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Indigenous Knowledge at a Crossroads: In Pursuit of Identity or Objectivity

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Abstract

In a world where science and the scientific method have become the exemplars of truth, innovation, and technology, indigenous knowledge systems appear relegated to the peripheries of knowledge. This paper interrogates this area and the esoteric nature of indigenous knowledge in relation to mainstream epistemic discourses. The paper draws lessons from the scientific world. It makes the case that science has evolved over the centuries because of the way in which scientific findings are publicized, either in writing or through public demonstrations, such that others interested in understanding its fundamentals have access to this public scrutiny. This public assessment aspect of science enables the identification of faults in a given hypothesis, with the objective of understanding the idea, verifying if it aligns with existing known and proven models of knowledge, then make necessary corrections, or even discarding the hypothesis. This essential characteristic of science appears to be lacking in indigenous knowledge systems,

wherein instead of seeking objectivity, we seek a Pan-African preservation of an identity. Matters of epistemic truth in this context are not considered important. This is the major reason why indigenous knowledge systems have remained largely stagnant over time. The paper recommends that if indigenous knowledge systems are to make a meaningful impact on the epistemic scene, then there is a need to make such knowledge public, rather than esoteric, in order to identify errors which leads to refinement.

Keywords: *Indigenous Knowledge, Truth, Science, Objectivity, Relativism, Pan-Africanism.*

Introduction

In contemporary Africa, increasing emphasis is made on the need to preserve indigenous knowledge. This is a noble cause, in light of the genuine possibility of such knowledge being subsumed by other forms of knowledge from the rest of the world. In the contemporary digital and globalized world, information from any part of the world has never been more accessible to anyone on the planet than any other epoch in human history. However, an observation can be made in the manner in which knowledge has been moving from one part of the world to another. In this regard, knowledge generally tends to move from societies considered more advanced, to those which are considered less advanced. Although *advanced* is a context-dependent and relative word, this paper restricts its definition to that of *technological advancement*. From this understanding, an advanced society typically has highly developed technology and industry, including efficient transportation systems, advanced healthcare, and cutting-edge communication tools (Abraham, 1962). Technology, in this context involves using scientific principles to create tools, machines, systems, and processes that meet human needs and wants. Technology encompasses both tangible artifacts (like computers, vehicles, medical devices) and the knowledge, skills, and infrastructure required to design, produce, and operate these artifacts. It includes various types such as mechanical, electronic, medical, communication, industrial, and manufacturing technologies. Although '*advanced society*'could carry other connotations such as a rich cultural life with artistic, literary, and intellectual traditions, strong political institutions, as well as economically diversified and developed systems with a skilled workforce, this paper argues that the more technologically sophisticated a society is, the more *advanced* it tends to be considered. From this understanding, there seems to be a strong correlation between a society being considered as advanced and

technology. That is, the more developed a society's technology is (in the sense described above), the more advanced a society becomes. It is rare that knowledge flows from less advanced to more advanced societies. African societies are seen as more of the consumers of knowledge from advanced societies as opposed to being the manufacturers of such knowledge. This raises an important question: why is indigenous African knowledge difficult to transfer to other parts of the world? This is the central question of this paper and the intention is to find peculiarities of African indigenous knowledge that hinder its dissemination. In dissecting this problem, the paper will proceed as follows: the first section deals with the nature of knowledge in general. It will then proceed to an exploration of the nature of African indigenous knowledge. Finally, the paper will make an assessment of why indigenous knowledge has not made its mark on the international epistemic scene as a viable knowledge system that can compete with any other types of knowledge on the planet.

The Nature of Knowledge

Various works have substantively dealt with the nature of knowledge and how such knowledge can be attained. From these works, this paper draws a few assumptions with the prospect that a clearer picture of the nature of knowledge can be painted. The starting assumption is that knowledge depends on truth such that for any claim to qualify as knowledge, it must be grounded in objective, verifiable reality (Sagan, 1997). What is *True* about the universe affects us all in the same way with no exception. The capital T in *Truth* is used deliberately to represent what is ultimately real as opposed to what *appears* to be real. In this sense, truth is a concept that refers to the quality or state of being in accordance with facts or in accordance with reality. It represents what is accurate, genuine, and verifiable, as opposed to falsehood or error. Relativism, to which the African indigenous knowledge systems subscribes, assumes that there is no objective reality and that there are multiple realities and truths which are context-dependent (Boghossian, 2006). This line of reasoning is based on the further assumption that the world affects people differently depending on context. Hence, their conception of truth is going to be different.

Relativism assumes that there is no such thing as objective truth, arguing that nothing can be objectively verified since reality is a matter of subjectivity. Truth, according to relativistic thought, becomes whatever a certain group of people want to believe is true (Boghossian, 2006). This is

a view known as constructivism. According to the constructivist view of truth, *truth* is not an objective reality independent of us, but rather a model or understanding of reality that is constructed by individuals or societies through social processes, cultural contexts, and human perception (Abraham, 1962). According to constructivism, we cannot know reality "as it is" directly; instead, we interpret it through frameworks created by social agreements, historical conditions, and power relations within communities. As such, constructivism rejects the idea of absolute or fixed truths, emphasizing that what is considered true can vary across different societies and historical periods. This is the essence of indigenous knowledge. Mapara (2009), gives an ardent definition of *indigenous knowledge*:

Indigenous knowledge…[is] a body of knowledge, or bodies of knowledge of the indigenous people of particular geographical areas that…have survived on for a very long time. They are knowledge forms that have failed to die despite the racial and colonial onslaught that they have suffered at the hands of Western imperialism and arrogance. They are knowledge that was swept aside, denigrated by the colonialists and their sciences as empirical and superstitious as they sought to give themselves some form of justification on why they had to colonise other people's lands (Mapara, 2009).

However, in the view of this paper, there are two principal ways in which reflective human beings try, by placing their lives in a larger context, to give sense to those lives. The first way is by telling the story of their contribution to a community. This community may be the actual historical one in which they live, or another actual one, distant in time or place, or a quite imaginary one, consisting perhaps of a dozen heroes and heroines selected from history or fiction or both. The second way is to describe themselves as standing in immediate relation to a nonhuman reality. This relation is immediate in the sense that it does not derive from a relation between such a reality and their tribe, or their nation, or their real/imagined band of comrades. Stories of the former kind exemplify the desire for solidarity, and stories of the latter kind exemplify the desire for objectivity. Insofar as a person is seeking solidarity, she does not ask about the relation between the beliefs and practices of her chosen community and something outside that community (Lynch, 2000). Insofar as she seeks objectivity, she distances herself from the actual persons around her, not by thinking of herself as a member of some other real or imaginary group, but rather by attaching herself to something which can be described

without reference to any particular human beings. This is the beginning of objectivity.

In other words, once we detach ourselves from the groups that we belong and the beliefs that we get from them, we can now begin to seek objective truth. As long as we remain attached to our groups, then we may constantly seek confirming evidence to our pre-existing beliefs, a phenomenon known in psychology as *confirmation bias* (Gilovich *et al*., 2002). This results in a biased assessment of the evidence and, subsequently, distorted conclusions about what it is that is true about the world. This paper adopts the view that there is only one *Truth*. That is, for anything to be true, there must be only one possibility which makes everything else false. A person should be willing to either abandon their initial position or modify it in light of contradicting evidence. This is what it means to know things as true or for something to be true (Gilovich*et al*., 2002).

This paper also adopts the view that the world works on predictable patterns, and that these can be discovered. These predictable patters are what constitutes objective reality and it is our task to discover them through evidence. In this view, the universe operates on predictable patterns that apply to the entire universe equally (Gardner, 1957). The laws of physics, for example, have the following characteristics:

- appear to always be true;
- are universal and do not deviate anywhere in the universe;
- seem unaffected by external factors;
- seem stable and appear to be unchanging;
- are omnipresent;
- everything in the universe is compliant to them;
- and are homogeneous in terms of space and time (Sagan, 1997).

Physics in this sense is considered as *Western knowledge* since, as a scientific discipline, it originated and developed primarily within the context of Western Europe, especially during the Scientific Revolution of the 16th and 17th centuries (Gorelik, 2011). One of the tasks of truth seekers, then, is to unearth these patterns for us to better understand them. Once we understand these underlying patterns then it is possible to manipulate them to our advantage in the form of technology in areas such as medicine, power generation, transportation and even weapons development. Thus, there must be a way to discover these predictable patterns in nature.

However, it is important to note that there have been questions regarding the predictability of these natural patterns. The weather, for example, is understood to work in predictable patterns which can be uncovered by scientific principles. Notwithstanding, despite all the scientific developments that have been made thus far, humans have not been able to accurately predict weather patterns. However, even this failure to predict weather patterns too can be explained on the basis of what we know about physical laws. The answer lies in a difference between the behaviour of fluids and solids. Solids are made up of many tiny atoms which are locked in place with respect to each other. Water is not like this, but is instead a fluid in which all the water molecules are always moving around and sliding past each other. We can also say something similar about the atmosphere where all the molecules in the air are moving around sometimes bumping into each other. Liquids (like water) and gases (like air) are fluids (Evans, 2015). We know that a fluid is a substance with no fixed shape because the particles are always moving around and they can be tricky to study. It is very easy to predict what solids will do. If we throw a ball, or drop something off the roof, there are very simple equations that predict exactly what these objects will do. If we have enough information, we can predict with great precision how high they will go, how long they will be in the air, and exactly where they will land. But the behaviour of a fluid is not so easy to predict. There is no simple equation we can use because a fluid is not one thing. Fluids consist of quintillions of molecules, each doing its own thing (Evans, 2015). That is why for hundreds of years we have been able to predict the behaviour of distant objects in space like planets and comets and say exactly where they will be at any given time, while it is still quite difficult to make predictions about the weather here on earth. Planets and comets are solids, so we can use equations to predict their behaviour, but this is not the case with the weather. In this case, it can be observed that knowledge is indeed, a kind of activity in which we seek to uncover the predictable patterns of nature.

An important assumption of this paper on the nature of knowledge is that, because there is a correlation between knowledge and truth, there should be a mechanism of distinguishing what is true from what is false, which is theessence of *evidence*. Here, evidence is to be understood as a body of objectively verifiable facts that are positively indicative of, or exclusively concordant with, only one available position or hypothesis over any other (Sagan, 1997). Unverifiable anecdotal instances, subjective impressions and logically fallacious arguments do not constitute evidence. In other words, belief is not to be considered as evidence in itself. It does

not matter if a person *believes* that something is true; strongly believing something does not make it true. A belief, in this case, is to be understood as the mental state of holding something as true without any sufficient evidence or justification for holding such a belief (Gilovich, 1991).

It is important to note that for information to count as evidence it must be *true*. In this regard, we must show that it is actually true before we can honestly assert that it is. Otherwise, we should remain skeptical of that which is uncertain. We should be more skeptical when the content of the information is about something that is not even possible, especially if there has never been even a single case when any type of similar claim was ever verified to be true or proven to be implicitly real in any sense. In this case, evidence must, in some distinct sense, comprise of facts. A fact in this context, is to be understood as information which is objectively verifiable and demonstrable with measurable accuracy. Regardless of how convinced we are that something is the case, belief alone does not constitute knowledge. If we cannot verify the accuracy of our claims, to any degree at all, then we cannot actually know what we merely believe.

If something is to count as true, then there should be a mechanism to distinguish what is possible from what is imaginary. The truth must be accurate for us to believe that it is the case. If we cannot show proof of it, then we should not convince ourselves that it is true. The only reason to believe anything about the world is evidence. This evidence must be assessed critically. We cannot derive truths about the world by intuition alone, or by feelings or opinions (Vyse, 1997). There should be evidence that people can look at for themselves in order to corroborate their beliefs and opinions. Asserting unsupported information as facts leads to deception and undermines factual integrity.

Knowledge is concerned with what is evident, and whatever is not supported does not warrant serious consideration. What is closest to the truth is not a matter of choice. We are compelled to face the facts and accept evident realities, and we are obligated to change our minds according to our understanding of the evidence regardless of our beliefs. We do not want to be fooled into basing our decisions on falsehoods. Only accurate information has practical application, thus, our goal should be to improve our understanding. The truth is what the evidence shows and what we can show to be the case. If we get contrary information which happens to be correct, then we should be challenged to shift positions in favour of the truth to avoid ignorance.

A claim becomes factual when it is confirmed to such an extent that it would be reasonable to offer temporary agreement (Sagan, 1997). But all

facts that count as knowledge are provisional and subject to challenge, and therefore skepticism can be considered as a method that leads to provisional conclusions. A skeptic is someone who questions the validity of a particular claim by calling for evidence. Some activities, such as water dowsing and extrasensory perception, have been tested and have failed the tests often enough that we can provisionally conclude that they are false. Other things, such as hypnosis and lie detectors have been tested, but the results are inconclusive, so we must continue formulating and testing hypotheses until we can reach a provisional conclusion. The key to skepticism is to navigate the treacherous straits between "know nothing" *skepticism* and "anything goes" *credulity* by continuously and vigorously applying the methods of critique. Skepticism, in this case is a vital part of knowledge.

Key to the skeptic way of attaining knowledge is *science*, which can be defined as a set of methods designed to describe and interpret observed or inferred phenomena, past or present, and aimed at building a testable body of knowledge open to rejection or confirmation (Gilovich et al., 2002). In other words, science is a specific way of analyzing evidence with the goal of testing claims. The takeaway here is that what is true should be demonstrably true.

In many African contexts, belief systems encapsulate knowledge claims which are not subjected to empirical evidence. Although the African belief system is rooted in religion, culture and history, there are limitations to understanding supernatural causes in a scientific manner. Upon the scientific discovery of how certain supposed *supernatural* events occurred, new paradigms of knowledge and discipline emerged. Untested claims, as noted earlier, lead to ignorance. Ignorance is the number one cause of misinformation where people are unwilling to explore or interrogate their assumptions. They become comfortable with the lethargic mentality of convincing themselves that they know what they do not actually know, or reject what is suggested by the evidence if it contradicts what they thought they already knew. What is true should, in principle, be demonstrable, reproducible and accessible in the public domain.

There has to be some way to know what is really true and how true it is. This is why science relies on evidence for everything. In science, positive claims require positive evidence, and extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence; and what can be asserted without evidence can be dismissed without evidence (Sagan, 1997). Scientists maintain caution unless something is evidently true because if a scientist turns out to be wrong, or says that something is definitely true without evidence, it

willdamage their credibility and reputation. They cannot claim anything without some evidence(Sagan, 1997). Any claim is going to be thoroughly checked by other scientists who are looking for mistakes. This is known as the process of peer review which is continuous, relentless and unforgiving.

So scientists are very careful to distinguish what they might believe from what they actually know, and they are still hesitant to say that they know things even when they do, because in science, knowledge is a justified belief, meaning that it has measurable accuracy. You can be tested on your knowledge to show what you know. But if you cannot demonstrate that knowledge to any degree at all or by any means whatsoever, then how can you be sure that you understand things correctly?

Drawing from the above assumptions, the final assumption of this paper is that anything that is unsupported by evidence does not count as *Truth*. As highlighted above, evidence is of great importance in epistemic judgments. That which is presented without evidence can be dismissed without evidence. The burden of proof lies on the one making the positive claim that something is the case. We do not have to disprove every empty assertion of impossible absurdity; rather, we should expect the person making the positive claim to justify their claims just like any honest person would. Shifting the burden of proof is a logical fallacy because positive claims require positive evidence and the burden of proof is always on the one making the positive claim. If you say position X is true, we can simply say 'no it is not,' and we do not have any burden to prove the negative, nor are we necessarily making that negative claim when we reply by rejecting or calling out the bluff of these unsupported claims. In other words, we have to show the truth of something or admit that there is no truth to it. But the majority ofpeople in this world are not willing to prove most of their unsupported beliefs. For example, in 2017, one self-proclaimed Zimbabwean prophet, Prophet Madungwe described an occasion where he went to heaven and had a wrestling match with God, where they won the match (nehandatv, 2017). There is clearly no evidence for this, and some absurd implications follow (such as what would happen to those who were praying when God was participating in a wrestling match), but followers tend to believe things like this without any evidence. Again, at the onset of the Covid 19 pandemic, various conspiracy theories were presented as explanations for the disease. For example, 5G technology was blamed for causing Covid 19, and rich billionaires of the world who were out to control world population were also blamed.

Holding such beliefs, and their rapid spread among certain groups, can have devastating consequences to the generality of humankind and may jeopardize public health response (for example, undermining motivation to engage in social distancing and willingness to vaccinate against the virus) which may have disastrous effects.

Identity Versus Objectivity in Indigenous African Knowledge Systems

There is a distinct tendency among African scholars to support indigenous knowledge systems as being at par with other modes of knowledge, especially scientific knowledge, which is generally viewed with suspicion and thought to be the arch-nemesis of indigenous knowledge systems. However, indigenous knowledge is difficult to classify as *scientific knowledge* due to a number of reasons. First, as shown in this discussion thus far, scientific knowledge seeks underlying principles that apply across different contexts, populations, or times, while indigenous knowledge may be limited to a specific context. Second, scientific claims must be testable and supported by data that others can verify independently. More often than not, indigenous knowledge claims cannot be tested in controlled environments, meaning they are difficult to verify independently. Third, scientific knowledge aims to minimize personal biases, emotions, or cultural influences, striving to represent facts as they truly are rather than how one might wish them to be. Indigenous knowledge demands, to a great degree, loyalty to a person's cultural beliefs rather than to objectivity. Fourth, science follows organized, methodical procedures such as hypothesis formulation, data collection, analysis, and generalization, whereas there is no discernible method followed in indigenous knowledge systems. Finally, scientific findings are reproducible and consistent when experiments or observations are repeated under similar conditions. Indigenous knowledge is often not subjected to experimentation such that the observations are reproducible in a consistent way.

This being the case, there is a sense in which science is considered a threat which has the potential to obliterate indigenous knowledge systems out of existence (Adebayo, 2013). It is the opinion of this paper that this kind of approach to knowledge is meant to promote solidarity with one's group (relativity, as discussed in previous sections of this paper) at the expense of standing aloof from one's own cultural beliefs as a disinterested observer; *objectivity*. Identity in this context can be understood as a kind of solidarity with one's own cultural beliefs, language, religion and ways of

doing things. In essence, to maintain one's identity, in this context, is to be at one with the group from which they come from. One identifies with their cultural group. Due to the communal nature of African existence as championed by African scholars such as Menkiti (1984), the group shapes their ideas, behavior, values and beliefs. But, as has already been noted, insofar as one seeks solidarity with their group, one moves away from objectivity and adopts a relativistic and constructivist view of reality. Objectivity in this context should be understood as seeking knowledge for its own sake, regardless of whether it conforms to one's own cultural or personal beliefs or not. It can be likened to seeking the Truth for its own sake. Where one seeks the Truth for its own sake, one detaches themselves from the grip of their group's beliefs, and even questions some of their own beliefs in order to come up with those beliefs that bring them closer to the truth.

Indigenous knowledge and its promotion has tended to follow the path of identity, rather than that of objectivity. Promoters of African indigenous knowledge often create the impression that all knowledge that stems from places that once colonized African countries should be treated with suspicion and, in some cases, must be discarded altogether. They create an*us-versus-them* scenario in epistemic discourses where *Us* is the African knowledge system and *Them*, is what is broadly bundled as *Western* knowledge systems (a conglomerate of European and American knowledge systems). There is a suspicion even towards objectively verifiable facts such as those we find in science, with African scholars even seeking a unique kind of scientific enterprise that is based on African experiences (Adebayo, 2013). Herein lies the biggest challenge of this kind of endeavor: an attempt to reinvent the wheel.

Reinventing The Wheel: Science Versus Indigenous Knowledge Systems

The history of science spans centuries, beginning with ancient civilizations such as the Greeks, up to the contemporary era, in which scientific progress has revolutionized the way we view the world from communication to advanced methods in agriculture, all the way up to artificial intelligence. Science as discussed earlier, should be understood as, not only a body of knowledge about the world we live in, but also method of obtaining such knowledge through observation, experimentation and documentation of replicable results. As indicated above, there is a great suspicion towards science because it is identified by African scholars as a

neo-colonial attempt meant to disregard indigenous knowledge systems. There are two problems that arise from this type of thinking.

First, there is an implicit assumption in such thinking that different cultures experience the world differently. For instance, in their characterization of African science, advocates of indigenous knowledge systems incorporate elements of the African belief system, with its emphasis on esoteric knowledge and beliefs in the supernatural (Hountondji, 1983). Most sub-Saharan African countries have an elaborate system of supernatural beliefs which are used to explain everything from natural phenomena to even misunderstood/unknown forces and worlds beyond the realm of the physical. The implicit assumption here is that Africans live in a different world where established laws of physics do not apply, or at least may be ignored or temporarily suspended. This is a world in which witchcraft exists, people possess powers to talk to the dead, control the weather and deliver important messages from the spirits (Hountondji, 1983). Yet this is not based on any evidentiary basis (except anecdotal and subjective impressions which are difficult to classify as evidence), and neither can it be replicated in controlled environments. The second problem that arises is that there is an implicit assumption that any knowledge that is foreign to Africa (especially that which contradicts or does not conform to established African beliefs and practices), is bad for Africans. Hence, by association, all knowledge of foreign/Western origin is bad.

Let's examine the first assumption. To say that Africans experience the natural world differently is quite difficult to substantiate, especially in the modern day. We now have a better understanding of the scientific world through scientific discoveries and technological advancements that span centuries. For instance, all human beings, regardless of context, are affected by the laws of physics the same way. Gravity, for example, pulls things down towards the center of the earth and this is true of all things on earth, hence the veracity of the claim 'what goes up, must come down.' There are elaborate mathematical computations that even make it possible to predict the gravitational pull even on planets that we have never been to as humans. As an example, on February 18th, 2021, the space rover *Perseverance* landed on Mars through complex calculations of gravity conditions on a planet that humans have never actually been to. All this is possible due to our vast understanding of how gravity works. The aerospace industry is based on scientific calculations that involve gravity. For a plane to fly, for example, the plane must have two essential things that help in overcoming gravity: thrust (provided by the engines to

overcome drag) and wings that can sustain lift once the pressure over the wings becomes lower than that flowing under the wings (Bernoulli's principle of lift). Such a simple, yet adequate and replicable, explanation of flight cannot be seen in African indigenous knowledge systems, where witches are claimed to fly, yet no one can provide any meaningful explanation of how they actually do this, neither can anyone replicate this in a public way that leaves no room for doubt, resorting instead to esoteric knowledge. This is a problem because, as hinted earlier, for it to count as knowledge at all, there must be a way to demonstrate it in a distinct way. This means that there must be some evidence that demonstrates that whatever we claim to be knowledge can be known at all.

When we come to the second assumption, it is plain to see that not all things of a Western origin are intrinsically bad. There are African scholars who champion what this paper would identify as *radical Pan-Africanism* in its different formulations. At the base of such radical Pan-Africanism is the idea that what is African is intrinsically good, and conversely, what is un-African is intrinsically bad by virtue of being foreign. To make matters worse, coming from a history of colonialism where the colonial system was brutal and oppressive towards Africans, it is expected that anything generally perceived as originating from the former colonial powers is viewed with great suspicion. This has been the basis why many African scholars in the area of Political Philosophy have argued that *Western* democracy is not ideal for Africa since, they claim, Africa has its own political systems which are different from the West.

However, this does not necessarily follow, as we have numerous things that are of Western origin that we have come to adopt as part of our way of life and, as Africans, we do not seem to have any qualms about those things. For example, it is not surprising to find that the same African scholars who champion African indigenous knowledge systems live an almost exclusively Western lifestyle, and quite hypocritically so, that has been made possible by the same knowledge system that they advance as a threat to indigenous African knowledge. They live in Western style houses, drive massive fancy Western SUVs, use the latest Western electronic gadgets, and their children, that they are ever so proud of, study in Western Universities abroad. In fact, most of these scholars who champion the advancement of indigenous knowledge systems have either received a Western kind of education, or actively seek opportunities to go and further their studies in the West, which they assume would make their lives better. This alone is sufficient to demonstrate the observation that what is Western is not necessarily a bad thing.

Further, the world in general has benefitted immensely from the achievements of mainstream science, which is generally considered to be a threat to African indigenous knowledge systems. This is not an attempt to put science on a pedestal where it deserves praise and veneration. But to deny that the numerous scientific and technological breakthroughs and findings have made the world a better place than any other epoch in human history, would be doing an injustice to reality. Talk of sanitary conditions to live in, vaccines that have almost eradicated some previously deadly diseases, ease of communication through mobile phone technology, increased outputs of food through agricultural technology, as well as ease of movement from place to place through various modes of transportation making the world one global village. All of these advancements have become possible because of advancements in science.

Indigenous Knowledge at the Crossroads

From the discussion thus far, it does seem that indigenous knowledge is indeed at the crossroads; either we continue down the path of seeking identity or choose the path of pursuing the Truth. It is easy for an African person to defend the view that indigenous knowledge comes with a host of benefits to the African, if not the world. Being raised in an African household and being acculturated to the African ways of doing things into their adult years, it becomes increasingly difficult for the average African to accept other worldviews as offering a better view of the world than what they already know. An African proverb runs 'the person who has never travelled thinks that their mother is the best cook.' In this sense, if we do not explore other epistemic avenues, we may fall into the trap of promoting our indigenous knowledge as being at par with other forms of knowledge, which, in reality, may actually be better than our own. The central problem with indigenous knowledge systems, as indicated above, is its esoteric nature. That is, much of it is shrouded in mystery and secrecy, such that it is difficult to subject to any kind of testing or empirical verification. Simply saying 'this is how we do things' has been demonstrated above to be insufficient where it pertains knowledge claims. Public demonstration of the veracity of knowledge claims is necessary. Public demonstration here is meant that for it to be true, information must in some shape or form be available to anyone who seeks to understand such things. If a person seeks to understand, for example, how to communicate with the dead, then there should be specific steps on how to do this, available to anyone in the world, which makes such information

replicable to a great degree. Many people have been deceived by clever individuals who claim to possess exclusive access to certain esoteric knowledge. It becomes imperative that such knowledge claims be publicly available to avoid instances of deceit, or at least creating a perceivable difference between the real and the imagined.

To ensure the relevance of Indigenous African knowledge in the 21st century, there must be a paradigm shift, from a culture of secrecy, to one where all beliefs are subjected to some sort of observable scrutiny. This allows us to distinguish which ideas are actually true (in the sense discussed throughout this paper), or at least open up our beliefs to critique, with a view of improving them, much like what happens in the world of science. This is not to say that science offers the best knowledge. However, from a purely results oriented perspective, judging by what science has produced in terms of technology, its method seems to be effective at providing us with a working understanding of how the world works. However, if we decide to maintain identity and solidarity with our group at the expense of the pursuit of the Truth, then, it will not be surprising that a hundred years from now, much of our African indigenous knowledge will still be the same, largely unchanging and always finding sympathisers who defend them simply because it is part of their culture, rather than on the basis of the merit of such knowledge, having withstood rigorous scrutiny.

Conclusion

It can be observed that although it is important to maintain our identities as Africans by championing African indigenous knowledge, this should not be done at the expense of the pursuit of the objective Truth. An antagonistic or adversarial approach to alternative kinds of knowledge does not necessarily drive our own knowledge forward, but has the potential to keep us stuck in one epistemic era, with knowledge that may be epistemically and functionally obsolete. Bringing our knowledge systems to the public domain, and subjecting them to public scrutiny, with the aim of improving them where they fall short, is the surest way that our belief systems will improve for the better, and be able to better compete on the world epistemic stage.

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