# Conceptualizing Indigeneity and the Implications for Indigenous Research and African Development*[1]

*Abstract*
This paper examines Indigenous knowledges in the context of conceptualizing Indigeneity to lay the grounds for Indigenous research as a counterpoint to conventional ways of knowledge production. It is noted that the urgency of articulating multiple ways of knowing and/or counter visions of knowledge emerges in the contexts of the limits, limitations, or shortcomings of dominant knowledge production. The Indigenous prism brings a critical perspective to Indigenous practices, epistemologies, roles, and spaces for sharing and producing local cultural knowledges, including understanding social relations of communal knowledge production. It is argued that central to Indigenous research are concepts of spirituality, spiritual knowing, the interface of body, mind, soul, and spirit, and the nexus of society, culture, and Nature. Indigenous research must begin with due recognition of the Land and Mother Earth and the acknowledgement of location and space as sources and sites of knowing. The researcher must acknowledge the sacred teachings of this Land as informing the conduct of research, research relations and the general pursuit of knowledge. It is also asserted that Indigenous research must proceed with a degree of humility and sanctity by affirming holistic relations involving the self as researcher, research subjects, the local community, and Nature. The imperative of centering Indigenous knowledges in nation-building efforts of Africans as nation builders is examined, while also paying close attention to the knowledge embodiment. In the conclusion, the paper examines the implications of Indigenous research for education as broadly defined.

*Keywords*
Indigenous knowledges, Indigeneity, research, spirituality, nation-building.

## I Introduction

How do we rekindle the spirit of place, Land and develop a heightened sense of worth for knowledge and human life? There is an emerging generation of scholars voicing dissatisfaction with dominant, Western hegemonic ways of knowledge production. So we need to ask: why? I do not think it is because these scholars want to be anti-intellectual or have no desire for scholarship and excellence. I see it as a quest for broadening existing debates about scholarship and excellence to be inclusive of multiple knowledges. The mimicking of dominant Euro-American knowledge of those in power has been nauseating. Such mimicry has not helped to provide adequate answers to the many challenges confronting humankind. The complexity of problems afflicting our world today requires multi-centric perspectives and not universal solutions. We can only cultivate multi-centric perspectives by beginning to work with multiple knowledge systems in education and research practice.

Hence, allow me to begin this discussion by asking some simple questions: How do we begin to think more creatively to offer counterstances that challenge dominant and conventional knowledge? How do we create spaces for counter-knowledges to co-exist in our institutions of learning? How do we produce counter and oppositional knowledges to subvert the status quo ensuing from hegemonic knowledge? What is the place of Indigenous perspectives in critical

* Paget Henry served as one of the blind referees for George Sefa Dei's article ›Conzeptualizing Indigeneity.‹ Since Henry's report in our view highlighted issues which we believe are germane to the broader debate on Indigeneity, but which, however, exceeded the scope of Dei's article, we, the editors, decided to reveal Dei's and Henry's identities to one another and to request from Henry a brief discussion of his own views on Indigeneity. We are pleased that both George Sefa Dei and Paget Henry agreed to this intellectual exchange seeing as we believe that it advances the current debate. We are particularly grateful to Dei in this regard since this format did not allow him the opportunity to respond to Henry's statement.

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research? What is the place of Indigenous knowledges in contemporary nation-building in Africa? I pose these questions not as mere intellectual musings. I raise theses questions in order to begin »to imagine a world that is not yet imagined« (Fine 1994: 30) ans also to help us organize disruptively for what could be (ibid.: 26).[2] These are also relevant questions for anyone advancing Indigenous knowledges in our institutions of learning. Increasingly, the relevance of Indigenous research has been raised as way to challenge the conventional approach to social research and knowledge production (Wilson 2001, 2008; Kovach 2009; Battise, and Henderson 2000; Smith 1999; Dei 2013a, 2013b, to mention a few).[3]

To this end, I take on two tasks: first, I interrogate the conventional concept of Indigeneity. Second, I draw some critical reflections on the implications and absences of Indigenous knowledge in the African schooling and the broader social context. Indigeneity and academic research are both implicated in the colonial project. I concur that as learners we are all implicated in the conventional ways of knowledge production and, particularly, the coloniality of the academy. Broadly put, the academy continues to sustain colonial structures that establish hierarchies and colonial relations of knowledge production. In order to subvert these prevailing structures, an anticolonial and decolonial lens is needed. Only then can counter and oppositional stances be articulated that really make a difference to science and scholarship in general. In this regard, I have always called for multi-centric analyses and approaches to knowledge production. Standards used in knowledge comparison must be fair and just at all times. We cannot uphold one standard of knowledge as better than

[2] M. Fire, »Dis-stance and other Stance: Negotiations of Power Inside Feminist Research,« in A. Gillin (ed.), *Power and Method: Political Activism and Educational Research*, New York: Routledge, 1994, pp. 13–35.

[3] S. Wilson, ›What is Indigenous Research Methodology?‹ *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, Vol. 25, No. 2, 2001, pp. 175–179; S. Wilson, *Research Is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods*, Halifax: Fernwood, 2008; M. Kovach, *Indigenous Methodologies: Characteristics, Conversations, and Contexts*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009; M. A. Battiste, and J. Y. Henderson (eds.), *Protecting Indigenous Knowledge and Heritage: A Global Challenge*, Saskatoon: Purich, 2000; G. Dei (with E. Coburn, M. Stewart-Harawira, and A. Moreton-Robinson), ›Unspeakable Things: Indigenous Research and Social Sciences,‹ *Socio*, Vol. 2, 2013a, pp. 331–347; G. Dei, ›Critical Perspectives on Indigenous Research,‹ *Socialist Studies/Etudes Socialistes*, Vol. 9, No. 1, 2013b, pp. 27–38 (URL: www.socialiststudies.com), [Special Issue on Transgressive Pedagogies and Research].





another. It must be an interrogative process. All knowledge systems must be assessed in their own right.

The second section of this paper begins by clarifying some important philosophical and conceptual standpoints so that this piece is not misread. In the third section, I will deal with questions of method and methodology in Indigenous research. In this section, I will highlight the process of coming to know the locality of a given context. The fourth section will sketch the role of Indigenous knowledges in the nation-building processes of contemporary Africa. Multi-centric knowing and the epistemological pluralism it entails will be addressed in the fifth section. I conclude the paper by looking at Indigenous research in the African context and the implications for education as broadly defined in the sixth section.

My article is not a response to dominant scholars or even minority scholars operating with dominant lenses, who are prone to assessing the merits and worth of Indigenous knowledges on the terms of dominant ways of thinking and knowledge production. Indigenous knowledges need not be forced into a conceptual framework which makes it primarily understandable and acceptable to dominant scholarship and thinking. I agree that Indigenous sciences and Western science cannot be presented as binaries. But rejecting the binary does not mean we forgo or downplay the deep philosophical differences and intersections between knowledge systems. Similarly, when we object to the use of the ›Indigenous,‹ as applied to everything ›African,‹ such a critique is a misleading misrepresentation of Indigenous knowledges. There is a body of local, cultural resource knowledge that comes with understanding and experiencing the African social, physical, and metaphysical worlds. We cannot claim that this is *not* African knowledge. Even if such knowledge is not shared by all African communities, it is still part of an African knowledge system. It relates to the land, cultures, identities, spirituality, histories, and local communities of Africans. There is a more questionable claim that a portion of Western science knowledge is based on the Land and spirituality. Even if one accepts this claim on face value, it does not dismiss the authenticity and validity of African Indigenous knowledges.

Indigenous knowledges have been primitivized, romanticized, negated, or ostracized outright from the corridors of Euro-American, conventional knowledge production. Proponents of such knowledges are associated with skepticism and are met with raised eyebrows. We are all affected by the limitations of conventional, dominant knowl-

edge production. We are not allowed to fully comprehend the history of ideas, events, and social happenings that have shaped human growth, challenges, and development. Many of us (even as African scholars) have been schooled to be dismissive of Indigenous knowledges. This is the problem with Eurocentrism. As learners, we are all shortchanged by working with limited intellectual prisms which contains a disturbing lack of depth in social meanings. We need to understand what Indigeneity means and the connections of Indigenous knowledges and other knowledge forms. We also need to think through the particular prisms and methodologies we employ in academic research and to see the contributions that Indigenous research can bring to knowledge production. We must explore Indigenous research, its parameters, and underlying principles more fully.

As indicated earlier, Indigeneity is implicated in the colonial project given that colonialism proceeded through the devaluation of the knowledge systems, cultures, histories, and identities of Indigenous peoples. By distorting histories and cultures, the Euro-colonizers succeeded in sowing an inferiority complex in the African mind such that as Africans, we shunned our cultures, histories, heritages, and knowledge systems in favor of the colonizers'. By not defending their cultural values and knowledge systems, colonized bodies have since been implicated in the colonizer's oppressions. How then does an Indigenous body in the Western academy, begin to push for a more nuanced understanding of Indigenous knowledges to highlight its contributions to global knowledge and science? How do we bring about a process of a more critical understanding of Indigeneity which can better relate to identity and practice?

There are many ways we can begin to respond to such questions. For example, there are prevailing imperial and colonial structures that continue to dominate academic research. It is important for us to highlight the contributions that Indigenous approaches bring to research, debate upon what constitute ›good‹ research, and refashion the particular epistemic paradigms worth engaging in our on-going relations with local communities. In this endeavor, our academic task should not be about comparing Indigenous knowledges with other forms of knowledge (e.g., Western science) but to insist on the validation, legitimation, and acceptance of such knowledges on their own merits and rights. This does not imply that we should not allow knowledges to interrogate each other. The starting point is to respect all knowledges worthy of academic inquiry and to raise questions that





allow knowledges to contest each other in the search for answers and solutions to global challenges. Indigenous knowledges must be regarded as an appropriate topic in academic discussions. Such knowledges cannot be dismissed or pushed to the background. They deserve to be heard just like Western science knowledge, particularly, if we are intellectually honest to admit that what actually constitutes the so-called ›science knowledge‹ is itself an appropriation of other bodies of knowledge.

For these reasons, we must also understand and begin to interrogate the negative reactions to Indigenous knowledges in the academy. As others have pointed out, resistance to Indigenous ways of knowing is not simply because such knowledge lacks scientific rigor or sophistication (see Battiste, and Hendersen 2000). Indigenous knowledges threaten colonial projects. Such knowledges help us raise some discomforting/uncomfortable questions. However, Indigenous knowledges are crucial for decolonization purposes. Clearly, decolonization cannot proceed solely on the basis of Western science knowledge since it has been a tool of colonization and domination of Indigenous peoples. Therefore, Indigenous knowledges when asserted are very threatening to the Euro-colonial domination, which continues to cast its shadow on academia. It is the fear of what Indigenous knowledges affirm and bring up for discussion that makes it a ›risky and threatening‹ conversation for those who want to maintain, or stabilize the privileged status of Western knowledge in the academy. These knowledges also bring to the fore issues of the appropriation of other bodies of knowledge by dominant ways of thinking, questions of colonialism and colonialization, land dispossession, violence on Indigenous persons, etc.

The foregoing also raises the question of assessing the contradictions which arise when Indigenous knowledges are seen through Western science prisms. The practice has been part of Eurocentric privileging. When Indigenous knowledges are assessed in terms of their conformity to principles and measurements set by Western standards of excellence, it is Eurocentricity par excellence. We need to think through more inclusive measurements of academic excellence. Throughout human history, ideas have been propelled by social change. While not all ideas are fully supported, some have the power to compel change. Ideas emerge from knowledge systems. Ideas are constitutive part of peoples' cultural knowledges. All it requires is for a group of staunch believers to hold steadfastly to their ideas and prin-

ciples and to question conventional knowledges. Not everyone is going to understand the particular stances we, Indigenous researchers, take as knowledge producers. Some of us may be viewed as lunatics, trouble-makers, or anti-intellectuals when our ideas do not sit well with dominant viewpoints. But all knowledge is produced for a purpose.

Reframing colonial discourses and practices is a difficult task to accomplish as has long been noted. Knowledge production is about power. Knowledge systems are heavily embedded in power relations and all knowledges are political and contestable. However, there is the tendency of the dominant knowledge to masquerade as universal knowledge and to appropriate other bodies of knowledge as its own. True, Western science knowledge is now being contested.[4] There is not a uniform body of knowledge called Western science. But beyond the contestations and irrespective of the plurality, there is an unmistaken assumption of the superiority of Western science knowledge. This false superiority can be seen in the devaluation, negation, and subjugation of other ways of knowing in the academy. In fact, the apprehension to Indigenous knowledges in the academy has more to do with the politics of knowledge production rather than a supposed lack of scientific and scholarly rigor of this body of knowledge. Because Indigeneity and Indigenousness threaten colonial hierarchies of knowledge production, not surprisingly, Indigenous knowledges and questions of Indigeneity do not sit well with dominant bodies and Western science. How else can we explain the arrogance of science and dominant scientific thinking which classify other bodies of knowledge as primitive, irrational, unscientific and unscholarly myths and superstitions? Is Western science the only form of logical, rational, and scientific thinking? Is Western science not simply one way of producing knowledge within the plurality of sciences?

While I critique Western science knowledge, I do not posit a binary with Indigenous knowledges. All knowledges are mutually interdependent and should be able to co-exist. One would expect the subversion of colonial and dominant knowledges to be carried out among groups that co-exist and are co-resisting together. Cultures are always

[4] See Battiste, and Henderson (2000); G. Emeagwali, and G. Dei, *African Indigenous Knowledge and the Disciplines*, Rotterdam and New York: Sense Publishers, 2015; L. Semali, and J. Kincheloe (eds.), *What is Indigenous Knowledge? Voices From the Academy,* New York: Falmer Press, 1999; L. Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, London: Zed Books, 1999.





in dynamic co-existence with each other, that is, living in interdependent relations and hopefully co-resisting and building relations with our landscapes. They share an interdependent relation that allows for an interrogation of what each knowledge system brings to critical dialogues about society. A culture or a community is in trouble when it no longer remembers what has been lost and, furthermore, it no longer holds on to the idea that something different is possible. The most difficult thing is to lose something and not know what one has lost. Despite substantial losses in the past, fortunately, most Indigenous peoples know what has been lost and are involved in a project of reclamation of knowledge, Lands, cultures, languages, identities, and histories.

There is now an on-going struggle of Indigenous resurgence and revitalization of cultures, languages, and histories. There is a growing sense that all cultures need to be heard and the revitalization of Indigenous histories carry an expectation of local peoples determining their own destinies. The struggle is perhaps more fierce in the Western academy located on settled Indigenous lands. European and settler colonialism has been disrespectful of Indigenous knowledges. European colonialism sought, and continues to seek, unearned privileges. The claim for a peaceful co-existence with Indigenous peoples is false because colonialism like settler-hood is about power and control. Consequently, all forms of colonialism including settler colonialism must evoke resistance.

The pursuit of a comparative analysis of ›Indigenous knowledges‹ and Western science is a political and an intellectual project. It is political because it serves to justify why one posits Indigenous knowledges in the first place. The critique against Western science as a ›rational and scientific discourse‹ is from an understanding that the way we have come to know the ›rational and scientific‹ has been skewed, narrow, and reserved for the dominant Eurocentric thinking. Also, any idea that Indigenous knowledges are stuck in the past or in the colonial period is a preconceived notion of the critics of such knowledge. Indigenous knowledges are living and breathing in the present; they change and adapt to emerging situations. However, the basic principles of such knowledges (e. g., the interface of culture, Nature and society, the connections of the physical and metaphysical worlds, and spirituality as the bedrock of such knowledge systems) remain intact. This is everyday knowledge of local peoples speaking to reality, to African reality in our particular case.

## II Conceptualizing ›Indigenous‹ Discursive Framework

Let me now begin conceptualizing the ›Indigenous‹ discursive framework. As argued elsewhere (Dei 2015a) the term ›Indigenous‹ is about relations to Land and place.[5] One is Indigenous to a place and Land that he/she deems to be a place of ›long term occupancy.‹ Being Indigenous is also about ›unbroken residence‹ in the sense that local peoples still claim territorial space and belonging to the Land. We define ›Indigenous knowledges‹ as knowledges developed on the basis of ›long-term occupancy‹ (unbroken residence) of a place, that is, Land (see also Fals Borda 1980); and accumulated on the basis of experiencing the social and natural (physical and metaphysical) worlds (Dei 1993).[6] The fact that colonization may have interrupted this ›long-term residence‹ does not deny local peoples the legitimacy of their claim of being Indigenous to the Land. However, when local peoples do not adhere to their Indigenous social values, cultural practices and abandon their histories, cultures and identities, because of a colonial imposition, the claim of Indigenous and Indigeneity is lost. For local peoples, who are Indigenous to the Lands and still lay territorial claim to their lands, histories, identities, heritage, and the cultural practices associated with the Land, the claim of being Indigenous to the place is never in doubt, except perhaps to the outsider, who is usually the colonial dominant.

Indigeneity, on the other hand, is about process, identity and resistance, as well as an insistence on the absence of colonial imposition. Arango (2014: 8) argues »Indigenous identity or Indigeneity is far from being a monolithic category […] and that despite their cultural differences, Indigenous groups share the experience of exclusion and subordination.«[7] The shared histories and experience depend on the subjects experiencing them. Indigeneity is asserted to resist the

[5] G. Dei, »Indigenous Philosophies, Counter Epistemologies and Anti-Colonial Education,« in W. Lehman (ed.), *Reader in Sociology of Education*, London: Oxford University Press, 2015a.

[6] O. Fals Borda, *Science and the Common People*, Yugoslavia 1980; G. Dei, ›Indigenous African Knowledge Systems,‹ *Tropical Geography*, Vol. 14, No. 1, 1993, pp. 28–41.

[7] A. D. Arango Herrera, ›Indigenous Knowledges and Power in Friction with Human Rights and Development Discourses: The Case of the Witoto Ethnic Safeguarding Plan in the Colombian Amazon,‹ PhD dissertation, University of Montreal, Quebec, 2014 [unpublished].





denial of a peoples' history, identity, culture, and language. As a process of identity formation, Indigeneity is also about politics and resistance. Indigeneity is developing an Indigenousness or an Indigenous consciousness of who one is and the importance of using such Indigenous identity to resist colonial, and on-going, colonial impositions. Like the term ›Indigenous,‹ Indigeneity has a close relationship to Land. It is about the politics of the Land that gives a people their identities. There are contestations and contentions of the ›Indigenous,‹ and ›Indigeneity.‹ There is neither a singular category which encompasses ›Indigenous,‹ nor ›Indigeneity.‹ ›Indigenous‹ is used broadly to encompass Aboriginal, African, Hawaiian, Australian, South American, Caribbean, etc., knowledge systems (Dei 2015a).

Usually when Indigenous knowledges are broached, there is the erroneous impression that the dichotomy of such knowledge and Western (science) knowledge is created. Clearly, any such dichotomy is problematic given that no knowledges exist in isolation. Knowledges borrow from each other and so-called Western science knowledge historically has appropriated other bodies of knowledge. However, a discussion of Indigenous knowledges is relevant on its own for two reasons. First, such knowledges have been devaluated and negated and even when they have constituted part of Western science knowledge, no credit is given.[8] Second, we need to highlight such knowledges for their unique contributions to global knowledge. They offer different prisms for reading our world and often highlight certain core values (e. g., community, responsibility, relationality, reciprocity) which may philosophically be different from the core values emphasized within dominant bodies of knowledge (e. g., rights, individual, competition, and control). What this implies then is: Any claim that there is one universal knowledge system is equally problematic and false. Often what has masqueraded as universal knowledge tends to be the knowledge of particular groups and bodies, who, more often than not, are the dominant segments of society. In other words, while all knowledge systems share a lot in common, it is also true that

[8] For related readings, see: S. Harding, »Gendered Ways of Knowing and the Epistemological Crisis of the West,« in N. Goldenberger, J. Tarule, B. Clinchy, and M. Belenky (eds.), *Knowledge, Difference and Power*, New York: Basic Books, 1996, pp. 431–454; »Is Modern Science an Ethnoscience? Rethinking Epistemological Assumptions,« in E. C. Eze (ed.), *Postcolonial African Philosophy: A Critical Reader*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers, 1997, pp. 47–70; Emeagwali and Dei (2015).

at times, there are unbridgeable differences or knowledge systems are incommensurable. Consequently, as noted elsewhere (Dei 2015a), the distinction between Western science knowledge and Indigenous science knowledge is more of a discursive stance to lodge a critique of dominant and conventional knowledges. The latter tends to be impositional and bequeaths unto itself what is deemed knowledge and knowable.

Local cultural knowledges herald the spiritual and cultural foundations upon which the survival of local communities rest. Arango (2014: 9) has insisted that »Indigenous knowledges are not only esoteric or spiritual, but also materially connected to the daily struggles for collective survival«. Indigenous knowledges call for placing emphasis on qualitative approaches (life histories, genealogies, personal narratives) as methods of social inquiry. Such knowledges also acknowledge the relevance of emotions and intuition, dreams, visions, storytelling, fables, proverbs, folksongs, folklore, folkloric production, museum artifacts, archives, and cultural memories as legitimate sources of knowing. Such narrative accounts need not be experiential; however, each subject is considered to be an ›authority‹ to interpret reality. The study of such knowledges also calls for interactive approaches. This means that key, subject informants, cultural custodians and other knowledge holders become central to the knowledge production project. Oral and cultural reporting are highly valued to textual documentation. The use of time and space do not follow a linear sequence but has a circular feel to it (see also Fixico 2003).[9]

In examining oral accounts and cultural narratives, there is a search for cultural logic around cognitive categories and themes that make meaning within particular social contexts. Knowledge is perceived as accumulative. It builds up through time negating the false claims of a static, pristine, and frozen nature of Indigenous knowledges. The inseparability of social and natural worlds in which humans are perceived as part of Nature brings a holistic meaning and interpretation to Indigenous knowledges. I prefer ›Indigenous‹ to ›traditional‹ because the latter evokes the ridiculous imagery as being the opposite of modern and modernity. The cult of modernity is a fabrication of Europe. Anglo-European societies through false claims

[9] D. L. Fixico, *The American Indian Mind in a Linear World, American Indian Studies and Traditional Knowledge*, New York: Routledge, 2003.





of modernity have sought to spread their social values and ideas globally. They have transformed this modernity into an European phase. It is a phase camouflaged by European economic, political, technological, and material power and is leading to an inevitable destruction of the global space.

Indigenous knowledges are about representation of traditional and Indigenous cultures, histories, identities, local experiences, and the teachings of Land/Mother Earth in the processes of educational delivery. When we speak of Mother Earth, we are not speaking of real estate. We are speaking of something bigger than the material. Indigenous communities have cultural custodians who are knowledge holders. Indigenous knowledges are affirmed in order to assert the intellectual agency of the colonized and marginalized. Such bodies of knowledge are not homogeneous. They are even contested from within. Nevertheless, they are best conceptualized and operationalized as more than simply ›non-Western forms of knowing.‹ Indigenous knowledges are about the everyday cultural knowings and form the cultural resource base of local peoples. These include, among other things, local traditions, customs, arts, music, aesthetics, folklore, other expressive and philosophical forms of knowing, communications and cultural production forms. Such knowledges are steeped in established traditions and morals.

A critical discussion of Indigenous knowledges must also focus on the construction of knowledge, access to knowledge, the transfer of knowledge and the application of such knowledges as part of multicentric ways of knowing. In fact, one of the major contemporary challenges in the academy is the trivialization and devaluation of local knowledges. For example, one must appropriately deal with the impunity of local (Indigenous) scholars who are so steeped in Eurocentric ideas and thoughts that they devalue such knowledge systems. There is also the alienation, tragedy, and irony of local, Indigenous Western-educated scholars who are not schooled in the socio-cultural and philosophical paradigms of their own communities. Indigenous consciousness must cultivate local, cultural knowledges, and languages that contribute to the search for home-grown solutions to local problems and challenges. This is because no Indigenous knowledge is alien to its particular socio-cultural and political milieu.

The promotion of African Indigenous knowledges can only be successful if attention is paid to Indigenous languages. Language and culture are intertwined. When communities lose their local lan-

guages, they also lose significant aspects of their culture. Indigenous knowledges can only flourish when local peoples are able to retain their languages. In Africa, like elsewhere, local languages have been a powerful medium for a transmission of culture and cultural expressions. This has significant implications for questions of development too (see Brock-Utne, and Skattum 2009).[10] We also need to ask whether we do justice to African oral culture when presented and expressed in the dominant colonizer's language (English or French) rather than in the Indigenous languages of local peoples. Young learners are exposed to the culture, traditions, and community histories by elders as cultural custodians only through the latter.

The Indigenous prism brings a critical perspective to Indigenous practices, epistemologies, roles, and spaces for sharing and producing local cultural knowledge, including understanding social relations of communal knowledge production. The Indigenous prism posits a counter-hegemonic perspective to challenge any claims to a universal discourses. It is argued that »the articulation between Eurocentric colonial discourses and powerful (mainly Western and masculine) positions has contributed to naturalize certain knowledges as universal [and that such] Eurocentric knowledges […] as civilization, progress, and literacy have become universal through scientific and technological arguments« that espouse the ability of the Anglo-Europe (Arango 2014: 2). The so-called universal discourses merely constitute forms of abstract knowledge which must be complemented with local cultural knowledges and practices. On the other hand, Indigenous knowledges reflect »culturally situated logical systems« acknowledging »their intrinsic connection to local cultures« (*ibid*.: 10).

Elsewhere (Dei 2009) I have articulated that as among the basic philosophical tenets of an Indigenous prism Indigenous ways of knowing are epistemologies that seek to connect Land and place, spirit, body, mind and soul in the process of knowledge production (see also Meyer 2008).[11] For example, Land/Mother Earth is seen as a site of

[10] B. Brock-Utne and I. Skattum (eds.), *Language and Education in Africa: a Comparative and Transdisciplinary Analysis*, Oxford: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

[11] G. Dei, ›Indigenous Knowledge Studies and the Next Generation: Pedagogical Possibilities for Anti-Colonial Education,‹ *Australian Journal of Indigenous Education*, Vol. 37, 2008, pp. 5–13; M. A. Meyer, »Indigenous and Authentic: Hawaiaan Epistemology and the Triangulation of Meaning,« in N. Denzin, Y. Lincoln, and L. T. Smith (eds.), *Handbook of Critical and Indigenous Methodologies*, Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2008, pp. 211–216.





knowing and spiritual identity (like other identities of race, class, gender, sexuality, and [dis]ability amongst others) is part of a way of knowing and being. In fact with the Indigenous prism, Land as well as spiritual identity become salient and fundamental analytical concepts offering significant entry points in understanding the lived experiences of the Indigenous peoples. The spiritual is embodied and constitutes the axis on which Indigenous knowledges rest, that is, the substructure for understanding the social, cultural, economic, material, political, physical, and metaphysical realms. Given that spiritual subjectivity is inseparable from social existence, one must insist that Indigenous knowledges reside in body and in cultural memory.

The Indigenous prism is also about a wholeness of existence, a nexus of body, mind and soul, and the interrelations of society-culture, and Nature. To understand a social phenomenon is to have a complete, holistic way of knowing how to connect the physical, metaphysical, social, material, cultural, and spiritual realms of existence. Society, culture and Nature are in intricate relations and no social occurrence is outside of the realms of culture and Nature. Everything that exists in society and culture is related with Nature and the metaphysical world. The world of the metaphysical has real social existence and this explains why in the African world, for example, local peoples humanize Nature and endow the forces that threaten them in the natural world with human qualities in order to relate to these.

A critical Indigenous discursive framework also brings three conceptual understandings to Indigeneity: First, is the dialectic of Indigeneity and colonialism. Colonialism, with its deep-reaching denial of history and local identity, has created unequal outcomes for groups in terms of their histories, engagement of culture and traditions, and spiritual identities. Indigenous peoples seek to upend such unequal relations through claims of Indigeneity as identity and process. Second, humans have myriad identities and there are situational variations in intensities of different identities given the effects and aftereffects of colonization. In a universe that is so spiritualized as in the Indigenous context, only some forms of identities can be colonized, but the spirit can never be. Indeed it is argued that African peoples mainly survived colonialism through the powerful connections to their spiritual identities. Third, central to decolonization of Indigenized and colonized communities is resistance. Through resistance, Indigenous bodies sow the seeds of our own decolonization. Indigenous peoples articulate and insist on their Indigeneity in order to overcome

their historical positions of marginalization. Through the process of Indigenous knowledge reclamation, Indigenous peoples become active subjects. Lastly, the Indigenous prism critiques the independence of scholarship from politics and activism. Indigeneity is about political resistance and we seek knowledge to bring about change and social transformation. Indigenous knowledges are about everyday living and human survival. The pursuit of such knowledge is to employ the knowledge received to serve humankind. The pursuit of knowledge cannot simply be for the sake of knowledge itself. Consequently, the worth of Indigenous prism as a social theory is measured by its philosophical principles and the ability of the theory to offer a social and political corrective. Because of the politics of decolonization, Indigenous knowledges are not just a search for knowledge or knowing how. It is knowledge to act and do. It is knowledge pursuit intended to help local communities deal with social problems in a global interdependent world still reeling from the on-going effects of colonization.

## III Indigenous Research: Confronting Some Epistemological Issues and Questions of Method and Methodology

As noted elsewhere (Dei 2013a, 2013b) there is a need for a reconceptualization of Indigenous research situating Indigeneity as a process of coming to know. Indigenous research is researching with an Indigenous consciousness. It is research that affirms local voice(s), authenticity of selves, and ›epistemic saliency‹ (Dei 1999) of the Indigenous experience.[12] Indigenous research is a complex decolonized approach of producing, interrogating, validating and disseminating knowledge based on Indigenous peoples' cosmology and worldview or ›worldsense‹ (Oyewumi 1997), as well as values system with its own unique methodological and theoretical framework accepted by the epistemic community in question.[13]

Indigenous research has a particular research agenda – to subvert the dominant ideology that seeks to dismiss, downplay and decenter

[12] G. Dei, ›Knowledge and Politics of Social Change: The Implication of Anti-Racism,‹ *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, Vol. 20, No. 3, 1999, pp. 395–409.
[13] O. Oyewumi, *The Invention of Women: The Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997.





the relevance of local peoples cultural knowings.[14] A critical Indigenous research methodology must therefore explore how local peoples resist continuous colonizing relations and practices by taking into account their interpretations of everyday practice and experiences. Indigenous research is about the authenticity of local voice and experience, not in the sense of purity or non-contamination, but rather, as local peoples remaining true to themselves, their histories, cultures, and experiences without filtering these through Eurocentric interpretations and understandings. Indigenous research is about representing the Indigenous experience outside of a Euro-American hegemonic lens.

In Indigenous research there must be a relationship between the ›concepts‹ used and the ›data.‹ The ›data‹ must move beyond what we know as researchers. Indigenous research upholds the view that researching for ›data‹ cannot be pursued as mere descriptive appendages of theoretical formulations (see also Dei, and Johal 2005).[15] This research argues that ›data‹ should be a theorization of the Indigenous experience located within the prism of local peoples' cultures, histories, identities, and the interpretations with their environments (physical and metaphysical). There is a need for dealing with the embodiment of research as more than understanding knowledge as socially and discursively constructed. Knowledge is also politically, emotionally, and spiritually constructed. Indigenous research seeks a co-relational status, a humanistic conversation with our communities in the search for knowledge (e. g., research is not a one-way conversation). But above all else, Indigenous research must sustain local peoples' capacity to undertake their own research.

Research that is informed by Indigenous prisms or perspectives as outlined in the Indigenous discursive framework in the earlier section operates with some critical understandings (e. g., holism; interconnections; spiritual relations; respect for Land and Mother Earth; the sacredness and sanctity of human activity; community interdependence; responsibility; transparency and accountability; reciprocity and reciprocal relations; the nexus of society, culture and Nature;

[14] Denzin, Lincoln, and Smith (2008); Kovach (2009); Wilson (2001, 2008); M. Stewart-Harawira, ›Challenging, Knowledge Capitalism: Indigenous Research in the 21st Century,‹ *Socialist Studies/Etudes Socialistes*, Vol. 9, No. 1, 2013, pp. 39–51.
[15] G. Dei and G. S. Johal (eds.), *Critical Issues in Anti-Racist Research Methodologies*, New York: Peter Lang, 2005.

and the interface of body, mind, soul and spirit; see also Wilson 2001, 2008). Research is perceived as a sacred activity involving human beings in the search for knowledge (see also Batacharya 2012; Shahjahan 2007).[16] This search begins with due recognition of the Land and Mother Earth and the acknowledgement of location and space as sources and sites of knowing. The researcher must be diligent in their dealings with the Land on which a study is conducted, acknowledge the sacred teachings of this Land as informing the conduct of research, research relations, and the general pursuit of knowledge. Research must proceed with a degree of humility and sanctity by affirming the Land as sacred (see also Wilson 2008). Indigenous research is about holistic relations involving the self as researcher, research subjects, the local community, and Nature.

Indigenous research also involves community and communal relations. Research must seek to build communities and community of learners. In Indigenous research, there is no ownership of knowledge but an expectation that those who give their knowledge must be appreciated and that those who receive such knowledge must also bring responsibility to such knowledge. The custodianship of knowledge requires that knowledge holders use their knowledge responsibly to build communities and not to enrich themselves. Indigenous research is built upon reciprocity and reciprocal relations between the researcher and the local community. Research is about reciprocal exchange of knowledge and works with an understanding that both the research and local custodians of knowledge have mutual obligations to each other. This must be respected and appreciated to ensure the success of the research process.

Responsibility, accountability, and transparency are three important pillars of Indigenous research. There is responsibility on the part of the researcher to pursue knowledge in ways respectful of the peoples' histories, cultures, and knowledges. This responsibility also extends to the researcher using the knowledge responsibly to bring about change in the lives of the local communities. The researcher's foremost accountability is to the local community who imparts its

[16] S. Batacharya, ›Life in a Body: Counter-Hegemonic Understanding of Violence, Oppression, Healing and Embodiment Among Young South Asian Women,‹ PhD dissertation, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto, 2012 [unpublished]; R. A. Shahjahan, ›The Everyday as Sacred: Trailing Back by the Spiritual Proof Fence in the Academy,‹ PhD dissertation, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto, Toronto, 2007 [unpublished].





knowledge. Research must proceed in a very transparent way such that the local community knows what is going on in terms of process, expectations, and responsibilities. Local community knowledge holders are also responsible to their own communities to ensure that the imparted knowledge truly reflects the aspirations of their community. Cultural custodians are accountable to the Land, Elders, and the ancestors. Their dealings with researchers must always be transparent and they must seek to uphold the good name of the local community.

Indigenous research is purposeful in terms of changing the direction of conventional research agenda. For example, as noted elsewhere (Dei 2010), in working on ›educational success‹ using student narratives through an Indigenous research paradigm, the research approach is not to follow a more conventional research agenda, to simply ›generate knowledge about a group of students‹ (that is, understanding the academic experiences of successful students) or seeing these students as ›objects of knowledge.‹[17] In an Indigenous activist research agenda, the focus is on students' discourses of resistance and alternative visions of educational success as critical to transform the current school system. Hence, Indigenous research paradigm will work with ›successful students‹ to offer their own perspectives about ›success‹ (e. g., how they define and achieve academic success) and the alternatives to dominant conceptions of success in ways that help us to rethink conventional schooling. Indigenous research on schooling then becomes forging a productive research and activist agenda between academic goals of searching for alternatives to conventional schooling as a way to strengthen the current school system (see Bhavnani and Davis 2000; Fine and Vanderslice 2005 in other contexts).[18]

On the interface of body, mind, soul, and spirit the research subject and the researcher must utilize all aspects of themselves in the

[17] G. Dei (with A. Butler, G. Charamia, A. Kola-Olusanya, B. Opini, R. Thomas, and A. Wagner), *Learning to Succeed: The Challenges and Possibilities of Educational Development for All*, New York: Teneo Press, 2010.

[18] K. Bhavnani and A. Y. Davis, »Women in Prison: Researching Race in Three National Contexts,« in F. W. Twine and J. Warren (eds.), *Racing Research, Researching Race: Methodological Dilemmas in Critical Race Studies*, New York: New York University Press, 2000, pp. 227–246; M. Fine and V. Vanderslice, »Qualitative Activist Research: Reflections on Politics and Methods,« in F. B. Bryant et al. (eds.), *Methodological Issues in Applied Social Psychology*, New York: Plenum, 1991, pp. 119–218.

pursuit of knowledge through research. The body, mind, soul, and spirit are legitimate sources of knowledge production. Just as race, class, gender, sexual and (dis)abled identities are linked with knowledge production, so is the interface of body, mind, soul and spirit. The nexus of society, culture, and Nature when evoked in knowledge production through research requires that an understanding of local communities engages with the connections of culture, society, and Nature.

In going beyond the episteme to method, Indigenous research is political. Working with the ›political‹ dimension of research is key to sustaining Indigenous research and scholarship. A truly Indigenous research must seek to capture the ›real‹ and everyday politics, sociomaterial realities, as well as the institutional practices and the resistances engaged in by subjects with or without explicit or conscious ›paradigms‹ to articulate them. The particular methodological approaches of Indigenous research must also look simultaneously at forms of external and internal colonial and oppressive relations and practices. A critical Indigenous research methodology must explore how the subjects of study resist continuous external and internal colonizing tendencies. What popular forms of consciousness inform these resistances and the subjects' interpretations of everyday practice?

There are obvious limitations in the ability of traditional, Euro-American social research paradigms, and methods to capture and explain the experiences of colonized, and oppressed peoples. To counter and redress these limitations the primary focus in Indigenous research methodology ought to be on the experiences of Indigenous subjects as key to understanding oppressions and the pursuit of transformative praxis. The ›epistemic saliency,‹ referring to the authenticity of local subject's voice, is critical in Indigenous research. Colonial relations cannot be understood fully by focusing solely on the colonized. We need the colonizer's input as well, and vice versa. Thus, there is a need to work with an overarching concern for domination studies and the transformative potential of Indigenous research. To this end, Indigenous research must enhance the agency and the ›agential power‹ (Daniel and Yearwood 2002) of the Indigene as part of a

[0] B. Daniel, and M. Yearwood, »African-Canadian Women's Bodies as Sites of Knowing and No-ing,« in S. Abbey (ed.), *Ways of Knowing In and Through the Body*, Welland, Ontario: Editions Soleil, 2002.





critical, transformative praxis.[19] Indigenous research does not make any distinctions between the ›knower‹/›known,‹ and ›researcher‹/›subject.‹ Research gives agency and voice to all parties. Local communities are not excluded as non-researchers but are active subjects playing significant decision-making roles in research projects involving their own communities.

The Indigenous prism raises questions about the relevance and the application of research. It asks: In whose interests has research sought knowledge? What are the implications of research for local subjects in terms of the pain, emotions, suffering, and other social and psychological costs of conventional research mired in colonial paradigms of control and power of knowledge? Indigenous research takes questions relating to pain and suffering seriously and seeks for ways to protect research from inducing pain. Pain and suffering that might emerge through the research praxis must always be known to the researcher, and made known to the researched. There is an obligation on the part of the researcher to create, and sustain a safe space for researching. Indigenous research must also provide a ›language of possibility for naming‹ for both the researcher and subjects of research, problematizing and potentially transforming the subjects' personal/lived experiences.

Conventional research often proceeds on the assumption that our research subjects have acquired the complete truth or the ›true facts‹ about the researcher, her/his intent, suggested procedures, guiding assumptions, motivations, and research questions. Unfortunately this is not always the case. The idea that somehow imposed research conditions preconceived by the researcher without participants' input, and the assumption that participants are ›informed‹ once they ›become part of,‹ or ›participate with(in)‹, is false and deeply problematic. The researcher has an on-going obligation and responsibility to communicate openly with the participants about the research interactivities and emergent design.

Local peoples must be part of the process of meaning-making. Research as an emerging process must be informed by multiple sources, including empirically situated socio-cultural phenomenon. The everyday-lived experience as a legitimate direction of social and educational research implies an on-going dialectic (non-mechanical, not mechanistic relations) between researcher and subjects. Clearly, research methodological approaches must have a dialogic interaction and conscientization. Indigenous research must seek to subvert pro-

cesses of domination, manipulation, and colonization of minds (see Rahnema and Bawtree 1997 in another context).[20]

Indigenous research ruptures the ›cult of expertise‹ of the researcher and the ›rape model‹ of research that leads solely to the career advancement of the researcher (see Reinhartz 1979: 95, cited in Lather 1986: 75).[21] As creators of knowledge and understanding, subjects are co-researchers who are able to change their own social situations and contexts. With this approach, research is no longer an authoritarian, parasitic encounter. Rather, it becomes a dialogic, reciprocal, and dynamic meeting.

## IV Indigenous Knowledges and the Challenge for Nation-Building in Africa

When Indigenous knowledges are gained through the methodology described above, they can contribute in responding to some of the challenges faced by postcolonial African nation-states. They can build up knowledge systems that resonate with the past, present, and future. In particular, they are adequate enough to face the challenges posed by globalization. The long experience in nation-building in Africa reveal moments in which such knowledges have contributed to social development. In many African rural contexts, for example, traditional pharmacology is still practiced alongside Western medicine. Indigenous farming systems and methods continue to provide daily sustenance to a number of African households. Folkloric productions of local communities attest to the vibrancy of African traditional cultures. In effect, contemporary African nation-states cannot categorically dismiss our Indigenous knowledge systems in the search for ›genuine development.‹ Such development must proceed through paradigms that are »steeped in our home-grown, cultural perspectives« (see Yankah 2004: 26).[22] Current struggles of African governance and democracy have much to learn from our traditional systems

[20] M. Rahnema, and V. Bawtree, *The Post-Development Reader*, London: Zed Books, 1997.

[21] S. Reinhartz, *On Becoming a Social Scientist*, San Francisco: Jossey-Boss, 1979; P. Lather, ›Research as Praxis,‹ *Harvard Education Review*, Vol. 56, No. 3, 1986, pp. 257–277.

[22] K. Yankah, *Globalization and the African Scholar*, Faculty of Arts, University of Ghana, 2004.





of governance. In order to build communities that African states and citizens desire, we need to tap into our rich, local, cultural resource knowledge base for their contributions to development.

Quintessential to African societies fully taking off on this trajectory, is the need for Africans to possess a decolonized and uplifting knowledge of self and their society. Many Africans have been socialized and taught to implicitly believe that they are inferior to the White man and woman. This ongoing tragedy is especially prevalent in the education system and the everyday social experience of Africans.

Let me use Nigeria as a good case in point. (What follows here is not only happening in Nigeria by the way.) In Chizoba Imoka's unpublished paper: ›Educating for Global Citizenship But Local Irrelevance,‹ she notes that many of the private schools in Nigeria train their students exclusively in the Cambridge and SAT curriculum for easier transition to schooling abroad.[23] The consequence of this is an unforgivable and inexcusable silence about the immediate socio-cultural context of children in the schooling curriculum. Many students do not come to learn and appreciate the value of their cultures, and histories. A number of African learners in the diaspora would concede that we learn more about our continent and cultural roots when we leave our home countries. For example, it is not farfetched to meet an African who has visited London, France, and the USA but has not visited other states within her own country or other African countries. Imoka raises some critical questions that are worthy of reflection:

> What does the silence about the immediate social environment of the students in school curriculum mean? For example, a Nigerian student who attends secondary school and lives in Lagos State graduates without knowing the basic history of Lagos but is taught about Buckingham palace and has visited the palace. Through such teaching, what values, history, and culture do students come to internalize as important? What does it mean for Ibo students in Nigeria to learn about their society in a way that tells them that a river their great grandparents swam in was discovered by the Scottish Explorer Mungo Park? What does it mean for Indigenous outfits in Nigeria to be called ›traditional‹ and the European outfits like suits to be called ›English‹ and these English outfits are what you wear for professional and economically relevant occasions? More so, ›traditional‹ outfits are worn to work on Fridays while ›English‹ is the norm for other days. (Imoka 2014: 1)

[23] C. Imoka, ›Educating for Global Citizenship But Local Irrelevance: The Case of the Nigerian Teenage School Girl,‹ University of Toronto, 2014 [unpublished course paper].

Indeed, as she observes, the consequence of this tragedy is that many African learners become schooled to think less of themselves and their societies. Through our colonized social priorities and actions, we ascertain that everything worthy and worthwhile of being studied is outside the continent. Our Indigenous cultures are something we only experience during the holidays when we go to our ›villages.‹ In a sense, Indigenous culture is stored in a museum *(ibid.)*. Instead of it being lived and used to inform social policies of economic inclusion amongst other things, it is conceived as useless for contemporary urban living. This fallacy must be undone. Africans need to unlearn this self-deprecating knowledge about ourselves and our communities. History needs to be taught in an African-centered way and from pre-colonial era (wa Muiu and Martin 2009) where great Kingdoms like the Benin Kingdom existed and continue to exist.[24] This way African learners will start to rightfully see ourselves as people with agency who have contributed to the advancement of our societies and the world from time immemorial (wa Muiu and Martin 2009; Ayitteh 2010).[25] In teaching from this lens, the richness and wisdom in African traditions, history comes to bear. This will also enable Africans who are eager to promote a nation-building project to engage with Western knowledge in ways that ensure a centering of African culture, our desires and aspirations however competing and contending with each other. More importantly, the minds and souls of Africans become the vehicle to drive nation-building (Imoka 2014).

This does not mean that development must only tap into African Indigenous knowledges. However, it is being insisted that genuine development must not dismiss African Indigenous knowledges as pre-modern and therefore of less use to contemporary societies. The failure of African development can in part be blamed on the troubling refusal to connect questions of culture and local knowledge with the science of development.

[24] M. wa Muiu and G. Martin, *A New Paradigm of the African State: fundi wa Afrika*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.

[25] G. Ayitteh, *2010 – Africa's Development – Making the State Accountable, The New School, YouTube*, http://youtu.be/voZBwS3rHUQ (last retrieved on 17 January 2015).





## V Multi-Centric Knowledging and the Challenge of Decolonization

Promoting Indigenous research is an approach to decolonizing knowledge, and the recognition of the importance of a multi-centric knowledge base. As an entry point into multi-centric knowledging, we must seek to ›Indigenize the school curriculum‹ (see Dei 2015b).[26] The curriculum must broadly include local resources in the search for knowledge. Viewed in such light, researching becomes a project of decolonization. Decolonizing and Indigenizing the modern university »is not just de-Westernizing but a total re-assertion of [Indigenous peoples and their knowledges] at the center of the process of knowledge discovery and dissemination« (Asante 2013: 3).[27] In the African context, this means that Indigenous voice(s) and the authenticity of selves must be affirmed; the epistemic saliency of the African experience underscored.

Multi-centric knowing is also about ›epistemological pluralism‹ and a challenge to epistemological polarity where rather than view knowledges as complementary they are pitted against each other as if always in perpetual conflict. Knowledges are in synthesis with each other. Epistemological pluralism must proceed through knowledge synthesis. However, before such a synthesis is possible in the Western academy, certain challenges must be addressed. For example, as some have noted there are fundamental tensions, difficulties, contradictions, and paradoxes of translating Indigenous knowledges and epistemologies into Western, non-Indigenous languages, categories, and technologies (see Andreotti, Ahenakew and Cooper 2011: 42; Santos 2002).[28] This difficulty arises because of the question of language. To have a more meaningful conversation about multiple knowledges in the dominant academy we are forced to use the language of the for-

[26] G. Dei, ›Decolonizing the University Curriculum,‹ *Socialist Studies/Etudes Socialistes*, Vol. 10, No. 2, 2015b [forthcoming].

[27] M. K. Asante, ›Decolonizing the Universities in Africa: An Approach to Transformation,‹ Keynote Address, Conference of African Scholars, *Promoting Critical Consciousness: Deconstructing Colonial Knowledge Legacies in the Academy*, Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, Port Elizabeth, South Africa, 7 August 2013.

[28] V. Andreotti, C. Ahenakew, and G. Cooper, ›Epistemological Pluralism: Ethical and Pedagogical Challenges in Higher Education,‹ 2011 [unpublished paper, forthcoming]; B. Santos, »Toward a Multicultural Conception of Human Rights,« in B. Hernandez-Truyol (ed.), *Moral Imperialism: A Critical Anthology*, New York: New York University Press, 2002, pp. 39–60.

mer colonizers (like English or French). The problem is that often the parameters for the conversation are set by the dominant language. Indigenous knowledges are expected to fit into these parameters in order to make themselves intelligible to language-speakers of the dominant language. This set-up presents the difficulty of working with Indigenous ways of knowing that do not fit the »parameters of acceptability established by so-called [modernity and] modern knowledge« (see also Andreotti, Ahenakew, and Cooper 2011: 42; Santos 2002). So the questions these authors have asked are: how do we as Indigenous scholars use the colonial language (in this case English), Western terminologies and logics (e. g., epistemology, ontology, axiology) and technologies (alphabetical writing, digital scripts) to address issues relating to Indigenous ways of knowing? Are there some ethical concerns and social responsibility issues when we force some of these oral knowledges into ›corrupted written forms‹ in the dominant language? Ethically, what are we doing when we seek to present these bodies of knowledges in terms simply comprehensible to the dominant and its ways of knowing? These are challenges that we can only think about and be creative in our pursuit of multi-centric ways of knowing and doing Indigenous research. Andreotti, Ahenakew, and Cooper (2011).

## VI Conclusion

I conclude this discussion by looking at Indigenous research and the implications for education as broadly defined. To reiterate: central to Indigenous research are concepts of spirituality, spiritual knowing, the interface of body, mind, soul and spirit, and the nexus of society, culture and Nature. The African spirituality is not the consumer spirituality we often witness in the European context, but a spirituality that recognizes contradictions, complications, and contentions. In a sense we must speak of African spiritualities. Elsewhere (Dei 2012) this connection of body, mind, soul, and spirit has been identified as the ›trialectic space.‹[29] The body, social context, location, culture, and history are crucially important in processes of knowledge production. All research is about knowledge creation. Research is about working with

[29] G. Dei, ›Suahunu: The Trialectic Space,‹ *Journal of Black Studies*, Vol. 43, No. 8, 2012, pp. 823–846.





myriad identities of the researcher and local, Indigenous peoples with whom knowledge is being produced. This means engaging with the myriad identities of gender, race, class, ethnicity, disability, etc. The trialectic space of body, mind, soul, and spirit implicate the dynamics of social difference (race, gender, class, sexuality, disability) in Indigenous research. Concretely and pragmatically, the trialectic space and the insistence on spirituality as a site of knowing bring concerns of gender, class, race, ethnicity, sexuality, and the ways people with non-normative bodies are disabled onto the table. What might the trialectic approach mean then for Indigenous research and education taking into account gender, class, race, ethnic, disability oppressions, etc.?

Similarly, notwithstanding the virtues of community we know that local communities can also be oppressive. Indigenous understandings of the values of community are not always tenable in contemporary contexts. So how do we ensure that Indigenous research by engaging the body, mind, soul, spirit in knowledge production as sites of identity and power is not also reproducing oppressions in the name of ›community?‹ How does Indigenous African spirituality help offer deeper insights into power, knowledge, and social action in critical research practice, and how are these tensions to be resolved? The need for decolonizing spaces that are without power hierarchies is noble. But there must be a more pragmatic recognition that power is included in all social relations including the power of the community.

Similarly, sexuality complicates dominant readings of community. For example, how are a gay or a lesbian supposed to hide their relations in the name of community? Or is the individual supposed to put community above self only in the socially-just community, that is, only in one that recognize the possibilities of all kinds of loving relationships including same-sex ones? My point is that communities are not always liberatory. Clearly, a trialectic approach to Indigenous research emphasizing the inevitable interrelations between body, mind, soul, and spirit, might create a new liberatory space for anti-colonial and Indigenous research. An Indigenous-centered research approach must affirm the Indigenous and subaltern learner as a social being who has resources for resistance. The research context is about learning from diverse socio-cultural environments. However, this implicitly is also about power and the power of dominant groups to define cultural norms. Indigenous research in local communities offers opportunities to critically understand the socio-cultural as a place where dominant colonial cultures can also seek to silence subaltern

cultural expressions. This is the challenge of Indigenous research as it seeks to break away from colonial hierarchies and relations of knowledge production.

From a nation-building standpoint, it is just as important to acknowledge interconnections among knowledge systems as it is to discursively separate the categories of ›Indigenous‹ and ›the West‹ in order to offer a sustained critique of the historic negation of Indigenous knowledge systems. We also have to be able to address the appropriation of Indigenous knowledges into Western science sometimes without due credit given for the source of such knowledge. Europe is not the advent of human history; Westerners need to understand this and African children need to be immersed in a decolonized knowledge of self and society. In turn, they will have to affirm their decolonized outlook in their civic practices, social choices, and their interaction with political leaders and fellow citizens.

Obviously, Africa had an Indigenous knowledge base before the arrival of Western science. The epistemological polarity that continues to exist in our institutions of higher learning point to on-going relations of dominance between Western and non-Western knowledge systems produced by a long, colonial history and colonizing practices of hierarchizing knowledges. This hierarchy was achieved through the active denial, negation, devaluation, erasure, and open dismissal of Indigenous cultural knowledges. As a consequence, an epistemic polarity has continued to exist that manifests itself in a ranking of knowledge systems. This is harmful to the ways we come to know about our world, the social choices we make, the knowledge we embody and how we act within such a world for change. The urgency of decentering and re-arranging the existing hierarchies both in the academy and contemporary African societies is real.

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# Indigenous Knowledge: An Engagement with George Sefa Dei

The primary aim of Professor Dei's paper is a defense of what he calls »Indigenous knowledge« against its devaluation and rejection by the Western academy. As such a defense it is a very spirited and polemical essay that takes direct aim at the relations of dominance between Western and non-Western knowledge systems. These relations of dominance were produced by the long history of European colonial practices. The impact of this period of colonization has indeed been quite deleterious for the epistemic orders of colonized societies. The process of colonization incorporated local cultural systems into a hierarchical order that was established between imperial and colonial cultural systems. Within this new hierarchical order, imperial cultural systems had to accumulate authority, information, legitimacy, normativity and other form of cultural capital at the expense of colonial cultural systems. The imperatives of these processes of cultural accumulation and dis-accumulation were such that local cultures rapidly lost normativity, legitimacy, epistemic authority and experienced major changes in basic sectors such as language, philosophy, religion and education. Thus Professor Dei is very much on point in coming to the defense of these Indigenous cultures.

Further indicating the importance of this defense is the fact that he is not alone. As is well established in the philosophical literature, scholars from these colonized areas have been highly critical of this imperial epistemic hierarchy and have sought to decenter and re-arrange it. In relation to Africa, one thinks immediately of Frantz Fanon, Amilcar Cabral, Henry Odera Oruka, Kwame Gyekye, Wole Soyinka, Kwasi Wiredu, Ngugi Wa Thiongo, and V. Y. Mudimbe. Professor Dei's defense of Indigenous knowledge is very much in the critical spirit of the tradition established by the above authors.

In the course of his defense, Prof. Dei defines Indigenous knowledge as engagements with the land, identity, spirituality, community, local histories, local cultures, and resistance to the dominance and to