

EPISTEMOLOGICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL  
FOUNDATIONS FOR AN ALL-INCLUSIVE RESEARCH  
PARADIGM IN THE SEARCH FOR GLOBAL  
KNOWLEDGE

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## Preface

This monograph was prepared for the “Field Building” Programme of research activities initiated by the Afrika Study Centre, Mbale, Uganda in collaboration with the Programme Committee on Global Security and Co-operation of the Social Science Research Council-SSRC-GSC. The Programme of activities arose out of a Workshop, which was held in Uganda in November 2001 financed by the SSRC-GSC as part of its attempt to broaden the understanding of security in security studies. In the way the SSRC-GSC understood the problem, the field of security studies had changed greatly since the early 1980s as it had become increasingly realised that threats to security of individuals and communities around the world originated from a variety of sources other than those connected with the military dimension of great power competition and rivalry that characterised politics in the period of the Cold War. Such ‘small events’ as localised wars, small arms proliferation, ethnic conflicts, environmental degradation, international crimes, drugs, and human rights abuses were all now being regarded as central to the understanding of security at local, national, regional, and global levels.

For this reason, it was considered necessary that the knowledge about all these different kinds of human security situations are scattered in diverse registers and libraries should be brought together so that they can interface in order either to interrogate each other, or to make themselves understandable to the other through processes of interrogation, dialogue, integration, and synthesis. This was particularly so if the production, integration, and dissemination of the new knowledge, which is required to understand the process of security in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, were to be met. By implication, what was required was the need to create new frames of knowledge through which dialogues between the different kinds of actors could be made possible. This would also make it possible for different kinds of knowledge being made accessible to all users in different contexts.

Apart from the academic researchers, Non-Governmental Organisations and other practically oriented research activists, there were also the custodians, theoreticians and practitioners of African indigenous knowledge systems who are major depositories of knowledge about security and co-operation in African communities. In all the three cases, the knowledge produced by the actors, is minimally analysed and, where it is available, it is used in narrow circles for immediate purposes and then stored away in their respective libraries, archives, and memories. It is for all practical purposes inaccessible even to people within the social science disciplines, let alone to the practitioners, activists, and indigenous knowledge users.

These researchers, practitioners, and activists have also inherited models of the state that are inadequate for understanding the increasingly complex environments that have been created by the globalisation of economic and social life within which these states operate. While some of these approaches point to the importance of non-state actors, a new generation of theory building about states and their relationships with each other and to different types of organisations and actors is required.

Therefore in order to build the intellectual capacity, which can relate different kinds of dimensions of security to each other (e.g. the environment, ethnicity, nationalism, migrations, infectious diseases, food supply, biodiversity, global finance, and crime) and at the same time relate them to the more traditional range of security issues centring on global security will be vital. This also means that there is great need

for collaborative (as distinct from merely comparative and interdisciplinary) research, which goes beyond the confines of the national level. This collaboration will lead to the development of regional and global networks of researchers and practitioners, dealing with human security and other issues. The approach will provide the necessary intellectual tools that can relate the understanding of the local security situations to the global dimension and for the creation of a truly global community in which different kinds of knowledge about peace and security are integrated and synthesised to promote dialogue and cross-cultural understanding.

This has implications for the way we look at knowledge and knowledge creation globally, for a research methodology of this kind which is all-inclusive requires that it be sensitive to different epistemological foundations within which methodologies, paradigms, methods, theories, and techniques are formed for the creation of knowledge in particular epistemes.

In this monograph, we support the adoption of the hermeneutic approach not because of its African origins, and that is important, but for its open-endedness and its contemporary usage as an emancipatory tool of struggle. We are therefore suggesting an epistemological and methodological basis for the creation of a global pool of knowledge that is all-inclusive of all communities, cultures, and civilisations. As Kofi Annan has correctly said, this century is a century of dialogue between all the civilisations of the world, in which those civilisations that were said to have died will resurrect for inclusion and recognition. This would be a basis in which we can, for the first time in human history, create a truly global knowledge in which we all feel comfortable because of its inclusiveness.

In the understanding of the Program Committee on Global Security and Cooperation Programme of the Social Science Research Council:

“At a minimum, practitioners working internationally need better tools and training for grasping local political, social, and cultural conditions and concerns. This in turn suggests the need for capacity to link practitioners’ not only to international scholars but to local scholars in various settings. This in turn requires opening interventions in areas such as conflict resolution and human rights monitoring to scrutiny and evaluation by local scholars and systematic comparisons across local settings.”

The purpose of the “Field Building” research activity under this programme is to set in motion various processes, which will lead to the building of a “field” of different kinds of knowledge into a more integrated and synthesised understanding of local and global security issues in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The Afrika Study Centre collaborates with the Social Science Research Council and all interested parties to promote such an understanding. The contribution of the Harry Frank Guggenheim Foundation, which funded the research on security issues in pastoral communities in Eastern Africa, and which also contributed to the funding for workshops in the second phase in 2002 is also recognised and appreciated in this connection.

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## Introduction

This monograph attempts to establish an epistemological and methodological basis for a research approach that is capable of accessing different sources of knowledge, which is available in the diverse archives and libraries of different communities, societies, and fields. To access these archives and libraries of knowledge, it is necessary to deploy an epistemological and research methodology that is capable of exhuming the truth from these sources. Since truth is contextual and diverse, the methodologies suggested must also be contextual and diverse. They must be capable of reaching out to these different sources of knowledge as well as truth-sites so that the actors in these sources can communicate what they know if such a methodology is to achieve the overriding objective of creating pools of human knowledge, which can be accessed by all users. This is what we mean by “Field Building” research activity in this monograph.

A research theory that does not recognize the autonomy of these diverse sources of world-views and philosophies of life based on them cannot access such knowledge and establish the truths inherent in such knowledge. By implication such a methodology must be broad and accommodative of these diverse epistemologies and world-views if the knowledge collected is to be truly universal. In short, we seek to establish the basis for a methodology that is sensitive to these different bases of knowledge and the cultures in which they are stored in order to access the totality of these archives. This is necessary if we are to constitute a universal library of the knowledge of all humanity that is accommodative of all of us. Such a universal library must include the possibility of people accessing one another’s wisdom, which does not necessarily reside in what is normally called “scientific knowledge.”

“Truth,” which is partial and that is located in one or a few epistemological foundations under the claim that it is universal knowledge, cannot be said to be universal. On the contrary, it can only be ethnocentric, biased in favour of a particular culture or civilization, such as Eurocentricism, which privileges Euro-based epistemologies and “scientific” systems of knowledge built on them. Such an ethnocentric epistemology tries to establish hegemony by totalizing methods of knowing over other modes of knowledge by declaring the others to be “unscientific” and “unreliable.”

Yet scientific knowledge itself, in the sense we know it today, is just one cultural episode in the evolution and revolution of human society and has justifiably been correctly “deconstructed” by hermeneutic, structuralist, poststructuralist, and postmodernist paradigms. Such a unilinear mode of knowing must be corrected if indeed, we are to deal with these myths of modernity referred to as the “neutrality” of “modern scientific knowledge” by interfacing such knowledge with other forms of knowing and knowledge. To reach such a comprehensive methodology would eventually mean a synthesizing of all human knowledge through dialogue and searching for truths. But we must first enquire whence came this depreciation of older forms of knowledge, now popularly known as indigenous knowledge systems, by modernity. In trying to construct new basis for “field building,” we shall lay the basis for interfaces between all forms of knowledge?

Epistemological basis of Western 'modern' paradigm<sup>1</sup>

To be truly universal, all human knowledge systems must be fully acknowledged as a source of truths, which can only be validated by others through intersubjective forms of communication and dialogues between these different knowledge systems. This necessity had since the European Renaissance been recognised but, over-time, it became submerged by the dominant scientific discourse based on "reason" referred to in common parlance as the "Age of Reason." For Kant, the Enlightenment was man's emergence from "self-incurred immaturity," which was his inability to use one's understanding guided by reason. This was the individual ego let loose from its spiritual basis of salvation. The soul was no longer to communicate with the Gods through dialogue. It became loose and acted in accord with the individual self-interest based on 'reason.'

According to Hansen, this "modernity-as-universal reason" episteme had always been marked, and enriched, if not challenged, by the existence of another, though weaker, romanticist episteme within Europe:

"This episteme posits knowledge and meaning as being culturally differentiated, as always mediated by a specific language, as always situated in a unique historical setting. It presupposes fundamental culturalist ontology, positing human beings as, first and foremost, cultural beings. The romanticist episteme marks in a certain way the final break-through of modernity as a cultural system as it, for the first time, posits originality and notions of autonomy and self grounding of human beings, cultures, and social forms as marks of the highest cultural and political value" [Hansen, 1995: 110-111.]

It appears that Hansen has in mind here the interventions of philosophers such as Heidegger, Nietzsche, and later Gadamer. These philosophers from the early twentieth century onwards denied the "scientific" form of Enlightenment a privileged position in the definition of the "eternal and immutable essence of human nature." Martin Heidegger in his great work: *Being and Time* (1927) initiated a philosophic "discourse," which has spilled over into the 21<sup>st</sup> century in which he argued that "discourse" was the way people communicated with one another. It was the "articulation of intelligibility" in which people gave expression to the way they understood the world and the way that made sense to them. For Heidegger therefore, communication was the process by which people shared and encouraged their sense that the world can be comprehended and that their experience can become significant in that communication [Heidegger, 1962:204].

Nietzsche's intervention placed aesthetics above science and challenged the dominant role given to rationality in the process of understanding. This attack gave a new role and a new impetus to cultural modernism in which the artist was seen as playing a special creative role of defining "the essence of humanity." Nietzsche saw modernity as "nothing more than a vital energy, the will to live and power, swimming in a sea of disorder, anarchy, destruction, individual alienation, and despair" [Harvey, 1990, 1995: 18]

Instead of the powerful modernist imagery of civilisation based on reason, universal rights, and morality, Nietzsche envisioned the eternal and immutable essence of humanity being represented in the mythical figure of

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<sup>1</sup> This part of the text is derived from my manuscript entitled: *Africa In the New Millennium: Towards a Post-Traditional Renaissance* [2002] to be published by Africa World Press, Trenton/Asmara

Dionysus, which had the power “to be at one and the same time `destructively creative and creatively destructive.” Harvey adds: “The only path to affirmation of self was to act, to manifest will, in this maelstrom of destructive creation and creative destruction even if the outcome was bound to be tragic” [Harvey, 1990, 1995: 15-16, 18-19].

Gadamer, a student and follower of Heidegger and whose work on philosophical hermeneutics will form the basis of this contribution, gave great impetus to the idea of communicative dialogue as the basis of understanding. He argued that one's present *horizons* and one's knowledge and experience, are the productive grounds of understanding. He further argued that limits to understanding of the `other' can be transcended through exposure to others' discourses and linguistically encoded cultural traditions because their horizons convey views and values that place one's own horizons in relief.

Gadamer therefore stressed the role of language in opening the subject to these other subjectivities and their horizons. In forcefully stressing the role of language in opening the subject to other subjectivities in constituting traditions, Gadamer placed language at the core of understanding. Consequently, understanding for Gadamer was not the result of a scientifically reconstructed intention, but instead it mediated between the interpreter's immediate horizon and his emerging one [Gadamer, 1975].

These interventions in fact remind us that the struggle for cultural autonomy and recognition of the “other” has been part of the ideological reality in the centres of modernity. This is the same trend that occurred with the struggle for decolonisation in Africa and other parts of the world that has enabled the African people to resist unilinear modernization and capitalist destructiveness without constructiveness. It demonstrates that the struggle for a humanistic approach to understanding has been part of the struggle within modernity in all its manifestations. The mainstream economic and political interests have always tried to block this humanistic approach to understanding based on a truly universal criteria for accessing all forms of knowledge. This is why they have given privilege solely to the “scientific” way of understanding, playing down other forms of knowledge and understandings.

### **The Dominance of Foundationalism**

The new “order of things” propagated by the new dominant forces now placed faith in the “scientific method” of understanding things and society itself. The method, as we have seen above, was encrusted in the Galileo-Newtonian atomistic-mechanistic methods based on the natural sciences these two scientists were developing. This formed the basis of philosophical and methodological foundationalism in the modern attempt to establish the truth through scientific research. According to this approach, it was possible for knowledge to be created out of pieces of certain and infallible knowledge. This was considered to be the “foundation,” upon which all other knowledge could be constructed.

Foundationalist strategy takes two forms in their practice. These are the Cartesian and Hegelian approaches. According to the Cartesian approach, fundamental presuppositions of thought and knowledge, which are laid out, are beyond any empirical questioning precisely because they themselves ground empirical knowledge. In the Hegelian variant, the contingency of knowledge is acknowledged, but this contingency is recovered in the singular dialectic of reason based a Eurocentric paradigm and episteme.

René Descartes (1596-1650), the initiator of foundationalism in his path-breaking book: *Meditations on First Philosophy* written in 1641 argued that the universe had no human purpose. It was simply governed by physical laws that we should do our best to ascertain in order to understand that purpose. This search was to establish “laws” that were indifferent to human strivings and feelings. As he understood it, the universe was cold, inhuman, and mechanical. Descartes believed that if he could conceive anything in his mind “clearly and distinctly,” he could rely on it as being true and then build the rest of knowledge upon it.

In criticising what he called “the Cartesian point of departure,” Heidegger made the following questions and observations of this reasoning:

“Mathematical knowledge is regarded by Descartes as the one manner of apprehending entities which can always give assurance that their Being has been securely grasped. If anything measures up in its own kind of Being to the Being that is accessible in mathematical knowledge, then it is in the authentic sense. Such entities are those, which *always are what they are*. Accordingly that which can be shown to have a character of something that constantly remains ( . . . ), makes up the real Being of those entities of the world which get experienced. That which enduringly remains, really is. That is the sort of thing which mathematics knows. That is which is accessible in an entity through mathematics, makes up its Being.” [Heidegger, 1962, 2001: 128].

This reasoning became the pattern with the school of scientists, which became known as the Rationalists, who built their systems of enquiry on the basis that they had self-evident *first principles* of demonstration, which were first conceived by Aristotle. But it was these “final causes” based on these “first principles” which Descartes had in the first place rejected. But for them, they still argued that something counted as “self-evident” if one knew it was true simply by understanding it, although these self-evident principles were themselves based on a certain preunderstandings and a certain historical horizon, which was assumed to be incontrovertible. Nor could those principles be assumed to be true, except in the mind of the solitary individual who was socialised to believe that these first principles were true.

This rationalist self-understanding suffered from the fact that what they regarded as “self-evidence” was in fact a subjective claim of certainty, which meant that different rationalists could regard different things, as being self-evident, in which case there could be no way the disagreement could be rationally resolved. This is why this approach could not be sustained even in the medium term. It was idealistic and non-scientific. This is the crisis of European sciences that Husserl highlighted in his critique. Husserl observed that the environment in which science operates is not value-neutral objective world because it is already coloured by our cognitive, ethical, and aesthetic values. This is what he called the “lifeworld,” which scientific investigation ignored. In his view, it was this world that provided the enabling condition for scientific practice [Husserl, 1954].

This opened the way for another foundationalism called empiricism. The empiricists were opposed to the rationalist approach, although they too claimed some things to be self-evident and true. They, on their part, regarded individual *experience* as providing a foundational basis for knowledge creation. The experiences were pieces of “facts” which if put together methodologically would constitute knowledge. This approach was also mechanistic and unreliable because statements about individual experience could not be regarded as being self-evident in themselves in terms of being understood as such. They could only be grasped intuitively as part of empirical observation and this could differ from individual to individual.

But like the rationalists, this approach also came to grief because of disagreements and mistakes that occurred in the course of direct empirical observation. The foundational “pieces” of knowledge or “facts” were neither certain nor infallible. Even knowledge based on intuition could also be faulted, whether it was empirical, rational, or otherwise. Thus we reached a stage in the “scientific” discourse when no item of ‘knowledge’ collected through these approaches could be regarded as true or unfaultable. It became self-evident that all knowledge could be mistaken and therefore capable of improvement. The question was how?

Since knowledge could not be constructed from nothing and since it could not be absolutely certain, then it appeared that all knowledge could be “deconstructed.” It also meant that there were alternative ways of finding and understanding knowledge. Since it could not be constructed from nothing, it must at least be built on the existing or previous knowledge. This does not however mean, as some postmodernists have asserted, that since there is no certainty to knowledge, and no permanent and fixed systems that exist to reproduce it, then new knowledge is what *we think* we know until something else happens to change our minds. This is ahistorical and anarchic because where there is history there is previous knowledge in the lived experiences of that people. Such knowledge is renewed and updated to deal with real life situations and is built within the cultures and languages of peoples. This argument of the postmodernists can only apply to the “scientific” knowledge “constructed” by rationalism and empiricism.

But much of this questioning was mainly raised in continental Europe and other parts of the world. There was not much notice of it in the Anglo-American world, until 1962 when Thomas Kuhn published his: *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* [1962.] This came at a time when the rationalist and empiricist foundationalism was under serious attack. Kuhn provided a powerful alternative vision to the Anglo-American analytic philosophical approach on which logical positivist methodologies were based. According to Kuhn, scientific knowledge changed, not so much through the confrontation of “hard facts,” but by a social struggle between *contending interpretations* of intrinsically ambiguous evidence. From now onwards, the focus shifted to the European continental brand of hermeneutics, which involved philosophers such as Gadamer, Feyerabend, Derrida, Foucault, Habermas, etc.

Whereas *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* hardly mentioned truth as a concern of science, many of the new hermeneuticists positively rejected the possibility of any kind of objective truth. Everything depended on the individual’s *interpretation of a text*. “Reality” was only accessible to the individual interpreter in terms of how he/she understood and interpreted that text. Thus, if there was no “reality” to be independently compared with our knowledge, all we could do was to oppose one interpretation of knowledge to another, and each of these interpretations would ultimately as well be motivated by these “facts” as any other, since there were no foundational pieces of knowledge to back them up. It was this kind of nihilistic understanding of hermeneutics which led, Roger Penrose, one of the leading mathematicians to say in disgust:

“I have taken for granted that any ‘serious’ philosophical viewpoint should contain at least a good measure of realism. It always surprises me when I learn of apparently serious-minded thinkers, often physicists concerned with the implications of quantum mechanics, who take the strongly subjective view that there is, in actuality, *no* real world ‘out there’ at all! The fact that I take a realistic line wherever possible is not

meant to imply that I am unaware that such subjective views are often seriously maintained--only that I am unable to make sense of them" [Penrose, 1989:299].

This kind of nihilistic understanding of "postmodernism" has also led to a counter-movement calling for an "external reality," which can impinge upon and limit our freedom of interpretation if the truth is to be recognized! This is calling for a return to authoritarian logical positivism once again under the guise that "hermeneutics" is a form of "relativism," which Penrose contrasts with "objectivism" of logical positivism [Bernstein, 1983].

### **The Hermeneutic Turn**

In fact hermeneutics as a philosophic reflection had emerged much earlier in the first phase of the European Renaissance, but it was silenced by the dominant Cartesian "scientific methodology," as we have pointed out above. Hermeneutics as a general system of mediation of understanding can be traced back to its African origins in the figure of the Egyptian Trismegistus Hermes.

In Greek mythology, the Egyptian Hermes was seen as the mediator, who was responsible for explaining the messages of the gods to ordinary mortals. In short, he was an interpreter, and hence the word *hermeneus* was coined in the Greek lexon to mean *interpretation*. In Egyptian history and religion, on the other hand, Herms and his identity were merged with that of Thoth, the God of arcane knowledge and wisdom who later, in the shape of Hermes Trismegistus (Hermes the thrice-powerful), was credited with authorship of the Hermetic Texts and scriptures in which all knowledge was embodied. Thus in the original Egyptian meaning, Hermeticism represented something broader than the mere mediation and interpretation of meaning.

Herms was not just an interpreter, he was a messenger between Zeus and the mortals; he crossed another boundary and became a messenger between Zeus and the underworld, and also between the underworld and the mortals. He was seen as a notorious thief, and according to legend, he crossed the threshold of legality without qualm. He also mediated between waking and dreaming, day and night. He became invisible and visible at his own will. *He was all the time at the margins of situations in his very essence.* It is this quality of *marginality* that has in all ages enabled great artists, writers, and social critics to be able go beyond the dominant social forms in order to see society from outside itself and bring a message for change from beyond.

Herms, in other words, is the "God of Gaps," in the real sense of being able to inhabit a space in-between the worlds. If hermeneutics is truly to reflect the character and meaning of the Egyptian-African Herms, the message must be that of Herms not just as an interpreter of messages, but in the character that has the capacity to listen to the message, understand it, and then be able to pass it on to other listeners. In Heidegger's understanding: "interpretation in its highest form, ... is to be able to understand these fateful tidings, indeed the fatefulness of the tidings. To interpret is first to listen and then to become a messenger of the gods oneself." It is to stand in a hermeneutic relation to one's being here and now as well as to one's heritage as a human being [Heidegger, 1962]. Richard Palmer adds to this when he says:

"What is interesting and important about this description of interpretation is that it goes behind technique-oriented conceptions to a moment more primordial, a moment before our present thought forms, in order to grasp something essential. Such interpretation enters into a loving and fundamental dialogue with the greatest efforts of the past to grasp the meaning of being. This primordial listening is hermeneutical

in yet another sense: it is listening to *texts*. The “message” one must interpret is really the doctrine and thinking of one’s forbearers as embodied in the great texts. To exist hermeneutically as a human being is to exist intertextually. It is to participate in the endless chain of interpretation that makes up the history of apprehending beings.” [Palmer, R. E: 2001].

Heidegger argued that in this hermeneutic process one entered into dialogue with the doctrines of past thinkers, which were “in turn learned by listening to the great thinkers thinking.” In this communication, “each human being is in each instance in dialogue with its forbearers and perhaps even more and in a more hidden manner with those who will come after” [Ibid: 31]. The great texts need not be written texts. Indeed the greatest of these are in oral form. This is why Gadamer, in his debates with Derrida, insisted that the “living language” was more vital than the written word, although reading the written text is also a hermeneutic experience, which can never be repeated.

In reasserting this hermeneutic position, Heidegger was opposed to the Cartesian approach, which he saw as being based on mathematics, as we noted above. Thus in revisiting hermeneutics as a philosophy of a world-outlook to be the basis of an African epistemology conducive to human understanding, we have to purge the philosophy not only of these Cartesian mythologies and misunderstandings, but also of its European and Western prejudgments and prejudices, which were essential to their modernist interpretation of the world.

The European philosophical hermeneuticism was derived from Greek interpretation of the Hermetic texts in a way, which rejected the African philosophic outlook and worldview. The Greek understanding of hermeneutics, which was later borrowed through Christian attempts at interpreting the Bible, was narrowed down to the interpretation of *written* texts. It became a more domain-specific application in the ancient Greeks' study of literature as well as in the ancient Biblical exegesis. Having narrowed hermeneutics to texts as organic or coherent wholes, rather than collections of disjointed parts, they expected texts to be consistent in grammar, style, as well as in ideas. They formalized what was essentially a flexible, dialogical system, based on certain belief systems, which constituted its philosophical basis.

Aristotle in his treatise: *Peri Hermeneias*, for instance, defined hermeneutics in terms determining the truths and falsity of assertions, whereas even in the more ancient Greek practice, it was used for interpretation in several senses, including the oral interpretation of Homer and other texts. Homer himself interpreted the Egyptian information, which was oral into written texts—at least in his book: *Histories*. Hermeneutics was also used in translation from one language into another, and in the exegesis of texts, which sometimes brought in hidden language. Hermeneutics in this more ancient Greek use brought out meanings, which were embodied in rhetoric, which had much more broader scope than what was later adopted in writing. But hermeneutics was also used in the explication of dreams, oracles, and other texts such as legal texts and precedents, as well as literary and religious texts [Palmer, R. E, 1999].

Egyptian philosophy, on the other hand, believed in the *hermeneutic circle*, which was an intrinsically mystical notion, which held that in order to understand the part, its function in the whole must first be clear; and yet the function of the whole can only under this mystical system be derived from the understanding of its parts. In this understanding, then every explication of one part became at once an exploration of the other, while the process of explication remained at the same time a project of self-discovery.

The Greeks, in trying to 'rationalize' the application of hermeneutics codified rules of grammar and style that they used to verify textual passages. By extending the logic of the part and the whole to a particular writer or school and his/its entire output, they entered a very grey area whereby they began to attribute works, which had uncertain origin, to certain writers or schools of thought. In this way, the idea of understanding the part through understanding of the whole was vulgarised by this mechanistic approach.

Thus, methodological hermeneutics, as understood by Dilthey involved tracing a circle from the text to the author's biography and immediate historical circumstances around him/her and then back again. *Interpretation*, or the systematic application of understanding to the text, would then reconstruct the world in which the text was produced and place the text in that world. This circular process precluded an interpretation of a text from being unique and scientifically objective, like the explanation of a chemical reaction, inasmuch as knowledge of the author or agent's world may itself critically depend on the present interpretation.

### **Towards an African Hermeneutic Epistemology**

In moving in the direction of trying to establish an epistemology that enables us to create methodologies for understanding knowledge and wisdom from diverse sources and to be able to tap that knowledge and wisdom for common human use, we must devise a theory that can take account of the knowledge-seeking activities of these different actors. Hermeneutics is a good starting point for restoring the balance between the knowledge-seeking "scientific subject" and the "object" of his effort—the one researched and the knower. It also enables us to restore the balance between seeking knowledge for knowledge's sake and recognizing the role of wisdom in defining the meaning of life for the different actors.

Since we have demonstrated that the purely "scientific" approach to research produces distorted results that may not reflect the reality on the ground, we must establish how this reality is to be comprehended through a hermeneutic approach. The scholarly researcher begins with a "scientific hypotheses," which he/she tries to prove or disprove through certain data (information) collecting "methods." These methods are also based on certain social science "disciplines," which are abstracted from reality, because the majority of them are based on imitating natural sciences. The "objects" of study are distanced from the researcher both spatially and culturally. The purpose of data collection is to find out the actual condition of the "object" that is researched upon, whose knowledge of him/herself is regarded as "suspect," until it is "validated" by "scientific enquiry." This "knowledge" is then supposed to reflect the "truth."

But there is more to "truth" than the mere search for "knowledge." As Simon Critchley has noted, there exists a "gap" between knowledge and wisdom "that cannot be closed through empirical enquiry" [Critchley, 2001: 120]. This "gap" includes the question as to what is the meaning of life, which is not reducible to empirical enquiry. There other areas of human understanding that cannot be accessed by scientific enquiry. Whereas scientific research may establish truth from its methodologies of "value-free" research, this approach can never fully do away with the existence of wisdom, which is a peoples' understanding of themselves and the meaning they attach to their existence as human beings. Such understanding of the wisdom of each people can only be accessed by dialogue and intersubjective communication in which *meanings* instead of "truths" are established. What life means to an Englishman or Frenchman, can never be the same as to what is means for

a pastoralist Turkana or Toposa. An African hermeneutic contribution must be in reasserting the balance between knowledge and wisdom. It is an area of critical reflection and communicative action.

The scientific methodology, which seeks the “truth” through empirical research, captures only a portion of human understanding. This is why this approach has historically disempowered the researched “other” since the “disciplines” upon which the scientific methodologies were based were racist and intended to create conditions for domination of the African and other non-European peoples. This is why their understanding of themselves and what life meant to them had to be ignored in order to dehumanise them; otherwise over-rule over them would have been impossible. It was necessary to dehumanise them in order to deny them the right to express a different meaning of life, different from that of the colonizer. The “gap” was filled in by imposition of a foreign region and meaning. This is what colonialism implied.

Indeed it can be stated with confidence that the whole imperial-colonial project was based on the need for research, which would deny the existence of such a worldview which gave a different meaning of life and of being different from that of the colonizer. It is for this reason that colonial research came to be described in some quarters as the “dirtiest word in the indigenous world’s vocabulary.” It is dirty because it “stirs up silence” and “conjures up bad memories” [Smith, L.T: 1999-2001:1], because colonial research tried to deny the colonized their humanity through colonization of their knowledge. Colonial research, based on such disciplines as anthropology, archaeology, ethnology, and their variants were intended to understand the “primitive others” who were regarded as belonging to another world, which had to be researched. But even then such research was subjected to double interpretation and dichotomisation of the “facts.” As Linda Smith correctly observes:

“This collective memory of imperialism has been perpetuated through the ways in which knowledge about the indigenous peoples was collected, classified, and then presented in various ways back to the West, and then, through the eyes of the West, back to those who had been colonized [Smith, 1999-2001:1].

This process of double interpretation was complicated by the procedures adopted by the anthropologists. First, they employed an “informer” who first collected the “facts” with or without the “informer.” Evans-Pritchard, for instance, when studying witchcraft, magic and oracles among the Azande of Sudan, paid his “informer” to infiltrate a magical secret society and report to him the “data” which he used to carry out his study. Second, the “informer” then interprets these “facts” to the researching anthropologist, who in his own turn “analyses” and again reinterprets the “facts”.

This double intervention in the research process was bound to distort what was communicated by the researched “primitive other” to the anthropologist. The “informer” became a key element in the whole knowledge creation process instead of the researched “objects” themselves. The “knowledge” found by the anthropologist through the “informer” was then sent back home for publication and circulation in the colonial academia for further reinterpretation and interrogation. Through this process, the “knowledge” was subjected to another level of “analysis”, reinterpretation, and synthesis upon which theories were constructed explaining the “behaviour” of the “natives” by the collective colonial-imperialist academia. This was

another double interpretation of the “primitive other” and was called “academic freedom.”

This “scientific truth” found by the anthropologist was subjected to distortion even before the “analysis” of the “facts.” This meant that the “analysis” itself was subject to grave error in that the “facts” so collected and the “method” used by the researcher was flawed and was correctly criticized later within the “discipline” as being “subjective.” By placing the bearer of the knowledge at a distance from the researcher, the research process was flawed in double way even at the initial stage. The next stage of transmitting this knowledge collected and analysed by the researcher to the center of knowledge for processing, digesting, and transmitting it back to the colony in policy packages was also subject to these double flaws. Such “knowledge” could not be called “neutral” or even “objective,” because the process of ensuring its “neutrality” became the very process by which it became unreliable. Such “knowledge” could also not be called “objective” since its neutrality and scientificity were flawed.

In the first place it could not be either since the researcher as subject was himself steeped in his own culture in that the symbolic framework through which he formulated his methodology were already predetermined. It was this framework that the data he had collected could be hypothesized, theorized, and then analysed. This “preunderstanding” of the researcher affected the way he/she formulated the procedures and methods for collecting data and the “facts.” One example of this kind of scholarship will illustrate the point.

The study of the Ik (Teuso) people of North-Eastern Uganda by one American anthropologist has come to exemplify a flawed racist anthropological research methodology. In the early 1960s, Turnbull was sent to Uganda by the New York American Museum of Natural History to conduct a preliminary ethnographic survey to describe the Ik’s customs and traditions, which were regarded in the popular racist preunderstanding of the people there as “primitive”, illusive, and “mysterious.” When Turnbull arrived in the area to carry out an initial mapping of the area occupied by the Ik, he is reported not only of having been “disappointed” by the people, but that he was also “out rightly disgusted” by them. This prejudgment, even before the research began, was indicative of the cultural situation of Turnbull and the society from which he came, which regarded the black people in general, including the African Americans, as “primitive.” His immediate impression of the Ik people was that they were “unfriendly, uncharitable, inhospitable and generally mean as any people can be.” This outrageously biased approach could not have produced any “neutral” result.

The background of the situation in the area was the famine, which had struck the area in 1965 resulting in the dislocation of family life of the Ik. Turnbull’s study, which did not take a sufficient understanding of the impact of the famine on family life in the collection of his “data” and “facts,” came to the superficial conclusion that the Ik people were “incredible sub-humans” who were devoid of any ritual! He observed, among other things, that sex for the Ik men was simply an act of getting rid of their semen! The Ik, he reported, defecated on each other’s doorsteps, including Turnbull’s own doorstep (a ritual, probably, which indicated that they did not like him because he stayed with them for a period carrying out his biased “observations”!-DWN). From “research” he was able to make “scientific findings” to the effect that the Ik people were a “loveless people” and that the community was headed to extinction within a short time and following it the ultimate destruction of the entire mankind [Abraham, 1996: 26].

Turnbull's study and findings were published in a best selling book titled: *The Mountain People*, which was hailed as a work that had succeeded in bring together "art and science" for which he won the 1974 Annual Award of the National and American Academies of Arts and Letters. A film was made out of the manuscript and had great circulation with Turnbull making a lot of money from it. But the results of the study were false. This was soon revealed when one of the few western-educated Ik who helped Turnbull to carry out his research as an "informer" called the book "an abuse" of the hospitality of the Ik people which they had extended to Turnbull during his stay in their community. Despite Turnbull's mystifications with his "science", the Ik, to be sure, is still a human community nowhere to near extinction than the Americans people of the United States. They survived the famine and continued with their lives, which they continue to lead in their own understanding of what life is all about.

As we have already indicated, this "scientific" empiricist approach could not hide behind its mythology of "neutrality" for too long and no wonder it was subjected to severe criticism within and outside the discipline. The analytic-positivist episteme continues to maintain its position, but with increasing difficulty since the Kuhn's criticism to which we referred earlier. It is no longer possible to rely on the field of "scientific experience" and rationality as a basis for claiming the objectivity of the social sciences. They are increasingly relying on the "successes" of technology to bolster their otherwise weak philosophical and methodological positions. This is not to imply that all knowledge obtained by science through some of the methods does not qualify as knowledge. Such an argument would be wrong. What is required is to look at the particular conclusions of a scientific enquiry and subject it to a "hermeneutic test."

This leads us to outline what kind of epistemology would, in our view, best ensure that the plurality of knowledge existing in all human society is recognized as having valid statements of truth, which ought to be accessed for interrogation and validation for common human use. The basic epistemological position must be found in the African philosophical statement, well reflected in the *kiganda* proverb, which says: "*amagezi si gomu*," which, translated literally, means: "no one has a monopoly of knowledge." This basic African world-view is reflected in other African languages, which also holds that there are many roads to the same goal. The Yoruba of Nigeria, for instance, hold that there are diverse routes, which lead to the marketplace: *Ona kan o wo oja*. There is a similar Igbo proverb, which holds that "there is no absolute way to anything" [Kolawole, 1997: 5-6]. Kolawole adds that in this African world-view:

"The world is conceived as a negotiation of values, as a continuum, an intersection between the past, the present, and the future. The world is conceived as a negotiation of diverse convictions and so heteroglossia is more valid to any African thoughts as opposed to monovocality. No wonder the market in most traditional African settings is an open place, a space characterized by active dialogues and negotiation. It is also a place characterized by fluid boundaries as each person's space is not rigidly divided but the borders of one woman's space marks the beginning of another with hardly any fixed dividing walls. The numerous points of entry and exist make room for everyone to confirm the Yoruba belief that there are diversities of routes into the market place" [Kolawole, 1997: 35].

These statements are at the back of African hermeneutics, which acknowledge the validity of the diverse ways of knowing and knowledge. It provides the methodological basis for entering into an intersubjective relationship with the bearers of such knowledge in order to access it through dialogue. Sekone, whom Kolawole

quotes, adds that the transformation of the market place into a communicative and diplomatic space in which both sides exchange notes on their interests, symbolizes the biological and social continuity and the importance of the complexity and plurality of perspectives in the construction of culture. The valences of conceptualization of human values are therefore multiple and this sometimes assumes a metaphysical importance from which African womanist ideology derives its dialogic outlook [Kolawole, 1997; 36].

This hermeneutic philosophic statement is further buttressed by another hermeneutic recognition of the common human virtue of “*Ubuntu*.” The Baganda believe in the culture of “*obuntu bulamu*,” literary meaning “good humanness.” These important African epistemological positions reflect a concern for the whole humanity and recognize the contribution of all humanity to a common human virtue reflected in “*Obuntu*” or “*Ubuntu*” in the Zulu language. In Kiganda culture, a good human being who practices humanism is said to practice “*obuntu bulamu*,” which literally means “good humanness.” The Shona of Zimbabwe, say: “*Hahungave hunhu ihwo hwo*” to express disapproval of the inhuman behaviour of people- “that cannot be the behaviour of a human being.” In isiNdebele, the same expression is put in the following way: “*Kabusho ubuntu lobo*,” meaning: “That is not humanness.” These philosophic statements are part of the world-view of some three hundred sub-ethnic groups that use variations of Bantu languages on the African continent [Smkange, 1980: 35-40]. Smkange adds that similar world-views are expressed in other non-Bantu African languages [Ibid: 36].

Former Archbishop Bishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa has argued that the term “Ubuntu” means the essence of being human. To quote him:

“It is part of the gift that Africans will give the world. It embraces hospitality, caring about others, willing to go the extra mile for the sake of others. We believe a person is person through another person, that my humanity is caught up, bound up and inextricable (linked) in yours. When I dehumanise you I inexorably dehumanise myself. The solitary individual is a contradiction in terms and, therefore, you seek to work for the common good because your humanity comes into its own community, in belonging” [Quoted in Mukanda & Mulemfo, 2000: 52-62].

According to Mukanda and Mulemfo, *Ubuntu or Botho* is the essential divine capacity that enables people to act according to their norms and values. In African philosophy, they argue, Ubuntu has both external and internal dimensions. It is the internal aspect which gives guidance to the external because the latter exists from the presence of the inside being, which enables the individual to express him/herself in building the community.

These philosophic positions of the African world-view also at the same time represent the African belief in freedom of the individual within the community. It is a belief in the need for individual dignity and respect, which *Obuntu bulamu* demands. This is not unique to Africa and Africans, but in the African case it is especially manifested and, continues to be manifested, in this belief of individual freedom as part of the community and the demand for an ethic based on *Ubuntu*. It is best expressed in spiritual freedom of the soul that enables individuals to struggle against forces of domination for freedom, but within a culture and identity. It is this spiritual freedom that enabled the enslaved Africans in the New World and elsewhere to survive the demands of enslavement and yet maintain their African identity and culture within new environments. This is what enabled them to hermeneutically

combine aspects of Christianity and western culture to their own culture for their survival. As Carlyle Fielding Stewart III has correctly pointed out:

“This freedom to `be’ is not preeminently conferred by social and political institutions nor is it governed solely by the material forces of history, although the result of such freedom is the transformation of both the individual and society. Even in cases of later modern African societies, where social institutions, as a result of white colonial influences, became the ultimate arbiters of political freedom, the dispensation of social justice and human freedom must still coincide with the reality of freedom in the African cosmology ... African cosmology, therefore, is at the heart of all African understandings of freedom [Stewart III, 1999: 12].

Thus we arrive at a holistic grounding of hermeneutics in African philosophy. It is, as we have already seen, expressed in the African-Egyptian Herms, who both represented an internal (spiritual-metaphysical) dimension and an external “ontological” dimension of African `being.’ In both these capacities, Herms was able to transmit the message and knowledge from the gods to the humans, while also at the same time providing the hermeneutic openness to other voices, which enabled the transmission of such knowledge possible. As Tsenay Serequeberhan, has correctly remarked, our duty as Africans of today is to contextualised what Herms did in his time to put it in the service of deciphering and interpreting the sense of our mortal existence within the bounds of the present post-colonial situation. In his view, this is the calling and duty of African philosophical hermeneutics [1994: 120]. It is this African philosophic outlook reflecting African cosmology and methodology that must be restated as a basis for developing new approaches towards a truly universal knowledge that is available from all cultures and civilizations.

Foucault in his book: *The Order of Things: The Archaeology of the Human Sciences* [1970], coins the concept “episteme” from its Greek origin to mean the fore-conception of any investigation in the search for knowledge. An episteme is therefore formed before hand through an “inner structure of being,” which constitutes its order. It is this order that arranges the world of being through the “symbolic disclosure” is produced by the order. According to Foucault:

“Order is, at one and the same time, that which is given in things as their inner law, the hidden network that determines the way they confront one another, and also that which has no existence except in the grid created by glance, an examination, a language” [Foucault, 1970: xx).

This means that every speaker or investigator acts in accord with the symbolic order of which he/she may at times be unconscious in the activities within the given culture and “discourse framework.” According to Foucault again: “The fundamental structures of a culture-those governing its language, its schemes of perception, its exchanges, its techniques, its values, the hierarchy of its practices-establish for every man from the very start, the empirical orders with which he will be dealing and within which he will be at home” [Ibid]. It is these prior historical forms, which constitute the ordered space that makes possible the articulation of particular statements while excluding others. Basing himself on Foucault’s understanding, Kögler adds:

“The episteme represents the symbolic horizon within which a certain statement is first formed and subsequently is able to be classified and evaluated as true or false. Whereas linguistic expressions-to which a truth value can belong-thereby refer to

innerworldly entities at empirical level, the framework for empirical reference is marked out at the prior level of the symbolic order” [Kögler, 1999:95].

It is this prior position of this conceptual framework that makes it possible to establish functional rules of discourse as well as methodologies and techniques “with respect to the formulation of statements that are possible in the corresponding discourse.” The symbolic order that forms this framework are, therefore, not merely formal, universal, or transcendental presuppositions of discourse or language: “Rather they consist in historically, culturally, and discursively specified modes of disclosure in which substantive, deeply embedded assumptions about being, nature, subjectivity, time, and so on, are introduced as material presuppositions for serious discourse about the corresponding domains” [Kögler, 1999:96].

It is this discourse that determines the horizon and background for the experience of objects, subjective speaker roles, the conceptual field, and thematic options. This discursive practice is subject to its own rules and is not formed by any objective standards or projected from an identical or unchanging terminology or inscribed within the persistence of themes. It is these rules that determine what will be the object of research, who may speak and in what way, as well as what will qualify as scientific terminology, which questions will be asked and which problems will be discussed and researched. Thus any search for knowledge from diverse sources has to take into account these historical and philosophic antecedents.

The name of Hans-Georg Gadamer is associated with this line of argument in hermeneutics in which he has stressed the need for the “fusion of historical horizons” as the best way of transmitting understanding between the different lived histories or experiences of different communities as the basis of their existence. Hermeneutics insists on both the cultural context as well as the historical contingencies of events as necessary in bringing about a true understanding of the different lived experiences.

According to this hermeneutic viewpoint, truth can conform only to a limited number of principles laid down within the context of a particular culture. Therefore, universal principles built on the basis of this limited scope may appear reasonable to the observer within his/her culture, but the principles do change over time. Therefore, hermeneutics insists that for the purposes of understanding other historical times and cultures, it is necessary for the observer to be sensitive to both his or her own particular historical and cultural circumstances and that of the people being observed and understood.

Hermeneutics also argues that what is important in the interpretation of what is being investigated is what is learnt through the dialectic and dialogue or “exchange” between the interpreter and the interpreted, each seen in the context of his/her own culture. This results in a new understanding for the interpreter as well as the interpreted. In this approach, hermeneutics does not seek to establish some ‘objective’ truth. Its main concern is to enable learning about oneself in relation to other peoples and things [Hollinger, 1985; Rabinow & Sullivan, 1979]. It seems to me that these philosophic viewpoints are in conformity with much of the African philosophic outlook referred to above.

The reconstitutive and reconstructive challenge implied here requires us to revisit the moral and philosophy behind hermeneutics as an original historical African experience. Late Christianity and Enlightenment rejected Egyptian religious and philosophic writings based on Herms, called Hermeticism, because of their competition with the writings of Christianity. Bernal has argued that the attempt to

preserve the ancient knowledge was connected with the emergence of a group of philosophers who tended to associate themselves with hermeneutics.

This support took the form of a special form of millenarianism that grew up in the late 17<sup>th</sup>-century after the English Restoration. It focused on the need to perfect or recover all previous knowledge from the Egyptian experience since it was believed to be the place where the mysteries and sacred initiations were first established. According to Bernal, “this was seen as a necessary precondition for the advent of the new millennium” of the Enlightenment [Bernal, 1987: 165]. But Christianity resisted this until it was marginalized.

Hermeticism is therefore deeply connected with the Egyptian religion centered on the cyclical conception of birth, death, and rebirth. This concept of periodicity, according to Bernal, “left an opening for the would-be restorers of the Egyptian religion in the Renaissance and the Enlightenment and even in the early Christianity” [Bernal, 1987:130]. This “opening” is still vital if we are to capture the basis of the new universalism that would place all human experiences, through their different language games, at the center of the universe against reason-based “universalism,” which has been the basis of modernity and its on-going crisis.

This is why Africa cannot take the European experiences of the Renaissance to guide its reawakening, because the late European Renaissance, which dominated the world, was aimed at global expansionism of Europe under the logic of mercantilism, which is still at the base of present day economic globalization. The African renaissance has to be a globally humanizing experience involving whole masses of the people under the Enlightenment of *global Ubuntu*, which enables us to struggle for humanism and emancipation alongside the other oppressed humanity. Ubuntu does not seek to dominate and exploit; it can only seek to *liberate the African* as a means of *humanizing the world*.

Thus if humanity is to recover from the moral and spiritual crisis brought about by recourse to human reason alone in seeking knowledge, humanity has to retrace the steps, that led to this malaise. The retracement will lead to the rediscovery of the ancient African-Egyptian wisdom and contributions regarding the relationship between the body, the soul, and the spirit. The human being without a soul cannot find meaning in life. According to Morris Klines:

“By this mastery of mathematical achievement, even the corrective measures formerly required of God were made unnecessary and God was deprived of one more duty. It was not long before God, Himself, was completely dispensed with, for Hume attacked causality, and, consequently, the need for a creator, or Prime Mover, of the universe. The earth became an eternal, infinite, self-moving machine, which existed before and would exist after insignificant man, serving no apparent purpose except perhaps to delight the mathematician who was slowly but surely uncovering the controlling principle. Events took place not because God ordered them, individually, and after due consideration, but rather because they were predetermined by fixed, already existing mathematical laws” [Kline, 1953: 258-59].

It is with this soul-less machine that is behind the pressures of the people of different historical and cultural backgrounds to revert to their cultures in defense of their identities. An African philosopher, Okonda Okolo, has pointed out that the reinvention of the hermeneutic movement in Europe is connected with the appearance of “crises of identity in German romanticism.” He has further observed that the “crisis of Europe confronted with technical world and language” which Heidegger, among others, had regarded “as the forgetting of Being,” is behind the new movement. Okolo also adds:

“In Africa, the interest in hermeneutics also arises out of the reality of crisis: a generalized identity crisis due to the presence of a culture - a foreign and dominating tradition - and the necessity for self-affirmation in the construction of an authentic culture and tradition” [Quoted in Serequeberhan, 1994: 24].

This crisis of identity is what we have called here the ‘crisis of modernity’ which has brought about the need for people to become ever more conscious of their cultural heritages and identities. It is also part and parcel of the *globality* that modern European civilization and the resistance to Westernisation on the part of the old cultures and civilizations, including the African one, has brought about. This, far from constituting a search for an “authentic” culture and tradition, has in our view been an on-going struggle for the reaffirmation of Africa’s humanness and existence as well as the demand for survival through an ongoing updating of African heritages through their cultures and traditions. This has taken place on the basis of an underlying intersubjective communication and dialogues, wherever this was possible. Now this underlying humanistic process that had been subdued must be made explicit. That is the “practice of freedom” that Cabral called for in the African liberation struggle.

In an equally incisive call, another African philosopher Tsenay Serequeberhan in his book: *The Hermeneutics of African philosophy: Horizon and Discourse*, has pointed out that the task of an African hermeneutic philosophy is to situate Africa in its lived historical horizon which calls for emancipation from the consequences of colonialism and neo-colonialism. It is engaged in articulation of the *truth* of its “lived present” which is postcolonial. With a deep historical gaze, he reminds us of our tasks as Africans:

“Hermes rendered the message of the gods; in our context, this is the service of deciphering and interpreting the sense of our mortal existence within the bounds of the present post-colonial situation. ... For this is the calling and duty of African philosophical hermeneutics. In this interpretative service *we* will contribute our share in consummating the self-emancipation of Africa. In so doing, we will acknowledge and partake of the process of repaying our collective debt to those whose sacrifice and hard struggle actualised our freedom. For ultimately, when all is said and done, this is the ethical, political, and existential impulse of African philosophic thought” [Serequeberhan, 1994: 120].

The historical experience, which the African people have gone through under colonialism and post-colonialism prove that Africans did use their cultural heritage to survive the impositions of colonialism. Although the colonialists were able to use some aspects of African customs and traditions in order to enforce their colonial rule, this did not succeed in subduing the people. This “invention” of traditions and customs, in the form of *neo-traditionalism*, was used to define African customs and traditions in a reified manner, which the colonialists called “customary laws.” These were administered through the system of “indirect rule” in which African chiefs were appointed to act as “native authorities.” As law, “customary law” was rendered unchangeable and non-dynamic, unable to respond to different situations and localities, except in an oppressive way for which it was intended. It was applied “universally” to the whole “tribe” without regard to local sensitivities and specificities.

The use of neo-traditionalism by the colonialists was quite distinct from the way the Africans used the same customs and traditions for their own identity and

survival. They used those aspects of their culture, which were responsive to change to adapt, modify practices and resist certain impositions, which they considered to be harmful to their existence and survival. Used in this way, tradition and culture enabled the people to reassert their humanness and the integrity of those aspects of their cultures and traditions that were essential to community life. In this sense, the use of culture and tradition was part and parcel of the human struggle for self-preservation, self-identity, self-representation, liberation, and freedom. This aspect of African culture and traditions, we have called *post-traditionalism* [Nabudere, 2002].

This post-traditional order is part of the African peoples' definition of what it means to be human and through it constitute themselves as part of the modern world. This post-traditional order is neither authentic nor is it even desirable for its own sake. It constitutes real lived experience of the African people. It seeks co-existence with other human beings in peace. It is this order, which defines the African in the new global context. It seeks recognition for its civilisational achievements and contributions to world history and culture. This is the very basis of the quest for an African hermeneutic philosophy in the existing world.

It is because of this that Okolo's philosophic observation becomes prophetic and true: the hermeneuticity of philosophy is grounded on the theoretical effort to reconstruct and appropriate meaning within the parameters of lived inheritances and traditions that have become increasingly estranged and alienated by the implications of the modern scientific outlook. Post-traditionalism is an attempt to reconstitute this world, but the effort is an unceasing one, as the struggle for freedom has always been.

Tradition and culture through language therefore play the role of transmitter of knowledge and understanding between the different lived experiences. This is because, according to Heidegger and Gadamer, "being" or tradition has primacy over man and not vice versa. The ontological and existential difference preserves tradition as the inexhaustible reservoir of the possibilities of meaning and therefore action. This is why language plays such a pivotal role in this process because we do not reinvent the languages through which we communicate. Rather, it is our "historical fate" that we communicate and therefore understand through a particular language. As Linge paraphrases Gadamer: this is "the way being or tradition has revealed itself to and concealed itself from them as their starting point" [Linge, 1976: lv]. According to Gadamer:

"As the art of conveying what is said in a foreign language to the understanding of another person, hermeneutics is not without reason named after Herms, the interpreter of the divine message to mankind. If we recall the origin of the name hermeneutics, it becomes clear that we are dealing here with a language event, with a translation from one language to another, and therefore with the relation of two languages. But in so far as we can only translate from one language to another if we have understood the meaning of what is said and construct it anew in the medium of the other language, such a language event presupposes understanding" [Gadamer, 1976: 98-99].

Gadamer here places language as central to the process of human understanding. It follows from this that the recognition and development of African languages, through which the overwhelming masses of the African people are able to communicate, is the precondition for bringing about a true human understanding and discourse with other cultures and civilisations. Indeed, as Kwesi Prah, following Cheick Anta Diop [Diop, 1974: 9-15; 1996: 33-45], has

correctly remarked, it is through these languages that Africans exhibit their native genius and creativity within their environment. They also represent their social-cultural and historical repositories of the overall cultural patterns and usages of the African people [Prah, 1985].

Without this recognition, any talk of an African renaissance, which is so much touted by the African elites in South Africa, is inconceivable nor is African “development” possible. Prah adds that the absence of African languages in the scientific discourse that informs economic development in Africa is “possibly the most crucial missing link in the planning, propagation and development of culture, science, and technology based on known historical foundations rooted in the practice of the people” [Prah, 1993:9]. It is in this struggle that Africa can recapture its historical heritages, which have been stolen from them.

Thus an African contribution to a hermeneutic epistemology that accords with the needs of its self-emancipation, while drawing on its deep cultural and civilisational heritage, must also take account of new developments. It must develop the tools that can draw on its deeply rooted indigenous knowledge systems, its practical knowledge and build on it technical knowledge that can serve its purpose in the present conjuncture in a globalised world. The African knowledge base must enrich other knowledge bases, while also learning from others. This open-endedness allows processes of “field building” and the pooling of knowledge accessible to all users.

### **An African Hermeneutic Methodology and Indigenous knowledge systems**

A methodology that can reveal this inner structure of African knowing has to be constructed within the framework of its symbolic disclosure. That means, any methodology has to establish the episteme, which determines the framework within which construction of rules and techniques for discovering meanings of a particular community is possible. We have stated that the African epistemology starts with the recognition that all knowledge is valid within its own cultural settings and that such knowledge can become the subject of dialogue for self-disclosure and cross-cultural validation. In the process of such a dialogue, it is possible to create conditions for an intersubjective communication and recognition of one another’s contributions. This is the hermeneutic approach.

Therefore, taking the African lived historical situation as whole, we can state that the post-colonial condition in which Africa finds itself calls for emancipatory methodologies, which can enable Africa to rid itself of the remnants of colonialism and its rule of violence that still engulfs the continent in structural and other forms. This step constitutes the “deconstructive challenge” for all Africans, including scholars [Serequeberhan, 1994: 118]. The challenge calls for the full exposure of the consequences of colonialism on the African people in order to develop tools, within the African hermeneutic experience, which can enable the generation of knowledge designed to describe, analyse, and empower the African people “to change negative social forces into positive social forces as they impact on life chances” as part of the process of emancipation [Kershaw, 1998: 29].

African-American scholars have developed an Afrocentric paradigm, which focuses on the black experience of people of African descent. They argue that apart from technical knowledge that has been developed by positivist methodologies and practical knowledge, which describes the African-American’s self-understandings acquired through practical life, there is also the emancipatory

knowledge for self-emancipation of the African people and their descendants. In this understanding, emancipatory knowledge must build on practical knowledge in that it is this which can enable Africans to ground theoretical models for investigation. In such a pursuit, great care must be taken to ensure that the subjects of investigation are the actual creators of the data and knowledge, which can only be accessed through their interpretation of their social conditions. This is what will accumulate the necessary data to generate Afrocentric rooted theories. The theoretical perspective so generated can then be tested for its accuracy after the accumulation of a sufficient degree of data [Kershaw, 1998: 37].

According to Wade Nobles, all methodological issues proceed in three phases. The first involves describing clearly the philosophy or cultural worldview, which guides and defines the phenomena under investigation; the second involves the developing and testing of theoretical models which are consistent with that philosophical worldview; and finally, it involves demonstrating the particular way in which the worldview manifests itself or is affected by contemporary factors. These phases involve both the generation and elaboration of technical and practical knowledge. But this style leaves us with a bifurcated perspective, which does not spell out the relationship between the researcher and the researched subject, in our case, the community being researched and for whom the knowledge to be collected is intended. [Quoted in Kershaw, op. cit.]

This problem can only be tackled if we look at a third category of knowledge, namely *emancipatory knowledge*, which alone can play that “deconstructive challenge” that Serequeberhan talked about. This is what Cabral called the “practice of freedom” resulting from emancipation where the practice of freedom becomes the lived actuality of the formerly colonised people since it represents the triumph of the people over colonialism and the tyrannies of post-colonial rule inherited from it. To this end, emancipatory knowledge in the African context aims at two things: firstly, to identify problems that impact negatively on peoples’ lives arising out of the colonial and post-colonial experience; secondly, to identify tools, which can resolve those problems and contradictions in a positive manner. In short, emancipatory knowledge is a liberating and humanising process.

But all these three categories of knowledge are interlinked in the modern world of which Africa is part. In the words of Kershaw:

“To generate emancipatory knowledge one needs to first generate practical knowledge. Then one needs to generate technical knowledge that helps one to identify and assess the empirical relationships described from the practical knowledge. One needs to begin by operationalising the effect of those social forces on the life chances of people of African descent. Finally, there is the need to participate in action that improves the life chances of African descended people [Kershaw, 1998: 39].

Thus methodologically, “field building” is the most appropriate way of promoting the integration and synthesis of these three kinds of knowledge. Key to the other forms of knowledge is the emancipatory aspect that practical and technical knowledge can bring about. Methodologically, emancipatory knowledge can best be generated using the following approaches [Kershaw, 1998: 39-43]:

1. The use of qualitative methodology involving in-depth interviews, participant observation, case studies, and biographical studies to generate practical knowledge;

2. The use of the knowledge generated from above technique to describe and analyse the empirical reality arising from the relationships and phenomena identified in practical knowledge. The tools for analysis are determined by the epistemological framework described earlier;
3. The analysis requires the development of a technical skill, which can enable the investigator to develop testable hypotheses arising out of the variables of the experiences generated by practical knowledge. Thus the technical skills required for analysis arise naturally out of the need to generate different kinds of knowledge, which is required for different needs in the emancipatory process. It can already be seen that practical knowledge helps to generate new concepts required for analysis; variables and culture-based theories built out of the analysed practical experience and grounded in peoples attitudes, behaviours, and historical relationships of the people being studied;
4. The theories so developed from this stage of the understanding in turn help to explain peoples attitudes, behaviours, and aspirations. Using theories developed in different cultural settings on the basis of so-called “universal” criteria, can only superimpose certain values and behaviours on another cultural groups of people, which can only be called colonisation. Hence the need for the development of an Afrocentric paradigm that captures these methodologies and approaches that ground theoretical knowledge in the actual lived cultural and historical experiences of the African people is crucial;
5. The above result will only be obtained by the use of qualitative methodology. But this does not mean quantitative methodologies are ill suited for the development of emancipatory knowledge. They are also necessary so long as we keep in mind that these methodologies help to analyse better the qualitative material obtained through the dialogical method, which is at the base of qualitative methodologies. Quantitative methods may help to obtain the actual situation in a sharper perspective and hence contribute to our understanding of our “objective reality”. This produces technical knowledge related to the actual life chances, which include analysis of relationships of African people and their descendants elsewhere that take account of gender, class, and race;
6. The dialogical element that enables the above to be done, by implication requires processes of communication between the researcher/investigator and the researched subject and this entails feed-back processes, which alone can create conditions for the validation of the knowledge in a dialogical way. Since the objective of generating emancipatory knowledge is to positively impact on the life chances of the African people, such knowledge can only be tested out and validated *through practice, further interrogation* and *education*-thus creating learning situations for the communities involved. This validates the knowledge but also creates conditions for further research. Here the researcher or scholar acts in the role of a participant in the discussion and, where necessary, in action to change those negative experiences that tend to dehumanise the African people in order to bring about the humanising of the world through emancipatory action on the part of Africans and people of African descent;
7. The most important phase in the process of generating emancipatory knowledge is the need to develop the analytical skills to place African

generated knowledge in dialogical relationship with other forms of knowledge. This requires the self-confidence of both the researchers and the researched subjects. At this level the dialogical relationship is not merely at the intersubjective level, but most importantly at the civilisational level for African knowledge systems derive directly from its civilisations generated over many centuries.

In this context, it is now widely accepted that African indigenous knowledge systems, despite efforts that have been made to deny its existence and value, does contribute to the world store of knowledge. Even the World Bank has recently taken an interest in this area, not because such knowledge can be of use to generate usable knowledge, but mainly because its interest is to try to exploit its possibilities for the sake of profit making for the monopolists who dominate world markets in the name of globalisation. Warren [1991] has defined indigenous knowledge as:

“Indigenous knowledge (IK) is the local knowledge-knowledge that is unique to a given culture or society. IK contrasts with the international knowledge system generated by universities, research institutions and private firms. It is the basis for local-level decision making in agriculture, health care, food preparation, education, natural-resource management, and a host of other activities in rural communities” [Warren, 1991].

For this reason, IKS is now widely recognised as encompassing a peoples’ skills, expertise, experiences, and insights, which the ordinary people possess in their existence. This recognition is important in breaking the strong-hold of Eurocentric knowledge base based on “universally” recognised “scientific” methodologies and bringing such knowledge to exist side by side with other forms of knowledge. This aspect of cross-recognition is itself arising out of the very processes of globalisation-that part of globalisation that recognised the hermeneutic reality of human existence. This humanistic globalisation recognises IKS as part of the emerging global knowledge pool, which international capitalism wishes to seize upon to monopolise for the sake of creating the “knowledge society” and the “knowledge economy” dominated by transnational corporations and anew technocracy of knowledge.

In fact IKS is the basic component of a peoples’ knowledge system. Therefore it already forms part of a peoples’ “knowledge society and economy.” The purpose of “field building” is precisely to ensure that this rich human heritage is not monopolised, patented and stored away by a few corporations and used for the exploitation of mankind. This is why “field building” must aim first and foremost in strengthening emancipatory knowledge through the empowerment of the oppressed peoples throughout the world. The contribution made by IKS to medicine, science, architecture, as well as pastoralists as guardians of biological diversity hitherto unrecognised, must be highlighted and acknowledged as part of this emancipatory process.

Even in the area of commercial activity and research, IKS of the rural communities has proved significant. This is why biopiracy and bioprospecting have become so rampant. While it is true that biodiversity prospecting does not always involve the use of indigenous knowledge systems alone (and this shows the need for “field building”), it is true that that valuable chemical compounds derived from plants, animals, and microorganisms are more easily identifiable with indigenous knowledge.

Their commercial value does not derive merely from their being plants or animals, but from the indigenous knowledge, which makes such commercial exploitation possible.

For example, according to U.S. Congressional Research Reports, for twenty years between 1956 and 1976, the U.S. National Cancer Institute carried out research in which it screened over 35,000 plants and animals for anti-cancer compounds. The programme failed to identify any significant new anti-cancer agents and was consequently terminated in 1981. However, a retrospective study which was carried out by the same Institute on the project revealed that the success rate in finding valuable species could have doubled if the indigenous knowledge possessed by the communities had been accessed and such information (data) obtained used to target particular species of plants.

Later scientists discovered that 86 per cent of the plants used by Samoan traditional healers displayed significant biological activity when it was tested in the laboratories [Cox, & Balick, 1994]. Here was a case of practical knowledge being validated by technical knowledge only on the basis of the data provided by the users of the plants and hence knowledge agents. Crude extracts of plants used by healers in Belize, when tested in the laboratory for anti-HIV activity also gave rise to four times as many positive results than the specimens collected at random.

Shaman Pharmaceuticals, Inc., a U.S. based multinational, which engages in collecting plants by talking to indigenous healers has claimed a success rate of 50 percent. Its formula is to target a plant wherever three different communities are found to use the same plant-kind for medicinal purposes. About fifty per cent of the plants collected by the company researchers are effective upon being screened, making this process of “filtering” of IKS 5,000 times more effective than random collections. This pirating of knowledge by the corporations for profit must be countermanded by emancipatory education of the masses.

All this evidence proves the importance of indigenous practical knowledge in the development of modern global knowledge and the need to combine technical knowledge with IKS in order to further develop our understanding of the use of plants and other microorganisms for the medicinal and other purposes such as agriculture and agro-pastoralism. It also proves that modern technical knowledge must build on local practical knowledge if we are to establish a truly universal global knowledge drawing from all knowledge sources and providing a global and universal access to all users. But to ensure that this process is of value to the ordinary people, scholars and researchers must, through action-oriented research and dialogue engage the communities in protecting their knowledge and their resources.

### **Paradigms, Methods, and Techniques**

Having dealt with the basic question of epistemology and methodology, it is necessary to reflect on practical questions of paradigms, methods, and techniques of generating knowledge. Methodology links or mediates between epistemology and (political) decision-making as well as the more practical-technical issues of method. Method is therefore the concrete level of operation where process, instrumentation, and data collection are crucial. Methodologies therefore tend to be *theoretical*, whereas methods and techniques tend to be *procedural*. On the other hand, paradigms operationalise the framework determined by the epistemological field through which methods are made operable. Paradigm is, therefore, a site of struggle between the different epistemes.

According to Thomas S. Kuhn, paradigms are “universally recognised scientific achievements that for a time provide model problems and solutions to a

community of practitioners” [Kuhn, 1962: x]. This community of practitioners is a community of scientists, who create this paradigm through which they can find solutions to the problems defined by the paradigm. According to Kuhn, they are able to do so because they share two “essential characteristics”:

“ Their achievement was sufficiently unprecedented to attract an enduring group of adherents away from competing modes of scientific activity. Simultaneously, it was sufficiently open-ended to leave all sorts of problems for the redefined group of practitioners to resolve” [Kuhn, 1962: 11].

Kuhn adds that men whose research is based on shared paradigms are committed to the same rules and standards for scientific practice. It is that commitment and apparent consensus that produces the prerequisite for the genesis and continuation of a particular research tradition. Since there are competing paradigms, these are often in contention and therefore other paradigms often replace them. So there is nothing “scientific” about paradigms since their rules are determined within the particular scientific discipline and episteme, which cannot be tested outside the disciplines.

In the context in which we have been dealing with the matter, the paradigm that has been dominant hitherto and still continues to be influential has been the “scientific” paradigm based on analytical (or logical) positivist epistemology and philosophy. What is questionable about the paradigm is its Cartesian epistemological justification, as we saw above. The paradigm has, however, been used and has produced some reliable knowledge under it. The scientific paradigm and method is therefore not rejected out of hand. It is its underlying foundational premises that are questioned. According to Critchley, already referred to above:

“The critique of scientism within phenomenology does not seek to refute or negate the results of scientific research in the name of some mystical apprehension of the unity of man and nature, or whatever. Rather, it simply insists that science does not provide the primary or most significant access to a sense of ourselves and the world. Anti-scientism does not at all entail an anti-scientific attitude, nor does it mean that ‘science does not think’, a late remark of Heidegger's that has caused more problems than it has solved. In my view, what is required here is what the young Heidegger called, in a much-overlooked but highly suggestive remark from *Time and Being*. ‘an existential conception of science’. This would show how the practices of natural science arise out of life-world practices, and that the life-world practices are not simply reducible to natural science explanation” [Critchley, 2001: 116].

Thus, instead of relying entirely on the scientific paradigm that is based on the analytic or logical positivist methodology, we need to reconceptualise the world in order to link it to the real life-worlds of communities in their cultural and lived experiences. It is when this is done that theoretical knowledge would be rooted in practical interests of people and not the other way round. To achieve this, requires interpretative clarification, or what we have called here, a hermeneutic approach and not the causal hypotheses of natural science or the causal-sounding explanations of pseudo-science. Thus what phenomenology and hermeneutics does is to provide a clarifying redescription of persons, things, and what the world we inhabit. In the words of Critchley:

“As such, phenomenology does not produce any great discoveries, but rather gives us a series of reminders of matters with which we were acquainted, but which become covered up when we assume the theoretical attitude of the natural sciences. Phenomenology provides what we might call ‘everyday anamnesis’, a recollection of

the background practices and routines that make up the delicate web of ordinary life” [Critchley, 2001: 117].

Thus approached from the angle of an existential conception of science advocated by hermeneutics and phenomenology, we should be able to apply some of the approaches designed under the paradigm of the “scientific method” and apply them to other epistemes in appropriate conditions through communicative action and research. Such a combined paradigm would consist of the following seven steps [Kershaw, 1998: 36]:

1. Identification of the a problem by studying the results of past empirical and theoretical work;
2. Developing empirically testable hypothesis, which can improve the existing theories’ explanatory and predictive powers of the theory;
3. Selecting of the proper setting for the research;
4. Development of measures and data collection based on previous research, observations, interviews in the setting, the researcher’s common sense or knowledge of social processes;
5. Gathering data through experiments, existing documents, and texts, surveys, interviews, and observations;
6. Analysing data to test hypotheses;
7. Altering theories or laws in lieu of the findings and state the next researchable stage of the problem, where appropriate;

Under the paradigm the researcher would have to overcome his/her “scientific neutrality” and avoid detaching him/herself from what is being observed or researched in order to produce “value free” findings. In the words of Kershaw:

“This perspective operates on the assumption that if one is detached from what one is observing then one’s values will not affect how one interprets what is observed; either the theory is supported or it is not. Science should not be determined by one’s political or cultural values, but rather by what is observed, by what is analysed and what can be empirically verified. This is a worthy goal, but one knows how difficult this can be because all too often when evidence differs from the theory, the ‘blame’ is placed on the group that the theory is being used on (...). The group’s behaviour is (then) described as deficient or deviant and needs to be changed, especially if that group is lower on the wealth, power, and prestige scale (of the researcher’s cultural classification-DWN). This does not (however) prevent Afrocentric scholars from generating technical knowledge. . . . Especially during this present historical period the importance of generating technical knowledge that empowers cannot be contested” [Kershaw, 1998: 36].

This quotation gives us a clear statement about the limitations of “value free” research, “scientific method” scholarship based on it and the technical knowledge it generates in that manner, as indeed, we saw in the case of Turnbull. It goes to prove that such knowledge is not in fact “value free” and/or “neutral,” but *value-loaded* with the scholar’s/researcher’s predilections and *ideological preunderstanding*. It is this ideological preunderstanding based on the philosophy or worldview embedded in one’ epistemology that determines the symbolic framework within which the researcher operates and one cannot therefore overcome this situation without seizing to be a human being, which is an impossibility.

Instead of being hidden under the cover of “neutrality” and “value free” scholarship and knowledge, these researchers prior ideological, cultural, and epistemological presuppositions should be clearly revealed to those being researched

so that the researched subject can also put into question the researcher's cultural presuppositions so that a clear intersubjective communication and inter-interrogation is carried out prior to the research. This is why Wade Noble is right in stressing that if Afrocentric-driven research aimed at generating technical knowledge that empowers the researched subject has to be carried out, special care must be taken to ensure that the subjects of investigation, are the actual creators of the data that produces the knowledge through the interpretation of their own condition [Quoted in Kershaw, 1998].

This is why the Cartesian methodology and paradigm is rejected by the phenomenological and hermeneutic as well as the Afrocentric epistemologies. These three worldviews question the premise that objective reality can be understood or captured by the logical positivist "scientific methods" based on these procedures. They insist that social or economic phenomenon constitute multiple realities, which can only be grappled by paying attention to these diverse situations. Moreover, the premises, preferences, and interests of the different investigators largely condition their construction of what they regard as objective reality. They therefore insist on a research methodology and paradigms that acknowledge the existence of the researched subject and place him/her at the centre of the research process.

In short, the researcher should not be placed in a position of control on what is to be researched as well as the interpretation of the "data", which enables him to determine the results. On the contrary, the researched subject must participate in defining the purpose, design, and execution of all the research undertakings. Thus, instead of it being a vertical axis between the researcher and the researched subject, the relationship of the research enterprise must be a horizontal axis. This approach therefore eschews the 'single technique' methods in preference to 'compound techniques' such as 'action research', which cater for multiple realities.

At this stage it is perhaps necessary to point to some of these alternative methods that have been developed in the process of struggle. Thus apart from the "scientific method" of logical positivism, phenomenological and hermeneutic have philosophies have impacted to create new paradigms, methods and techniques. These are the *participatory action research* method and the *rapid appraisal* methods, which have become a focus of paradigmic struggle.

### Rapid Appraisal Methodology

The proponents of this method view it as a tool for articulating the opinions, concerns, judgements, and perspectives of those who are often ignored by the social scientists who research on "development intervention." They also attempt through the use of this methodology to "discover" systems of "indigenous knowledge" from small farmers-particularly the women and the landless- as well as the perspective of deprived groups to assist their "interventions." In so doing they put aside the pursuit of "objective reality" and instead try to investigate subjective factors negatively and positively influencing the "development" process.

In carrying out research under this methodology, resort is had to both formal and informal techniques and modes of data collection that are used to provide decision-related information in "development settings." There are no precise procedures, which have been established for this purpose. Informal approaches rely on such perspectives as intuition, experience, and common sense that enable certain decisions to be made by the "developers." Such techniques as conversations with certain individuals, visits to existing or planned project sites, and general perusal of official records are used to enable project "practitioners" to reach conclusions.

The “development practitioners” because of low cost favour these techniques. The informal methods are seen as being cost-effective for appraising, monitoring, and evaluating small rural projects. Informal methods are considered quick and inexpensive, which usually do not require outside assistance. A project coordinator can alone gather relevant information and data in a readily usable form to come to conclusions and make implementable decisions, regardless of the reliability of the information and data.

For this reason attempts have been made to develop and refine more formal methods of information gathering. These methods include such techniques as cross-sectional and longitudinal sample surveys, censuses, experiments, and non-reactive data collection that have been used in social, economic, and behavioural sciences. The procedures used are specified and the investigator is expected to scrupulously follow them in theory and practice. Such methods, where used, do generate quantitative data that can be statistically analysed to draw conclusions within specified “confidence margins.”

Between the extremes of both informal and formal methods, which are neither highly informal nor fully formalised, rapid appraisal methods are used. These require more than robust common sense and understanding on the part of the investigator. According to Krishna Kumar:

“The investigator using rapid appraisal methods must have sufficient grounding in formal data collection methods to use them effectively. Although the investigators generally have considerable flexibility, they should make every attempt to systematically report procedures so that others can scrutinise them for accuracy and relevance. In most cases, rapid appraisal methods do not generate quantitative information from which generalisations can be made in a statistical sense to populations larger than those in the immediate cases examined” [Kumar, 1993, 1998: 12].

Nevertheless, the core rapid appraisal methods and techniques, which have been deployed by the different actors include:

1. Key Informant Interviews: This method is used by “development practitioners” in policy-oriented studies and evaluations. They target select individuals and groups for qualitative in-depth interviews for required information.
2. Focus Group Interviews: This is used by market researchers to gauge reactions of potential consumers to new products and services by focussing on select groups for interviews and reactions;
3. Community Interviews: These take the form of public meetings open to all members of the local community. The investigators ask questions, raise issues, and seek responses from the participants, which are aimed at a particular objective designed by the “development practitioner.”
4. Structures Direct Observation: This involves a careful gathering of data or information based on well-designed observation forms, which take consideration of the nature of the “object” to be observed. This may involve individuals or groups in the community. Direct observation may also involve the observation of physical objects such as roads, dams, or agricultural production. These kinds of observations lend well to quantitative results.
5. Informal surveys: These are conducted on the basis of an open-ended questionnaire that permits respondents to answer questions in their own words. The sample size for informal surveys usually ranges between 25 to 50 people,

who are selected on the basis of non-probability sampling techniques used in quantitative sampling. A popular technique is “convenience sampling”, in which respondents are interviewed in markets, shops, public meetings, organisations, and other places selected on the basis of easy accessibility.

Despite their limitations, rapid appraisal methods are used, apart from the advantage of rapid results and low cost, to ameliorate the serious limitations of the formal methods of investigation, especially those using logical-positivist paradigms. In the words of the World Bank, through Krishna Kumar:

“A major limitation of many formal methods is that they tend to focus primarily on quantifiable information, and much information is lost in the process of ‘operationalising’ social and economic phenomena. Thus, they are often of limited value in studying complex socio-economic changes, highly interactive social situations, or people’s underlying motivations, beliefs, and value systems in project and programme settings” {Kumar, 1993, 1998: 19}.

But the recognition of the weaknesses of quantitative methods by the World Bank and a resort to the more informal methods does not mean the World Bank is interested in developing understanding of the real situation of the poor and marginalized groups. Its objective is to utilise these methods and techniques in order to extend its economic globalisation agenda in the rural areas on behalf of global corporate capital. That is why Kumar is with confidence able to say:

“For us, rather than debating the above alternative views, rapid appraisal methodology can better be explained as falling within a continuum of various informal and formal modes of data collection that are used to provide-decision-related information in development settings” [Ibid: 11].

Here, “for us” means the World Bank and decisions are those made by agents of the World Bank or other international developers who design and “decide” on the appropriate “development settings” on behalf of the people. The “popular participation” involved here is to facilitate those decisions, which in the end impact negatively on the lives of the poor such as the structural adjustment programmes. Whilst the people in understanding their situation may use aspects of rapid appraisal methods in certain circumstances, this has to be done in conditions where they are themselves in control of the designing of the issues to be investigated, the implementation process, as well as evaluating the results along the way.

### Participatory Action Research.

This method tries to overcome the limitations and weaknesses of the logical-positivist paradigm as well as the negative use of the rapid appraisal methods for purposes of imposing solutions from the “donors” and financial institutions. It is designed from pedagogical participatory methods of dialogue developed by the Brazilian adult educator Paulo Freire. The method tries to eliminate the epistemological divide between the researcher and the researched subject by getting rid of the vertical axis that permeates this relationship and instead build horizontal axis to promote dialogue between the two. The methodology also tries to develop emancipatory knowledge through participatory research.

The cognitive processes in the linkages to this participatory approach based on Freire’s approach are the key the participatory process. These are: action, reflection, questioning, researching hunches, drawing conclusions, evaluating options

and planning further action based on the learning process, which has been generated through the participatory approach. This circular or spiral effect of the process ensures that the participatory element is not eliminated at any point, ensuring that what is found valid through dialogue, action, reflection, and further action ensures control of the investigation-learning process by the participants. This ensures that the research and the evaluation of the results are a single continuum. There is no distinction between the researcher and the researched subject. All are involved in the research, dialogue, action, reflection, and further action [McTaggart, R:1991].

This epistemological approach is centred on the use of dialogue between individuals and communities, as well as researchers carrying out research in communities. Dialogue, unlike monologue, entails the joining of thinking and feeling in order to create new meanings for everyone involved. It is the interplay of words and a flow of meanings between or among people out of which emerges some new understandings. It is the result of the change of our epistemological outlook, which recognises that knowledge is not an exclusive preserve of any single individual. It is a hermeneutic turn for the better [Paya, 2002: 12].

From these considerations, it can be said that the participatory action research aims at achieving the following:

1. *Empowering people* through dialogue and learning to reflect on their situation and to seek ways of improving their own practices through a self-reflective spiral;
2. *Collaboration* by widening the group from those directly involved to as many people affected by the practice or problem as possible;
3. Establishing *self-critical communities* committed to enlightening themselves about the relationships between circumstances, action, and consequences in their own situation, and emancipating themselves from institutional and personal constraints, which limit their power to live their own social and educational values;
4. Developing “*critical intelligence*” in the communities through systematic learning processes set in motion by the participatory action since the process enables people to act deliberately through knowing, and remaining open and responsive to opportunities;
5. Involving people in *theorising* about their practices by being inquisitive about circumstances and taking action to deal with them. These theories may initially be expressed in the form of rationales for practices; but these rationales may be developed by treating them as if they were no more than rationalisations and subjecting them to critical scrutiny through the participatory action research process;
6. Developing skills, which enable people to handle the *gathering of compelling evidence*, which could convince them that their previous practices, ideas, and assumptions were right, wrong or wrong-headed, and to remain open-minded as to what counts as evidence (or data). This involves not only keeping records, which describe what is happening, but it also involves collecting and analysing their own judgements, reactions, and impressions about what is going on. This also enables communities to “*objectify*” *their own experiences* through recording in personal journals their progress and reflections about two parallel sets of learning: about the practices they are studying and about the processes or practices and studying them;
7. Enabling the participants to develop a *political awareness* through the process of participating in bringing about socio-economic change in their

local communities. This creates conditions for resisting or critiquing those changes that they consider harmful to their situation and adopt those that are to their advantage;

8. As part of the process objectifying their experiences and developing critical attitudes to situations, enabling communities to build archives and libraries of their knowledge such as: (a) records of their changing activities and practices, (b) records in the changes in language and discourse in which they describe, explain, and justify their practices, (c) records of the changes in the social relationships and forms of organisation, which characterise and constrain their practices, and (d) records of the development of their expertise in the conduct of action research. In this process, participants are able to demonstrate evidence of what they expect and to give evidence to back up such claims. They must also show respect for the value of rigorously gathered and analysed evidence-and be able to show and defend evidence to convince others. This is because participatory action research allows and requires participants to give reasoned justification of their social (and educational) work to others because they can show how the evidence they gathered and the critical reflection they have done have helped them to create a developed, tested, and critically examined rationale for what they are doing [MacTaggart, R: 1991].

The two methods dealt with above as alternative ways of carrying out research and investigation reveal that other possible ways of understanding are available for the development of dialogues and searches for knowledge in a multifaceted manner. The rapid appraisal method as the term indicates was developed for the purposes of rapidly appraising “development projects,” especially in rural villages of Africa. To be sure, it had its origins in this method, originally called Rapid Rural Appraisal, which was developed in Kenya as a counter-model to the “quick and dirty” appraisal mode of urban-based professionals. These were pejoratively called “development tourists,” but the method was also aimed against the “long and dirty” traditional methodologies, which were correctly criticised.

Robert Chambers from his Institute in Sussex, England, using data and the practice he employed with African helpers in the rural areas of Kenya was able to write a book titled: *Putting People First*, which later attracted the attention of the World Bank. It now enjoys the confidence and support of the Bank and the Rome-based Institute of Food and Development (FAD) and has been marketed by World Bank for its rural projects. Based on the popularity of his book in these circles, Chambers Paper: “Shortcut Methods for Gathering Social Information” was published by the Oxford Press, which publishes World Bank publications on a commercial basis. The paper is part of an anthology of participatory research favoured by the Bank.

Participatory Action research has its roots in a people-inspired adult education project, which draws from other humanistic experiences and humanistic educational philosophies. It has been shown that it has the potential for creating an empowering process of the ordinary people through the methodologies developed by Paulo Freire and other popular educationalists. His work has strengthened communities throughout the world and Freire’s work is legend throughout the entire world. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Council-UNESCO at its CONFENTIA V in Hamburg, 1997, at least officially endorsed his work. It should be studied and used to develop the kind of dialogue we advocate here based on hermeneutic epistemology.

### Conclusion

We started this paper by trying to establish an epistemological and methodological basis for developing a paradigm that could be used for “field building” and intersubjective understanding. We were interested in a methodology or a research approach that was capable of enabling diverse groups of people such as academic scholars, “practitioners,” and indigenous knowledge custodians and theorists to understand one another’s knowledge in order to access the skills and expertise contained therein. The idea is to ensure that such knowledge is placed in a pool, which would be accessible to all users. This “field building” approach means that we have to develop research “instruments” for consolidating and synthesizing the available knowledge in particular contexts such as agro-pastoral communities.

We emphasized that in order to access these diverse archives and libraries of knowledge, it would be necessary to deploy research methodologies that are capable of exhuming the truth from these archives and archaeologies and since the truth is diverse, the methodologies suggested must be diverse as well, capable of bringing forth the custodians of these different knowledge sources and truth-sites to communicate what they know. This is necessary, if such a methodology is to achieve the overriding objective of creating global pools of human knowledge which can be accessed by all users. This is regardless of whether such knowledge is “codified and explicit” or “tacit and implicit” [Stiglitz, 1999].

Even the World Bank is also busy trying to establish such a “field building” network called the Global Development Network. This network is part of the idea of creating a “Knowledge Bank,” which will exist side by side with the Money Bank. But this Knowledge Bank will not be a democratic bank in which knowledge from all sources is accessed for the common good of all humanity. It will be put to the use of the “Knowledge Society”- a new superstructure of “Knowledge Technocrats” who will manage and control the world on behalf of those who control the Money Bank.

Our objective on the other hand in developing this project is to counteract the monopolization of knowledge, which this “offensive” of the World Bank implies. It is hoped that those who have read this paper will see the potential in the development of ways in which different kinds of knowledge-technical, practical, and emancipatory can be accessed for use by all humanity for the realisation of the “good life,” which each people aspire to.

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