, thus justifying husbands ruling their wives, by saying that both men and women are human beings who have “humanity” in them (*bandu, olima obandu*) (Odera Oruka 1991, 113). Similarly, Nyandere and M’Nkabui have an abstract concept of a human being in mind when they state that all races and genders are equal (Odera Oruka 1991, 98-100). But Oduor is skeptical of abstractions, evidenced when he suggests that God’s equal love for all persons does not mean that people are “really” equal. For him, the concrete differences are more important and more real than the abstract similarities (Ochieng’-Odhiambo 1996, 240).

Some sages, as soon as they are asked the question of the equality of the sexes, go directly to examples of the social roles of each. For instance, when Rang’inya is asked, “How do you think a man and a woman should live together?” he answers with a survey of Luo traditional social roles and responsibilities of men and women (Odera Oruka 1991, 120).

Akoko may very well have had such an abstract ideal of equality between the sexes in mind when he espoused the need for change in gendered social roles over time - coincidentally, Odera Oruka is proudest of this sage’s insights (Odera Oruka 1991, 4-5, 140). In the middle of his long, role-bound description of men and women, Akoko says that “men and women are inherently equal,” but he does not explain the basis for his claim (*ibid.*). When Akoko is asked, “Do you think that man and woman should be considered equals?” he replies, “There is a popular Luo belief that the man is the owner and master of the homestead, the whole homestead, but I think this belief is wrong. For, when we come to the house, the woman is in control there” (Odera Oruka 1991, 139). In this, he is advancing a kind of separate spheres or balance of power theory of egalitarianism. He goes on to describe a peaceful and harmonious relationship between husband and wife, each of them asking the other about issues that affect them both, neither acting single-handedly or in a domineering way. In private, it is not unusual to see a woman showing more talent and intelligence than her husband. However, he stipulates that in public, men do not like letting it be known that women can surpass them in knowledge (Odera Oruka 1991, 140).

This stipulation “in private” would seem to suggest that seeing such displays of female superiority in public would be unusual. Similarly, Betty Potash’s 1970s study of Luo marriages noted that “a woman is constrained to comply outwardly with her husband’s wishes and to avoid openly opposing him” (Potash 1978, 388). Thus, regardless of what happens behind closed doors, confining women’s competence and outspokenness to a narrow private sphere still constitutes inequality in important respects.

The public-private distinction applies not only to rural areas in Kenya, but to cities like Nairobi as well. Contemporary Kenyan women have furthered discussion on gender discrimination since Akoko’s time. While some women have been able to pursue education and become faculty in Kenyan universities, Njoki Kamau’s study shows that stereotypes about women’s proper place in society continue even in the university context (Kamau 2004). Njeri Kang’ethe explains that educated women who do not marry but instead pursue careers are not understood or accepted by their families. It would not be unusual for such women to hear comments about themselves along the lines of, “what is the point of her great education if she is still in her mother’s kitchen, unmarried?” (Kang’ethe 2005, 62).

Within feminist philosophy, debate is ongoing whether feminists should aspire to equality with men. Luce Irigaray (1985) has argued that our current “gender-neutral” universals actually privilege the masculine. Women gaining “equality” is always understood as women getting what men now have; but what men have, for example, a male-dominated political system, is a deeply flawed and dehumanizing system. Why would women want to inherit or participate in such a warped system? This has resulted in Irigaray’s approach, first articulated in the 1980s, being called “difference” feminism in contrast to “equality” feminism.

But this contrast could be misunderstood. While Irigaray wanted women to focus on ways in which they were inherently different from men, she did not disagree with the political goal of fighting for and maintaining equal civil rights. She just wanted to ensure that the struggle for social equality did not make conceptual errors by thinking that what men currently have should be the goal for women (Irigaray 1985, 81; Khader 2008, 50-51). Already within the field of those who consider themselves equality feminists, varying opinions have been expressed ranging from those who think that equality means participating in current institutions to those who long for radically transformed social institutions (Stone 2007, 131).

But the point of the feminist agenda is not just to note in an abstract sense that women, as legal persons, are just as human as men. Feminists want to go further and challenge the denial of women's social status. They argue that denying women opportunities based on irrelevant distinctions between women and men is morally wrong.

In contrast to the abstract, egalitarian approach, Akoko appears to argue not for an abstract equality, but for an idea of complementarity of roles. In my opinion the most gender-sensitive of the sages interviewed, Akoko explained that while at first glance men's accomplishments may seem more prominent, a closer look will show that women also excel in their own ways, so that they are naturally equal. Odera Oruka says of Akoko's argument that it "is independent of the communal chorus of the general Luo beliefs about women" (Odera Oruka 1991, 50).

What is the value today of arguing for complementarity of men and women? Allen uses a tripartite schema to locate philosophers' positions on the relations between men and women: polarity, complementarity, and equality. Polarity involves asserting both gender differentiation and inequality, whereas complementarity asserts difference without denigrating one of the poles, namely, women. Those who advocate for gender equality opine that complementarity actually conceals subtle denigration of women. For example, Aristotle says that women can still have virtue, it's just that their virtue is different from men's (Aristotle 2009, 17, 52, 51-52, or 1260a9-11). An optimistic reading would emphasize an "equal but different" interpretation of the text. But according to Allen, a closer look at what is said about men and women's virtue would result in seeing that Aristotle's actual position is one of polarity, since women's virtues are not as great as men's (Allen 1997, 342).

Recent news from North Africa reported that in August 2012, many Tunisian women were protesting a draft law passed by the National Constituent Assembly on August 1 that read: “The State shall preserve women’s rights and achievements under the principle of complementarity with men within the family and as partners of men in the development of the homeland.” Many women considered the emphasis on “complementarity” to fall short of genuine equality as earlier stated in Tunisia’s Personal Status Code. Other women defended it saying “Complementarity does not mean inequality . . . Complementarity suggests exchange and partnership” (Tajine 2012).

Whether complementarity can be part of a feminist agenda (perhaps compatible with “difference” feminism) is itself clearly in dispute. For want of space, this paper can only point to the ongoing dispute and note that the best case for equality made by the sages in Oruka’s *Sage Philosophy* (1991) was such an argument.

IV. The Interview with Oginga Odinga

It is significant to note that the sage philosophy interview with Oginga Odinga is quite different from any of the interviews with the sages included in *Sage Philosophy*. Odera Oruka explains that he interviewed Oginga Odinga on this topic of gender equality in 1991-1992, after *Sage Philosophy* was published. Before giving his personal opinion, Oginga Odinga says he will first summarize the Luo traditional wisdom on the topic of men and women’s equality. He argues that due to men’s physical strength, they were given all the roles which needed superior physical strength. But he quickly follows that remark with categories of activities in which some women excelled, such as giving speeches, making rational decisions, fighting in war, and contributing materially to society with their wealth. He explained that women who could excel in these activities were treated as equal to men. He gave as an example Grace Onyango, who was elected as the first woman mayor of Kisumu in the 1960s, and was later elected first woman member of Parliament (1969-1979). Odinga insists that no one minded that Onyango was a woman. He claimed that he thought a woman could be President of Kenya. He gave the example of a lady from his village who would come to gatherings such as the ones where people come to contribute to a marriage fund. She would “seat herself on a chair as distinguished as the ones the men occupied. She would not sit down on the ground in front of some men considered above her, as was customary” (Odera

Oruka 1992, 111). She would contribute a goat or cow as others did, and “No one bothered to complain that she was going contrary to customs” (ibid). Oginga Odinga explained that since everyone could see her clear ability, they did not deny her equal participation.

The interesting point about Oginga Odinga’s testimony is that while he is clarifying that he is intending to represent Luo traditions, he is presenting them on two levels. He explains that there is a custom that women should not seat themselves on chairs along with men, but rather they should sit down on the ground instead (this implies women are considered to have less worth or lower status). But he is also saying that despite this custom, men of his community readily grant exceptions to these behavior norms for women who have proven themselves to be equal to men. He does not use the word “exceptions” himself, but it is clear that it is implied, because if women considered equals to men were not exceptions, why would there be a tradition of women not sitting on chairs when men did so? Would there also not have been men who did not prove themselves sitting on the floor next to women who did not prove themselves?

This reference to exceptions based on individual ability is related to an observation of Cohen and Atieno-Odhiambo’s in Siaya, the same district in which Oginga Odinga’s home was situated. Men with whom they spoke on market day noted that while the men were of the opinion that women should subordinate themselves to men, “this is hardly the way that women behave,” because in countless cases women seize the initiative from men, or even in some cases have the power to “tame” men (Cohen and Atieno-Odhiambo 1989, 85). There is a song men sing in bars whose lyrics include: “Dare you tether women? You dare not. There’s no way” (Cohen and Atieno-Odhiambo 1989, 86). In this case, women’s subordination is more a wish than a description.

If Luo men readily give way to women who through their abilities show that they can take charge, then their insistence on inequality of the sexes is shown to be, through their actions, less dogmatic than some Western versions of discrimination that insist that nature and law allow no exceptions. After these frank discussions about how Luo society actually treats women, I wonder whether the other sages’ descriptions of their society’s traditions were based on actual practices or on the ideal that men would like to have themselves and others believe—of men in charge and women subservient.

Odera Oruka also asks Oginga Odinga to comment on marital relations. Oginga Odinga recommends that husband and wife consult each other when making decisions and cooperate with each other (Odera Oruka 1992, 112). In general, Oginga Odinga comes across as the most egalitarian of the sages. Significantly, the interview comes five years after the others and is published in a subsequent book, so it is not always mentioned by other scholars along with the other accounts of sages. What is more, Oginga Odinga attended Makerere University in Uganda, and had made several visits to China and the Soviet Union in his role as Vice President of Kenya. Therefore, he has a broader cosmopolitan experience than the sages in *Sage Philosophy*. Nevertheless, his role in the Luo community is deeply rooted, as he held the position of *ker*, meaning, as Odera Oruka explains, “the torch bearer of Ramogi, the dominant ancestor of the Luo” (Odera Oruka 1992, 10). The future of Kenya may be charted more and more by those who, like Odinga, broaden their experience while remaining close and committed to their rural communities.

V. Conclusion and Epilogue

This paper has surveyed and evaluated claims of women’s inferiority to men found in Odera Oruka’s study reported in his *Sage Philosophy* (1991). Problems with each argument were discussed. The paper also looked at the few arguments in favor of women’s equality and found shortcomings of these views, in that the beliefs were not followed up with plans for action. For example, Akoko did not design a strategy that involved challenging men’s views and organizing men’s support for change.

Western philosophical sources, that locate the issues within a broader context of arguments against women’s equality, illustrated that Kenya’s sages are by no means alone in holding these opinions. By drawing upon Kenyan authors, it is shown that the sages did not hold these views simply as a reflection of their culture, since their culture included diverse voices, some of whom did not approve of beliefs of women’s inferiority. In their cultural context, they were familiar with some arguments for women’s equality but rejected them in favor of arguments in their own tradition. It was also shown that some sages were able to explain how women were equal at an abstract level as human beings, but they were unwilling to concede that this equality was broad enough to support equal treatment on key practical issues such as inheritance. This study went further to include the interview with Oginga Odinga, the sage who most clearly explained that in practice, women are sometimes treated as equal to men.

It is important to note that Kenya promulgated a new constitution in 2010, which clearly prohibits discrimination against women (articles 27 and 60f). Courts have defended women's equal rights over the last few years in ways that were not legally available before. For example, several women Justices - Mary Kasango, Martha Koome, and Kalpana Rawal - have made rulings upholding the right of women to inherit property that is part of their fathers' estates (Wambugu 2011).

These new laws have protected women from unfair disinheritance. Before European colonialism, in the area known now as Kenya, land was held by families or communities, but when title deeds were given to men during colonialism and after Kenya gained independence, women were left dependent on men. The current changes in law finally take a step toward rectifying the situation (Maathai 2009, 227-28). This is just the tip of the iceberg in concrete changes won by women's persistent advocacy.

Currently, many studies in philosophy and related fields are helping to further analyze and debunk ideas that keep women from fully exercising their rights. In Tanzania, Elinami Veraeli Swai explores women's knowledge systems through narratives in which women explain their agency. She interviews and observes the life of Mama Mona, a midwife and healer, as well as Mama Fatuma and Mama Abdul, who write proverbs and slogans for *khangas*, a popular cloth worn by women (Swai 2010, 52, 84-99, 103-106).

D.A. Masolo advocates evaluating everyday discourse, especially debates regarding traditions, not only or primarily through interviews as Odera Oruka advocated (Masolo 2010, 50). Accordingly, he has studied novels, such as Shaaban Robert's Swahili novels *Siku Ya Watenzi* and *Kusadikika* for criticisms of religion's role in discriminating against women (Masolo 2010, 97-101). He analyzes a Luo "charter" read to a young man near his time of marriage, and notes that the charter spells out all of the new bride's duties but none of her rights. Her servitude and total obedience to men is required in order to have peace in society (Masolo 2010, 114). He notes, "oppression doesn't always have to be by a foreigner and that is neither better nor less hurtful when it is perpetrated by one of your own" (Masolo 2010, 129), and suggests that some customary norms and practices in Africa such as female circumcision and prearranged or forced marriage for girls should be "reevaluated and subsequently modified, replaced, or discarded altogether" (Masolo 2010, 130).

In subsequent research, I plan to address sage philosophy's relation to the project of women's equality, addressing Odera Oruka's work beyond *Sage Philosophy* and including interviews with women sages (see also Presbey 1999a, 95-96, 101-02; 2000; 2001; Graness 2011, 83-84).

These new and ongoing studies in African philosophy in general and sage philosophy in particular can continue this process of evaluating our cultures and traditions so that they are fairer and more inclusive.

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