

Addressing Epistemic Injustice in African Feminism: Cultural Relativism in View

Wasilat Opeoluwa LASISI¹

Abstract

African gender reality has been greatly influenced by Western influence, and this creates a double challenge for African women. On one hand, the society sometimes ignores or undervalues what they know and experience. On the other, even feminist conversations can sometimes push ideas that do not fully fit African cultural realities. That being said, many African feminist scholars are pushing back by offering perspectives that are grounded in local contexts. This discussion examines the interconnection of gender, knowledge and justice in African settings, especially through the idea of epistemic injustice, which is basically the unfair treatment of women in relation to knowledge and understanding. Two key issues show up here: First is testimonial injustice, where African women are not taken seriously or believed; Second is hermeneutical injustice, where there simply are not enough shared ideas or language to properly explain their experiences. One possible way forward is cultural relativism. This means respecting and valuing indigenous knowledge systems instead of sidelining them. In the end, what is needed is a shift in how feminist thinking approaches knowledge, one that listens to African women and reflects their lived realities, rather than forcing them into borrowed frameworks.

Keywords: African Women, Cultural Relativism, Hermeneutic, Gender, Knowledge, Testimonial

¹wasilat.lasisi@lasu.edu.ng, Department of Philosophy, Lagos State University.

Introduction

Across the globe, marginalized groups often face barriers that prevent their voices from being heard and their knowledge from being taken seriously (Miller, 2004). African women, in particular, have long experienced such exclusion, both in society and in academia. Miranda Fricker (2007) noted that epistemic injustice occurs when individual's knowledge and experiences within society are systematically and unjustly subjugated and these have manifested in various forms: testimonial injustice, where a person's credibility is undermined based on stereotypes; hermeneutical injustice, where certain individuals are unable to fully make sense of their own experiences due to a lack of shared concepts within society (Fricker, 2007). One of the central issues of the domain of knowledge is the role of epistemic injustice on African women. African women, like many other marginalized groups, face various forms of epistemic injustice in academia, in society and in everyday interactions (Fricker, 2007), because they are being evidently silenced, dismissed or discredited in the knowledge production process.

This paper seeks to answer two central questions, which border on how testimonial and hermeneutical injustices undermine African women's credibility and ability to contribute to knowledge; and how a culturally informed perspective can help restore their epistemic authority. To achieve this, the paper takes a critical, analytical approach, and ideas from African feminist epistemology with examples from indigenous knowledge practices. It examines how societal stereotypes and dominant epistemic structures have contributed to silencing African women. The expected outcome is a framework in which cultural relativism is not used as a tool to challenge exclusion, honour African women's knowledge and integrate it into epistemic and academic communities.

The paper unfolds in four sections. The first section introduces the foundational concepts of epistemic injustice within African philosophy and establishes the conceptual framework for understanding the nature and significance of the problem. The second explores testimonial injustice that shows how African women's expertise and credibility are often unfairly undermined. The third examines hermeneutical injustice by highlighting the

ways African women are constrained in making sense of and communicating their experiences. The fourth section presents cultural relativism as a potential solution and illustrates how a contextually sensitive approach can restore credibility and promote inclusion. The paper closes by synthesizing these discussions and proposing ways to ensure African women's voices are heard, respected, valued and evaluated in knowledge production.

Understanding the Basic Underpinnings of Epistemic Injustices in African Philosophy

According to Fred Dretske (2000), the term 'epistemic' refers to beliefs, information, and knowledge that an individual possesses about the world. It is often used in the context of epistemology, the branch of philosophy that deals with the study of the nature and scope of knowledge. Paul Boghossian and Christopher Peacocke (2000) further explain that the term, epistemic, relates to the cognitive states of individuals, particularly their beliefs and the reason and evidence that support those beliefs. They argue that epistemic justification is the standard by which beliefs are evaluated, as it determines whether a knowledge claim is rational, credible and worthy of acceptance. In their view, a belief qualifies as knowledge when it is supported by adequate epistemic reasons, making epistemic justification indispensable to assessing the validity and reliability of knowledge claims. The word injustice means lack of justice or the violation of rights, in terms of unfair treatment, discrimination or violation of moral or legal principles (Kidd, Medina, Pohlhaus, 2017). In John Rawls' view, Injustice can be understood as a condition that arises when individuals in a society are deprived of their basic liberties and rights (Rawls, 1971). Martha Nussbaum (2006) contends that injustice extends beyond individual acts of unfairness to encompass broader social structures and systems that perpetuate inequality and discrimination.

Epistemic injustice, as defined by Fricker, has to do with the harm done to individuals through processes of testimonial marginalization and credibility deficits which result in their knowledge being dismissed or not taken seriously due to their social identity or position within society (Fricker 2007).

This form of injustice is particularly prevalent among marginalized groups, including African women who face specific challenges in having their knowledge and experiences recognized and validated based on factors such as gender, race, or other sociocultural characteristics.

Epistemic injustice is thus predicated on unequal formation within epistemic space. It is the idea that one can unfairly be discriminated against in one's capacity as a knower based on prejudices about one's gender, social background, ethnicity, race, sexuality, accent, and so on. Jane McConkey credited the concept of epistemic injustice to Fricker as the conferral of credibility upon knowledge claimants McConkey further and explained credibility as the believability a person possesses (McConkey, 2004). This credibility is conferred on individuals by the community and since it is the community or society that has the power to determine if one is believable or not, there is possibility of denying some group of people credibility to knowledge.

This means that the powerfully privileged ones seem to be more favoured in credibility assessment than the underprivileged, in this case, African women who suffer the injustice of credibility assessment (Tshivhase, 2021). Kenneth Abudu and Elvis Imafidon (2020), argue that epistemic injustice entails the suppression of others and monopolization of knowledge production and distribution. It is evident that epistemic injustice is a systematic and often deliberate process through which certain individuals or social groups are excluded from participating fully in the production, validation, interpretation and dissemination of knowledge on the bases of prejudice, stereotypes or entrenched social power relations (Dotson 2018; 2011). In this sense, epistemic injustice is not only about who knows what, but also whose voices are heard and whose experiences are considered credible.

Dennis Masaka (2017) posits that epistemic injustice is generally a form of epistemicide the aim of which aim is to destroy other epistemologies and their agents so that the hegemonic people and their epistemology assume a position of unchallenged superiority over the conquered people. In the so-called Global South, knowledge has been silenced because it does not

conform to the perceived standard of knowledge as set out by the West for the purpose of eroding the epistemology of the South. It can be argued that earlier than the inventing of the term 'epistemicide', a parallel precarious appraisal of the nuisance of the hegemonic knowledge model on the global South has been adequately done by a plethora of thinkers from the West such as Boaventura de Sousa Santos (Santos 2014). The aim of such a project is the elimination of indigenous knowledge and the glorification of the epistemologies of the West. This will now corroborate their erroneous conception that Africans are incapable of producing a system of thought that is purely African. This is the logic behind the denial of Africans' humanity; hence, epistemic injustice is the foundation of all other forms of injustice suffered by Africans.

Edet Mesembe (2018) posits that in the context of African women, epistemic injustice is a pervasive and systematic issue that has deep roots in historical and processes of colonization, patriarchy, and racism. There is no doubt that women have faced series of marginalization in various aspects of life. In terms of knowledge accreditation, African women have been deprived of their knowledge capability and credibility (Mesembe 2018; Uchendu & Kwaghe, 2021). African women are often subjected to multiple layers of oppression, which contribute to their experience of epistemic injustices. This leads to a lack of recognition and validation of their experiences, expertise and knowledge. The intersectional oppression faced by African women originated from their gender, race and other social identities, yet, as noted by Mesembe, the history of African philosophy may be incomplete if the importance of women's perspectives is underestimated (Mesembe 2018).

The subjection of African women to multiple layers of oppression underscores the fact that they experience discrimination and marginalization on various fronts, say, stereotypes and assumptions which can exacerbate their epistemic injustices. It is arguable that the history of African philosophy is the history of male dominance in the intellectual space (Mesembe 2018). This is evident in the exclusion of female African philosophers in the historiography written by some early African philosophers. Notable among them are Paulin Hountondji's 1983 book titled *African Philosophy: Myth and*

Reality, which surveys the development of African philosophy almost exclusively through male philosophers; and D. A. Masolo's *African Philosophy in Search of Identity*, which focuses overwhelmingly on male intellectuals. To buttress this point, Bernard Matolino avers that the philosophical enterprise has long been treated as a male space, and this has influenced who gets remembered. He shows that even African philosophers, the likes of Odera Oruka, almost overlooked women and ignored their roles in political struggle and intellectual life. His *Sage Philosophy* sought to demonstrate that philosophy existed in Africa through the reflections of indigenous sages, almost exclusively male sages. So, the absence of women from the project prompted the question of whether the criteria for identifying philosophical sages, or the social contexts in which they were sought, inadvertently reproduced existing gender hierarchies within African societies.

This is probably why Matolino insisted that African women were systematically pushed out of philosophy. They get a bad deal within epistemic space, but the agencies and reasons for this intellectual quagmire have been underexplored. Some scholars focus heavily on women's rights while, perhaps unknowingly, overlooking the fundamental epistemic right that underpins all other rights. Evaristus Eyo and Precious Obioha (2021) note that epistemic injustice is the foundation of all forms of gender subjugation in African philosophy and epistemology, in particular. Mesembe has also raised some significant questions as to whether there is any form of justice in African philosophy when the works of Odera Oruka and Kwasi Wiredu are considered, but those of Sophie Oluwole and Anke Graness are ignored (Mesembe 2018). A deep reflection on this subject matter will clearly point to the fact that there is no justice in doing so, and thus, a need for reconstruction of the African epistemological edifice. Without mincing words, the structure of African epistemology is set in such a way that it excludes women from the framework. Jonathan Chimakonam (2015), on his part, contends that African epistemology, if beclouded with gender exclusion, can lead to a one-sided philosophical enterprise.

One would begin to wonder what the justification for the epistemic oppression against women might be, though it has been argued by Uduma O.

Uduma (2018), in response to Mesembe, that there is no evidence to support the claim that African philosophy has been consciously made a male-dominated profession. According to him, since there appears to be no deliberate attempt to maintain male control over the production of ideas in African philosophy, there is an absence of intentional gender bias in the field. However, Matolino (2018) noted that one could counter-argue that this perspective undermines the existential condition of women. Women have historically been marginalized and the discrimination they face has often been subtle rather than overt. Thus, the prevailing epistemic exclusion despite the apparent complementary and communitarian society.

Invariably, due to the existing prejudice that the words of a woman do not possess much weight as the words of a man, women are often deprived of credibility. Thus, as Eyo and Obioha (2022) argued, women are denied the freedom to express themselves and it leads in the long run to the existence and practice of testimonial epistemic injustice in the African space. They viewed the dominant two-valued logic system as the foundation of a skewed binary opposition, which fosters and maintains epistemic injustice against women. Invariably, the epistemic edifice is erected in unequal and diametrically opposition to each other. But credit should be accorded Jonathan Chimakonam's *Ezumezu logic*, which rides on the crest of a trivalent system of logic (Chimakonam 2019), a prototype of African logic, and is a testimony to the fact that contemporary African epistemology is founded on inclusivity (Eyo & Obioha, 2022). It is here that the experiences and perspectives of women would be given due consideration. It is a complementary epistemology that seeks to remove all artificial barriers, bifurcations, and marginalization. Thus, credibility will be given to all, irrespective of sex or gender.

African Women, Knowledge System and Testimonial Injustice

Testimonial injustice, a specific type of epistemic injustice, as discussed by Fricker (2007), occurs when someone is given less credibility or is not believed based on stereotypes and prejudices. In today's society, testimonial injustice is a prevalent form of epistemic injustice that disproportionately

affects women. In the case of African women, testimonial injustice is rooted in racism, sexism, and colonialism which have historically marginalized and silenced their voices. African women are particularly vulnerable to testimonial injustice due to the intersecting oppressions of gender and race they face in society (Henriques, 1995). In education, African women may be doubted or discredited by teachers and peers, thereby leading to lower academic achievement and limited opportunities for advancement. In the workplace, African women may be overlooked for promotions or assigned menial tasks due to stereotypes about their competence and abilities (Cooke & Hastings 2023). This may result in devastation, feelings of inadequacy, alienation, self-doubt, and low self-esteem (Fricker 2007). Being constantly discredited or not believed can erode their sense of agency and autonomy and can make it difficult for them to advocate for themselves and assert their rights (Cooke & Hastings 2023). In academic settings, African women are sometimes dismissed or ignored in discussions and research on important social issues. This erasure not only deprives them of the opportunity to contribute to knowledge creation and scholarship but also perpetuates the stereotype that their voices are not valuable or credible. They may be disbelieved or scrutinized when they report instances of discrimination, violence, or micro-aggressions. This lack of credibility not only diminishes the agency and autonomy of African women but also aggravates harmful stereotypes and power dynamics.

Hermeneutic Injustice and African Women

Fricker (2007) refers to hermeneutic injustice as the harm done to individuals by being deprived of the resources needed to interpret their own experiences. African women encounter hermeneutic injustice in various aspects of their lives, which hinders their ability to make sense of their experiences and articulate their perspectives. In societal narratives and dominant discourses, their voices are often marginalized and this sometimes leads to lack of representation and recognition of their unique experiences and knowledge (Fricker 2007).

The dominant culture may not have the concepts to comprehend and appreciate the experiences of African women, which results in misinterpretations or misunderstandings, since their perspectives and narratives may be distorted or dismissed. The inability to convey their experiences and perspectives can result in feelings of frustration, disempowerment, and alienation (Fricker 2007).

It is arguable that one of the factors that engendered hermeneutic injustice is colonialism. For instance, Christian missionaries promoted European ideals of womanhood that emphasizes domesticity and subservience to men (Abdullahi, 2022). This conflicted with the roles African women held in their communities, such as leaders, warriors, midwives or traders (Ngcobo, 2024; Muraina & Ajímatanraèje, 2023). The introduction of Missionary education, which they claimed aimed to civilize African women by teaching them European domestic skills discouraged traditional practices. More often than not, colonial economies often relied on the exploitation of African women's labour in agriculture, medicine, domestic service and informal sectors. European colonial powers restructured local economies to serve their interests in such a way that devalues women's traditional roles and economic contributions.

Cultural Relativism: Epistemological Shift in Addressing Epistemic Injustice in African Feminism

Feminine epistemologies challenge the dominant patriarchal narratives that have historically shaped knowledge production and dissemination by creating space for alternative ways of knowing that recognize the embodied, relational and contextual dimensions of knowledge (Hooks, 1984). In the previous sections of this paper, Fricker's notion of testimonial and hermeneutical injustice has been explored. However, African women, who have been marginalized and silenced within traditional epistemic frameworks, stand to benefit from a shift towards feminine epistemologies that honour their voices and indigenous experiences (hooks 1984). In the discourse surrounding epistemic injustices faced by African women, there is a growing recognition of the need for an epistemological shift that centers on

feminine perspectives and experiences. Cultural relativism, a theory that asserts that beliefs, values, customs and social practices can only be properly understood within the cultural contexts in which they emerge, provides a powerful framework for addressing epistemic injustices as experienced by African women.

The theory emerged as a reaction against nineteenth century ethnocentrism and unilinear theories that measured all societies against Western standards of civilization and rationality. Franz Boas (1940) argued that every culture develops according to its own unique historical circumstances and therefore should be understood on its own terms rather than judged by external criteria. This idea was further developed by Ruth Benedict (1934) who demonstrated that cultural values are internally coherent and meaningful within their respective societies. Within this perspective, the knowledge, experience and interpretive practices of African women can no longer be dismissed simply because they differ from dominant patriarchal models and norms. Instead, their voices, indigenous knowledge system and lived experiences become legitimate sources of knowledge that deserve equal recognition. Consequently, cultural relativism is adopted as an important epistemological shift that challenges exclusionary knowledge structures, questions inherited assumptions about authority and rationality, and creates space for recognizing African women's epistemic agency and contributions on their own cultural and historical terms.

Cultural relativism asserts the value of understanding cultural practices from within the context of the culture itself, rather than through an external or universal lens. In the context of epistemic injustice experienced by African women, cultural relativism can provide a means for striking a balance by acknowledging the diverse perspectives and knowledge systems that shape their experiences. It is a counterpoint to ethnocentrism and Western-centric perspectives that often dominate discourses on knowledge and epistemic norms both locally and globally. In the case of African women, cultural relativism recognizes the importance of understanding and valuing the knowledge systems, beliefs, and practices that are specific to their cultural contexts.

Cultural relativism underscores the need to consider the multiple layers of oppression and privilege that African women navigate in their lives, thereby stressing a dynamic approach to understanding the complexities of epistemic injustice on African women and the ways in which their voices are silenced or marginalized. This will allow for an intersectional analysis that takes into account the interconnected dynamics of race, gender, class, and culture in understanding and addressing epistemic injustices.

Cultural relativism emphasizes the importance of understanding another culture's beliefs and practices from the perspective of that culture itself, rather than judging them by the standards of one's own culture. It does not claim that anything goes, nor does it deny the possibility of judgement; rather, it insists that judgement should begin with understanding. In a global world, common ground is not created by imposing a single supposedly neutral standard, but by recognizing that moral meanings grow out of lived histories, social struggles and shared vulnerabilities. Far from being arbitrary, this approach demands intellectual humility and encourages us to listen before we evaluate. Objectivity, on this view, is not abandoned but reconceived as something achieved through dialogue across cultures, rather than declared in advance by the most powerful voices. The concern about women's rights is more serious, and cultural relativism creates space to challenge injustice from within cultural contexts, based on internal values, histories of resistance and women's own voices. Cultures are not monoliths. They are contested, evolving and full of disagreement. Cultural, rather than rigid relativism, allows us to recognize women's oppression without assuming that liberation must always look Western. In this way, cultural understanding becomes a resource for critique but not an excuse for silence.

This principle, which has its roots in anthropological studies, challenges ethnocentrism and prioritizes the appreciation of cultural diversity. It stresses that no culture is superior to another, and each culture has its own intrinsic value and logic (exemplified by *Ezumezu* logic, *aji-o-gbeta*, etc.) and involves recognizing the validity and richness of African women's knowledge systems and experiences (Crenshaw 1989, 151). Chimakonam notes that there is an urgent need for women themselves to narrate their points of view, rather than

the male thinking for them (Chimakonam 2018). This thought from Chimakonam geared towards cultural relativism and promotes dialogue and exchange across women of different cultural traditions that will invariably foster opportunities for learning and growth. To this end, cross-cultural interactions that are based on mutual respect and reciprocity, can allow African women to share and exchange knowledge, experiences and perspectives in ways that enrich and expand collective understanding of the world (Chimakonam 2017). Thus, the works of Sophie Oluwole, Nkiru Nzeogbu, Chimamanda Adichie, Omolara Ogundipe-Leslie, Mesembe Edet, Oyeronke Oyewumi, Anita Allen and so on, ought to be revisited and built upon by early-career female scholars in order to avert any further forms of epistemic injustice on women.

Another way through which cultural relativism can address epistemic injustices is by validating many epistemologies. African women possess rich, indigenous knowledge systems and methodologies, that range from traditional medicine and agriculture to conflict resolution, spiritual practices and informal economies. They are frequently the backbone of rural economies and are responsible for a significant portion of food production and market trading which contrasts with the roles women play in highly industrialized societies. This calls for understanding African women lived experiences. For instance, the use of traditional herbal medicine by African women is often dismissed as unscientific or superstitious by Western medical standards (Abdi, 2023). However, a culturally relativistic approach acknowledges the empirical knowledge and cultural significance embedded in these practices. This recognition not only validates the experiences and expertise of African women but also enriches the global knowledge pool by incorporating diverse perspectives and practices.

Epistemic injustice does not begin when a belief is carefully examined and then questioned, it begins when a belief is dismissed before it is even listened to. Calling African women's herbal knowledge superstitious without first trying to understand how it works or what evidence sustains it is a way of refusing them credibility from the start. The harm is not in criticism; it is in shutting the door on a knowledge system simply because it does not look like

Western science. In this case, the injustice is the pre-judgement. African women are not being argued with, instead, they are being ignored. As earlier discussed, the construction of African philosophical canon by influential scholars like Oruka, Bodunrin, Masolo and Barry Hallen, together with the curriculum developers and university departments, played a significant role in establishing a canon that overwhelmingly privileged male voices. Although these scholars made foundational contributions to African philosophy, the limited inclusion of African women philosophers in their works contributed to the invisibility of women's epistemic contributions within the discipline.

The credibility and voice of African women can be enhanced through cultural relativism by challenging prejudiced stereotypes and biases that undermine their testimonial authority. This rests on the recognition that cultures are not fixed authorities but lived, contested spaces shaped by power, history and human agency. Cultural relativism, properly understood, asks us to evaluate African women's voices within their cultural contexts, not beneath them. This means grounding credibility in women's actual epistemic contributions, on their roles as healers, caregivers, political actors, storytellers and moral reasoners rather than in inherited stereotypes about gender or tradition.

Challenging bias, then, is not an external imposition of foreign values, but an internal moral demand that arises from within cultures themselves, where values such as communal well-being, justice, wisdom and care already exist. Through this, cultural relativism becomes a tool for restoring testimonial authority, not by denying culture, but by refusing to treat patriarchal interpretations as the final or authentic voice of that culture. When African women's voices are discredited due to racist or sexist prejudices, their ability to participate in epistemic communities is severely compromised, but an equitable evaluation of testimonies where the cultural context of the speaker is taken into account can ensure their credibility. For example, in academia, African women's contributions are often undervalued due to biases that prioritize Western methodologies and perspectives (Abrahamsen, 2003). A culturally relativistic approach would involve creating academic spaces that

are inclusive of diverse research methods and epistemic frameworks that enhance the credibility and voice of African women scholars. This not only addresses testimonial injustice but also enriches academic discourse with a broader range of insights and perspectives. African women can contribute their unique knowledge to the epistemic landscape to enrich and expand our understanding of the world from a contextually feminine standpoint (Lugones, 1987).

It should be noted that the understanding of cultural relativism in this paper is not a familiar call for tolerance, rather, it is advanced here as an epistemic corrective void of mere moral slogan. What distinguishes this argument from much of the existing literature is not the claim that African women possess knowledge, but it is the insistence on where injustice actually occurs: at the moment of pre-emptive dismissal. The argument here shows, through concrete examples such as herbal medicine, agriculture and informal economies, that African women's knowledge is not rejected after evaluation but excluded before evaluation because it does not fit dominant epistemic templates. Cultural relativism as conceptualized in this paper is not used to suspend critique, but to reorder the terms of engagement and demand that knowledge claims be first understood within the cultural and material conditions that produce them. In doing so, it exposes how supposedly neutral standards function as exclusion mechanisms that silence certain knowers. This move shifts the debate from abstract pluralism to lived epistemic harm and demonstrates that cultural relativism, when critically applied, is necessary for restoring credibility, voice and participation to African women within global epistemic communities.

Oyèrónké Oyèwùmí's charge for conception of an African feminist thought that transcends Western-centric frameworks has an undertone of cultural relativism. She argues that Western gender categories are not universally applicable and that African societies have their unique social structures and understanding of gender. She noted the importance of decentering Western norms and recognizing the distinctiveness of African cultures. Her position that pre-colonial Yoruba society, for example, did not organize itself strictly along gender lines as understood in the West but rather

based on seniority and relational roles, highlights the necessity of developing an epistemology rooted in African cultural contexts and historical realities, rather than imposing Western gender binaries on African experiences (Oyewumi, 1997).

Oyèwùmí, like Sophie Oluwole, mentions the influence of language on knowledge and experience. She points out that many African languages do not have gendered pronouns, which influences how gender is perceived and understood. Consequently, if indigenous languages and concepts are prioritized, African feminist epistemology can better reflect the lived realities of African women (Oyewumi, 1997).

Sophie Oluwole's advocacy for an indigenous African philosophy and cultural practices exemplifies the necessity of reclaiming and reinterpreting African intellectual traditions, particularly in the context of feminist thought. She stresses the importance of indigenous knowledge systems and argues that African societies possess rich intellectual traditions. For example, she often referenced Yoruba philosophy and the works of ancient African philosophers like *Orunmila* to illustrate how traditional African thought systems can inform contemporary feminist epistemology (Oluwole, 1997), although it may be argued that the foundation of Oluwole's quest for indigenous philosophy is itself based on a male-centric orientation.

Oluwole calls for a critical examination of the impacts of colonialism and Western education on African thought. She believes that colonialism disrupted and devalued African intellectual traditions and imposed Western frameworks that often marginalize or misrepresent African perspectives (Oluwole 1997).

African women may experience forms of social oppression that are not adequately captured by Western feminist frameworks. Cultural practices such as female genital mutilation or early marriage, while widely condemned in Western discourse, are deeply embedded in certain cultural contexts and carry complex social and cultural meanings. While these practices may be deeply embedded and even supported by women within their communities, understanding them requires more than labeling them as either good or bad from an external perspective. Cultural relativism encourages us to first listen,

understand and situate these practices within their social and cultural context, recognize the pressures, meanings and communal norms that sustain them. It is not about condoning harm, but about approaching these realities with humility and care, rather than imposing judgement from the outside. At the same time, it redefines how it is done. Rather than dismissing women's choices outright, it supports dialogue within the community and empower women to question, reinterpret and transform harmful practices from within. Change that emerges through internal reflection and culturally intelligible processes is more meaningful and respectful of women's agency. In this way, cultural relativism provides a framework for addressing oppression while centering the voices and experiences of the women directly affected.

A culturally relativistic approach would involve engaging with these practices in a context-sensitive manner and seek to understand the underlying cultural logics and motivations rather than outright condemnation of the practices. This does not mean condoning harmful practices, but rather approaching them with a respect for cultural complexity and a commitment to collaborative and culturally informed solutions.

Conclusion

Epistemic injustice of women in Africa n is multifaceted, and it is linked to sociocultural factors such as race, gender and societal background. To address this, this paper argues for the pressing need for an epistemological shift in feminist discourse that genuinely honours the voices and experiences of African women. The paper started by examining the manifestations of epistemic injustice, such as testimonial and hermeneutical injustices and reveals how African women are often marginalized within both societal structures and feminist discourses that impose Western paradigms of gender equality.

The proposed solution of cultural relativism lies in the emphasis of the importance of recognizing and valorizing indigenous knowledge systems and cultural practices. This approach advocates for an inclusive feminist discourse that respects and integrates the cultural contexts in which African women live and eradicating the dominance of Western feminist paradigms.

Although African feminist scholars have already made significant strides in developing alternative theories that highlight the unique cultural contexts and experiences of African women, the effort at recognizing cultural relativity is crucial in combating the dual marginalization faced by African women and in creating feminist interventions that are both equitable and relevant to their lived realities, thus, a call for re-imagining feminist enterprise, one that moves away from a one-size-fits-all approach, and instead embraces diversity of women's experiences across different cultural contexts.

References

- Abdi, A. (2023). "Epistemic Injustices in African Studies: Root and Remedies," *Dhaxalreeb*, Vol. 19 No. 1, 29-46.
- Abdullahi, S. (2022). Women and the Christian Missionary Encounter in the Jos Plateau Area of British Nigeria. *African Journal of Social Sciences Education*, 2(1), 22-49. DOI: 10.64712/ajsse.v2i1.90
- Abrahamsen, R. (2003) "African Studies and the Postcolonial Challenge," *African Affairs*, Vol. 102 Iss. 407, 189-210. <https://doi.org/10.1093/afraf/adg001>.
- Abudu K., Imafidon E. (2020) "Epistemic Injustice, Disability, and Queerness in African Cultures," *Handbook of African Philosophy of Difference*, pp. 393-410. Springer Nature.
- Benedict, R. (1934) *Patterns of Culture*. Houghton Mifflin
- Boas, F. (1940) *Race, Language and Culture*. The Free Press
- Boghossan, P. & Peacocke, C. (2000) *New Essays on the A priori*, Oxford University Press.
- Chimakonam, J. (2019) *Ezumezu: A System of Logic for African Philosophy and Studies*, Springer Nature
- Chimakonam, J. (2018) "Addressing the Epistemic Marginalization of Women in African Philosophy and Building a Culture of conversations," Jonathan Chimakonam and Louise du Toit (eds) *African Philosophy and the Epistemic Marginalization of Women*, pp8-21, Routledge.
- Chimakonam, J. (2017) "African Philosophy and Global Epistemic Injustice," *Journal of Global Ethics*, Vol. 13, pp1-18, 10.1080/17449626.2017.1364660.
- Cooke C., Hastings J. (2023) "Black Women Social Workers: Workplace Stress Experiences," *Qual Soc Work*, doi: 10.1177/14733250231151954. PMCID: PMC9841199.

- Crenshaw, K. (1989) "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Anti-discrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics," *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, Vol. 140, pp139-167,
- Dotson, K. (2011) "Tracking Epistemic Violence, Tracking Practices Of Silencing," *Hypatia*, Vol. 26 No. 2, pp. 236-257.
- Dotson, K. (2018) "Accumulating Epistemic Power: A Problem with Epistemology," *Philosophical Topics*, Vol. 46, No. 1, pp.129-154, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26529454>.
- Dretske, F. (2000) *Perception, Knowledge, and Belief*, Cambridge University Press.
- Eyp, E. & Obioha, P. (2020) "African Epistemology and Epistemic Injustice Against Women: Complementary Epistemology to the Rescue," *Sapiential Journal of Philosophy*, pp.144-154.
- Fricker, M. (2007) *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing*, Oxford University Press.
- Henriques, Z. (1995) "African-American Women: The Oppressive Intersection of Gender, Race and Class," *Women and Criminal Justice* Vol. 7 No. 1, pp67-80.
- hooks, b. (1984) *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*, South End Press.
- Kidd, J., Medina, J., and Pohlhaus G. (2017) *The Routledge Handbook of Epistemic Injustice*, Routledge.
- Lugones, M. (1987) "Playfulness, "World"-traveling, and Loving Perception," *Hypatia*, Vol. 2 No. 2. pp3-19,
- Masaka, D. (2017) "Global Justice and the Suppressed Epistemologies of the Indigenous People of Africa," *Philosophical Papers*, Vol. 46 No. 1. pp59-84,
- Matolino, B. (2018) "African Philosophy's Injustice against Women," Chimakonam Jonathan. and Louisedu Toit. (eds.). *African Philosophy and the Epistemic Marginalization of Women*, pp.126-141, Routledge.
- Mcconkey, J. (2004) "Knowledge and Acknowledgement: Epistemic Injustice as a Problem of Recognition," [Politics], Vol.24 No.3, pp198-205.
- Mesembe, E. (2018) "Women in the His-story of Philosophy and the Imperative for a Her-storical Perspective in Contemporary African Philosophy," Chimakonam, Jonathan and Louise du Toit (eds) *African Philosophy and the Epistemic Marginalization of Women*, pp. 155-166, Routledge.
- Miller, D. (2024) "Epistemic Injustice against Khoi-Coloured Women from the Cape: Connected Encounters with the Matriarchal Lineages of Krotoa," *Journal*

- of International Women's Studies*, Article 7. Vol. 26: Iss. 3, Available at: <https://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol26/iss3/7>
- Muraina, O. & Ajimatanraeje, A. J. (2023) "Gender Relations in Indigenous Yorùbá Culture: Questioning Current Feminist Actions and Advocacies" *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 44 No. 9, pp2031-2045 <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2023.2213171>
- Ngcobo, S. (2024) "The conquest of black African women: A collusion of church and coloniality in Africa," *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies*, Vol. 80 No. 2. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v80i2.9034>.
- Nussbaum, M. (2006) *Frontiers of Justice: Disability, Nationality, Species Membership*, Harvard University Press.
- Oluwole, S. (1997) *Socrates and Orunmila: Two Patron Saints of Classical Philosophy*, University of Ibadan Press.
- Oyewumi, O. (1997) *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Rawls, J. (1971). *A Theory of Justice*, Belknap Press.
- Santos, B. (2014) *Epistemologies of the South: Justice against Epistemicide*, Routledge.
- Tshivatse, M. (2021) "Understanding and (Re)configuring Personhood: Contra Systemic Dehumanisation," Molefe, Motsamai and Allsobrook, Christopher. (eds.), *Towards an African Political Philosophy of Needs* pp109-129. Springer Nature.
- Uchendu, E., Kwaghe, Z. (2021). "Challenges of Writing African Women's Histories." Yacob-Haliso, Olajumoke & Falola, Toyin (eds) *The Palgrave Handbook of African Women's Studies* Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-28099-4_8
- Uduma, U. (2018) "Are Women Marginalized in African philosophy?" Jonathan Chimakonam Jonathan. and Louise du Toit. (eds.). *African Philosophy and the Epistemic Marginalization of Women*, pp219-248. Routledge.