

African Ways of Knowing and Pedagogy Revisited

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Abstract

Whereas African ways of knowing have previously been ‘misunderstood, misinterpreted, ridiculed and ignored’ in colonial discourses, this paper situates debate on their relevance in defining the African personhood and pedagogy of liberation and progress in Africa. The paper is designed to inform educators of African students on the nature of the African paradigm of knowing to understand the African psyche. Although modern people (especially the African elite) tend to invest little faith in developing indigenous knowledges, this paper amply demonstrates that traditional ways of knowing (spirituality centered wisdom) continue to be relevant in modern life even beyond the African boundaries. The insights informing the paper were gleaned from several studies conducted by this researcher (and others) exploring the African paradigm from Shona and Ndebele cultures’ conceptions of giftedness. The paper recommends revisiting African traditional ways of knowing to harmonize the past with the present and establish the true basis for pedagogy of liberation and progress in Africa.

Introduction

Despite Africa’s immensity and diversities, which include about a thousand indigenous languages, African indigenes show distinct, consistent and enduring commonalities transcending geographic boundaries and ethnicity. Hence, in the African context, we can talk about unity in diversity (Goduka, 1999). The most enduring commonalities of Africanhood include ways of knowing that are grounded in indigenous African cultural traditions, history and ecology. However, modern Africans operate on with multilayered knowledge systems (Mpfungu, 2002). In former British colonies, Africans used both their indigenous cultural heritage and Anglo-Western knowledge systems. In this context, it might be assumed that the two knowledge systems mutually enrich the African student’s learning as it should. However, as reality would have it, modern African education is far from being regarded as a true pedagogy of liberation and progress as highlighted in this paper.

While acknowledging the contribution of Western knowledge systems to the development of modern Africa and harboring no wishes to turn back the clock of development to the past, this paper refocuses critical issues of African ways of knowing of which educators of African students should be conscious. The paper specifically sheds light on the existence and nature of an African paradigm of knowing in the context in which it should inform pedagogy in Africa. African ways of knowing not only reflect the African worldview but they also define the African personhood. Equally, indigenous ways of knowing focused on here constitute the African paradigm that has been

misunderstood, misinterpreted, ridiculed, and ignored during the scramble for and the colonization of Africa. Africa then was portrayed as the 'Dark Continent' or '*terra incognita*' (meaning land without a cultured mind), which justified occupation and subjugation of the Africans by imperial forces (Goduka, 1999). The African was portrayed as '*pure savage*' and later moderated to the '*noble savage*' often satirized in the West's earliest popular novels such as *King Solomon's Mines* by Rider Haggard (1933). *Noble savage* qualifies the native people's natural tendency for simplistic goodness (while untutored). In the Rhodesian context of the previous apartheid systems of Southern Africa, the earliest formal education in 'The Division of African Education' was functionally known as '*Taming of the Savage*'. In this scenario, indigenous knowledge systems were denigrated and relegated to the dustbins of curriculum planning in Africa. The cultural hegemony of colonialism systematically destroyed indigenous systems of survival. With the African's self-esteem and efficacy having collapsed, Africa degenerated into a dependence syndrome as a helpless receptacle of both pity and charity from the West. Commenting from the Freirean perspective, Mugo (as cited in Ngara, 1992) observed:

The ultimate target for the invaders is the economic base of the invaded. However, since culture is evolved as people creatively act on their economic base during the production process, destroying a people's cultural life and expression in essence becomes a calculated move to dispossess them economically, for, cultural zombies can neither create nor defend their birthright (p. xiii).

In this context, the African elite stand accused as the last bastion for cloning and recycling a colonial mentality opposed to transforming pedagogy in Africa (University of British Columbia African Symposium, 2006). The local elite tend to marginalize indigenous cultures long after gaining political independence. It is not surprising that some people measure success in life by the distance one moves away from one's indigenous culture. The elite's children attend local elite schools or go to schools abroad and come back as *the flight been to* or *Made in USA*. On their part, African politicians merely pay lip service to the indigenization rhetoric but, in reality, they lack political will to effect the desired change in Africa.

A true pedagogy of liberation, among other things, will restore African dignity as the true basis for advancing genuine development on the continent. Lamentably, even the African teacher is still blinkered by the vestiges of colonial hegemony. According to Shizha's (2004) study, Zimbabwean teachers tended to stereotype indigenous knowledge as "backward... retrogressive, unauthentic, and unreliable since it could not be verified by scientific methods..." (p. 202). Consequently such unprogressive thinking "...increased the risk that students with giftedness in contexts and skills valued in their communities would not be recognized or supported by teachers in their development" (Mpofu, Ngara & Gudyanga, 2007, p. 243). The basic knowledge structures that the average African child brings to school have been collectively constructed and transmitted through a participatory and collectivist model of learning with a community focus.

In the African sense, a child is a child of every adult in the community. Teaching the child in traditional Africa was therefore not the monopoly of the biological parents. Every responsible adult could teach any child about the community's ways (etiquette,

survival, welfare, etc). There was a division of labor and specialization whereby youths were apprenticed to skilled masters of healing arts, blacksmithing, hunting, midwifery, craftwork, etc. Any adult who happened to be free could enjoy teaching children traditional games including counting, puzzles, riddles and reciting children's poems (to the new moon, to the rain, to the sun, etc). Grandparents were not relegated into seclusion by virtue of old age but they remained with the family, imparting their acquired wisdom and philosophical ideas of the community. Children would congregate at the home of a well known story teller whose services they reciprocated by bringing firewood. Certain information was taught through taboos, initiation rites and apprenticeships. Taboos originated from people's tacit knowledge.

Tacit knowledge involves intuitions and hunches acquired by people through their informal experiences (Polanyi, 1962). Information was also transmitted through song and poems. Topical issues were sung about. In this connection, the writer is most intrigued by a popular Shona revolutionary war song *Tinozvireva chete* (We will continue to say it) played on *mbira* musical instrument. The song expresses the Zimbabwean people's historical belligerence in claiming their birthright, despite the colonial masters' threats of gunfire and arrests. The song is mostly *mbira* instrument rhythms while its lyrics, though known, were unsung for fear of provoking the colonial regime's wrath.

These indigenous ways of knowing as briefly summarized above shape the background cognitive structures that the average African child brings to school. While the African ways of knowing are denigrated, the question is: Suppose we were able to vacuum clean the African (child's) mind of all traces of indigenous ways of knowing and then replace them with a generous immersion in Western culture, would that constitute development in Africa? To the contrary, development in Africa, as elsewhere in the world, does not occur in a cultural vacuum. As proposed by Ausubel (1963, 1978), meaningful learning occurs when new material is related to the learner's existing knowledge. In agreement with Ausubel's Theory of Meaningful Learning, Obotetukudo (2001) advances the notion that communication (or making sense of stimuli) depends on integration of new material with cultural knowledge and values systems. Obotetukudo thus proposes that development in Africa can be realized through an African philosophy of development derived from what the Africans think of themselves as informed by their indigenous cultural knowledge (typified in African proverbs). If a people's culture and values are not integrated in the communication interchange, then a sense of alienation ensues and no development can be expected. Real development will only take place when a people's culture and value systems are shared globally. Given the relentless discourse of denigrating Africanhood as highlighted earlier, so much is lost of African heritage that could inform the development of the continent's true pedagogy of liberation and progress.

The scarcity of research literature on African ways of knowing is a major cause for concern in this discourse. If the school curriculum is not informed by research insights on multilayered knowledge systems including indigenous ways of knowing, this implies pedagogy of confusion and stagnation in Africa. In a way, this probably explains some of the obstacles blocking the emergence of giftedness for technological and economic development in Africa. In these circumstances, when the quest for cultural liberation and development appears to have hit a dead end, Cabral's (1973) advice is simple: *Return to the source.*

Corroborating Cabral's (1973) call through song, the Zimbabwean musician Hoseah Chipanga's metaphor *Chakabaya Chikatyokera* (Habit dies hard) satirizes how the vestiges of colonial mentality continue to play havoc in African minds. Chipanga lambastes the ignorance of failing to appreciate the cultural wisdom that is embedded in one's language. *Chakabaya Chikatyokera* typically rebukes the African elite's arrogance for despising their own mother tongue. Chipanga finds it nauseating how English language is often used even at situations best served by local languages. In this context, the singer asks, "How can people receive God's blessings (talents) while forsaking their very systems through which their blessings can be realized?" In the African paradigm, the term 'blessing' expresses the equivalent concept for 'talent' or 'exceptional ability'. According to Mugo's (as cited in Ngara, 1992) analysis, Ngara's revolutionary poems corroborate Cabral's call to return to the source. Ngara advocates returning to orature. Defined by the Kenyan writer Ngugi wa Thiongo (as cited in Dei, 2002), orature is orally composed and transmitted literature that is functionally performed. The type of oral literature and performance is dictated by the occasion. In Mugo's interpretation of Ngara's poems, *Return to the source* implies "... reaffirming as well as reviving/evolving those heritage's ethics and aesthetics that are conducive to the growth of collective as well as individual humanity" (p. xiv). However, *Return to the source* does not imply an uncritical romanticization of the African past. Equally, to keep on mourning how colonial hegemony destabilized Africa's story of development without charting the way forward does not help either. The critical issue here is for Africans to harmonize their present with their past, then to forge ahead from a vantage point that uses their multilayered knowledge systems. In this paper, *Returning to the source* is read as a call for a renaissance of African ways of knowing to bolster the African's dehumanized sense of personhood and inspire the development of assertiveness, independent thinking and creativity. The potential for creativity is inherent in all humans. Africa is likened to a sleeping giant still lying intoxicated by remnants of colonial hegemony. However, the big question is: When will Africa come around from her stupor and exploit her immense heritage of resources to assert her rightful place in the globalized world?

Studies that Inform African Ways of Knowing

While research on indigenous constructions of knowledge in Africa is scarce, this paper shares great insights of Africanists and/or Afrocentric scholars (e.g., Asante, 1987; Dei, 2000; Goduka, 1999; Obotetukudo, 2001; Petrie, 1991). Africanists refer to scholars who advocate the African renaissance as the basis for advancing the development cause in Africa. Afrocentric also refers to an alternative way of viewing the world that originates from African worldviews. This paper is mostly informed by this writer's studies on indigenous views of giftedness in Shona and Ndebele cultures of Zimbabwe (e.g., Mpofu et al., 2007; Ngara, 2005, 2006, current study; Ngara & Porath, 2004). The writer uses an insider perspective, drawing from both his research insights and personal experience of African personhood. Meanwhile, this paper makes no claims that Africanism or Afrocentrism can cause Africa's development in isolation of other knowledge systems of the world. In Shona cultural wisdom, *Kakova kanozara nemadirirano* (The river is flooded by tributaries). This implies that, to get a more complete and realistic understanding of the world, we need to value all the available alternative ways of

knowing as much as our own.

African knowing is bound up with notions of affirming the self and indigenous subjectivity in ecology. Typically, Africans espouse spirituality centered thought and wisdom (Dei, 2002; Goduka, 1999; Horton, 1967). As observed by Dei, spirituality is quite a broad term with diverse meanings even in the same cultural group. It encompasses relationships between living souls and the living dead, self and collective empowerment, humility, metaphysical and psychic powers, healing, and wholeness. Spirituality defines interactions between body, mind and soul as they relate to values, beliefs, and ideas of integrity and dignity shaping both individual and collective consciousness into unified existence (Dei, 2002). As defined by Rahnema (1995), spirituality refers to:

... sensitivity, the art of listening to the world at large and within one, from the hegemony of conditioned 'me' constantly interfering in the process; the ability to relate to others and act, without any pre-defined plan or ulterior motives, and the perennial qualities of love, compassion and goodness which are under constant threat in economized societies. (p.130)

Spirituality centered wisdom stands for both justice and dignity and it cannot be trivialized (Dei). It emphasizes philosophies of connectedness, coexistence, belongingness, love, and compassion in education. In the light of this understanding of spirituality, the African renaissance and pedagogy should be grounded in spirituality centered wisdom, cultural identity and consciousness (Asante, 1987; Mazama, 1998). As asserted by Palmer (1999), involving spirituality in pedagogy is "reclaiming the vitality of life" (p. 3).

Previous studies of Shona and Ndebele cultures' conceptions of giftedness (e.g. Mpofu et al., 2007; Ngara & Porath, 2004, 2005; Ngara, 2006) have established that giftedness has spiritual foundations. Both Shona and Ndebele cultures of Zimbabwe espouse the view that giftedness is a blessing from God which is mediated by one's ancestry. In Shona culture, God is *Mwari* (*MU-ari*) meaning *He Who Is*. Families facilitate the development of the gift by encouraging individuals to honor *Mwari* (*Nkulunkulu* [Ndebele]) through showing respect to ancestors and working hard on unselfish goals. Giftedness is believed to be inferred to all individuals at birth, but lost to some. It may be denied, delayed, withdrawn for selfishness (e.g. neglect of family), being disrespectful (to ancestors and God) and laziness or wickedness (Mpofu et al., 2007). As established in these studies, spiritualism is paradigmatic, expressing the notion of exceptionality of ability (or talent) and its biological basis (believed to be given by ancestors). Giftedness emerges in participating and contributing to the collective survival of the community. Hence, knowing and giftedness are community focused and collectivist (Ngara, 2006) in nature. Spirituality expresses immensity of intensity of passion and energy exhibited by talented individuals. Great achievements are acknowledged and reinforced by reciting clan praise poems (totem [spiritual] praises) to boost the spirit (motivation) for achievement (Ngara & Porath, 2005).

In this context of understanding the spiritual foundations of giftedness in African culture, Ngara and Porath (2004, 2005) traced the linguistic origins of *Bantu* languages' equivalent vocabulary for giftedness and established that the *Bantu* groups espouse similar spirituality-based views of giftedness. In African languages, *Bantu* means

‘people’ (while the singular case is *mu-ntu* [person]) but in the English dictionary, it refers to an African family of languages from Central and Southern Africa with a common vocabulary for ‘person’. Bantu terms for giftedness are all derived from a common verb root/*-p-* (give) connoting a special gift or blessing (whereby the Giver is God, the Greatest Spirit). To cite a few examples: *chipo* (Shona-Zimbabwe/Mozambique); *isipiwo/ isipho* (Zulu/Ndebele-South Africa/Zimbabwe); *mpho* (Sotho-Lesotho); *ukupelwa* (Zambia); Swahili (East and Central Africa)-*kipawa* (Mpofu et al., 2007; Ngara, 2006; Ngara & Porath, 2005).

Ngara and Porath found ‘Spirituality’ to be the African equivalent paradigm for expressing ‘extracognitive’ phenomena. ‘Extracognitive’ refers to “...everything not strictly cognitive” (Runco, 2004, p.18). Shavinina and Seeratan (2004) further elaborate that extracognitive phenomena encompass four interrelated and yet different components: a) specific intellectual feelings (e.g., feelings of direction, harmony, beauty and style), b) specific intellectual beliefs (e.g. beliefs in elevated standards of performance), c) specific preferences and intellectual values (e.g. choice of field), and d) intuitive processes.

As revealed in Ngara’s (current) study on Shona stone sculptors of Zimbabwe’s attributions of creativity, the artists’ metaphor of creative vision *releasing the spirit in stone* is paradigmatic (consistent with spirituality centered wisdom). The metaphor expresses the artists’ constructions of perceived meanings of the mode of experiencing and reflecting the dynamic complexity of creativity. Creative art (among Shona artists) involves complex cultural and personal beliefs inspiring passion, confidence, and creative intuition but to an outsider such culture and beliefs are ‘illogical myths’. Ngara’s study suggests that belief systems are part and parcel of the artists’ inspiration and constructions of reality (such as creativity). However, Zilberg (1996) dismisses the Shona artists’ creative metaphor ‘*releasing spirits in stones*’ as unrealistic ‘mystification of creativity’. Zilberg further stated that he had not seen any Shona sculptors carving stones while possessed by a spirit.

Art inspiration is not about being possessed by a spirit. All artists talk of some form of inspiration or the Muse (Piirto, 2005). Why then should Zilberg dismiss ‘*releasing spirits in stones*’ as myth in the African context of creative vision and inspiration? As noted by Ngara and Porath (2004, 2005) being gifted (or *blessed*) in the African sense does not imply being reincarnated by a spirit to perform a task. Spirituality is simply the African paradigm for expressing extracognitive phenomena such as inspiration, passion, feelings, beliefs, intuition and vision, and compassion. In Shona cultural terms, a student expressing exceptional academic passion is said to have *shavi rechikoro* (spirit for school). This does not imply that a highly motivated scholar is reincarnated by a demon of learning. *Shavi rechikoro* simply expresses intellectual prowess and learning passion. ‘Spirit’ expresses the notion of intensity of ‘overexcitabilities’ which according to Dabrowski (cited in Piechowski, 2002) distinguish gifted children from ungifted ones. Overexcitabilities refer to heightening in five modes of experiencing - psychomotor, sensual, intellectual, imagination, and emotional. In the same way that Dabrowski explained overexcitabilities as the ‘heart and fire’ that ‘ring loud and clear’ in gifted children, *shavi* (spirit) here expresses intensity and the spiritual foundations of exceptionality or giftedness.

Spirituality centered wisdom is therefore far beyond the “*participation mystique*” (mystic thinking) of Levy-Bruhl’s (1923, 1926) myopic intellectualism of racial

prejudice. Contrary to Levy-Bruhl's condescending beliefs of 'primitive mentality', Horton (1967) demonstrated how African traditional thought is a fully-fledged theoretical model for understanding the world. The difference from the West is that African traditional thought uses a personal idiom (of spirituality centered wisdom) whereas the West uses an impersonal idiom (of science) to explain reality. As rightly argued by Horton, the difference in the idiom for expressing world views should not imply the absence of philosophical ideas in Africa. As confirmed by Obotetukudo (2001), Africa has rich philosophical ideas capable of spearheading development on the continent. Ethnic Africans espouse similar philosophical ideas which are explicit in orature, especially in the proverbs. For example, one of the most common proverbs of the continent states: 'A person's true enemy is the very person' - *Isitha somuntu ngumuntu* (Zulu/Ndebele-South Africa/Zimbabwe); - *Sitsa somuntfu ngumuntfu* (Swati-Swaziland); - *Sera samotho kemotho* (Sotho-Lesotho), - *Mhandu yomunhu munhu* (Shona-Zimbabwe/Mozambique); *Ichilwani chamuntu nimuntu* (Bemba-Zambia); - *Mudani wamuntu nimuntu* (Cewa-Malawi/Zambia); - *Umwansi w'umuntu n'umuntu* (Kirundi-Burundi), - *Sibiwi wamutu nimutu* (Swahili-Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, Tanzania) (Ngara, 2006). Another commonly acknowledged wisdom states that, 'the strength of a fish (or crocodile in other ethnic groups) is in the water', suggesting that a leader derives power from his/her supporters. However, although this wisdom was designed to promote a democratic dispensation in governance, it is open to abuse by the notorious dictators of the world. Dictators coerce poor citizens to attend mass political rallies where they shout to the world their familiar propaganda claims, "Our people like us, so we continue to rule them." In so doing, reality becomes distorted and spirituality centered wisdom is desecrated.

As further suggested in Ngara's (current) study, inspiration in stone sculpturing art is initially triggered by exposure to the art through kinship or friendship association (through social and vicarious learning [Bandura, 1977, 1986]). At a basic level, social learning explains learning through social observation, imitation and modeling. In essence, social learning entails reciprocal interactions between cognitive, behavioral and environmental influences. Social observational and vicarious learning is culturally acknowledged in indigenous cultural wisdom. For example, the Shona proverb states, *kugara nhaka huona dzavamwe* (One knows how best to administer inheritance estates from observing others). Creative individuals do not just imitate or copy what they see but they develop or transform the idea. In this connection, Dominic Benhura (Zimbabwe's acclaimed stone sculptor), interviewed in Ngara's (current study), revealed how exposure to other people's fascinating ideas (of art) inspires one's creativity, "...No matter how talented one is, one has to start from somewhere...It's not possible to start creating something without having seen.... It's like music, when you hear it, that's when you see that you have your own way of doing it. One needs a platform...." Following this perception, as continental Africans have been exposed to the West's talents in science and technology, this should inspire their own giftedness to manifest in developing an appropriate based technology for Africa.

It seems that folk wisdom may corroborate the basic philosophical ideas behind some theories in contemporary psychology. For example, Shona wisdom advises, *Tenda muchero uwe* (Express your gratitude for the fruit tree to drop down more fruits for you). Despite being expressed in a spiritual metaphor (reifying inanimate things), from what

we know in contemporary psychology, this wisdom articulates the basic principle of Skinner's Reinforcement Theory. In its basic premise, reinforcement theory proposes that reinforcement or reward controls behavior (Keller, 1969; Skinner, 1968, 1969). One can search everywhere for clues to the puzzle of underdevelopment in Africa but as long one ignores the fundamental truth in cultural wisdom, one is no better than a headless chicken running without a compass.

It is possible that the clues for solving some of the problems of the world exist unexplored in some cultures of the world. So much useful wisdom was lost because of breakdown of communication (through differences in languages and worldviews compounded racial prejudice) between the conquerors and the conquered. In the African context, if scholars would care to understand the depth in cultural wisdom, they might see cultural wisdom as a good basis for conducting scientific research. It might not be an outrageous claim to assert that some scholars have published copyrights of existing cultural wisdom. Fortunately or unfortunately, indigenous knowledge is collectively owned and no one can identify the original wise thinkers of the past.

Scenarios of Spirituality Centered Wisdom in Modern Life Contexts

This section presents four specific scenarios that confirm the continuing validity of spirituality-centered thought and wisdom in modern life endeavors beyond Africa's boundaries. Taboos and avoidances have been taken out of context as merely superstitious myths of uneducated people. A taboo is simplified wisdom presented as a law of avoidance to direct behavior but its underlying meaning is not given. At a superficial level, taboos may just be myths of traditional culture but, behind each taboo, there is a rational, logical or possibly plausible scientific explanation that evades simplistic analysis. A case in point is a tragedy witnessed by the writer in 1993 that resulted in the death of five men in one night at a funeral in Zimbabwe.

The tragedy occurred at a village in Murehwa District (about 80 km North of Harare). The fateful day was an unusually cold night. Male mourners (among them local villagers and visiting relatives of the deceased) had been warming themselves throughout the night, either sitting or lying around a fire of burning logs, in accordance with the local rural funeral practice. As time passed, some men fell asleep while others sat dozing on their stools occasionally chatting, smoking and drinking opaque beer as per traditional custom. However, at daybreak the following morning, the horrifying and mystifying news broke out that five men had died around the fire. A few others woke up dazed and weak and had to be rushed to the local hospital. In this bewilderment, several speculations started circulating to explain the possible cause of the tragedy. Among them, witchcraft and accidental food poisoning were suspected. However, before the results of the hospital pathologist were released, rural elders examined the logs used as firewood and cursed whoever brought that type of wood that is culturally taboo to burn as firewood in the Zezuru clan's (Shona dialect) beliefs. According to the elders, burning such wood at home invoked the wrath of the spirits, hence, the tragedy. However, the local scientists later established that the particular wood species that was used as firewood on the fateful night emits a poisonous smoke.

In the above scenario, a taboo might be ignored by modern westernized Africans but obeying the avoidance could have saved lives. In this case taboos are paradigmatic expressions of some possible plausible scientific truths. Most people have problems understanding science because of its technical jargon. In the same way, a medical doctor gives you a simplified explanation of your ailment (which is still in tandem with its complex scientific explanation); a taboo also tells you the basic law in simple terms of avoidance behavior. If you violate the taboo, then you suffer the consequences. In a way, taboos reflect how wise people in the past protected their knowledge in similar ways to how modern professions protect their knowledge. Nobody tells you everything about anything. Even the scientists only tell you what they think you need know. So it is with taboos, not because their originators lacked sufficient knowledge. Denigrating cultural wisdom somehow originates from the way we define science. Basically, science borders on observation of cause and effect relationships and the reproducibility of results in similar circumstances. If an incident occur where a phenomenon was observed twice or more, though incidentally, and keen observers consistently related the cause to the consequences, why should such wisdom not qualify as science?

The next scenario is characteristically known as *Made in USA Syndrome*.

African herbal medicines (from healers/diviners or the so called witchdoctors) have been attracting interest among some medical researchers especially those specializing in fertility and sexual potency. Researchers come and understudy the herbalists' knowledge of certain herbs and their respective ailments (of course securing their cooperation through some meager payments). The researchers then go back to carry out elaborate and complex laboratory studies using their sophisticated technology to ascertain the medicinal qualities asserted by the healer. The outcome is a big name for someone in the discovery of some potent medicines laboratory processed, factory packaged and sold as a protected patent labeled Made in USA.

In the scenario above, the researcher (s) in question do not acknowledge the contribution of the African healer's/diviner's (*n'anga/sangoma*) herbal knowledge (of wood buck chemistry) as the guardians of indigenous healing wisdom. The institution of traditional healing and counseling has played an important role in the survival of the indigenes of Africa for centuries. To this end, Palgrave's documents acknowledge existence of plausible traditional medical practice that can be supported by modern scientific research (Palgrave, Drummond & Moll, 1988). Palgrave is an authority in dendrology (study of tree identification) and has extensively studied the trees of Southern Africa (Zimbabwe and Mozambique) in their cultural contexts. In this context, knowing which herb has what medicinal qualities, then knowing again which medicine cures what ailment and issues of dosage proportions are significant challenges in science.

The following two sub-scenarios were downloaded from a woman's magazine (aladmagazine.com). The scenarios relate the accounts of young women with African roots (both Blacks and Whites) in the Diasporas reflecting their testimonies for consulting the 'so called 'witch doctor' (African traditional healers or counselors). Their accounts are here presented unedited. So, the scenarios capture their actual words as reflected in

the website.

Hurray, for the Salad magazine and for us all! Finally, a place to call our own!

Linda, from the house of the White tribe, “I did call a witchdoctor but it was for marital relations. I needed some herbs and I recalled that they had them. My husband needed a boost and we didn’t trust some of these medications. So, I simply looked up Zinatha (Zimbabwe National Traditional Healers Association) on the web and called them. They referred us to someone who sent my husband some herbs. We used them and they worked. I know my problem is not so big, but, we did use witch doctors!

Lulu, a member of the Zulu house, “I constantly had a boil on my backside. It would be treated, and come back again, bigger and more painful. It was difficult for me to function. So, I called my witchdoctor and he conjured a spell for me over the phone. He said to me afterwards, “Now you can go to the hospital, the doctors will know what is wrong with you. They couldn’t tell you see, but now they will know.” I went to see my doctor the next morning, he recommended I get it surgically removed. I agreed. They told me that they removed a dead piece of flesh underneath the boil and it wasn’t mine. I know for a fact that I have never suffered from boils again. Of course I would do it again. My witchdoctor did help me didn’t he?

The above scenarios show how traditional wisdom remains relevant to people’s lives even beyond Africa’s boundaries. In both scenarios, young women resort to the institution of traditional medicine and counseling from back home to cope with problems encountered abroad in foreign lands. The question that arises is: Why would those seemingly sophisticated women in the rich Diasporas of affluence and advanced medical science trust African traditional healers so stigmatized as ‘witchdoctors’?

The last scenario situates spirituality-centered wisdom in the context of Zimbabwe’s revolutionary struggles against colonial oppression (chimurenga).

Nehanda Nyakasikana (affectionately known as Mbuya [Grand mother] Nehanda), a spiritual medium and revolutionary war heroine of Zimbabwe’s first chimurenga was captured by colonial forces, tried and sentenced to death by hanging in 1896 (in Harare). Just before Nehanda was hanged, she warned her executors, “Mapfupa angu achamuka” (“My bones shall rise”). While Nehanda is regarded as gifted in African cultural traditions and honored as a war heroine of Zimbabwe (Ngara & Porath, 2004), the colonial historian failed to understand her spiritual wisdom and ridiculed her prophecy as absurd (Mpofu et al., 2007). As events unfolded in Zimbabwe’s history of colonial liberation, Nehanda’s prophetic words inspired courage among the later generations of Zimbabwe to resume the fight against colonial oppression as “the risen bones!” Her quest for colonial liberation and sacrifice was vindicated.

The above scenario shows how spirituality centered thought and wisdom works in

the political arena. Things get done. In modern analysis of strategic war studies, Nehanda's wisdom and leadership (in war tactics) would qualify her as a legendary genius of war psychology that inspired both bravery and patriotism in two revolutionary wars. In the spirituality paradigm, patriotism is invoked by addressing nationals as 'children of Zimbabwe' (*vana veZimbabwe* [Shona]/ *bantwana beZimbabwe* [Ndebele]). Alternatively, patriotism is invoked by 'children of the soil' (sons and daughters of the soil) or 'children of Africa'. The reification of the land as mother simply expresses the recognition of spiritual protection guaranteed to all mortals tied to the land.

Conclusions and Implications for Education

This paper has gone beyond the usual debates contesting the existence of an African philosophy. Spirituality-centered thought and wisdom is a definite paradigm of knowing in Africa. Spirituality-centered wisdom not only defines African personhood but it also provides the needed clues and hopes for surmounting the puzzle of lack of development in Africa. Inevitably, development in Africa will be enhanced by pedagogy of liberation that among other things restores African dignity and self-efficacy. African ways of knowing constitute invaluable aspects of African heritage that harmonize Africa's past broken story of development with its modern realities of globalization.

Other alternative ways of knowing are needed to jumpstart the African intellect and imagination towards giftedness for technological development. Pedagogy in Africa should value multilayered knowledge systems while evaluating their functionality in advancing progress in the modern cash economy and ecology. Indigenous knowledge has a definite place in the school curriculum. Its inclusion in the school curriculum reduces the sense of alienation among diverse minority students (Dei, 2000). Instead of just dismissing taboos of lightning in science lessons, why do the teachers not try involving students in scientific investigations to understand or disprove the underlying meanings behind those taboos? Teachers should be championing interpretation of the indigenous knowledges and wisdom and upgrade them through research. Taboos could be signals of some plausible hypotheses of phenomena begging for formal scientific investigation. Hence, in this context, the writer finds Cabral's (1973) call to *return to the source* a legendary piece of practical wisdom.

As illuminated in this paper, Horton (1967) is right to dismiss the established false dichotomies between African traditional thought and Western science: "intellectual versus emotional; rational versus mystical; reality-oriented versus fantasy-oriented; causally oriented versus supernaturally oriented; empirical versus non-empirical; abstract versus concrete; analytical versus non-analytical" (p.69). These false dichotomies tend to reinforce prejudiced mental sets that are impervious and retrogressive to the understanding and accommodation of cultural diversity and alternative ways of knowing. This paper supports the call to integrate pedagogy with spirituality-centered wisdom to liberate the mind from the hegemony of racial difference and individualism (e.g. Asante, 1987, 1989; Dei, 1997; Goduka, 1999). Although this paper makes the case for Africa, spirituality-centered wisdom is not a monopoly of Africa only. Spirituality is an aspect of human consciousness and existence acknowledged across cultures. Hence, Asante (as cited in Petrie, 1991) asserts that Afrocentricity (basically spirituality-centered thought and wisdom) is applicable beyond the African cultural boundary as "...non divisive..."

pluralism without a hierarchy” (p.21).

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