

(Dis)continuity of African Indigenous knowledge

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Abstract

What role does Indigenous knowledge play in the lives of contemporary Africans? To investigate this question, we visited three communities in Ghana—rural, peri-urban, and urban—where we interviewed community members involved in communal education. Contrary to the literature on the decline of Indigenous knowledge, we find that Indigenous knowledge, practices, and institutions are resilient across all contexts. Traditional leaders continue to play a significant role as stewards of Indigenous knowledge despite the impact of colonization, rural–urban migration, and globalization. However, Indigenous knowledge does not exist in a vacuum. It coexists and competes with many knowledge systems, inculcating in Africans multiple identities and consciousness. We discuss the implication of our findings and explain why there is a need for Africans to better integrate their multiple consciousnesses and different lived realities.

Keywords

African Indigenous knowledge, Ghana, identity formation, postcolonial, traditional education, traditional leaders

Introduction

Many individuals are increasingly turning to African Indigenous knowledge, which is the expressions, practices, beliefs, understandings, insights, and ideas developed by local communities to aid their survival and flourishing overtime (Mawere, 2015), for inspiration on how to solve Africa's intractable problems. However, African Studies scholars disagree on the current state of African Indigenous knowledge and the role it plays in the lives of contemporary Africans. The issue at stake in this debate is not about the necessity or validity of Indigenous knowledge. It is about whether Africans continue to utilize Indigenous knowledge and the strategic role such knowledge can play in resolving Africa's problems. While the various schools of thought engaged in this debate focus on different aspects of contemporary life in reaching their conclusion, they hardly examine the state of Indigenous knowledge across multiple contemporary African communities simultaneously. This omission makes it difficult to appreciate the (dis)continuities of traditional practices and their role in the lives of 21st century Africans. The debate also ignores the resilience of traditional institutions and the third Industrial Revolution's distinct impact on African Indigenous knowledge systems.

The lack of intentional focus on the impact of these two phenomena in multiple communities is puzzling for two reasons. One, references to Africa's knowledge heritage abound everywhere. Although much of the existing literature argues that the influence of African Indigenous knowledge has waned, many individuals continue to practice Indigenous religions and utilize Indigenous proverbs and symbols in their daily lives (Abidogun & Falola, 2020; Maunganidze, 2016). Indigenous knowledge

permeates popular culture in most countries on the continent. And it is easy to identify its influence on institutions that Africans inherited from the West, East, and Middle East (Mazrui, 1986; Nkrumah, 1965a). Ignoring the multiple influences of African Indigenous knowledge limits the explanatory power of current scholarship, preventing it from offering a not-so-accurate representation of the varying role that Indigenous knowledge plays in the lives of today's Africans.

The second reason why the lack of systematic study is bewildering is that we risk misunderstanding the agency and power each African possesses for Indigenous self-liberation. Efforts to Africanize education, decolonize the mind, educate children in Pan-Africanist thought, reform Indigenous institutions, and develop African solutions to African problems have not produced the desired results (Coe, 2020). Part of the reason is that the architects of these solutions fail to appreciate Africa's multiple heritages and their implication for identity formation. Indigenous, Islamic, western, Eastern, and other knowledge systems interact to bring contemporary African societies into existence. We are likely to misdiagnose the causes of Africa's underdevelopment and either overestimate or underestimate the ability of existing tools to transform the situation if we lack a critical understanding of the actual

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state and influence of any one of these knowledge systems. Lamenting the loss of African Indigenous knowledge paints a distorted picture of what generations of Africans have endeavored to do to keep Indigenous knowledge alive.

Ghana, in particular, presents an interesting case study since it is the first country to gain independence in sub-Saharan Africa and played a historical role in Pan-African thought. Ghana is home to over 70 ethnic groups, most of whom claim to have migrated from elsewhere (Boahen, 1975). In this article, we argue that Ghanaians continue to actively utilize Indigenous knowledge in rural, peri-urban, and urban communities, not just in remote areas. These communities are impacted by globalization and each other in different ways. Urban centers bring together a large population of diverse ethnic groups from all areas, while peri-urban communities are situated next to urban areas as a transitory area from industrial to rural. Although rural areas tend to have stronger cultural traditions, the trend of rural-urban migration has weakened ties in rural communities. Because of the distinct qualities of these different communities, we investigated the role of African traditional education in these contexts by speaking to stewards of African Indigenous knowledge and young people in these communities. We interviewed traditional rulers, elders, traditional priests, church leaders, teachers, youth, and community members in three different communities and participated in traditional festivals. We found that Indigenous knowledge is relevant to people in all three communities for different purposes. Although study participants had differing levels of exposure to traditional knowledge depending on where they lived, they recognized the importance of some traditional practices and utilized the wisdom derived from Indigenous knowledge to guide their decisions. Similar to the study participants, the study team had differing levels of exposure to Indigenous knowledge and practices. The first named author is a Ghanaian, who comes from a royal lineage and takes keen interest in traditional practices. We did not collect data in his community. The second named author is a Japanese-American who has lived and worked in six countries on the continent and considers herself a learner of African Indigenous knowledge.

The next section reviews some of the existing literature on this debate on the relevance of African Indigenous knowledge. After that, we introduce our study design and methodology. Then we elaborate on our findings and provide detailed evidence to support our claims while identifying the key themes and tensions that arose from our research. The article concludes with a discussion of the implication of the results.

Literature review

Many individuals are increasingly turning to African Indigenous knowledge for inspiration on how to solve Africa's intractable problems because they blame some of Africa's problems on the continued dominance of western and Islamic knowledge systems. Among those seeking a

revival of African Indigenous knowledge, some argue that Indigenous knowledge is waning and no longer plays a significant role in Africans' lives (Abidogun & Falola, 2020). Others disagree, arguing that Indigenous knowledge continues to play a role in contemporary African societies, but its influence is mostly limited to rural areas (Maunganidze, 2016). Despite their differences, these scholars agree that African Indigenous knowledge has experienced a significant decline.

However, there are serious disagreements over how African Indigenous knowledge lost its influence. Some scholars blame colonialism (Emeagwali & Shizha, 2016; Olufemi, 1993). Others fault postcolonial African governments (Coe, 2020; Igoe, 2006). Abidogun and Falola (2020) point to a lack of support and recognition from national governments. Another argument is that society perceives Indigenous knowledge as irrelevant because it remains under-theorized (Kaya & Seleti, 2014). Boahen (1980) identifies African elites and their role in the diffusion of western lifestyles as the threat to African Indigenous knowledge and ways of knowing. While Coe (2020) also focuses on elites, she blames them for stripping African cultural knowledge and practices of their deep and authentic meanings. She reasons that rendering traditional practices into sound bites, commercial props, and symbols for formal education undermines their civic ordering functions and renders them moot (Coe, 2020). This section will explore these scholarly debates in-depth.

Is it colonialism?

A longstanding debate in various African communities is about colonialism and western imperialism's impact on African Indigenous knowledge. Many individuals exclusively blame colonialism for the perceived destruction of African Indigenous education and ways of knowing (Diop, 2012; Emeagwali & Shizha, 2016; Olufemi, 1993). There are reasons to doubt this argument, however. Scholars are right to point out the different ways in which western representations of Africa and Africans in books and audio-visuals stripped and continues to strip Africans of their humanity, dignity, knowledge, and culture. These dehumanizing portrayals are harmful, and Africans are right to rebut and reject such works. However, the colonialists' psycho-cultural warfare was primarily an elite project. In effect, African educational practices and Indigenous knowledge survived colonialism in large parts of the continent (Asante, 2019; Kenyatta, 1965). Although locals learned from Europeans and incorporated what they learned into their cultural and educational practices, which usually happens when two cultures meet, many Indigenous African ideas, values, and practices survived the onslaught of western colonialism and imperialism.

Our observation might appear as radical to some people now, but it is not. It was a widely shared view among the first generation of postcolonial African elites. In *Education for Self-Reliance*, Julius Nyerere (1968) acknowledges that the colonial education system failed to achieve its intended goal of replacing Indigenous knowledge with western

knowledge. Chinua Achebe (2009) reflects on his childhood, noting that his village, Ogidi, which was only partly Christianized when he was growing up, maintained most of its traditional practices. Achebe also offers many examples of how challenging it was for colonialists to penetrate African societies. He describes how rare colonial rulers and colonial institutions were in the hinterlands and how it took the missionaries 30 years to spread Christianity from Onitsha to Ogidi, even though the two towns were only 7 miles apart (Achebe, 2009). Similarly, Boahen (1980) describes colonialism's impact on Indigenous knowledge and practices as limited, lopsided, and an urban phenomenon that left rural life "virtually untouched" (p. 144). Some contemporary scholars also assert that African Indigenous knowledge plays a vital social ordering role in many postcolonial African states (Abidogun & Falola, 2020; Bob-Milliar, 2009). Omolewa (2007) documents several educational initiatives in different parts of the continent that highlights the value of existing African Indigenous knowledge and practices.

Is it African elites?

Instead of the colonialists, many scholars credit African elites for ensuring that colonial attitudes, ideas, and knowledge have enduring appeal and a negative impact on African Indigenous knowledge and epistemology. Nyerere (1968) asserts that colonial education influenced the attitudes, ideas, and knowledge of beneficiaries. These elites act as the diffusion agents of western ways of being and knowing by privileging western and Islamic education and political systems (Boahen, 1980). Their lifestyle and growing status in the postcolonial world also appeal to young people, who desire those kinds of lifestyles (Mandela, 1995; Nkrumah, 1965b; Williams, 1980). Some of the African elites view the colonial elites' lavish and ostentatious lifestyles as the standard of a good life and try to mimic them (Yale & Gestrin, 1998). Put simply, the most potent legacy of the colonial system is the African elites, who continue to reproduce colonial attitudes and oppressive systems (Ngũgĩ wa, 2011; Rickford, 2016). The desire to live the elites' elegant life inspires many young people to obtain western education and discount any form of education that does not provide the coveted certificates, which would give them access to the Afro-western world. Fanon (1967) makes a similar argument, noting that an inferiority complex took root among the colonized, who assimilated metropolitan culture and rejected their Blackness in their quest to be seen as equals to the Whites. Fanon (1967) argues that this tendency is a legitimate coping mechanism in response to the violence to which Black people have been subjected.

What is often missing in the literature is the extent to which the postcolonial elites need and depend on Indigenous knowledge. The literature portrays the elites as though they have lost all links to their traditional heritage and wholly embraced non-African ways of knowing while using Indigenous knowledge only as political and economic tools. Simultaneously studying the role of Indigenous

knowledge in both elite communities and non-elite communities is essential for understanding the enduring appeal of Indigenous knowledge, its ability or inability to guide the moral behavior of contemporary Africans, and the threats to its continued relevance. Without such knowledge, Africans might continue to yearn for the revival of traditional values, ideas, and knowledge without realizing that they never lost them in the first place. It would be like someone wearing eyeglasses while frantically searching for them all over the place.

Is it globalization?

African cultures have never been static. They have evolved over the years, just like any other culture, due to internal and external pressures (Kotowicz, 2013). But the pace of change quickened after many sub-Saharan African states ventured into the information age in the 1990s. Economic and political liberalization in the 1990s opened a whole new world to Africans. The number of communities without electricity, internet, and hospitals continue to decrease (Blimpo & Cosgrove-Davies, 2019). Urban communities also experienced a great transformation. Most metropolitan areas went from having one or two television stations to having dozens of local and foreign stations. Smartphone penetration continues to deepen, enabling daily internet access (GSMA, 2020). Whereas standardized education offered by governments and colonialism only succeeded in creating an elite culture in urban areas (Ezeanya-Esiobu, 2019), the proliferation of mobile technology and other internet-driven media has expanded non-African knowledge to the hinterlands, leading to extraordinary learning and assimilation. Instead of depending on hearsay, many more Africans can now watch social media and 24-hr news channels to glean insights into life beyond their shores.

Method

To carry out a comparative analysis of the role of different knowledge systems in various parts of Ghana, we visited and collected data from three communities: Tumu (rural), Otinibi (peri-urban), and Madina (urban). Subjects included chiefs, queen mothers (female traditional leaders who are, theoretically, equal in power and responsibility to the male chief), elders, traditional singers, traditional drummers, community leaders, church leaders, teachers, parents, university students, secondary school students, and out-of-school youth. We interviewed a total of 72 key informants (25 in Tumu, 25 in Otinibi, 22 in Madina) across the three communities. We had an equal number of male and female participants.

In each community, we first visited the chief of the community to introduce ourselves and seek permission to carry out our study. Second, using key contacts from the chief and other sources, we used the snowball sampling technique to interview various education stakeholders and leaders in the community through focus groups and semi-structured one-on-one interviews. Where necessary, we enlisted the assistance of a translator so that the informant

could speak in their dominant language. We participated in community activities as participant observers. Data from the interviews and observations were transcribed and analyzed thematically to answer the research question.

Findings

Resilience of Indigenous knowledge

Contrary to our theoretical expectations, the urban area still had many African traditional practices coexisting with other ways of being. Many youths joined our meetings with the elders in urban Madina, just like the children who sat through our meetings with elders in rural Tumu, and many children also joined in the traditional festival preparations in peri-urban Otinibi. These young people did not verbally join the conversation; they were silent participants but engaging in the traditional process of observing and learning from their elders' examples.

For traditional specialist roles, whether in urban, peri-urban, or rural settings, people were still being trained in a way that reflected Indigenous educational practices. For instance, a herbalist shared about how his father trained him from a young age. He was sent to look for plants for his father's work, and through this process, he would learn the names of Indigenous plants and their medicinal uses. This approach entailed serving as an apprentice until the learner was ready to make medicine by himself. This was also the case for the chiefs who underwent training under the mentorship of the elders to learn the ways of their communities. The traditional priest trains his understudy in the same way. The understudy observes him during rituals, attends consultations with him, and runs errands for him. Through these activities, he gains knowledge of the role and develops the situational wisdom required to be an effective traditional priest.

Moreover, traditional leaders still play an important role in their communities. The chief is regularly occupied, assisting community members. Even in the urban community, people often go to the chief to resolve their problems, whether they are marital conflicts, land issues, or family turmoil. As a chief shared:

[Traditional leaders] were in charge of administering justice and adjudicating cases. They have been doing it and doing it perfectly even now. Their judgements are done without bias. Also, there is the involvement of spirituality, so if you don't tell the truth, you may die. In addition to that, people always go to the elderly to seek advice. Some of the old men have insights into some of our challenges, so most of the time, particular elders are consulted for advice. They might just have to use proverbs to advise you Every day, the community members come with their problems, and then we find solutions to them. The problems vary. From education, conflict, social activities. It's general, all kinds of issues when you reside in a community; and [the elder] has to preside on all these things. (Participant 50, August 30, 2019)

Nonetheless, there is a tension between contemporary and traditional ways of life. The traditional drummers in Madina learned how to drum in their village before migrating to the city. Although they tried to use a similar pedagogy to

teach university students, the chief drummer confessed that it was difficult since students did not spend their entire time with them as trainees would have done in the village. This gave teachers multiple opportunities to watch and correct students in real time, enabling them to learn improvisation. Such a pedagogy is difficult to replicate in a university setting, where interactions with students are limited.

Traditional festivals remain important across all three communities, but the function of these events and the level of community engagement varied. A rural community leader noted,

Some of the things we still do is that, after harvesting, we look for the elderly, the old ladies, and share some food with them to indicate that we are out of the farm. Then after that too we have a simple get together to mark the year. (Participant 29, August 30, 2019)

The festival appears to be a modest gathering of everyone, young and old, to celebrate the harvest and to feast together.

Otinibi is a historically Ga-Adangbe (an ethnic group in Ghana) community but became more diverse with the immigration of many different ethnic groups into the community. Otinibi celebrates Homowo, which is a Ga festival meaning *hooting at hunger*, every year around August. Homowo commemorates the history of the Ga people and their triumph over famine—it embodies a spirit of joy and thanksgiving. The traditional priest sprinkles a specially prepared steamed and fermented cornmeal, kpekpele, along with the pouring of libations to thank the gods for the harvest. All the people then eat the kpekpele and palm nut soup, usually from shared bowls, in a communal feast. During a certain part of the festival, people go around the town to publicly call out the wrongdoings of different people in the community through songs, and the guilty person must run to the singing people and vow to not do it again to stop the singers from continuing to tell the public about their misbehavior.

The night before the festivities, several women gathered to prepare the feast for the following day. We went to participate in this preparation while conversing with the women as they prepared the palm nut soup late into the night. One of the older women served as the leader and teacher. She had learned to prepare all the dishes from cooking with her predecessors. Through working together with the other women, she taught new people how to cook the special food.

Although the people of Otinibi still observe Homowo, many adolescents are not actively participating in preparation for the festival. For instance, the women preparing the food lamented that young women were not learning how to prepare this special meal; only a few young women were present. There were several groups of young children, most of them not yet of school-going age, who were curiously watching the preparations from a safe distance. We saw the same children in the early morning when the chief was sprinkling the kpekpele. Future studies could investigate why more young children took interest in the traditional festivities than the adolescents.

We find a different situation in Accra, Ghana's capital city, where the largest Homowo festival is held. Although only a smaller percentage of the overall community is

involved in organizing the events, many young people participate. Here, the festival is much more commercialized and promoted as a tourist attraction. When we visited the Homowo festival in Accra, we saw many kinds of entertainment, including trick biking, live painting, modern dance-offs, and live bands alongside traditional dances, attires, and singing. While the traditional rulers continue to celebrate Homowo like their ancestors, it appears that the public, whether Ga or not, comes together as a community to commemorate that history in new ways while uplifting the creatives and entertainers in the community. Therefore, while the composition of traditional festival organizing committees appears more elderly across the different contexts in Ghana, they still play an essential role in fostering community cohesion and identity. For the elders to attract the active participation of young people at the preparatory stage in the urban community, they need to accommodate the schedule and needs of a community that is no longer predominantly agrarian.

Preserving Indigenous knowledge

We observed many intentional efforts to transmit and preserve cultural knowledge. Some families continue the tradition of evening storytelling. There are families who have modified this tradition to suit the contemporary lifestyle. The sister of a chief reveals that her late father

used to tell us the history of the town every 31st December dawn; instead of going to church, he sits us down and pours libation for us twice. After he is done, he starts to tell us how [our town] came into existence. (Participant 29, August 30, 2019)

Using storytelling to preserve and transmit cultural knowledge is not limited to the family setting. Some leaders invite young people to sit in meetings or join them in explaining their culture to visitors. The Ghanaian government has produced TV series of traditional stories and mandated the teaching of local culture and languages in school. Individuals are producing podcasts and videos to document and transmit the wisdom of the past to the future generations.

A chief shared about how he was working on preserving the names of Indigenous plants and feared that without proper documentation, people would continue to forget their names and their uses. According to the chief,

We have already lost so much, and we are continuing to lose a lot partly because we are not documenting, and it's unfortunate that when you get to many of the communities and you go to the school and you get two or three children, and you want them to mention the local names of 10 plants, they cannot. It's so bad. And if you live within your environment and you cannot identify the various plants that you live among, it's quite a disturbing issue for some of us. Not long ago I documented the Indigenous names of the Salah people. I haven't been able to cover all the names but at least I have over 4000 names; that is my way of trying to preserve these names. For all you know, some of these things may have very good medical uses. If we are even beginning to lose the names that we have for them as a people, then you can imagine what will happen in the next generation. (Participant 1, June 17, 2019)

This chief's effort to catalog and educate his community about Indigenous uses of plants is part of a long tradition of similar efforts, dating to the precolonial era. Contrary to the narrative that Africans did not document their history, the Timbuktu Manuscripts, a collection of historical manuscripts documenting life and ideas of Africans starting from the late 13th century, number approximately 700,000 in Timbuktu alone ("Mali: Timbuktu heritage may be threatened, Unesco says", 2012). Scholars have discovered hundreds of thousands of old manuscripts in cities across Africa, including Agadez, Chinguetti, Walata, Oudane, Kano, and Qasr Ibrim; they found almost 250,000-year-old manuscripts in Ethiopia, and thousands of manuscripts on Makuria, a medieval Sudanese empire, written in eight different languages in Egypt (Understanding Slavery Initiative, n.d.). During colonialism, African writers wrote graphically about their communities, providing useful, vivid descriptions of life in African societies. Some of the notable writers are James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw, Mahmud Kati, and Olaudah Equiano. The historians and cultural writers who saddled the colonial and postcolonial era include Florence "Buchi" Emecheta, Cheikh Anta Diop, Chinua Achebe, Jomo Kenyatta, Adu Boahen, Jan Vansina, Raymond Mauny, and Louis-Vincent Thomas. Contemporary historians are too numerous to list.

The participants also highlight the vital role of family historians. These are individuals who families and elders look up to when they need help filling in missing parts of the family, clan, or town's history. An elder in Madina explain that the person is selected for the role based on the individual's interest and attitude:

People usually show interest. And they want to sit and walk with the elders. There is one among us who can tell the whole story of our community. He can even meet any elder in Accra and ask certain questions about their families. That is how he acquired his knowledge. (Participant 51, August 30, 2019)

Being a historian appears to be a self-selected, self-driven process. Historians seek out elders, who serve as facilitators, creating opportunities for the historian to obtain information and witness historical events. Another chief notes that it is not just anyone that is allowed to play the role of family or community historian. They take that individual's proclivity for truth and integrity into consideration because not all information should be shared freely with all.

Tensions between Indigenous and other knowledges

The interviewees' responses suggest that there are tensions between non-Indigenous knowledge systems and Indigenous knowledge. These tensions frequently dominate the public debate in Ghana. For example, a primary school textbook's stereotypical portrayal of Ewe people as people who practice juju or witchcraft, stirred an uproar in the country at the beginning of 2021. Some argued that juju, or traditional religious practice, is practiced by all ethnic groups in Ghana and that juju needs to be normalized rather than looked down

upon as a taboo. This debate illustrates the paradoxical relationship that many modern Ghanaians have with Indigenous knowledge, which sometimes involves secretly practicing juju while disavowing it in public. It is a simultaneous embracing and rejection of Indigenous forms of being and knowing. However, Christianity, Islam, and colonization are not the only driving factors; rural–urban migration and nation-building policies have also contributed to this disconnect from Indigenous knowledge. The further we move from rural areas, the fewer social structures are in place to help young people learn about their ethnic heritage. Instead, the urban youth have opportunities to help them learn about other ethnic cultures through their schooling, just not with the breadth and depth needed for solid identity formation. As a result, these young people know a bit of many cultures but are not an expert in any one. Interviewees recognized that urban societies were culturally diverse and that only learning about their culture could be limiting. One student explained that she would only know about her culture if she was home-schooled, but she learns about many cultures at school. This situation results from policies the elite put in place to build national unity and reduce tribalism (Coe, 2020).

A sense of collective responsibility to raise children, which was the norm in Indigenous societies, appeared to fade and turn into a more nuclear family approach as we moved into the more urban areas. Disciplining other's children as well as one's own is still the norm in many rural areas, where children are scolded or caned by their elders in the community if they were caught doing something wrong. However, residents of Tumu, the rural community, explained how the introduction of the concept of children's rights was changing this practice. One respondent explains:

The NGOs [Non- Governmental Organizations] have educated children on their rights and educated parents on their responsibilities, but others are saying that what is missing in all this thing is the education on the responsibilities of children. (Participant 2, June 18, 2019)

The respondents remarked that the lack of a communal approach to discipline has led to the rise of delinquency and other immoral behaviors. The inability to correct children on-the-spot denies children the opportunity to develop situational wisdom and a sense of responsibility to the community.

Relatedly, the spread of both Islam and Christianity reduced the power of traditional taboos, which laid out clear and immediate consequences for immoral actions. One community member said:

They used to train children by letting you understand what the tradition is and the taboos in it. When you refuse and go and break it, [you receive] the consequences in that light. When religion comes, religion decides to open things up and say, "No, they are only deceiving you, or you can do it without anything." (Participant 3, June 18, 2019)

Adding on to this change in how parents raise their children, it seems in general that parents are talking less with their children and that fathers are becoming less

involved in their children's lives. Several respondents noted that parents used to spend more time with their children; they would share stories and the history of their clan, as well as teach drumming and dancing in the evening to teach moral lessons. These close-knit interactions continually strengthened the ties of the family and the transmission of Indigenous values to the youth. However, this was not the case anymore in many homes. A community leader expressed:

Before the raising up of the children used to be the best. In the morning the father has to see the child. If the child wakes up in the morning, the mother will say go and greet your daddy. When he gets to the father, he squats and greets. Sometimes the father will put his hand on his head to encourage him for the day . . . In the evening, when they all come to the house, the child will still go to the father and greet and then sometimes sit and eat with the father. But today it's not there like that. (Participant 5, June 18, 2019)

Many urban young respondents said they could not explain what they knew about their own culture simply because they did not grow up in the places where their parents come from, and their parents were not available to teach them. A queen mother explained that "now civilization has taken place globally, affecting our way of life" (Participant 30, September 1, 2019). She explains that changes in how societies educate children have made it more difficult for parents to be able to advise their children.

Adapting to the times

Among the interviewees, there was a recognition that not all aspects of Indigenous knowledge were relevant or ethical. People have chosen to abandon some of the practices because they see them as harmful. For example, a student brought up the practice of trokosi, where a virgin girl is sent to a traditional priest to atone for the sins of a family member. The traditional leaders agree that they need to reform or discard these harmful practices, but they are also wary of the impact of changing practices without adequate consideration. As these leaders grapple with the changing dynamics, they are conscious of their role as the custodian of their culture and the bridge between the past and the future. They want to adapt to contemporary realities without compromising their tradition. One of the elders noted that,

We can stop some, but we cannot throw everything away. We cannot say we are developed, so we can throw everything away . . . because one day we will be held accountable. It is our legacy, so we need to keep some. It is good to keep our traditions since we don't want to regret not showing and sharing it with our dear future children. Some traditions are good; others are bad. (Participant 53, August 30, 2019)

Many of the participants brought up this idea in different ways. A chief said that "the elderly always wish we don't throw away our tradition" (Participant 2, June 16, 2019). This statement indicates that the desire to preserve Indigenous African knowledge and practices is not new. It

is not an afterthought. Previous generations have been intentional about it and instill in some of the leaders the essence of preserving Indigenous knowledge, maintaining its relevance and reproduction mechanisms.

In terms of recognizing the importance of traditions and cultural identity, we can identify two groups of people from the informants. One group appears apathetic about Indigenous knowledge because it seemed irrelevant to their livelihood. A second group wants to reconnect with their cultural roots to solidify their identity and develop a sense of pride in their origins. A chief's sister shares that although she was playing a leadership role in community activities, she was still not as familiar with many of the traditions of her clan and struggled to explain some aspects of it. Nevertheless, she indicates that she is trying to learn as much as she could from the chief and elders. A queen mother mused:

Although we are answering questions, it brings back memories, and it makes you know that there are things that we need to go back to and revise because some of these things will come up in the future, and we need to know who we truly are, our culture and upbringing. This helps raise our hope in the African way. (Participant 30, July 15, 2019)

The queen mother expressing her desire to deepen her understanding of her own culture illustrates the awakening and identity conflict in these communities. Despite the resilience of Indigenous knowledge, these tensions and resulting internal confusion and public debate show that many Ghanaians continue to have a complicated relationship with Indigenous knowledge.

Discussion and conclusion

Yes, they [still practice traditional forms of education], but they still blend it with the modern one. I can say that every child is in school as I speak. We cannot say we will take only the modern education system without the traditional. So, we blend the two. (Participant 54, August 30, 2019)

The above statement by Participant 54, a chief, summarizes our argument perfectly. Although many of the communities we studied embrace contemporary education, they hold on to what they consider to be the essential aspects of their Indigenous practices and knowledge. A middle-aged woman in Madina captured the same idea when she said, "Traditional education will always be there, whether there is schooling or not" (Participant 57, August 30, 2019). In Tumu, we learned that the British imposed their current chieftaincy system on them during the colonial era. Previously, landlords served in a capacity similar to the chiefs and continue to play leadership roles in the community. The fact that the landlord and chieftaincy systems exist in tandem demonstrates the prior system's resilience.

Despite centuries of fears that Africans would lose Indigenous knowledge, practices, and institutions, it has survived. From our observations, African Indigenous knowledge has widespread support in many Ghanaian

communities, and their popularity is growing. Many people, even those who are not enthusiastic, express interest in learning about their culture because they think it is essential to understand who they are as individuals. Stewards of Indigenous knowledge are cognizant of their essential role in preserving such knowledge and are working to ensure that future generations can learn them.

An overwhelming majority of Ghanaians of all ages value African Indigenous knowledge. A student offers some clues as to why many youths consider themselves Pan-Africanist and value Indigenous knowledge: "Tradition is important to us because there is a saying that people will live anyhow when there is no tradition in a community. But there is order when there is tradition" (Participant 60, September 1, 2019).

Although support for the traditional way of life remains high, access to western education continues to grow simultaneously (Lewin, 2009). One traditional priest argued that

western education does help a lot. It opens your mind to so many things. With traditional education, it limits you to one place. You are unlikely to travel because you would not be able to speak and write English. But if you can read and write, you will go to more places. (Participant 35, August 26, 2019)

Like the traditional priest, many study participants recognize the value of the different approaches to education and knowledge, and they want to enjoy the benefit of all worlds. This situation indicates that none of these knowledge systems is in the position to dislodge the other permanently.

Our study's primary finding is that African knowledge and other knowledge systems, western, Islamic, and Eastern, coexist in Ghana. Indigenous knowledge does not just exist in the past—it constantly morphs and continues to influence the present and the future. Whereas one form of knowledge is more dominant than others in some settings, they coexist and compete in all communities. Different systems of power produce, maintain, and reproduce the different bodies of knowledge, and they all make claims to different truths (Akena, 2012; Ezeanya-Esiobu, 2019). In their current warring state, the different bodies of knowledge cannot provide healthy nourishment to the soul by merely coexisting. There is a need for educators to make conscious efforts to integrate these bodies of knowledge for learners to develop into true human beings. Put differently, Ghanaian societies cannot expect learners to develop into ethical, innovative, and creative self-actualizers without helping them acquire the tools they need to merge their competing warring ideals and multiple selves into a fuller self (Du Bois, 2007). Rather than striving to become more human through the White gaze (Fanon, 1967) or rejecting everything foreign, Ghanaians can learn how to navigate these tensions and create new identities to express the fullness and complexity of their being. However, we cannot equip the younger generation with the skills and tools that we do not have. It would be ideal for scholars to theorize and develop a new vision of African humanism in the modern world. They need to provide clear insights to help people navigate their multiple identities and ideals.

In other words, the bifurcation of knowledge in African societies has sociopsychological and empirical implications. For example, studies have shown that the dual power structures—western and traditional—of African countries contribute to the precarious security and political environment (Mamdani, 1996). Having parallel systems is both a gift and deprivation (Du Bois, 2007; Ngũgĩ wa, 2011), but it can become an asset through intentional effort. It behooves people who find themselves in such a position to develop coherent systems that would extract the benefits of these multiple identities and transform the destructive elements. However, an inability to build an integrated education system, where Indigenous knowledge reinforces and complements western knowledge rather than serving as a sideshow, could produce stagnation and deprivation.

The paradox of our findings is that Indigenous knowledge is resilient and Ghanaians value it, but it has been placed in an antagonistic competition with other knowledge systems. Part of the reason is that the postcolonial elites sought to re-Africanize African societies without making a clear break from the colonial way of life. While they did not want to lose the traditional ways of being, they similarly refused to give up the colonial practices, ideals, ontologies, and epistemologies that they inherited from their colonial masters. They chose to build postcolonial societies on parallel knowledge systems rather than create a unified system. The political leaders elevated the colonial system to the status of formal knowledge while relegating Indigenous knowledge to the informal space, where it continues to act as a tool for resisting the inherited colonial system. Although most people yearn for the White world's glamor, it is taboo to declare total allegiance to such a world (Achebe, 2009). This situation is not constructive.

It is time to fashion a new path forward. This is an opportunity to theorize about what it means to live African beliefs and values in today's world. There have been some attempts. For instance, the concept of Afropolitanism, developed among the African diaspora, tries to define contemporary Africans as cultural hybrids who straddle borders and identities (Eze, 2014), but this notion has been criticized as elitist and out of touch from the lives of most ordinary Africans (Santana, 2013). What our finding emphasizes is the importance for each of us, not just the elites, to engage in this process of meaning-and-sense-making and identity exploration. Each person's meaning-and-sense-making contributes to shaping the collective identity, providing new direction.

There is a need for answers to questions like: How do African societies cater to their citizens' economic, psychological, social, and nutritional needs without compromising their love for community? How can Africans harness nature's power to live with nature instead of harnessing nature's power to wield it over nature? What does it mean to be a postcolonial African? How do Africans fuse the wisdom from the different realities that the black soul embodies to answer new questions while providing the space for new answers to emerge? This is a critical time to continue building on this identity-exploring endeavor to refine our approach to Africa's development.

Authors' note

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Glossary

Ga-Adangbe	an Indigenous people of Accra, Ghana's capital city
Homowo	literally, hooting at hunger; an annual festival around August that commemorates the history of the Ga people and their triumph over famine—it embodies a spirit of joy and thanksgiving
juju	a traditional religious practice
kpekpele	steamed and fermented cornmeal
trokossia	practice in which a virgin girl is sent to a traditional priest to atone for the sins of a family member

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