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**Reconstructing a Fractured
Indigenous Knowledge System**

Abstract

African colonial experience bequeathed a culture of epistemological silencing of African indigenous epistemology with its monochrome logic of Western epistemology. It systematically devalued African indigenous knowledge systems by presenting African intellectual enterprise as allogical and sometimes primitive. Immediately after the colonial experience, the attempts by some African scholars to establish the depth of African scholarship fractured the African knowledge systems. This is because they attempted to use Western logic and models as paradigms in investigating, interrogating, and evaluating our knowledge practice. In this paper, I argue for the need to reconstruct fractured African indigenous epistemology. I shall present how African indigenous knowledge systems (AIKS), otherwise referred to in the paper as African indigenous epistemology, are distorted and fractured. After that, I shall propose its reconstruction by articulating how we acquire and validate knowledge in African indigenous epistemology. By African indigenous epistemology, I mean a system of investigating, understanding, assimilating, and attributing African conception of reality that is distinctively African and philosophical. To this end, I shall adopt the philosophical methodology of critical analysis, evaluation, and reconstruction to delineate the notions of indigenous knowledge systems (IKS), African indigenous epistemology, the fracturing effect of colonialism, globalisation, and Western framework on African indigenous knowledge systems (AIKS). I conclude that to reconstruct African indigenous epistemology, we have to free it from the grip of Western evaluative paradigms. In this way, it would reflect an authentic African thought pattern that describes a way of knowing that is true to African experience, both the past and present, without necessarily disparaging other ways of knowing.

Keywords

African, indigenous knowledge systems (IKS), African indigenous epistemology, colonialism, philosophical sagacity

Introduction

Hegel's omission of Africa from his four cultures or civilisations is often interpreted as classifying Africa to be of unhistorical and undeveloped spirit. It sets the tone for Western consideration of Africans as irrational and emotion-governed people. Such denigration of African rationality provided theoretical grounds for colonisation, which further repressed the idea that Africans are capable of knowing. Post-colonial literature on the subject shows attempts by African scholars to dispel these imperialist conceptions of Africa. Most of these attempts demonstrate that Africans have commendable rationality, articulate systems of knowledge and governance that were discredited and relegated to the fringes. However, many of the scholars tend always to validate

African systems of knowledge using the Western paradigm by trying to present African approximations of Western specifications.¹ Such methodology implies that when we demonstrate that Africans have categories and concepts that are similar or equal to Western categories and concepts, we establish African rationality and knowledge systems. This idea is a distortion of African indigenous knowledge systems (AIKS) because it denies AIKS of a logic and rationality of its own. Making Western logic and models the constitutive framework for assessing the validation of African knowledge practices fractures our indigenous epistemology. It suggests that as an African, I am ‘rational’ just because I reason like a Westerner – I follow and apply Western categories and logic in my thought pattern.

Without prejudice to the contributions of Western models to knowledge inquiry, I argue in this paper that African knowledge systems, which I refer to as African indigenous knowledge or epistemology, have their methodology of inquiry and validation that are distinctively African. Therefore, I propose a reconstruction of African epistemology, which is intended to free African indigenous knowledge systems from the grip of Western models of validation that have fractured it. My understanding of African indigenous epistemology is a system of investigating, understanding, assimilating, and attributing African conception of reality that is distinctively African and philosophical.

Therefore, in this paper, I shall critically analyse the idea of indigenous knowledge systems (IKS) and African (indigenous) epistemology, which consists in the traditional African ways of acquiring, justifying, and communicating knowledge. Furthermore, I shall interrogate the effect of colonialism, globalisation, and the application of the Western framework on African epistemology. My concern in this analysis is to expose how African indigenous epistemology, which I consider to be a valid system of knowledge practice, is distorted and fractured. I propose its reconstruction by critically delineating and establishing our indigenous ways of acquiring and validating knowledge. The reconstruction I propose does not blindly eliminate other ways of knowing, which includes Western epistemology; instead, it emphasises that no particular system of knowing should be universalised while objectifying others.

The Idea of Indigenous Knowledge System (IKS)

We find a diversity of meanings and understanding of Indigenous knowledge (IK) because of the differences in academic disciplines, social anthropology, and studies in sustainable development that investigate the knowledge practices which are often characterised as indigenous. It is sometimes described as a local, traditional, peasant, and/or folk knowledge. For instance, Dennis Warren defines IK as

“... the local knowledge – knowledge that is unique to a given culture or society. IK contrasts with the international knowledge system generated by universities, research institutions and private firms.”²

Similarly, J. M. Flavier, A. De Jesus, and C. S. Navarro define IK as “the information base for a society, which facilitates communication and decision-making”.³ Although these definitions emphasise the important aspects of utility, experience, and diversity involved in IK, they do not present a comprehensive articulation of what IK entails. Gloria Emeagwali provides a more comprehensive conception of IK when she defines it as “the cumulative body of strategies, practices, techniques, tools, intellectual resources, explanations,

beliefs, and values accumulated over time in a particular locality, without the interference and impositions of external hegemonic forces”.⁴ Implicit in Emeagwali’s definition is the notion that indigenous knowledge systems (IKS) transcend the material sphere, as there is an interconnection with the spiritual and non-material realms of existence.

AIKS is social and communitarian. By this, I mean it is not an individualistic or subjective understanding of reality; instead, it is a collective (communitarian) understanding that embodies individual contributions. Bert Hamminga instructively notes this when he describes the African epistemological view as immediately social,⁵ meaning that we cannot attain knowledge alone outside a social context. IK “comes as a given via tradition, ancestors and heritage”,⁶ hence, Hamminga describes it as a “we” enterprise.⁷

IK is an appraisal of the sense of rationality by which a people make meaning out of reality and thereby foster a harmonious interaction amongst themselves. In this context, IK can be said to be the refusal to devalue or marginalise indigenous ways of acquiring, preserving, and transmitting knowledge. It is a dynamic engagement with a people’s rationality that intends to decolonise the hegemony of colonialism and indoctrination.⁸ Such a process of mental decolonisation requires that we reclaim, rethink, reconstitute, rewrite, and validate IK.⁹ It is, therefore, an exercise in epistemological recuperation with the intrinsic character of being counter-hegemonic.

There is no universal or official definition of ‘indigenous’, partly because of the diversity of indigenous people all over the globe. It is often associated with the ‘traditional’, ‘aboriginal’, ‘vernacular’, ‘African’, ‘Black’, and ‘na-

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My expressions “African approximations” and “Western specifications” are from: Elvis Imafidon, “Western Specifications, African Approximations: Time, Colour and Existential Attitudes”, in: Isaac E. Ukpokolo (ed.), *Themes, Issues and Problems in African Philosophy*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York 2017, pp. 255–265.

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Dennis Michael Warren, “The Role of Indigenous Knowledge in Facilitating the Agricultural Extension Process”, paper presented at International Workshop on Agricultural Knowledge Systems and the Role of Extension, Bad Boll, Germany, May 21–24, 1991.

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Juan M. Flavier, Antonio De Jesus, Conrado S. Navarro, “The Regional Program for the Promotion of Indigenous Knowledge in Asia”, in: Dennis Michael Warren et al. (eds.), *The Cultural Dimension of Development: Indigenous Knowledge Systems*, Intermediate Technology Publications, London 1995, pp. 479–487.

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Gloria Emeagwali, “Intersections between Africa’s Indigenous Knowledge Systems and History”, in: Gloria Emeagwali, George J. Sefa Dei (eds.), *African Indigenous Knowledge and the Disciplines*, Sense Publishers, Rotterdam 2014, pp. 1–17.

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Bert Hamminga, “Epistemology from the African Point of View”, in: Bert Hamminga (ed.), *Knowledge Cultures: Comparative Western and African Epistemology*, Rodopi, Amsterdam 2005, p. 57–84, p. 57, doi: https://doi.org/10.1163/9789401202947_005.

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Ndubuisi Christian Ani, “Appraisal of African Epistemology in the Global System”, *Alternation* 20 (2013) 1, pp. 295–319.

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B. Hamminga, “Epistemology from the African Point of View”, p. 58.

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G. Emeagwali, “Intersections between Africa’s Indigenous Knowledge Systems and History”, p. 1.

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Ibid. G. Emeagwali, according to: Edward Shizha, “Rethinking and reconstituting indigenous knowledge and voices in the Academy in Zimbabwe: A decolonisation process”, in: Dip Kapoor, Edward Shizha (eds.), *Indigenous knowledge and learning in Asia/Pacific and Africa*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York 2010.

tive American'.¹⁰ As Edward Shizha noted, "most writers use it to refer to first peoples who are minorities in their lands".¹¹ Shizha argues, and I agree with him, that this is a narrow understanding of indigenous people precisely because it *disindigenises* (to borrow Shizha's term) many groups in Africa. Africa is a conglomeration of indigenous people with a multiplex of varied cultures, as they also do not have common ancestry. This makes conceptualising African indigenous people problematic. However, it is hardly contestable that the notion of indigenous connotes natural belongingness to a place. Thus, by indigenous people, we refer to "a specific group of people occupying a certain geographical area for many generations".¹² The language expressions, systems of belief, and means of livelihood of these people give meaning to their life and distinguish them from other groups, thereby constituting their knowledge practice. Therefore, IKS describes the totality of that which is meaningful, which provides the rational basis that undergirds the life of the natives of a particular place.

IKS is inherently dynamic, and being social and communitarian, it is passed on from one generation to another in the form of tradition and heritage, and people in each era adapt and add to it. Therefore, it is continuously adjusted as circumstances warrant. It could be argued that such dynamism diminishes an essential characteristic of knowledge, which is stability; for what is known must be true as we cannot possibly know that which is not true. Truth, as a property or condition for knowledge, is stable and does not change by circumstances and environmental conditions. The dynamism of IKS does not imply a change in the content or an adjustment in the truth of the epistemic claim, but an adaptation or application of the epistemic claim for pragmatic purposes. Knowledge for the African is purposeful; it is a pragmatic enterprise; to know implies to possess a truth by which we navigate the social order. Therefore, IKS does not refer to static accumulated cognitive claims, but to accumulated cognitive claims that are adjusted continuously and passed on to subsequent generations to provide survival strategies.¹³

Following from the above, IKS should be understood in relation to time and history. Within this context, IK refers to cognitive claims by the natives of a particular place who are culturally distinct and have occupied the territory before the arrival of a new population that has its own distinctive and dominant culture.¹⁴ The dimension of time and history juxtaposes IKS with cosmopolitan knowledge. The latter, whose linchpin is Western systems of perception, is often described as "scientific knowledge"; considered to be independent of time and history. In the light of the preceding, I share Catherine Hoppers' description of IK as "the totality of all knowledge and practices, whether explicit or implicit, used in the management of socio-economic, spiritual and ecological facets of life".¹⁵ This covers virtually all aspects of human endeavour, ranging from what we conventionally call the natural sciences to the human and social sciences. It conceptualises theories and perceptions of nature and culture. Therefore, "it includes definitions, classifications and concepts of the physical, natural, social, economic and ideational environments".¹⁶

Unlike Western "scientific" knowledge systems that attempt to conquer by capturing the secrets of nature, IKS, being communitarian, emphasizes the interrelatedness and interdependence of all phenomena. By that, it relates to all domains of life and operates on the entwined levels of the empirical and the cognitive. The empirical consists of (i) the natural, (ii) the technological and architectural, and (iii) the socio-cultural spheres. The natural sphere includes ecology, biodiversity, soil, agriculture, medicinal, and the pharmaceutical.

The technological and architectural sphere includes the crafts of the people, like metallurgy, textiles, basketry, food processing, building, etc. The sphere of the socio-cultural consists in social welfare, governance, conflict resolutions, music, art, etc.¹⁷

Based on Hoppers' analysis of IK, Anwar Osman describes the central features of AIK as holistic yet fragmentary, community-based, unwritten but preserved through oral tradition and collective memory. As holistic, it includes all the aspects of life; as fragmentary, it is not the possession of any single individual since there is no single person that possesses complete knowledge. Even though it is not documented in writing, it is preserved in the customs, practices, rituals, proverbs, and oral stories of the people.¹⁸ Hoppers maintained that "the context in which traditional knowledge is generated and preserved is extremely important to its meaning, and reflects the internal cultural cognitive categories of the particular community".¹⁹ This is because, even though particular traditional knowledge is generated within specific context to satisfy a particular goal, for example, curing a sick patient, expressing the aesthetic will of the artisan, etc., it is always symbolic of a deeper order or belief system. Thus, the holistic nature of IK, which explains why it is a system rather than a theory.

The very idea of knowledge systems brings within its purview, especially as it applies to IKS, the plurality of its properties and functions. For instance, the performance of a song by a traditional singer would include particular modulations or inflexion of the voice as well as a melody. These follow the rules and protocols that have been maintained through generations, which enables the listeners to understand it as a particular type of music as distinct from a different kind of music. More so, the performance entertains, educates, and unites the audience with the past. Within a knowledge system, the combination of practical knowledge, social history, art, and spiritual or religious practices provide the foundation and the framework by which its adherents understand reality, attribute and transmit beliefs, ethics, and traditions of a particular people.²⁰

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J. A. Loubser, "Unpacking the Expression 'Indigenous Knowledge Systems'", *Indilinga: African Journal of Indigenous Knowledge Systems* 4 (2005) 1, pp. 74–88.

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Edward Shizha, "Reclaiming Our Indigenous Voices: The Problem with Postcolonial Sub-Saharan African School Curriculum", *Journal of Indigenous Social Development* 2 (2013) 1, pp. 1–18.

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Anwar Osman, "Indigenous Knowledge in Africa: Challenges and Opportunities", Inaugural Lecture at Centre for African Studies, November 2009. Available at: https://www.ufs.ac.za/docs/librariesprovider20/centre-for-africa-studies-documents/all-documents/osman-lecture-1788-eng.pdf?sfvrsn=e436fb21_0 (Accessed on May 11, 2018).

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Catherine A. Odora Hoppers, *Culture, Indigenous Knowledge and Development: The Role of the University*, Centre for Education Policy Development (CEPD), Johannesburg 2005, p. 2.

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International Labour Organisation (ILO), *International Labour Organisation Convention on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries*, Convention 169, Geneva 1989, article 1.

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C. A. O. Hoppers, *Culture, Indigenous Knowledge and Development*, p. 2.

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Ibid., p. 3.

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Ibid.

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A. Osman, "Indigenous Knowledge in Africa: Challenges and Opportunities".

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C. A. O. Hoppers, *Culture, Indigenous Knowledge and Development*, p. 5.

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Ibid., p. 6.

In the era of colonialism, the colonial masters superimposed their Western culture and systems of knowing upon indigenous cultures and ways of knowing. They branded the indigenous cultures as barbaric and uncivilised, and proclaimed IKS to be irrational and alogical. In that way, IKS of the colonised populations was systematically eroded and fractured as the customs, practices, and rituals of the colonised populations were either forcefully repressed, or the people were socialised into believing that their indigenous practices and ways of doing things were wrong. Colonialism ushered in an era of devaluation of the rich cultural and traditional heritage of Africa, which globalisation further corrupted “through its progressive technological changes in communication, political and economic power, knowledge and skills, as well as cultural values, systems and practices”.²¹ Their combined effect bequeathed to *collective* African consciousness the wrong idea that its own indigenous culture and ways of knowing are inferior to Western culture and systems of knowledge.²² This wrong idea undergirds the attempt to use the Western paradigm to validate African ways of knowing.

The Fracturing of African Indigenous Epistemology

By ‘fracturing of African indigenous epistemology’ I mean a situation of distortion which has broken and dismembered AIKS through systematic degradation and epistemological silencing. Western domination of the world manifests itself in various forms and ways. In scholarship, for instance, we find it in the repression and subversion of alternative systems of knowledge and ways of knowing contrary to a Western framework, such as African indigenous epistemology, which the combined effect of the colonial devaluation of IKS and globalisation have broken and dismembered. According to Kwasi Wiredu, as noted by Olusegun Oladipo, we were not just colonised, colonialism made deep inroads into the psychology of most of us and formidably distorted our African identity.²³ Wiredu further asserted that “this induces in Africans a colonial mentality which ensures that Africans over-value foreign things coming from the erstwhile colonial masters”.²⁴ In the same vein, Emeagwali and Sefa Dei argued that immediate post-colonial African academic culture is laden with Western monochrome logic and paradigms of rationality; rather than “acknowledging the multiple, collaborative, and accumulative dimensions of knowledge, we see attempts to dismiss, devalue, or negate indigenous knowledge as being not worthy of scholarly engagement”.²⁵ Colonialism brought foreign “scientific” knowledge systems “that denigrated IKS as unscientific, untried and untested for education and social development”.²⁶ Western knowledge and IK systems were entrapped in power relationships in which the former overpowered and dismissed the latter as unimportant because it is considered crude, primitive, religious and emotion-laden. According to Shizha:

“This partly explains the neglect of using IKs [indigenous knowledges] in the education system in Sub-Saharan Africa. African politicians, academics, policy makers and administrators, because of the Western education they attained, developed a colonised mind that still exists and persists today. This is the reason why they undermine and undervalue IKs in education and development.”²⁷

Through colonialism, Western culture and beliefs invaded African culture and beliefs by introducing a paradigm that is alien to the ontological base of the African worldview. As I argued elsewhere, this activated “an epistemological crisis as the movement of new methods of learning from one cultural area

to the other” introduced a literary revolution that “exposed more Africans to Western education and literature within Africa”.²⁸ This affected the cognitive content and structure of the African mind, which precipitated some form of re-orientation in African ways of experiencing and knowing reality. We now tend to be excessively analytic by trying to compartmentalise reality into the material, spiritual, and mystical, and try to establish a causal relation (necessary connection) between phenomena. In doing so, we jettison the unitiveness in African communitarian understanding of reality that sees the material, spiritual, and mystical as the same reality.

Globalisation, on the other hand, is a multidimensional phenomenon which suggests that we cannot separate events in one country from those in other countries. It emphasises the oneness and interconnectedness among the people of the world²⁹ through “the intensification of cross-border interactions and interdependencies among nations”.³⁰ It is a form of trans-borders reorganisation that calls for new principles directed towards the service of the common good of the human family as a whole. Consequently, it implies building new structures and putting in place new systems that foster justice and solidarity for the good and wellbeing of all. It is therefore “a revival of the principles of social justice to prevent a man from being trampled by the faceless globalised mechanisms”.³¹

Understood as such, globalisation in itself is a welcome development, but as Ali Mazrui noted, the acculturation that accompanied African colonialism

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E. Shizha, “Reclaiming Our Indigenous Voices”, p. 4.

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The use of *collective* here does not necessarily mean that we have a single post-colonial African mind; this would be unfair to African scholars who challenged the colonialist idea. However, the pervasive tendency has been the glorification of Western systems of knowledge over African indigenous systems of knowledge.

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Olusegun Oladipo, *Philosophy and the African Experience, The Contributions of Kwasi Wiredu*, Hope Publications, Ibadan 1996, p. 35.

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Kawsi Wiredu, “Problems in Africa’s Self-Definition in the Contemporary World”, in: Kwasi Wiredu, Kwame Gyekye (eds.), *Person and Community: Ghanaian Philosophical Studies 1*, The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, Washington DC 1992, pp. 59–70.

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Gloria Emeagwali, George J. Sefa Dei (eds.), *African Indigenous Knowledge and the Disciplines*, Sense Publishers, Rotterdam 2014, p. ix.

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E. Shizha, “Reclaiming Our Indigenous Voices”, p. 4.

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Ibid.

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Anselm Jimoh, “An African Theory of Knowledge”, in: Isaac E. Ukpokolo (ed.), *Themes, Issues and Problems in African Philosophy*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York 2017, pp. 121–136.

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John Baylis, Steve Smith, Patricia Owens, “Introduction”, in: John Baylis, Steve Smith, Patricia Owens (eds.), *The Globalisation of World Politics: An Introduction to International Relations*, Oxford University Press, New York 2001, p. 7, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1093/hepl/9780198739852.003.0033>.

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Yunusa Salami, “Globalisation, Foundationalism and African Philosophy”, in: Martin F. Asiegbu, Joseph C. A. Agbakoba (eds.), *Four Decades of African Philosophy: Issues and Perspectives*, Hope Publications, Ibadan 2002, pp. 195–213.

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Paul Kehinde Oredipe, *The Interrelation of Faith and Reason in the Search for Truth: An Appraisal of John Paul II’s Fides et Ratio*, Pontificia Universitas Sanctae Crucis, Roma 2002, p. 288.

depicts globalisation as homogenisation. It brought in a world culture, which is Western culture. Homogenisation (which is making all of us look similar) and hegemonisation (which is making one of us the boss) are the consequences of globalisation on African culture.³² Shizha implicitly confirms Mazrui's claim when he argues that globalisation "promotes the epistemological and ontological realities and experiences of the most powerful world".³³ It is a form of biocolonialism that allows a continuation of the oppressive power relations that historically informed the interactions of Western and indigenous cultures,³⁴ thereby facilitating the colonisation of African indigenous epistemology. According to Jacinta Maweu:

"The advent of globalisation, with its emphasis on modern science and technology, has led to this form of knowledge [IKs] being either subsumed in the western concept of 'knowledge for sustainable development', or ignored altogether. The irony is that most of the developments in science and technology, which are at the core of globalisation and 'civilisation', have their roots in Indigenous knowledge."³⁵

A salient point in Maweu's claim is that all forms of knowledge begin as indigenous knowledge. On the strength of the truth of this claim, we should seek out ways to re-establish AIKS and work out how we can draw from our IKS to promote African development. Within this context, we understand and appreciate post-colonial and recent attempts to revive IKS in academics.

Early post-colonial attempts to establish the depth of African scholarship, especially in the field of philosophy, took different dimensions as epitomised in the debate on the idea of African philosophy. Oladipo summarised the debate on African philosophy into three positions: (i) The likes of K. C. Anyanwu, Oyekan Owomoyela, and Kwame Gyekye advocated an authentic African philosophy that is true to African cultures and traditions, (ii) the likes of Peter Bodunrin advocated a strong Western orientation in African philosophy, and (iii) others like Gene Blocker conceived the issue as a conceptual one – clarifying the meaning of cross-cultural concepts.³⁶ Moses Oke claims, and I agree with him, that professional philosophers in Africa were more familiar and rooted in Western intellectual tradition, which is an impact of colonialism and education. The western intellectual tradition was propagated for a long time in Africa to the neglect of indigenous cultures and traditions.³⁷ The latter contributed to the fracturing of our indigenous knowledge systems.

According to Emeagwali, "we have the sad situation where some uninformed, brainwashed African scholars themselves categorise their indigenous ways of knowing as 'myths', 'superstition', and non-science".³⁸ Chinweizu Ibekwe, Onwuchewka Jemie, and Ihechukwu Madubuike had the following to say:

"Another common failing among African critics is their habit of attempting to force African works into the procrustean beds of an alien aesthetic. This brand of criticism insists on applying Western paradigms or models to African works, predictably concluding that the African work fits the Western model and, by implication, is thereby worthy of recognition by 'the world'."³⁹

Chinweizu *et al.* further submitted that "contemporary African culture is under foreign domination",⁴⁰ which they denounced and advocated that we "destroy all encrustations of colonial mentality, and (...) map out new foundations for African modernity".⁴¹ In their opinion, it requires

"... a deliberate and calculated syncretism: one which, *above all*, emphasises valuable continuities with our pre-colonial culture, welcomes vitalising contributions from other cultures, and exercises inventive genius in making a healthy and distinguished synthesis from them all."⁴²

I share this opinion as it applies to reconstructing African indigenous epistemology, namely, that we clearly articulate our African indigenous ways of

knowing, welcome and synchronise with its positive contributions from other cultures that do not subdue our knowledge practice. In the light of this, African scholarship must disengage from appealing to Western methodologies for validation to prevent the destruction of our plausible systems of knowing, which indigenous populations have derived from, and continue to find useful in unravelling the complexities of the universe as it affects their existence.

Osman avers that the colonial powers consistently inferiorised our indigenous cultures through devious policies and methods that included concerted efforts to erase existing systems of knowledge and replace them with Western-driven belief and knowledge systems.⁴³ Although there are efforts in some institutions of higher learning to reverse this, there is still visible colonial domination in our systems of knowledge attribution. Some of the latter is reflected in Western hegemony that remains noticeable in the unequal format of intellectual exchange. Paul Zeleza confirms this in his claim that in Europe, African studies (which include IKS), constitute a marginal part of the academy but European epistemology remains central in African studies.⁴⁴ The continual domination of knowledge and the resulting marginalisation of African knowledge systems is hazardous to African indigenous epistemology. Therefore, there is a need for us to reconstruct our fractured indigenous epistemology by defining and working out these epistemologies.

Reconstructing African Indigenous Epistemology

Let us note from the outset that the very idea of African epistemology is rooted in the fact that the concepts of knowledge, truth, and rationality are not the exclusive preserve of any culture. We, therefore, do not have to recourse to any intellectual culture or conceptual framework outside Africa to interpret

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Ali Mazrui, "From Slave Ship to Space Ship", *African Studies Quarterly* 2 (1999) 4, pp. 5–11, p. 4.

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E. Shizha, "Reclaiming Our Indigenous Voices", p. 4.

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Ibid., p. 5.

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Jacinta Mwendu Maweu, "Indigenous Ecological Knowledge and Modern Western Ecological Knowledge: Complementary, not Contradictory", *Thought and Practice: A Journal of the Philosophical Association of Kenya* 3 (2011) 2, pp. 35–47.

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Olusegun Oladipo, *The Idea of African Philosophy*, Hope Publications, Ibadan 2000, p. 15.

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Moses Oke, "Modelling the Contemporary African Philosopher: Kwasi Wiredu in Focus", in: Olusegun Oladipo (ed.), *The Third Way in African Philosophy: Essays in Honour of Kwasi Wiredu*, Hope Publications, Ibadan 2002, pp. 19–35.

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G. Emeagwali, G. J. Sefa Dei (eds.), *African Indigenous Knowledge and the Disciplines*, p. ix.

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Chinweizu Ibekwe, Onwuchewka Jemie, Ihechukwu Madubuike, "Toward the Decolonization of African Literature", *Transition* 48 (1975), pp. 29–37, 54, 56–57, doi: <https://doi.org/10.2307/2935056>.

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Ibid., p. 36.

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Ibid.

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Ibid.

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A. Osman, "Indigenous Knowledge in Africa: Challenges and Opportunities", no. 2. 1.

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Paul Tiyambe Zeleza, "The Disciplinary, Interdisciplinary and Global Dimensions of African Studies", *International Journal of African Renaissance Studies* 1 (2006) 2, pp. 195–220, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/18186870608529717>.

these concepts. We have African categories and concepts provided by African cultural experience by which we understand and interpret knowledge, truth, and rationality. This section of my paper reconstructs African indigenous epistemology by critically delineating the means Africans use to gain knowledge, the evaluative criteria of the validity of knowledge, and the underlying purpose in our pursuit of knowledge.

African indigenous epistemology is a distinctively African epistemic system; a social and communitarian epistemology that espouses a cultural and situated notion of knowledge, firmly established on the ontological notion of a continuum. It “encompasses [the] experiential, rational, religious, intuitive, symbolic, mythical and emotional aspects of reality”.⁴⁵ For the African indigenous epistemologist, reality goes beyond the empirical; therefore, to understand natural phenomena, we have to appeal to experiences that are not empirically verifiable but are warranted nonetheless. The African notion of continuum implies the presence of spiritual components of nature that influence human experience and perception. These are incorporeal components that possess consciousness or awareness of nature and can respond to perceptions just as human beings do.⁴⁶

Culture distinguishes members of one human group from another and programmes the mind of those who belong to a cultural group to perceive and understand the world as they do. Rationality is essentially cultural because it reflects the cultural experience and background of people. The way we reason, understand and comprehend reality is determined by our socio-cultural milieu, our environmental background, and the specific era – time and space, in which we live. Therefore, we cannot separate the understanding and epistemic claims of anyone from the prevailing ideas among the people of the time.⁴⁷

In the past few decades, with “the political recognition of indigenous people, failure of development planning to achieve the desired results, the growing disillusionment of Africans with the promises of modern ‘Western’ science at the same time increased public awareness of the value of cultural Heritage”.⁴⁸ This has increased the consciousness about African Indigenous Knowledge Systems (AIKS) within the sphere of scientific inquiry. Emeagwali and Sefa Dei insist that scholarship has its foundations on the societal-cultural knowledge system, which makes it imperative that academic scholarship recognise local cultural ways of knowing as legitimate sources of knowledge.⁴⁹ They contend further that:

“Ancient African civilisations bore sophisticated knowledge systems deeply embedded in local culture and social politics (...) such forms of knowledge [although] transformed have not been abandoned by rural communities. Such knowledge has adapted to the times to serve pressing social issues and challenges. Such knowledge has not remained static, neither has it been confined to the shores of the African continent.”⁵⁰

Epistemology as how we derive knowledge varies from one social environment to another because of the natural proclivity of human beings to interpret things differently by their backgrounds. Backgrounds are constituted by cultural, religious, emotional, educational, and historical influences. In case we think this is being relativistic, we should not be lost to the fact that the complexity of the world does not allow for an absolute or universal paradigm of comprehending reality.⁵¹ Always in some ways “rationality and truth are related to local conditions and are culture-bound”.⁵² As Kwasi Wiredu argues, every culture has the right to conceive the world in its image.⁵³ Elsewhere he avers that relativism provides the room for cross-cultural considerations through dialogue.⁵⁴

African indigenous epistemology is about what “the African means and understands when he makes a knowledge claim, [it is] how the African sees or talks about reality”.⁵⁵ Traditional Africans conceive reality in accordance to the frame of their minds as informed by their culture. In this regard, I find Molefi Asante instructive on the elements of the African mind that govern how it conceives reality. These include; “the practicality of wholism, the prevalence of poly-consciousness, the idea of inclusiveness, the unity of worlds, and the value of personal relationships”.⁵⁶ These elements reinforce the underlying commonality by which the traditional African comprehends the universe. Within this commonality, while the self remains real and the material is concrete, both the self and the material are interwoven by custom and tradition through human correlativity. Thus, reality is one whole interconnected system in which the individual alone – without connection to his culture and environment, cannot attain knowledge. In other words, the African knower thinks and comprehends, in and through society.

If African indigenous epistemology is a collective project, as Hamminga describes it, does it not imply that the individual’s rational ability is subjugated to the communal enterprise? This question presupposes the denial of the socio-cultural dimension of knowledge, which is a subscription to the views of some Western scholars like Francis Bacon and adherents of logical positivism. Namely, that socio-cultural considerations deface the genuine comprehension of reality.

Bacon and the logical positivists were drawing from the achievements and successes of science, especially in the Renaissance and the Enlightenment. Based on the latter, science was fronted as the paradigm of inquiry because its procedural method was conceived as free of preconditions and presuppositions. The research about the procedural method of science, lucidly articulated in Thomas Kuhn’s *The Structure of Scientific Revolution* (1970), shows that scientific research is always orientated towards specific goals. Such goals

45
N. C. Ani, “Appraisal of African Epistemology in the Global System”, p. 305.

46
A. K. Jimoh, “An African Theory of Knowledge”, p. 122.

47
Kwame Gyekye, *An Essay on African Philosophical Thought: The Akan Conceptual Scheme*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1987, p. 25.

48
A. Osman, “Indigenous Knowledge in Africa: Challenges and Opportunities”.

49
G. Emeagwali, G. J. Sefa Dei (eds.), *African Indigenous Knowledge and the Disciplines*, p. ix.

50
Ibid.

51
N. C. Ani, “Appraisal of African Epistemology in the Global System”, pp. 301–302.

52
Philip J. Nel, “Indigenous Knowledge Systems: Contestation, Rhetorics and Space”, *Indilinga: African Journal of Indigenous Knowledge Systems* 4 (2005) 1, pp. 2–14.

53
Kwasi Wiredu, *Philosophy and an African Culture*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1980, p. 60.

54
Kwasi Wiredu, *A Companion to African Philosophy*, Blackwell Publishing, Oxford 2005, p. 13.

55
A. K. Jimoh, “An African Theory of Knowledge”, p. 123.

56
Molefi Kete Asante, *The Egyptian Philosophers: Ancient Voices from Imhotep to Akhenaten*, African American Images, Chicago 2000, p. 2.

pre-determine the method of procedure. Therefore, even science as fronted is not context-independent. Subsequent developments, especially in the works of Paul Feyerabend and advocates of social and collective epistemology, like Ernest Sosa, John Greco, Linda Zagzebski, Alvin Goldman, and others, reveal the folly of denying socio-cultural influences in knowledge practice. We can contestably maintain that Western epistemology failed in its attempt to argue that we can only achieve genuine knowledge of reality when our inquiry is devoid of socio-cultural and environmental influences.

Epistemology is not about what we know but about what it means to know. For traditional Western epistemology, to know means to hold a belief that is true and justified. The failure of traditional Western epistemology to satisfactorily defend this position led contemporary Western epistemologists to seriously consider the socio-cultural dimensions of knowledge – social epistemology. Knowledge is the property of a knower (cognitive agent), for nothing is known that is not known by a knower. The knower, through a given process or processes, arrives at a proposition that describes a particular state of affairs. The state of affairs is not knowledge; it is the understanding of the state of affairs that a cognitive agent acquires that is knowledge. Consequently, an epistemology is defined not by what is, but by how a cognitive agent understands a particular state of affairs.

For African indigenous epistemology, we gain an understanding of a particular state of affairs – knowledge derivation, through a collaborative enterprise that involves individual contributions. The synthesis of individual contributions produces a collective understanding and rationalisation of the community.⁵⁷ This is ‘epistemological communitarianism’ or communitarian epistemology – a situation in which the community, rather than the individual, is the primary bearer of knowledge.⁵⁸ The emphasis in African indigenous epistemology as a communitarian epistemology is on dialectics, cooperation, and togetherness, which makes knowledge a derivative of a chain relationship. In this chain relationship, the cognition of any one aspect of reality is intertwined with knowledge of the other aspects of reality because, for the African, reality is a unity of the material, spiritual, and mythical. The human person, who is the cognitive agent, is at the centre of this ontological communion where we have a holistic understanding of reality.

Within the holistic understanding of reality, African indigenous epistemology attributes meaning to the various particular components of reality. This holistic approach brings within its purview the experiential, rational, intuitive, and mythical aspects of reality. Therefore, according to E. A. Ruch and K. C. Anyanwu, “knowledge (...) comes from the cooperation of all human faculties and experiences”.⁵⁹ The cognitive agent and the object of cognition are united such that “the self of the subject and the objective world (...) are united as one in a relationship [where] the subject vivifies and animates the objective world”.⁶⁰ African indigenous epistemology understands the inextricable union of humans and nature such that humans only arrive at genuine knowledge of the object with which together they constitute or are part and parcel of the same reality.

Contrary to the above, Western epistemology subjugates reality to rigorous rational scrutiny by employing mathematical and logical formulations that differentiate and fragment reality into the rational, empirical, and mystical, thereby losing the unitiveness of reality. Rather than resolve the ontological puzzle of the one and the many, it conveniently bypasses it and drives a wedge of separation between the material and the non-material. Therefore, creating a

distinction between the rational and the empirical, and between the subjective and the objective. Consequently, it produces an epistemological system that is fiercely dichotomised.

The African vision of totality provides the grounds on which the African conceives reality as a harmony within which their existence and that of other beings find meaning. It also justifies the African holistic approach to knowledge practice. Knowledge, in African indigenous epistemology, consists of

“... an integrative grasp of reality. It entails the recognition that the whole universe is a single whole. Every aspect of reality is interdependent.”⁶¹

According to Léopold Senghor, the African exhibits a preponderance of strong sensibility and emotional disposition towards the object of cognition such that they do not draw a clear-cut distinction between themselves and the object.

“[The African] does not hold [the object] at a distance, nor does he merely look at it and analyse it, as the European would do; rather he touches it, feels it, smells it.”⁶²

In this way, the subject and the object intersect in an organic and dynamic relationship that provides the subject with a profound perception of the object. Thus, the African arrives at a comprehensive and holistic apprehension of reality.

A distinctive feature of knowing in African indigenous epistemology is the intrinsic link between knowledge and wisdom. When the African knower seeks knowledge, they do not just seek to know how to address particular issues but also seek the “wisdom of life”. The latter consists of the ability to apply knowledge while dealing with complex and puzzling situations of navigating the social milieu and interacting with fellow humans. African indigenous epistemology achieves this in its multidimensional approach to life.⁶³ It is in this connection that ancestors, who are the knowledge link between the living and the dead, and elders of the community, are considered the repositories of knowledge. The justification for this position lies in the wealth of experience age bestows on the elders since wisdom is a practical and experiential phenomenon.

We should not interpret this to imply that all elders are wise and knowledgeable and younger persons are not capable of possessing genuine knowledge. Younger people can acquire knowledge through formal education, study,

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Itibari M. Zulu, “Critical Indigenous African Education and Knowledge”, *The Journal of Pan African Studies* 1 (2006) 3, pp. 32–49.

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I have borrowed this phrase “epistemological communitarianism”/ “communitarian epistemology” from Martin Kusch’s “Testimony in Communitarian Epistemology”, in: *Studies in History of Philosophy of Science* 33 (2002) 2, pp. 335–354, doi: [https://doi.org/10.1016/s0039-3681\(02\)00008-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/s0039-3681(02)00008-0).

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Ernest Albert Ruch, K. Chukwulozie Anyanwu, *African Philosophy: An Introduction to the Main Philosophical Trends in Contemporary Africa*, Catholic Book Agency, Rome 1984, p. 94.

60

A. K. Jimoh, “An African Theory of Knowledge”, p. 125.

61

N. C. Ani, “Appraisal of African Epistemology in the Global System”, p. 305.

62

Léopold Sédar Senghor, *On African Socialism*, Frederick A. Praeger Publishers, London 1964, p. 72.

63

E. A. Ruch, K. C. Anyanwu, *African Philosophy: An Introduction to the Main Philosophical Trends in Contemporary Africa*, p. 46.

and the experience of phenomena. However, the wisdom that comes with knowledge for the African is not one to be acquired through formal education and limited scope of experience. Such limitation in experience cannot comprehend the complexity of interaction and the cohesion of things in the world that is at the same time a union of the material, non-material, and mystical. Therefore, to consider the elders as repositories of knowledge is a recognition of their diverse experiences over the years, which cover a broader scale than the younger generation's. However, we should not take it for granted that all elders are credited with wisdom as there are those amongst them who are regarded as custodians of knowledge in every community. They are the ones consulted to explain and resolve complex issues within the community.

African indigenous epistemology is a complex enterprise because of the intricacies involved in the underlying ontology of communality. The relationship and interactions between the physical and the spiritual world, the role and participation of the ancestors in the daily affairs of the community life, and the historical and social exigencies of the people make comprehension of African beliefs and knowledge systems complex. Hence, it is argued that philosophising among indigenous Africans is the interest of a few – the class of elders, who have intuitive insights and rational stamina to investigate into challenging problems.⁶⁴ They serve the interest of all in the community to acquire or establish a profound knowledge of reality. This is the preoccupation of the African notion of philosophical sagacity.⁶⁵

Philosophical sagacity is an account of the beliefs of particular members of the community; the body of thought produced by the wise members of the community who are referred to as sages. There are two classes of sages; the folk sages and the philosophical sages. The former are versed in the collective wisdom, culture, and beliefs of their people. Thus, they essentially conform to the communal set-up. The latter goes beyond the communal set-up to investigate the rational foundation and critically evaluate cultural beliefs; they probe deeper through questioning and reflecting on the content of collective beliefs.

Philosophical sagacity is often dismissed on the basis that it is not proper philosophy, because it is considered to lack a critical reflection on reality. If to be 'critical' is to expose, interpret, analyse, and evaluate, if it is a dialectical process in which we formulate the thesis, antithesis, and synthesis of a given subject matter, we cannot justifiably claim that philosophical sagacity is uncritical. Philosophical sagacity goes through the dialectics of analyticity by questioning the thesis – collective beliefs, generating its antithesis – possible alternative understanding and synthesising by reconstructing and generating an inclusive conception of reality. I, therefore, do not consider it to be popular philosophy; it is rational and critical, it interrogates and investigates, deconstructs and reconstructs basic claims about reality and generates justified knowledge of what it considers to be the case. A good example of this is Barry Hallen and Olubi Sodipo's attempt to articulate a Yoruba epistemology.⁶⁶

However, I consider Hallen and Sodipo's elaborate efforts to distinguish between knowledge and belief an instance of trying to make African approximations of Western specifications. My reservation notwithstanding, the explanations and analysis of the *oni'se'gu'n* (those considered to be knowledgeable with herbs and interactions with the ancestors/spirits) led to plausible conclusions. The particular conclusion of interest in this discourse is the fact that propositional attitudes are not universal.⁶⁷ By implication, the epistemic paradigm differs from context to context. Context here includes language,

culture, worldview, etc. My point is that the yardstick for assessing what is critical and rational is not the prerogative of what is Western. Therefore, we cannot, by Western understanding, relegate African indigenous epistemology to the realm of the uncritical, irrational, and unqualified to be epistemology. Such an attitude as the latter is what has brought about the fracturing of our indigenous ways of knowing and necessitates that we re-establish, as a form of reconstruction, African indigenous epistemology.

Conclusion

Through the instrumentality of colonialization and globalisation, Western epistemology was universalised, and other epistemologies were confined to the level of delusion and irrationality. Colonialism and its Western knowledge systems subjugated and silenced African voices so much that Africans were forced to assimilate a hegemonic culture as they were removed from knowledge conversations and their indigenous existential experiences. Against the holistic learning and ways of knowing of African indigenous epistemology, African learners were made to imbibe fragmented and compartmentalised knowledge.⁶⁸ Tutored in this mentality, early post-colonial scholarship in African space attempted to validate the African knowledge practice on the paradigms of Western epistemology rather than the communitarian paradigm and model of African ontology. This somewhat distorted and fractured African indigenous epistemology, which I understand in this paper as African ways of knowing.

Following the Western model that is laden with individualistic approaches, fractured African indigenous epistemology produces an African community replete with individualism and unhealthy competition, which contradicts the traditional holistic and integrated African community prior to colonialism. Fractured African indigenous epistemology distorts and misrepresents African realities, experiences, and thoughts. I opine that this situation needs to be corrected through a process of reconstruction. My idea of reconstruction here requires that we first deconstruct the superimposition of Western epistemology upon African indigenous epistemology by establishing that knowledge is not a monopoly of any civilisation, and that no single knowledge practice of any given culture can arrogate to itself a universal model of knowledge justification; thereafter, to lucidly articulate the means by which African indigenous epistemology acquires, interprets and validates knowledge.

Knowledge can mean different things by different cultures and epochs, which implies that we cannot have an external position of certainty. By the external position of certainty, I mean that there is no universal understanding outside the confines of history and society. African indigenous knowledge was disparaged because “Western scientific logic and rationality could not comprehend

⁶⁴
Ibid., p. 27.

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Henry Odera Oruka, “Sagacity in African Philosophy”, *International Philosophical Quarterly* 22 (1983) 4, pp. 383–393, doi: <https://doi.org/10.5840/ipq198323448>.

⁶⁶
Barry Hallen, J. Olubi Sodipo, *Knowledge, Belief, and Witchcraft: Analytic Experiments*

in African Philosophy, Stanford University Press, Stanford 1997, pp. 40–85.

⁶⁷
Ibid., p. 84.

⁶⁸
E. Shizha, “Reclaiming Our Indigenous Voices”, p. 7.

the mythical, religious, and intuitive nature of African epistemology”.⁶⁹ Interestingly, Western scientific system of knowledge has changed its concepts over time; for example, modern science has replaced the absolute conception of reality with the theory of relativity, which is a clear indication of its inconsistencies. Therefore, we can conclusively argue that ‘science’ cannot lay claim to certain knowledge. As Robert Audi noted, scientific theories in the past were discovered to be mistaken and so abandoned, the present theories may be discovered to be mistaken in the future and likewise abandoned like some of those from the past that are already abandoned.⁷⁰

The process of reconstructing African indigenous epistemology must take note of civilisation and recognise the positive aspects of globalisation. To this end, reconstructed African indigenous epistemology must open itself to assimilate those aspects of other ways of knowing, which, though foreign to it, do not compromise or negate its primary aim, namely, “to prepare individuals for communal responsibility and interpersonal relationships”.⁷¹ It must accommodate “difference, diversity, pluralism, multiplicity and heterogeneity without portraying any one form of knowledge as the culture of reference”.⁷²

Reconstructing African indigenous epistemology is not a project to essentialize the African knowledge practice but an effort to correctly establish and advance the values, ideologies, and the ways of knowing of Africans in a globalised world. It is meant to liberate African indigenous epistemology from the subsuming methodologies of foreign systems of knowledge that tend to monopolise and dictate models of inquiry. Specifically, it is orientating African minds to understand and appreciate their indigenous knowledge practice by decolonising them from Western objectifications and universalisation.

Anselm Kole Jimoh

Rekonstruiranje razlomljenog sustava domorodačkog znanja

Sažetak

Afričko iskustvo kolonizacije zavijestilo je kulturu epistemološkog utišavanja afričke domorodačke epistemologije monokromatskom logikom zapadnog mišljenja. Sistematično je obezvrijedila afričke domorodačke sustave znanja time što je afrički intelektualni pogon predstavljala kao alogičan i ponekad primitivan. Odmah po kolonijalnom iskustvu, pokušaji nekih afričkih istraživača da utvrde dubinu afričkog obrazovanja razlomilo je afričke sustave znanja. Do toga je došlo jer su pokušali koristiti zapadnjačku logiku i modele kao paradigme za istraživanje, ispitivanje i ocjenjivanje afričke prakse znanja. U ovom istraživanju argumentiram za potrebu rekonstruiranja razlomljenog sustava afričkog domorodačkog znanja. Predstaviti ću kako su sustavi afričkog domorodačkog znanja (AIKS), na što se u radu još referiram kao na afričku domorodačku epistemologiju, iskrivljeni i razlomljeni. Potom, predložiti ću rekonstrukciju tako što ću artikulirati kako stječemo i ovjeravamo znanje u afričkoj domorodačkoj epistemologiji. Pod afričkom domorodačkom filozofijom podrazumijevam sustav istraživanja, razumijevanja, zaprimanja i označavanja afričke koncepcije zbilje koja je specifično afrička i filozofijska. S obzirom na to, primijenit ću filozofijsku metodologiju kritičke analize, evaluacije i rekonstrukcije u svrhu ocrtanja pojmova domorodačkog sustava znanja (IKS), afričke domorodačke epistemologije, efekta kolonijalnog razlamanja, globalizacije te zapadnog uokvirenja sustava afričkog domorodačkog znanja. Donosim zaključak da je za rekonstruiranje afričke domorodačke epistemologije potrebno osloboditi je zapadnjačke paradigme procjenjivanja. Time bi se odrazio autentični uzorak afričke misli koji opisuje spoznavanje istinito za afričko iskustvo, kako u prošlosti tako i danas, bez da se drugi oblici spoznavanja podcjenjuju.

Ključne riječi

afričko, sustavi domorodačkog znanja, afrička domorodačka epistemologija, kolonijalizam, filozofijska mudrost

Anselm Kole Jimoh

Rekonstruierung des zerbrochenen Systems von indigenem Wissen

Zusammenfassung

*Die afrikanische Kolonisationserfahrung vermachte eine Kultur der epistemologischen Stille-
gung afrikanischer indigener Epistemologie durch die monochromatische Logik des westlichen
Denkens. Sie entwertete systematisch die afrikanischen indigenen Wissenssysteme, indem sie
den afrikanischen intellektuellen Antrieb als alogisch und bisweilen primitiv hinstellte. Unmit-
telbar nach der kolonialen Erfahrung haben Versuche einiger Forscher Afrikas, die Tiefe der
afrikanischen Bildung festzustellen, die afrikanischen Wissenssysteme zerbrochen. Dies lag
daran, dass sie die westliche Logik und Modelle als Paradigmen für Durchforschung, Unters-
uchung und Bewertung afrikanischer Wissenspraxis zu verwenden versuchten. In dieser Studie
argumentiere ich für den Rekonstruktionsbedarf des zerbrochenen Systems des afrikanischen
einheimischen Wissens. Ich werde darstellen, wie die Systeme des afrikanischen indigenen Wis-
sens (AIKS) – worauf ich mich in meiner Arbeit noch unter dem Namen afrikanische indigene
Epistemologie beziehe – verzerrt und zerbrochen wurden. Dann schlage ich eine Rekonstruktion
vor, indem ich artikuliere, wie man das Wissen in der afrikanischen indigenen Epistemologie
erwirbt und validiert. Unter afrikanischer indigener Philosophie verstehe ich das System der
Erforschung, des Verständnisses, des Empfangens und der Bezeichnung der afrikanischen Rea-
litätskonzeption, die spezifisch afrikanisch und philosophisch ist. Vor diesem Hintergrund wen-
de ich die philosophische Methodologie der kritischen Analyse, Evaluation und Rekonstruktion
an, zum Zwecke der Umreißung von Begriffen des indigenen Wissenssystems (IKS), der afrika-
nischen indigenen Epistemologie, des Effekts des kolonialen Zerbrechens, der Globalisierung
sowie der westlichen Umrahmung des afrikanischen indigenen Wissenssystems. Ich ziehe die
Schlussfolgerung, für die Rekonstruierung afrikanischer indigener Epistemologie sei es unent-
behrlich, sie von dem westlichen Bewertungsparadigma zu befreien. Dadurch würde sich ein
authentisches Muster des afrikanischen Gedankens widerspiegeln, das eine für die afrikanische
Erfahrung wahrhafte Erkenntnis schildert, sowohl in der Vergangenheit als auch heutzutage,
ohne andere Formen der Erkenntnis zu unterschätzen.*

Schlüsselwörter

afrikanisch, indigene Wissenssysteme, afrikanische indigene Epistemologie, Kolonialismus, philo-
sophische Weisheit

Anselm Kole Jimoh

Reconstruction du système de connaissances indigène morcelé

Résumé

*À travers la logique monochromatique de la pensée occidentale, l'expérience coloniale en
Afrique a légué une tendance à annihiler l'épistémologie indigène africaine. Cette logique
a dévalorisé de manière systématique les systèmes de connaissances indigènes des peuples
africains en présentant l'appareil intellectuel africain comme alogique, voire même primitif.
Durant l'expérience coloniale, très vite, les chercheurs africains qui ont tenté d'interroger
la profondeur de l'éducation africaine ont entraîné un morcellement au sein des systèmes de
connaissances africains. Cela est le résultat de tentatives qui se sont servies de la logique et
des modèles occidentaux en tant que paradigme de recherche, d'enquête et d'évaluation des
pratiques de connaissances africaines. Dans cette étude, j'argumente en faveur de la nécessité
de reconstruire le système de connaissances indigène africain. Je présenterai la manière à tra-
vers laquelle les systèmes de connaissances indigènes africains (AIKS), ce que dans ce travail
j'appelle l'épistémologie indigène africaine, ont été faussés et morcelés. Ensuite, je proposerai*

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N. C. Ani, "Appraisal of African Epistemol-
ogy in the Global System", p. 312.

70

Robert Audi, *Epistemology: A Contemporary
Introduction to the Theory of Knowledge*,
Routledge, New York 2003, p. 263.

71

E. Shizha, "Reclaiming Our Indigenous Voices",
p. 8.

72

Ibid., p. 10.

une reconstruction de leurs systèmes de connaissances en expliquant comment nous acquérons et validons la connaissance dans l'épistémologie indigène africaine. J'entends, sous l'idée de philosophie indigène africaine, un système de recherche, de compréhension, de réception et de signification qui se rapporte à une conception de la réalité africaine spécifiquement africaine et philosophique. Compte tenu de cela, j'appliquerai la méthodologie philosophique d'analyse critique, d'évaluation et de reconstruction dans le but de donner une ébauche des concepts du système de connaissances indigène (IKS), à savoir de l'épistémologie indigène africaine. J'amène en conclusion l'idée que, pour reconstruire l'épistémologie indigène africaine, il est nécessaire de libérer des paradigmes d'évaluation occidentaux. Ainsi, pourrait émerger un échantillon authentique des pensées africaines qui décrit véritablement la connaissance au sein de l'expérience africaine, se rapportant au passé comme au présent, sans que d'autres formes de connaissances soient mésestimées.

Mots-clés

africain, systèmes de connaissances indigènes, épistémologie indigène africaine, colonialisme, sagesse philosophique