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All Knowledge Is first of all Local Knowledge: An Introduction

Theophilus Okere,* Chukwudi Anthony Njoku,** & René Devisch***

Abstract

Against a monolithic view of knowledge production and the tendency to universalize science, this article calls attention to the unique genius and distinctive creativity and originality which underlines production of knowledge in any given cultural context. It takes seriously, the fact that, at its roots, knowledge production is context bound. Hence the authors emphasize the fact that all knowledge is first of all local knowledge. From this fundamental understanding of the true wellsprings of the production of knowledge, it argues against a mythic veil, which reformist modernity, especially, tended to place on the process of producing and transmitting knowledge. This deceptive myth about knowledge production, it opines, has had the negative impact of stereotyping, blackmailing, inferiorizing and derailing the production and sharing of knowledge and its artefacts in cultures other than the West. The colonial encounter, with its assumptions and presumptions, helped to rub in this vision of reformist modernity and to muffle the voices of colonised cultures. Hence such labels as 'indigenous' knowledge. In recognition, therefore, of the creative and genuine originality latent in every culture, this article seeks to empower cultures to realise, work on and appropriate the riches embedded in their own local knowledge tracts and trajectories. This appropriation by cultures, of their own rich genius, is, for the authors, the gateway

* Theophilus Okere is currently the president of the Whelan Research Academy for Religion, Culture and Society in Owerri, Imo State, Nigeria.

**Chukwudi Anthony Njoku, is a catholic priest of Owerri archdiocese, Whelan Research Academy for Religion, Culture and Society, International Centre, 162A Whetheral Road, Owerri, Nigeria. Email: Akuabata30@Yahoo.co.uk.

***René Devisch is Special Emeritus Professor of Anthropology at the Catholic University of Louvain, Leuven, Belgium.
Email: Rene.Devisch@ant.kuleuven.be.

to re-acquiring cultural dignity and self-confidence and indeed an opportunity for each cultural node to positively contribute to the commonwealth of world knowledge. Such variegated approach to mining the wisdom and ecological advantages of various cultural groups will enhance the sharing of knowledge in a spirit of both vertical and horizontal border-linking exchanges of riches found in different cultural contexts and knowledge fields. The ancient wisdom of the Igbo of south eastern Nigeria is used in the article as an illustration of this latent, culture specific genius. The article also highlights the mission of Whelan Research Academy for Religion, Culture and Society, Owerri, Nigeria, in creating awareness, space and forum for paying closer attention to indigenous knowledge tracts endangered in this derailment of a wider spectrum of cultural nodes of knowledge.

Résumé

Cet article s'élève contre la conception monolithique de la production de connaissances et contre cette tendance à universaliser la science. Il attire l'attention sur le génie et la créativité, et l'originalité distinctive qui caractérisent la production de connaissances dans tout contexte culturel. Cet article tient compte du fait qu'à la base la production de connaissances est avant tout liée au contexte culturel, d'où le caractère local, avant tout, de la connaissance. À partir de cette détermination fondamentale de la réelle source de production de connaissances, ce texte développe un argumentaire contre ce voile mythique que la modernité réformiste, particulièrement, a posé sur le processus de production et de transmission de la connaissance. Ce texte affirme que ce mythe trompeur de la production de connaissances a eu certains effets négatifs : il a contribué à stéréotyper, à placer en situation de chantage et d'infériorité, et a également déstabilisé la production et le partage de la connaissance et de ses produits par des cultures autres qu'occidentales. L'épisode colonial, avec son lot d'hypothèses et de suppositions, a contribué à instiller cette vision de la modernité réformiste, et à museler les voix des cultures colonisées, d'où certaines dénominations, telles que la connaissance 'indigène', etc. Au vu de l'originalité créative et authentique en latence dans chaque culture, cet article cherche à aider les cultures à réaliser, exploiter et s'approprier les richesses existant dans leurs propres voies et trajectoires de connaissance locales. Cette appropriation par les cultures elles-mêmes, de leur propre génie, est, selon l'auteur, la meilleure façon de rétablir la dignité culturelle et la confiance en soi ; ainsi, chaque univers culturel peut positivement contribuer à enrichir le patrimoine de connaissances universelles. Une telle approche cosmopolite tendant à exploiter la sagesse et les avantages écologiques de divers groupes culturels permettra de mieux partager la connaissance, dans un esprit d'échanges transfrontalier des richesses puisées dans différents contextes culturels et différents champs de connaissances, aussi bien dans un sens vertical qu'horizontal. Le savoir ancestral des Igbos, dans le sud-est du Nigeria, est cité dans cet article, pour mieux illustrer ce génie latent, spécifique à la culture de chacun. Cet article met également en exergue la mission de la

Whelan Research Academy for Religion, Culture and Society, à Owerri, au Nigeria, consistant à sensibiliser, à créer un espace et un forum permettant d'attirer l'attention sur les voies de la connaissance indigène, qui sont menacées par cette déferlante de composantes culturelles de la connaissance.

Political, epistemological and socio-cultural dimensions

All knowledge is first of all local knowledge. This simple statement regarding the humble roots of knowledge production and sharing is for us critical in addressing the vital issues of rehabilitating in today's increasingly interactive and polycentric world the corpus of what has variously been labelled as *ethnoscience and indigenous, endogenous or local* knowledge. On their side, the glitter and efficiency of the cosmopolitan science and technology mediated and propagated by the West (or the North) in the last few centuries as the one-and-only valid about the one-and-only universe, may sometimes unduly veil the local roots, cultural origins, history, and limited epistemological assumptions of that very science production. By 'local roots of knowledge' we refer to any given culture's unique genius, and distinctive creativity which put a most characteristic stamp on what its members in their singular context and history meaningfully develop as knowledge, epistemology, metaphysics, worldview. This particularity in the nodes and mode of knowledge is often a result of that mutual push and pull between the people and the potential in their history and life-world, their task-related networks and living communities. 'Local' therefore refers, not so much to a geographic location, but to any given people's singular set of organising principles (be they linguistic, socio-cultural, economic, ecological, technocratic, historical, religious) which run through them like a weave that is constantly being adapted, linking them up in a unique way with their forebears, fellow-people and life-world in an interaction with neighbouring socio-cultures and more encompassing, visible and invisible, environments. The local is therefore not referring to some exotic traits, but to a given people's particular, self-organising, transgenerational cultural weave. The particular local indeed indicates the active creative originality of vital contexts and networks, the originary well-springs of that given people's endogenous ability to shape and manage their world, generation after generation, in lines with their own genius. An Igbo proverb, *Mba na-asu n'olu n'olu, ma akwaa ukwara, oburu ofu (Different peoples speak different languages, but the sound of their coughing is the same)* captures this local heart of creativity and self-organisation. The local is not a passive substratum, but indeed an endogenous force or active set of principles and forces both moulded by and inspiring a given people's unique trajectories and aspirations to knowledge, sovereignty and dignity, as well as their unique mode of inhabiting their life-world.

In this essay, we shall illustrate our argument mainly by referring to the rich knowledge sources and practices of the Igbo of Southeast Nigeria. The following Igbo proverb indeed aptly captures the local source of experiential and practical knowledge: *Nku di na mba na-eghere mba nri, The firewood in a particular context is good enough for the cooking in that environment.* The proverb acknowledges the endowment of each ecosystem and life-world as well as its members' giftedness for finding genuine ways of meaningfully putting to full use the resources at hand. Another proverb, *Uche bu akpa, onye obula nya nke ya, Knowledge (experiential and thoughtful) is like a handbag, everyone carries his or her own)*, acknowledges the quotidian and indeed singular nature of such skilful knowledge. The proverb moreover suggests how much knowledge is never someone's monopoly, but shared in a respect of fellow-people's insights. We could say that the heart of this proverb is a step ahead of Aristotle's dictum that *All men by nature desire to know.* While Aristotle gives primacy to *the quest* for knowledge, Igbo elders and experts basically assume possession of knowledge as their starting point and aim at sharing and applying one another's modes of knowledge and ways of understanding and doing as their starting point. Such knowledge acquisition or transmission never occurs from scratch. Or as the Brazilian educationist Paulo Freire would say, learning is not happening to an empty vessel or a *tabula rasa.* Indeed, knowledge proficiency happens, in the Igbo view, via the giving and receiving or the conversation-like intertwining of the forces and insights at hand, namely as a transactional meeting of minds, skills and experiences. When stated in a council dealing with conflicts or other critical issues in the community, the same proverb moreover stresses the need not only to share insights but also to open up to ever new, possibly external, inputs.

A number of Igbo rhetorical questions forcefully stress how much knowledge should never stop developing along unforeseeable tracks proper to any meeting and sharing: *E si be gi eje be onye? O gi na achara m moto? I na enye m nri? (Does the pathway to other people's house begin from your own house? Are you the one who helps me avoid the on-coming traffic? Do you feed me?).* In other words, *Do you have any monopoly of knowledge? Do you control my affairs for me? Are you the one guiding my every step? Do I really depend on you for my survival and sustenance*? These questions call for humility and the realisation that knowing, comprehension, grasp and mastery are really, at heart, local in their (epistemological and phenomenological, hence metaphysical) origins. Knowledge has a many-sided face that ought to be gathered in for a richer integral development of its thrust. Re-stating that all knowledge is basically local knowledge undermines

the Reformist Modernity's pretence at monolithic knowledge trajectories for mankind. This pretence moreover tended to universalise science, which was in origin a local, historically determined, contingent ethnoscience. It tended to suffocate the voice, vision, and unique perspectives and contributions of the great variety of other and genuine knowledge systems and epistemologies from the many cultures of the world. Because of its particular civilisational roots, cosmopolitan science and its modern institutionalisation are more of a global than universal nature. Yet a pluralistic, non-patronising poly-logue between the great variety of local knowledge practices is still in need of criteria for horizontal border-linking without encroachment upon one another, that is a non-colonising cross-fertilising and thus reciprocally re-empowering of adjacent culture-specific knowledge fields at their very border-zones.

But African societies have since colonisation and till today been marked by 'othering' from the North. Its great civilisational traditions (in particular, political, medical, biological, commercial, and religious ones -cf. Janzen 1989, p'Bitek 1971) have been inferiorised and subdued in particular during the 19th and 20th centuries' colonial and missionary enterprise. That jaundiced *civilising mission* assumed that all 'traditional' knowledge in Africa, where their very presence were acknowledged at all, were obsolete. In the colonial era, western *Enlightened* knowledge and expertise were a priori proclaimed superior probably because of its roots in Classical Greek Antiquity and western monotheistic metaphysics, as well as its literacy and technocracy. Ostensibly propagated for 'the good of the colonised peoples', this western civilisational *version* of knowledge was being imposed on several levels, in particular through the colonial and Christian missionary schools. Religious conversion and education joined forces to help African communities to *catch up* with the West. Of course, the colonial school education did not remain without positive effects. It indeed initiated young Africans into a groping dialogue with the West, its literature and technological development, by making the western texts, histories, world views and technical skills accessible to them primarily by the breaking down of the linguistic barrier. This entooling was, however, carried out in a lopsided manner as it imposed its own definitions and hegemonic dichotomy of subject (the one who knows) versus object (the known, the measurable), 'developed or modern' versus 'not-yet-developed or traditional' (van Rinsum 2002), meanwhile obnubilating the basic realities and originary local African knowledge vectors (Hountondji 1995, p'Bitek 1971). In this othering, rather than genuinely being an enriching centre for the dialogue of civilisations, the colonial school turned out to be a rigid institutional setting for entrenching monologue if not an *Invention of Africa* (Mudimbe 1988), whilst excluding the voice of subordinated civilisations.

Through these schools, entire generations of young Africans were re-directed away from their originary cultural knowledge roots and sources. They were made to despise and abandon their so-called native linguistic tools for learning purposes. In most colonial schools, the use of vernacular language was punished. The young Africans were relentlessly exposed to western-style education and inserted into the language and discourses of the colonial master, whether this language was Afrikaans, English, Flemish, French, German, Italian or Portuguese. Nothing more fundamentally completed the rupturing of the generational link in the knowledge production and transmission. The voice of the elders and experts in Africa was literally cut off and silenced by that very strategic linguistic and literary re-routing. The young generation of Africans was severed from ongoing critical dialogue with their elders, Africa's 'informal intellectuals'. The tragic nature of this rupture was moreover rubbed in by the oracy in the older generations.

The alien language, content and style of colonial and missionary education intimately affected the students' learning ability and enthusiasm, and indeed contributed in narrowing their interests in various subjects on account of the difficulties posed by the linguistic and cultural barrier. The students' attention to mathematics and the exact sciences in particular declined. More than the social sciences, the exact sciences required extra-sophistication in the imaginative and representational capacities of students. The school idiom of mathematics, physics, chemistry and biology is indeed replete with cultural assumptions and models stemming from an overall scopic culture of dualistic space-time di-vision and arborescent (taxonomic) categorisation. In the western paradigmatic model of knowledge 'the universe is considered to be a text that can be decoded (...) Seen as regularly patterned and therefore knowable [by means of rational investigation], but at the same time contingent' (van Rinsum 2002:30). The curricula and the texts used in the colonial and mission schools were densely foreign in particular in their latent worldview and the lavish use of illustrations and applications from the West, that obviously were far-removed from the lived reality and sensibilities of the students, their cultural parameters and values, their ecology and life-world. All this contributed immensely in making the school education culturally alienating, enhancing the severance of the students from their cultural roots, values and mores. The books and education style offered virtually no positive, theoretical or even practical, relations to the life-context and existing familiar knowledge nodes to which that school knowledge could have been socketed, contrasted with, dialogued with, or separated from. At school, the local was never called upon as triggers of thought and reflection. This grand re-direction of the students mental energy and imaginative powers was re-enforced each

step of the educational *ladder* as the students graduated from primary to secondary and then to tertiary or university education. The more these young Africans advanced into 'the very core' of this educational – though alienating – journey *upwards*, the more they were led to subordinate their originary culture to their new and admittedly more *evolved* knowledge and worldview. The uprooting thrust of this education moreover fostered in the minds of the impressionable students the mistaken view that no valuable education had been taking place at home *prior* to the coming of European missionaries, colonial education officers and administrators to Africa. Christianity was proselytising the heathen, and the school figured as the privileged site to enter the true and universal knowledge 'for the sake of domesticating nature and making it eligible' (van Rinsum 2002:31).The deliberately imposed clear break between this imported version of education and the indigenous one *prior* to the arrival of the *white* man to the shores of *black* Africa, made it seem as if there were no teachers in these indigenous contexts, no education worth the name in Africa.

Numerous scholars have noted this derailment of indigenous knowledge in Africa, and the mimicry of the West which it fostered: think of Ajayi *et al.* (1996), Appiah (1992), Ashby (1964), Ashcroft et al. (1989), Assaba (2000), Bates et al. (1993), Bernal (1991), Bhengu (1996), Crossman (1999), Ela (1994), Eze (1997), Guyer (1996), Gyekye (1997), Hountondji (1994), Ki-Zerbo (1990), Masolo (1994), Mazrui (1978, 1992), Mudimbe (1988), Ndaw (1997), Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1986), Ramose (1999), Van Rinsum (2002), Wiredu (1996), Yesefu (1973). It was a realisation of this dissonance in colonial and missionary education in Africa which fired and powered the *Négritude movement* and featured prominently in the writings of its most outspoken champions as well as dominated the discourse of its principal voice, namely *Présence Africaine*. The passion to correct this misleading trend in exogenous education of Africans prompted and sustained the work of major African novelists, poets, musical artists and statesmen, such as Chinua Achebe, Anthony Kwame Appiah, Aimé Césaire, Frantz Fanon, Fela Anikulapo Kuti, Ezekiel Mphalele, Julius Nyerere, Okot p'Bitek, Wole Soyinka, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Léopold Sédar Senghor. Some of the visionary African nationalists who spent their energies engaging in the struggle for Africa's independence, such as Ghana's Kwame Nkrumah, took up their pen to name this dissonance and as much as was within their powers strove to correct it. Eminent African historians, philosophers and theologians, such as Cheikh Anta Diop, F. Eboussi-Boulaga, Jean-Marc Ela, Kenneth Dike, Meinrad Hebga, Paulin Hountondji, Alexis Kagame, Joseph Ki-Zerbo, Issiaka Prosper Lalèyê, Ali Mazrui, Achille Mbembe, John Mbiti, Vincent Mudimbe, Vincent Mulago, Theophilus Okere, Tshiamalenga Ntumba, Kwasi Wiredu,

and numerous others have in their various ways put a finger on this derailment of African knowledge and called for a re-alignment or re-coupling of Africa's dislocated and obnubilated knowledge resources and practices.

In spite of the realisation that 'Things Have Fallen Apart', to paraphrase the telling title of Chinua Achebe's first novel (of 1958), the local knowledge systems in postcolonial Africa still continue to be marginalised. Both the African governments as well as the hegemonic arena of cosmopolitan science and universities, alike the international donors, go on aligning 'modern' knowledge with management, power, technical efficiency, whilst giving any local knowledge the inferior status it got from the European colonial and missionary teachers and administrators. Today, Africa severely suffers from an overall crisis of self-critical intellectual leadership. The dazzling crisis of many post-colonial African nation-states is essentially due, side to side to the structure of their historical determination, to their basic mimetic artificiality and alienness, the basic absence of informed and bottom-up consent in the amalgamated units, and the lack of socio-cultural embeddedness of the Constitution, civil code and bureaucratic machinery in any form of deep-rooted endogenous socio-culture and ethics. At independence, African governments were facing the unenviable task of uniting into a nation-state many previously self-ruling peoples, abruptly amalgamated and reigned as they were into jumbo territories by colonial rule. The task then at hand of blending their languages, cultures, and indeed varying political traditions and agendas, seems to have hit the rocks. The attempt to keep some political unity out of formerly loosely related societies, whose division was sharpened by their recent conversion to imperial world-religions and their world-strategic riches, has led the new governments to inimical compromises, moreover directly incapacitating the qualitative transformation of the inherited educational enterprise. Often the choice was made of the former colonial language as *lingua franca*, seen as a way of maintaining unity of the colonially amalgamated linguistic and cultural groups. Since independence, the question of determining the language, content and form of school education in most newly independent African states has moreover hinged on extraneous circumstances. Some governments do masquerade interest in the educational programmes and infrastructure designed by international donors so as to mark their 'political correctness', whilst overriding for example any consideration of the fundamental role of the mother-tongue instrument and the local cultural forms of decision-making and management in the educational process.

At independence, most African countries merely adopted the borders of the states as created in the late 19th century scramble for Africa and sustained by colonial rule. At independence, there was virtually no room to critically

re-appraise these national borders on account of the history of how they had been drawn in the first place, for what reasons they were constituted the way they were. Cracks in the very foundations of a number of such loosely amalgamated nation-states in Africa started showing from the first years of political independence and have had to be held together by force or dictatorship. A critical re-visiting of the basic foundations of the state borders and of the bureaucratic rationale in Africa ought to dig deep into the pre-colonial era. Post-colonial independence assumed that borders created by the colonial regimes. This was perhaps in the hope that unity of the various cultural and political units amalgamated by the colonial powers into one country would be realised. Unfortunately post colonial independence realities seem to argue that the embedded frictions and differences in the constituting groups seems to be in the way of progressive development of the various African countries. Different agendas seem to be corrupting the central administration of the various African countries and endangering political accountability. Perhaps it has become necessary that this earlier independence ought to give way to the more authentic and liberating independence and self-determination of the constituting groups, which would enhance responsibility and commitment in the progress of the units that would eventually emerge by consent of the various groups. Integral rethinking of the state borders and the election of the nation's governors in Africa is called for if Africa is to actively participate in the march of progress in the increasing globalised environment. At the moment, in most African states there is an urgent need to re-visit and re-energise the institutions dedicated to nurturing and building up the moral and human capital base, without which no nation-state can really develop for the benefit of the citizens. Most military dictators aimed at eroding the prestige and even self-esteem of African intellectuals, for example, by co-opting them as counsellors for programmes that have ended by undermining the school education and sidelining the University itself. In some cases there have been direct violent attacks on prominent critical members of the educational and scientific community, forcing a number of them into exile. The resulting South-to-North brain drain is as much a function of the economic pull as well as the response to *real* threats to the lives and survival of 'the fleeing brains'. This interference of some African governments in the educational sector has moreover adversely affected the image of the teaching profession, bringing it down drastically from its elevated mode from the 1950s throughout the 1980s, to something of scorn today, thus scaring away from a very important profession the best minds who now branch out into seemingly more respectable, stable and lucrative professions.

With a mere handful of exceptions, there has been the wholesale failure of the educational institutions and legacies left behind by the colonial agents and missionaries. Its agenda and ethos have been carried on almost by incredibly faithful proxy by local successors who mostly have bought into the basic assumptions and institutionalisation of the western-style education vis-à-vis the indigenous knowledge systems. Regrettably these heirs of the western mentors have retained the scorn with which African knowledge systems have been treated in the past.

A reversionary path of self-empowering border-linking: The appeal of *Aku ruo ulo, 'Making acquired wealth/knowledge have impact on the home front'*

The African colonial and missionary educational story is not in the final analysis a failure. Education indeed seeks to basically develop a scrutinising tool and a conceptualising equipment, namely a means for sharpening the intellect and providing avenues of agency for the dispossessed. Education aims at attuning the trainees to both critical enquiry, enthusiasm and commitment as a compass for developing other compasses, for creating other maps, for discovering new routes and educational plans and for understanding the world. In its very core, irrespective of the initial ideological thrusts and windows, education may develop horizons and trajectories of hope, re-invention, discovery, restoration and healing of oneself and one's root culture. There is indeed a subversive heart in the educational transaction, namely in the questioning and answering, the seeking and finding, the wooing and cooing, the varied exercising of the reflective faculty of the mind, which finally contains the seeds of freedom for the student or apprentice. Seeds and sharing of knowledge which have the capacity to make the apprentice to eventually become a master in charge of the art, theory and practice, able to practically and in a rhizome-like manner adopt and adapt new technologies in contemporary social, economic and political life, outside any imperialising grand narrative (Garuba 2003, Odhiambo 2002).

For example, a number of Igbo scholars, admittedly fewer than one would have hoped for, have been able to intermarry their western education and their mastery of genuine Igbo knowledge. In the field of history, for example, already in the 1950s, Professor Kenneth Onwuka Dike had the vision to realign African historiography: his seminal *Trade and Politics in the Niger Delta* played a key role decolonising of African historiography. Professor Dike himself was one of the founders of what is now known as 'Ibadan school of History'. The great achievements by Chinua Achebe point to the subversive hermeneutical promise of even colonial and missionary education. In Igboland, the growing harvest of the Ahiajoku Lecture Series witnesses to

the capacities of a few local scholars formed in the moulds of the western institutions to fruitfully turn their skills, aspirations, critical gaze and knowledge capacities into uncovering from within, and enfleshing, Igbo local reality. Such a re-orientation, resolutely beyond nativistic discourse and Afro-radical claims of selfhood (Mbembe 2002a, b), has the promise of enhancing the qualitative transformation of the students capacities and enabling them to achieve context-relevant insight in their chosen disciplines. The aim is to swing the pendulum towards an optimal realisation of the latent capacities and creative genius of the vast majority of students in touch with their intersubjective networks and culture of origin, whose resonance for history and belonging breaches the local/global divides. The critical consideration in our opinion is the reversionary path ensuring a robust line of communication, interaction and forward-looking contribution to the home front, even from the diaspora or the so-called brain-drain from Africa: tying one's knowledge up with the originary – the very core of the 'local' – is opening it up to life-sources ahead. All too numerous diasporic Igbo and other African intellectuals are presently anchored in various corners of Europe and America sustained in their arts, laboratory or other academic work, alike in their personal stamina, by the stable environment, enabling infrastructures, and availability of kindred spirits and sharpened interlocutors in their adopted institutions, communities and homes.

Some 'returnees' have come home from the diaspora with 'riches' (*aku*), above all knowledge that they have acquired in other knowledge traditions. These riches include new skills, methodologies, tools and perspectives, alike new eyes, ears, sensibilities and tastes, artistic or otherwise. Some are coming back with a sharper appreciation of the knowledge practices in their parents home. Able to take a perspicacious and critical view on both their originary culture and the foreign one in their diaspora, they are therefore, in many ways, a *border-linking* people, well placed to effect and bring home a cross-pollination of ideas, skills, techniques, methods, in the very spirit of *aku ruo ulo (making the wealth and knowledge they have acquired have an impact on their homes*. The classical injunctions or admonitions of the Igbo elders to their sons and daughters offer such border-linking reversionary path, as is expressed in the following proverbs: *Nwata ukwu njenje ka okenye isi awo ihe ama (The child who travels a lot often is wiser than the grey hair old man sitting in the village); Adighi ano ofu ebe ekili mmanwu (Deeper appreciation of the beauty of the masquerade can only be achieved by seeing the masquerade from several vantage positions)*; and *Njepu amaka (Travelling is enlightening)*. Yet, for Igbo elders, one's journey is only completed when one is back home: *E je alo, bu isi ije (Going and coming back; Going in*

order to come back), is the very *raison d'être* and fulfilment of the journey. It is a coming home to tell the story of the journey, share the insights gathered from far distant lands, and make the impact of the new knowledge or wealth acquired. It hints at an important feedback loop into the endogenous educational process. This de-briefing of the journey has the capacity to change a community's knowledge status quo. Indeed Igbo knowledge culture genuinely fosters such qualitative transformation through its eagerness to integrate new insights and perspectives, technologies and practices which have proved their richness, superiority, and greater functionality. The proverbs *Ahu ihe ka ubi eree oba (If what is more important than farming appears on the horizon then the barn needs to be sold)*, and *Egwu dagharia, atugharia ukwu egwu (If the melody changes, then the dance steps must also change)* underline the need to change with the changing circumstances, values, techniques and approaches. Indeed, Igbo culture is a knowledge culture with open ears.

Speaking metaphorically, the western-style education and its products need to show up for de-briefing to the local cultures in Africa (Odora-Hoppers 2002). The project of domesticating, bringing home western-style knowledge in Africa concerns earthing this knowledge in the African soil and tuning in with African spirituality, thereby healing the alienating and destructive division between mind and body, literates and non-literates, town and gown. It entails the cross-fertilisation *in situ* between the academic and the local context-bound knowledge practices and living arts (Gerdes 1999, Odhiambo 2002). The classroom should interconnect concretely and creatively with the life, memory and ethics in the homes and homesteads. This de-briefing of the journey so far and its critical dialogue with the local cultural modes of knowledge production and modes of being in the world is the task awaiting any programme of fostering an endogenous knowledge economy complying with sovereignty and dignity. It is not our intention to further detail, as has been done (Crossman & Devisch 2002, Devisch 2001), instances of re-appropriation in the complex terrain of shifting African identities and subjectivities. Yet such effort to redress the imbalance ought to avoid the danger of insulating Africa's educational pedagogy and infrastructure, a self-bottling or impoverishing inbreeding and clannishness. An education that aligns with the endogenous knowledge might break out of the place exogenously assigned to Africa within the (post)colonial structure of determinations and alienations. Education in Africa must foster gifted members of African communities or networks to also play an active part in this emerging globalised and intricately networked world. Another Igbo proverb, *E ji eshi ulo mara mma fuo ama (Becoming beautiful in the public eye starts at home)*, horns in on the need to have a strong home base. From

the mother-tongue and intersubjective base, the process of border-linking education that connects those concerned intimately to other knowledge cultures, begins and returns in a dialectical way, in the spirit of *aku ruo ulo*.

In contrast, the colonial and missionary education developed an intrusive if not uprooting *border-crossing*, leaping over not just the contextual realities and knowledge nodes of the particular students, hence in most education programmes it overlooked the plurality of the mother-tongues and life-worlds of those concerned. Such border-crossing education created the bizarre situation where Igbo students, for example, knew European history, geography and cultural realities better than they ever came to know about their Efik, Idoma or Yoruba neighbours. This leap was partly responsible for the students' and the new elites' extroversion of interests and tastes, to which we have earlier alluded. The colonial border-crossing overlooked its heavy orientation towards relating on the vertical South-North civilisational hierarchy, while hardly paying any serious positive attention to a border-linking of creative and empowering energies on the horizontal (i.e. South-South) axis. The wisdom of *E ji eshi n'ulo mara mma fuo ama (Becoming beautiful in the public eye starts at home)* was being side-stepped in the school education, with disastrous consequences on the educational, economic and political fronts. Witness for example, the alienating borrowing of political models from alien contexts, the mimetic cultivation and mimicking of western tastes or fashion with its heavy consequences for the very survival of local crafts and markets. Or conversely witness the perverse preying, by the new elites in state functions or in control of economic power, of local people's so-called animist unconscious 'for spurious cultural instruments to bolster their authority and legitimacy' (Garuba 2003:255).

An innovative border-linking education could expand its focus in concentric circles or outflowing ripples engaging in a knowledge of realities, cultures, values, histories and languages of one's neighbouring cultures. Indeed self-understanding and cultural re-rooting include a thoroughgoing understanding of one's neighbours and the other groups with which one has very frequent interaction and significant knowledge exchange. In their respective border-zones, such as interregional markets and seasonal festivals, neighbouring peoples make effort to understand one another but none of them has the ambition to supersede the other linguistically or culturally. In such zones of poly-logue and border-linking, there is a 'live and let live' in the tolerant co-existence of languages, spiritualities, skills and techniques.

While more disciplines may have important roles to play in the enterprise of re-appropriating and revalorising local knowledge practices on the formal state institutional scenes, anthropology and philosophy may help those in

charge for deepening self-understanding of, and border-linking between, local life-worlds and more global scenes. However, acutely aware how much western philosophers and anthropologists may formerly have misrepresented local people, realities and histories, particularly during the colonial period, the disciplines of philosophy and anthropology can in contemporary times henceforth contribute to unravel the knowledge riches of local worlds and foster intercultural exchange and empowerment of selves in their border-zones with interrelated worlds. This can be achieved especially through decolonising their scope and mental toolkit. Africans must become anthropologists to themselves by unveiling *their* cultural patrimony, memory and diversity of experiences, and giving fuller account to themselves and their interacting neighbours of who they really are, what they really have to offer themselves and the world. There is need to put African cultural riches into texts or better perhaps in multimedia documents that moreover report on, analyse and theorise from within their weave both the local cultures' genius and limitations. To the extent that anthropology as an internal hermeneutics of local cultures abandons its Eurocentric, patriarchal and logocentric biases, it may have an emancipatory effect on the examined culture's prominent and outgoing actors. Anthropology done in a receptive border-linking may foster local knowledge in the matrix of councils, rituals and local scripts being shared among *co-responsible* members. In the empathetic encounter which anthropology aims at, attention moreover should go to exploring and deepening cultural relationality with its emphasis on solidarity. Attention can also be given to the bodily and sensory ways of perceiving and experiencing enchanted being-in-the-world, performatively and contextually elaborated. An intimacy of affinity and co-affectivity then develops on the level of the border-zones between the student and the bearers of the culture. In the participant observation and the co-subjectivity-as-encounter at shared border-spaces (Lichtenberg Ettinger 2004), the co-subjects are incorporating and appropriating a trans-subjective *connaissance* (lit. co-birth) that precedes them, or is co-emerging in the moment of jointness. Such anthropological encounter weaves a texture of vibrating, intersubjective and intercultural, threads.

The project of bringing local knowledge practices into the formal educational endeavours in Africa will follow a number of critical lines if it is to be viable in the long run. We have already indicated the critical importance of promoting the mother tongues of Africa as a major language of education not only in the primary schools but all the way till the university level. We do acknowledge that such a plea is somehow a visionary one and replete with dilemmas, as Ngugi Wa Thiong'o (1996) has warned us. Indeed implementing

these criteria practically poses challenges on various fronts, from mobilising political support to generating texts to support this linguistic turn. These will in turn underline the necessity to have schools of translation in context as an important branch of the educational infrastructure in Africa.

In view of the long history of neglect of local knowledge practices two interrelated and complementary lines of action are critical. The first aims at opening up local knowledge practices in the sphere of the formal institutions (state, economy, education) by creating new courses and discussion forums that elicit the neglected fields of local knowledge. It is a process of unfolding new knowledge routes, new trajectories of thought, digging and dredging new canals as outlets and inlets of ideas, knowledge models and means. It moreover entails a process of inaugurating naming, *ikpo aha*, as Igbo would put it, is literally, *calling into being, giving recognition, summoning forth,* thereby carefully outlining artful, practical and aetiological knowledge that the co-subjects themselves deem important. Naming new areas of knowledge allows for *ihughari ji n'oku (Turning over the yam so that the other side too can be roasted in the fire)*, turning over other dimensions of reality for auspicious and critical encounter. It is a process of re-directing the attentive eye, the receptive ear, around certain themes and subjects, so that they can be 'seen *again*' with fresh eyes, 'heard *again*' with new ears, and so that they thereby can reveal a *little bit more* of themselves than had been the case.

The second line of action will basically concern itself with healing the breach between local knowledge practices and other civilisational systems of knowledge, such as West- or East-African, Bantu, Islamo-Arabic, Berber knowledge systems, and beyond. This second line of action would concern itself with building bridges to start overcoming seeming faultlines in the cultural productivity and knowledge trajectories of African knowledge systems and practical arts (such as, of agriculture, architecture, medicine and marketing). It is about border-linking the local knowledge and practical arts with the ones developing in other continents, as has been the case since centuries of the pre-colonial political institutions throughout Africa and southern Asia (van Binsbergen 2003:235-316). This process prioritises the role of history in unravelling connections.

The role of Whelan Research Academy

The Whelan Research Academy (WRAC) was founded in 1999, at Owerri, Nigeria. The Whelan Research Academy's general objective is to foster advanced research in the entire field of the humanities and social and behavioural sciences, as well as stimulate scholarly interaction in an interdisciplinary and international setting. The uniqueness of the Academy above all lies in its particular aim which is to enhance a cross-pollination between the afore-

mentioned cosmopolitan sciences and the local African knowledge practices and living arts. For this, the Academy endeavours to bring out the best of intellectual and artful creativity of the scholars, as well as the 'informal intellectuals' and artists of local societies, meeting at the Academy to lift their research and (inter-)cultural border-linking at a higher level.

Two conditions are vital for inter-disciplinary and inter-cultural advanced research of a border-linking type. First, it is the Academy's role to offer a stimulating forum for the establishment of an intellectual community of scholars, informal intellectuals (such as, elders or experts in local knowledge practices) and artists (think of experts in the living arts, such as festivals, rituals, local community councils, as well as the expressive arts). Indeed, WRAC offers a forum for the regular meeting of this intellectual community from within the region and beyond, irrespective of religious affiliations, to engage in stimulating exchange of knowledge, ideas and skills. Secondly, the academic freedom promoted by the WRAC lies at the core of explorative border-linking in as yet unknown territory and its broadening effect on intellectual and artistic minds.

The Academy's mission is also to contribute to recover Africa's rich but presently dispersed intellectual capital in the Diaspora, by enabling some of this vast network of scholarly and technical expertise to have a healthy impact on the African continent.

The Academy offers opportunities for meeting and reflecting on research questions with a view to helping to create context relevant research agenda. It aims above all at improving the quality of African related research, fundamental reflection and creativity and to widen the intellectual and cultural horizons of its intellectual community and their respective societies. This orientation hopes to have a lasting impact for re-rooting the local cultures' well-springs, not only in the short, but also particularly in the long run.
The objectives of WRAC to create an interdisciplinary, international community of highly talented African and Africana-related scholars, intellectuals and artists, on a mission to conduct advanced border-linking research, are reached as follows:

1. Through the invitation at regular WRAC lectures, local workshops and international symposia of scholars, intellectuals, artists of high repute whose performance has been evaluated on originality, research ability, ability to exchange ideas, and productive promise.

2. Through a physical setting, in Owerri, which provides an infrastructure for these activities (including moreover archival documentation with particular attention to preserving oral heritage, art exhibitions and festivals),

a library, and possibly electronic access to libraries, universities and research centres.

3. Through editorial service for publications, such as the Academy's Annual Conference Proceedings, a Quarterly Bulletin of WRAC, and book publications of the findings of the Academy.

4. Through research incentives fostering focussed attention to specific, promising areas of local knowledge and the living arts.

5. Through collaboration with other, regional and international, research institutions and agencies in creating and realising applied scientific and artistic projects.

The Whelan Research Academy is not defending science for the sake of science, nor the living arts for the sake of art alone. Nor is it defending science or artful creativity only in utilitarian terms. Yet the Academy offers an interdisciplinary environment that is competitive, performance oriented and international. Here, scholars, intellectuals and artists from diverse disciplines and interests are in a position to meet for concentrated exchange, to become acquainted with new subjects and different approaches and so inspire each other to take a fresh look at their own research, and responsibility in sociocultural matters. This type of free, interdisciplinary and international community is rare and much needed to inspire one another and explore new paths down the garden of scholarly ideas.

The Whelan Research Academy for Religion, Culture and Society is also an opportunity structure to expand horizons of all sorts of religious, cultural, social and community health, political, economic, agricultural, architectural and communicational factors. The Academy's task is like that of a gardener or farmer, who waters and nourishes the soil, so that the plants in the garden or on the farm will grow and flourish.

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