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Pan-African Epistemologies of Knowledge Production: A Deconstruction-Based Critical Reflection

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Abstract

The idea of Pan-African epistemologies of knowledge production remains a vexing issue that continues to promote critical transdisciplinary discourse. The intent of this paper is not to bring finality but rather to broaden the debate through the lens of Gayatri Spivak's deconstruction-laced strategic essentialism. To this end, we resituate the discourse within the broader architecture, structures, and processes of postcolonial thought where Pan-African epistemologies of knowledge production are reinvigorated in pushing forward the unfinished business of liberation and transformation in knowledge production. This is done with a renewed search for Pan-African epistemologies of knowledge production within the collective insights of

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indigenous knowledges. The idea is to interrogate the practices of knowledge production and usage that privileged coloniality. In deconstructing knowledge, we simultaneously engaged in its reconstruction and highlight how hegemonic domination is perpetuated through disguised performativity matrices neutrally packaged as pristine scholarly practices but masked with hegemonic and colonial intent.

Keywords: African academy, deconstruction, epistemology, knowledge production, Pan-Africanism

Résumé

L'idée d'épistémologies panafricaines de la production du savoir reste une question épineuse qui continue à promouvoir un discours critique transdisciplinaire. L'intention de cet article n'est pas d'apporter une finalité mais plutôt d'élargir le débat à travers la lentille de l'essentialisme stratégique de Gayatri Spivak imprégné de déconstruction. Pour ce faire, nous resituons le discours dans l'architecture, les structures et les processus plus larges de la pensée postcoloniale dans lesquels les épistémologies panafricaines de la production du savoir sont revigorées pour faire avancer l'entreprise inachevée de libération et de transformation de la production du savoir. Cela se fait par une recherche renouvelée des épistémologies panafricaines de la production du savoir dans les perspectives collectives de savoirs indigènes. L'idée est d'interroger les pratiques de production et d'utilisation du savoir qui ont privilégié la colonialité. En déconstruisant le savoir, nous nous engageons simultanément dans la reconstruction de celui-ci et soulignons comment la domination hégémonique se perpétue à travers des matrices de performance déguisées, présentées de manière neutre comme des pratiques académiques immaculées, mais masquées par des intentions hégémoniques et coloniales.

Mots clés: Académie africaine, déconstruction, épistémologie, production du savoir, panafricanisme

Introduction

Scholarly interest in Pan-African epistemologies is not new; it has been reinvigorated by recent evidence suggesting that Western-produced knowledge has not worked in non-Western contexts. Escobar (1995) documented failures and contradictions in development projects driven by Western knowledge systems in developing countries. Similarly, Chambers (1997) drew attention to errors in Western research-driven development initiatives. As critical voices in the academy began to emerge to question the contextual relevance of knowledges upon which developments in Africa were premised, the World Bank (1998) also published a report that acknowledges that the path to sustained economic growth and human wellbeing is shaped more by knowledge than capital. In the context of Africa, these developments generated renewed interest in Pan-African epistemologies and systems of knowledge production, with some arguing that "the basic component of any country's knowledge system is its indigenous knowledge" (Economic and Social Department, 2006, p. 9).

The discourse on Pan-African epistemologies and the broader debate about knowledge production[1] are very often heated due to the roles of colonialism, imperialism, and globalism in subordinating African indigenous ways of knowing (Appiah, 2005; Dei, 2000; Mudimbe, 1988; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018; Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 2012). This is not a settled debate but an evolving one, especially with the emergence of postcolonial scholarship within the broader context of postmodernist approaches. Since knowledge is never produced in a vacuum but within an institutional paradigm that is shaped by historical and contemporary events, Africa, and its diaspora, like knowledge itself, is shaped by the evils of enslavement, colonialism, and hegemony (Mamdani, 2016; Mkandawire, 2005; Mudimbe, 1988; Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 1986; Zeleza and Olukoshi, 2004). The affective nature of the Pan-African epistemological discourse vis-à-vis the dominance of Europe as the epicentre and paradigm of knowledge production is not a recent development (Adesanmi, 2011; Adomako Ampofo, 2016; Zeleza and Olukoshi, 2004; Zeleza, 1997). This discourse dates to Africa's humiliating encounter with enslavement and colonisation (Mandani, 2016; Mkandawire, 2005; Mudimbe, 1988; Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 1986; Zeleza and Olukoshi, 2004).

Also, the modern realities and experiences of Africa are shaped in the words of Mazrui (1986) by a triple legacy of indigenous heritage arising from time-tested knowledge, Eurocentric capitalism imposed through colonialism, and the

1 For contemporary debates about decolonisation and knowledge production within the ambit of academic freedom, see IAS seminar series at https://youtube.com@AfricanStudiesLegon.

jihadist and evangelistic spread of Islam.

Similarly, Mudimbe describes the "domination of physical space, the reformulation of natives' minds and the integration of local economic histories with Western perspective as the three complementary projects of colonialism" (1988, p. 15). This historical phase, in the words of Okech also speaks discernibly to the "inattentiveness to gender" as a visible "category and as a theoretical framework for understanding inclusion, exclusion and investment in higher education and research" (2020, p. 316). The need for interventions on decolonisation of knowledge and its institutional patriarchal structures featured fervently in the discourse of African feminists who spearheaded the call for dismantling Eurocentric concepts and approaches (Adomako Ampofo & Beoku-Betts, 2021; Amadiume, 1997; Cole et al., 2007; Medie & Kang, 2018; Okech, 2020; Tamale, 2011; Tsikata, 2007).

Rooted in and emanating from these historical events, Pan-African epistemologies and knowledge production in the broader context have re-emerged as a critical discourse, yet still without any proper resolution (Mama, 2003; Nnaemeka, 2005; Oyewumi, 1997). To this end, it is apt to say that the epistemological position of Europe and its dominant collaborators have permeated the African intellectual landscape. This description applies both to the hegemony of the practice of knowledge production and its consumption (Adomako Ampofo, 2016; Adomako Ampofo & Beoku-Betts, 2021; Mama, 2003; Ngugi wa Thiong'o,1986; Okech, 2020; Tamale, 2020).

We use the term hegemony not strictly within the confines of Gramscian trappings, which is often status quo legitimising. Interestingly, writing from the boundaries of the academy, Ayi Kwei Armah found solace in paralleling his 'collective intellectuals' within the trappings of Gramscian organic intellectuals as he searched for the saviours of his new Africa (Mami, 2011). On his part, Shivji (2018) captures the contemporary trajectories of the neoliberal march on the knowledge production process and the transformation of African intellectuals. In his account, the African intellectuals have "metamorphosed from colonial natives and migrants to neo-colonial indigenous tyrants" (Shivji, 2018, p. 5). We are, however, hesitant in anchoring our call for Pan-African epistemologies of knowledge production within the Gramscian trappings as indicated already. We situate the hegemonic practices within the perimeters of Foucauldian explications of power and knowledge. This power/knowledge dichotomy stares the African intellectual, whether on the continent or its diaspora, in the face and works both

ways in perpetuating what Immanuel Wallerstein (2004) describes as a capitalist-embracing world system. The African scholar is persistently confronted by a variant of intellectual imperialism that seeks to dismiss, and exclude as irrelevant, knowledge rooted in the African cultural experience unless such experiences are forced to approximate those of the coloniser (Adomako Ampofo & Beoku-Betts, 2021; Mandani, 2016; Mkandawire, 2005; Mudimbe, 1988; Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 1986; Zeleza & Olukoshi, 2004). As Chilisa observed, "… it is still the practice in academic debates to invoke Euro-Western belief systems and methodologies to dismiss as irrelevant knowledge from former colonised societies" (2011, p. 61). In this regard, coloniality has become the quality standard of produced knowledge in African educational institutions (Adomako Ampofo, 2016; Adomako Ampofo & Beoku-Betts, 2021; Mama, 2003; Mandani, 2016; Mkandawire, 2005; Mudimbe, 1988; Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 1986; Okech, 2020; Tamale, 2020; Zeleza & Olukoshi, 2004). The common practice in the African academy is that the form and structure of knowledge production and its underpinning narratives must conform to the dictates and structures of the coloniser. This culture of practice accepts the universalising Western epistemologies of knowledge as the 'gold standard' and keenly looks forward to its isomorphic mimicry. This hegemonic knowledge production and legitimation is unequivocally captured by Edward Said:

> Without significant exception the universalizing discourses of modern Europe and the United States assume the silence, willing or otherwise, of the non-European world…But there is only infrequently an acknowledgement that the colonised people should be heard from, their ideas known (1993, p. 50).

It is clear from the above that to pretend that the knowledge practices within the context of African universities are not part of the problem is just as naïve as indicating that the colonial context and the hegemonic impulses inherent in academic knowledge production from the Global North are figments of our collective imagination. The question, however, is do our contemporary practices provide the space to pursue what can be recognised as Pan-African epistemologies of knowledge production? Is it possible to contemplate its practice purely on Africa's own terms? While these pervasive questions keep reverberating whenever the issue of Pan-African epistemologies of knowledge production is raised, it must be noted that their persistence is not because there is a lack of effort on the part of postcolonial scholars.[2] This is more so when African feminist scholars

2 For an insight into the debate about the long and detailed history of knowledge production about Africa, see 'The Founding of the African Studies Association,' by G. Carter, 1983, *African Studies Review*, 26(3/4), pp. 5–9; *African Studies* in the US, by J. Guyer, 1996, Atlanta: ASA Press.

have and continue to raise questions encompassing the full gamut of knowledge and power (see Adomako Ampofo & Beoku-Betts, 2021; Amadiume, 1997; Cole et al., 2007; Mama, 2003; Medie & Kang, 2018; Nnaemeka, 2005; Okech, 2020; Oyewumi, 1997; Tamale, 2020; Tsikata, 2007).

However, once we turn on the critical postcolonial gaze to unpack the discourse of epistemologies vis-à-vis global knowledge production, the Western knowledge form becomes the measuring rod. Therefore, in the production and consumption of knowledge through legitimation practices, the Derridean nudges to deconstruct and reconstruct loom large. It must be stated that what we envisaged in this paper is not the application of deconstruction based on logocentrism and mere representations (Derrida, 1973, 1976 & 1978). Rather, we deconstruct through the lens of Gayatri Spivak's concept of strategic essentialism. This deconstruction-based postcolonial thought opens the possibility of a viable Pan-African epistemology. Once activated, postcolonial theory's strategic essentialism unleashes African intellectual identity as enmeshed within the cultural norms and values of Africa by providing avenues to reinvigorate indigenous knowledge systems. Thus, within the context of the vexing question of whether there can be fully-fledged Pan-African epistemologies of knowledge, we reopen the debate for a critical self-reflection. This provides ways through which scholars and practitioners reclaim their voices, like the proverbial hunter, with equal control of their tales as well.

The question of reclaiming Pan-African epistemic voices is raised within a discernible ambience that prioritises scholarly accounts of the Global North as the gold standard for assessing postcolonial scholarship. Thus, within the context of African universities, the culture of knowledge production and its practices are so much tinged with residual colonialism. This, in recent times, is anchored through the insistence on such practices as the indexing of scholarly outputs in colonial outlets and the obsession with university ranking scores. These indexing outlets are designed to legitimise and delegitimise knowledge practices emanating from postcolonial sources. For instance, a British scholar who publishes in journals based in the United Kingdom is not confronted with the stigma of publishing only in local journals, by any stretch of the imagination. However, a Ghanaian scholar is scolded, metaphorically speaking, for playing only in the local league. Despite this, there is a need to interrogate the discourse of knowledge production and its practices in postcolonial society. This deconstruction allows us to redefine the search for Pan-African epistemologies of knowledge production within our

collective intent to harness the rich insights of indigenous and postcolonial knowledges. This fits into the original intent of President Nkrumah in developing an Institute of African Studies. As Allman tells us, Nkrumah's desire for an Institute of African Studies was to be a "highly developed code of morals" (2013, p. 183). Together, these philosophical and practical instruments of knowledge are to produce authentic Pan-African epistemologies of knowledge that are path-breaking. This tradition has continued to some extent as various directors of the Institute of African Studies, both past and present, have seized opportunities to repeat the call to decolonise knowledge and academia.

The paper is structured around four broad overlapping themes. The next section interrogates the concept of Pan-Africanism. It situates the debate of Pan-African epistemologies of knowledge production within the broader context of what Pan-Africanism meant in the first place and how African knowledge systems have been historically caricatured. The hegemonic practices of knowledge and its legitimation practices are then highlighted. This paves the way for the debate on Pan-African epistemologies of knowledge production within the confines of Gayatri Spivak's deconstruction-laced concept of strategic essentialism. The fourth section details the pathways for Pan-African epistemologies within the immediate African context. The paper concludes that truly Pan-African epistemologies of knowledge production pathways are viable if strategic essentialism is invoked in both theory and practice.

Pan-Africanism and the Debate About the Role of Epistemology

Pan-Africanism, both as a concept and a process, has had very emotional and psychological effects on the people of Africa and its diaspora. As with social science concepts, the term defies a universal definition to the extent that some writers are hesitant to even propose or agree that a definition is discernible (see Ackah, 1999; Geiss, 1974; Langley, 1973; Legum, 1962; Nascimento, 1980; Shepperson, 1962; Thompson, 1973). The vagueness of the term, as suggested by Adi, "reflects the fact that Pan-Africanism has taken different forms at different historical moments and geographical locations" (2018, p. 2).

While the concept of Pan-Africanism still lacks an acceptable definition, its continuing relevance as a process is without doubt. There is an inherent understanding that the process must reflect the totality of Africa and its diaspora (Adi, 2018; Clarke, 1988). The underlying faith in these manifold visions and approaches to exploring Pan-Africanism both as a concept and a process emanates from the shared history and purpose of Africa and its diaspora. The fundamental creed is the notion that there is coherence in Africa's diversity

(Adi, 2018). The African Union magazine, AU Echo, in January 2013 provided a contemporary definition of Pan-Africanism as:

> An ideology and movement that encouraged the solidarity of Africans worldwide. It is based on the belief that unity is vital to economic, social and political progress and aims to 'unify and uplift' people of African descent. The ideology asserts that the fates of all African peoples and countries are intertwined. At its core, Pan-Africanism is a belief that African peoples both on the continent and in the diaspora share not merely a common history, but a common destiny (AU Echo, 2013, p. 1).

If we place our critical gaze on this definition, Pan-Africanism both as a concept and more importantly as a process has evolved. Emerging at the peak of the slave trade era, Pan-Africanism came to express the practical anticipation that the African continent and its diaspora would be liberated. It must be noted that there are differing accounts relating to Pan-Africanism that are not fully explored in this paper.[3] Justifiably, Pan-Africanism's modern understanding and value emanated from the struggle against colonialism (Adi, 2018). Symbolically, the process was birthed, amplified, and given meaning by the famous statement by President Kwame Nkrumah at the historic declaration of Ghana's independence:

> We have done the battle and we again rededicate ourselves not only in the struggle to emancipate other countries in Africa. Our independence is meaningless unless it is linked up with the total liberation of the African continent (Nkrumah, 1979, p. 156-171 quoted in Biney, 2011, p. 240).

In political terms, liberation has come for many countries, but intellectually, the idea of Pan-African epistemologies of knowledge production remains elusive. This situation is not helped by the explicit attempt to deny the geography, intellectual space, and recognition of what can truly be termed Pan-African epistemologies of knowledge. As late as 2007, the disgraced former president of

3 See Nantambu, K. (1998) Pan-Africanism versus Pan-African Nationalism: An Afrocentric Analysis. *Journal of Black Studies*, 28(5), 561-574 for what he described as an Afrocentric approach to a proper, historical, unifying, and holistic perspective; Clarke, J. H. (1988). Pan-Africanism: A Brief History of an idea in the African World. *Présence Africaine* 145, 26-56; Ọbádélé Bakari Kambon, Pan-Africanism Defined, at *Definitions of Pan-Afrikanism: Preview to the Ancient Origins*, 2019, https://youtu.be/E8KWImibNyI.

France, Nicholas Sarkozy, arrogantly asserted in a speech that Africa's tragedy is that it has no history and no "idea of progress" (Adi, 2018, p. 3). But as critical observers have noted, this caricaturing of Africa is not new as outright dismissals of Africa in historical accounts abound (Adi, 2018). Sarkozy's denial was just a return to the Eurocentric path constructed by those before him. For example, in a public lecture at the University of Sussex in October 1963, the historian Trevor-Roper stated:

> Perhaps, in the future, there will be some African history to teach. But at present there is none, or very little: there is only the history of the Europeans in Africa. The rest is largely darkness, like the history of pre-European, pre-Columbian America. And darkness is not a subject for history (Adi, 2018, p. 3).

Unfortunately, Trevor-Roper, just like Sarkozy after him, was only retelling a long-established Eurocentric assertion which sought to deny any intellectual space to talk about Pan-African epistemologies of knowledge production. The well-known German philosopher Friedrich Hegel stated in 1830:

> At this point we leave Africa, not to mention it again. For it is no historical part of the World; it has no movement or development to exhibit. Historical movements in it – that is in its northern part – belong to the Asiatic or European World. Carthage displayed there an important transitionary phase of civilization; but, as a Phoenician colony, it belongs to Asia. Egypt will be considered in reference to the passage of the human mind from its Eastern to its Western phase, but it does not belong to the African Spirit. What we properly understand by Africa, is the Unhistorical, Undeveloped Spirit, still involved in the conditions of mere nature, and which had to be presented here only as on the threshold of the World's History (Hegel 1956, p. 99).

This racist caricaturing of Africa and its knowledge systems is depressing. It is imperative to state that the role of the Institute of African Studies at the University of Ghana was, from the onset, meant to confront these racist caricatures. As indicated by its founding director, Hodgkin:

> It was the job of African Studies, not only to expose racist colonial myths ('Africa has no history' for example) but to build up systematically as comprehensive a body of source material as possible to disprove those myths and then to undertake the process of reinterpretation of the evidence and the making available of the results of this interpretation (Allman, 2013, p. 190).

The implication, therefore, is that what Pan-African epistemologies of knowledge production should contain, and how they should be advanced, was incubated at the birth of the University of Ghana's Institute of African Studies. In addition, across Africa, the call for rethinking education and the structures of knowledge has been mapped out by various scholars (see Mama, 2003; Mamdani, 2016; Zeleza & Olukoshi, 2004). However, we lost our way and articulation. As events unfolded, the attempt to decolonise knowledge only found expression in the permissive appeal to the oppressors (Prakash, 1995). In most situations, the construction of our cultural norms, scripts, and society ensued from an unending emptiness because we were too quick in dismissing Pan-African practices as subjective while exalting Western interpretations as universal, interest and value-free (Prakash, 1995). Interrogating Edward Said's admonition regarding commodities and representations, the reality of our predicament and the task ahead glaringly stare us in the face. As Said aptly articulated,

> We live of course in a world not only of commodities but also of representations – their production, circulation, history, and interpretation. In much recent theory the problem of representation is deemed to be central, yet rarely is it put in its full political context, a context that is primarily imperial. Instead, we have on the one hand an isolated cultural sphere, believed to be freely and unconditionally available to weightless theoretical speculation and investigation, and, on the other, a debased political sphere, where the real struggle between interests is supposed to occur. To the professional student of culture – the humanist, the critic, the scholar – only one sphere is relevant, and more to the point, it is accepted that the two spheres are separated, whereas the two are not only connected but ultimately the same (1995, p. 34).

Unfortunately, the African intellectual cannot write in a vacuum. We are situated within an academic world that is saturated with negative statements by non–Africans about ourselves and our continent. This is reasonable given the imperialistic nature of social science (Ake, 1982). As a result, in reconstructing the discourse on Pan–African epistemologies of knowledge production, our very own realities must be front and centre. There is no excuse to steadily hold on to the epistemological ideals that others have constructed for Africa without attempts to produce one that represents our reality.

Regrettably, even in the attempts to deconstruct and reconstruct the very process of knowledge production within the confines of Pan–Africanism, the assemblages of knowledge production are premised on the extent to which the African scholar embraced the Western narrative (Falola, 2004). The West's hegemonic dominance is built on the denigration of indigenous knowledge (Falola, 2005; Oppong, 2013; Yankah, 2004). Ironically, while a cardinal principle for creativity and innovation is competition, when it comes to knowledge production, indigenous African knowledge systems are not seen to be on the same pedestal. The universalising discourse of the West and the reality of our predicament is that our very own default recognised knowledge mode is enunciated in non–nativised languages and Western–styled educational settings. In the next section, we focus on the global context of knowledge production to point out how the enterprise of knowledge and its production continues not only to be tinged by the vestiges of colonialism but operates largely within its permeated boundaries.

The Context of Knowledge Production

The pervasiveness of hegemonic discourse on knowledge production and its legitimation is very much a taken–for–granted reality in terms of how non–Western knowledge and its foundational epistemologies are delegitimised. In the classical form of giving a dog a bad name to hang it, knowledge is categorised as science and non–science, with the prototypical non–Western ways of knowing depicted as falling outside the scientific categorisation. So, in the sociology of science literature, the classical Robert Merton provided a romanticised account of science as an epistemic knowledge that is organised around functionalist norms of universalism, disinterestedness, organised scepticism, and communalism (Merton, 1973). These norms that collectively came to be known as the ethos of science provided the institutional context for what was to be accepted or disregarded as knowledge, scientific, and non–scientific practice. The 'universalism' norm prohibited the scientist's social status and role from being a basis for the validation and acceptance of knowledge claims. The ethos

of 'disinterestedness' guaranteed neutrality in the assessment of knowledge claims while 'organised scepticism' safeguarded the established standards and measures of accepting or rejecting knowledge claims. The ethos of 'communalism' detailed knowledge exchanges within the scientific community (Dzisah, 2010). However, we are aware that these scientific ethos as ideal types are farther away from actual practice. Nevertheless, the scientific ethos provided a theoretical and practical yardstick through which non-Western knowledges are quickly discarded.

As broadly defined, one sees an immediate problem in seeking to forge some kind of unity in diversity when it comes to Pan-African epistemologies. In fact, once we turn on the critical gaze, the veiled inherent biases in knowledge production are unmasked. Paul Tiyambe Zeleza was more poignant in stating the obvious:

> …the terms of global intellectual exchange, like the terms of trade for the so-called developed and developing economies, are decidedly unequal: African studies in the North is a peripheral part of the academy, whereas the Euro-American epistemological order remains central in the African academy. Since the colonial encounter, the construction of scholarly knowledge about Africa has been internationalised both in the sense of it being an activity involving scholars in various parts of the world and the inordinate influence of externally generated models on African scholarship (2007, p. 2).

Baber (2003) also revealed elsewhere how practical/technical research is relegated to the periphery while pure/theoretical work is reserved for the core. Admittedly, there is no clear-cut division of intellectual labour, but discerning configurations are visible. As Baber pointedly stated:

> conceptual, theoretical work that sought to universalize its findings from, provincial locations was the preserve of the colonial scholars. Knowledge produced by scholars located in the colonized societies had a particular geographical referent, constituted a case study, and hence had no theoretical contributions to make…A few notable exceptions notwithstanding, knowledge produced by scholars located in metropolitan societies was deemed to be general and universal in their implication regardless of how local or provincial their terms of reference might be (2003, p. 617).

This development parallels the description of the colonial division of labour in which there is the uncritical affirmation that scholarly outcomes from Africa and its diaspora are inferior and can only serve as raw material that partially solves local issues (Hountondji, 2002). This relegation of African intellectual output to the backyard is not new as has been catalogued by African scholars such as Mbembe (2005) and Mudimbe (1988). However, as Chakrabarty reiterated,

> For generations now, philosophers and thinkers who shape the nature of social science have produced theories that embrace the entirety of humanity…The everyday paradox of third-world social science is that we find these theories, in spite of their inherent ignorance of 'us,' eminently useful in understanding our societies (2000, p. 29).

The promptings of these deconstructionist nudges are that we must resituate knowledge production within the idea of open-endedness and reflexivity. This must encompass our overall culture of practices that have been wrought by the legacy of coloniality. Since production and consumption are intertwined, the deconstruction of how we privileged and reinforced coloniality through routine performativity matrices of journal outlets and citation indexes must be debated. These indexes are nothing but disguised mechanisms that revivify colonial knowledge structures. Ending their privileged status is a starting point for Pan-African epistemologies of knowledge production to re-emerge. We must go beyond these veiled neo-colonial practices by critically reflecting on the production, consumption, and measurement of knowledge.

The reconstruction of what qualifies as Pan-African epistemologies of knowledge rests precisely in going back to the question that Chakrabarty succinctly asked: "What allowed the modern European sages to develop such clairvoyance with regard to societies of which they were empirically ignorant? Why cannot we, once again, return the gaze?" (Chakrabarty, 2000, p. 29). To this end, we need to reengage those intellectual activities that advance Pan-African epistemologies of knowledge (Falola, 2004; Mamdani, 1999; Mkandawire, 2000, 2002; Quijano, 2007; Zeleza, 1992). There is a need to review what constitutes Pan-African knowledge and the extent to which it must be measured by our very own inherent standards. Also, to what extent must Pan-African knowledges deviate from other knowledges? In the next section, we interrogate postcolonial theory as a way of unmasking the hegemonic discourses sustaining colonial empire and its enduring knowledge base.

Postcolonialism and the Hegemony of Western Knowledge Practices

Postcolonial theory emerged along the line of revolutionary new frontiers and cultural studies (Gandhi, 1998). These so-called new humanities appeared just as the philosophies of post-structuralism and deconstruction and became tied to postcolonial theory (Loomba, 1998). The impact of postcolonial theory attracted immediate scrutiny and criticism largely based on its trendiness. It was, therefore, not surprising when Harold Bloom, the famed literary critic, denounced postcolonial studies as being infected with 'the disease of resentment' (Hedges 2000; Go, 2016). The attempts to by critics to relegate postcolonial theory to non-knowledge notwithstanding, its diversity provided a foundational coordinate (Go, 2016). To this end, the first wave of postcolonial theorists unsettled the Enlightenment notion of objective knowers. This so-called Cartesian subject provided the basis for construing the universe as an objective reality out there. This idealised rendition of the objectivity of knowledge, far removed from the realities of the world, was made untenable. This is because knowledge is relational, whether in its curiosity form or neoliberal capitalised format (Dzisah, 2016). More in tune with the postcolonial critique is the fact that knowledge is intrinsically tied to power, especially imperial and colonial power (Go, 2016). This critique went to the core of the idea of Enlightenment. It challenges its universal knowledge claims, teasing that "if the imperial knower cannot pull the 'God trick,' then its knowledge is not universal" (Go, 2016, p. 33).

In Representations of the Intellectual, Edward Said (1996) provided yet another insight into how universalism claims underlie much of the hegemony of Western knowledge. For instance, a close reading of Marx provided such a universal epistemological proposition in terms of his usage of the categories of 'bourgeois' and 'pre-bourgeois' or 'capital' and 'pre-capital.' The prefix 'pre' signified a notional and sequential relationship (Said, 1996). In the Grundrisse, Marx insisted that the emergence of the bourgeoisie and, for that matter, capitalist society produces a historical, philosophical, and universal category – capital. This category depicts the ability to theoretically comprehend the material history of not just Europe but the entirety of humanity. In the process, this universality of history rendered Pan-African knowledges and other non-European history redundant because history must theoretically be based on its differences from the European version. The fact that "cultures are too intermingled, their contents and histories too interdependent and hybrid, for surgical separation into large and mostly ideological oppositions like Orient and Occident" (Said, 1996, p. xii), notwithstanding,

the universalism claim continued unabated. As surgical narrated by Dipesh Chakrabarty, in the work of Marx, one just has to substitute the words 'Europe' for 'capital' and 'European' for 'bourgeois' (2000, p. 29–30) to unmask the universal claim of Western hegemony.

In the previous section, we indicated the need to explore what constitutes knowledge within the settings of Pan–African epistemologies of knowledge and the extent to which these knowledges are to be measured. We have already alluded to the fact that scholarship in Africa is responsive rather than proactive due to the epistemological influence of the reality of the West (Falola, 2004 & 2005; Yankah, 2004). So, working within this reality, how do we reconstruct Pan–African epistemologies to reflect our cultural and historical practices? In the African systems of thought, the emphasis is on the holistic picture of the larger society. This, as we have already indicated, informed the vision of President Nkrumah in articulating the primary function of the Institute of African Studies (Allman, 2013). The lingering question, though, is why we have abandoned this vision and adopted academic practices that privilege only one form of knowledge, that is, knowledge that is based entirely on the Western performative standards. To put it bluntly, why are contemporary African centres of knowledge production, institutions of research and higher learning, insistent that only colonial outlets and their contemporary versions of performance metrics provide the measuring rod of scholarship? Why are African universities taking pride in accepting university rankings performed by Western–based rating agencies, some very dodgy, without any tinge of decolonial intent? (Shivji, 2018)

A major step in the process of deconstructing contemporary knowledge production in the African context is to pay critical attention to the conscious and unconscious perpetuation of the hegemony of Western knowledge systems. This takes the form of the uncritical practice of acclaimed scholarship being based on the geographical location of a journal or its indexed site. The obsession with the hegemonic Western standard must be reconsidered if we are to prioritise Pan–African pedagogical and epistemological approaches (Adomako Ampofo & Beoku–Betts, 2021; Mama, 2003 & 2007; Okech, 2020; Oyewumi, 2002; Nnaemeka; 2005). The rallying point for a true constitution of Pan–African epistemologies of knowledge production starts from the rejection of the new indexing colonialism and prioritising, in its place, the uniquely African experiences, where scholarly preparation, appraisal, and the determination of outcomes are rooted within the specific African cultural contexts.

Regarding the question of the extent to which Pan-African knowledges must deviate from the Western forms, our ability to deconstruct and simultaneously reconstruct knowledge and the academy will determine the way forward. As we have indicated from the onset, we use the term 'deconstruction' in the Derridean fashion only to showcase the possibility of authentic Pan-African epistemologies. This possibility is only viable if such knowledges are situated within the broader architecture, structures, and processes of knowledge production that keep African cultural values alive. There is the need to recast the discourse and focus on knowledge production practices specifically within the African academy and society, recognising the various ways that we ourselves are perpetuating the hegemony of the West in implied and calculated ways. This is why the deconstructionist perspective allows us to redefine the search for Pan-African epistemologies of knowledge production within our collective intent, which is geared towards harnessing the rich insights of our indigenous knowledges, for a more recognisable paradigm shift.

In fact, until we resituate knowledge production within the idea of reflexivity that takes cognisance of and corrects our overall culture of practices, the search for what constitutes Pan-African knowledge, and its epistemological compass, will remain elusive. The need for reflexivity is critical because our knowledge practices are underpinned by an enduring legacy of colonialism. Indeed, the extent to which we must deviate from the Western hegemonic knowledge as the referent is reflective of how our meanings and interpretations are derived from our uniquely African social organisation and social relations (Mamdani, 2016; Oyewumi, 2002; Quijano, 2007). This way of deconstruction is not new. It has been adopted by postcolonial theorists that are broadly grouped under the lexicon of subaltern studies (Go, 2016) and postcolonial ways (Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 1986, 1993 & 2012). However, since Spivak's strategic essentialism is used to frame this paper, we need to delve into the main goal of subaltern studies historiography. As indicated by Go (2016, p. 59), it is intended "to map subaltern agency and excavate the knowledges, perspectives, and understandings of colonised groups that have been subjugated by imperial culture."

The subaltern approach that was directed at critiquing "the cultural hegemony of European knowledges" while simultaneously reasserting the "epistemological value and agency of the non- European world" (Gandhi, 1998, p. 44) provides a philosophical perspective and an entry point for the critical reflection on Pan-African epistemologies of knowledge production. For instance, what the subaltern theorist Gayatri Spivak offers as "strategic essentialism"

(Go, 2016) provides a path for addressing the epistemological question relating to the ways of knowing about our reality. The concept of strategic essentialism allows us to simultaneously deconstruct and reconstruct. For instance, it is a fact that in theory and practice, the category 'woman' is not capable of rendering visible the deep-seated heterogeneity of the experiences and practices of 'women'. However, in a Derridean fashion of deconstruction, we accept the argument that, despite the inherent hegemonic biases toward Western knowledge forms, it is plausible to utilise the concept within the sphere of politics to mobilise and make claims.

As paradoxical as it may sound, this paper, in the light of deconstruction, depends on both postcolonial and Western hegemonic discourses in making the case for critical reflexive Pan-African epistemologies of knowledge production and practice. This paradox stems from the fact that we are immersed in the colonial indoctrination in all its forms to such an extent that we stood within the Western hegemonic paradigm while charting a path for Pan-African epistemologies of knowledge in both theory and practice. In any case, it is the inability of Western epistemology to measure up fully to African realities that has given rise to recent interest in Pan-African epistemology. As such, standing on the shoulders of what it considered the shortcomings of the hegemonic Western knowledge systems, the construction of true and meaningful African knowledge systems is possible.

Strategic essentialism in this case enables us to treat social agents as if they are made up of fixed identities just to reclaim their fundamental identity. In other words, our argument, by extension, is that Pan-African epistemologies of knowledge production must simultaneously be fixed and fluid and emerge both from within and outside the academy. The scholarly work of Ayi Kwei Armah and the likes who stood largely outside the academy must be acknowledged in this regard. For instance, his insistence that the university provide the space for effecting desirable social change is very evocative (Armah, 1969, 2006; Mami, 2011). In blending traditional forms of knowledge practices with the academically normalised ones, the true critical reflective Pan-African epistemologies of knowledge must re-emerge from the throes of the original vision of the Institute of African Studies. However, this time round, it must be much more enduring to enable us to distinctively delineate African indigenous knowledge forms. This approach is not without limitations. It may even be objectively indefensible as Frantz Fanon (1970) indicated in Toward African Revolution. Nevertheless, it provided a theoretical route for deconstruction

and difference even in the case of Fanon (1970), where nationalist movements appealed to an indigenous African past during the heat of the postcolonial struggle if they were wary of the 'paradoxes and pitfalls' of such appeals. However, those appeals, within the context of decolonisation struggles, provided political value which anchored the task of defeating colonialism in all its forms.

Furthermore, the concept of strategic essentialism, deployed in making the case for deconstructing knowledge production and situating Pan-African epistemologies of knowledge broadly, is also a political and historiographical device. Its aim is to "recover native agency and voices as best as the historical archive allows, while nonetheless making visible the incompleteness of the representation" (Spivak, 1988, p. 205). It implores us to read the archives of history for the 'subaltern subject-effect' and significantly treat that effect as demonstrating an actual stable identity. As Spivak put it:

> one writes the subaltern as the subject of history – finding a positive subject-position for the subaltern – but only to show that the subaltern marks the absolute limit of the place where history is narrativised into logic, not to establish an inalienable and final truth of things (1988, p. 16).

This recasting of the postcolonial archive is for "affirmative deconstruction" (Spivak 1988, p. 205). Deconstruction for Derrida, and its readings for Spivak, provide an avenue for a new way of appreciating that which is being deconstructed. Knowledge is indeed power. A critical analysis of the structure of the production of knowledge and its associated practices, especially in the African academy, are subservient to the hegemonic dictates of what is Western. As such, in challenging the binaries upon which knowledge has been constructed, through the prism of deconstruction, there is the possibility of limiting the destructive impacts of elevating Western knowledge forms while denigrating non-Western forms. As such, in our collective resolve, there is the opportunity to provide an alternative representational strategy that enables us to situate Pan-African epistemologies of knowledge on a culture of practice that is devoid of neo-colonial simulations.

Pathways for Pan-African Epistemologies of Knowledge Production

In utilising Derridean deconstruction through the lens of postcolonial theory, the different pathways of knowing and conceptualising reality within the context of Pan-African epistemologies of knowledge production look promising. This is because the cumulative nature of knowledge and its implications could shape our practical and subjective experiences and provide cover for deconstructing

knowledge that pretends to offer the only mode for decoding knowledges. Framed in this way, the pathway for constructing Pan–African epistemologies of knowledge and, in fact, an indigenous knowledge system, differs from the overly positivistic epistemological traditions.

The Pan–African epistemological mode holistically engages the immediate African context. This extensive knowledge base allows us, through the lens of deconstruction–based critical postcolonial theory, to pry open academic discourse, disciplines, and practices. This deconstruction exercise produces a nuanced reconstruction that leaves both the process of knowledge production and practice, substantively decolonised yet adaptive to each emerging situation. This task is not an easy one because the transformative structures of Pan–African epistemologies of knowledge if not properly anchored, can be disenchanting rather than enchanting. As a way of illustration, it must be said that we are using the same methodologies as the colonisers. Ochwada (2005) reminds us about the experiences of African historians caught in the methodological fixes their historical iterations so fervidly critiqued. This admonition is imperative because we need to pay attention to the situatedness of knowledge. Unless we chart a new path and take immediate steps to incorporate in our practices actions that respect the nature of our indigenous knowledge systems, the search for Pan–African epistemologies of knowledge production will remain elusive. This is because the struggle against remnants of colonialism in knowledge production is an endless one. Indeed, a major step forward is in developing and utilising reflective Pan–African epistemologies of knowledge without any apologies (Mkandawire, 2005).

Consequently, the search for enduring Pan–African epistemologies must intensify through a holistic deployment of indigenous African knowledge systems. In addition, within the realm of African universities, the question raised by Mazrui in another context finds a fitting expression here: "Apart from ensuring a climate of academic freedom and the free flourishing of intellectualism, what does society have to do to develop a university before intellectuals and scholars become capable of helping to develop society?" (2005, p. 60). As he explicated, resources are crucial, but we must eschew some of the practices as well. The practices we are referring to in this paper are those that are blinkered and destructive to the original intent of Pan–Africanism, especially its liberatory and transformative versions.

In essence, deconstruction requires the simultaneous reconstruction of knowledge production in a manner that is conscious of the residual effects of existing Western epistemic practices. For instance, the emphasis on the

practices such as indexing of scholarly outputs in colonial outlets for most parts only serves as a legacy of colonialism. They provide justifications for delegitimising African indigenous knowledge systems. As Adomako Ampofo has lucidly reminded us:

> not all voices have the same power—where we speak, and the authority of our voices don't have equal reach, and hence impact our lives differentially. Some voices are marginalized by the way the academy is structured in different places around the globe, exemplified most sharply perhaps by the so-called impact factor syndrome (2016, p. 17).

We are not completely dismissing everything about knowledge production inherited from the colonisers. Rather, our intention is to move towards an active Pan-African epistemological gaze that mirrors what Gerald Vizenor (1994) referred to as 'survivance'. As understood, survivance allows scholars interested in African epistemologies to go beyond resistance, endurance, and survival in a complementary manner, where both the colonised and the colonisers learn from each other (Chilisa, 2011).

Conclusion

We have mapped out the contours of global knowledge production within the prism of Pan-African epistemologies of knowledge production. This is done from the context of the dominant colonial practices that underpin what is recognised and practised as knowledge. This paper, in a way, is contradictory because we make the argument for a critical self-reflection within the African academy in terms of the practices of knowledge and how to revive the discourse of Pan-African epistemologies of knowledge production standing inside those very structures. We depend on both postcolonial and Western hegemonic discourses to make our case. The paradox of our immersion in the colonial reproduction of knowledge is not lost on us, but we contend that it is necessary to stand within the same Western hegemonic paradigm to carve out possibilities, where the Pan-African epistemologies of knowledge are not merely recanted but are re-engaged.

In terms of the dominance and the pervasiveness of the universalising colonial discourses, as Edward Said (1993) has already reminded us, they are very pervasive. We have argued that hegemony of power and knowledge as enshrined within the Western-dominated performativity principles measured within the confines of African academy in terms of citation index, impact factor,

Western-based visibility matrix and university rankings, have laid bare the extent to which the discourse of Pan-African epistemological foundations of knowledge remains a weapon of the weak. The usual practice in the African academy has been the activation of the default mode, that is, the standard practices within which the context of what is considered relevant knowledge is subsumed under the attendant practices of the Western-dominant account. This narrative emanates from the colonial encounter but has been constantly renewed in postcolonial times. For generations now, "philosophers and thinkers who shape the nature of social science have produced theories that embrace the entirety of humanity" (Chakrabarty, 2000, p. 29). Since we live in a commoditised world that is based on the representation of certain cultural elements that are largely Western-based (Said, 1993), the question about how to revive and sustain Pan-African epistemologies of knowledge production are germane and we must indicate that postcolonial scholars have somehow taken the lead (see; Adomako Ampofo, 2016; Appiah, 2005; Bodomo, 2013; Dei, 2000; Falola & Jennings, 2002; Mudimbe, 1988; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018; Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 1986; Nnaemeka, 2005; Onyewumi, 1997). However, within the contours of the African academy, the pressing question has to do with at what material moment will Pan-African epistemologies becomes the measure of knowledge? At what point will the cultures of practice begin to change to adopt African standards? Despite the pessimism, there is hope, if we start fusing indigenous reality with rationalism (Mazrui, 2005), and encouraging it as the backbone of our academic practices.

The task is daunting, but the fact remains that there is the need to continually deconstruct knowledges, if we are to eventually reconstruct the paradigms of their production. This is the only way through which we can adequately uproot the pervasive colonial structures reinforcing postcolonial practices. The process of deconstruction and reconstruction provides a path to correct the psychological damage, distortion, humiliation, and embarrassment visited upon African societies through Western epistemologies. We must embrace Pan-African epistemologies to counter existing theories, correct misinformation, and right intellectual wrongs. The time to act and decolonise these cultures of practice from the African academy is now.

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