

Concept, Principles and Research Methods of African Environmental Ethics

by

Diana-Abasi Ibanga

ibanga.letters@gmail.com

Centre for Environmental Governance and Resource Management, Nigeria

Department of Philosophy, University of Calabar,

Cross River State, Nigeria

Abstract [English]

This paper aims to discuss ten traditional and contemporary methodological paradigms in African philosophy, and demonstrates how they may apply to African environmental ethics research. The methods include: Ethno-philosophy, Sage Philosophy, Conversational Philosophy, Conceptual Mandelanization, Eco-Afrocentricism, Indigenous Language Analysis, Eco-Afro-feminism, Conceptual Decolonization, Storytelling Philosophy, and Cultural Adaptationism. The significance and limitations of the methodologies are highlighted. The concept and principles of African environmental ethics are analyzed and discussed to facilitate an understanding of the conceptual frameworks that underpin the methodologies. In conclusion, the discourse demonstrates that environmental ethics research in Africa should be based on African philosophical methodologies so as to facilitate production of research that will be relevant in African contexts.

Keywords: African philosophy, African environmental ethics, philosophical methodology

Edon Iko [Annang]

Ŋwed nduongo ami ayem ibene nwɔd mme ŋkaan nne mfa usung unam nduongo ke vilosovi Afrike, nne nte amo ekeme iwam unam nduongo mbanga ido ukpeme nkan-nkuk ke Afrike. Mme usung unam nduongo ami nsehe ade ami: vilosovi mben ufok, vilosovi ŋkan ideen, vilosovi nneme, vilosovi Mandela, "Eco-Afrocentricism", nduongore usem utiit ajid, vilosovi ibaan Afrike, vilosovi mkpok-nyak, vilosovi ŋke, nne ukpep ido idung agwo. Ŋwed ami abene awod mme ikek nne nde mem idem usung nduongo ami. Ŋwed ami atang mkpo abanga se ido ukpeme nkan-nkuk ke Afrike anwongo nne mme itai amo, nne nte amo ewam mbon nduongo edioho nnanga ekpekakpa iboro nduongo amo. Ke ŋsuuk iko, ukpep ami mkpo abene awod ate ke ekpena ekama usung nduongo vilosovi Afrike enam nduongo ebanga ido ukpeme nkan-nkuk ke Afrike man iboro nduongo asanga akekem nne se adiiwam Afrike.

Ŋkek-Iko: vilosovi Afrike, ido ukpeme nkan-nkuk ke Afrike, usung nduongo vilosovi

Introduction

Researchers have produced a large body of research that has significantly affected our understanding of environmental ethics. The contributions have helped facilitate the evolution of environmental ethics for different contexts. The core objective underpinning these researches in environmental ethics is to help communities solve human needs without risking safety and integrity of the ecosphere, and posterity. However, there is a balance of opinions among ethics researchers that there is pressing need for researchers in environmental ethics to produce researches that are compliant to specific cultural contexts; since the different cultural contexts are not exactly responding to the same ethics (Ibanga, 2017a; Ekwealo, 2017; Ogbonnaya, 2016; Francis, 2016; Mangena, 2015; Ibanga, 2014; Bisong & Sunday, 2014; Tangwa, 2004; Ogungbemi, 1994). Different philosophical places have responded to this call differently, employing different methodologies traditional to their philosophical traditions.

Africa philosophers have also responded to the call; but many have done so without paying attention to the methodologies in African philosophy. The issue is not a lack of relevant methodologies, but the different methodologies have not been shown in how they can contribute to African environmental ethics research. Some African philosophers set out to use scientific methods and Western philosophical methodologies without realizing the negative impact that alien paradigms may have on facilitating environmental ethics research in Africa. This has merely led to a certain fallacy called “descriptive chauvinism”, that is, thinking that African and Western concepts, meanings, and methodologies, construct questions and responses in a similar manner (Edet, 2015).

To address the problem, this paper discusses ten traditional and contemporary methodological paradigms in African philosophy and demonstrates how they can effectively be applied to African environmental ethics research, and helps facilitate the discovery of ecological values that are meaningful to African people. It also discusses the concept and principles of African environmental ethics in order to show the conceptual underpinnings of the methodologies, and facilitate an understanding of how the methodologies should be employed in research.

The Concept of African Environmental Ethics

African environmental ethics is still a developing area of African philosophy. Few scholars have written to establish the theoretical basis of the discipline in terms of determining its comprehensive philosophical aspects. Most scholars of African environmental ethics focus on the ethical, axiological, and metaphysical aspects; while neglecting the logical, epistemological, pedagogical, and gender aspects. Meanwhile, Ucheoma Osuji (2012) argues that the metaphysical aspect of African environmental ethics cannot be separated from its epistemological aspect. One may also say that the logical and epistemological aspects of African environmental ethics are not counter-intuitive.

However, Ibanga has attempted to map the logical aspect (see Francis, 2016). Davie Mutasa, Shumirai Nyota, and Jacob Mapara (2008) has attempted to discuss its pedagogical aspects. Also, Ekwealo and Ibanga have attempted to map its political aspects (see Ekwealo, 2017; Ibanga, 2017b).

In all these, the question that would linger is: what is African environmental ethics? So far, three scholars have defined African environmental ethics. First, Chigbo Ekwealo (2017) posits that “African environmental ethics deals with the fundamental principle that govern the relationship between man and the environment based on African worldview [by analyzing] the basic terms like man, environment, spirit, et cetera and examines the approaches by which [they are] known” (p.52). This means environmental ethics focuses on analyzing the basic concepts employed in understanding the environment. Osuji (2012) avers that when the farmer, for example, “understands what water means and its role to its forest habitat” and to the whole economy of life, that he/she would take proactive steps to address unwholesome habits in self, and in the surrounding environment (p.116).

Another definition of African environmental ethics is provided by Ibanga (2017b) “as the fundamental governing principles that defines human-animal-plant-inanimate-posterity nexus based on African worldviews, analyzing the basic concepts such as human and nonhumans, animate and inanimate, and examines the processes by which they (ought to) relate, for the purpose of facilitating an understanding of the ontology of man within the context of an environment it shares with nonhumans” (p.1867). This definition projects African environmental ethics as a set of governing principles, and a philosophical study where the later serve to justify the former. And, Osuji (2012) argues that “African environmental ethics should not only be a way of life but should also show habits of exactness, rigor in thinking and clarity in philosophical analysis” (p.111).

One other definition to consider here is by Osuji (2012) that African environmental ethics refers to prescribed values and critical study grounded in the culture and experiences of Africa. Hence, Osuji (2012) argues that it is the duty of African environmental ethics to re-examine the basis of scientific laws, theorems and principles of the environment. In doing this, African environmental ethics should be “critical and reconstructive” such that it can “distil traditional ideas between those that are anachronistic and those that can allow human flourishing within our African world” (Osuji, 2012, p.111). She further argues that it is the task of African environmental ethics to: (1) carry out a philosophical distillation of the ideas stuck in traditional belief systems; (2) philosophically appraise environmental science based on African ontology, and (3) do conceptual decolonization of African environmental study in order to rid African philosophy of perverse dialogue and provide philosophical analysis for our habits (Osuji, 2012). It is through this that African environmental ethics would provide a rigorous indigenous ethics for positive environmental transformation.

Principles of African Environmental Ethics

Ibanga (2017a, 2017b, 2018a, 2018b) identifies five principles of African environmental ethics drawn from the wide corpus of African environmental ethics. These are precepts or injunctions designed to guide the behaviour of people in the environment. And in this, Ibanga (2018b) states that “the principles call for restraint and circumspection in decision-making and action-taking such that one’s lifestyle, behaviour and dealings can lead to avoidance of wastage of resources and minimize injuries caused other beings (humans and nonhumans) and their communities (culture, ecosystem, etc).” In other words, the principles serve as a context to anticipate before acting. In addition, they serve as a guide to researchers when they analyze and interpret data collected in African environmental ethics research. They are:

- Principle of Accommodation: Act in such a way that nonhuman existents and future people are considered and accommodated in your daily decisions and dealings.
- Principle of Gratitude: Act in such a way that reflects your gratitude towards other existents, humans and nonhumans, for contributing to support your beingness or existence.
- Principle of Restoration: Always act to restore to Nature the loss you have caused it. For example, re-planting a tree after felling one.
- Principle of Control: Act in such a way that you control your action from producing too much negative externalities.
- Principle of Necessity: Act only on decisions and actions that are absolutely necessary.

Methods of African Environmental Ethics Research

The core idea underpinning research in African environmental ethics is to help communities solve human needs without risking safety and integrity of the ecosphere, and posterity. The aim is to produce the logic and ethic that help guide policy-making in sustainable ways. Generally, there are a number of core methodologies of African philosophy that can be used to search out answers to research questions in African environmental ethics. Here, I want to focus on ten methodologies, namely: (i) Ethnophilosophy, (ii) Sage Philosophy, (iii) Conversational Philosophy, (iv) Conceptual Mandelanization, (v) Eco-Afrocentricism, (vi) Indigenous Language Analysis, (vii) Eco-Afro-feminism (viii) Conceptual Decolonization (ix) Storytelling Philosophy, and (x) Cultural Adaptionism. These ten methodologies respectively represent the earlier and contemporary methodologies in African philosophy; but the list is by no means exhaustive. Let us look at them briefly, and see how they may contribute to research in African environmental ethics and values.

Ethnophilosophy

The concept of ethnophilosophy was first used by Kwame Nkrumah and popularized by Paulin Hountondji, who used it to describe the quality/type of philosophy that early African academic philosophers produced – which were mainly ethnographic representations of worldviews of African communities. Anke Graness (2012) notes, “ethnophilosophy describes African philosophy mainly as traditional communal thinking as it can be found in proverbs, fables, special features of African languages, etc” (p.9). Hence, ethnophilosophical method involves searching for metaphysical, epistemological and ethical material from proverbs, fables, African languages, arts, music, religion, and so on, by analyzing them for the purpose of making philosophical import from them or representing them as philosophies. This method was very popular during its early discourses, and today serves the foundation of African philosophy. Many African philosophers have adopted this method for African environmental ethics research. One of the major merits of this method to African environmental ethics research is that it goes back into time to unearth ancient practices and virtues that help kept the environment in harmony, then it imports these virtues and practices into the present in contexts relevant to guiding persons, firms and communities toward sustainable practices and values. The major limitation of this method is that sometimes it misses the fact that traditional values may not successfully apply in modern circumstances; and also fails to realize that traditional values that were successful in rural contexts may not necessarily provide an expected guide in urban contexts (Ibanga, 2017c).

Sage Philosophy

Another method is sage philosophy method, a philosophical paradigm situated in the Socratic and Confucius traditions (Ibanga, 2017d; Graness, 2012), developed by Henry Odera Oruka in 1973. This is a method of doing African philosophy whereby the academic philosopher visits a traditional community to identify sages for the purpose of engaging them in philosophical dialogues in the form of oral conversations on any given philosophical subject in order to midwife or abstract those aspects of philosophical ideas embedded in the thought(s) of African sages. The sages are recognized as the most solicitous custodians of the finest achievements of the past. Yet, philosophic sages are persons who are not only endowed with communal wisdom, but they are also individuals who possess intrinsic capacity of critical reflection and are capable of rationally transcending communally-held ideas to attain actual philosophical capacities (Oruka, 1990, 1991, 1998). The critical attitude of the philosophic sage makes him/her not to simply accept ideas of the past, but critically rework and enrich them with new experiences. The probing questions of the academic philosopher is expected to give impulses to the development of the internal contradictions necessary for philosophical leap, and awaken the consciousness of the sage unto attempting to exceed the boundaries of what he/she had known; thus leading the sage to question his/her own thought and beliefs (Ibanga 2017d).

Generally, sage philosophy leads a person to reflect on the received wisdom of the past for the purpose of reimagining it and recreating it philosophically. As a method of doing African environmental ethics, sage philosophy serves similar purpose as an ethnophilosophy in that it leads the philosophic sage back into time (cultures and histories) to midwife ancient virtues that helped kept the traditional environment in ecological harmony, then it imports these virtues and practices into the present in contexts relevant to guiding modern people toward sustainable practices and values.

The major advantage it has over ethnophilosophy is that, it does not simply import ancient virtues wholesale to apply to modern circumstances; rather its intrinsic capacities of critical reflection enable the individual to rationally transcend communally-held values to critically rework and enrich them with new experiences. This method had been used widely in African philosophy research, but it has not been yet applied to African environmental ethics research. The major demerit of this method is that the tape recording device used in collecting the views of the sage “reduces the sage’s freedom to think and express him/her self freely” (Falaiye, 2005, p.65); which may cause him/her to become apologetic and toe line of communal consensus rather than apply philosophical reason.

Conversational Philosophy

Another method of African philosophy that can help research in African environmental ethics is conversational philosophy. Although conversational method of philosophizing in African philosophy is not a new paradigm (Ibanga, 2017d; Janz, 2016; Azenabor, 2009); but the method as it is now used in contemporary African philosophy was developed by Jonathan Chimakonam in 2013 and was adopted as the official doctrine of the Conversational School of Philosophy (CSP) in 2014. Conversational philosophy is a philosophical method whereby individual thinkers holding opposing ideas engage fellow philosophers’ thoughts in contestations and protestations, not to agree, but to disagree, and philosophical reasoning in which critical and rigorous questioning creatively unveils new concepts from old ones, not by synthesizing, but by decentring and displacement (Chimakonam, 2015a, 2015b). The purpose is “to critically analyze and to logically examine pertinent substantive issues in a culture” (Chimakonam, 2015b, p.466); and to generate concepts to address the inconsistencies. The method focuses on minimising inconsistencies, establishing complementarities, and promoting creative adaptations among different postulations, addressing the same problem. Its relevance lies in its capacity to engender the African philosophical place to inaugurate “viable ideas, thoughts, principles, theories, and systems in African philosophy that can help humans in different societies across the globe to address specific challenges and meet their need” (Nweke, 2016, p.56).

One major way conversational philosophy can help promote research in African environmental ethics is by initiating and sustaining conversations among environmental ethics researchers about what works and continually raising questions about new suggestions and offering alternative views, and in the process minimising inconsistencies and establishing complementarities among the different postulations in African environmental ethics literature. This helps to point to new directions of further research.

Generally, philosophical conversations are necessary to sustain African environmental ethics discourse. The major draw-back with this method is that it views philosophical research as a reactionary process rather than as proactive measures. This is based on its conception of African philosophy as product of “frustration” (reaction), rather than as a “wonder” (imagination). This therefore creates the impression that African environmental ethics researchers should wait for disaster to strike before they postulate measures, since no one knows with certainty about future events. This method is popular at the Calabar School of Philosophy, and becoming increasingly in use in African philosophical places. However, it has only been recently applied to African environmental ethics research (see Ibanga, 2017c).

Conceptual Mandelanization

Conceptual Mandelanization is one of the newest and youngest methods of African philosophy, developed in 2014 by Mesembe Edet to address social and political problems in Africa in a way that is philosophically relevant. It is a process of reconceptualising concepts, themes, and social issues through the application of the systematic, logical, critical and analytical tools of philosophy, in reflection on the “total experience” of Africa that we know in shaping the Africa of the future, based on the appropriated values, qualities and legacies of the “deified personage” of Nelson Mandela (Edet, 2015; 2017). The argument is that African philosophy has been made to focus on not-so-urgent issues such as decolonization of philosophical concepts in response to the call of “conceptual decolonization” by Kwasi Wiredu, instead of addressing the problems and challenges in the “Africa we know” (Edet, 2015; Asuoazu, 2004). This methodology takes the view that the Africa we know is the Africa of corruption, poverty, conflict, environmental pollution, religious bigotry, overpopulation, power adventurism, retrogression, and failure. Therefore, the task of African philosophy is to address the “concrete existential problems” within the social and cultural circumstances of the modern African so as to reconstruct the Africa we know towards shaping a progressive Africa of the future (Edet, 2015). Conceptual Mandelanization is premised on this idea, based on “methodological preconditions for the development and evolution of a viable indigenous development oriented social ideology” to address the African condition (Edet, 2017, p.43).

Conceptual Mandelanization is based on the three step rules or principles, namely: Rule One, “Ask what Nelson Mandela would have done”, Rule Two, “Ask what did Mandela say”, and Rule Three, “Interrogate the concept in the context of what Mandela would have done or/and what he said” (Edet, 2017, p.44). The ‘Rule Three’ clearly indicate that the exercise in Conceptual Mandelanization is not for the purpose of image laundry; rather it provides a basis to subject Mandela’s values to analysis and critique, to judgment in negative and/or positive terms. Basically, to source for material for the questions of what Mandela would have done or said, the researcher is expected to analyze his autobiography, biographies and general literature on him or design a survey questionnaire to obtain responses from those who knew Mandela directly or indirectly. As a method of doing African environmental ethics, Conceptual Mandelanization demands that African environmental ethics researchers operationalize their research questions by asking ‘what would Mandela had done’, then follow up with another operationalization ‘what did Mandela say’ in response to the question. Finally, they are to interrogate their research questions on the basis of what Mandela did and/or said.

To interrogate, in this context, means to raise negative questions about what Mandela would have done or said (Edet, 2017) in response to the question. Chimakonam (2014) notes that the process of interrogation involves intracultural and intercultural reflective assessment of concepts and institutions in light of tradition and modernity for the purpose of deconstructing and reconstructing them in pursuit of futurity. The main point of Conceptual Mandelanization is that many people regard Mandela as a role-model and would willingly be guided by his virtues. One major disadvantage that may be identified with this method is that Mandelanization may likely be viewed as ‘colour-bias’ in Southern Africa, and thus generally becomes ineffective among people who do not ‘idolize’ Mandela. Despite this, this method looks promising to via the future of African environmental ethics research.

Eco-Afrocentricism

Another method of doing African environmental ethics research is called Eco-Afrocentricism. This method was introduced by Diana-Abasi Ibanga in 2017 at STIAS Wallenberg Research Centre in Stellenbosch University, as an explanatory-analytic technique to guide the interpretation of the matrix of the interplay in the human-environment-posterity nexus, and to account for environmental changes in Africa for the purpose of guiding ecological policy development (Ibanga, 2017a). It was designed to decentre current conservation philosophy in Africa that constructs ecological issues as being potentially independent of social issues in the continent (Ibanga, 2017b). Generally, environmental policies designed for Africa do not significantly embed human welfare to the wellbeing of the ecosystem as a whole, which is counter-intuitive to cultural contexts in Africa. Eco-Afrocentricism projects the view that environmental issues overlap directly and/or indirectly with the socioeconomic condition of African people (Ibanga, 2017a, 2017b). Thus, ecological questions and responses in the African context should be constructed in such a way that they reflect this overlapping. And the issues concerning the wellbeing of the African environment cannot be fully understood unless they are analyzed jointly and simultaneously with socioeconomic problems affecting African people. Ecological issues affect both humans and nonhumans, and frequently they intertwine with social justice issues. Hence, the pursuit for environmental justice in Africa should overlap with social justice and vice versa.

As a method of doing African environmental ethics research, eco-Afrocentricism demands researchers to examine social issues to see how they interlink to environmental problems and to concurrently examine ecological issues to determine how they might interlink with the social conditions of African people. For example, the African environmental ethics researcher may have to examine the problem of poverty in Africa by determining the linkages poverty have with problems in the African ecosystems. By so doing (that is, by establishing the interlinkages), the research may demonstrate that addressing poverty problem in Africa may have to be done hand in hand with addressing ecological issues in the continent. This method is very promising in that it encourages both the social researcher and the ethics research to adopt interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary approaches to research problems, therefore proffering holistic solutions to the problems. The major limitation with this method is that it may encourage the researcher to adopt an attitude of one-size-fit-all to addressing problems, which is counter-intuitive to the spirit of eco-Afrocentricism.

Indigenous Language Analysis

Method of indigenous language analysis (or indigenous language philosophy) is another technique that can be used to do African environmental ethics research. (The ‘Indigenous Language Analysis’ is different from the Western’s “Ordinary Language Analysis” merely by its logic of analysis). The analytic tradition in African philosophy rightly hold that tool of analysis is germane for understanding of African worldviews and thought systems. Analytic methodology implies determining how concepts are used in language, whether it is natural or artificial languages. Barry Hallen (2002) avers that the method can be applied to analyze African indigenous languages for their meanings and evaluation of the beliefs embedded in those languages. This is significant given the fact that language embodies a people’s beliefs, thoughts, traditions, customs, values, norms, etc. Moreover, it is through language that those properties are made known. This makes African indigenous languages relevant to African philosophy because it contains those forms and reasoning that can express African worldviews.

It was for this reason Gbenga Fasiku (2008) advocated that every word, concept, sentence, etc. of African indigenous languages should be subjected to philosophical analysis so as to distil those philosophical ideas embedded thereof. This is clearly in the domain of ordinary language philosophy or what I may call ‘Indigenous Language Analysis’, which is a methodology that is not based on some strict technical patterns such as scientific conceptual analysis, but is open to accommodate description, and an analysis of beliefs and traditional thoughts. Indigenous language analysis allows researchers to source materials from oral literature such as proverbs, parables, oracular verses, music, etc. which are believed to possess some philosophic values (Fasiku, 2008; Hallen, 1998); and to draw independent, empirical data from which to undertake systematic analysis of African meanings (Hallen, 1996). Moreover, the method of indigenous language analysis allow researchers to clarify meanings of words, concepts, aphorisms, etc. used in African philosophy to identify more clearly the criteria governing their usage (Hallen, 1996). The method of ordinary language analysis is very popular among scholars at the Ibadan and Ife schools of Philosophy. Indigenous language analysis technique has been notably identified with the works of Sophie Oluwole.

The major significance of this method is that it motivates researchers in African environmental ethics to analyze the concepts at use in the field, along with their meanings and relevance to modern ecological issues. Fasiku (2008) maintains that “ordinary language philosophy enables us to look inwardly in order to appreciate and explore the invaluable and inestimable philosophical data inherent and peculiar to the language, which, if subjected to description and analysis, can be developed into coherent, unique and novel philosophical ideas and ideals” (p.110). By conducting incisive and intrusive analysis into concepts and meanings, indigenous language analysis can help to decentre Western meanings impose on African words, concepts and aphorisms employed to do African environmental ethics research resulting from the mental attitude of “descriptive chauvinism”. In other words, it encourages African environmental ethics researchers to look inwards to find solutions to problems bedevilling African ecology.

The importance of this method to African environmental ethics research is that it allows for discovery of old problems embedded in the present understanding of African environmental ethics; and in turn, beam the light to enable researchers to chart the way forward. Fasiku (2008) rightly observes that “there are philosophical issues and solutions to most philosophical problems in indigenous African system of cognition, which are embodied in African languages” (p.110). However, the major problem that may come with this method is that it may lead to a mental attitude called “perennialism” which presumes philosophical traditions and linguistic systems as fixed, static, and monolithic (Edet, 2015).

Eco-Afro-Feminism

Another method of doing African environmental ethics research is in an Afro-feminist analysis. This is not exactly based on Western oriented feminism; rather it is based on what is called “African womanism”. Eco-Afro-feminism represents ecological aspects and it is based on the concept of *Ala* (Okoroafor, 2012) and *Abot* (Ibanga, 2012); rather than on class conflict that orients eco-feminism (see Warren, 1994). Also, Afro-feminism is not theoretically constructed as ‘right-seeking’ or ‘power-seeking’; but as an advocacy to restore the pride of the African woman. Previously, the African woman has been in power (Okafor, 2012; Ariole, 2011; Chinweizu, 1990). The African woman lost her place of pride in the home to capitalism-oriented industrialisation which displaces the woman from the centre of the home as care-giver or manager unto wandering the economic sphere. Therefore, the African woman seeks to be restored to her place in the scheme of things as care-giver, both to human beings and nature. Afro-feminism also seeks to overthrow the prevalent ontological orientation of the African place, which is vertical-hierarchical with African men on the upper rung; to replace it with a horizontal non-hierarchical system that is based on the maxim of live and let live (Osuji, 2011).

The kind of ontology Afro-feminism advocates recognizes the difference. The point is that being different does not imply that one is unequal to the other; instead it affirms exactly the opposite. That is why Afro-feminism is not designed to seek equality of men and women by de-emphasizing gender difference, rather it seeks to justify the difference and on that basis demands unequal treatment that favours the woman. It does not seek to disrupt patriarchal spaces (by making it unrestrictively accessible) instead it affirms the patriarchal spaces but in doing so seeks to affirm too that there are matriarchal spaces that must be respected (e.g. the woman sensible bodily parts). The Afro-feminist is not contesting for the male’s place in the scheme of nature; rather she wants to return to her original place in the scheme of nature – which is care-giver. Also, eco-Afro-feminism does not argue that the African man subjugate the African woman by subjugating nature; but rather, it argues that men are poor managers of nature (environment), and that the major work of caring for African ecology can be placed with the essence of the African woman. In other words, the African man has usurped the place of the African woman in African ecology by taking the centre stage in the African ecological consciousness, but in doing so, he has performed poorly in managing it. Therefore, there is the urgent need for the woman to reclaim her place at the centre of African ecological consciousness to restore care to the Earth. Eco-Afro-feminism challenges the African woman to no longer stand aloof from the scheme of things pertaining to nature; but to take up the role of care-giving, both to human and nonhumans.

The other dimension of eco-Afro-feminism views environmental problems as being suffered more by African women, than by African men (Osuji, 2011; Ejizu & Awajiusuk, 2011). It does not view the African woman and Nature as being subjugated by the African man; but as suffering from the stresses of neo-colonialism and capitalism. Despite this, the African man is better off than the African woman, because the patriarchal ideology of the Western economic system favours him. Eco-Afro-feminism therefore advocates that environmental problems should be viewed principally as the problem of the African woman. Therefore, in analyzing ecological issues, the condition of African women should be jointly analyzed, and accordingly prioritize. In other word, there is linkage between ecological problems and the condition of women created by the Western economic system that disfavour the African woman and nature. Since the African woman and nature are in the same condition, emancipating nature must lead to emancipation of African women, and vice versa. The methodology suggested by this philosophy is that the researcher in African environmental ethics should not analyze or examine environmental issues in isolation to the condition of African women. Rather, in doing African environmental ethics research, the condition of African women should be taken into consideration; since both nature and the African woman shares the same heritage of subjugation and disservice.

The methodology of eco-Afro-feminism also urges researchers in African environmental ethics not to only link their research questions to the condition of African women, but to also devise strategies that would bring the African woman into the heart of resolving ecological crisis in Africa. The major credit of this view is that it may lead to awaking African women from slumber and apathy to ecological issues in the continent, and put responsibility in their hands to care for the environment. The main problem with this methodology is that it may lead to neglect of the African man, who is equally affected, albeit negatively, by the ecological crisis; and causes the ecological injuries to be displaced from the woman and from nature unto the man.

Conceptual Decolonization

Conceptual decolonization is another method of African philosophy with significant relevance to African environmental ethics research. This method was introduced by Kwasi Wiredu in 1980 at a UNESCO conference, as a methodology or strategy to decentre historical imposition of foreign categories on African thought systems. The superimposition came through three avenues, namely, language, politics and religion (Wiredu, 1995). Superimposition through language is recognized as the most fundamental, due largely to philosophical training in the African place, conducted mostly in foreign languages. Methodology of conceptual decolonization is done in two ways. First by means of critical conceptual analysis of the unexamined assimilation into contemporary African philosophy the conceptual frameworks embedded in foreign philosophical traditions, and second, in the judicious exploitation of the African indigenous conceptual schemes to the extent it is relevant to the contemporary philosophical problems (Wiredu, 1995).

But this does not imply automatic/uncritical rejection of foreign concepts, but rather, it provides a “particular mode of thought that yield [philosophical] concepts may reflect the specifics of the culture, environment and even the accidental idiosyncrasies of the people [originating the concepts]” (Wiredu, 1995, p.23). Hence, much of the concepts are expressed through/in languages, therefore, methodology of conceptual decolonization demands that foreign concepts to be thought through in African languages.

The implication is that the re-thinking of the concepts may yield new (original) meanings which can lead correction to the distortions of the African consciousness (Wiredu, 1980; 1995), as well as aid indigenous people in understanding and internalizing philosophical postulations. The programme of conceptual decolonization involves cultural reconstruction of both pre-colonial and post-colonial African thought. The methodology of conceptual decolonization implores us to explore and exploit African indigenous conceptual schemes in terms of making them relevant to the modern society. However, the researcher should not merely do expository work on indigenous conceptual schemes, but instead, critically examine those traditional models and make them relevant to the modern need of Africa (Wiredu, 1980). In other words, a programme of conceptual decolonization also involves a project of reconstruction and modernization of African cultural schemes.

The decolonization project must be done in such a way that it does not lead to a new philosophical synthesis of anachronism, authoritarianism and supernaturalism; which afflicted traditional societies. That is, the tendency to place premium on age as a basis for philosophic wisdom with the adoption of cultural ideas without being based on critical reasoning and identification with gods, ancestors or Supreme Being is counterproductive. Hence, in general, Wiredu (1980) insists that a critique of African cultural schemes must take into cognizance the influence and consequence of science in modern society; as it accepts logical argumentation as necessary to methodology.

Wiredu (1995) has listed some of the concepts requiring decolonization to include: being, reality, existence, thing, object, entity, matter, ego, self, person, individuality, community, justice, god, world, universe, nature, supernatural, space, time, morality, nothingness, etc. The significance of this method to African environmental ethics research is that it ensures a re-examination of concepts and postulations. Hence, critical conceptual analysis of Western conceptual frameworks assimilated into African environmental ethics can go a long way to, not only to decentre Western meaning impose on African concepts employed to do research in the field, but it can also facilitate the relevant adaption of the Western models where such is absolutely necessary to furtherance research. Further, the exploitation of relevant African indigenous conceptual schemes can go a long way to replace decentred Western conceptual frameworks, and reposition postulations in African environmental ethics for easy internalization by indigenous and local people, using the scheme.

Moreover, the emphasis placed on criticism and rigor in the re-examination project in order to avoid sliding into anachronism, authoritarianism and supernaturalism will go a long way to ensure that researchers doing African environmental ethics do not import anachronistic elements of culture into their research in the name of maintaining an African flavour, or by using the ideas of elders uncritically, and thus, tie environmental ethics to unrealistic concepts. The emphasis of recognizing the place of science and logic in the scheme of things will particularly help to ensure that researchers adapt their researches to modern cultural shifts in Africa. The major draw-back of this method is that in placing premium on scientific knowledge and logic, it refers to Western scientific and logical paradigms; and generally with the objective to enable African societies to catch-up with the West in terms of physical development. Segun Ogungbemi (1994) has correctly identified the race to catch-up with Western countries by African societies as one of the main sources of environmental problem in Africa – whereby African countries by-pass sustainable practices in their yearning for development. Therefore, African environmental ethics researchers adopting this methodology should, in integrating Western scientific and logic paradigms, further decentre the foreign conceptual framework embedded in those paradigms.

Cultural Adaptionism

Another method of African philosophy that is relevant to African environmental ethics research is cultural adaptationism, a methodological paradigm identified with neo-universalists school in African philosophy. Some of the scholars identified with this school include Peter Bodunrin, Douglas Anele, Paulin Hountondji, Muyiwa Falaiye, and Uduma Uduma. The method refers to the paradigm view that philosophical cultures in non-African places are adaptable to the needs of African societies, based on the notion that philosophical methodology is universal without particularistic perspectives and that philosophy is neutral to culture (Azenabor 2002). The conceptual frameworks underpinning cultural adaptationism are embedded in scientific positivism. The idea is that philosophy is scientific and typically Western or that the most advanced forms of philosophical paradigms have been developed in the West, and all that is left is for application to other cultural contexts. Cultural adaptationism involves technique of critical conceptual analysis, logical scrutiny, rigorous examination, systematization, synthetic coherence, and scientific reflection.

In African environmental philosophy, promoters of the model of cultural adaption maintain that there are already many ecological models in the Western philosophical place which can sufficiently apply to environmental problems in African places (Ojomo, 2011; Fayemi, 2016). In other words, cultural adaptationism impresses on researchers doing African environmental ethics to sort out those ethical models developed in the West and articulate how they may apply in African contexts. The major significance of this method is that it has the tendency of opening up the field of African environmental ethics research to consider useful models in Western cultural contexts and adapt the relevant ones to cultural contexts in African places. But it also has the disadvantageous tendency to plunge scholars doing African environmental ethics research into what Edet (2015) refers to as “descriptive chauvinism”, that is, the attitude of researchers to assume uncritically that paradigms from Western traditions ask questions or construct responses in similar manner as those in an African context.

Storytelling Philosophy

One other method of doing African environmental ethics research is via a storytelling technique, a technique advocated by Davie Mutasa, Shumirai Nyota, and Jacob Mapara. It is a didactical technique that involves the process of telling a folktale to a select audience, usually comprising adult men and women who are learned in the wisdom and history of the community they represent. Thereafter, the participants are asked to identify elements in the story which communicate lofty thought with the intent of establishing their historical references. The participants are also asked to explain certain phrases and proverbs used in the story identified by the researcher. The procedure is repeated with different select groups, usually to establish corroboratory premises and disconfirm false interpretations. Mutasa, Nyota and Mapara (2008) avers that “folktales contain lessons for life, which are applicable to real life situations that are not lesson specific, but like proverbs, they are general and can be applied to most themes as long as the teller picks an appropriate Ngano [folktale] for the situation” (p.36).

This method is based on “dialogue, encounter and reflection”, and the researcher’s role is of “mediator between people and their perceptions of the world around them” (Mutasa, Nyota and Mapara, 2008, p.36). In using this method, the researcher has to “give her audience room to ask questions and give suggestions for problem solving” (Mutasa, Nyota and Mapara, 2008, p.36). With this method the researcher has the advantage of neutrality. However, it is the duty of the researcher to pick the folktales that would be used in the study. The researcher can also adjust the folktale to suit what he/she wants, since folktales are adaptable.

One major advantage of the storytelling method is that its didactic nature encourages some dialogue or participation by both the researcher and participants. Mutasa, Nyota and Mapara (2008) avers that it is “a more engaging method because it promotes reflective thinking and debates, as it teaches while entertaining and gives an opportunity for discussions to flourish” (p.52). The spill over effects is that it affords research participants the opportunity to identify possible environmental risks in the common habits in the community as well as the challenges surrounding an environmental issue, “and they can also learn the importance of the application of environmental impact assessments” (Mutasa, Nyota and Mapara, 2008, p.33). Further, Taylor (1997) notes that the joint participation of the researcher and local people serve to enrich the field work experience of the researcher. On the other hand, the participants’ interface with the researcher exposes them to encounter philosophic questions which enriches their field work experiences in terms of deepening their reflections and causing them to engage communal norms and standards as they relates to the challenges of the present times. Moreover, the “stories and accounts of material practices are offered as a way forward, to create models of virtue to enliven and empower the moral imagination of [the participants]... helps to build a more inclusive moral community, ...[serve] as a vehicle for normative action, providing a palpable demonstration of ‘good ethos’” (Goralnik *et al*, 2014, p.15).

The disadvantage with this method is that it allows very little for cross-cultural and inter-cultural interpretation of folktales as the participants would frequently insist on their own worldviews as being sacrosanct. Another limitation is that the researcher has to be learned (or at least fairly communicate) in the native language of the local participants in order to carry them into the research.

Conclusion

The thesis of this discourse is that in doing African environmental ethics research it is necessary to use methodologies of African philosophy so as to facilitate production of research that will be relevant in African contexts. Hence, ten methodologies have been identified in African philosophy to demonstrate how they can be employed in African environmental ethics research. The methodologies considered are: ethnophilosophical method, sage method, conversational method, Conceptual Mandelanization, Eco-Afrocentricism, indigenous language analysis, Eco-Afro-feminism, conceptual decolonization, Storytelling method, and cultural adaptationism. It also highlights and analyzes the significances and limitations of the methods. Further, it carries out expository analysis on the concept of African environmental ethics while also identifying the five principles thereof. The discourse reveals that African environmental ethics refers to: one, a set of governing principles, and two, a critical study of environmentally related concepts.

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