

# "*Kumen Mfe Nungwan Ibyumegh*" (Pounding Knowledge, Adding Foolishness): A Tiv Epistemological Critique of Western Epistemic Modality in Political Philosophy

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## ABSTRACT

This paper critiques Western epistemic modality in political philosophy through the lens of Tiv epistemology, encapsulated in the proverb *Kumen Mfe Nungwan Ibyumegh* ("Pounding Knowledge, Adding Foolishness"). It interrogates the intellectual dependency on Western epistemology in African political thought, arguing that it often results in an epistemic framework that alienates indigenous perspectives and renders them subordinate or irrelevant. Adopting an eclectic framework that combines Syed Hussein Alatas's Academic Dependency Theory and Chinweizu's Piles of Rubbish Theory, the study highlights the intellectual hegemony that marginalizes indigenous epistemologies, particularly Tiv political philosophy, in favour of Eurocentric paradigms and offers a pathway for getting out of the quagmire. The paper contends that Tiv epistemology offers a critical perspective on the limitations of Western epistemic modality, revealing its inherent contradictions, exclusions, and decontextualized universality. It argues that Western epistemology, when uncritically adopted, functions as a form of intellectual neocolonialism, stifling the organic growth of indigenous African political philosophy. By analyzing Tiv oral traditions, proverbs, and philosophical constructs, the paper exposes the epistemic violence embedded in the universalization of Western thought. The conclusion calls for the reclamation and reinvigoration of African indigenous epistemologies, advocating for a decolonial turn that integrates Tiv epistemological insights into the discourse of political philosophy. The paper recommends an epistemic pluralism that situates indigenous knowledge systems as coequal to Western paradigms, promoting an Afrocentric approach to political philosophy that values contextual realities and intellectual sovereignty.

**Keywords:** Tiv epistemology, Academic Dependency Theory, Pile of Rubbish Theory, Western epistemic modality, decolonial philosophy.

## "*Kumen Mfe Nungwan Ibyumegh*" (Pounding Knowledge, Adding Foolishness): A Tiv Epistemological Critique of Western Epistemic Modality in Political Philosophy

Epistemology involves the study of knowledge production and legitimization, using various philosophical frameworks such as rationalism and empiricism. The predominant Western epistemologies in modern political discourse emphasize empiricism, viewing knowledge as objectively progressive, static, and universal. However, scholars such as Thomas Kuhn, Michel Foucault, and Linda Tuhiwai Smith challenge this notion, illustrating knowledge as a dynamic construct shaped by intellectual contestations and power struggles. Kuhn's (1970) theory of paradigms critiques the assumed neutrality of Western epistemologies, arguing that scientific knowledge does not progress linearly but undergoes paradigm shifts that disrupt established frameworks. This perspective contrasts with Karl Popper's principle of falsification, which emphasizes the progressive nature of scientific inquiry (Mukherjee & Ramaswamy, 2011), and Auguste Comte's positivist epistemology, which posits that knowledge evolves through distinct theological, metaphysical, and scientific stages (Temilola, 2015). Kuhn (1970), however, asserts that scientific revolutions introduce epistemic discontinuities, undermining the assumption of rational and cumulative knowledge development. His assertion also raises critical questions about the authority and legitimacy of dominant epistemological frameworks. This critique becomes even more pertinent when examining the historical imposition of Western epistemology on non-

Western societies, where knowledge production has been shaped by intellectual hegemony rather than organic paradigm shifts.

In this regard, Foucault (1970) demonstrates that knowledge is inextricably linked to power, shaped by sociopolitical forces that reinforce epistemic hierarchies and marginalize alternative ways of knowing. He argues that dominant knowledge systems are not neutral repositories of truth but instruments of power that sustain existing structures of authority. This perspective aligns with the Tiv epistemological assertion *Ka wa fa ga i tumbul a we* (“If you don’t know, you will be manipulated”), a reality evident in colonial and postcolonial contexts where Western epistemologies have been imposed as universal standards, displacing indigenous knowledge systems and fostering intellectual dependency. Smith (1999) extends this critique by illustrating how colonial knowledge structures systematically devalue indigenous epistemologies, framing them as primitive or unscientific. She contends that this epistemic marginalization is not an unintended consequence of colonialism but a deliberate strategy to maintain intellectual and political domination. This viewpoint is further reinforced by decolonial scholars such as Chinweizu (1980), Agrawal (1995), Alatas (2003; 2008), Mignolo (2011), and Santos (2014), who argue that the exclusion of indigenous epistemologies functions as a structural mechanism of dependency. African knowledge systems often require validation through Western frameworks to gain legitimacy, perpetuating epistemic hierarchies and sustaining neocolonial control over knowledge production. In alignment with Kuhn, Foucault, and Smith, these scholars challenge the universalization of Western epistemology and advocate for a pluralistic and contextually grounded approach to knowledge production. By recognizing the validity of indigenous epistemologies on their own terms, they call for a restructuring of global intellectual discourse that moves beyond Eurocentric paradigms, allowing for a more equitable and diverse epistemic landscape.

Within this broader critique, diverse African epistemologies emerge as synthetic knowledge systems that integrate rational and empirical insights. Unlike Western epistemic modalities, which often prioritize reductionism and compartmentalization, African epistemologies offer adaptive worldviews that are deeply embedded in cultural heritage and communal values. These knowledge systems are transmitted through rituals, oral traditions, and linguistic expressions, particularly proverbs, that encapsulate complex philosophical and practical wisdom. Berkes (2012) affirms that African indigenous epistemologies are neither anecdotal nor mystical but are intricately linked to ecological and social structures, providing praxis-oriented insights that counter Western epistemology's reductionist tendencies. This epistemological holism aligns with the worldview of the Tiv people of north-central Nigeria.

The Tiv are one of the predominant ethnic nationalities occupying the Benue Valley in Central Nigeria. They found themselves in their present location through migration that occurred centuries ago (Nomishan, 2020). Their societal system and intellectual traditions are deeply rooted in a distinct epistemological framework that synthesizes theology, metaphysics, and empiricism (Wegh, 2003). This approach fundamentally rejects rigid compartmentalization of knowledge. By compartmentalization, we mean the fragmentation of knowledge into discrete, isolated domains that limit cross-paradigmatic engagement and obscure the interconnectedness of reality. Tiv thought resists this fragmentation by integrating spiritual, historical, and practical dimensions into a cohesive epistemological framework. It embraces experiential learning, spiritual insights, and collective deliberation as primary modes of acquiring and validating knowledge. Unlike Western traditions, which often prioritize either rationalism or empiricism, Tiv epistemology underscores the interconnectedness of all forms of knowledge, ensuring that wisdom remains deeply embedded in lived experience and communal well-being. By centering relational and context-dependent understandings of truth, the Tiv intellectual tradition challenges dominant epistemological paradigms and offers a robust framework for knowledge processing and production, particularly in practical domains where excessive fragmentation may obscure critical insights and undermine the effectiveness of applied knowledge, thus exposing foolishness instead.

Within this broader epistemological framework, this paper critiques the dominance of Western epistemic paradigms in African political philosophy, employing the Tiv proverb *Ka wea kumen mfe, u nungwan ibyumegh* (“When you pound knowledge, you add foolishness”) as a conceptual lens to illuminate their inherent limitations. The study argues that the reductionist nature of Western epistemologies through often disregards the holistic and communal dimensions integral to African systems of thought, thereby exposing the epistemic shortcomings of excessive scientification and constraining the intellectual space for African

philosophical traditions. This, in turn, impedes indigenous approaches to development by privileging external frameworks over locally grounded knowledge systems. By challenging the hegemony of Western epistemologies, the paper joins other scholars in advocating for a more inclusive, integrative, and context-sensitive framework that broadens the scope of political philosophy beyond its conventional Western boundaries. In doing so, it seeks to foreground the epistemic contributions of African indigenous knowledge systems, particularly Tiv epistemology, in addressing critical epistemic challenges related to indigenous governance and development.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This paper is grounded in Syed Hussein Alatas's concept of academic dependency and Chinweizu's Piles of Rubbish theory, both of which critically examine the enduring influence of Western epistemologies on knowledge production in the Global South. While Alatas provides a structural analysis of intellectual dependency, highlighting systemic constraints that subordinate indigenous scholarship to Western paradigms, Chinweizu advances a prescriptive decolonial approach that advocates for the systematic dismantling of inherited colonial epistemologies. Accordingly, this study not only critiques the persistence of epistemic dependency but also explores viable pathways for reclaiming intellectual autonomy and fostering indigenous epistemological renewal.

Academic dependency theory was first proposed in the 1970s by Syed Hussein Alatas, notably in *The Myth of the Lazy Native* (1977) and *Intellectuals in Developing Societies* (1977), as a critical framework for analyzing structural inequalities in global knowledge production. At its core, the theory argues that intellectual dependency mirrors economic dependency, wherein knowledge production in postcolonial societies remains subordinated to Western epistemologies, methodologies, and institutional paradigms. This framework critiques the continued reliance of Global South scholars on Western research models, funding mechanisms, and academic validation processes, which marginalize indigenous epistemologies and constrain intellectual autonomy. Ake's (1979) seminal work, *Social Science as Imperialism*, further reinforced this perspective by exposing how social science has historically served as an instrument of Western hegemony, shaping research priorities in ways that perpetuate intellectual subjugation.

Since its inception, academic dependency theory has evolved to incorporate new dimensions of epistemic inequality. Alatas further developed the theory in *Academic Dependency and the Global Division of Labour in the Social Sciences* (2003) and *Intellectuals and National Development in the Third World* (2008), where he identified specific forms of academic dependency, including methodological dependence, research agenda dependency, and linguistic dominance. These factors reinforce the intellectual asymmetry between the Global North and South. Subsequent scholarship has extended the theory's scope, addressing contemporary challenges such as the rise of digital knowledge monopolies, the influence of global university ranking systems, and the neoliberalization of higher education, all of which further entrench Western academic dominance (Connell, 2019; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018). These developments underscore the enduring relevance of academic dependency theory in deconstructing epistemic hierarchies and advocating for more equitable, pluralistic frameworks of knowledge production.

The major defect of academic dependency theory lies in its structural focus, which critiques systemic inequalities in global knowledge production but offers limited prescriptive solutions for intellectual emancipation. While it exposes epistemic subjugation, it does not provide a clear strategy for reclaiming indigenous knowledge systems. Chinweizu's Piles of Rubbish theory complements this shortcoming by advocating for an active and systematic dismantling of colonial epistemological debris.

Chinweizu's Piles of Rubbish theory, first articulated in *The West and the Rest of Us* (1980), presents a radical critique of Africa's intellectual landscape by arguing that the continent's knowledge systems remain buried under layers of colonial epistemological debris—metaphorically referred to as a "piles of rubbish." This concept underscores the extent to which Africa's intellectual traditions have been suppressed, distorted, or overshadowed by imposed Western paradigms, necessitating a deliberate and systematic process of epistemic reclamation. Unlike Syed Hussein Alatas structural critique, which focuses on systemic academic dependency and the intellectual division of labor that subordinates African scholarship to Western epistemic authority,

Chinweizu emphasizes the urgency of intellectual decolonization through the active rejection of imposed frameworks. He contends that Africa's educational curricula and research methodologies remain misaligned with indigenous realities, reinforcing dependency rather than fostering independent thought and innovation. This misalignment, he argues, perpetuates epistemic subjugation by compelling African scholars to operate within intellectual frameworks that prioritize Western validation over indigenous knowledge systems.

Beyond critique, Chinweizu's Piles of Rubbish theory offers a prescriptive strategy for epistemic emancipation, seeking to answer the fundamental question: how can Africa extricate itself from the intellectual quagmire of colonial imposition? His call for the systematic dismantling of inherited knowledge structures aligns with contemporary movements advocating for the revitalization of indigenous epistemologies. This perspective resonates with decolonial scholars such as Santos (2014), who similarly argue for epistemic liberation through linguistic, cultural, and methodological decolonization. By advocating for an intellectual reawakening grounded in indigenous African thought systems, Chinweizu's framework challenges the hegemony of Western epistemologies and provides a roadmap for restoring Africa's intellectual sovereignty.

Together, these perspectives underscore the urgency of reclaiming intellectual sovereignty by redefining knowledge production on African terms. However, one of the major challenges in decolonizing academic frameworks lies in dismantling entrenched structures that privilege Western epistemologies. These challenges manifest in several ways, including the linguistic dominance of English and other colonial languages as the primary mediums of academic discourse, the continued influence of Western funding agencies in shaping research priorities, and the pervasive reliance on Western theoretical models. Additionally, global university ranking systems exacerbate dependency by prioritizing research published in Western journals, thereby marginalizing indigenous knowledge production and limiting the visibility of alternative epistemologies (Zezeza, 2016).

Overcoming academic dependency, therefore, requires both structural reforms and a deliberate effort to reclaim intellectual autonomy by fostering indigenous knowledge systems and alternative epistemologies. However, the process of decolonizing academic frameworks is fraught with challenges, including linguistic dominance, the influence of Western funding agencies, and the prioritization of research published in Western journals (Zezeza, 2016). Despite these obstacles, various postcolonial societies have successfully indigenized their academic and intellectual traditions, demonstrating that epistemic liberation is not only necessary but also achievable.

In Latin America, the Buen Vivir philosophy, rooted in Andean indigenous worldviews, has influenced policy and academic discourse, challenged Western models of development and introduced a relational approach to knowledge production (Escobar, 2018). Similarly, in South Africa, the Decoloniality Movement has led to the inclusion of indigenous philosophies and Afrocentric curricula in higher education, marking a shift towards epistemic justice (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018). In Nigeria, the resurgence of indigenous historiography has repositioned oral traditions as valid sources of historical knowledge, actively countered Eurocentric narratives and reaffirming local intellectual agency (Falola, 2022). These cases illustrate the potential for epistemological pluralism, where indigenous and Western knowledge systems coexist on fair terms, enabling intellectual sovereignty without isolating non-Western academia from global discourse.

Global collaborations, as discussed by scholars of decoloniality, present a paradox in the fight against academic dependency. While asymmetrical partnerships often reinforce Western epistemic dominance by dictating research priorities, methodologies, and funding structures, equitable collaborations can serve as mechanisms for epistemic justice and the redistribution of knowledge production power. Initiatives such as the African Research Universities Alliance (ARUA) and the Latin American Council of Social Sciences (CLACSO) have facilitated South-South knowledge exchanges, reducing reliance on Western institutions and fostering regional intellectual self-reliance. Moreover, digital platforms and open-access publishing have emerged as transformative tools in democratizing knowledge production, enabling indigenous scholars to disseminate research without the constraints of Western academic gatekeeping (Chan, 2016). However, ensuring that these collaborations do not replicate epistemic inequalities requires a fundamental shift toward mutual intellectual exchange, funding autonomy for indigenous research, and the integration of localized



epistemologies, including oral traditions, proverbs, and indigenous knowledge systems, into international academic discourse, particularly in political philosophy, as done by this paper.

### The Imperative of Epistemological Critique in Political Philosophy

Epistemology, defined as the study of knowledge, investigates the processes of knowledge acquisition, justification, and validation, addressing its sources, limitations, and reliability (Audi, 2010). The emphasis is on the fact that it decides which sources of knowledge is valid and can be accepted into the folders of legitimate knowledge. The intersection of epistemology with political philosophy is fundamental, as the foundations of political thought, governance, and legitimacy are inherently shaped by epistemic frameworks. Political ideologies, institutional structures, and normative principles rest upon underlying assumptions about truth, authority, and justification (Tully & Weinstock, 2012). Without a critical examination of how knowledge is produced, legitimized, and disseminated, political philosophy risks perpetuating epistemic biases that reinforce ideological dominance and structural exclusions (Bohman, 2021). Consequently, epistemological critique is indispensable for deconstructing inherited intellectual traditions, interrogating power-knowledge relations, and fostering more inclusive and contextually grounded political theories (Fricker, 2007).

Epistemology within political discourse is shaped by diverse philosophical traditions, including rationalism, empiricism, pragmatism, critical theory, postcolonialism, decolonial thought, and African indigenous epistemologies. Rationalism, as exemplified by Rawls (1971), grounds conceptions of justice in reason and fairness, advocating for universally justifiable principles. In contrast, empiricism, rooted in the works of Locke and Hume, emphasizes sensory experience as the basis of knowledge, influencing liberal political thought and governance through empirical reasoning. Pragmatism, as advanced by Dewey (1927), highlights the role of practical consequences and democratic engagement in shaping knowledge, reinforcing the importance of collective problem-solving in political legitimacy. Critical theory, particularly in Habermas's (1984) framework, underscores the role of communicative rationality in democratic deliberation, asserting that legitimacy emerges through rational discourse and consensus-building. Postcolonial and decolonial perspectives, articulated by Fanon (1961) and Quijano (2000), critique the epistemic underpinnings of colonial political structures, exposing how Eurocentric knowledge hierarchies marginalize indigenous epistemologies. Quijano's (2000) concept of the "coloniality of power" further illustrates how epistemic dominance sustains political and economic dependency in postcolonial societies. Additionally, Kuhn's (1970) theory of paradigms challenges the presumed neutrality of knowledge, demonstrating that shifts in dominant epistemological frameworks are often driven by power dynamics rather than pure rational progress, as exemplified by the dominance of Western-centric frameworks epistemologies in colonized entities.

African indigenous epistemologies, in contrast to Western reductionist traditions, emphasize holism, communal knowledge, and the integration of spiritual, ethical, and practical wisdom. Scholars such as Wiredu (1980) and Hountondji (1996) have explored these epistemologies, highlighting their foundations in oral traditions, proverbs, and collective deliberation, which prioritize relationality and continuity over abstraction and fragmentation. The Tiv epistemological framework exemplifies this perspective, embodying a synthesis of spiritual, moral, and practical knowledge. It reflects an indigenous approach to governance and social organization, reinforcing the significance of community-based wisdom, ethical leadership, and the interdependence of knowledge and societal well-being. This holistic epistemology challenges dominant paradigms by centering the lived experiences and historical consciousness of African societies, offering an alternative model of political thought deeply rooted in communal values and indigenous knowledge systems. It is within framework that Tiv epistemology can be understood.

### Tiv Epistemology

Epistemology in the Tiv intellectual tradition aligns with African indigenous knowledge systems, emphasizing a holistic integration of spirituality, morality, communal experience, and practical wisdom (Wegh, 2003). Knowledge is known in Tiv linguistic expression as *mfe*, wisdom is called *kwaghfan*, while the ultimate truth is termed *mimi*. Western epistemologies, which often privilege rigid categorizations and abstract theorization, Tiv knowledge is inseparable from lived experience and initiation. This is evident in the concept of *tumbu* (initiation), which has a dual meaning: on one hand, it signifies access to deeper cultural and spiritual truths,

but on the other, its absence leads to epistemic exclusion, manipulation, and confusion. The Tiv expression *Ka wa fa ga i tumbuu we* (“If you lack knowledge, you can made more confused”) highlights this paradox—those uninitiated remain disoriented, unable to grasp essential knowledge, while insiders not only access deeper knowledge but can also manipulate the boundaries of understanding. This duality underscores a broader epistemological marginalization, as indigenous knowledge systems are often schemed out of Western intellectual discourses precisely because they do not conform to externally imposed frameworks of validation. Consequently, the erasure of initiation-based epistemologies reflects the larger colonial disregard for knowledge forms that derive authority from lived, communal, and spiritual dimensions.

In Tiv epistemology, the justification of knowledge is rooted in communal deliberation and practical application rather than abstract reasoning. This principle is exemplified in *ijir ôron* (judicial and dispute resolution processes), where truth is not determined by individual assertion but emerges through collective reasoning. The primacy of communal wisdom is reinforced through proverbs such as *waa za tswuen hule* (“A river goes alone and meanders”), suggesting that without collective guidance, knowledge—like the river—may stray from a clear course. Knowledge transmission in Tiv society is primarily oral and experiential, occurring through storytelling (*kwagh-hir*), *amo* (songs) (Kyaagba, 2024), proverbs and sayings (*anzaakaa man ukyaan*) (Terngu, 2021), ritual practices (*kombo koron*), and direct engagement with both natural and social environments, particularly through activities like farming and politics. This epistemic framework underscores the deeply embedded nature of knowledge in communal life, where understanding is validated not through abstraction but through lived participation and collective affirmation.

In Tiv epistemology, there is a distinct division between observable and non-observable dimensions of knowledge. Observable knowledge, referred to as *ieren* (practice), encompasses knowledge acquired through direct interaction with the physical world, such as agricultural techniques, medicinal practices, and communal governance. This form of knowledge prioritizes experiential learning and practical engagement over abstract theorization. For instance, Tiv farmers rely on intergenerational wisdom regarding soil types, weather patterns, and crop cycles to make informed cultivation decisions. In contrast, non-observable knowledge, expressed as *mnenge* (theory, perception, and perspective), is deeply rooted in Tiv paradigms such as religion, mythology, and superstition (Akpar, 2015). This category extends beyond empirical verification and encompasses insights derived from dreams, divination, and ancestral wisdom. It also forms the foundation of Tiv moral judgments, ascribing behaviors as good or bad, right or wrong. The practice of *akombo* rituals exemplifies this epistemic framework, reflecting a politico-religious understanding that unseen forces shape material reality (Makar, 1994). Similarly, the concept of *tsav* (mystical power) reflects an individual’s ability to perceive hidden realities and mediate between the visible and invisible realms. A concrete illustration of epistemological holism in Tiv thought is found in their political philosophy through *tar sôrôn* (repairing the land) and the role of the *orsôruntar* (one who restores the land or state) (Makar, 1994), which conceptualizes governance as both a physical and metaphysical responsibility. Leaders are expected to harness spiritual insight, apply ancestral wisdom, and integrate metaphysical practices to restore harmony, thus aligning governance with moral and cosmic order.

The foundational modalities of Tiv epistemology are vividly illustrated in Tiv oral traditions. For instance, Iyough Ute’s composition *Inya Kperan* (“Struggle for Land”) underscores the necessity of historical consciousness in fully grasping contemporary realities, such as land disputes in present-day Tiv society. His lyrics convey this idea succinctly:

Tiv mba ngise kperan ingyor man aduduKpa hegen yo ityo yase ve gema inya I kperan (“In those days, the Tiv struggled for ingyor and adudu But nowadays, they struggle for land”).

*Ingyor* was an ancient Tiv practice in which a female relative was allocated to a man as a medium of exchange in marriage, particularly within the framework of marriage through *yanshe* (a system akin to trade by barter). This was abolished by colonial administration in 1927. *Adudu*, on the other hand, referred to a specialized storage box woven from babassu palm fronds and grass, used for safeguarding a family’s most valuable possessions, including *Imborvungu*, an apostrophic deity. These two elements—*ingyor* and *adudu*—represented the most treasured assets of fortune in traditional Tiv society. Historical records indicate that disputes over these valuables frequently led to social strife and hostility, a dynamic that appears to have

extended into the contemporary struggle for land. Thus, through this analogy, Iyough Ute, a Tiv oral historian, not only critiques the fratricidal conflicts in contemporary Tiv society, advocating for their resolution, but also exposes the deeply historicist nature of Tiv epistemology. This perspective parallels the historicism found in Hegelian and Marxian thought (Little, 2020). However, while Hegel and Marx emphasize the processual and contingent nature of ideas and material conditions, Tiv historicism, mirroring Kuhn's (1970) and Foucault's (1970) explanations of epistemology, diverges by situating historical change within a 'traditional cosmological' framework that acknowledges a hierarchical structure of power encompassing supra, super, and lesser forces including God, semi-deities, spiritual entities, and human beings.

Within this epistemic structure, indigenous Tiv political philosophy seeks to interpret and resolve political change and societal tensions, as exemplified in Ute's work. Unlike Western materialist historicism, the Tiv approach integrates cosmological conjecture with logical reasoning, recognizing the dynamic interplay between supra/super forces, such as God, and lesser forces, including human wit and inquisitiveness. It emphasizes the interdependence of these forces and relies on historical patterns, symbolic interpretations, and intuitive reasoning to derive meaning. An example of this epistemological modality is further found in Tarker Golozo's song *Aondo, Ter u hemba ga ma m zehe awe* ("Father, God, you are supreme; otherwise, I would quarrel with you"), in which he interprets the January 1 1984 coup in Nigeria as the "whip" of God, reflecting the interconnectedness between divine will and human affairs. Similarly, Pevkyaa Zegi's axiomatic assertion that "If God does not call you and you respond, it is not right" (Anzah, 2017) reinforces the epistemic principle that political legitimacy in Tivland is contingent upon divine sanction. Through this lens, the relationship between society and supernatural forces, particularly God, becomes a foundational element in validating political authority and interpreting both historical and contemporary events.

Moreover, the Tiv conjectural method of abstraction in knowledge employs terms such as *myerinen* (mystery), *gba-aondo* (natural or preternatural), and *mhoonum* (humanitarian) in its process of deduction, serving as interpretive frameworks that distinguish different dimensions of reality and their epistemological significance. These concepts allow Tiv epistemology to rationalize complex phenomena, differentiating between what is inherently unknowable, what operates within a natural or supernatural order, and what is driven by ethical imperatives. For instance, the existence and transitory nature of certain phenomena, such as ultimate power (*Tsav*), is explained through the concept of *myerinen*, reflecting a widely accepted belief in Tiv cosmology that some realities remain elusive and beyond empirical comprehension. Within this framework, certain socio-political occurrences, such as the rise and fall of individuals like Terwase Agwaza, also known as Gana—feared for their reputed mystical prowess—are perceived as mysteries or divinely orchestrated events that transcend human reasoning, which is predominantly reliant on sensory evidence. Likewise, authority and leadership are understood as *gba-aondo* (preternatural), divinely sanctioned rather than subject to human manipulation, reinforcing the belief that any attempt to subvert this cosmic order may result in social disorder. Additionally, the concept of *mhoonum* (humanitarian) offers insight into Tiv socio-political ethics, particularly in its validation of the political philosophy of *ya na angbian* ("eat and give your brother"), which underscores the moral obligation to promote equality and maintain a communal ethic that prioritizes collective well-being over individual ambition (Anemba, 2012).

The Tiv methodological analysis has a major advantage in that it encompasses a broad range of gathering relevant clues and making educated guesses, without dismissing possibilities even if immediate validity cannot be established. This is why oral tradition, which was also relied upon in Akiga's account of Tiv history (1939), was widely accepted by early educated intellectuals analyzing Tiv history, such as Makar (1994) and Orkar (1979). These traditions provide ample space for verification and confirmation of knowledge within the Tiv epistemic framework. It is justified by its aim of generalization, encompassing causal explanations, interpretations, and predictions of contingencies, including attacks and misfortunes within Tiv society. The epistemic modalities of indigenous Tiv thought and their generalizations are implicitly expressed in concepts like *ishor*, which refers to divination or soothsaying. *Ishor* is a Tiv form of prognostication that explains contingencies, predicts the future, and pre-empts events or occurrences based on evidence that may not be visible to everyone, except those possessing special powers like prophecy or sorcery, which are believed to be bestowed by heavenly God, semi-gods, or deities. The practice of *ishor* in classical Tiv political thought is emphasized by Jibo (2021). Golozo also acknowledges the relevance of *ishor* in Tiv socio-political thought in the following excerpt from his songs.

Tor Bai, ishor I hia sha vee

A er nan Akpehe ve a pase

Or u ishor I ker nan?

(“Chief Bai, the sorcery is burnt up

How do we divine and fish out

The person who is guilty?”)

In Tiv epistemology, *ishor* functions as a mechanism for attributing justice, sanctioning socio-political misconduct, and assigning culpability. Beyond its role in moral judgment, *ishor* also explains phenomena such as omens and provides access to hidden knowledge, whether residing within an individual’s consciousness or with supernatural entities like spirits and ancestors. This dual function is captured in the Tiv adage *Ka akpehen we ishor u kpehen ke ishima yol* (“When you seek knowledge through *ishor*, you also search your mind”), which suggests that uncovering hidden truths through *ishor* requires supplementary introspection and self-examination. This epistemic process aligns, in principle, with Auguste Comte’s positivist emphasis on verifying claims before accepting them as true or false. However, in the Tiv cosmological framework, verification is not exclusionary; rather, it incorporates self-reflection and retrospective reasoning across multiple domains of knowledge, including theology, metaphysics, and empirical inquiry.

A compelling example of this principle is found in Tarker Golozo’s song *Tyo yam Tiv time ke asema aen* (“My dear Tiv people, search your minds”), which underscores the necessity of self-examination in confirming knowledge obtained through *ishor* or other traditional means. This reflective process helps validate acquired knowledge, even when further empirical proof is absent or unattainable. Furthermore, *ishor* is not only a cognitive tool but also symbolizes conscience and intuition, aiding in the discovery of concealed truths—such as recognizing a past transgression that may have triggered a present misfortune. For instance, Tiv belief holds that an individual who desecrates the land is vulnerable to spiritual retribution, as exemplified in the story of *Karagbe* (Makar, 1994). Within this epistemological framework, those with a clear conscience are generally believed to be immune to misfortune, except in cases where unseen forces like *akombo* impose consequences beyond human comprehension—requiring wisdom that transcends ordinary sensory perception to decipher.

The foundational idea that *kwagh gbe eren ga* (“Nothing happens without a cause”) reflects this epistemic structure, asserting that even when causality is not immediately perceptible, an underlying reason exists. This perspective extends to political fortune or misfortune, which, in Tiv thought, is not always empirically explainable but may be governed by forces beyond material observation. Consequently, this worldview incorporates a degree of fatalism, recognizing that certain events are dictated by metaphysical forces beyond human control, further reinforcing the holistic and non-reductionist nature of Tiv epistemology.

### Tiv Epistemology Versus Western Epistemic Modality

Western epistemology, rooted in rationalism, empiricism, and positivism, prioritizes observable experiences and empirical verification while often dismissing non-observable phenomena as speculative or unscientific. It emphasizes objectivity, linear progression, and reductionism (Temilola, 2015). Descartes’ rationalism privileges deductive reasoning, Locke’s empiricism asserts that knowledge derives from sensory experience, and Comte’s positivism elevates scientific inquiry as the highest form of knowledge. Even Karl Popper’s critique of strict empiricism through falsifiability—arguing that knowledge advances through conjectures and refutations rather than mere accumulation (Mukherjee & Ramaswamy, 2011)—remains bound to empirical constraints, reinforcing the privileging of observable phenomena. This epistemic framework institutionalizes knowledge through formal education, experimentation, and codified documentation, detaching it from communal and experiential contexts. By prioritizing scientific rationality, it marginalizes alternative ways of knowing, reinforcing epistemic hierarchies that discount indigenous epistemologies integrating spiritual and metaphysical dimensions (Foucault, 1970; Smith, 1999). Critics such as Mignolo (2011) and Santos (2014)



argue that this exclusion perpetuates epistemic injustice and sustains neocolonial intellectual hegemony. While Western epistemology has significantly advanced scientific knowledge, its exclusivist tendencies necessitate a more pluralistic approach—one that acknowledges diverse knowledge systems beyond empirical verification.

A key divergence between Tiv and Western epistemological traditions lies in their differing approaches to the metaphysical and spiritual dimensions of knowledge, a contrast with profound implications for political philosophy. Since the Enlightenment, Western epistemology has largely been shaped by rationalism, empiricism, and the systematic categorization of knowledge into discrete, verifiable units. This approach, often referred to as the “scientific route” to knowledge, is grounded in a positivist framework that privileges sensory perception and objective verification, forming the basis of dominant Western political theories that emphasize institutional rationality, bureaucratic governance, and technocratic expertise (Temilola, 2015). By contrast, Tiv epistemology adopts an ontologically pluralistic perspective, recognizing the interdependence of empirical, experiential, and metaphysical dimensions in the construction of knowledge. Foundational elements such as *Aondo* (God), *Mba-aondo* (semi-divine beings), and *Tsav/Akombo* (supernatural forces) highlight a worldview in which reality is multi-layered and cannot be reduced to purely rationalist classifications. This perspective advocates for governance models, such as *tar sôrôn* (repairing the land), that integrate spiritual and communal legitimacy alongside technical rationality, challenging the reductionist tendencies of Western epistemological paradigms (Makar, 1994).

This epistemological orientation is evident in governance structure of *Ityo*, where decision-making is a dynamic, iterative process involving elders, lineage heads, and other stakeholders (Bohannon, 1957). Unlike Western liberal democracy, which often prioritizes procedural legality and institutional mechanisms, Tiv *Ityo* governance structure reflects elements of what Mbembe (2001) describes as “conviviality”—a form of political life rooted in negotiated authority, relational ethics, and spiritual accountability. Furthermore, Tiv political philosophy, as embedded in concepts such as *ya na ngbian*, which connotes mutuality and brotherhood, reinforces the idea that governance should be an exercise in relational responsibility rather than power accumulation. This notion directly challenges Western political thought, particularly liberal individualism, which often conceptualizes governance in terms of authority, competition, and self-interest (Rawls, 1971). In Tiv society, leadership is not an individual pursuit but a collective duty, where a leader’s legitimacy is contingent upon their ability to embody communal values, foster harmony, and engage in continuous dialogue with the people. The Tiv critique, therefore, raises fundamental questions about the limitations of Western political philosophy, particularly its reliance on rigid institutional structures, adversarial politics, and technocratic governance models that often fail to account for the complex, relational nature of human societies (Nyerere, 1968; Mbiti, 1969).

In another dimension, the contrast is further reflected in economic and ecological epistemologies. While Western economic thought, shaped by classical liberalism and capitalist rationality, tends to prioritize efficiency, specialization, and market-driven innovation (Smith, 1776/1999; Schumpeter, 1942/2003), Tiv agricultural knowledge systems emphasize ecological balance, communal ownership, and sustainability. The principle of *sule sôrôn* (“farm repair”) exemplifies an epistemology that integrates environmental cycles, spiritual harmony, and practical wisdom—an approach that aligns more closely with contemporary ecological economics than with industrialized Western farming models (Altieri, 2018; Shiva, 1993).

Ultimately, Tiv epistemology presents an alternative paradigm that prioritizes communal wisdom, iterative knowledge production, and an integrative approach to reality. By rejecting the reductionist tendencies of Western rationalism and embracing a more holistic perspective, the Tiv philosophical framework challenges the dominance of Eurocentric epistemologies that marginalize indigenous ways of knowing. This paper argues that embracing Tiv epistemology not only enriches African political thought but also offers valuable insights for global intellectual traditions seeking to move beyond the limitations of Western epistemic modalities. In doing so, it calls for a broader recognition of orature, indigenous epistemologies, and relational governance models as legitimate and necessary components of contemporary philosophical discourse (Hountondji, 2002; Gyekye, 1997; Wiredu, 1998).

## Proverbs as a Token of political philosophy in traditional African societies

Proverbs are concise, metaphorical expressions that convey traditional wisdom, cultural values, and practical truths derived from experience. The Tiv word for proverbs is *anzaakaa*. They often use imagery and metaphor to address universal themes such as morality, governance, relationships, and community. Proverbs are culturally significant tools for teaching, critiquing, and guiding behaviour, especially in oral traditions. According to Finnegan (2012), proverbs are “short, pithy statements of widely accepted truths about everyday life,” reflecting societal norms and values. Similarly, Taylor (1962) describes them as “the wisdom of many and the wit of one,” emphasizing their collective origin and communicative efficiency.

In traditional African societies, proverbs play a vital role as a medium of political philosophy, embodying the collective wisdom, governance principles, and ethical norms of communities. They provide insights into conflict resolution, leadership, and social harmony. For example, the Ndebele proverb “*Koniwa ngomlomo kulungiswe ngomlomo*” emphasizes dialogue as a peaceful solution to disputes, reflecting the value placed on negotiation and consensus in political governance. Proverbs often criticize power dynamics and promote ideals of justice, reconciliation, and cooperation within societies (IOSR Journals, 2012; Academia, n.d.).

These sayings encapsulate a community’s philosophical underpinnings, offering guidance on effective leadership and the need for ethical governance. They highlight a preference for collective decision-making, as seen in proverbs across diverse African cultures that advocate peacebuilding and negotiation over violence. Through these teachings, proverbs remain foundational in understanding African political thought and practices (IOSR Journals, 2012).

Proverbs are not unique to African societies but put in the words of the immortal Chinua Achebe, they are like the palm oil with which we eat yams. This is not a snack but a delicacy of the Igbo (nay African) culinary culture. This means that proverbs are the tokens of wisdom, the currency of African philosophy. The African society with its signature intellectual identity of orature is veritably the DNA of philosophy. This, too, is the point of departure of African philosophy from the European nay Western stereotype.

Proverbs play a central role in Tiv epistemology, serving as vehicles of wisdom, moral instruction, and philosophical thought. They function as condensed expressions of cultural knowledge, often used to communicate complex ideas about truth, experience, and communal values. One notable proverb, “*Mimi tende igbun ga*” (“Truth does not have a wounded toe”), highlights the idea that truth is whole and unblemished, reinforcing the epistemological principle that genuine knowledge is self-evident and cannot be concealed. This aligns with the Tiv belief that knowledge should be pursued with integrity and discernment, as any attempt to distort it ultimately fails. This perspective is echoed in the music of Atim Kasua, particularly in the song “*Mimi tende igbun ga*” (“Truth does not have a wounded toe”), where traditional wisdom is often used to critique dishonesty and uphold the value of truthfulness in communal life. Similarly, the proverb “*Hiaa ka a hiin a igbe*” (“A whirlwind starts with igbe [caution]”), as reflected in Tarker Goloza’s music, underscores the importance of attentiveness in knowledge acquisition. This saying emphasizes that knowledge begins with careful observation and awareness of one’s surroundings. It serves as a reminder that understanding complex issues requires patience and attentiveness, reinforcing the Tiv epistemological view that knowledge is built progressively through keen insight and lived experience.

In the same vein, the proverb *Tem mongo Mgbagbera vaa iwa* (“Together, *Mgbagbera* people succeed in blacksmithing”) illustrates the communal nature of knowledge production in Tiv society. It reflects the idea that knowledge is not an individual pursuit but a collective effort shaped by shared experiences and collaboration. This proverb is particularly relevant to Tiv epistemology, which values intergenerational learning and the transmission of knowledge through communal interactions, mentorship, and storytelling in open arenas such as the Ate, the traditional meeting place where elders and community members gather to deliberate, share wisdom, and resolve disputes. These proverbs encapsulate fundamental epistemological principles, reinforcing the integration of experience, intuition, and tradition in knowledge acquisition. They illustrate that Tiv ways of knowing are deeply embedded in oral traditions, guiding ethical behavior, decision-making, and intellectual inquiry. Through proverbs, the Tiv articulate complex understandings of reality, ensuring that wisdom is preserved and adapted across generations.

Proverbs also play a crucial role in addressing foolishness within Tiv epistemology, where ignorance is not simply the absence of knowledge but a failure to integrate experience, communal wisdom, and discernment. Foolishness is often corrected through storytelling, communal mentorship, and sometimes public admonition to ensure individuals align with the values of holistic understanding and responsible decision-making. The proverb "Fa gege tese ibyumegh" ("Claiming too much knowledge exposes ibyumegh") warns against intellectual arrogance, emphasizing that true wisdom comes from humility and openness to learning, or accepting that one does not know. In Tiv society, those who feign expertise without genuine understanding are gently corrected through communal discourse, where elders use narratives and lived examples to illustrate the consequences of misguided knowledge. Similarly, the proverb "Waa yen twuen hule" ("A river goes alone and meanders") underscores the dangers of isolation in the pursuit of knowledge. It teaches that wisdom flourishes in collaboration and guidance, rather than solitary or impulsive actions. Within the Tiv community, individuals who act without consulting elders or peers are often redirected through collective discussions, reinforcing the importance of shared learning and intergenerational mentorship. In this way, foolishness is not punished outright but remedied through structured communal interventions, ensuring that knowledge remains a collective pursuit rooted in lived experiences, cultural practices, and ancestral wisdom.

Traditional Tiv epistemology critiques the reductionist tendencies of Western intellectual traditions, emphasizing the dangers of excessive abstraction and compartmentalization. This critique is encapsulated in the proverb *Ka wea kumen mfe, u nungwan ibyumegh* ("When you pound knowledge, you add foolishness"), where the metaphors of "pounding" (*kumen*) and "adding" (*nungwan*) illustrate how over-intellectualization can distort understanding by severing knowledge from its broader cultural and spiritual contexts. Rather than yielding deeper insight, excessive analysis can result in epistemic blindness, reinforcing the limitations of detached reasoning. Consequently, Tiv epistemology advocates for a balance between intellectual humility and continuous inquiry, fostering an approach that guards against the arrogance of rigid theorization. This perspective aligns with broader African traditions that privilege communal rationality and lived experience as the foundation of wisdom, recognizing that knowledge must remain integrated within its social and spiritual milieu to retain its relevance and transformative potential (Batteau, 2010; Santos, 2014).

### Demystifying the Tiv Proverb: "Ka Wea Kumen Mfe, U Waan ibyumegh"

Tiv epistemology presents a compelling critique of Western political philosophy by challenging its fundamental assumptions about knowledge production, rationality, and the role of intellectual inquiry in governance and society. Unlike Western epistemological traditions, which often prioritize analytical rigor, reductionism, and empirical verification, Tiv knowledge systems advocate for a holistic, dynamic, and context-sensitive understanding of reality. Central to this critique is the proverb *Ka wea kumen mfe, u nungwan ibyumegh* ("When you pound knowledge, you add foolishness"), which presents a profound philosophical reflection on the nature of wisdom, learning, and the paradoxes of intellectual pursuits. A proper demystification of the underlying meanings, contexts, and implications of the proverb requires a close examination of its key terms:

In Tiv culture, the verb *kumen* (to pound) primarily refers to the physical process of breaking down substances, such as yams or grains, by hitting repeatedly to enhance their refinement and usability. Symbolically, it represents intellectual processing, analysis, and refinement, activities central to deep inquiry and learning. It also reflects the iterative nature of learning, debate, and decision-making. In governance (*tar sôrôn*), knowledge is not derived from singular authoritative voices but is collectively refined through discourse, deliberation, and community engagement. Traditional Tiv councils employ *ijir ôron* (deliberative dialogue), a process where elders and community members engage in rigorous debate to refine perspectives and reach socially just conclusions. This deliberative approach is encapsulated in the proverb *Tem mongo Mbagbera vaa wia* ("Together, Mbagbera people succeed in blacksmithing"), which underscores the value of collective wisdom in problem-solving. Such an epistemic framework contrasts sharply with Western models that often privilege expertise, specialization, and hierarchical structures, sometimes detaching knowledge production from communal realities. Similarly, Tiv agricultural practices (*aeren a tom sule*), such as intercropping and organic soil management, illustrate a knowledge system refined over generations through empirical observation and oral transmission, rather than abstract scientific modeling (Mazrui, 1986). In healthcare (*twev u Tiv*), the integration of herbal medicine with spiritual practices highlights an epistemology that prioritizes

holistic well-being over compartmentalized, symptom-based treatment, offering a counterpoint to the biomedical reductionism prevalent in Western medical traditions (Hountondji, 2002).

However, pounding also implies an act of forceful manipulation, raising the question of whether excessive intellectualization can distort or overcomplicate knowledge (*mfe*), which, in Tiv thought, signifies wisdom, intelligence, and understanding. The proverb thus suggests that knowledge is neither an absolute nor a static entity but one that can be transformed—or even diminished—by excessive intellectual labour. It carries an implicit caution that an uncritical or relentless pursuit of knowledge might result in unintended consequences, such as confusion or self-contradiction. The verb *nungwan* (to add) denotes an unintended accumulation, implying that through the relentless “pounding” of knowledge, one inadvertently increases an element that should ideally be minimized—foolishness. This challenges the assumption that greater knowledge necessarily equates to greater wisdom. Instead, it warns that excessive theorization or abstract reasoning detached from practical reality may lead to folly (*ibyumegh*). With this, Tiv epistemology fundamentally rejects intellectual arrogance and the dangers of unchecked rationalism, a theme deeply embedded in the concept of “adding foolishness” (*nungwan ibyumegh*). Unlike the Western tradition, which often equates knowledge with mastery and absolute certainty, Tiv thought views wisdom as an ongoing negotiation between understanding and humility. “Adding foolishness” functions as an epistemic check against the presumption that knowledge acquisition automatically equates to wisdom. In this sense, it resonates with modern cognitive theories, such as the Dunning-Kruger Effect, which demonstrates how individuals with limited expertise tend to overestimate their understanding (Dunning & Kruger, 1999). Tiv wisdom traditions caution that knowledge, if not tempered by humility and contextual awareness, can lead to misjudgments, misapplications, and epistemic blindness. Moreover, within the Tiv worldview, *ibyumegh* does not merely denote a lack of intelligence but can also signify a loss of practical sense, arrogance, or an inability to perceive beyond one’s intellectual constructs. Consequently, the proverb ultimately suggests that when knowledge is subjected to excessive analysis (pounded), it risks losing its grounding in reality, resulting in impractical or even absurd conclusions. This is particularly relevant in governance and leadership, where decision-making should not be based solely on technical knowledge or abstract principles but should be informed by collective wisdom, moral considerations, and long-term societal impacts (Nyerere, 1968).

Synthetically, the proverb acknowledges the complexity of knowledge while it critiques the dangers of over-intellectualization. It implies that the more one dissects and manipulates knowledge, the greater the risk of distorting it, making it impractical, or even leading to arrogance. It resonates with broader philosophical concerns about the limits of human reason. In Western philosophy, this aligns with Socratic wisdom, the idea that true wisdom comes from recognizing one’s limitations. In African philosophy, it echoes the value of communal wisdom over excessive individual theorization. This proverb is especially relevant in contemporary contexts, where the pursuit of knowledge is often equated with sophistication, but in doing so, it sometimes leads to disconnection from common sense, tradition, or ethical considerations. It warns against intellectual arrogance and the illusion of mastery, urging a balanced approach to learning—one that values both inquiry and practical wisdom.

## **Tiv Epistemological Critique of Western Epistemic Modality in Political Philosophy**

### **The Complexity of Knowledge**

The Tiv proverb under review suggests that knowledge is inherently complex and cannot be reduced to mere empirical observation or logical abstraction. It is not just as a proverb but an epistemic stance on the nature of truth and meaning, which aligns with Gadamer (1975) argues that knowledge cannot be reduced to mere objective data; rather, it is shaped by history, tradition, and the interpretive process itself. *In Truth and Method*, Gadamer critiques the Western tendency to separate knowledge from lived experience, much like the Tiv critique of over-analyzing knowledge to the point of foolishness. The metaphors of “pounding”, meaning breaking down into smaller digestible particles, and “adding”, or increasing, as used in the proverb vividly capture this perspective, urging caution against intellectual reductionism that oversimplifies intricate realities. It portends that knowledge is neither purely empirical nor purely rational but deeply intertwined in experience, context, and relational networks. Thus, when knowledge is reduced to easily digestible forms, it risks losing the depth and interconnectedness inherent in the systems it represents, leading to epistemic



distortion or even folly. This serves as a rich epistemological critique of the tendency of Western epistemic modalities to overanalyze or oversimplify knowledge. This insight aligns with broader critiques in political philosophy concerning the limitations of Western epistemic modalities, particularly in their application to governance, justice, and political reasoning.

This concept is reflected in the Tiv approach to conflict resolution, where disputes are not isolated incidents but disruptions to the harmony of the entire community. In Tiv society, resolving such conflicts requires a thoughtful, collective process led by the council of elders (*mbayaav*). This approach incorporates a range of tools, such as proverbs for moral guidance, storytelling for historical context, diplomacy, and collective wisdom to ensure diverse perspectives shape the solution.

Rather than simplifying conflicts into a binary of right versus wrong, the Tiv approach seeks to address the root causes and broader implications. For example, a land dispute might involve not just legal ownership but also historical claims, ancestral rights, family connections, and spiritual obligations tied to the land. Reducing the issue to a single aspect, such as legal title, risks overlooking these critical layers of meaning. Such an oversimplified resolution would be incomplete and could inadvertently foster further discord, highlighting the importance of maintaining a nuanced and holistic perspective in addressing complex issues.

This integrated approach contrasts sharply with Western legal systems, which often prioritize procedural analysis and adherence to codified rules; emphasize individual rights over communal considerations; and seek resolutions through compartmentalization, which can fragment the broader social and cultural context. Such an approach, while efficient in some ways, risks losing the interconnected meaning embedded in the conflict. For the Tiv, this fragmentation undermines the integrity of the knowledge and the resolution process.

By embracing this mindset, we are reminded to respect the intricacies of knowledge, avoiding reductionist tendencies that might simplify, distort, or diminish its profound complexity. This is in stark contrast to Western philosophical traditions that often prioritize reductionism, such as the Cartesian method of doubting everything to its simplest components. René Descartes, in his *'Meditations on First Philosophy'* (1641), proposed a radical method of doubt that introduced significant philosophical challenges, including the mind-body problem. Descartes found himself entangled in what a variant of the Tiv proverb captures as "*fa gege tese ibyumegh*," or "too much knowledge reveals foolishness." This proverb critiques the reductionist approach by implying that excessive intellectual analysis often leads to confusion and, ultimately, foolishness. Over-analyzing knowledge can fragment our understanding, neglecting the holistic nature of reality. This critique aligns with scholars like Kwasi Wiredu, who emphasize that African epistemologies, including the Tiv, focus on the interconnectedness of knowledge systems rather than reducing them to isolated components (Wiredu, 1980).

### The Limit of Human Understanding

At the core of the proverb under review is the acknowledgment that human cognition has limitations. This directly opposes Western epistemic modality, particularly in its Enlightenment foundations, which assumes that reason is the ultimate tool for comprehending reality. Tiv epistemology, deeply intertwined with metaphysical and spiritual dimensions, recognizes that not all knowledge can be fully grasped through rational inquiry alone. Some aspects of reality remain beyond human grasp, a perspective shared by thinkers such as Friedrich Nietzsche, who challenged the notion that reason alone could reveal absolute truths (Nietzsche, 1887/2006).

Immanuel Kant also recognized the limitations of human understanding in his *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781), where he distinguished between the phenomena (things as we perceive them) and the noumena (things as they are in themselves), asserting that human knowledge could never fully grasp the latter. Similarly, the Tiv proverb suggests that certain aspects of knowledge are beyond empirical or rational inquiry. However, Tiv perspective diverges from Kant and critique him when pushed forward. While Kantian rationalism posits that human beings can arrive at universal moral laws through pure reason, a claim that harbours arrogance, Tiv belief that the one needs to approach inquiry into knowledge with humility and a recognition of mystery (*myeren*) to be able to admit even realities that are beyond immediate understanding. By respecting these

boundaries, one avoids the arrogance of assuming that all knowledge is within human reach, a humility that is foundational to Socratic philosophy, particularly the Socratic paradox that “I know that I know nothing,” which underscores the limits of human wisdom. Socrates, as presented in Plato’s *Apology*, suggests that true wisdom comes from recognizing one’s ignorance. This perspective aligns with contemporary critiques from postmodern and decolonial scholars argue that such universalist claims are not only epistemically flawed but also politically dangerous, as they impose Eurocentric assumptions on diverse societies (Santos, 2014; Mbembe, 2016). In political philosophy, this limitation is evident in the unpredictability of socio-political change, where rigid ideological frameworks often fail to accommodate the fluid and evolving nature of governance and human societies.

For instance, liberal democratic models, rooted in Enlightenment rationalism, often assume that institutions based on universal principles of rights, representation, and legal frameworks will naturally lead to stable and just societies. However, the lived realities of many postcolonial states reveal the limitations of such assumptions. The imposition of Western political structures in African nations, for instance, has often failed to account for indigenous governance systems, communal decision-making processes, and socio-cultural factors that shape political legitimacy (Mamdani, 1996; Ake, 2000). A striking example is the democratic experiment in Iraq following the 2003 U.S. invasion, where Western policymakers assumed that imposing electoral democracy would lead to political stability. Instead, the failure to recognize the complex ethno-religious fabric of Iraqi society resulted in prolonged conflict and instability, demonstrating that abstract rationalist models are insufficient in addressing deeply rooted socio-political complexities (Chandler, 2010). Similarly, the Tiv political tradition, as embodied in *Tar Sôrôn* (repairing of the land), emphasizes adaptability, consensus-building, and the recognition that no single framework can fully capture the nuances of governance. This aligns with Santos’ (2014) argument that epistemic diversity must inform political structures rather than relying solely on Eurocentric models.

Furthermore, the unpredictability of political movements, revolutions, and ideological shifts illustrates the limitations of purely rationalist approaches to governance. The collapse of the Soviet Union, the Arab Spring, and the resurgence of nationalist movements in the West all reveal that human societies do not conform to deterministic theoretical predictions. Instead, they evolve in ways that cannot always be anticipated through rigid ideological or empirical frameworks. The Tiv proverb *Kumen Mfe Nungwan Ibyumegh* thus serves as a reminder that knowledge, particularly political knowledge, is never static or absolute but must be approached with humility, adaptability, and an openness to the unknown. By acknowledging these limitations, both in epistemology and political philosophy, the Tiv perspective offers an alternative framework that prioritizes contextual wisdom, lived experience, and an acceptance of mystery (*myeren*). This perspective not only challenges the epistemic arrogance embedded in Western political thought but also opens pathways for a more pluralistic and inclusive approach to knowledge and governance.

### The Dangers of Over-Simplification

The proverb further critiques the tendency to oversimplify knowledge. Tiv epistemology insists on the importance of preserving the complexity of knowledge, cautioning that reducing it to oversimplified components leads to superficial understanding. This critique parallels the rejection of positivism, as articulated by critics like Auguste Comte’s attempt to reduce human experience to empirical data alone. In *The Course in Positive Philosophy* (1830–1842), Comte sought to apply scientific methods to social phenomena, but his critics, including post-positivists like Karl Popper, argue that this approach ignores the rich, qualitative dimensions of human life (Popper, 1959). The critique the tendency to reduce knowledge to verifiable facts, dismissing alternative epistemologies as speculative or non-scientific. This approach is evident in political science methodologies that prioritize quantitative analysis over qualitative insights. For example, modernization theory, which dominated political discourse in the mid-20th century, proposed a linear model of development based on Western historical trajectories (Rostow, 1960). Following this model, Western political philosophy has often sought to categorize societies as either “developed” or “underdeveloped,” “modern” or “traditional,” creating rigid binaries that fail to capture the fluidity and complexity of real-world societies. Walter Rodney (1972), in *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, critiques this Eurocentric epistemology, arguing that African societies were not “backward” but had sophisticated governance structures that Western frameworks simply failed to recognize. Tiv epistemology, by contrast, values contextual knowledge and

relational wisdom, recognizing that governance and development cannot be understood through reductionist models but require nuanced, situated understanding.

Similarly, the Tiv warning against oversimplification echoes the concerns of African philosophers like V.Y. Mudimbe, who critiques the reduction of African knowledge systems to Eurocentric scientific paradigms. Mudimbe's *The Invention of Africa* (1988) argues that Western frameworks often strip indigenous knowledge systems of their depth by forcing them into alien categories of understanding. The Tiv proverb, with its emphasis on preserving the full complexity of knowledge, resonates with Mudimbe's critique by advocating for an approach that maintains the richness of local epistemologies.

In contemporary global politics, this oversimplification is evident in international interventions that assume a one-size-fits-all model of governance. The failure of democratic state-building efforts in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Libya, for example, illustrates the pitfalls of applying Western political theories without considering local epistemologies and governance traditions. The Tiv proverb warns against such intellectual arrogance: knowledge, when forcibly pounded into rigid forms, ceases to be wisdom and instead becomes folly.

### The Critique of Over-Analysis

Over-analysis, or the excessive intellectualization of knowledge, or “pounding” knowledge, is another key target of the proverb's critique. Tiv thought values practical wisdom and moral accountability, suggesting that knowledge must serve the community and be rooted in the lived experience. Over-analysis, when detached from practical application, risks becoming abstract and disconnected from reality. This critique is similar to Martin Heidegger's rejection of Western metaphysics in “Being” and “Time” (1927), where he warns against the objectification of knowledge. Heidegger argues that the Western tradition has lost sight of the meaning of “Being” by reducing it to abstract concepts, thereby alienating knowledge from human existence. Moreover, the Marxist critiques of capitalism, while valuable, have been criticized for their abstract formulations that fail to provide actionable solutions in contemporary political contexts (Žižek, 2011). Similarly, post-structuralist political thought, as advanced by thinkers like Foucault and Derrida, deconstructs power structures but offers little in terms of concrete alternatives (Foucault, 1970; Derrida, 1976). The Tiv epistemic stance, in contrast, prioritizes knowledge that serves communal well-being and practical governance. This aligns with the African philosophy of Ubuntu, which emphasizes practical wisdom and collective responsibility over abstract theorization (Ramose, 1999).

Besides, the relativity of meaning of key concepts is also key. We allude to the piece by Akpar (2015) in his examination of the philosophy and thought of Botwev, a Tivman of the traditionalist order. Upon learning that the Whiteman has a gadget that does “work,” in one fateful episode goes to buy a watch. In the Tiv lexicon, a time piece can be said to be “working” or “work.” The man goes to bury the watch in his farm. After some time, he goes to inspect the “work” done. He finds nothing of the sort expected. Your concept of work is not the same with that of the Tiv and are vastly different indeed.

Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* (1953) also critiques the tendency of Western philosophy to over-intellectualize knowledge, arguing that meaning arises from practical use rather than abstract theorization. Wittgenstein's emphasis on the ordinary, everyday use of language resonates with the Tiv insistence on grounding knowledge in communal and practical contexts. The proverb, by cautioning against over-analysis, aligns with these philosophical traditions, advocating for a balanced approach that integrates intellectual inquiry with practical wisdom.

### Knowledge, Foolishness, and Wisdom

Kumen mfe nungwan ibumegh, offers a nuanced understanding of the relationship between knowledge (*mfe*), foolishness (*ibyumegh*), and wisdom (*kwaghfan*). It suggests that wisdom lies not in the accumulation of facts or the relentless pursuit of analysis, but in the ability to discern the limits of one's understanding and to respect the complexity of knowledge. Aristotle's distinction between *sophia* (theoretical wisdom) and *phronesis* (practical wisdom) in the *Nicomachean Ethics* is relevant here. While theoretical wisdom seeks universal truths, practical wisdom is concerned with ethical action and the navigation of complex realities. The Tiv

proverb reflects a similar understanding, where true wisdom is found in the integration of knowledge with moral responsibility and communal well-being.

Isaiah Berlin's critique of monistic traditions in philosophy, particularly in his essay "Two Concepts of Liberty" (1958), also resonates with the Tiv perspective. Berlin argues for value pluralism, recognizing that multiple, often conflicting values must coexist in a complex world. This pluralistic approach, which resists the reduction of reality to a single framework, is echoed in the Tiv epistemology that values the multiplicity of knowledge sources—ranging from the empirical to the spiritual.

"Pounding knowledge, adding foolishness," serves as a rich metaphor critiquing Western epistemological approaches. Tiv epistemology, rooted in oral tradition and community-based knowledge systems, offers a holistic and multifaceted understanding of knowledge. It acknowledges not only the intellectual but also the spiritual, communal, and ethical dimensions of knowing. In contrast, Western epistemology, particularly as shaped by Enlightenment thinkers like Descartes, Kant, and Hume, tends to prioritize deductive reasoning, empiricism, and individual rationalism. While these methods have advanced scientific inquiry, their universal application often overlooks non-empirical, communal, and spiritual forms of knowledge, which are integral to African thought.

In the Tiv healthcare system, for example, illness is understood as a disruption of harmony between the physical body, the community, and the spiritual realm, leading to an integrated approach that combines herbal medicine with spiritual practices. Traditional healers (*mbasôron twev*) diagnose ailments by considering physical symptoms alongside spiritual and social factors, such as breaches of communal ethics or supernatural influences involving *Tsav* (mystical powers) or *Akombo* (spiritual forces linked to specific rituals). Treatments often include herbal remedies, such as *kor*, prepared using knowledge passed down through generations, alongside rituals or sacrifices to restore spiritual balance and appease offended entities. These practices, deeply rooted in Tiv epistemology, emphasize that healing is not an isolated process but a communal and spiritual endeavour, reflecting a holistic understanding of well-being. In contrast, Western healthcare systems often prioritize empirical diagnosis and pharmaceutical solutions, overlooking the interconnected social and spiritual dimensions central to Tiv health practices.

A key example of this epistemic divergence is evident in Tiv jurisprudence, particularly in the *ijir ôron*

(council deliberations). Unlike Western legal traditions that emphasize codified laws, rigid proceduralism, and precedent-based adjudication, Tiv jurisprudence prioritizes consensus, communal wisdom, and restorative justice. The goal is not merely to determine guilt or innocence based on predefined legal principles but to restore social harmony and ensure justice aligns with the broader moral and cultural fabric of the community. This contrast becomes particularly evident when examining Nigeria's judicial system, where the excessive reliance on procedural technicalities often obscures substantive justice. For instance, cases of corruption, electoral fraud, and human rights violations are frequently dismissed due to procedural lapses such as lack of jurisdiction, technical errors in filing, or statute limitations—despite overwhelming evidence of wrongdoing. A case in point is the annulment of election results or the dismissal of high-profile corruption charges based on procedural grounds rather than the merit of the case. This practice aligns with the critique embedded in the Tiv proverb *Kumen Mfe Nungwan Ibyumegh*—when legal knowledge is "pounded" into excessively rigid formalities, it can paradoxically produce injustice rather than fairness.

In contrast, *ijir ôron* deliberations focus on achieving resolutions that maintain peace and social cohesion. When a land dispute arises, for example, the elders do not simply refer to legal documents or land deeds; they consider ancestral ties, historical occupation, community welfare, and moral obligations. The emphasis is on the broader implications of the conflict rather than a narrow legalistic interpretation of ownership. This approach resonates with legal pluralism theories, such as those advanced by Santos (2014), which argue for integrating indigenous and customary legal systems into contemporary governance structures. By juxtaposing Tiv and Western legal traditions, *Kumen Mfe Nungwan Ibyumegh* warns against the dangers of over-intellectualization in legal and political processes. Knowledge, when detached from practical wisdom and communal experience, risks becoming counterproductive. This critique extends beyond legal frameworks to governance and policymaking, where an overreliance on theoretical models without contextual adaptation



often leads to ineffective or even harmful outcomes. The Tiv epistemic model, therefore, presents an alternative paradigm—one that values not just knowledge itself but the wisdom to apply it meaningfully within the complexities of human societies.

### **Critique of Eurocentrism and Epistemic Hierarchies**

One of the core critiques of Western epistemology is its inherent Eurocentrism—the assumption that European thought represents a universal standard for knowledge and intellectual inquiry. This bias, historically entrenched through colonialism and cultural imperialism, places European thinkers like Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau at the center of political philosophy, often at the expense of indigenous African knowledge systems. Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) critiques this Eurocentrism by showing how Western intellectual traditions have historically marginalized non-Western knowledge, categorizing it as inferior or “exotic.”

African scholars have long critiqued this marginalization. Kwasi Wiredu, in *Cultural Universals and Particulars* (1996), argues that African knowledge systems offer alternative frameworks that are no less rigorous or legitimate than their Western counterparts. He challenges the Western assumption that knowledge must be empirically verifiable to be valid, highlighting the role of communal knowledge and oral traditions in African societies. For example, in the Akan concept of *Sankofa* (“go back and fetch it”), knowledge is understood as a retrieval of wisdom from the past to inform the present. This pluralistic approach to epistemology contrasts with the monism of Western thought, which seeks to apply universal truths to all societies.

Ngugi wa Thiong'o, in *Decolonising the Mind* (1986), further critiques the ways Western educational systems have perpetuated these hierarchies. He argues that by privileging written texts, linear reasoning, and individualism, Western epistemology “others” African oral traditions, presenting them as primitive or less sophisticated. For example, the Western emphasis on written constitutions and formal legal systems often overlooks African governance structures, such as the consensus-building practices found in many African communities, including the Tiv council of elders (*Ijir Tamen*), which relies on oral deliberation and communal wisdom. These systems of governance, while not codified in written law, are deeply embedded in African political philosophy, and emphasize collective decision-making and moral responsibility.

### **Colonialism and the Institutionalization of Western Epistemology**

The dominance of Western epistemology in African societies can be traced back to the legacy of colonialism, which imposed European legal, political, and educational structures on African nations. Rodney (1972) explains how colonial powers systematically dismantled African knowledge systems and replaced them with European models of governance and education. Colonial education systems, for example, emphasized Western history, literature, and philosophy, positioning European knowledge as the universal standard. This not only eroded indigenous knowledge systems but also established intellectual hierarchies that privileged Western thought over African traditions.

Post-colonial African nations, in adopting Western political systems such as parliaments and formal bureaucracies, often found themselves at odds with indigenous governance structures. V. Y. Mudimbe, in *The Invention of Africa* (1988), critiques how this intellectual colonization imposed foreign epistemological standards on African societies. Mudimbe highlights how African knowledge systems, which emphasize oral traditions, communal decision-making, and spiritual understanding, were systematically excluded from academic and political discourse. For instance, the Tiv political concept of *ya na angbian* (“eat and share with your brother”) (Tughhemba, 2021) reflects a communal approach to governance and resource distribution, which contrasts with the Western individualistic focus on property rights and contractual governance as seen in Locke's *Two Treatises of Government* (cited in Gauba, 2008). Thus, we may not see anywhere a house of parliament in Tivland but the communal traditionalist consensual mode of decision-making intricately binds the humanistic values at the heart of traditional form of governance. In many places all over Tivland, it is the contrast between this form of governance and the western parody pasturing and holding sway by the western educated elites in crude exercise of western democracy that is the problem.

## The Universalization of Reason and Its Limitations in the Context of African Development

The intellectual foundations of Western epistemology are deeply rooted in the Enlightenment, a period that privileged reason, empiricism, and scientific inquiry as the primary means of acquiring knowledge. These epistemological commitments have significantly shaped global intellectual traditions, often positioning Western rationalism as the gold standard of knowledge production. However, the universalization of reason, while influential in advancing scientific and technological progress, has also been critiqued for its epistemic exclusivity, particularly in relation to non-Western knowledge systems. Scholars such as Kwame Anthony Appiah (1992) argue that the Enlightenment's emphasis on rationality led to epistemic imperialism, systematically marginalizing African ways of knowing by framing them as irrational or unscientific. This epistemic hegemony has implications for African development, where indigenous knowledge systems, which integrate spiritual, communal, and holistic dimensions, are often undervalued in favour of Western paradigms.

One of the most profound critiques of Western epistemology comes from African political philosophies, which offer alternative models of governance, social responsibility, and knowledge production. Ubuntu, a philosophical concept rooted in Southern African traditions, encapsulates the idea of interconnectedness and communal well-being. The phrase "*umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*" (often translated as "I am because we are") underscores the relational nature of human existence, in contrast to the individualism central to Western thought. Desmond Tutu (1999) highlights Ubuntu's role in post-apartheid reconciliation, emphasizing its potential as a governance model that prioritizes collective welfare over isolated individual rights. Ubuntu challenges the Cartesian dualism inherent in Western philosophy, proposing instead a more holistic and relational ontology that aligns with African communal traditions.

Similarly, the Tiv concept of *mzhehemen*, which translates to "development through communal effort," reflects the integration of spirituality, social cohesion, and collective progress in African epistemology. Unlike Western development models that often prioritize economic growth and individual competition, *mzhehemen* underscores the importance of mutual support, shared labor, and ethical leadership in achieving sustainable development. This perspective resonates with Amílcar Cabral's (1973) call for an epistemological decolonization that acknowledges and integrates indigenous African knowledge systems into contemporary governance and policy frameworks. By recognizing these alternative epistemologies, African societies can resist the uncritical imposition of Western rationalism and instead foster a more pluralistic and inclusive intellectual landscape.

The limitations of the universalization of reason become evident when considering the diverse epistemic traditions that have historically guided African societies. While reason and empiricism are valuable tools for intellectual inquiry, their dominance as the sole criteria for legitimate knowledge production risks erasing the epistemic contributions of non-Western traditions. As Wiredu (1996) contends, African philosophy must engage in a process of conceptual decolonization, critically evaluating Western categories of thought while simultaneously affirming the validity of indigenous epistemologies. This approach does not reject reason but instead expands its application to encompass the relational, spiritual, and communal dimensions of knowledge that are central to African thought.

While the Enlightenment's rationalist paradigm has contributed to scientific and intellectual progress, its universalization has often resulted in the marginalization of African epistemologies. By engaging with indigenous African knowledge systems, such as Ubuntu and *mzhehemen*, scholars and policymakers can develop more inclusive frameworks for governance, development, and intellectual inquiry. This epistemological pluralism not only challenges the dominance of Western rationality but also enriches global philosophical discourse by incorporating diverse ways of knowing.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION:

### Rediscovering African Knowledge for Sustainable Development

This paper concludes that knowledge is an inherently multidimensional and dynamic phenomenon that cannot be confined to a singular epistemological framework. Rather, knowledge must be understood within the

specific cultural, historical, and social contexts in which it is embedded. The dominant Western epistemic paradigms, largely shaped by rationalism and empiricism, have often been positioned as universally valid, leading to the marginalization of indigenous African ways of knowing. However, as the Tiv proverb "*Ka wea kumen mfe, u wan ibyumegh*" suggests, excessive reliance on external epistemological frameworks—without critical adaptation—can lead to the erosion of indigenous knowledge systems and epistemic dependency. This proverb underscores the epistemic violence that occurs when African intellectual traditions, rooted in oral traditions, spirituality, and communal wisdom, are dismissed or devalued.

In alignment with African scholars advocating for epistemic decolonization, this paper asserts that African intellectual traditions must be recognized as legitimate foundations for political philosophy, governance, and development. African proverbs provide alternative epistemological and governance frameworks that challenge the Eurocentric dominance in global knowledge production. These indigenous African traditions emphasize interconnectedness, ethical leadership, communal responsibility, and holistic development—values that are crucial for fostering sustainable governance and inclusive economic progress.

Nevertheless, this position does not suggest an outright rejection of Western intellectual traditions. It is important to acknowledge the valuable contributions of Western frameworks, such as the institutionalization of secularism, which has facilitated pluralism, democratic governance, and intellectual freedom. However, the applicability of these models in African contexts must be critically examined. Blindly replicating Western governance and development paradigms without considering indigenous African epistemologies risks perpetuating intellectual neocolonialism and undermining locally relevant solutions. Instead, a more constructive approach involves the synthesis of insights from diverse intellectual traditions, fostering innovation while maintaining cultural integrity.

Africa's quest for rediscovering and reclaiming its indigenous knowledge systems must be driven by a commitment to epistemic pluralism—an approach that integrates indigenous wisdom with contemporary advancements to construct development models that are both contextually relevant and globally competitive. Such an approach necessitates the revalorization of traditional African knowledge, which has historically provided frameworks for governance, conflict resolution, and economic sustainability. Critical dialogue between African and Western epistemologies should not be a matter of assimilation but rather a process of adaptation and mutual enrichment.

The rediscovery of African epistemologies presents a crucial opportunity not only for intellectual sovereignty but also for addressing deep-seated socio-political challenges, particularly the normalization of corruption. While indigenous knowledge systems emphasize communal welfare, reciprocity, and moral accountability, modern governance structures have often been co-opted by patronage networks that distort these values. In many African societies, corruption is no longer seen merely as a vice but is, in some instances, justified or even celebrated under the guise of ethnic solidarity and communal obligation. This phenomenon, often termed the *communalization of corruption*, occurs when individuals and communities rally behind corrupt leaders, not necessarily because they endorse corruption itself, but because they perceive these leaders as protectors of their ethnic or regional interests. This dynamic erodes trust in public institutions, undermines meritocracy, and perpetuates cycles of misgovernance and economic stagnation (Mbaku, 2020).

A concrete example of this phenomenon is Nigeria's political landscape, where high-profile corruption cases have often been met with ethnic and regional defenses. The 2015 trial of Sambo Dasuki, a former National Security Adviser accused of misappropriating \$2.1 billion in defense funds, was framed by some groups as a political witch hunt rather than an issue of national accountability (Owen & Usman, 2015). Similarly, the trial of former South African President Jacob Zuma, who was accused of corruption and state capture, was accompanied by widespread protests and ethnic mobilization, demonstrating how political elites exploit communal loyalties to evade justice (Southall, 2019). Rather than being viewed as an ethical failure, corruption is often rationalized as a necessary survival strategy in a system where political power is unequally distributed. The persistence of such attitudes makes the fight against corruption not just a legal or institutional challenge but also an epistemic and cultural one, requiring a re-engagement with indigenous moral frameworks that historically emphasized integrity and communal responsibility.

Historically, many African societies upheld stringent ethical codes that ensured communal accountability, with traditional governance systems designed to check abuses of power. Among the Igbo of Nigeria, for example, the *Ofo* system was a moral and judicial framework that emphasized truth and justice, where leaders who acted against communal interests were held accountable through public sanctions (Nwaubani, 1997). Similarly, in pre-colonial Tanzania, the *Ujamaa* philosophy emphasized collective responsibility, discouraging individual accumulation of wealth at the expense of the community (Shivji, 2009). Among the Tiv of central Nigeria, the concept of *ya na angbian*—which translates to “eat and give your brother”—was a guiding principle of wealth distribution and social justice. Rooted in the idea of mutual support, *ya na angbian* mandated that resources, including political and economic opportunities, be shared equitably among members of a community. In its original context, this principle fostered a culture of fairness and collective well-being, ensuring that no individual amassed excessive wealth at the expense of the group (Moti, 2010). However, in contemporary times, this philosophy has been manipulated to justify patronage and nepotism, where political elites distribute public resources not for communal welfare but as a means of securing loyalty and consolidating power. What was once an ethical system designed to promote fairness has been distorted into a mechanism for perpetuating corruption, demonstrating how the reinterpretation of indigenous values can either uphold accountability or enable unethical governance.

Addressing this challenge requires a reintegration of indigenous ethical frameworks into contemporary governance structures. Civic education that draws on indigenous moral philosophies, such as the Yoruba concept of *Omoluabi* (which emphasizes integrity, responsibility, and good character), can help reshape societal attitudes toward corruption. Furthermore, legal and institutional reforms must be complemented by community-driven anti-corruption mechanisms, where traditional councils and cultural institutions play an active role in holding leaders accountable. Some African countries have already begun incorporating these principles; for example, Botswana’s *kgotla* system—a traditional assembly where citizens openly deliberate on governance issues—continues to serve as a model for participatory democracy and transparency (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012). Similarly, Rwanda’s *Gacaca* courts, though primarily focused on post-genocide reconciliation, have demonstrated the effectiveness of indigenous judicial mechanisms in fostering communal accountability (Mutisi, 2011). By restoring indigenous ethical principles in governance, societies can create frameworks that emphasize transparency and responsibility without relying solely on external, Western-oriented models.

Beyond governance, achieving epistemic pluralism—the coexistence of multiple knowledge systems in shaping policy and governance—requires an intentional integration of African epistemologies into political and economic decision-making. This can be operationalized through hybrid governance models that combine traditional leadership structures with modern democratic institutions. For instance, Ghana’s National House of Chiefs plays a consultative role in legislative matters, ensuring that indigenous governance perspectives inform national policies (Ray & van Rouveroy, 1996). Additionally, the inclusion of indigenous dispute resolution methods in formal legal systems can enhance access to justice while reducing the inefficiencies associated with Western-style bureaucracies. By institutionalizing indigenous governance practices, Africa can create governance models that are both culturally authentic and responsive to contemporary socio-political challenges.

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