The Yorùbá Concepts of *Ìgbàgbọ́* and *Ìmọ̀*: Understanding Human and Nonhuman Species Interactions

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Abstract

There is a growing scholarship that shows how myths, mysteries, common sayings and beliefs aid the advancement of a sustainable future for human and nonhuman species. This article takes one such example, the Yorùbá concepts of *Ìgbàgbọ́* and *Ìmọ̀*, and explores their relevance for contemporary global discourses on sustainability that extend beyond the context of one local community. The article argues that the myths, mysteries, proverbs, common sayings and beliefs circulated about human and nonhuman species within Yorùbá communities (classified as *Ìgbàgbọ́*) reinforce the relevance of the global agenda for a sustainable future for all. The article shows that the encoded ideas in the Yorùbá myths, mysteries, proverbs and other narrative forms on human and nonhuman species complement the extant philosophical and ecological thoughts in global scholarship. This complementarity speaks to the importance of collaborative efforts for the mitigation of an undesirable future for human and nonhuman species and thus is of relevance for the agenda of a sustainable future grounded in a non-discriminatory global partnership.

Abstract in Yorùbá

Iṣẹ́ akadá kan tí ó ń dágbàsókè, tí ó ń ṣe àfihàn ìtàn, ohun ìjìnlẹ̀, àwọn ìsọ tó wọ́ pọ̀ àti ìgbàgbọ́ tó ń ṣe ìrànwọ́ fún ìdàgbàsókè ìdúrósinsin ọjọ́ iwájú fún ènìyàn àti ohun tí kìí ṣe ènìyàn wa. Àpilẹ̀kọ yìí mú àpẹẹrẹ irú rẹ̀, ìwòye Yorùbá nípa ìgbàgbọ́ àti ìmọ̀, ó sì ṣe àyẹ̀wò ìjìnlẹ̀ nípa bí èyí ṣe bá àjọsọ àkókò bágbàmu ní àgbáyé lórí ìmúdúró sinsin tí ó tàn kọjá ìjọba ìbílẹ̀ mu. Àpilẹ̀kọ yìí jẹ́ kí ó di mímọ̀ pé àwọn ìtàn, ohun ìjìnlẹ̀, òwe, ìpèdè tí ó wọ́pọ̀ àti ìgbàgbọ́ tí ó tàn ká láàárín àwùjọ Yorùbá nípa ẹ̀dá ènìyàn àti ohun tí kì í ṣe ènìyàn (tí a yà sọ́tọ̀ gégé bi ìgbàgbọ́) mú agbára wá fún ètò tí ó ní ìtumọ̀ ní àgbáyé fún ìmúdúró sinsin ọjọ́ iwájú ohun gbogbo. Àpilẹ̀kọ yìí fihàn pe ọ̀rọ̀ alárokò inú ìtàn Yorùbá, ohun ìjìnlẹ̀, òwe àti àwọn ọ̀nà alòhun nípa ẹ̀dá ènìyàn àti ohun tí kì í ṣe ènìyàn kọ́wọ́rin pọ̀ pẹ̀lú àwọn èrò àwùjọ nínú ẹ̀kọ́ àgbáyé. Ìbáṣepọ̀ yìí sọ̀rọ̀ nípa pàtàkì ìfọwọ́sowọ́pọ̀ fún àtúnṣe ìgbé ayé fún ẹ̀dá ènìyàn àti ohun ti kì í ṣe ènìyàn, èyí sì wà ní ìbámu pẹ̀lú ètò ìmúdúró sinsin ọjọ́ iwajú àgbáyé tí kò si ẹlẹ́yàmẹ̀yà.

KEYWORDS: Indigenous knowledge; *Ìgbàgbọ́-Ìmọ̀*; human and nonhuman species; environment; sustainable future; Yorùbá

ÀWỌN KÓKÓ ỌRỌ̀ (NI YORÙBÁ): Ìmọ̀ ìbílẹ̀; Ìgbàgbọ́-Ìmọ̀; Ẹ̀dá Ènìyàn àti Ẹni tí kì í ṣe Ènìyàn; Agbègbè; Ọjọ́ Iwájú tó dúró sinsin; Yorùbá

Introduction

The quest for a sustainable future for the human race remains a germane concern and it is largely dependent on the conducive conditions of the environment (natural and cultural) within which humans coexist with nonhuman species. "Nonhuman species" is an inclusive concept for all life forms (animals, plants, insects, trees, water sources, and so on) as determined by the cultural contexts of understanding. The inevitable human nature of self-preservation drives the interaction with nonhuman species within the environment in diverse ways. This "human factor" complicates the conceptualisation and actualisation of a sustainable future for human and nonhuman species. Despite this reality, resilient interventions from modern scientific approaches, innovative technologies and techniques of environmental management of natural resources to secure a sustainable future are forged to douse the adverse effect of the "human factor". In the same vein, indigenous knowledge systems of environmental management are often recognised and advanced as complementary sources to these approaches and techniques (Brundtland 1987; UN 1992). The rationale for the close attachment of indigenous knowledge to nature (Johnson 1992; Banuri and Apffel-Marglin 1993), which has enhanced the survival and mobility of indigenous peoples' livelihood amidst the pressures and dynamics of social change (UNESCO 2017), amplifies its relevance for factoring indigenous knowledge initiatives into the global quest for a sustainable future. Efforts to advance this, however, would have to contend with the sceptical challenge against indigenous knowledge systems as unscientific, backward and "time-frozen" (Lévi-Strauss 1962, 1963; Horton 1967; Banuri and Apffel-Marglin 1993; Agrawal 1995). In other words, since indigenous knowledge is often described as the know-how of local or native communities about phenomena encoded in their beliefs, myths, mysteries, common sayings and practices, the need to justify its pragmatic relevance for global concerns (in an intercultural world) such as creating a sustainable future for human and nonhuman species is crucial.

Within philosophical parlance, the nature, limitation and justification of any form of knowledge about phenomena is the subject matter of epistemology, which elaborates the extent of the truth, relevance and certainty of any claim presented as knowledge, as different from a mere opinion or belief (Rescher 2003). It follows that the advancement of indigenous knowledge (in terms of myth, mysteries, common sayings/beliefs) about the phenomenon of a sustainable future for human and nonhuman species can be subjected to critical engagements. This article critically interrogates the relevance (if any) of indigenous contents, such as myths, mysteries and common beliefs circulated among the Yorùbá people (as an exemplar of indigenous knowledge) to envisioning a sustainable future for human and nonhuman species. The choice of Yorùbá myths, mysteries and common sayings and beliefs as exemplars is not to impress their exceptionality when compared to similar indigenous worldviews.

The first section of the article presents the rationality–mythology debate on environmental sustainability in indigenous knowledge to aid a critical engagement of the ongoing discourse on a sustainable future and the viability of an indigenous knowledge approach. The second section proffers insights into the nature of myths, mysteries and common sayings in the Yorùbá context to exemplify their relevance for the advancement of a sustainable future of interdependency between human and nonhuman species. The third section examines the contribution of Yorùbá indigenous knowledge to the ongoing global agenda for a sustainable future for all (human and nonhuman species).

The Rationality–Mythology Debate on Environmental Sustainability and Indigenous Knowledge

Environmental sustainability can be described as a concept that emphasises the desirable and harmonious ways of human interaction with the entirety of nature or the environment in order to mitigate the recurrent global challenges of environmental degradation, poor state of health or wellbeing, climate crisis and inequalities, among others (Morelli 2011; Goodland 1995). In other words, environmental sustainability is a conceptual blueprint for global partnership and efforts towards achieving a holistic, inclusive, better and sustainable future for all life forms, human and nonhuman. Despite this understanding, the contributions of indigenous norms, know-how and belief-oriented practices to the actualisation of a sustainable future for all are often doubted.

One of the reasons adduced for such doubt is the sceptical charge against the universal application of the internal logic of indigenous norms or practices as mythical, mysterious and mere beliefs. Another reason is that indigenous contents are considered to be "time-frozen" – that is, fixed in time (Adams, Potkanski, and Sutton 1994; Kalland 2000) – since it is assumed that the cultural expressions constitute the tradition of past tactics or approaches of pre-modern or pre-scientific societies, which can hardly address the complexities of contemporary social change or the evolution of human and environment/nature interaction (Wallace 1990; Bottici 2014). Also, the view that indigenous knowledge and practices are shaped by the rigidity of unchanging cultural wisdom (Chikaire et al. 2012, 205–6) is grounds for such sceptical expressions.

The dominant view that indigenous knowledge is culture/place-specific and narrow in scope, and thereby has limited application to non-indigenous conditions, constitutes the core basis for the supposed limitation of its universal relevance. This raises a fundamental concern about the scientific legitimacy of indigenous knowledge which culminates in the binary categorisation of indigenous knowledge as unscientific, traditional or mythical and against time-tested systematic and scientific knowledge systems whose principles and modes of application are considered universal (Agrawal 1995; Ellen and Harris 2000; Herbert 2000). Scholars like Agrawal (1995), Briggs et al. (1998; Briggs 2005) suggest that such demarcation between indigenous and scientific knowledge is at once too sharp and too strong due to the place of power relations and differentiation in determining what "counts" as knowledge. They provide plausible insights into the problems and challenges of making sense of knowledge from the presupposed binary prisms of indigenous knowledge versus (Western) scientific knowledge. Briggs emphasises that the approaches of theorists or proponents of indigenous knowledge aid the rationale for the binary conception of indigenous knowledge (as fixed and culture-specific) and scientific knowledge (as open, general, abstract and practical). Briggs explains that the proponents of indigenous knowledge often romanticise it as a closed and error-proof system of knowledge. This assumed closed nature of indigenous knowledge renders it redundant for explicating everyday lived experiences of the people who are often shaped by the techno-scientific (epistemological) drives of the West in the pursuit of sustainable development. Thus, the external and internal factors responsible for the sceptical stance on the universality of indigenous knowledge were identified by Briggs (2005).

Indigenous Know-How in the Yorùbá Context on Human and Nonhuman Species

Barry Hallen and Olubi J. Sodipo's seminal work *Knowledge, Belief, and Witchcraft*, written in 1997, explicates the linguistic limitations responsible for the distortion of meanings and

understanding about commonplace (or universal) issues from one context to another. Hallen and Sodipo attempted to nuance the Yorùbá understanding of universal issues through two explanatory frameworks: namely, *Ìmọ̀* and *Ìgbàgbọ́*. While scholarly debates on their work remain ongoing (Kalumba 2008; Fayemi and Azeez 2021; Janvid 2021), its heuristic worth lies in the effort to unravel the indigenous Yorùbá accounts or explanations of issues. Their explanatory frameworks provide a way for understanding the nature of indigenous myths, mysteries, proverbs, common sayings and beliefs about issues such as human and nonhuman species' relations in the Yorùbá context.

According to Hallen and Sodipo (1997), *Ìmọ̀* refers to a first-hand experiential account by a person which is a result of being conscious/aware of (*ẹ̀ẹ̀rí ọkàn*) and witnessing/seeing (*ríri*) an event as it happens or unfolds. This means that an account or explanation about such an event is subject to the verification of a person's awareness of or consciousness about it, through seeing/witnessing, which must necessarily correspond with what can be verified by others as true (*òtítọ́*). In other words, a person in the Yorùbá context is said to have *Ìmọ̀* (putative knowledge) when they have seen (*ríri*) an event happen or occur, have *ẹ̀ẹ̀rí ọkàn* (awareness/consciousness) about it and access its truth (*òtítọ́*), and the said truth is confirmed by others apart from the person. *Ìmọ̀*, as a paradigm of explanation in this context, is characterised by openness, verification, clarity and certainty of individual or collective/group accounts about things as they are in correspondence with what is observed and experienced. For instance, G. Olusola Ajibade's (2006:, 155–172) classification of animal species, by virtue of their physiological features and habitats in the Yorùbá context, contains *Ìmọ̀* about animals. Ajibade's classification of animals into *ẹran omi* (aquatic animals), *ẹran ilẹ* (land animals), *ẹran afàyàfà* (reptiles), *ẹran ẹlẹ́sẹ̀ méjì* (bipeds/two-legged animals), *ẹran ẹlẹ́sẹ̀ merin* (quadrupeds/four-legged animals), *ẹyẹ* (birds), *ẹran ilẹ* (domestic animals) and *ẹran ìgbẹ́* (wild animals) reflects a Yorùbá account or explanation of diverse animal species derived from seeing/observing (*ríri*) the habitats within which these animals are domiciled as well as their physiological features. Verifying the truth (*òtítọ́*) of this classification is open and accessible to anyone due to first-hand experience or account through direct observation (sighting and awareness – *ẹ̀ẹ̀rí ọkàn*) of animals within the habitats in which they are found and their physiological features. Put simply, *Ìmọ̀* is the certainty of the "knowledge out there"; it is open and subject to verification, awareness, and witnessing/sighting.

Hallen and Sodipo (1997) further suggest that not all accounts or explanations about issues in the Yorùbá context are products of first-hand experiences. This means that explanations are circulated in this context that are projections of a testimonial acceptance (*gbígbà*) through hearing (*gbígbọ́*) from a source (maybe a person, communal repository, or custodian agents like elders, customary institutions or norms) and choosing to believe the source (*gbàgbọ́*), based on the moral status or reputation of the source. Hallen and Sodipo (1997) term this way of accounting or explaining issues that are informed by acceptance through hearing from a source or believing in the moral reputation of the source as *Ìgbàgbọ́* in the Yorùbá context. Thus, *Ìgbàgbọ́* refers to second-hand information since it is usually not a product of first-hand experiences. The authors show that, through the processes of *ìsesí* (that is, when the sourced information conforms/corresponds with what is obtainable "out there") and *ìwádìí* (verification through observation), *Ìgbàgbọ́* can transit into *Ìmọ̀*. The exception of *Ìgbàgbọ́*'s transition to *Ìmọ̀* does not in any way imply that *Ìgbàgbọ́* is a prerequisite condition for *Ìmọ̀* in the Yorùbá context since both are different explanatory frameworks about issues (by virtue of first-hand or second-hand understanding). Besides, both explanatory frameworks, as presented, are constitutive explanatory models within the Yorùbá oral tradition in which *Ìmọ̀* is desirable for certainty of claims about things/issues while *Ìgbàgbọ́* remains gratuitous and is often

susceptible to *àríyànjiyàn* (that is, contestation, disagreement/disputation of truths/facts). "Àríyànjiyàn" (which is inherent in *Ìgbàgbọ́*) replicates the sceptical impression about the timely and universal relevance of Yorùbá indigenous know-how. I shall discuss how this could be the case in due course.

The body or content of information about issues that are not subjected to first-hand experience, which are passed down from one generation to another (within any oral culture), constitutes *Ìgbàgbọ́* in the Yorùbá context. Myths, beliefs, common/proverbial sayings and accepted practices that are not derived first-hand are thus the contents of *Ìgbàgbọ́*. Myths are devised as etiological vehicles of interpretation by individuals, communities or groups to convey beliefs and explanations about the origins (imagined, speculative, fictional or real) of humans, nonhumans and the cosmos (Losada 2015). This simply implies that myth can also be conceived as an insightful medium of making meaning and proffering answers to what seems unanswerable or incomprehensible. This conception of myth echoes the existing position about the exclusive nature of myth as a body of fiction or falsehood that is empty of facts and *logos* (reason) – hence, it is unsystematic and illogical (Lévi-Strauss 1963). Conceptualising myth as a framework of interpretation through beliefs and explanations presupposes it as a didactic system of thought for making sense of what is often considered incomprehensible, imagined, fictitious or real. In this direction, myth provides the fictional, non-fictional and extra-fictional foundations of meaning and interpretation of ideas, thoughts or beliefs held by individuals or groups. This gives credence to Anyanwu's (1987) opinion that humans (and, by extension, human society) are myth-making animals. In terms of myth-making, the Yorùbá context of cosmological narratives and accounts about the beginning or origin of human, nonhuman and environmental life forms are not exceptional.

Oftentimes, the ontological accounts of the existence of life forms (human and nonhuman) in the Yorùbá thought system are traced to the ordinance of the Supreme Being called *Olódùmarè* and the subordinates: namely, the primordial agents. The diverse Yorùbá accounts about Olódùmarè and the existence of primordial agencies like *Ifá* (the corpus of knowing in the Yorùbá worldview), *Òrúnmìlà*, the five-foot cock, sand, cat, snail shell, *Odùduwà* and so on suggest the multiple perceptions about the evolution of the cosmos and of human and nonhuman life forms, as well as the dynamic network of interactions that occur among them. While the classical works of Idowu (1962), Parrinder (1969), Mbiti (1969), Awolalu and Dopamu (1979) suggest that *Olódùmarè* is the arch-designer of the cosmic order of existence or "being" in the Yorùbá belief system, Abimbola (2005) holds the different position that *Olódùmarè* consulted *Ifá* and, hence, contends the previous claim of *Olódùmarè* as an arch-designer. Other circulated mythological accounts identify both *Ifá* and *Olódùmarè* as the source of *Aṣẹ́* (the power/force that makes things happen), which is responsible for the existence of all things and interdependent relations among all life forms (Harvey 2015, 242–3). Specific myths portray the mystery of *Olódùmarè* as a child of the royal python, a mythical belief that reinforces the Yorùbá disposition to worship and revere the snake (in connection with the Supreme Being). The *Ifá* myth regarding this recounts the belief as follows:

> *Àhéré oko sísún ní í mú ọ̀pọ̀lọ́ tọ luni ní òru*
>
> *Á dá fún erè*
>
> *Tí ó ń fi ẹkún ṣe ìráhùn ọmọ*
>
> *Nwọ́n ní kí ó rúbọ kí ó lè bí ọmọ,*

Ewúrẹ́ kan, aṣọ kíjìpá, ara erè, ejìlógún

Ó gbọ́, ó rú

Erè sì lóyún. Ó sì bímọ

Àwọn ènìà sì bẹ̀rẹ̀ sí wí pé "lódù ni ọmọ tí erè bí yìí"

Nígbà tí ọmọ náà sì dàgbà, ó sì jọba ní ojú ìyá rẹ

Òun ni gbogbo ènìà sì ńpè ní Olódùmarè títí di òní.

When we sleep in the farm hut, frogs jump on us at night

It was divined for Python

When she was weeping for a child.

She was told to make sacrifices to enable her to give birth

They are one she-goat, the homespun cloth, her cloth

She obeyed

The Python became pregnant and gave birth to a child,

And people began to say: "This child that python bore has Odù."

And when the child grew up, she lived to see him become a king.

He is the one whom all people are calling "One who has *Odù*,

Child of Python [*Olódùmarè*] until this very day." (Harvey 2015, 244)

It is apposite at this point to clarify that the variations in mythological accounts or narratives such as this make it difficult to consider myth as a reliable and factual source of explanation. Specifically, in the Yorùbá framework of explanation (as in *Ìgbàgbọ́* – the second order account) within which a myth is classified, such variations in mythological account or explanation are riddled with "*àríyànjiyàn*" – disputations of facts, disagreements or contentions. This is the case since the re of such accounts is transmitted from one generation or person to another as some sort of "unquestionable" communal belief; it is a process characterised by the lack of immediate observation or experience by individuals or groups, who hold on to such beliefs. This is the reason such mythological accounts do not culminate in *Ìmọ̀*, but *Ìgbàgbọ́*. It is equally important to explore the case of proverbs and common sayings in the Yorùbá context within the frame of indigenous know-how. It is essential to attempt a description of the nature of proverbs prior to their engagement within a context. Oyekunle O. Adegboyega (2017, 22) describes a proverb as a phrase or sentence that expresses general truth to pass messages of admonition, caution or advice. He further opines that, besides the expressive nature of proverbs, they are also deployed for providing explanations, though not in an exhaustive manner.

One can affirm that, since proverbs may not necessarily be exhaustive in providing explanations, their sufficiency for the expression of general truth may be in doubt, following Adegboyega's conception. Despite this, the point that a proverb is a kind of oral (verbal) tradition that expresses a value-oriented rationale for acting or eliciting dispositions in particular ways is impressed by Adegboyega, and this point is well argued. It follows that proverbs can be described as a system of expression or repertoire of people's way of life, morals and value system (Dauda 2016, 284–5). *Òwe lẹsin ọ̀rọ̀, bi ọ̀rọ̀ ba sọnù, òwe la fi ń wá a* – proverb is the horse of word, when a word is lost, we retrieve it through a proverb (Owomoyela 2005) – is a popular aphorism in the Yorùbá context that emphasises the elastic utility of proverbs as a mechanism for searching, conceptualising, explaining and condensing the meanings of things, events or conditions, to pass messages as intended from a speaker to a listener. It is apparent that proverbs (*Òwe*) in the Yorùbá context fall within the limits of testimonial acceptance from hearing and believing what is said or heard by virtue of the belief in the moral standing of the source of the information (the proverb). With specific reference to human and nonhuman species, *Òwe* are often utilised as metaphors to illustrate the dynamics of the relationships among animals, humans and the environment, to advise, caution and prescribe values. Exemplifying some of the ways in which *Òwe* are deployed within the Yorùbá context is necessary for insights into their utility:

> *Àìkọ́wọ̀ọ́ rìn ejò ní'ṣe ikú pawọ́n lọ́wọ̀wọ́, tí ọ̀ká bá ń lọ níwájú, tí ejòlá tẹ̀lé e, tí paramọ̀lẹ ń bọ̀ lẹ́hìn, kò sí ẹni tó lè kojú wọn.*
>
> The refusal of snakes to move together in a common direction makes them vulnerable to death one after the other; if the boa constrictor takes the front position, the python follows it and the carpet viper takes the rear position, no one dares to confront them.

This proverb is suggestive of the ideals of cooperation, unity or solidarity, and bespeaks the relevance of such for the common survival of a species. This lies in its emphasis on reliance on each other among the snakes to avert individual annihilation. It is sufficient to state here that, as a matter of metaphoric analogy, the ideal of invulnerability attained through the projected solidarity/cooperation among the different species of snakes is devised to convey human understanding about the essence of interpersonal cooperation. In other words, such a proverb is not just an expression but has the correlative function of capturing and making meanings in everyday interactions. For instance, the correlative function of the proverb that suggests the ideals of solidarity is often deployed during political rallies in Yorùbá communities, even in contemporary times, especially when a political aspirant's intention is to persuade the electorate to vote for him or her on the basis of a common cultural or ethnic identity. An example is the recent utterance by a popular political aspirant during the campaign period for the 2023 election in Nigeria: "*Ẹ má fi egbò yìí ṣe egbò ilé, gbogbo wa nii ọmọ ilé oo*" (which literally means "Do not use the partial lens of primordial affiliation to determine your loyalty"). This saying echoes the point about the general use of proverbs as a persuasive mechanism for gaining support or solidarity on the basis of ethnic or cultural ties.

In situations where a politician has invested a great deal to earn the trust and loyalty of the electorate or his or her followers yet they remain largely unpopular, a proverb such as "*Eyín t'ájá fi ń bá ọmọ ẹ̀ ṣeré, ló fi ń gé e jẹ*" – the same teeth a dog uses to play with its puppies are also used to bite them (Oluremi and Olugbemi-Gabriel 2022) – is deployed to convey an expression of threat and the intention to mete out punishment for any acts of betrayal or disloyalty. The point here is not to imply that this is the only proverb suitable for the expression of such a stance within the Yorùbá context; rather, the emphasis is on the heuristic essence of

Yorùbá proverbial expressions. Another proverb, "*ìṣe ènìyàn ni ìṣe ẹranko*" (the ways of humans are the ways of animals), directly points to the moderation of human interaction with animals based on the consideration of common behavioural and psychological characteristics shared by humans and animals, such as consciousness or awareness.

Proverbs like this establish the need for humans to exercise considerable care and empathy towards animals in the pursuit of their survival to deter the indiscriminate treatment of animals. This also serves as a subtle way to ensure that humans are not the only species with capacities, needs or desires; hence, there is a need to exercise caution in human interactions with animals and with the ecosystem at large. The Yorùbá saying "*Igi kan kò lè dá igbó ṣe*" (a tree cannot make a forest) further reiterates the ecological imperative of such a consideration in terms of the invaluable essence of the different species or life forms in the sustenance of a commonly shared ecosystem.

"A tree", as deployed in this expression, can be considered as a metaphoric reference to the imperative of a sustainable ecosystem for human and nonhuman species. A sustainable ecosystem in this context implies a state or condition of ecological balance or order where diverse species can enhance their opportunities for survival and thrive. This is well captured in the Yorùbá saying that "*ìrọ̀rùn igi ni ìrọ̀rùn ẹyẹ*" (comfort for the tree is comfort for the birds). Again, the tree and the bird are metaphoric references to the wide range of human and nonhuman species in the Yorùbá context. Such a saying highlights the inevitability of interdependence among species for the sake of survival since they coexist within the same ecosystem. This implies that the Yorùbá conception of a sustainable future for human and nonhuman species is foregrounded by the anticipation of beneficial conditions that would aid human survival, which is also informed by the patterns of interaction with animals and the ecosystem.

The anticipation of beneficial conditions that would aid human survival underlies the circulation of Yorùbá beliefs about some animals as totemic symbols that deserve reverence. Attitudes of reverence towards animals such as the vulture, buffalo, bird and fish (which are considered totemic symbols of deities and ancestors) foster the moral imperative for the conservation of these species and their environment. For instance, the belief about the buffalo, when found in a swampy waterscape, is that it serves as a symbolic representation of *Ọya* (the river goddess). The association of the buffalo found within such a waterscape with the river goddess is foregrounded by the religious-cultural expectation that the Yorùbá community must relate to it and its surrounding environment with respect and care. In other words, such a water source is to be exempt from fishing, the buffalo found in it are not to be hunted, and the trees whose roots sprout within the water are to be revered as an embodiment of *Ọya.* The Yorùbá belief about such waterscapes is further evident through the offertory to the buffalo and the re of its cognomen that are performed by *Ọya*'s devotees during their festivals. If the expected norms of relations with the buffalo and its environs are breached, it is believed that certain undesirable consequences will befall the perpetrator. Again, this indicates the indispensable place of interdependent relations between humans and animals, such that the adverse consequences of the human breach of the cultural norms of reverence for the space within which animals coexist may cause the loss of human lives, communal chaos and environmental disasters. Persons identified as the cause of the breach which led to the undesirable consequences of loss, chaos or disaster are considered as disruptors of cultural norms and subjected to reprimand in the Yorùbá context, which serves as a deterrent. Speculative Yorùbá sayings, such as the one presented below, capture this:

B'éwúrẹ́ bá da Ifá nù, ẹ̀jẹ̀ rẹ̀ la ó fi kó o.

> The goat that disrespects *Ifá* by throwing its divining instruments to the ground would pay dearly with its blood.

The "goat" in the above represents the entity responsible for the breach (who could be a human being who breached the cultural norms of expectation in terms of any disrespect for the revered space within which the animals coexist). The significance of the goat as the source of a breach echoes Mwangi's (2019) idea of the art or aesthetic symbolism of animals as reflectors of the interpersonal relationships and identity politics that occurred between the colonialists and the colonised natives, which is conveyed in the ideological schism of being superior and human (colonialist) over being inferior and animal (colonised natives). In Mwangi's case, the image of the lizard and dinosaur were deployed as signifiers in correlation with the breach (which was sanctioned by the Creator against the dinosaur because of its gluttony) that resulted in the reduction of the latter's size to the former's. Mwangi's insightful analysis reiterates the case for reclaiming indigenous identity formation, justice and harmony to blur the ideologies of difference that de-naturalise balanced relationships. In similar terms, Aderinto (2022) has engaged the colonial subjectivity of animals' representation in the Nigerian context by intellectually exploring the social history of the ethnic (symbolic) reading and construction of prejudices about famed animals such as *Lekewogbe* (a dog), *Jubilee* (a horse) and *Aruna* (a gorilla), among others. These scholarly interventions ground the need to seek understanding about the critical place of contexts of perceptions, beliefs and constructions of human understanding about nonhuman species. Discerning the context of proverbial expressions, beliefs and sayings, and their capacity as crucial knowledge sources on a sustainable future for human and nonhuman species, is crucial at this point.

There is no doubt that the preceding exegesis on the metaphorical analogy of the tree and the goat, as deployed in the proverbial expressions, seems to suggest a rigid and unilateral interpretation for the sake of a sustainable ecosystem. Scholars in the field of paroemiology have clarified that fixing the meaning or interpretation of proverbs in this way reflects the peculiar nature of the "traditional proverbs" that are believed to embody pristine cultural and conventional values. The basic contention here is that the context of the circulation and use of proverbs extends beyond the traditional or cultural meanings since proverbs are also deployed to convey meanings in changing moments and spaces. Raji-Oyelade's (2022) incisive article on the Covid-19 "postproverbials" illustrates how the use of proverbs captures such temporal and spatial dynamism. The use of proverbs to convey diverse meanings, explanations or interpretations underscores their multivalent and non-static nature. In other words, the view that the usages, meanings and interpretations of proverbs are not so fixed is sustained. As such, even within the contemporary Yorùbá context, proverbs elicit varying creative and re-creative impulses for conveying intentions to reflect current or ongoing realities. It is in this sense that scholarship is proliferating on the limits of traditional proverbs, in relation to the emergence of postproverbials (Lemoha, Ohwovoriole, and Agugua 2020; Fadare 2020) and anti-proverbials (Meider 2007; Litovkina et al. 2021). Scholarly engagements of postproverbials and anti-proverbials underscore the essential nature of proverbs as conveyors of shifts in meaning and constructed values. Raji-Oyelade aptly captures the shifting nature of proverbs in the Yorùbá context in the quest to delineate the idea of the postproverbial:

> The "relative fixity", or rigidity of the typical traditional proverb is apparently dictated by conventional usage, more so, by the need to transmit the verbal properties of the proverb, if not its conventional cultural meaning, with absolute consistency and fidelity

> to its original structure. In other words, there is an assurance quality of stasis in the traditional proverb or conventional verbal genre; situated in the dynamic space of informal speech and modern African culture, the relative fixity of proverbs dissolves and ultimately they are deconstructed as postproverbials. The emergence of postproverbials in contemporary Yorùbá society is undoubtedly the effect of the interplay of orality, and literacy-modernity, the critical correspondence between an older, puritanistic generation and a younger … generation. (Raji-Oyelade 1999, 75)

Two issues are noteworthy about proverbs (traditional or postproverbials) from the assertion above. The first is the suggested universal nature of proverbs as meaningful and value-laden traditional oral expressions embraced or projected by individuals or communities despite the effect of literacy-modernity. The second is the dynamic structure of proverbs (their "post" status) as informed by the transition in time and social realities (which inform shifts in values and meaning). These issues reinforce the point that proverbs are hardly fixed in meaning and are open to diverse interpretations – hence, they are inexhaustible. For instance, the proverbial expression about "a cow without a tail" and its postproverbial form in the Yorùbá context may imply different meanings as intended by the speaker.

> Màlúù tí kò ní ìrù, olúwa ní bá a lé esinsin.
>
> Only the Supreme Being helps to ward off the flies that feed on a cow without a tail.
>
> Màlúù tí kò ní ìrù, ó pọ̀ ní Sábó.
>
> Cows without tails are many in Sabo.

While the first, which is a proverb, can be classified as an example of the traditional (conventional) Yorùbá proverb about "a cow without a tail", which expresses hope or faith in an unexpected intervention to save someone in a helpless situation, the latter expression, which is a postproverbial, fits in the class of playful expressions that express cynicism about a person's predicament as a common occurrence. In other words, such a proverb may be used to placate oneself by pointing out that a predicament is experienced generally. Also, literally, the postproverbial also appears to capture the modern reality of cows with bodily mutilation (due to excessive and indiscriminate subjection to inclement conditions) within the cattle market or ranches. Within the *Ìgbàgbọ́–Ìmọ̀* distinction, the popular circulation of either of the expressions above is mainly through their use by others over time in the Yorùbá context, and this presumes some uncertainty about the actual state or condition of "cows without tails" since this is not observed or experienced directly. Such proverbial sayings can be regarded as expressions of beliefs (*Ìgbàgbọ́*) circulated from one person or generation to another, not knowledge (*Ìmọ̀*). Illustrating the other available proverbial sayings that can be categorised as a part of *Ìgbàgbọ́*, as an explanatory framework in the Yorùbá context, can hardly be exhausted in a discourse of this nature. However, it is important to discern the contribution of such a framework to the global agenda of a sustainable future for human and nonhuman species.

Contribution to the Global Agenda of a Sustainable Future for Human and Nonhuman Species

Given the above exemplification of the *Ìgbàgbọ́–Ìmọ̀* distinction in the Yorùbá context, especially with reference to the expressions of thought about human and nonhuman species, the tendency to subject *Ìgbàgbọ́* to a further engagement for the sake of discerning its

contribution to the global agenda for a sustainable future is inevitable. The reason for this is not far-fetched. The multivalent nature of the interpretation of myths and of the construction of beliefs or sayings seems to make discerning the moral or extra-moral rationale of human interactions with nonhuman species open-ended or flexible. In other words, even though *Ìgbàgbọ́* as a framework of explanation is often considered as the gratification of beliefs or thought systems that may shape or inform human (individual/communal) actions or inactions, it seems feasible that it is essential as a source of the constructions of beliefs, ideals, precepts or principles of a desirable future for human and nonhuman species. In fact, the feasibility of *Ìgbàgbọ́* for such possible constructions has been nuanced in the preceding section through the discussed instances of proverbial sayings and beliefs that seem to propel the interdependent relationship between human and nonhuman species for survival.

It can be reasoned that such interdependency implies the universal reality of the entanglement of human survival with nonhuman survival. The global urge for the moderation of human interactions with biodiversity and the ecosystems at large, to mitigate the frequency of climate crises and enhance harmony and prosperity for humans today and for future generations, aligns with the significant communal and cultural impetus of interdependency among the species through the indigenous construction of myths, beliefs or sayings about human and nonhuman beings/forces and the use of trees, goats, rivers, buffalos, birds and the like as totemic symbols in the Yorùbá context. Since it is admitted that these constructions are grounded through testimonial justification (which is second-hand), which influences and shapes perceptions, attitudes and human actions towards nonhuman species, discerning the implications of human–nonhuman interdependence for the global vision and pursuit of a sustainable future becomes a matter of theoretical possibility. This is so at the level of its acceptance as a framework of precepts or principles that is underscored by its inclusion in the mandate of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 17, which emphasises the importance of global partnership to realise pragmatic and sustainable environmental policies. In concrete terms, a purposeful engagement of the indigenous repertoire on human and nonhuman species should inform the formulation of an inclusive environmental policy for a sustainable future which would enhance a sense of belonging to the globe among indigenous communities through their consensual and full participation. Indeed, this would lead to the projection of an ideal and non-discriminatory global partnership.

There is no doubt that a non-discriminatory global partnership would also be influenced by power relations, in terms of the effect of techno-scientific and resource capacities that would determine the nature and extent of communal, national and international participation. Nonetheless, the point is that such a global partnership towards the realisation of a sustainable future for all is desirable to aid epistemic justice and acknowledgement of alternative and complementary knowledge systems, and it should not be treated lightly. Through epistemic justice or acknowledgement of alternative and complementary knowledge systems, the pathway to the validation of indigenous knowledge of a sustainable future is readily set. The ethical goal of the conservation of species and the environment – through a heuristic myth about *Ọya*, the buffalo and the river, for instance – reiterates the inestimable value of enhancing the integrity of life on land and in water. This is corroborated by the functional role of the avoidance of breaches (to deter the outbreak of diseases, communal disharmony or disaster), as expressed in such a proverb as *B'éwúrẹ́ bá da Ifá nù, èjẹ̀ rẹ̀ la ó fi kó o* (the goat that disrespects *Ifá* by throwing its divining instruments to the ground would pay dearly with its blood), through regard for cultural norms and expectations of reverence for spaces of biodiversity.

Importantly, earmarking the contributions of the indigenous know-how of a sustainable future for humans and nonhuman species would remain incomplete without situating its impact on the field of ecological studies. Despite the cultural texture of the indigenous know-how about humans and nonhuman species in the Yorùbá context, its conceptual and explanatory framework appears to be a blend of a human-centred (anthropocentric) outlook and its extension to the nonhuman, which can be termed the "metaphysical ecology" outlook. The metaphysical ecology outlook is foregrounded by the human-centred outlook since the attribution of symbolic functions or roles to forces beyond the physical or human world (such as gods, goddesses, deities, spirits or ancestors) in the sustenance of the environmental order or balance is mainly a matter of human construction (imagination, belief and disposition). Such ecology is also eco-centred (as it prioritises the nonhuman spaces or environment as the centre of all lives) and animistic. The point here regarding the conceptual fabric of Yorùbá thought on human and nonhuman species is that this indigenous know-how is not one of a kind as it is not totally different from other, similar indigenous ecological worldviews elsewhere. This substantiates the universal relevance of extant ecological theories within the context of indigenous communities like the Yorùbá, which is not detached from the global realities of human and environmental crises such as ecosystem imbalance, loss of biodiversity, shrinking of natural spaces and the extinction of nonhuman species, among other issues, that constitute impediments to the attainment of a sustainable future for human and nonhuman species.

Furthermore, the attempt to explore a Yorùbá account of a sustainable future for human and nonhuman species through the *Ìgbàgbọ́–Ìmọ̀* framework aids the expediency of linking the epistemology and ethics of care to obliterate the challenge of selective engagement with the wellbeing of individual species at the expense of other vital species within the environment. In other words, an analysis of the Yorùbá explanatory framework drives the initiative to connect exclusive extant epistemological and ethical reflections on the inevitable consequences of human interactions with nonhuman species from the perspective of indigenous worldviews. This implies that the projection of an epistemic-ethical consideration of care (that is, an epistemology and ethics of care) for the future of human and nonhuman species would bridge the disconnect between the questions "Why care for nonhuman species?" and "What does care entail for nonhuman species?" The first question borders on the ethical rationale of care elicited through arguments about the best criterion for the consideration of care, which may involve the consideration of varying capacities like rationality, feeling, consciousness, sanctity of life and ecosystem integrity, among others. Singer's (1975) seminal work on animal liberation aptly reflects the basis of consideration of such capacities for the inclusion of animal interests, rights and wellbeing. As laudable as Singer's position is, it entertains an exclusive rather than an inclusive consideration of care for individual species (that is, animals) at the expense of others. Proffering a detailed engagement with this concern about Singer's position is not a central issue here, however, considering that its reflective and provocative impulse for further scholarly responses is the point in focus. And this is essentially linked to the second concern: "What does care for nonhuman species entail?"

This concern is mainly an epistemological one that stems from the quest for a justification for the conception of care for nonhuman species. In other words, one would be dealing with the complex issues of justifying who or what is speaking about care and on whose behalf. A way to grapple with this is to inquire about the justification or appropriateness of human knowledge or understanding about what care means for nonhuman species. There is no doubt that engaging with such a question would demand meta-linguistic and deep philosophical engagements that are beyond this discourse. Jacques Derrida's "The Animal that Therefore I Am" (2008) represents such a deep philosophical inquiry since it problematises and attempts to deconstruct

the arbitrariness of exclusive ethical considerations of animal interests or wellbeing through human-centred concepts such as morality, interests, rights and welfare, among others, that are proliferated by Singer and other scholars. While Derrida's position widens the horizon of the discourse by decentring anthropocentric conceptual schemes, it seems to elevate the epistemological consideration over the ethical rationale of care. Recourse to the Yorùbá account of the *Ìgbàgbọ́–Ìmọ̀* distinction for consideration of care for human and nonhuman species indicates an inclusive consideration of both epistemological and ethical dimensions (as explicated in the previous sections). And such an inclusive epistemic-ethical consideration of care is required for factoring in to the discourse philosophically relevant indigenous ideologies in non-Western communities like the Yorùbá. Since this epistemic-ethical consideration is situated in an intricate aspect of Yorùbá indigenous worldviews, then the inclusion of its heuristic value for the projection of a global agenda for a sustainable future for all can hardly be discounted.

Conclusion

While the indigenous knowledge framework proposed by Hallen and Sodipo to capture the internal structure of Yorùbá thought is not free of criticism from scholars in the field of (African) epistemology, its relevance for unravelling indigenous explanations or accounts of issues that amount to beliefs (representations acquired through second-hand means) and knowledge (acquired through first-hand means) supports the quest for a sustainable future for human and nonhuman species in the Yorùbá context, and thus makes a contribution to the global agenda. Through a critical engagement with the rationality–mythology debate in environmental studies and indigenous knowledge, the article has engaged with the conception of knowledge as scientific or indigenous (understood as non-scientific). The extent to which this dichotomy hinders the acceptance or inclusion of indigenous knowledge systems as practically relevant for interrogating environmental issues was discussed. Such a dichotomy raises a pseudo-problem since knowledge constitutes a continuum of thought in time and space, subject to social, cultural and political factors. This, I argued, provides a point of entry for the consideration of what constitutes knowledge within a given context. Hallen and Sodipo's *Ìgbàgbọ́–Ìmọ̀* distinction model was subsequently embraced to exemplify, in particular, the Yorùbá understanding of a sustainable future for human and nonhuman species. Some myths, proverbs, postproverbials and common sayings that circulated in the Yorùbá context were thus considered for their literal and metaphorical essence and their possible contributions to the global agenda of instituting a sustainable future for human and nonhuman species. It was emphasised that these myths, beliefs and sayings are inherent constituents of the *Ìgbàgbọ́* framework of explanation about the relations between human and nonhuman species, and provide an open-ended and flexible ground for discerning the theoretical contribution of indigenous know-how, at the level of precepts or principles, to reinforce the global agendas for human–nonhuman interaction. Since indigenous knowledge in the Yorùbá context also reflects some of the rudiments of the global agenda for a sustainable future for both human and nonhuman species, the relevance of its inclusion on the ground of a non-discriminatory global partnership is indispensable.

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