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African epistemologies and the decolonial curriculum

In this article we argue that a discussion on African epistemologies must precede the quest for both the decolonisation of knowledge and curriculum in Africa. Decolonial thought in Africa is significant because it focuses, among other things, on the decolonisation of Western epistemological supremacy within the space where knowledge is produced and transferred. We contend that knowledge acquired through the process of learning must resonate with people's lived experiences and realities. To meaningfully pursue that involves placing in focus people's modes of thought and epistemic ideas, in the interpretation of their experiences and the realities around them. This article argues that designing a decolonised curriculum that centres unique African intellectual ideas should be informed by the understanding of African epistemologies, whose principle of epistemic validation is grounded on the idea of interconnectedness in African thought. Considering a decolonial curriculum as an attempt in pursuing 'centring' is to align curricula with the modes of knowledge validation in African thought.

Keywords: Curriculum decolonisation, epistemic decolonisation, African epistemology, interconnectedness, African philosophy

Introduction

The aim of this article is to set the epistemological framework for the decolonisation of the curriculum in Africa. The idea of decolonisation entails, among other things, decolonising the institutions of learning, such as the university. While decolonising

the university is not the same as decolonising the curriculum, achieving the latter is part of the former. However, a decolonised university would mean more than curriculum decolonisation. It would include decolonising the teacher–student relationship, university administration and architectural designs, among others, that speaks to the psychology of learning. Also, while a decolonised philosophy curriculum, for instance, may be different from a decolonised psychology curriculum, both subjects could follow the same structure of decolonisation, especially in developing the content of teaching. This paper suggests structure or pattern in order to achieve an African-centred curriculum. Our understanding of a decolonised curriculum in African spaces is a curriculum the knowledge content of which is informed by the African epistemological framework, that is, an African pattern of knowledge validation grounded in the principle of interconnectedness that defines the communitarian traditional African thought. The idea of interconnectedness emphasises the importance and connection of epistemic agents in the process of how a knower’s belief is validated. That is, how facts are certified as reliable. Admitting that the curriculum of different subjects is designed to pass on knowledge of specific forms, the paper shows that, a decolonial African university curriculum may be patterned by the traditional African approach to epistemic claims and modes of thought.

In the first section of the article, we will discuss the rationale for decolonisation in Africa and its institutions of learning. In the second section, we focus attention on the nature of African epistemologies. This is to introduce the project of curriculum decolonisation to the nature of knowledge in African thought, especially, its derivation and validation. In the third section, we discuss the principles of interconnectedness, on which African epistemologies are grounded. This paper contributes to both the project of curriculum decoloniality in Africa and the development of African epistemology.

The quest for curriculum decolonisation in Africa

In this section, we discuss the idea of decolonisation and the justification for the decolonisation of the curriculum in African universities. The idea of decolonisation has become one of the dominant discourses among African intellectuals. In its epistemological agenda, it “seeks to rid of the formerly colonised space of the epistemological effects of colonisation’s frames of understanding and interpreting reality” (Matolino 2020a: 221). It is a rage against what one of the leading decolonial scholars, Ndlovu–Gatsheni, calls the metaphysical empire, which deals with reconfiguring the colonised’s mind and image to the colonisers’ epistemic patterns and image; it entails the destruction of the epistemology of the colonised and the domination of their mind by the colonisers. Though the

metaphysical empire followed the physical empire, it nevertheless outlived it. Decolonisation, in this sense, is the deconstruction and decommissioning of Western-colonial epistemological frameworks, culture, patterns of thought and channels of knowledge acquisition, such as the curriculum (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2018: 98-102).

Given that knowledge is central to what we define as decolonisation, especially curriculum decolonisation, the need is for epistemic decolonisation, that is, the critical interrogation and the dismantling of colonial epistemologies. Deconstruction and centring are two factors in how we approach this issue. The first sets the standard on what the decolonised designate¹ should reject as a people in the process of decolonisation. This has been the major focus in literature on decolonial thought. The second is about bringing their epistemic ideas to the centre of how they interpret and understand themselves (Chilisa 2012: 30). The deconstruction agenda is fulfilled in the success of the centring agenda. One way to know a process of decolonisation is taking place is the degree of internal inputs, internal interpretations, and perspectives of the local environment we have in reacting to a people's lived experience or realities.

Decolonisation, argues Matolino, asserts the right of former victims to be authentically themselves (Matolino 2020a: 215). The dismantling of epistemic claims that aid colonial oppression in Africa and the Western modes of thought that sustained continued coloniality is nothing but the affirmation of the African identity. This is because the success of the decoloniality project is the progress made towards identifying the uniqueness of the formerly colonised, and the recognition of the authenticity of the people and what they have to offer to the global world. In this sense, we can talk about epistemological authenticity. This includes promoting the ideas unique to the people's worldviews, without echoing an adaptation of the ideas of the colonisers, as well as promoting the modes of acquiring epistemic ideas and the rationale that gives rise to their validation (Adeate 2022).

Getting the knowledge content of what should form the mode of interpretation in decolonised spaces requires an epistemic process not informed by colonisers' theories, but should entail forms of knowledge acquisition and validation of epistemic claims that arise from the thought and practices of the decolonised designate. The success of decoloniality is thus achieved in not just the outcomes but in the process too. Consequently, epistemic ideas in university curricula

1 The term decolonial designate is used here to refer to a situation that indicates the attainment of the rights to being decolonised, the rights to affirm one's authenticity but one that has not fully come into the state of being decolonised.

must not only be affiliated with African thought or history, but must also be seen to have arrived through a process of epistemic validation that resonates with African thought. This latter part defines the objective of this research.

One may disagree with decolonising the curriculum in African universities, especially with the stretching of the functionality of African epistemologies for that purpose. You may argue that since the goal of knowledge is the development of humans, culture or race notwithstanding, subject contents should be universal, rather than geographically informed. This concern mirrors Ward Jones's assessment of African philosophy. Philosophy, as Jones (2001) argues, makes universal claims rather than particular as the questions it asks are general questions that concern human beings and not just a culture or a race. Philosophy asks deep questions about humans, that transcend the particular human. For instance, Jones (2001: 217) notes that the question on how we treat each other is universally addressed, and ought not entail how individuals of different races or tribes treat themselves differently. Such principles of social relations apply universally. Outside philosophy's universal nature, Jones notes, philosophy is methodologically an armchair endeavour that does not concern itself with empirical study of instances of different groups.

Given Jones's position, and since many others make claims that are not limited to a geographical location but claim to be universal, the quest to decolonialise curriculum could be unnecessary or might lead to the danger of geographical philosophies or curricula. So there would be no need to talk of an African-inspired curriculum, or African epistemologies, as that would require an empirical study of particular beliefs, cultures and traditions and ways of knowing specific to a one group, rather than all humanity.

Matolino reacts to Jones's position as perpetuating a pretense that ignores specificities (Matolino 2015: 437). He adds that Jones does not understand the importance of those particulars and specifics associated with various groups. Matolino says Jones's position downplays the works of notable philosophers who have acknowledged the difference in the metaphysics of humans through their study of specific facts of particular human(s) that are different from those of others. This can be seen from Hume's and Kant's characterisation of different races, a classification that affirms the rejection of the universal view of humans (Matolino 2015: 437).

Jones (2001), however, believes specifics exist, and that humans are shaped by different conditions. His concern is that a study on those particulars, that could culminate in a body of knowledge called, for instance, African epistemology, can only be philosophy if those specifics allow universal claims to make judgement on them (Jones 2001: 218). Philosophy's relationship with the specifics, argues Jones,

is to charitably introduce itself to them by making judgement on their claims. Philosophy itself is immune to being influenced or informed by those specifics.

In connection to the above, he posits, philosophy can be ascribed to the studying of the specifics or particulars of a people if there are lessons to be drawn from the questions the study raises that can apply to all humans and not to, for example, Africans alone. Such lessons or questions must have the capacity to be generalised to qualify as philosophy. Here, we see Jones accepting the point of what Emmanuel Eze (2001) refers to as the “anti-import position”. This approach maintains that African philosophy exists and it does not need external ideas, theories and methods to affirm its existence or make it philosophically meaningful.² In so far as it is people who philosophise, and Jones agrees that individuals are by nature culture-determined and may not transcend their particular divisions, philosophical reflections and outcomes will always mirror the conditions of individual philosophers, who should enjoy the privilege of making their own demands as an independent discourse or body of knowledge. While ideas are cultural products, as the anti-imports would advise, with all cultures capable of developing them, they should be mutually compatible and commensurable (Eze 2002: 209).

What is different for Jones is that while Eze emphasises the recognition of other specifics to be the goal of the anti-import, Jones is interested in how the particulars and the specifics in focus at a given time can develop into a general universal discourse, extending to all humanity. That said, we can think of Jones’s

2 In a 2001 paper, “African Philosophy and the Analytic tradition,” Emmanuel Eze identified four approaches and positions to the nature of philosophy in relation to the study and understanding of African philosophy as philosophy. The first he called the ultra-faithful position. This camp believes that philosophy is by nature universal, and its ideas are so. As a result, African philosophy is non-existent. What exists is the universal discipline of philosophy that cannot be named or described by regional, ethnic or racial qualifiers. The second position he called the cautious group. This group believes African philosophy or modern philosophy in Africa is still in its infancy, and therefore caution is required in how we name and popularise it. The emergence and development of African philosophy should not be discouraged by a narrow conception of the field, such as referencing philosophies in African culture as all that constitutes ‘African philosophy’. The third position is the anti-import. This approach believes African philosophy exists and it does not need external ideas, theories and methods to affirm its existence or make it philosophically meaningful. Despite emphasising the particular, the anti-import believes in multi-cultural approaches and cross-culturality. They believe in the flow of ideas from one culture to another rather than a unilateral exportation of ideas (Eze 2002: 209). The historical approach is the fourth approach to the question of African philosophy, which is Eze’s preferred way. In this approach, philosophy is seen as an offshoot of historical events and narratives. According to Eze, all traditions usually develop in historical contexts, including philosophical ones. What we have as modern African philosophy is a body of text and reflections borne out of historical enquiries into African traditions and cultures.

claim and this submission as saying differently that African modes of knowledge validation can be drawn upon to form a universal mode of knowledge validation that can be employed by all humans as a medium of knowledge validation and claim of ownership. Having something to draw upon from African philosophy, as Jones would agree, holds significance for a non-linear perspective to knowledge, where the voices of others would be heard in what we claim to be universal. We can count on this acknowledgement to justify the role of African philosophy³, and the need to decolonise the hitherto hegemonic centre to create spaces for the recognition of other voices.

Besides seeing discourses in African philosophy as a contribution to philosophical thought, therefore, fulfilling the task of decoloniality in the field of philosophy, African philosophy as an academic discipline in the areas of teaching and research is tasked to pursue the objectives of centring African intellectual ideas for the interpretation of realities in Africa for Africans. It is when African epistemic ideas have influenced the ways of life in Africa, through the consumption of those ideas by Africans, that the goal of exporting those ideas as contributing to a global community of knowledge can be meaningful.

At the research level, African philosophy is seen to be fulfilling its role as a pointer of Africans' unique contribution to knowledge. This could be through the theorisation of the African version of communitarianism. Afro-communitarianism is a concept rooted in African social philosophy. It is the hallmark of African social thought that transcends cultural identity to define African moral and political ideas (Adeate 2023: 3). The growth of scholarship on the idea of Afro-communitarianism forms part of the decolonial agenda. Unlike Western communitarianism that is a critique of, and resistance to, political ideologies that emphasised individualism, such as liberalism, the motivation for Afro-communitarianism is an appreciation, and a reawakening, of indigenous philosophy and practice alleged to have been truncated by colonialism. What can be interpreted as the element of resistance in the theory of Afro-communitarianism is the use of the theory as a tool for decolonisation. The deployment of Afro-communitarianism has been to demonstrate the mode of the African system of social ordering before the colonial eruption. The main objective is to dismantle the parochial hegemony of non-African theories.

3 There is enormous literature on the rationale for the emergence of African philosophy and its meaning as that which is African and philosophical. See Eze (2001) on 'African philosophy and Analytic Tradition', to which Jones (2001) is a reaction. The emergence of African philosophy is triggered by the need to dismantle hegemonic colonial theories and mode of thoughts. Matolino (2020a: 216) describes it as "a viable field that had a legitimate claim to producing knowledge and being representative of African reality".

For Edwin Etieyibo, the decolonisation of the curriculum in the African context is the Africanisation of the curriculum. He argues that this, which fulfils the task of curriculum transformation, is a matter of moral obligation, one of which is to promote utility by allowing Africans and non-Africans alike to benefit from the vast intellectual resources in the African traditions. In his view, epistemic injustice would be committed against African culture and Africans if the curriculum in their universities does not reflect their capacity for knowledge. He posits that Africanising curriculum entails having a curriculum that reflects and represents the perspectives and experiences of Africans, appropriating and incorporating their values, beliefs, and practices (Etieyibo 2016: 405).

Etieyibo adds that making curriculum African should follow what he calls the 'moderate view' rather than the 'radical view'. The latter suggests a curriculum the knowledge content of which is restricted to reflecting African traditions and thought, while the former allows the inclusion of non-African traditions. The moderate view, argues Etieyibo, fulfils the quest of Africanisation through the diversification curriculum to include African-based knowledge and other non-African traditions.

On the surface, the moderate view defence may sound like a charitable appeal to include African-based knowledge to what we want Africans to consume. It thus looks different from what Africanisation could suggest: a complete shift away from a knowledge system that has excluded the people it meant to teach from the scheme of knowing. This would suggest the quest for Africanisation demands an overhaul of the curriculum in universities in Africa and not cosmetic or partial decolonisation that entails creating a space for African culture and thought. However, Etieyibo considers, for instance, the Africanisation of the philosophy curriculum in universities in Africa to mean "to provide the space in the philosophy curriculum for African philosophy or the African philosophical tradition (or philosophy with an African content) to thrive and be taught alongside other philosophies and traditions, namely that of the West" (Etieyibo 2016: 413).

Matolino (2020b) says doing philosophy in Africa should go beyond having a module or two on African philosophy. It must go beyond taking note of certain ideas associated with African thought, as we have referenced with Afro-communitarianism⁴. A decolonised philosophy deserving of being taught

4 We should not only teach ideas in African philosophical thought in modules dedicated to teaching African philosophy. In African universities, we should encourage, for instance, teaching courses in African ethics in ethics dedicated modules. Ideas and themes in African philosophy should not be limited or confined to modules dedicated to strictly African philosophy. Academics in African universities should have the luxury of teaching that which is 'African' in any module.

by philosophy teachers, argues Matolino, should have Africa at its foundation. It must not be about certain views on Africa, but about the realities of the learning environment, that would enable students to appropriately engage with philosophy. This paper agrees with Matolino if we interpret him thus: philosophical experience in a country like South Africa should not be devoid of Africa, and its epistemological grounding, as its basis. Simply put, decolonised philosophy must be reflective of the 'place' where the knowledge experience is happening. This comes close to the idea of centring the 'African' in the content of production and distribution of knowledge in institutions of knowledge production and acquisition.

While having a curriculum that takes cognisance of the major concern of the people and their environment, we need to be more concerned about the direction for the creation of African-centred knowledge and the direction for the development of epistemic frameworks that aid the interpretation of those particular experience and realities. It is therefore imperative for decolonial researchers, especially those in the Humanities, to think around the direction of the meaning of African epistemologies and what their decolonial quest means for the university curriculum. We can extend this further to say, if philosophy is of any relevance to pedagogy, African epistemologies may have a lot to contribute to finding the path of decoloniality for the university curriculum as a whole. In the next section, we assess what African epistemologies are and its relation to the subject of decoloniality.

Understanding African epistemologies

In this section, we discuss the idea of African epistemology and its importance to the agenda of decoloniality. Epistemology can be referred to as a theory of knowledge (Pritchard 2016). It is preoccupied with identifying the scope, nature, and limits of knowledge. Arising from this definition is the view that the essence of epistemology is knowledge. It is therefore important that before a meaningful journey into epistemology is made an understanding of the notion of knowledge is crucial.

Knowledge is a universal phenomenon that is embraced to guide the path of meaning in life. The universality of knowledge and epistemology is further demonstrated in the belief that every human has the capacity to know (Kaphagawani and Malherbe 2003). Kaphagawani and Malherbe note that the universality of epistemology and its objective of evaluating claims of knowledge does not take away the variance in the means to, presuppositions and bases of knowledge claims (Kaphagawani and Malherbe 2003: 260). Knowledge is context-based, in that it draws resource and interpretation from specific locations (culture and traditions), which informs its meaning and usage (see Nel

2005: 8, cited in Nwosimiri 2019: 27, and Chimakonam and Ogbonnaya 2021). Epistemological adventure or activities is about making sense of the realities around us. These activities rest on interpretations, which are also influenced by the realities themselves.

From this, we can argue the possibility of different traditions of knowledge developed to have a clear understanding of the dynamics of knowledge and its groupings. These include African epistemologies, Western epistemologies, feminist epistemology, for example. Our understanding of French epistemology in the history of philosophy refers to theories of knowledge or epistemological ideas developed by French epistemologists. Unlike French epistemology, African epistemologies are not limited to personal epistemological accounts and theories of individual thinkers, it is preoccupied largely with epistemic ideas domiciled in traditional African thought serving as impetus and data for contemporary knowledge production by African epistemologists⁵. Thinking beyond personal ideas of individuals is important in understanding the nature of African epistemologies. This may inform why Kaphagawani and Malherbe (2003: 260) define it as simply “an African articulation and formulation of knowledge”.

Kaphagawani and Malherbe give a sense of how African epistemologies can be understood from the different trends and schools of thought in African philosophy classified by Odera Oruka. These trends include ethnophilosophy, philosophic sagacity, politico ideological philosophy, and professional philosophy (Oruka 1983 in Kaphagawani and Malherbe 2003). However, Kaphagawani and Malherbe’s work focused on the ethnophilosophical approach to the analysis of African epistemologies. They argue that the ethnophilosophical view affirms the thesis of unique African characters, which is necessary to support the claim of the existence of characteristically African epistemologies (Kaphagawani and Malherbe 2001: 266).

Besides the claim that the various trends mentioned above have their different descriptions of African epistemologies, the ethnophilosophical approach signifies how best to begin the thought on African epistemologies. This is because African epistemologies as we conceived them seems to draw on cultural and social impetus for their development. Also, the approach requires an historical expedition into the thought of the Africans before colonisation, that is, a critical awareness of traditional African thought.

5 African philosophers, in particular, African epistemologists in traditional African societies are anonymous. Sometimes when that anonymity is eroded, reference would be made to community. Contemporary theories of knowledge and ideas in Africa are now ascribed to individuals instead of collective subjects. However, those theories can be seen to have their root in thoughts that are perhaps, originally collectively derived.

As well as African epistemology being an introduction of a specific body of knowledge to philosophy, part of its achievements is in indigenising the discipline and decolonising its canons and idioms. Hence its emergence is also triggered by an anti-colonial intention. African epistemology, like African philosophy, offer an account of the traditional modes of thought of the formerly colonised Africa. This objective is mostly captured in the idea of epistemic decolonisation as a discourse in decoloniality.

However, the success of decolonial thought is limited, argues Matolino (2020b), in so far as it does not provide us with the ground for questioning the reasons for current developmental challenges on the African continent. Matolino is of the view that the African continent has a wide gap of development crises exacerbated by corrupt leaders. This gives rise to the conclusion that the cry for decolonisation will always shield local perpetrators of African underdevelopment. Matolino recommends that Africa needs to think beyond the intellectual limit of epistemic decolonisation and other decolonial thoughts to what will better the lot of people in current situations on the continent.

Matolino's criticism is a reaction to how political leaders have hitherto wooed Africans into believing that the problem of development on the continent is restricted to the effects of colonial experiences, and that decolonising knowledge will solve the development issues. However, to deal with the political quagmires in which Africa is may require more than epistemic decolonisation, it may involve a political revolution, through critical interrogation of the internal political systems. This, however, does not suggest that we have exhausted the merit of epistemic decolonisation. This paper contributes to strengthening the functions and promoting the relevance of epistemic decolonisation through a discussion of a principle of knowledge search and validation in African thought and how it connects to achieving a decolonial curriculum.

It is essential to point out that decolonisation of the curriculum includes both the decolonisation of knowledge and the decolonisation of the process of knowledge distribution and consumption. The university and its curriculum are platforms and channels to give the formerly colonised voices a space to express themselves. The university is also a platform for the epistemic ideas of the marginalised to be investigated so as to produce new knowledge. This is made possible through the acknowledgment of the project of decolonisation in the universities as a manufacturer of knowledge. Therefore, it is important, as this paper argues, to consider a critical excavation of the process of knowledge acquisition in traditional African thought and to discuss it as an African systems of facts validation.

Interconnectedness as a ground for knowledge validation in African thought

In this section, we shift to the argument that the idea of interconnectedness in the Afro-communitarian thought resonates with the principles of knowledge validation in African epistemologies. We argue that this mode of knowledge justification ought to be the requirement for the formulation of the content of decolonised curricula in African universities. The rationale for the defense of interconnectedness as a principle of knowledge validation in African thought is grounded on the background that rules that guide the process of knowledge may be informed by a people's sense of realities that have hitherto shaped their perception of the world. Hence, the justification for the geographical reference to knowledge and its meanings.

The idea of interconnectedness is a dominant feature of many African thought systems. Traditional African societies placed emphasis on the relationship and communion among its members. The claims of the collective, rather than the individual, are given prime attention. While that philosophy has some inherent consequences, its significance lies in the cooperation and joint action it promotes. More importantly, one can argue that the survival of the community rests upon this idea. Outside of the claim of natural genealogy that exists among members of the community, the principles of interconnectedness among members captures the philosophy of existence in African thought. This is aptly echoed in the Mbitian dictum: "I am because we are; and since we are, therefore I am" (Mbiti 1970: 141). It is this philosophy of interconnectedness that influences how Africans think about numerous questions ranging from the political, moral, social, to name a few. The pattern of reasoning on issues centres around thinking from the concern of the collective to the individual. This is why traditional African epistemologies are largely communal and their mode of justification relies on the coherent relation in the testimonies of the collectives.

Epistemic justification is an important part of epistemology that gives meaning to epistemic elements such as belief. It is an important part of the epistemological process in any philosophical tradition that helps in testing the rigour of epistemes and confer credibility on them. The notion of justification implies providing a good reason or reasoned claim for epistemic ideas. The idea of interconnectedness in African thought connects very well with how Africans in traditional, pre-colonial societies agree on what knowledge is before it becomes accepted. This process involves the connection between the testimonies of various epistemic agents. Bewaji's (2007) position captures the significance of this position of interconnectedness when he points attention to the Yoruba adage that says *Igi kan ki i da'gbo se* (Translation: One tree

does not make a forest). This adage could be understood, in this context, to mean that an individual cannot be mentally, emotionally, and spiritually self-sufficient to derive validation to a belief. They would require the contributions of other people. This does not imply that the collective cannot err in judgment. It only illustrates the significance of joint action that informs philosophies in most traditional African societies. Barry Hallen (2002) corroborates this view of interconnectedness when he notes that, in Yoruba discourse, a piece of information or belief can only become knowledge if it can be tested by more than one person (Hallen 2002: 38-39). This is essential to how we hold information as a belief or knowledge. Verifying information from second-hand sources in a first-hand manner by other epistemic agents determines its reliability and upgrade to knowledge (see also Hallen and Sodipo 1997).

In the light of the above, one can affirm that justification of knowledge in African thought is the connectedness of the testimonies of epistemic agents. Put concisely, the interconnectedness in the idea of justification holds that a belief held by an epistemic agent, whether through experience or reason, becomes knowledge if it shares connections with other beliefs of other epistemic agents in the community. This idea is not born out of a dogmatic desire for claims, but a rational progression to knowledge. The people investigate the claim and then come to a rational agreement on the truth of available evidence. As a result, some testimonies may be rejected due to the level of their truth-conditions. The truth of various testimonies is grounded on the connection with the testimonies of others and the coherence with existing facts. Knowledge can be evidentially justified if it fits into what people say about the truth of the belief. While acknowledgement might be given to the perceiver of the belief, it gives credits to other epistemic agents to affirm what is perceived, received, or reasoned.

Therefore, African epistemologies prides themselves on epistemic ideas from the community⁶, rather than individual self-rationality. We see the community members as capable agents of knowledge formulation, different from other aspects of their lives such as being moral agents or political agents in the community. It simply means that the community of individual members of the socio-cultural community are serving as formulators of knowledge. It does not reckon with a subjective, ego-centric prescription of the 'I.' African epistemology requires a reasoned collective testimony for a belief to attain the status of knowledge. Epistemic agents agree in a manner of coherent testimonies to validate any observable facts or beliefs as episteme. This collective source of knowledge questions the possibility of individual ownership of knowledge in

6 The use of community in this paper refers to cultural community, where members are bound by the same ethno-cultural norms.

the African thought system and promotes the idea of 'collective copyright'. This 'collective copyright' dismantles parochial hegemony of knowledge and theories.

The above rests on the reference contemporary African scholars give to community in the use of ideas domiciled in traditional African intellectual and philosophical traditions. Theories of thought in contemporary African philosophy from Innocent Asouzu's *ibuanyidanda* and Jonathan Chimakonam's conversationalism to mention two give intellectual acknowledgements to the anonymous authors of these ideas. Though, the anonymous authors might not have given these ideas their current nomenclature, their descendants who inherited those ideas, and have gone through formal philosophical training have deemed it fit to fine-tune these ideas and theorise them for global relevance. We do not argue that the anonymous authors are individuals like their contemporary counterparts; their ontological stance tints towards collective than individuality.

Whether an individual thinker should be recognised in the initiative that leads to knowledge cannot be avoided in contemporary African philosophy. Whatever response we give must be convincing in evidence. The controversy can be understood from the debate between the two dominant approaches in African philosophy – traditionalists and modernists.

The traditionalists admit the importance of cultural worldviews as sources of knowledge in Africa. They believed cultural worldviews are the springboard for whatever counts as knowledge and philosophy from Africa, meaning no individual copyright to ideas and knowledge. We can understand the traditionalists' position to mean that epistemological adventure cannot be done in isolation of the community. The influence of the traditionalists' thesis has become a concern to some contemporary theorists, who argue that this is the reason for the lack of innovative ideas by African scholars (Agada 2015). The modernists⁷ believe in recognising and acknowledging individual thinkers. While it is good to associate ideas with the thinkers who promulgated them, it is difficult to unlink the innovative ideas and epistemic claims of individual thinkers from the residual knowledge of culture and beliefs of the community that modelled the thinkers.

The above affirms the position that besides knowledge validation residing in the community, epistemological ideas, that serve as the impetus for new ideas, are also domiciled in the community as proverbs and folklores, customs and practices, among others. These are parts of what Kaphagawani and Malherbe (2003: 264) refer to as "the epistemic threads in the fabric of a culture". African

7 Paulin Hountondji is prominent among the modernist school of thought in African philosophy. For a comprehensive description of the various schools of thought and trends in African philosophy, see his work *African Philosophy: Myth and Reality Second Ed.*

epistemologies are not only epistemic ideas of certain individuals. Also, they should not be limited to the corners of university libraries. They are contained in traditional archives of knowledge, which Falola (2018) refers to as ritual archives⁸. Contemporary scholars, to whom we have ascribed certain ideas, have taken this on by drawing on ideas in traditional African thought to build theories. These theories are evidence of the principles of interconnectedness of epistemic agents as the ground for knowledge claims and the community being the residue of epistemes.

Examples are Asouzu's *ibuanyidanda* and Chimakonam's conversationalism. The idea of *ibuanyidanda* is rooted in the Igbo communal orientation. *Ibuanyidanda*, a compound Igbo word that Asouzu (2011ab, 2013) coined from the life of a species of ants, is a sociological model that emphasises the importance of complementarity, mutual and harmonious existence in resolving existential crises. Though used as a metaphysical claim and postulation, the idea of *ibuanyidanda* could be understood as the rationale for knowledge claims and veracity of ideas and theories in African epistemologies. In *ibuanyidanda* epistemology, emphasis is placed on the recognition of parties to knowledge contribution. It emphasises the significance of collective reflection. This form of epistemology recognises all forms of realities, spiritual and physical, as contributing to our understanding of ourselves and the world in which we live. *Ibuanyidanda* emphasises the 'whole' in the quest for what is meaningful.

While Asouzu might be regarded as a modernist thinker, ascribing *ibuanyidanda* to his intellectual worth, his understanding of Igbo cultural beliefs provides the raw data for the epistemological idea. The Igbo cultural worldview also offers the justification on which the idea is taken to be true. This is why communal copyrights of knowledge, especially on traditional epistemes, hold more primacy in African thought than individual copyrights. Nevertheless, this does not take away the credit due to contemporary individual scholars who initiate intellectual conversation and reflections on the indigenous knowledge domiciled in African philosophical traditions.

The second idea that illustrates the importance of the interconnectedness of epistemic agents in the mode of justifying knowledge claim is the idea of conversationalism. Conversationalism or conversational thinking is an idea developed by Jonathan Chimakonam (2017, 2018) and adopted by the Conversational School of Philosophy (Chimakonam 2015a; Chimakonam and Egbai 2016; Egbai and Chimakonam 2019; Chimakonam and Ogbonnaya

8 Falola (2018: 889) defines ritual archives as a body of words, ideas, symbols, shrines, images, performances that point to understanding the African experience.

2021). It is informed by the idea of relationship or commune in African thought. Chimakonam (2017: 115) understood relationship to mean “a wilful, creative and critical epistemic experience which two agents known as *nwa-nsa* and *nwa-nju* share with the intention to create new concepts and open up new vistas for thought”. *Nwa-nsa* means proponent while *nwa-nju* means critic. In conversationalism, only one position forms the content of the engagement. This position is held by the *nwa-nsa*. The *nwa-nju* does not hold any opposite position, except to question the veracity and the viability of *nwa-nsa*'s position, to revise and enrich or reject the position. The *nwa-nsa*, recognises the limitation of human rationality in conceptualising complex matters and thus approaches the epistemic adventure between itself and the *nwa-nju*, with an epistemic humility and openness for its belief to reach the status of knowledge.

Conversationalism demonstrates the systematic engagement of discourses in African thought because of its root in the idea of relationship and community in generating and validating epistemic claims. The validation of knowledge is domiciled in the community, beginning from the first two interlocutors. The medium of interaction with the community, in the manner of interconnectedness, validates knowledge.

It is important to anticipate objections to this paper's position. One may challenge the suggestion that the copyright of traditional epistemologies belong to the community. The above position may sound questionable to some contemporary African thinkers who criticise the communal thesis in African theorising for curbing the authorship of individuals in the development of ideas. Chimakonam (2015b: 110) says “communitarian Africa does not encourage heroic endeavors in individuals. Individuals are not celebrated or readily recognised for achieving great feats, especially those that have to do with art, craft and intellect.” Elsewhere, Chimakonam and Ogbonnaya (2021: 182), echoing Nasseem (2003), in his acknowledgement of both empiricism and rationalism as the harmonised source of knowledge in African epistemologies, defended the knowing process as involving the individual knower experiencing the object of knowledge, then feeling, imagining, intuiting, reasoning and arriving at knowledge. The emphasis on the knower's capacity for knowledge claim makes the community, an epistemic agent, redundant.

It is essential to point out that the communal reference in African epistemologies acknowledges the capacity of individuals to form beliefs and reflect on them to create epistemic ideas. However, they do not engage in that reflection in isolation of other epistemic agents in the community. The epistemic process is not done in secrecy, but public and individual ideas are shared with members of the epistemic community. The use of the word epistemic agent here does not solely mean that

the community will sit in conference to agree on any knowledge claim. Two or more epistemic agents can seek validation of a claim. The more the epistemic agents involved in fine-tuning the epistemic idea, the stronger its validation.

One may worry that the idea of many agents involved in the validation of knowledge in the history of African epistemology would suggest the non-uniqueness of the idea to African thought given that contemporary research activities have similar approaches especially regarding the point of collaborative research. Researchers often work in teams, research results are submitted for peer review, critical readers offer comments. This collaborative process is quite common. This is part of how we may work out the idea advanced in this paper. However, such levels of modesty and acceptance is not common yet in intellectual space regarding the ownership of ideas. One way to look at this is the status we ascribe to reviewers in the development of ideas. It is only when reviewers are seen as co-authors, that is, as being co-responsible for a particular idea that we have fully embraced the notion of a collective copyright that comes with the collective validation of ideas. It may be expedient to consider how we come to accept ownership of ideas, as a new call for the decolonisation of research.

With respect to the collective validation of epistemic claims, interconnectedness as an epistemic principle emphasises the significance of communal orientation in African thought by acknowledging the community in epistemological processes. As a principle of knowledge derivation and validation, it is vital to the structural approach to developing content knowledge for decolonised curricula in African societies. A decolonised curriculum in African spaces must centre intellectual ideas and modes of thought that resonate with the people's lived experiences and realities while appealing to the epistemic framework entrenched in African thought. Resting on that background, referencing the traditional mode of knowledge acquisition and validation, and generating ideas in African thought is essential to our quest for decolonising knowledge and developing knowledge content that centres African intellectual ideas.

Conclusion

The article adds its voice to the call for curriculum decolonisation in Africa. It emphasises the significance of the African epistemological framework in how we decolonise knowledge and curriculum in African spaces. It recommends the principle of interconnectedness as an idea of knowledge validation rooted in traditional African thoughts and epistemologies as a structural approach to developing knowledge content. In this article, we established that both African epistemology and curriculum decolonisation in Africa pursued the centring of African epistemic ideas in African spaces. The article considers the merit of

universality and particularity as it relates to knowledge and how they function as an independent and interdependent phenomenon. It aligns with the view that in discussing the claims of universals, the ontology of the particulars must not be threatened. In doing this, the article gives voice to the function of the particular through a discussion on African epistemologies and an African-inspired curriculum. The article submits that the decolonisation of the African curriculum is essential to producing and distributing knowledge that appreciates African epistemologies.

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