

AN ONTOLOGICAL DECONSTRUCTION OF THE 'EPISTEMIC AGENTS' IN INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE STRUCTURES

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to provide an ontological analysis of the influence of 'epistemic agents' in the determination of our stages, strengths and capacities of reasoning towards the structure of thought and branches of knowledge. It will access the role of 'epistemic agents' in the enhancement of intellectual development in African thought. These 'epistemic agents' include people, land, water and the entity of nature. The relationship among them is that they are the centre of knowledge, and our level of understanding of them affords us the opportunity to build genuine knowledge and strong social constructions on them. This will add to our knowledge built up as well. This stems from the fact that when Africans encounter these 'epistemic agents', they either conceive them in terms of their significance, in worship (religions) or in knowledge (traditional, moral, medical, social, science and development). This brings us to the knowledge of them as empirical 'epistemic agents.' This paper presents these 'epistemic agents' as 'empiricities' that undertow the epistemic rules that moved and are still moving the thinking of the people. This paper argues the following, that; (i) Our knowledge of the epistemic rules generating knowledge from these 'epistemic agents' is ideologically saturated. (ii) Our linguistic pre-figurative

strategies of explanation are not enough to portray our indigenous understanding of them. (iii) The African understanding of these agents has been lost in the myths of rationality and science espoused by the Western dominant canons, and as such, has been decoupled from the cognitive power of language and formalized systems of thought. The objective of this paper is to emphasize on the notion of 'epistemic agents' as the sources of the mental infrastructure of all human branches of knowledge and, more importantly, the foundation for Africa's self-development and research. The aim of this paper is to rescue African narratives from primordial silence caused by the suppressive effects of dominant classical traditional protocols and to propose an original development of the 'epistemic agents' in the invention of relevant indigenous academic disciplines from our genuine understanding of these agents.

Keywords: Deconstruction, ontology, empiricist, knowledge, 'epistemic agents', language, nature

Introduction

The central concern of this paper is that the Western orientations, research and knowledge about the 'epistemic agents' tend to dominate other orientations about them. It is such that other world views on these 'episteme agents' have been swallowed up in Western epistemological blocks, and the relevance of other sources of knowledge about them is contested and considered as myth or non-scientific. This calls for a review of knowledge development and other methodologies associated with the study of these agents.

African studies of these 'epistemic agents' is one of those epistemological blocks that have been dominated by the West epistemological structures. One has to ask; does it mean that there is

no genuine study of these 'epistemic agents' within the indigenous structures of learning? How can the Western paradigm be evaluated in contemporary African paradigm and pedagogy? Philosophers are continually engaged in discussions, emanating from diverse cultures and temperaments, about what knowledge is and what philosophers should do. In any country where the philosophical scene is overwhelmingly dominated by non-indigenous concerns and approaches, questions ought to be raised concerning this dominance. Moreover, it is important for philosophers to engage actively in the ongoing debates about philosophical perspectives that have emerged not only in contrast to the Western epistemological paradigm but also in contestation of it.

However, it is important, within the larger society, that philosophy in Africa shakes off the Western paradigm. Again, we have to state the reasons for these actions? There is need to recognize the character and meaning of philosophies dominated by the Western epistemological paradigm in Africa. There is need also to take cognizance of the use of the term 'non-Western', as it is objectionable to the extent that it positions other philosophies as caricatures of Western philosophy.

Furthermore, the dominance of Western methodologies in African researches is so overwhelming. It is such that research must be done based on an approved or given Western criteria. This leaves us to ask; is there no African philosophical research or epistemological paradigm? What is the relationship between philosophy and the culture from which it emanates? This is the wake of intellectual decolonisation, where other methodologies must be approved as standard, since they generate knowledge. This is ideological liberation. Thus, 'deconstructive' and 'reconstructive' challenges arise in the African epistemological paradigm, science and intellectual discourses. Thus, the need to deconstruct the sources that are considered as the foundation of all human engagements arises. It is part of the goal of this paper to engage in the ontological deconstruction of epistemic agents in order to create space to re-

evaluate African (indigenous) epistemological structures and paradigms.

Defining ‘Episteme Agents’

What are ‘epistemic agents’? By ‘epistemic agents’, we mean objects of cognition. They are objects that create impression on our senses the moment we come in contact with them. They are as well our objects of thought. This paper discusses them as *empiricities*; that is, they are empirical in nature. Again, they guide the direction of knowledge, science, discovery and experimentations, for instance: land, people, water, air, nature and lots more. In the physical science, land or earth crust is part of their study and researches. Biology studies the living nature, psychology studies human behaviour, and various aspects of human research and learning are specialties in any of these agents of episteme.

The presence of epistemic agents is well-defined within indigenous canons, knowledge structures and hierarchal systems. In this form, they are considered as episteme. Considerably, episteme is world view, a slice of the historical, common to all branches of knowledge which proposes on each other the same norms and patterns and postulates. It is a general stage of reason, a certain structure of thought that the men of a particular age/period cannot escape – a great body of legislation written once and for all by some anonymous hand (Foucault, 1972: 191). This term, which Foucault introduces in his book *The Order of Things*, refers to the orderly 'unconscious' structures underlying the production of scientific knowledge in a particular time and place. It is the 'epistemological field' which forms the conditions of possibility for knowledge in a given time and place.

Our contacts and knowledge of ‘episteme agents’ reveal how our lives have conformed to the concepts inherent in the understanding them as ‘*empiricities*’. These ‘*empiricities*’ are evidenced in every aspect of our lives, socio-economic discourse, belief (religion) and labour. These

'epistemic agents' constitute the body of legislation that make up the principles and concepts that our bodies of knowledge consist of. This means that 'epistemic agents' serve as measures to determine our stages of reason and human development. It is within the study of these agents that we discover clashing classes, industrial revolutions, frontier experiences, catastrophic famines and scientific discoveries. This study as well provides us with the necessary knowledge to access civilizations and individuals bent on world domination, information revolution, philosophies, histories and varying ideologies.

The creative essence of epistemic agents is naturally connected. In the sense that these epistemic agents are outside of us, environmentally constituted, it is not hidden from any age, race and group. What is needed is our genuine understanding of them using a developed and functional language to create and convey our knowledge of them. In his definition of episteme, Foucault places great significance on language in the constitution of knowledge. He further elaborated;

By Episteme, we mean, in fact, the total set of relations that unite, at a given period, the discursive practices that gives rise to epistemological figures, sciences, and possibly formalized systems; the way which ... each of these discursive formations ... are situated and operated (Ibid, 191).

This could be simply understood especially when we see that nature is rationalized in connection to the epistemic agents. The validation of epistemological structures can be seen with the indigenous knowledge structures, even though the presentations may not be tantamount to modern-day intellectual canons and systems of 'scientific' specifications. An analysis of indigenous presentations could be deduced in three parts; (a) the world has a rational structure (b) this structure is knowable, and (c) it is relatively simple and easy to understand. This can be related in Hargrove's evaluation of Thales as follows;

Thales believed that the world was organized in an orderly manner and that the principles describing or governing this

order were true for all parts of the universe. Furthermore, he was convinced that these principles could be discovered and comprehended through the use of reason. In other words, [humans], by engaging in rational activity could uncover the secrets of the rational world ... (Hargrove, 1989:18).

This has led to the need to study the universe and all it has to offer, in order to improve humanity. This is also seen in the historical excavation of truth - philosophical, cultural, scientific and many other forms. The goal is to understand the world - epistemic agents.

The Paradox of Knowledge Formation within Indigenous Knowledge Structures

When we think about the paradox of knowledge formation from these ‘episteme agents’, we are reminded of the *empiricites* and *epistemic organization* of knowledge. These agents bring to our mind the structure of knowledge, especially when we see from the natural perspective - most times. They remain unknown to us only after deeper exploration about them. This is the only way we can afford the chance of genuine knowing. Thus, our knowledge and history emerge from our understanding of these agents, whether from religious, scientific historical and social constructions. For instance, countries are especially known for the people that live there, the rivers or water bodies surrounding them as well as their land masses. Obviously, nations are described essentially in terms of people, land and water. This could be best understood in terms of ontological relatedness. These serve as the reason why these ‘episteme agents’ influence the epistemic organization of knowledge. In this case, nations are known as great, developed and technological in terms of their level of research, exploration and discoveries of people, land and water. They are referred to as world powers. It is from the understanding of these ‘episteme agents’ that those archipelagos of branches of knowledge are constituted.

Hence, branches of knowledge are built based on the divisions of these ‘episteme agents’. The science, social science, humanities,

management and behavioural sciences are all discipline emanating from the study of these agents and their transactions. Our division of the different specializations of knowledge still rests on these agents. This shows that by exploring what constitutes the 'episteme agents' (what happens catastrophically within and/or between them, their cause and effect mechanism) that the contents of each discipline is created, and as well they do not succeed each other. Humans exercise their rational privileges and strengths to ensure that knowledge, its contents, demonstrations and practice are built, and adequate demarcations are placed on each discipline to ensure discipline in study, as this will enhance research and development.

Human beings are both empirical and deductive beings. They are the product of their lived social experiences as well as the constitutors of knowledge by the invocation of deductive knowledge. This placed the human person in a bi-standpoint in terms of knowledge; first as a subject of knowledge (episteme agents) and second as a knowledge creator (epistemic constructor or canon creator). Okoro wrote that:

There are two very important points we have to note (a.) that human being endowed with consciousness is the source of historical reality (metaphysical inquiry) (b.) human being endowed with consciousness is also the determinate of reality (epistemological Inquiry). (Okoro, 2011: 182)

The implication of this is to enable us to draw the limits of when humans are legislating knowledge formation from when they are objects of epistemological inquiry. This also recognized the human persons as not only a being-in-the-world but a being-with-others (Unah, 1996:60). The import of this is that not only is the human person constituted by his/her projects and relations with the things which s/he makes use of, s/he is also related to others, because in the first instance, others are also beings-in-the-world (Oyeshile, 2005:32). This means that the place of humans must be delineated within indigenous structures. This could lead to the various forms the epistemological paradox of humanity assumes. The import of this is that there is where the canon creation is assessed in terms of

objectivity from a subjective standpoint and away from bias. This is also where the contents and constitutions of knowledge are clearly demonstrated.

One of the contemporary paradoxes of knowledge formation within indigenous structure is using Western or other intellectual paradigms to evaluate, articulate and/or transfer knowledge of any form to African indigenous scholarship or vice versa. Basically, the influence of foreign scholarship on the attitude of writing and research can harm the organization of indigenous knowledge and their connections to native learning. This is why indigenous scholarship must be independent. Indigenous scholars should understand the implication of this. The true nature of indigenous knowledge forms is still not brought to limelight; thus, it becomes a suppressive agenda and another type of epistemological colonization. This means that a deconstruction of epistemic agent is a project worth taken seriously.

Indigenous Linguistic Pre-Figurative Strategies of Explanation Versus Formalized Systems of Thought

Frankly speaking, our access to knowledge reality is through language. Language is a scheme of skills vital to human beings. Within African studies of reality, there are doubts about the possibility of a genuine knowledge about reality without the use of indigenous knowledge. Knowledge building and the understanding of these ‘episteme agents’ in Africa have been polarized. This stems from the fact that majority of African scholars and the intelligentsia no longer think within their indigenous languages. Second is the fact that the foreign languages in Africa are not well known to all indigenous people and, as such, there is a vacuum in the thought system of scholars in their conception of reality. Thus “African academic philosophers (and scientists of all kinds) have had their philosophical (and scientific) discourses in the languages of some foreign culture; English, French, Spanish and Portuguese” (Wiredu, 1998b:147). The repercussion of this is that there is a paradox of understanding and transmission of knowledge that have double effects on both the

indigenous and foreign epistemological blocks. This is to say that the philosophy of our indigenous culture, as expounded in such language, must in principle be understandable to the people who own the language (ibid). This then implies that they are to juxtapose what they have learnt from the foreign with the indigenous, including the conditions, values, truth and knowledge-forming processes.

Third, most African scholars are faced with 'Reconstructionist' assumption about the nature of reality in their indigenous studies. Reconstructionist scholars believe that the indigenous knowledge lost in colonization, or undocumented forms can be reconstituted using modern assumptions in order to fill up the gap in knowledge. Hence, the African conception(s) of reality has (have) been distorted and the understanding of reality is left 'un-African.' This is evident in fact that none of the over twenty-three thousand (23,000) major languages in Africa are used in terms of serious research, and as building knowledge blocks in the world generally and in Africa in particular. Academic research is still done within the sphere of dominant languages such as English Language and French in Africa. In this regard, Kwasi Wiredu is of the view that;

What is immediately pertinent is to remark that unanalyzed exhortations to Africans to preserve their indigenous culture are not particularly useful- indeed, they can be counterproductive. There is an urgent need in Africa today for the kind of analysis that would identify and separate the backward aspects of our culture ... from those aspects that are worth keeping. That such desirable aspects exist is beyond question and undoubtedly many African political and intellectual leaders are deeply impregnated by this consideration. Yet the analytical dimension seems to be lacking in their enthusiasm (Wiredu, 1988:198).

This brings to mind an inevitable question; with what language do Africans conceive reality? This creates gaps and doubt for the possibility of a genuine knowledge about the reality of African studies? This calls for scholarly debates. This notwithstanding, even

though there are claims that reality is conceived in indigenous languages, how are these realities expressed? Considering the statement below,

The assumption ... that in speaking a person must be *guided*... There must be something at hand that shows him how to speak, how to put words together grammatically and within coherent sense ... what is being explained is knowledge – both knowing that and knowing how. The presence in him of the structure of the language or of its systems of rules is supposed to account for this knowledge – to explain how he knows (Malcolm, 1971:389).

We are still trapped with the technicalities of language - the ability to translate, transliterate and the search for synonymous between languages to convey necessary ideas and knowledge exactly. If these technicalities are not properly overcome, the ideas and knowledge under translation are subject to being discarded as irrelevant, lacking in logicity, unscientific, and as such do not have the capacity to meet the standard of knowledge. We see these in Western attitude to non-Western philosophies.

The most important fact remains that the agents of episteme is indeed 'out there.' They stir the creativity in minds. However, the articulation of these agents depends on knowing how the indigenous languages have developed and functioned so as to create and convey knowledge. The role of language is crucial in building systems of knowledge. Language is a receptacle of thought. Language is a medium for the transfer of knowledge. Thus, Amaku reiterates;

One Importance of language is that it expresses a unique world view; a people's conception of the world, their fears, hopes and aspirations ... language is a form humanity brings itself to expression. Treats of the diversity of structure of human language is the extent that the intellectual development of mankind stands upon its influence ... (Amaku, 2005: 104).

This makes the cognition-linguistic processes (meaning, coding, encoding, referencing, oratorical, thought processes, writing,

consciousness, rationality and communication and lots more) all prey to language use. The fact remains that our active articulations of these 'epistemic agents' depend on knowing how our indigenous language has developed and functioned to create and convey knowledge. There is need to emancipate these epistemic agents from the 'veil of ideas.' Our consciousness, rationality and communication can all become prey to the use of language. The massive changes and dislocations in consciousness are only manifested in the use of language. Reality perceived through these agents manifest in various forms, such as, religious, artistic, scientific, ideological, historical, metaphysical, epistemological, and the rest. The way we can understand them is through linguistic modes of consciousness. These various manifestations of the different understanding of episteme are only evidenced in the dominant use of language. These show that African indigenous languages have roles to play in our conception of reality. This is better conceived as *epistemic linguistic change*.

It more so reveals the fact that knowledge and other secrets of nature can be known through the vehicle of transparent language. Language is the essence of culture and constitutes the medium for cultural transmission (Okediadi, 2004: 126). The functions of language are different and important in terms of knowledge creation. Language, being transparent, must represent the true order of things. A less-developed language creates ambiguities in understanding reality. It possesses lesser track to reality. It is essentially used in presenting (telling or writing) and in some kind of knowing and understanding. Language is the essential underlying matrix that facilitates the growth and development of epistemological structures.

In essence, indigenous linguistic strategic figure of expression should be employed to express objectivity of knowledge structures. As against the formalized systems of thought, developing indigenous languages is the only structure and super-structure that should be created to address the paradoxes indigenous languages present in developing African epistemological blocks and other forms of

indigenous knowledge systems. In this instance, indigenous languages do not correspond to this contemporary scientific standard of acceptance. If we do not accept the referential nature of language, we raise doubts about the project of constructing an indigenous epistemological structure. This is because the referential nature of language is a key to indigenous reconstruction and construction paradigm which is important in several ways: building indigenous epistemological structure and developing indigenous languages. When we do not use indigenous language in its referential nature, the originality of our indigenous epistemology will be questioned in terms of its truthfulness and ability to solve the problems of the indigenous people. That is to say, if our language cannot produce the real meaning of knowledge, we are forced to seek the meaning of life outside there, either at the intertextual realm of the recorded and re-signified evidence or the cultural interpretation it generates. Put differently, if our languages lack the cognitive capacity to express our problems and knowledge about them, then we have to look elsewhere for relevant linguistic figurations of reality. This is one of the ways indigenous language lacks cognitive capacity for research, and the language automatically dies academically. Then we can pose this question: How many indigenous languages in Africa can stand as academic language?

Why we are emphasizing on the development of African languages is that if the indigenous language is opaque, it makes it difficult to deconstruct, construct and reconstruct our epistemological blocks and (re)orient and (re)create the future. We need a *linguistic deconstructive turn* in the creation of branches of knowledge. Language opens the avenue to explore the meaning invested by people on the ‘epistemic agents.’

An Ontological Deconstruction of the ‘Epistemic Agents’ in Indigenous Knowledge

Another issue with building indigenous epistemological structure is the imposition of cultural custodian of knowledge. Cultural custodians

of knowledge can be in form of kings, titled men, traditional priests and priestesses, community historians, philosophers and indigenous repositories of knowledge. When the place and roles of these cultural custodians are not properly addressed in building indigenous epistemological structures, it will make knowledge manifest in form of artefacts. This has affected the narrative nature and structures of agents of episteme in African knowledge systems. It turns indigenous knowledge into metaphoric or topological structures which are incapable of generating knowledge *per se*, especially when placed on the same contesting ground with knowledge from other continents. This is where the cognitive elements in indigenous languages have been misplaced, and what is obviously on ground is the African indigenous understanding which constitutes linguistic object-denotation problems. This may be seen as secondary referent. I am not arguing here that all African knowledge and science are representatives of cultural metaphors. But this is a key deconstructive insight and should not be dismissed as a footnote. African interpretations of these 'agents of episteme' are usually metaphoric because of the cultural-historical narrative. But then, there ought to be the contemporary urge to discover the past reality and reconstruct it scientifically. This is the time to think about African's indigenous knowledge forms, system, science, history rather than investigate them. This, however, places the questions of the myth of cognitive process and structures within African studies as well as clears the root mistakes exacted within traditional theory and foundations of ideas.

In the production of indigenous epistemological structures, naïve reconstructionist empiricism or constructionist deduction or statistical probability methodology can efface the impositionalism of the indigenous scholars. The constant issue of textualization serves as evidence of the indigenous past or practices, traditions, cultures. This accounts for the evolutionary theory of indigenous knowledge forms because each "culture builds, with individual variation, on an almost identical ground-plan" (Nwigwe, 2004: 143). This is to say that irrespective of the development of human knowledge in this century, mythological thinking stands as background to it. To illustrate is this,

we find that the *Illiad* and the *odyssey* of Homer, the *Theogony* of Hesiod and so on occupy unique positions in the recorded literature of Western civilization. In these texts, man, gods and the universe have beginning. This is also seen in African-ethnic and tribal myths, which should not be seen as why they are inferior, but that myths have a universal stake in the development of human history, knowledge and science. And at the same time, it should be noted that European worldview is not ultimate in itself.

Its roles cannot be overlooked when we consider what marked the beginning of scientific inquiry. Again, sources of knowledge are not one directional but multi-directional, and as such African sources should not be neglected or allowed to be swallowed in the evolutionary process of other cultures, bearing in mind that the purpose of intellectual transaction often tilts in the favour of one against the other, and vice versa in other civilizations. Thus, there are three stages in building indigenous epistemological structures using the ‘epistemic agents.’ Thus, three phases are involved; (i) deconstruction (ii) construction and (iii) reconstruction.

Deconstruction phase: By deconstruction, it implies that there are knowledge systems already existing and thriving. So for the indigenous to come on board, there is need to create *intellectual space* before its structures are launched in. The necessity of this first stage stems from the fact that most “African scholars and/or philosophers will find that it is the philosophies of West that will occupy him most, for it is the part of the world that modern developments in human knowledge have gone farthest” (Wiredu, 1980: 49). This is the stage where intersection of intellectual forces plays out to create space for indigenous studies. This space will be created using indigenous language structures, conceptions, themes, ideologies and indigenous scholarly schools of thought and movements. This stage is important because ‘it will use for the service of the whole humanity the fruit of historical experiences of Africa ... and will break down all artificial barriers that separates mankind or necessitates the flowering of racist,

sentimental, continental philosophies which partition mankind into psychological and philosophical war zone which endanger philosophic horizon of the world' (Ozumba, 2003:9). This will enable basal shifts that will map out the space for this epistemic change. This will be most effective if the indigenous languages are used to present and represent the knowledge structure and epistemological toolkit of the indigenous people. Here, the use of indigenous scholars becomes inevitable, because their role is paramount, especially in the engagements of constructionist epistemology using the *phenomenological toolkit* of these *agents of episteme*.

Again, because they are indigenous scholars, the use of imposed linguistics, foreign thought analysis and influence of Western (or other) knowledge structures will be reduced to the barest minimum. This will enhance originality of thought, and the space created after deconstruction will be fully occupied by the growing of indigenous knowledge structures. This is why Falaye writes that:

Understanding African (Nigerian) Weltanschauung requires one to first and foremost, understand the problems and mysteries of the people. African (Nigerian) studies, therefore is that which analyzes the African (Nigerian) mystery, which concerns itself with the way in which African (Nigerian) people of the past and present make sense of their existence, of their destiny, and of the world in which they live, (Falaye, 2003: 28) (The emphasis is mine).

Another advantage of using indigenous scholars is that they are well equipped with the epistemic organization of knowledge with indigenous cultures. This is because they can prefigure and narrate the place of the 'episteme agents' as lived experiences of the people more cognitively than the non-indigenous scholars. The indigenous scholars are more equipped with indigenous languages; they can use the adequate language to retell the lived experiences of the cultures, using dominant indigenous epistemic figurative trope and expression. By using indigenous scholars for deconstruction, it will help eliminate part of the existing influences of dominant epistemological hegemony

and discourses. The manifestation of this will be strong inevitable inclinations towards the certainty of raising other indigenous epistemological foundations. Thus:

We can understand our representational activities ... only by re-describing them in terms of concepts of a total theory of the universe as physical system which, of natural necessity, evolves subsystems which in turn necessarily project increasingly adequate representations of the whole. To put it crudely, we must come to see physical universe as an integrated physical system, which necessarily 'grows knowers' and which thereby comes to mirror itself within itself (Rosenberg, 1974:144).

The use of indigenous languages will give grounds for the understanding of these 'episteme agents,' not as aliens, or secondary forms of existences or knowledge, but as concrete realities. This is because building new epistemological blocks from indigenous perspectives need evidential generation, re-regeneration and representation of knowledge based on using modes in relationship to the world as experienced and explained by the people, to the people as and when lived, through the use of dominant and subordinate narrative structures (language is the primary vehicle for ideological dominance). We may find out how each of the *agents of episteme* and its meanings invested by the people at a certain time in history changed and influenced their perceptions.

Construction phase: This is the stage of trooping, figurations and ordering of knowledge generated from these 'episteme agents'. This is a stage where knowledge needs foundation. Trooping operates at a great depth of human thought, creating meaning through otherness and destroying the dominant models of epistemological imaginations for indigenous superstructures. This is at the heart of the deconstruction project of epistemology. The necessity of this stage is cogent because some foreigners will not be willing to concede that Africans as traditional people and global citizens were unable to present a coherent worldview. There are many things to be considered in the

construction phase. There is need for defining the scope of indigenous knowledge and epistemology such that it must carry moral, ideological and power implications as well as show the principle of rational evidence. In this regard, Oruka noted that:

If African philosophy should vary from its western counterpart, the variation should not be fundamental. African philosophy to some of them is the work of professionally trained Africans in all areas of philosophy. It is desirable that the works be set in some African context but it is not necessary that they do so (Oruka, 1990, 65).

Even though philosophy is a universal discipline which does not need to have the African version, there is an essential aspect of it; it should be a discourse that is culturally based, and as such, ready to solve the problem of indigenous people. Then its geographical relevance is salient to ascertain the soundness and validity within discourses. This is because knowledge can be relative; its necessity is to the service to humanity. Thus, the implication of defining the scope and nature of indigenous knowledge should be done logically without losing the essence of drawing the demarcations between the epistemological boundaries of the African and others. Indigenous scholars should understand that there is background to indigenous epistemological structures which needs to be considered for its own worth. There are three levels of knowledge structure identifiable within indigenous knowledge forms. There is the folk knowledge which mostly is oratorical in transmission. There is also knowledge at the level of symbols and the written and modern forms of indigenous knowledge forms. Not only that, the cultural signatures of metonymy, synecdoche, irony, stylish figures of speech, proverbs, use of traditional axioms and all the uses of expression, should be properly characterized to avoid incoherence. We have to stop using certain axioms such as our people say, our ancestor say, Igbo says, Yoruba says, Efiks says. Let there be more coherence, logicity, consistency, and assertiveness in presenting our researches and their findings. For example, our belief-thought-process should be separated from myths.

In other words, there is need to separate belief from myths; in the case of animal and environmental rights, indigenous scholars should rationalize that the essence of traditional taboo system in the environment of animals of any kind is to preserve nature and not just dwelling on the myth set by ancestors or the gods. Other examples may be in not doing domestic activities in streams of river because it is not good to pollute the water body, and not dwelling on myths of certain kinds. It should be understood that the gods were part of the normative forms of traditional society. There are more examples in this regard. This is the stage of essence and conception, where three essential categories of logic come in to play; the logic of contrastive determinacy, the logic of determination and the logic of determinate individuality.

The construction of indigenous epistemology is an exercise in narrative cognition. This is where all metaphysical and epistemological questions are reduced for simple apprehension. The natural ideas must be retained at this stage, since it is a stage that shows that it comprehends all that applies to the world. To understand indigenous epistemology, there is need to construct and reconstruct one which will address the issues of correspondence or homology between cognitive narratives forms and lived experiences. Thus, Oladipo reverberated;

The new (knowledge structures) philosophy for Africa must be critical and reconstructive. It should be capable of inculcating in a large percentage of the African population those habits of mind such as Habits of exactness and rigours in thinking, the pursuit of systematic coherence and the experimental approach (Oladipo, 1998:17).

Again, Wiredu (1980:41) noted that ‘what is immediately pertinent is to remark that uncritical exhortations to Africans to present their indigenous culture are not particularly useful; indeed, they can be counter-productive’. The importance of reconstruction can be seen in Wiredu’s writings as follows;

There is an urge in need in Africa today for the kind of analysis that would identify and separate the backward aspects of our culture from those aspects worth keeping. Yet the analytical dimension seems to be lacking in their enthusiasm ... the principle of rational thinking is not entirely absent from the thinking of the traditional African ... the quest for development should be viewed as a continuing world-historical process which all people ... are engaged (1980: 41, 42, 43).

There is a need to halt and jettison the old uncritical habits of thoughts, and move ahead of the level of traditional thinking, since it is believed that the primitive always adopt inscrutable ontology. This means that indigenous scholars should work to recover truths, origins, science, and various appeals to knowledge forms, but more importantly, they are to provide an adequate correspondence between words, the world and worldviews.

The project of constructing an indigenous epistemology can employ different methodologies such as narrative, historical, explanatory analytical, critical, hermeneutical and ontological methods. There may be no need to emphasize on methodological orientations, but then there should be a detectable fissure between people and contact with any 'episteme agents'. The free style methodology here simply means the ability to put thoughts down without any standard methodological commitment. What is important is that our thoughts be lucidly expressed and found to be the true picture of the world view we are expressing. Logical analysts believe that the task of philosophy is conceptual analysis, while the integrative school sees the task of philosophy as multi-faceted. They hold that there are different methodologies which are all important (Uduigwomen, 1995:21). The task of philosophy in this project is beyond the restrictions of methodology. This means that free style methodology should be adopted. But then, originality in harnessing its complex ideologies, explicatory knowledge and rethinking of its entire structure and the study of its fundamental issues should be the objective of this project.

This will ensure that ideological implications in indigenous knowledge forms must account for epistemic change in building knowledge blocks. This is a radical benefit of deconstruction and construction to indigenous epistemology, breaking down the barriers of dominant epistemology and rebuilding its form and content, and more essentially, it is a cognitive structure of how we can explain our encounters of knowledge in our lives. By this, we will not only recover the past but also interpret it in our own time and place for ideological purposes.

The most basic hallmark of science must be *correctness* of thought, expression, and execution. Apart from accidental discoveries that can be made by anybody, it is '*epistemological correctness*' that causes discovery, invention and advancement. Freedom merely facilitates the communication and dissemination of discovery and invention (and, naturally, of everything else). Thus, there is need to remove inconsistencies and falsity hidden within the tracks of indigenous knowledge and "each elimination of obscure constructions or notions that we manage to achieve, by paraphrasing into more lucid elements, is a clarification of the conceptual scheme of science" (Rorty, 1979:200). From this, we approach a clearer pattern of canonical notation, its understanding of the structures and lining of 'epistemic agents' which will be useful for practical and experimental knowledge.

Reconstruction phase is a stage of legitimizations of indigenous epistemological structures and accurate evaluation of the development of indigenous human knowledge actions. It is a stage of re-interpretation and re-textualization, by re-evaluating in-between the lines, the several issues (universal or particular, physical or metaphysical, indigenous or alien, objective or subjective, elementary or complex and so on), systems of research and their strategies, origins and history of thought, and their ideological implication. This offers the opportunity for cultivating and establishing authentic African personality which is perceptual, inferential and holistic

(Ekwuru, 199:31-37). This will equip the African scholars with the tools needed to project perspectives and enhance the meanings, teachability, availability and understanding of indigenous epistemology and various knowledge structures. Ozumba (2003: 11) noted that:

All attempts at philosophizing become reconstructive- putting every experience to a positive use in order to achieve a more serene world. This proposal may be utopic, far-fetched and an outright impossibility. The idea here is to affect a revolution at the spirit level of our (indigenous) philosophical discourse.

Reconstruction offers valuable opportunity to mine original, deep and provocative explanations, thought patterns, schools and trends of thought offered by indigenous scholars. This could be done at an individual level, preferring the general level of explanation covering many other knowledge platforms, perspective and forming schools of thought. This gives room for classification and categorization in indigenous knowledge and thought patterns, and an opportunity to compare and contrast their ideologies and philosophies. The logic here is that reconstruction is the stage where analysis of already constructed indigenous knowledge forms and epistemology yields their epistemic products in which it is written. For example, within the history of modern philosophy, the reconstruction stage saw to the classification of the scholars of those periods as British empiricists (Locke, Berkeley and Hume) and continental rationalists (to include; Descartes, Spinoza and Leibniz). It is a formal aspect of creating a systematic study of reality which provides the conceptual structure for a non-metaphysical interpretation of reality. It is the stage of objectivity and innovation purified by phenomenology and formulated without any reference to concepts of abstractions from reality. The logic here proceeds to generate categories of thought. This creates a multiplicity effect through re-engineering of thought yielding into epistemic social infrastructure and super-structures of knowledge blocks. This will only be achieved when already constructed knowledge forms are geared towards organizations and re-organizations of the contents of past writers.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The relevance of the study on ‘episteme agents’ is numerous: it interrogated critically the understanding of the relationship and interconnectedness of humans and the natural environment (‘episteme agents’) for indigenous knowledge forms and structures. It enables the development of indigenous epistemological structures and bodies of knowledge that add to the scholarly world in Africa. It is also a meaningful task to re-create our world, grooming a more rational attitude to understanding reality from a more related (indigenous) perspective. This study enhances the understanding of related disciplines such as environmental philosophy and ethics. It ultimately enhances proper analysis of our cultural values, attitudes and formulates cognitive attitude that will ground a more harmonious way of understanding our relationships, world and natural environment.

We can neither shy away from nor rely extensively on the orientations of others, with regard to understanding these ‘episteme agents’. The need for their studies becomes immanent, and based on this, we make the following recommendations. The study of ‘epistemic agents’ is necessary:

- (i) To address the fundamental role of indigenous language in representing epistemic agents. This paper advocated for an epistemic linguistic change that will birth indigenous language autonomy.
- (ii) To enlighten African scholars on the necessity for the shift from dominant knowledge, cultural/linguistic procedures to develop African narratives and rescue them from the long primeval silence.
- (iii) This paper encourages academic groups to participate more actively in the apprehension of the educational developmental needs of the continent, through the use of indigenous linguistic phenomenological toolkits in researching on the ‘episteme agents’. It is worthy to note that there is need to recognize the importance of researches

dealing with rural, cultural and regional centres, as they are of primary significance in addressing societal problems.

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