

**A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE CONTRIBUTION OF SELECTED SHONA
PROVERBS TO APPLIED PHILOSOPHY**

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Declaration

Student Number: 4719-395-6

I declare that *A Critical Analysis of the Contribution of Selected Shona Proverbs to Applied Philosophy* is my own work and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

Ephraim Taurai Gwaravanda

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Summary

The research focuses on the epistemic tension between Western positivist epistemology and African indigenous knowledge systems particularly Shona proverbs. The research argues that Western epistemological hegemony is both unjustified and unacceptable in the context of the pluriversal understanding of knowledge where systems of knowledge are both multiple and diverse. After a critique of Eurocentric thinking, the research defends an African epistemological paradigm that emerges as an alternative framework for the authentic and legitimate study of African knowledge systems and ways of knowing. The approach opens intellectual space for the philosophical study of Shona proverbs. Under Shona environmental philosophy, it shall be argued that *ubuntu* respects all aspects of the environment, recognizes the dependence of human beings on the environment, sees the land as sacred and affords responsibility for future generations by encouraging the preservation and conservation of resources. Three Shona proverbs have been used to show how the Shona think about preservation of natural resources, conservation of natural resources and the interdependence between humanity and the natural world. In the context of Shona philosophy of law, it is argued that *ubuntu* provides the basis of a coherent philosophy of law among the Shona. Shona philosophy of law is a reflection of legal elements and the study draws these elements from selected proverbs. These proverbs have been used to show the metaphysical basis of Shona legal philosophy, the role of the law in protecting the dignity of individuals and the importance of the law in peace building within the community. Concerning political philosophy, the study has argued that *ubuntu* is the political foundation of solidarity, oneness and mutual support in politics. Shona political philosophy stresses coexistence and relatedness (*ukama*) within the community. Shona political philosophy maintains that authority should be guided by respect, good governance, solidarity and peace. Under Shona philosophy of economics, themes of human dignity, respect for hard work and the need for moderation in the desire for money are discussed in the context of the Shona philosophical worldview. The proverbs under study contribute to alternative ways of philosophical reflection in the context of the pluriversality of knowledge.

Key terms

Epistemological paradigm, Afrocentricity, Pluriversality, Ubuntu, Shona Proverbs, Community, Environmental Philosophy, Philosophy of Law, Political Philosophy, Philosophy of Economics.

Introduction

African philosophical studies on the use of indigenous culture to address philosophical issues reveal a conflict between three positions. The first perspective, which Kwame Gyekye calls “cultural revivalism” (Gyekye 1997b: 233), defends the African cultural heritage. According to this line of thought, the route to addressing contemporary dilemmas, uncertainties and paradoxes affecting African countries lies in reclaiming and revitalizing indigenous culture. The African indigenous culture has been marginalized, degraded and suppressed in the wake of colonialism. Colonialism disturbed African indigenous values and imposed European systems in environmental philosophy, philosophy of law, political philosophy and philosophy of economics upon the conquered people of Africa. The task of contemporary African philosophy is to critically reflect upon these systems of thought. African philosophy must now pursue decisive liberation, a “decolonization” of African minds and communities. For revivalists, genuine modernization in Africa can only be realized through the revitalization of African cultural norms.

The second perspective challenges the revivalist attitude toward the African indigenous heritage. Defenders of this position argue that the revivalist project is unjustified and inappropriate to the challenges of contemporary Africa. The call for a nostalgic return to the past is ill-advised, conservative, romantic and unreflective. Cultural revivalism diverts attention from real African philosophical issues concerning the environment, law, politics and economics. Hountondji (1996:48) in his earlier position, argues that, Africans must make a “clean break” with the pre-modern past in order to address the most urgent demands of the present modernisation, for them, modernisation requires a mental orientation commensurate with the problems of the present, not an attempt to resurrect ideas from societies of the distant past.

According to the third position, the critical trend, the first two positions may seem mutually exclusive but they fail to realize a third possibility of integrating the two aspects. The first two positions commit a fallacy of false dichotomy in different directions. Revivalism argues for a total embrace of the African indigenous past while anti-revivalism suggests a total abandonment of the past. It is a mistake to relegate culture to the past since these cultures are still in existence today. Indigenous culture carries religion and morality and hence, these values are still in strong existence in the contemporary period. The research examines the role of indigenous culture in the provision of elements that can be used to address philosophical issues. Ramose (2009:413) argues that “the indigenous conquered people of Africa must construct an epistemological paradigm on their own as a means of expressing authenticity and to attain true liberation.” The study follows Ramose’s line of thought and it tries to depart from Western epistemological paradigm and adopt an indigenous knowledge based approach so as to address philosophical issues in Zimbabwe. However, the work should not be understood as a cultural revival project but an attempt to look critically into the past heritage and pick out useful elements. Ramose (2009:414) maintains that “tradition should function as a source from which to extract elements that will help in the construction of an authentic and emancipative paradigm relevant to the conditions of Africa at this historical moment.” If Ramose’s thinking has to be logically and consistently applied, then indigenous knowledge systems can function as a source from which to draw elements for applied philosophy in Zimbabwe at this point of history.

The first chapter critically examines the Eurocentric epistemological paradigm which has historically and systematically disturbed, disrupted, disfigured, dislocated and disregarded

indigenous knowledge systems (IKS) such as the Shona proverbs. The critique is important in this study because it interrogates, dialogues and explores the assumptions that have been used to sideline IKS in general and Shona proverbs in particular. The critique objects to the claims of “objectivity, universality and absolutism” that have dominated the Eurocentric epistemological paradigm. The first chapter identifies and acknowledges the existence of the African epistemological paradigm as an alternative way of knowing. The critique of abstract universalism is a call to overcome the provincialism of Western male epistemology and the invisibility it produces on the social historical experience of subjects that have been submitted to gender, sexual and racial oppression. The idea is to produce a more comprehensive and rigorous critical thought beyond epistemic racism or sexism.

After a justification of the legitimacy of proverbs as sources of knowledge, the research relied on a total of 1876 proverbs based on collections made by Hamutyinei and Plannger (2013:1-484). Out of the total, about 63 proverbs were initially identified as philosophical in nature. The philosophical proverbs were further divided into 21 proverbs which focus on pure branches of philosophy such as metaphysics, epistemology and ethics. 42 proverbs were seen as focusing on applied philosophical branches and out of these, the researcher picked proverbs that expressed elements of environmental philosophy, philosophy of law, political philosophy and philosophy of economics. Further, the researcher found it reasonable to select proverbs that highlight important themes within the chosen divisions of applied philosophy. The choice of three proverbs for each chapter was arrived at using the criteria of (1) cultural basis of the proverb (2) widespread usage (3) capacity to address contemporary applied philosophical issues. As a result of the usage of the above criteria, some proverbs were dropped because of failure to comply with

at least one of the above criteria and the researcher had to settle for three proverbs in each chapter. Furthermore, an examination of three proverbs per chapter allowed depth in the analysis of each proverb and it made it easier for the researcher to relate the themes addressed by each proverb.

The second chapter shall argue that African philosophy, which has very deep roots in the history of pre-colonial, colonial and independent Africa will be used as the basis and example of African environmental philosophy. The chapter shall analyse three Shona proverbs that provide evidence of environmental responsibility. These proverbs may be used to refute the skeptical view on African environmental philosophy in general. The three selected proverbs shall examine Shona environmental philosophy that culminates in environmental preservation, conservation and nature relatedness.

The third chapter defends the possibility of an African conception of law that is based on the philosophy of *ubuntu*. The chapter argues on for a Shona philosophy of law basing on three selected proverbs. The first proverb shall examine the metaphysical and social foundation of the law among the Shona. The second proverb shall explore the role of the law in protecting the dignity of persons who may be facing accusations. The third proverb focuses on the significance of the law in promoting and building peace within the community.

The fourth chapter explores the significance of an African political philosophy in general and focuses on three Shona proverbs that have important implications for political governance in particular. The first proverb in the chapter addresses the significance of co-existence, relatedness and mutual respect between political leaders and their subjects. The second proverb shall argue for the epistemic role of others in the provision of experience and wisdom in political

governance. The last proverb examines the significance of truth telling in reconciliation and harmony within the Shona communities.

Chapter five argues for the importance of an indigenous philosophy of economics basing on reflections obtained from *ubuntu* philosophy. Three Shona proverbs shall be examined to draw implications for Shona philosophy of economics. The first proverb defends the importance of the dignity of persons in the context of wealth acquisition. The second proverb examines the importance of hard work in economic activity among the Shona. The last proverb shall focus on the ethical significance of moderation in the acquisition of riches among the Shona.

CHAPTER 1: DEMARGINALISING SHONA PROVERBS: A CRITIQUE OF THE EUROCENTRIC EPISTEMOLOGICAL PARADIGM

1.0 Introduction

This chapter critically examines the Eurocentric epistemological paradigm which has historically and systematically marginalised¹, silenced, stereotyped, dislocated and decentred indigenous knowledge systems (IKS) such as the Shona proverbs. The critique is necessary because it questions, refutes and challenges unwarranted assumptions that have been used to unfairly subjugate IKS in general and Shona proverbs in particular. The chapter shows that critiques of positivist epistemology that arise as opposing positions within the Eurocentric epistemological paradigm in the form of postmodernism, deconstructionism and structuralism are inadequate because they fail to fully address on the fact on colonialism. The critique challenges the claims to “objectivity, universality and absolutism” that have characterized the Eurocentric epistemological paradigm. Positively, the chapter identifies and acknowledges the existence of the African epistemological paradigm as an alternative way of knowing. Western philosophy pretends to be “universal” but it is historically situated and develops values that are specific to Western culture. These values cannot be applicable to all people at all times. Asante (1990:396) maintains that the “unquestioned and unproblematised acceptance of the European perspective as ‘universal’ should be challenged.” It is within Asante’s critical perspective that this research

¹ Marginalisation, with reference to indigenous knowledge is defined by Ocholla (2007:3) as exclusion, a state of being left out or to be given insufficient attention. Marginalisation has retarded the development and integration of indigenous knowledge. Colonialism and imperialism are responsible for marginalisation of IKS through the use of language that describes IKS as primitive, backward, archaic, outdated, pagan and barbaric (Ocholla, 2007:3). This demeaning reference excludes IKS from exchange with other forms of knowledge that had given itself the image of being Western, scientific and modern. If a person or community uses IKS, that person or community is wrongly labeled as inferior. IKS have been victimized, illegitimated and suppressed to the extent of producing generations that do not recognize, appreciate and value IKS.

questions Eurocentric epistemology. For Grosfoguel (2012:90), abstract universalism in the epistemic sense gives a subject that is faceless and placeless in spatio-temporal terms and this is problematic. An alternative to abstract universalism is the reality of concrete pluriversality. Pluriversality entails excavating history and bringing to the table multiple points of view for enrichment and contestation (Maldonado-Torres, 2012:5). Grosfoguel (2012:91), gives intellectual work that stands as a serious effort to think pluriversally, not by increasing from a single point of view, but by engaging histories and knowledges in different parts of the world, particularly paying attention to the plight of the dispossessed everywhere. Pluriversality is a critique to abstract universalism to bring an alternative conception of reality. Grosfoguel (2012:100) maintains that the notion of pluriversal is developed from the global South and represents a democratic decolonial alternative to “universalism.” According to Grosfoguel, (2012:101), the critique of abstract universalism is a call to overcome the provincialism of Western male epistemology and the invisibility it produces on the social historical experience of subjects that have been submitted to gender, sexual and racial oppression. The idea is to produce a more comprehensive and rigorous critical thought beyond epistemic racism or sexism. The problem with Western epistemology is that it is imperialist and patriarchal where one cultural point of view defines what is good for the rest. The “pluri” as opposed to the “uni” is not to support everything that is said by the subaltern subject from below but a call to produce “critical decolonial knowledge that is rigorous, comprehensive, with a worldly scope that is non-provincial” (Grosfoguel, 2012:102).

Dussel (2012:50), invokes a pluriletic process in which the Western knowledge system is not left behind but given a seat at the table as part of the larger puzzle, one that has to re-understand itself to be sure as a particular which is part of a larger formation.

“The affirmation and growth of the cultural alterity of postcolonial communities (*peoples*), which subsumes within itself the best elements of Modernity, should not develop a cultural style that tends towards an undifferentiated or empty universal cultural identity, an abstract universality, but rather a *trans*-modern *pluriversality* (with many elements similar in common: European, Islamic, Vedic, Taoist, Buddhist, Latin American, African, etc.), one which is pluricultural, and engaged in a critical intercultural dialogue” (Dussel, 2012:50).

Intercultural dialogue is important for this study because it opens up possibility of mutual respect of knowledge from both the Western and the African paradigms. This gives a better position that attempts to overcome the narrowness of assumed universality. According to Dussel (2012:55), abstract universality ought to be converted to an analogical pluriversal similarity, which is not the equivocal incommunicability or the identical univocity, but the concrete pluriversality of the analogical similarity with the inevitable distinction of each cultural tradition. Dussel’s notion of pluriversality is therefore inclusive in scope more than it denounces Western universalism. Pluriversal similarity becomes the product of deconstruction of knowledge forms. This gives an open and flexible approach that provides room for alternative viewpoints for the purpose of enriching knowledge.

On the basis of the above critique of Western abstract universalism, it is argued here that Shona proverbs do and must have a place in the pluriversal architecture of knowledge. Shona proverbs are given authenticity and validation because they spring from the African epistemological paradigm which is an alternative to the Eurocentric one. Shona proverbs authenticate and validate because they are local, relate to the people and they are understood by the Shona people.

The work makes sense of Zimbabwean experience, specifically Shona experience in the area of proverbs by deconstructing the myths created by Western scholars and by challenging the exclusion, silencing and marginalisation of IKS. African indigenous thought systems are cultural products that were created, pursued, accepted, preserved and maintained to the present by successive generations (Gyekye, 1997a:221). While these have been described by Eurocentric scholars as precritical, prereflective (Barry, 1996: 23), prelogical and prescientific (Levi-Bruhl,1967:21) the central claim of this study is that proverbs can be a source of critical and speculative hypotheses. This chapter falls into five sections. The first section clarifies the meanings of epistemology and paradigm. The second section is an exposition of the key assumptions, claims, arguments and consequences of the Eurocentric epistemological paradigm. The third section is a critique of the Eurocentric epistemological paradigm from a number of perspectives. The fourth section defends the actuality of the African epistemological paradigm, as a framework within which Shona proverbs can be validated. The fifth section deals with the justification of proverbs as sources of knowledge in general and philosophical thought in particular.

1.2 Conceptualising epistemology

Code (1995:190) sees problems in the practice of Western epistemology in the sense that the epistemological subject has been construed as abstract, ahistorical, disembodied and faceless. In stressing this point, Code writes;

“Since a theory of knowledge, as I conceive of it, should aim to inform and explicate practice – to determine how people can know and act within the specific symbolic, cultural, and social structures and institutions they inhabit, and to incorporate those understandings into its own articulation – then what matters is the practical impact of any theoretical project, and its openness to modification, when practice reveals its shortcomings.” (Code, 1995: 190–1)

This emphasis on the practical aspects of a theory of knowledge is accompanied by a critique of scientism in epistemology. In the critique, Code (1995:109-1) identifies six problems associated with positivistic epistemology. The first problem involves the use of physics as the model of epistemology. This involves excessive reliance on sense perception thereby excluding other forms of knowledge. The second problem lies in the opposition between truth and falsity. Epistemology, it is argued, takes its examples and paradigmatic statements almost exclusively from the natural sciences, especially from physics (Code, 1995: 189); the examples are stated in idealized “simple perceptual propositions” or “elementary propositions” (Code, 1995:189). It can be argued that reality is irreducible to physics. As a result, the model of physics, though useful in the natural sciences, remains inappropriate for philosophical studies. This involves excessive reliance on sense perception thereby excluding other forms of knowledge. There is an overly simple opposition between true and false statements postulated (Code, 1995: 189). The third problem involves presupposition of an abstract and isolated subject of knowledge (Code, 1995: 204). This tendency excludes knowledge forms that are generated by communities and this gives problems in the communal dimension of knowledge. In its abstract universalism this form of epistemology “fails to be context sensitive” (Code, 1995:187–8). The context of knowledge production is culture and as a result plurality of knowledge forms should be as multiple as cultures themselves. The fourth problem is that positivistic epistemology presupposes, imperialistically, a false homogeneity (Code, 1995: 201, 206) with the “often coercive view that we all see everything in the same way” (Code, 1995:201). The positivistic lens of looking at knowledge is narrow because of its disregard for alternative viewpoints. Fifthly, positivist

epistemology “constrains the concept of knowledge” (Code, 1995:190). If sources of knowledge are multiple, the concept of knowledge should be broad and enriched. Lastly, positivistic epistemology relies excessively on the principle of excluded middle that posits knowledge as either scientific knowledge or not knowledge at all. Code explicitly opposes “the old positivist credo according to which knowledge is either scientific knowledge or it is not knowledge at all” (Code, 1995:195). Against this, she advocates “an epistemology of everyday life” (Code, 1995:xi). The epistemology of everyday life is based on cultural experiences and reflections. Code (1995:206), denies the possibility of generalization for an epistemology based on scientific examples because of there being ‘no reasons to assume and expect homogeneity across the physical and social world’. The model of physics is seen as inappropriate in the study of how people and communities obtain knowledge. Even though Code is writing from a feminist standpoint, her contribution is important for this research because it exposes the false assumptions of positivist epistemology.

While Code challenges the practice of Western epistemology theoretically, an empirical approach is taken by Nisbett *et al* (2001:290) who suggest the possibility that different groups of people might have very different epistemic intuitions. While the theoretical assumption may be the same as that of Code, Nisbett and his group constructed their epistemology from an observation of cognitive processes. Nisbett *et al* (2001:291) observe systematic differences between East Asians and Westerners’ cognitive processes such as perception, attention and memory. These groups also differ in description, prediction and explanation of events. Furthermore, they differ in categorization of objects and in revision of beliefs in the light of new arguments and evidence. Nisbett *et al* (2001:292) maintain that these differences “can be loosely

grouped together under the heading of holistic versus analytic thought.” Holistic thought, which predominates among East Asians, is characterized as “involving an orientation to the context or field as a whole, including attention to relationships between a focal object and the field, and a preference for explaining and predicting events on the basis of such relationships” (Nisbett *et al.*, 2001:292). Analytic thought, observed largely among Westerners, is characterized as “involving detachment of the object from its context, a tendency to focus on attributes of the object in order to assign it to categories, and a preference for using rules about the categories to explain and predict the object’s behavior” (Nisbett *et al.* 2001: 293). Westerners also have a stronger sense of agency and independence, while East Asians have a much stronger commitment to social harmony. In East Asian society, the individual feels “very much a part of a large and complex social organism where behavioral prescriptions must be followed and role obligations adhered to scrupulously” (Nisbett *et al.* 2001: 292-293). As a result of these differences, Nisbett and his colleagues maintain, there is considerable cultural variation in the epistemic practices in these two cultural traditions – people in the two cultures form beliefs and categories, construct arguments, and draw inferences in significantly different ways. The importance of above empirical research is in refuting the Eurocentric assumption that there is one way of knowing thereby opening epistemic space for alternative ways of knowing. However, Nisbett and his colleagues have not paid attention to the colonial fact in the practice of epistemology and this gap shall be filled by border thinking theorists below.

Border thinking is the epistemology of the exteriority; that is, of the outside created from the inside; and as such, it is always a decolonial project (Mignolo and Tlostanova, 2006:206). Border thinking (or border epistemology) emerges primarily from the people’s anti-imperial epistemic responses to the colonial difference – the difference that hegemonic discourse endowed to ‘other’

people, classifying them as inferior and at the same time asserting its geohistorical and body-social configurations as superior and the models to be followed (Mignolo and Tlostanova, 2006:208). These people refuse to be geographically caged, subjectively humiliated and denigrated and epistemically disregarded. For this reason, the de-colonial epistemic shift proposes to change the rule of the game – and not just the content – and the reason why knowledge is produced: de-colonization, instead of working toward the accumulation of knowledge and imperial management, works toward the empowerment and liberation of different layers (racial, sexual, gender, class, linguistic, epistemic and religious) from oppression, and toward the undermining of the assumption upon which imperial power is naturalized, enacted and corrupted (Mignolo and Tlostanova, 2006:208).

A more comprehensive approach in the practice of epistemology is given by Maffie (2012: 1-21). Western epistemological practice is seen as simply one among many alternatives, contingent epistemological projects advanced by and available to human beings. In this manner the assumptions, methods, problems, and claims of Western epistemology have to be decentered.

“Ethnoepistemology rejects what it considers to be the double standard embraced by most Western epistemology that exempts itself from the same kind of anthropological scrutiny that the epistemologies of non-Western cultures receive at the hands of Western ethnographers. And it also rejects the double standard that characterizes the epistemological activities of non-Western thinkers as mere *ethnoepistemologies* while characterizing the epistemological activities of Western thinkers as epistemology proper” (Maffie, 2012:1)

Ethnoepistemologists contend that there is a dualism that is commonly expressed by the assertion that thinkers in other cultures practice mere “ethnoepistemology” or “ethnophilosophy” (Maffie, 2012:1). The epistemic practices of other cultures, are dismissed as mere anthropological curiosity, and those practicing it are seen as unqualified to take part in the

West's "genuinely" epistemological undertaking. Ethnoepistemologists argue that there is a dualism that is commonly expressed by the assertion that thinkers in other cultures practice mere 'ethnoepistemology' or 'ethnophilosophy' (Maffie, 2012:1). If knowledge production is based on culture, it is difficult to understand why Western culture assumes a transcultural standpoint. "The [customary] use of the term[s] ["ethnophilosophy" and]"ethnoepistemology" by Western philosophers is objectionable to ethnoepistemologists because it assumes that Western philosophy is the benchmark by which all other cultures' philosophies and reflective activities are to be understood and measured" (Maffie, 2012:2). The assumption of Western philosophy as a standard of measurement is problematic since it is based on falsity. A pluriversal understanding of knowledge places all cultures on an equal platform for the purpose of learning from each of them. According to Maffie (2012:1), "all epistemological activities are instances of ethnoepistemology in this broad sense; and all ethnoepistemologies are instances of epistemology."

The use of the term ethnoepistemology has an advantage for this study because the practice of epistemology is left open and this accommodates alternative epistemologies. In addition, ethnoepistemology has the capacity to recognize a variety of answers to the questions of epistemology. Still, ethnoepistemology respects differences among world epistemologies and in that way, it becomes less ethnocentric by virtue of accepting alternative views. In the context of this study, the above traits open epistemic space for the study of Shona proverbs.

1.3 Understanding a paradigm

According to Gokturk (2012:2), an etymological analysis shows that the word 'paradigm' comes from the Latin word '*paradigma*', and it also comes from the Greek word '*paradeigma*'. The

English borrowing of the Latin derivative, *paradigma* is example. In Greek, paradeigma is a compound of two words; the prefix ‘para-’ meaning ‘alongside’, and ‘deiknunai’ meaning ‘to show,’ so the two words together sound as ‘alongside shown’ or ‘what shows itself beside.’ Historically the word paradigm has been understood as an example or a model.

Kuhn uses the word paradigm to relate to the exemplary notion of the word as found in the Latin etymology. Kuhn makes use of the word ‘paradigm’ in the context of natural science, where it means the category for describing or constructing standpoints in the practice of science. For Kuhn paradigms are interchangeable with what they exemplify. Further Kuhn (1970:23) emphasizes the meaning of paradigm thus:

“A paradigm is a fundamental image of the subject matter within a science. It serves to define what should be studied, what questions should be asked, and what rules should be followed in interpreting the answers obtained. The paradigm is the broadest unit of consensus within a science and serves to differentiate one scientific community (or sub-community) from another. It subsumes, defines and interrelates the exemplars, theories, and methods and tools that exist within it. A paradigm is the specific collection of questions, viewpoints and models that define how the authors, publishers, and theorists, who subscribe to that paradigm, view and approach the science.”

Four points significant for this study may be drawn from Kuhn’s definition. Firstly, a paradigm is a self image that is given by a community of practitioners. Although Kuhn’s discussion is within the field of natural science, this self image can also apply to philosophy and this shall be shown in detail in the next section. Secondly, a paradigm plays the role of differentiating one view of looking at science or philosophy from other perspectives. This differentiation yields serious implications especially in philosophy where racism comes in. Thirdly, a paradigm is responsible for the conceptual definition of terms and the formulations of theories. Fourthly, a

paradigm unites the assumptions, problems, methods and solutions to given philosophical or scientific issues. These views may be condensed in Gokturk (2012:2) who technically defines a paradigm as; “a set of assumptions, concepts, values, and practices that constitute a way of viewing reality for the community that shares them, especially in an intellectual discipline.” Gokturk’s technical definition is important because it is not necessarily defined within a given discipline as in Kuhn but it stands outside specific disciplines and is applicable to both science and philosophy.

1.4 The Eurocentric Epistemological Paradigm and its Consequences

Serequeberhan (2003:64), views Eurocentrism as the “pervasive bias located in modernity’s self-consciousness of itself.” Within this bias, there is a model that connects the assumptions, perspectives and theories related to knowledge perspectives that can be identified as the Eurocentric epistemological paradigm. The Eurocentric epistemological paradigm can also be construed as the view expressed by Descartes (1998 [1637]:103-105), Locke (1995 [1689]:26), Hume (1975 [1739]:63), Kant(1978 [1878]:23) and Hegel (1998 [1807]:201) that Western philosophy, Western European values and culture are the standard through which humanity is measured. The assumption is that Western European values, culture and philosophy are qualitatively superior to all non-Western philosophical values and culture. The position also entails that Western men (in the gendered sense) provide the norm of what humanity is. According to Outlaw (1991: 216), “the western epistemological paradigm is a complex, multifaceted, projected (self-) image of the Graeco-Roman or European rational man.” The ideas are raised to the level of paradigm through the efforts of dominant figures of Western philosophy which tries to identify itself with the human essence. Rationality was linked to Enlightenment

modernism² which created a self understanding of reason and progress. The construction of the self image has sources in the works of Plato and Aristotle and it is revised and continued by Descartes (1998 [1637]:95), Kant (1978 [1878]:23) and Hegel (1998 [1807]:201). Philosophy gives itself the right, responsibility and capability to see the fundamental realities in terms of which this self image was to be articulated (Outlaw, 1991:218). The fulcrum of this multifaceted self image is formed around the notion of rationality. Through this concept and with the help of other concepts such as truth, goodness and virtue, a fundamental linkage was made between human existence and the cosmos.

“The structure of the cosmos is rational; humans reason, through *nous* or mind and thus set into operation of a dynamic structure whose principles of operation are the same as those structuring the universe; hence, the highest and most appropriate exercise of human reason or *logos* is to see and grasp those most fundamental structures of principles and to bring human existence into accord with them” (Outlaw, 1991:218).

The point being made by Outlaw is that since *logos* is thought to be the code of being, the task of philosophy is to elucidate this code. As a result of the above linkage, philosophy becomes identified with epistemology. This identification of philosophy with epistemology is clear in Descartes (1998 [1637]:103-105), who narrows the self image of humanity into *logos* or reason. According to Grosfoguel (2011: 5), Descartes replaces God as the foundation of knowledge in the theo-politics of knowledge of the European Middle Ages with the Western man as the

² Modernism can be understood as a Western self-image, a self-understanding coalesced around Enlightenment notions of reason and progress. This interpretation of modernity held that there is a close link between a scientific culture, a rational legal order, and individual freedom, and its goal was to establish a fully rational society. Critics of modernity have pointed out that this self-conception of modernity was a selective, one-sided, reactivation of Western past ideas. As such the modernist idea is internally inconsistent because modernity failed to completely break with the past. Enlightenment naturalism and materialism served to unite ‘man’ and world, and the naturalist image of humankind was under the service of reason.

foundation of knowledge in Western European modern times. The result is that all the attributes of God are transferred to the Western man. The universal truth beyond space and time privileges access to the laws of the “universe” and the capacity to produce specific knowledge and theory is now placed in the mind of the Western man. The Cartesian “Cogito ergo sum” is taken as the foundation of modern Western science. By producing a dualism between mind and body, between mind and nature, Descartes was able to claim a non-situated, “universal”, God-eyed view of knowledge (Grosfoguel 2011:5). This view of knowledge is described by Gomez (2003:4) as the point zero perspective of Eurocentric philosophies. For Gomez, point zero is the point which hides and conceals itself as being beyond a particular point of view. It is the god-eye view that always hides its local and particular perspective under abstract “universalism.”

The first consequence of the Eurocentric epistemological paradigm is epistemological racism. Epistemic racism is the view that the “West” is the only legitimate perspective of thought able to produce knowledge and the only one with access to “universality,” “rationality” and “truth” (Grosfoguel, 2010:29). Epistemic racism considers non-Western knowledge to be inferior to Western knowledge. Historically, Eurocentric perspectives have denied any philosophical thinking among the Bantu speakers in general and Shona speakers are no exception. Eurocentric thinking systematically displaced African³ knowledge systems by negating the applicability of the concept of rationality to Africans. Locke (1946 [1690]:33) argued that skin colour is an essential property in defining humanity. Locke’s thinking amounts to the view that white skin is equivalent to the essential skin, while the black skin is considered to be less important in defining humanity. In addition, Hume (1987:[1753]: 125), maintains:

³ For Ramose (2010:1) the meaning of the term Africa is problematic for two reasons. Firstly, the name Africa is not given by the indigenous peoples to describe themselves. Secondly, the definition given by the outsider does not refer to African history as related by indigenous people. Ramose uses it under protest and in this study, the term Africa is used under the same protest.

“I am apt to suspect the negroes, and in general all the other species of men (for there are four or five different kinds) to be naturally inferior to the whites. There never was a civilized nation of any other complexion than white, nor even any individual eminent either in action or speculation. No ingenious manufactures amongst them, no arts, no sciences. On the other hand, the most rude and barbarous of the whites, such as the ancient GERMANS, the present TARTARS, have still something eminent about them, in their valour, form of government, or some other particular. Such a uniform and constant difference could not happen, in so many countries and ages, if nature had not made an original distinction betwixt these breeds of men. Not to mention our colonies, there are NEGROE slaves dispersed all over EUROPE, of which none ever discovered any symptom of ingenuity; tho’ low people, without education, will start up amongst us, and distinguish themselves in every profession. In JAMAICA, indeed, they talk of one negroe as a man of parts and learning; but ’tis likely he is admired for very slender accomplishments, like a parrot, who speaks a few words plainly.”

Hume’s racism has intellectual consequences since colonizers thought that they were rationally superior to blacks. This perception serves as the basis of epistemic racism. Kant’s racism was more emphatic, “humanity exists in its greatest perfection in the white race. The yellow Indians have a smaller amount of talent. The Negroes are lower, and the lowest are a part of the American peoples” (Kant, (1978 [1798]:9). Kant also argues that the order in skin color corresponds to mental and general ability. The implication of Kant’s racism is clear, the black person is seen as mentally inferior and could be educated only as servants. Kant (1960 [1764]:10-11) maintains;

“The Negroes of Africa have by nature no feeling that rises above the trifling. Mr Hume challenges anyone to cite a single example in which a Negro has shown talents and asserts that among the hundreds of thousands of blacks who are transported elsewhere from their countries, although many of them have been set free, still not a single one was ever found who presented anything great in art or science or in any other praise-worthy quality, even though among the whites some continually arise from the lowest rabble, and through superior gifts earn respect in the world. So fundamental is the difference between these two races of man, and it appears to be as great in regard to mental capacity as in colour.”

Kant correlates mental capacity and colour between the two races and he goes further to infer that reason and rationality are not indigenous to Negroes. Still, Hegel (1975 [1739]:28) further complicates racism by totally excluding sub-Saharan Africa⁴ from world history. Hegel denies reason, morality and religion to Sub-Saharan Africa. Hegel (1931[1807]:14), argues that Africans are incapable of doing Philosophy given the low caliber of their intellect.

The second far-reaching effect of Eurocentric thinking is epistemological hegemony. Western epistemology, basing on its racist assumptions, tends to dominate other forms of knowledge and this scenario can be described as epistemological hegemony. Grosfoguel (2011:6) argues that, “historically, such thinking has the consequence of allowing the Western man (the gendered term is actually used here) to represent his knowledge as the only one capable of achieving universal knowledge and thus dismiss non-western knowledge as particularistic and thus unable to achieve universality.” The point being made by Grosfoguel is that the self image of “universal” knowledge created by Western epistemology resulted in the dismissal of other forms of knowledge as particularistic. Further, European colonial expansion was able to construct a hierarchy of superior and inferior knowledge and thus of superior and inferior people around the world.

⁴ Davidson (1991:5) maintains “for while it is true that Sahara has long been placed as a barrier between northern Africa and the rest of the continent, and that the great rain forests, further south, have sometimes proved to be still a greater barrier in relation to central-southern Africa, it is also true that all these regions really belong together, and what is particular to each of them is general to them all in their foundation and emergence.” There is little sense in studying Africa in isolation since there is no cultural separation and difference. While the Sahara desert is seen as a geographic line of division to some extent, it was never a complete barrier in historical times but a zone for intercommunication and trade. The Sahara desert did not always exist in Africa as shown by Zeleza (2006:15) who argues that the conflation of Africa with “sub-Saharan Africa,” “Africa South of the Sahara” or “Black Africa” offers a racialized view of Africa, Africa as biology, as the “black” continent. This view rests on the metaphysics of difference, a quest for the civilizational and cultural ontology of blackness (Zeleza, 2006:15).

Two significant points can be drawn from Grosfoguel's historical analysis. First, the West sees itself as the standard not only of knowledge in the epistemic sense but of knowledge related to writing, history, development, democracy and human rights. As a result of such a self image, all other forms of knowledge and conceptions of writing, history, development, democracy and human rights are conceived in negative terms in the sense of being absent and this is a consequence of the created epistemological domination. Related to the above, the second point is that, Western philosophy in general and Western epistemology in particular gave itself a self-appointed role of being the guardian of world history and culture.

The third consequence of the Eurocentric epistemological paradigm is epistemological dualism. In the broad sense, dualism can be defined as “the philosophical concept which defines human nature by two opposing sets of qualities – good versus evil, egoism versus altruism, vice versus virtue”(Babu 1981: 56). In the epistemic sense, dualism entails division along knowledge related concepts such as subject versus object; truth versus falsity; fact versus opinion. Such dualism has created an epistemic hierarchy that privileges Western knowledge and cosmology over non-Western knowledge and cosmology. The ascribed superiority of European knowledge in many areas of life has an important aspect in the coloniality of power⁵. As a result subaltern knowledges were

⁵ Quijano (2000:533-40) points out three distinct but related consequences of coloniality. The first is racial thinking which creates a false image of epistemic power. This image has to be challenged from both a logical and an epistemic perspective. The idea of race is defined as “a mental construction that expresses the basic experience of colonial domination and pervades the more important dimensions of global power, including its specific rationality: Eurocentrism” (Quijano 2000:533). Racism has caused a related problem which is the hegemonic tendency of the West where, “the model of power that is globally hegemonic today presupposes an element of coloniality” (Quijano 2000:533). This entails that former colonisers tend to dominate their former colonies even in the sphere of knowledge production. The third problem is seen in

excluded, omitted, silenced and ignored (Grosfoguel, 2011:23). The dualistic tendency of Western epistemology has resulted in the domination, repression and subversion of other systems of knowledge and other ways of knowing that are non-dualistic.

1.5 Criticism of the Eurocentric Epistemological Paradigm

An examination of the weaknesses of the Eurocentric epistemological paradigm shall be made using the following theories; deconstruction, reconstruction, decolonisation, Afrocentricity, Africanisation and the IKS based approach. The choice of these theories is mainly on the basis of their points of convergence. Firstly the theories are all critical of the Western epistemological paradigm even if the lines of criticism vary. Secondly the theories see the African epistemological paradigm as valuable in challenging Western epistemology as well as in broadening the scope of epistemology in a democratic way. However, they differ in what exactly should be provided by the African alternative paradigm. Thirdly, the theories take cognisance of the African historical, social and cultural circumstances in the production of knowledge. The point of divergence lies in the manner of emphasis and the degree to which certain issues are

“Coloniality of power based on a Eurocentric system of knowledge where production of knowledge is assigned to Europeans” (Quijano 2000:540). Any form of knowledge that lies outside Europe is dismissed as myth. This creates a marginalisation of knowledge systems including the African knowledge system in general and the Shona knowledge system in particular. The use of Western European ways of knowledge production is prioritized. This resulted in a simultaneous denial of knowledge production to the conquered peoples and repression of indigenous modes of knowledge production. The last problem involves “an element of coloniality of power is the creation of cultural systems that revolve around a Eurocentric hierarchy” (Quijano 2000:540). These cultural systems tend to universalise knowledge from one culture instead of seeing knowledge production as plural.

stressed. A detailed examination of the Eurocentric paradigm shall be made using each of these theories in the sections that follow.

1.5.1 Deconstruction Critique

Derrida (1981: 6), defines deconstruction thus:

“To ‘deconstruct’ philosophy, thus, would be to think—in the most faithful, interior way—the structured genealogy of philosophy’s concepts, but at the same time to determine—from a certain exterior that is unqualifiable or unnameable by philosophy—what this history has been able to dissimulate or forbid, making itself into a history by means of this motivated repression.”

From Derrida’s definition, it can be inferred that deconstruction is a series of moves, which include the dismantling of conceptual oppositions and hierarchical systems of thought and an unmasking of self-contradiction in philosophy. Deconstruction may be seen as a way of reading philosophical texts with the objective of making these texts question themselves, making them take account of their own contradictions, and exposing the oppositions they have ignored or repressed. Derrida does not question one kind of philosophy from the standpoint of another, more complete, less contradictory system. He does not come from a point of departure outside philosophy. Rather Derrida works within the discourse of Western philosophy itself, looking for hidden oppositions that jeopardize it. Derrida’s critique of philosophy is itself basically philosophical. By opening philosophy to this questioning, Derrida is being faithful to the spirit of philosophy: unquestioning and slavish adulation ultimately makes a mockery of philosophy (Newman 2001:2). Deconstruction is, therefore, a strategy of questioning philosophy’s claims to reflexive self-identity. Deconstruction may be seen as a critique of the authoritarian structures in philosophy, in particular ‘logocentrism’ – that is, philosophy’s subordination, throughout its

history, of writing to speech (Newman 2001:2). The privileging of speech over writing in philosophical texts is an example of what Derrida calls the ‘metaphysics of presence’ in Western philosophy. It is an indication of how far philosophy is still grounded in the metaphysical concepts it claims to have transcended. Derrida points to Plato’s *Phaedrus* in which writing is rejected as a medium for conveying and recording truth: it is seen as an artifice, an invention which cannot be a substitute for the authenticity and immediate presence of meaning associated with speech. Where speech is seen as a means of approaching the truth because of its immediacy, writing is seen as a dangerous corruption of speech – a lesser form of speech, which is destructive of memory and susceptible to deceit. Moreover, speech is associated with the authority of the teacher, while writing is seen by Plato as a threat to this authority because it allows the pupil to learn without the teacher’s guidance (Norris, 1987:31). Derrida attacks this *logocentric* thinking by pointing out certain contradictions within it. He shows that Plato cannot represent speech except through the metaphor of writing, while at the same time denying that writing has any real efficacy as a medium at all. As Derrida (1981:148) maintains: ‘it is not any less remarkable here that the so-called living discourse should suddenly be described by a metaphor borrowed from the order of the very thing one is trying to exclude from it.’ Speech is, therefore, dependent on the writing that it excludes. Writing is an example of the ‘logic of supplementarity’: a *supplement* is excluded by presence, but is, at the same time, necessary for the formation of its identity. Writing is thus a supplement to speech: it is excluded by speech, but is nevertheless necessary for the presence of speech. The unmasking of this logic of supplementarity is one of the deconstructive moves employed by Derrida (1981:149) to resist the logocentrism in philosophy. Speech claims to be a self-presence that is immediate and authentic to itself, whereas writing is seen as diminishing this presence. However, Derrida shows that this

authenticity, this purity of self-identity is always questionable: it is always contaminated by what it tries to exclude. According to this logic no identity is ever complete or pure: it is constituted by that which threatens it. Derrida does not want to deny self-identity or presence: he merely wants to show that this presence is never as pure as it claims to be. It is always open to the other, and contaminated by it.

Derrida provides us with a way of thinking, accounting for and disrupting metaphysical foundations, without putting other foundations in their place. Deconstruction provides a way of undermining truth claims without having to argue from some fixed position (Hepburn, 1999:649). Derrida wants to avoid centered modes of thinking such as phonocentrism⁶ and logocentrism⁷ which arise out of operating with metaphysical certainties. Deconstruction of phonocentrism provides a critique of truth as centered within autonomous individuals as seen in speech/ writing. Deconstruction of logocentrism provides a critique of Enlightenment rationality and principles that arise from it (Hepburn, 1999:649-650). Treating deconstruction as a relativist position will not account for deconstruction as a response to endless positing of foundations. One is unable to escape or stand outside logocentric thought from some privileged position. Deconstruction urges the development of greater sensitivity to the ways that reality and truth are constructed. To deconstruct is not merely to highlight one marginalized half of a binary, instead, it should not leave a clear line between one side and another. It becomes undecidable which 'side' is which. The entire principle of the organization of texts through hierarchical oppositions

⁶ The belief that sounds and speech are inherently superior to, or more primary than, written language. Proponents of this view argue that writing is a derived method of capturing speech.

⁷ The attitude that 'logos', the Greek term for speech, thought, law or reason, is the central principle in philosophy and language. It is the assumption that there is a realm of truth **that** exists prior to and independently of its representations by linguistic signs.

is subverted (Hepburn, 1999:653). Deconstruction problematizes those areas where metaphysical assumptions carry their greatest power (Hepburn, 1999:654)

Derrida emphasizes that any text or event has many potential meanings, many possible truths and no single meaning remains fixed or stable for all contexts. Every textual interpretation denies or suppresses some alternative meaning, some alternative interpretations of the text (Feldman, 2000: 58). Derrida seeks to highlight the other that hides in the margins of one's understanding. For Derrida, violence is seen in denial, oppression and exclusion of the other. This violence sets a limit to human understanding. In Western discourse the marginalized systems of knowledge are seen as opposed to Western epistemology. It might be argued, then, that these epistemological paradigms are actually a supplement to universal epistemology, in the same way that writing is the supplement to speech. In addition, even though Derrida provides self-questioning to Western philosophy, the questioning does not, in general, address the colonial factor that shall be included in the next section. Derrida's thinking can be exploited to develop critical and discursive work as shown by Outlaw in the next section.

According to Outlaw (1991:216), African philosophy should challenge the enterprise of philosophy in general to rethink and redefine itself so that African philosophy can be recognised as modality and tradition that belongs to a non-European culture. Such efforts of self-critical reflection are deconstructive. For Outlaw (1991:216)

One of the objectives of deconstruction is to critique and displace the absolutist metaphysics and epistemology which are thought to identify and provide knowledge of a rational order of axioms, first principles and postulates that are the foundation of all that is, and of knowing what is. The point of deconstruction is to show that all philosophical systematizing is a matter of strategy which pretends to be based on a complete system of self-evident or transcendental axioms. Having

their bases in philosophical strategies, such concepts are thus constructions, a product of numerous histories, institutions and processes of inscription, which cannot be transcended by being conceived as absolute, self-evident and axiomatic.

Outlaw’s deconstructive strategy is significant in the study of Shona proverbs because the assumed “universality” and axiomatic ground of Western philosophy is to be displaced in the context of pluriversality. This displacement potentially paves room for the recognition of a non-European culture such as the Shona culture as capable of providing a valid foundation of knowledge through proverbs.

1.5.2 Reconstruction

The reconstructive aspects of this challenge are to be found in the self-definition, the specification and reappropriation of an African authenticity and legitimacy in disproving and displacing of the inventive discourse and most importantly in the efforts to reclaim control over African historicity and the interpretation of African history in general and African philosophical history in particular. According to Olela (1984:77) African philosophical history influenced Greek philosophy as shown by the table below:

Fig 1: African foundations of Greek Philosophy:

Philosopher	Philosophical Teaching	Influence from Egypt
1. Thales	Water is the fundamental stuff of the universe	Egyptians taught that water (<i>nun</i>) is the origin of all things
2. Anaximander	The basic element is the boundless	Adopted the Egyptian boundless (<i>Huk</i>)
3. Anaximenes	Air is the basic stuff	Egyptians taught that air (<i>Shu</i>) is the life giving spirit
4. Heraclitus	Fire is the basic element	Egyptian notion of fire (<i>Atum</i>)
5. Pythagoras	The universe is basically	Taught mathematics by

	mathematical	Egyptians
	Theory of transmigration of the soul	Orphic doctrine borrowed from Egypt
6. Xenophanes	Doctrine of One God	Egyptian idea of monism
7. Parmenides	Being is one	Egyptian belief in the spherical earth
8. Anaxagoras	The mind (Nous) is the initiator of motion in the universe	Egyptians identified Khu with the mind
9. Democritus	Atoms as the ultimate elements of the universe	Egypt's mystery system about atoms and opposites
10. Plato	Tripartite division of society into philosophers, soldiers and artisans	Egypt had spectators, athletes and peddlers
11. Aristotle	Doctrine of the Unmoved Mover	Egypt's notion of the Unmoved Mover
	Doctrine of the soul	Egypt's idea of the soul

The table, constructed from the views of Olela (1984:77), shows that there is evidence of Egyptian influence in ancient Greek philosophy and this evidence must be used in the reconstruction of African philosophy.

According to Obenga (2004:31)

“African philosophy as a historical fact must be understood within a historical frame. The origin, evolution, and development of African philosophy follow the streams and currents of African history. The long history of African philosophy has shown connections with other continents, chiefly with Europe, since the Graeco-Roman world. In remote times African philosophy was mainly located in the Nile Valley, that is, in Kemet or ancient Egypt, and in Kush (Napata- Meroe). Philosophy flourished in Egypt from about 3400 bc to 343 bc and in Kush (also known as Nubia or Ethiopia by the Greeks) from about 1000 bc to 625 bc.”

The above analysis shows that the serious study of African philosophy from antiquity through the present era will reveal that African philosophy has a very wide scope. All the key issues that have attracted the attention of philosophers in Asia, Europe and America can be found in African philosophy (Obenga, 2004:31). They were explored through many centuries in ancient Egypt,

during the great kingdoms of West, Central, and Southern Africa, in modern times and in contemporary times. Obenga (2004:31) argues that “any doubt about reason and rationality in Africa was chiefly due to anthropological innuendoes.” Philosophy has always been part and parcel of the African mind. The fact is that in human history philosophy has been everywhere a mark of the triumph of the human mind (Obenga, 2004:31).

Reconstruction addresses the question of meaning of Africans through rehabilitating the African mindset while constructing an identity and authenticity thought to be appropriate. While the mainstream characterization of philosophy may be in Western Europe, rationality is not the birthright of Western Europe, nor of Greece but it is a capacity shown by all humans, their race or ethnicity notwithstanding. If rationality is the capacity of all humans, then there is a legitimate ground for the African epistemological paradigm in general and the Shona epistemological paradigm in particular. There is no Platonic abstract essence in philosophy and there is no single style of philosophizing. Any research in African philosophy, as in Shona proverbs, in the current study, involves confronting the privileged self-image of the Western model of philosophy. It is this confrontation that problematizes and forces its deconstruction in its relation of difference with the European. Outlaw (1991:232) questions Eurocentric thinking in the following manner:

“Does it mean that philosophy is left without universality and unity? Yes. Does it mean that philosophy is without universality and unity? Yes, again, but it never had these characteristics in the sense proclaimed by philosophy.”

Two points can be drawn from the above examination by Outlaw. First, Western philosophy has given itself “universality” and unity within a particular culture. This culture proceeds to draw these characteristics and pretends that they are absolute thereby assuming what has to be proved.

In other words, it does not necessarily follow that the given cultural portrait is tenable. Secondly Outlaw shows that the said characteristics are simply a creation within a historical period and as such they are particular and tentative. They are particular since they arise within a given historical and cultural setting, contingent because they depend on a possibility and not a necessity and tentative because the said characteristics are debatable even within Western philosophy itself.

1.5.3 Decolonization Critique

By decolonization, I mean divesting African philosophical thinking of all undue influences emanating from our colonial past (Wiredu, 1998:17). For Wiredu, the key word is “undue” since it may not be rational to reject everything of colonial past. Colonialism is not only a political imposition, but a cultural one as well. Philosophical decolonization is necessarily a conceptual enterprise, it is not a critique of doctrine but of fundamental conceptualisation. Philosophy becomes a critical examination of the conceptual framework upon which the thought of a culture is erected. From the perspective of decolonization, Eurocentric epistemology should be critically examined in the context of colonization because the epistemic images given to Africa by the West were meant to facilitate colonization not only of the African continent in the sense of physical space but of the African mind as well. Grosfoguel (2011:13) argues that, “one of the most powerful myths of the twentieth century was the notion that the elimination of colonial administrators amounted to the decolonization of the world resulting in the myth of the postcolonial world.” The fact of the matter is that the formerly colonized are living under

Western European exploitation and domination including epistemological domination. The domination which occupies intellectual space and mindsets is more dangerous compared to economic or political domination. The decolonization critique is significant for this study because it challenges colonial assumptions that have been used to sideline African knowledge systems such as Shona proverbs.

Grosfoguel (2011:13) makes an important distinction between colonization and coloniality. For Grosfoguel, colonization allows us to think of the continuity of other forms of domination after colonial administration. Coloniality addresses present forms of situations in racist culture and the ideological strategies used by Western Europe. It involves rethinking the modern colonial world from the colonial difference point of view. Thinking from a colonial difference point of view allows us to modify important assumptions of our paradigms. Grosfoguel's line of thought gives room to rebut the false assumptions of Eurocentric thinking and validate and legitimize Shona proverbs as indigenous knowledge systems. The particularist approach is important for this study because it accommodates Shona proverbs that constitute the source of philosophy.

Alcoff (2007:80) notes that, "the epistemic effects of colonization are the most damaging, far-reaching and least understood." The damaging effect is seen in the destruction of mindsets, denial of one's own culture, uncertainties and contradictions that characterize colonized minds. The epistemic effects of colonialism are said to be far-reaching because they displace one's epistemological paradigm to the extent of disregarding one's indigenous forms of knowledge and think like the Eurocentric philosophers. The epistemic effects of colonialism are least understood because of the brain washing victimization created by Eurocentric epistemology among Africans.

As a result, individuals may fail to think outside the epistemological images created by colonizers. The task of decolonization is to come up with an anti colonial epistemic resistance (Alcoff, 2007:80). One way of epistemic resistance is the construction of forms of knowledge based on an African epistemological paradigm in general and the Shona epistemological paradigm in particular.

Zea (1988:36) acknowledges that, the rationality and the very humanity of the people of the conquered world were put on trial and judged by the jury of its conquerors. The judgement was made, not on the basis of reasoned research and evidence, but merely on prejudice. Logically this is a fallacious procedure whose conclusions are both hasty and baseless. Paradoxically, Africans were not considered to be in a position to present their own epistemic credentials, much less to judge the Western European ones. As a result, there was no uniform epistemological platform but a one sided analysis of the conquered by the conqueror and this indicates epistemic injustice. Although claims to objectivity were made by the Eurocentric thinkers, they used ethnic and racialised identity to judge the epistemic status of the indigenous people of Africa. This shows inconsistency in the claims of Eurocentric thinkers.

Colonialism created and developed a hierarchy of knowledge and knowers for the purpose of colonizing administratively and even epistemically. An alternative to the above imperial epistemology, such as African epistemology, requires the toppling of the cultural hierarchy that colonialism enforced. Mignolo (2008:98) maintains:

“Subaltern reason must aim to rethink and reconceptualize the stories that have been told and the conceptualization that has been in place to divide the world between Christians and pagans, civilized and barbarians, modern and premodern and developed and undeveloped regions and people.”

Mignolo’s thinking shows that the conclusions arrived at by colonizers were based on prejudice. By implication, Shona proverbs that have been historically and epistemically trivialised are victims of prejudice. As such, the task of subaltern reason is to deconstruct and reconstruct the proper image of the conquered people and regions. It is interesting to note that generalizations were drawn from mere geographic regions to serious epistemological consequences of the people of the concerned regions.

Since Western epistemology is questionable, can Western hermeneutics be trusted? While the focus of epistemology is knowledge, hermeneutics studies meaning and understanding. According to Mignolo (2000: 90) the weakness of both domains is that they neglect the fact of colonial difference. The question of what is meaningful or intelligible is equally subject to colonial representation. For Alcoff (2007:89), both epistemology and hermeneutics are judged with a European frame of reference. If both have a European frame of reference, it means both of them rely on questionable assumptions. The point is that multiplicity must be revealed and tension and contradictions must be shown between colonizing and colonized spaces. Panikkar (1979:9), suggests the use of pluritopic hermeneutics to signify the way in which hermeneutics may be cured of Eurocentricism and provide a real alternative to monological, imperial and unified standards of reference. Pluritopic hermeneutics does not assume one unified historical culture with which new meaning must be fused. Rather pluritopic hermeneutics assumes no central frame or unified tradition and thus opens up the determination of meaning to multiple

possibilities even within the same historical horizon. Pannikar (1979:9) warns against Eurocentric mistakes as follows:

“To cross the boundaries of one’s culture without realizing that the other person may have a radically different approach to reality today is no longer admissible. If still consciously done, it would be philosophically naïve, politically outrageous and religiously sinful.”

The philosophical naivety observed by Panikkar is a result of lack of facts while there is rushness predicated on prejudice. Given the context of colonialism, meaning has to undergo contestation and negotiation. Alcoff (2007:90) argues that, both epistemology and hermeneutics, whether monotopic or pluritopic, have to be transcended since they both presuppose a subject-object distinction with epistemology focusing on a de-subjectified object and hermeneutics on a non-objective subject. This means that while epistemology conceals the subject, hermeneutics conceals the object. Mignolo (2000:93), tries to overcome the limitations of epistemology and hermeneutics by introducing the concept of border thinking;

“Border thinking is the notion I am introducing now with the intention of transcending hermeneutics and epistemology and the corresponding distinction between the knower and the known. To describe in reality both sides of the border is not the problem. The problem is to do it from its exteriority. The goal is to erase the distinction between the knower and the known, between hybrid object and a pure disciplinary or interdisciplinary subject uncontaminated by the border matters he or she describes. To change the terms of conversation, it is necessary to overcome the distinction between subject and object on the one hand and between epistemology and hermeneutics on the other.”

The above analysis entails the use of non-dualistic thinking because dualistic thinking contains the assumptions of epistemological imperialism. Epistemology must be decolonized of these assumptions. Knowledge must be disentangled from the snares of colonizing assumptions to

pave way for indigenous knowledge systems. According to Mignolo (2000:93), border thinking is not aimed at normative epistemic concerns about justification and belief formulation, but it is focused on the way knowledge is normatively defined with reference to others. It specifies the location of subaltern knowledge as a border location rather than simply beyond Western knowledge. Situating knowers in a context is revolutionary in itself, going against the normal procedure of Western epistemology. Border thinking is seen as a double critique with a capacity to examine the thinking of both the colonizer and the colonized. Border thinking implies the ability to think from both sides. It is dissolution of borders as opposed to border control. The task of border thinking is to unmask preconceptions about divisions.

1.5.4 Afrocentric Critique

The Afrocentric perspective (Asante, 1998:1) can be defined as a philosophical paradigm which deals with the question of African identity from the perspective of Africans as centered, located, oriented and grounded. Afrocentricity gives centrality to African agency, thus creating an acceptance of African values and ideals as expressed in the highest forms of culture while terminating always in the creative function towards mental liberation (Asante, 2007:15). As such, Afrocentricity activates our consciousness as a functional aspect of any revolutionary approach to phenomena. The cognitive and structural aspects of a paradigm⁸ are incomplete without the functional aspect. There is something more than knowing for the African perspective, there is also doing. The functional aspect allows for a revolutionary context to

⁸ However, although Kuhn's (1962) treatment of a paradigm may appear rather comprehensive from a Eurocentric standpoint, it is lacking an important dimension as far as Afrocentricity is concerned. A third and critical aspect to the cognitive and structural aspects must be added, namely, a functional aspect.

change the lives of the oppressed. Asante claims that one must not assume that Afrocentricity is the opposite of Eurocentricity because Afrocentricity does not degrade other perspectives but it accommodates pluriversality.

Asante (2007:14) acknowledges two scientific advances made to the Afrocentric theory by Ama Mazama. Firstly, she launches the paradigmatic shift in the discourse on Afrocentricity and shows how it is a revolutionary concept for the African world. Afrocentricity is revolutionary because it casts ideas, concepts, events, personalities, political and economic processes in the context of black people as subjects and not as objects basing all knowledge on authentic interrogation of location (Asante, 2007:15). Afrocentricity elevates the cultural and historical location of the African and uses that as a source of surveying knowledge (Asante, 2007:15). Secondly, she infuses the older ideas of Afrocentricity with a functional, actionable, practical component that energizes the concept (Mazama, 2007:14).

The idea of conscientisation is central to Afrocentricity. It is possible for one to practise African customs and mores without being Afrocentric. This means that one can lack the conscientization related to agency of African people. Being Afrocentric entails being a conscious human being.

“By way of distinction, Afrocentricity should not be confused with its variant Afrocentrism. The term Afrocentrism was first used by opponents of Afrocentricity who in their zeal saw it as an obverse of Eurocentrism. The adjective ‘Afrocentric’ in the academic literature always referred to Afrocentricity. However, the use of Afrocentrism reflected a negation of the idea of Afrocentricity as a positive and progressive paradigm” (Asante, 2007:17).

It is important to note that Asante (1998: x) gives a distinction between Afrocentricity and Afrocentrism by presenting the latter as the antithesis of the former. Afrocentrism is a label from conservative critics who see the African agenda as a movement to bring disharmony to American society by raising the self-esteem of the African American youth (Asante, 1998:ix). These critics

see Afrocentrists as replacing documented history with ideology. Afrocentrism is a reinvented concept that demolishes responsible scholarship while making absurd or indefensible claims. Afrocentrism is a misrepresentation of Afrocentricity by scholars who erroneously define Afrocentricity as an attempt to misinterpret historical and scientific claims about Africa. Mazama (2001:387) argues that, “Afrocentricity contends that our main problem as African people is our usually unconscious adoption of the Western world-view and perspective and their attendant conceptual frameworks.”

Asante (1998:1), sees his work as “a radical critique of the Eurocentric ideology that masquerades as a universal view in the field of philosophy.” The critique is seen as radical because it suggests a turnabout, an alternative perspective on phenomena. Forcing the concept of “universality” on non-Western people implies that the West is the cultural standard of measurement. It is critique which emphasizes the importance of Africans, in culture, economics, politics, philosophy, and history. While taking cognizance of the various strands of Afrocentricity, the research focuses on Asante’s ideas of Afrocentricity. The Afrocentric theory is appropriate in this study because it gives value and pride to an African epistemological paradigm which has been historically marginalized, abused and displaced by the fallacies of Eurocentric epistemology.

Dei (1994:3) argues that, Afrocentricity is an alternative way of understanding the world; an investigation of phenomena from a standpoint grounded in African-centered values and a call for the validation of African experiences and histories as well as a critique of the continued exclusion and marginalization of African knowledge systems. Dei’s analysis is important

because it facilitates the validation of an African epistemological paradigm using African perspectives and it offers a critique to the flawed argument of white supremacy. Afrocentricity is an intellectual theory deriving its name from the centrality of African people and phenomena in the interpretation of experience (Asante, 1998:8)

Shona proverbs, which are the focus of this study, are to be understood in their historical and social factors within the broad African epistemological paradigm without generalizations. Semali (1999: 307-308), identifies the following about African indigenous knowledge; firstly, indigenous African knowledge (IAK) does not derive its origins from the individual but from collective epistemological underpinnings and rationalization of the community. Secondly, IAK is about what local communities know and do and what local communities have known and done for generations. Thirdly, the ability to use community knowledge produced from local history forms important literary skills critical for survival in the African context. The above observations are important because the collective consciousness of the community is the basis of African proverbs in general and Shona proverbs in particular. In addition, the knowledge passed from the proverbs is critical for survival.

The use of proverbs is consistent with the African epistemological paradigm. Asante (1998:45), defines a paradigm in the African context as, “a conception that includes a multiplicity of theories, as such, it allows us to develop better interpretations, fuller understandings and effective articulations of the meanings of human goals and interactions.” The words “better”, “fuller” and “effective” are not idle in Asante’s definition but they are important because the

African epistemological paradigm has been ignored, silenced and stereotyped so the task of the paradigm becomes both deconstructive and reconstructive.

1.5.5 Africanisation Critique

Seepe (2000:119) states that Africanisation of knowledge is a process of placing the African worldview at the centre of analysis. Africanisation advocates the need to foreground African indigenous knowledge systems to address African problems and challenges. MacGregor (1996:5) makes an important distinction between Africanisation of knowledge and Africanisation of education⁹. Knowledge should be relevant to African issues and this can only be done through the application of the African worldview. The use of the African worldview acknowledges and validates African knowledge systems such as Shona proverbs. Makgoba (1997:199) notes that Africanisation is about affirming African culture and identity in a world community. Makgoba (1997:177) notes that, knowledge is a human construction which is purposeful by its very nature and knowledge cannot be sterile or neutral in its conception, formulation and development. The generation and development of knowledge is contextual. Knowledge generated in the African context has a purpose in the existence of Africans and it is philosophically naïve to overlook this issue as done by Eurocentric thinkers. Shona proverbs are valid within the African epistemological paradigm because of their functions within the

⁹ Africanisation of education means focusing on problems that have roots and significance especially in institutions of higher learning. It entails four related aspects, *firstly* changing the composition of students, academic and administrator bodies; *secondly* changing the syllabus or content; *thirdly* changing curricula; and *fourthly* changing the criteria that determine what is excellent research (MacGregor, 1996:5). Africanisation of knowledge refers to a process of placing the African world-view at the centre of analysis [and] advocates for the need to foreground African indigenous knowledge systems to address [Africa's] problems and challenges' (Seepe, 2000:119).

community. Africanisation becomes relevant because it gives authenticity to Shona proverbs.

Ramose (1998:64) maintains:

“Africanisation holds that the African experience in its totality is simultaneously the foundation and the source for the construction of all forms of knowledge. On this basis, it maintains that African experience is by definition non-transferable but nevertheless communicable. Accordingly, it is the African who is and must be the primary and principal communicator of the African experience. To try to replace the African in this position and role is to adhere to the untenable epistemological view that experience is transferable. Clearly, Africanisation rejects this view. It holds that different foundations exist for the construction of the pyramids of knowledge. It dismisses the view that any pyramid is by its very nature eminently superior to all others. It is a serious quest for radical and veritable change of paradigm so that the African may enter into genuine critical dialogical encounter with other pyramids of knowledge.”

Three points can be drawn from Ramose’s analysis. Firstly, Ramose points at African experience as both the foundation and source for African forms of knowledge. This is significant to the present study because it validates Shona proverbs by implication as a source of knowledge. Secondly, Ramose gives a flexible position that this stands in contrast with Eurocentricism that there are different foundations that exist for the construction of pyramids of knowledge. Africanisation gives intellectual space to African knowledge systems. Thirdly, Africanisation paves the way for an alternative paradigm for critical dialogue with other forms of knowledge and this is fruitful in negotiating and contesting controversial assumptions brought forward by Eurocentric epistemology.

Nkomo (2000:54) emphasizes that, an earnest effort to deconstruct the prevailing Eurocentric epistemology must be a primary project. The African reality should be placed at the center of the new democratic epistemology. The centrality of the African reality should not negate other realities that enrich the corpus of knowledge. Formerly silenced African indigenous knowledge systems should be brought back to life through renewed African research. In line with this

thinking, Ntuli (2000:54) notes that, African renaissance as a rebirth requires us to reexamine our knowledge systems anew. A critical examination involves a rebuttal of Eurocentric epistemological assumptions while reclaiming African cultural values for development.

1.5.6 Indigenous Knowledge Systems Based Critique

While Africanisation focuses mainly at institutional transformation in the context of knowledge production in higher education, indigenous knowledge systems emphasize on the validation of formerly marginalized ways of knowing. Masolo (2010:21) defines the term indigenous through making this contradistinction:

“Like its cognates (local, native, original, old, or insider) and its antonyms or counterparts (migrant, alien, new, settler, or outsider), the term “indigenous” is used to define the origin of an item or person in relation to how their belonging to a place is to be temporally characterized, especially in comparison to other contenders in claiming belonging.”

For Masolo, the term indigenous is not innocent since it is coined by the West in the attempt to gaze at other cultures. “As the gazing subject the European enjoyed the privilege of seeing its ‘*Other*’, the African without being seen for some time and in the process took this opportunity to define the African as its negative Other” (Viriri and Mungwini 2010:30). This means that the African was misrepresented in the Eurocentric gaze.

Akena (2012:3), defines indigenous knowledge as “multidimensional bodies of understanding that have, especially since the beginning of the European scientific revolution of the seventeenth and eighteenth century, been viewed by European culture as inferior, superstitious and primitive.” Indigenous knowledge is a complex accumulation of local context based relevant knowledge that embraces history and culture. Indigenous knowledge is seen as a viable tool for

reclaiming context relevant ways of knowing that have been deliberately suppressed by Western knowledge. Part of the knowledge systems that were suppressed includes the Shona proverbs. The dominance of Western ways of knowing should not undermine the value of indigenous knowledge. Akena (2012:603) insists; “when knowledge is produced, conceived as civilized and imposed by dominant groups onto others without due consent of the recipient populace, the knowledge will tend to favour the producer at the expense of the recipients, hence domination of foreign knowledge.” This entails that the Western epistemological paradigm imposed its assumptions and images on indigenous cultures of the colonized. When people have their knowledge displaced, the result is that the one displacing will have an advantage over the other person whose knowledge is displaced. “In the rhetoric of this politics, the defense and promotion of the indigenous goes hand in hand with the anti-hegemonic quest for freedom and autonomy, so that whatever is indigenous or locally produced is reinstalled at the head of epistemic regimes of local or regional cultural interests, where it will have greater political and cultural value than what is foreign or imported” (Masolo, 2010:22). What is seen by Eurocentric thinkers as rational knowledge is disputable among colonized groups such as the Shona. Producing knowledge in Africa reveals a deep concern for indigenous knowledge systems as the basis of a legitimate concept of development that is historically relevant, socially meaningful, and responsive to need (Masolo, 2010:27).

1.6 A Defence of the Legitimacy of Shona Proverbs

Having shown that the Eurocentric epistemological paradigm is flawed in several ways, the research proceeds to create space for and validate the legitimacy of Shona proverbs as alternative sources of knowledge in the context of pluriversality. The validation of Shona proverbs shall be done through the following steps; problematising the term Shona; elucidation of proverbs;

exploring the debate on the link between proverbs and philosophy, contextualizing Shona proverbs in their worldview; and examining the style, structure and classification of Shona proverbs.

1.7 The Term Shona

The Shona people are the largest indigenous ethnic group of people in Zimbabwe in terms of population. Mberi (2009:253) states that, about 75% of Zimbabwe's 13 million people speak Shona. Whilst the term Shona has been taken for granted by a number of scholars, it is legitimate to problematise it. The etymology of the term Shona is controversial because a number of mutually exclusive theories are postulated to explain its origins. Gombe (1998:22) notes that, the term 'Shona' was coined by outsiders and he gives four possible theories. The first theory is alleged to come from an Ndebele description of the people of the eastern side of Ndebele territory as *masvina* (those who remove stuff from intestines of slaughtered beasts). The second theory is given as a Suthu and Tswana description of people who lived north of the Limpopo river as *vaTshona*. The third theory is that the term was used to label people who migrated from Sudan to the west, *tshona* means west. The last position is that the term was coined by Portuguese and Arab traders. Despite the differences in the four possible theories, there is agreement that the term was coined not by the Shona themselves but by outsiders. The term was popularized by the British colonial government after the unification of Ndau, Manyika, Karanga, Korekore and Zezuru dialects by Doke in 1931 as Shona. Doke (1931:79) maintains;

“Certainly no people in the Shona country (Southern Rhodesia) claim the name Mashona as their tribal name and each would prefer to be described by the proper name of his particular group...it has been widely felt that the name 'Shona' is inaccurate and unworthy, that it is not a true name of any of the peoples whom we propose to group under the term 'Shona speaking people' and that it lies under a strong suspicion of being a name given in contempt by enemies of the tribes...it is

pretty certainly a foreign name and as such is likely to be uncomplimentary (like the name *kafir*).”

It is clear from Doke’s analysis that the term Shona is problematic in two respects. Firstly, the term was not coined by the indigenous people of Zimbabwe to describe themselves. Secondly, the term has controversial and external origins. As a result of the two problems above, the term shall be used under protest. Ranger (1985a:6) argues that, the term Shona is an invention of colonialism “as a deliberate policy to divide and rule.” For Ranger, the emphasis on tribal dialects prevented a wider sense of Shona identity so there was invention of distinct dialects of Shona. In addition, Ranger (1985a:14) suggests that, “the establishment of supposed dialect boundaries was a result of turning a spoken language into a written language.” The exercise created sub-tribes for Shona for colonial manipulation. Prior to written Shona dialects, Ranger observes that there was one spoken language over a wide area. Emphasis was put on clusters of dialects that seem to show differences and this invention was done systematically through tribal divisions in work places, missionary activity and colonial administration. This similarity of culture was given little attention by the colonial government and overemphasis was given on differences in order to accomplish the goal of inventing tribalism. For Magwa (1999:1), the name Shona was taken up by the Zimbabwean postcolonial government for official and administrative use and it is now acceptable despite its controversial origins.

1.8 Proverbs

In understanding proverbs, it may be interesting to draw parallels from three indigenous African cultures¹⁰, namely, Yoruba, Akan and Shona. The Yoruba word for proverb is *owe* “meaning

¹⁰ A knowledge of situations which proverbs are cited may also be an essential part of understanding their implications (Finnegan, 1970:3).

something that literally wraps it” (Lindfors and Owomoyela, 1973:2). Further connotations in the Yoruba language point to “making qualities observable side by side” or to “intertwine” (Lindfors and Owomoyela, 1973:2). Three philosophical implications can be drawn from the Yoruba word for proverb. First, wrapping gives the image of hiding something and this is a pointer to the hidden meaning of proverbs. Observing qualities side by side suggests parallel meanings that can be drawn from the images widely used in proverbs. Intertwining suggests tying things together and this requires a skilled person to untie knots in the manner skills are required to draw meaning from proverbs.

Gyekye (1975:45) states that the Akan word for proverb is *ebe* in both singular and plural forms. Gyekye (1975:45) traces the etymology of the Akan word for proverb to the palm tree and he sees an affinity between the characteristics of the palm tree and the proverb. The products of the palm tree include “palm oil, palm wine and palm soap” which are all a result of the process of distillation Gyekye (1975:45). For Gyekye (1975:45) the products are “not immediately obvious to the eye but lie deep in the palm tree.” Gyekye (1975:46) draws a similarity and argues that “proverbs are not immediately understandable but one must go deeply into a statement in order to get its meaning.” As a result, “the meaning of a proverb is not obvious or direct, it is profound and not superficial, the distillate of a reflective process (Gyekye 1975:46). Proverbs are distilled from experience and in turn form one source of the Akan philosophical ideas (Gyekye, 1975:46). Akan proverbs are “pithy sayings pregnant with philosophical ideas” Gyekye (1975:46).

Chimundu (1980:37) sees two variants in the Shona word for proverb. The first is *tsumo* which is based on the Zezuru dialect and the second is *shumo* which is based on the Karanga dialect. Although the Karanga variant has been discarded in standard writing of Shona, it is still in use among speech communities (Chimundu, 1980:37). The Karanga meaning of proverb is philosophically interesting since it traces *shumo* back to ‘something that makes sense’, ‘something that is meaningful’ or ‘that which contains wisdom’. As products of deep and careful reflection, Shona proverbs can be linked to deep meaning and wisdom.

What can be inferred from the cultural conceptions of proverbs is that the root meanings point to the hidden meaning of proverbs and this gives definitional problems among scholars. The term proverb is difficult to define because the study of proverbs often falls into an uncomfortable range between linguistics and folklore and hence, a precise definition has eluded researchers working in the field (Bagwasi, 2003:18). Due to this intersectional problem, scholars tend to find their own working definitions (Mieder, 1980:113). However, for Mieder, working definitions have not succeeded in enabling one to identify a sentence positively as proverbial but authors work on those sentences that are culturally classified as proverbs. Mieder (1980:119) defines a proverb as “short, generally known sentence of the folk which contains wisdom, truth, morals and traditional views in a metaphorical, fixed, memorable form which is handed down from generation to generation.” Interesting observations can be made on Mieder’s definition. Firstly, it is reasonable to hold that proverbs contain philosophy because proverbs serve as a medium of expressing collective philosophy. The philosophy is gathered through “sharp observation, experience and reflection” (Furusa 1996:84). Secondly, truth is the ultimate goal of philosophical enterprises in the sense that philosophy is concerned with the nature and meaning of truth. Thirdly, morals are the subject matter of philosophical ethics. Fourthly, proverbs may be seen as

capturing collective consciousness of a people and they are products of reflections based on observation of nature and to that extent, indigenous views express indigenous philosophy.

The use of metaphors does not symbolize in a one-to-one relationship to their referents but symbolize multifariously (Wanjohi, 1997:72). This points to the fact that proverbs involve some degree of abstract thinking which is characteristic of some philosophy. By being fixed, proverbs suggest the ability to transcend timeframes from one generation to the next and this classic feature is a philosophical attribute. Proverbs are also seen as memorable or worth remembering because of their ability to apply to a range of situations. From the above observations, it can be logically concluded that proverbs reflect evidence of philosophical features.

In the light of these findings, Doyle (2001:57) identifies the following as undisputed five characteristics of a proverb; “an old saying, a pithy expression, often metaphorical, occurs in tradition, and tends to display the author’s wit, profundity and moral oracularity.” The list provided gives the key elements of proverbs and this implies that the characteristics work together and if one is missing, it may be difficult to identify a proverb. Magwaza (2004:32) observes that proverbs, “identify and dignify a culture, they bring life into wisdom and wisdom into life.” This shows that proverbs are intrinsically connected to a culture and they add value to a given culture.

Transmission of proverbs has been done orally in the past. Vansina (1965:3) states that proverbs are part of the categories of oral tradition alongside narratives, anecdotes and historical lays. Oral tradition becomes reliable if it refers to recent events, if an adequate capacity for critical judgement existed at the time it was handed down (Vansina, 1965:6). While Vansina is largely

commenting on oral tradition in the context of historical events, proverbs though passed orally remain with a capacity for critical judgement. Dossou (1997:281) maintains that oral traditions are messages transmitted orally from one generation to another. As part of oral traditions, proverbs survive the test of time through repeated usage in different generations (Dossou, 1997:281). However, it may be important to note that the bulk of Shona proverbs have now been put in writing. The knowledge of proverbs was passed without writing and still there is room that proverbs that have not been captured in writing can now be expressed in writing. The importance of oral tradition is that it enables the transmission of knowledge. Proverbs may not lose meaning through this passage because proverbs are functional¹¹ short sayings that are easy to remember.

From the above discussions, a proverb may be understood as a sentence of a cultural group which contains wisdom, truth, morals and indigenous views in a metaphorical, fixed, memorable form which is handed down from generation to generation within local communities. This understanding applies to Shona proverbs.

1.8.1 Proverbs and Philosophy

Scholars hold two contradictory views on the question of the role of proverbs as a source of philosophy. The first view is skeptical and it holds that philosophy cannot be based on proverbs.

Wimmer (2002:20) represents this position as follows:

“People show an emancipatory interest, if they document the sayings and tales of their tradition or reflect on the history and structures of their language. Europeans have done so, too, in the period of the beginning of nationalism during the late 18th and 19th centuries. However, these collections of sayings and proverbs, of

¹¹ Sumner (1999:29) identifies five functions of proverbs namely, cognitive, expressive, normative, discursive and cultural. The cognitive involves an understanding of the situation depicted by the proverb. The expressive involves approval or disapproval. The normative trains morally. The discursive is linked to speech or discourse while the cultural function carries the cultural past of the community.

tales and myths, and analysis of linguistic patterns and structures hardly provide any argument on philosophical matters. Can we ever expect to get arguments in favour or against, say, Kantian concepts of time (or of moral duties) by reading Grimm's tales? It sounds no less absurd to me when I hear that Kant's theory of the categorical imperative is proved to be invalid by some Gikuyu sayings...Proverbs may have taught us to be cautious, they do not teach us the way to obtain knowledge. A proverb never "refutes" any (philosophical or other) argumentation, as the majority of ethnophilosophers, confined to their respective authorities, race, language and "authentic thinking" etc., seem to think."

Several issues may be drawn from Wimmer's views. Firstly, to say "proverbs hardly provide any argument on philosophical matters" shows that Wimmer is unsure but he gives a provision for the benefit of doubt because if something hardly provides, it means there is a limited extent of provision. Wimmer's argument appears to commit a fallacy of ignorance because he moves from the position of being unsure to maintain that "a proverb never "refutes" any (philosophical or other) argumentation." The fallacy is seen in that while Wimmer's first claim is skeptical, he appears to conclude using a definite position and the transition seems inconsistent. It can be argued that, proverbs, in themselves may not constitute arguments but they serve as premises and conclusions for arguments. It can be shown that proverbs provide the basis for philosophical arguments inductively and deductively. Inductively, proverbs act as generalizations from experience and they culminate as conclusions of a series of observations. According to Hurley (1985:498) an inductive argument is "one in which the conclusion is claimed to follow only probably from the premises." The inductive process consists of a series of logically coherent propositions that culminate in one statement as a proverb. The proverb *kune chauraya zizi harifi nemhepo* (something has caused the death of the owl; it does not die of wind). The proverb is an expression of the principle of causality. A series of observations that are linked to causality are made and the proverb is coined as a conclusion of such observations. Deductively, proverbs can be used as syllogistic premises and conclusions. A syllogism is a deductive argument consisting

of two premises and a conclusion (Hurley 1985: 497). The general statement that is arrived at on the basis of observation can be used as the starting point of a syllogism. If the principle of causality expressed in the above proverb is modified, the premise “All events have causes” is obtained. If the second premise such as “Death is an event” is supplied, the conclusion “Death has a cause” is obtained. In addition, proverbs can be expressed as premises in propositional logic. Hurley (1995:496) defines propositional logic as, “a kind of logic in which fundamental components are whole statements or propositions.” Propositional logic, also known as sentential logic (Gustason and Ulrich , 1989:79) or statement logic, is the branch of logic that studies ways of joining and/or modifying entire propositions, statements or sentences to form more complicated propositions, statements or sentences, as well as the logical relationships and properties that are derived from these methods of combining or altering statements. This means that they can be presented as logical premises that are compatible with the rules of inference. Rules of inferences are logical methods of inferential deductions used in proving the validity of arguments (Feyami, 2010:5). They are rules because any argument that is capable of being reduced to their form (i.e. their correct substitution instance) is intuitively and automatically taken as valid. This validity is based on proven internal validity structure (Fayemi, 2010:5). Some Shona proverbs are expressed in sentences that are analyzable in terms of propositional logic. This points to the view that proverbs can be used as premises or conclusions of arguments. These may be implicit or explicit arguments for several philosophical issues. The Shona proverb, *kana mwezha wapfumba, mumwena mune mbeva* (If the mouse’s path is well trodden, then there is a mouse in the nearby hole) takes the form of a conditional statement. The argument that is behind this proverb is as follows: (Premise 1) If the path is well trodden, then there is a mouse habituating in the nearby hole. (Premise 2) The path is well trodden. (Conclusion) there is a

mouse residing in the nearby hole. A negation is seen in the proverb, *Chisi chako hachibatsiri* (what is not one's possession is of limited usefulness) can be used to construct the following argument: (Premise 1) All that does not belong to an individual is of limited usefulness. (Premise 2) This particular tool does not belong to X. (Conclusion) This particular tool is of limited usefulness. A conjunction is expressed in the proverb *bveni kuipa zvaro asi haridiyi chakafa choga* (the baboon is ugly but it does not eat what dies on its own). Dropping the left hand conjunct gives a valid inference through the rule of simplification. A disjunction is shown in the proverb *kana shumba yashaya nyama, inodya bundo* (Unless the lion fails to find meat, it feeds on grass). From this proverb, the following argument is implicit: (Premise 1) Either the lion fails to find meat or the lion feeds on grass. (Premise 2) The lion has failed to find meat. (Conclusion) the lion shall feed on grass. Secondly, to ask "Can we ever expect to get arguments in favour or against, say, Kantian concepts of time (or of moral duties) by reading Grimm's tales?" may seem innocent and empirical. However, a closer analysis of the question tends to reveal some bias. Even if one may not expect to get arguments, it does not necessarily follow that the arguments are absent. Failure to expect may not be a result of empirical investigation but a result of personal biases. Wimmer's view is factually incorrect and no strong argument can be constructed from a false premise. Thirdly, Wimmer claims that "it sounds no less absurd to me when I hear that Kant's theory of the categorical imperative is proved to be invalid by some Gikuyu sayings..." Against this line of thought, it can be argued that Gikuyu sayings or any other African proverbs may not have been directed to the Kantian categorical imperative, as shown in the example, but they serve to refute certain claims within the context in which they arise. African proverbs in general and Gikuyu proverbs in particular, arise within the African epistemological paradigm and it may be unfair to expect them to address issues that arise in a

foreign paradigm. In the same line of thinking, Kant's categorical imperative does not need to refute Gikuyu sayings for it to be relevant. Fourthly, Wimmer accepts that "proverbs may have taught to be cautious..." Wimmer implicitly accepts that proverbs are a source of information and knowledge¹². Teaching implies imparting information and knowledge. This shows that Wimmer concedes that proverbs have an educational value as sources of information and knowledge. Teaching to be cautious implies knowledge and information. In addition, some philosophical insight also accompanies knowledge and information. Indirectly Wimmer sees the implicit value of proverbs. Fifthly, Wimmer's claim that "proverbs do not teach us the way to obtain knowledge" may be refuted on the grounds that some Shona proverbs teach how to obtain knowledge. Two examples shall be used to support this point. The proverb *chitsva chiri murutsoka* (new knowledge can be obtained through travelling). Experiential knowledge is gained as one travels. The point of this proverb can be seen in that travelling gives new experiences and the new experiences can be seen as a source of information and knowledge. The proverb *zano moto rinogokwa kune vamwe* (an idea is like fire, it can be borrowed from others). For the Shona, ideas are a key source of knowledge and one can get ideas through interaction with others. The analogy of fire is very significant because just as the source of fire is not depleted by passing on fire, the source of an idea, the human mind is not depleted by passing on ideas to others. Sixthly, to say "proverbs never refute any philosophical or any other argument" appears to be an overstatement. While all proverbs may not be used for refuting arguments, some proverbs can be used to refute philosophical arguments. Shona proverbs such as *badza harinyepi* (A hoe does not lie) and *Mvura haina n'anga* (There are no herbs to cure dirty water) clearly refute some implied arguments or opposing viewpoints. The proverb, a hoe does not lie, can be

¹² Information refers to data that can be interpreted as a message while knowledge has been seen as non-accidental possession of justified true belief.

used to refute claims that contradict evidence. Just as the marks of a hoe on the soil is evidence of some activity of digging or weeding, evidence that is left in any other context may be difficult to contradict. The proverb, there are no herbs to cure dirty water, can be used to refute situations where an individual may want to try the impossible. The Akan proverb which goes; *when the rain beats the leopard, its fur becomes wet but its spots do not wash away* is also in refutation of a contrary argument or viewpoint that certain activities reveal rather than conceal evidence. Seventhly and lastly, it can be argued that Wimmer's work (published in 2002) is made about five years after both Wanjohi and Kimmerle made their contributions (with 1997 publications). Wimmer overlooks the works of these two scholars who explore the philosophical significance of proverbs as shown below.

Proverbs can be a legitimate source of philosophy. This view is held by Kimmerle (1997a:62-67; 1997b:162-168) and Wanjohi (1998:78). According to Kimmerle (1997a:62), language is a medium in which philosophy works. This means that philosophy draws possible questions and answers from language. For Kimmerle, (1997a:62-63) language is understood broadly to include "grammatical structure as well as the meaning of words and word combinations, and also myths, poetry and stories, sayings and proverbs play an important role." Ethnophilosophers examine the way in which proverbs "form the philosophical substratum of the thinking of a people" (Kimmerle, 1997a:63). Sages formulate their answers about difficult questions through proverbs. These answers can easily be remembered if they take the form of terse sayings or proverbs (Kimmerle, 1997a:63). Proverbs are distilled from everyday language and they form terse and compressed formulations. They are enigmatic (showing obscurity of thought), elliptical

(characterized by extreme economy of expression or omission of superfluous elements) or cryptic (having hidden meaning).

Kimmerle (1997b:167) observes that, proverbs are a source of African philosophy and the basis of justification is seen in the philosophical study of, among other languages, Akan, Yoruba and Gikuyu proverbs. For Kimmerle, certain proverbs can underline their importance in the specific languages they serve. In other words, Kimmerle's point is that proverbs implicitly reflect on language as shown in the Gikuyu proverb, "we speak in proverbs; he who is intelligent will understand." This shows the complexity of proverbs as a source of philosophy. Although Kimmerle himself does not exemplify his point using Shona proverbs, the maxim *mubayi wetsumo anowana zvaanoda* (one who applies proverbs gets what he or she wants) shows that proverbs have argumentative power and consequently, they are philosophical because of their implied logical reasoning aspect. Kimmerle (1997b:167), draws lines of convergence between African philosophy and Western philosophy of language "which is concentrated in short formulations similar to those in proverbs" using two lines of justification. Firstly, Kimmerle employs Heidegger's saying; language is the house of being to show that "language, like Being, is there already before human beings use it, and will not continue to be there without human beings who use it" (Kimmerle 1997b:167). Proverbs are a product of human thought and they can be used to express the philosophical content of a given cultural grouping. Secondly, Kimmerle uses Wittgenstein's idea of "language as different language games" whereby proverbs involve the application of various sets of linguistic rules. This connects proverbs to reflective thought and thereby showing their link to philosophy. The Shona, just like any other

ethnic group have intellectual curiosity about their surroundings resulting in keen observation and reflection of nature.

Wanjohi (1997:90) argues that, proverbs are a source of philosophy because, firstly they operate at the level of second order discourse, meaning that they are critical and reflective of the subject matter they are treating. Secondly, Wanjohi maintains that other proverbs are philosophical in the way they implicitly refer to the basic and applied branches of philosophy. In defence of African proverbs as a source of philosophy, Wanjohi (1997:91) responds to two standard objections. The first objection states that to imply philosophy is not logically the same thing as offering philosophy. Against this objection, Wanjohi (1997:91) argues that, “the bulk of philosophical activity consists, not in repeating what the author has said clearly and unambiguously, but in what he has left unsaid or not clearly expressed.” Proverbs are a source of philosophy because their figurative nature gives rise to analytical and critical reflection.

The second objection is that it requires a philosopher to bring out the philosophy found in African languages. In response, Wanjohi (1997:91) states that, “...the communal philosophy of African proverbs must have originated with one intelligent individual who was the first to see the truth and enunciate it in a short and pithy linguistic form that we call a proverb.” For Wanjohi (1997:72) the origin of proverbs is inductive generalization and this is a sign of individual and reflective thinking. Wanjohi examines the philosophical impact of Gikuyu proverbs and he sees proverbs as a “third degree of symbolization” by looking at literal meaning, metaphorical meaning and a “polysymbolical” and “multifarious” symbolization.

Because of the philosophical nature of proverbs, negativity can be used in proverbs for the purpose of drawing out opposites and paradoxes. Sumner (1995:327) identifies negativity in the use of Oromo proverbs. Sumner examines sixteen proverbs on the topic of women and almost all are wholly negative and only one is positive by making reference to companionship that a wife can provide. Of the fifty Oromo proverbs on vice, only eight are on virtue (Sumner 1995:327). There is one Oromo proverb on reality while fifteen are on appearances (Sumner 1995:327). “The opposite, being well-known does not become the subject of the proverb” (Sumner, 1995:292-293). The use of negativity may be a result of the need to allow focus on what is negative, so that the positive may be drawn out in the process.

1.9 Shona proverbs and their worldview

Wanjohi (1997:38) sees a worldview as “how an individual, a society, a community, or a historical epoch views, sees, conceives or understands the world, and the reaction which follows therefrom.” Apart from individual worldviews, Wanjohi (1997:39) identifies other worldviews such as scientific or philosophical, religious and cultural worldviews. A worldview can be studied or portrayed by proverbs. Shona proverbs deal with both unperceivable and perceivable reality within the Shona worldview. Unperceivable reality refers to the spiritual world where reference is made to *Mwari* “God” and *vadzimu* (the living dead). The bulk of Shona proverbs focus on the perceivable reality and they make reference to, among other realities, human beings, non-human animals, mountains, trees and rivers. According to Bhebe and Viriri (2012: 40), “all this (reference to reality) is an indication of the versatility of Shona proverbs in providing a picture of reality as comprehensive as possible, a worldview.” This means that Shona proverbs can be used to understand the thinking and culture of the Shona people. Shona proverbs are generalizations covering virtually all aspects of life. For Bhebe and Viriri (2012: xiv) Shona

proverbs represent the wisdom of the past in a new situation to justify current behaviour, condition or thinking. This means that proverbs can be used as a source of the history of a people. Nyambezi (1990:xii) maintains that, “proverbs show how observant people are, for the habits of birds and animals, and the behaviour of nature in general, do not go unobserved, they reveal what it is that a people adore, what it is that they hate, what they respect and what they despise.” This means that the Shona people’s wisdom as shown by proverbs, “represents moral lessons, science, philosophy, art, history, religion and social vision- in short, truth that is derived from experience” (Bhebe and Viriri 2012:xvi).

1.9.1 Use of images in Shona proverbs

To make assimilation of Shona proverbs easy, there is use of metaphors that are appealing to imagination (Bhebe and Viriri, 2012:xxiv). The use of animals is common in Shona proverbs as shown in the following (1) *Nzou hairemerwi nenyanga dzayo* (An elephant does not find its tusks heavy). (2) *Tsuro pfupi haitemi uswa hurefu* (a small rabbit does not eat tall grass). Images are significant in the following manner:

“Images from the animal world concretise ideas that children need to remember in order to help their decisions later in life , since children are already aware of the animal metaphor through *ngano* (folktales), they find it relatively easy to extend their knowledge through further analysis of animal metaphors” (Bhebe and Viriri, 2012:xxv).

Beyond the animal world, images used in Shona proverbs can be constructed from the phenomena that people have observed in their homes, fields, forests and social interaction. To people who dwell in such habitat, communication entails knowing the organic world of the speakers. The use of images has the advantage of making Shona proverbs impersonal and

objective. According to Pongweni (1989:5), proverbs “give speakers a neutral point of reference thus minimizing subjective commentary on the case under review and this means that proverbs authoritatively and objectively evaluate behaviour.”

1.9.2 Style and Structure of Shona Proverbs

Shona proverbs rely on rhythm and figures of speech for vividness (Bhebe and Viriri, 2012: xxvi). Most Shona proverbs are in verse structure and this makes them poetic. Poetic balance in Shona proverbs is seen through the use of parallelism, cross-parallelism and repetition of syllables. For Hamutyinei and Plannger (2013: xvi), parallelism corresponds to initial linking as shown in the following example, *chadyiwa nemurombo, chadyiwa nashe* (what has been eaten by the poor person, has been eaten by the chief). The word *chadyiwa* (what has been eaten) appears first in both phrases and this is where the parallelism lies. In cross-parallelism, similar words are not in corresponding but in transposed positions as shown in the following example, *chinokanganwa ibadza, ivhu harikanganwi* (What forgets is the hoe but the disturbed soil does not). The element of *kunganganwa* (forgetting), lies in opposite positions in the proverb. The use of double propositions in which the second part is explanatory can also be found in Shona proverbs (Hamutyinei and Plannger, 2013 :xvii). The following proverb shows the double propositions *chirema ndechina mazano, chinotamba chakazendama nemadziro* (A lame person is clever, he or she dances while leaning against the wall). The use of negation is also found as in *hapana mvura isina chura* (there is no water without a frog). An example of such structural balance is shown in the proverb; *Kupedza nyota kuenda kutsime* (To quench thirst is to go to the well). Shona proverbs create symmetry which beautifies logic. The embellishment in Shona proverbs makes them interesting utterances. Without this embellishment or decorative detail, speech would be conducted in cold logic that is uninteresting and difficult to remember (Bhebe

and Viriri, 2012: xxvii). Vividness makes proverbs convincing to listeners who are trained to discern logic out of the imaginative language. Some Shona proverbs can be shortened if they are well known to both the speaker and the audience as follows:

“Instead of saying *Chitsva chiri murutsoka, magaro haana chawo* (The foot leads to new things, sitting on buttocks does not); a speaker will end up saying *Chitsva chiri murutsoka* (The foot leads to new things) suggesting that it is redundant to complete the cliché, thus saying the obvious” (Bhebe and Viriri, 2012:xxvii)

The capability of Shona proverbs to be shortened makes them flexible figures of speech. This helps to reduce complexity leading to brevity that will make the proverb easy to remember.

1.9.3 Classification of Shona Proverbs

Hamutyinei and Plannger (2013: viii-x) classify Shona proverbs under the following eleven categories; wisdom and foolishness; human nature; friendship and enmity; fortune and misfortune, honesty and dishonesty; domestic affairs; the circle of life; authority; unity; warning and general advice; and miscellaneous. This classification may make the task of readers easy for reference purposes since it groups related proverbs. Contrary to the classification, Bhebe and Viriri (2012: xxi) observe, “this typology in Hamutyinei and Plannger, is not as neat as it might appear because life itself does not prescribe proverbial use in one domain.” This means that a single Shona proverb can be applicable to a variety of contexts and circumstances, beyond the obvious application, thereby showing the limit of classification. In the same line of reasoning, Bhebe and Viriri (2012: xxi), discourage the use of categories in collections of proverbs because “readers require reference to a broader social context than to be blinkered.” This means that readers should be given the opportunity to apply proverbs to a variety of life situations without some rigid guidelines.

1.10 Conclusion

The chapter has examined the Eurocentric epistemological paradigm and it has discussed the effects of the paradigm such as sidelining, marginalizing, silencing, ignoring and stereotyping of African indigenous knowledge. The effects of the Eurocentric epistemological paradigm that include epistemological imperialism, hegemony and racism have been challenged and critiqued. A multifaceted critique that is based on deconstruction and reconstruction, decolonial thinking, Afrocentricity, indigenous knowledge based analysis, and anti-dualistic approach has been advanced. Deconstruction has been used to displace absolutist and rigid claims of positivist epistemology and arguments that favour the historicity and particularity of knowledge perspectives have been advanced. Decolonial thinking has been employed to topple the false epistemic hierarchy that had been constructed by the Western epistemological paradigm. Afrocentric thinking stands as a radical critique to Eurocentric epistemology and it dismisses the alleged universalism in order to provide a cultural footing to the African epistemological paradigm. Africanisation calls for the placing of the African worldview at the center of analysis and it has argued for the use of African indigenous approaches for addressing African problems and challenges. The indigenous knowledge based approach advocates for locally based knowledge systems that are not violent and imposing on the recipients but come from grassroots to meet the needs of the communities from which knowledge systems develop. Anti-dualistic epistemological perspectives argue for pluriversal epistemology and acknowledge the relatedness of the knower to the community. The chapter upholds an African epistemological paradigm that

comes up as an alternative framework for grounding assumptions, theories and methodology for the authentic and legitimate study of African knowledge systems and ways of knowing thereby opening intellectual space for the philosophical study of Shona proverbs that shall be examined in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 2: SHONA ENVIRONMENTAL PHILOSOPHY

2.0 Introduction

Environmental philosophy is the inquiry into the nature and justification of metaphysical, epistemological and ethical claims relating to the environment. While environmental philosophy can take various perspectives, this chapter shall focus on environmental philosophy that has been handed down through the generations by cultural transmission; in particular, the Shona culture. Firstly, the chapter explores the debate on the conception of African environmental philosophy. Some scholars are skeptical about African environmental philosophy on the assumption that there is either nothing or very little to be known about African environmental philosophy. Other scholars hold the view that African environmental philosophy cannot be possible because African philosophy is human centered and does not extend to the environment. In addition, Africa is considered as the worst on earth in terms of environmental records and as such, cannot be expected to contribute meaningfully to the global environmental responsibility debate. Secondly, and contrary to the above view, it shall be argued that African philosophy, which has very deep roots in the history of pre-colonial, colonial and independent Africa will be used as the basis and example of African environmental philosophy. African environmental philosophy, through *ubuntu*, emphasizes cosmic interconnectedness, relationality and coexistence. Further, the chapter aims to contribute to the articulation of an environmental philosophy based on Shona proverbs and inspired by broad African environmental perspectives. This shall be done through an analysis of three Shona proverbs that provide evidence of environmental responsibility. These proverbs may be used to refute the skeptical view on African environmental philosophy in general. The three selected proverbs shall examine Shona environmental philosophy that

culminates in environmental preservation, conservation and nature relatedness. Further, the chapter shall discuss the significance of environmental philosophy.

Proverbs can be used to construct an indigenous environmental philosophy with the potential for global application in the spirit of the pluriversal understanding of knowledge. African environmental philosophy has been described by the natural resources literature as “a cumulative body of knowledge and beliefs, handed down through the generations by cultural transmission, about the relationship of living beings (including humans) with one another and with their environment” (Berkes, 1995:100). In indigenous environmental philosophy, knowledge of foods and medicinal plants embodies relationships and self-identification with places in the use of what nature has offered (LaRochelle and Berkes 2003:366). Campbell and Shakeroff (2007:351) identify three aspects that relate to indigenous environmental philosophy in general and African environmental philosophy in particular, the first is that indigenous environmental philosophy involves symbolic meaning through oral history, place names and spiritual relationships. The second is that indigenous environmental philosophy encompasses a distinct world view; including a view of the environment different from that of Western science by emphasising relationality, dependence and interconnectedness. The third is that indigenous environmental philosophy examines relationships based on sharing and obligations toward other community members and other beings.

2.1 Understanding the Environment

Belshaw (2001:2) identifies four conceptions of the environment. The first account is a human centered approach that sees the environment as “where people live, work and enjoy themselves.” This understanding places emphasis on human beings yet it is very broad to cover offices, homes, cities, countryside and open seas. This perspective suggests connection only with human life to the extent of excluding wilderness areas, polar regions, remnants of deserts and the bottom of the sea from which people are absent. The second view which considers the environment as “the natural and non-human world” (Belshaw, 2001:2) stresses on nature. This approach sees human beings, alongside with their cities, roads, industries and airports, as encroaching into the environment and competing with it for space. Human activities are seen as disturbing the natural state of the non-human environment. The third view, which can be described as the global approach, sees the environment as the component that is spread over the surface of the world. According to this view, the environment is one and it existed before humans were found on the earth. This conception takes the environment to include zones that are unoccupied by human beings. The fourth view is called the localized approach and it takes the environment to mean, “home ground, the territory familiar to and supportive of a particular kind of life” (Belshaw, 2001:2). This means that one can make reference to an urban environment, a rural environment and a cultural environment, among others.

While the first view of the environment places emphasis on the human surroundings, it tends to exclude the non-human world and as a result, it is a narrow conception of the environment. The second view is the opposite of the first and it places emphasis on the non-human environment while neglecting the human environment. These perspectives seem to rest on the fallacy of false

dichotomy¹³ by assuming that there is either a human environment or a non-human environment. A balanced approach considers the environment as consisting of the human and the non-human components. The third view, which is the global approach, fails to convince because it is too broad and too general to capture the environment as it relates to specific groups of people. The last view may be significant for this study because it takes an approach restricted to a particular territory that can be used to express an environmental understanding by a group of people such as the Shona. Restricting the study of the environment to a particular group of people is done for the sake of convenience even though the effects of environmental protection or destruction remain unrestricted.

If one has to apply Occam's razor¹⁴, it may be better to understand the environment as one rather than many. An African view holds that, by environment, we mean our surroundings, including the life support provided by the air, water, land, animals and the entire ecosystem of which human beings are part (Osuntokun, 2001:293). Osuntokun's view has two advantages; firstly, it is consistent with common usage and this means that it is credible from a common sense perspective. Secondly, it suggests that living spaces affect one another as they interact. This interaction is a relational perspective that has important implications in understanding African environmental philosophy in general and Shona environmental philosophy in particular.

¹³ The fallacy of false dichotomy rests on the mistake of thinking in mutually exclusive categories and consider them as exhaustive yet there is a third possibility or alternative.

¹⁴ Occam's razor is the principle that holds that when postulating entities, it is prudent to avoid unnecessary multiplication of beings by assuming the fewest assumptions.

2.2 Defining Ecology

Since the ecosystem is part of the environment, it is necessary to define ecology and show its significance to the environment. Etymologically, the word ecology is derived from the Greek words *oikos* meaning household and *logos* meaning “study”; this means that it is the study of the environmental house that includes all organisms in it and all functions that make the house habitable (Odum and Barrett, 2005:2). Ecology can be defined as “the study of the interactions between living organisms and their environment” (Bowler 1992:309; DesJardins, 1993:166). As an empirical science, ecology claims that it may not necessarily make a particular commitment to preservation or pronouncement of the value of that which it studies.¹⁵ Even though ecology is distinct from the study of the environment, “in so far as environmentalists aim to understand the character of environmental problems that they detect, and hope to uncover the methods for preventing or reversing unwelcome change, then they need to draw on ecology’s resources” (Belshaw, 2001:8). The point being made by Belshaw is that ecology informs thinking about the environment with specific details that may enable sound and informed decisions. The convergence between environmental studies and ecology is seen in the deep ecology movement¹⁶

¹⁵ However, Allchin (1988:1083) argues that science cannot be value free on the basis of three reasons. Firstly, science relies on epistemic values such as reasonableness, explanatory adequacy, predictive power, simplicity and coherence while it disvalues fraud, error and pseudoscience. Secondly, scientific enterprise is always embedded in some particular culture and ethical and cultural values enter science through individual practitioners whether consciously or not. Thirdly, scientific values emerge from science both as a product and process and may be redistributed in society. Science may be seen as successful or powerful and things associated with science can be given authority or value. Science may be taken as the image for problem solving and a means for objectivity.

¹⁶ Naess’ position is regarded as deep ecology because of the extent to which it examines humanity’s relationship with the natural world to arrive at philosophically profound conclusions as opposed to ecology as a branch of biology.

(Belshaw, 2001:8). Naess (1973:151) argues that, “the idea that a human being is such an individual possessing a separate essence, radically separates the human self from the rest of the world. The separation leads to selfishness towards other people and induces human selfishness towards nature.” As a counter to egoism at both the individual and species level, Naess (1973:152) proposes the adoption of an alternative relational image of the world. According to this relationalism, organisms (human or otherwise) are best understood as knots in the biospherical net (Naess, 1973:154). The identity of a living thing is essentially constituted by its relations to other things in the world, especially its ecological relations to other living things. If people conceptualise themselves and the world in relational terms, the deep ecologists argue, then people will take better care of nature and the world in general. Naess (1973:155) maintains that, the deep satisfaction that we receive from identification with nature and close partnership with other forms of life in nature contributes significantly to our life quality. Naess’ position has important implications for this study because it sees nature as central and the human being is seen as depending on the natural world and this is in line with the African view of environmental philosophy.

2.3 Contextualising Environmental Philosophy

Brennan (2009:8) observes that, various schools of philosophical thought arise from diverse methodologies in approaching environmental philosophy. The analytic or Anglo-American tradition in philosophy emphasizes conceptual clarity, logical rigour, empirical soundness, and scientific validity of arguments (Brennan, 2009:8). In its approach to environmental philosophy, the analytic school focuses on the analysis of environmental concepts. By contrast, continental

philosophy ¹⁷ is more critical of claims of scientific rigour. It is more open to exploring the historical and cultural context of ideas, and is more inclined to explore larger philosophical themes such as the nature of being, existence, and consciousness (Brennan, 2009:8).

Contemporary environmental problems are complex; they involve issues of public health and social justice, attitudes to nature, and deep disagreements about matters of science, policy, rights, and ethical obligations (Brennan, 2009:10). These complexities apply to many areas of contemporary environmental debate: drought, changing weather patterns, the loss of habitat and species, the burden of caring for environmental refugees, the effects of consumerism, and the health problems associated with various forms of pollution. The resolution of such conflicts and ambiguities demands increased interdisciplinary cooperation between philosophers, political theorists, legal experts and scientists. Such a cross-disciplinary approach would require environmental philosophy because it borrows from both theoretical and applied philosophy.

While the above trends may represent Western environmental philosophy, they are hardly exhaustive because they do not, in general, discuss environmental debates within African historical and cultural contexts. African environmental philosophy in general and Shona environmental philosophy in particular are part of marginalized knowledge systems. The perspective of pluriversality gives room and legitimacy to the examination of African environmental philosophy as seen in the section that follows.

¹⁷ So named because it arises from the work of philosophers from the European continent, most prominently France and Germany.

2.4 African Environmental Philosophy Debate

Three distinct positions can be identified in the African environmental philosophy debate. The first view is comparative, holding that “scholars have kept quiet or what they have said about Africa is rather thin compared to what they have said about Native Americans, Asians and Australian Aborigines” (Kelbessa, 2005:20). This shows that Africa has been a neglected zone in terms of environmental philosophy. In addition, certain scholars tend to totally disregard Africa and focus on other regions as shown below;

“An open-minded comparative study of Eastern environmental attitudes and values will enable Western environmental philosophers better to recognize and criticize their most ingrained and otherwise unconscious assumptions inherited from the long and remarkably homogeneous history of Western thought” (Hargrove, 1989: xx).

The second position sees Africa contributing to environmental philosophy in a weak sense. The weak sense is based on the anthropocentric understanding of African ethics in particular and African philosophy in general;

“Apparently, therefore, Africa looms as a big blank spot on the world map of indigenous environmental ethics for a very good reason. African thought orbits, seemingly, around human interests. Hence one might expect to distill from it no more than a weak and indirect environmental ethic, similar to the type of ecologically enlightened utilitarianism.” (Callicott, 1994: 273).

Some will object that, empirically, Africa has one of the worst environmental records on earth (as exemplified by widespread deforestation, pollution and soil degradation) and obviously cannot be expected to contribute very much to global environmental responsibility. Africans are seen as incapable of overcoming their own environmental crisis. But a closer look at African history shows that the real issue is not so simple. One has to examine how and why Africa has

faced an environmental crisis before concluding that Africans are environmentally unfriendly. This examination may show that colonialism and its ills are largely responsible for the African environmental crisis. As a result an African perspective of studying African environmental problems becomes necessary.

The third position affirms the existence of a meaningful African environmental philosophy. Opuku (1993:77), commenting on African culture writes, “there is community with nature since man is part of nature and is expected to cooperate with it; and this sense of community is expressed in terms of identity, kinship, friendliness and respect.” Three issues can be drawn from Opuku’s analysis. Firstly, human beings are part of nature and this means the community extends beyond human beings to include environmental issues. Secondly, the ethical expectation to cooperate with nature means environmental responsibility that involves protection, conservation and respect of the environment. Thirdly, the respect for fellow human beings means taking care of the environment.

Commenting on African environmental ethics, Murove (2004:195-196) notes, “this is an ethic of the interdependence of individuals within the larger society to which they belong and to the environment on which they all depend.” Murove (2004:196) posits society and environment and the interrelation of the two is made possible through an ethical concern. The ethical concern cares for fellow human beings as such and it also cares for them through the care of the environment.

Africans aim to promote harmonious existence between the past, present and future (Murove, 2004:196). This entails that African ethics recognizes the bond between the humans and their

environment, the debt that members of any generation owe to their forebears and their consequent responsibility to posterity (Murove, 2004:195).

Tangwa (2004:839) writes, “the indigenous African metaphysical outlook implies recognition and acceptance of interdependence and peaceful coexistence between earth, plants, animals and humans. The dichotomy between human beings, non-human animals and plants is slim and very flexible”. The metaphysical outlook that Tangwa refers to is significant for epistemology and ethics thereby providing the foundation of environmental philosophy. Metaphysics plays an important role in the construction of a sound African environmental philosophy.

The Oromo of Ethiopia consider not only the well-being of humans but also other nonhuman animals (Kelbessa, 2005:21). In a defence of African environmental thinking, Kelbessa (2005:22) writes;

“But the Oromo are not exclusively pragmatists. The bonds between the environment and the rural people are not only material but also spiritual and moral. Normative principles are implicit in the thought and practice of the Oromo people. For them, land is not only a resource for humans’ utilitarian ends, but also it has its own inherent value given to it by *Waaqa* (God). For the Oromo *Waaqa* is the guardian of all things, and nobody is free to destroy natural things to satisfy his or her needs. The Oromo believe that the law of society is based on the laws of *Waaqa* as given in nature.”

The material bond with the environment gives methods of how to manage, conserve and exploit the environment. Reflection upon such knowledge at a philosophical level, paves way for an environmental epistemology. The spiritual bond with the environment entails metaphysical forces in the protection and control of the environment. The moral bond with the environment is

a clear indicator of an environmental ethic among the Oromo. Since the Oromo are part of the indigenous cultures in Africa, the existence of an environmental philosophy among the Oromo helps to refute the skeptical view that Africans have no environmental philosophy.

Furthermore, Kelbessa (2005:24) suggests, that the moral code of the Oromo people of Ethiopia

“does not allow irresponsible and unlimited exploitation of resources and human beings...it reflects deep respect and balance of various things. The Oromo do not simply consider justice, integrity and respect as human virtues applicable to human beings but they extend them to nonhuman species and mother earth.”

A moral code that applies to the exploitation of natural resources is a clear indication of an environmental ethic. The balance of various things that Kelbessa refers to allows an environmental philosophy that is based on a broad ecological perspective that respects the different levels of being within the environment. Humans are conceived not as masters of the universe but they are friends, beneficiaries and users (Mbiti (1995) cited in Kelbessa, 2005:23).

Basing on the above scholars, it can be inferred that African environmental philosophy is the study of the environment in relationship to human beings from an African point of view. African environmental philosophy is based on a metaphysical dimension that recognizes the different levels of beings in the universe. The African metaphysical perspective recognizes a kinship between humans and nature. The metaphysical perspective informs an environmental epistemology that involves experiential and practical knowledge about ecological preservation and conservation. The knowledge is acquired through experience, transmitted orally within a community, and is validated by its relevance to the daily life. Both the ontological assumptions and the epistemological claims provide a basis of an African environmental ethical concern that

includes co-operation with nature, friendliness, respect, unity of purpose, interconnectedness, interdependence and peaceful co-existence as shown in the philosophy of *ubuntu* in the next section.

2.5 *Ubuntu* and African Environmental Philosophy

Ramose's exposition of *ubuntu* shall be selected to provide justification for *ubuntu* as a legitimate point of departure for an African environmental philosophy in general and Shona environmental philosophy in particular. *Ubuntu* is the root of African philosophy. *Ubuntu* is a wellspring flowing with ontology and epistemology (Ramose, 2005:35) it is an indigenous philosophy that is simultaneously the foundation and the edifice of African philosophy (Ramose, 2005:35). Just as the environing soil, the root, stem, branches and leaves together as a one-ness give meaning to our understanding of a tree, so is it with *ubuntu*. The foundation, the soil within which it is anchored, as well as the building must be seen as one continuous whole-ness rather than independent fragments of reality (Ramose, 2005:35). The argument for *ubuntu* as the basis of African philosophy is based on three premises.

In the first premise, Ramose makes reference to ontology and metaphysics through establishing a connection between the two. In the African context, human existence is understood at three levels namely, the living human being, the living dead and those yet to be born (Ramose, 2005:45). Since two of the levels pertain to beings which are either unknown or unseen, we may refer to them as ontology of invisible beings (Ramose, 2005:45). The ontology of invisible beings is the discourse of the unknown from the standpoint of the living (Ramose, 2005:45). The unknown remains unknowable from the side of the living (Ramose, 2005:45). However, the

belief in the unknown has a direct influence in the life of the living. In this sense, the belief in the unknown and unknowable is metaphysics (Ramose, 2005:45). Metaphysics becomes a claim, based upon belief, to knowledge about beings outside the domain of the world of the living (Ramose, 2005:45). The ontology of invisible beings is the basis of *ubuntu* metaphysics.

The nature of human relations in the world of the living is based upon and influenced by the onto-triadic conception of being (Ramose, 2005:46). *Umuntu* cannot attain *ubuntu* without the intervention of the living dead (Ramose, 2005:46). By implication human beings cannot adequately manage the environment without the intervention of the living dead. The living dead are important to the upkeep and protection of the family of the living. For this reason, it is important that leaders and elders of the community must have good relations with the living dead (Ramose, 2005:109). This speaks of *ubuntu* understanding of cosmic harmony which must also translate into harmony with the environment.

*“Ubuntu has to be discussed in a comprehensive ontological horizon. It shows how the be-ing of an African person is not only imbedded in the community, but in the universe as a whole. This is primarily expressed in the prefix *ubu-* of the word *ubuntu*. It refers to the universe as be-ing enfolded, containing everything. The stem *-ntu* means the process of life as the unfolding of the universe by concrete manifestations in different forms and modes of being”* (Ramose, 2005:109).

Thus social interconnectedness is a more particular expression of a universal connectedness of being, which sets African thought sharply in opposition to the atomistic ontology of ‘Enlightenment’ modernism, although not to other non-western intellectual traditions. In contrasting African and modern Western conceptions of being, we find an understanding of the interconnectedness of all levels of being contrasted with an atomistic materialism. This interconnectedness is something more than that of the mechanically interconnected systems that

the modern worldview found itself able to comprehend and work with. African understandings of being are premised on social and cosmological connectedness, and this participatory way of being.

The second premise in Ramose's argument is based on epistemology. *Ubuntu* epistemology is characterised by an insistence on the interconnectedness of the world, the unity of the knower and the world, and the relatedness of the knower within a community. This process includes the emergence of the speaking and knowing human being. Thus *-ntu* stands for the epistemological side of be-ing. This is the wider horizon, in which the inter-subjective aspects of *ubuntu* have to be seen. Mutual recognition and respect in the different inter-subjective relations are parts of the process of unfolding of the universe, which encompasses everything, in the speaking and knowing of human beings. This process in itself leads to the forms of inter-subjective relations that have been mentioned above. Ramose (2005:109) underlines the oneness and the whole-ness of this ongoing process. The affirmation of interconnectedness, as well as the consequent denial of the ontological autonomy of objects or things and of the human observer, leads to a participatory epistemology.

The third premise of Ramose's argument is anchored on *ubuntu* ethics. The ethical side of *ubuntu* can be seen in humanness. For Ramose (2005:105), the proverb *motho ke motho ka batho* is a Sotho proverb that means to be human is to affirm one's humanity by recognizing the humanity of others and on that basis establish humane relations with them. Being human (humanness) and having a respectful and polite attitude constitute the core meaning of the above proverb. The notion of *ubuntu*, *hunhu* or *botho* (humaneness) is particularly in use in Southern

Africa. In West and East Africa, we come across the notion of communalism, by which the inter-subjective aspects of *ubuntu* are expressed in a similar way, although the more comprehensive philosophical horizon of *ubuntu* is missing here. There is an ethics of mutual help and of caring for each other.

According to Ramose (2005:104), “*Motho ke motho ka botho* is a Sotho proverb found in all indigenous languages of Africa. It means to be human is to affirm one’s humanity by recognizing the humanity of others and on that basis, establish humane relations among them.” The proverb calls for respectful and polite attitude towards other human beings. To care for one another therefore implies caring for physical nature as well. “Without such care, the interdependence between human beings and physical nature would be undermined” (Ramose,2005:109). Moreover, human beings are indeed an intrinsic part of the physical nature although possibly a privileged part (Ramose, 2005:109). Accordingly, caring for one another is the fulfillment of the natural duty to care for physical nature too.

The concept of harmony in African thought is comprehensive in the sense that it conceives of balance in terms of totality of the relations that can be maintained between and among human beings as well as between human beings and physical nature (Ramose, 2005:109). The quest for harmony is the striving to maintain a comprehensive but specific relational condition among organisms and entities. It is the constant striving to maintain a balance between human beings and physical nature.

The principle of wholeness applies to the relation between human beings and physical objective nature (Ramose, 2009a:309). The concept harmony in African thought is comprehensive in the sense that it conceives of a balance in terms of the totality of the relations that can be maintained between and among human beings, as well as between human beings and physical nature (Ramose, 2009a:309). The task of human beings is to constantly strive to maintain a balance between human beings and physical nature (Ramose, 2009a:309).

Human dignity can be understood in terms of relations with other human beings as well as relations with physical nature (Ramose, 2009a:309). The universe is seen as enfoldment of the interaction and interdependence of all things (Ramose, 2009a:312). The insight of mutual care arises, not only between and among human beings, but also between human beings and physical nature (Ramose, 2009a:312).

Reductionist, fragmentative and empirisistic rationality continues to make great progress in the sphere of technology (Ramose, 2009a:312). These advances have resulted in serious disturbance of ecology (Ramose, 2009a:312). This disturbs the balance between human beings and the environment. Technological advancement continues to reaffirm the need to restore *Ubuntu* because humanity is faced with the threat of catastrophic ecological disaster (Ramose, 2009a:313). The evidence of ecological disaster is seen in air pollution, climate change and destruction of the ozone layer (Ramose, 2009a:309). The rational option is a call for the restoration of *ubuntu* (Ramose, 2009a:313).

The research has examined Ramose's understanding of *ubuntu* since it is a broad perspective of *ubuntu* that appears to be credible and balanced. It is credible because it captures the realistic dimensions of African philosophy and it is balanced because it takes into account all the major philosophical aspects that define *ubuntu*. This study has considered *ubuntu* in the broad sense because this perspective informs environmental philosophy fully and it has broad implications for environmental responsibility. Ramose's argument paves way for African environmental responsibility as shown by Bujo in the section that follows:

While arguing for an African environmental responsibility, Bujo (2009:281-282) maintains that the point of departure in African environmental philosophy will be an analysis of the antithesis between life and death as precursor to describing what Africans see as the proper relationship between the human person and the cosmos. Africans believe that life is the most sacred but life is permanently threatened by death (Bujo, 2009:282). The task of the human person is to identify the enemies of life to defeat death (Bujo, 2009:282). All beings in the universe possess vital force of their own: human, animal, vegetable or inanimate (Bujo, 2009:282). The human person and the cosmos complement each other to such an extent that they only exist interdependently (Bujo, 2009:282). The world of force is like a spider web where disturbance of the vibration of one single thread causes the shaking of the whole netweb. (Bujo, 2009: 282). Within the hierarchy of forces, the human person appears as the synthesis of the whole universe (Bujo, 2009:282). All beings, organic and inorganic, living and inanimate, personal and impersonal, visible and invisible, act together to manifest the universal solidarity of creation.

The African person can only be understood as being characterized by interrelationships (Bujo, 2009:285). The network of these relations includes the entire cosmos and God himself (Bujo, 2009:285). Through a consideration of this relationship, people should become aware of the fragile nature of human existence (Bujo, 2009:285). Human existence could break down if the cosmos is neglected (Bujo, 2009:285). Human greed and blind confidence that anything could be achieved, however unnatural, is likely to lead to the destruction of the cosmos (Bujo, 2009:285). By failing to distinguish between life friends and enemies, the human person can lead himself and all humanity to death and destruction (Bujo, 2009:285). This position paves way for inclusivity that makes environmental responsibility possible. Bujo's point that all forces depend on each other like a web is important for environmental responsibility because if one part of the web is disturbed, the whole web is disturbed. This idea is significant for environmentally responsible human activity

For Bujo (2009:288), technology does not necessarily contribute towards making the world more human. Western technology has to be revised to relearn the language of nature (Bujo, 2009:288). Technology has to respect other cultures. The future of those values that promote culture will shape the future of humanity (Bujo, 2009:288). Only the values that promote culture are capable of rescuing humanity. Without such values, there is no future even for technology (Bujo, 2009:288). The ecological scandal makes it clear that the world with its high level of technology should be humanized (Bujo, 2009:289). The dramatic consequences of technology should remind Africans to keep their heritage and technology should be accepted critically (Bujo, 2009:290). The return to African indigenous environmental thinking calls for the liberation of life in all its manifold facets (Bujo, 2009:290). The significance of Bujo's analysis is that it justifies the use of

indigenous environmental philosophy in addressing environmental problems that are currently facing Africa. Human relations with the environment must be based on an understanding of the cosmos as continual strife for harmony. It is such anchorage that gives authenticity and legitimacy for an African environmental philosophy in general and Shona environmental philosophy in particular as shown in the next section.

2.6 Shona Environmental Philosophy

An understanding of Shona environmental philosophy can be achieved through an analysis of three key related dimensions, namely, Shona environmental metaphysics, epistemology and ethics. The Shona conception of being includes belief in the existence of *Mwari* (Supreme Being). The belief in *Mwari* becomes the basis of Shona metaphysics. This metaphysics provides a foundation for an epistemology and an ethic that results in environmental preservation, conservation, management and exploitation that takes into consideration both the living dead and the yet to be born. The relatedness of these three dimensions is obtained through the philosophy of *ubuntu* which is the basis of African philosophy in general and Shona environmental philosophy in particular.

For Tangwa (2004:389), the African metaphysical outlook involves recognition and acceptance of interdependence and peaceful coexistence between earth, plants, animals and humans. Africans are cautious in their attitude to plants, animals and inanimate things and the various invisible forces in the world. The metaphysical separation among plants, animals and inanimate things, between the sacred and the profane, matter and spirit, and the communal and the individual, is a slim and flexible one (Tangwa, 2004:389). Shona metaphysics can be understood

as the totality of the Shona people's perspectives of observing, interpreting and making sense of reality. Metaphysics is important in understanding environmental issues because it supplies the assumptions and justifications that form the basis of environmental reflection.

In the Shona metaphysical worldview, the *mhondoro* is the spirit of the founder of a clan. The chief is in most cases the medium of the territorial spirit. The role of the *mhondoro* is to protect the fertility of the land and to control rainfall (Taringa, 2006:198). The Shona perform rituals to them to get rid of pests, bless seeds before a new crop is sown to ensure a successful harvest and to thank and celebrate successful harvest seasons (Taringa, 2006:198). As noted above, the *mhondoro* is the ultimate owner of *nyika*. *Nyika* also refers to the area associated with the history of the founder of the clan as the first person to settle in a particular area (Taringa, 2006:198).

The family *vadzimu* are guardians of the extended family. They are spirits of each family or small extended family lineage. So they are mostly concerned with the peace and welfare of individual family units. What is important to note is that *mudzimu* is associated benevolent experiences such as rain, forest fruit, the harvest, domesticated and friendly animals. Overall at both territorial and family level it means the human ancestors possess spiritual power and thus participate in sacred reality. Even though they inhabit the world of spirits they are still present in the human community as guardians of the family traditions, providers of fortune, and punishers of those who break accepted mores. So like in most African communities, among the Shona the *vadzimu* are crucially important for the continued welfare of the family and the community (Taringa, 2006:199).

Within the Shona metaphysical framework, being is understood hierarchically. This hierarchy starts with *Mwari* on the top, followed by *vadzimu*¹⁸ (the living dead), then comes living individuals, followed by those to be born, the last is the level of plants and animals. The ontological hierarchy is significant for this study because it gives an understanding of the environment that is based on *ubuntu* in the sense reality is seen as relational and based on co-existence not only with the living but also with the living dead. The environment is seen as sacred because of these metaphysical forces that are behind it for sustenance.

Although Matikiti (2007: 218) does not use the term Shona environmental epistemology, he describes knowledge claims that relate to the environment as “the collective knowledge of an indigenous or local community about relationships between people, habitat and nature.” Shona environmental epistemology refers to knowledge systems that can be used for the benefit of the environment. Such an epistemology is largely based on observation and reflection of the environment. Conclusions can be drawn on the basis of the environment, to give knowledge that relates to the environment. These principles give knowledge that can be used for environmental responsibility. The Shona have grounded their knowledge to environmental concerns in order to understand, manage and exploit the physical environment. Indigenous knowledge empowers local communities and promotes sound management of local resources (Matikiti, 2007:226).The significance of indigenous knowledge systems in environmental management programmes is

¹⁸ The word *vadzimu* cannot be readily be translated into an English equivalent because it refers to the living dead. The living dead are persons who have departed earthly life but continue to influence events among their communities and as such, they are treated with respect and reverence. In English language, an ancestor is someone who has died but follows the chain of succession in the sense of a descendant. The term ancestor is philosophically narrow and cannot capture the philosophy of the Shona with respect to the dead.

neglected yet it is vital if local communities have to fully participate in environmental conservation (Rusinga and Maposa, 2010: 206).

The Shona possess ethical norms, principles and codes that govern their relationship with the physical environment. The bulk of Shona environmental ethics, as derived from proverbs, is conservation ethics that allows the Shona to take care of the natural environment basing on the virtues of *ubuntu*. The idea of Shona environmental ethics is that, taking care of the environment is an indirect way of consideration to fellow members of the community (who also use the environment) and it also involves taking care of future generations who are to use the same environment. Shona environmental ethics covers concepts of duties, rights, codes, care and respect, all in relation to the physical environment. Matikiti (2007:219) writes;

“Closeness to nature deepens the natural impulse for gregariousness and sense of community among the Karanga people. Community is both a society, as well as, a unity of the visible and invisible worlds; the world of the physically living on the one hand and the world of the ancestors on the other. By observing common rules of respect in an area the people develop a single identity.”

While Matikiti refers to the Karanga people, who are a sub-culture of the Shona, the observation he makes still applies to the Shona culture in general. Despite Matikiti’s usage of the problematic term ancestors, instead of the term *vadzimu* or the living dead, the point he makes is important because ethics is connected to the living dead, the living and the environment. In Shona environmental ethics, care is a key concept which sustains the present state of the physical environment. Damage of the physical environment is seen as disrespect to fellow human beings and to the *vadzimu*. Taking care of the environment is a sign of respect both to fellow human beings and the living dead. The Shona have respect for the physical environment and this has important implications for environmental ethics since this promotes an attitude of care.

Chemhuru (2014:81) argues that *ukama* (relatedness) provides the ethical anchorage for human social, spiritual and ecological togetherness. The significance of relatedness links human beings to the environment at large (Chemhuru, 2014:81). Being human (*kuva munhu*) cannot be realized without first realizing others or the community of others who in essence could encompass the environment at large (Chemhuru, 2014:84). This entails that the community is ethically prior to individuals and the communal basis of ethics also extends to non-human animals. It is part of being morally upright to take care of non-human animals and nature as a whole (Chemhuru, 2014:85). A complete and good human being is defined by the way one relates to other human beings, non-human animals and the environment. *Unhu* entails promoting well-being not only of oneself but that of other human beings and that of the environment (Chemhuru, 2014:85) legitimizing an African ontology-based environmental ethics is a viable perspective in ecosophy.

2.7 Shona Environmental Philosophy as shown in Selected Proverbs

While Shona proverbs may make reference to human or non-human animals, within the Shona experience, the interpretation of the proverbs goes beyond the images used by the proverbs to give a broader application. While Hamutyinei and Plannger may be credited for collection and classification of proverbs, the classification they give may be problematic in several respects. The authors appear to focus more on the anthropocentric interpretation of proverbs in the sense that the meanings of proverbs are given largely in the context of human nature and behaviour. This may give a false impression that Shona proverbs have no reference to environmental issues yet there is a flexibility in application that allows reference to environmental aspects. Hamutyinei

and Plangger (2013: xxi) acknowledge the limitation of their own classification as they write; “the broad content classification we have chosen could certainly be more detailed.” Viriri and Bhebhe argue against such classification insisting that life itself is unclassifiable into such categories. The point being made by Viriri and Bhebhe (2012: xxi) is that Shona proverbs are meant to apply to different aspects of life without necessarily following some form of categorization.

Three proverbs shall be explored to show implications on environmental philosophy. The three proverbs chosen are linked to the preservation of natural resources, conservation of natural resources and human relations with the natural environment within the Shona context.

2.7.1 Preservation of natural resources

Preservation, in the Shona context of environmental thinking, involves attempts to maintain, areas untouched by human influence in their present condition. The proverb *gombo rine chitsva ndiro rine kudya* (it is virgin land that provides more yields)¹⁹ (Hamutyinei and Plangger 2013:340) can be used to draw environmental implications. In this broader context, the proverb may be taken to mean that the natural state of the soil, forests and air are conducive and necessary for improved outputs. Virgin land is land that is covered by natural vegetation and has

¹⁹ While Hamutyinei and Plangger (2013:340) classify the above proverb under the general title of “unity,” there is a sense in which the sub-title may be appropriate and inappropriate for this discussion under different respects. In the context of Hamutyinei and Plangger’s anthropocentric interpretation, the point is that in order for virgin land to give abundant harvest, there is need for unity in tilling the land. This can be summarized in the statement, “the harder the work, the greater the reward.” However, it may be argued that the application of the proverb goes beyond the sense identified by the two authors in a much more richer and flexible way.

not been brought under cultivation. This type of land contains more humus, nitrogen, better soil texture, better compactness and better water holding capacity. Virgin land is rich in terms of humus content, water holding capacity, aeration and polarity resulting in higher crop yields compared to previously cultivated land. Conscious of this point, the Shona can apply the proverb to environmental preservation. Among the Shona, the principle of the natural state as the best scenario guides environmental preservation. This means that preservation efforts are aimed at achieving the natural state of the environment which is arguably the better scenario in comparison to cultivated land. The argument behind preservation is the pursuit of the ideal undisturbed land that is the most suitable for ecology. Preservation of land resources is important because it gives the land a natural state that promotes favourable environmental outputs.

The Shona have practices of preserving animals, tree species and water bodies. These practices are consistent with the proverb *gombo rine chitsva ndiro rine kudya* in the sense that preservation ensures that there is elimination of threat of extinction to animal and plant species. Ordinary people are not allowed to kill the *haka* (pangolin) that is considered an endangered species (Rusinga nad Maposa, 2010:205). The *haka* is under the protection of indigenous chiefs and it is a punishable offence under the chief's laws to kill the animal. Taboos are enforced to maintain the value of and respect for animals such as pythons and pangolins (Risiro *et al*, 2013:22). These taboos help to reinforce the need to preserve the environment as implied in the proverb *gombo rine chitsva ndiro rine kudya*. Animals are also protected from extinction through various totems, each clan has an animal which the clan would not kill and eat (Risiro *et al*, 2013:19). The net result is that within a given Shona clan, there is an animal species that is preserved and this contributes to animal preservation in general.

According to Risiro *et al* (2013:20) Bvuma mountain in Zaka district, a predominantly Shona district, is kept with its dense forest both for the preservation of the natural environment and for undertaking cultural ceremonies. Visiting, cutting down trees and hunting are prohibited in sacred forests (Chemhuru and Masaka, 2010:128). *Muchakata*, *muonde* and *mukamba* trees are dedicated to the living dead and they are preserved thereby helping to preserve these species as well. *Muzhanje*, *mutamba* and *mutohwe* trees are not used for firewood for the purpose of preservation (Chemhuru and Masaka, 2010:129). *Mutarara* (*gardenia globiflora*) is prohibited from construction usage. The *muhacha* tree is not cut down even in contemporary times because it is considered as sacred (Chemhuru and Masaka, 2010:129). Indigenous fruit trees like *muzhanje* (*uakapa kirkiana*), *mutamba* (*strychnos*), *mutohwe* (*azanza garkaena*) and *munhengeni* (*ximene*) are not used as sources of firewood to protect the tree species and ensure a constant supply of fruits (Duri and Mapara, 2007:105). *Mubvamaropa* (*pterocarpus angolensis*) and *muzimbani* (*lippie javanica*) are preserved for medicinal properties that treat wounds and coughs respectively (Duri and Mapara, 2007:105). Among the Shona, it is a taboo to cut down a *mukute* tree (*syzygium cordatum*). The tree grows on wetlands or along river banks. The reason is for the preservation of the tree and protection of water sources from drying up (Duri and Mapara, 2007:105).

With regard to preservation of water sources, springs and swamps are protected because they sustain the life of river systems (Chemhuru and Masaka, 2010:126). Barring agricultural activities in catchment areas and prohibiting streambank cultivation (Maposa and Mhaka, 2012:27) also help to preserve the life of rivers.

The above preservation strategies are important because they express the environmental philosophy that is contained in the proverb *gombo rine chitsva ndiro rine kudya* . The strategies are home-grown and they have survived the test of time (Mapira and Mazambara, 2013:90). The result is that the preservation efforts become reliable and trusted among the Shona communities in particular and the global environment in general.

2.7.2 Conservation of natural resources

The proverb, *rwizi rukuru rwukapwa, mombe dzinomwepi?* (if the big river dries up, where will cattle drink water from?) (Hamutyinei and Plannger 2013:281) can be used as a source of environmental philosophy among the Shona. Asking reflective questions on the situation that is obtained after the depletion of natural resources is a philosophical procedure. The question demands environmental reflection to address causes of environmental problems at different levels. The question allows individuals to imagine a scenario where the community is weak and vulnerable after the depletion of a key natural resource. The solution to such a scenario is beyond the powers of individuals. To avoid such a scenario, an appeal is made to the living dead so that the environment is blessed with adequate rain to reduce the dangers of environmental disasters.

The search for answers to the profound question gives rise to conservation measures. These measures relate to the three levels of being. The living dead are involved through rituals that are done to enforce taboos that conserve resources. The living *munhu* takes care of resources for the benefit of the present community and for the sake of those yet to be born. A consequentialist argument is behind the question that is asked. The notion of dependence identified by Hamutyinei and Plannger, can be extended and applied to the dependence of the Shona on the

environment. If the big river in the proverb is used as a symbol of the environment, the question in the proverb can be further extended to mean, if the environment as the source of air, food, warmth and water is destroyed, what will people depend on? The environment is an important aspect of human life that requires practical conservation measures in several ways.

The common miombo woodland species such as *Mnondo* (*Julbernardia globifora*), *Musasa* (*Brachystegia spiciformis*) and *Mupfuti* (*Brachystegia boehmii*) which are sources of firewood are used sparingly. Individuals are allowed to cut branches from selected trees without dropping down the entire tree to allow the tree to continue to survive and grow new branches (Rusinga and Maposa, 2010:205). The practice allows the trees to regain and this ensures a constant supply of firewood for present and future generations.

In the conservation of grassland ecosystem, cattle are often loaned to other areas for a number of reasons, one was which to avoid overstocking and overgrazing. By spreading livestock over a large area, range ecology was preserved. This system of loaning cattle is called *kuronzera* (Duri and Mapara, 2007:103). The grassland management strategy helps to keep ecological balance in grasslands. In addition to the above, culling is done to preserve grassland ecosystems.

In the management of river ecology most fishing nets were designed in a way that allowed small fish to escape leaving out the big ones (Duri and Mapara, 2007:107). The use of fish poison (*mutika*) was prohibited because it killed all types and sizes of fish in a wide area even extending many kilometers downstream (Duri and Mapara, 2007:107). These practices help Shona communities to maintain aquatic ecosystems.

2.7.3 Human relation with the environment

The proverb *simba rehove riri mumvura* (the strength of fish is in water)²⁰ (Hamutyinei and Plangger, 2013:437) can be used to defend ecological balance. The environmental application of the proverb is that the vital connection between water and fish can be compared to the link between human beings and the environment. If water is taken away from fish, the fish dies and similarly; if the environment is taken away from human beings, humanity does not survive. This shows relationality, dependence and interconnectedness. The relatedness with the environment *ukama* is an important dimension that gives status and respect to the environment. Water symbolizes the environment and fish represent communities that depend on the environment. The environment becomes a source of strength since it gives economic, cultural, social and religious benefits. The life of human beings depends on the air, water, wood and soil that are essential for human survival. Without the environment, human life is impossible since the environment is the source of air, water, food and warmth that are essential for survival.

The practical dimensions of the proverb *simba rehove riri mumvura*, is seen in Shona environmental practices that enhance ecological balance. The Shona have ways of keeping soil, water, forest and animal ecological balance. Zero tillage (*manje*) reduces soil erosion in cultivated areas (Risiro *et al*, 2013:33) *marozhi* (stone ridges) are used to reduce soil erosion in hilly slopes. The Ziwa terraces of Nyanga, a Shona community of Eastern Zimbabwe, are believed to have been built before the fifteenth century. The Shona people built the terraces in an effort to reduce loss of soil from slopes and preserve fertility. The practice is still applicable even

²⁰ Hamutyinei and Plangger classify the proverb under ‘miscellaneous’ which means that it may not fit in to the categories they identified.

in contemporary times (Duri and Mapara, 2007:103). The reduction of soil erosion ensures minimum disturbance of soil ecosystems.

Among the Shona, evidence of human relations with wild animals is seen through *mitupo* (totems). According to Mangena (2013:40) *mutupo* accords moral status and relations with the natural world. The *mutupo* (totem) principle focuses on fostering the primary relationships between animals and humans, animals and the deity, humans and humans, deity and humans, nature and humans, the dead and the living (Mangena 2013:40). The *mutupo* principle attempts to enumerate or approximate the ideal mode of life which assures a sustainable future for all existence. An analysis of the fundamental elements of the *mutupo* principle reveals that it is a principle which seeks to create a cosmology that takes the existence of non-human entities seriously (Mangena 2013:40). If one's totem is *nguruve* (pig), one cannot eat pig meat and this is meant not only to protect pig species from extinction through arbitrary killing for meat but also to show that pigs and human beings are related (Mangena 2013:40). For a person of the pig totem, eating pig meat will be more like eating oneself. By extension this means that all persons of the pig totem will accord moral status to pigs (Mangena 2013:40).

Rotational cultivation is a sustainable resource use because all its resources such as tree branches and ash are ploughed back to the soil (Duri and Mapara, 2007:102). Adequate time for up to three years is given for land to recover and vegetation to regenerate. The technique was used on sandy soils which are less productive. On basalt and alluvial soils, more time of up to six was taken before rotation was done. The use of artificial fertilizers is prohibited in wetlands to ensure that the soils in such areas do not dry up thereby preserving wetland ecology.

Inter-cropping was a technique in which grains, beans, pumpkins and root crops are grown together. The technique has the advantage of soil protection, improved soil structure, moisture retention, and suppression of weeds and pests (Duri and Mapara, 2007:103). The practice introduces a form of biological diversity that is found within natural vegetation. Agro-forestry refers to mixed cultivation of multi-purpose trees and plants in cultivated areas to improve productivity, kill pests, provide nutrients and prevent soil erosion (Duri and Mapara, 2007:103).

2.8 Objections and replies

Selected Shona environmental proverbs are considered unsuitable as a platform for environmental philosophy because the insights provided by Shona proverbs are based on small communities and their practical link to national conservation strategies are limited. It can be argued however, that the strategies for preservation and conservation of resources start at a local level. Shona environmental philosophy starts among Shona communities and it can be extended to other areas within Zimbabwe.

The second objection is that Shona environmental proverbs are based on wasteful mentality in the use of resources. Notions of shifting cultivation and abandonment of tracts of land embedded in one of the proverbs are connected to wasteful mentality in the use of resources. It can be argued that the context of shifting cultivation was suitable in the past because of small population densities and in the contemporary times, there is a tendency towards rotational cropping and rotational grazing to allow the soil to regain its status.

The third objection is that Shona environmental proverbs lack ideas of sustainable use of resources. Against this objection, it can be argued that the idea of sustainable resource use is evident in the sense that the Shona consider the environment as linked to three levels of human

beings, namely, the living beings, the living-dead and the yet to be born. If resources are used with the three levels of human beings in mind, it follows that the element of sustainable resource usage is present.

The fourth objection is that the use of Shona environmental proverbs as a foundation of environmental philosophy is a theoretical approach that is devoid of practical application. While it may be partly true that proverbs are a theoretical reconstruction of experience, it may be wholly untrue to characterize proverbs as merely theoretical because they are based on experience. In addition, to state that Shona proverbs lack practical application is false because the insights from the selected proverbs are used in environmental conservation, care and preservation of natural resources.

2.9 Significance of Shona Environmental Philosophy

While Shona environmental philosophy shares similarities with the broad African environmental philosophy, it can be argued that the content of Shona environmental philosophy is shaped by Shona people's experiences on and reflections about their physical environment. The savanna climate that characterises most locations of Shona communities, is marked by hot, wet summers and cool dry winters. The average annual rainfall of nearly 600mm per year, interrupted by dry spells and droughts in some cases, influences vegetation growth, the type of wild animals that survive under these conditions and the seasonal flow of rivers. The type of environmental philosophy that arises out of Shona communities would be different from what can be obtained the equatorial regions for example, where water conservation may not be a critical issue

The discussion of Shona environmental philosophy as shown in Shona proverbs reveals that there is a justification for the retention of indigenous Shona preservation and conservation practices in the context of Western technology that threatens the environment. Focusing on the African environmental philosophy at large, Bujo (1997:216) argues, “Western rationality can be revisited to relearn the symbolic language of nature. It is only when the technologically oriented world listens to the symbolic language, that it will become once more able to promote life instead of death.” When there is destruction of nature, indigenous culture closely linked to nature is also destroyed. Bujo (1997:216) quotes the following proverb from New Guinea, “the forest is our skin and if one removes the skin of the human being, the end result is death.” In Africa, forests are preserved because forests are where life originates and develop (Bujo, 1997:216). For Bujo, (1997:218), ecological scandals make it clear that the world and its high level of technology needs humanization. “The return to African indigenous culture calls for the liberation of life in all its manifold facets” (Bujo, 1997: 219) African communities should be aware of the dangers of technology transfer. “Only reconciliation and peaceful co-existence can guarantee peace for the active creation and transform the human person from being a ruler into a guardian of the cosmos.” (Bujo, 1997:220) Today humankind is looking for an ethic which makes the earth permanently habitable (Bujo, 1997:221).

While Shona environmental philosophy contained in proverbs could have been expressed before United Nations environmental conventions, it may be argued that Shona environmental philosophy contains elements that can be integrated with these conventions. The inclusion of metaphysical and physical well-being linked to an ethical dimension in environmental concerns gives a holistic approach to environmental philosophy. The advantage of the holistic

environmental approach is that it fosters a greater care of the environment compared to Western fragmentary approaches to environmental issues. The non-fragmentary perspective gives honour to the living dead who have preserved the environment in the past, demands environmental responsibility for present generations and ensures sustainable resource exploitation for future generations.

The reliance on Shona indigenous philosophy for environmental issues constitutes efforts in line with the Rio earth summit whereby, principle 22 of the Rio earth summit states:

“Indigenous people and their communities and other local communities have a vital role in environmental management and development because of their knowledge and traditional practices. States should recognize and duly support their identity, culture and interests and enable their effective participation in the achievement of sustainable development.”

The involvement of indigenous ecological knowledge to global environmental responsibility allows the Shona to participate in a way that respects their own knowledge. The approach is culturally sensitive and acceptable to Shona communities. Foreign approaches are not only difficult to comprehend, but they tend to be inconsistent with inherited environmental philosophy. Shona proverbs serve as a participatory approach to environmental responsibility by harnessing the indigenous knowledge of the communities through proverbs.

It can be argued that Shona environmental philosophy is compatible with the United Nations Convention on biological diversity due to its preservation and conservation efforts. Biological diversity means the variability among living organisms from all sources including, *inter alia*, terrestrial, marine and other aquatic ecosystems and the ecological complexes of which they are part: this include diversity within species, between species and of ecosystems (United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity, 1992:3). Biological resources includes genetic resources,

organisms or parts thereof, populations, or any other biotic component of ecosystems with actual or potential use or value for humanity (United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity, 1992:3). Article 8j of the *Convention on Biological Diversity* states

“Subject to its national legislation, respect, preserve and maintain knowledge, innovations and practices of indigenous and local communities embodying traditional lifestyles relevant for the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity and promote their wider application with the approval and involvement of the holders of such knowledge, innovations and practices and encourage the equitable sharing of the benefits arising from the utilization of such knowledge, innovations and practices” (United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity, 1992:6)

Shona environmental philosophy shows evidence of adapting to climate change at least at a local level because of its attempts to maintain hydrological cycles, forest resources and water bodies that help to reduce the impact of climate change on temperature and precipitation. Evidence to fight climatic change is seen using environmentally friendly methods of sustaining forests and water bodies²¹. The United Nations Convention on climate change promote the development and strengthening of indigenous capacities and capabilities to participate in international and intergovernmental efforts, programmes to do with climate change (Article 5 of the Convention on Climate Change). Shona environmental philosophy shows capacity to fight climate change because of its emphasis on environmental responsibility in several ways that have already been discussed.

Shona indigenous environmental philosophy is consistent with the indigenous rights to

“maintain, control, protect and develop their cultural heritage, traditional knowledge and traditional cultural expressions, as well as the manifestations of

²¹ Instead of joining the capitalist mentality that destroys the environment for economic gains Shona environmental philosophy fights climatic change through preserving, conserving and sustaining the environment.

their sciences, technologies and cultures, including human and genetic resources, seeds, medicines, knowledge of the properties of fauna and flora, oral traditions, literatures, designs, sports and traditional games and visual and performing arts. They also have the right to maintain, control, protect and develop their intellectual property over such cultural heritage, traditional knowledge, and traditional cultural expressions” (United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Article 31, 2007).

Article 6 of the *Convention on Wetlands of International Importance Especially as Waterfowl Habitat* ensures that those responsible at all levels for wetlands management shall be informed of, and take into consideration, recommendations of such Conferences concerning the conservation, management and wise use of wetlands and their flora and fauna (UNESCO, 1976:248) This convention has recommendations that are consistent with indigenous Shona environmental philosophical ideas on wetland conservation and preservation.

The Shona indigenous approach to the environment emphasizes a practical application of knowledge and skills. The epistemic basis to environmental issues trusts in inherited wisdom that links environmental quality to the quality of human life. The practical approach helps every member of the community to participate in environmental conservation and preservation. The practical approach helps members of the community to participate in part, in the global concern for environmental responsibility.

Shona environmental philosophy is connected to life. The connection to life is significant since the recognition of the life web between humans on one hand and forests, rivers, air and the soil on the other hand allows the Shona to respect the environment. The respect of the environment is an important virtue that can be used in other African countries for both the conservation and preservation of the environment.

Shona environmental philosophy contributes to global sustainability by virtue of experience in living sustainably on the land. The 1992 Earth Summit in Rio De Janeiro signed the legally binding convention on Biodiversity and emphasized the critical role of indigenous people and their knowledge for achieving sustainable environmental and resource management. Science and technology, taken on their own, cannot extricate the world from the current environmental crisis and indigenous ecological knowledge becomes a viable alternative approach that integrates with science yet it remains current, relevant and viable in indigenous communities. The indigenous approach overcomes the limits of scientific viewpoints to environmental aspects by inclusion of metaphysical dimensions to environmental philosophy.

Chemhuru (2014:87) argues that Shona perspectives bring alternatives to global ethical reflection in an enriching and informative manner for sustainable development. Concepts used in Shona environmental philosophy are understandable at local level and this provides a basis for participation in global environmental responsibility. Shona environmental philosophy provides a culturally relevant understanding of environmental protocols and this justifies the retention of Shona indigenous environmental practices even today. It also provides pathways for recognition of interdependence between people and nature. Shona environmental philosophy fosters conditions for creating relationships with NGOs that promote both indigenous culture and conventions. In order to protect indigenous ecological knowledge, the people themselves and their way of life must be protected. Implementation of protocols becomes user friendly and culturally adaptable.

2.10 Conclusion

The chapter has examined various conceptions of the environment and it has argued for an African conception of the environment which places emphasis on relationality, interconnectedness and interdependence where the human element is seen as part of the environment. The debate on the possibility of an African environmental philosophy has been explored and the research has defended an African environmental philosophy. The chapter has shown that *ubuntu* philosophy is the basis of African philosophy. An environmental philosophy based on *ubuntu* respects all aspects of the environment, recognizes the dependence of human beings on the environment, sees the land as sacred and affords responsibility for future generations by encouraging the preservation and conservation of resources. Three proverbs have been used to show how the Shona think about preservation of natural resources, conservation of natural resources and the interdependence between humanity and the natural world. The significance of Shona proverbs in the context of global environmental responsibility has been shown.

CHAPTER 3: SHONA PHILOSOPHY OF LAW

3.0 Introduction

This chapter defends the actuality of African philosophy of law in general and Shona philosophy of law in particular. While the debate on the possibility of African philosophy appears to be over, the debate on distinct branches of African philosophy is still persisting (Idowu, 2005:66). Commenting on the tendency of Western scholars to marginalize African jurisprudence²², Murungi (2004:519) writes:

“Construing the Africanness of African jurisprudence as marginal to jurisprudence or construing the Africanness of African philosophy as marginal to African philosophy is equally contestable. To see why this may be contestable one can imagine the absurdity of construing what it is to be human in a manner that marginalizes individual human beings. If one were to try to turn away from individual human beings and try to focus attention on human being as such, one would be focusing on nothing.”

Murungi’s approach is important for this study because African jurisprudence, cannot be conceived as marginal to jurisprudence in a pluriversal perspective. Jurisprudence is an integral component of philosophy of law and African philosophy of law may not be understood as a peripheral philosophy. African ideas and models of law, which derive from African societies rather than foreign cultures, are best suited for social control in African societies (Nonso, 2006:37). Mapaire (2011:151) argues that African law is a feasible means by which to advance

²² While there is a common ground between jurisprudence taken as the elucidation of legal concepts and normative theory from within philosophy of law, there is legal theory that is non-philosophical that jurisprudence considers. There is an intersection between the two but the two terms are not interchangeable. Legal theory is a much broader and encompassing term, encompassing the philosophy of law and jurisprudence as well as theorizing from a variety of other perspectives, including economics and political thought (Sulum, 211:421).

an Afrocentric approach to African integration in a globalizing world of hostile jurisprudential viewpoints. There is need to approach philosophy of law from a broad perspective that respects other cultures. Concerning the need for an open-ended approach, J.S. Mill (1947 [1859]:41) writes;

“The only way in which a human being can make some approach to knowing the whole of a subject is by hearing what can be said about it by persons of every variety of opinion and studying all modes in which it can be looked at by every character of mind. No wise man ever acquired his wisdom in any mode but this.”

In this citation, J.S. Mill is arguing for openness to other viewpoints in the process of constructing one’s own approach. Philosophy may contradict itself through marginalization of other views because such an approach is inconsistent to the acquisition of wisdom. In this regard, Friedrich (1963:7) observes that only by taking account of all the different kinds of experience can one give an image of law that is adequate to reality.

Firstly the chapter makes a conceptual analysis of both law in general and African law in particular. Secondly, it examines the debate on African philosophy of law. Thirdly, the work articulates an African conception of law that aims at social harmony, solidarity, peace and responsibility that are integral aspects of *ubuntu* philosophy. Fourthly, the research explores Shona philosophy of law that flows from Ubuntu philosophy and it aims at promoting the virtues of peace and harmony among the Shona. Shona philosophy of law is seen in the administration of justice at different levels of *matare* (indigenous Shona courts). Fifthly proverbs shall be used to show the metaphysical and social basis of law, the role of Shona law in promoting individual dignity and the application of Shona law in peace building. Sixthly, the research reflects on the significance of Shona philosophy of law.

3.1 Understanding law

Madhuku (2010:1) defines law as rules and regulations that govern human conduct or other societal relations and it must be enforceable. For Harris (2002:3) rules may give a common sense view of law but this approach fails to provide an adequate account of law because there are other system of rules apart from law. These systems of rules may be moral rules or religious rules. Harris states that while it may be immoral to tell lies, it may not be unlawful to do so. Law can be understood as a system of rules and guidelines that are enforced through social institutions to govern behaviour.

Curzon (1993: 219) defines law as

“the written or unwritten body of rules largely derived from custom and formal enactment which are recognized as binding among those persons who constitute a community or state, so that they shall be imposed upon and enforced among those persons as appropriate sanctions.”

Curzon’s understanding of law has important implications for this study because it appears to be based on pluriversality in three ways. First, Curzon recognizes the point that law can be written or unwritten and this broad conception accommodates the type of law that has been historically marginalized by Western conceptions of law. Prior to Curzon, Ibekwe (1975:297) had already noted that:

“European laws are written, because the art of writing and reading had long become part and parcel of their civilization. Regrettably enough, our own indigenous law is unwritten. It was handed down the ages from generation to generation. Like a creed, it seems to live in the minds of the people.”

Secondly, law can bind communities or states and this justifies the existence of law in cultural circumstances. Thirdly, law can be derived from custom or formal legislative body. The first

disjunct gives the basis of a culturally specific conception of law and this opens room for an analysis of an African conception of law as shown in the next section.

3.2 African Law

To Africans, law comprises all those rules of conduct which regulate the behaviour of individuals and communities, and which by maintaining the equilibrium of society are necessary for its continuance as a corporate whole (Driberg, 1934:231). This analysis shows that law is part and parcel of the community and it has practical significance.

For Driberg (1934:231),

“African law is positive and not negative. It does not say " Thou shalt not," but " Thou shalt." Law does not create offences, it does not make criminals; it directs how individuals and communities should behave towards each other. Its whole object is to maintain an equilibrium, and the penalties of African law are directed, not against specific infractions, but to the restoration of this equilibrium. There is no written code, but the law is an organic growth, inherent in the body politic and accepted just because it is organic and coherent. A crime is the disturbance of individual or communal equilibrium, and the law seeks to restore the pre-existing balance.”

Three issues can be drawn from Driberg’s observation. First, African law aims at corrective measures to both the individual and community without stressing much on conviction of offenders. Second, African law achieves justice by maintaining social balance. Third, African law is organic and coherent in the sense that it is lived and it is practical.

It appears theoretically impossible for a community member to commit an offence against a fellow-member which would lay him or her open to a private suit, it is obvious that there must be some machinery to protect the community from an habitual offender (Driberg, 1934:234). The principle of group responsibility makes this essential, as one who is constantly involving the community in costly extra-clan disputes is wasting the property of the community without

contributing an equivalent to its economic prosperity (Driberg, 1934:234). The offender in such a case, while under no liability to an individual of his group, is nevertheless making it impossible for his or her group to maintain its group status or equilibrium in relation to the other groups of the community he or she is jeopardizing the principles which ensure the stability of the society. The habitual offender is accordingly outlawed by his or her clan: he is publicly put out of status; he or she cannot claim the protection of the clan and the clan disowns all further responsibility for his or her actions. This sentence may be followed by the maximum penalty of execution, which is frequently the fate of the habitual offender; but whether this is so or not, the result is much the same, as without the protection of the clan all economic activities are closed to the individual and he will either die of starvation or by assassination, his murder being of no concern to anyone, now that he has no membership in a protective group. This treatment of the habitual offender emphasizes the cardinal principle of African behaviour that the individual has communal responsibilities and obligations, only by discharging which is he entitled to any of the benefits which membership of a society confers (Driberg, 1934:234).

Without prisons and a police force it is assumed that there can be no sanctions such as would give law the requisite validity (Driberg, 1934:237). It is at this point, I suspect, that we differ most widely. The penal sanctions are the least important of them all, chiefly because the law is positive and not negative, and because it is solely interested in maintaining the social equilibrium (Driberg, 1934:237). I shall try to sum up the sanctions which are universally valid in Africa as briefly as possible, only remarking that in certain areas, particularly in West Africa, secret societies tend to operate as a sanction for the observance of the law. Many of them, like the Oro and the Ekemeku, are police societies which act as guardians of public morals and punish

offenders. In them we find the nearest approach to our system of punitive justice (Driberg, 1934:237).

The law has the moral support, not only of the living members, but of all the members who have ever lived and died (Driberg, 1934:238). This reference to the departed, is in itself a very potent force in securing due regard for the law. It introduces a religious sanction, which is perhaps the most potent factor of all (Driberg, 1934:238). No compensation for an offence, no reparation, is complete without sacrifice. Every offence has to be legally compensated and ceremonially purged, and till both are done the offender and his community are in danger of spiritual retribution. It is this religious nexus which gives African law an authority sufficient to dispense with the mechanics of enforcement (Driberg, 1934:238)

It is the duty of every member of the community, owing to the fact that he is one of a collective responsibility, to report any breach of the public law, of which the chief should thereupon take cognizance (Driberg, 1934:241). As it may take some time for the processes of law to be put into action, there is an obvious danger that the culprit may suffer summary justice at the hands of the injured party; but provision is made for this by the establishment of sanctuaries, where an accused man may await in security the slow movements of the law. This indeed is probably the chief social function of sanctuary in African societies. The institution of private suits is not necessarily a simple matter and, as we have seen in some communities, recourse has to be made to indirect methods. The central authority may only be concerned with certain specified cases, the public causes, and it may be necessary for the aggrieved party in a private suit to commit one of these major crimes, in order that in the subsequent public inquiry into his conduct his private complaint may be indirectly investigated (Driberg, 1934:241).

Ayinla (2002:151) defines African law as “an instrument of maintaining social equilibrium with emphasis placed on distributive justice rather than formal justice.” For Ayinla (2002:151) law in Africa aims at maintaining peaceful, harmonious, inter-personal relations among members of the society as a whole. The object of the African system of law is to foster communal well being and harmonization of different interests likely to result in social conflict (Ayinla, 2002:151). The laws are accepted as binding upon various members of different communities (Ayinla, 2002:151). African law rests on collective responsibility and the conscience of individual members of the community (Ayinla, 2002:151). African law cannot be separated from the culture of African people in that it is in-built in the life of Africans since it permeates the totality of the facet of their life (Ayinla, 2002:151). The maintenance of equilibrium is the principle that underlie African conception of law (Ayinla, 2002:153). “Law comprises of all those rules of conduct which regulate the behaviour of individuals and communities and which by maintaining the equilibrium of society are necessary for its continuance as a corporate whole.” (Ayinla, 2002:153). The group or collective responsibility extends to criminal offence like killing of a fellow villager. In such a case, all the family members of the slain party demand compensation and not only the immediate relatives (Ayinla, 2002:155). Legal personality is interwoven in the sense that it presupposes collective responsibility and a kind of interdependence.

3.3 African Philosophy of Law Debate

According to Idowu (2006:35), the debate concerning African philosophy of law has four distinct positions. These varying positions have their corresponding justifications. In the first place, there are scholars who hold that there is nothing like African philosophy of law. The second position states that there may be African philosophy of law but no one is sure what it really consists of. The third position states that African philosophy of law is not very different from

Western philosophy of law. The fourth response posits that there is an African philosophy of law with a particular cultural context and content.

3.3.1 The Skeptical Argument

In the first place, there are proponents of the view that there exists no African philosophy of law. Holleman (1974: 12) also states that there is nothing like an African philosophy of law. Holleman's view is premised on the position that Africans lack a conceptual analysis of the notion of law. Further, Holleman (1974:12) insists that, even if Africans have indigenous systems of social control, they lack any trace of legal elements. The attack on the idea of African philosophy of law has been reduced to the idea that African rules of societal control and norms cannot be distinguished from rules of polite behaviour. The basis for this assertion and the denial of African philosophy of law can be explained in the light of three reasons: firstly the absence of a legislative system, with formal courts system and legal officials; secondly, the absence of a recognised system of sanctions; and thirdly, the presence of authoritarianism which is not subject to and controlled by law.

It can be argued that African philosophy of law has a particular history and context. The historical circumstances leading to the marginalization of African indigenous knowledge claims have already been handled in chapter 1. It can be argued that the attempts to marginalize the reality of African systems in general and African philosophy of law in particular has a peculiar history. But then it is sufficient to state, as a conceptual and intellectual response, that regardless of the state of a given society, Idowu (2005:76) notes that it is human and logical to expect that survival of this kind of society is a sufficient indicator of the existence of some form of enlightened thinking on the part of its members.

Bewaji (2002:1) argues that

“when we make a critical examination of the diversity of human beliefs in various parts of the world, it seems clear that even the simplest-looking belief system must be acknowledged to have developed from some form of critical examination of events, things, beliefs. Without such philosophical presuppositions and, indeed, expostulations, on the part of members of these societies, it is difficult to see how such cultures and societies could have survived.”

From Bewaji’s observation, it can be argued that the critical examination of events, things and beliefs forms the philosophy of a group of people. It becomes difficult for Africans to have continued to enjoy the progress they have even in the face of civilisation if they could not think and reflect on law.

3.3.2 The Ignorance Argument

Secondly, there are those who contend that there is something reminiscent of law that can be labelled African philosophy of law but the problem is that one cannot be sure of what the substance is or what it consists of. In this view, it is held that at best what Africans refer to as their philosophy of law or legal concepts are ingrained in customs thereby lacking in reflective significance. Hartland (1924: 5-6) rendered this point in ethnocentrically un-mistakable terms when he opined that “primitive law is in truth the totality of the customs of the tribe.” Scarcely anything eludes its grasp. “The savage lives more in public than we do; any deviation from the ordinary mode of conduct is noted, and is visited with the reprobation of one’s fellows” Hartland (1924:6). However, it can be argued that Hartland’s attempt to dismiss the reality of African philosophy of law commits the fallacy of appeal to ignorance. From the fact that one is ignorant of African philosophy of law, it does not necessarily follow that such a philosophy of law is non-existent.

3.3.3 The Non-Difference Argument

The third position on African philosophy of law consists of scholars who are of the view that African philosophy of law is not different from Western philosophy of law. The question on whether there exists an African philosophy of law becomes unnecessary. The purpose of the third position has been to interpret and apply the schools of thought in mainstream philosophy of law in the context of the African legal concepts. Okafor (1984:157), Taiwo (1985:197) and Nwakeze (1987:101) attempt to legitimize and justify African legal systems. They hold that African philosophy of law is consistent with the Western philosophy of law. The approach taken by the above scholars is that of picking Western concepts of law such as rule of law, justice, punishment, crime, penalty, responsibility and related concepts before validating them in the African context.

3.3.4 The Reality Argument

The fourth position is that of scholars who argue that African philosophy of law embodies a significant aspect of African life. African philosophy of law not only exists but also displays a basic reality that is authentic. The arguments on the existence and reality of African philosophy of law consist in an indirect form of attack on the denials of African philosophy of law. Elias (1956: 6) posits that except for the differences in social and cultural environment, law knows no differences in race or tribe as it exists primarily for the settlement of disputes, and, the maintenance of peace and order in all societies. Elias (1956: 33) writes;

“the two chief functions of law in any human society are the preservation of personal freedom and the protection of private property. African law, just as much as for instance English law, does aim at achieving both these desirable ends.”

In line with this position, Gluckman (1972: 173) writes that the denial of the African conception and system of laws is a great mistake stemming from a tradition imbued with enough ignorance about how the law works among Africans. In his words, “Africans always had some idea of natural justice, and a rule of law that bound their kings, even if they had not developed these indigenous conceptions in abstract terms.” While Gluckman’s position that Africans have the notion of natural justice is correct, the position that their indigenous conception of law has not been developed in abstract terms is false. Having established the reality of African philosophy of law, the work proceeds to examine the definition and content of African law.

3.5 African Philosophy of law

According to Ayinla (2002:147) African philosophy of law, is the pursuit of wisdom or knowledge of law as obtained in indigenous African societies. This approach has an advantage because law is related to the belief systems of Africans, it respects the community and it makes people responsible to fellow human beings. Furthermore, Ayinla (2002:148) argues that African philosophy of law is the elucidation of law from branches of African philosophy such as metaphysics, epistemology, ethics and logic. Metaphysics debates on the existence and nature of African law, epistemology focuses on the grounds of knowledge about African law; ethics examines the relevance of ethical principles of law while logic examines the reasoning, proof, thinking and inference used in law (Ayinla, 2002:148).

In Murungi’s view, a genuine understanding of African legal philosophy should include the historical context of African law. African legal philosophy is a victim of European conception of what is rational (Murungi, 2013:2). African legal thinking is trashed as superstitious, irrational and unscientific. Europeans have also associated rationality with civilization, this association

leads them to declare Africans uncivilized (Murungi, 2013:2). Under the delusion that Africa is lawless, Europe has taken up the mission of sending missionaries of law to Africa (Murungi, 2013:2). For Murungi (2013:2) the Europeans suffer from the illusion that what law means has already been universally settled and what remains is to have everyone recognize and implement it. This illusion is consistent with both enslavement and colonization of Africa. It provides justification for the inhuman treatment of Africa.

African legal philosophy is “a sense of law or domain of law in Africa, a domain where African has a say by being African” (Murungi, 2013:7). African legal philosophy “seeks to articulate and bring in Africanness about law” (Murungi, 2013:7). To think of African legal philosophy is to take the being of the African into account (Murungi, 2013:7). According to Murungi (2013:8) African legal philosophy is a branch of African philosophy. It sets aside other studies of African law which are non-philosophical. In Murungi’s view, African legal philosophy must bare an African conception of philosophy and it must necessarily challenge European dogmatism.

African legal philosophy is an intersection where branches of African philosophy meet (Murungi, 2013:9). Its integrity is preserved by the internal unity of philosophy (Murungi, 2013:9). It articulates indigenous African legal philosophy. It prepares for and reinforces a genuine philosophical dialogue between Africans and non-Africans (Murungi, 2013:13). The task of African legal philosophy is to find African thinking about law that divorces African thinking from dictatorial and paternalistic tendencies of Western philosophy (Murungi, 2013:13). It takes into consideration how to think in an African way (Murungi, 2013:13). Thinking in African way examines what Africa is and what an African is (Murungi, 2013:16).

“Authentic African legal philosophy is a philosophy that affirms and empowers the humanity of every African, a philosophy which the material expression of the

dignity of every African is recognized and affirmed. This is the landscape of African legal philosophy” (Murungi, 2013:20).

The above observation suggests that African legal philosophy must take an Afrocentric position for the restoration of African dignity. Genuine African legal philosophy is in part, the struggle to stem aside the destruction of the Africanness of the African (Murungi, 2013:24). The objective of African legal philosophy is to decolonize the African mind (Murungi, 2013:24). This decolonization addresses the thinking within African legal philosophy so that it becomes free of colonial mentality. It is a self-reflective exercise where the African reflects about how he or she thinks about the law. According to Murungi (2013:24), “we must not make the assumption that indigenous African legal sensibility is without fault or that it is entirely without merit.” This demands a critical assessment that sees both the strengths and weaknesses of indigenous African legal philosophy.

A call for the Africanness of African legal philosophy is a call to awaken Africans to the condition under which they live so that they can identify and remove whatever stands in their way to being members of the African community - a community where no one human being lives at the expense of another human being, and in which where no one human community lives at the expense of another human community (Murungi, 2013:24).

In Africa, there is a home for philosophy, a home not only for Africans but for the humanity of all human beings (Murungi, 2013:2). This points to the fact that African philosophy in general and African legal philosophy in particular, is accommodative of other viewpoints in the context of pluriversal thinking. When law is taken up in African

philosophy, it is about securing this home (Murungi, 2013:24). African legal philosophy is a human story being told in an African context (Murungi, 2013:27). For Murungi (2013:27) the context is “our autobiography and a webiography that does not consist of a collection of individuals that exists independent of one another but as members of an organic community.”

“Whenever we associate law with lawyers, judges, jurists, lawmakers, law professors, and law enforcement officers, we miss out on what is law. What is essential to law is what constitutes us as human beings, and what defines us as such. In such a view of law, none of us is a stranger to any one of us. Such a view of law is what is pursued under the umbrella African legal philosophy” (Murungi, 2013:27).

The point being made by Murungi is that the essential ingredient of African law is that law becomes part of life and it ceases to be abstract as shown in the *ubuntu* conception of law below.

3.6 African Philosophy of law and *Ubuntu*

The African view of law is not abstract as in the Western conception but it is a lived experience (Ramose, 2005:84). While the Western legal subject lives in or within the law, the African legal subject lives the law (Ramose, 2005:84). The former represents the law and the latter takes law as manifestation of thought. *Ubuntu* law is a combination of rules of behaviour that are contained in the flow of life (Ramose, 2005:84). *Ubuntu* legal philosophy must be understood on the basis of an onto-triadic structure where being is seen in terms of three interrelated dimensions, namely, the living, the living dead and the yet-to-be born (Ramose, 2005:88).

3.6.1 Metaphysics of *Ubuntu* law

According to Ramose (2005:84), *ubuntu* law has a metaphysical conception of being as an onto-triadic structure. This means *ubuntu* law involves three levels of being, namely, the living human

being, the living dead and those yet to be born. Recourse to protection by supernatural forces constitute the metaphysical basis of African law. The constant communication between the living and the living dead speaks of the rheomodic character of African law (Ramose, 2005:80) where rheomodic language is understood as a conscious endeavor to be at one with reality as a wholeness as opposed to fragmentation of reality that that result in fixations of the mind that lead to false images of reality (Ramose, 2005:88). Wholeness and oneness is made up of the triad of the living, the living dead and those yet to be born (Ramose, 2005:88). The underlying metaphysics of being as an onto-triadic structure means that *ubuntu* has got a transcendent dimension (Ramose, 2005:88). The law has to be communicated to the living dead (Ramose, 2005:88). The communication of the law to the living dead becomes the metaphysical basis of the authority of *ubuntu* law. This metaphysical structure ensures communication among the three levels of being. On the basis of this structure, justice determined by the supernatural forces is declared on their behalf by the living who are in authority. Orientation towards the supernatural forces is the abstract dimension of *ubuntu* law. Its quest for justice is not focused in the world of the supernatural forces. Instead, it is directed immediately towards the world of the living in the first place and, the yet-to-be-born in the second place. This determination by the supernatural forces is consistent with the metaphysics of *ubuntu* law. This consists in a triadic structure of the living, the living dead (the supernatural forces) and the yet-to-be-born.

3.6.2 Ethics of Ubuntu law

Ramose (2005:72) argues that *ubuntu* may be seen as the basis of African law. African law is about the philosophical family atmosphere prevailing among the indigenous peoples of Africa. It is also a body of legal rules applicable to a particular group of African people at a particular

place and time (Ramose, 2005:72). Justice in *ubuntu* philosophy entails the exchange and sharing of these forces of life (Ramose, 2005:85).

“The authority of law is derivative, law is dependent upon the prior active presence of *umuntu*. Without the living *ubuntu*, law cannot arise. The experience of the living *umuntu* leads to the idea that law is desirable. Accordingly, law is by no means a pre-established necessity. It is always a desideratum arising from concrete experience at a particular place and time” (Ramose, 2005:85).

Another feature of *ubuntu* law is that it is linked to morality. The flexibility of *ubuntu* law speaks to the idea that it is law without a center. This is because *ubuntu* philosophy holds that being is one continuous wholeness rather than a finite whole. On this reasoning, the legal subject cannot be the center of the law. This does not deny the importance of the legal subject in law. Law consists of rules of behaviour contained in the flow of life (Ramose, 2005:84). Justice harmony and peace are the aim of *ubuntu* law. The idea that life is a constant flow and flux means that it cannot be decided in advance that certain legal rules have an irreversible claim to exist permanently (Ramose, 2005:84). It is believed that if and only if the law enhances harmony in human relations, the living dead have given their approval to it (Ramose,2005:88). *Umuntu* must be the embodiment of *ubuntu* because the fundamental ethical, social and legal judgement of human dignity and conduct is based upon *ubuntu* (Ramose, 2005:88). *Ubuntu* is the principle that we act humanely and with respect towards others as a way of demanding the same from them (Ramose, 2005:89). This belief connects the metaphysical basis of law with the moral dimension of law thereby providing a coherent philosophy of *ubuntu*. Justice is determined by the supernatural forces. Their determination seeks to restore harmony and promote the maintenance of peace. Justice as the restoration of equilibrium is a central element of the *ubuntu* philosophy of law. The *ubuntu* understanding of

justice as the restoration of equilibrium means that law as a continually lived experience cannot reach a point of finality.

For M'baye (1974:147), prescription is unknown in African law. This means that “the African believes that time cannot change the truth” (M'baye 1974:147). Just as the truth must be taken into consideration each time it becomes known, so must no obstacle be placed in the way of the search for it and its discovery (M'baye 1974:147). It is for this reason that African judicial decisions are not authoritative. They must always be able to be called into question resulting in flexibility without a compromise to reasonableness. The broader understanding of African law enables the research to situate the Shona conception of law in the next section.

3.7 Law among the Shona

Gombe (1998:59) observes that for the Shona, *mutemo or murao* (law) is made up of a set of rules and regulations that have been handed over by *madziteteguru*²³ (the living dead) and administered by chiefs and their councilors for the good of the community. This shows the metaphysical foundation of law among the Shona since law is based on some spiritual entities that have influence on the living. This view is in line with Idowu (2004:53) who maintains that “a people’s system and conception of law is clearly connected and rooted in their history.” Law, among the Shona cannot escape Shona history and cultural context. For the Shona, law is part of life and the community observes laws for social harmony. According to Gombe (1998:58),

“A human being is not like an island that exists lonely but is found in the community that sets regulations and rules for the sake of peace, co-existence, solidarity, harmony and friendliness among the members of the community.”

²³ Madziteteguru is a synonym of vadzimu (the living dead) with emphasis on their advisory role.

The Shona indigenous court (*dare*) is responsible for cases that involve breaking of the law (Gombe, 1998:51). Breaking the law (*mhosva*) is taken seriously among the Shona and it affects not just the offender and the offended, but the whole community at large. Gombe (1998:51) identifies three types of courts in the Shona indigenous system of law. The first one is the family court (*dare repamusha*). This involves a private court session between members of a single family or between two families of the same extended family. The male family head or aunt presides over the case for the purpose of bringing justice to feuding parties without involving members of the wider public. The involvement of the male family head or aunt is deliberate since it is part of gender sensitivity among the Shona. If a case involves males and issues to be discussed may require the exclusion of females, the male family head presides over the case. Similarly, if a case involves female issues that may not be easily disclosed to males, the aunt presides over the case. For the Shona law is in the first place, is about a family atmosphere prevailing among the indigenous people. The purpose of law and hence the related court system is to build unity, togetherness and harmony which are clear traits of the family atmosphere. The second type is the local court (*dare remumana*) which presides over cases involving two or more different families. This court handles smaller crimes such as thefts, fights and adultery. For Gombe (1998:53), local courts are the foundation of law and ethics among the Shona. The aim of the local court is to instill social harmony among the disputing parties. In addition, the court also encourages the complainant to understand that wrongdoing is part and parcel of human nature to facilitate the forgiveness of the accused and promotion of social harmony. The third type of court is the higher court (*dare repamusoro*) which involves the settling of cases by chiefs and sub-chiefs. In this type of court, the chief presides over the case with the help of advisors who were chosen on the basis of intelligence, knowledge and eloquence of speech. In most cases, the

advisors are either philosophic sages or folk sages who demonstrate a vast amount of wisdom about Shona law. All the three types of courts are significant for this study because they show the various levels at which law is interpreted for the administration of justice.

3.8 The link between Shona proverbs and philosophy of law

The use of Shona proverbs makes language lively and vivid because proverbs make use of various mental images (Gombe, 1995:151). Proverbs make one think seriously about what is being said because they challenge one's reflective capacity to come up with the deeper meaning involved. Proverbs are used euphemistically which means that harsh and distasteful terms are substituted with mild and more morally acceptable language. In line with this thinking, Gombe (1995: 162) asserts, "it can be said that the majority of these expressions are used in a context where a speaker does not want to use blunt or offensive terms." Polite and less offensive terms are culturally acceptable in a gathering that may involve elders or even young people. In the context of the present research, the use of proverbs with reference to offences is less offensive. When a member of the community breaks the law, it is prudent to use less offensive proverbial language that does not hurt. Proverbs are considered as reflecting the Shona people's philosophy of law. Proverbs are a result of inductive generalizations that have been tried and tested with experience. As a result, proverbs can be used to capture different situations that have a direct or indirect bearing to law. Proverbs are significant in relation to the Shona conception of law because they can be used to resolve disputes in the court (Mandova and Wasosa, 2013:871). Proverbs are used in Shona courts because they interpret the law and they can be used to articulate a philosophy of law.

3.9 Shona Philosophy of law

The functionality of the Shona legal system finds concrete manifestation in the concept of *dare* which means a place for the administration of justice (Chimuka, 2001:28). For the Shona, the metaphysical that relate to the law are non-individualistic but they embrace a social dimension. This means that the law (*mutemo*) does not only affect the culprit or wrong doer but it also affects the community as a whole including the living dead. The metaphysical basis of law through the belief of *vadzimu* can disapprove or approve the law is useful in challenging positivist conceptions of the law that see the human being as the creator and assessor of the law. The appeal to a transcendent foundation of law facilitates the link between law and morality. The law must pass the moral test to gain approval by *vadzimu*. Members of the community shoulder moral responsibility upon themselves so that there is approval by *vadzimu*.

The Shona indigenous justice paradigm is based on a holistic philosophy and the world view of the Shona. The holistic philosophy connects everyone involved with a problem or conflict on a continuum, with everyone focused on the same center. The connection includes the living, the living dead (*vadzimu*) and those yet to be born. Shona law takes into consideration underlying issues that need to be resolved to attain peace and harmony for the individuals and the community. The Shona justice system starts with disclosure of problems related to breaking of the law, to discussion and resolution within the Shona indigenous courts (*matare*), to making amends and restoring relationships. The methods used are based on concepts of restorative and reparative justice and the principles of healing and living in harmony with all beings and with nature.

Among the Shona, restorative principles refer to the process for renewal of damaged personal and communal relationships since what affects individuals affects the community as well. The victim (*mukanganisirwi*) is the focal point, and the goal of Shona law is to heal and renew the victim's physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual well-being. Shona law also involves attempts to make the offender to regain dignity and trust, and to return to a healthy physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual state.

Within the Shona justice system, reparative principles refer to the process of making things right for oneself and those affected by the offender's behavior. To repair relationships, it is essential for the offender to make amends through apology, asking forgiveness, making restitution, and engaging in acts that demonstrate a sincerity to make things right. The mending of relations is very important among the Shona because the communal aspect allows for crime to be viewed as a natural human error that requires corrective intervention by families and elders or indigenous leaders. Offenders among the Shona remain an integral part of the community because of their important role in defining the boundaries of appropriate and inappropriate behavior and the consequences associated with misconduct.

The indigenous approach requires problems to be handled in their entirety. Conflicts are not fragmented, nor is the process compartmentalized into pre-adjudication, pretrial, adjudication, and sentencing stages. These hinder the resolution process for victims and offenders and delay the restoration of relationships and communal harmony. All contributing factors are examined to address the underlying issues that precipitated the problem, and everyone affected by a problem participates in the process. This distributive aspect generalizes individual misconduct or criminal behavior to the offender's wider kin group, hence there is a wider sharing of blame and guilt. The

offender, along with his or her kinsmen, are held accountable and responsible for correcting behavior and repairing relationships

3.10 Selected Shona Proverbs as Expressions of Shona Philosophy of law

The research shall select three Shona proverbs that have implications to Shona philosophy of law. These implications border around the metaphysical and social dimension of law which is based on the Shona understanding of human reality; the dignity of the individual person despite a strong bias on collective responsibility in law and the function of the law in peace building. These implications are connected in the sense that both the metaphysical basis of Shona law and the protection of individuals by the law are aimed at peace and harmony within the community.

3.10.1 The Metaphysical and Social dimension of law

The social dimension of law is demonstrated by the Shona proverb; *changu ndoga isadza mhosva ndinodana vamwe* (what belongs to me alone is sadza, but as for an offence, I invite others). For the Shona, social ontology is the basis of understanding crime. The law is understood as a social instrument of order and *mhosva* (breaking the law) has a social dimension. If Urayayi (not his real name) kills Sinjonjo (not her real name) the Shona maintain that it is not just Urayayi who is the offender but the whole nuclear and extended family of Urayayi is guilty of a serious offence. Similarly the entire extended family of Sinjonjo becomes the complainant. If Urayayi's family fails to compensate Sinjonjo's relatives for the loss of their daughter, it is believed that the revenge takes a metaphysical dimension in the form of *ngozi* (avenging spirit). In its administration of justice, the avenging spirit kills the family members of Urayayi before finalizing the kill with the real culprit. If the offender is a poor person who fails to compensate the offended family, his or her family members are supposed to help by contributing because if

they fail on this duty, the consequences of the revenge will be undesirable and destructive. In addition, court sessions involve family members of both the offender and the offended. For the Shona, a crime should not be understood in the Western, positivistic and individualistic sense but it should be seen as affecting the community at large. As a result, there are no individual egoistic boundaries that relate to crime but there are social grades that are tied to crime. This means that one offender can disturb the whole social web and as a result administration of justice equally shoulders on the community.

Since no single individual can claim expertise over weighty and intricate cases, the strategy of Shona indigenous court practices is to pull epistemic tools together (*kuita maonera pamwe*). This means that the chief and his judges help each other by putting their ideas together to judge the merits of a case. This practice is consistent with the sociality of knowledge among the Shona. Knowledge is shared communally and in the context of legal epistemology, there is a team work approach to knowledge. The communal nature of legal epistemology is meant to ensure that epistemic tools come from several individuals so as to overcome the dilemmas, complexities, paradoxes and contradictions that may be involved when dealing with court cases. Pulling epistemic tools together is democratization of knowledge and it is an effective strategy in the sense that it is internally self corrective and evaluative. The implication is a participatory, democratic and social approach to knowledge of law, there is emphasis on team work and team building and this makes it easy to democratize knowledge of law. The democratization of legal knowledge helps in the recognition of the limits of individual efforts.

In the Shona court sessions, plenty of time is given to the witnesses to say out their opinions. The perspectives of members of the public are also seriously taken into account to give greater

flexibility and a wider range of opinions. As a result, there is openness towards dialogue and truth in the Shona legal epistemology. The diversity of opinions is epistemically healthy because it allows the judges to compare the diverging opinions and come up with the most reasonable of opinions. Competing truth claims can be used to overcome false claims and as a result, it becomes relatively easy for the judges to decide over intricate cases.

Shona practices that give evidence to the proverb discussed above include the involvement of others people right from the time the law is broken. This involvement takes three levels. First, living individuals are consulted on the nature and extent of law breaking. These other people comprise of members of the nuclear family, members of the extended family and other members of the community at large. These people help in giving ideas, especially to the offended member of the community, that help to interpret the law and how the justice system may be carried out. The second level is the involvement of the living dead in the administration of justice. Just laws must be approved by *vadzimu* while unjust laws are believed to anger *vadzimu*²⁴. The third level is made up of those yet to be born. While this category has no direct bearing with the law, the law is used to clear offences that may result in avenging spirits *ngozi* that may affect future generations if justice is delayed.

3.10.2 Law as protecting the dignity of individuals

In the Shona ontological conceptual scheme, a human being is considered sacred and is always treated with respect (Gombe, 1998:132). The offender is seen as an otherwise good person who

²⁴ While it is a fact that laws are created by human beings, such laws are subject to moral evaluation by both the living and the living dead. For the good of the community, laws must pass the moral test and among the Shona, it is believed that breaking the law can result in punishment from *vadzimu* in the form of misfortunes that can be evidenced by ill-health, failure to make progress and *urombe* (poverty).

has made a mistake. As a result, an ontological distinction is made between the person who has committed an offence and the offence. Because of this essential distinction, there is a possibility of hating the offence and not the offender. The proverb, *dare harizvondi munhu, rinozvonda mhosva* (the court does not despise the person but the offence) serves to show the said ontological distinction. The Shona understanding of law allows this distinction. In its literal meaning, the first part of the proverb assumes this ontological distinction because a human being is seen as having intrinsic value owing to his or her possession of *mweya* (soul). This ontological value is based on *ubuntu* which articulates that the value of the human being comes from *Musikavanhu* (Supreme Being) and no individual can take away this value. At the same time the living human being is believed to be under the custody of his or her *vadzimu* and hence the value. Law is understood in the context of the ontological hierarchy that includes not just the living, but the living dead and *Musikavanhu* (Supreme Being).

Shona practices that show the above proverb is that the accused is respected before the law. This respect accords fair hearing to the accused so that the law can be used to determine the offence, if any. The protection of individual dignity also helps to handle false accusations. Even if the accused is found guilty, there is still respect for that person since the person still possesses the potential to do good. When one is found guilty, a team of elders explains the nature of the offence in the context of the law with the aim of rehabilitating the individual. For the sake of harmony within the society, the offender and the offended, are encouraged to restore relations and possibly forgive each other. In cases that involve a dispute arising out of the impregnation of one's daughter by a young man, there are high tensions that characterize the family of the daughter and the young man involved. However, the skillful application of the law may result in

the two rival families respecting each other as in-laws after some negotiated settlement arrives at a marriage plan in the process of solving the dispute.

3.10.3 Law as an instrument of peace

In the Shona legal philosophy, the peaceful settlement of court cases is always valued. Peace is seen as important because it facilitates social harmony it helps in the management of potential conflict at grassroots level. Even if the offended may be very angry to the extent of thinking of fighting the accused, the Shona encourage peaceful settlement of conflict. Emotional episodes may burst but the Shona encourage peaceful settlement of such cases. It is the moral duty of the chief and his or her panel of judges to ensure peaceful and fair trial of cases. This perspective is captured by the proverb, *mhosva haitongwi nekurwa* (an offence is not settled through fighting). Peaceful dialogue is therefore the proper way of dealing with crime among the Shona. Logically, fighting does not solve the problem but it worsens the conflict. For the Shona, it is ethically desirable to engage in peaceful dialogue so as to manage conflict. If conflict is not managed well, it may lead to security threats. This thinking derives from the philosophy of *ubuntu*.

Peaceful settlement gives room for forgiveness. The advantage of the system is that forgiveness helps in community social harmony by building trust in individuals. Forgiveness is based on the broad concept of *hunhu* (Chimuka, 2001:26) and the practice helps to restore social harmony. The communal nature of Shona life makes forgiveness important because grudges cannot be sustained where people live together. Outside this context, the proverbial implication has

capacity for application in situations of conflict and violence where truth telling is required so as to achieve fairness and justice in society. Law is subordinated to peace.

The administration of Shona indigenous law is seen in indigenous courts (*matare*). *Matare* are used as tools for dialogue between two disputing parties. Law is applied for a negotiated and peaceful settlement. Dialogue opens up light for the two parties using the law. Despite some harsh episodes that may occur especially among the accused, law among the Shona is used to instill discipline so that a peaceful settlement is reached. Negotiated settlements ensure that justice is achieved in a peaceful context. The law is seen as an instrument of peace within the community and the administration of peace must be consistent with justice.

3.11 Objections and Replies

The use of Shona proverbs to construct philosophy of law can be seen as anachronistic. According to Wiredu (1980:1) anything which is anachronistic “outlasts its suitability.” For Wiredu (1980:1) anachronism becomes the failure to perceive that things need to be discarded or modified as the case may require. If Shona proverbs are anachronistic because they need to be discarded, then the claim falls away because they are still being used in the language. Furthermore, if Shona legal proverbs are to be discarded because they require modification, then the objection again falls off because legal philosophy reconstructs their application to suit contemporary needs. Critical reflection on proverbs provides innovation and reconstructive application that provide new life to the Shona legal proverbs. It can be argued that some Shona proverbs provide insights for human dignity and peace in the context of the law within the community.

The second objection is that Shona proverbs that give rise to philosophy of law may not apply outside small communities and their influence on the nation may be trivial or insignificant. While it may be true that the selected Shona proverbs were coined within the context of small communities, it does not necessarily follow that they lack trans-cultural application. The ability of Shona proverbs to cross cultural settings implies their applicability even outside Shona communities. In addition the philosophy of *ubuntu* from which the proverbs are derived is trans-cultural. As a result the main thrust of the objection becomes untenable.

The third objection is that Shona legal philosophy is based on collective wisdom rather than concepts of trained jurists. The objection is based on a questionable and narrow understanding of legal training. The questionable view of legal training assumes that there is one culture that gives legal training and the assumption becomes narrow and unrealistic in the context of pluriversality. Legal philosophies must be seen as diverse and multiple in proportion with the number of cultures across the globe.

The fourth objection is that the use of selected Shona proverbs as the foundation of insights in legal philosophy is exclusivist within Zimbabwe because Shona language is only one among Chewa, English, Koisian, Nambian, Nda, Ndebele, Shangani, Sign language, Tonga, Tswana, Venda and Xhosa.²⁵ While the observation about the multiplicity of languages is true, the claim about exclusivism does not necessarily follow. Due to language contact and change, languages tend to influence each other and a cross-cultural comparison of proverbs show that insights from one language can still be expressed in another language.

²⁵ *The Constitution of Zimbabwe*, (2013:6).

3.12 The Significance of Shona indigenous approaches to philosophy of law

The use of Shona indigenous philosophy of law is consistent with and validates the following

United Nations international instruments:

“Indigenous peoples and individuals have the right to belong to an indigenous community or nation, in accordance with the traditions and customs of the community or nation concerned. No disadvantage of any kind may arise from the exercise of such a right.” *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, (Article 9).

The instrument gives a platform for the Shona communities to exercise their right to pursue traditions and customs. It is within these traditions that proverbs find place since this is part of the intellectual traditions of the Shona. The exercise of intellectual traditions gives room for critical reflection and reconstruction of the implication of Shona proverbs within the contemporary period.

“Indigenous peoples have the right to practice and revitalize their cultural traditions and customs. This includes the right to maintain, protect and develop the past, present and future manifestations of their cultures as well as the right to the restitution of cultural, intellectual, religious and spiritual property taken without their free and informed consent or in violation of their laws, traditions and customs” (*Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, Article 12).

To practice and revitalize cultural traditions entails the use of proverbs in philosophical thinking and this becomes part of ‘developing the past’. The word ‘develop’ is appropriate since it includes selecting what is useful and reconstructing it to meet the needs of contemporary situations. Proverbs cut across the cultural, intellectual, religious and spiritual property of the Shona people.

“Indigenous peoples have the right to own, develop, control and use the lands and territories, including the total environment of the lands, air, waters, coastal seas, sea-ice, flora and fauna and other resources which they have traditionally owned or otherwise occupied or used. This includes the right to the full recognition of their laws, traditions and customs, land-tenure systems and institutions for the development and management of resources, and the right to effective measures by States to prevent any interference with, alienation of or encroachment upon these rights” (*Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, Article 26).

The use of proverbs for philosophical thinking is consistent with the full recognition of indigenous laws. The full recognition of indigenous law among the Shona includes the philosophical reflection upon the justification, purpose and meaning of law and this culminates in a philosophy of law. The state should promote indigenous law and the philosophy behind to facilitate the exercise of this right.

The Constitution of Zimbabwe Section 174 (b) recognizes the existence of “customary law courts whose jurisdiction consist primarily in the application of customary law.”²⁶ Although the use of the term customary law is problematic, the point is that the use of indigenous law helps to preserve important cultural practices among the Shona.

The use of Shona indigenous approaches to law ensures not only consistency with the above international and domestic instruments but it also leads to a participatory approach to the administration of justice. Wide participation means ordinary people are involved in the application, procedure and outcome of the law. Ordinary people become part of a law process

²⁶ The term customary law is problematic in the following ways (1) it subordinates African law to foreign law (2) it displaces or marginalizes the African epistemological paradigm from which African law is derived (3) it negates the idea of legal pluralism in the spirit of pluriversality.

that allows them to own and understand law decisions and the punishment within an indigenous justice framework. As a result, law becomes lived and practical rather than abstract and theoretical. The participatory process is just as important as the result of the case, involvement of as many villagers as possible implies that excessive bias, corruption and miscarriage of justice are avoided. In the final analysis, offenders, village youth, future elders, go-betweens and adjudicators all learn about indigenous law by implementing it. The participatory framework makes it easier for elders and women to understand and speak within the law process thereby ensuring a wider participation within the community.

The Shona philosophy of law, as shown by the selected proverbs, provides an alternative conception of understanding justice and the law. This gives a broad framework that is achieved in the spirit of pluriversality. Anyone in the village has the right to join in when a case is being heard and there is a wide debate in the village over guilt, degree of seriousness of the offence, and the appropriate level of punishment and compensation.

Among the Shona, the objective of the law is to promote peace, solidarity and harmony within the community. Conflicts can be dealt with quickly to reconcile the two parties, restore harmony and social cohesion. A serious problem becomes a little problem since the community is placed before the law. Shona possess grassroots tools of peace building through reconciliation that involves dialogue and critical discourse. Dialogue is the basis of solving conflicts and avoiding feuds. In the African set up, tribal conflicts and ethnic wars paradoxically exist in a geographical zone which has the tools of humane and dignified conflict resolution efforts. The significance of Shona philosophy of law is that local thinking can be used to bring about regional and even

global peace. Peace building efforts are therefore part and parcel of Shona thought systems and this means that the Shona have the tools to contribute towards world peace

The advantage of the Shona law perspective is that it places potentiality of goodness on the shoulders of the offender in the administration of justice and it helps in the formulation of dignified and humane corrective measures. Globally this has promise to challenge the inhuman treatment of human beings in prisons of war or in ordinary prisons where there is a materialistic view of persons which is devoid of any immaterial entity. The spirituality imbedded in the Shona ontological framework transcends the limitations of materialistic conceptions of persons who have committed offences. Cross culturally, the said Shona understanding has potential to promote sound rehabilitation philosophy.

In the context of the offender, Shona philosophy of law focuses on the rehabilitation and reintegration of the offender into society. This makes the law victim friendly while discouraging offences at the same time. As a result, law among the Shona is lived, practical and meant to improve the moral standing of members of the society.

Shona legal metaphysics is significant as it stands as an alternative to the individualistic or atomistic approach to legality that is championed by Western legal systems. It serves both as a critique and a promise for social ontological harmony. It is a critique because it comes as a standpoint of a historically marginalized thought system that has been thrown away not on the basis of criticism and scrutiny but on the basis of fallacies and prejudice. It serves as a promise

because it has potential for balancing society through participatory conflict resolution and peace building.

3.13 Conclusion

The chapter has argued for the reality of an African conception of law that is based on the philosophy of *ubuntu*. The Shona philosophy of law draws from the broad African perspective that cherishes the philosophy of *ubuntu*. *Ubuntu* provides the basis of a coherent philosophy of law among the Shona. Shona philosophy of law is a reflection of legal elements and the chapter draws these elements from selected proverbs. These proverbs have been used to show the metaphysical basis of Shona legal philosophy, the role of the law in protecting the dignity of individuals and the function of the law in peace building within the community. The chapter also explores the significance of Shona philosophy of law in offering an alternative way of thinking about law.

CHAPTER 4: SHONA POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

3.0 Introduction

The chapter argues for an African political philosophy in the broad sense and Shona political philosophy in particular. Shona proverbs shall be used as the basis of an epistemological paradigm of a culturally rooted political philosophy. Several lines of justification can be used to support the need for an indigenous African political philosophy. Wamba-dia-Wamba (1992:67) argues that the content of democratization in Africa must be redefined in terms of a mode of politics in crisis towards a new mode of politics. The politics in crisis is imported Western politics and a new mode of politics lies in the African indigenous political paradigm. The African philosophical paradigm must refute the social epistemology of domination (Wamba-dia-Wamba, 1991:12). The refutation and dislodgement of the epistemology of domination will pave the ground for an indigenous philosophy that articulates and defends African values.

Ramose (2005:93) argues that indigenous conquered people of Africa must construct an epistemological paradigm of their own as a means of expressing their authenticity in order to attain true liberation. The position that Western-style democracy is the answer to political organization in contemporary Africa is flawed for two main reasons. It is metaphysically erroneous because it does not take seriously the principle of contingency of being by being subject to historical determinism (Ramose, 2005:96). Secondly, it is inauthentic expression of African political culture because it is an imposition. For these reasons, in Ramose's view, Western-style democracy fails to be emancipative and this justifies the search for African indigenous political insights.

Commenting on the potential contribution of indigenous political systems, to contemporary African political systems, Wamala, (2004:441) argues that, multiparty politics, although conceivably good for alternative policy advancement in individualistic societies, has tended to be very problematic in communalistic societies. The problem that Wamala sees is the adoption of a foreign epistemological paradigm whose ontological assumptions, epistemological framework and ethical values are inconsistent with the host culture. Salami (2006:69) maintains that democratic values in indigenous Yoruba social and political society established a participatory democracy as it employed different models of involving citizens in governance which allows for political representation of diverse interests. This useful approach cannot be neglected in contemporary African political philosophy because it involves consultation and involvement of communities in political decision making. In the same line of thinking, Chemhuru (2010:180) maintains that governance, peace and development, if ever they are to be achieved in Zimbabwe, it is imperative to consider the socio-political and economic order of traditional²⁷ Zimbabwean societies instead of relying on borrowed liberal democratic principles. Ciaffa (2008:127) argues that indigenous African societies displayed a humane ethical orientation and a communalist political philosophy that can be mobilized in the contemporary setting, serving as powerful

²⁷ Tradition is used in the positive sense to refer to indigenous thought systems in the sense of cultural products that were created, pursued, accepted, preserved and maintained to the present by successive generations (Gyekye, 1997:221). Another view of tradition represented by Hountondji (1996:48) sees tradition as the past that is misguided and ill-suited to address the challenges of contemporary Africa. Hountondji (1996:48) calls for a “clean break” with the past and suggests that African philosophy and culture lie before us, rather than behind us. The problem with this rejectionist stance is twofold. First, the moral and political spheres of traditional life have much to offer as Africans deal with the challenges of political modernization. Second, thinkers who view the African past with varying levels of disdain and skepticism are often guilty of overemphasizing the scientific aspect of modernization at the expense of the political aspect.

antidotes to political authoritarianism and the growing influence of Western individualism and consumerism. These ideas must be reclaimed and revitalized, not ignored.

The importance of the community is emphasized in the *African Charter*. Article 20 (2) states that colonized or oppressed people shall have the right to free themselves from the bonds of domination resorting to any means recognized by the international community. An African political philosophy is necessary to dislodge mental oppression and colonization because it articulates African ideals and approaches in debates (Heyns, 2006:15). Bujo (2009:391) argues that an abrupt break with African indigenous approaches, in favour of Western-style democracy, would be unwise because the Euro-American²⁸ models originate in their historical and cultural space and adopting them without questioning would be problematic.

This chapter is organized into five main sections. The first section examines various definitions of political philosophy and defends a conception of political philosophy that tries to approximate the ideal of pluriversality. The pluriversal definition is chosen because it provides a platform for African political philosophy in general and Shona political philosophy in particular. Other definitions of political philosophy shall be criticized for narrowness in the sense of excluding alternative views of thinking about political philosophy. The second section highlights African political models that currently obtain in various countries. These models help to show the extent to which indigenous political ideas are included or marginalized in state governance. It is important to note that chapter 15 of the 2013 *Constitution of Zimbabwe*, which is now in use, officially recognizes indigenous political roles from chiefs and this makes the study of Shona

²⁸ Euro-American refers to the Americans with European ancestry and this excludes Afro-Americans and native Americans.

political philosophy relevant and appropriate. The third part examines the applicability of *ubuntu* philosophy to political thinking in Africa. It is argued that *ubuntu* is important for political thinking because it is a source of friendliness, solidarity, togetherness, oneness, sameness and groupness that give identity and common ground for an ethically justifiable political philosophy. *Ubuntu* provides political philosophy with an epistemology that has been tested in the collective wisdom of African culture. The fourth section looks at how Shona political philosophy has been organized in the past. This organization exhibits metaphysical assumptions of *ubuntu* because it credits *vadzimu* with political vision and goals. The living, represented by the chief, are held together by the chief in a family atmosphere to achieve peace and harmony within the society. In section five, Shona proverbs are used to provide elements of Shona political philosophy as a means of expressing authenticity. These proverbs are used to provide alternative thinking that can be used to dislodge Western political paradigms.

4.1 Understanding Political Philosophy

Strauss (1959:12) defines political philosophy as, “the conscious, coherent and relentless effort to replace opinions about the political fundamentals with knowledge about them.” Furthermore, Strauss suggests that political philosophy is the attempt “to know the nature of political things and the right, or the good, political order” (1959: 12). According to Miller (1998:1) political philosophy can be defined as philosophical reflection on how best to arrange collective life - government institutions and social practices, such as economic system and the pattern of family life. Political philosophers aim at to establish basic principles that will justify a particular form of state. This involves analysis and interpretation of ideas like justice, authority and democracy and then applying them in a critical way to the social and political institutions that currently exist

(Miller, 1998:1). Both Strauss and Miller's definitions, while they may pick essential attributes of political philosophy, appear to be narrow since they fail to accommodate views of marginalized political philosophy. Khan (2001: 215), writing in an Islamic context, argues that political philosophy must be a critical enterprise. Political philosophy must articulate a critique of imperialism, Westernization and the de-Islamization of society. In the context of this research, political philosophy must be critical of the West for the marginalization and sidelining of indigenous political systems of thought without adequate justification.

Leca (2010:525) construes political philosophy in the following manner:

“Political philosophy is that area of philosophy dealing with politics and government, that unstable mix of war and *foedus*, conflictual division and authoritative union. As ‘philosophy’ it is part of the *vita contemplativa*, which is pure thinking; as ‘political’ it has always something to do with *vita activa*, that is action and praxis in a world that exists with its own rules and language games before any philosophical attempt to make that world the embodiment of a theory as Plato did. Philosophy, like science, is about truth whereas politics is about power or, more accurately, ‘the constrained use of social power.’ This formulation reintroduces truth into the possible constraints alongside rhetoric, persuasion, compromise and negotiation.”

The point being made by Leca is that political philosophy, as a discipline, reflects upon empirical issues of governance which may not be necessarily systematic and neat and this makes political philosophy rely upon political science for its data. However, Leca's definition appears circular since it brings back the word ‘politics’ which is supposed to be clarified.

Tully (2002:534-535) identifies six ways in which political philosophy is critical. First, it starts from and grants a certain primacy to practice. It is a form of philosophical reflection on practices of governance in the present that are experienced as oppressive in some way and are called into

question by those subject to them (Tully, 2002:534). Second, the aim is not to develop a normative theory as the solution to the problems of this way of being governed, such as a theory of justice, equality, or democracy, but to disclose the conditions of possibility of this historically singular set of practices of governance and of the range of characteristic problems and solutions to which it gives rise (Tully, 2002:534). Third, this practical and critical objective is achieved in two steps. The first is a critical survey of the languages and practices in which the struggles arise, and various theoretical solutions are proposed and implemented as reforms (Tully, 2002:534).

The second step broadens this initial critique by using a history or genealogy of the formation of these specific languages and practices as an object of comparison and contrast (Tully, 2002:534). Fourth, the approach seeks to establish an ongoing mutual relation with the concrete struggles, negotiations, and implementations of citizens who experiment with modifying the practices of governance on the ground (Tully, 2002:535). Fifth, these philosophical investigations thus stand in a reciprocal relation to the present, as a kind of permanent critique of the relations of meaning, power, and subjectivity in which we think and act politically and the practices of freedom of thought and action by which we try to test and improve them (Tully, 2002:535). Sixth, it applies the critical methods beyond and against its Eurocentrism by testing and going beyond limits on the basis of continuous critical dialogue with a contrasting metaphysical thinking oriented to discovering and overcoming limits. (Tully, 2002:535). The last point of critical activity is important for this study because it gives room for alternative and pluriversal perspectives in thinking about political philosophy.

4.2 Political Models in Africa

The debate on whether African indigenous political philosophy must be given priority gives dilemmas to post-colonial African governments resulting in different forms of indigenous²⁹ political institutions. The models serve as an empirical justification of the extent to which indigenous political systems have been adopted in different African countries. The differences show the extent to which Western models of governance have influenced African states. The dualisation of indigenous systems of governance and foreign models has led to tension and controversy both at the level of policy and administratively. Political models are a source of administrative dilemmas for post-colonial African states since the decision to maintain indigenous forms of government or abolish them altogether is problematic. These institutions can exist side by side with the state or they can exist on their own. Hinz (2008:61) identifies five models that show the interplay between indigenous political governance and Western model governance. Hinz (2008:61-63) calls these models strong modern monism, unregulated dualism, regulated dualism, weak modern monism and strong modern monism. Although Hinz uses problematic terms such as tradition and modernity³⁰, these models shall be adopted for the sake

²⁹ According to Dei (2002:12) indigenous past reflects the history, customs, cultural practices, ideas and values handed down from one generation to the next. It is this past that constitutes the group's cultural identity. An important question is how do we define the 'real past' if we accept that culture is not a "passively inherited legacy", and also, that cultures and traditions are constructed in particular social and political contexts? (Linnekin 1992: 249-250). Recognition of situational, contextual, historical and political embeddedness of culture should lead us to the understanding that the indigenous is not an undifferentiated category. It is a term that is contested and articulated in multiple ways, none of which implies that we cannot speak of the 'indigenous'.

³⁰ Gyekye (1997: 233), argues that the key to addressing contemporary political problems lies in reclaiming and revitalizing indigenous systems that have been degraded and suppressed in the wake of colonialism. Colonialism violently disrupted African cultural ideals and imposed, with varying degrees of success, European forms of thought and social organization upon colonized peoples. Having achieved political independence, postcolonial Africans must now pursue a more decisive liberation, a "decolonization" of African minds and societies.

of showing the interplay between indigenous political structures and Western style political structures before giving a critique of these models.

4.2.1 Strong Modern Monism

In the model of strong modern monism, African indigenous political structures which Hinz (2008:62) calls traditional structures are abolished from the formal government structures. Where the model of strong modern monism is adopted, the society may be familiar with indigenous political leaders despite the fact that the indigenous leaders will be politically powerless. From the political viewpoint however, they would be at no other level than other stakeholders and opinion leaders in the society (Hinz, 2008:62). Indigenous leaders would not form part of the overall governmental structure of the society (Hinz, 2008:62). The reason for the use of strong modern monism becomes clear because there is a heavy bias towards Western style model of governance which marginalizes the indigenous political structures to the level of mere opinion leaders.

4.2.2 The model of unregulated dualism

In the model of unregulated dualism, the state tolerates indigenous political structures without formally confirming or recognizing their existence, performance and acceptance (Hinz, 2008:62). Western style of governance dominates but indigenous political structures are allowed to make their own political decisions which the state allows to bind.

4.2.3 The model of regulated (weak or strong) dualism

The model of regulated dualism involves the state confirming indigenous political governance taking its own place apart from the authority structures of state government. In other words, the overall political system would be a dual, or better, plural system with the state-run system on the one side and a plurality of indigenous political systems on the other. Dual or plural systems are systems in which indigenous political governance is officially recognized. Whether a given dualistic situation will be called *weak* or *strong*, will depend on the degree of autonomy the state accepts to grant to those semi-autonomous social fields (Hinz, 2008:63). Indigenous political governance is given room to exist semi-autonomously³¹.

4.2.4 The model of weak modern monism

The state takes note of the existence of indigenous political governance but does not acknowledge its existence in the model of weak modern monism by giving it a semi-autonomous status as in model 3 above. Instead, the state provides for a set of rules that integrate indigenous authority into the overall state system (Hinz, 2008:63). Indigenous leaders could become civil servants and thus be fully responsible to the state as any other civil servant. They would be entitled to perform official functions not because of their indigenous legitimacy, but because of the legitimacy of the state.

³¹ Zimbabwe is an example of a country where indigenous leaders are officially recognized. Sections 280-287 of the new Constitution of Zimbabwe recognise the existence, duties and roles of chiefs in political governance.

4.2.5 The model of (strong) traditional monism

In the model of traditional monism, African indigenous political characteristics will prevail at the level of the state. The government of such a state would have the form of indigenous authority. Swaziland is the only African example that comes close to model 5. In the model, political authority follows the path that has been passed on from past generations.

4.2.6 Critique of African political Models

The strongest recognition of the importance of the African indigenous system of government lies in the model of “strong traditional monism.” Although the inclusion of the term traditional is problematic in the sense that it gives a conservative and backward implication, the model shows the greatest extent of indigenous political autonomy. The subordination of the indigenous political system to the state is not only a continuation of colonial mentality but also an expression of skepticism over the significance of the indigenous institution of governance. The skepticism is based on the questionable assumption that the West has a superior system of governance. The assumption is questionable because it is based on prejudice rather than fact. Humane elements of peace, harmony, solidarity and oneness provide evidence of community oriented political goals within the African indigenous political system. The trivialization or the complete abandonment of the indigenous political system is culturally unjustifiable because it allows the dominance of foreign models in political affairs. The indigenous political model is healthy to any African state because it provides checks and balances to the adopted foreign models. While it can be argued that it may not be possible to go back to the past, the humane elements that are present in the indigenous political systems may not be overthrown as well.

Sogolo (1993:185) argues that, reflective thought that is associated with philosophy is evident in African indigenous culture. In the context of this study, the reflective capacity of the African past is seen in proverbs across African cultures in general and in the Shona culture in particular. The false claim that the African past was deficient in the ability to reflect critically can be ignored as “false impression of human imagination” (Sogolo, 1993:185). Claims based on observations that deny critical reflection in the African indigenous past are “not factual and if they are, the interpretations given are incorrect” (Sogolo, 1993:185). If the claims are based on falsity and inaccuracy, then they are unreliable in constructing the foundation of African political thought. According to Sogolo (1993:185), most of the work produced by African thinkers is intended as revivals of indigenous social forms. In searching for an African political framework, Sogolo (1993:186) observes that colonialism is unquestionably regarded as one historical fact that had the greatest effect on African political institutions as well as intellectual orientations towards political organizations. African thinkers have to search for political ideas that go beyond mere political and economic freedom from colonizers to address questions of conflicts among colonized groups themselves (Sogolo, 1993:186). The necessity for an African political philosophy is seen in the fact that Africa is still caught between the conflicting ideologies of the so-called politically developed nations of the world. Ideologies from both the West and East are “incongruent with the social structure of indigenous Africa” (Sogolo, 1993:186). The incongruency gives rise to the need for “an African political framework as a basis for determining the social and political destiny of its people” (Sogolo, 1993:186). In searching for a viable political framework for Africa, it is important to take into consideration the ideals of freedom, democracy and justice that are part of indigenous social structures (Sogolo, 1993:192).

4.3 Why an African political philosophy?

An African political philosophy is necessary since it gives a basis of critiquing Western political philosophy models that have been imposed by colonialism on the conquered people of Africa. This is done by challenging assumptions about democratic principles and governance. An African political philosophy can be used as a platform for evaluating arguments advanced by the West on African political philosophy by refuting false premises and challenging unwarranted conclusions about African indigenous political culture. This kind of criticism opens space for an alternative indigenous African political philosophy epistemological paradigm that is understandable to African communities. The epistemological paradigm becomes a source of insightful aspects that provide concepts and principles for humane political governance in contemporary Africa. In the next section arguments that justify the need for an African indigenous political philosophy shall be explored.

4.4 The African political philosophy debate

Wingo (2003:450) sees African states as existing in the middle of two forces. The first force can be traced to African indigenous political culture as carry-overs from the pre-colonial past (Wingo, 2003:450). The second force comes from the oppressive colonial regimes and imposition of the foreign version of democracy (Wingo, 2003:450). In most African states there is a myriad of indigenous systems of government with superimposed foreign structures. Faced with this state, some African political theorists take a fundamentalist stand: either a total return to the African past or a total unmitigated acceptance of Western political arrangements (Wingo, 2003:450). Such a view commits a fallacy of false dichotomy since there is possibility of a third alternative that integrates elements of African indigenous political thought with elements of Western political ideas. Neither of these approaches is viable and it shall be argued later in the

chapter that innovative reconstruction of African indigenous philosophy is the way forward. This innovative reconstruction takes place within the context of contemporary African political life

Makumba (2007:128), argues that, it is important for any society who wants to proceed meaningfully in politics to, first of all, take stock of its own identity by discovering its values which are the lifeblood for any human community. The values are normally expressed in beliefs and thinking about the human person, community, authority and the world (Makumba, 2007:129). It is only when these values are identified that supplementary (foreign) values can be incorporated into the creation of a solid political structure (Makumba, 2007:129). The opposite is reckless; one cannot make foreign values the basis of one's political doctrine, only to incorporate in them worthy homegrown values as supplement (Makumba, 2007:129). It is better to begin with what is proper to the person and community and then allowing for the possibilities to be enriched from outside (Makumba, 2007:129). The individual is never defined in isolation but in relationship to the other individuals within the community (Makumba, 2007:129). Despite the communitarian sense of African communities, individual talents and contributions are recognized (Makumba, 2007:130).

4.4.1 Argument 1: Wamba dia Wiamba's critique of multi-party democracy

Wamba-dia-Wamba (1992:29) sees the concept of democracy as problematic in the sense that democracy is taken as fashionable yet the concept of multi-partyism leads to authoritarian regimes rather than social and political emancipation of the people. This observation opens room for a critical examination of the idea of democracy, democracy must not be taken for granted but it must be brought under scrutiny. There must be a shift from the politics in crisis to a new mode of politics (Wamba-dia-Wamba, 1992:29). The politics in crisis is democracy because it has

failed to bring emancipation to African states. Proposals for political change in Africa remain imprisoned in state centered conception of politics. Wamba-dia-Wamba argues for the decentering of politics from the state to the masses. Society must have autonomy as a way of limiting state powers. Democracy must be about the people's treatment of differences among themselves rather than democracy as a form of state. The parliamentary mode of democracy subordinates political parties under state consensus. Political parties become state organizations competing for the distribution of positions rather than the people's reconstruction of the state (Wamba-dia-Wamba, 1992:30). According to Wamba-dia-Wamba, the competition for state positions reduces politics to a "game of numbers" whereby more votes become the basis for legality and legitimacy (Wamba-dia-Wamba, 1992:30). This mode of politics is not about civil liberties but it destroys freedom. The multi-party mode of politics is characterized by state-centredness, oppressiveness and a tendency to freeze creativity and imagination (Wamba-dia-Wamba, 1992:31). People outside of a party do not exist politically.

Wamba-dia-Wamba (1992:32) warns that in Africa, we must move away from the following tendencies: Firstly, nation building from above which is rooted in colonial legacy and insists on political unanimity seen as the basis for nation building (Wamba-dia-Wamba, 1992:32). The process is seen as blocking people's creativity and mass enthusiasm. Wamba-dia-Wamba gives an example in which citizens of one state may be required to treat relatives from a neighboring country as refugees or enemies (Wamba-dia-Wamba, 1992:32). Secondly, Wamba-dia-Wamba (1992:32) warns against developmentalism. For Wamba-dia-Wamba (1992:32), developmentalism is the tendency to transfer economic, cultural, political and social models arrived at through outside controlled process of decision making. Authoritarian cultural imposition is the guiding principle. Thirdly, Wamba-dia-Wamba argues that Africans must

challenge traditions invented or imagined by colonialists while claimed to be African. These traditions are used to justify and enforce the post-colonial state which must be de-imperialised (Wamba-dia-Wamba, 1992:32). Fourthly, Wamba-dia-Wamba (1992:32) argues that we must move away from the process of moving away from traditional society and internalizing the colonial state.

Wamba-dia-Wamba (1992:33) argues that we must democratize the knowledge process which is now completely dominated by the outside. In Wamba-dia-Wamba's view, we must have control over our cultural creations, de-marginalise the masses, unblock their creativity and allow them to be the centre of history making (Wamba-dia-Wamba, 1992:33). The multi-party system has failed to induce self-emancipation of the people and has tended to keep people in poverty, misery and ignorance. People must have political consciousness that takes the form of state antagonism. Revolutionary capacity must not be within the powers of the state but the masses (Wamba-dia-Wamba, 1992:34). Internalization of the state by the people and state orientation in handling political differences among the people provokes self-censorship and blocks political consciousness (Wamba-dia-Wamba, 1992:34).

Wamba-dia-Wamba (1992:34) recommends the indigenous way of political thinking where “every speaking person of the community is called upon to discuss the affairs of the community.” At national level, this can be reconstructed into national conferences where limits are given to the authoritarian state (Wamba-dia-Wamba, 1992:35). The indigenous way of thinking accords thinking to the people, “In Africa too, people think and this is the sole material basis of thought” (Wamba-dia-Wamba, 1992:36). Authoritarian thinking assumes people to be unthinking, silences them and forces them to comply (Wamba-dia-Wamba, 1992:36). Traditions that acknowledge the capacity of people to think must be reactivated and extended (Wamba-dia-Wamba, 1992:36). Wamba-dia-Wamba’s argument is important for this study because it challenges Western democracy models that have external control and it argues for community participation and democratisation of political knowledge. This can be achieved by a critical and innovative study of indigenous insights as found in African proverbs in general and Shona proverbs in particular.

4.4.2 Argument 2: Revisiting political culture and democratization in Africa

No political culture, no matter how high or low, is meaningful and civilized when it does not put at its very foundation the well-being of its people (Omotola, 2008:60). This implies that the political culture of democracy must be rooted in the existential circumstances of the African people. Democracy becomes irrelevant if it disempowers the people, the very object of culture and democratization (Omotola, 2008:60). Democracy becomes inconsistent with its intended objectives. According to Omotola (2008:60), “a major problem that confronts African scholarship and policy makers is basically how to reclaim the concepts of political culture and democratization in a way that captures African realities.” This makes democracy culturally and

contextually relevant. This seems the most viable option if the democratization process is to be meaningful in terms of being people-driven and development-oriented. A viable path to this is to recapture the historicity of African societies, which helps to lay bare how the structure of power politics in the international system has continuously crippled the emergence of a democratic developmental state in the continent (Omotola, 2008:60). This historicity can be captured through a critical examination of the African indigenous political culture with the aim of taking useful elements in the political development of Africa.

4.4.3 Argument 3: African political authenticity and liberation

According to Ramose (2009b:413), the indigenous conquered people of Africa must construct an epistemological paradigm of their own as a means of expressing their authenticity to attain true liberation. This can be done by picking up useful elements from the African past. Tradition must function as a source from which to extract elements that will help in the construction of an authentic and emancipative epistemological paradigm relevant to the conditions of Africa at this historical moment (Ramose, 2009b:414). What is authentically African springs from African political culture and gives an alternative way of thinking about politics.

Ramose identifies four options on how the indigenous epistemological paradigm may be accommodated vis-à-vis the foreign colonial paradigm. The first option consists in overthrowing the indigenous social organization (Ramose, 2009b:416). However, Ramose quickly warns that it would be imprudent and philosophically unjustified to reject African tradition completely and replace it with an alien culture of the European conqueror (Ramose, 2009b:416). African tradition would remain as a source of paradigmatic reconstruction (Ramose, 2009b:417). It would not make logical sense to argue for the retrieval and preservation of African tradition if indeed there were nothing at all to retrieve or preserve (Ramose, 2009b:417). If there is

something to retrieve and preserve, it is both logically sound and empirically justified to talk about African tradition (Ramose, 2009b:417).

The second option consists in abandonment of the European pattern but the problem is that the alien European culture has become an intrinsic part of contemporary African lifestyles (Ramose, 2009b:417). The consequence is that the alien culture cannot be overthrown altogether (Ramose, 2009b:417). Ramose (2009b:417) suggests the way forward as follows, “it is therefore, an imperative of practical realism to situate the alien culture of the European conqueror in fundamental dialogue with African tradition.” The aim of this dialogue would be to determine if the radically opposed epistemological paradigms might be reconciled (Ramose, 2009b:417). If reconciliation is problematic and elusive, then voluntary peaceful co-existence between the two should be expelled (Ramose, 2009b:417).

The remaining options, reconciliation and coexistence, are not mutually exclusive and might be pursued concurrently (Ramose, 2009b:417). Most post-colonial sovereign states have finally accepted western-style democracy symbolized by plural political parties as the best form of political organization in Africa (Ramose, 2009b:417). Western style democracy results in political monologue leading to a solipsistic life in the midst of a suppressed African indigenous political culture (Ramose, 2009b:418). To speak of the conqueror’s political discourse without engaging in such discourse in dialogue with traditional African culture is to assume at the very least that the latter is unlikely to make any meaningful contribution to solving the continent’s political problems (Ramose, 2009b:420). Traditional African political culture can still speak authoritatively in finding emancipative African solution to African political problems (Ramose, 2009b:420).

Ramose identifies insightful aspects of African indigenous political culture. The first of these elements is respect for persons. He quotes the Sotho proverb that goes *motho ke motho ka batho* which means to be human is to affirm one's humanness by recognizing the same quality in others and on that basis, establishing humane relations with them (Ramose, 2009b:420). To be a human being *botho*, means to have a polite and respectful attitude towards other human beings (Ramose, 2009b:420). The individual human being is a subject of intrinsic value. *Motho* (a human being) is truly human only in the context of actual relations with other human beings (Ramose, 2009b:420). The relational context always reveals the potentialities of the individual (Ramose, 2009b:420).

Traditional political culture recognizes oneness rather than unity of being (Ramose, 2009b:421). Oneness is used because one human being is deemed to be the same thing as another human being and one human being is seen only in relation to another human being (Ramose, 2009b:421). This is a way of expressing equality. Reciprocity becomes pivotal in the sphere of human relations (Ramose, 2009b:421). Reciprocity crystallizes into solidarity in the sphere of political relations (Ramose, 2009b:421). This is an example of innovative reconstruction of elements based on indigenous political culture. Adversarial politics, the hallmark of western style democracy is foreign to African traditional political culture (Ramose, 2009b:421). Adversity promotes social and political instability against people who are supposed to be one. This foreign trait retards political progress in Africa. Traditional culture allows free and open discussion of issues with a view of arriving at a common solution (Ramose, 2009b:422). The advantage of consensus is that it checks unconstructive partisanship and divisiveness. A solution arrived at through consensus is seen as a joint achievement. This means that people participate in decision

making and they own the decision as a group. Everyone is given the chance to talk. The *kgotla*³² was a form of free and serious discussion aimed at making laws and finding communal solutions to problems (Ramose, 2009b:422). Africans would prefer to live time and not live in time (Ramose, 2009b:423). Openness to being is readiness to expect the unexpected and deal with such eventuality when it arises (Ramose, 2009b:423). If people are guided by traditional principles of oneness, consensus, openness and humility, then true liberation of Africa might not be too far (Ramose, 2009b:426). This indigenous trajectory suggested by Ramose paves way for the use of Shona proverbs in identification of elements that are useful for giving insights to contemporary African political culture.

4.5 Ubuntu and Politics

According to the South African Government Gazette (1996:18) *Ubuntu* is seen as:

“The principle of caring for each other’s well-being and a spirit of mutual support...Each individual’s humanity is ideally expressed through his or her relationship with others and theirs in turn through a recognition of the individual’s humanity. *Ubuntu* means that people are people through other people. It also acknowledges both the rights and the responsibilities of every citizen in promoting individual and societal well-being.”

The significance of the above citation is that the South African government has adopted the philosophy of *ubuntu* as the basis of well-being, support and recognition of human dignity. *Ubuntu* is also understood in the context of rights and responsibilities and the advantage of this approach is that cultural aspects are promoted and not alienated in the

³² Public meeting, headed by the chief, for discussing community issues through dialogue and consensus.

name of human rights. Koster (1996:111) observes that *ubuntu* fosters cooperation, solidarity and supportiveness. A person's well being is considered as inseparable from the well being of others. Lienberg and Sindane (2000:38) affirm that *ubuntu* gives humanity to the individual in direct relationship to fellow human beings. *Ubuntu* must be expressed in the political aspects of life (Tambulasi and Kayuni, 2009:429). *Ubuntu* is the basis of African communal cultural life and expresses Africa's principle of caring for one another and the spirit of mutual support (Eliche *et al*, 2010:81). Even if no single view of *ubuntu* exists, it represents the richness of cultural diversity in Africa (Prozesky, 2009:9).

Nussbaum (2003:2) links *ubuntu* with politics as she comments, "*ubuntu* is the basis of our communal cultural life. It expresses our interconnectedness, our common humanity and responsibility to each other that deeply flows from our deeply felt connection." There is emphasis on groupness and sameness (Cobbah, 2006:35) and respect is the guiding principle within the family and the society at large (Cobbah, 2006:36).

Ramose (2005; 96) comments on the political relevance of *ubuntu* as he writes, "to be human is to affirm humanity by recognizing the humanity of others, and on that basis, establish humane relations with them." The principle that can be derived from the above view states that, "the individual human being is an object of intrinsic value in his own right" (Ramose, 2005:96). The second principle of *ubuntu* that is important for political thought is, "a human being is truly human, only in the context of actual relations with other human beings" (Ramose, 2005:96). The relational context has important elements of African indigenous political culture. The first

element is the recognition of oneness. One human being is deemed to be the same subject, a human being in relation to another human being. This hinges upon equality and reciprocity in human relations. The second element is consensus in political authority and in decision making by councilors. The third is the principle of sharing that covers entire human relations. It refers to sharing of joys and sorrows of life, the goods of the earth and personal property (Ramose, 2005:96). It places an obligation to come together to find common solutions to issues.

In stressing the authenticity and liberating potential of *ubuntu*, Louw (2001:29) writes, *ubuntu* calls on Africans to be true to themselves. It calls for the liberation of Africans, not so much from the colonizing gaze of others, but from colonization:

“persons depend on persons to be persons. The goal of morality according to this ethical vision is fullness of humanity; the moral life is seen as a process of personal growth. And just as participation in community with others is the essential means to personal growth, so participation in community with others is the motive and fulfillment of the process. Everything that promotes personal growth and participation in community is good, everything that prevents is bad” (Shutte, 2001:30).

According to Metz (2009:336) the African moral theory or *ubuntu* offers a useful way of evaluating political choice. A moral theory is a fundamental principle that accounts for what right actions, as opposed to wrong ones, have in common. *Ubuntu* places harmonious or friendly relations at the heart of right action. In this regard, Metz (2009:236) borrows from Mbiti (1969:108) and adopts the dictum that a person is a person through other persons. The relationship under consideration values cohesive relationship. Tutu (1999:35) identifies harmony, friendliness and community as great social goods. Anger, resentment and aggressive competitiveness are seen as corrosive to this social good (Khoza, 2005:58). Harmony is valued for its sake and not as a means to some other social good.

Shutte (2009:376) sees the community as the foundation of political life. According to Shutte (2009:376), people's natural dynamism for personal growth urges them into relationships with others, in the family, in the sphere of education and in politics. Human community is a natural development from simple family life. As the community of humans grows bigger the need to organise arises (Shutte, 2009:377). When the community is united and organised by laws, it has entered the sphere of politics and the community becomes political (Shutte, 2009:377). The authority in a political community must come from people who are its members (Shutte, 2009:377). Members of a given community rely on their political paradigm for political organisation. If members of a political community rely on their paradigm, it means that they are in control of their political principles and ideas as opposed to a situation where foreign political models dominate. Political authority must come from the people themselves because they are self-determining (Shutte, 2009:377). Political self-determination implies the use of indigenous systems of government. An authority imposed on a community from outside would contradict and prevent self-determination (Shutte, 2009:278). It would contradict self-determination because it opposes the use of local political ideas and it would prevent self-determination because it requires the use of foreign models for its implementation. What is important from the perspective of *ubuntu* is to see that political community and government as a natural progression of human nature. This means that political activities are conscious and deliberate creations. If *ubuntu* in government means respecting people's freedoms, it must also mean requiring their responsibility (Shutte, 2009:379). A humane political government depends on the qualities of those in government (Shutte, 2009:380). The fundamental reason for government as well as its ultimate goal, is to promote people's common good. Government should create social conditions for the flourishing of people's common good. In a political community a life with *ubuntu*,

government will reflect this (Shutte, 2009:381). *Ubuntu* facilitates reciprocity between the people and those in authority by giving a platform for mutual respect. People will trust those in authority because of their personal qualities and not simply their power (Shutte,2009: 381). Those in authority will have the freedom to judge as honestly as they judge best because they genuinely aim to govern for the common good (Shutte, 2009:381). Government should provide personal growth and community for its people (Shutte, 2009: 381).

The aim of political life is to focus its available resources and power to create conditions that favour nation building (Shutte, 2009: 381). This means that political activities should focus on the principles of *ubuntu* as test for effectiveness. *Ubuntu* tends to focus on oneness even if cultural and compositions are varied. This means that *ubuntu* can unify people whose cultural beliefs are varied. Individuals can value each other for the sake of their common humanity. *Ubuntu* commits people to one another's personal growth and their shared community. *Ubuntu* has the capacity to unite people from different cultural backgrounds is a trait of *ubuntu*. The aim of *ubuntu* is to form friendship that transcends differences of origin and culture (Shutte, 2009:383). *Ubuntu* challenges people to love and include in their loving. It challenges people to open more widely, to other and alien influences, for the right motives and in the right spirit, is not to lose one's identity but to enhance it and develop a person (Shutte, 2009:383).

Shutte (2009:384) argues that human nature contains a natural dynamism towards political community. It is now impossible for a single country to provide complete and integrated environment for the personal growth of its people without reliance on other countries. The development of political community should take place at the level of the whole world for any political community to be a reality (Shutte, 2009:385). Worldwide political structures regulate the political lives of different countries in the world. *Ubuntu* can heal political divisions even at

global level. The principle of subsidiarity is limited at the international level for the following reasons; first, it is too small to provide adequate environment in every sphere for personal growth and community. Secondly, it is too small to provide economic and military security and thirdly, it is too large for people to identify truly in a personal and patriotic way (Shutte, 2009:385).

From the above views, it is clear that *ubuntu* provides the foundation of ethical ideals, epistemological insights and ontological assumptions for respectable political authority. *Ubuntu* sustains good governance, communality, togetherness and oneness in political aspects. *Ubuntu* can be used to refute individualistic tendencies that lead to greediness, corruption, dictatorial tendencies that affect African countries.

4.6 The Shona Political System

Gombe (1998:194) asserts that *madzimambo* (kings) were the symbol of authority in Shona indigenous political culture. Each king had a territory in which he delegated political duties to subordinates such as *madzishhe* (chiefs), *masadunhu* (sub-chiefs) *masamana* (village heads). Kings were responsible for political administration; they were seen as the axis of legal and moral norms, holding people together in a political community. The council of heads of clans under the king acted as the rulers and lower down were the chiefs at the various levels of society; all of them assisted in the social and political administration of society. Gombe (1998:194) made the following observation: where these rulers are found, they are not simply political heads: they are the mystical and religious heads, the divine symbol of their people's health and welfare.

Below the king was the *ishhe* (chief) who represents the head of the political organization of indigenous Shona society which gives political, juridical, and executive power he can exercise in

council with other chiefs and officials within part of a king's territory. The Shona society accorded the *ishe* a considerable amount of respect, although his powers are not meant to be absolute due to a hierarchy of power relations in conducting human affairs in the community. Hence this hierarchy of power relations tilted in favour of the *ishe* but it did not translate to an un-checked power. Thus the power arrangement in traditional Shona political setting was such that it provided checks and balances. A structure that gave power to some bodies of persons to exercise on behalf of others was checked.

4.7 Proverbs and Shona Political Discourse

Proverbs are regarded as repositories of the Shona people's collective social, political and cultural wisdom and as analytic tools of thought. Proverbs have the capacity to provide a politician with what is dearly needed in any political talk, adding power, authority, clarity and expressiveness to political discourse (Orwenjo, 2009:124). This capacity arises from two factors. First, the ability of proverbs to crystallize complicated and long messages into a short sentence, consisting of only a few words, thereby precluding the need for circumlocution which could easily distort the original message. Second, due to the fact, especially in African societies, that proverbs are communally owned as repositories of communal wisdom and knowledge arising from a community's age old experiences, and are continually transmitted from one generation to another. Thus, proverbs are regarded as pieces of conventional wisdom and when used, the community easily accepts their truth value, appreciates them and identifies with them. Challenging the appropriateness of proverbs is like challenging the wisdom of the entire society.

4.7.1 Political significance of Coexistence and Relatedness

The proverb *ishe vanhu* can be understood in four senses. First the proverb expresses oneness or identity between the chief and the subjects. The identity lies in sameness in dignity as human beings. There must be mutual recognition of equality and of dignity between the chief and the subjects. Secondly *ishe vanhu* makes reference to mutual respect between the chief and the subjects. Thirdly, *ishe vanhu* can be understood negatively to mean that without people, the chief's political rule cannot be possible. Fourthly the proverb expresses humane relations between the chief and the subjects. The basis of political rule among the Shona is respect. The chief must establish humane relations with the subjects so that the subjects will reciprocate the good relations. The primary sense of *vanhu* in the proverb is the community. The chief should consider common good before making decisions and this can be done through consultation. Consultation takes place through dialogue between the chief and representatives of the chief. In the Shona indigenous political organisation, the chief is there because of his or her subjects and without subjects the ontological significance³³ of the chief is negated. Social ontology is the root of the chief's existence. In the Shona political situation, the chief possesses executive, judicial and legislative powers. These powers are significant if and only if the chief is recognized by his or her subjects (Moyo and Ncube, 2010: 39). The being of the chief depends on the being of others. This includes the living dead and the living subjects. If the ontological significance of the

³³ The **ontological** position speaks to the primary assumptions that people (within given cultures) make about the nature of reality. In African systems of thought, the ontological viewpoint stresses that to understand reality is to have a complete or holistic view of society. The view stresses the need for a harmonious co-existence between nature, culture and society. There is the idea of mutual interdependence among all peoples such that the existence of the individual is only meaningful in relation to the community that she or he is part of.

subjects is undermined, the chief's ontological significance is undermined also. For the Shona, the proverb *ishe vanhu* (the chief gets recognition through subjects) shows the intrinsic relationship between the chief and the subjects. There is no atomistic individualism on the part of the chief but his or her existence depends on the recognition of the social ontology of the subjects. The subjects are ontologically prior to the chief. The subjects (*vanhu*), can be categorized into councilors and ordinary people. Regarding knowledge, the chief depends on councilors for the exercise of administrative, judicial and executive powers and this shows the epistemic dimension of the above proverb. As a result, the chief is identified with his or her councilors. The existence of the chief's powers is sustained by the prudent advice of councilors (Gombe, 1998:53). The proverb, *ishe makota* (the chief is his councilors) is used to emphasise this crucial point. It can be argued therefore that the legal powers of the chief depend on the strength of the chief's advisors.

Ishe varanda (the chief is his or her subjects) is a proverb that recognizes the close relationship between the chief and his/her subjects. The close relationship is found in several dimensions but the closeness that is significant at this juncture is a moral one. The moral closeness is analyzable in terms of the intrinsic goodness and value of persons. For the Shona, the concept of *munhu* is normative because it is value laden. Every human being has intrinsic value and as a result, the subjects, even if they have little political power, should be treated with respect owing to their intrinsic value. If the subjects are accorded respect, they will reciprocate to the goodness of the chief. A morally upright ruler will therefore receive respect from the subjects. The moral teaching in the proverb is that a chief does not assume a higher moral ground but puts himself at the same level with the subjects because they share an equality of intrinsic value.

Among the Shona, the proverb, *ishe vanhu* can be seen in the consultation of a chief before a development project is done in an area that is believed to be sacred. Before a cellphone booster is constructed in a sacred area, for example, the chief is consulted and the chief will have to further consult fellow advisors for the way forward. The reason why the chief is consulted before a project is done is that the chief is believed to be both a political and religious leader. The chief gets in touch with local spirit mediums (*masvikiro*) to provide the necessary steps usually in form of rituals. If such steps are omitted, the development project may be a failure and when it fails, the blame is usually given to the chief and his or her advisors.

4.7.2 Political Significance of Others

Chieftainship skills are learnt from others within and outside the territory. The social dimension of knowledge is seen in the maxim *ushe hunokokwa kune vamwe* (chieftainship is learnt from others). The epistemic skills of others who have held similar positions³⁴ are used to develop a sound epistemology of governance among chiefs. Critical examination of past and current practices allows the chief to pick out what is valuable and dispose what is of little significance in governance. The word ‘others’ has two ontological levels, the first is the *vadzimu*, the second is the living. In the Shona political system, the chief was supposed to travel extensively to enter into agreements with other chiefs and get ideas from other chiefs. Through the journeys the chief learnt from the practice of other cultures and a critical mind was required to select what was appropriate. Without travel, therefore the chief’s experiential knowledge is static. The chief’s knowledge becomes proportional to the travels made. *Ushe hwunokokwa kune vamwe* gives an epistemological emphasis to experience. Since politics is a practical human activity that requires

³⁴ These are limited few members of the community

skills, the Shona emphasize the role of experience in political administration. Through experience, political leaders are likely to gain wisdom and the Shona advise leaders to learn from others who have the experience so that one may avoid making the same mistake that will have been made by earlier leaders. At the same time successes of other political rulers may be used to improve one's way of leadership

4.7.3 The political role of truth

The concept of reconciliation in the Shona context is aimed at restoring harmony within the community. Harmony is analogous to a web that ties up the whole community and when it is disturbed, the whole community is disturbed. In other words, the whole community feels the ripple effects of violence. The first stage of reconciliation requires truth telling. In the Shona context, truth telling is not just an epistemological demand but a moral responsibility as well. The Shona have developed proverbs that show this point well. One proverb is *chokwadi hachiputsi ukama* (truth telling does not destroy relations). The concept of *ukama* (relations) ties up the community. *Ukama* stands for the conviction that reality is relational. It means not only that people will only find their true identity in relationship with other people, both those now alive and those who live in the spirit world, a belief in the watchful presence of the living dead being present in African traditional cultures, but - importantly - with nature as well. As such, *ukama* can be seen as a highly inclusive concept applying to all that exists (Murove, 2004:198). Truth telling as a moral requirement opens up for honesty and dialogue thereby removing the possibility of hypocrisy, illusion and pretence. Sweeping some crimes under the carpet does not only destroy relations but it also contradicts *ubuntu*. The political moral teaching of the above Shona proverb is therefore to call for honesty in dealing with cases of political violence in

particular. Truth telling cements relations in the community. On the contrary, falsity and hypocrisy are damaging. In the Shona context peace should be built starting from grassroots levels. This implies that peace building in the small scale starts in the neighbourhood before it gets to the larger community. Mutual understanding and friendly relations are the moral seeds for peace. Friendship, based on *ubuntu*, is the basis of mutual understanding and allows people to live in harmony and peace in the community.

In the Shona moral reasoning, peace building is not an individual effort but it is a co-operative affair. The concept of peace building logically implies otherness and interpersonal involvement. As a result, peace building is not an individual exercise but it is a community affair. This understanding is in line with *ubuntu* ethics that places emphasis on community relations. The South African philosopher Augustine Shutte has given a handily concise interpretation of the ethic implied by *ubuntu* in a recent book, explaining this concept as “the insight that persons depend on persons to be persons” (Shutte, 2001:25). He adds: “The goal of morality according to this ethical vision is fullness of humanity; the moral life is seen as a process of personal growth” (Shutte, 2001:25). Just as participation in community with others is the essential means to personal growth, so participation in community with others is the motive and fulfillment of the process. Everything that promotes personal growth and participation in community is good, everything that prevents is bad (Shutte, 2001:30).

4.8 Objections and replies

Standard objections have been made against the use of political proverbs in the following manner; firstly, political proverbs have been considered as conservative since they are rooted in

the past. Against this objection, it can be argued that while it is true that political proverbs have roots in the past, it does not necessarily follow that their application is also limited to the past since the past has a bearing, to some extent, on the present. The humane elements which are seen in the proverbs can be used for contemporary political stability. In addition the worldview in which the proverbs were formulated is still in usage today. The Shona worldview from which the proverbs arise is understandable and more applicable to the Shona.

The second objection is that Shona political proverbs are narrow in application since they are only understandable among the Shona. This objection may be true but the narrowness is seen in terms of other languages besides Shona. Within Shona groups, there is a wide application and there is potential for cross cultural application outside the Shona. In a pluriversal world, it is prudent to consider views from different cultures so as to come up with a balanced understanding of political issues.

The third objection is that Shona political proverbs are inconsistent with democratic models of governance. This objection rests on the problematic assumption that there are democratic models from a particular culture that must be taken as 'the models'. It is necessary to point out that democratic models do not arise in a vacuum but from a given culture. If it is acceptable, the Shona political proverbs are expected to be consistent with Shona democratic models and there is no reason of measuring them against foreign models. Still democratic models must be as many as possible within cultures and no single model should override other cultures.

The fourth objection is that proverb based political insights may be considered as a source of political authoritarianism since proverbs are based on past authorities. Authoritarianism may be defined as the tendency to concentrate power on one person or a few individuals. Shona proverbs

are not necessarily authoritarian but they are sources of critical reflection. While it may be true that the proverbs are based on authority, it does not necessarily follow that they are authoritarian. This means that elements of authority may be extracted from proverbs and used positively without sliding into the extreme use or reliance on authority.

The fifth charge is that of anachronism. Anachronism is the tendency to rely on something that is outlived in its correct chronological place. With reference to proverbs, the charge states that Shona political proverbs were formulated within past political settings and their application to contemporary political settings is problematic. It can be argued that human consciousness and reflection cannot be fixed within a rigid timeframe. Ideas that have been expressed through proverbs with the aim of improving the moral qualities of persons may continue to have force and application even in contemporary times. The authenticity of the worldview in which Shona political proverbs arose results in the continued application of the proverbs. Political principles based on proverbs are understandable within the political situations in which they arise and they remain useful.

The sixth objection is that Shona political proverbs are based on supernaturalism. Shona proverbs rely on *vadzimu* and “God” for political order. This objection may be seen as confusing an extreme view – supernaturalism, with a moderate position of a religious appeal to the deity. An appeal to *vadzimu* and “God” is a positive cultural practice among the Shona. The objection assumes the correctness of a reductionistic political framework that divorces politics from both the deity and the community of the dead. Such an objection is question begging because it assumes the correctness of a non-Shona worldview in a Shona worldview.

The last objection is that Shona political proverbs are inconsistent with globalization. If globalization is defined as the tendency of cultures and philosophies to spread throughout the world, surely, Shona proverbs may be inconsistent with globalization because of their local focus. Inconsistency with globalization is unproblematic since globalization arises in a culture that is foreign to the Shona culture and whose values are incompatible with Shona political philosophy. This inconsistency may be seen positively as evidence of cultural diversity within a pluriversal world.

4.9 Significance of Shona Political Philosophy

Shona Political philosophy is significant insofar as it promotes constitutional obligations. *The Constitution of Zimbabwe* 16 (1) states that, “the state and all its institutions and agencies of government at every level must promote and preserve cultural values and practices which enhance the dignity, well-being and equality of Zimbabweans.” Shona political philosophy, as shown in the selected proverbs, contains principles that are consistent with dignity, well-being and equality.

The use of Shona proverbs to articulate a Shona political philosophy gives a platform for intercultural dialogue. According to Wiredu (1995:1) if we approach the philosophic suggestions of other cultures (as, for example, those of the Orient) in the spirit of due reflection, being always on the lookout for any conceptual snares, perhaps we can combine insights extracted from those sources with those gained from our own indigenous³⁵ philosophical resources to create for ourselves and our peoples modern philosophies from which both the East and the West might

³⁵ The Shona are just part of the indigenous people of Zimbabwe who include the Ndebele, the Venda, the Shangani, the Tonga, the Kalanga and the Nambia

learn something. Indigenous knowledge (IK) is a significant resource which could contribute to the increased efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability of the development process (Gorjestani, 2000:1).

Shona political philosophy takes the history and culture of the Shona people into account. Indigenous peoples should be encouraged in their vision of an integrated political development system that encompasses the development of human capabilities, capacities and skills; appropriate infrastructure that does not displace people; recognition of pluralistic systems respecting other cultures and civilizations; promotion and provision of a democratic space to continue practicing indigenous ways of life; and the pursuit of self-determined development (Lasimbang, 2008:45). The political history of the developed countries of today shows that the development process involves much more fundamental phenomena. These include wholesale economic, social and administrative reforms, perceptible changes in the attitude of the people to work, to savings and investment and to life generally and a widespread acceptance of the discipline in private and national lives which are the prerequisites of development (Asante, 1991:4). Where these reforms and changes have taken place economic development has proceeded very rapidly. Until developing countries come to realize that development touches all aspects of a society and the individual's attitude to it they will continue to mistake indices of development for its process (Asante, 1991:5).

4.10 Conclusion

The chapter has defended a pluriversal understanding of political philosophy that has relevance to the African historical and cultural context. Political models that obtain in Africa have been discussed with the aim of showing the model that applies to the Zimbabwean context. The

chapter has argued that *ubuntu* is the political foundation of solidarity, oneness and mutual support in politics. The political philosophy of the Shona, as contained in their proverbs, is also based on the Shona social ontology which gives priority of the community over the individual. Shona political philosophy stresses coexistence and relatedness (*ukama*) within the community. Administrators respect the significance of others for the meaning and function of their political roles. Shona political philosophy maintains that authority should be guided by respect, good governance, solidarity and peace. These values are not only important for social harmony but for economic activities as well and this leads to Shona philosophy of economics in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5: SHONA PHILOSOPHY OF ECONOMICS

5.0 Introduction

This chapter argues that, African philosophy of economics in general and Shona philosophy of economics in particular, must be rooted in the respective cultural paradigms. An African philosophy of economics must articulate the metaphysics, epistemology and ethics of African culture. It must critique the narrowness and fallacies of Eurocentric economic philosophy using the richness of cultural intellectual resources. For Mbembe (2001:7), Western disciplines have undermined the very possibility of understanding African economic thought. In spite of the countless critiques made of theories of social evolutionism and ideologies of development and modernisation, the academic output of these disciplines continues to be negative to Africa (Mbembe, 2001:7). Human beings and nature must be seen as interconnected, dependent and related rather than divorced, independent and isolated. The Africans' desire to maintain cohesiveness and cooperation with nature, self, and others has been mistaken for docility (Nyasani, 1997:113), complacency and passivity (Shalita, 1998: 10). Economic philosophy must be rooted in the realities of African life as observed by Wiredu:

“no society could survive for any length of time without basing a large part of its daily activities on beliefs derived from the evidence. You cannot farm without some rationally based knowledge of soils, seeds and climate; and no society can achieve any reasonable degree of harmony in human relations without the basic ability to assess claims and allegations by the methods of objective investigation” (Wiredu, 1980: 42).

The consequence of adopting an African philosophy of economics is twofold; it provides room for economic life to be assessed in terms of African metaphysical belief system and it offers a conception of ethically justifiable economic behaviour and activity. Much classical economic theory was developed to explain the particular case of the European capitalist economy and immediately raises questions about the usefulness of this theory for understanding other economies outside Europe (Gregory, 1982: 6). Arguing for a multi-cultural or inter-cultural intellectual approach, Amato (1997:75) dismisses the view that religious-inspired ideas and accounts of social reality are necessarily regressive. On the contrary, he argues, philosophical reason is not independent of mythic or religious life of the people. He thus sees this view as likely to perpetuate the stereotypes towards other intellectual discourses, while simultaneously upholding the Western intellectual discourse's claims. Philosophy, as it now exists in various continents, cultures and countries, is demonstrably tied in some respects to the particularities of their languages and social formations (Wiredu, 1997:29). It stands to reason, therefore, to expect that if Africans take adequate cognizance of their own languages and cultures in their philosophical meditations, they might formulate philosophical options that are in some respects different from those, for example, of the Western culture within which ways of philosophical thought such as phenomenology and analytic philosophy have had their home (Wiredu, 1997:30).

Gyekye (1997a:25) points out,

“ the postcolonial era not only signified an end to the period of dictation, forcible imposition of a variety of alien values and institutions, (but also) a period of autonomous self-expressions on the part of the formerly colonized people, as well as of self-assertion, sober reflection on values and goals, and the gradual weaning away from the self-flagellating aspects of colonial mentality acquired through decades of coloniality.”

Gyekye's observation suggests the need for self-expression, self-assertion and sober reflection by using African philosophy to understand economic activity in present day Africa. Philosophy as a critical reflective activity does not go on in a social vacuum. This is because the stuff of reflection comes from the worldview of one's community, or other communities, or the philosophical reflections of other people from in or outside one's community (Agbakoba, 2009:552)

This chapter is divided into four main sections. The first section, drawing from cultural revivalists, anti-revivalists and the critical approach, examines the African philosophy of economics debate. It shall be argued that an African philosophy of economics is necessary to avoid the weaknesses of the Eurocentric paradigm in economic philosophy. The second section defends three conceptions of African philosophy of economics to articulate authenticity and cultural relevance in approaching economic issues. The third section explores Shona philosophy of economics as reflected in three selected proverbs. Themes of human dignity, respect for hard work and the need for moderation in the desire for money are discussed in the context of the Shona philosophical paradigm. The last section discusses the significance of using Shona philosophy of economics in terms of providing a platform for dialogue and criticism in the face of pluriversal perspectives of economic philosophy.

5.1 Definition of terms

In the words of Alfred Marshall (1961: xv), economics or economic theory is mainly concerned with human beings who are impelled to change and progress. His definition of economics, which

he equates with political economy, corresponds to the examination of ‘that part of individual and social action which is most closely connected with the attainment and with the use of the material requisites of wellbeing’ (Marshall, 1961: 1). Philosophy of economics is the branch of philosophy that studies the metaphysical foundation of economic claims, the epistemic status of economics and the values implied in economic activity. African philosophy of economics is the study of economic behaviour on the basis of the African epistemological paradigm. The Shona term for economics is *ongororo yezveupfumi* meaning the study or reflection upon economic activity. Shona philosophy of economics would be *pfungwa dzamu dzezveupfumi*. Shona philosophy of economics draws from the African philosophical ideas in general and focuses on the philosophical reflections of Shona people regarding production, consumption and transfer of wealth.

5.3 Debate on the relevance of African indigenous philosophy of economics

The relationship between economics and indigenous philosophy has been a central theme of postcolonial African philosophy. Kebede (1999:45) identifies two schools of thought in the question of African development. The first is ethnophilosophy that has a twofold target (1) to critique the Western conception of development and (2) to rehabilitate African cultures for authentic African development (Kebede 1999:45). Proponents of ethnophilosophy include Tempels, Senghor, Ngugi wa Thiong’o and Fanon. The second school of thought is professional philosophy that argues that African philosophy must place development in the transition from particularism to a pluriversal culture . It aims at liberating Africa from marginalization so as to embrace global concerns in the economic development debate. However, Kebede’s analysis

overlooks a third alternative, the critical trend that challenges both ethnophilosophy and the antirevivalist school. The critical school is developed by Gyekye and Oladipo.

While African philosophers have examined this theme from many angles, several basic questions have become the focus of ongoing debate and discussion: What is the relevance of indigenous African economic values to the challenges of contemporary capitalism and globalization? Do indigenous economic modes of thought and behavior constitute resources or impediments to the economic development in Africa? A critical examination of such questions reveals three distinct positions, namely cultural revivalism, antirevivalism and the critical trend.

5.3.1 Cultural revivalism

The first perspective, which Kwame Gyekye calls “cultural revivalism” (Gyekye 1997b³⁶: 233), basically defends an African indigenous cultural thought system. According to this perspective, the key to effectively addressing contemporary African economic problems lies in reclaiming and revitalizing indigenous economic philosophy that has been degraded and marginalized by colonialism. Colonialism violently disrupted African philosophy of economics that stresses sharing, communality, dignity and respect for individuals. It imposed Eurocentric economic thinking that is individualistic, fragmentary, selfish and exploitative. In the postcolonial era, the task of African philosophers is to decolonize the African mind. While revivalists are critical about calls for Western models of development for Africa, dismissing their argument invites the continued imposition of European capitalistic thinking. It is important to realize that they do not typically view their own project as inconsistent with development. For revivalists, African

³⁶ Gyekye continues the debate in *Beyond Cultures: Perceiving a Common Humanity*, by responding to critics and by clarification of seemingly obscure issues.

economic philosophy must embrace African culture and values for serious economic progress to be made.

Cultural revivalism is historically bound in the colonial era. It emerged as a reaction to European discourses about African identity and culture (Ciaffa, 2008:123). Colonialism was supported by literature that showed European superiority (Ciaffa, 2008:124). Tempels' work provided a key stimulus to cultural revivalism (Ciaffa, 2008:125). Tempels (1960:35) asserts that the Bantu possess a comprehensive philosophy of life. The key element of Bantu philosophy is that the pluriverse consists of vital forces that exist in a hierarchical relation with each other beginning with "God", the Supreme vital force, ranging through the intelligent spirit, including ancestors into the world of the living (Tempels, 1960:77). Bantu understanding of reality is just different from that of the Europeans but is not necessarily less rational. "Let us try above all to understand Bantu philosophy, to know their beliefs and what is their rational interpretation of the nature of visible and invisible things" (Tempels 1960:35). Their ideas on the nature of the pluriverse are essentially metaphysical knowledge, which constitutes them an ontology (Tempels 1960:35-36). Before we set out to teach Africans about our philosophy, let us try to master theirs. It is legitimate to set out the task of their philosophy (Tempels 1960:38). Tempels proceeds to elucidate Bantu ontology, Bantu wisdom, Bantu psychology, Bantu ethics. The purpose of Tempels' work lies in "illuminating colonial practice and missionary evangelization tomorrow" (Tempels 1960:15).

Tempels' work challenged existing literature about the African mind. As a result, Tempels work got resistance from colonial authorities but it was embraced by African intellectuals who saw the work as an opportunity to explore and revitalize the African past as a basis for their struggle

against colonialism. There are dependent and reciprocal relationships existing between the cultural situation and the economic situation in the behaviour of human societies. Culture is always the life of society, more or less direct expression in the kinds of relationships that prevail in that society. In line with the revivalist argument, Ngugi (1972:13) argues that we must reclaim our past and the very condition of successful and objective reclamation is the dismantling of all colonial institutions, and especially capitalism as patterns of social and economic development. For Ngugi (1972:13) African nations should completely break from their colonial past. It was an attempt to repudiate the truth of cultural adequacy that Europe created “the myth and fiction” that Africa was culturally sterile so that Europeans could more justifiably impose their political culture on the continent and exploit it economically. This act of sabotage as Ngugi sees it, is committed the active collaboration with the Christian church so that in Kenya, while the European settler robbed people of their land, the missionary robbed people of their soul. According to Ngugi (1972:13) “a completely socialized economy, collectively owned and controlled by the people: a complete and total liberation of the people, through the elimination of all exploitative forces is necessary for a national culture.” Concerning capitalism, Ngugi (1972:81-82) wrote; “The European stifled all possibility of a continuous culture on the part of the colonized by denying them a common culture, deprived them of economic and political power leading to a situation where the African still looked to the white world for a pattern of life even after political independence.”

Cabral (1973:110) reinforces the revivalist argument when he argues that culture plays an important role on the ideological plain as an element of resistance to foreign domination. “Liberation struggles are preceded by an increase in the expression of culture, consolidated

progressingly into a successful or unsuccessful attempt to affirm the cultural personality of the dominated people, as a means of negating the oppressor's culture." Cabral (1973:110) argues that liberation welfare should go beyond the immediate goal of the struggle for independence to a greater aim of restoring a people to their own history and avoid the mis-development of neocolonialism. For Cabral (1973:42), in culture lies the responsibility for assuring the prospects for evolution and progress of the society in question. Central to Cabral's ideas is the premise that in peasant villages African culture is substantially undamaged (Cabral, 1973:64).

Onyewuenyi (1991:39) argues that, "the African has an unwritten timeless code of behaviour and attitudes which have persisted over centuries." Africans must not yield to laws and institutions that are "divorced from our philosophy, from the nature of beings as we understand them... from our view of the world" (Onyewuenyi, 1991:45). The goal of revivalism is to mobilize African cultural norms to address contemporary problems. African problems are due to cultural and spiritual corruption initiated during the colonial era. Indigenous beliefs and practices have been swallowed by systems of thought and social organization that are impediments to African wellbeing. The solution lies in rediscovering and resuming our proper selves through the study of African civilizations (Owomoyela 1991:181). African cultures possess scientific knowledge as evidenced by the use of medicinal herbs, advanced agricultural techniques and methods of food preservation (Owomoyela 1991:174). Egyptian civilization provides metallurgy, astronomy and mathematics. The call for Africa to become more scientific overlooks these accomplishments and amounts to the call for Africa to duplicate European models of science.

Senghor accepted the idea that Africans and Europeans are different. According to Senghor (1995:117), the Negro is a man of nature. The Negro is more sensuous and responsive to the environment (Senghor, 1995:117). The European sees the world as a scientist or engineer while the African is participatory. Senghor critiqued the alleged white superiority and argued that Africans did not lack reason, but showed a different form of reason (Senghor, 1995:121).

5.3.2 Critique of Cultural Revivalism

Cultural revivalism raises important points about the importance of the cultural past in providing a philosophical foundation for economic norms and values. However, a blind acceptance of such norms and values may be problematic. Ethnophilosophy is an endorsement of Western anthropological discourse in Africa. This endorsement is seen by Kebede (1999:45) as the apex of self contradiction. The affirmation of difference reproduces the anthropological view of irrational and mythical Africa (Kebede, 1999:48). It supports the colonial reasoning about Africa. As a result, Kebede (1999:45) sees the retrieval of African tradition as a continuation of Africa's subordination to the West.

Tempel's contribution sets the pace for African cultural revivalism but he controversially subordinates the role of African philosophy to missionary tasks. This gives an instrumental value that is outside the interests of African themselves yet such a philosophy must pave way for economic independence and emancipation.

Ngugi's analysis focuses on economic independence and this is an important point raised in the study of African philosophy of economics. However, Ngugi's call for a complete break with Western culture raises practical difficulties. The new culture cannot be eliminated but it requires reflection and reconstruction. The challenges of the present cannot be solved by abandoning the

colonial culture since it is part and parcel of contemporary Africa. A complete rejection of foreign culture becomes a practical impossibility.

Cabral's claim that restoration of history is a requirement is important for African philosophy of economics since history becomes the source of important lessons for the present and the future. However, the use of history must be carefully done to avoid nostalgic tendencies and oversimplification of issues. The past should be reflected upon so that modifications for the way forward may be done with a critical awareness of shortcomings and pitfalls.

Several lines of criticism have been advanced against negritude. Negritude is a collective name under which Haitians, West-Indies and Negro-Americans group their ineffable desire to retrieve from their distant past something of beauty which they could embellish the present (Niekerk, 1970:98). Their poems are ones of revolt, anger, bitterness, and reminiscences of trade in human flesh across the Atlantic; but also of longing for recognition as a human being (Niekerk, 1970:99). The poems have an underlying theme of suffering (Niekerk, 1970:99). The poems are mixed with references to Senghor's deep attachment to Europe and France (Niekerk, 1970:100). The values which the authors of negritude have held up to the world as typically negro or African are values of a world which these authors no longer belong or could not even conceivably belong (Niekerk, 1970:101). An example of such value is ancestor worship. The return to the sources (African past) is nothing more than literary fiction (Niekerk, 1970:103). The sources provided inspiration and nothing else (Niekerk, 1970:103). The poems are silent about philosophy that could only exist on paper without a relationship to real life (Niekerk, 1970:106). What is depicted by the authors of negritude is true of the first negritude authors and poets but no longer true today (Niekerk, 1970:107). Senghor's philosophy of negritude has been based on assumed premises (Niekerk, 1970:112). Negritude has infact, already died a natural death and its

message to contribute something of lasting beauty to the world, yet will remain the guiding star of generations of African poets to come (Niekerk, 1970:112).

Sogolo (1993: 202) sees negritude as a basic affirmation of negro values and a reaction to the imposed inferiority upon the Africans. For Sogolo (1993:202), negritude moved from the rebuttal of the European portrait, beyond the affirmation of equality with the European into a claim of superiority. Negritude is an anti-racist stand whose objective is to rescue the African from European racialism (Sogolo 1993: 202). However, “the affirmation of cultural superiority of the African over the European commits no less a crime than that of European racist” (Sogolo, 1993: 202). Negritude turns out to be a form of anti-racist racialism. In Sogolo’s view, negritude romanticizes the past of the African world. Sogolo objects to the glory of the African past for the following reasons, first, the belief in human sacrifices and secondly, the belief that twins should be killed is dysfunctional. For this reason, the demand of negritude for a revival of the totality of the African past is morally questionable. Furthermore (Sogolo 1993:204) argues that the nostalgic feelings we have for the past may blind our eyes to the realities of the contemporary world. The impact of modern science and technology cannot be thrown away in favour of pre-scientific values. However, Sogolo (1993:204) maintains that negritude as an intellectual doctrine with all its weaknesses still provides the African culture with a base for constructing social and political institutions that meet the needs of contemporary Africa.

For Soyinka (2003:621), negritude was emphasized as a liturgy of racial exorcism and, for the victims of French colonial alienation, it provided the vessel of the exorcist creed, extolling the recovery of identity. According to Soyinka (2003:621), a tiger does not need to proclaim its tigritude but it simply attacks. Soyinka sees it as irrelevant for negritude to emphasize on blackness since this is just a reaction to white supremacy. Negritude is supposed to address

issues that affect Africans rather than focusing on issues of identity. This means the doctrine falls prey even of the very object it wishes to attack. Soyinka (2003:622) sees it as a form of “anti-racist racism.” As a result of its internal inconsistency, negritude failed to be a philosophy of relevance to colonial and post colonial African realities (Soyinka, 1999:99). Soyinka questions Senghor’s anchorage of the poem “The Prayer for Peace” on Roman Catholic Forgiveness. While this may be considered as a fallacy of ad hominem circumstantial in the sense that Soyinka attacks Senghor on the basis of his Catholic background, instead of concentrating on the flaws of negritude as such, Senghor can also be accused of endorsing Catholic doctrine without subjecting it to critical reflection. Soyinka (1999:113) sees Senghor’s stance on forgiveness of the white race in general and the French in particular, as “inhuman heart of forgiveness.” For Soyinka, it is inhuman because it is “near super human or transcendental” especially when Senghor asks for “the setting of France upon the Father’s right hand.” Senghor understands of the Africans as people of intuition, rhythm and ancestral³⁷ strength as laven for reconciliation in the dough of humanity is neither real nor applicable to the self and the community (Soyinka, 1999:132).

Makumba (2007:121), views negritude as “a proposed theory of black racial consciousness and the creation of African collective identity.” It is a solution to the problem of degradation of the African race created by colonial ideology but it is critiqued for its culturalism. Culturalism is the tendency of seeing a particular culture as wholly good. For Makumba, poems, folklore and songs are insufficient for shaping African culture (Makumba 2007:121). Negritude remained uncritical and failed to be radical enough to shake off the racist status quo (Makumba, 2007: 123). The

³⁷ The use of the term ancestral uncritically is an endorsement of colonial mentality Soyinka wishes to dislodge. As pointed out earlier in chapter 2, the term ‘living dead’ is more appropriate as it captures the African understanding of life after death.

weakness of negritude lies on the fact that it thrives on the same fallacy of colonial culture³⁸ as it hoped to counter. The fallacy lies in begging the question or assuming what has to be proved. Negritude remains contradictory and irrelevant as long as it rests on internal weaknesses. For Makumba (2007:123), an irrelevant philosophy cannot rest satisfied with responding to apparent problems or symptoms of problems. Unless African philosophy has the African situation for its object, such a philosophy is of no use and it serves to alienate Africans more and more from themselves (Makumba, 2007:123).

5.3.3 Anti-revivalism

Hountondji offers a multifaceted critique of ethnophilosophy.³⁹ Ethnophilosophy is the view that African philosophy exists in the form of a collective worldview and that the task of contemporary African intellectuals is carefully to document this worldview so that it might be pressed into the service of practical aims. Hountondji (1996:60) argues that ethnophilosophy rests on mistaken assumptions about African peoples and about the nature of philosophy. In the end, he believes that ethnophilosophy impedes rather than facilitates efforts effectively to address the challenges of the present. Hountondji (1996:60) maintains that ethnophilosophy perpetuates a false and ultimately insulting view of African peoples. African intellectuals perpetuate “the myth of primitive unanimity” when they write about “négritude,” “timeless codes of behavior,” or “*the African worldview*,” (Hountondji 1996: 60). The myth holds that

³⁸ Namely, the “special logic” controlling the mutual perception shapes the cultural logic of a stereotypical picture drawn from a prejudice and double edged destructive racist perception

³⁹ Although ethnophilosophy is not the same as cultural revivalism, ethnophilosophy is the source of myths, proverbs, taboos, stories and songs from which cultural revivalists construct philosophy. An attack of ethnophilosophy becomes an indirect attack of the cultural revivalist project.

African persons are fundamentally united in their views about the most important matters in life. This idea originated in colonial discourse about Africa, and Hountondji (1996:60) argues that it is not enough simply to put a positive spin on the traits that define African identity. The very idea of a global African mentality or worldview distorts the richness and cultural diversity of African peoples. Ethnophilosophers might see such unifying concepts as a basis for needed solidarity, but Hountondji (1996:60) sees them as a distinct liability, since they fail to take into account real differences among Africans in addressing the complex problems that beset the continent. In a discussion of unanimism, Kwame Appiah highlights precisely this point when he remarks: “Africans share too many problems and projects to be distracted by a bogus basis for solidarity” (Appiah 1992:26). Hountondji himself emphasizes a more ominous side of the distraction noted by Appiah. Specifically, he argues that ethnophilosophy serves as a powerful tool for authoritarian governments who wish to divert the population’s attention away from the realities of exploitation and oppression. In a characteristically acerbic passage, Hountondji writes:

“At a time when the gap between oppressor and oppressed is widening throughout our continent and political differences are becoming more radical, the ethnophilosopher claims that we have always been . . . and always will be unanimous. On every side we see terror tightening its stranglehold on us . . . ; every word spoken spells danger and exposes us to untold brutality . . . ; insolent neocolonial state apparatuses parade in triumph, leaving a trail of intimidation, arbitrary arrest, torture and legal assassination and poisoning genuine thought at its source. And the official ideologue smiles, content, and declares: “Alleluia, our ancestors have thought!” (Hountondji 1996:170)

As Hountondji (1996:170) sees it, in authoritarian states, slogans about African authenticity and attendant celebrations of African cultural traditions function as a “powerful opiate,” which serves to “mystify” the masses and deaden them to the bleak realities of everyday life.

The problem with this use of the term “philosophy” can be seen when it is contrasted with the way the term is used in reference to the Western tradition. To define philosophy as a collective worldview is to obscure the proper meaning of the term: Philosophy is a critical activity, not a passive holding of beliefs by either individuals or social groups (Hountondji, 1996:171).

5.3.4 Critique of anti-revivalism

The argument advanced by antirevivalism amounts to an evasion of the kind of critical thinking that is urgently needed to address the problems that exist within African societies. What is needed is a careful analysis of the ways in which traditional beliefs might impede modernisation, and the ways in which they might provide useful insights. Hountondji’s suggestion of a clean break with the past is problematic since the past can provide elements for innovative reconstruction for contemporary problems. Hountondji’s definition of philosophy as “a critical activity, not a passive holding of beliefs by either individuals or social groups” is objectionable for two reasons. First, the definition is too narrow to accommodate definitions of philosophy that come out of different cultures in the pluriversal world. Secondly, to deny the philosophy held by individuals or groups is to miss the whole point in cultural philosophy. Again the holding of beliefs by groups cannot be described as “passive” because there is some critical reflection upon experience made to arrive at such a beliefs.

5.3.5 The Critical Trend

The critical trend comes in as an examination of both revivalism and antirevivalism in the African philosophy of economics debate. The approach mainly sees both revivalism and

antirevivalism as fallacious in the sense that each position sees total acceptance or total rejection of the cultural past as the way forward in contemporary African philosophy of economics. Such thinking is based on the fallacy of false dichotomy that assumes two alternatives as exhaustive without taking into consideration a third possibility that accepts positive elements while rejecting negative elements from the cultural past.

Oladipo (1995:34) argues for a cultural synthesis of elements from both the African past and ideas from Western culture. A selection of elements is a critical exercise since it takes positive aspects while putting aside negative views. This approach becomes relevant for this study which focuses on selected Shona proverbs in search of important philosophical elements for the study of contemporary economic problems. While it is important to admit that it is no longer possible to rely entirely on ideas of the cultural past, it is important to consider that it is not possible to reject this culture entirely. Africa today is in a state of development and this requires changes in the physical environment and the mental outlook of the people (Oladipo, 1995:34). It should be noted that the realization that change is inevitable does not entail the belief that a total break with the past is possible or that the road to freedom in Africa lies in assimilation of African culture to western culture (Oladipo, 1995:34). Certain aspects of the cultural past require modification as we participate in the quest for development and the past has a role in this quest (Oladipo, 1995:35). Development is a process of social reconstruction in which the past survives in the present though in modified form (Oladipo, 1995:35). Our origin defines the essence of our being which can be modified under the impact of various influences, but which remains part of our being and which we cannot outgrow or leave behind (Oladipo, 1995:35). The past survives in the present (Oladipo, 1995:35). For Oladipo, (1995:35) “this is not to say that this past is static and

unchanging as revivalists would want to convey, but it changes” (Oladipo, 1995:35). If the past survives in the present, then an adequate understanding of the present depends, in part, on having an adequate knowledge of the past (Oladipo, 1995:35). Since an adequate knowledge of the past depends on reasonable grasp of ideas which our people lived by and how they informed their daily activities, then a critical study of indigenous conceptions of the past is essential (Oladipo, 1995:34). According to Oladipo (1995:35) “such studies [of the cultural past] would enable us to determine the strengths and weaknesses of past conceptions and the need of transformation they need to undergo in order to enable us to cope with the challenges of today.” African scholars should study and reconstruct indigenous conceptual schemes with a view of determining their suitability for contemporary life. We can develop without compromising our identity. The need to improve conditions does not entail self-alienation (Oladipo, 1995:35-36). There is need to explore all aspects of our culture namely, indigenous thinking, Christianity, Islam and Western ideas (Oladipo, 1995:36). Exploring ideas would mean readiness to extract the best from each with a view of attaining a synthesis that would be relevant for contemporary existence (Oladipo, 1995:36). The quest for development cannot be successful if all we do is strive to return to our old ways of life or pursue change along lines established by foreigners (Oladipo, 1995:34). Oladipo (1995:36) observes;

“The challenge of this quest requires recognition and maintaining two mutually supportive forces namely (1) examination of the past with a view of discovering aspects of it that are useful for contemporary existence and preserving our identity (2) observing the present and contemplating the future with a view to appropriate best practices in scientific and intellectual resources of mankind.”

A careful and balanced use of these two forces can strengthen our interaction with other cultures (Oladipo, 1995:36). This approach appears to escape the pitfalls of both revivalism and

antirevivalism while paving a way forward that is both plausible and critical. The critical approach presented by Oladipo is reinforced by Gyekye in the argument that follows.

Gyekye (1997b:237) argues that, the perception of the normative status of the value of the African cultural past in the contemporary world results in “tensions, confusions, uncertainties, ambivalences and inconsistencies.” For Gyekye (1997:237b), confusions and inconsistencies stem from the failure to delineate or distinguish between positive and negative features of African culture. It is this failure that leads revivalists to collapse the two features into something entirely valuable while leading the antirevivalists to collapse them into something entirely worthless. According to Gyekye (1997b:237), neither the revivalists nor the antirevivalists are entirely correct in their claims. In his critical approach, Gyekye (1997b:237) makes a distinction between extreme or unrestricted revivalist position and extreme or unrestricted antirevivalist position. An extreme revivalist position is nostalgic about the African past. It sees the heritage of the past as perfect and constituting a viable context of contemporary life (Gyekye, 1997b:237). An extreme antirevivalist position sees the heritage of the past as useless for contemporary life (Gyekye, 1997b:237). Both positions are seen by Gyekye (1997b:238) as “mistaken, implausible, and unjustifiable because they appear to unnecessarily overstate their case.” The antirevivalist position is inconsistent with empirical findings “for scholars have documented the virtues of the African past” (Gyekye, 1997:237b). If an argument goes against established facts, then it is uncogent or unsound. It is implausible to argue for the rejection of the whole complex of creations of the cultural past (Gyekye, 1997b:238). An indiscriminate rejection of the entire cultural past is an absurdity (Gyekye, 1997b:238). There are cultural values, ideas, practices and institutions that have never been allowed to completely sink (Gyekye, 1997b:239).

According to Gyekye (1997:239b), “to reject the position of unrestricted antirevivalism, however, is not by any means to embrace the position of the revivalist.” The reason is that not every aspect of the cultural past ought to be revised. Every society has a culture but not every society is developed. Elements of culture must function adequately to attain the goals of development (Gyekye, 1997:240b). Aspects that are impediments to development must be dropped. The revivalist assumption that all characteristics of a culture can constitute themselves into a viable framework of development is mistaken. A critical examination of the cultural setting of development should be done (Gyekye, 1997b:240). For Gyekye (1997b:241);

“By advocating for a return to and maintenance of the entire cultural past and not showing any awareness of the negative features of the culture that are deleterious to the course of development, the revivalist have taken a position that is misguided and counterproductive in matters of development and progress of their societies.”

Unrestricted cultural revivalist and the extreme unrestricted cultural antirevivalism must be rejected on the grounds that both positions are infected by unnecessary hyperbole (Gyekye, 1997b:241). Both positions are affected by sweeping, hasty, premature and lopsided judgements about the negative and positive features of African culture (Gyekye, 1997b:243). “Any judgement about the total relevance or the total irrelevance of cultural values of the past to contemporary cultural setting is bound not only to be premature but also to be a distortion of the truth” (Gyekye, 1997b:243). A wholesale condemnation or exaltation of the culture of a people would be unrealistic and could easily be falsified if investigations into the complexities of the culture result in one’s rejection or appreciation of some features of it.

Hountondji, (2002:23) revises his earlier position⁴⁰ and sees the problem of indigenous knowledge as marginalisation and “it goes its own way, side by side with the new knowledge system.” This situation gives a relationship that Hountondji (2002:23) calls “mute juxtaposition and mutual ignorance.” Indigenous knowledge “lies in the margins of science” and “we must not close ourselves into heritage without a critical approach” (Hountondji 2002:24). This situation creates exclusivism in knowledge and its consequences are undesirable. To move out of such a stagnant position, Hountondji (2002:36) suggests “we should invent new ways in which knowledge can be better shared by the North and South in all its phases, be at the phase of production, accumulation and capitalisation or of application.” The exchange of knowledge will result in free and critical evaluation of “anything that can be useful for us in the intellectual heritage available in the world” (Hountondji, 2002:36). This opens up “critical reappropriation of indigenous knowledge systems” (Hountondji, 2002:36). “We must find ways of reformulating traditional knowledge in terms of the imported knowledge and vice-versa, we must integrate the traditional into the modern in a way that allows the development of new forms rationality, enlarged and more comprehensive than the forms prevailing today” (Hountondji 2002:36). The research draws from Oladipo and Gyekye and later Hountondji’s critical positions to argue for an African philosophy of economics in the next section.

⁴⁰ The change of position by Hountondji can be seen as a progression of thought rather than a contradiction of his own position. The researcher shall make a distinction between early Hountondji and later Hountondji in the analysis of tradition and modernity.

5.4 Why an African Philosophy of Economics?

The work shall draw from Gyekye's argument against economism and Okere's critique on the meaning of science to justify the necessity of an African Philosophy of Economics. Economism and an inadequate conception of science contribute to a flawed understanding of economic thinking in Africa. According to Gyekye (1994:45), the Western epistemological paradigm sees economic thinking in terms of exaggerated emphasis on measurable indexes of wealth and identification of economic development with the capacity of national economy to generate an annual increase in its gross national product of above 5%⁴¹. Principles and categories of Western epistemological paradigm are used. The above Western views are described by Gyekye (1994:46) as "economism." Economism denigrates the values and knowledge system that sustain African indigenous economic organization (Gyekye, 1994:46). Gyekye sees economism as misplaced and narrow because it overlooks historical, cultural and economic situations in the philosophical conception of economic development (Gyekye, 1994:46). Economism falsely categorises people into wealthy and poor, developed and underdeveloped that are misleading in the African economic worldview (Gyekye, 1994:46). Gyekye sees the divisions as false because they leave out a third category of 'average wealth' and 'developing' in each category respectively.⁴² For Gyekye (1994:46) economism is lopsided, inadequate and unrealistic because

⁴¹ The depiction of development in terms of mere satisfaction of needs rather than validation of beliefs largely explains the underdevelopment of Africa. By not being a program of corroboration of beliefs, development fails to be animated by a competitive, insatiable, and creative spirit (Kabede, 2004:107).

⁴² A further criticism leveled at this perspective was directed at its tendency to draw dichotomies such as "open/closed" and "modern/traditional", whereby the West is seen as having open and modern societies and Africa as having closed and traditional societies. Peter Amato (1997) is one of those in the forefront advancing this criticism. In his article entitled "African philosophy and

if fails to accommodate the complex nature of human society and culture. “Economism is fallacious because it identifies economic development with development yet a species cannot be identical with its genus.” The unrealistic assumptions, the narrowness and fallacies of economism justify the need for an African Philosophy of economics that meaningfully accommodates the African paradigm, historical and economic circumstances that are necessary for an adequate conception of African economic thinking.

For Okere (2005:21), the desire to know is natural in all human beings and all cultures have developed their forms of knowledge. Okere’s observation opens room for African philosophers to question the reliance on borrowed knowledge to explain the African economic situation. Science remains “only one of the many legitimate forms of knowledge and the West as only one of its producers” (Okere, 2005:20). Okere (2005:22) identifies three distinct definitions of science. The first is “a special activity or mode of being where human beings relate to reality from the perspective of truth” (Okere, 2005:22). This conception of science is a definition of knowledge. In the second definition, science is understood as “the building of bodies of systems of truth about specified regions of reality following well defined methods” (Okere, 2005:22). The third understanding sees science as the study of matter using mathematical applications (Okere, 2005:22). The third definition is the most restrictive and it has gained the greatest prominence. In the third definition, science is restricted to a fraction of reality and to one

modernity”, Amato dismisses such dichotomies within the Western intellectual thought as simply rhetorical and having a tendency to undermine African philosophy while allowing Western culture to subsume others in a “homogenous, self-serving narrative” (Amato, 1997: 75). The main pitfall of this discourse, he argues, is its failure to acknowledge the role and contribution that different intellectual cultures may play in producing overlapping conceptualizations of social reality and human nature. Hence, there is a need for a shift from putative universal horizon to differentiated horizons of different cultures and writers, which allows for a mutually free discourse (Amato, 1997: 75).

pathway of human knowledge (Okere, 2005:22). Science is plural and not one (Okere, 2005:22). While the restricted conception of science has produced technological success, it becomes “more a science of the materially useful and less a science in the quest for truth, it becomes a know-how rather than a knowledge” (Okere, 2005:22). The restricted understanding of science is used for measuring the economic success of cultural groupings while neglecting their moral and spiritual attitudes towards economic thinking. The marginalization of metaphysical and epistemological perspectives in economic thinking justifies the need of a genuinely African philosophy of economics. Philosophy of economics must be understood to be broader and deeper than the narrow and restrictive mathematical focus.

5.5 African Philosophy of Economics

African philosophy of economics can be defined as the critical use and application of indigenous African epistemological paradigms for economic behaviour, transformation and growth. The term ‘critical’ is important because the African epistemological paradigm has to be examined to select elements that may be appropriate to the contemporary African economic condition. African philosophy of economics provides the metaphysical basis of wealth and well-being. In addition, it offers ethical criteria for evaluating economic behaviour and justification of economic actions that are seen as good for the community. The application must be critical and reflective enough to pick important elements while rejecting aspects that may retard progress. In the section that follows, three distinct but related arguments for the meaning, purpose and application of African philosophy of economics shall be examined.

5.5.1 Argument 1: African economic philosophy as a critique of capitalism

Murove (2009:221) argues that, African philosophy of economics is incompatible with the capitalist spirit. Contemporary attempts by African scholars to devise a modified system of economic philosophy inclusive of African indigenous values are aimed at making capitalism conceptually relevant to the African cultural realities. This can be acceptable as a starting point but beyond that Africans need to think of their economic system that is appropriate for their needs and informed by African philosophical ideas. Such a philosophy will avoid the pitfalls of capitalism. Capitalism revolves around individualism and personal gain as opposed to communitarian economic relations of African philosophical thought⁴³.

Gyekye (1997:155) observes that the pursuit of wealth in Africa has a metaphysical foundation since the munificence of “God” is the basis of human well-being. The metaphysical foundation has important implications for economic behaviour in Africa. Economic behaviour has to pass the ethical test. Material success and well-being are constantly evaluated from an ethical perspective.

Moyo (1999:51) reinforces Gyekye’s argument when he contends that among Africans, wealth is seen as coming from “God” and the living dead. To prosper is to live in harmony with others and the living dead. This entails that wealth must be clean without being mixed with any evil deed because that is inconsistent with the expectations of both the living dead and “God”. Material possessions are seen as deriving from the living dead and by implication; they must be shared with others in the community as a way of expressing solidarity (Murove, 2009:231). The

⁴³ Wiredu (2009:16) understands personhood as “something that one can gain and later lose.” There is a discomfort that arises with this view of personhood. “The discomfort arises out of a clash of oral intuitions reflecting the deep difference between African communalism and Western individualism” (Wiredu, 2009:16).

obligation to share means one cannot be individualistic or live in isolation from the living dead and the needy since that will be viewed as anti-communal that fits the life of a witch or a sorcerer (Moyo, 1991:52). The witch or sorcerer is seen as anti-communal because they disrupt peace and harmony by doing evil acts that result in the suffering of members of community. Material possessions come from providence and there is an ethical obligation for individuals to refrain from selfishness. Ranger (1989:299) asserts that, among the Shona, *Mwari* is believed to own the country's resources. Drought and epidemics are seen as *Mwari's* disapproval in people's participation in the new capitalist cash economy. For Murove (2009:231), in a socio-cultural context where material goods are understood to be under the sanction of the deity, those ethical norms approved by the deity come to determine economic behaviour. The Weberian economic qualities of thrift and frugality are inconsistent with African economic behaviour (Murove, 2009:231). In the African context, sharing is very important among neighbours and whoever does not share withholds life from another. Sharing keeps human contact close and that is why Africans can afford big feasts for friends and relatives. Relations should be considered as more important than material possessions. African economic behaviour places emphasis on celebrations as a way of expressing communal solidarity. African economic behaviour is based on subsistence without over-accumulation of wealth (Murove, 2009:232). The African belief system allows for contentment and uniformity in the community. Goodness, kindness and decency are seen as examples of economic behaviour set by the living dead. Economic progress is seen as good if it benefits the community and it is bad when it exploits members of the community. Virtues of collectiveness such as group solidarity, conformity, compassion, respect, human dignity and unity should be made integral to African philosophy of economics (Murove,

2009:232). Communalism and well-being are central to African economic thinking and indigenous values might allow a new culturally relevant economic system in Africa.

5.5.2 Argument 2: African economic philosophy as a means of economic transformation

Nussbaum (2009:238) defends *ubuntu* as an African economic paradigm that is capable of catalyzing the transformation of business and economic practice in Africa. The concept of catalyst is important because *ubuntu* becomes a philosophy that brings change without it being changed in the process. African economic thinking must embrace *ubuntu* in the way business is run (Nussbaum, 2009:239). *Ubuntu* should be included in economic thinking because it is “deeply communal and spiritual” (Nussbaum, 2009:239). With modification, African *indabas* (participatory community meetings) can have important roles in economic thinking as vehicles for dialogue and economic transformation. *Indabas* accord dignity and value for every member that participates in the debate without sidelining the views of others. Business is seen as a community rather than a structure of power (Mtembu, 2002:221). A community provides room for interdependence and teamwork while a structure of power becomes the basis of authoritarian thinking and intimidation of weaker members. *Ubuntu* encourages relations, community and team building in the economic sphere. Business articulates the need for people to recognize their common humanity (Nussbaum, 2009:245). Recognition of common humanity is important because each person shall be considered as significant within the economic system.

Prior to Nussbaum’s views, Allee (2003:135) had observed:

“We are beginning to redefine ourselves not as masters of the pluriverse but as global citizens sailing a precious blue planet through the cosmos together. This awareness of interdependence, of a common humanity is experienced in the

business sector with greater frequency. And yet we are just beginning to acknowledge the emotional and spiritual losses associated with our inattention to unconscious shared inhumanity.”

Allee’s observation underlines the need to address emotional poverty using African indigenous economic thinking that places emphasis on emotions and spirituality. If emotions and spirituality are part and parcel of the human being in the African context, their exclusion in economic philosophy creates an alienated and inauthentic economic being.

According to Nussbaum (2009:245), “one of the repercussions of a new business paradigm infused with *ubuntu* would be to free Western workplaces from the tyranny of soulless technical professionalism and the culture of emotional denial.” This will help to transform economic thinking into the realistic and practical levels. In Eurocentric corporate culture, people are expected to “leave their feelings and their spirituality at home” (Nussbaum, 2009:245). In Africa, feelings and spirituality would naturally be part of the work context (Nussbaum, 2009:245). The culture of reciprocity within work or community is deeply embedded within African culture (Nussbaum, 2009:246). Work goes beyond physical labour to imply fulfillment of family or communal obligations.

African economic philosophy can influence corporate culture and governance in the following ways: spiritual collectiveness is prized over individualism. This determines the communal nature of life where households live as interdependent neighborhood. Humility and helpfulness to others is more important than criticism of them. African culture values co-existence with other people. There is inherent belief in trust and fairness. There is high standard of morality and optimism based on the belief in the supreme being who is believed to be the creator of mankind (King Report, 2002:1-5).

Ubuntu would foster the human qualities of humility over arrogance, co-operation over domination and generosity over greed, not only within but between companies and their relationship with stakeholders in other countries (Nussbaum, 2009:249). *Ubuntu* helps to place inclusive dialogue and discussion at the heart of economic agendas (Nussbaum, 2009:249). It promises a humane future for the good of all (Nussbaum, 2009:249). *Ubuntu* encourages generous and co-operative consciousness that recognizes communality of groups. *Ubuntu* results in compassion that eliminates criminality, terrorism, poverty and greed in the sharing of economic resources. *Ubuntu* could become one of the best methods for creating sustainability and social security (Nussbaum, 2009:250). Africans believe that the only wealth is that which is shared and is made visible to the community (Nussbaum, 2009:250). If economies were to harness *ubuntu* values more purposefully, there would be more formal and informal mechanisms to create social and economic policies and institutional strategies (Nussbaum, 2009:250). Wealth would be shared more visibly by ensuring that all people had access to basic services (Nussbaum, 2009:249). *Ubuntu* would provide an integrating philosophy to inform and transform business relationships between seemingly separate categories of profit and people, politics and economics, material and spiritual (Nussbaum, 2009:250). *Ubuntu* would seek to create conditions where relationships are mutually reinforcing, productive, fair and co-operative within and between companies and their links with national and global networks (Nussbaum, 2009:250). *Ubuntu* paradigm provides ethical principles to corporate leaders and consumers (Nussbaum, 2009:250-251). *Ubuntu* potentially transforms the meaning of business, the manner of trade and investment, the nature of profit and the character of economic relations. The potentiality is seen in the *ubuntu*'s encouragement of networks and teamwork within business relations.

While capitalist thinking is based on the extraction model where oil or coal is extracted from the ground, labour from employees, capital from local community, sales from customers or market shares from the market with the net effect of depletion of natural and human resources; *ubuntu* is other-oriented, process oriented, and stresses on communal responsiveness and responsibility (Nussbaum, 2009:251). In the *ubuntu* model, stakeholders and community are enriched by business exchanges so that business transactions become mutually affirming and productive so as to serve the needs of humanity. Value systems promote economic sustainability. *Ubuntu* is wiser, more caring and collaborative when compared to capitalism. Compassion and care pave way for a holistic economic philosophy that provides a new understanding of humanity and interconnectedness. *Ubuntu* encourages corporate social responsibility where profits made in economic activity are ploughed back to the community for the benefit of the community.

5.5.3 Argument 3: Critical selection of African indigenous values in economic growth

Dandala (2009:260) maintains that *ubuntu* cannot be reduced to a methodology but it is a statement about being. The way one relates to other people and one's surroundings is critical to determining one's beingness (Dandala, 2009:260). *Ubuntu* requires learning and sharing for it to be cultivated among economic transactions. The fundamental values of African economic thinking can trigger African economic growth. Economic growth depends on the community and family.

According to Dandala (2009:260), economic growth in the African context is seen in the expression "cows never die." The expression is based on the cow loaning practice called *ukusisa* in Zulu or *kuronzera* in Shona. In the practice, a fellow member of the community who is poor is assisted out of poverty by being lent a cow (Dandala, 2009:260). The practice protects the

dignity of the poor person. The poor person is politely asked to look after the cow and when the poor person obliges, the cow will provide milk, manure and draught to the poor person. After some years, the owner will reclaim the cow but the poor person will be entitled to one or two calves as seed capital for his or her new herd. This is a way of sharing wealth that is positive and affirming *ubuntu*. It is dignified, productive and embedded in African culture. The method of sharing wealth strengthens individuals and the community and the model can be used by companies to share wealth. *Ubuntu* forbids management from exploiting workers for unfair gain and encourages sharing to ensure teamwork is rewarded (Dandala, 2009:275). The process of sharing wealth does not only encourage economic growth but it also involves key African values such as dignity, community and self-respect. In the cow example, a sense of responsibility towards the cow is expected. “It would be shameful for a person looking after a cow to let it die. Even if the cow is stuck in the mud, a man who values his cows would urge his herders to rush and slaughter it before it dies” (Dandala, 2009:275). For a cow to die out of negligence, it would mean the owner was uncaring. In the African context, “there is no natural death of a cow. A cow never dies but it must be slaughtered” (Dandala, 2009:275). A slaughtered cow can bring quality beef to the owner for sharing with relatives and friends or it can bring economic gain from selling the beef. Cows are seen as symbols of wealth that require responsible care. *Ubuntu* should allow economic growth based on the African value system by “implementation of its principles, creativity and formation of partnerships” (Dandala, 2009:276).

5.6 Shona Philosophy of Economics

Shona philosophy of economics is based on the Shona metaphysical belief system that acknowledges the existence of both the supreme being *Mwari* and *vadzimu* (the living dead). For the Shona, *pfuma* (wealth) is a result of the providence of both *Mwari* and *vadzimu*. Any

acquisition of wealth should be consistent with the expectations of *Mwari* and *vadzimu*. *Mwari* and *vadzimu* are seen as wishing good for the community. This metaphysical belief provides room for ethically sound ways of thinking about wealth.

According to Gombe, (1998:150) indigenous Shona people have long developed a variety of systems to govern their communities. Their indigenous and local economic systems ensured sustainable utilization of resources, social responsibility and harmonious relationships through cooperation. Gombe (1998:151) identifies reciprocity and social responsibility as main principles of Shona indigenous economic systems. The principles result in sharing among indigenous communities. Shona communities seek to meet the basic needs of all their members through the sharing of food, labour or implements. Gender relations and division of work in some communities are well defined and, in special cases called *nhimbe* (working together).

A third principle is the sustainable use of resources. The lifestyles of Shona indigenous communities are relatively simple, in line with their practice of sustainable use of natural resources (Gombe, 1998:205). Locally available materials are used for crafts and tools, discourage wasteful use of resources, and practice zoning for different land uses. They have regulatory mechanisms in place to ensure sustainability. These mechanisms involve the participation of every member of the community in the use of natural resources. In addition, the chiefs, kraal heads and village police officers ensure that every member of the community abides by the rules by enforcing laws that attract fines to those who violate the laws.

5.7 Shona Philosophy of Economics as expressed in selected proverbs⁴⁴

The research shall select Shona proverbs to examine the dignity of poor persons, the significance of hard work and the social problems associated with the extreme desire for money. In each of the themes, the role played by Shona metaphysics and ethics shall be shown so as to develop a Shona philosophy of economics. The selected proverbs reinforce the earlier observation that Shona philosophy of economics has a metaphysical basis and any economic activity is seen as good if it is ethically justified by both the living dead and the living members of the community. Furthermore, dignified economic activity must also be of benefit to those yet to be born through *nhaka* (inheritance of wealth).

Three themes that include the dignity of the poor person, the importance of hard-work and moderate desire for money have been chosen to exemplify Shona philosophy of economics. The themes have been selected because they show the philosophy of *ubuntu* that is critical to greediness and individualism while articulating an indigenous philosophy of economics. The themes rely on metaphysics and ethics of the Shona which place importance on the human subject in economic thinking. Dignity appears to unite the three themes since dignity of persons; dignity of work and dignity of attitudes are shown. The internal thread of dignity helps Shona

⁴⁴ Bodunrin (1984:12-13) contends that proverbs could serve a philosophical function for the African philosopher. He writes: "There is no *a priori* reason why proverbs,...could not be proper subjects for philosophical enquiry.... The African philosopher cannot *deliberately* ignore the study of the traditional belief system of his people. Philosophical problems arise out of real life situations." For Bodunrin no African or non-African philosopher should ignore Africa's belief systems because from them emerges the stock from which African philosophy is built. Whether these philosophies are written or not, they are thoughts of a people.

economic philosophy to guard against exploitation of persons, unethical acquisition of wealth and greediness in the use of money. In the spirit of the critical trend, these proverbs have been used in a way that reconstructs the positive elements in contemporary times.

5.7.1 The Dignity of the poor person

The philosophy of *ubuntu* enables the Shona to accord dignity to persons who may be under disadvantaged economic situations. The proverb that goes *murombo munhu* (a poor person is a human being) shows this point (Hamutyinei and Plannger, 2013:33). Dignity of persons is considered as an intrinsic value that arises from the sacredness of the human being due to the metaphysical belief in *Mwari* who is seen as the creator of human beings. The Shona also believe that the poor person can one day come out of his or her poverty if he or she makes a genuine appeal to *vadzimu* (the living dead). *Vadzimu* may sympathise with the poor person and help can come through living persons within the community such as friends or relatives. As a result, economic thinking should respect the ontological status and significance of the individual. A human being, among the Shona, should always be taken as a subject and never as an object. Poverty is considered as a phase of history that affects individuals but it has no capacity to diminish intrinsic value. Recognising the dignity of persons may not entail going back to the past as revivalists may wish to claim, but it is a critical appraisal of a useful element that can be used to transform and reconstruct economic philosophy.

A Shona practice that shows the dignity of persons is the practice of *nhimbe* (working as a team). While the practice of *nhimbe* (doing work together), is not specifically targeted for poor persons among the Shona (Gombe, 1998:151) it benefits the poor person more and it is done

indiscriminately to confirm the proverb *murombo munhu*. *Nhimbe* covers many agricultural activities that include ploughing, weeding, harvesting and shelling grain. Administration of *nhimbe* is centralized and it is done by the village head to ensure that two *nhimbe* related activities are done on separate days and spaced sufficiently to allow room for individual tasks (Gombe, 1998:151). A poor person who may not have cattle for draught may benefit in a dignified manner from *nhimbe*⁴⁵. Fellow villagers who own cattle come to the assistance of the poor person by ploughing all his or her fields in one day. The practice allows the poor person to invest in farming and get food security for the family in a dignified manner. To ensure that poor villagers are not ashamed, *nhimbe* can also be carried out for rich villagers. Regardless of the economic status of the beneficiary of *nhimbe*, fellow villagers who do the work must be supplied with abundant food and drink in form of *doro* (beer) or sorghum drink (*maheu*).

Another practice which is done among Shona women is sharing seeds as a way of economic empowerment. The seeds shared are for crops that are reserved for women such as groundnuts,

⁴⁵ According to Wiredu (2015:6) the Akan proverb *obra ye nnoboa* (life is mutual aid) is expressed practically when members of a community help each other in tasks of agricultural production such as clearing the ground or scooping heaps of cocoa beans. For such help to be obtained, it was necessary to inform fellow villagers of the time, place and nature of work to be done (Wiredu, 2015:6). Invited members of the community would carry out the task with speed and enthusiasm using their own tools for the work. The act of helping others would be reciprocated in future when a member who has participated in helping a fellow villager would also need help in future. Although Wiredu (2006:6) points out that the practice of mutual aid may be losing power because of commercialization of agriculture and urbanization, he still insists that the people of Ghana in general, and the Akan people in particular, help each other in daily life in countless ways. Wiredu (2015:6) adds that a Ghanaian in a large city or in the countryside still gets out of his or her way to help a Ghanaian or a foreigner who may be in a difficult situation. The point made by Wiredu shows the cross-cultural nature of African proverbs and the communalistic foundation of African ethics.

round nuts, sorghum, millet, cow peas and sweet potato cuttings. If one woman discovers a high yielding variety of any of the mentioned crops, she may identify a poor fellow woman within the village and assist her with the high yielding seed. The purpose of the sharing is to ensure that the poorer woman gets food for her family and surplus for sale. This also reduces the poor woman's dependency on other villagers and she is saved from shame and embarrassment. This practice is still prevalent in Shona rural areas of Zimbabwe and it confirms the proverb *murombo munhu*.

5.7.2 The importance of hard work

The Shona proverb *kupfuma kunowanikwa nedikita* (riches come through hard work) emphasizes the economic value of work (Hamutyinei and Plannger, 2013:327). Diligence is valued among the Shona because it is considered as an ethically acceptable way of acquisition of wealth. By prescribing hard work as a means of getting rich, it means the Shona are aware of other methods of acquisition of wealth that are unethical and non-dignified such as theft, robbery, magic and exploitation of fellow human beings. A variant of this proverb is *chekuba hachipfumisi* (A stolen thing cannot enrich a person) which means that for the Shona, wealth must pass the ethical test. Hard work is pleasing to the living dead and *Mwari* while theft is believed to be contrary to the ethical expectations of *vadzimu*. There is dignity and respect in hard work. This dignity applies to both the worker and fellow members of the community. Unethical means of wealth acquisition disturb the peace of the community and such wealth may bring problems rather than benefits to the community. For the Shona, wealth should benefit the living and those yet to be born while being acceptable in the eyes of the living dead.

Shona practices that show respect for hard work include *kudetemba mutupo* the use of praise poems, *kushuma* to encourage hard workers and *kupembera* celebrating achievements. Praise

poems are usually recited by women in Shona culture to thank anyone who will have worked hard. The hard worker may be a child, a relative or friend regardless of gender. In the past, praise songs were used to thank hunters and fruit gatherers but currently praise poems can be used for thanking anyone who has exhibited hard work in farming, fishing and even domestic work. To children, praise poems are effective tools of encouraging hard work and prosperity. Among the Shona, it is immoral to pass through a place where people are working without passing a comment that praises hard work. The comments that respect and dignify work are known as *kushuma*. Among the Shona, *kushuma* may not only involve comments that praise hard work but it may also include assisting the workers for a few minutes for free. If a member of the Shona community comes across other members weeding for example, it is morally appropriate to politely get the hoe from the eldest members of the team, weed for a few minutes while encouraging them to continue working hard and then proceed with one's journey. The gesture is an affirmation of the extent to which the Shona value hard work. Hard work is seen not just as an economic means of survival, but also as an ethically acceptable means to prosperity that comes without disgusting *vadzimu*, disturbing social peace and threatening suffering for those yet to be born. The Shona see it fit to hold elaborate celebrations *kupembera* as a way of recognizing and blessing the fruits of hard work. If a Shona person invests in hard work and acquires a university degree, a car, or a house, the person invites friends and relatives to celebrate by offering food and drink. The celebration must not be seen merely as a party where eating and drinking are done but also as an occasion where members gathered articulate principles of Shona philosophy of life through speeches. Elder members may use the achiever as an example for the youth to follow by articulating the importance of hard work in the Shona philosophy of life.

5.7.3 The social problems of extreme desire for money

The Shona have seen the ills of capitalism in their society particularly regarding human attitudes towards money.⁴⁶ For the Shona, money itself may not be intrinsically bad but human attitudes towards money that are inherited from greed, selfishness and consumerism lead the Shona to adopt a careful attitude in their philosophy of economics. The proverb, *mari ine chitema, mai vakatengesa mwana* (money is associated with evil, it caused a mother to sell a child) affirms the bad side of the extreme love for money (Hamutyinei and Plannger, 2013:417). For the Shona, money is seen as the root of evil and members of the community are encouraged to live within their means and be contented with the little they have to avoid temptations associated with the use of money. In the Shona community, *mai* (a mother) is a symbol of care and love to the child and other family members. There is an emotional bond between a child and its mother, there is a connectedness based on love. However, greed and selfishness motivated by capitalism can break the bond between mother and child resulting in the mother exchanging the child for cash. Such evil is strongly condemned by the Shona and it is a representation of other evils associated with

⁴⁶ In Zimbabwe's pre-colonial era, money was absent and economic transactions were done using barter trade (Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe website, 2015). International trade evolved around exchange of copper, gold, ivory for glass beads, pottery and cloth. In domestic trade, practical objects such as knives, axes and hoes were exchanged for grain, cattle and marriage agreements (Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe website, 2015). The use of money started with colonialism in 1890 with English and South African coins as the legal tender. In 1932, the first Rhodesian coins were used and in 1940 the first Rhodesian notes were used. Indigenous Shona people were mainly employed by white settlers as domestic workers and farm labourers and they gradually became familiar with the use of money. As circulation of money increased after the adoption of the Rhodesian dollar, critical reflection on the positive and negative use of money began. While similar reflections could have taken place historically, the context in which this thinking took place among the Shona is influenced by capitalistic tendencies that prevailed among the Shona in the colonial period.

greed and selfishness such as theft, robbery, fraud and use of *zvikwambo* (goblins) in the attempt to get rich. Among the Shona, evil acts done for the desire of getting money are disrespectful both to *Mwari* and *vadzimu* (the living dead). These evil acts done in the attempt to get rich do not only disgust the *vadzimu*, but they also disturb peace, justice, unity, togetherness, oneness the ideals of *hunhu* (humanness) within the community of the living. More seriously, if the desire for money results in the spilling of human blood, it is believed that there is a potential danger of *ngozi* (avenging spirit) that can bring suffering to members of the extended family of the murderer and this can also affect those yet to be born through the belief that *ngozi* can wipe out members of the existing extended family in the present and in the future. Aware of these deadly consequences, the Shona encourage a moderate attitude to money especially among the youth. Elders carefully monitor the behaviour of the young and they avoid spoiling them with more than necessary pocket money to avoid *kuparirwa* (bringing trouble to members of the extended family) that may occur due to the love of money. The Shona discourage a life of extravagant spending and possession of material goods beyond the necessary levels⁴⁷ so as to avoid social ills that may develop because of *kukara mari* (the extreme desire for money).

5.8 Possible objections and replies

The first charge that can be made against Shona economic philosophy is that economic ideas that are based on proverbs are unscientific. This objection may be considered as based on a narrow understanding of science. This narrow understanding sees science as emanating from a particular culture and must be used as a standard of evaluation to other cultures. This narrowness is both

⁴⁷Even though *ubuntu* contradicts capitalism by its emphasis on the good of the community instead of profits, this humane approach allows the community as a whole to benefit as opposed to capitalistic greed that focuses on individual benefits.

misplaced and fallacious. It is misplaced because it is inapplicable in the Shona cultural “scientific” thought. It is fallacious because it is question begging.

The second objection is that Shona proverbs are unlikely to trigger economic transformation within the society. It can be argued that Shona proverbs can influence economic thinking and behaviour within the Shona culture. Furthermore, it is possible for proverbs to cross cultures, and the unlikelihood to transform other societies may be unrealistic. Transformation in other societies is possible at least potentially through dialogue with other cultures.

The third objection is that Shona economic philosophy is suitable for agrarian, small scale and sedentary economies. The objection is based on fallacious reasoning. From the fact that Shona economic philosophy is practiced by small agrarian economies, it does not follow that the applicability ends there. The humane elements contained in Shona economic philosophy can be extended to other parts of Zimbabwe, Africa and the world. Suitability is a relative concept that requires justification and analysis.

The fourth objection is that Shona economic philosophy fails to escape conservative implications and its suitability to contemporary times is compromised. Against this objection, it may be argued that it may be true that Shona economic proverbs indeed contain some conservative implications because proverbs were formulated in the past. However, if proverbs were formulated in the past, it does not necessarily follow that the proverbs are unsuitable for contemporary times since the moral and spiritual elements addressed by the proverbs are still part of humanity even in the present day. While it may be true that the economic circumstances facing humanity have changed, the moral demands towards economic activities may still remain the same or they may be stronger in this day and age.

5.9 Significance of Shona Philosophy of Economics

Indigenous knowledge is a very sensitive issue, related with cultural identity and ethnicity of stakeholders (Gupta, 2011:61). It reflects the dignity and identity of the local community (Gupta, 2011:61). Shona philosophy of economics gives self-identity, dignity and authenticity among the Shona. Article 3 of *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* indicates that “Indigenous peoples have the right to self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development.” The economic development aspect is important for this study since it is consistent with Shona economic philosophy. Self-determination allows the Shona to link economic development with that worldview so that economic development is seen in the context of other development dimensions like the spiritual and moral development. Article 5 of *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* highlights that “Indigenous peoples have the right to maintain and strengthen their distinct political, legal, economic, social and cultural institutions, while retaining their right to participate fully, if they so choose, in the political, economic, social and cultural life of the State.” The right to maintain and strengthen economic institutions allow the Shona to critique other paradigms for the purpose of borrowing positive elements and reject issues that are inconsistent with their cultural philosophy of economics. African philosophy is necessarily the philosophical work carried out by African thinkers in African sociological milieus but the content of such work could be any combination of locally generated ideas and locally adapted external ideas (Keita, 2000:123)

The use of indigenous knowledge based economic thinking allows the use of indigenous knowledge and opens a platform for dialogue with other paradigms. Guri and Hiemstra (2009:1) argue for inclusive development that accepts the African epistemological paradigm and other paradigms of economic thinking. According to Guri and Hiemstra (2009:5) endogenous development is defined as development from within, based mainly though not exclusively on locally available resources, values, institutions and knowledge. Economic development involves revitalising ancestral and local ways of knowing and learning, and addressing their current relevance (Guri and Hiemstra, 2009:5). Endogenous development aims to empower local communities to take control of their own development process. External resources that best fit the local conditions are selected by the communities (Guri and Hiemstra, 2009:5).

In addressing the organizational crisis in Africa as a result of the neglect of Africa's indigenous institutions and ways of organization, the concept of endogenous development becomes relevant (Guri and Hiemstra, 2009:5). The argument for engaging the rural "un(western)educated" population is not that the western forms and criteria for organizing people should be dropped in favour of only the indigenous forms of organization of Africa. The argument is for creating an interface between people representing different paradigms (Guri and Hiemstra, 2009:5). Hence for Africa to attain global competitiveness, the gaze should be to mobilize Africa's total human capital using both African and western lenses (Guri and Hiemstra, 2009:5). This requires that development institutions develop the capacity for working with people from the perspectives of their indigenous institutions, ways of organizing and facilitating economic activity (Guri and Hiemstra, 2009:5).

The use of Shona proverbs to articulate a Shona philosophy of economics opens the possibility of intercultural dialogue. There is certainly considerable scattered information on the cognitive or 'emic' categories utilized by societies outside the West to describe the types of 'economic' relationships that establish their webs of societal relations (Wiredu, 1995:1). Indigenous knowledge (IK) is a significant resource which could contribute to the increased efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability of the development process (Gorjestani, 2000:1).

Shona philosophy of economics takes the history and culture of the Shona people into account. Indigenous peoples should be encouraged in their vision of an integrated economic development system that encompasses the development of human capabilities, capacities and skills; appropriate infrastructure that does not displace people; recognition of pluralistic systems respecting other cultures and civilizations; promotion and provision of a democratic space to continue practising indigenous ways of life; and the pursuit of self-determined development (Lasimbang, 2008:45). The economic history of the developed countries of today shows that the development process involves much more fundamental phenomena. These include wholesale economic, social and administrative reforms, perceptible changes in the attitude of the people to work, to savings and investment and to life generally and a widespread acceptance of the discipline in private and national lives which are the prerequisites of development (Asante, 1991:4). Where these reforms and changes have taken place economic development has proceeded very rapidly. Until developing countries come to realize that development touches all aspects of a society and the individual's attitude to it they will continue to mistake indices of development for its process (Asante, 1991:5).

Another significance of a Shona philosophy of economics lies in its rootedness in the African mind. A philosophical system that fosters Africa's development, be it cultural, spiritual, religious, economic, or political, must be a reflective one. That reflective philosophical system is wrapped in philosophical presuppositions of the African personhood, made whole in the community in which the African lives (Nyasani 1997:51). The assumptions are that there are particular processes of thought that are African; and that some Africans organize and categorize their world from a strictly indigenous socio-cultural milieu (Nyasani 1997:51).

5.10 Conclusion

The chapter has drawn from cultural revivalists and their critics to examine the African philosophy of economics debate. It has been argued that an African philosophy of economics is necessary to avoid the weaknesses of the Eurocentric paradigm in economic philosophy. The chapter has also defended three conceptions of African philosophy of economics to articulate authenticity and cultural relevance in approaching economic issues. Furthermore, the chapter has explored Shona philosophy of economics as reflected in three selected proverbs. Themes of human dignity, respect for hard work and the need for moderation in the desire for money are discussed in the context of the Shona philosophical paradigm.

CONCLUSION

The research has investigated the epistemological tension between indigenous knowledge systems particularly Shona proverbs and the Western knowledge system that tends to marginalize African knowledge. It has been argued that, the relegation of Shona knowledge systems is both unjustified and unacceptable. It is unjustified because it is based on assumptions rather than facts. It is unacceptable because it fails to accommodate other forms of knowledge in the spirit of pluriversal thinking. Eurocentric epistemology tends to unjustly marginalize African knowledge systems in general and Shona knowledge systems in particular. The research has argued that, the marginalization of Shona proverbs is based on prejudice and misconceptions rather than facts. It has been established that Eurocentric epistemology is based on false premises and false conclusions thereby rendering its arguments for the dismissal of alternative epistemologies as unsound. A multifaceted critique that is based on deconstruction and reconstruction, decolonial thinking, Afrocentricity, indigenous knowledge based analysis, and anti-dualistic approach has been advanced. Deconstruction has been used to displace absolutist and rigid claims of positivist epistemology and arguments that favour the historicity and particularity of knowledge perspectives have been advanced. Decolonial thinking has been employed to topple the false epistemic hierarchy that had been constructed by the Western epistemological paradigm. Afrocentric thinking stands as a radical critique to Eurocentric epistemology and it dismisses the alleged universalism in order to provide a cultural footing to the African epistemological paradigm. Africanisation calls for the placing of the African worldview at the center of analysis and it has argued for the use of African indigenous approaches for addressing African problems and challenges. The indigenous knowledge based approach advocates for locally based knowledge systems that are not violent and imposing on the

recipients but come from grassroots to meet the needs of the communities from which knowledge systems develop. Anti-dualistic epistemological perspectives argue for pluriversal epistemology and acknowledge the relatedness of the knower to the community. The criticism of the Western epistemological paradigm has been used to pave way for pluriversal thinking. Pluriversality accommodates historically marginalized epistemology including Shona knowledge systems from which selected proverbs used in the research are based. The research has argued that some Shona proverbs are sources of insights and elements that can be reconstructed in the contemporary world to fill epistemological gaps that have been created by colonialism particularly in the areas of environmental philosophy, legal philosophy, political philosophy and philosophy of economics.

The philosophy of *ubuntu* has been employed in the research to facilitate the transition from a broad African epistemological paradigm to the particular epistemological paradigm of the Shona from where selected proverbs have been derived. In the area of environmental philosophy, *ubuntu* is the foundation of connectedness, dependence and interdependence with the environment as evidenced in preservation, conservation and care of the environment. In Shona legal philosophy, *ubuntu* is the basis of oneness and connectedness among members of the community and law is established for the achievement of social harmony and peace. Regarding Shona political philosophy, the research has argued that *ubuntu* is the basis of community relations and solidarity that are ingredients for peace within the community. In philosophy of economics, *ubuntu* is the platform of human dignity and respect that are necessary for humane economic affairs within the community.

Shona proverbs provide alternative ways of thinking about the environment. The environment is linked to the community and conservation and preservation of resources is done for the good of the community. In the Shona community, there are three levels of being namely the living, the living dead and those yet to be born. Environmental philosophy, as conceived by the Shona, considers these three levels of being. There is a web of interrelationships between the three levels in relation to the environment. The research has examined various conceptions of the environment and it has argued for an African conception of the environment which places emphasis on relationality, interconnectedness and interdependence where the human element is seen as part of the environment. The debate on the possibility of an African environmental philosophy has been explored and the research has defended an African environmental philosophy. The research has shown that *ubuntu* philosophy is the basis of African philosophy. An environmental philosophy based on *ubuntu* respects all aspects of the environment, recognizes the dependence of human beings on the environment, sees the land as sacred and affords responsibility for future generations by encouraging the preservation and conservation of resources. The researcher has defended Shona environmental philosophy that captures the experiences and reflections of the Shona people on their physical environment. Three proverbs that address themes of preservation, conservation and human dependence on the environment were examined. Preservation of the environment is important among the Shona given the semi-arid conditions that characterise most regions occupied by the Shona in Zimbabwe. Preservation maintains the status of the environment and the original state of the environment becomes the standard for comparing the ideal situation with worse off scenarios in the context of the environment. Conservation of the environment enables careful and responsible exploitation of water sources, forests, grassland and wildlife. The realisation that human beings are part and

parcel of the environment gives an opportunity for co-existence with components of the environment. If the physical environment is damaged, human life is under threat as well. The significance of Shona proverbs in the context of global environmental responsibility has been shown.

Legal philosophy proverbs provide the importance of law in the community for the achievement of peace and harmony. Law is established to facilitate good relationships rather than creating offenders and victims. Shona philosophy of law places individuals first. The law is established to serve individuals and not the other way round. Even if human beings are found on the wrong side of the law, their dignity is kept since Shona philosophy of law makes an important distinction between a crime (*mhosva*) and an individual (*munhu*). The law addresses the crime while attempting to maintain individual dignity as much as possible for the purpose of rehabilitating the individual in future. The research has argued for the reality of an African conception of law that is based on the philosophy of *ubuntu*. The Shona philosophy of law draws from the broad African perspective that cherishes the philosophy of *ubuntu*. *Ubuntu* provides the basis of a coherent philosophy of law among the Shona. Shona philosophy of law exploits proverbs that show the metaphysical and social dimension of law. Both the living and the living-dead are involved when the law is violated because it is believed among the Shona that the extended family system suffers the effect of violating the law. Among the Shona, law must be subordinated to human beings and as a result, law is used to protect the dignity of persons. Even if one is accused of wrong doing, the dignity of the individual must be protected under the trial processes. In addition to protecting individuals, law is used among the Shona to serve the

interests of the community as a whole. Peace is the most valued ideal that facilitates the realisation of other values among the Shona. Law serves as an instrument for peace.

Shona political philosophy focuses on humane relationships between the ruler and the subjects. These relationships are based on respect and mutual recognition of intrinsic value. Political philosophy aims at community harmony and peace. Truth telling is considered an important virtue in Shona political philosophy. Truth telling helps to manage conflicts that may arise within the community for the good of every member of the community. The study has defended a pluriversal understanding of political philosophy that has relevance to the African historical and cultural context. Political models that obtain in Africa have been discussed with the aim of showing the model that applies to the Zimbabwean context. The research has argued that *ubuntu* is the political foundation of solidarity, oneness and mutual support in politics. Under Shona political philosophy, it has been argued, on the basis of selected proverbs, that co-existence and relatedness are the basis of mutual respect owing the recognition of dignity and equality before political institutions. The political significance of others has been shown especially in the epistemic role of critical exchange of ideas and opinions and widening the scope of political knowledge. Among the Shona, truth telling is a valued political practice because it gives the platform for forgiveness and reconciliation within the community. Harmony and progress are also achievable if there is commitment to truth within the community.

Philosophy of economics provides the principles of respect for persons and exercise of moderation in the face of capitalist greed. Human life is given priority and persons are considered to be intrinsically valuable despite external conditions of poverty. For the Shona, a

poor person may one day emerge out of his or her conditions and for this reason, he or she deserves to be treated with respect. The research has drawn from cultural revivalists and their critics to examine the African philosophy of economics debate. It has been argued that an African philosophy of economics is necessary to avoid the weaknesses of the Eurocentric paradigm in economic philosophy. The research has also defended three conceptions of African philosophy of economics to articulate authenticity and cultural relevance in approaching economic issues. Furthermore, the research has explored Shona philosophy of economics as reflected in three selected proverbs. Themes of human dignity, respect for hard work and the need for moderation in the desire for money are discussed in the context of the Shona philosophical worldview. Still, the significance of using Shona philosophy of economics in terms of providing a platform for dialogue and criticism in the face of pluriversal perspectives of economic philosophy has been discussed.

While the above lines of reasoning are attempts to apply insights from Shona proverbs to contemporary issues in applied philosophy, such reasoning may be considered objectionable by critics. Firstly the use of proverbs is considered weak because of the conservative implications of the proverbs. Against such thinking, it has been shown by Wiredu (1980: 1) that, while culture may adopt technologies and scientific advancement from the West, the moral underpinnings of a culture that address themes of human dignity and respect are classic and timeless. They are classic because they remain relevant and applicable. They are timeless because they cannot be fixed in a particular historical epoch. The use of Shona proverbs is significant because proverbs are understandable to the local community; proverbs promote indigenous knowledge systems development. Shona proverbs are based on people's thought system and experiences. Proverbs

are rooted in the Shona people's historical and cultural setting. Proverbs critically reflect upon historical events to give a cautious position.

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