

Epistemic Unfairness in Barry Hallen's Account of Agency in Yoruba Moral Epistemology

Ademola Fayemi & Abiola Azeez

Department of Philosophy
University of Lagos, Nigeria
kcaristotle@yahoo.com
abiolaazeez045@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper exposes the problem of unfair treatment and discrimination against epistemic agents in knowledge production, knowledge sharing, and consensus practices in Hallen's account of Yoruba epistemic thought. It does this to contribute to Barry Hallen's account of Yoruba moral epistemology which it substantiates with some explanations from Fricker's epistemic agency. The paper contends that understanding epistemic agency is pivotal to exploring the depth of epistemic harm and occlusion latent in Yoruba epistemology. It shows that three kinds of epistemic agencies – human agency, communal agency, and divine agency – which result in structural and cultural epistemic injustice, are identifiable in Yoruba epistemic space. The paper is significant because it shows that there exists an alarming endogenous epistemic injustice in Yoruba thought, which is exogenously complicated by the structural imbalance and institutional hiccup in the distribution, accessibility, and sharing of globally produced knowledge in contemporary Africa.

Keywords: *agency, belief, injustice, knowledge, onisegun*

Introduction

When epistemic theory from each of two different philosophical regions – in this essay, Africa, and the West to be specific – are combined to explain the problem of unfair treatment in epistemology, it might be widely accepted as a significant contribution to the inter-regional account of epistemology. Following the above specifics, we substantiate Hallen's Yoruba moral epistemology with Fricker's epistemic injustice for two

reasons: first, the terms and concepts in Fricker's epistemic injustice make clear some grey areas in Hallen's Yoruba moral epistemology; and second, Yoruba moral epistemology is not free from endogenous epistemic injustice which Fricker's view helps to make clear.

Hallen argues that there is a coherent, rational, non-supernaturalistic and highly sophisticated epistemology in Yoruba thought, which he termed 'moral epistemology'.¹ He shows this by focusing on the conceptual interrelations between some aspects of epistemic, moral, and aesthetic values in Yoruba thought. While Hallen establishes an intricate connection between knowledge and morality and draws as well, some significant contrasts between Yoruba 'Moral Epistemology' (ME) and Western epistemology, we might say that the fundamental question of epistemic injustice is obscure in his scholarship on Yoruba moral epistemology.

To make clear Hallen's position, we apply explanations from Fricker's idea of agency and types of injustice². Using Fricker's view: Firstly, we show that the idea of a knower – epistemic agent – is nuanced. Specifically, we show that there might be more to any interpretation given to the idea of the individual knower by Hallen. We identify three agencies in Yoruba epistemology: Human agency, communal agency, and divine agency. Secondly, we show that the idea of injustice is also nuanced.

¹ In a joint written work with J. O. Sodipo in 1986, *Knowledge, Belief and Witchcraft: Analytic Experiments in African Philosophy*, Hallen presented a pioneering philosophical piece on an instance of African epistemology by adapting the techniques of analytic philosophy to ordinary language of the Yoruba. The seed of the idea of 'moral epistemology' was planted here and consequently built on in Hallen's later writings: "Moral Epistemology – When propositions come out of Mouths" (1998), *The Good, The Bad and The Beautiful: Discourse about Values in Yoruba Culture* (2000), "Yoruba Moral Epistemology" (2004) and *African Philosophy: The Analytic Approach* (2006).

² Why is Fricker important? Fricker is important because she is the first known scholar to provide a robust account of the injustice that is epistemic. For us, it is as if Fricker prints a book that names and maps out the problems, issues, complexities associated with epistemic injustice. And so, we can use Fricker's view to explain the epistemic issues found in other research like the one of Barry Hallen.

Specifically, we show that there might be more to any interpretation given to the idea of injustice by Hallen. Also, we identify three injustices in Yoruba epistemology: Testimonial, structural and cultural epistemic injustice.

In this paper, we expose the problem of unfair treatment and discrimination against epistemic agents in knowledge production, knowledge sharing, and consensus practices in Yoruba thought. We focus on an overview of Hallen's account of Yoruba ME in the first two sections. In section 1, we discuss the first problem addressed by Hallen that concerns whether 'know' and 'believe' have precise meanings in the English Language. The second problem addressed by Hallen concerning whether there is the equivalence of 'know' and 'believe' in Yoruba language is discussed in section 2 with an exploration of the agency of *onisegun*. Section 3 is a discussion of Fricker's explanation of an agency as it applies to either non-character-based agency or character-based agency as we would see in Hallen, i.e., *onisegun*. We expose the layers of agency injustice between Hallen's idea of *onisegun* and the people in Section 4; while in Section 5, we propose that an epistemic recognition may be a plausible solution to agency injustice in Hallen's account of Yoruba ME.

The Problem of Precise Meaning: 'Belief' and 'Know' in Hallen's Yoruba ME

Hallen engages the Yoruba³ knowledge system in a co-authored text with Olubi Sodipo, *An African Epistemology: The Knowledge-Belief*

³ It is important to make clear the term Yoruba. This is because the term Yoruba underlies why we talk about regional epistemology in the first place. Hence, it is important that before we continue with the objective of this section, we make clear in this footnote what Yoruba entails and its epistemic identity from Hallen's point of view. *Yoruba* covers many things splendid and proud. From the identity of a people to their character, history, tradition, culture and spread across different regions, from Southwest Africa up to the Caribbean and South America. The richness and meta-physicalism of the Yoruba people's way of life might be one

Distinction and Yoruba Thought. The view articulated in the text might be considered as deliberate and systematic given that they explore separately two types of an inter-regional epistemic problem but in a way that they are connected.

As mentioned in the introduction, (a) the problem in assuming that epistemic terms such as 'know' and 'believe' in the English language have a precise meaning and, (b) the problem in assuming that 'know' and 'believe' have equivalence in the Yoruba language. In what follows, we focus on the first problem as discussed by Hallen and Sodipo. As we see what the duo did in the text, they challenge Willard Van Orman Quine's idea of indeterminacy of universal propositional attitude. We now turn to the first problem that Hallen and Sodipo address in comparison with Quine's view.

Hallen and Sodipo begin by aiming to understand the common understanding of the terms – 'know' and 'believe' in Western philosophy. And as well as the criteria that must be satisfied before one can have a particular kind of knowledge or belief. They made use of the explanations and analysis of the *onisegun* (Master of Medicine) – an epistemic agent – in an attempt to explain the supposed equivalents of 'know' and 'believe', which are *mo* and *igbagbo* in the Yoruba language. They continued by comparing the meanings between the two language systems on the notions of 'knowledge' and 'believe' versus 'mo' and 'igbagbo' with Quine's view. In the end, they disagreed with Quine over the degree to which indeterminacy can be problematic and consequently established the position that propositional attitudes are not universal. The reason they disagree with Quine is not clear unless we show what they understand about Quine's view.

Quine (1956:186) observes that verbs like know, doubt, hope, want and believe are words meant to express a person's attitude towards certain statements or propositions. These terms are psychological attitudes that can also be said to be propositional attitudes. Propositional attitudes

of the reasons that attracted scholars from different parts of the world, one of whom was Barry Hallen, an American.

are statements that are of the standard form: 'I believe that X'. 'X' here is itself a proposition. Quine (1975:91-92) argues against the universality of propositional attitudes in his indeterminacy thesis of radical translation.

He does so by saying that it is impossible to prove that there are culturally universal propositions, both in terms of verbal and non-verbal meanings. As we see it, verbal and non-verbal meanings, for Quine, are not only relative to any language but are also learned and defined behaviourally.

We find that Quine's indeterminacy thesis implies that it is impossible to prove that the meaning assigned to a word, which connotes a particular propositional attitude in one language (for instance, 'know' in the English language) is indeed equivalent to that of a word in another language ('*mo*' in the Yoruba language). In other words, the claim that certain alien (verbal or nonverbal) behaviour is equivalent to 'believing', 'knowing', 'desiring' etc., is always relative and inevitably indeterminate. We need to note that this notwithstanding, Quine insists that certain standards or criteria must be used to distinguish good indeterminate translations from bad ones. Quine provides four criteria in this regard.

The first criterion requires that the translator favours the conventional meaning equivalent in his primary language for translations of alien psychological attitudes (Quine, 1960:69). The second criterion is the simplicity of the overall manual of translation (Quine, 1960: 69). The third criterion cautions against the translator's assumption that propositional attitudes are universal, whether in another analogous situation or different alien content. (Quine, 1960: 219). The fourth criterion requires that we do the equivalent with the unnatural. That is, it is safer to presume that a certain propositional attitude in a certain situation holds the same for the aliens if it is unnatural for the translator (Quine, 1960: 219). The overview of Quine's view – as we have shown from the foregoing –, as we see it does not appeal to the logic of Hallen and Sodipo's view.

Against the popular presumption of Quine that propositional attitudes are fundamentally human and transcultural, Hallen and Sodipo explore the consequences of applying Quine's four criteria for good indeterminate translations to propositional attitudes in respect of '*mo*' and

'*igbagbo*' in Yoruba thought. In exploring Quine's four criteria in the analysis and translation of the propositional attitudes – 'knowledge and belief' – in the Yoruba language, Hallen and Sodipo discuss these concepts using the language style of English philosophy. This is for the sake of laying a good platform for interesting comparisons with the views of their Western counterparts. We now turn to the second type of problem which is more interesting to this paper. This is because we are now focused on Hallen and Sodipo's original interests.

The Problem of Equivalence: 'Know' and 'Believe' and *Onisegun*⁴ in Hallen's Yoruba ME

The second type of problem – as earlier mentioned – is in assuming that 'know' and 'believe' have equivalence in the Yoruba language. As we see what Hallen and Sodipo do here, they use a representative model, 'knowing that' as the primary meaning of knowledge. 'Knowing that' is knowledge by description, which is mostly got from testimony, from reading texts, or hearing, etc. (Hallen and Sodipo, 1986: 46).

In our view, as an instance of propositional knowledge, knowledge in this sense does not have the character of the first-hand encounter, which knowledge by acquaintance has. They explain as well, the theories of truth. This is because of their conviction that theories of truth are mostly concerned with outlining the conditions for explaining the basis of "knowing that". Using Keith Lehrer's (1974) analysis of theories of truth as their basic reference, Hallen and Sodipo (1986: 48-49) discuss both the correspondence and coherence theories of truth.

The former theory says that what is true is that which corresponds to and accurately reflects reality. Coherence theory argues that there are no basic truths that may be directly, individually, and indubitably verified, as correspondence theory tells us. Rather, truths do not occur in isolation from one another, but in the form of inter-related systems where one truth either explains or is explained by (or perhaps both) others.

As we see in Hallen and Sodipo, both theories have their problems and inadequacies, but they consider the correspondence theory a better theory of the two. And for this reason, Hallen and Sodipo integrate the

⁴ *Onisegun* is equaled to or can be understood as a type of agency.

correspondence theory in their model of knowledge. Let us discuss some instances of what Hallen and Sodipo mean.

On belief, for example, which is often contrasted with knowledge, Hallen and Sodipo make some distinctions about ‘believing that’, ‘believing a person’, and ‘believing in’. They pitch their tent with ‘believing that’ as the meaning of belief because it expresses a propositional attitude. What this means is, Hallen explores the relationship between ‘knowledge’ and ‘belief’ in the language style of English philosophy. In this culture, information which is “considered most reliable is labelled knowledge and described as true ... information considered less reliable of which one cannot be certain is labelled belief” (Hallen, 2000: 13). While knowledge is necessarily true, belief can neither be proved nor disproved with certainty.

Meanwhile, a most problematic subcategory of information in the West according to Hallen is what can be called propositional knowledge. This is characterized as ‘second-hand’ information that cannot be tested or proven decisively by most people. Therefore, ‘it has to be accepted as true because it agrees with common sense or because it corresponds to or coheres with the very limited amount of information that people can test and conform to first-person manner’ (Hallen, 2000: 15). The weak evidential basis of this sort of knowledge has not eluded western scholars, third-person view. We also think that this concern shared is also evident in the distinction between ‘imo’ (putative knowledge) and ‘igbagbo’ (putative belief).

As we see it, the discussion heads in a more contextual direction when Hallen and Sodipo explore this distinction using the *onisegun* (Master of Medicine)’s explanation of knowledge in Yoruba language discourse, who they have interrogated. In their reportage, the *onisegun* state the two conditions that must be satisfied for something to be regarded as *imo*. One, the experience must be first-hand. What this means is that the person who claims to ‘mo’ (know) must literally have seen the thing himself. Perception is therefore a necessary condition for *imo*. Perception should not be merely understood here as a sensation; it implies cognition as well, meaning that the persons concerned must comprehend *that* and *what* they are experiencing (Hallen, 2004: 298).

The second condition that must be fulfilled is to have 'imo', the correlative element of cognition, which is the witnessing of the Yoruba word 'okan' – a name in the south western part of Nigeria, which is equivocal to 'heart' and 'mind or apprehension'. What this means is that one's mind witnessing something for once indicates self-consciousness. Apart from 'ri' (which is the visual perception of a first-hand experience, the subject of knowledge must also comprehend what he/she is seeing and judge that he/she has done so. It is in cases where the *okon* (heart) does not witness a thing (whether it is or is not) that doubts crop in. In such instances, the *eri-okan* is not judgmental. More here, *eri-okan* has now been taken to mean conscience in popular discourse restrictive to the moral sense alone. This according to them, is a result of conceptual or religious colonization of indigenous Yoruba concepts.

Meanwhile, just as in the western tradition where truth is a necessary condition of knowledge, the Yoruba have related terms- *ooto* (true) and *otito* (truth) in their analysis of knowledge conditions. So, anything I *mo* (know) is *ooto* (truth). *Ooto* is firmly linked to *mo*. For a thing to be *ooto*, two conditions must be met: *ri* (perception) and *eri-okan* (self-consciousness) (Hallen and Sodipo, 1997: 62). Besides these conditions, Hallen alerts us to why it will amount to a category mistake to construe the Yoruba understanding of *ooto* (true) in the same sense as what obtains in the English language. According to him, 'in the English language 'truth' is principally a property of propositional knowledge, of statements human beings make about things, while in Yoruba, *ooto* may be a property of both propositions and *certain forms of experience*' (which are not anyway mentioned by him) (Hallen, 2004: 298).

From this point forward, let us turn to some substantive arguments which can be raised and made clear using what has been drawn from Hallen and Sodipo so far. Having explored two main problems of Yoruba moral epistemology in the current and previous sections, according to Hallen's account, the next section seeks to discuss the idea of agency in Fricker's epistemic injustice. This is important as a foreground to establishing our thesis in the third section, that there is endogenous epistemic injustice in Hallen's account of Yoruba moral epistemology. As endemic as it is, it is exogenously complicated by the structural imbalance

and institutional hiccup in the distribution, accessibility and sharing of globally produced knowledge in contemporary Africa.

Agency in Fricker's Epistemic Injustice

It might be difficult to explain the idea of agency in Fricker's view without exploring the basics of Fricker's epistemic injustice. Specifically, we refer to the basics that are relevant to the claim of this essay. In this section, we show that the idea of agency along with its possible unfair treatment and discrimination is within the explanations of types of epistemic injustice - testimonial and hermeneutical injustices - provided by Fricker. Also, we show that Fricker does not speak about agency in terms of a special, individual, or communal character as Hallen does. Instead, it would be seen that Fricker adopts the analytical method of philosophical writing which, in this case, seeks to present the conceptual meaning of agency in the broadest manner possible. Hence, this allows us to understand the characters employed by Hallen as agents using what we would draw out from Fricker in this section.

As distinct from the very broad and controversial subject of justice, the philosopher Miranda Fricker identifies a specific category of injustice – epistemic injustice – which has spurred a series of contributions in philosophical areas that cut across epistemology, feminism, ethics, and political philosophy. The subject also expands into disciplines like medicine and law. Meanwhile, at the heart of each of these disciplines are agents who naturally yearn to know what the disciplines entail, produce what they learn as bodies of knowledge. And sometimes, these agents further find a relationship amongst them like epistemic injustice.

Epistemic injustice expresses the idea that a person can be treated unjustly as it concerns his/her capacity to know. Fricker in *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing*, distinguishes between two types of epistemic injustice: testimonial injustice and hermeneutical injustice (Fricker, 2007:1). The former holds when there is a conscious or subconscious attribution of inferiority by an agent to the testimony of another agent, under the presupposition that the other agent lacks certain epistemic qualities. In this case, the credibility of an agent's testimony is held with little or no esteem. This view can be made clear: if an agent who

holds a degree in Economics from a reputable institution may unduly assign low credibility to the postulations of say, a petty trader – another agent – on the issue of stock market or budgeting.

Hermeneutical injustice on another hand constitutes the inability of epistemic agents to make sense of their social experiences. It represents the presence of a lapse in a people's collective interpretative resources when a group of people – agents – cannot altogether understand peculiar and particular experiences (Carel and Gyorffy, 2014). Havi Carel and Gita Gyorffy in 'Seen but not heard: Children and Epistemic Injustice' recognize some degree of epistemic injustice as it concerns children – who can be called agents – in areas such as education and their general upbringing, particularly in the area of health care.

Giving the instance of a five-year-old child-agent who complained of double-vision even with one eye being closed, presumably due to acute headache, but whose testimony was ignored until another physician was able to diagnose that she had been trying to describe the blurred vision. Carel and Gyorffy (2014) note that the girl lacked the epistemic resources to describe her symptoms accurately, nonetheless, she was conveying important information. In such cases where epistemic injustice occurs, the subject-agent often seems unfounded, possessing limited or even no powers of reason due to factors including the inability to assume mastery of a language to transmit thoughts effectively. As a result, their interpretative frameworks suffer rejection or are treated with much levity. Besides from epistemic injustice as it relates to children, there has also been recent attempts aimed at looking into the psychiatric narrative of mental illness, and the negligence of the voices of those labelled mentally deranged in the course of psychiatric treatment. The discovery and presence of epistemic injustice reduce the potency of any knowledge of inquiry or research. Fricker (2007: 6) argues that the wrong of testimonial injustice 'cuts conceptually deeper than anything we have so far envisaged: a matter of exclusion from the very practice that constitutes the practical core of what it is to know.' Let us now show how epistemic exclusion is tied to the epistemic agency.

What Fricker means by epistemic exclusion reads better when knowledge injustice is approached from what might be called epistemic agency. The crucial nature of epistemic agency, as Gaile Pohlhaus Jr.

(2017: 13) explains, borders on how epistemic values like ‘truth, aptness and understanding’ are captured in strengthening epistemic practices, i.e., the natural ability of agents to know and express what is known. This portends those values are not self-developed and spread but transmitted through the involvement and exchange of knowledge communicators. From the foregoing, it can be said that these communicators, to say the least, are considered epistemic agents. Interestingly, Fricker introduces that those epistemic agents are expected to operate in the capacities of the ‘Good Informant’ (Fricker, 2007: 129). Good informants are those who develop societies and strengthen moral institutions by the simple act of knowing and conveying knowledge.

We observe in Fricker that societies emerge from a state of nature, which is referred to as the state of ‘epistemic need’ (Fricker, 2007: 129). Inferably, we agree with Fricker’s point as one which articulates that, unlike the popular social contractarian descriptions of the state of nature, a state of civility has successfully met the epistemic needs. This implies that societies are not lacking Bad Informants, who, for identity prejudice or credibility deficit, exclude a group of people from airing their views. Another important point that we draw out from this explanation is that it can be said that Fricker’s explanation provides validation to the idea that knowing is inherent in human beings. This is because transiting from a state of nature to a state of civility can only be possible when human beings have the hunch that there can be a state of life that is better and more organized than the best form of the state of nature. Said another way, it is the instinct to know of a human being that continually takes human beings – in every step – closer to the best form of life. From the foregoing, we further observe in Fricker that:

Epistemic exclusion is [obviously] a crucial feature of the politics of epistemic real life. Those social groups who are subject to identity prejudice and are thereby susceptible to unjust credibility deficit will, by the same token, also tend simply not to be asked to share their thoughts, their judgements, their opinions.

(Fricker, 2007: 130)

We note in the excerpt that there is an obvious disregard for a group of people's views – agents' views –, and this amplifies the notion of testimonial injustice. Earlier, we described testimonial injustice as the attribution of inferiority by some agents to a group of people for lacking certain epistemic qualities. If epistemic agents are not asked to share their views, we simply receive this treatment as finding motivation on the ground that they either lack certain epistemic qualities or are epistemically inferior.

The important point taken – and in agreement with Kristie Dotson – is that epistemic exclusion is an express indication of unjust infringement upon some agents' ability to utilize persuasively shared epistemic resources within a given epistemic community to participate in knowledge production and, if required, the revision of those same resources (Dotson, 2012: 24). With Dotson, the problem of epistemic oppression enters the conversation. The nature of epistemic oppression follows the logic that a group of people considers their knowledge production superior or sometimes sole, and considers the knowledge production of other groups of people inferior or dependent on theirs. It interests us, at this juncture, to find what Fricker's epistemic injustice holds for Hallen's Yoruba moral epistemology.

It is important to mention that this section – as mentioned at its start – would present – in the broadest manner – the conceptual meaning of agency. And through explaining the types of epistemic injustice – testimonial and hermeneutical injustices –, it could be seen how unfair treatment and discrimination is possible in the manner Fricker discusses the idea of agency as we have shown. Also, as we have shown, an agency can be specific character-based, but Fricker does present it as a non-specific character-based idea. What this means is that it can be any kind of agency be it with communal, individual affiliation etc., and this, as a point, is crucial to the next section where we present two reasons to show how Fricker substantiates the significance of Hallen's account of Yoruba moral epistemology. We now turn to the first reason which concerns the question of agency.

Question of Agency: Exposing the layers of Hallen's Agency of *Onisegun*

The focus of this section concerns the issues that emerge in Hallen's character-based agents like the *onisegun*. To interrogate these issues in the manner that this paper aims, we use some interesting points taken from the previous section. They include that (a) an agency is a concept and can apply to both non-character-based and character-based agents, and (b) because agents are trying to influence power by knowing or letting knowledge determine who holds power, there can be seen some unfair treatment and discrimination among epistemic agents.

If we consider what Hallen's view of *onisegun* entails, three kinds of epistemic agency can be found namely; human, communal, or divine agency. Firstly – divine agency –, the *onisegun* relays divine instruction from the gods to the people. Secondly – communal agency –, before can relay divine instructions, he must consider himself part of the community and share the same communal values. Thirdly – human agency –, the *onisegun* – who shares communal values with others in a community – is considered a person with a personage in the community.

Also, three kinds of epistemic injustice can be found These are testimonial, structural, or cultural injustice. Firstly – testimonial injustice –, the *onisegun* who is seen as the mouthpiece of the gods, has the exclusive and unchallenged authority to approve or disapprove the truth even when it is clear that what is truth ought to be pronounced. The *onisegun* would not be challenged because the people would believe it was a wise counsel inspired by the gods' will. Secondly – structural injustice –, when the *onisegun* does this – in denial of truth –, he would have told lies in the name of the gods who are considered the protectors of the structures of the culture. Thirdly – cultural injustice –, when the *onisegun* does not tell the truth, he would have flouted the cultural tenet that the truth is told when the gods speak through the *onisegun*.

From the foregoing, two issues emerge, and they are the credibility of the *onisegun*'s first-hand information, and what we call the problem of epistemic esoterism. We describe epistemic esoterism as the closing up of knowledge within a small social group who are perceived as custodians of the sacred epistemic practices, from which the general populace is excluded. The problem is made clear when the cult of *oniseguns* is compromised, and the people are in danger of not receiving

the true information. Another implication is whether, in a cult of *oniseguns*, they receive the same information from the gods. Hallen investigates these implications altogether using a focus-group method.

Initially, about 60 *oniseguns* were recruited as colleagues in the research and were later screened to a dozen. The epistemic injustice implicit in Hallen's account bothers much on the method of determining his respondents' capacities as knowers and representatives of the people's epistemological worldview. The positional dispute which arises from this practice begs the question: Had Hallen unfairly assigned a higher level of credibility to the *onisegun*'s testimonies?

The concern that – knowledge is credible when received first-hand – is absent in people who consult with *oniseguns*, might justify why the Western paradigm may undermine the merits of the *onisegun*. This absence implies that it may heavily dent the image and vitiate the substance of African philosophy. Hallen explains that “from the outset, African philosophy has been haunted and handicapped by the possibility that the indigenous African mentality does not measure up in intellectual terms” (Hallen, 2000: 33). Africans are said to not possess analytic skills which are fundamental to the western conception of intelligence.

Considering the foregoing, it will be illusory to think that the account of moral epistemology presented by Hallen is a unique epistemic experience of the Yoruba. As far back as 1969, H. H. Price, writing on belief in the Western philosophical tradition, had noted that there is a moral dimension to the principle of charity which is an attitude of believing and accepting what one is told unless or until one has specific reasons for doubting it (Price 1969: 127).

What is understood by Price's view can further underestimate the practices of *onisegun* and by extension, Hallen's account of Yoruba moral epistemology. This is because Price's view is that an agent's decision is his responsibility and when the agent doubts a piece of information, it is because obtaining the truth of information is inherent in the agent. Hence, *the onisegun* as the mediator between the gods and people is an injustice to the people's natural yearning to acquire knowledge.

In traditional Africa, knowledge was preserved in form of oral tradition. Hallen posits that the bias against or for tradition has been due to its questionable reliability as a source of knowledge. How traditions

were inherited from the past to the present and the future, suggests that the traditional Africans had no ‘intellectual incentive to articulate’ (Hallen, 2000: 19). Cross-cultural comparison has however shown that the ‘Yoruba language does employ terminology and systematic criteria for the evaluation of any type of information (Hallen, 2000: 19). As a result of their difference as regard second-hand knowledge, the Yoruba language culture would regard the English language culture as ‘dangerously naïve and perhaps even ignorant’ (Hallen, 2000: 16). This is because the Yoruba are not willing to accept with certainty that which they cannot verify. While the English language culture, on the other hand, would criticize the Yoruba culture as a people who have yet to discover the benefits of institutionalized knowledge via science and formal education (Hallen, 2000: 17) especially because of the cultural presumption that one can only know what one can see.

Let us add that given the foregoing, it can be said the Yoruba knowledge system is not free of the evil associated with gerontic authoritarianism. Given the level of gerontic authoritarianism in the Yoruba thought system, the *onisegun* – when found acting the capacity of three types of an agency and epistemic injustices mentioned earlier – has failed to act as Good Informant (Fricker 2007: 129). The *onisegun*, for reasons bordering on his epistemic esoterism, fails to contextualize, communicate openly and clearly, indicate open and clear communication, and contextualization. (Fricker, 2007: 130).

To further make clear our point, let us take one of Kwasi Wiredu’s ideas of three evils. Wiredu contends that the nature of authoritarianism⁵ – as one of the three evils – impedes the development of Africa (1980: 1, 5). This is the view that the older people in a culture know better than others, so are authorities. If we evaluate Hallen’s method with Wiredu’s view, it is reasonable to say that epistemic injustice is when a cult of *onisegun* – older people – unfairly assigns a lower level of credibility to some other members of the community because they do not speak with the gods as they do.

⁵The two other evils, according to Wiredu are anachronism and supernaturalism (Wiredu, 1980: 1, 5).

An objection to advance the merit of epistemic esoterism may claim that perhaps such assigning was occasioned by some forms of prejudice that such group lack collective interpretative framework to articulate the difference between belief and knowledge. By denying these groups of differently talented people their potential of being an epistemic agent is a form of epistemic exclusion and injustice. This implies the notion of epistemic objectification.

Epistemic objectification, as Susan Haslanger says, occurs ‘when a group’s actual or imagined epistemic weaknesses are wrongly taken to be due to their nature, or essential to them as a group’ (2017: 280). As we see it, the impact of epistemic esoterism is prioritized above any other concept, cultural and sacred. Its sacredness, however, creates an unchallenged position with regards to the extent of what the *oniseguns* can disclose to the populace.

Another consideration points to language delimitation. We observe that indeed, the conclusion arrived by Hallen resulting from his interview of the *oniseguns* might be a consequence of the respondents’ limited epistemic language to articulate the kind of distinctions evident in Western epistemological discourse. A more nuanced analysis of epistemic agency is pivotal to expose the prevalence of epistemic exclusions in Hallen’s account of moral epistemology. Revealing from this analysis is the existence of alarming endogenous epistemic injustice resulting in cognitive and emotive harms in Yoruba thought.

Value of Recognition: Addressing Injustice in Hallen’s Yoruba Moral Epistemology

From the previous sections, we have established a few points. Firstly, the capacity to know is inherent in every man. Secondly, epistemic injustice only occurs between epistemic agents. Thirdly, the role of *onisegun* in the Yoruba knowledge system can compromise truth and first-hand information. The third point is important because we find the unfair treatment and discrimination among epistemic agents. Specifically, the unfair treatment and discrimination between the *oniseguns* and the people.

To address the problem, we hold that an epistemic theory of recognition is a plausible solution. The concept of epistemic recognition⁶ entails the values of intersubjectivity, interconnection, shared rules of a political community, and public condition. What is important is that epistemic recognition could help address the problem of epistemic occlusion – in another way to describe the problem – in Hallen’s moral epistemology. In what follows, we outline the recommendations to the problem mentioned. Firstly, epistemic recognition values plurality as an instrument to realise fair knowledge production and sharing of globally produced knowledge in contemporary Africa (Arendt, 2018: 7). This explanation follows the logic that, as Yar Majid (n.d.) explains that actions cannot be justified for their own sake, but only in light of their public recognition and the shared rules of a political community.

Secondly, epistemic recognition values action and practice as a *public* category. As public categories, they are the worldly practice that is experienced in our intercourse with others, and ‘can be actualized only in a human polity (*ibid*).

Thirdly, epistemic recognition holds that life will be meaningless if the epistemic agency of an individual is not located in the community and recognized as individuals living in the web of a community (*ibid*). This follows the predicate that, as Arendt argues that man does not act alone but acts in concerts, human’s epistemic agency is best realized when the community is structurally open and inclusive.

If we take Arendt’s (1958) view, it can be found that communication, language, and knowledge are public actions because they are drawn from the collective inputs of those who make up the public sphere. Arendt maintains that:

Action, the only activity that goes on directly between men...corresponds to the human condition of plurality, to the fact that men, not Man, live on the earth and inhabit the world. While all aspects of the human condition are

⁶ Epistemic recognition is often credited to Hannah Arendt. The first two values capture Arendt’s phenomenological position, while the last two are Arendt’s phenomenological epistemology in observation and application.

somehow related to politics, this plurality is specifically *the* condition – not only the *conditio sine qua non* but the *conditio per quam* – of all political life.

(Arendt, 1958: 7)

The excerpt above disagrees with the epistemic occlusion of Hallen's view that actions of knowledge should be given to certain individuals who usually share a small group of associations. In the case of Hallen, it alludes to the group of *oniseguns*, who are trusted as custodians of 'imo' based on their representation knowledge and moral embodiment. They are trusted to direct communities with their trusted divine instruction from the gods. They are also perceived as the ones whose words should be trusted because, by their *persona*, they bridge the spirit world and the world of the living. Hallen, however, misses the possibility of the *oniseguns* keeping information from the populace by assuming that the populace lacks the spiritual epistemic quality to liaise with divinity.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have exposed the problem of unfair treatment and discrimination against epistemic agents in knowledge production, knowledge sharing, and consensus practices in Hallen's account of Yoruba epistemic thought. We did this by focusing on the problems associated with 'knowing', 'believing', *onisegun* in Hallen's account. In what followed, we discussed the idea of agency in Fricker, exposed the layers of agency injustice in Hallen's idea of *onisegun* and recommended epistemic recognition as a plausible solution. The significance of this paper is that agency injustice inherent in Hallen's idea of *onisegun* is exposed and might be considered as a contribution to Hallen's account of Yoruba ME.

References

- Arendt, H. (2018). *The Human Condition: Second Edition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Carel, H. and Gyorffy, G. (2019). “Seen but not heard: Children and Epistemic Injustice”, *The Lancet Journals*, 384 (9950), 1256-1257. Accessed on July 1, 2019 [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(14\)61759-1](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(14)61759-1)
- Dotson, K. (2012). A Cautionary Tale: On limiting Epistemic Oppression, *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, 33(1): 24-47.
- Miranda, Fricker (2007). *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hallen, B. and Sodipo, J. O. (1986). *Knowledge, Belief, and Witchcraft: Analytic Experiments in African Philosophy*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Hallen, B. (1998). “Moral Epistemology – When Propositions Come Out of Mouths”, *International Philosophical Quarterly*, XXXVIII/2 (Issue No. 150, June): 187–204.
- Hallen, B. (2000). *The Good, the Bad, and the Beautiful: Discourse about Values in an African Culture*, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.
- Hallen, B. (2004). “Yoruba Moral Epistemology” in Kwasi Wiredu (ed.) *A Companion to African Philosophy*. Malden, USA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd. 296-303.
- Hallen, B. (2006). *African Philosophy: The Analytic Approach*. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press.
- Haslanger, S. (2017). Objectivity, Epistemic Objectification, and Oppression. In: I. Kidd *et. al.*, (eds.) *The Routledge Handbook of Epistemic Injustice*. New York: Routledge, pp. 279-290.
- Kwasi, W. (1980). *Philosophy and an African Culture*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Quine, W. V. O. (1956). Quantifiers and Propositional Attitudes”, *Journal of Philosophy*, 53: 177–87.

- Quine, W. V. O. (1975). "Mind and Verbal Dispositions", in S. Guttenplan (ed.) *Mind and Language*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 83–95.
- Quine, W. V. O. (1960). *Word and Object*. Cambridge, MA: The M.I.T Press.
- Pohlhaus, G. (2017). Varieties of Epistemic Injustice. In: I. Kidd *et.al.* (eds.) *The Routledge Handbook of Epistemic Injustice*. New York: Routledge, pp. 13-26.
- Wanderer, J. (2012). "Addressing testimonial injustice: Being ignored and being rejected", *The Philosophical Quarterly* Vol. 62, No. 246: 148-169.
- Yar, M. (n.d.). "Hannah Arendt", Internet Encyclopaedia of Philosophy <https://iep.utm.edu/arendt/> Retrieved September 22, 2021.