

***Philosophy, Oral Tradition and Africanistics.* By Joachim MUGALU. (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1995. Pp. 226, preface, introduction, bibliography.)**

Zainab K. Haruna

Volume 18, Number 2, 1996

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1087588ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1087588ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Association Canadienne d'Ethnologie et de Folklore

ISSN

1481-5974 (print)

1708-0401 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Haruna, Z. K. (1996). Review of [*Philosophy, Oral Tradition and Africanistics.* By Joachim MUGALU. (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1995. Pp. 226, preface, introduction, bibliography.)]. *Ethnologies*, 18(2), 209–211.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1087588ar>

Schoemaker, George H., ed. 1990. *The Emergence of Folklore in Everyday Life: A Fieldguide and Sourcebook*. Bloomington: Trickster Press.

Eileen CONDON

*Memorial University of Newfoundland
St. John's, Newfoundland*

Philosophy, Oral Tradition and Africanistics. By Joachim MUGALU.
(Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1995. Pp. 226, preface, introduction, bibliography.)

Joachim Mugalu's *Philosophy, Oral Tradition and Africanistics* is worth recommending for those with an interest in African philosophy and oral traditions. In his study, Mugalu surveys and examines two bodies of knowledge which are central in the discourse of Africanistics: the "Question of African Philosophy" and "Oral Traditions" (p. 13). Essentially, Mugalu investigates and examines elements of African philosophy in African oral traditions. The oral tradition which he uses as a case study is the "Story of Kintu" (*Olugero Iwa Kintu*) — a mythological narrative text from the corpus of oral traditions in Buganda (Uganda). His approach to the analysis and interpretation of the "Story of Kintu" has been inspired by *cultural hermeneutics* (the philosophical investigations and interpretations of the various facets of culture and/or tradition). The author's analysis of the "Story of Kintu" further proves that there is in existence what can be considered a distinctive "African philosophy" and "African oral tradition."

The structure of the book reflects its origins as a Ph.D. thesis. The work is divided into five parts which are in turn subdivided into chapters. Although each part deals with specific topics, all the topics presented, described, and examined are interrelated.

Part 1, "Philosophy and the Oral Traditions in Africa," surveys and examines the question of philosophy and the relationship between philosophy and oral traditions from the perspectives of four major schools of thought in African philosophy, namely: ethnophilosophy, philosophical sagacity, nationalistic ideological philosophy, and professional philosophy. Mugalu's

survey and description of the perspectives of the four major schools of thought on African philosophy quickly draws the reader's attention to the many and diverse views about African philosophy, especially the continuing debate on its constitution and nature. Mugalu uses the term "African philosophy" in a broad sense to designate the totality of publications by Africans or Africanists, and these works are situated in an African context, or have some reference to Africa, and are, in one way or another, philosophical in nature.

In "Language, Orality and Oral Tradition" Mugalu describes and examines aspects of language, orality, and literacy in terms of their interrelationship within oral traditions. Mugalu uses the term *Africanistics* to designate the various disciplines or fields that specialize in Africa or African people including ethnology, ethnohistory, oral tradition, philosophy, cultural anthropology, literature, linguistic philology, religion, music and drama.

Part 3, "What is Myth? A Survey of the Oral-Narrative Theory," surveys and examines various ethnographic and structuralist theories of myth including those of E. B. Taylor, Levi-Strauss, Levi Bruhl, James Frazer, Malinowski, D'Equili and Laughlin, and Isidore Okpewho. The survey reveals that there are many diverse interpretations of the dimensions of myth. Mugalu also explores and examines the aesthetic-qualitative approach to myth. He supports the view that myth is one of the genres of oral literature and an aesthetic product of man's mind and/or imagination. He uses the term "myth" as a collective for all the oral narrative forms of oral tradition. Mugalu also proposes a model for the genres of oral narratives in Buganda. His proposed model and his analysis of the oral narratives in Buganda reveal that Western criteria, theories, and approaches used for generic classifications and analyses of oral narratives in the West can be used to classify and analyze oral narratives in Africa, but only with limited success. There is still a need for analysts and critics of African oral narratives to apply indigenous African criteria and perspectives.

In "The History and Institutions of Buganda," Mugalu surveys and examines various dimensions of the clan and religious institutions of Buganda. The study reveals that, like each of the clans in the clan system, each of the various gods (*Balubaale*) in the traditional religion (*Kiganda*) of Buganda has its distinguishing history, features, positions, and functions.

Part 5, "The Story of Kintu," presents and analyzes the "Story of Kintu" from structural, cultural, and philosophical points of view. The analysis shows that the "Story of Kintu" (*Olugero Iwa Kintu*) is a mythological narrative text which embodies the origin, history, religious belief, philosophy, world view, and social and cultural values and attitudes of the Buganda. The central issue in the "Story of Kintu" appears to be attempts by the Buganda to provide their own answers to the universal question of human *thanatology* or mortality. Why and how did death (*Walumbe*) enter into the human condition?

In short, Mugalu's study is a useful contribution to the study of African oral traditions and to the discourse concerning the existence and nature of philosophy in Africa.

Zainab K. HARUNA

*Memorial University of Newfoundland
St. John's, Newfoundland*

American Hooked and Sewn Rugs: Folk Art Underfoot. By Joel KOPP, and Kate KOPP. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995. Pp. 141, 233 colour and black and white illustrations, endnotes, bibliography, index.)

Anyone who has ever been intrigued by material history and culture will delight in *American Hooked and Sewn Rugs* by Joel and Kate Kopp. Those of us desiring a copy of earlier editions no longer in print are now fortunate to obtain the most recent publication of the book by the University of New Mexico Press.

While this latest edition (the book was originally published by Dutton in 1975, with a revised second edition in 1985) is a welcome boon to hooked-rug aficionados, neither the authors nor the recent publishers had the hindsight to include new developments and recent scholarship in the field of hooked-rug research. Specifically these would include the outstanding contribution by Paula Laverty on the history and documentation of Grenfell mats (Laverty 1994).

Leaving such criticisms aside, however, the book is rich in detail, covering hooked rugs from their very beginnings in the form of bed rugs, yarn-sewn and shirred rugs. The latter portion