



Research Paper

Testimony as Valorisation Instrument for African Socio-Moral Epistemology

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ABSTRACT

Overwhelmingly, testimony constitutes a perennial fundamental and indispensable mechanism of indigenous knowledge validation, as well as the nucleus of socio-moral epistemology. It incorporates the transmission of trustworthy information, beliefs, truth, and justifiable knowledge; largely realizable in communicative communal acts, rather than individual scopes. Hence, due to its exceptional dependence or reliance on oral tradition, testimony in African socio-moral epistemology hoists plethora of challenges and criticisms. Inevitably, this article draws awareness to perspectives of valorisation of testimony; cognisant of its socio-moral and epistemic nuances and procedures, for validation and credibility, trust, assignment of worth, authority authentication, and justification of sources. However, in acknowledging and resonating the fact of testimony as an indispensable valorisation instrument for African socio-moral epistemology, it is necessary to accentuate the idea that akin to memory, it does not generate knowledge that was not previously there; inversely, it preserves knowledge in its entirety. Consequently, this article expounds on fundamental testimonial components of African socio-moral epistemology, and engages specifically on challenges of testimony as a valorisation instrument and prospects.

KEY TERMS: African, Testimony, Valorization, instrument, Social, Moral, Epistemology

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I. INTRODUCTION

Testimony is vital for acquisition and validation of knowledge in diverse fields: science, law, daily life, and practical social sciences. The testimony of others in African socio-moral epistemology is so fundamental in the process of gaining knowledge pertaining to the world. Therefore, visualizing it as ordinary empirical sign of the testified and deemed generally dependable, even if distanced from infallibility becomes relevant. Notwithstanding its credibility, testimony attracts criticisms, for instance in Simon Blackburn's perception:

Critics point out that it [testimony] is impossible for the individual to check or single-handedly verify what he or she is told enough of the time to generate a statistic of this reliability; so testimony needs to have a default title to credit built into it. (BLACKBURN Simon, 2008: 361)

Certainly, aforementioned observations are pertinent apropos testimony; yet, it is dazzlingly a fundamental source of indigenous knowledge, vis-à-vis its role of trust pertaining to social practices, moral dimensions and valorisation, epistemic injustice, and confrontations with direct knowledge, and contextual valuation.

Generally, African epistemologies highlight the centrality of testimony beyond mere acquisition of beliefs; exceptionally isolating witnessing as African social moral epistemology's admission of knowledge via others' expressions. This is predominantly within communitarian contexts; exceeding passively generated justified and integrated broader perspectives for understanding reality as full of interconnectedness. Jennifer Lackey corroborates from a diversified spectrum other than the African perspective in relation to perceptions, conceptions, and apprehensions:

[Fewer] consensus, however, are found when questions about the nature and extent of our dependence on the word of others arise. Is our justified reliance on testimony fundamentally basic, for instance, or is it ultimately reducible to perception, memory, and reason? Is trust, or some related interpersonal feature of our social

interaction with one another, essential to the acquisition of beliefs that are testimonially justified? (LACKEY Jennifer, 2011: 71)

The forgone lines suggest that testimony as a valorisation instrument in African socio-moral epistemology, identifies puzzles whether testimonial knowledge inevitably gains acquisition through variable diffusion from speaker to hearer, or generate vindicated epistemic characteristics of its own genre and right.

Consequently, although testimony is visualized as a generative source of indigenous knowledge regarding African socio-moral epistemology in general, and the Nso' of Cameroon (as case study) in particular, critical engagement in this research goes beyond blind approval; sourcing justification or valorisation that embraces credibility and coherence of facts connecting knowledge and experience. Hence, communal validation, trust and reliability, moral authority and authentication, intergenerational valuation, and verification override individualistic epistemology.

Subsequently, addressing dimensions of testimony as a valorisation instrument in African socio-moral epistemology unequivocally imposes the socio-cultural, critical analytic, hermeneutic, experiential, and dialectical methods. In order to evade the dangers of epistemic injustice, this article explores intrigues of valorization, valuation, interpretation, and affirmative perceptions, geared towards establishing credibility and value of testimony; determined by social norms and trust, rather than mere subjective independent verification. This compels us to structuralize this research into two major parts: fundamental testimonial components of African socio-moral epistemology and challenges of testimony as valorisation instrument; complemented by prospects or the way forward. Equally, each of the parts accommodates four sectors each, and culminates with a general conclusion and bibliography for further exploration.

1. FUNDAMENTAL TESTIMONIAL COMPONENTS OF AFRICAN SOCIO-MORAL EPISTEMOLOGY

In order to understand testimony as valorization instrument in African socio-moral epistemology, we must transcend mere belief (through oral tradition) as a generative source of knowledge and communitarian validation frameworks, to critical engagement. To this end, verification, justification, and core codes for validating testimony in indigenous knowledge includes features associated with witnessing, trust and reliability, testimony and moral authority, testimony and communitarian-based validation, testimony: perception, retention, and teleology. At the forefront of these, are concepts of perception and reason preceding every knowing process. Bartholomew Abanuka fittingly estimates these as concepts immediately obtained from sense perception; for instance, the concept "red," immediately given in sense perception, established in particular things and their sensible characteristics. In the second instant, he intimates that concepts of reason compliment perception; although based on sense experience, in themselves articulate general characteristics that are not concretely given to the senses. (ABANUKA Bartholomew, 1994: 68) Thus, as foundational elements of testimony, the concepts of perception and reason in African thought, especially in Bantu cultures, summarise the classical western five senses into two: "to see" and "to hear;" expressing also to smell, feel, and taste. Consequently, perception and reason cannot be divorced from testimony apropos ancestral affirmation. In connection, Abanuka once more intimates:

We perceive human beings walking the streets not ancestors. However, the concept of ancestry is derived from sense experience as a support for human values and aspirations. That is, in the sense that it gives some meaning to certain practices or beliefs of community. (ABANUKA Bartholomew, 1994: 69)

In highlighting perception, Abanuka outrightly vindicates aspects of intelligence wrapped in reason, and applicable to validating testimonial claims. This recalls Christopher Seka's consideration of the Nso' sage's assertion that *wir ker vifi*: humankind as endowed with intelligence/reason. (SEKA Christopher, 1985: 7) Hence, Abanuka and Seka rightly underscore intelligence as consisting of the capacity to interpret the signs of time, historical events, as well as taking a stance for or against phenomena as they suit the concerned in relation to testimony.

1.1. TESTIMONY IN RELATION TO WITNESSING, TRUST, AND RELIABILITY

Testimony as a process in African thought corresponds with witnessing, trust, and reliability. Implicitly, individuals' informative statements must obligatorily be recounted with precision to related circumstances; expressed unreservedly without cause for uncertainty or imprecision. Barry Hallen affirms:

Determining whether the information derives from the speaker's firsthand or second-hand experience is part of this process. A person's diligence in doing this also considers important evidence of their moral character. With specific reference to moral epistemology, at least four positive behavioural values need emphasis: [1] Being scrupulous about the epistemological basis for whatever one claims to know, to believe, or to have no information about. [2] Being a good listener; with emphasis upon cognitive understanding rather than a polite and respectful demeanour. [3] Being a good speaker; with emphasis upon speaking in a positive, thoughtful, and

perceptive manner, rather than merely having beautiful elocution. [4] Having patience; with emphasis upon being calm and self-controlled in judgment and intellect, rather than merely in manner and demeanour. (HALLEN Barry, 2006: 301-302).

Significantly, Africans just as their western counterparts are apprehensive about exercising control over the quality of information emitted in public spheres. In an oral dominated culture, such as African indigenous knowledge contentions, testimony establishes valorisation principles for epistemological virtues; founded on their instrumental value that promotes information accuracy. Hence, oral tradition as a central value in many African cultures, base heavy reliance on testimony for transmitting knowledge, moral values, and history; imperative for justification and validation of truths.

1.2. TESTIMONY AND MORAL AUTHORITY

A further exploration of testimony as a valorisation instrument in African worldview proceeds from its dimensions of witnessing, trust, and reliability; to its foundation on moral authority. For instance, commencing with divination as a way of knowing, every human community (even in the Greek culture of the west) recognizes a need for the special knowledge gained via divination. Despite much knowledge lost, consequent of earlier prejudices against divination, moral authority in relation to testimony continues to animate sheer volume of information gained current and ever-increasing thorough investigations concerning divination. Philip M. Peek in agreement intimates that:

Throughout Africa, whether in the city or in the countryside, no matter the religion, sex, or status of the individual, questions, problems, and choices arise for which everyday knowledge is insufficient and yet action must be take. The information necessary to respond effectively is available, but often only through a diviner. That is why divination continues to provide a trusted means of decision-making, a basic source of vital knowledge. (PEEK M. Philip, 1998: 171)

Evidently, as moral authorities' vis-à-vis testimony, diviners guard a trusted system in African socio-moral epistemology; enclosed in standardized processes for deriving truth facts and reliable learned discipline based on extensive bodies of knowledge. Although diverse and believed to entertain obtained inaccessible information, diviners as moral authorities follow set routines. Equally, most of them operate self-explanatory mechanisms, which for Emmanuel C. Eze, reveal answers; requiring diviners to interpret cryptic metaphoric messages:

Divination sessions are not instances of arbitrary, idiosyncratic behaviour by diviners. A divination system is often the primary institutional means of articulating the epistemology of a people. Much as the classroom and the courtroom are primary sites for the presentation of cultural truths in the United States of America, so the diviner in other cultures [African] is central to the expression and enactment of his or her cultural truths as they are reviewed in the context of contemporary realities. (EZE C. Emmanuel, 1998: 172)

Thus, localizing divination sessions involves reliance on objects, words, and characters of diviners highlighting testimony validations' process enforced by social interaction and imploration of oracular knowledge; illustrating foundations of a people's worldview. Hence, diviners and divination systems comprise means and premise of knowing and ascertaining the validation of testimonies; playing critical roles of mediators linked to cultures in rapid transition. John S. Mbiti complements aforementioned contributions of diviners connecting testimony to moral authorities as valorisation instrument; emphasizing their role of ensuring the search of causes when things go wrong. According to him, "they find out which spirit may be troubling a possessed person; what it wants and what should be done to stop the trouble." (MBITI S. John, 1977: 156)

In connection, the Fon and other titled persons in Nso' worldview, often carefully judge their utterances; weighing circumstances and making sure that all are appropriate. Therefore, each leader's words and those of respectable personalities must be diligently eschewed (*jii se kilimbiy si ker mo a ker vifi*). According to Roland Bernggeh, the Fon's importance and power resides in his words with the phrase: "*Fon dze Wong, a Wong i dze Fon, Fon Nso' dze Nso'*". This implies that the Fon is an embodiment of the Nso' people; therefore, his utterances and deeds are on behalf of the entire populace (BERNGEH Roland, 1981: 18). Emphatically, by embodying truth as an aspect of testimony, the Fon in Nso' is expressed in the appellation "*Shuy Nso'*," literally meaning "the sun of Nso'," since his utterances are considered as enlightening to all. Seka corroborates stating that:

By virtue of the attributes accorded the Fon by the Nso' people, there is no doubt that his words will command greater respect in Nso' society. For when he speaks, it is as it were, the tribe speaking to itself. Every word he utters then especially when addressing the tribe carries with it a lot of power and authority and has a great

impact on the people than if the words were addressed to the same audience by another Nso' man (SEKA Christopher, 1985: 15).

By implication, the Fon's utterances and deeds as a moral authority often impart curses on defaulters guilty of mischief in the land. Equally, as auxiliary to the Fon, sub-chiefs judiciously insure that communicators and communications evade compromising the truth and agreed resolutions, due to personal gains. In another dimension, the moral authority of the Fon as guarantor of testimony validation is extended to binding of his throne; witnessing or oath taking occupies central stage in vindicating innocence or punishing culpability of crimes (*ka-an/dzev kava fon*).

In another dimension, Hallen raises awareness to fundamental undercutting challenges channelled against interlocutor's reliability; reigniting concerns around the moral character or virtue of the interlocutor especially regarding Yoruba indigenous thought. Inadvertently, he takes sides the version of "internalism;" redirecting requirement of access to interlocutor's reliability. Consequently, he concludes that: "the moral character of the informant becomes an important criterion of its reliability;" recipients needing access to reliability through the moral character of the interlocutor, prior to being justified in testimonial beliefs. (HALLEN Barry, 1998: 187-204) Inevitably linked to Hallen's conception of interlocutor's reliability in African socio-moral epistemology are three aspects or moral authority and wisdom: moral character and knowledge, conscience, and functionalism. First, moral character and knowledge exhibits elements of honesty and sincerity when dealing with society. This is recognized as outstanding in persons who do not compromise the truth (*ngasuiru* for the Nso' of Cameroon), and those who weigh the consequences of their words before uttering them. Second, involves conscience connected to African ethics; emphasizing internal moral sanctioning and judgment of moral advice. Third, we have functionalism dealing with moral and practical knowledge; objective is promotion of human welfare (humanism), by minimizing instances and tendencies of instrumentalization of human beings.

1.3. TESTIMONY AND COMMUNITARIAN-BASED VALIDATION

In conjunction with testimony and moral authority, African communitarian epistemology underscores individuals' interconnectedness in community; extended to the role of shared knowledge and values, which shape understanding. In an important sense, community-based validation of testimony acts as knowledge claims vindicators; simultaneously ensuring knowledge's alignment to shared experiences and values (belief, truth, and justification). Interestingly, justification and validation in African worldviews (Nso' particularly), involves four aspects: Proximity (*ngayen*), the person closest to the happening; announcer (*ngasui/nga'fihti*), the informant who communicated the act or deed; self-manifestation (*vinjen*), uncompromising actor with childlike innocence; and witnessing (*bin nsa-ah*), in judicial cases especially regarding traditional councils. Anselm Kole Jimoh admits of the overwhelming significance of testimony as a communitarian-based validation, adding to it the "cosmotheandricity" element that underscores interconnectedness of the divine, human, and cosmic realms. In his estimation, knowledge validation goes beyond human experience derivation; extending to spiritual and cosmic sources. Analytically, he reiterates the fact that knowledge and testimony in African communitarian epistemology, explicates the meaning and nature of knowledge and justification; outrightly postulating that elders' testimony is a genuine source and justification of knowledge; (JIMOH K. Anselm, 2023: 243)

Testimony as African socio-moral epistemological valorisation instrument recognizes primary propositional sources or second-hand information in oral culture (other persons' spoken word). Inevitably, knowledge of persons' moral character (past or present), their honesty, and reliability or trustworthiness, are indispensable for evaluating obtained information. In concurrence, Kwasi Wiredu reiterates that:

Knowledge of another person's moral character is obtained most reliably, from observing (firsthand) his or her behaviour (*isesi*). In addition, in Yoruba discourse behaviour conventionally extends to 'what they say' and 'what they do,' which also pretty much corresponds to the standard Western notions of verbal and non-verbal behaviour. (WIREDU Kwasi, 2006: 301)

Similarly, the Nso' concurs with the abovementioned breadth of testimony as expounded by Wiredu of the Yoruba worldview. Accordingly, evidence in this context is priority attributed by the Nso' upon hard evidence; the capacity of knowing what witnesses in a first-hand manner (*ngaa njen wo mbiy*). Subsequently, individuals' verbal and non-verbal behaviour construe as first-hand evidence (*vinjen*) of their moral character (*lee*). Thus, since persons' moral character for the Nso' is not observable in like terms to material objects, inference is involved; drawing from a plethora of observed individual actions (*lee wiri*), to generalizations about defined characters. Finally, epistemic certainty is validated on basis of reliable information provided by persons with moral authority; established via the interplay of knowledge (*kiiy*) and belief (*biime*).

Furthermore, testimony and communitarian-based validation accentuate aspects of communal foundation, orality and reliability, elders' role, and justification methods. By this token, gullible acceptance of dogma witness evasion and all information undergoes rigorous testing, prior to handing down as reliable

indigenous knowledge. Equally, elders become as legitimate source; not just because they are elders; but rather due to their wisdom and experiences within communities. This is justified by the proverb: “what an elder sees sitting down, a child/youth would not see climbing a tree.” Eze exemplifies this with the trustworthy women group (*umada*) of the Nigerian Igbo clan; often invited as female kindred (married out of the village); due to their nobility, to clarify and testify issues during ritual celebrations. (EZE C. Emmanuel, 2006: 305)

1.4. TESTIMONY: PERCEPTION, RETENTION, AND TELEOLOGY

African traditional thought considers individuals and knowledge of reality as inseparable entities. Individual knowledge arising from intuition commences right from childhood; a stage in which the power of the mind is believed to immediately perceive dimensions of truth (immediate knowledge contrasted with mediate knowledge). This reliable knowledge only develops in adulthood when environment and culture exert their influences; grounds for ascertaining testimony as valorisation instrument for socio-moral epistemology. Therefore, as a teleological consideration, the success or failure of actions established on testimony, simply play vital validation roles via witnessing and trustworthiness in tradi-medical fields; expressed in cures and taboos guaranteeing preservation or conservation practices. In connection, Abanuka explores testimony apropos perception, retention, and teleology asserting that:

Knowledge comes from the cooperation of all human faculties and experiences... Man sees, feels, imagines, reasons or think and intuit; all at the same time. Only through this method does he claim to have the knowledge of the other. Intuition thus, has a central role in the theory of knowledge. (ABANUKA Bartholomew, 1998: 94)
Therefore, the method of arriving at trustworthy knowledge of reality (God, man, spirit, society, and social facts) according to Abanuka and corresponding African authors is intuitive and personal experience. Similarly, K. C. Anyanwu illustrates reliability of testimony in indigenous knowledge in ensuing words:

The African makes use of concepts by inspection, imagination, and intuition with aesthetic qualities. The meaning of these concepts derives from personal and immediate experience; from the social and historical experience of the people. The African does not only think about such concepts, but also live and feel their realities. (ANYANWU, K. C., 1984: 95)

Accordingly, for instance in relation to children, certain experiences in the knowing process like a burn from fire; prevents a child from approaching it or hot objects. This highlights the Nso’ proverb *kimomri fo toni* (interpreted as once beaten: burnt, twice shy); implying that experience plays a significant role in shaping individuals’ process of knowledge acquisition and testimonial. In addition, African socio-moral epistemology holds that the capacity of one’s memory depends on the length of experiences and intensity of impressions through perception. Therefore, preservation of testimonies in the mind depend on organisms’ operations; the human mind in its activity becomes a reservoir of reliable knowledge; assuming the role of generator of thought. Martin N. Nkemnkia underscores this stating that: “Memory is the origin of experience, the ‘know-how.’ In other words, experience is an acquired knowledge through perception as a sensitive component of the cognitive act.” (NKEMNKIA N. Martin, 1997: 181) By implication, experience in African thought connects to knowing and learning simultaneously; thus, one cannot declare possession of knowledge or testimony, unless he has personally perceived and memorized data of claimed information.

2. CHALLENGES OF TESTIMONY AS VALORISATION INSTRUMENT: THE WAY FORWARD

Ensuing from fundamental components of African socio-moral epistemology above: testimony in relation to witnessing, trust and reliability, testimony and communitarian-based validation, testimony and moral authority, and testimony: perception, retention, and teleology, is unquestionably an indispensable spring of knowledge. It presents a compelling argument for incorporating its features in the emergence epistemological discourse; displaying its potential contribution of ameliorating inadequacies, improving methodological frameworks for appraising oral tradition, and assessment of indigenous knowledge systems. Notwithstanding, gaps of prejudices/biases must be eliminated to ascertain positive contributions in the world of epistemology. However, critical engagement cautions that while testimony is of value, acceptance should not be blind or gullible. Hence, testimony’s justification becomes an extra credible source of knowledge; if strictly examined and contexts of testimony streamlined on coherencies of knowledge and communal experiences, it becomes relevant. Therefore, challenges ensuing from testimony as a valorisation instrument do not invalidate features of credibility and trustworthiness; yet, they lessen the extent of reliability. This permits the exploration of the following: the problem of belief, truth, and justification, testimony and psychological import, witchcraft and divination: verification and validation, and testimony in confrontation with technological perceptions.

2.1. THE PROBLEM OF BELIEF, TRUTH, AND JUSTIFICATION

African epistemologies unerringly prize testimony beyond mere acquisition of beliefs; esteemed as a generative indigenous knowledge source, especially via oral traditions and community-based validation. For instance, in the Nso' worldview, knowledge and belief (*kiiy wuna biime*), refer to firsthand experience, acquired in sensory experience; particularly visual perception. Abanuka, in a related prescription insinuates that statements made of this kind of knowledge are observation or empirical sentences that are subject to verification as first-order knowledge. (ABANUKA Bartholomew, 1998: 47) In an attempt demonstrating this reality, the Nso' would say: *mo' dze fo ghan se shiinen shii binkir lav* (I witness the bird transform into a house). Accordingly, Abanuka in considering utterances as this contends that they are inadmissible if void of evidence or testimony. (ABANUKA Bartholomew, 1998: 47) However, certainty regarding similar claims is often inadequate; creating series of sceptical thoughts.

In connection, "belief" in African epistemologies generally, and as highlighted by Abanuka, scrutinizes it (*gbagbo*), as second order knowledge which individuals may or may not accept; depending on the degree of reasonableness of syllogisms used to determine *gbagbo*. In Abanuka's estimation, these are hanging statements; that is, statements about statements. By implication, *gbagbo* (belief) statements can become *mo* (knowledge) after verification or testing. (ABANUKA Bartholomew, 1998: 48) This understanding qualifies *gbagbo* (belief) statements as a theoretical system with its components. Verification does not occur in isolation as vindicated by Abanuka; merely constituting only one possibility in case of controversial information claims. (ABANUKA Bartholomew, 1994: 49) Thus, since verification is an imperative, such is the appeal of this research; insistence on investigating the extent of certitude and skepticism in divination and witchcraft practices. Severally and unchallenged, divination and witchcraft claims are largely construed on unverified beliefs rather than demonstrated truths. This confronts the ever-challenging reality of truths of facts in relation to truths of reason.

Unequivocally, despite the overbearing relevance of testimony as a valorisation instrument in African socio-moral epistemology, sporadic challenges including balancing reliance on elders and oral traditions, risk of uncritical dogmatic acceptance of claims, tensed atmosphere between communal subjective and individualistic truths in opposition to objective or universalistic truth criteria, and indiscriminate embrace of community-based validation are eminent or overwhelming. Initially, although elders and oral testimony are reliable, particular steps establishing their trustworthiness cautions against gullibility and avoiding uncritical dogmatic accommodation of facts. Second, due to conflicting assent degrees between communal subjective and individualistic truths creating tension, there is friction regarding the assessment of testimonial truths resulting from knowledge as a social and communal product. Third, universality is lacking in many testimonial cases; raising doubts or uncertainties about reliance on oral transmission lacking in accuracy, preservation, and possibility of validating knowledge claims in a span of generations.

In reaction to aforementioned challenges apropos testimony and scope of witness, trust, and reliability, Alvin I. Goldman's "peer disagreement and higher order evidence" is pertinent. According to him:

The conjecture is true, others that it is false; all agree there is no basis that would justify a firm opinion one way or the other. Then, one day, the unexpected happens: alone in your study, you succeed in proving 'the conjecture.' Based on your proof, you become extremely confident, indeed practically certain, that the conjecture is true. Because your high degree of confidence [establishes] a genuine proof that you correctly recognize as such, it is fully justified. Later, you show the proof to a colleague whose judgement you respect. Much to your surprise, the colleague, after examining the proof with great care, declares that it is unsound. Subsequently, you show the proof to another colleague, and then to a third, and then to a fourth. You approach the colleagues independently and take pains to ensure that they are not influenced by one another in arriving at their judgments about the status of your proof. In each case, however, the judgement is the same: the proof is unsound. (GOLDMAN I. Alvin, 2011: 199)

Although the above lines ultimately demonstrate convincing proofs in western mathematical communal testimonial validation or consensus, exceptions do occur; in comparison to oral traditional testimonial challenges, we may not marginalize local experiential knowledge. Nevertheless, inconsistencies in oral or community-based validation are explainable by its dominant individualistic traditional epistemological focus. As further assumed by Olubi J. Sodipo, the greatest challenge arises from the fact that sources of justification in this context derive from "outer experience," whose invention is from the five senses; rather than inner experience (introspection) and reason. (SODIPO J. Olubi, 1997: 532-557) Equally, communal judgment incidentally is misleading evidence, although in a limited degree. However, a peer believing differently can make it rationally incumbent on you to alter initial belief; this does not prevent individuals from giving weight to peer's opinion or personal conviction.

2.2. TESTIMONY AND PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPORT

The challenge resulting from the problem of belief, truth, and justification connects to that of psychological import. Testimonial features are interestingly founded on knowledge by hereditary in indigenous knowledge; influencing individuals' assent to certitude. Mbiti attests to this asserting:

Therefore, we can say that the African traditional thought system is part of the African heritage. This is the product of the thinking and experiences of our ancestors. They formed these; observed ceremonies and rituals; told proverbs and myths which carried meaning. The evolving nature of their laws and customs safeguarded the system of knowledge and life of the individual and community. (MBITI S. John, 1977: 12)

By implication, individuals (children) grow up completely immersed in the world designed or mediated by their elders and parents. Through the power of the word, the "once," the "formerly," and the "before" become the "now;" implored as a valorisation instrument. Abanuka explains follows:

Myths and symbols show that the community's institutions and values as far as they are enshrined in its laws, customs, and traditions, have origins, which cannot be measured in temporal terms. Myths narrate the divine origin of agriculture or of the smelting of iron and blacksmithing. (ABANUKA Bartholomew, 1990: 45)

Abanuka's myths and folklores highlighted above function as validated culture transmitting agents; containing three genres of stories: stories of origin, explanatory, and didactic stories. Their designation qualifies them as socializing agents, educational illustrations, entertainment, psychological, and emotional conditioners. Overwhelmingly, this constitutes an enormous challenge with regard to testimony in relation to group knowledge and rationality apropos psychological import. Christian List's "judgment aggregation perspective," challenges community-based validation established on grounds of myths and folklores. Accordingly, List thinks pursuing testimonial validity in social epistemology must include prioritizing "groups as epistemic agents over and above their individual members." However, he thinks many philosophers and "individualistic minded social scientists," dismiss groups as reliable epistemic agents; particularly random crowds that sometimes make-up the cream of African socio-moral epistemology. These are incapable of forming collective reliable beliefs. (LIST Christian, 2004: 222-223). Subsequently, two challenges ensue: "rationality and knowledge challenge." Testimonial features of indigenous knowledge exhibit rationality challenge if groups' collectively endorsed beliefs are to be consistent; on the other hand, knowledge challenge explodes if the same judgements or beliefs trace certain truths.

2.3. WITCHCRAFT AND DIVINATION: VERIFICATION AND VALIDATION

African witchcraft and divination systems raise epistemological questions surrounding verification and validation. For instance, Nso' diviners/divination (*ngam wo schwengin/ngang ye sho'on/schweng fu'*) are believed to be omniscient; a repository of unsurpassable knowledge and wisdom. By implication and as commonly thought of in indigenous knowledge, this transcends limits of human cognitive capacities. Olufemi Taiwo vividly captures this thus:

If one proceeds from the religious standpoint and identifies Ifa as a god, the capacity [that we have just mentioned follows] as a matter of course. While this may offer an easy way out of the perennial problems of epistemology [testimony validation in particular], it limits the appeal of Ifa to only those who are religiously inclined. More importantly, the babalawo or Ifa diviner, does not ask the client to affirm a faith in Ifa, before, during, or after consultation; the capacity of Ifa to know a client's fate is not affected by the non-membership of a applicant in the tradition. (TAIWO Olufemi, 2004: 305)

The challenge revolves around the fact that different forms of divination are mistaken for religious observation; nursing possibilities of analyzing it purely as a divination system, seeking to interpret its presuppositions, criteria of correctness, and adequacy. Divination as a process of knowledge acquisition with taproot of testimony lacks some degree of certitude; for instance, when diviners as seers are regarded as having sharp capacities of insight, foresight, and capable of predicting occurrence of events. This falls short of D. Q. McNerny's compulsory components of true certainty: firm assent of the knowing subject, absence of any fear of doubt, and an objective motive. (MCINERNY D. Q., 2007: 293) Application of these three components to divination and witchcraft as testimony validating processes is unjustifiable due to lack of objective motives sustaining firm assent.

Another issue on table concerning witchcraft and divination challenges in relation to verification and validation is the threat of marginalizing indigenous knowledge. This challenge is in progress, especially regarding experiential knowledge as propounded by traditional healers, diviners, and spiritual sources confronting western scientific standards. The challenge of verification is contextual due to testimony's intersubjectivity; connecting declared truths to communal experiences, rather than isolated and objective observations. Furthermore, Hallen extends the verification problem embedded in witchcraft and divination

beliefs, as arising from “beliefs formed on the basis of testimony;” this must not constitute knowledge in epistemic practices. This explains the fact that testimony in his estimation, does not reach the threshold of knowledge; set via verification by firsthand experience. (HALLEN Barry, 1997: 282)

2.4. TESTIMONY’S CONFRONTATION WITH TECHNOLOGICAL PERCEPTIONS

Verification and validation as testimonial challenges in relation to witchcraft and divination, affix a succeeding challenge with technological perceptions; for, experiential knowledge involving witnessing and direct experience are highly valued. Although testimony in various facets is significant, various processes must incorporate assessing reliability, and avoiding reductionism. Thus, while recognizing diverse perspectives and experiences, there should be no reduction of knowledge to individual perception or reasoning as Hallen reiterates. (HALLEN Barry, 1997: 290) In spite of its limitations and challenges of overwhelming reliance on oral tradition and community-based validation, testimony in African socio-moral epistemology acknowledges the fact of scientific testimony as provided by collect as well as individual expertise. Hence, testimony’s confrontation with technological perceptions unravels challenges of precision and trustworthiness in community-based validation.

Ultimately, this consignment as the preceding section unravelling challenges of testimony as a valorisation instrument in indigenous knowledge, is the most radical level of practical discourse; narrowing the rift that attempts contrasting Western individualistic epistemology to African communitarian epistemology. Justifiably, testimony’s overwhelming reliance on oral tradition and community-based validation, nurses negative tendencies of uncertainties. Nevertheless, it explores specific conducts for arriving at or justifying reality. This is essentially a social and communitarian epistemological system of knowledge acquisition; the primary bearer and justifier of knowledge being community. Conversely, majority challenges breeding contempt of undermining testimony, likewise several other African concepts, is when one falls prey to comparing African to Western thought. Wiredu succinctly exposes this unfortunate reality with the admonition that:

Western societies too have passed through a stage of addiction to spiritistic explanations of phenomena. What is more, significant residues of this tradition remain a basic part of the mental make-up of a large mass of the not-so-sophisticated sections of western populations. (WIREDU Kwasi, 1998: 193)

In his estimation, and rightly so, “it is a matter of first rate philosophical importance to distinguish between traditional, that is pre-scientific, spiritistic thought and modern scientific thought, by means of a clearly articulated criterion.” (WIREDU Kwasi, 1998: 193) Therefore, as the closest approximation to pre-scientific stage of intellectual development, African thought system demands enhancement rather than castigation. Hitherto, vis-à-vis justification and testimony, Goldman’s rendition of Mikael Janvid’s position is momentous in limiting the weight of challenges. He interprets Janvid as propounding that the main divide of epistemology lies between reductionism and anti-reductionism; the latter anti-reductionists regarding “testimony as a *sui generis* source of justification alongside, for example, perception, reason, and memory;” by contrast, the former reductionists, “denying that testimony provides sufficiently strong justification on its own.” (JANVID Mikael, 1999: 282)

Having thus highlighted the importance of improving on the limitations or challenges of testimony in indigenous thought, the solution does not lie directly in contrasting it with scientific or technological perceptions. Rather, George K. Barimah’s recommendation of promoting “collective scientific testimony,” becomes relevant in matching testimony in African thought to technological perceptions. Accordingly, if the main reason of knowledge is “production and dissemination of the same knowledge for several purposes [use in policy decision making and practical reasoning of members in the public],” then “collaborative research with increase in number of peer scientific paper publication,” acknowledges that this is a provider of information. This becomes a potential recipient of epistemic trust. (BARIMAH K. George, 2024: 85) Consequently, African testimony established on community-based validation and similar to western categories with collective nature of knowledge (producing collaborative research), instead demands amelioration of limitations and challenges to harness its reliability.

II. CONCLUSION

Testimony in conjunction with witnessing, so crucial for knowledge acquisition and transmission in African thought, constitutes an indispensable valorisation instrument for its socio-moral epistemology. First, through its fundamental components (relation to witnessing, trust, and reliability, testimony and moral authority, its communitarian-based validation, and aspects of perception, retention, and teleology), it has been proven beyond reasonable doubt, that its reliability as an intergenerational knowledge/experiential knowledge is valuable. However, challenges of testimony as a valorisation instrument, ranging from the problem of belief, truth, and justification, psychological import, witchcraft/divination: verification and validation, and

confrontation with technological perceptions, calls for some degree of critical engagement. Hence, despite its value, acceptance should not be blind; justification that involves reconsideration of credibility of sources and coherence should guide every process.

Essentially, the epistemological ramifications of testimony as a valorisation instrument imploring justification, requires supportive sources in order to enhance positive epistemic trust and status. Thus, since it does not provide recipients sufficient justification due to reliance on oral tradition, being a communitarian epistemological system with the community as primary bearer/justifier of knowledge, ameliorating limitations is what matters. The objective of this research anchors on the fact testimony is a legitimate instrument of validation in African socio-moral epistemology; constituting a genuine indigenous field of epistemic inquiry and enhancement. Notwithstanding, while acknowledging testimony's relevance, addressing pertinent issues remain difficult when distinguishing knowledge from belief; highlighting emerging challenges linked to themes as nature of knowledge, sources, and objective reliable transmission of knowledge arising from testimonial claims. Hence, our explication of knowledge apropos testimony in African socio-moral epistemology, demonstrates that its nature, source, and methodology of validation is genuine in epistemological explorations. Moreover, testimony as an integrals nexus of African epistemology is grounded on African ontology; vindicating its significance.

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