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Introducing the book

The ownership of global knowledge

Both my grandmothers died while I was already a grown-up, however, I never saw my grandfathers, who both died before I was born. On my father's side, my grandfather died of asthma. That was in the 1960s. It seems that asthma runs in the hereditary line because my father's brother also died of asthma in 1997. My younger brother, 20 months younger than me, developed asthma by the time he was seven. A friend of my father, a fellow policeman, knew traditional medicine that cured asthma. My brother took the herbs, and his asthma, known in modern medicine to have no permanent cure, disappeared.



Dr. Steve Sharra (PhD, Michigan State)

Decades later, when I was a primary school teacher in a rural part of Malawi, I once developed severe, bloody diarrhoea. The local clinic said it was dysentery, and they prescribed modern medicine. It did not help. A husband to one of my cousins in the village went into the bush and brought back some herbs. He made a concoction for me and I took it. By the end of that day my dysentery was gone.

There was nothing mystic or mysterious about the herbs I took for my dysentery, nor the ones that my brother took for asthma. No magic or witchcraft. Just products of nature endowed with the ingredients that happen to cure dysentery, or in my brother's case, asthma. This was indigenous knowledge that had probably been discovered through some unintended experiment, tested and replicated over time, and proved to work. It was passed on through observation, apprenticeship and oral instruction, the well-established methods of passing on knowledge in endogenous contexts.

This knowledge is rapidly disappearing. Much of it has already disappeared, buried with the last known repositories, usually old people in the villages. Yet even modern science is uncovering 'new' knowledge from this old indigenous knowledge. Dieticians and medical doctors are now recommending ancient and natural foods as wholesome and healthier for us. We are now also encouraged to walk more instead of using our cars, and to be active instead of spending long hours seated in an office. These practices, once considered 'old-fashioned' are now seen as better for our bodies and our health. Organic foods are now considered to be healthier than processed foods and we are encouraged to grow our own food instead of buying it from the supermarket.

But questions of knowledge production processes and ownership of scientific knowledge persist. The system of acknowledging who produces what knowledge and who gets credit for that knowledge remains steeped in asymmetrical power relations and geopolitics. A recent case in southern Africa is an example. In 2009, a team of British scientists announced that they had discovered a new rain forest and mountain in Mozambique¹. One of the scientists, Julian Bayliss, said he had been working on Mulanje Mountain in Malawi when the discovery was made. He had returned to Britain and was using Google Earth when he noticed something that had not been mapped and recorded in the scientific record before. With the help of local people, the team of scientists went into the forest, and up the unmapped mountain. There they found new species of plants and animals that were unknown in the scientific record, including trees and chameleons.

Ironically, the local people knew some of the trees and the animals, and had names for them. One of the local people is heard on the YouTube video speaking Chichewa, the dominant language in Malawi and parts of Mozambique and Zambia, and mentioning a type of tree whose bark is used as medicine for back pain. But because this knowledge and the names of the creatures were not recorded in scientific databases, the forest and its creatures were considered unknown. *The Guardian* newspaper, acknowledging that the local people knew about the mountain already, reported: 'The locals knew of this mountain, of course, but scientists had no knowledge of it before 2005'².

That gave the British scientists the licence to claim that they had discovered the forest and the new species. Mozambican and Malawi government institutions are acknowledged in tributes at the end of the video, but neither videos nor media articles feature interviews with any local Mozambican or Malawian scientists offering their version of the 'discovery.'

On social media sites, such as YouTube, where news of the discovery was posted, a debate raged as to how someone could claim to have 'discovered' new areas in a part of Africa that was habited and occupied by people and protected by a government. Were the team of scientists oblivious of the painful history that has caused so much anguish for African people through similar claims by Westerners several centuries before? Why was the knowledge of the people indigenous to the area not recognised? When is knowledge considered knowledge? By whom and for whom?

Although the above story is not a part of this volume, the questions asked form the undercurrent throughout this book on the importance of recognising knowledge developed in indigenous contexts but unrecognised by the formal school system, legal frameworks and policy structures. The quest to advance indigenous African knowledge reveals a troubling paradox, as Gregory Kamwendo argues in this volume, why do we need an Africanised curriculum while everyone else is going global? A related question to that is whether indeed everyone is going global. What does going global look like? As

Kamwendo argues, the paradox is made more apparent when one looks at the extent to which African universities are going to internationalise their curricula and research.

There are growing efforts across African universities to educate students so they can fit in what is said to be a global context. There is more stress on attracting foreign students, through formal recruitment and also through study abroad and exchange programmes. The hold of the English language as the language of instruction, research and policy is growing from strength to strength. Kamwendo gives the example of an African university that teaches an indigenous national African language in English while pursuing a goal to be a leading 'African' university.

Obviously this is an intriguing quandary for African universities. And the irony should not be lost on us. This book, whose singular purpose is to argue for greater effort in enhancing the status of indigenous African knowledge, has been written entirely in English. This testifies to the power and global reach of the English language in carrying out teaching, scholarly discussion, research, policy and publishing. Even the terms used in the discussion are English terms, as are concepts, such as curriculum, science, technology and theory. These are products coming out of the modern education system, where the dominance of English has become overbearing and incontrovertible. But the history of how English came to dominate the knowledge industry is not as straightforward and linear as it is usually presented, as Simon Gikandi (1996) has argued³.

But African scholars are not the only ones championing indigenisation of the education curriculum at all levels of the education system. As Mishack Gumbo and Paul Webb indicate in this volume, in separate chapters, several regions of the world, including New Zealand, Canada, the Philippines and China, have also embarked on indigenising their educational systems.

A common realisation in all the contexts where the indigenisation of knowledge is an ongoing debate is the low status of indigenous knowledge and the absence of investment in encouraging local knowledge production. The overwhelming belief in these contexts is that the only knowledge worth recognising and using for educational purposes and for running governments and economies is what is considered to be 'Western' knowledge. In order to understand where this belief comes from, one needs to examine the status of the legacy of colonialism today.

Although the issue of what constitutes 'Western' knowledge has been debated for decades (see, Cheikh Anta Diop⁴; Martin Bernal⁵; Ivan Van Sertima⁶; Simon Gikandi⁷; Odora-Hoppers⁸), Western claims to the ownership of science remain very powerful and consequential. This is one of the enduring legacies of colonialism, now propelled by the immense power of global capital. But as the authors in this volume contend, and as have others before them, these claims do not represent the whole truth of how knowledge is

produced. It is one thing to have a domain known as 'Western' knowledge; it is another thing to make claims about who developed and came to own that knowledge. If the scholars in this volume are calling for the 'Africanisation' of knowledge, it is because there have been claims of a 'Westernisation' of global knowledge.

This volume underscores the importance of the African university in advancing this goal. Unless they conduct research that addresses Africa's problems, Vuyisile Msila has argued, African universities will become irrelevant. This message was powerfully presented by Mahmood Mamdani at Makerere University in 2011⁹. Mamdani pointed out that the importance of research in a university lay in formulating problems obtaining in a particular context. He said the research agenda in Africa was now being driven by Western donors who were funding academics to conduct research through consultancies. Mamdani argued that Africa had a higher education tradition going back to the 11th century in what today are the countries of Egypt, Morocco and Mali.

This type of knowledge flies in the face of claims of 'Western' knowledge and who developed it. The authors in this volume are participating in the broader discussion of how global knowledge is a sum of many types of knowledge from different parts of the world. This observation is the subject of a book published in 2000 and edited by George J. Sefa Dei, Budd L Hall and Dorothy Goldin Rosenberg, which challenges the received wisdom and dominance of claims to Western knowledge¹⁰.

In 2002 a book edited by Catherine Odora-Hoppers, with contributions from various researchers in Africa, Asia, Australia and Europe put this argument into sharp perspective¹¹. The book originated from South Africa's Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Arts, Culture, Language, Science and Technology, which requested heads of the country's science councils to explore the development of indigenous knowledge systems (IKS).

The contributors to this volume continue in this tradition and cover a wide range of issues seen from the perspective of curriculum and pedagogy in a school setting and educational policy context in Africa. In the first chapter, Phillips Higgs sets the tone of the volume by posing questions that link the decolonisation of the school curriculum to African epistemologies. He argues why the curriculum must be transformative by being conscious of other types of curricula, including the hidden curriculum, and how it obscures our vision of a better society. The historical perspective that Higgs provides on how the desire to Africanise the South African curriculum has evolved since 1994 is instructive.

In Chapter 2, Gregory Kamwendo provides a framework for approaching the Africanisation of the higher education curriculum. He poses questions about the purpose of the quest and its possible implications on resources and on educational policy. Kamwendo cautions against intellectual isolation, arguing that Africanisation must be balanced and be made to work with internationalisation for both systems to enrich each other.

Mishack Gumbo takes a different turn to offer a practical model for introducing MEd programmes in Indigenous Knowledge Systems at the University of South Africa (Unisa). He indicates that the Unisa College of Law is already pioneering efforts in this direction, requiring its students to study indigenous aspects of the legal system. Gumbo discusses the ideas of Tanzania's founding president, the late Mwalimu Julius Nyerere, who argued for the indigenisation of his country's education system. Gumbo also discusses other models of indigenisation of the curriculum outside Africa, including Australia, the Philippines and China.

Nyerere's ideas for the type of education relevant for African contexts still resonate with biting poignancy nearly five decades since he stated them¹². Nyerere argued that the purpose of education was to cultivate skills and knowledge that would enable a society to function into the future. When a society failed to deliver this type of preparation, that society would implode into a chaotic mess. The education system inherited by most formerly colonised African societies, argued Nyerere, was not meant to serve this purpose of looking into the future. While the system had successfully persuaded African societies to stop investing in indigenous systems, it failed to fully equip them for the world they now lived in. This, Nyerere presciently pointed out, resulted in Africans 'getting the worst of both systems' (p. 59).

The inherited educational system was breeding steep inequalities and was leaving a lot of people ill-prepared to succeed. It was breeding what he termed 'intellectual arrogance' on the part of the so-called educated who looked down upon their compatriots who had not attained this type of education. Yet, it was, and still remains to this day, in its nature to allow only very few individuals to proceed with further education. People's worth was now being measured by their ability to pass examinations, rather than by their attitudes and character, lamented Nyerere. Traditional knowledge had now been completely undermined.

In Chapter 4 Vuyisile Msila explains the rationale for an African philosophy of education. He embarks on a search for relevance and argues that this project is not about IKS for their own sake. The larger goal, argues Msila, is emancipation of the African people. He contextualises this search in the history of education in South Africa, where Bantu education was imposed on African people with the overt aim of giving them an inferior education. The rationale he sets out to provide comes out through definitions he provides for the key terms in the project, including Africanisation of education, African Renaissance, IKS, African philosophy of education, and emancipatory education.

The discussion over a rationale is extended by Vitallis Chikoko who brings in the concept of Ubuntu and how it further contributes to the political emancipation of Africans. In Chapter 5, Chikoko reaffirms the importance of IKS in the education system, presenting students' views on the Africanisation of the curriculum, globalisation, and the expressed goal of educating students into global citizens.

An important aspect of the discussion on indigenising the curriculum is the role of women in leadership positions. Vuyisile Msila and Tshilidzi Netshitangani address the place of women and African feminism in the discussion on indigenising the school curriculum in Chapter 6. They posit that the position of women in contemporary Africa has not always been relegated to subsidiary roles as it is today. Colonialism changed gender relations on the continent and placed hurdles in the advancement of women. Msila and Netshitangani argue that by reclaiming the knowledge of traditional forms of leadership, women can be galvanised to bring their leadership roles to contemporary contexts.

Technology is integral to knowledge production, argues Mishack Gumbo in Chapter 7. He decries the absence of indigenous knowledge in the modern curriculum, saying this is a consequence of the dominance of Western perspectives in the education system. He uses what he terms 'critical corrective theory' to deal with the subjugation that relegates IKS to an inferior status and leaves technological advancement in the narrative. Providing a design process model for integrating technology in the indigenisation process, Gumbo suggests 'technacy' as a concept that provides holistic technology education that incorporates literacy and epistemological issues in the knowledge production process.

In Chapter 8 Soul Shava returns to the issue of relevance started by Msila, arguing for both internal and external critical reviews of the indigenous knowledge process. He refers to the work of Catherine Odora-Hoppers, a leading researcher of IKS who has cautioned against 'indigenous epistemicide,' the marginalisation of indigenous knowledge by scholars trained in the Western tradition. Shava draws on research on indigenous agriculture and indigenous diets as examples of domestic science that is now being appreciated as being healthier and better than modern diets. This understanding, argues Shava, ought to make us wary of the false dichotomy between modern science and indigenous science created by the Western curriculum.

If there is an indigenous Africa philosophy that brings together all these to Africanise the curriculum, it is Ubuntu. That is the argument in Chapter 9, in which Msila defines Ubuntu and discusses how it shapes a new type of leadership in school management and in educational policy. As we debate how best to educate Africa's future leaders, Msila emphasises the notion of servant leadership and how it contributes to community building. Ubuntu holds the key to African values of group solidarity and communal interdependency, argues Msila. He cites the work of Chiku Malunga, a leading thinker of Ubuntu management philosophy, whose five Ubuntu principles ensure collective ownership, relationships, participatory decision making, patriotism and reconciliation. Msila uses these principles to come up with a further articulation of how Ubuntu philosophy builds community. The significance of Ubuntu can be seen in the South African Department of Education documents, where it is considered central to the education process, according to Msila.

In Chapter 10, Onoriode Collins Potokri argues that the project to Africanise the curriculum must be put to the test of what he terms 'mixed methodology research'. He explains that mixed methodology research is pertinent to the nature of higher learning environment, which are always looking at problems from various perspectives. He argues that mixed methodology research is not given the attention it deserves, and calls upon educationists, researchers and policy-makers to incorporate it into research designs and the training of new researchers.

Chapter 11 addresses the question of how to bridge the gap between indigenous knowledge and science education. Paul Webb uses Contiguity Argumentation Theory as a way of resolving what appears to be a conflict of ideas between the two types of knowledge. He surveys the arguments for including indigenous knowledge in the Science curriculum and the arguments against. He argues that by highlighting the similarities and the differences between the two systems, it is possible to reach common ground that respects cultural heritage and identity and makes science education more meaningful and understandable for students.

The penultimate chapter focuses on arguments surfacing constantly on the cultural hegemony reflected in African education which hampers the education of African children. In a world of global growth and knowledge building Africans should also stand strong among other nations as they reflect on their African heritage. Msila looks at why the African university needs to be reinvented.

Finally, the closing chapter captures the varied pertinent arguments in the book. In his summary Sesanti traces the gallant struggles in pursuit of Africanisation against extreme odds so as to give a historical context. Using a somewhat sharp tone, the reader paradoxically may find Sesanti raising more arguments than ushering the debates to repose.

This volume is coming out at a time when there is growing recognition for Ubuntu philosophy as an African indigenous epistemology that has relevance for the global context. Ubuntu has been made the theme for the 2015 conference of the Comparative and International Education Society (CIES), the most important grouping of international education researchers and academics in North America. The significance of this decision by CIES is captured by the perspectives offered in this volume, which collectively demonstrate how IKS cannot be discussed in the vacuum of isolation or vacant stagnation.

Returning to Mamdani, he has argued that the challenge for African universities today is to prepare the next generation of researchers using a new paradigm that rethinks old questions and formulates new ones (2011). This calls for original research rather than research driven by the needs of Western institutions. Mamdani calls for new programmes that 'will seek to understand the global from the vantage point of the local.' He sees the formulation of problems as central to the new research framework: 'the point of basic

research is to identify and question assumptions that drive the very process of knowledge production' (2011).

As the scholars in this volume have argued, making research relevant for African societies will be a pivotal task. It will require tremendous improvement in translation projects, requiring massive investments, between African languages and foreign languages. That will serve two purposes; first to make African knowledge more readily available to Africans and to the world, and second to make global knowledge readily available to Africans.

Since Nyerere made the observations discussed above, very little has happened in an attempt to change things. Nevertheless there still remain pockets of persistence and dedication that still think it is not too late. This volume joins those efforts aimed at what Soyinka-Airewele and Edozie (2010) call a 'reframing' of knowledges and discourses about the continent of Africa¹³. It also joins efforts by Emeagwali and Sefa Dei (2014) to bring to bear new thinking from various academic and research disciplines on indigenous knowledges in the Pan-African world¹⁴.

Very few cultures on the planet today enjoy untouched serenity and epistemic purity. This comes with the great risk of asymmetrical power relations, an awareness sharply acknowledged by researchers engaged in IKS. Knowledge production is a sociological process that thrives on contact between and among various cultures and societies from near and from far. Knowledge production in the 21st century is a complex phenomenon that collapses language barriers and transcends epistemic boundaries. This is where African universities and other educational and knowledge producing institutions need to bring forth their intellectual capital and research expertise to make a contribution to society. This is the challenge the scholars in this volume have taken up.

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