

Research article

# Harnessing African Indigenous Knowledge Systems for Knowledge Production: A Redefinition of a Culture-Centric Epistemology

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**Abstract:** Evolving an appropriate theoretical model which has the capability of exploiting the wealth in African indigenous culture-centric knowledge systems towards knowledge production is the great challenge that prompted this research. The aim of this study therefore is to re-examine the definition of culture in order to provide the interpretative criteria for understanding the foundational role African cultures play in the determination of the nature, scope and sources of Knowledge Africans appreciate and pursue, which are exploitable for effective knowledge production. This research identifies the indigenous values which yield pertinent knowledge that has historically kept Africa stable prior to the advent of slave trade, colonization and even in the face of today's globalist agendas hence, the author projects the same for universal beneficence. However, this paper observes that the habitual reliance on Western interpretations of African realities is a gap created by Africans themselves by their over dependence on foreign epistemological structures with its strictures. The study in conclusion, suggests that Africa re-interprets her reality through a re-reading of her history, ideologies and the subsequent application of her knowledge systems through the lenses of her cultural uniqueness. The study adopts the content analysis and hermeneutical methods of enquiry.

**Keywords:** harnessing, indigenous knowledge, knowledge production, epistemology, culture

## 1. Introduction

Despite the dexterity and energies expended by the debates of trans-modernism and afro-constructivism schools in African philosophy including the romanticizing labours of afrocentrists and ethnocentrists, there is still a yawning gap of knowledge production, dissemination and appropriation in Africa. The consequence is the overdependence on foreign epistemologies that continue to define African realities according to their own logic. The instances of this dependence include: the prevalent theories, paradigms and methods whereby knowledge is sought and practiced in the social sciences, and the types of literature and scholarship found in various disciplines today (Okpanachi, 2014). Apparently, the foregoing is the reason the West has continued dictating the tunes Africa dances to politically, economically and even the direction of our research and ideological orientations. This regrettable fate historically undermines all facets of life in Africa. In any case, this paper does not intend to re-echo the litanies of African woes. It neither does not pretend to trade blames over the spilt milk of the backlashes of slavery, colonization, the incalculable evils of forced acculturation or even the present days' politico-economic cum cultural globalization championed by the hegemonic West nor does it intend to promote some pernicious patterns of primordialism and ethnocentrism. Instead, this research, aims at harnessing African Indigenous Knowledge Systems (AIKS) for the purpose of its integration into African knowledge production projects and through a re-definition of our conception of culture in Africa's culture-centric epistemology. It could be recalled that the past projections of this culture-centric epistemology have made higher education in Africa seem too academic, distant and irrelevant to development alternatives within local African communities. In a bid to upturn this regrettable trend, this research seeks to provide the interpretative criteria for apprehending the foundational role a re-examined concept of culture can play in projecting the significance and wealth in African Indigenous Knowledge System.

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African Indigenous Knowledge Systems (AIKS) as presently used in the context of this paper, encompass the various forms of knowledge, belief systems and practices which are founded on traditions, customs, cultures and spirituality of African communities. These systems are integral to the socio-economic, political and ecological fabric of African societies. However, there is a controversy surrounding what constitutes this indigenous knowledge in Africa. “Western worldview of knowledge has since its introduction in Africa and other non-African societies lacked the understanding of the holistic nature and approach of non-western ways of knowing and knowledge productions (Chavhunduka & Desderio, 2005). This misconception of African Indigenous Knowledge (as consisting in mere rituals and an endless circular practice devoid of definitive theories and any meaningful relevance) smacks of intellectual arrogance. Unfortunately, such arrogance will remain with us until Africans undertake an endogenous introspection that ceases her intellectual self-derision and helpless, wholesome and uncritical overdependence on foreign epistemologies that operate with logic of divisiveness, segmentations, categorizations and denigration of any value foreign to her. The science inspired by such epistemology has tended to celebrate dichotomies, dualisms, analogies, dismissing anything that does not make sense in their Cartesian or behaviourist terms, confining to religion and metaphysics what it cannot explain by disqualifying as nonscientific more inclusive epistemologies. Evidently, what is needed in the words of Okpanachi (2014), is to pursue a rededicated effort at creating epistemologies (knowledge), programmes and policies that are African context/reality relevant if Africa is to be relevant in the global scheme of things.

This paper is therefore an attempt in that direction hence, the research first examines the tapestry of culture and value as treasure chests for African Indigenous Knowledge system. The study furthers to explore African cognitive worldviews in order to establish what represents meaning making in-contradistinction to the Westerners’ epistemic and logical strictures. The research however proceeds to consider the nature, scope and subsequently, methods of indigenous knowledge acquisition and transmission in Africa. These penultimate segments serve as precursors to the re-examination of our culture conception thesis, which is the instrument this research employs to drive its recommendation of meaningful knowledge production that would be of universal beneficence.

## 2. Materials and Method

This study is a qualitative research which employs the hermeneutical and content analysis methods of enquiry within which the researcher consulted Textbooks, Commentaries and Journal Articles dealing respectively on African Traditional Indigenous Cultural Systems and Knowledge production. While the hermeneutical enables the researcher to analyse the meanings of our keywords, the content analysis method aided the explorative task involved in our re-examination and re-definition of the concept of culture and its’ implications for knowledge production purpose.

## 3. Results and Discussion

### 3.1 Culture and Value Tapestry as Treasure chests for African Indigenous Knowledge System (AKS)

The diversity displayed by African indigenous knowledge system reflects the differences in the cultures of communities in Africa. The uniqueness of these communities is found in their various values, practices, beliefs and general worldviews. This ranges from their medicinal knowledge of their traditional healers, their agronomic practices, ontology, economy, and their social organisation. The foregoing encompasses a wide range of domains that witness to how well or otherwise they have adapted to their immediate environments in other words, their general civilization. In spite of their many cultural divergences, Africans have shared principles and a great measure of interconnectedness as could be seen in the commonalities also noticed among African cultures. Some of these cultural commonalities include but are not limited to wholesome human relations, respect for elders, community fellow-feeling as reflected in their communal land tenure and ownership systems; their live and let live philosophy; their metaphysics of man, good sense of hospitality and brotherhood (Onwubiko & Okere, 1988).

According to Onwubiko and Okere (1988), these cultural expressions are founded on the shared values which range from the highly treasured sense of community life (communality), good human relations, sense of sacredness of life and of hospitality; sense of



the sacred and of religion, sense of time, sense of respect for authority and the elders to the sense of language and proverbs as cohesive of the community based on the truth. Given the forgoing, African cultures seem to have represented a coherent anatomy of standards and beliefs and a solid community body (Taiwo, 1971). But all that seems to be fading away but these have been the traditional indigenous culture proclivities that held sway and stabilized the African nation prior to the advent of slavery, colonization and globalization. These factors regrettably tear Africans between two worlds and end up isolating them from both. A situation in which these supersonic social changes occasioned by foreign accretions brought in its trail, a corresponding moral laxity, capitalistic, selfishness, mutual suspicion, tension, political recklessness, social decadence and unbridled violence and wars, in fact, it brought an upturned world which leaves Africans in a confused state of *aporia* created by the cultures of the West, which in African perceptive have only succeeded in normalizing the anomaly.

While this paper regrets the devastating disservices of forced acculturation, and the destruction of African humanistic system by massive influx of the Western sciento-technological ideologies, it nevertheless blames Africans for spending years to mourn a romanticized past but more, for letting go almost all indigenous values in an unquestioning embrace of anything foreign. The cases of the Chinese and Indians, who though colonized, tenaciously held to their value point to a lost opportunity Africa imposed on itself by its total embrace of foreign epistemologies which they fail to realize its full imports. In consequence, the African of today is no more their brothers' keepers. He lives in a world of luxury and plenty but endures abject poverty. Armed with the western sciento-technological mindset, he moves like a caterpillar devouring his cherished values, living inauthentic individualistic life and squandering foods his brothers need yet priding himself as sufficiently lettered civilized and modernized. Ihuah (2012) has it that the atomistic western techno-scientific culture with its reductionist view of reality encourages collective selfishness, class divides and reduces a segment of humanity to the culture of the ghetto with the attendant vulnerability to diseases, drug abuse and innumerable social vices and insanity of sorts. Truly, "this Western techno-scientific culture and civilization has led Africans to an improved means to an unimproved end" (Ihuah, 2012). We will now detour to examine the difference in meaning making, cognition and worldview of Africans with the westerners.

### *3.2 African Cognitive Worldview and Meaning-making vis a vis The West's Logical Structures*

To say that Western cultural epistemologies as canvassed by missionaries and colonizers were almost incomprehensible to the Africans is an understatement. Metu and Ojoade (1999) enthuse that Traditional African theory of knowledge conceives knowledge in terms of wisdom and insight into various individual and social problems. This is consequent upon the belief in practical utility of knowledge rather than knowledge for its own sake. Being knowledgeable the Igbo indigenous way, meant becoming sufficiently indoctrinated into the forms of Igbo knowledge system as Omenala encapsulates it (Ihejirika et al., 2023). By Omenala, the Africa Igbo means, the customs upheld in the land and these apply to any aspect of social and ritual life of their various communities. In Omenala (which is the charter of dos and don'ts and the values Igbo culture projects), is the realization of the culture and civilizations of the African Igbo hence, whatsoever practice that is not in concord with Omenala constitutes an affront to indigenous cultures (Ihejirika et al., 2023). According to Nwala (1985), this is the reason Omenala represents the body of law moral, etiquette along with their metaphysical foundations. By reason of their failure to understand the, Igbo culture in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, the missionaries and colonizers were considered ignorant and this had dire consequences (Ezuma, 1989). "The Whitemen had brought a government, built a court, where the District commissioner judged cases in ignoramus. The courts messengers were foreigners, arrogant and high handed hence, the Africans stood by and watched the Whiteman's court award a person's land to a wrongman" (Achebe, 1980). This miscarriage of justice was one aspect of the Whiteman's advent into indigenous African Igbo land that angered the indigenous Africans hence, the author of the Novel accuses them of putting a knife in the things that held Africans together thus causing Africans to fall apart.

In this Indigenous African setting, the possession of critical judgement which consists in a secure sense of discerning intelligence, accurate assessment of a people and situations, a good sense of communalism, not excluding a good understanding of Igbo ontology and values as couched in indigenous cultures are glaring evidences of possession of knowledge (Ihejirika et al., 2023). When the foregoing is compared with the techno-scientific culture of the West, certain peculiarities come to the fore. These unique elements define both cultures

marking out their differences.

The Western conception of knowledge has truth, certainty as necessary condition for knowledge. At some other times, when belief in this system is founded on conclusive evidence, it gets justified and is considered as knowledge just like a sufficiently corroborated hypothesis turns into a theory having gained verisimilitude (Ihejirika, 2021). Now the perspectival differences between the foregoing Western epistemic system with that of indigenous African lies in its overemphasis on the justification, methodology and evaluation premise (Masaiti & Ndonyo, 2021).

For the Africans, any culturally destabilizing epistemology is considered abominable. The African identifies himself with the object, sympathizes with it and even dies as herself in order to be reborn to the other. His sense of community overrides his individual interest, the indigenous Africa thinker does not realize that he thinks, he feels that he feels, he feels his existence, he feels the other, he is drawn towards the other to be reborn in knowledge of the world” (Kaya & Seleti, 2013). Thus, for him, the act of knowledge is an agreement of conciliation with the world. It is an act of the simultaneous consciousness and creation of the world in its indivisible unity (Ihejirika, 2021). This wholistic African cultural worldview humanizes western epistemology and saves her from the scandal of metaphysics (Ijioma, 1996). When justification, methodology and evaluation are emphasized at the detriment of the realization that it is actually the nature of an object that determines its justification, we miss the point. African cultural knowledge demands erudition in the people’s ontology and does not exclude appreciation of a foreign worldview that does not deny her unique African identity. Knowledge among Africans, therefore, consists in a disposition that is behaviourally demonstrable in such a way that favours human welfare and aids in fashioning solutions to problems of man in his cultural environment. This is reason why the individual in African gets fulfilled in an organic complementary arrangement, where an individual’s wisdom must dovetail to problem solving within the community before it is recognised. The knowledgeable is not therefore the one variously certified in different discipline but one, who understands his culture and ably fuses same with techno-scientific knowledge in an application that solves problems identifiable within the same culture and even in the entire universal human society.

However, recent knowledge production activities unveil the fact that today’s cross hybridization of cultures via information technology challenges cultural epistemologies thereby questioning the projection of any culturally distinctive epistemology, which lacks universality.

Howbeit, it remains a truism that the cultural peculiarities of any people give them their distinct identities. It is therefore inappropriate, misleading and a mismatch of categories to subject African indigenous cultures to modern Western criteriology which regards folklores, myths and whatever does not appeal to Cartesianism as logically bankrupt, pre-scientific, barbaric and anachronistic. Bundling whatever does not yield to Western criteriology to metaphysics and religion is a skewed justificatory action which showcases the highest level of epistemic naivety. Such pejorative categorizations drive forced acculturation which is the process by which dominant hegemonic Western cultures completely undermine non-western cultures and belief systems.

In summation, African cultures necessarily require a different logic, which is comparatively less stringent and argumentative than those of natural sciences and western epistemologies. Such logic needs to recognize diversity in cultures including the polysemy of linguistic expressions. Only such culture-centric epistemology can resolve western designative tendencies towards African cultures.

### *3.3 Nature and Scope of Knowledge transmission in Indigenous Africa*

The embeddedness of African indigenous knowledge system in local cultures and its’ holistic encompassing of the physical, social and spiritual aspects of life shows that knowledge in Africa is naturally context and environmentally based. Consequently, knowledge in this indigenous setting, emphasizes the interconnection of all phenomena. This comprises of practical techniques, profound philosophical insights that promote harmony, reciprocity and the well-being of the African community. However, Uduigwomen (1995), this ontological setting of African mode of knowing blurs the lines of any distinction between the epistemic subject and object. Africans cannot conceive of the world in isolation of the self or ego nor can they separate mind from matter rather, knowledge, in this traditional context involves the entirety of man’s faculties which are brought to bear on the object of experience. This co-operation of all human faculties and experiences gives birth to knowledge. Conversely put,

the African who is in need of achieving knowledge instead employs the aid of concepts by inspection, intuition and imagination. He is domiciled in a cultural environment enriched by great art, synthesis and continuum in which he receives vital experience, feels, imagines and sympathizes with that environment. The African within this cultural enclave, sees, feels, imagines, reasons, thinks and intuits all at the same time. His trustworthy knowledge is a function of his intuition and personal experience informed by the culture of the community, where he lives, interacts with others, feeds and procreates. No strict lines are therefore drawn (except through the guidance of culture) for the realization of trustworthy knowledge. When actions are in tandem with the community's well-being and the cultural values, man consequent upon his existing in a spacio-temporal arrangement and by his position at the centre of the world, he arrives at knowledge of reality by mere holistic grasping of the complex vital experience. His approach to knowing through his cultural worldview renders ridiculous the question whether man is mind or matter (Uduigwomen, 1995).

In any case, it is pertinent to note that African indigenous knowledge is and often derive from multi-disciplinary and trans-disciplinary, routes hence, archeology; agronomy; history; philosophy; the arts; languages; sciences; religion; technology; mathematics; music; geography; sociology; literature; biology; agronomy, engineering; wisdom of the elders/traditional rulers; land use system; traditional governance; proverbs; folktales; myths; experience; observation; supernaturalism; calendar and concept of time; witchcraft theories and African metaphysics all represent possible sources of Indigenous African Knowledge system. Howbeit, Acheampong & Gordon (2015), say that the transformation of knowledge into social action for the greater good is the very consummation of the indigenous knowledge production in Africa.

The transmission of knowledge in traditional indigenous African is chiefly undertaken through the means of oral tradition. The cultural values in this indigenous setting are passed down to succeeding generations by way of narrativity, assumes the forms of retelling of myths, legends, folklores, pithy sayings, riddles and adages. From the elders (who are considered as repositories of this knowledge system) to younger generation. In this closely knit communities, elders gather the young and indoctrinate them into their culture by storytelling, proverbs sharing and explanations, ritual dances and initiatory and coming of age ceremonies. In the later cases, the young learn through observations and participation in cultural practices of their community. This is part of the reason Africans revere their aged, who only ranks next to ancestors in wisdom. In Achebe's *Arrow of God*, the chief priest confided in the son that a man does not speak a lie to his son. Remember that always, to say my father told me is to swear the greatest oath (Achebe, 1964). The premium placed on this truth of oral tradition in African society is overbearing. A society where oral tradition remained for centuries, the main if not the only source of knowledge of the past, necessarily passes family history including accounts of ownership of land truthfully from father to son as only fathers who excel in lived wisdom of the community are considered erudite and wise.

Howbeit, the weakness of memory of the elderly could not have left these oral histories undistorted because of the passage of time. Again, the histories of land ownership, their original descent as a people must have stretched further than any elder could comprehensively recall.

Besides, by the fact that different fathers told their children different versions according to the recalling abilities of their memories meant that certainty in these versions were evidently lacking. Hence, citizens of such indigenous society were at liberty in holding conflicting viewpoints occasioned by the weaknesses of oral tradition. Yet, comforting enough is the fact that the body of the elders led by the Chief Priest of the coming constituted the judiciary, which weighs the different versions of oral traditions and decides on that which is considered as true after the republican and democratic nature of the African Igbo, which allows all to air their views before a wise decision is reached.

In Elechi Amadi's *The Great Ponds*, we also find an element of supernaturalism in the dispensation of justice. This factor of Divine justice becomes relevant should the elders fail to reach a reasonable consensus regarding any matter. Hence, in the case of the ownership of Wagaba pound (Nnolim, 2009), which defied the ability of the judgement of the 7 kings of Erekwu land retributive justice was therefore served by Ogunabali, who sent Wang-small pox which visited the Aliakoro/Asiali people with punishment over their kidnap of Chiolu women and the rape of Chisa one of their war captives. Also, the Rikwo people, who bought Chiolu women as slaves. For all these atrocious acts, Wang, the deadly disease was visited on all the

offending lands. Similarly, in *The Concubine*, Elechi Amadi showcases this note of Divine justice by affirming that it is impossible for the wicked to go unpunished since the ever-watchful gods of retribution, Ofo and Ogu always ensured that justice is served (Udoidem, 2012). In all, whatsoever knowledge the gods are incapable of providing remains unknown in African just the same way the absence of mnemonic devices in oral tradition leads men into forgetfulness thereby turning facts into fantasies. By so doing, such knowledge is lost without any hope of their retrieval. We can say that oral tradition as a vehicle of knowledge transmission suffers incurable disease of forgetfulness in the societies that have them as their Hobson's choice for knowledge transmission.

### *3.4 Some Sources and Methods of Indigenous Knowledge Acquisition in Africa*

The questions that need to be resolved here include the following: (1) What constitutes the wellspring through which Africans derive their knowledge in the traditional indigenous setting? And (2) How do they go about the cognitive challenge of arriving at such knowledge from the identified sources? An attempt to proffer an answer to the former question leads us to acknowledge that there is no definitively defined uniformity regarding the sources of knowledge among the different indigenous people of Africa.

However, this study rather discusses the sources of knowledge that command majoritarian recognition in Africa. These include but are not limited to: Anamnesis/Reincarnation; Supernatural Revelations/ Divination; Extra Sensory Perception (ESP); Longevity; Rituals, Songs, Dances and Proverbs; Moonlight stories, Myths and legends and signs/symbols. A brief discussion of each of these identified sources will further clarify what makes up the sources Africans in their traditional indigenous setting arrive at knowledge.

#### *3.4.1 Anamnesis/Reincarnation*

The Africans' strong belief in reincarnation informs this source of knowledge. A reincarnated person is believed to be capable of experiences of his or her former existence. This is identified as an idea of innatism, the type Hindus' doctrine of Samsara upholds. The remembrance from previous existence due to its unverifiability is philosophically dubitable to the West but so authentic to the African who has the experience (Ihejirika & Edodi, 2005). A case where a young person is able to recall historical facts and names of dead ancestors remains an unresolved mystery. It is believed that those who led holy and righteous lives in strict obedience to their customs become spirits so close to the gods who communicate with them on matters of administration of human welfare.

#### *3.4.2 Supernatural Revelation/Divination*

The gods are the custodians of all knowledge and truth in African hence, the belief that when the ways of a man is pleasing to the gods, they reveal a whole lot of truth - bearing information to man. It is in this regard that the deceased musicians: Chief Osita Osadebe and Oliver dé Coque could respectively claim that *Muomiriziri m egwu* (Igbo words meaning the river goddess taught me to sing) and *Egwuomasinanmiri* (another Igbo words meaning good music is from the river). Besides, there is also this widespread belief in supernaturalism in its form of divination among Africans. This dependence on getting information from discarnated spirits through Ouja boards, etc. is so overwhelming in Africa such that even converts of Christianity and Islam secretly fall back on divination, when indeterminate situations defy their abilities and understanding.

#### *3.4.3 Extra Sensory Perception (ESP)*

Clairvoyance, telepathy hold sway among Africans. Many research carried out on this often prove that this secret source of knowing seems to be a reliable source of knowledge among indigenous Africans. These are knowledge gained without a medium.

#### *3.4.4 Longevity*

Africans relate old age to exposure and accumulation of time-honoured experience hence, the saying that "old brooms know the corners of the house". However, not every grey hair is counted wise. Among the Igbos of Nigeria, an aged fool is called *Efulufu* or *OkenyeIberibe* (which means a stupid old man/fool). Conversely, the young who washes his or her hands clean, walks circumspectly and behaves well dines with the elders. Hence, the chieftaincy title among the Igbo's *Nwatakwochaka* (meaning a child who washes his/her hand clean). This title is given to the young who distinguishes themselves in pertinent understanding of his /her peoples' culture and the virtues and values it embeds.

#### *3.4.5 Rituals, Songs, Dances and Proverbs*

Among the Africans, the re-enactment of rituals is meant to be didactic. Also woven into songs, dances, proverbs and pithy sayings are tribal wisdom of the indigenous Africans, which the young must by socialization come to terms with in order to be responsible citizens of the African traditional indigenous society.

#### *3.4.6 A Moonlight Stories, Myths, Legends*

The aforementioned sources fall under oral traditions. The true wisdom of this traditional society is embodied in these stories and its related sources. Informal education of the child is conducted by the parents using these as tools that teach the African child the dos and don'ts of his society, this type of folk education engrains a good sense of morality into the child and this is enriched by the retelling of these myths, legends and stories.

#### *3.4.7 Signs/Symbols*

Several signs hold meanings deeper than mere superstition among indigenous African communities. For instance, it is believed that certain signs like the shaking of one's palms or fingers are always a precursor to an imminent occurrence which may entail much expenses. Similarly, the shaking of one's left thumb is also seen as a bad omen. At other times, the sudden appearance of certain totem animals in unusual places such as seeing the green snake in a closed pot is indicative of the displeasure of the earth goddess. While a foreigner to this custom may think that such belief is akin to those of the early mythic and pre-scientific period of philosophy, the indigenous Africans know what will befall him/her should certain appeasement not follow such signs in order to avert the imminent calamity.

It is interesting to remark here that all the sources of indigenous knowing system discussed above are simply the customs of the people. These customs form part of African culture but does not represent the entire cultures of all indigenous Africans as would be seen in the section that re-examines our conception of culture

Howbeit, to answer the second question posed at the beginning of this sub-section, which has to do with how Africans come to knowledge, we must as a matter of necessity point out that Africans learn perceptually, (by this, is meant knowledge gained by observation throughout senses). We learn, inferentially (from conclusions arrived at through reasoning). Africans more importantly learn wholistically. Here, there is a unity of experience where there is no gap between the subject and object (Ihejirika & Edodi, 2005). This is described as a felt totality, where a life-force is an active participant (not a passive spectator of the West). Hence, the African operates in Anyanwu & Ruch's (1981), parlance with the logic of aesthetics, which holds that the whole is real. With this logic, he arrives at knowledge.

Additionally, African Epistemology is also discernible from mystical knowledge, the interplay of premonitive and ontological knowledge sign knowledge from signs as previously discussed combines with the right understanding of the balance of life forces where God is at the top of the hierarchy before the deities, ancestors and elders follow in that top to bottom order (Uduigwomen, 1995). There is no need re-emphasizing the fact that as we previously identified that African's cultural continuity is propelled by the wheels of oral tradition, therefore any discussion of how Africans gain insights into realities in their traditional indigenous setting must make reference to it.

Be that as it may, we observe from our discourse thus far, that knowledge in African is a function of a wholistic co-operation of all faculties of man and the totality of his supernatural and natural experiences not excluding his rationality as informed by his culture-centric indigenous setting. If culture has such an overwhelming hold on Africans, it therefore qualifies to receive our special attention hence, this study takes up the challenge of rethinking culture in African context. This is hoped to bring about a more progressive paradigmatic shift that cures African culture-centric epistemology from both the anachronism of ethno-philosophy and the pride philosophic sagacity, a product of the orientation by the West.

## **4. A Re-definition of the Concept of Culture as a Precursor to Enhanced Knowledge Production in Africa**

The question of what constitutes the root of African cultural identity as couched in the behavioural patterns of African people and their many symbolismisms is one which when successfully answered, will occasion the emergence of a re-defined and easily comprehensible African personality. Granted that every society has its own cherished culture and values, what significant distinction makes the African think that his society has a superior culture that was

devastated by the coming of foreigners into their soil? Centuries of lamentations have been spent bemoaning and regretting what NgugiWaThiongo cited in Ihua (2012), describes as a cultural bomb. The cultural bomb, he explains, has the effect of annihilating peoples' belief in their cultural heritage and in themselves. For him, it is the cultural bomb that annihilates a person from belief in their names, language, heritages and their unity, denying them self-confidence and an independent thought process. As Efemini (2002) observes, the West has fanned their notion of development and it has enabled them to canvass western values and experience as being coeval with development. Ihejirika observes "that in today's Africa to be scientifically aware has come to mean the rejection of our cultural and ethical values and their replacement with western exhibition in dressing codes, Christianity and Islam in religion, capitalism in economy, pop and rap in entertainment" (Ihejirika, 2013). The writings go on and on and my question is, till when? This tenacious nostalgic remembrance of the pre-colonial ways of living of indigenous Africans seems to have created a heaven out of a past where human sacrifice was rife and crude ways of life was the order of the day. This research conceives such inclinations as akin to the infantile behaviours of a newly weaned baby and attributes it to a sense of lazy romanticization of ethnocentrism in that is so backward looking that the more sophisticated man of 21st century cannot help jettisoning in order to relevantly live in a world already turned a global hamlet by information technology.

This research maintains that Africans glorification of a false conception of culture is chiefly responsible for his retrogressive ideologies. If our forefathers were the champions of the old order, why did the West defeat them with their highly efficient armaments, skills and an epistemology that denigrate anything foreign? Suffice it then that we ought to confidently face our fears, confronting them head on with a rational solidarity that seeks to unveil both the rhetoric of the West and the internal perception altering drug called our idea of old culture is necessary at this point. It was Machiavelli, who observed that nothing is more difficult to carry out, more doubtful of success, nor more dangerous to handle than the imitation of new order of things. This is because the former has enemies in all those that profit from the old order and only lukewarm defenders in all those who could potentially gain from the new order (Utomi, 2011).

Before now, at the mention of the word culture, the African readily reminisces about ritual dances, festivities and communal lifestyles of their past. Granted that African values were intact and held the society in closely-knit ties in which palpable safety and social cohesion held sway, yet, it was not the best possible world. This researcher dare say this cognizant of the ease to life the services of techno-scientific adventure has brought, thus, far and not overlooking its many shortcomings too, which apparently, tempts many an African to think that the best is in the past and the past is the era of African indigenous culture. The question arises: what then has been our definition of culture in the traditional setting? Understood properly as the totality of a people's worldview, practices and actions, ways of life with which their society is ordered not excluding the norms, laws, culture. This has always been considered (in the African context) as a reference to the customs of the land hence, on cultural days, we see even students in higher institutions of learning running back to their villages to bring their masquerades and ritual dancers to the school environment. For these ones, they are celebrating their culture. You need to see their awkward dressing, a typology of what Nollywood movies and Ghallywood project as the African past yet, these so-called ordering practices belong to the ways we lived, which have no relevance to how society is ordered today. What social control can masquerade societies bring about today? If the truth is to be told, some of them are functioning as the direct opposite of what they used to do in the past.

Udoidem (2014), observes that this is because the notion of culture circumferences around the irrelevant, static and non-function past, whereas it is in the way we presently do our things, the way our lived life is ordered today that is culture. "A redefinition of culture entails our abandonment of this misconstrued celebration of the past as opposed to a lived way of life" (Udoidem, 2014). Culture in the context of this paper therefore becomes the complex, multi-faceted concept that consists in our present social, historical and psychological ways of living. It embeds our current shared beliefs, values, norms, behaviours, customs, traditions and language, songs, dances, food, science and technology. In other words, it is the way we live today and not the way life was lived in the past. This understanding of culture recognizes the dynamism of man and life thereby bringing out the relevance and currency of culture. For instance, the use of cell phones, ear phones, including the embrace of the merits of science and technology and rejection of any epistemic element that retards our progress in knowledge production, problem-solving and total development are all part of



the culture we seek today. Besides, being a product of nature and nurture, culture, therefore derives from a peoples' fundamental principles and values for understanding their contexts. It has its theoretical imports by its ability to direct our perceptions and thinking. Similarly, its practical imports lie in its dictating the tune we dance to on daily basis in our day-to-day activities (Udoidem, 2014).

With this re-defined concept of culture, Africans can now better able shape our individual and collective identity since it makes provision for individuals' and groups to interpret and understand their place in their society. It challenges us to hold firm to the norms and values that will enhance social integrations rather than banish us from the rest of the world dumping us in the dust bin of time as the remote village of the world. While being mindful of our African identity, this new conception of culture creates in the African the cultural diversity consciousness which challenges ethnocentric prejudices and biases while broadening our epistemic horizons in readiness for effective knowledge production. A skewed perception of the meaning of culture will only leave us cap in hand to the rest of the world as the wretched of the earth while Africa, as even acknowledged by the West is the most naturally endowed of all continents.

## 5. Pathways to the universal beneficence of African Indigenous Culture-Centric knowledge System

Articulating the way forward for the employment of African culture-centric epistemology towards knowledge production is a task that must be done. This challenge heavily relies on the strength and capabilities of higher institutions within Africa. It is high time Africa looked inward for focused and coordinated formulae that will bridge the knowledge production gap as well as aid our decolonizing our development projects. This knowledge gap multiplies the existing inequalities between Africa and the rest of the world. It impedes progress, stalls and dwarfs' techno-scientific development and perpetuates the cycle of dependence on external knowledge sources. This attitude thereby stifles local innovation and emasculates African scholars from harnessing their own intellectual resources. Bridging the knowledge production gap therefore requires a pragmatic and action-oriented approach, which first identifies the challenges to knowledge production in Africa and subsequently, addresses them by articulating solution armed with our redefined concept of culture. In this direction therefore, the following are found by the researcher as consisting major affronts to African knowledge production projects. These are namely:

### *5.1 The Challenges of Globalization, Urbanization, Cultural Assimilation, Banking System of Education and Religion*

These are instruments as (previously noted), that the hegemonic West daily employs to continually keep Africa dependent on them for almost everything. The World Bank and International Monetary Fund are their economic institutions that spread neo-colonization ideologies and perpetually keep African going cap-in-hand to them. Politically, the rhetoric of democracy and recently, modernism which has assumed the form of westernization in full gear are their ideological springboards infecting Africans with bias that cost them their personal identity and self-confidence. If for years, you tell a child that he is just worthless and good for nothing, his tendencies of internalizing such inferiority complex will approximate to a hundred percent. Yet, the worry continues. Why must Africa allow itself to be that newly weaned child that clamours for the mother's breast milk in order to live? Is it that Africans are not rational enough as the West would have us believe or is there something ontologically wrong with Africa? These are akin to the concerns that had Chinua Achebe describes Africa as a country that suffers from a 'cargo-cult' mentality.

At this juncture, this paper blames Africa for allowing herself to be repeatedly raped and used. A look at Africans' derision of their indigenous values, adoption of near meaningless foreign names and labeling of our languages are mere vernaculars and dialects while French, English and Portuguese just to mention a few, are considered as languages and even given recognition as a lingua franca in some African countries. It should be noted that our identities, histories, worldviews are couched in our languages, which are part of our culture. Any denigration in this direction, is the denigration of our cooperate identity. Therefore, the failure to articulate or adopt an African language or the failure to promote our local languages (in which we think, reason, discern and judge reality and the failure to divest ourselves of these borrowed foreign robes) leave us as perpetual servile servants to the rest of the world. In

Nigeria for instance, this problem surfaces as the problem of language barrier, which arose after the amalgamation of the Southern and Northern protectorates by the British colonial governor, Lord Lugard Frederick, who in 1914 bundled together in a single country, 625 different linguistic groups<sup>38</sup>. Up till date our terminology developers and linguists are yet to be able give us a lingua franca using any of our local languages of African or Nigeria origin. Rather, we still regrettably conceive a foreign language, as the measure and criterion of intelligence and rationality in our educational system. Is it not shameful that this promotion of foreign languages gradually occasion the demise of our local languages alongside the values they embed?

Besides, imbalances in the policies made and pursued by African governments and her leaders, which cart away every African wealth both material and ideological to foreign lands is another factor which alongside imbalances in the research direction of African scholars promote West worldviews to the detriment of Africa. These factors terminate in the internalization of an infectious inferiority complex among Africans. This ugly development gets glaringly manifested in the lack of endogenous epistemic liberty novelties hence, most of the philosophy departments in Nigeria encourage a very negligible number of projects, thesis and dissertations, which focus on African science, African epistemology, African culture. This factor tells the entire tale of value misplacement. What then is the way out of this politico-economic ideological quagmire?

This research armed with our new understanding of Africa culture-centric epistemology, considers decolonizing our knowledge systems, right understanding of our African cultural specificity and adoption of the wholistic worldview of our African indigenous knowledge system (AIKS) and a collaborative approach to knowledge production as the panacea needed for effective knowledge production system that fills the lacunae created by the gap in knowledge production. A brief discussion on the above identified pathways to knowledge production will now be undertaken before, a further submission of our findings and conclusion.

#### *5.2 Decolonizing Knowledge Production:*

The African culture-centric epistemology challenges the colonial structures and frameworks that dominate mainstream knowledge production. By integrating techno-scientificism with local wisdom embedded in our values and mores in a forward looking and dynamic stance towards her development, Africa produces an alternative perspective that plays down and dismantles hierarchies within knowledge systems while enhancing the decolonization of knowledge production. Although the reality of brain-drain, brought about by the emigration of highly skilled scholars and African professionals in search of greener pastures and opportunities in foreign lands, yet, the available ones through their research into African realities have proved that African epistemology makes allowance for the new horizons by granting recognition to domesticated knowledge, which has been devalued over the years. African values have the potentials of universal beneficence when fused with the advantages of the worldviews of science and technology.

#### *5.3 Promotion of African Cultural Specificity*

The awareness that in African cultures resides the entirety of their religious, economic and political worldviews shows that there is blurring of classes in Africa. This gives Africa an entirely unique cultural identity since her their culture vestiges, folklores, myths, dances, pithy sayings, defy western logic and rationalism. It is therefore inappropriate and a mismatch of categories to subject such African cultures (Which is characterized by a wholistic understanding of all realities), to the modern western criteriology of Carterianism and her dichotomizing logic. African cultures require a logic which is less stringent and argumentative than those of science and technology. The African herself should be conscious of the specificity of this culture-centric worldview and should realize that this uniqueness in African indigenous knowledge system (AIKS) bestows on his personality, (not as a less rational being but as one that has a descent that expresses itself in a polysemy of linguistic expression and recognizes diversities in cultures. The African must not go about it with peacockish pride but with an open-minded mindset that will enrich what he already has in his culture. This dynamic epistemology is what our present redefinition of culture canvasses.

#### *5.4 Adoption of Collaborative Approach to Knowledge Production*

The culture-centric African indigenous knowledge system must encourage collaborative knowledge production by welcoming the contributions of all disciplines and stakeholders in

the knowledge production process. This is made possible by ensuring that their voices and viewpoints are heard and respected. The referred stakeholders include: presently marginalized local communities considered as minorities, interdisciplinary scholars who through enhanced interaction enables cross disciplinary collaboration and cross breeding of ideas. Africans can harness the knowledge of her local herbalists in medicine, exploit its local talents in arts and crafts, recognize its diverse intellectual endowments by cultivation of a pool of her university experts in all fields, who are already equipped with the know-how to conduct quality research. This arrangement makes provision for them to contribute their insights. When these different groups are allowed to co-intent on African challenges and realities; there will result a co-creation of knowledge in other words, a generation, validation and dissemination of knowledge produced by Africa, for Africa and for universal beneficence. That way, the knowledge production potentials in Africa will get fully unlocked and harnessed such that the knowledge production gap gets bridged. Also, welcoming the advantages of Western alternative epistemologies will help in the boosting of techno-scientific endeavours in Nigeria. It will as well strengthen our higher institutions by its entrepreneurship bent and innovativeness. Such framework of knowledge exchange and collaborations brings multiple perspectives that generate new insights. It encourages cross-cultural dialogue, which is necessary in the making of relevant, and dynamic and balanced worldview that drives innovations without the denigration of any culture.

## 6. Conclusion

In summing up this research, it is expedient that this study unveils the fact that knowledge production pursued philosophically and through the lenses of a culture-centric African epistemology requires the systemic exploration of the fundamental questions about African reality, existence, morality and the nature of knowledge Africans value and pursue. In this research therefore, it is observed that for an effective integration of African indigenous knowledge system for knowledge production, there is need for the interplay of several factors that include: collaboration with other disciplines, recognition of uncertainty and the constant pursuit of intellectual growth, which necessarily demands openness to challenges of one's previous beliefs and the re-thinking of one's perspectives (if need be). That includes, the recognition that knowledge is personal and subject to revision based on new evidences of balanced logical developments. The research also underscores the fact that knowledge production in African indigenous epistemic system does not emphasize mere theoretical abstractions hence, an integration of insights from various disciplines is found to enrich insights and analysis such that a further and better understanding of such complex phenomenon as culture in Africa is achieved. This research exemplifies that commitment to theoretical inquiry has a way of fostering intellectual humility and a rededication to the pursuit of relevant knowledge rather than a tenacious holding of retrogressive concepts, and preconceived notions/biases. Informed by our redefinition of culture and its relatedness to knowledge production in Africa through the indigenous knowledge system, the truth becomes clear that the Western epistemic criteria of literacy as consisting only in formal schooling, respect for colonial authorities and belief in their religion is erroneous. African cultures therefore represent an alternative perspective to understanding African reality and could by extension, be of universal beneficence.

The study concludes by considering our re-definition of the culture project as one that solidly places African culture-centric indigenous knowledge system in a proper position to achieve effective knowledge production that bridges almost all gaps that stifle development. This suggestion, fends off any tincture of primordialism and ethnocentric prejudices while maintaining the unfixed nature of ethnic groups and their cultures due to the dynamism of man and society. This contribution similarly recognizes that every society has values that could be universalized for the multi-cultural enrichment of insights and perspectives. When the multi-culturalist African philosophers must have sieved away the retrogressive elements in culture (African or foreign), what remains will be a synthesis of culture that could be adapted to the specific needs of particular societies. This is different from the cultural globalism approach, which imposes dominant cultures on others in a manner of forced assimilation. Our recommended approach is akin to a philosophical interculturalism idea, which safeguards the integrity and values in our individual cultures while being sensitive to other cultures' progressive and forward-looking values. This is what our present redefinition

of African's culture-centric indigenous knowledge system's conception of culture targets. It is then the position of this paper that this approach places African Indigenous Knowledge System on a better pedestal for more meaningful and relevant knowledge production purposes that will drive African development despite the challenges of all forms of globalization.

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