Problems of Knowledge and Knowledge Production in Africa

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Abstract: Indigenous and foreign researchers have long produced knowledge on African realities. Nevertheless, the outcome has shown perceptual imbalances. This is because the knowledge gatekeepers, or individuals and organisations such as researchers and companies who associate with knowledge production and sharing, might have usually produced misconceptions on African realties due to various reasons, including inadequate data procession, politics and deliberate acts of juxtaposing the African realities. With globalisation now operating, the question how knowledge is being produced in Africa and what role gatekeepers play in this respect becomes harder to answer. Africa pursues low-level knowledge production activities, focusing on traditional sources of knowledge and a limited scale of individual interaction, as opposed to the high-level mainstream academia of the industrialised world, which is based on official interaction, aided by adequate infrastructures encompassing numerous educational institutions, facilities, skilled human power, technological capacity and financial resources. The African indigenous knowledge system (AIKS) is inadequate in all these areas. As compared to the technologically advanced Western knowledge system (WKS), the African case projects a substantial discrepancy. Basically, knowledge production in Africa is subordinate to foreign influence. Despite being independent in theory, the process in practice remains intact under the political pressure of globalisation with governments jumping on board. Even though one can observe that some Africa-related foreign media run commercials, the process of knowledge production in Africa has not led to raise public awareness, ensure job security, or sustainability in all senses of the term. The notion that knowledge is tantamount to power falls short when applied to Africa. There is a vivid cause of intellectual poverty across Africa, the fixing of which is an urgent matter. That would provide the key to solving a range of misfortunes from poverty to violence that have inflicted the continent as we know it today.

Introduction

This article tries to re-examine the problems of knowledge and knowledge production in Africa by comparing the African indigenous knowledge system (AIKS), which is local in scope, with the Western knowledge system (WKS), which is international in scope. Knowledge production by indigenous individuals and by Western gatekeepers do not seem to be mutually exclusive. As a result, knowledge has not yet become a power that causes and sustains development in Africa. In order for knowledge production, sharing and its adoption to become beneficial to boosting sustainable growth and human development in Africa, it is worthwhile to start with and preserve the AIKS. This is to say that it is relevant to maintain and foster the root upon which knowledge in Africa should base itself in order to develop further.

The way in which Western scientists and local artisans have participated in Africa over the last several decades has not produced significant progress in various areas including the power relations among relevant stakeholders. Africa is not yet being seen as an entity that has entered history,[1] it does not play a significant role in the process of international political decision-making and it is not represented in major decision-making structures like the United Nations Security Council. Thus, the socio-economic conditions in the continent remain worrisome and continue to be under persistent foreign influence to the present day. While critically assessing cultural, political, environmental and economic issues in relation to knowledge production on Africa, within the ongoing discourse encompassing the interface between the local and the international, this paper will emphasise the recognition and perpetuation of local modes of knowledge, which may be taken as the basis for development research. The basic idea is that sustainable growth should not lack a traceable

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1   For instance, the former French president Nicolas Sarkozy, during a visit to Senegal on 27 July 2007, declared, "the tragedy of Africa is that the African has not fully entered into history ... They have never really launched themselves into the future." Even though this notion was not new to history, it was seen as outrageous by the African Union and most African intellectuals. The speech did not stress the significant share of colonialism in lagging Africa's progress, in which France itself was one of the major actors.

root connecting it with the continent. This paper attempts to find a balanced framework that avoids Western misconceptions and to develop a non-unilateral model of credible integration in which both WKS and AIKS, during the process of interaction, could truly cooperate to cause veritable change.

While embarking on the topic by means of an analytical method, the ongoing sees the African knowledge-manufacturing context as possibly obtainable from organisational informal networks even though it occurs in the absence of sophisticated technologies, highly qualified personnel, and technical knowledge. Here the emphasis on the informal is, arguably, due to the fact that in Africa formal organisational networks themselves are experiencing a huge influence from the global informal version of institutional networks. As a result, they largely seem to be inept in the sense of producing the kind of knowledge that embodies local ingredients, nor capable enough to induce development within the context. The discourse about the interface between the AIKS and the WKS and, broadly speaking, the entire discussion on Afrocentrism as compared to Eurocentrism, currently rising to attention, appears to have long been downgraded by the majority of Western historians or contemporary African philosophers of Western affiliates who mostly hold gatekeeping positions.

Afrocentric versus Eurocentric Views of Knowledge

Most discussions on Africa, including the present topic, do not circumvent the Eurocentric and Afrocentric debates of various natures. In the context of knowledge production, as circumscribed above, it sounds as if Afrocentrists are scarcely welcomed or cited by the gatekeepers in the circles of academic African philosophers (van Binsbergen 2011: 253-81) of foreign or domestic origin alike.

Howe, for instance, presents a devastating political and ideological critique of Afrocentrism as a case of intellectual history. Despite belittling the intellectual values of Afrocentrism, he has been led by the best of intentions, by concern for the future of scholarship and education (Howe 1999). It is now obvious that the compartmentalising process of globalisation that had started in the past has paved the way for a mythical geopolitics, which came into being on the foundation

of Western knowledge production. This notion is in agreement with Bernal, who among others sees the mystery of Europe, and recently that of North Atlantic in general, as a solid ideological power base for colonialism and postcolonial hegemony that maintained itself on the basis of keeping the indigenous efforts of knowledge in a subordinate place. According to this way of thinking, arguably, one may lean towards endorsing a view of knowledge or world history which is, as van Binsbergen (ibid.) blatantly puts it, potentially "hegemonic, Euro-centric, mythical, non-inclusive and probably demonstrably incorrect." In this light, as also discussed above, Afrocentrism may be seen as an inspiring reversal of accepted hegemonic paradigms, that is to say, it brings us much closer to the empirical or demonstrable truth concerning the knowledge of Africa, which can be claimed as a contribution to humankind's world-wide culture that has emerged over the millennia.

In this regard, Bernal indicates the need to "recognise the Afro-asiatic roots of classical Greek civilisation, which predates the Graeco-Roman Antiquity based Eurocentrism" (Bernal 1987, 1991). According to Bernal the notion of Eurocentrism, being heir to the genial Greek civilisation, allegedly without roots in any previous non-European civilisation, has played a major role in the justification of European intercontinental imperialism.[2] As Paar-Jakli (2015) has also presented in her work by calling upon Stone (2005), the notion indicated above in relation to the hegemonic paradigms can be further reinforced by the neo-Gramscian approach,[3] which treats knowledge discourse "as a tool of power, used by dominant interests in maintaining the capitalist order", rather than cause equitable and sustainable development to the multitude of people of the earth, including Africa. In this more vivid view, knowledge, its networks and the gatekeepers are politicised and have become part of the "micro-politics of contemporary hegemony... [or a] component of the 'globalising elite'" (Gill 1995, as quoted in Stone 2005, cited in Paar-Jakli 2015: 20), instead of distancing

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2   See Bernal, *Black Athena*, I, o.c.; W. Burkett 1992, *The Orientalizing Revolution: Near Eastern Influence on Greek Culture in the Early Archaic Age*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

3   This is one of the three approaches Stone has incorporated in her work, while explaining the usefulness of knowledge networks in global governance since they systematise knowledge from a wide variety of sources. The other two are the epistemic community approach and the discourse coalition and communities approach.

themselves from ostensibly one-way-street practices. It could thus be argued that if historical truth, intellectual integrity, the canons of logic and proof are to be violated for the sake of boosting the prospects of the capitalist order, the state of our current knowledge production and dissemination raises more questions.

Knowledge – Meaning and Context

Before proceeding with a discussion of knowledge production in Africa or beyond, we have to establish the meaning of the concept itself. The term knowledge is an ambiguous concept, thus several definitions and theories have attempted to explain it in various ways. In a nutshell, however, it is understood as familiarity, awareness, or an understanding gained through experience or study. Thereby science is being understood as organised knowledge.

Further assessments reveal that knowledge refers to facts, information, and skills acquired by a person through experience or education, which amounts to saying that knowledge is the theoretical or practical understanding of a subject. Accordingly, it can be implicit, as with practical skills and expertise, or explicit, as with the theoretical understanding of a subject; knowledge can be more or less formal or systematic.[4] It is often viewed as a human faculty resulting from interpreted information, or an understanding that germinates from the combination of data, information, experience and individual interpretation. In recent years, knowledge has come to be recognised as a factor of production, as in knowledge capital, in which case it is, in its own right, distinct from labour. In the legal sense, it means awareness or the understanding of a circumstance or a fact, gained through association or experience.[5]

The definition of knowledge is still a matter of ongoing debate among philosophers in the field of the theory of knowledge (epistemology). As Peters discussed it well, the classical definition, described but not ultimately endorsed by Plato, specifies that a statement must meet three criteria in order to be considered knowledge: it must be

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4   On the variant of the general definition of knowledge consult for example *The Oxford Dictionary*.

5   This explanation of knowledge appears in the *Business Dictionary*, and it may be consulted at <http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/knowledge.html>

justified, true, and believed (Peters 2001: 13). Some, for instance, Richard Kirkham,[6] claim that these conditions are not sufficient. Also, it is worth mentioning that knowledge acquisition involves complex cognitive processes including perception, communication and reasoning; while knowledge is also said to be related to the capacity of acknowledgment in human beings.

Technically, we have to make a distinction between propositional (codified or explicit) knowledge and tacit (implicit) knowledge (Polanyi 1958; Ryle 1949). The former refers to knowledge that involves facts about the world and scientific knowledge, that is to say, knowledge that can be expressed in sentences, often formal, and can be shared (Nonaka 1991: 97-8), while the latter refers to know-how, that is, knowledge of how to do something. Thus, in contrast to explicit knowledge, tacit knowledge usually refers to skills and it is not necessarily easy to communicate this kind of knowledge (at low cost) to other individual actors, or between organisations (Olssen and Peters 2005: 333-4). To Nonaka, cited above, tacit knowledge "consists of mental models, beliefs, and perspectives so ingrained that we take them for granted and therefore cannot easily articulate them." However, according to Hildreth and Kimble (2002), explicit (or "hard") and tacit (or "soft") forms of knowledge are interwoven, that is to say, knowledge is a duality and tacit knowledge may become in some other context explicit knowledge.

As far as its scope is concerned, knowledge is widely understood as either indigenous and local or as non-indigenous and international. The indigenous knowledge system, to which African indigenous knowledge is part and parcel, forms a huge body of knowledge that predates the WKS but it is not solely local in scope. It may go under various names; nevertheless, indigenous knowledge refers to knowledge that is based on the social, physical and spiritual understandings that have informed a people's survival and contributed to their sense of being in the world. In more general terms, however, knowledge reflects the capacity of causing development that ultimately leads towards the betterment of a certain society. In the case of African societies, however, arguably, the cooperation of the indigenous forms of knowledge with that of the non-indigenous and, particularly, Western knowledge system has

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6   He discusses this issue in his much-cited *Theories of Truth* (MIT Press, 1992), available at <http://philpapers.org/s/Richard%20L.%20Kirkham>

not produced any significant improvement in the status of the prior. This is probably due, among others, to perpetual prejudices of Western gatekeepers, who deny acknowledging and embracing the local mode of knowledge production, while deeming it inferior. The way Western gatekeepers behave in regard to the African indigenous knowledge system and its production, in various fields of research, as well as the failure of their cooperation to deliver what has now convincingly come to the forefront, needs to be seen through a critical lens.

Knowledge Gatekeepers and How They Operate

Knowledge gatekeepers explore and analyse significant events of knowledge in the light of perspectives that show the ways in which the production, storage and access of the source materials of knowledge, such as books, CDs, etc. have been privileged, while encouraging the marginalisation of other sources. According to Allen, knowledge gatekeepers are "a small number of key people to whom others frequently turned for information. They differ from their colleagues in the degree to which they exposed themselves to sources of technological knowledge outside their organisation. Their features are such as they constitute a small community of individuals, they are at the core of an information network, they are overexposed to external sources of information, and the linkages they developed with external actors are more informal" (Allen 1977: 145). They are knowledge senders, or knowledge brokers. Since they are so well interconnected, they are largely identified by their degree of interconnectivity, which they maintain with other colleagues of various organisations or institutions.

Organisations acting as gatekeepers play their role through creating platforms of knowledge sharing, which are assumed to fulfil several functions at a time, including the function of influencing and the task of public relations in favour of the existing system. Hence, they do not seem to be defying vested interests that seek to maintain the status quo at any cost. They work as inter alias and are located in the government structure as stakeholders, where they have substantial influence in the field of science and technology policy decision-making, which in turn guides research and development activities. Through expanding their networks of interaction, such gatekeepers access valuable knowledge from their networks for the operation of daily formal and informal

activities. They are seen as sources of veritable knowledge that is able to cause development. They act as relevant actors in the areas of knowledge transfer, which is one of their dominant preoccupations in the process of building the knowledge-based capitalist economy. Nevertheless, AIKS and WKS relations have shown several barriers that hinder effective knowledge creation and transfer in various fields, among which cultural distance between the actors is the main feature. In such a situation, one brand of knowledge gatekeepers, also known as communities of practice (CsP), plays a significant role of facilitating knowledge exchange in culturally homogenous spaces. However, CsP are less effective for connecting different organisations in culturally heterogeneous spaces. Thus, gatekeepers (GKs) other than CsP have become the subsequent solution, mainly in situations of inter-organisational networks.

In between the formal and informal organisational networks at least four forms of knowledge gatekeepers seem to be operating upon the notion presented above. According to Harorimana,[7] the gatekeepers include technological gatekeepers (TGKs); communities of practice (CsP); key persons (KPs), also referred to as key men (KM), as well as communities of key organisations (CKO) all of whom collect information; they vet and contextualise information before sharing or transferring it to their professional networks. TGKs are predominantly operating within the boundaries of an informal network. They are not fulfilling an administrative role or any contractual obligation. They are inclined to share information and knowledge with only a few technological experts within their network from whom they expect some level of peer recognition by citing the contributions of their peers in meetings, financial rewards, in findings reporting and intellectual property rights. KPs and CKOs such as the academia are acting as key people and organisations because this is part of their daily routine and they have been appointed by or make up an organisation. They are not necessarily the experts. They are considered as "key people" for the daily work and are operating within a formalised network of the organisation. Communities of practice constitute a form of KM with a collective relation to an element of TGKs as a sub-set. CsP is

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7   See Deogratias Harorimana. 2012. "The Gatekeeper and the knowledge environment-who they are, how they work. Empirical evidences from High-tech Manufacturing and R&D Firms."
    Available at <http://works.bepress.com/knowledgeispower/1>

perceived to be a source of transformational power and a way through which knowledge can be accessed from the organisational informal network that is available within. Among key barriers to successful knowledge management are issues of trust, the relational context, and the identity between the source and recipient of knowledge.[8]

The gatekeepers thus encompass those people and organisations who interact within local and international knowledge networks. Stone explains that those who typically interact in such knowledge networks are "university researchers and other experts who may be based in consultancy firms, philanthropic foundations, independent research institutes and think tanks" (2005: 87-89). They contribute to knowledge production through "a complex interweaving of network interactions" (Stone 2003: 55). They play a significant role in knowledge production and gatekeeping, within international knowledge networks, which can be understood as "system[s] of coordinated research, [through which they] disseminated and published results, study ... intellectual exchange, and financing, across national boundaries" (Parmar 2002: 13).

Their research on Africa, or other parts of the non-Western world, as developed thus far through the so-called approach of a long intellectual tradition, appears to be part of an overall project of knowledge accumulation initiated and controlled by the West, which as a result maintains its knowledge dominance at an international scale over other types of knowledge systems.

Understanding the Essence of Knowledge Production

There are at least three models of knowledge production. According to Harold Jarche,[9] knowledge is a process that undergoes various stages before being produced. These include the low value or seeking stage, the sensing stage, and the high value or sharing stage. To demonstrate this, Jarche presents a much improved version of the model describing personal knowledge management, which includes intermediate stages between gathering and distributing. These intermediate stages involve filtering or gatekeeping, that is to say, the separation of relevant from

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8   See Harorimana, in ibid. above, at <http://works.bepress.com/knowledgeispower/1>
9   This has been discussed in Stephen Downes, Three Models of Knowledge Production, Half an Hour blog, Wednesday, March 17, 2010.

irrelevant information based on specific criteria; a validation that amounts to saying that information at use is supported by research thus far reliable; a synthesis that is to be able to describe patterns or trends in large amounts of information flow; a presentation, that is, the capacity of making information understandable through visualisation or logical demonstration; and a customisation, that is, the process of describing accumulated information in context.

The "filtering" or mining approach is one in which one goes from data to wisdom through successive filtering processes. And while there are different ways to think of knowledge, the mining model (with data, information, knowledge, understanding and wisdom) arguably adheres to a more basic view. The construction and the growth approaches, too, share a similar view. The mining approach aims at accuracy and purity, or getting at accurate data and validating it. It focuses on "best practices" and aims at adding value to what is out there by nature, and not to something different from what is in nature.[10] The construction approach, by contrast, is focused on sameness and identity. This means that something is being represented. And this meaning must be consistent, be identical, from instance to instance. Standards-based, meaning-based and representational systems, such as the Semantic Web, are illustrative of the construction approach (Downes 2010).

The growth approach focuses on creation and creativity. In this case, the "knowledge" produced from the input is contained in the state of the system as it grows and produces (Downes 2010). This organic model is the only one of the three in which knowledge and wisdom are not "outputs" of the process, but rather knowledge and wisdom remain as properties or artefacts of the knowing system from which we infer the knowledge they contain. To the organic model, each agent is the sole source of its own knowledge and it cannot pass along that knowledge per se, but rather, passes along artefacts, which are embodied in the system and can become the raw material for other entities in the system to create their own knowledge. Artefacts are not consumed as commodities. The pyramids in Egypt, the rock-hewn churches of Ethiopia, such as Lalibela, are but some examples among ranges of artefacts from which knowledge can be inferred and

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10 See Stephen Downes, Three Models of Knowledge Production, Half an Hour blog, Wednesday, March 17, 2010.

produced. This third model associates more fully with the indigenous knowledge systems.

Filtering, which the gatekeepers ostensibly conduct, for example, is not merely a matter of selecting the best and the purest. It is also a matter of selecting the most salient, the most relevant and the most important. And we filter deliberately, when doubting a testimony or refusing to be fooled by a mirage. This may also imply that there is a deliberate bias to misuse information for the purpose of creating a knowledge base that suits the political, military, or other powerful intentions. In this sense, mutual cooperation between the local and international systems of knowledge has become even harder.

In the present discussion, we observe two types of knowledge systems. On the one hand, there is the commoditised and franchised WKS, which dares to spread swiftly beyond its own boundaries in an attempt of imposing itself on the global scale, in order to stifle the local or indigenous systems of knowledge, while deeming them inferior. This WKS spreads through various actors, including private companies, knowledge gatekeepers and ranges of other actors. Its objective is, among others, to supplant the local system of knowledge abroad. In Africa, which is still seen as a major frontier of Western expansion, despite some self-serving commercials that propagate the attainment of progress in the content, in reality there are no plausible signs that indicate the continent is getting anywhere closer to the point of playing a dominant role in global politics or economics, due to the benefits acquired from the Western system of knowledge that has been imposed upon it for decades if not centuries. On the other hand, there is the local or indigenous system of knowledge that purports for autonomy or for a meaningful two-way-street cooperation. As concerns Africa, its objective includes, among others, the reestablishment of African studies (Hountondji 2009:1)[11] on a different basis, distinct from that of Western dominated so-called African studies, including other interrelated disciplines such as African sociology and anthropology, African philosophy, African history, etc. This is a different approach with the objective of getting the continent to an appropriate place

11 The term "African studies" does not refer to just one discipline. Usually it meant the whole range of disciplines that take Africa as a subject of study. According to Hountondji, these include, among others, such disciplines as "African history," "African sociology and anthropology," "African linguistics," "African politics," "African philosophy," and the like.

in the international arena, while advocating more generally for the development of an autonomous, self-reliant tradition of research and knowledge that addresses problems and issues directly or indirectly posed by Africans.

The Politics underneath Knowledge Discourses

When it comes to the distinctions between AIKS and WKS, as has been indicated earlier, the former is seen as being inferior, illogical or unsystematic, whereas the latter is perceived as superior by powerful voices or gatekeepers within the knowledge industry. Unlike the modernists' claim that knowledge is global, post-modernists see it as local, partial and fragmented (Foucault 1973, 1980; Kolawele 2012).

To a large extent, knowledge production seems to be constantly politicised amongst African academics and scientists as well as Western gatekeepers. Africans who trained in the West often downgrade the knowledge that is indigenous to Africa. For example, those indoctrinated by the modernist school of thought support aspects such as "... positivism, rationalism, the belief in the linear progress and universal truth ... and the standardisation of knowledge and production" (Kolawele 2012).

In this manner of thinking, the perception about African Indigenous knowledge is retrogressive and anti-development. Those holding this view seem to assert that one can only be called civilised if one is educated in the West. When it comes to research administration, again there is a huge imbalance because selected powerful groups decide what is appropriate for research and where and when to conduct it. In this regard, at the international and national policy levels, resource allocation is mostly directed to studies deemed "appropriate" as research is headed towards where the rich and powerful [interests] direct it (Chambers 1983, as cited in Kolawele).

This dismal situation led the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA), the "premier pan-African institution of knowledge production" (CODESRIA 2009, as cited in Kolawele), to solicit endowment fund from its members in order to ensure intellectual autonomy. It emphasises: "in the last decade, the research funding environment has become increasingly volatile,

with many donors supporting only specific, earmarked projects and programs that coincide with their priorities or the priorities set for them by their governments or founders" (CODESRIA 2009b, cited in Kolawele). Unfortunately, those who are sympathetic towards the validation of local knowledge are few in number and as such appear not to have a voice that is loud enough to chart a new pathway.

In so far as Western knowledge's political motivation, and their actors' behaviour in the face of non-Western systems is concerned, one among the numerous relevant examples may be the case of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), where a number of Western actors, including the gatekeepers, Western governments and predominantly Western companies pressured a United Nations panel to omit details of shady business dealings revealed in October 2003.

As the British newspaper, *The Independent*, had reported one year earlier, in October 2002, the panel accused 85 companies of breaching OECD standards through unfair business activities. Humiliating misconducts such as rape, murder, torture and other human rights abuses followed the scramble to exploit Congo's wealth after the war had exploded in 1998. According to the panel, for example, the trade in coltan, a rare mineral used in computers and mobile phones, had social effects "akin to slavery." But, as Tamene and Bočaková (2014) claim, concerning this case no Western government or gatekeeper nor unbiased activist had expressly investigated these Western companies, alleged to be linked to such abuses. Some, including those from the UK, the USA, Belgium and Germany, had lobbied to have their companies' names cleared from the "list of shame." This blatantly undemocratic practice has been aided with biased gatekeepers of knowledge, erroneous and deceptive in the face of those beyond the West. Despite little lip service about human rights, the rule of law, and the pursuit of democracy, the major target in the case of the DRC appeared to be the international battle over resources. This conduct, to the contrary, encouraged further corruption and self-enrichment, which led to the exploitation of the mineral wealth of the country (Bekoe and Swearingen 2009). Resources from the mining sector have provided a source of violent competition as well as income for combatants in eastern DRC (Collier and Hoeffler 2000). On top of this, the mainstream media too, as a gatekeeper, have acted for most part, manipulating information and knowledge in favour of power.

In turn, this behaviour seems to have been imposed on Africa in the current time of neoliberalism and globalisation, resulting in a knowledge production in Africa that is subordinate to foreign influence, regarding for instance the notions of corruption, immigration, democracy and human rights. Solutions that come from within the local arena and attempts from below are primarily subjugated in favour of practices of global dominance even if these practices do not intersect with the local ones. This case exemplifies the possible misconceptions that gatekeepers usually projected onto African realties due to various reasons, including the inadequate data procession, the cultural differences, a desire for funding and/or a deliberate act of juxtaposing African realities.

African Indigenous Knowledge System and Western Knowledge System

As indicated earlier, Africa possesses an indigenous knowledge system. According to the World Bank Group assessment, as Warren (1991) wrote, indigenous knowledge refers to a local knowledge that is unique to a given culture or society. It contrasts with the international knowledge system generated by universities, research institutions and private firms. It is the basis for local-level decision making in agriculture, health care, food preparation, education, natural-resource management, and a host of other activities in rural communities.[12]

The historical background of AIKS and local knowledge production predates the coming of WKS; its future, too, should not depend exclusively on Western world views. Various scholars, including Kimwaga, seem to think that human societies across the globe, including African indigenous societies have, for centuries, developed their own sets of experiences and explanations relating to the environments they live in (Kimwaga 2010). This is due to the fact that the way learning is perceived and how people actually learn is culturally specific. Different cultures have different ways and experiences of social reality and, hence, learning (Matike 2008). As several other scholars confirm, the process of learning and knowledge production in various societies is influenced by their worldview and belief systems about the natural environment, including the socio-economic and

12   This description has been endorsed by the World Bank Group. Available at <http://www.worldbank.org/afr/basic.htm>

ecological context of their livelihood. Thus knowledge and knowledge production happens to be culture and local specific. These culturally and locally specific ways of knowing and of knowledge production are often referred to as traditional, ecological, community, local knowledge systems, and so on. They encompass sophisticated arrays of information, understanding and interpretation that guide interactions with the natural milieu: in agriculture and animal husbandry, hunting, fishing, natural resource management, conflict resolution, transformation, health, the naming and explanation of natural phenomena, and strategies to cope with fluctuating environments (Semali and Kincheloe 1999).

Numerous projects support the argument developed above. An example is the study conducted at Lokupung Village in South Africa's North-West Province in 2012. Students of the Indigenous Knowledge Systems Program at North-West University conducted this study, in collaboration with the North-West Provincial Department of Agriculture and Environment. Village community members initiated the project, based on their concern and experience with interfacing indigenous and modern knowledge systems. The findings indicate that, in most situations, the application of technologies from outside (such as extension services, hybrid seeds, fertilisers, chemicals, machinery and credit systems) were not always adapted to the local conditions; i.e., the local ecological conditions could be inappropriate for their application, the inputs required might be unavailable locally, maintenance and follow-up systems might be lacking, or conditions might be socially or culturally (including linguistically) unfavourable,[13] thus causing mutually exclusive situations.

Although the foundation of all knowledge systems is local, Western nations and cultures have universally imposed their knowledge systems, cultures and languages due to unbalanced power relations stemming from colonialism and other forms of imperialism (Wa Thiong'o 1986; Timothy 1998), a practice still being perpetuated. However, due to the currently relatively intensified advance of globalisation, many problems such as climate change, poverty and

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13 See Hassan O. Kaya, Revitalising African Indigenous Ways of Knowing and Knowledge Production, May 26, 2014. Moreover, an extensive, related explanation on this subject is presented by E-International Relations' free-to-download Edited Collection, Restoring Indigenous Self Determination, available at <http://www.e-ir. info/publications>

environmental degradation have become global. This raises important questions about how AIKS can contribute to the global knowledge industry. It is suggested that sustaining AIKS, given the broader global challenges indicated, necessitates the convergence of African indigenous world-views – embedded in African social practices through orality in their indigenous languages and knowledge systems – with other ways of knowing and knowledge production embedded through literality (Moodie 2003; McCarthy 2004).

The best practices of AIKS are identified in such areas as (1) indigenous agriculture and food security, (2) African traditional medicine and healing ailments, (3) conflict settlement and management, (4) traditional system of governance and (5) linguistic, cultural and self-reflection on the history of the continent. Africa can benefit from its indigenous knowledge, which it may use to base itself upon, while carefully enriching its scope from the increased exposure to global knowledge pools, which globalisation has made possible.

Africa may also need to intensify knowledge diplomacy with the BRICS, the EU and other regional blocs to be able to transform its economy from a natural resource-based traditional approach to the modern knowledge-based trend. This is not to deny the fact that the Western concept of knowledge-based economy is one of its cultural hegemony archetypes. To impose knowledge-based economy may mean to culturally dominate non-Western societies. Western-based knowledge production is now obviously connected to the notion of knowledge-based economy. This has been discussed very well, among others, by Foucault, who elaborated the process through the concept of the market as a regime of truth (Foucault 1973-4; Foucault 1979-80). When I insist on knowledge-based economy in the African context, I am referring to an economy that should base itself on the huge array of indigenous knowledge systems, which should be cultivated in order to enable an effective communication and representation of Africa at all levels. AIKS should not be sneezed at; if appropriately brought up it can be an alternative tool of knowledge to address issues of economic growth, development, the ecology, social justice and various interrelated subjects, in which the WKS has diametrically failed. On top of challenging the inappropriate approaches of WKS, it may as well work to strike a balance for cooperation. It could be the basis for ideas of an African renaissance, a renewal of political commitment

to science and technological innovation that should induce overall development and progress in the continent. This sounds a difficult task, but it is undeniably inescapable.

The discussion about revitalising AIKS and knowledge production facilitates an intra- and intercultural dialogue between ways of knowing, knowledge production and value systems. It enables local African communities to better understand the differences and interactions between AIKS and other knowledge systems in order to appraise their own knowledge system as one upon which their own communities should be based in order to make better-informed decisions, or to be able to choose appropriate systems (indigenous or international) for their sustainable future (Ntuli 1999).

Cases of Knowledge Production and Gatekeeper Relations in Africa and Beyond

Among the various accounts that attempt to describe this subject is the general case presented by the environmental anthropologist Sabine Luning, titled "Anthropologists in the company of gatekeepers," which was posted on the *Leiden Anthropology Blog* on 3 September 2013.[14] In her fieldwork experiences in Suriname and French Guiana, the implication of which is also relevant to Africa, this anthropologist raised the problem of access to the fields held by concessional companies, which are gatekeepers themselves. Her observation was that the process of negotiating access to people and places, during the field study, is in itself a major source of knowledge about power relations,[15] that possibly affect the nature of knowledge production about many non-Western societies including Africa. Such cases underscore how field studies are in many ways unreliable in producing unbiased knowledge, and how research could be influenced to come up with results that are favourable to the interests of the dominant actors or gatekeepers rather than reflect truth, reliable and justifiable results.

From this example it is obvious that under approaches of WKS a juxtaposed knowledge may emerge. Negotiations between the company (TNC), the interlocutor and the community could possibly

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14 The material is available online, at <http://www.leidenanthropologyblog.nl/
   articles/anthropologists-in-the-company-of-gatekeepers>

15 See ibid.

end up in favour of the dominant actor, that is, the company, at the expense of the communities in question. Basically, the researcher is seen as a potential ally who may help solve the problems identified by the gatekeeper companies.

What has contributed to this state of affairs is probably a weak social capital of the developing world and, in the case of Africa, most likely, the lack of attention to revitalise the AIKS; hence, the awareness level of the population is still unimproved; what is out there is thus now a societal structure in which people live their lives as if given to them by fate, while conducting little or none conscious negotiation to ascertain their rights within the social fabric of their society. In regard to this state of affairs, while sociologists like Beck and Giddens perceive modern society as reflexive, they also suggest that people, where-ever they may be, should live their lives less as a fateful given, and more as a continuously conscious negotiation on the effects of a "risk society" (Beck 1992: 1-6; Giddens 1991: 2-4). Beck seems to have been critical about the tendency that reflexivity has been excluded from the social and political interactions between experts and social groups over modern risks, because of the systemic assumption in science (Beck 1995: 3-7). Similar arguments have recently been reflected by Paar-Jakli (Paar-Jakli, 2015: 11-12). In connection with indigenous communities and knowledge production, as has been indicated above, often the negotiations do not seem to be yielding mutual benefit. From what has been covered thus far, it is possible to infer the problem of knowledge gatekeeping and knowledge production in Africa.

In another well-known example the historian Curtis A. Keim (2013) depicts the problem of knowledge in Africa through his writings on the deliberate misperception of Africa. He emphasises how this act often leads to the production of mistaken knowledge about the continent. His "Mistaking Africa" looks into the historical evolution of the mind-set that infuriates Africa, while criticising the role that popular media play in creating and disseminating a biased knowledge. Keim addresses the most prevalent myths and preconceptions, demonstrating how this attitude prevents a true understanding of otherwise diverse peoples and cultures of Africa (Keim 2013).

As the author describes in detail, the WKS-based perception of Africa immediately conjures up in the Western mind-set images of safaris,

ferocious animals, strangely dressed "tribesmen" and impenetrable jungles. Although the occasional newspaper headline includes genocide, AIDS, malaria or civil war in Africa, the predominant collective American consciousness still carries strong mental images of Africa that are reflected in advertising, movies, amusement parks, cartoons, and many other corners of society (Keim 2013). The account confirms that almost none or very few intellectuals or knowledge gatekeepers have dared to question these misperceptions or the topic of how they came to be so deeply lodged at the heart of the WKS. "Mistaking Africa" is one of few important works that warns against the usually juxtaposed production of knowledge by the gatekeepers on Africa.

As has been argued in the foregoing, the process of production of knowledge about Africa and its dissemination by Western gatekeepers looks like the production of a major misperception that can serve various interests of the West, including the prolongation of economic, political and cultural forms of domination. In this context, the South African researcher Catherine O. Hoppers, who has significantly contributed to the advancement of AIKS, argues that the current phase of international political system that occurs in the environment of globalisation and the neoliberal ideology driving it, with regard to Africa, has become simply a " continuation of the war that began with colonialism and never ended" (cited in Ukeje 2000: 149; Tamene 2009: 92).

One last example comes from Sharlene Khan's account, "Gatekeeping Africa," which was edited in *Artlink*, volume 27, number 2, 2007.[16] The author critically discusses "contemporary" African art in an attempt to challenge the role of the gatekeepers, in this particular area where, observably, Western curators take on the job of selecting and sharing knowledge on African art by displacing the rightful owner — the African. Calling upon Edward Said's idea of the intellectual and of curators, Khan complains about these knowledge gatekeepers, urging that they should seriously consider the implications of their role as intellectuals in contemporary culture.

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16 For more insight, see Khan online. Available at <https://www.artlink.com.au/articles/2959/gatekeeping-africa/>

He reveals that many Western curators who have traversed African countries in order to acquire artwork to represent the continent have deficiencies. He criticises them for perpetuating some of the same stereotypes that they themselves have tried to challenge; he emphasises that such gatekeepers can be seen as guilty conscious, who collaborate in exploiting "Africa" in the same way colonist traders, anthropologists and historians did in the past.[17] More recently, the phenomenon has manifested itself through engaging with African art superficially, by choosing to focus on socio-political work only and then through a "supermarket shopping" mentality that intends to commodify almost everything, including knowledge,[18] solely in favour of profit making. This entails a serious moral and intellectual problem that hides behind Western gatekeepers' activities in particular and behind prejudices of the WKS in general.

Khan argues that the curator-intellectuals or gatekeepers are active players in the ongoing "redefinition" of Africa for the West; they fail to define Africa for the African peoples, who struggle with life in various parts of Africa. The masses do not seem to be ready to endorse the view that intellectuals are in the position of serving their interests. As the post-modernist critic, Michel Foucault, put it aptly: "In the most recent upheaval, the intellectual discovered that the masses no longer need him to gain knowledge, they know perfectly well, without illusion; they know far better than he and they are certainly capable of expressing themselves" (Foucault 1978-79). Nevertheless, it is still hard to hear expressions of people in Africa about themselves, their homes, and their art except through these Western curators or gatekeepers.[19] This and similar reasons call upon the people of Africa to rise up with an action to revitalise the AIKS.

In all of the cases considered above, indigenous elements have faced a deliberate exclusion from the process of knowledge production. The likely outcome of such practices is a troubling brand of knowledge. Currently, as the interface of the local and the international intensifies, the choice may be resisting domination through cooperative efforts that may lead to inclusion, or push to maintain some sort of autonomy.

17 See ibid.
18 See Sappy on the commodification of knowledge; Noble also gives a wonderful insight in this topic.
19 Ibid.

Concluding Remarks

The purpose of this study has been to compare AIKS and knowledge production with that of the WKS and to analyse the interface in the space available. It sought to address the role of knowledge gatekeepers in the wake of the interaction, how their cooperation or failure could advance or affect development, and how this in turn affects the overall progress of the continent. The success of AIKS is the likely foundation upon which local progress could flourish. By attempting to explain who the gatekeepers are, and how they operate, this paper has identified the barriers to knowledge creation and knowledge sharing that have been caused within the manufacturing and high tech areas as well as in the areas of public domains.

The best experiences of the AIKS, which are discernible in various areas of activity, including indigenous agriculture, traditional medicine and the like, should not be undermined. They need to be revitalised and enhanced by a careful use of wider sources of the knowledge pool from across the world, to which Africa has more exposure at present due to the access that globalisation has enabled. Indigenous ways of knowing and knowledge production facilitates a between and across cultures dialogue that could produce a better understanding of various ways of knowing, or ways of knowledge production, as well as boost tolerance between various value systems.

Presumably this approach can contribute to enable the local African communities to grasp the differences and the on-going interactions between AIKS and other knowledge systems. It will facilitate the capability of the continent to gain an appropriate place in the international political and economic structures. By cultivating and revitalising the AIKS, local African communities would be able to make better-informed decisions about their current situation and their sustainable future, including which knowledge system is appropriate for their conditions. This is also part of a creative step to induce development and progress in the continent, which are significantly unavailable despite the talk of cooperation between WKS and AIKS.

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