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Knowledge, Power Matrix, and the Vision of African Renaissance

Abstract

The task of advancing knowledge on Africa from rural African spaces by urban African researchers confronts two formidable challenges; namely, the preponderance of myths and 'being as a force' in the network of rural African gnosis and the contemptuous poise of the urban African researcher against indigenous knowledge systems (IKS). This attitude is the aftermath of colonial efforts at reserving epistemic hegemony and neo-colonisation by Africans who have been inundated against the possibility of an African knowledge system. The fixation on myths and force by rural agents and western academy-derived knowledge system constitute mutually antagonistic power structures with the cumulative effect of stifling efforts at understanding Africa from inside out. This paper focusing on the Yoruba knowledge society employs a reconstructive approach in proposing two paths to the development of a robust African knowledge base by African researchers. The first path argues that rural agents contributing to developing African episteme must disenchant where necessary. The second is directed at the urgency of achieving a consummated decolonisation. While the former path sees the rural moving from a system of myths to the articulation of liberal epistemic system, the latter seeks to nullify the incredulity and contempt urban researchers have about the reality of knowledge in Africa. Knowledge that has the benefit of African originality can thus be consolidated on an open dialogue between urban researchers and rural agents who have direct relations to the deposit of African gnosis pertaining to politics, law, ethics, pharmacognosy, health care, economy and the environment.

Keywords

knowledge, power, open dialogue, African Renaissance, Yoruba

Introduction

The challenge of advancing qualitative and quantitative development in Africa is beset by a further epistemological problem. The problem consists in the conflict between rural agents and urban researchers who approach the same African reality from opposing ends in terms of insights and methodology. By "rural agents", the African epistemic agents domiciled in rural and indigenous African spaces which have no antecedent training in western epistemological methods are meant. Urban researchers are researchers who, albeit they are living in urban African spaces and/or the diaspora, employ their training in the western mode of knowing on inquiries into African epistemologies.

The power matrix constituted by the rural agents in African spaces and urban researchers working on African spaces is simplified into two aspects. On the one hand, there is a preponderance of myths and 'being as a force' in the network of rural African gnosis; which prevents the rural African agent

from accounting for the realities in the universe in terms of the dictates of reason as far as is possible. On the other hand, the urban researcher focusing on Africa is often accustomed to maintaining a contemptuous poise against African indigenous knowledge systems (IKS). The condescending approach of the urban researcher is a vestige of colonial efforts at reserving epistemic hegemony and engaging in a neo-colonisation by Africans who have been inundated against the possibility of an African knowledge system. The fixation on myths and *force* by rural agents and western academy-derived knowledge system constitute mutually antagonistic power structures with the cumulative effect of stifling efforts at understanding Africa from inside out.

This paper, focusing on the Yoruba knowledge society, employs a reconstructive approach in proposing two paths to the development of a robust African knowledge base by African researchers. The first path argues that rural agents contributing to developing African episteme must disenchant where necessary. Disenchantment here refers to the conscious effort to replace as much as is possible the mythical and *force*-oriented approach to reality with a more rational approach to nature which helps to engender total human development. The second is directed at the urgency of achieving a consummated decolonisation. While the former path sees the rural moving from a system of myths to the articulation of liberal epistemic system, the latter seeks to nullify the incredulity and contempt urban researchers have about the reality of knowledge in Africa. Knowledge that has the benefit of African originality can thus be consolidated on an open dialogue between urban researchers and rural agents who have direct relations to the deposit of African gnosis pertaining to politics, law, ethics, pharmacognosy, health care, economy and the environment.

The paper proceeds in the first place by making an exposition of the supposed death of indigenous African epistemologies occasioned by the denigration of the indigenous African mode of knowing. It is argued here that the propagation of the idea of a moribund indigenous African system – a certain epistemicide to be precise – exceeds the damage done to Africa through the depletion of human and material resources for development. The second and third parts of the paper focus on the challenge imposed by the task of matching indigenous African epistemologies with the techno-scientific demands of total development in contemporary times. These sections emphasise the disconnection between the logocentric parameters of the western gnosis and the force-myth motif which dominates the greater part of indigenous knowledge systems. The final part of the paper envisages an active response to the charge to employ the use of reason in determining what must be preserved of indigenous Yoruba thought system as philosophy and what may be imbibed from other cultures and systems.

Requiem for Indigenous African Epistemologies

Postcolonial efforts focusing on the colonial experience of African nations are replete with narratives depicting the abridgement of the place of Africa in the scheme of international affairs through the depletion of human, natural and economic resources during the colonial era. The import of the fixation of scholarly narratives on the misappropriation and depletion of human and material resources in colonial Africa is that the colonial deconstruction of indigenous African epistemologies receives little and often, passing attention.

In the face of the focus on the material and human damage done to the African in the context of colonization, it is important to state in the same voice with Abosedo Ipadeola that

“... the sabotage inflicted upon the epistemological structures existing prior to the advent of colonial rule significantly outweighs other forms of damage because the success of the colonial rulers greatly depended on weakening the African peoples first at the epistemic level.”¹

The highpoint of colonial incursion in Africa, therefore, consists in the re-engineering of the African mind to doubt the reality and or potency of indigenous African knowledge systems and so come to regard the foreign and western mode of knowledge as orthodox and most appropriate in the quest for meaning and development. Ipadeola aptly describes the procedure for actualising what may be referred to as epistemicide committed against the African continent in the following:

“The colonialists, in their bid to create a new epistemological order in Africa, brought with them the Western form of education. Western styles of education and training were considered the only authentic means of acquiring knowledge. In the new epistemological order, those who acquired Western education were made to enjoy certain privileges denied to those who lacked this form of education. Hence, the new epistemological order brought with it a new reality of social classes not in existence in pre-colonial Africa. *This also engendered a series of class struggles between those who had acquired Western education and skills and those who had not.* The colonial epistemological order has lingered on in Africa, such that in spite of being decolonised politically and to some extent economically, many African countries are still grappling with epistemic colonization.”²

One of the greatest outcomes of epistemic colonisation in Africa is typically represented in the denial of the history and indigenous civilisation of a people. This, in turn, is extended to generate in the mind of the African according to Paul Ahluwalia, a sense of inferiority manifesting in the form of reduced capacity for social, economic and political agency.³ The erection of the appurtenances of colonialism gave way to a negative binary relation of powers. The functionalist education and culture in pre-colonial African spaces were supplanted with the western mode of knowing and cultural expressions; where the latter educational system and cultural life form were promoted through consistent propaganda as superior and depicting civility. Thus the class struggle which Ipadeola referred to was created between those who acquire western education and skills and those who continue to advance their lives and wellbeing by the elements of pre-colonial African values. The acolytes of the western system of values which are mainly the colonials and Africans who have adopted the western form in total would come from then on display a contemptuous poise towards anything African.

Albert Boahen has shown the nexus between the class struggle instituted at the advent of western colonization in African spaces and the rural-urban migration pattern by noting that

“... the creation and widening of the gap between the urban centres and rural areas is a corresponding aftermath of the continuous pull of young men and women to the urban centres

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Abosedo P. Ipadeola, “The Imperative of Epistemic Decolonization in Contemporary Africa”, in: Isaac E. Ukpokolo (ed.), *Themes, Issues and Problems in African Philosophy*, Palgrave Macmillan, Cham 2017, pp. 145–160, pp. 145–146.

2
Ibid., p. 145. The emphasis in the cited text is mine.

3
Cf. Paul Ahluwalia, *Politics and Colonial Theory*, Routledge, London 2001, p. 41.

by the need for education, employment and better social facilities which are characteristically domiciled in urban spaces.⁴

Indeed, the denigration of rural Africa as the ‘dark continent’ is a consummation of the epistemicide launched by colonial activities. This denigration as captured by Boahen saw to it that young Africans migrated in droves from rural African spaces to urban areas characterised by the elements of western values.⁵

In the wake of the postcolonial, scholarly materials in the form of rejoinders have been written to challenge the negation of the histories and the variety of civilizations present in pre-colonial Africa and to insist on the reality of the various means by which this wealth of historical antecedents and cultural civilizations were transmitted to younger generations of African heritage. Ipadeola has noted for instance that, the fact of a people’s existence over a protracted period in history is itself a first pointer to the reality of ‘an epistemological system among them’ – a means of relating to the world as it ‘comes’ to them and responding to the primary needs for their wellbeing.

Of the dimensions of the indigenous African knowledge system, Benedicta Egbo has described the pre-colonial African knowledge system as one “based on the principles of functionalism”. This functionalist orientation was meant to sustain “the practical, social, spiritual and intellectual needs of the communities within which they were practised”.⁶ A similar point is made by Walter Rodney on what indigenous African education consists in:

“Indeed, the most crucial aspect of pre-colonial education was its relevance to Africans, in sharp contrast to what was later introduced. The following features of indigenous African education can be considered outstanding: its close links with social life, both in a material and spiritual sense; its collective nature; its many-sidedness; and its progressive development in conformity with the successive stages of physical, emotional and mental development of the child.”⁷

From the aforesaid, we are able to say that indigenous African knowledge system prior to colonization encompassed at once all the elements of history and indigenous civilizations which includes among other things, the various technologies for producing food, textiles, art, architecture, tools for various practical uses, the means of organizing the society (laws, politics, economics), religious practices and the means of transmitting these values (education) from one generation to the next. All these stand in contradistinction to the proclamations of European scholars such as Lucien Levy-Bruhl, who maintain that there is a privation of rationality in the African mind;⁸ and G. W. F Hegel, who in his *The Philosophy of History* stated that the many negative traits noticeable in the Africans (Hegel uses the term ‘negroes’ to refer to Africans) is as a result of a characteristic lack of self-control.⁹

A reflection on the narrative of the epistemicide instituted by colonial efforts leads an inquirer to query the strength and validity of what existed before the advent of colonialism as *episteme* in African spaces. If it is argued that pre-colonial African spaces were sustained by certain functionalist modes of knowing, what then were the missing links in the chains – the vulnerability factor(s) of these functionalist modes which made it possible for the western foreign system to ride roughshod over them? The question raised here is pertinent given that the task of negotiating a renaissance in African spaces which is the focus of this article necessarily requires in the first place, retrieval and evaluation of whatever existed as African modes of knowing before colonialism. As this question is not merely rhetorical, an attempt would be made to put it in perspective in the following sections.

Indigenous Epistemologies and the Contemporary Challenge

Issues regarding the existence, strength and validity of indigenous African epistemologies are most relevant in the contemporary discourse on the status and patterns of development in post-colonial African spaces which today have metamorphosed into semblances of modern nation-states. The question raised earlier concerning the vulnerability factor of pre-colonial African epistemologies is relevant here, and it can be restated in this connection thus: Are the indigenous modes of knowing and the means of transmitting them appropriate for the existential needs of today's Africa? An attempt to provide answers to this question leads ultimately to the perennial tradition – modernity debate in African philosophy. Indeed, the approximation to a resolution of this debate is a *sine qua non* for the consolidation of decolonization, properly so called since a society that must decolonize must first examine the state of affairs before colonialism to determine the forms of adjustments required for confronting existential issues in the post-colonial.

The tradition and modernity debate in African philosophy occur in the context of negotiating development in African spaces especially in the aftermath of the experience of colonialism. Such a quest for development is a quest for a renaissance – a rebirth in Africa. Jay Ciaffa states the relevant questions which the debate throws up thus:

“What is the relevance of indigenous African traditions to the challenges of contemporary life? Do traditional modes of thought and behaviour constitute resources or impediments to the projects of development and modernization in Africa? What, precisely, is meant by the terms ‘development’ and ‘modernization’ when they are used about African countries?”¹⁰

Responding to these questions further generates dialectical positions; with the *revivalist* school championing the cause of African development from a perspective which seeks to retrieve primordial African values and epistemologies bearing no elements of the foreign mode of relating to being as the basis of securing existence in Africa. From this perspective, all the elements required for the consolidation of a renaissance in Africa are already contained in some pre-colonial African cultural reserves; hence Africans only have to draw from these ancient repertoires earlier impugned and relegated by colonial interests in responding to contemporary issues in African existence and development. The other position in the dialectics considers the recourse to a glorious African past from which templates for the modernization of Africa must be ob-

4 Albert A. Boahen, *General History of Africa VII: Africa under Colonial Domination*, James Currey Ltd, London 1990, p. 335.

5 Ibid. See also: A. P. Ipadeola, “The Imperative of Epistemic Decolonization in Contemporary Africa”, pp. 149–151.

6 Benedicta Egbo, *Gender, Literacy and Life Chances in Sub-Saharan Africa*, Multilingual Matters Ltd, New York 2000, p. 61.

7 Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, Pambazuka Press, Cape Town 2012, p. 239.

8 Cf. Lucien Levy-Bruhl, “How Natives Think”, in: Albert G. Mosley (ed.), *African Philosophy: Selected Readings*, Prentice Hall, New York 1995, pp. 40–61, p. 54ff.

9 Cf. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, Batoche Books, Ontario 2001, pp. 109–116.

10 Jay A. Ciaffa, “Tradition and Modernity in Postcolonial African Philosophy”, *Humanitas* XXI (2008) 1–2, pp. 121–145, p. 121.

tained as simplistic; failing to consider the complex challenge of evolving a modern Africa in a globalizing world. For instance, Paulin Hountondji refers to the revivalist approach to the determination of the dimensions and methods of African philosophy as *ethnophilosophy*¹¹ – a designation which bears some note of cynicism on account of the argument that traditional African thought which by virtue of its content is disconnected from demanding political issues, and the advancement of modern science and technology is not suited to addressing the problems of contemporary Africa.¹²

The vision of African renaissance as conceived in this paper is not merely an exercise which romanticises the African past. The vision rather relates to the paradigms of modernization of which two aspects are delineated; namely, the quest for scientific and technological advancements which are supposed to lead the African into a new dispensation wherein human primary needs like food, dignified shelter, clothing, functional health and education systems which are typically quantitative in nature can be more efficiently attained. The other aspect of this modernisation is oriented towards the political order wherein human persons can apply their agency to the task of evolving political systems which, in the words of Ciaffa, “enhance the liberty and welfare of all citizens, rather than the select few”.¹³ The latter aspect of modernisation which focuses on the cultivation and development of human agency in the context of the *polis* is indeed qualitative in so far as the human person animated by positive liberty participates actively in the determination of policies for human flourishing. In fact, it must be stated that the quantitative aspect earlier mentioned serves the qualitative interest in so far as the satisfaction of primary human needs provides a foundation for galvanising human agency.

While the following section of this paper exposes the elements making up the Yoruba indigenous knowledge system (IKS); especially as it pertains to how that IKS functioned in the pre-colonial, the power matrix occasioned by the Yoruba mode of knowing to come in contact with the Western paradigm of knowledge shall be discussed. The aim here is to make retrieval of relevant elements of the IKS while proposing the need for a new dialectic between the African and the Western, regarding the evolving a renaissance in African culture. The issues are concerned regarding the values, if any which the Yoruba IKS would contribute to the actualisation of the quantitative and qualitative aspects of modernising Africa today. The other point of concern would be a connection of the Yoruba system of epistemological variables with other epistemological approaches through a process whereby African rural dwellers collaborate with scholars and researchers in urban spaces who are immersed in doing researches into African epistemologies.

Dimensions of an African Indigenous Knowledge System

The Yoruba people are occupying south-western Nigeria present particular modes of knowing bearing semblance to how being is appreciated in an African continent that is inherently heterogeneous. By being, reference is made to the totality of existence which indeed does not preclude indigenous modes of knowing. The Yoruba people, a differentiated ethnic group in West Africa, display extensively a confirmation of the position of Placide Tempels regarding the African *Weltanschauung* that “force is the nature of being, force is being, being is force”.¹⁴ To state that ‘force is being and being is a force’ is to make a point about the essential element of the Yoruba worldview driven by the inspiration of extra-terrestrial entities; divinities who initiate, guide and

sustain the continuity of being. Within such schema of African understanding of the nature of being, all things are intricately bound together by the impersonal, life-giving force often characterised as a supreme Deity.¹⁵

The supreme force animating the totality of being in the indigenous Yoruba world, therefore, spreads its influence through every aspect of human welfare: health, reproduction, nutrition, the environment, politics and governance, religion, education, technology, etc. The belief in the overarching influence of the supreme force is explained by the existence of a pantheon of divinities that have particular charge over those aspects of human welfare listed above. The Yoruba pantheon features divinities such as *Òrìsà nlá*, *Òrunmila* – the divinity who has custody of the *Ifá* divination system, *Ògún* who superintends over warfare, metallurgy and the dispensation of justice, *Şango* reputed as the god of lightning and thunder, *Osanyin* is believed to have a mastery of traditional medicine especially as it has to do with the use of herbs for therapeutic purposes, while *Osun* and *Òrìshà oko* have faculties for enhancing female reproductive health and agricultural fertility respectively. In coordinating human activities, these divinities are believed to inspire and command that humans perform the duties and activities required for the sustenance of their existence in prescribed ways.¹⁶ The Yoruba person, whose being revolves around the existential categories over which these divinities preside, is also expected to consult and offer supplications regularly to these divinities or as may be statutorily required by the specific nature of human activity in perspective.

The Yoruba worldview which can be considered as a microcosm of a wider indigenous African knowledge system which is also driven by myths detailing prescribed actions and taboos which are themselves drawn from religious beliefs. Here, Mircea Eliade's notion of the myth is important:

“The myth is a sacred story, hence a ‘true history’, since it always deals with *realities*.”¹⁷

It should be noted that while the sacred forces in these stories create and legitimize models for all significant human activities, the truth of a myth is only so-proclaimed in so far as the myth – a sacred story attempts to explain aspects of being as it presents itself to a people and not on the merit of stating that the characters in a mythical narrative were real physical entities in history. Hence, myths function within the context of Yoruba worldviews as pedagogy for illustrating a reality in its totality or aspects of it – a geopolitical space, species of plants and animals, a technique or methodology for particular trade or occupation, culture, human behaviour, etc.

In contrast to the Yoruba notion of being and knowledge characterized as it were by an ontological complementarity between immaterial, deistic *force*

11 Cf. Paulin J. Hountondji, *Endogenous Knowledge: Research Trails*, CODESRIA, Dakar 1997, p. 52.

12 J. A. Ciaffa, “Tradition and Modernity in Postcolonial African Philosophy”, p. 122.

13 Cf. *Ibid.*

14 Placide Tempels, *Bantu philosophy*, Presence Africaine, Paris 1959, p. 25.

15 Jaco Beyers, “What is Religion?: An African Understanding”, *HTS Theologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 66 (2010) 1, pp. 1–8, p. 3, doi: <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v66i1.341>.

16 Bode Omojola, “Rhythms of the Gods: Music and Spirituality in Yoruba Culture”, *The Journal of Pan African Studies* 3 (2010) 5, pp. 29–50, p. 32.

17 Mircea Eliade, *Myth and Reality*, translated by Willard R. Trask, Harper and Row, Publishers, New York 1963, p. 6.

and other aspects of human interest and the whole of nature, the western notion of being which by extension also determines the epistemological orientation of the west is for the most part positivistic; admitting of no other realities except what is rational by virtue of it being perceptible to the sense. The distinction between the global West's notion of being and what exists for the most part as the African orientation towards being is expressed by Anselm K. Jimoh in the following:

“In classical African philosophy, there is a concrete existence of man and nature. African tradition talks about the two entities only in terms of conceptual numericality and not in terms of separate ontological existence. It is impossible for the African to separate man from nature. They are sacredly united. In this unity, they both participate in the same locus without being opposites. So, the African world is a unitary world, as against the analytical world of Western thought.”¹⁸

This positivist orientation of the global west regarding the notion of being also accounts for a bifurcation between subject and object in the context of epistemology; such that, unlike the ontological complementarity in the Yoruba system whereby the subject is supposed to participate in a continuum of relations with the object of knowledge, the forces in nature and being.

As the elements of a deistic force pervading all of reality and the myths which ground the narratives of meaning in the context of Yoruba are intricately woven into the fabric of indigenous knowledge, it can be argued that the prominence of myths relating to invisible forces in the network of IKS often shortchanges attempts to rationally understand the African (Yoruba) without recourse to the extra-terrestrial. This poses a challenge to the study of rural Africa by urban researchers who may or may not be Africans themselves. In fact, one could state here that the preponderance of invisible forces and the plural myths bearing the narratives about these forces inspired the negative attitude shown by Levy-Bruhl to the idea of the possibility of African rationality when he stated with reference to Africa that

“... the civilized mentality is regulated by reason, and interacts with the world through carefully organized conceptual schemes. In contrast, the primitive mentality is hardly capable of abstract thought and is regulated by the forces of myth and superstition.”¹⁹

The force-myth motif which is prominent in the Yoruba IKS poses a real challenge in the context of advancing and consolidating systematised epistemologies which would meet the needs of a modernized African entity subsisting in a globalized world.

Having noted earlier that the Yoruba IKS and the western mode of knowing are two incongruent approaches in the context of articulating an epistemology that would drive development in an Africa space, the point should also be made that the western attempt at supplanting the entirety of the African knowledge schema with the western mode of knowing resulted in what could be described as the mutual estrangement between epistemic subjects domiciled in rural African spaces and researchers on African epistemology immersed only in the western mode of knowing who live in urban African spaces and in the diaspora. The mutual exclusion of both subjects and their approaches to knowledge in African spaces typically manifests in the form of a suspicion nursed by the African epistemic subject domiciled in rural Africa against the epistemic subject who either comes from African spaces that have adopted western forms of life (urban Africa) or from the global western diaspora and proposes to study particular phenomena in Africa. In contemporary times and more particularly in reaction to the experience of colonisation, the former

subject may either suspect the latter of having an intention to *kidnap* original local ideas and materials and use them for his or her *self-seeking* research purposes. On the other hand, the researcher (African or not) proceeding from western diaspora and equipped with the methods and orientations of the west to study phenomenon in rural Africa may either display a penchant to *look down* on the totality of rural African life-forms – dismissing them as lacking in method, meaning and function or actually engage in what the rural African subject has serious reservations for; that is, obtaining by pretext, valuable and original local ideas and material resources from an African archive that is considered to be underdeveloped.²⁰ The overall effect of such mutual suspicion from both epistemic subjects is the abridgements of the chances for a collaboration which enhances sustainable development in Africa.

***Sapere aude*: The Renaissance Imperative**

Given all of the aforesaid, it is argued here that the quest for a renaissance in the context of modern African spaces in a globalised world does not consist in a simplistic alignment with the revivalist school of thought which recollects wholesale the African past and seeks to adapt its practices and modes of knowing for contemporary use. Rather, there is the need to engage indigenous African values in a dialectics driven by *logos* and aiming at retrieving what is valuable of the past and embracing elements of true values that may not necessarily be extracts of African origin in so far as they serve to advance the course of being. This point is well nuanced in the thoughts of Ciaffa who noted that:

“To suggest that Africa’s finest minds should be content to document and revere traditional beliefs does not lead to the articulation of genuine African philosophy. Instead, it amounts to an evasion of the kind of critical thinking that is urgently needed to address the problems that exist within African societies. (...) What is needed is a careful analysis of how traditional beliefs might impede modernisation, and how they might provide useful resources.”²¹

The point here is to insist on the inevitability of a constructive change given a more dynamic epistemological approach that is intended to yield qualitative and quantitative development. The inevitability of developing a more dynamic epistemology draws from the very nature of being as reality embodying dynamism. To borrow a line from John Henry Newman, “to live is to change and to be perfect is to have changed often”.²²

The need for a more dynamic epistemological orientation with specific reference to the Yoruba IKS echoes the vocative made by Immanuel Kant at the dawn of the European renaissance in his essay, “Answering the Question: What is Enlightenment?”. There, Kant makes a passionate call: *sapere aude*

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Anselm K. Jimoh, “An African Theory of Knowledge”, in: I. E. Ukpokolo (ed.), *Themes, Issues and Problems in African Philosophy*, pp. 121–136, p. 126.

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L. Levy-Bruhl, “How Natives Think.”, p. 54ff.

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Cf. Toyin Falola, “Ritual Archives”, in: Adeshina Afolayan, Toyin Falola (eds.), *The Palgrave Handbook of African Philosophy*,

Palgrave Macmillan, New York 2017, pp. 721–722.

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J. A. Ciaffa, “Tradition and Modernity in Post-colonial African Philosophy”, pp. 129–130.

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John Henry Newman, “The Development of Christian Doctrine”, *Newman Reader*. Available at: www.newmanreader.org/works/development/chapter1.html (accessed on April 10, 2018).

– *dare to be wise*. Humanity is thus enjoined to emerge from its “self-incurred immaturity” occasioned “not from a lack of understanding, but from the lack of courage to use one’s reason (...) without the guidance of another”.²³ While it might seem inconsistent to cite Kant in a work that critiques the efforts of the global West at reserving epistemic hegemony; especially given that Kant himself had expressed disparaging views about Africans when he stated in his *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* that the low level of intelligence of the negro (African) necessitated that the African can only be trained for slavery,²⁴ and in another writing, *Innate Characteristic of Human Beings* where he suggested that weak-heartedness or the privation of courage makes the African person fear so much as to be unable to exercise rational agency,²⁵ it is nevertheless instructive to note that the call to humanity to free itself from “self-incurred immaturity” extends to every kind of the human species. The imperative of this call is therefore taken in this context to go beyond the possible unflattering prejudices Kant may have had against Africans.

The imperative to be courageous and use one’s reason elicits different responses from the rural African epistemic agents and against the epistemic subject schooled only in the western mode of knowing. From the rural epistemic agent, the imperative insists on the need to migrate from an epistemic system that is reliant for the most part on myths and divine commands to a system characterised by systematic, logical reasoning. In this connection, Ciaffa noted how Kwame Gyekye had decried the indigenous African systems which were rich in theosophical understanding of nature and its various elements but suffered from a privation of scientific inquiry into the active agents present in efficacious herbal treatments for example.²⁶ The point here is that it is not enough to have a mere functionalism-oriented, non-systematic ‘trial and error’ approach to technologies for human needs. It is important to understand the logic that grounds such technologies instead of simply attributing functionality to the potency of force and institutionalized myths. Advancing a renaissance in contemporary Africa, therefore, requires that the *rural* must disenchant where necessary; thereby transforming *forces* into rational science for the advancement of being.

The disenchantment process which essentially involves the jettisoning of indigenous values and belief systems that are inimical to societal flourishing and the cultivation of valuable resources for contemporary wellbeing can be said to be a necessary stage in the course of human history. It has driven the wheels of progress; from Xenophanes’s critique of the Greek pantheon and the plethora of myths developed by Homer and Hesiod – which the Greeks patterned their lives after²⁷ to the era of the European Renaissance which signalled the birth of modern Western science.

The imperative to disenchant elicits a different response from the global west-oriented researcher who studies realities domiciled in African spaces. The urban researcher disenchants when s/he transcends the contemptuous pose of the Western mode of knowing by adopting a more objective attitude to reality in the African spaces constituting the object of research; so that instead of simply denigrating the Yoruba usage of the herbal concoction *àgbo* for therapeutic purposes as fetish and unhygienic for example, the urban researcher would rather advance the frontiers of knowledge by seeking to collaborate in a rational and systematic way with rural agents who have firsthand relations to the particularities relating to African therapies and other forms of indigenous technologies for subsistence. The disenchantment of the urban researcher is an extended decolonization; which exorcises the feeling of superi-

ority complex by which the researcher is either estranged from rural Africa or is considered as one who employs African spaces merely as instruments for the propagation of biased opinions sold off to the rest of the globe as the total reality about Africa.

The possibility of advancing an intellectual alliance between the rural and the urban has begun to gain importance in scholarly works. For instance, Akinmayowa Akin-Otiko has argued for the importance of developing an integrative approach to medical diagnosis and therapy by drawing insights from pre-colonial Yoruba society where the *Oniṣẹ̀gùn* functions as a healer who makes diagnoses of ailments, acts as a pharmacognosist cum pharmacist – having knowledge of and prescribing necessary herbs and mixtures for therapy while also performing the indispensable role of a ‘hospital chaplain’ since ailments are supposed to always have relations with the spiritual.²⁸ This integrative approach to wellness could be a valuable resource for tackling health issues in contemporary Africa. The archaeological works of Abidemi Babalola chronicling evidence of pre-colonial glass bead making in the Yoruba town of Ile-Ife ca. 1000–1500 AD; in present day the Osun State of Nigeria also points in retrospect to the high probability of pre-colonial Yoruba spaces possessing some level of *techné* required for human needs and social subsistence, albeit the inchoate stage of such technological applications.²⁹ The task today, therefore, is to seek to attain a retrieval of such ancient knowledge repertoire and further proceed to bring them into dialogue with the advancements of modern science and technology as a means of filtering out what is obsolete for today’s needs and to absorb what is useful for contemporary existence.

Most of the contemporary Africa, according to Kwasi Wiredu, cannot afford to wish modern science and technology away on the ‘Western irrationalist’ ground because the contemporary West suffers from certain individuals’ negative use of science and technologies. Wiredu makes a point about the importance of allowing certain humane values to moderate the use of science and technology.³⁰ The benefit of a contemporary dialogue between the African indigenous knowledge system and the modern western scientific system would, therefore, be to seek new ways of abstracting essential elements of indigenous African life forms and putting them within the purview of a globalised world.

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Immanuel Kant, “Answering the Question: What is Enlightenment?”, *Minnesota State University*. Available at: <http://web.mnstate.edu/gracyk/courses/web%20publishing/KantOnEnlightenment.htm> (accessed on May 10, 2018).

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Cf. Immanuel Kant, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, translated by L. D. Victor, Illinois University Press, Carbondale 1978, p. 264.

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Conclusion

The original intent of this paper was to bridge the wide gap of epistemic relations occasioned by the power matrix commissioned by rural African spaces and its agents and the western scientific models bearing differentiated methodologies.

In achieving this, the paper began by making an exposition of what is thought of as the death of indigenous African epistemologies and then proceeded to show with particular reference to the Yoruba of western Nigeria how the dimensions of indigenous African knowledge system is implicated in the quest for an African renaissance in the context of modern scientific advancement and the demands of a globalizing world. The final part of this paper insists on the urgency of a disenchantment which sees to the breaking of the power matrix calcified by the opposing methodologies of rural agents in African spaces and the urban researcher whose intellectual inquest is centred on being in Africa.

The paper calls for symbiotic relations across spaces. Such relation is advanced by the activities of the ivory towers whose office always consists in bridging the town and the gown. It should be stated here that the idea of the rural benefitting from schemas already developed by the methods of the urban researcher should not be considered simply as an activity of transposing the western episteme over indigenous African forms. Such cross-fertilizations are better conceived of in line with Louis Munoz³¹ as indicative of the natural human penchant to borrow ideas and civilisations from other spaces. After all, the entirety of humanity is only able to see more things, and more far-off ones, because it stands on the shoulders of giants.

Benjamin Timi Olujohungbe

Znanje, matrica moći i vizija afričke renesanse

Sažetak

Zadatak razvijanja znanja o afričkim ruralnim područjima od strane urbanih afričkih istraživača susreće se s dva značajna izazova: nadmoć mitova i 'biće kao sila' u mreži ruralne afričke gnoze i prijezirno držanje urbanih afričkih istraživača spram domorodačkih sustava znanja (IKS). Ovaj je pristup rezultat kolonijalnih nastojanja da se sačuva epistemička hegemonija i neokolonijalizacija uz pomoć Afrikanaca koje se okrenulo protiv mogućnosti afričkog sustava znanja. Fiksacija na mit i silu ruralnih aktera i zapadnjačkog akademski orijentiranog sistema znanja sačinjava obostrano antagonističke strukture moći s kumulativnim efektom zagušivanja pokušaja da se Afriku razumije iznutra prema van. Ovaj rad, usmjeravajući se na društveno znanje Yoruba, primjenjuje rekonstruktivni pristup predlažući dva puta do razvoja robusne afričke baze znanja. Prvi put argumentira da se ruralni akteri koji doprinose razvoju afričke spoznaje moraju raščarati gdje je to potrebno. Drugi je put usmjeren na urgentnost postizanja potpune dekolonizacije. Dok prvi put vidi kretanje ruralnog od mitova prema artikulaciji liberalnog epistemičkog sistema, drugi put želi ukloniti nevjericu i prijezir koji urbani istraživači imaju o zbilji znanja u Africi. Znanje koje ima koristi od afričke originalnosti može se konsolidirati otvorenim dijalogom između urbanih istraživača i ruralnih aktera koji imaju izravnu vezu s ispostavom afričke gnoze u pogledu politike, prava, etike, farmakognoze, zdravstva, ekonomije i okoliša.

Ključne riječi

znanje, moć, otvoreni dijalog, afrička renesansa, Yoruba

Benjamin Timi Olujohungbe
Wissen, Machtmatrix und die
Vision der afrikanischen Renaissance

Zusammenfassung

Die Aufgabe der Fortentwicklung des Wissens über afrikanische ländliche Gebiete seitens der urbanen Forscher Afrikas stößt auf zwei bedeutende Herausforderungen: die Überlegenheit der Mythen und „das Wesen als Macht“ im Netz ruraler afrikanischer Gnosis sowie die verächtliche Haltung urbaner afrikanischer Forscher gegenüber den indigenen Wissenssystemen (IKS). Ein solches Herangehen ist das Ergebnis kolonialer Bemühungen, die epistemische Hegemonie und Neokolonialisierung beizubehalten, und zwar mithilfe von Afrikanern, über die man gegen die Interessen des afrikanischen Wissenssystems die Oberhand behielt. Die Fixierung auf den Mythos und die Macht der ländlichen Akteure sowie des westlichen, akademisch orientierten Wissenssystems vereint beiderseitig antagonistische Machtstrukturen mit dem kumulativen Effekt, Versuche zu ersticken, Afrika von innen heraus zu verstehen. Diese Arbeit, indem sie sich auf das Wissen der Yoruba-Gesellschaft konzentriert, setzt den rekonstruktiven Ansatz ein und schlägt zwei Wege zur Entwicklung einer robusten afrikanischen Wissensbasis vor. Der erste Weg argumentiert, dass die ruralen Akteure, die der Entwicklung der afrikanischen Erkenntnis ihren Beitrag leisten, erforderlichenfalls entzaubert werden müssen. Der zweite Weg ist auf die Dringlichkeit der Umsetzung einer vollständigen Dekolonisation ausgerichtet. Während der erste Weg die Fortbewegung des Ländlichen von den Mythen zur Artikulation des liberalen epistemischen Systems erkennt, verfolgt der zweite Weg das Ziel, den Unglauben und die Geringschätzung zu beseitigen, die urbane Forscher gegenüber der Wissensrealität in Afrika pflegen. Das Wissen, dem die afrikanische Originalität zugutekommt, lässt sich durch einen offenen Dialog zwischen urbanen Forschern und ruralen Akteuren konsolidieren, die eine direkte Verbindung zur Außenstelle der afrikanischen Gnosis in Bezug auf Politik, Recht, Ethik, Pharmakognosie, Gesundheitswesen, Wirtschaft und Umwelt haben.

Schlüsselwörter

Wissen, Macht, offener Dialog, afrikanische Renaissance, Yoruba

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Savoir, matrice du pouvoir et vision de la renaissance africaine

Résumé

La mission des chercheurs africains issus des milieux urbains pour développer le savoir dans les zones de l'Afrique rurale se confronte à deux défis significatifs : la prédominance des mythes et « l'être comme force » au sein du réseau africain de la gnose, et l'attitude méprisante des chercheurs issus des milieux urbains envers les systèmes de connaissances indigènes (IKS). Cette approche est le résultat d'efforts coloniaux pour sauvegarder l'hégémonie épistémique et le néocolonialisme par le biais d'un assujettissement des Africains qui va à l'encontre d'un éventuel système de connaissances africain. L'idée fixe qui porte sur les mythes et sur la force des acteurs issus du milieu rural, mais également sur celle du système de connaissances académique constituée, des deux côtés, des structures de pouvoir qui ont pour effet d'étouffer les tentatives accumulées pour comprendre l'Afrique de l'intérieur. Ce travail, en s'orientant vers le savoir de la communauté Yoruba, applique une approche de reconstruction en proposant deux voies qui mènent à un développement solide de la base du savoir africain. La première voie discute le fait que les acteurs ruraux qui contribuent au développement du savoir africain doivent éclaircir la situation là où il est nécessaire de le faire. La seconde voie se penche sur l'urgence pour parvenir à une complète décolonisation. Alors que la première voie conçoit l'évolution du rural à partir des mythes et se dirige vers la formation d'un système épistémique libéral, la se-

conde voie souhaite se débarrasser de l'incrédulité et du mépris des chercheurs urbains envers la réalité du savoir en Afrique. Le savoir qui tire ses avantages de l'originalité africaine peut se consolider par le biais d'un dialogue ouvert entre les chercheurs urbains et les acteurs ruraux qui ont un lien direct avec la gnose africaine établie eu égard à la politique, au droit, à l'éthique, à la pharmacognosie, à la santé, à l'économie et à l'environnement.

Mots-clés

savoir, pouvoir, dialogue ouvert, renaissance africaine, Yoruba