Jìmí O. Adésínà

Sociology and Yorùbá Studies: epistemic intervention or doing sociology in the 'vernacular'?[1]

1. Introduction

At the heart of Sociology has been the need to find explanations beyond the particular instance or case being studied. It is precisely because Sociology aspires to being (indeed claims to being) nomothetic, that the claims of universality generally made for western sociology require critical assessment. The sociological concern is with generalisation and deriving theoretical insights from the particular. However, western sociology is deeply idiographic in its discourse and origin. We cannot understand Weber or Durkheim outside of the particular social context in which they wrote. It is, therefore, important to recognise what is idiographic about western sociology – regardless of the attempts to substitute it for global sociology. Insights rooted in other idiographic contexts cannot, therefore, be defined as *indigenous sociology* or worst still 'teaching sociology in the vernacular', which has been the dominant response to attempts to infuse non-western discourses into global sociology. Cultural studies, in this case Yorùbá studies, offer rich idiographic, local narratives which can contribute to a genuinely global sociology. This paper critically engages with the work of Akìwowo, the Nigerian sociologist, so intimately identified with the project of an African 'indigenous sociology.'

However, it is important to put our discussion within a wider context of the stirring among African scholars for a distinct African voice in their disciplines. Much of this was driven by the perceived need to overcome the negative representation of the African in dominant Western scholarship, especially in the social sciences. For decades, there have been calls for a culturally specific and locally sensitive production of knowledge. In 1993 and 1997, Onigu Otite repeated these calls for Sociology and Anthropology, respectively. The *Ibadan School of History,* for instance, was driven by the racist historiography of the colonial project. My argument, with these earlier efforts, as with Akìwowo, more substantively, is that most did not overcome the epistemic framework of the western scholarship that they sought to displace. This is what I refer to as the epistemic crisis in the efforts at displacing received western paradigms, and I explore this, briefly, in Section 2.

The specific agenda of this paper is Sociology, and it is in this respect that I focus on the distinctly seminal contributions of Prof. Akínsolá Akìwowo. He drew on the ontological discourses embedded in the oracular narratives of *Odù*

Ifá[2]. However, the Akìwowo Project (as I call it) cannot be rendered as *indigenous sociology*, as he himself and the International Sociological Association establishment call it (Akìwowo, 1999; Archer, 1991; Albrow and King, 1990). The value of the Akìwowo Project requires that we go beyond Akìwowo himself, if we are to realise the epistemic potentials in sourcing from indigenous knowledge systems. Akìwowo's latest work (1999) provides a glimpse at the basis of such shift. The premise of this epistemic shift is what Akìwowo considers the 'fuzzy logic' in the oracular narratives of Òrúnmìlà (see Note 2). This is in sharp contrast to Aristotle's 'binary logic' (Kosko, 1994; Akìwowo, 1999). However, we need to go beyond 'fuzzy logic' to grasp the kernel of the epistemic challenge that the idiographic narratives of Òrúnmìlà offers.[3] Òrúnmìlà, I argue, is not a fuzzy logician. I developed this argument in Section 4. It is in engaging with epistemic issues (hence epistemic intervention), rather than habituating western sociology, that we can enrich a genuinely global sociology. In section 4, I outline the framework of such epistemic intervention.

Given the extensive use of Yorùbá words and phrases in this paper (especially in section 3), I have provided a glossary of the Yorùbá words and phrases for the benefit of non-speakers of the language.

2.   Sociology in Africa: crisis of received knowledge

An African 'interrogation' of Sociology begins with the universalistic (nomothetic) claims that Goldthorpe and others make for Western Sociology. It is an aspect of what we refer to as the crisis of western sociology. The same factors that inspired Gouldner's withering critique of Parsonian sociology also played an important role in widening the scepticism of African social scientists. What began as an anti-colonial, anti-imperialist demand for reclaiming the social sciences for themselves as Africans found allies within the Western societies. Many of the people that Otite (1993) identified as the third generation of Nigerian sociologists trained when these empirical crises were unfolding.

However, revolt against western sociology or paradigm has not always defined the discipline – and even at its height, it was patchy. Even now, the dominant response to the received paradigm has been acquiescence. This is not only in Sociology but also across the Social Sciences. The Marxist interjection remains marginal. Nevertheless, even among those whose scholarship falls within 'radical' discourse, the capacity for regurgitating the received paradigm remains acute. The application of 'sociological imagination' to the African situation may happen in some instances, but this broadly within received paradigms, which often impose categories on local experience.[4]

Critical engagement with received paradigms took different forms. There were those who applied the 'sociological imagination', and in whose hands the local conditions forced a rethinking of theory. Peter Ekeh's (1975) 'theory of the two publics' is such a seminal work in the area of Political Sociology. However, Ekeh's work was not about the rejection of western epistemic or

paradigm in the analysis of public affairs – indeed the insight he offered was rooted within the Public/Private divide in western political sociology. Colonialism created a dual 'public': one civic, the other primordial. Corruption was not a mindless plundering of the public treasury. The one who plunders the civic public will not do the same when operating within his/her 'primordial public' (the domain of familial, local and ethnic affairs). Nevertheless, Ekeh's work is a resourceful application of 'sociological imagination' to his local contexts, even if rooted in the received paradigm of the private/public divide.

Often the critique of received western paradigms comes in the form of a demand for culturally relevant scholarship; a demand for the replacement of western discourses with those more relevant to Africa's development needs. Onigu Otite's 1997 address to the Pan-African Association of Anthropologists took such an instrumental view of Africanist scholarship.

The more radical critique of Western Sociology found greater resonance among Nigerian scholars of Marxist persuasion. Within Anthropology, for instance, the colonial instrumental manipulation of the field provided the basis for a revolt, while the immanent conservatism of Parsonian Sociology defined the revolt. In this Omafume Onoge[5] (1971 [1977], 1973) typifies the essence of the rebellion, and matched similar revolts among other African scholars in Anthropology such as Mafeje (1976, 1997), Magubane (1971), and Prah (1991). Within Political Science, Claude Ake's (1984) polemical attack on western *Social Science as Imperialism* typifies this revolt. In Economics, Onimode (1992) provided a similarly critical voice.

In the same way that Ekeh represented a fresh and imaginative deployment of a received paradigm, much of the radical critique of western (bourgeois) discourse involved a radical rebuttal, but within the framework of the received paradigm and little engagement with local ontological discourses. Onoge (1977) is suggestive of such engagement with local ontological narratives or cultural studies, especially in the area of Sociology of Literature, which he pioneered at Ibadan.

The most persistent effort, in Sociology, at engaging with the narratives of local ontological discourses, and using these to raise a distinctly African voice has come from Professor Akínsolá Akìwowo. A discussion of Akìwowo's works is not new. My engagement with Akìwowo's works, and the specific direction that I believe is necessary to push his legacy, is best understood in the wider context of International Sociology. In other words, mounting an epistemic challenge rather than 'doing sociology in the vernacular'. I will review this context, briefly, before turning to the Akìwowo Project.

3.   Sociology and Yorùbá Studies: the Akìwowo Project

A different and more recent idea of the crisis of western sociology is rooted in the consequence of post-positivism and the 'rise of globalisation'. As Archer noted in her 1991 ISA[6] Presidential Address:

> In the wake of positivism's funeral came a massive retreat from the kind of international endeavour within sociology, and a re-celebration of diversity, difference, locality, context specificity, and indigenisation. Hence the irony of an increasingly global society which is met by an increasingly localised sociology. (1991, p.132).

The funeral wake of positivism is perhaps most celebrated in Postmodernism's anti-foundationalism – a rejection of 'modern views of science, epistemology and methodology' (Rosenau 1992, p.109). Sceptical post-modernists, as Rosenau calls them, 'have little faith in reason, and they disavow conventional criteria for evaluating knowledge' (ibid). In its deconstructionist form (rooted in the works of Jacques Derrida and Jean-Francois Lyotard), postmodernism is a vehicle for a horde of epistemological anarchists. They affirmed the fringe; insist on difference without seeking common strands. Diversity and local narratives become an end in themselves. The world they claim they represent is the post-modern world of 'globalized, net-worked' terrain of ever-fragmented identities, in which culture and communication drive everything else (Castells 1996, Waterman, 1999).

For a President of the ISA, the post-modern 'horde' portends the end of scholarship, as she knew it: these were the new 'barbarians' at the gates of Rome. It became a negation of what the nomothetic aspiration of Sociology is all about. Archer's (1991, p.131) reaction was towards trenchant advocacy for:

> A single sociology, whose ultimate unity upon which humanity rests by acknowledging the universality of human reasoning, the unicity of humanity, and the endorsement of a single world whose oneness is based upon the adoption of a realistic ontology.

This precisely is the problem. The 'unicity of humanity' that requires that we have 'a single discipline' for 'a single world' is in the imagination of the conventional western sociologist. It is one thing to defend foundationalism in sociology (at least some basis for epistemic adjudication) against the anarchist tendencies of postmodernism. It is an entirely different thing to assume that the dominant traditions in western sociology can pretend to speak for the global community of sociology. The nomothetic design that Archer saw in what she called 'the international endeavour within sociology' is one that has advanced not because of its universality but as an idiographic narrative of (a section of) the West, often part of the imperial agenda that has been called the 'triumph of the West'. The 'single humanity', that Archer pitches for, assumes its 'unicity' by denying a voice to the non-western voices. (And the non-dominant voices in the West, as well).

When Archer argues that 'complementary work from outside the developed world is needed', the question is complementing what? At what point is this another phrase for the traditional demand by western scholars for a global division of labour in knowledge production where epistemic issues are the concern of western scholars and data gathering and lesser concerns are farmed out to non-western sociologists? I will argue later that in seeming to follow this demand for 'complementary work' Akiwowo undermines his most important

contributions to Global Sociology. In 1999, Akìwowo was still concerned with 'indigenous sociology', which reinforces Archer's claim that his works were about 'teaching/doing sociology in the vernacular'[7] (Archer 1991, p.143).

An apparently different reaction to 'localised sociology', within the ISA, has been to 'embrace' it. Indeed the motivation within the ISA for founding the journal *International Sociology* is to provide a platform for articulating sociological insights from outside the West. As Martin Albrow (1987, p.2) remarked: existing outlets for scholarly works in sociology do not fulfil the purpose of global access to what 'sociologists from diverse cultural traditions and national origins' have to say (Cardoso 1986, p.1). Cardoso in *International Sociology*'s first edition states that the vision of the journal is 'to increase our knowledge about the contemporary societies and sociologists, by showing pluralistic paths of concern in sociology rooted in different historical and cultural traditions' (1986, p.2).

A discerning reading would show that rather than being divergent the concern of *International Sociology* is embedded in Archer's robust defence of epistemic unicity. By 1999, the concern of *International Sociology* seems to have coalesced around 'Indigenous Sociology' – but it is still largely about 'teaching/doing sociology in the vernacular'. I will suggest that it is important to take the Akìwowo Project[8] outside the tendency to 'embrace' and put into a 'ghetto' openings for critical epistemic interventions in the discipline, which is informed by the ontological narratives of the Òrúnmìlà oracular discourses. I have gone to this length to outline these reactions, precisely because I think it is in the epistemic openings that Akìwowo offers that we should take his project. Further, I have highlighted the role of postmodernism in the crisis of confidence within Sociology because unlike postmodernism's anti-foundational orientation, I would insist that epistemology is important and scholarly dialogue becomes impossible when we reject (as postmodernists do) any basis for intellectual adjudication.[9] In teasing out the epistemic openings in Akìwowo's works, the local narratives we are concerned with are different from, indeed hostile to, those of postmodernism.

3.1. The Akìwowo Project: a critical encounter

Over the last two decades, the Akìwowo Project has been concerned with infusing Sociology (*albeit*, indigenous sociology for him) with insights from the ontological discourses of the Ifá orature[10] generally credited to Òrúnmìlà. There are two distinct components to the Akìwowo Project. The first concerns the extraction of concepts embedded in the ontological narratives of the Yorùbá language and oral literature. These concepts focus on sociational life. For Akìwowo, *Àjobí* and *Àjogbé* are two such important concepts (Akìwowo 1983). *Àjobí* reflects consanguinity and the social relations among those claiming such blood relationship or common ancestry. The norms that govern the relationship of those whose sociational life is defined by *àjobí* will be rooted in

shared progenitors or ancestry and therefore the invocation of such common origin to reward or sanction specific behaviour. Statements like *'àjobí á da'*[11] or *'"àjobí a gbè wá'*[12] have meaning and resonance only when people are sociated by consanguinity.

Àjogbé (cohabitation), on the other hand, reflects a looser sociational life that the co-existence of larger number of people will involve. Proximity of living and interaction not defined by the 'glue' of shared ancestry will raise a different set of social problems -- the normative framework must depend on new forms of sociational cohesion. For Akìwowo (1983) the social bonding derived from consanguine relations suffered under the pressure of Western culture 'which encouraged dissociation through competition, envy, and conflict over the means to success' (Payne, 1992, p.180). Sociational life deriving from cohabitation (*àjogbé*) replaced sociational life deriving from consanguine bonding. The affinity with Ferdinand Tönnies' concepts of *gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft* is hardly a coincidence: the one defines 'relationships which have grown out of sympathetic sentiments' while the other refers to relationships 'which have been set up consciously and for a definite purpose' (Heberle 1948, p.233 [1937]). Often the coincidence between Tönnies' *gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft* and Durkheim's idea of 'mechanical solidarity' and 'organic solidarity', respectively, is generally taken for granted. Heberle has however warned about the danger with such an assumption since Tönnies' concepts do not assume the two to be 'antithetical conceptional categories' (1948, p.233).

Mákindé's (1988) elaboration of Akìwowo's twinned concepts of *àjobí* and *àjogbé* suggests succession – one emerges at the breakdown of the other. It is in this sense that they bear greater affinity with the idea of the movement from traditional (or pre-modern) society defined by 'mechanical solidarity' to the 'modern society' that coheres on the basis of 'organic solidarity' in Èmile Durkheim's work. Akìwowo's rejoinders (1991, 1999) to Mákindé (1988), Láwuyì, and Táíwò (1990) do not suggest any fundamental disagreement with Mákindé's interpretation. Indeed, Akìwowo (1983) hinges the shift from *àjobí* to *àjogbé* (as the defining framework for sociational life) on the intrusion of European economic activities on African local lives, which 'led to the acquisition of profitable forms of money, sudden social upheavals which led to the physical separation of blood relations' (1983, p.19). Since Akìwowo does not suggest that the categories are purely ideal types states, we must accept the criticism of Láwuyì and Táíwò (1990) that the empirical coexistence of of *àjobí* and *àjogbé* did not receive sufficient attention in Akìwowo's original works nor adequate reflection from Mákindé. It may be less appropriate though to consider these concepts deriving from the Yorùbá lexicon as merely finding local words (in the collage of concepts) for what already exists in western sociological discourse. For instance, Durkheim's concern was with the shift in norms binding a (pre-modern) society that is defined by the ascriptive division

of labour – something he assumed is 'mechanical' – to the modern society which he assumed is based on achievement and a division of labour that does not necessarily depend on what your forebears did. *Àjobí* and *Àjogbé* share the sense of a change in the premise of normative bonds holding the members together, but the assumption of ascriptive as against achievement orientation does not follow. Durkheim's pre-modern society does not necessarily derive from consanguinity, neither is the modern society necessarily devoid of the moral authority and strictures of consanguine sociation.

Mákindé (1988, p.70) raised the problem of transition from *àjobí* to *àjogbé* forms of sociation, and what follows if the *àjogbé*-based sociation begins to disintegrate. This is an important question, if we are to avoid static discourses, and forms of sociation about which we have no idea of transmission, sociation and dissociation. Akìwowo (1999, p.129) answers thus: 'whether both or other forms of sociation discontinue or "break down" it would depend on how the *èmí* (life force) expresses itself in the individuals who are sociating'. That, one may say, is not good enough. While it introduces the 'spirit' dimension into the forms that 'concrete, tangible thing of flesh and bones' take (ibid), it reifies the actual concrete social relations. It is an issue to which I will return.

Láwuyì and Táíwò (1990), I believe, rightly drew attention to the imprecision and multiplicity of meanings in Akìwowo and Mákindé's use of key concepts in the Akìwowo Project. It is an issue on which I will elaborate in a moment since I believe this is at the heart of Akìwowo persistence in throwing up a collage of concepts and words and his interpretation of the oracular narratives in *Àyájó Alásùwàdà*. However, Láwuyì and Táíwò's call for precision seems to be based on an assumption of such 'rigour' and 'precision' in Western Philosophy and Sociology: indeed they used Aristotle as such yardstick. Here I believe they failed both to enter into the distinct logic embedded in the narratives of the esè Ifá and to appreciate the measure of imprecision in much of Western thoughts/discourses. Let me illustrate with the case of the Parsonian paradigm of structural functionalism. If you ask any second year Sociology student to outline Parsons' paradigm (or 'grand theory' as it was mistakenly called),[13] you will get a rapid rattle of 'the four functional prerequisites that a social system must meet for it to persist: adaptation, goal attainment, integration, and latent pattern maintenance'. You get the impression that Parsons elaborated what each of these 'functional prerequisites' involves. How could Parsons' structural functionalism have maintained its hegemony in the classrooms of Nigerian sociology classes if he did not? The problem is that this is in fact the fiction repeated by teachers who probably never read the original text. Beyond an elaboration of adaptation and goal attainment, and the sub-systems that perform these functions at the level of the social system, the discussion about the other two was imprecise.

The second major strand in the Akìwowo Project is his idea of *Asùwàdà* and *Asùwàdà* Principles (1986, 1999). *Àsùwà,* he defines as 'what exists after

different entities with given forms are shaped together to form a larger whole'
(1999, p.131). If there is something within the Akìwowo Project that *he
considers* as constituting a paradigm for the analysis of sociational life and a
society, it is the *Asùwàdà* Principle: As he argued in his most recent work
(Akìwowo 1999, p.117):

1. The *Asùwàdà* principle rests securely upon an organismic system embed-
    ded in Yorùbá mythological metaphor.

2. There is a clear and unambiguous interconnectedness of concepts that
    form the process-structure of the theory of the *àsùwàdà ènìyàn* (human so-
    ciety).

3. *Àsùwàdà*, as a concept of the dynamic process-structure nature of human-
    kind, culture, and society, is a vital mental orientation – a paradigm – to the
    systemic study of local human communities, ecologies and globality of
    human society. As a concept, *Asùwàdà* is only an approximation of the re-
    ality to which it is made to refer when employed in general discourses by
    non-westernised Yorùbá thinkers.

I suspect that what Akìwowo calls 'vital mental orientation' is what we might
call 'an abstraction'. Akìwowo explained the idea of this human society as an
'organismic system' by reference to a particular narrative in *Ifá* text: the myth
of *Akatagbirigbiri*. This myth involved the story of how the different parts of
the body came to be together (Akìwowo 1999, p.133-4). In coming together to
form an organismic entity, the various anatomical parts 'remained permanent
with each other performing what became an intrinsic function' (*ibid*, p.133). It
was in this association – where *Orí* [the head] came to be at the top – 'that each
[anatomical part] realized its full potential as a relating individual' (*ibid*,
p.134). When faced with the prospect that the cohering parts in this organismic
paradigm could disintegrate, Akìwowo responded by claiming that such disin-
tegration can be prevented by the deployment of *ifogbontáyése* – literally 'us-
ing wisdom to make the world better'. Note that this is an inventive reaction to
Lawuyi and Taiwo rather than something inherent in the original myth of
Akatagbirigbiri. The myth itself, meant to address a different issue from its use
by Akìwowo, did not envisage the possible disintegration of the sociation
between the parts.

3.2. Meaningfulness and Engagement: Yoruba narratives in context

As I mentioned above, Akìwowo's efforts at providing indigenous basis for the
Sociological enterprise is quite commendable; on its own it would secure
Akìwowo's place. At the minimum, it provides the basis for what Archer calls
'teaching and doing sociology in the vernacular'. Providing a collage of
'Yoruba equivalents for Western sociological concepts' (Archer 1991, p.143)
has both its advantages and disadvantages; the former if the enterprise is simply

to teach and do sociology in the vernacular. At the University of Ifè in the 1970s, the project of teaching the full secondary school curriculum in Yorùbá (that Prof Babátúndé Fáfunwá championed) generated some excitement.[14] This is the context of the initial stirring of the Akìwowo Project.

To the extent that Akìwowo regularly strayed in the direction of distinct paradigms – especially one deriving from his *Asùwàdà* principle – it is important to engage with Akìwowo regarding his use of Yorùbá language and the oracular 'poetry' he relies on. I will suggest that a bounding sociological imagination should be tamed by a grounded appreciation of Yorùbá semiotics and linguistics: it is one area in which the Akìwowo Project requires serious review. Let me expatiate.

An engagement with Yorùbá language and 'orature' – as in Akìwowo's use of *Odù Ifá* – should recognise the following:

1. The distinctly ethereal and grounded nature of the language. Yorùbá language is broadly situational and at the level of what is called its orature (*esè Ifá* and *ohùn enu*), this situational use of words and phrases is even more profound.

2. An appreciation of wordplay is vital for a situational reading of Yorùbá language. The significance of rhyming sound; the rhythmic movement of even everyday phrases and the 'musicality' of the everyday dimension of the language is important. I will, indeed, argue that often the preference is for musicality above meaning. Indeed, it is in the rhythmical movement and musical connectedness of words and phrases that meaningfulness (or meaning) emerges. This is as much in everyday use of the language as it is in more specialised use in oral poetry. Prose and poetry share this penchant for musicality.

3. The tonal nature of the language – where minor inflections in sound may produce a dramatically different meaning to two words that share similar letters. For this reason, reading written Yorùbá becomes impossible, at some stage, without the tone marks. The nuanced nature of the language requires attention to ethereal use and context of words and phrases.

4. One must make a distinction between words that exist as distinct words in themselves and those that can be created by linking a preposition or prefix and a noun or verb.

Let me use these issues in the language to define my engagement with the Akìwowo Project. This is at two levels. First is the situational reading of *Àyájó Alásùwàdà*; the second is Akìwowo's profuse adoption and manufacture of Yorùbá words for his project of 'indigenous sociology'. I will use the concepts of *àjobí, alájobí, àjogbé, alájogbé,* and *ìwà* (see the Glossary), to illustrate the latter.

Quite often in the Akìwowo Project, there is a tendency to deal with *esè Ifá* (verses in the corpus of Ifá oracular discourse) as poetry. This is a constant idea in Akìwowo's use and return to *Àyájó Alásùwàdà*. In a broad sense, it is poetry; in a more specific sense *Àyájó Alásùwàdà* is much more than poetry. While some *Odù Ifá* (stanzas in Ifá oracular discourse) are narratives that seek (by analogy) to comment on an event by drawing on the dialogue between Òrúnmìlà and other deities (Ògún, for instance), others have clearly more spiritual force. *Àyájó Alásùwàdà* falls into the latter category: it is a category of oracular narratives that combine 'poetic style' with invocation. *Ohùn Enu* or *ofò* (incantation), as the Yoruba call it, involves conjuring up spirits by incantation. It involves attempts to invoke spiritual forces to affirm or bring into being what the person chanting the incantation is demanding. In the specific case of *Àyájó Alásùwàdà*, we see several instances where the person chanting the *ofò* is attempting such invocation (cf. Akìwowo 1986, pp.347-351):

> *Alasuwada,* It is You I call
> To send all goodness to me. (Lines 66 and 67, p.348).
>
> *Origun Olu-iwa-aye:* Help me to achieve my goal… (lines 90 and 91, p.349)
>
> *Origun:* come forth and collect (*su-iwa-da*) for me
> *Ela wooro-wayi*!
> You are the *Alasuwada!* (Lines 98 to 100, p.350).

A contextual reading of the *àyájó* shows that *Orígún, Origun Olu-iwa-aye* and *Alásùwàdà* refer to the same entity (spirit-being). Further, *àyájó* is a special type of 'poetry': it is incantation. The chanting of incantation involves an attempt to invoke the spirit-being (*Alásùwàdà*) to affirm the chanter's words, to bring into existence something that the chanter desires e.g., *ire gbogbo* (diverse fortune[15]). What is the significance of this?

First, an attempt to derive sociological concepts or paradigms from *Àyájó Alásùwàdà* (or similar oracular 'poetry') must appreciate the instrumental nature of the narratives and the intention of the chanter. *Àyájó Alásùwàdà* is not the same as a regular dialogue in *Odù Ifá* where Òrúnmìlà expresses a philosophical viewpoint. The latter is *more* amenable to supplying the building blocks of a paradigm for sociological discourse. Second, considering that the objective of the *àyájó* is to invoke spirits that will confirm the desire for good fortune, harmony, and peace of the new human habitat being consecrated when *Àyájó Alásùwàdà* is chanted, the emphasis will be more functionalist in its approach to life. Such instrumental concern will privilege functionalist discourse and assumptions than other narratives in *Odù Ifá*. Akìwowo seemed less sensitive to this aspect of *àyájó*. I will raise the implications of this for the sociology of knowledge (production) in section 5 below.

In his 1991 reply to Láwuyì and Táíwò, Akìwowo pointed out 'that pragmatically a sentence in Yorùbá is capable of different nuances of meaning' (1991, p.248). While forming the basis for dismissing some of the criticism of Láwuyì

and Táíwò, Akìwowo did not pay sufficient attention to the nuanced nature of the language. I will argue that this is one of the more contentious aspects of the Akìwowo Project. Much of the collage of concepts that Akìwowo produces for doing sociology in the 'vernacular' involves the manufacture of words which might not exist in regular Yorùbá lexicon and a tendency to infuse them with meanings that they do not have in ordinary use of these words. Let me illustrate with the conceptual derivatives of Àyájó Alásùwàdà.

Láwuyì and Táíwò (1990) have pointed out the multiplicity of meanings that asùwàdà or asùwà have in Akìwowo and Mákindé's works – leading to conceptual 'fuzziness' – and that need not delay us further. Beyond this, as I noted above, is that a contextual reading of the àyájó shows that Orígún, Orígún Olú-ìwà-ayé and Alásùwàdà all refer to the same transcendental spirit-being with the capacity to do what the chanter of the ofò desires (at least so s/he thinks). While Alásùwàdà is the transcendental force that can bring asùwà (cohering or to cohere) into existence or motive force for every instance of asùwà, 'Asùwàdà' does not exist as a distinct word in the lexicon of Àyájó Alásùwàdà. It had to be invented by Akìwowo for him to come up with the idea of 'a concept of the dynamic process-structure nature of humankind, culture and society' (1999, p.117).

A more dramatic form of such concept-invention (in the *concept collage* of Akìwowo) is the distinction between àjobí and àjogbé, and between alájobí and alájogbé. While the first three words exist in the Yorùbá lexicon as words, the forth (alájogbé) exists essentially as a conjugation of two words: the prefix alá and the verb jogbé. The latter means to cohabit. Fixing the preposition alá to the verb jogbé creates a word connoting 'someone with whom one cohabits' or a cohabiter. In the specific case, while alájobí is a transcendental force of consanguinity, alájogbé is not a comparable transcendental force but a conjugation of a prefix and a noun, verb or adverb. Yorùbá language provides for an infinite conjugation of preposition, prefix and nouns or verbs. If the objective of the Akìwowo Project were simply to teach and do sociology in the vernacular, and generate a collage of concepts, there might not be much of a problem. When the idea is to generate distinct paradigms and make an epistemic intervention in global Sociology, then it becomes a problem. Merely inventing words will not do. Often the Akìwowo Project skips between the two (as late as in Akìwowo [1999]) – with the sublime intention of epistemic intervention but ending up with a collage of Yorùbá words and phrases that can be assumed to be equivalents of concepts or ideas in western sociology.

A corollary of the above is the tendency to split words in ways that may undermine the intended meaning. Splitting words into their constituent parts may be useful in knowing their root-meanings, but it also risks de-contextualising the words or phrases. The meaningfulness of asùwà is in the whole of the Àyájó Alásùwàdà not splitting Alásùwàdà: first asùwàdà, then asu-ìwà-dà, then extracting ìwà out to give the impression that in asu-ìwà-dà

good character raises the concern of positive conduct necessary for cohabitation that resonates with structural-functionalist sensibility. The danger is that it uproots the word *ìwà*, which in the context of *àyájó* would be *w'íwà* (to be or come into existence) as in *n 'ígbà ìwá sè* (at the beginning of creation or something being brought into existence).[16]

This brings us to what I consider a fundamental limitation of Akìwowo's enterprise: the paradigm underscoring his works.

3.3. The Functionalist Crisis in Akìwowo's Paradigm: the limits of conformity

The fundamental problem with Akìwowo's '*Asùwàdà* principle' is paradigmatic. An aspect of this has to do with the sociology of knowledge in his works. He failed to reverse the direction of interrogation in the interaction between Sociology and Yorùbá studies: while Yorùbá studies supplied his sociological enterprise with concepts, he did not approach Yorùbá studies with the critical requirements of Sociology.

Essentially, Akìwowo's paradigm is functionalist – *albeit* situated within *esè Ifá* rather than Durkheim or Parsons. As a general venture in idiographic account or the mythical discourses, this would not be such a problem. As a premise for a distinct epistemic intervention in 'global sociology' this discourse raises a wide range of problems, both old and new. This is one important area of the series of queries raised by Lawuyi and Taiwo (1990) to which Akìwowo might have been more sensitive. As they argued:

> The view that society has a purpose which it seeks to attain is one that has undergone considerable stricture in the history of sociological theory [...] If Akìwowo wants to rescue that theory and cite it as a promising African alternative theory of sociological explanation, he should defeat those strictures. (Lawuyi and Taiwo 1990, p.138, also cited in Akìwowo 1999, p.118)

Akìwowo's response that his concern was to contribute 'to the mainstream of sociological theory, but not with the aim of defeating the strictures' (1999, p.118) is putting a gloss on the issue. He still needs to address the issue if he insists on reverting to such a paradigm of society and social life. *Asùwàdà* is purposive; *àjogbé* as a form of sociational life is defined from the perspective of common purpose among those living in the community (the *alájogbé*). Akìwowo (1999) failed to pay attention to this fundamental critique of his paradigm. His response (Akìwowo 1999, pp.133-4) was to insist on an even more truculent retreat into the organismic-functionalist paradigm, drawing on the myth of *Akatagbirigbiri*. There are two aspects to the crisis of *asùwàdà principle* as a source-code for an African contribution to global sociology.

First, if the idea is to contribute to 'the mainstream of sociological theory' but not avoiding the most notorious and 'the counter-revolutionary' aspects (Onoge 1973), then what is the value of another local (idiographic) illustration

of what has already been accepted as an embarrassing child within the socio-logical family (even by mainstream western sociologists)?

Second, after decades of anti-colonial struggle, a century-old struggle leading to the defeat of apartheid in South Africa, and decades in which society was forced to acknowledge the systematic disregard for women's rights, how can an epistemic project in sociology be rooted in such (organismic) function-alism? Such a paradigm is not only reactionary, it fails the most basic of nomothetic aspirations: explain social relations and behaviour. The social fixity of society is only hegemonic at the level of the myths of the ruling powers of every society. The only fixed feature is not that things remain the same or 'traditions' remain fixed; it is in fact that the only constant thing is change. But this is not in the teleological and fixed destination of the movement from birth to death that the body (with all its 'sociating anatomical' parts) will experience.

The epistemic cul-de-sac into which the Akìwowo Project is locked is a result of an uncritical focusing on, and acceptance, of the functionalist narra-tives of *Àyájó Alásùwàdà*, which had a different intention from its use by Akìwowo: the *àyájó* is chanted in the consecration of a new human habitation (see my discussion above). Why did Akìwowo take such a stridently organ-ismic and functionalist direction? I will suggest that it is biographical. Akìwowo's training and gestation were within the functionalist school. It is in our sensitivity to the specific intention of these idiographic narratives that they lend themselves to providing ontological inputs to Sociological discourse. More significantly, it calls for a critical engagement with Yorùbá studies and the ontological discourses in Yorùbá 'traditional philosophies'. If the Akìwowo Project, has been more appreciative of the issue of the *sociology of knowledge production* – an important epistemic concern – the locus of the Ifá priest in the traditional Yorùbá social structure would have been brought to the fore.[17]

First, most *Ifá* priests were located at the heart of political power. It would not be a surprise if an Ifá diviner or priest within the palace pushed his narra-tives in the direction of organic functionalism. Outside of committing class suicide, as a privileged satrap in the palace of a 'monarch', the Ifá diviner-priest could hardly champion the revolution of the peasant populace or subvert the dominant structure of power! Beyond all the claims regarding the spirituality of the oracular discourses of *Odù Ifá*, it is in a more grounded reading of its process (and essence as a form) of knowledge production that a viable epistemic challenge should rest – not its disavowal. Indeed, the Ifá priestly class had a near monopoly on what may be called the formal system of educa-tion in pre-colonial Yorùbá areas.

Second, a primary difficulty with Akìwowo's works as a basis for epistemic intervention is that it started by trying to do sociology in the vernacular within the framework of Parsonian Sociology, without paying attention to the epistemic foundations of that tradition in Sociology. Akìwowo developed the

collage of concepts in an *ad-hoc*, incremental fashion. The result is incoherence among the concepts in his *concept collage*. That is clear in Akìwowo's reply to Mákindé, and Láwuyì and Táíwò (Akìwowo, 1991, 1999).

The direction in which we can take the Akìwowo Project requires raising the epistemological issues. It is from here that we can move to construct distinct paradigms with concepts that are defined by both the episteme and the paradigm.

4.   "Fuzzy Logic" and beyond: some provisional notes

In the opening section of this paper, I raised the issues of the idiographic basis of knowledge production and the nomothetic aspirations of sociology as a 'science'. I argued that while the dominant tradition in western sociology asserts its nomothetic ambition; it is impossible to grasp Weber's work – or that of Goldthorpe or Archer – without an appreciation of their idiographic contexts. The same applies to Economics, Political Science, and Psychology. It is on this platform of the idiographic foundations of the nomothetic in western sociology that truly global sociology requires epistemic intervention from non-western idiographic local narratives. I will argue that in Akìwowo's later work he opens up such possibility with the idea of 'fuzzy logic'.

True, Akìwowo's adoption of fuzzy logic was almost as a pun-response to Láwuyì and Táíwò's charge that his concepts were too 'fuzzy' (too imprecise) to be of much use. In responding to this charge, *albeit* in a rather brittle manner (and evasive of the specific charge of conceptual imprecision), Akìwowo provided us with a basis for pushing a more robust epistemic enrichment of Sociology from Yorùbá studies. Akìwowo displaced the argument of imprecision by arguing, correctly in my view, that Láwuyì and Táíwò locked themselves within the prison of Aristotle's binary logic – which has defined much of what was considered scientific within western discourse. Akìwowo's recourse to 'fuzzy logic' derives from Bart Kosko's work. To examine the relevance of 'Fuzzy Logic', we need to look briefly at Kosko's elaboration of the 'logic'.

4.1. "Fuzzy Logic", "Asùwàdà Principle" and Òrúnmìlà

Fuzzy logic for Bart Kosko (1994) has two meanings. The first is "multivalue or 'vague' logic." 'Everything is a matter of degree, including truth and set membership' (Kosko 1994, p.292). The second meaning derives from the work of Lotfi Zadeh (Kosko's mentor and doctoral thesis advisor) – it means 'reasoning with fuzzy sets' (1994, p.292). Fuzzy set refers to 'a set whose members belong to it to some degree' (*ibid.*). In the binary logic of Aristotelian discourse that prevails within western science and philosophy, an item belongs to a set (1) or it does not (0). This is most obvious in computer language where sets have the value 0 or 1. You are either tall or short; you cannot be tall AND short. In contrast, fuzzy logic rests on the position that membership is a matter of degree

– not 0 or 1 but lying somewhere between 0 and 1. Instead of the binary logic (bivalence or bivalue) of Aristotelian discourse, Kosko – who went a long way to refine and expand Zadeh's original works – argues for multivalue or multivalence. Unlike the bivalent logic where the sky is either blue or white (as Aristotle famously stated), fuzzy logic argues that the sky is blue AND white. While Kosko acknowledges the pioneering works of some western logicians, mathematicians and philosophers[18] before Zadeh's work on fuzzy sets, it is to Buddha that he turns for inspiration. Where western science 'trades accuracy for simplicity' (Kosko, 1994, p.21), and 'there is little tolerance in (western) science for views that admit contradictions' (p.23), Buddha admits both. Fuzziness, he argues, 'begins where contradictions begin' (p.23). Where real life, for instance, is about degree of greyness, the dominant Western discourse is rooted in the binary units of 0 or 1. Scientific training involves replacing the complexity of the greyness of real life with the simplicity of bivalent reasoning, which then becomes the basis for ordering the real world. Binary voting systems demand that you vote for party A *or* B; fuzzy voting asks for the degree to which you agree with the various parties.

Sociologists may be quick to point to Economists as the quintessential binary logicians in the social sciences – trading accuracy for simplicity in their (econometric) models – but neither Parsonian sociology nor Weberian sociology, for instance, escapes this problem. Parsons' idea of 'four functional prerequisites' for the survival and persistence of social systems is, perhaps, the most obvious example in Sociology. However, societies, as we know them concretely, are not defined by the neo-classical assumptions of self-equilibration. Indeed, change and disruption would seem more obvious than 'order' and equilibrium. Weber's 'ideal types' follow the same tendency to trade accuracy for simplicity. In epistemic terms, we are also often prone to defining some sociological analysis as positivist or phenomenological or 'critical realist' when most exhibit two or more tendencies to some degree.

In seeking to adopt 'fuzzy logic', Akìwowo notes that bivalent logic contrasts with what is found in many non-western faiths. The latter is a world of multivalence, not mutual exclusivity. The sky is not either blue or not blue, but *it is* in fact both at the same time. However, as noted above, Akìwowo's work remains firmly grafted in functionalism of the Parsonian variant. Fuzziness might have been raised as a pun response to his critic, it is not immanent to his discourse or his *Asùwàdà Principle*. Functionalism, like much of western philosophy and 'science', trades accuracy for simplicity. While much in the Òrúnmìlà discourses reflects the polyvalence of 'fuzzy' logic, I think what defines it and much of Yorùbá discursive narratives is the idea that two contradictory things do cohere and co-exist: or more appropriately, the mutual self-embeddedness of contradictory things. The narratives of Òrúnmìlà, and much of Yorùbá ontology, are dominated by such thinking and logic:

t'ibi, t'ire, l'adá ilé ayé

the world was created in the cohering of contradictory forces.[19]

In the specific dialogue that Òrúnmìlà had with Ògún,[20] which Akìwowo used to illustrate the point, marriage is not only about youth and about beauty; it is also about frailty and about old age. The two mutually cohere within the concept of marriage. One who marries the young beautiful bride today has a frail, old maid of the future embedded (immanent) in the beautiful, young bride of the moment.

While much of the Akìwowo Project has been about finding Yorùbá words and concepts that depict different aspects of sociational life, all too often the list he produces sound turgid. The central issue in the development of a new paradigm is not just about the development of concepts. Rather it is the shift in the framework of thought and, more foundationally, the question of how we make sense of things and how we produce knowledge: this is the epistemological aspect.

If Akìwowo's paradigm is, as he argued, embedded in the idea of *asùwàdà* as organismic functional sociational relationship, then we would neither have a paradigm shift nor provide anything new in epistemological terms. Logical abstraction is at the heart of neo-classical economics, Weber's sociology, and Parsons' structural functionalism. The latter would in fact be a more sophisticated expression of logical abstraction than Akìwowo's *asùwàdà*. Rather than *Asùwàdà*, it is in the thinking and logic of Yorùbá ontological narratives that we discern the basis for a paradigm shift. This is at two levels.

The displacement of Aristotelian binary logic and the affirmation of contingent co-existence of opposites in the narratives of Òrúnmìlà provide the basis for a distinct sociological paradigm. This is one in which the coexistence of opposites and the open-ended outcome of social interaction or contending social forces provide an analytical framework devoid of teleological discourse. History and contemporary social practices and sociational life are open-ended in their outcomes. Sociational and dissociational forces coexist, and when and how things move from sociational tendencies to dissociational ones depends on a concrete expression of social relations and deployment of forces. The cultural is embedded with contradictory forces. Resistance has conformity embedded, as conformity is embedded with the contestation of the terrain of its performance. Outcome is not fixed beforehand. When we confront class, ethnic, religious, gender (etc.) manifestations of mutually exclusive identities; it will not be that we take them as alternative identities – as Aristotelian logic that pervades the discourses suggests.[21] Rather it is in their inter-penetration and mutual embeddedness that we understand real, lived existence as multi-layered, contradictory and context-situated (rather than the postmodernist imagined identities). We are not 'either' / 'or'; we are often many things embedded in one. The negotiation of multiple identities – sometimes contradictory, sometimes not – is something we do everyday.

But is Òrúnmìlà a fuzzy logician? I will argue that it is only to some degree (no pun intended). Kosko acknowledged the contingent existence of opposites, but the weight of his fuzzy thinking would seem more concerned with multivalence, as distinct from binary logic. I would like to stress that the Òrúnmìlà narratives are defined largely by the mutual self-embeddedness of contradictory states or beings. Where the idea of fuzzy units stresses that 'membership of a set is a matter of degree', hence placement is matter of degree on the continuum between 0 and 1, I will argue that beyond this, the Òrúnmìlà 'logic' will argue that even at the point of the value 0, its opposite unit (1) coheres. For one, the unit 0 has no existence in the absence of the unit 1. The significance of 0 is in the existence of its 'opposite' unit: 1. To illustrate from a persistent idea in Yorùbá narratives: if we take conception as one end of life and death as the other, one is embedded in the other not just as states of greyness. Death is immanent in life and vice versa. Death is not the termination of existence, only another state of existence! It is in this context that one understands the pervasive 'role' and reference to ancestors in traditional Yorùbá discourse and daily life. The ancestors are considered as ever present but in a parallel place of existence, of a kind, with capacity to affect what happens in the plane of the 'living'.

For want of a better way of phrasing it, I will call this logic in the Yorùbá discursive narratives *Ti'bi-t'ire* Logic. I will suggest that a focus on this logic as the basis for a renewed epistemological challenge within Sociology; the basis for a paradigmatic venturing into the heart of Sociology's nomothetic aspirations. It requires further study of Yorùbá ontological discourses. The difference with postmodernism is that these are not issues of imageries and imagined lives; the epistemological quest is in the context of the centrality of complementarity not difference for its sake. It is about affirming a definite basis for adjudication among competing explanations – competing (multiple) explanations cannot all be considered correct or true.

4.2. Methodological Aspects of an Epistemic Challenge

The second aspect of '*Ti'bi-t'ire* Logic' is methodological. Much epistemic debate in western social thought has been about positing knowledge production based on the senses to validate experience, on the one hand (Empiricists), and on reason (Rationalists) as the basis of knowledge production. In typical Aristotelian fashion, we are locked into the mutual opposites of Hegelian dialectics – thesis and antithesis. If you are an Empiricist, then you are not a Rationalist, and vice versa.

If we bring the discussion back to the possibilities of the *Ti'bi-t'ire* Logic of the Òrúnmìlà ontological narratives supplying the basis for an epistemic intervention in Sociology, the issue of the method of knowing becomes important. Much of the positivistic currents in western discourse have been about the contrast of the material (senses and reason) and the spiritual (faith/inspira-

tion/illumination). If it is not verifiable it does not exist, and to put a Popperian complication on it; if it is not falsifiable it cannot qualify for science. I will suggest that this may not be a useful approach, nor is it borne out by actual practice in the natural sciences.[22]

I have raised these examples to draw attention to a critical area that within Aristotelian binary logic would have required either an 'is' or 'is not' answer. Within *Ti'bi-t'ire* Logic we have their mutual coexistence, as contending but also as mutually reinforcing forces. Every researcher can attest to the inspiring moments when the mind seems suddenly illuminated or flooded with ideas that one previously was unaware of or connections between observed phenomena not previously appreciated. Yet the same researcher would appreciate that these moments do not exist without the hours of plodding through the field or data; quietly sieving and re-sieving the little grains of knowledge. While the empiricist-positivistic tradition will privilege the latter; moments of what one should call divine inspiration or illumination are no less central to knowledge production – even if most are embarrassed even to mention it. Are these moments of inspiration less tenable as epistemic sources in the production of knowledge than when one plods through the field, the library, and the data in the quest to answer one's research or epistemological question?

While the Aristotelian logic will privilege one or the other, *Ti'bi-t'ire* Logic will argue that rather than being mutually exclusive, the three sources of epistemic vocation are mutually inclusive and interpenetrating. As Sorokin (1941) argues, reason, senses, and faith are not mutually exclusive. To 'sense', 'reason', and 'inspiration', one should add a fourth: *serendipity*. Discoveries of this nature we will generally ascribe to 'accident', 'chance' or 'good fortune'. In a vocation that is rooted in an ontological narrative that assumes that there are no other sources of knowledge other than ourselves, we will insist on 'accident' or 'chance', but who knows?

5.   Conclusion

In this paper, I have examined the crisis of development as partly a crisis of intellectual and epistemic nerve. The demand for an Afrocentric discourse has often not been matched by attention to epistemic issues. This is as much in Sociology as in other branches of knowledge. In exploring this theme, I have used the seminal works of Prof Akínsolá Akìwowo (and what I call the Akìwowo Project, generally) as the basis for going beyond this failure of epistemic nerve. In examining Akìwowo's works I have argued that while they hold some promise, there are serious epistemic problems in his use of idiographic narratives of the Òrúnmìlà orature to do this. A fundamental crisis is in his failure to address the problem around his insistence on an organismic functionalist paradigm. I have argued that contrary to the claims made for western sociology, its idiographic basis does not allow for the universalistic claims made for its nomothetic aspirations – and aspiration is not the same as its reali-

sation. Rather than doing or creating 'indigenous sociology', I have argued for a global sociology that takes on board the idiographic narratives of other cultures and peoples within the global community of sociologists. The foundation for such epistemic intervention, rather than 'doing sociology in the vernacular', I argue, exists in *Ti'bi-t'ire* Logic. I have sketched some provisional notes on the potential of such logic for contribution to a global sociology.

Notes

1. The original version of this paper was commissioned for the 2000 J.F. Odúnjo Colloquium (Conference Centre, University of Ibadan. Thursday, 4 May 2000. It had the sub-title: 'between local narratives and global explanation'. A significantly re-worked version (more concerned with epistemic issues in Sociology) was presented at the Nigerian Anthropological and Sociological Association Conference (15 and 16 November 2000, Ilé-Ifè, Nigeria); as a Staff Seminar at the Department of Sociology in University of Ibadan, Nigeria, and the South African Sociological Association Congress (1-4 July 2001, Pretoria). The present version has benefited from comments from these meetings. I wish to thank several colleagues at Ibadan against whom I have bounced several ideas, many of which are reflected here. They include Prof. O. Olátúnjí and Dr P. Adédòtun Ògúndèjì, both of the Department of Linguistics and African Languages; Dr Délé Jégédé and Dr Ifeanyi Onyeonoru, of the Department of Sociology; Prof. J.A.A. Ayòadé of the Department of Political Science; and Dr. S.A. Osúnwolé, of the Institute of African Studies. Above all, I thank Elizabeth Uduak, a wonderful partner, for her enduring enthusiasm for the overall project, as I do all my colleagues and students at Ibadan who seem thrilled or puzzled by some ideas expressed in the paper but never indifferent. The usual disclaimer applies.

2. This is the sacred oral poetry used by Ifá priests among the Yorùbá for purposes of divination and interpretation of events. The stanzas or chapters are referred to as Odù Ifá while the verses are referred to as esè Ifá. The Ifá priests serve as the repositories of this body of scholarly commentaries. Odù Ifá normally takes the form of dialogues between Òrúnmìlà, who established the Ifá priestly line, and other Yorùbá deities or stories driven by analogies.

3. A necessary aspect of the interaction between Sociology and Cultural Studies (as in the case of Yorùbá Studies) and enriching the nomothetic orientation of Sociology is to engage in a reverse contribution. In other words, the sociological 'interrogation' of Cultural Studies and indigenous knowledge systems. The present tendency for uncritical reproduction of folk-narratives weakens the contribution of oral narratives (or orature) to the social sciences; even the idiographic concerns of cultural studies should be of a critical nature. This is where the innate scepticism of radical Sociology comes into play: scepticism not in the negation of the vocation of seeking knowledge, as postmodernism does, but in 'the admission of ignorance in the self and the questioning of truth' (Mamdani 1997, p.2).

4. Examples are Fádípè (1970), Olókò, and Labinjoh (1996).

5. The case of Professor Omafume Onoge is interesting considering that his doctoral thesis at Harvard University was done under the supervision of Talcott Parsons.

6. The International Sociological Association.

7. Interestingly, Margaret Archer refers to Yorùbá as 'vernacular'! What for Akìwowo and I is mother tongue as English is to Archer is to her a 'vernacular'. I have retained her phrase, 'doing sociology in the vernacular' precisely to highlight this problem and Akìwowo's singular failure to challenge that position.

8. I use Akìwowo Project to define not only what Prof Akínsolá Akìwowo himself wrote but as inclusive of the efforts of other scholars to build on his works: especially by Mákindé, Payne, etc.

9. More importantly, politically, postmodernism represents a grave danger for African scholarship, especially regarding the need for a socially engaged and relevant scholarship. I doubt if we can afford the idle scepticism of postmodernists or their preference for a self-centred hedonism. I also do not see the political usefulness of demanding that we *privilege* local narratives and act locally, when the forces of neo-liberalism, which are daily (mis-) shaping our lives and countries, remain global and daily engage in 'aster narratives' The suggested one-sided activism is impolitic: historically successful social movements have always combined the local and the global.

10. Orature: *oral* litera*ture*.

11. Literally: 'call the ancestors to witness against you and impose the punishment'

12. Literally: 'may the ancestors aid us', or 'grant us success'.

13. This disavowal of 'grand theory' is something that US sociologists, in particular, suffered from in the 1950s, I suspect, following Karl Popper's vigorous rebuttal of the validity of inductive inferences as the basis for the production of knowledge. Popper sought to create a new epistemology based on what he called 'conjecture and refutation'.

14. The experiment, which saw the turning of the University of Ifè Staff secondary school into a vast language laboratory was soon caught in its own contradictions: the pursuit of ethno-linguistic exclusivity in the context of the requirements of ethno-linguistic inclusiveness at the national level, and English as an important vehicle for international discourses. The weakness of the enterprise is also conceptual: it confused Afrocentrism with ethnocentrism.

15. I believe 'diverse fortune' is a more appropriate translation of *ire gbogbo* than the 'all goodness' that Akìwowo suggests.

16. Láwuyì and Táíwò as well as Mákindé were prone to this venture; the former following Wande Abimbola along a track that Abimbola did not consider viable for his lexical enterprise.

17. Mákindé, Láwuyì and Táíwò, as well as Payne all failed to address this point.

18. Mainly Jan Lukasiewicz, the Polish logician, Bertrand Russell and Max Black.

19. The problem of translation, that captures contextual meaning, is common. Here we face the same problem. It may seem straightforward to translate *ibi* as 'bad' or 'evil', but I think it misses the situational meaning of the word. *Ibi* may be rendered 'negative', 'bad', 'evil' or 'something undesirable.' *Ire* may be rendered 'good', 'positive'; 'something desirable'. *Ti ibi* (or *Ti'bi*) can be rendered as 'that which is

undesirable' and *ti ire* (or *t'ire*), is 'that which is desirable'. A related, and closest in context-sensitive meaning is the Yorùbá word for placental – *ibi omo*: literally 'that which comes with a child but not desired' or 'the obverse of a child'. In a sense, the most context-sensitive meaning for the conjoined use of 't'ibi t'ire' would be 'the cohering of contradictory forces (or elements)'.

20. Ògún in Yorùbá belief-system is the deity of iron and war, with a fiery temperament; an enduring mythical person in Wolé Sóyínká's poetry.

21. For further discussion in respect of its expression in Labour Studies see Jimi Adesina, 1993, 'Rethinking Worker Consciousness: work, class and culture', *Annals of the Social Science Council of Nigeria,* No.5, and Jimi Adesina, 2000, 'Adjustment and the Transformation of Labour Identity: what's new and does it matter?' in Attahiru Jega (ed.) *Identity Transformation and Identity Politics under Structural Adjustment in Nigeria,* Uppsala, NAI.

22. The work of Francis Crick and James Watson in the unveiling of the structure of the DNA is a important illustration of this. Dr James Watson's recent account 'Discovering the Double Helix' (Watson, 1999) is an interesting account of chance encounters, miscues, bumbling, hard work, empirical work, intense rationalist effort, and 'wild' guesses that actually worked – out of several others that did not.

Glossary of Yorùbá Terms (grouped in clusters)

Àjobí: Consanguinity.

Àjogbé: Cohabitation.

Alájobí: A group of people in consanguine relations. Also used to denote the spirit of consanguinity.

Alájogbé: Group of people who live in close proximity.

Alasùwàdà: The transcendental force of sociation.

àsùwàdà èníyàn: Human sociation or for Akìwowo: human society.

Àsùwàdà: 'Bonding' or 'coming together' or sociation in Akìwowo's usage.

Àyájó: Verses from *Odù Ifá* recited in the form of *ofò.*

Àyájó Alásùwàdà: A special stanza chanted (almost as incantation) at the inauguration of a new human settlement.

Ibi: A negative or undesirable thing.

Ire: A positive or desirable thing.

T'ibi t'ire: undesirable and desirable thing; or cohering of contradictory things or forces.

Ìwà: A person's conduct or comportment.

Ifá: A unique Yorùbá deity (or *òrìsà*) distinct for divination. The priestly line of Ifá priest is reputed to have been founded by the mythical figure *Òrúnmìlà.*

Odù Ifá: Chapters (or stanzas) of the *Ifá* sacred oral text. The text is usually rendered as poetic verses, and recited orally by Ifá priests or devotees.*Esè Ifá:* Verses of the *Ifá* sacred texts.

Ògún: The deity of war or metal workers.

Ofò: Incantation or mystical poetry with assumed spiritual force; it is usually made of many sentences and is chanted.

Ohùn Enu: Literally 'sound of the mouth' but refers to statements involving the type of wordings used in *ofò*.

Orí: 'Head'.

Origun Olu-iwa-aye or *Orígún:* Renderings for "the transcendental force".

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Jìmí O. Adésìnà
Department of Sociology
Rhodes University
East London
South Africa