Research Article

Volume 3, Issue VIII 2026
Journal Home Page: https://farpublisher.com/journals/
Page: 09-22
DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.23968375

Received: 06-10-2026 Accept Date: 12-10-2026 Published: 03-11-2026

LIKE WESTERN MORAL THEORIES, POGORO MORAL KNOWLEDGE SHOULD BE RECOGNIZED AS LEGITIMATE

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Abstract
This study aims to explore moral knowledge of the Pogoro people of Tanzania and argues for its recognition as a legitimate ethical theory within global philosophical discourse. It examines the way in which indigenous moral systems, particularly Pogoromorality, should be understood and recognized in global philosophy. This issue arises in the context of persistent marginalization of indigenous African moral systems which are traditionally regarded as folklore or cultural practices rather than ethical theories. Three interconnected dimensions will be explored: first, content and structure of Pogoro moral knowledge and its practical expressions in social upbringing of children and everyday social life; second, philosophical background of the marginalization of indigenous knowledge systems and reconstruction of epistemological hierarchy of colonial era that was oriented towards marginalization of oral knowledge, communal ethics and communal responsibility; third, methodological framework of Pogoromoral knowledge reconstruction. Key findings show that Pogoro indigenous ethics represents a coherent philosophical system that can be considered as legitimate ethical theory. Such recognition challenges residual colonial epistemic assumptions concerning what could be recognized as ethical theory and contributes to decolonization of knowledge. The study confirms the idea that Pogoro indigenous moral thought constitutes a serious autonomous ethical theory.
Keywords: Pogoro, Western moral theories, Pogoro moral knowledge, marginalization, legitimate, communal morality

Introduction

Historical dominance of Western ethical theories has been shaped philosophical views concerning what should be recognized as a legitimate moral knowledge. Western ethical theories—such as utilitarianism, deontology, virtue ethics, and rights-based approaches—have been treated as universal frameworks for understanding right and wrong. In contrast, indigenous moral systems, particularly those of African communities, have been disregarded as legitimate ethical framework for cultivation of good character; instead they have been treated as folklore and cultural traditions, which lack philosophical depth and rigour. In other words, there has been the epistemological hierarchy that led to the marginalization of indigenous knowledge systems. Contemporary studies on decolonization and African philosophy calls for recognition of the indigenous knowledge systems as the coherent form of moral knowledge. This study addresses this concern through exploration of moral knowledge of the Pogoro people of Tanzania. This ethnic group has a set of distinct ethical principles, values, and practices which shape their social relationships, communal responsibility, respect for elderly people, environmental ethics and human dignity. In other words, they have a distinct system of moral knowledge which is transmitted through oral traditions, proverbs, customs and experience. However, similar to many other

indigenous African moral systems, Pogoro moral knowledge has remained marginalized and has not been discussed in the context of philosophical theory of ethics.

The central concern of this study is the way Pogoro indigenous moral knowledge can be reconstructed and recognized as a legitimate ethical theory. To achieve this, the study examines three interrelated dimensions. First, the study analyses the content and structure of Pogoro moral knowledge and practical applications of this system in child upbringing and everyday social life. Second, the study investigates philosophical background of the marginalization of indigenous moral systems including non-philosophical reconstructions of indigenous ethics. Finally, the study proposes a methodological framework for reconstructing Pogoro moral knowledge. The key goal of this framework is to provide philosophical justification for the recognition of this body of knowledge as a legitimate moral theory.

In doing so, the study contributes to the decolonization of moral knowledge in philosophical sense. This includes not only the reconstruction of Pogoro moral knowledge but also the challenge to epistemic hierarchy of colonial era, which has been denied legitimacy to indigenous moral systems. The recognition of Pogoro indigenous moral knowledge as a legitimate ethical theory can be seen as contribution to the decolonization of knowledge.

1.1 The Pogoro Indigenous Moral Traditions

The Pogoro people, also referred to as Wapogoro, are a Bantu-speaking ethnic group of Tanzania, whose traditional habitat is located particularly in Ulanga District and the Mahenge highlands of Morogoro Region.[1] Marcus Paulo Mjokonti asserts that the "Pogoro people are real Bantu as regards the physical appearance and language."[2] The Pogoro people are also referred to as Pogolo, and their language is commonly called Kipogoro/Chipogolo/Pogolo.[3] The Pogoropeople speak Chipogoro/Pogolo (which is a Bantu language), and have retained their cultural identity through their language, oral traditions, customary practices, institutions, music, rituals, and relationship with land.[4] Traditionally, moral knowledge has been transmitted through Pogoro language, oral expression, storytelling, customary practices, family instructions, and interactions with elders, while contemporary education operates through Kiswahili and formal schooling. The Pogoro people traditionally lived in fertile valleys and forested areas where they engaged in agriculture practices related to their environment.[5] Historically, the geographical environment has greatly influenced the lives and economic organization of Pogoro people. Their traditional homes include highlands, valleys, forests and lands adjoining the fertile Kilombero floodplain. Both historical and contemporary studies denote farming as a core activity of Pogoro livelihoods, involving the cultivation of maize, rice and other crops. Mjokonti says that:

> The pogoro are mainly peasant farmers. About three quarters of the population are employed in the agricultural industry. For them agriculture is a backbone of their economic life. The agricultural activities, in Ulanga District, Southern Tanzania, have been enhanced greatly by the reliable rainfall seasons. The short

1. Jonathan M. Jackson, "Coercion and Dissent: Sleeping Sickness 'Concentrations' and the Politics of Colonial Authority in Ulanga, Tanganyika," *The Journal of African History* 63, no. 1 (2022), 43–44. doi:10.1017/S0021853722000202

2. Marcus Paulo Mjokonti, *Oral Litrature of the Pogoro People of Mahenge Tanzania* (Tabora: TMP Book Department, 2024), 1.

3. Joshua Project, "Pogoro in Tanzania," *Joshua Project*, accessed August 15, 2026, https://joshuaproject.net/people_groups/14425/TZ

4. Jackson, "Coercion and Dissent," 44.

5. Joshua Project, "Pogoro in Tanzania,"

> rainy season normally starts in October until February. From March to June, the people experience heavy rains. In other words, within these two rainy seasons, the area gets a total rainfall of between 1500 and 1800 mm. due to the conducive climate, the main crops cultivated are both food and cash crops. The food crops are rice, maize, millet, beans, and vegetables. At the same time, the people earn financial income through growing and sell cotton, cashew nuts and some of the food crops.[6]

According to Mjokonti, the pogoro people have little time for leisure throughout a year. They use the little time available for other traditional and customary practices and cerebrations. To a great extent, they use every minute available for clearing farms, sowing, weeding and harvesting. The hardworking people are respected, praised and imitated; they receive greatest and valuable recognition.[7]

Through language, customary practices and governance, Pogoro have maintained a unique cultural identity. Their traditional structures and practices have been disturbed to some extent by the colonial encounters in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, but many of their traditional moral practices have been sustained, thus shaping their ethical tradition.[8] Among the Pogoro, morality cannot be separated from communal life. Virtue is seen less as an abstract philosophical principle and more as a way of practising behaviours that help in sustaining relationships and promoting the wellbeing of the community. Honesty, diligence, humility and bravery are greatly valued traits, while the moral education teaches how to instil these virtues since childhood.

The Pogoro worldview is oriented towards communal responsibility. Every individual is responsible before the community as a whole, and his or her actions are evaluated on their effect on others. Mutual support in agriculture work, childcare and resolution of conflicts is one of the factors that maintain social cohesion, and thus ethical norms are inseparable from communal practice. A person's moral worth is evaluated by his or her contribution to the wellbeing of the clan or village.[9]

Upbringing children among the Pogoro is a purposeful process of moral and social education. Children are socialized through imitation, observations and participation in communal activities to learn to accept the cultural norms. They are trained from early age in practical matters, taking responsibilities and the importance of contributing to the family and community affairs. In other words, these practices imply the incorporation of moral lessons in daily activities.[10]

Proverbs and storytelling play an important role in moral education among the Pogoro. Oral traditions embody the wisdom of the community and provide guidelines for proper behaviour, ethical dilemmas and social responsibilities. For example, proverbs may emphasise reciprocity, honesty and diligence, expressing ethical norms in a concise and culturally meaningful way. Besides, they educate not only children but also social norms among adults.[11]

Elders are the key transmitters of moral and cultural knowledge. They are mentors, judges and storytellers, providing the transmission of ethical tradition from generation to generation. Their instructions are accepted and even never

6. Mjokonti, *Oral Literature of the Pogoro*, 3–4.

7. Mjokonti, *Oral Literature of the Pogoro*, 4.

8. Mjokonti, *Oral Literature of the Pogoro*, 2.

9. Mjokonti, *Oral Literature of the Pogoro*, 11-16.

10. Peter K. Ekeji, *Child-Rearing Practices in Eastern African Societies* (Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 1998), 63–66.

11. Paula L. Brown, *African Proverbs and Moral Philosophy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 78–81.

questioned due to the Pogoro belief that wisdom comes with age and experience. Elders transfer both practical skills and ethical norms through rituals, storytelling and day-to-day contacts, thus instilling virtues within the framework of the communal life. Mjokonti states that:

> Among the Pogoro people, there is slight difference between education and initiation. Every initiation procedure is aimed at channelling educational values and vice versa. Educational values such as self-reliance, respect for human dignity, and integrity, hospitality, humanity, obedience, courage, courtesy, perseverance, hardworking, mutual co-operation, love, prize, hope, fidelity, are rendered on the basis of age, sex and perceptible abilities. Briefly, the cultural truth, moral precepts, religious aspects and standards are some of the main themes which the initial educational process aims at and this whole process is based on the culture. The elders are entrusted with the responsibility of educating the youth. They become the trustworthy educators accrued from their sincere experience and frankness in societal values and life.[12]

Rituals and customs are necessary for keeping the moral order. Initiation ceremonies, communal feasts and seasonal rites promote social cohesion and instill ethical norms. Disciplinary procedures, mostly non-punitive in many cases, correct people's behaviour and confirm communal norms. These rituals are not only religious or cultural, but also the mechanisms for cultivation of virtue and maintenance of moral traditions.[13]

Despite the richness and complexity of the Pogoro moral knowledge, like any other indigenous moral tradition, it is mostly marginalised within academic and philosophical discussions. The Pogoro moral knowledge has been regarded as informal, unsystematic and just cultural traditions, but not a moral theory. The marginalisation is due to the predominance of Western philosophical tradition, where written, individualistic and abstract moral systems are privileged against oral, communal and contextual moral knowledge of indigenous populations.

1.2 Philosophical Foundations of Marginalization of Pogoro Moral Knowledge

According to D. A. Masolo, the debate on African marginalization is related to two historical events: Western discourse on Africa, and African response to it.[14] This dialogue has taken many forms, discussing various subjects and ideas about the individual's influence on shaping and controlling identity and destiny. At the centre of this debate lies the concept of reason—a value usually associated with the distinguishing feature of the civilized and uncivilized, logical and mystical. As the debate progressed, it became a sequence of claims and counterclaims, arguments and refutations, between two opposing visions: Western and non-Western.[15]Masolo provides a detailed background of the development of the debate in its present complicated shape. In this background, he describes how the publication of AiméCésaire's*Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* (*Return to My Native Land*) in 1939 introduced two concepts that would become central to the debate on African identity and significantly affect Francophone representations and productions of knowledge about Black Africa and its diaspora.[16]The first concept is the term *negritude*,

12. Mjokonti, *Oral Literature of the Pogoro*, 12.

13. Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing, 1969), 94–97.

14. D. A. Masolo, *African Philosophy in Search of Identity* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994) Transferred to digital print 2004, 1.

15. Masolo, *African Philosophy in Search of Identity*, 1.

16. Masolo, *African Philosophy in Search of Identity*, 1–2.

which Césaire is credited with coining in the *Cahier*. Throughout the poem, Césaire uses the word "negritude" six times in order to assert the dignity, humanity and personhood of Black people. The term negritude is not just the description of the identity of Black people, but rather the philosophical and cultural affirmation of its worth and self-definition. The second concept is *return*—a theme directly conveyed in the title of the poem. The idea of return brings dignity and humanity of Black people into the dimension of history and power relations. In this way, return becomes not only the physical but also the historical beginning of negritude as a cultural movement.

The intellectual struggle over African identity and knowledge has been thoroughly discussed by Valentin-Yves Mudimbe in *The Invention of Africa* (1988).[17]Mudimbetraces the genealogy of the African episteme, arguing that it was born as a result of complex interplay of Western political and cognitive powers. According to Mudimbe, they created Africans as "the Other", alienating and objectivizing them in Western systems of knowledge. Then, Mudimbe carries out the critical deconstruction of the epistemological foundations of the present discourse revealing Western assumptions about rationality which lie behind it. Like many structuralist and poststructuralist philosophers who influenced his thinking, Mudimbe provides the convincing historical analysis of African culture and its intellectual development. However, due to his strong dependence on Michel Foucault,[18] he falls into the same trap as other poststructuralist scholars, who try to deconstruct the very epistemological model, from which their own criticism emerges. Richard Harland remarks on this problem in the following way:

> The dilemma that Foucault is coming up against at the end of The Order of Things and the end of The Archaeology of Knowledge—two works that significantly inform Mudimbe's project—is a problem that confronts all the early poststructuralists. It is easy enough for the theory of epistemes to encompass the thought of other historical periods; but when it encompasses the thought of our own present-day period, it also encompasses the thought of the theorist who advances the theory of epistemes. The power of received social discourse suddenly becomes an embarrassment when Foucault himself has to submit to its control. It is a classic case of a deterministic theory that reflexively determines itself out of existence.[19]

Harland's criticism highlights the basic paradox of the epistemological model of Foucault. If any knowledge is historically and discursively determined, then the knowledge of Foucault is determined by the same conditions. Since Mudimbe's research is largely based on the concept of epistemes of Foucault, it suffers from the same weakness: it provides powerful deconstruction of Western representations of Africa, but cannot establish an alternative epistemological ground for reconstruction of African knowledge.

According to Masolo, black people have sought to reaffirm their cultural identity, which was denigrated and nearly destroyed through the Western domination, slavery and colonialism.[20]

17. See Valentin-Yves Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988).

18. See Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1970; New York: Pantheon Books, 1973); and Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972).

19. Harland, R., *Superstructuralism: The Philosophy of Structuralism and Post-Structuralism* (Routledge, London and New York, I987), 123.

20. Masolo, *African Philosophy in Search of Identity*, 3.

This historical experience gave rise to the acute necessity of the Black race to re-discover, re-define and re-affirm their identity, heritage and cultural values.[21] What started as a cultural stereotype in the West, weakly supported by the racist interpretation of the Bible, slowly transformed into historical reality which consisted of two interconnected dimensions: transatlantic slave trade and slavery on one side, and scholarly and philosophical theories on the other side.

European scholars provided ideological support to the racial hierarchy through the influential academic publications, where they described Africans as the inferior people. Prominent representatives of this movement were Immanuel Kant[22] and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel.[23] In his essay *On the Different Races of Man* (1775), Kant tried to explain the formation of different human races as a result of the influence of geographical and environmental conditions on them. According to Kant, the original human race was white, while Black people were considered to be degenerate branches of humanity. Kant repeated his similar views in his review of 1785 of Johann Gottfried von Herder's *Ideas for the Philosophy of the History of Humanity*, in which he claimed that a philosophical explanation of human history should compare data from various sources. In this way, he claimed that both Indigenous Americans and Africans represented spiritually degenerate branches of the human race.

On the other hand, Hegel made similar statements about the African people in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*. He claims that Africans had not yet achieved the consciousness of the universal or objective principles such as God, law or rational freedom. To him, Africans lacked the ability to separate individual existence from the universal being, and therefore remained unaware of the absolute reality beyond themselves. He states:

> The characteristic feature of the negroes is that their consciousness has not yet reached an awareness of any substantial objectivity—for example, of God or the law—in which the will of man could participate and in which he could become aware of his own being. The African, in his undifferentiated and concentrated unity, has not yet succeeded in making this distinction between himself as an individual and his essential universality, so that he knows nothing of an absolute being which is other and higher than his own self.[24]

The interpretation of Hegel is largely based on the outdated historical information, especially the works of Herodotus and the reports of Christian missionaries, which reflected poor knowledge of African cultures and confirmed existing European stereotypes. His works greatly influenced the philosophical and historical views on Africa in the 19th century as a continent without history, rationality and civilization.

Hegel'saccount on philosophy of history treated reason as the driving force that intervenes in the world, transforming reality through dialectical struggle and producing culture as its concrete expression. For Hegel, reason is an infinite idea which realizes itself through the sequence of finite historical moments. Reason is not only a logical principle, but also the historical one, since it manifests itself through human actions and social development. He famously said in the *Philosophy of Right*: "what is rational is real, and what is real

21. Masolo, *African Philosophy in Search of Identity*, 3.

22. See Immanuel Kant, "*Von den verschiedenenRassen der Menschen*" ["On the Different Races of Man"] (1775), in *Kant's Physical Geography*, trans. and ed. Ernest C. F. Krause (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1968).

23. See Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975; revised ed., 1989).

24. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*, 177.

is rational."[25] In that case, reason became both a basis of reality and a tool by means of which history develops as a process of transformation through dialectics. Hegel saw African societies not as the development of dialectical reason but only "as a succession of contingent happenings and surprises."[26] He claimed that Africans lived in innocence and did not have self-consciousness, historical purpose, and possibility for cultural development. Thus, Hegel denied the existence of Africa in what he called history in philosophical sense.

The intellectual tradition that presented Africans as mentally and culturally inferior lasted up to the twentieth century. One of its prominent representatives was the French philosopher and sociologist Lucien Lévy-Bruhl whose works *Les Fonctionsmentalesdans les sociétésinférieures* (1910)[27] and*La Mentalité primitive* (1922)[28] suggested that so-called "primitive" peoples, including Africans, had a quite different type of thinking. Although these theories were criticized and rejected later, they had a great influence on the development of anthropological and colonial sciences and supported racial stereotypes and justified colonial domination over Africans. According to Lévy-Bruhl, the nature of thinking of the individual is defined and formed by collective representations of the society in which the individual lives. These collective representations are formed by social institutions and cultural practices. In the societies strongly influenced by scientific institutions, people get the habit of logical, analytical, and procedural thinking. On the contrary, the prescientific age is marked by explanations of events by supernatural forces, mystical powers, and occult influences.

Using these distinctions, Lévy-Bruhl divided human societies into two big groups: the "civilized" and the "primitive" ones. Each group, in his opinion, had a special type of thinking, epistemology, and morality. Various stages of institutional development generate various types of thinking and perception of reality as well as different types of ethical values. In this way, Lévy-Bruhl's position included moral relativism that was directly linked to his epistemological relativism. In his researches on "primitive mentality", Lévy-Bruhl rejected an idea of the existence of one universal logical structure of human thought that works identically in all societies and at all historical epochs. According to Lévy-Bruhl, modern Western individuals make judgments following the principles of logical identity and contradiction, while so-called primitive peoples follow their collective representations and perceive things and events mystically and directly. For this reason, he called the mentality of "primitives""prelogical".

The theory of the prelogical mind, as highlighted by Masolo, was based on the comparison of Western and non-Western systems of reasoning. According to Lévy-Bruhl, the Western reasoning was naturalistic and depended on observation and empirical verification. This type of reasoning followed the logic of conditional propositions.[29]According to Lévy-Bruhl, however, primitive reasoning worked differently and did not depend on sufficient empirical grounds and observable causality. On the contrary, it

25. See Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, trans. H. B. Nisbet, ed. Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), Preface.

26. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*, I76.

27. See Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, *Les Fonctionsmentalesdans les sociétésinférieures* [*The Mental Functions of Inferior Societies*], 9th ed. (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1951).

28. See Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, *La Mentalité primitive* [*Primitive Mentality*], 15th ed. (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1960).

29. Masolo, *African Philosophy in Search of Identity*, 7–8.

introduced an additional mystical or supernatural factor in the explanation of experience.[30]

Though Lévy-Bruhl made important questions regarding the differences in systems of knowledge of different societies, his generalizations about the patterns of reasoning in them contained serious flaws. Because the scientific thought became central to the definition of truth and knowledge in the West, Lévy-Bruhl assumed that the Western people were scientific and rational in all aspects of their life. On the contrary, because some non-Western explanation included some elements that contradicted to formal logic, he generalized this characterization for non-Western societies as a whole. Such an approach ignored the diversity of the intellectual practices in all societies.

At the end of his life, Lévy-Bruhl realized some limitations of his earlier theory and tried to revise his position. In *Les Carnets* (*Notebooks on Primitive Mentality*) that he wrote shortly before his death and that was published posthumously in 1949, he renounced the idea of opposition of historically different forms of logic. On the contrary, he believed that humans had two coexisting forms of mentality and experience: one naturalistic and the other one mystical. In this new version of his theory, Lévy-Bruhl believed that the mystical mentality prevailed among so-called primitive peoples and made various forms of experience coexistence possible that seemed to be incompatible to the European scientific view. For example, the magical beliefs were not perceived as impossible or meaningless by such societies; rather, they worked within the other frame of experience. Later Lévy-Bruhl admitted that there were contradictions only in the case when the concept of "impossibility" was assumed to be identical. He understood that even the people who believe in mystical beliefs used practical and naturalistic reasoning in their daily activities. In other words, when dealing with ordinary experiences outside ritual or magical context, the non-Western people just like Europeans could distinguish what was possible and what was impossible.

Despite these later revisions, the influence of Hegelian philosophy and Lévy-Bruhl's anthropological theories contributed to the formation of the European assumptions about the African societies. Being applied to history, anthropology, philosophy, and religion, these ideas supported the views of the Africans as having inferior religion, law, economy, political organization, technology, and reasoning. Such intellectual approaches justified the colonial claims of superiority and the belief in the responsibility of Europeans to bring Africans into the sphere of "civilization" and "culture".

1.3 A Methodological Framework for Reconstructing Pogoro Moral Knowledge

Having proved that indigenous moral knowledge is philosophically legitimate, and that reconstruction of the knowledge requires avoiding both epistemological dismissal and uncritical romanticization, this study provides a framework for reconstruction of Pogoro moral knowledge. The framework is based on the following philosophical conviction: indigenous moral traditions should not be treated only as ethnographic information nor assimilated uncritically into existing philosophical systems. Instead, they should be critically interpreted, analyzed and evaluated in a way which would respect their conceptual integrity while allowing them to participate in philosophical discourse.

Any methodological framework is not philosophically neutral. According to Paul Ricoeur, interpretation is not just recovery of information but "the work of thought which consists in deciphering the hidden meaning in the apparent meaning."[31]The reconstruction of Pogoro

30. Masolo, *African Philosophy in Search of Identity*, 8.

31. Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1976), 87.

moral knowledge involves discovery of philosophical concepts which are embedded in indigenous practices, narratives, rituals, proverbs and communal institutions. That which looks to be an ordinary social practice contains sophisticated moral knowledge about virtue, responsibility, personhood, authority, and common good.

Also, the reconstruction offered in this study follows the dialogical method proposed by Gadamer. He argues that understanding is not a process of abandonment of one's philosophical standpoint but a process of engagement in dialogue between the tradition and the interpreter, resulting in the "fusion of horizons" (*Horizontverschmelzung*). In that process, an interpreter does not eliminate one's historical and cultural prejudices but critically engages in the dialogue with them in order to achieve a broader understanding of the subject matter.[32]The proposed framework does not try to isolate Pogoro moral thought from broader philosophical reflection or reduce it to the categories of Western philosophy. Instead, it allows Pogoro moral concepts to be expressed in their own voice while entering into philosophical dialogue with established traditions of moral philosophy.

The proposed methodological framework consists of three stages: cultural interpretation, comparative philosophical analysis, and critical evaluation. Those stages are not necessarily sequential but mutually reinforcing. Together they provide a coherent method of reconstruction of Pogoro moral knowledge as a participant in contemporary ethical discourse.

1.3.1 Cultural Interpretation

The first stage of reconstruction is cultural interpretation. Prior to comparative analysis of the indigenous traditions and established philosophical theories, the tradition must be understood within its own conceptual world. That principle reflects a basic idea of philosophical hermeneutics: understanding involves entering, as far as possible, into the historical and cultural horizon of meanings. As argued by Gadamer, real interpretation involves openness towards the tradition under investigation. According to Gadamer, every interpreter approaches a text with prejudgments, previous experiences, linguistic assumptions, and historically formed expectations. All of those pre-understandings are not necessarily obstacles to the process of interpretation. On the contrary, they constitute the starting point from which understanding becomes possible. The only requirement for the interpreter is to become aware of his or her assumptions and to be ready to revise them when challenged by the text or the tradition. Genuine interpretation thus involves openness towards the object of interpretation. An interpreter should be ready to hear the object of interpretation speaking in its own voice without imposing preconceived categories. The point of becoming aware of one's own preconceptions is not to get rid of all preconceptions (which is impossible according to Gadamer), but to avoid being their slave.

Gadamer develops this idea through his ideas of the hermeneutical circle and the historically effective consciousness (*wirkungsgeschichtlichesBewusstsein*). The process of understanding takes place through a movement between the interpreter's pre-understanding and the meaning revealed by the text or the tradition. An interpreter approaches the object of interpretation with certain expectations, but the engagement with the object confirms, modifies, or transforms them. Thus, interpretation is not a mechanical process of extracting the fixed meaning from the text; it is a dynamic process during which the interpreter and the interpreted tradition start a dialogic interaction. This aspect becomes especially important when an interpreter encounters something new and different. Gadamer thus treats openness as the essential condition of understanding—the interpreter must be ready to accept that the tradition has something meaningful

32. Gadamer, *Method*, 300–307.

to say to challenge the contemporary categories.[33]Thus, interpretation does not involve either complete submission to the tradition or domination of the interpreter over the tradition, but dialogical interaction.

Although Gadamer talks mainly about written texts, this insight can also be applied to the oral tradition. The interpreter must avoid imposing external conceptual categories on the indigenous practices. Instead, the task is to find out how the members of the community understand moral responsibility, virtue, authority, and cultivation of character. That is why reconstruction of Pogoro moral knowledge starts with interpretive questions rather than with philosophical conclusions. What are the virtues that are valued in Pogoro society? How are children taught those virtues through family and communal practices? What are the social relations that constitute moral responsibility and accountability? What practices are responsible for the cultivation of moral identity and shaping of character of the individual? The questions of this sort move philosophical research from abstraction to lived ethical experience. Instead of asking whether there is a written theory of ethics in the Pogoro community comparable to Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, the research asks how moral wisdom is practiced in Pogoro culture.

Also, KwasiWiredu argues that the indigenous concepts should be analyzed first in their own linguistic and conceptual terms and then translated into foreign philosophical categories. He argues that philosophical inquiry requires "conceptual clarification,"[34]not conceptual replacement. The task of interpretation is thus to preserve the integrity of indigenous meanings and make them available for philosophical discussion. When applied to the upbringing of children in Pogoro society, cultural interpretation reveals the moral world where virtue is cultivated through participation in practices, not theoretical knowledge. Children learn ethics by observing virtuous behaviour, participating in communal activities, listening to moral stories, respecting elders, and assuming responsibility corresponding to their age. Thus, moral knowledge is embodied in social practices before being formulated propositionally. A philosophical reconstruction of the indigenous tradition thus begins by allowing the Pogoro moral concepts to emerge in their own historical and cultural context.

1.3.2 Comparative Philosophical Analysis

After the indigenous moral concepts have been interpreted within their own context, the second stage is comparative philosophical analysis. Comparisons are not made in order to prove that Pogoro moral knowledge is identical to Aristotelian ethics, communitarian philosophy, or theories of moral development. Instead, comparison is made in order to highlight the common philosophical concerns while respecting conceptual differences. Comparative philosophy starts from the assumption that different intellectual traditions answer common human problems in different ways. The issues of virtue, justice, moral education, responsibility, friendship, authority, and the good life are universal problems of mankind. They emerge in the context of universal conditions of human existence, while having diverse cultural expressions.

In this regard, MacIntyre offers a valuable theoretical framework for the comparative method. He maintains that a living tradition is not merely a set of inherited doctrines that need to be maintained as such; rather, it is a debate about the values, virtues, practices, and standards of excellence that represent a moral tradition of a community. Traditions emerge through the process of the transmission of practices and beliefs from one generation to another; however, this process necessarily entails interpretation, criticism, and rethinking of these practices and

33. Gadamer, *Method*, 375–379.

34. KwasiWiredu, *Philosophy and an African Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 20–24.

beliefs.[35]Therefore, according to MacIntyre, traditions have the ability to criticize themselves and develop rationally. In other words, a tradition can face various difficulties, contradictions, or challenges that cannot be solved using its inherited resources. These challenges can serve as the source of intellectual development for the members of the tradition. It means that participation in a tradition does not mean uncritical acceptance of everything that has been inherited from the past. On the contrary, rational agents can critically reflect on their tradition and use its intellectual resources. It is particularly significant for comparative philosophy since it implies that different traditions can engage in rational dialogue without losing their identity. Thus, comparative engagement becomes a possibility to see the strengths of a tradition as well as its weak spots that can be identified with the help of other traditions. In this way, traditions can learn from one another while retaining their historical and conceptual identity. Thus, MacIntyre's conception of tradition provides a model of philosophical dialogue based on criticism, intellectual learning, and rational development instead of opposition of various cultural systems.

Applied to the comparison between Pogoro moral formation and Aristotelian virtue ethics, MacIntyre's approach makes it possible to regard both as participants in a broader conversation about human flourishing, virtue, character, responsibility, and communal life. The purpose of comparison should not be to demonstrate that Pogoro morality is simply an African version of Aristotle's philosophy, nor should Aristotle be treated as the universal standard against which Pogoro ethics must be judged. Instead, both traditions can engage in a critical dialogue where they can help each other better understand the issue of virtue and moral formation. The concepts of Aristotelian virtue ethics such as habituation, practical wisdom, and human flourishing can be used for the analysis of Pogoro moral tradition, while some specific aspects of Pogoro communal moral practices can shed light on virtue ethics. Therefore, comparative philosophical analysis does neither subordinate indigenous knowledge to Western philosophy nor separate it from philosophical discussion. Instead, it shows converging interests, complementary insights, and unique contributions to moral philosophy.

1.3.3 Critical Evaluation and Affirmation

The final stage of philosophical reconstruction is critical evaluation. The interpretation alone would not be sufficient since philosophy presupposes reasonable judgment concerning the sufficiency of the moral claim. Similarly, comparative analysis without evaluative conclusions would only serve to describe indigenous moral knowledge. Therefore, philosophical reconstruction always reaches its culmination in evaluating the moral tradition against the criteria which are philosophically defensible. The first criterion is 'conceptual coherence.' A moral tradition must display consistency of understanding of such key concepts as virtue, personhood, responsibility, and communal life. Coherence does not imply the presence of complete agreement in opinions. Yet it requires that the different elements of the tradition constitute an intelligible ethical system and do not form merely a random set of customs.

The second criterion is 'explanatory power.' A philosophically meaningful moral tradition is able to throw light on such fundamental questions as why certain actions are right or wrong, how moral character is formed, and what is a good human life. Charles Taylor argues that humans always orient themselves within certain 'moral frameworks,' which give significance to their ethical judgments.[36]It is precisely this aspect that

35. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 221–225.

36. Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 27–52.

makes indigenous moral traditions worthy of philosophical reconstruction.

The third criterion is 'contribution to human flourishing.' In the famous formulation of Aristotle, "every craft and every inquiry, and similarly every action and choice, is thought to aim at some good."[37]In this context, ethical traditions must be evaluated in accordance with their capacity to help the formation of a flourishing human life based on virtue, wisdom and meaningful social relations. Pogoro childhood upbringing seeks precisely this aim through the creation of responsible persons capable of contributing to the life of their family, community and future generations.

The last criterion is 'contemporary relevance.' Indigenous moral traditions cannot be limited to mere preservation of their past but examined for the ability to address current moral challenges. According to MacIntyre, traditions remain living and vibrant only insofar as they continue to address new challenges through rational deliberation.[38]In this respect, the ethical resources, which are embedded in the communal life of the Pogoro people, can provide important lessons related to such issues of our time as individualism, moral fragmentation, weakness of family structure and crises of character formation.

This process of evaluation should not be confused with the attempts to test indigenous moral knowledge against some external standards of Western philosophical tradition. It is rather an expression of the universal commitment of philosophy to reason. All ethical traditions, including Aristotelian, Confucian, African and liberal traditions, remain open to analysis, clarification, criticism and improvement. Thus, the result of the methodological framework is neither the transformation of Pogoro moral knowledge into the object of contemplation in the intellectual museum, nor its automatic acceptance because of its indigeneity. The process of reconstruction allows this knowledge to participate in philosophical conversation as an equal partner. Its concepts of virtue, responsibility, moral education and communal flourishing can serve as objects of critical reflection along with the concepts of other ethical traditions while maintaining their unique historical identity. In this manner, the reconstruction of Pogoro moral knowledge helps not only in the development of African philosophy but also in the development of moral philosophy as a whole by enlarging the scope of intellectual resources with which humanity reflects upon the question of how to live.

Conclusion

This study has reviewed how Pogoro indigenous moral knowledge can be seen as a legitimate ethical theory at par with already existing moral theories. It has been shown that Pogoro indigenous moral knowledge possesses internal consistency, philosophical depth, and practical significance that justify the recognition of it as a legitimate ethical theory. The findings confirm that Pogoro moral knowledge can and should be recognized as a legitimate ethical theory. Recognition of such knowledge is a challenge to residual colonial assumptions that define what constitutes legitimate moral theory. It becomes a part of efforts to decolonize knowledge by restoring epistemic legitimacy of indigenous knowledge systems. By recognizing the Pogoro indigenous moral knowledge as a legitimate ethical theory, this study emphasizes the importance of pluralistic approach to ethics. It invites researchers, educators, and policymakers to see indigenous moral knowledge not as peripheral cultures' expressions but as autonomous and insightful theories in the area of human understanding of the good life.

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