Ancestor centrism: A Philosophical Paradigm for Transdisciplinary Research (A)

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Abstract:

This research explores Ancestorcentrism, a transdisciplinary research framework emphasising respect for diversity, knowledge development, clear values, practical applications, and cultural sensitivity. It argues for decolonising knowledge by highlighting the perspectives of the Mossi-Dagbamba people of West Africa.

The study employs transcendental philosophy and qualitative methods, including interviews and observations, to understand the lived experiences of the Mossi-Dagbamba in relation to Ancestorcentrism. Considering their social, cultural, and spiritual context, this framework values indigenous knowledge, science, philosophy, and development.

The research concludes that Ancestorcentrism fosters collaboration and empowerment for indigenous communities, enriching the global knowledge landscape. It recommends promoting dialogue, collaboration, and knowledge exchange between indigenous and non-indigenous communities for a more inclusive and equitable academic environment.

Keywords: Mossi-Dagbamba, Ancestorcentrism, Ontology, Worldview, Human Nature, Educational Implications.

1. Introduction

In African philosophy, ontology occupies a central position. The way reality is perceived in the African world influences African life and activities, both as individuals and as groups. The recognition of the existence of a hierarchy of beings and the interaction of these beings determines the structure of events in traditional African communities and how people behave about one another and their environments.

My investigation is an attempt to clarify this African ontology and its underlying driving force in African life situations. This understanding is hoped to lead to a better appreciation and application of the African worldview and cosmovision, especially with regard to education and real-life situations. To achieve this goal, the paper will investigate the concepts of ontology and African ontology. It will then examine the African understanding and existential practices. African understanding of human nature and African existential experience are the foci of attention here. This will lead to the exposition of the implications of African ontology for education in Africa. The outcome of the entire discourse will form the basis for the conclusion to be arrived at and some recommendations for improvements where necessary.

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Problem analysis

The Mossi-Dagbamba and African worldview and cosmovision, logic and sense-making, ontology, and epistemology are interwoven with their gnoseology, axiology and the knowledge community and governed in a complex whole. The life of the Mossi-Dagbamba is governed by strong beliefs and practice of spirituality and the sacredness of the indigenous knowledge system that provides Africans with the needed identity and personality/personhood. This spirituality guides the decisions and day-to-day lives of the people. As such, their position in terms of description of science, philosophy, development, chieftaincy, identity, morality and values are described differently from the narrative provided in Western literature.

However, Indigenous knowledge systems have long been marginalised, often overlooked or dismissed within mainstream academic discourse.

In response, Ancestorcentrism emerges as a pioneering paradigm that challenges conventional research approaches. Ancestorcentrism emphasises the commitment to diversity, varied epistemologies, explicit values, practical application, adaptive relationality, and decolonisation. My article argues that understanding the scientific and philosophical perspectives within Ancestorcentrism is pivotal for unlocking the complexities embedded in indigenous contexts. Doing so reshapes how we perceive and engage with indigenous knowledge and contributes to a more inclusive and equitable global knowledge landscape.

My study seeks to explain the scientific and philosophical perspectives of Ancestorcentrism and attempt to add my voice to the current debate and advocacy campaign on the need for a holistic indigenous paradigm for knowledge scientific, developmental, and philosophy in problem-solving in Ghana, Togo Burkina Faso and Africa.

Explanatory notes on terminology

1. "Saakumnu" literally means ancestorship – what the ancestors used to do that has persisted over generations. It also connotes sacredness, identity, and personality.

2. Worldview here means a coherent body of knowledge that covers all aspects of the world of a people. It is a mindset/map that people use to orient, position, and explain their world, and from which they assess and act or refuse to act and establish for themselves an expectation/motivation and a vision for the future.

3. Beliefs are assumptions that have not been verified and tested but are held faithful by an individual or a community of believers. The source of belief can be revelations or teachings by spiritual leaders, ancient texts, or supernatural experiences.

4. Data refers to outcomes of observations that can be processed, quantified or qualified. The processed data is called information.

5. Information refers to data that have been processed and analysed and to which a specific interpretation or meaning has been ascribed. Information can, therefore, be carried in reports, books, or computer systems but also indigenous forms such as songs, prayers, poems, sayings and other narratives.

6. _Knowledge_ is in people. It refers to the assumptions, concepts and interpretations of information individuals or groups acquire. Knowledge is understood here as how people give meaning to phenomena and translate them into action. Knowledge production, then, is a process that links information with meaning, values and action that cannot be reduced to a set of 'objectively' validated information. Knowledge is inextricably linked to the social, environmental and institutional contexts. Knowledge can result from a certain tradition, confined to a certain locality, linked to indigenous people, to a particular continent or have a global character (hence the possible labels as traditional, local, indigenous, African, or global knowledge).

7. _Science_ is the body of knowledge and its classification under a theoretical framework, tested in observation or supported by its logic. It includes the complexity of producing knowledge and information with assumptions, general principles, theories, and methodologies about a range of phenomena on which a specific community has reached a consensus. The knowledge acquired is always limited and subject to modification in light of new data and information. Some social and methodological norms govern a professional community of knowledge practitioners in a society where a particular science is accepted and used.

Adopting these definitions allows one to state that besides the academically established science, many other 'sciences' refer to numerous 'knowledges' co-existing.

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2. Conceptual Frame

The belief in ancestors and ancestral spirit by the Mossi-Dagbamba of Africa is a branch of metaphysics, worldview and cosmovision, logic and sense-making and ontology. These factors are components of science and philosophy and are interwoven together. If any other factors are left out, the rest fail to work properly, and their meaning in indigenous science and philosophy is incomplete.

Ontology is the study of being or reality. The way people perceive and understand reality usually shapes their day-to-day lives and activities. The reality of existence is fundamental in all human societies and affairs. There are differences in people's worldviews based on their convictions about the nature of beings. These convictions greatly inform, influence and guide their everyday life and activities in relation to one another and their environments. In other words, people's ontology is a basis for their existential practices. In this regard, my investigation explored the Mossi-Dagbamba and African ontology and its implications for decolonising/Liberating and re-schooling indigenous knowledge system, science, philosophy and development in African education.

Using a philosophical approach, the conceptual frame and critical analysis of contents and contexts, my investigation argues convincingly that African ontology is holistic, hence the integrated African worldview and cosmovision, with a high premium placed on the sanctity of human values, morality and ethic and the entire life of the community members. For the Mossi-Dagbamba and Africans generally, life is a continuum, with all beings, though hierarchical, in constant interaction. Some of the implications of this for African education were highlighted, such as the need for integral knowledge, system, science, development and philosophy in the education of the person/individual, community/society and holistic character formation for order, unity and progress in the Mossi-Dagbamba people and African society.

2.1 Respecting Diversity/Complexity: A Holistic Approach

For instance, Murray and Roscoe (1998) elaborate work on the subject from which many have referenced was mainly from the works of earlier European missionaries in Africa and primarily based on symbolic inscriptions, observations, and the partial views of people involved in the practice. Yet traditional signs and symbols are defined as dynamic human actions with varied meanings that affect every living sector to achieve meaningful progress and harmonious coexistence in African civilisation (Ushe, 2012). Indeed, the core of African symbols is a shared understanding of their meanings and messages conveyed in that symbol. This is only possible if there is an understanding between the senders and receivers of their backgrounds or fields of experience. One can argue that in the case of same-sex practices in Africa, there was no holistic conveyance or shared understanding of information from especially the senders to the receivers. The senders were not appropriately considered in the information flow process.

This is because, according to Dunn et al. (2002), signs transmitted through words or pictures have many meanings, the most common being denotative, connotative and contextual. The **denotation of a sign** is the reality that involves the literal association of signs with what they represent. The **connotation of a sign** pertains to secondary and subjective realities designated by the sign, as well as eventual (favourable or unfavourable) evaluations, which are associated with primary or secondary realities, depending on the society, whilst the **contextual meanings** (mental, visual or oral), are influenced by the context in which the message appears. More often than not, the factors determining the understanding of the sender's message are rooted in cultural signs and symbols.

Ancestorcentrism, as a transdisciplinary research paradigm, stands out for its profound emphasis on respecting and celebrating diversity within communities and beyond. This commitment extends beyond human diversity to encompass the intricate tapestry of biodiversity. Scholars such as Marshall (2007) and Smith (2000) underscore the significance of learning from the wealth of biodiversity, asserting that ecological richness mirrors the cultural richness within indigenous communities.

The characteristic of diversity appreciation in Ancestorcentrism ensures that the research paradigm is not confined to a singular lens but rather acknowledges and integrates a wide spectrum of perspectives. This inclusivity is vital in unravelling the complexities inherent in indigenous cultures, where diverse worldviews co-exist. By recognising and valuing this diversity, Ancestorcentrism facilitates a holistic understanding beyond surface-level analyses.

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Moreover, Ancestorcentrism recognises that indigenous communities are not static entities but dynamic and ever-evolving. Celebrating diversity becomes a catalyst for adapting research methodologies to capture the ongoing changes within these communities. This approach aligns with the dynamic nature of ecosystems, acknowledging that both cultural and ecological systems undergo continuous transformation.

The spirituality and ancestral spirit domains encompass belief and or insight into the immaterial and non-physical realities or experiences of the transcendent nature of the world that extends or transcend into other areas such as rituals, festivals, meditation, prayers, contemplation, ceremonies, sacrifices, initiation rites, revelations, myths etc.

2.2 Missing Vital Linkages:

(i)   The connection between the Human, Natural, Spiritual, and Universe realms lacks clarity, hindering a comprehensive depiction of the ancestral worldview and cosmovision of the Moshi Dagbani ethnic group. The intricate chain of interconnectedness requires attention to detail for a holistic representation.

(ii) Neglect of Ancestral Spirit's Role: The mediating and supervisory role of the Ancestral spirit (the Third Eye) in overseeing the three worlds and the universe, crucial for understanding knowledge emergence, is omitted in Millar and Santuah's models.

(iii) Omission of Axiology (Ethics and Values): The critical components of ethics and values (axiology) are absent in both models, overlooking essential aspects of community life and decision-making.

(v) Gnoseology: Gnoseology, within the context of African Sciences as outlined by Haverkort et al. (2012), can be succinctly defined as the systematic exploration of the ways of learning and the methods used to establish the basis for knowledge. It involves examining and validating the structures through which knowledge is acquired, organised, and validated within African scientific frameworks. Gnoseology in this context encompasses the epistemological foundations and methodologies underpinning knowledge acquisition and verification within the African scientific tradition.

(iv) Absence of Knowledge Community Leaders: The models do not account for knowledge community leaders, individuals safeguarding the community's vision and values, whose role is vital for preserving cultural identity.

(v) Neglect of Co-creation and Integration: Neither Millar nor Santuah's models provide insights into how co-creation, integration, and complementary knowledge and worldviews could be addressed.

3. Methodological Approach

This study employed a phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of individuals in relation to the phenomenon. Purposive and snowball sampling were employed to recruit participants experiencing despondency (Etikan et al., 2016). Interviews were conducted to gather rich, detailed accounts of participants' perceptions and experiences. Thematic and content analysis were utilised to identify recurring themes and capture the essence of participants' narratives, allowing readers to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon through the participants' perspectives.

4.0 Findings and Discussion

First and foremost, my investigations found that the Mossi-Dagbamba people believe in the existence of the ancestral spirit. The belief in ancestral spirits plays a significant role in understanding the Mossi-Dagbamba ontology, Gnoseology, Knowledge community members, Knowledge co-creation and integration.

To make these findings more relevant and meaningful to this study, I discussed with a cross-section of leading actors in the thematic area using various interview sessions to obtain their thoughts and views about the belief in the ancestral spirit, how they acquire it, how they also disseminate it and how that belief influences indigenous knowledge of Ancestorcentricsm and understanding the Mossi-Dagbamba ontology, Gnoseology, Knowledge community members, Knowledge co-creation and integration.

 The outcome shows that the knowledge of Ancestorcentrism's emphasis on ancestors' spiritual connection between the living and the departed fosters a sense of knowing and continuity beyond the physical realm; for example, healing is through inheritance, and one has to be chosen by the gods and has to go through an initiation process to qualify to practice.

A soothsayer from Bimblla in the Northern region indicated as follows

Text box 1

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"Ancestors and their spirits can be traced to the first creator in the lineage- AllFather/God. The spirits are living because they are believed to be doweling in the same place or closer to each Allfather. The ancestral spirit or the "living dead" is a guardian of knowledge, morality, values, ethics, Cultural Continuity and Identity. They provide historical Consciousness and Precedence Guide in African families, clans and tribes. That is why they are revered, and sacrifices are made for them.

The ancestral spirit is revered and worshipped in African society because of its tremendous and sacrificial role in shaping their families, clans and tribes. With time, their contributions go beyond the families, clans and tribes to communities, e.g., villages, towns, countries and the continent".

"The analogy of spirit and ghost is similar to God and Satan, heaven and earth, good and bad, etc. Before becoming an ancestral spirit, one must live a life worthy of emulation, die a natural death without accident or serious diseases, and have a funeral performance to transition into the next world to become an ancestral spirit. Again, "shei ka eyea mira". This means you must be "a person or personhood". Being a person means having specific values beyond yourself, e.g. honesty, respect, integrity, hard work, love for others, etc. These values are called transhumanist principles. For example, every family member takes over from either a present or past ancestor and is influenced and guided by that person's spirit" *(Key Informant, 2023 in Bimbilla)*.

Source: Field report, 2023

The first and foremost finding from **the text box above** is that the Mossi-Dagbamba people believe in the existence of the ancestral spirit. Such spirituality is about principles, ideals, and concepts of honour and integrity that mould individual consciousness into a group and united life so that the person develops spirituality via participation in society, culture, and connections with nature ((Dei, 2002), p.341). According to Haverkort and Hiemstra (1999), an African cosmology is the foundation of African existence and shapes peoples' epistemology, ontology, and axiology. Ordinary things and occurrences mould this African cosmology. Decisions are made, issues are resolved, and populations are arranged according to the spiritualised worldview.

Therefore, spirituality to the Africans is an issue of identity. According to Wellman et al. (2009), spirituality is "about how people identify themselves, how they view the world, interact with others, and make decisions" (also see (Knoetze, 2019), (Amanze, 2011)). According to (1993), Africa is the most spiritual of continents, demonstrating that the scholar means that African people are united by their common spiritual strivings that Africans relate all dimensions of human life, especially their strivings for freedom and empowerment, to some trans-historical source of power and meaning. Indeed, spirituality is the principle by which the African (human) spirit is related to its primary source of meaning and power.

Maya Spencer describes spirituality as a recognition of the existence of a greater divine nature beyond the present self, a knowing that our present lives have significance within the greater divine nature and personal pursuit of this greater divine nature. As a recognition, it is a feeling or sense or belief that there is something greater than the self, something more to being human, and then sensory experience and that the greater whole of which we are part is cosmic or divine in nature. As a knowing, it is an understanding that our lives have significance beyond the mundane everyday existence, and as pursuit, it involves an exploration of universal themes (love, compassion, altruism, life after death, wisdom and truth) based on the knowledge that some people (such as saints or enlightened individuals) have achieved and manifested higher levels of development than the ordinary person (undated).

My investigation further reveals that Ancestorcentrism is expressed in various ways and forms. The forms are categorised into the following

1. : culture and art. This includes the observed and the non-observed in society.
2. Spirituality and the sacred. This includes sacred sites and places, spiritual healing isnd belief systems.
3. Religion and faith. Forms of worship and ancestral veneration
4. Indigenous knowledge and science. A holistic knowledge emerging from social, material, spiritual or biological, physical and spiritual perspectives and beyond
5. Indigenous Philosophy. The local ways of investigating truth and facts.

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6. Endogenous development. Development emerging within the local people and communities.

4.2 Spirituality and sacredness as a critical denominator in African life

From Text box one above, the Mossi-Dagbamba people of Africa's belief system is complex and highly diverse, with its own concepts of matter, life, death, and time. Ancestral support and spirit are crucial, and the advice of the ancestors and their spirits are sought in all aspects of life through sacrifices and spiritual specialists. For example, the soothsayers, Tindanas, witches, chiefs, praise singers, lung bansi, etc, in the community. These people represent their ancestors and their spirits in their various communities. They are the core of the knowledge communities. They socially construct, preserve, guide, shape, direct, refine and safeguard the ancestral knowledge in every community. This finding is similar to Millar (2006), who indicated that every form of knowledge and its community members – including the one produced by natural and quantitative science is socially constructed. This means that knowledge cannot exist separate from its construction process. What makes a certain form of knowledge more disseminated than others is related to its degree of meaningfulness either for people or due to the degree of instrumentalisation by powerful elites within different societies or historical periods. 'Truth' is not so much determined by objectivity but by 'inter-subjective validation'. This explains why the knowledge of community members' opinions is sought in complex decision-making, as each is expected in their own right.

Again, an elder at the age of about a hundred plus (100+) gives a fascinating revelation about "Kaari" (Ancestorcentrism), as captured in the text box below.

> "Kaari Nye ti sheli kam" Translated by the research to mean 'Kaari" is our spirit, core, crux or essence. It is our total wellbeing. It is that which binds us together as one collective and beyond that, sustaining the bondage of the Mossi-Dagbamba people even across boundaries to Togo, Burkina and Ghana, giving us one identity. It provides an inextricable link between the living, the dead, and the unborn. In "Kaari", life and death are like day and night – one and the same day. It is about our spirituality and the sacred, culture, **science, arts**, development, and philosophy. It is our total way of life and our view of the world. Some of this phenomenon is expressed in the (extended) family system, the clan system, the lineages, our totems, our beliefs, our values and our personalities across borders. Kaari also connotes sacredness, identity, and personality.
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> Kaari help in shaping our ontology, ethical and moral values within indigenous communities, validation and transmission of knowledge, to facilitate co-creation and integration processes within indigenous knowledge systems and serve as mediators between the physical, social and spiritual realms, interpreting the guidance of spiritual realities for the benefit of the community"
> *a (Key Informant, 2023 in Binde) in the Bunkprugu -Nakpanduri district*

Source: Field report, 2023

In **Text Box Two above,** the key informant was straightforward in his submission. 'Kaari" is our spirit, core, crux or essence. It is our total wellbeing. It is that which binds us together as one collective and beyond that, sustaining the bondage of the Mossi-Dagbamba people even across boundaries to Togo, Burkina and Ghana, giving us one identity.

In the Mossi-Dagbambas culture and worldview, spirituality emphasises the connections between the body, mind, and soul/spirit. This belief of the Mossi-Dagbambas community members is scientific and philosophical. It is the matter of ontology, logic and sense-making, epistemology, worldview and cosmovision that concert itself with essence and link or connect to the moral values of the knowledge community members in the society. The finding also shows that the belief in spirituality and the existence of ancestral spirit is the fulcrum through which the Mossi-Dagbamba ontology emerged.

Ontology is a sub-branch of metaphysics. It deals with the reality of existence. It is the science of being and becoming. The general metaphysics is concerned with the meaning and nature of every reality. Ontology is concerned with everything that is in existence. Its interest is in the essence of things: entities in the universe and even beyond the universe, questions regarding the existence, kinds, nature, modes of operations, and meanings of all things that fall within the ontology domain. In the context of ontology, anything that exists is a being or reality.

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They explain that `these domains encompass belief and or insight into the immaterial realities or experiences of the transcendent nature of the world and also extend to other areas as rituals, festivals, meditation, prayers, contemplation, ceremonies, sacrifices, initiation rites, revelations, myths etc. Material and non-material, social beings or world, the physical and the spiritual domain are within ontology.

Similarly, Millar argued that questions relating to **"The What, The How and The Why"** are raised and the explanations or answers sorted. As such, the pursuit for knowledge(s) in the typical African sense is based on different paradigms and, therefore, made up of several domains: a) **the physical world,** which comprises of ('dead') material and that of the living world including the biology of humans, plants and animals, b) **the social domain** which includes knowledge(s) about the resident organisations, resident leadership and administration of natural resources, joint help, conflict resolution, gender relations, art and language and c) **the spiritual domain** which touches on knowledge(s) and beliefs about the spiritual forces, divine beings, ancestors, invisible world, which further interprets into values and other related practices. Again, Millar and Abazaami (2018), in their book Developing Inclusive Sciences, Concepts and Challenges in Endogenous Development, argue that knowledge in the African sense is plural knowledge(s) and not singular. This means that Africans have different sources and interpretations of a matter.

Ekeh (2020) also argued that material or physical realities are those beings that we can see or perceive with our senses, while non-material or mental realities are those that we cannot see or perceive with our senses. Examples include man, animal, tree, and sand; others include God, Angels, and spirits. It is pertinent to note that although many ontological questions are posed, such questions do not require "yes or no" answers. They rather evoke critical thinking and reflection, going beyond the factual to the abstract.

However, Onwuka (2010:5) and Uche and Njoku (1989:31) have a contrasting view of the findings with Millar's (2006) ontology. Onwuka (2010:5), as cited in Ekeh (2020), argued that ontology studies both physical reality and mental reality. "All sorts of questions about beings are raised. Such questions include: What is a being? What do you need for a change to occur?" In fact, Onwuka (2010:5) concentrated his argument on the physical, social, and mental realities, neglecting the spiritual realm. This view expressed by Onwuka (2010:5) was similar to the view of Uche and Njoku (1989:31) that "ontology deals with reality and its role are determined by what is real about things and all aspects of the world and beyond it". These scholars limited their argument to the physical and social realities, leaving the spirituality and spirit realities.

4.3.0 The significance of spirituality and the Ancestral Spirits Mossi-Dagamba philosophy and science.
The presence of spirituality and the belief in ancestral spirits plays a significant role and add diverse perspectives in understanding the following in the Mossi-Dagbamba culture, worldview and cosmovision:

- (i)   Ontology
- (ii)   Gnoseology
- (iii) Knowledge community members
- (iv)   Knowledge co-creation and integration:

4.3.1 The Mossi-Dagbamba and African Ontology
The finding in the text box revealed that the Mossi-Dagbamba and some African people ontology. Ontology refers to the traditional African metaphysical convictions about the nature of beings that inhabit the African world. The Mossi-Dagbamba worldview and cosmovision are generally based on this ontology. It is the bedrock of every other activity and interpretation of events. There are categories of being in the Mossi-Dagbamba ontology. "Reality can be subsumed under these seven categories: Spirit, human, things, place, time and modality". Everything that is must locate itself within any of these categories and is not conceived as substance but as a force. For the Africans, therefore, force is the nature of being. Ogugua (2005:68), as cited in Ekeh (2020), made a similar observation about reality in the people of Nigeria's "Igbo-African world". However, Nwala (1985) had a contrasting view. Nwala categories fall into three categories: Spirits and forces, human beings and things. The scholar argued that although he/she was writing about the Igbo-African in particular, the same concept of ontology cuts across the whole of Africa. For instance, even some decades back, Temple (1969:52) had this to say about the Bantu people of Africa:

> *"It is because all beings are force and exist only in that it is force, that the category force includes of necessity all beings: God, men, living and departed, animals, plants, minerals. Since being in force, all beings appear to the Bantu as force".*

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The focus of my study does not include going into details about categories of being; so, suffice it to note that there is a hierarchy of being in the Mossi-Dagbamba and African ontology and that the recognition of this hierarchy influences and even determines the organisational structure in the African traditional communities. Despite the perceived hierarchy, there is an interaction of all beings and forces. The idea of a separate substance is alien to African ontology. Describing this interconnectivity of forces, Temple (1969:60) brought in the analogy of the spider's web, saying that "the world of forces is held like a spider's web of which no single tread can be caused to vibrate without shaking the whole network".

Following from the above, it can be said that Africans have a unified worldview. In this regard, Keita (1984:72) maintains that the "African worldview is essentially holistic in the sense that it accepts the material world as given, thus making possible empirical science". The Africans believe in and offer a dualistic explanation of reality, but in contrast to the Western understanding of reality, there is no radical distinction between the body and the soul. For instance, they believe that man is a composite of body and soul, yet there is no separation between the two, not even in death, since they are always united.

The Mossi-Dagbamba and African worldview and cosmovision are ontologically integrated. Similarly, Adesanya (1961:69-70) observed that the African worldview is integrated and holistic nature "is not simply a coherence of fact and faith, nor of reason and contingent facts, but a coherence or compatibility among all the disciplines".

4.3.2 Axiology (Ethics and Values):

Ancestral spirits often play a significant role in shaping ethical and moral values within indigenous communities. They are believed to embody the wisdom and moral guidance of past generations. The absence of acknowledgement of ancestral spirits in the models overlooks the traditional ethical framework rooted in ancestral teachings. Ancestral spirits provide a moral compass for decision-making, guiding individuals and communities towards actions that uphold collective wellbeing and harmony.

4.3.3 gnoseology:

Within African sciences, ancestral spirits are often considered repositories of knowledge and wisdom passed down through generations. They are integral to the epistemological foundations of African scientific and philosophical traditions. Ancestral spirits contribute to the validation and transmission of knowledge within indigenous communities. They are revered as sources of insight and understanding, guiding the systematic exploration of learning methods and knowledge validation.

4.3.4 Knowledge Community Members and Leaders:

Ancestral spirits are deeply intertwined with the roles of knowledge community leaders within indigenous societies. These leaders often serve as mediators between the physical, social and spiritual realms, interpreting the guidance of spiritual realities for the benefit of the community. The absence of recognition of ancestral spirits overlooks the important role of knowledge community leaders in preserving cultural identity and transmitting ancestral wisdom to future generations.

4.3.5 Co-creation and Integration:

Ancestral spirits are believed to facilitate co-creation and integration processes within indigenous knowledge systems. They mediate between different knowledge holders, fostering collaboration and mutual understanding. The gap in the models can be filled by acknowledging the role of ancestral spirits in co-creation, integration, and complementary knowledge systems. Ancestral spirits act as bridges between diverse knowledge perspectives, promoting holistic approaches to problem-solving and decision-making within indigenous communities.

I believe the Mossi-Dagbamba people and African theories of reality are so tightly linked that any attempt to separate one from the whole leads to incomplete representation and the paralysis of the entire structure.

In summary, ancestral spirits play multifaceted roles in indigenous knowledge systems, encompassing ethical guidance, epistemological foundations, leadership dynamics, and collaborative processes. Recognising the presence and influence of ancestral spirits is essential for understanding the holistic nature of indigenous knowledge and its relevance in contemporary contexts.

Text box two emphasises the similarities and differences between spirituality and spirit. My investigation delves deeper into the two and found the following in the table below.

Table 4.1 The table compares various aspects of spirituality and spirits in the Mossi-Dagbamba worldview and cosmovision in Africa.

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Aspect	Spirituality	Spirits
Definition	Pursuit of connection with something greater than oneself, search for meaning, inner peace, and transcendence.	Non-physical entities or supernatural beings are believed to exist beyond the physical world.
Nature	Personal growth, self-awareness, exploration of more profound questions about existence, purpose, and morality	Believed to possess consciousness, agency, and various powers, ranging from benevolent to wicked
Focus	Inner exploration, personal growth, connection with the divine or transcendent	Beliefs about supernatural entities and their influence on the world and individuals
Influence	Shapes beliefs, worldviews, and cultural practices, often individualistic and subjective	It can influence religious, cultural, and spiritual practices; beliefs may vary widely across cultures.
Practices	Meditation, prayer, mindfulness, contemplation, rituals aimed at nurturing inner life and fostering connection	Rituals, offerings, and ceremonies aimed at appeasing, communicating with, or harnessing the powers of supernatural entities
Similarities	Both involve aspects of the non-physical or transcendent realm, significant roles in shaping beliefs, worldviews, and cultural practices, and inspiration for practices fostering personal growth, connection, and wellbeing	Both can play significant roles in shaping individuals' beliefs, worldviews, and cultural practices; both involve aspects of the non-physical or transcendent realm.
Differences	Focuses on personal growth, inner exploration, and connection with the divine or transcendent; individualistic and subjective	Beliefs about supernatural entities and their influence may involve external rituals, offerings, or interactions with supernatural entities.

Author Construction (2023).

This table now presents similarities and differences as separate columns for clearer comparison across various aspects of spirituality and spirits.

Koenig (2012) and Stausberg (2011) made similar findings when the scholars investigated religion, spirituality, and health as distinct disciplines.

4.4. The Mossi-Dagbamba and African understanding of existential practices

4. 4.1. The Mossi-Dagbamba and African Understanding of Human Nature

The thought pattern of the Mossi-Dagbamba is grounded on his ontology. The Mossi-Dagbamba and African ontology give rise to the African anthropological frame of mind. In fact, human beings are generally a constant point of reference in the scheme of things about reality. So, any consideration of the Mossi-Dagbamba and African ontology should, as a matter of necessity, take cognisance of his anthropology. Human nature gives rise to human behaviour, which is vital to development. The traditional Mossi-Dagbamba and African philosophy are part of the person's identity and are inextricably connected with life.

For Africans, human beings are the centre of creation and are the main actors in the drama of existence and life. Their actions evoke reactions from the gods and have profound implications for human beings themselves, the lower beings and forces. Man is also endowed with reason. The soul is the life principle, and it is believed to be the basis of equality and human dignity for all human beings. The soul cannot die since it is the principle of immortality.

It is the general belief of the Mossi-Dagbamba and the Africans that man does not live in isolation. He is always under the protection of the spirits as well as the ancestors. He also lives in his culture, in his community, among his peers, and in close interaction with the lower beings. The Mossi-Dagbamba and the African concept

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of man are integral. In the traditional Mossi-Dagbamba society, for one to be a person (Neera), one must identify with one's community. This makes for unity, respect and progress.

Man is regarded as the most crucial aspect of creation. He is also superior to created beings in this world. The Africans strongly believe in the sacredness of human life. Human life is inseparable from blood. Life for the Mossi-Dagbamba implies an existence in which a human being still functions naturally. Hence, the life principle is the animating force of his activity. Life and action go together, and so to be alive is to be active. My finding is similar to Nwala's (1985:44) observation. Nwala (1985:44) put it thus:

> "To be alive or to possess life means to be active and effective, thereby fulfilling one's roles (those roles expected of him by virtue of the communal values and ideas) …. If he is physically existing but ineffective, then he becomes living that is worse than dead".

Life, for the Africans, is a continuous process. Life does not end, and death is just a change in the mode of living. Both life and death of a community member are interwoven with the others" through the common blood which they share, and through the web of economic and social interdependence which practically exists in the community (Nwala, 1985).

The evident truth is that the African worldview is solidly anchored on life. Africans highly value what gives life, supports, enhances, reveals, saves, protects and enriches life. Again, for the Africans, life is not limited to the physical. It has spiritual, religious, economic, political and social dimensions as well, all well integrated. Even the life of lower animals, plants and, indeed, everything that exists, the life of the past, present and future, is an integral part of the African worldview, hierarchically structured.

4.4.2. African Existential Practices

Africans believe strongly in the reality of existence. Existential experiences or practices in this context refer to all those activities that are carried out in day-to-day living in the African world as manifested by the Africans. In his day-to-day activities, a man usually goes through certain experiences. Regarding this, Iroegbu (2003:7) states that:

"There is a background to every experience. Nothing springs from nowhere. All experiences, including religious ones, have a foundation and springboard, which we may call the mother that gives birth to the experiences. Equally, the experience is also a father of basic tenets, including the metaphysical convictions and religious credo of persons and peoples".

Reflecting on the above, Ogugua (2006), as cited in Ekeh (2020), is of the view that these experiences are interpreted based on one's perception of reality, which no doubt is based on a metaphysics for culture and worldview that is an outcrop of an ontology. It is said that action follows being (agere sequitur esse). In African ontology, every being is a being to others. There is no being that exists in isolation. There is always an interaction of beings of all categories.

Due to his integrated ontological perspective, the African, from the practical point of view, integrates all the categories of reality in all his undertakings. Care is taken to see that order is maintained among all realities and not bring disorder. This is because the Africans believe, as Nwala (1985:34) notes:

That even natural objects possess dynamic forces which can be taped for their medicinal values. Thus, the medicinal value of plants (roots, herbs, leaves, etc.) is linked with their spiritual contact in the sense that they are effective for a certain purpose or not.

The point being made here is that, based on his ontology, the African has regard for all categories of being, which is made manifest in his actions concerning these beings. Some of the African existential practices include hard work, care for the family, living in freedom, the contribution of ideas, money and other material goods to the development of the community, and satisfaction of needs, especially those of feeding, shelter and clothing, the pursuit of knowledge, discussions, storytelling, etc.

In all these and other activities, each category of reality or being has its due place recognised and protected in the scheme of things. The African existential practices are founded on the African ontology. Consequently, there is an integration or coordination of activities in such a way that there is a continuous flow of life in thoughts, words and actions, bearing in mind the interconnectivity that cuts across all the dimensions of reality.

4.5 Implications of ancestral spirit on African Ontology for the following;

4.5.1   **Education in Africa**

It has been seen that in the traditional African ontology, there is a unified worldview. Based on this, the lives and actions of the Africans are interconnected, hierarchically embracing all realities. This has some

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implications for education in Africa. The Western style of extreme individualism and rigid compartmentalisation has already infected Africa. This Western style came with the Western education. Now that we are Africanizing our education, our unified worldview must be brought to bear on our education. Since in African ontology, there is no radical distinction between the body and the soul, there is an integrated African worldview.

Our education system needs stronger emphasis on educating all the dimensions of the person: intellectual, moral, emotional, social, political, economic, religious and vocational. When individuals are sound in these aspects of their lives, evil traits such as stealing, robbery, calumny, economic sabotage, selfishness, favouritism, sycophancy and other forms of corrupt practices would be eliminated or reduced to the barest minimum. This corroborates the argument by Nwabuisi (2000:116) that "the person who acquires a value integrates the value in question into his life system. That value becomes, as it were, part of him". This will give rise to the exhibition of holistic characters for the purpose of order and progress in society. In this way, we show that we value our African ontology.

Our education should stress the value of life based on the African-integrated worldview. Thus, education will positively influence other aspects of life. Politics will then be seen as a means of uniting the different segments of the society: Ethnic groups, religious affiliations and social statuses. A situation where politicians engage in violent or anti-life activities should not be encouraged any longer. In social life, individual and group activities should be carried out in ways that would produce and promote harmony and peaceful coexistence, not only among persons but also among all the categories of reality. This is because man's behaviour is very crucial to the stability of the whole array of the universe of beings since he is the centre of creation. Religion should not be separated from practical life, as in many African societies today.

4.5.2   **Renaissance or Reawakening of Knowing and Science: Rediscovering Epistemological Diversity**
Ancestorcentrism places a distinctive emphasis on honouring different epistemologies, marking a central tenet of its approach. This commitment to recognising diverse ways of knowing reflects a broader paradigm shift, seeking to reclaim what has been lost in the assimilative currents of modernity. Dei (2000), Millar (2004), and Wilson (2008) expound on the importance of reawakening spiritual, intuitive, and metaphysical knowledge within indigenous knowledge systems.

This renaissance in knowledge is not merely a nostalgic yearning for the past; rather, it signifies a deliberate effort to embrace a diversity of ways of understanding the world. Ancestorcentrism contends that the exclusion of certain epistemologies in the dominant scientific discourse results in an incomplete comprehension of complex phenomena. By incorporating spiritual, intuitive, and metaphysical knowing, Ancestorcentrism enriches the research landscape, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of indigenous cultures and their interconnectedness with the environment.

Furthermore, the reawakening of diverse epistemologies challenges the hegemony of Western knowledge paradigms. Ancestorcentrism seeks not to replace one form of knowledge with another but rather to create a harmonious coexistence where different ways of knowing complement each other. This integrative approach fosters a more robust and inclusive scientific discourse that transcends the limitations of a singular epistemological framework.

4.5.3 Explicit value base and shaping ethical foundations
Axiology, the study of values, holds a central and explicit position in the Ancestorcentric research paradigm. Values such as communality, reciprocity, honesty, and interdependence with nature are not only acknowledged but actively incorporated into the fabric of the research process. These characteristics draw inspiration from the works of Caastellano (2004), Loppie (2005), and Millar (2006).

The explicit value base in Ancestorcentrism goes beyond a theoretical acknowledgement; it becomes a guiding force shaping the ethical foundations of the research paradigm. Communality, emphasising communal wellbeing over individual gains, establishes a framework where research outcomes contribute to the collective advancement of indigenous communities. Reciprocity underscores the importance of balanced and respectful interactions between researchers and the researched, creating a symbiotic relationship that transcends the transactional nature of traditional research approaches.

Honesty becomes a cornerstone in reporting findings and acknowledging the limitations and potential biases inherent in the research process. This transparency cultivates a sense of trust between researchers and indigenous communities, laying the groundwork for genuine collaboration. Interdependence with nature, a

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value deeply rooted in indigenous wisdom, ensures that research acknowledges the interconnectedness between human societies and the environment.

In conclusion, Ancestorcentrism's emphasis on respecting diversity, reawakening diverse epistemologies, and shaping its ethical foundations through explicit values positions it as a robust and holistic transdisciplinary research paradigm. By embracing these characteristics, Ancestorcentrism contributes to the academic understanding of indigenous cultures and the cultivation of meaningful and reciprocal relationships between researchers and the communities they study.

4.5.4 Practical Application of Theories and Knowledge:

Ancestorcentrism, as a transdisciplinary research paradigm, significantly emphasises the practical application of theories and knowledge. It stands apart by insisting that research should be an intellectual exercise and a catalyst for tangible and positive change within indigenous communities. Mi'kmaq College Inst (2006) and Smith (2001) advocate for this pragmatic approach, asserting that research outcomes should be beneficial, supporting improvements in both cultural and socio-economic conditions.

This characteristic of Ancestorcentrism aligns with the principles of community-based participatory research, where the research process is collaborative, and the knowledge generated is directly applicable to addressing the needs and aspirations of the community. The emphasis on practicality ensures that research is not an isolated endeavour but a dynamic process that actively contributes to the wellbeing and development of indigenous communities.

Ancestorcentrism rejects the notion of research for research's sake and instead promotes a research paradigm where theories and knowledge are powerful tools for positive transformation. It challenges researchers to bridge the gap between academia and the lived experiences of indigenous communities, fostering a symbiotic relationship that transcends the boundaries of traditional research approaches.

4.5.5 Adaptive Relationally and Rationality:

Relationships are at the core of the Ancestorcentric research paradigm, permeating every phase of the research process, from inception to conclusion. Before research even begins, Ancestorcentrism emphasises the importance of establishing relationships built on mutual respect and understanding. The during phase involves active collaboration, with researchers working hand-in-hand with indigenous communities, acknowledging and honouring diversity, including the intricate relationship with nature.

Mutual respect is not only a moral imperative but a practical necessity for the success of the research endeavour. Solidarity and the maintenance of relationships, as proposed by Battiste (2000), Bishop (2005), and Wilson (2008), underscore the enduring commitment to sustaining these connections beyond the immediate research objectives. This relationality extends beyond the human sphere to encompass nature, recognising that the environment is not merely a backdrop but an active participant in indigenous communities' lives and knowledge systems.

Adaptive rationality in Ancestorcentrism acknowledges that relationships, like ecosystems, are dynamic and subject to change. Researchers must be adaptable and open to evolving methodologies based on feedback and community needs. This adaptability ensures that the research remains relevant, responsive, and respectful of the intricacies of indigenous cultures and their relationships with the environment.

4.5.6 Decolonising/Liberating Knowledge Pursuit, Culture, Science, Development, and Philosophy:

Ancestorcentrism is a powerful instrument in critically interrogating historical relations between indigenous and Western cultures, sciences, development, and philosophy. This critical analysis is not merely an intellectual exercise but a transformative process that seeks to dismantle oppressive structures and liberate indigenous knowledge systems from the shackles of colonial impositions. Scholars such as Battiste (2000), Henderson (2000), Little Bear (2000), and Smith (2001) champion this decolonising and liberating approach. The paradigm challenges the notion of indigenous knowledge as the "other" and endeavours to position it as inherently valuable. By appreciating and validating indigenous ways of knowing, Ancestorcentrism contributes to the broader movement of knowledge decolonisation, disrupting the hegemony of Western-centric paradigms. This liberating pursuit extends beyond academia, influencing cultural practices, scientific methodologies, developmental strategies, and philosophical frameworks.

Ancestorcentrism, in its pursuit of decolonisation, advocates for a reciprocal exchange of knowledge, acknowledging that indigenous communities have much to offer regarding sustainable practices, ecological

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wisdom, and holistic philosophies. The liberation of indigenous knowledge is not a rejection of other forms of knowledge but a recognition of the equality and coexistence of diverse epistemologies.

Those who critique the Ancestorcentrsm framework remind us that;

"unless there is a unity and integrating theory in place, gathering scientific and philosophical, developmental, psychological and sociological data about people will only yield scattered lumps of information that do not relate to each other in any coherent sense" (Lynch et al., 2020).

The alignment between Ancestorcentrism and transdisciplinarity included their broad scope, relational process, complex knowledge management, humble attitude to knowing, and real-world outcome focus.

TABLE 4.2 Principles of Ancestorcentrism and transdisciplinary approach to knowledge and problem complexity, co-creation or production, integration and co-use.

Aspects	Focus	Author's remarks
Complex knowledge Management	Complex problems Coherent integration	Ancestorcentrism and transdisciplinary approaches aim to address complex problems by coherently integrating diverse knowledge systems.
Scope	Integrative purpose Inclusive scope	The inclusive scope of these approaches emphasises an integrative purpose, seeking to bring together various perspectives for comprehensive understanding and action. Both also adopt an inclusive scope, recognising the importance of diverse voices and knowledge traditions.
Translative real-world Impact	Pragmatic focus Outcome orientation	Both focus on practical applications, aiming for tangible outcomes in addressing real-world challenges. The pragmatic focus includes an outcome orientation, guiding efforts towards achieving tangible results in problem-solving endeavours.
Relational process	Collaborative understanding Participatory co-creation	Collaboration and participatory co-creation are essential components, fostering a relational process that emphasises shared understanding and collective action. Both approaches encourage a humble attitude to know, recognising the importance of embracing diverse perspectives and co-creating knowledge collaboratively.
Humble attitude to Knowing	Emergent attitude Reflexive position	An emergent attitude and reflexive position are integral to these approaches, acknowledging the dynamic nature of knowledge and the need for continual reflection and adaptation. The reflexive position entails a willingness to critically engage with knowledge systems, acknowledge their limitations, and seek ongoing refinement and improvement.

Author Construction (2023).

5. Conclusion

In light of what has been said in this paper, one can confidently assert that African ontology remains the basis for African existential practices. This is clearly manifested in the African worldview, which is holistic and filled with the interactions of all categories of being: material, spiritual, animate, inanimate, etc. This comingling of beings enriches the African world since the daily activities of the Africans are always centred on life, people and the supernatural. One can conclude with Marie De Paul Neiers (1965:117) that in African ontology, "the being and its milieu form a totality of which the break would leave the being vent and mutilated".

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Ancestorcentrism stands out as a transformative research paradigm, particularly for indigenous contexts. Its characteristics—diversity acknowledgement, varied epistemologies, explicit values, practical application, adaptive relationality, and decolonisation—make it dynamic and inclusive. It offers a model for collaborative and reciprocal relationships between researchers and indigenous communities.

Again, ancestorcentrism's characteristics hint at its potential to foster a respectful global coexistence of diverse knowledge systems. It challenges established hierarchies, advocating for a reciprocal exchange of diverse epistemologies.

6. Recommendations

Based on the conclusion that African ontology is the basis for African existential practices, the following recommendations are put forward:

1. African ontology needs to be strongly re-emphasised through seminars, workshops, conferences, and so on, which African philosophers and scholars can organise.

2. It is necessary to re-orient the mindset of the Africans, especially the young ones, on the sanctity of human life over and above money, influential positions, power and other material acquisitions. This will curb the spate of killings pervading most of the African countries today.

Integrate Ancestorcentrism into research methodologies, especially in studies involving indigenous communities. Ensure active incorporation of its study design, implementation, and dissemination principles, aligning research outcomes with tangible contributions to community wellbeing.

5.0 Major Contribution of the Study to New Knowledge, Theory, Methodology, and Practice

The study provides a holistic framework for studying philosophy and science in indigenous communities using Ancestorcentrism, as shown below.

Philosophical Basis of Ancestorcentrism

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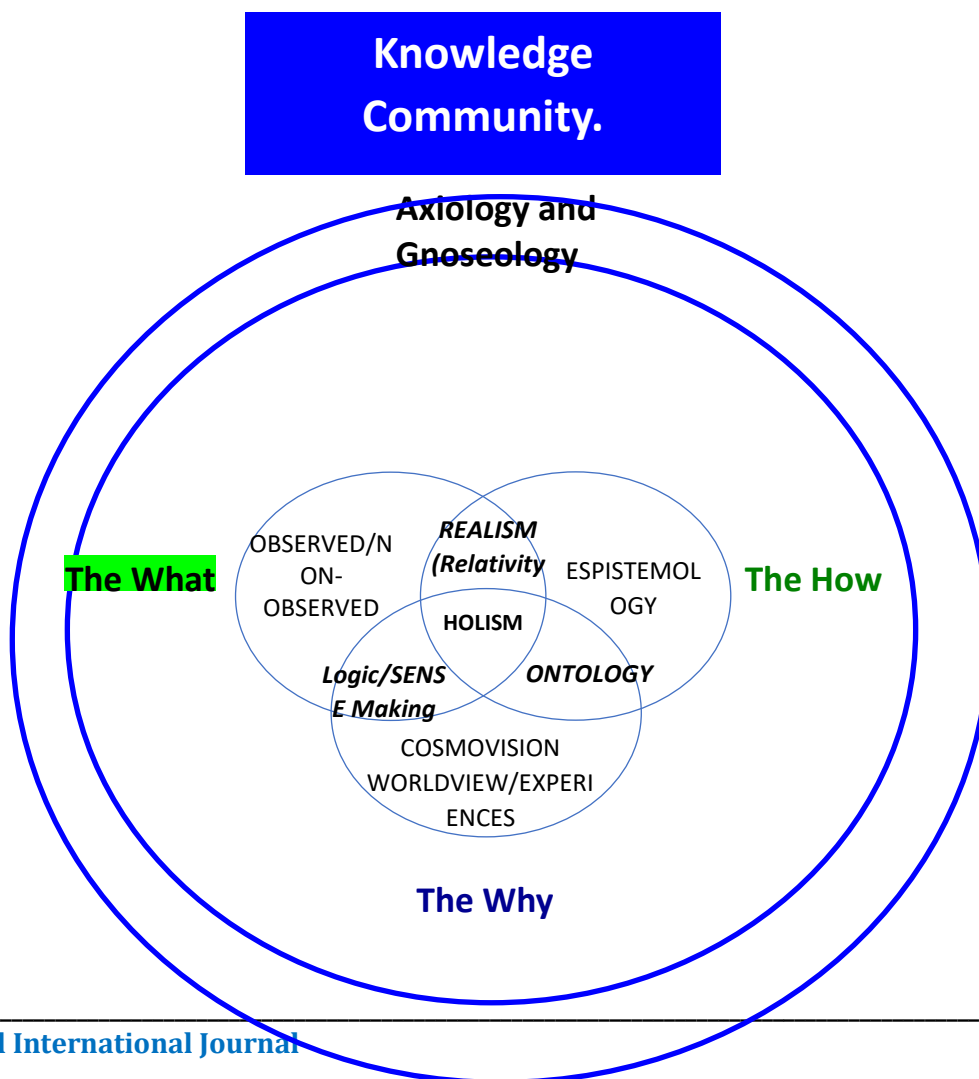
Author Construction (2023)

Keys:
Perspective of Ancestorcentrism
(i)   Philosophy
(ii)   Science and

The framework provides Sustainability and globalisation, which require a complex and diverse approach in philosophy and science. My study categories are historical, cultural, philosophical, scientific, and endogenous development perspectives. This framework is pioneering in its holistic approach to integrating various dimensions of indigenous life—culture, spirituality, religion, knowledge, philosophy, and development—within a singular analytical lens. It significantly advances and contributes to new knowledge, Theory and Methodology, offering a unique transdisciplinary perspective, particularly in indigenous studies and global knowledge systems.

5.1 Justification of the Framework as a Major Contribution
1. **Holistic Integration of Indigenous Life Aspects**: Ancestorcentrism transcends traditional disciplinary boundaries, encapsulating a comprehensive understanding of indigenous life. Unlike conventional frameworks that often isolate cultural, spiritual, or philosophical aspects, Ancestorcentrism weaves these together, presenting a more complete picture of indigenous realities. This holistic approach aligns with scholars like Escobar (2008), who emphasise the need for integrative frameworks in understanding complex social phenomena.
2. **Challenge to Western Epistemological Dominance**: This framework challenges the Western epistemological dominance in academia and research by foregrounding indigenous knowledge systems. This framework aligns with the calls by De Sousa Santos (2014) for recognising indigenous epistemologies and advocating for a more pluralistic and inclusive understanding of knowledge.
3. **Transdisciplinary Methodological Innovation**: this framework challenges the current transdisciplinary frameworks and provides theoretical and methodological innovations and modifications. Ancestorcentrism lies in its transdisciplinary nature. It combines insights from various disciplines and creates new methodologies that are more appropriate for studying indigenous science and development. This approach resonates with Nicolescu's (2002) advocacy for transdisciplinarity to bridge different areas of knowledge.
4. **Practical Implications for Indigenous Development**: Practically, Ancestorcentrism offers pathways for endogenous and Africa Development Agenda 2063, which advocated the "Africa We Want" aspirations 5 and 6 highlighting the importance of indigenous culture, knowledge system, science, philosophy and practices fostering sustainable community growth. This aligns with the sustainable development discourse, which emphasises the role of local communities and indigenous knowledge in achieving sustainable outcomes (United Nations, 2015).

5.2 Limitations of the Study
Despite its contributions, the study acknowledges certain limitations. The focus on the Mossi-Dagbamba may not fully represent the diversity of indigenous experiences across Africa or globally. Additionally, the approach may face challenges in seamlessly co-creating and integrating different methodologies and epistemologies.

5.2 Suggestions for Future Studies:
Future research should apply the Ancestorcentrism framework to other indigenous groups within and beyond Africa to test its applicability and relevance in varied contexts. Additionally, further refinement is necessary to harness the potential of a transdisciplinary approach fully. Studies exploring the interaction between Ancestorcentrism and contemporary global issues, such as climate change or technological advancements, would also be valuable.

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Declaration. I declare that the article has no competing interest whatsoever.

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