JUSTIFICATION OF ORAL TESTIMONY IN IGBO AND YORUBA EPISTEMOLOGY

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Abstract
This article is aimed at justifying oral testimony as a source of knowing in Igbo and Yoruba epistemology. This paper was informed by the fact that although previous studies on the subject by scholars acknowledged that orality is a crucial aspect of acquiring, retaining and disseminating knowledge in Africa, however, their claims were neither argued with appropriate epistemological theory and methodology, nor with processes or procedures for evaluating and authenticating orality which brought about prejudice and presupposition in their works and in turn makes their arguments and conclusions inadequate. This lacuna made contemporary epistemological discourses in African Philosophy to barely capture the plural oral indigenous knowledge systems which had made meaning to individuals, peoples as well as cultural groups in traditional Africa. This paper is aimed at filling this gap by using epistemological context-based theory to examine Igbo and Yoruba oral testimony arising from proverbial knowledge, mystical knowledge, mythical knowledge, symbolic knowledge, old-age knowledge, folklore knowledge, intuitive knowledge, religious knowledge and oral tradition. This will be done through the epistemological theory and methodology of reductionist and non-reductionist approaches, which emphasise critical analysis and philosophical evaluation in justifying knowledge claims on the basis of what we are told or heard. Hence, our conclusion is that oral testimony is as much a justification for believing and claiming to know in Igbo and Yoruba epistemological context and is arguably a veritable, valuable and authentic means of acquiring, retaining and disseminating knowledge.

Keywords: Justification, Oral Testimony, Epistemology, Igbo, Yoruba.

Introduction
Epistemology is the study of theories about the nature and scope of knowledge, the evaluation of the presuppositions and basis of knowledge, and the scrutiny of knowledge claims. Basic epistemological questions include; what we know, how we know and the justification for what we know. African epistemology describes how Africans conceptualizes, interprets and apprehends reality within the context of African cultural or collective experience. (Anyanwu, 1983:60) this is predicated on the assumption that certain concepts such as knowledge, truth, rationality, etc can be interpreted using African experience without necessarily having recourse to western conceptual frame work. Hence, this epistemology is abstracted from collective world view of Africans leaning essentially on such materials as myths, folktlores, proverbs, folk wisdom, etc (Udefi, 2014:108) which is mostly transmitted through orality. Thus, this work seeks to resolve the question of justification of oral testimony in African epistemology. This is based on the fact that the history of the African people whether ancient or contemporary African society, has been vastly preserved by the oral tradition which in turn informed our knowledge, beliefs and assumptions about reality. Oral traditions are knowledge about reality transmitted orally from one generation to another. This
knowledge is usually transmitted and acquired through speech or song and may take the form of folktales and fables, epic histories and narrations, proverbs or sayings, and songs. Oral Traditions are veritable method of transmitting and impacting knowledge across generations before formal writing came into existence. Hence, it is a portent source of histories that help people make sense of their world and are used to teach children and adults about important aspects of their culture. (Ruth, 2012)

The questions that arise are; how has the oral tradition been able to flourish and sustain the African epistemological world-view? What were the processes involved in oral transmission of knowledge from one generation to another in Africa with less misinformation? What are the bounds of such knowledge claim? How do we justify the authenticity of such knowledge? What are the methods used in justification of such knowledge claims? How do we justify the truth value of oral knowledge claim in epistemology? This study is aimed at interrogating these questions as well as justifying oral testimony as a method of knowing, retaining and transmitting knowledge in Igbo and Yoruba communities using testimony both as context based and as communal form of knowledge transmission. Thus, oral testimony is a declarative sentence by a speaker to a hearer or to an audience. A vast number of our beliefs arise through oral testimony or inferences drawn from it. (Coady, 1992) Epistemology of testimony is not only on the nature of testimony itself, but also on how justified belief or knowledge is acquired on the basis of what other people tell us. (Lackey, 2005) It is therefore worthy to note that a very large number of our beliefs and knowledge arise from what people tell us in African, not only in the past as to oral tradition, but also in the current African epistemological discourse.

A close examination of scholars on African epistemology reveals some discordance views on oral testimony and its justification. For instance, Ozumba (2001:171) argues that African epistemology has to do with Africa's own way of carrying out its enquiries into the nature, scope and limits of knowledge. For him, the pertinent question is: “What is that Africa's own way of knowledge acquisition?” He concludes that, “it is simply the mode or manner through which the African talks about reality in the African world”. There is no doubt that Africa has traditional manner and mode through which they construe reality according to Ozumba but, his argument fails to identify these modes and the nature of relationship this knowledge acquisition, that is to say: whether the “Africa's own way” (or ways) of knowledge acquisition is rooted in any epistemological source and theory of knowledge? Secondly, what are the possible challenges with adopting such mode and manner of knowledge acquisition? The above questions Ozumba's work failed to address. Similarly, Uduigwomen (1995:40) posits:

Myths serve as a means of acquiring and transmitting knowledge, for knowledge has a prominent place in the African mind. It enables the African to recollect past activities of men and societies which make it possible for the individual or societies to orientate themselves aimed at bewildering currents of the society.

He also argued that there have been disputes and disagreements as to the role and place of myths in African Philosophy, but failed to address what myths means for Africans and its relationship with knowledge acquisition process. Barry Hallen, (2004:29) in his article “Yoruba Moral Epistemology”, in Wiredu, Companion to African Philosophy identified the major challenge in African Epistemology when argues:

... in the context of the colonial relationship between Africa and the west, African epistemology was degradingly deemed irrational and unscientific because it was allegedly opined to be muddled with emotions, religious beliefs, intuitions and myths.

The above problem associated with the posited challenge of African Epistemology by Barry is closely connected with the same problem Uduigwomen's argument was addressing. That is,
African thought system lacks the right and adequate theory which explains its realities because it is perceived to be saddled with religious beliefs, emotion and myth. This degrading of African Epistemology and thought system as a whole by the Western philosophers is as a result of their inability to understand African realities within the context of the theory which underlies it. Tempels (1959:40) earlier contends that in African epistemology, there is an intimate ontological bond and relationship between every being. He argues that the “African view of a world of forces (beings) is like “a spider’s web of which no single thread can be caused to vibrate without shaking the whole network”. Hence, African-oriented knowledge is derivative from a chain of relationships. Like a spider’s web, the knowledge of one aspect of reality is intertwined with the knowledge of other aspects. Ruch (1984:36) similarly affirms that “in African epistemology, knowledge is an integrative grasp of reality. It entails the recognition that the whole universe is a single whole. Every aspect of reality is interdependent on each other.” Thus, in the vision of totality, Africans conceive reality to be in harmony. According to Ruch, an African seeks the order that ought to be in the universe and uses his/her findings to give meaning to his/her existence and the existence of the whole of reality. In this respect, African epistemology takes on a holistic approach that encompasses experiential, rational, religious, intuitive, symbolic, mythical, and emotional aspects of reality. Ejikemewuwa (2004:34) gave a non-holistic approach by arguing that there are varied forms of knowledge in African epistemology. They include: perceptual knowledge, common sense knowledge, old age knowledge, inferential knowledge, mystical knowledge, oral tradition, holistic knowledge, etc.

From the arguments above that there is a basic agreement between the holistic and nonholistic scholars about the nature of African mode of knowing, transmitting and retaining knowledge. The problem their postulations did not address is the process, steps or stages by which oral testimony is authenticated within the African knowledge community. Igbo and Yoruba languages and cultures have an inbuilt codified epistemological system existing in their material and immaterial cultures. For instance, in Yoruba culture Ifa oracle, Fables, folklores, proverbs and other aphoristic sayings. The Ifa Oracle is often regarded as the storehouse of Yoruba knowledge inside which the Yoruba comprehension of their own historical experiences and understanding of their environment can always be found. Even till today, the Ifa oracle is recognized by the Yoruba as a repository for Yoruba traditional body of knowledge embracing history, philosophy, medicine and folklore. Ifa as an oracle is also known as Orumilila, which is the Yoruba god of knowledge, wisdom and divination. The Yoruba oral tradition affirms that, it was a special privilege for Orumilila to know about the beginning of most things. Akinyemi (2003) writing from African studies asserts:

For the Yoruba culture is the unwritten constitution of the society. It is a guide to morality, a determiner of ethics and a paradigm of inter-personal relationships. Yoruba tradition is essentially oral driven. Folklore lies on the knowledge production process of the people. Indigenous epistemology is a bye-product of its oral tradition. Knowledge is a communal heritage passed through word of mouth across generations.

From the foregoing review oral tradition has been portrayed as the reservoir of history through which Yoruba people nurture and transmit their knowledge. This can be affirm from the Yoruba adage: “Bí omo ò bá bá ìtàn, à bá àróbá, Àrobá baba ìtàn” (Meaning: “If a child doesn't witness history, such child will witness tales; tales the father of history.”). Similarly, Ajayi (2005:24) closely describes Oral tradition as having a relationship with testimony when he argues:

An indispensable source of reconstructing the early culture and civilization of Africa is Oral tradition. Oral traditions are testimonies of past events transmitted from one generation to the other through the words of mouth.
In the same vein Vansina (1985:12) argues that oral tradition is “the testimony of the past which are transmitted from mouth to mouth.” This connotes that oral tradition comprise mainly of events that happened in the past and transmitted through spoken words from one generation to the other. Thus, oral tradition as stated above is peculiar to history of past events; Ajayi and Vansina acknowledge the role of testimony in the transmission of knowledge from one generation to another. Ajayi (25) however went further to outline its epistemological import when he avers that:

... that Oral tradition may take the form of myths and legends, songs, folklore, proverbs and poems, epigrammatic sayings, popular history or stories. These are usually passed on by a special people such as Lineage heads, ballad singers and court chroniclers, drummers, priests, chiefs and other categories of knowledgeable men and women.

It is thus observable that the forms which Oral tradition takes as argued by Ajayi above are the basic modes and manner of knowledge acquisition in African epistemology, which in turn is a sign that there is an underlining epistemological theory that account for African modes and manners of knowledge acquisition. Ajayi (25) unfortunately concludes that despite the merits of oral tradition, “chances of exaggeration and omission are great”, it “harbours elements of contradiction” and that “people can twist materials to suit or support their purpose”. He suggested that “a researcher relying on Oral tradition for information should learn to distinguish significant evidence from trivial matters. He should also watch out for over-simplification of issues by informants.” Ajayi seems right in his view about oral tradition and its limitations in history, but he did not provide an epistemological theory that explains the justification of oral tradition to enable the justifying, scrutinizing, distinguishing and evaluating beliefs which flow from it. How then should oral information be addressed in the face of philosophical and epistemological scrutiny? This task is what oral testimony provides in African epistemology. Hence, Oluwole (1999:30) argues:

The acts of reflection, criticism, analysis, argument and discussion can all be carried out in a purely oral form. And since the formulation of poetry, discursive prose, verse, narrative, etc. did not depend on the art of writing, the creation of these literary styles and structures cannot be said to depend on the mastery of writing.

She further asserts that “… Socrates must have been led to believe that oral discussion promotes human thought better than writing, most especially when the former is carried out in the form of a dialogue – the form in which many of his discussions were later recorded by one of his pupils Plato. Thus, while Oluwole argues that certain aspects of oral tradition constitute philosophy in themselves, other scholars such as p'Bitek (1970), Gyekeye (1987), Ozumba (1997), Kimmerle (1997), Imbo (2002) and Adegbìndin (2010) hold that oral tradition as it were can only serve as source materials for philosophizing. (Fayemi & Babajide 2005:59) However, Ihuah (1999:136) reiterates that there is “authentic philosophy expressed in all African oral texts: names, proverbs, folktales and songs amongst others.” Sophie Oluwole quoted Hountondji without seeing or perhaps, she chose to ignore the epistemological implication of his thought on her claim in the following words:

Oral Tradition favours the consolidation of knowledge into dogmatic, intangible systems, whereas archival transmission promotes better the possibility of a critique of knowledge between individuals and from one generation to another. (Hountondji 1983).

Hountondji rightly points out the epistemological implications of oral tradition in philosophy. He listed “archival transmission” as a qualification criteria oral tradition needs in order to promote the critique of knowledge. Archiving, in turn involves systemizing and organizing.
This further implies that oral tradition requires a process of refining, organizing and systematizing so as to possess the philosophical import that may enable it fit into epistemological discourse. Oluwole later acknowledge that the inadequacies of oral tradition came into being as a result of a social accident namely; the absence of public organization of knowledge. This is in line with Hountondji’s view on oral tradition and knowledge acquisition, as well as a confirmation that oral tradition is too loose to convey philosophical thought without a proper organization and systematization. Hountondji (1983) reiterates that: rejection of reason in defence of tradition can never be but a metaphor,...it seems more reasonable to try and know our traditions as they were, beyond any mythology and distortion, not merely for the purpose of self-identification or justification, but in order to help us meet the challenges and problems of today.

Thus, for Hountondji the coexistence of reason and tradition gives way for the Philosophy of any culture. Hence, oral tradition in turn requires reason to enable it see beyond the mythological claims in the tradition. Rationality becomes the epistemological criteria to test consistency of oral testimony in African philosophy. At this juncture, one may incline to ask: What is epistemological basis or justification of oral testimony in African philosophy?

**Epistemology of Testimony Based Belief**

Lackey (2005:3) describes epistemology of testimony as not only to describe the nature of testimony, but also on justified belief or knowledge acquired on the basis of what other people told us. While Pritchard (2004:329) define testimony-based belief as “...any belief which one reasonably and directly forms in response to what one reasonably takes to be testimony and which is essentially caused and sustained by testimony.” Deducible from Pritchard’s position, we can argue that through understanding and accepting the utterances of others, we form beliefs especially from the common place ones, like belief in our birth-date or the identity of our parents, traditions, lifestyle, norms, values and cultures. For instance; from oral testimony in Yoruba traditional culture we were told how Orunmila came to earth as the messenger of Olodumare and host of other cultural narratives. Our knowledge of the world and the past, our knowledge of other minds and our own minds are each and all interwoven with testimonial knowledge. (Faulkner1998:9) What is important for a distinctive testimonial justification of knowledge is that a hearer forms a given belief on the basis of the content of a speaker’s testimony. Given that testimonial beliefs are the beliefs we formulate on the basis of the words of others. By this, we can argue that testimony based beliefs and justification are the central focus in epistemology of testimony.

Barry and Sodipo (1997:60) distinguish between “knowledge” and “belief” in Yoruba language discourse called “*imo*” and “*igbagbo*”. *Mo/imo* is know/knowledge while *gbagbo/igbagbo* is believe/belief. The one you use your own eyes to see and which your *okan* witness is *ooto* (true) is regarded to be the best. Because it is clear in my eyes. This means that I have witnessed it myself. It is clear in my eyes. Thus, the person who claims to *mo* must literally have seen the thing himself. You (*ri*) (see or witness) it before you *mo* (know) it. Similarly, the Igbo expression, *Nkem fulu n’anya bu ezi okwu, mana nkem nulu so na nti were ike obulu asi*. Meaning: What I see or witness with my eyes is true knowledge, but the one only heard with my ears may likely be mere belief *nchekwube*. In fact *ndi igbo* almost equates *onye amamife* (wise person) with *onye ezi-okwu* (truthful person) *(udefi 2014:115).* From Barry and Sodipo’s position, a person who holds a firsthand knowledge of having seen and heard as in Igbo expression above can rightly claim to know. By this, a person or people that are to acquire this already acquired knowledge can only know through the testimony of the knower who has the knowledge firsthand. In this case, Barry argues that such person or people have only acquired *igbagbo* (belief). Thus he asserts that:
... If and when my *imo* is challenged by other persons who have not undergone a similar firsthand experience and who therefore doubt what I say I actually saw happen, the best way to convince them would be to arrange for some kind of test whereby they will be able to see the thing happen for themselves. If I cannot arrange for this kind of direct testing, the next best I can do is to ask any others who may have personally witnessed my own or a similar experience to come forward and testify. In this case my firsthand experience cannot become the challengers' own (*imo*), but if they are influenced by the combined testimony they may decide to “believe” me and accept the information on a second-hand basis, as *igbagbo* (Barry and Sodipo, 1997:60).

From Barry's argument, we are left with *igbagbo* each time we try to acquire knowledge we have not personally witnessed. And on this basis, such belief that is, *igbagbo* is opened to challenges from those who formed beliefs from what they heard were told. This is done through combined testimony. Despite how explanatory this position held by Barry seems to be, there is an inherent problem. It is not the case as posited by Barry on his knowledge/belief distinction that we cannot *mo* (know) someone else's *imo* (knowledge) since we didn't acquire it firsthand and we are only left with either to *gbagbo* it (believe) or not. Rather, we can also acquire knowledge from the word or testimony of others since acquiring it second-hand is also a dimension of a firsthand if we have adequate justification to make it *imo* (knowledge).

For instance; if before my birth, *my father presented a car to my mother on their wedding day*, they can both be said to have a firsthand knowledge of the event. I, as their son, I am left with forming a belief from their testimony that *my father presented a car to my mother on their wedding day on a second-hand basis*. This doesn't necessary imply that I cannot acquire “knowledge” (*imo*) based on the belief I formed within me that *my father presented a car to my mother on their wedding day* if I am justified. Knowledge can be acquired from my formed belief and I can also have a degree of a firsthand knowledge that that *my father presented a car to my mother on their wedding day*. Witnessing my father narrating the occasion is in itself a version of a firsthand based on the combined testimony of my father and my mother. But this requires some level of justification which leads to the question of how testimony based beliefs become justified true knowledge in epistemology.

**Epistemological Justification of Testimony-Based Belief**

One of the central questions in the epistemology of testimony is how hearers acquire justified beliefs from the testimony of others? In other words, what justifies accepting testimony of others as true knowledge? Answers to this question can be approached from two epistemological theories namely; reductionism and non-reductionist perspectives.

**Non-Reductionist or anti-reductionist Approach**

The non-reductionist approach which can also be regarded as anti-reductionist approach maintains that acceptance of testimony is justified in itself; unless there is some reason to think that the testimony is false. What this implies is that a testimony is a basic source of justification as long as there are no relevant undefeated defeaters; hearers can be justified in accepting what they are told merely on the basis of the testimony of speakers. For instance, Tyler Burge (1993:467) writes that “a person is entitled to accept as true something that is presented as true and that is intelligible to him, unless there are stronger reasons not to do so". Similarly, Matthew Weiner (2003:257) argues that “we are justified in accepting anything that we are told unless there is positive evidence against doing so”. And Robert Audi (1998:142) reiterates that ‘...gaining testimonial grounded knowledge normally requires only having no reason for doubt about the credibility of the attester.' In all of these passages, we
find endorsements of non-reductionism. There are two types of defeaters that are relevant to the non-reductionist's view namely; psychological and normative defeaters.

**Psychological Defeaters**
A psychological defeater is a doubt or belief that is had by S, and indicates that S's belief that \( p \) is either false or unreliably formed or sustained. Defeaters in this sense function by virtue of being had by S, regardless of their truth-value or epistemic status.

**Normative Defeaters**
A normative defeater is a doubt or belief that S ought to have, and indicates that S's belief that \( p \) is either false or unreliably formed or sustained. Defeaters in this sense function by virtue of being doubts or beliefs that S should have (whether or not S does have them) given the presence of certain available evidence. The underlying thought here is that certain kinds of doubts and beliefs contribute epistemically unacceptable irrationality to doxastic systems and, accordingly, justification can be defeated or undermined by their presence.

**Reductionist Approach**
Reductionist views hold that the justification of beliefs based on testimony is not special to testimony, but rather relies on the independent justifiability of beliefs based on perception, memory, or inductive inference. (Paul Thagard 2005:312) They argue that the justification of an agent's testimony based belief is always dependent upon that agent possessing further independent grounds, that is, at the very least, grounds that are independent of the instance of testimony in question. In contrast to non-reductionism, the reductionists, whose historical roots can be traced to the work of David Hume, maintain that in addition to the absence of undefeated defeaters, hearers must also possess non-testimony based positive reasons in order to be justified in accepting the testimony of speakers. These reasons are typically the result of induction. (Lackey 2005:6) For instance, hearers observe a general conformity between reports and the corresponding facts and, with the assistance of memory and reason, they inductively infer that certain speakers, contexts, or types of reports are reliable sources of information. In this way, the justification of testimony is reduced to the justification for sense perception, memory, and inductive inference. Thus, in order to be justified in accepting the testimony of speakers, hearers must possess non-testimony based positive reasons for believing that testimony is generally reliable.

**Objections to Non-Reductionism and Reductionism**
Both non-reductionism and reductionism have been subject to various objections. The central problem raised against non-reductionism is that it is said to sometimes sanction gullibility, epistemic irrationality, and intellectual irresponsibility. (Lackey 2005:6) For given that, on such a view, hearers can acquire testimonial justified beliefs in the complete absence of any relevant positive reasons, randomly selected speakers, arbitrarily chosen postings on the internet, and unidentified telemarketers can be trusted, so long as there is no negative evidence against such sources. Hence, accepting testimony in these kinds of cases is a paradigm of gullibility, epistemic irrationality, and irresponsibility. Against reductionism, it is equally argued that young children clearly acquire a great deal of knowledge from their parents and teachers and yet it is said to be doubtful that they possess or even could possess non-testimonial knowledge based positive reasons for accepting much of what they are told. For instance, an 18-month-old baby may come to know that the stove is hot from the testimony of her mother, but it is unclear whether she has the cognitive sophistication to have reasons for believing her mother to be a reliable source of information, let alone for believing that testimony is generally reliable. Given this, reductionists, of both the global and the local
stripes may be hard-pressed to explain how such young subjects could acquire all of the testimonial knowledge they at least seem to possess.

The above two approaches are part and parcel of knowledge process in traditional African community especially as it relates to acquisition, transmission, and retention of knowledge. For instance, the non-reductionist approach is found mainly among the young children as individuals in the community, where they acquire a great deal of knowledge from what their parents, elders and teachers told them, it is therefore doubtful whether they possess or even could substantiate non-testimonial reasons for accepting what they are told. As this research is concern with the acquisition, retaining and transmission of knowledge in Africa, it is pertinent to emphasize that knowledge acquisition, retention and transmission in Africa depends more on testimonial knowledge transmitted orally from one generation to the next. Such transmission takes place majorly between the adults/elders etc and the young who form beliefs from what they are told. By so doing, these groups become the core point of the knowledge transmission process, which is not contrary to what the reductionist approach is advocating. Hence, our next discussion will focus on illustrating how Igbo and Yoruba epistemic community justify oral testimony.

The Igbo and Yoruba knowledgeable Community
Audi (1997:405) describes an epistemic or knowledgeable community as a network of professionals with recognized expertise and competence in a particular domain with an authoritative claim to policy-relevant knowledge within that domain. African traditional community in which Igbo and Yoruba belong to despite being communal in nature is a knowledgeable community with an epistemic intent. This is evident in their traditional ways of expression especially in proverbs and other symbolic expressions. For instance, The Yoruba has a proverb that says: Omode gbon, agba gbon, lafi da ile-ife. Meaning: The young is wise, the old is wise, and that is why the land of Ife was established. Owo omode o to pepe, t'agbalagba owo kengbe Meaning: Hand of a child does not reach the altar, so also the hand of elder does not enter the wine keg (It emphasizes the unique role of individuals in the society both young and old) (Adebayo, 1979:57).

Similarly, an Igbo proverb says: ife okenyne no ani fu, Nwata kwuoto agaghi afu ya, What an elder sees, while sitting down, a child cannot see it even while standing. Another slightly contrary one states: Nwata njeje n’aka okenyne no n’ulo amaihe. A child that has travelled far and wild is more knowledgeable than an elder that stays only within his domain. The above proverbs point to the fact that in African community no person or group has monopoly of knowledge, rather each person has something to contribute to the community knowledge process and bank. These go to underscore the belief in the communal kinship spirit which respects individual opinion and knowledge in both Igbo and Yoruba traditional epistemic communities. We will now discuss the dependency of epistemic authority in the application, production and justification of knowledge in Africa.

Dependence on Epistemic Authority in Africa
Most African traditional communities acknowledge the existence, reliance and dependence on knowledgeable authority in their knowledge process. For instance, apart from the fact that a speaker of any word of statement being an epistemic authority for the hearer or audience at a time, there are special and important people in the society that is regarded as an epistemic authority in African community. They are regarded as the custodians of their socio-cultural heritage and values. Epistemic authority is most salient when the speaker is an expert speaking about his area of expertise. In forming a belief by appealing to an epistemic authority an audience or hearer is epistemically dependent on the speaker. Once our epistemic dependence on epistemic authorities is accepted, we come closer to the justification of such belief as a knowledge claim. In Yoruba community, two major epistemic
authors have been identified namely; the sage (elders or Old age) and ifa. Didier N. Kaphagawani and Jeanette G. Malherbe (2003:269) describe a sage in African context as:
the elders of the tribe, people whose wisdom and knowledge of the traditions, the folklore, the values, customs, history, habits, likes and dislikes, character and thought, of their people is very great. Sages are the mouthpieces of a culture. They are applied to by ordinary folk for authoritative judgments and decisions on various matters. The sages of African traditional society are a rich source of philosophical insights—the raw material of much work by professional African philosophers who aim at systematizing the folk philosophy of particular African societies, linguistic communities, or ethnic groups.

The role elders play in the acquisition, retention and transmission of knowledge is of great importance to oral testimony. This is often associated with their past years in which they have acquired a lot of experiences. In Yoruba community an elder is locally referred to as agba. Because they possess wisdom, tact and maturity accumulated through experiences over the years, which are collectively called ogbon agba (elderly wisdom).

In most African communities, elders are usually accorded the position of an orator during an important discussion. One curious aspect in Yoruba culture is the customary homage that one pays to the elders in the process of using a proverb. The usual practice is to take a bow and say to the elders present before using the proverb: Agba ni o n p’owе, Awon Agba lo n wipe... "It is the elders who make a proverb that, as the elders say or as the Yoruba say..." And at the end of the proverb, one will say 'Toto', meaning "it sounds like a proverb, if I have trespassed, may the elders forgive me." Then the audience with the elders amongst them will respond, 'Wa pa omiran', meaning; “You will tell another” (proverb) implying that the speaker's foundation of proverbs will never become dry. The importance of this dramatic aspect lies in the fact that it enhances the audience's alertness and participation in the discussion. Similarly, in Igbo culture the ability to apply proverbs in speech is not only a sign that the speaker has adequate knowledge of the subject matter but that he/she has a better understanding of the topic under discussion. Thus, the Igbo say that a child who knows how to use proverbs have justified the dowry paid on his mother. The centrality of proverbs in Igbo-African oral tradition is manifested in the frequency of its use in their conversations, speech, instructions, judgments, drama, arguments, storytelling, in fun making to name a few; and this is based on the fact that the Igbo regards proverbs as essential vehicle through which a message can be adequately transmitted. (Kanu 2014:165) In fact, proverbs in Igbo language are the oil that lubricates Igbo sentences and speech; without proverb speech would sound like a running engine without oil lubrication. Thus, Opoku (1978:158) avers: Proverbs serve as prescription for action or act as judgments in times of moral lapses. Often a proverb cited at an appropriate time during an argument can settle the dispute instantly, for the proverbs are believed to have been handed down by the ancestors and predecessors to whom we owe our communal experience and wisdom.

Likewise, there is the belief that the old people are closer to the gods who are the source of all wisdom. So the ontological states of old people within the African world presuppose knowledgeability. Tempels avers that; in the human realm, the elders in a community assume a hierarchical position superior to that of the youth, for it is such that their greater age, experience and vital force bestow an eminent understanding of the nature of things.

Elders, who are regarded in Igbo culture as people of wisdom amamife, acquired through wealth of experience and have won the approval of the ancestors to speak or officiate for the community most times applies proverbs while giving advice to the younger ones. Hence, both cultures accord great respect to their elders because they are the
custodians of their socio-cultural and religious heritage. Similarly, the role of elders in Yoruba culture is aptly summarized in the proverb: *Ilu ti ko ba si agba, Ilu nna ki i tooro* “When there are no elders in town, the town degenerates, when the head of the family dies, the house becomes desolate”. Another says: *Agba ki n wa o'ja k'ori omo tuntun wo* “An elder cannot be in the market and a child's head will be allowed to droop”. In the same vein Ndi Igbo has a similar one that says: *okenye adi ano n'ulo ewu amuo na ogburi*. An elder does not stay at home while a she goat suffers the pain of parturition on a teeter. Proverbs therefore, are particularly crucial in justification of oral testimony in Africa, because they seem to be most frequently used owing to their “literal attribute of being figurative, colourful, and terse, and their earthly qualities of containing truths and hard facts borne out of experience” (Peter1971:98) Okolo (1985) particularly notes that the wordings of proverbs are as fixed as their contents and messages transmitted in them have a cultural standardization in both form and content. This fixed nature makes for easy memorization and retention so that anybody wishing to acquire them will not have to grapple with the problem of variation. Thus, in using proverbs he notes that, it is not enough simply to memorize and recite them. A good speaker has to use them in appropriate contexts because contexts play a major role in their correct interpretation. Hence, mere rendering of proverbs out of context not only makes the exercise boring and uninteresting, but also conceals the colour and beauty they give to language.

Truly for an elder to be regarded as an epistemic authority, he /she is expected to live up to societal expectations, such as being discreet, truthful and morally responsible in fulfilling family and social obligations. Any elder that is found wanting in these areas gradually losses his/her social and moral respect, even within his/her family. Thus the Yorubas say: *'Agba to je ajeiwehin, yoo ru igba re dele’* (The elder who shirks his responsibilities should not count on his juniors’ respect). Thus, for them to guide against mistaking a questionable elder in the society to be responsible and thereby ascribing to him the position of an epistemic authority, such person must be morally responsible. In other words a sage in African context must be truthful person and morally responsible. In the same vein Ndi Igbo made a clear distinction between *ako n'uche* (wisdom), *amamife* (knowledge) and *nchekwube* (belief). In Igbo context there is an ontological relationship between *ako n'uche* (wisdom), *amamife* (knowledge), *nchekwube* (belief) and *eziokwu* (truth). This is because what the Igbo claims to know is what in the final analysis are true. Thus, in Igbo context a knowledgeable person is a truthful person usually regarded as *onye nwere ako n'uche na ezi-okwu*. On the contrary one may be knowledgeable but a liar *onye asi*, for one to be classified as an authoritative source in Igbo community he must possess moral integrity of which the ability to say and stand on the truth is a necessary prerequisite. This is because both knowledge and truth are regarded as possessing divine and moral status. Udefi (2014) avers: This is in keeping with their saying, *ezio-kwu bu ndu* (truth is life). So in order to verify the truth of a claim or event, it is not enough to see how propositions correspond with facts or the weight of superior logic of the argument but it is important to consider the person's *omume* (character), that is, his moral standing within the community is paramount.

He therefore argue that even though *nchekwube* (belief) relies essentially on testimony or second-hand report from other people and is usually held on trust, and faith, but nonetheless can qualify as knowledge after deliberate effort to empirically test and corroborate the information obtained from them. Thus, *Ndi Igbo* in other to verify the authenticity of information apply the process of empirical testing and corroboration which starts with a comprehensive examination of the proposition with what others have said and in accord with *omenani ndi Igbo* (Igbo tradition and custom). Hence, *Ndi Igbo* attach different epistemic certainty to oral testimony of elders, prompting them to believe that what someone experiences or sees with his eyes at first-hand coupled with mind or cognitive apprehension
of it is taken as a reliable way of knowing and is regarded as true (ezi-okwu). Udefi concludes and we totally agree with him that “The next reliable is nchekwube (belief) which, though derived from second-hand information, is capable of being empirically tested and verified. However, nchekwube (belief) that can never be verified is the least certain.”

However, there are circumstances in most African cultures in which they believe that the above various ways of knowing and verifying the authenticity of oral testimony may not be exhaustive, most especially when some unexplainable misfortunes like witchcraft attack, sickness that have defiled known treatment, sudden death, infertility etc. They therefore tend to provide explanation /justification of authenticity of such occurrence through recourse to oracles consultations and other paranormal ways of ascertaining the ‘truth' like divination Igba-afa in Igbo and Ifa in Yoruba cultures.

Ifa as Epistemic Authority
As previously mentioned Ifa oracle is regarded as one of the sources of knowing in traditional Yoruba community through its consultation. Ifa is the name of the god of knowledge and wisdom. There is no literal translation for the word Ifa. It also refers to a religious tradition and exists in western part of Nigeria. It is also an understanding of ethics, a process of spiritual transformation and a set of scriptures that are the basis for a complex system of divination. The originator of Ifa was Orunmila. (Folorunso & Sofolowe et al 2010:115) Orunmila is regarded in Yoruba culture as an epistemic authority thought to have been chosen “to possess an infinite source of knowledge” (Awojoodu and Baran 2009:130). Abimbola (1977:1) reports in his Ifa Divination Poetry that the first-hand knowledge, the divination God, Òrúnmilà, gained was by the virtue of his presence at creation, is the source of the disclosure system he supervises during divination. Ifá’s divination procedures are retrieval mechanisms that access the corpus of primordial knowledge stored in (and as) divination stories. He concludes that “Ifá was put in charge of divination because of his great wisdom which he acquired as a result of his presence by the side of the Almighty when the latter created the universe. Ifá therefore knew all the hidden secrets of the universe. Hence his praise name Akéréfinúṣogbón, (the small one who is full of wisdom).

In Ifa divination system, consultation involves information and knowledge about present, past and future events (Sofoluwe 2002:65). The consultation processes are knowledge-intensive. They host a particular high percentage of professionalism with active “tacit” knowledge that command important domains of knowledge. This knowledge is acquired through the Ifa priest (babalawo) (Awojoodu O. and Baran D. 2009:130), in a mystical experience. This in turn makes the Ifa priest to know what he knows (Folorunso, et al 2010:114). Ifá’s knowledge includes animals, plants, Ofo (oral incantations), divination, medicinal plants, and all sciences associated with healing diseases. This “wise man to whom nature has taught her secrets” is the controller of language, culture, philosophy, and religion. Ifá knows the causes, secret names, origins, and chemical compositions of all things (Awojoodu and Baran 2009:131).

In Yoruba mythology, Orunmila corresponds to the highly knowledgeable Irunmole, (deity of destiny and prophecy). He is recognized as "ibi keji Olodumare", that is,. second only to Olodumare (Almighty God)) and elei ipin, that is,. witness to creation. Orunmila is the Orisha of divination, the Supreme Oracle, the great benefactor of humanity and its main adviser. He reveals the future from the secret of Ifá, Orunmila personifies knowledge and wisdom and the highest form of divination practice among the Yoruba people. Orunmila carried Ifá, the wisdom of Olodumare, to Earth. (Awojoodu and Baran (2009:130), see also Abimbola (2006:90). For these reasons, Ifa is regarded as an embodiment of knowledge and thus, an epistemic authority in Yoruba tradition, hence, an epistemic authority in justification of oral testimony in Yoruba community.
Similarly, in Igbo culture the truthfulness of oral testimony of an elder when in doubt can be confirmed through recourse to igba-afa (divination) and oracle consultation in which divination is an important aspect. Oral testimony based on belief nchezewube from Ndichie (elders), Ozo (title holders), Arusi (oracles) and Dibia-afa na aja (native doctors of different category) when under dispute and cannot be subjected to empirical verification are subjected to consultation of several diviners (igba-afa) differently to ascertain their authenticity. The above process by the Igbo and Yoruba to appeal to supernatural and paranormal agencies constitute their own ways of trying to offer explanation on what seem to defy their empirical solution.

**Conclusion**

The justification of testimonial based beliefs as it relates to the acquisition, retention and transmission of knowledge are basically follow two contending approaches namely; non-reductionist or anti-reductionist and reductionist approach. The two approaches are largely expressed and applied in African situation as an epistemic community. The major loopholes in the above approaches as identified earlier are less problematic when applied to African epistemology. For instance, while transmission of knowledge from older generation to the younger generation is favoured by the non-reductionist or anti-reductionist approach which holds that; so as long as there are no relevant undefeated defeaters that is, insofar we have no reason to doubt the testimony of others, the audience is justified in accepting what they are told merely on the basis of the testimony of speakers, since the process of knowledge acquisitions and variability of its authenticity are guided by their dependent on epistemic authorities namely; the sages and elders in line with their customs and tradition already noted above.

The reductionist approach favours conversational processes and formation of beliefs from the testimony of others in Africa, which is further based on perception, memory, or inductive inference as argued above. This approach is also largely influenced by the nature of Igbo and Yoruba cultures as an epistemic community and its reliance on epistemic authorities as identified in Igbo and Yoruba tradition namely; the sages, the Ifa Oracle, dibia-afa etc as argued above. Thus, these become their last resort when there are forms of dissatisfactions or doubts in their formed beliefs. Thus, Igbo and Yoruba justification of epistemology of oral testimony cannot be dismissed as radically different from Western tradition because of its appeal to supernatural and paranormal which most times are unquestionably accepted. However, this unquestioning attitude is not peculiar to Africans alone; in fact, characterize all human culture irrespective of geographical location, race, colour, language, etc.

Again, contrary to the argument that rationalization and speculation which are basic ingredients of philosophical activity are not accounted for by the oral testimony, because the traditional is characterized by an absence of alternatives to established authority and are largely conservative. Udefi (2012:123) reminds us that “the traditional society is as innovative, creative, and dynamic as any other in so called modern society”. He reiterates that “the tendency by some professional African philosophers to stress rigor and critical analysis as the essential hallmarks of philosophy seems presumptuous. This is because they fail to understand that there are both ‘critical’ and ‘narrative’ aspects to philosophy.” Bell has earlier identified the above two aspects as not mutually exclusive but complimentary to each other. He further cited Socratic philosophy as a typical illustration of the application of both the critical and narrative aspects of philosophy when he states:

Socrates as oral philosopher makes his way into subsequent philosophical history, independent of Plato as his critic and he gives shape to a distinctive philosophical style. Socrates was not only engaged in doing philosophy with


