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Theory and Praxis in Traditional Society: A Thematic Review of African Knowledge, Practice and Their Lessons for Contemporary Uganda

Ocan Richard[1], Nyaera Judith Mokaya[2], Ginyera Stephen[3], Basemera Collins[4]

[1]Department of Political & Administrative Studies, College of Humanities & Social Sciences, Kampala International University, P.O. Box 20000, Kampala, Uganda
ORCID: 0009-0004-0778-4191
[2]Department of Applied Psychology, College of Humanities & Social Sciences, Kampala International University, P.O. Box 20000, Kampala, Uganda
ORCID: 0009-0007-6941-4403
[3]Department of political & Administrative Studies, College of Humanities & Social Sciences, Kampala International University, P.O. Box 20000, Kampala, Uganda
ORCID: 0009-0006-1061-4729
[4]Department of Development Studies, College of Humanities and Social Sciences

Abstract*: Traditional African societies are often described as communities of custom rather than of thought, places where people act out inherited practices without reflecting on them. This article challenges that picture. It examines the relationship between theory and praxis in traditional society, using African and especially Ugandan traditions as its main reference point. Theory is understood here as organised reflection that explains, justifies and guides action, and praxis as reflective, value-laden action aimed at living well and changing the world. The article is non-empirical. It draws on Aristotle's distinction between theoria, praxis and poiesis, on the praxis tradition of Marx and Freire, on Bourdieu's theory of practice and on African communitarian philosophy. Through an integrative review of philosophical, anthropological and educational literature, analysed with reflexive thematic analysis, six themes are developed: theory embedded in everyday practice; oral tradition as a vehicle of theory; communal praxis and the ethics of the collective; ritual and moral praxis in justice and the life cycle; ecological and technical praxis; and the dynamism, internal critique and colonial disruption of the theory and praxis relationship. The analysis shows that in traditional society theory and praxis were not separate domains. Theory lived inside practice, was carried in proverbs, rituals, crafts and institutions, and was tested by its results in community life. Examples include Acholi fireside education, the mato oput reconciliation process, Kiganda bulungi bwansi communal work, Bamasaba imbalu initiation, barkcloth making and indigenous weather forecasting. At the same time, traditional praxis could be conservative, exclusionary and resistant to criticism, and colonial schooling widened the gap between what is taught and what is lived. The article concludes that recovering the unity of theory and praxis, without romanticising tradition, offers valuable lessons for education, research, development and governance in contemporary Africa, and it offers recommendations for policy makers, educators, researchers and community leaders.*

Keywords—theory; praxis; traditional society; African philosophy; indigenous knowledge; communitarianism; oral tradition; Ubuntu; thematic analysis; Uganda

1. INTRODUCTION

A common story told about traditional societies is that their members followed custom without thinking about it. On this view, reflection, analysis and theory arrived with writing, schools and universities, while traditional life was a matter of habit, ritual and obedience to elders. The story has deep roots. It shaped colonial policy, missionary education and early anthropology, and it still lingers in the way many African curricula treat indigenous knowledge as folklore instead of knowledge (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 1986; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018).

The story is misleading. Anyone who has listened carefully to an Acholi elder settling a dispute, a Muganda barkcloth maker explaining when the bark is ready, or a Bamasaba clan leader preparing boys for imbalu initiation will recognise that these practices rest on reasons. They carry ideas about what a person is, what the community owes its members, how nature behaves and how wrongs can be put right. Those ideas are rarely written in treatises, but they are ideas all the same, and they guide action in systematic ways.

This raises an old philosophical question in a particular setting: what is the relationship between theory and practice? Since Aristotle, Western philosophy has tended to rank contemplative theory above practical action. Marx reversed the emphasis, insisting that the point of philosophy is to change the world. Freire (1970) defined praxis as reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it. African philosophers, for their part, have long debated whether traditional thought counts as philosophy at all, and how far traditional wisdom can guide modern life (Hountondji, 1983; Wiredu, 1980; Gyekye, 1997; Oruka, 1990).

The question matters for present-day Uganda and Africa for practical reasons. Education systems still separate what is learned in class from what is needed in life, a gap that the competence-based lower secondary curriculum introduced in Uganda from 2020 is trying to close (National Curriculum Development Centre [NCDC], 2020). Development projects designed by outside experts often fail because they ignore local knowledge and practice (Chambers, 1997). Transitional justice debates in northern Uganda have shown both the promise and the limits of traditional reconciliation practices (Baines, 2007). In each case, the way theory and praxis relate in traditional society is directly at issue.

1.1 Purpose and Guiding Questions

The purpose of this article is to examine the relationship between theory and praxis in traditional society, with particular reference to African and Ugandan traditions, and to draw out its implications for contemporary education, research, development and governance. Three questions guide the analysis:

1. How were theory and praxis understood and related in traditional African society?

2. Through which institutions and practices were traditional theory expressed, transmitted and tested?

3. What lessons does the traditional relationship between theory and praxis hold for contemporary Africa, and what are its limitations?

The article proceeds as follows. The next section sets out the theoretical framework, followed by a clarification of the key concepts. The review approach and analysis procedure are then described, the six themes are presented, and the implications, discussion, recommendations and conclusion follow.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Aristotle: Theoria, Praxis and Poiesis

The distinction between theory and practice begins, in Western thought, with Aristotle. In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle separated three kinds of human activity. **Theoria** is contemplation of unchanging truths, pursued for its own sake. **Praxis** is action whose end lies in acting well, above all ethical and political action in the life of the community, guided by practical wisdom or **phronesis**. **Poiesis** is making or production, such as building a house or crafting a pot, guided by technical skill or **techne** (Aristotle, trans. 2009). Aristotle placed contemplation at the top of this order. His categories nonetheless remain useful, because they remind us that practical wisdom is a distinct and demanding form of knowledge, not merely the application of theory.

2.2 Marx, Freire and the Praxis Tradition

Marx challenged the priority of contemplation in his *Theses on Feuerbach* (1845), arguing that philosophers had only interpreted the world in various ways when the point was to change it (Marx, 1845/1976). For Marx, theory is tested and made meaningful in practical, social activity. Paulo Freire (1970) developed this idea for education. He criticised the "banking" model, in which teachers deposit information into passive students, and defined praxis as the unity of reflection and action aimed at transforming the world. Theory without action becomes empty verbalism; action without reflection becomes blind activism. Carr and Kemmis (1986) carried the praxis idea into educational research, arguing that teachers themselves should theorise their own practice.

2.3 Bourdieu's Theory of Practice

Pierre Bourdieu's (1977) study of the Kabyle of Algeria offers a bridge between Western theory and traditional society. Bourdieu argued that much of social life is governed by **habitus**, a set of durable dispositions acquired through upbringing that lets people act competently without consciously following rules. Traditional practice, on this view, has its own "logic of practice" that differs from the logic of the detached theorist. Bourdieu's work helps explain how traditional knowledge can be both reasoned and largely tacit, carried in the body and in routine as much as in words.

2.4 African Communitarian Philosophy

African philosophers have offered their own account of the relation between thought and life. Menkiti (1984) argued that in African traditional thought personhood is achieved through participation in community, so that moral knowledge is inseparable from moral practice. Gyekye (1987, 1997) proposed a moderate communitarianism that recognises both communal values and individual rights and reasoning. The Southern African idea of Ubuntu, often expressed as "a person is a person through other persons", treats ethics as a matter of relationships lived out in practice (Ramose, 1999; Metz, 2007). Mbiti's (1969) phrase "I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am" captures the same relational view.

2.5 Theoretical Integration Note

These perspectives work together in this article. Aristotle supplies the vocabulary of theoria, praxis and poiesis, which allows traditional activities to be classified without reducing them to mere custom. The praxis tradition of Marx and Freire provides a normative standard: knowledge should unite reflection and action to improve human life. Bourdieu explains how traditional knowledge can be embodied and tacit yet still systematic. African communitarian philosophy provides the substantive content of traditional theory, especially its view of the person and the community. Together they suggest that in traditional society theory and praxis were integrated, and they provide the analytical categories for the themes that follow.

3. Conceptual Clarification

3.1 Theory

In this article, **theory** refers to organised reflection that explains why things are as they are, justifies ways of acting and guides future action. Theory need not be written, abstract

or produced by specialists. A proverb that explains why cooperation succeeds, a myth that explains the origin of a clan's taboos, or a healer's account of how illness arises are all forms of theory in this sense, because they offer general explanations and reasons that guide action.

3.2 Praxis

Praxis refers to reflective, purposeful and value-laden action. It differs from mere behaviour or routine in that it is informed by reasons and oriented to living well or improving the world (Freire, 1970; Carr & Kemmis, 1986). In traditional society, praxis includes farming and herding, settling disputes, raising children, conducting rituals, governing, healing and crafting, whenever these are guided by shared understandings of what is good and right.

3.3 Traditional Society

Traditional society refers to communities whose social organisation, knowledge and values are transmitted largely through oral tradition, kinship, ritual and apprenticeship, and whose institutions developed before or alongside, rather than through, modern state and school systems. The term must be used with care. Traditional societies were never static or uniform. They changed through migration, trade, conflict and contact with other peoples, and they contained internal debate and disagreement (Gyekye, 1997). Nor are they simply a thing of the past. Traditional institutions such as clans, cultural kingdoms and customary justice remain active in contemporary Uganda alongside the modern state.

3.4 Perspectives on the Theory and Praxis Relationship

Table 1 summarises the main perspectives drawn on in this article and their relevance to traditional society.

Table 1: Selected Perspectives on the Relationship between Theory and Praxis

Perspective	Key Work	View of Theory and Praxis	Relevance to Traditional Society
Aristotle	Nicomachean Ethics	Distinguishes theoria (contemplation), praxis (ethical action guided by phronesis) and poiesis (making guided by techne); ranks contemplation highest.	Provides categories for classifying traditional moral, political and technical knowledge as genuine forms of knowing.
Marx	Theses on Feuerbach (1845)	Theory is realised and tested in practical, social activity; the point is to change the world.	Highlights that traditional knowledge was validated by its practical results in community life.
Freire	Pedagogy of the Oppressed (1970)	Praxis is the unity of reflection and action aimed at transformation; rejects banking education.	Mirrors traditional learning through participation and dialogue; critiques colonial schooling.
Bourdieu	Outline of a Theory of Practice (1977)	Practice follows a logic of habitus, embodied dispositions that guide competent action without explicit rules.	Explains how traditional knowledge can be tacit and embodied yet systematic.
African communitarianism	Mbiti (1969); Menkiti (1984); Gyekye (1997)	Personhood and moral knowledge are achieved and shown through participation in community.	Supplies the substantive theory of the person and community behind traditional praxis.
Sage philosophy	Oruka (1990)	Individual traditional sages reason critically about accepted beliefs.	Shows that traditional society contained reflective, critical theorists, not only collective custom.

4. Review Approach and Analysis Procedure

4.1 Design

This article is non-empirical. It uses an integrative, philosophical and hermeneutic review design, which is suited to questions that require the interpretation and synthesis of ideas from different disciplines (Kraus et al., 2022). The review was guided by the three questions stated in the introduction.

4.2 Sources and Selection

Sources were drawn from African philosophy, anthropology, history of education, indigenous knowledge studies and the philosophy of education, including classic works and recent scholarship. Searches were made in Google Scholar, JSTOR, African Journals Online and university library catalogues, using terms such as "theory and practice", "praxis", "traditional society", "African philosophy", "indigenous knowledge", "indigenous education" and "Uganda". Classic works were included where they remain the standard reference points in the debate, and ethnographic and

historical studies were included where they document specific traditional practices, particularly from Uganda and East Africa.

4.3 Analysis

The sources were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis as described by Braun and Clarke (2021, 2022). The authors read the sources repeatedly, coded passages that described how knowledge and action were related in traditional settings, grouped the codes into candidate themes, reviewed these against the sources, and then defined and named the final themes. The themes are understood as patterns of meaning constructed by the authors through engagement with the literature, informed but not restricted by the theoretical framework.

4.4 Limitations

The review is interpretive and does not claim to cover all traditional societies. Africa contains thousands of distinct cultures, and generalisation across them carries a risk of flattening real differences. Much of the documentary evidence was recorded by outsiders, including colonial ethnographers, whose accounts may be partial. The article addresses these limits by grounding its claims in specific examples and by drawing on African scholars and on Ugandan sources wherever possible.

5. Thematic Analysis: Theory and Praxis in Traditional Society

The analysis produced six themes. Each is presented below, and the themes are summarised in Table 2 at the end of this section.

5.1 Theme One: Theory Embedded in Everyday Practice

The first theme is that in traditional society theory did not stand apart from practice. It was embedded in it. Knowledge was acquired, expressed and validated through participation in the tasks of daily life. Ocitti (1973), in his classic study of indigenous education among the Acholi of northern Uganda, showed that children learned through a structured programme of participation, observation, imitation and instruction. Boys learned herding, hunting and the defence of the homestead; girls learned farming, food preparation and the care of younger children. In the evening, at the fireside known as **wang-oo**, elders taught history, clan lore, moral values and proper conduct through stories, riddles and discussion. The fireside was, in effect, a seminar in which the theory behind the day's practice was made explicit and debated.

This pattern was widespread. Fafunwa (1974) described traditional education in Nigeria as functional, holistic and closely tied to the needs of the community, with every lesson linked to a social or economic purpose. Nsamenang (2006), writing from Cameroon, argued that African traditional views of intelligence stress social competence and responsibility, not abstract reasoning alone, so that a child is judged intelligent by how well he or she performs roles in the family and community.

Bourdieu's (1977) concept of habitus helps explain why this knowledge often appears to outsiders as mere custom. Much of it was held tacitly, in trained perception and bodily skill, and was expressed only when needed. Yet it was systematic. The Acholi herder who could read the condition of cattle and pasture, or the Kiganda mother who knew which foods to give a sick child, was acting on a body of theory about animals, land and health that had been refined through generations of practice.

5.2 Theme Two: Oral Tradition as a Vehicle of Theory

The second theme concerns the role of oral tradition. Proverbs, myths, folktales, songs, riddles and praise poetry were the main ways in which traditional theory was stored, transmitted and applied. They compressed general explanations into memorable forms that could be invoked in practical situations.

Proverbs illustrate this especially well. The Luganda proverb "Agali awamu ge galuma enyama" (teeth that are together are the ones that bite meat) states a general principle about the value of cooperation and is used to guide concrete decisions about working together. Achebe (1958) captured the importance of proverbs among the Igbo in his remark that "proverbs are the palm-oil with which words are eaten". In disputes and councils, the skilful use of proverbs was a form of argument, linking a particular case to a general principle accepted by the community.

Myths and clan histories also carried theory. Among the Baganda, clan origin stories explained the relationships between clans, the reasons for totems and taboos, and the obligations of clan members, providing a theoretical foundation for social organisation and resource use (Kagwa, 1934). Songs and dances at weddings, funerals and harvests expressed ideas about life, death and the proper ordering of society.

The status of this oral theory has been debated. Tempels (1959) presented Bantu thought as a collective philosophy of vital force, but Hountondji (1983) criticised such accounts as "ethnophilosophy" that attributed a single, unanimous worldview to whole peoples and ignored individual critical reflection. Oruka's (1990) sage philosophy project responded by interviewing individual sages in Kenya, such as Paul Mbuya Akoko, and showed that traditional societies contained thinkers who reasoned critically about accepted beliefs. The theme therefore recognises oral tradition as a genuine vehicle of theory, while acknowledging that it included individual reflection and disagreement, not only collective consensus.

5.3 Theme Three: Communal Praxis and the Ethics of the Collective

The third theme is that traditional praxis was deeply communal, and that its guiding theory was an ethics of the collective. Menkiti (1984) argued that in African traditional

thought a person becomes fully a person through fulfilling obligations to the community. Moral knowledge was therefore shown in practice, in how one shared, helped, respected elders and contributed to common tasks.

Communal work institutions express this unity of theory and praxis clearly. In Buganda, **bulungi bwansi** (for the good of the nation) refers to voluntary communal work such as clearing paths, maintaining wells and helping neighbours, grounded in the idea that individual well-being depends on the well-being of the community. In Kenya, the idea of **harambee** (pulling together), popularised by Jomo Kenyatta after independence, drew on similar traditions of collective self-help to build schools and health facilities. Among many Ugandan communities, rotating work parties in which neighbours cultivate each other's gardens remain common.

Some post-independence leaders tried to turn these practices into national theory. Nyerere's (1968) philosophy of Ujamaa sought to build Tanzanian socialism on the traditional values of family-hood, mutual respect and shared work. The experience is instructive. Ujamaa drew on real traditional praxis, but when it was imposed from above through forced villagisation in the 1970s, it lost the voluntary and local character that had made the traditional practice work. The lesson is that traditional praxis cannot simply be scaled up by decree. Its theory is bound to the relationships and consent that sustain it.

5.4 Theme Four: Ritual and Moral Praxis in Justice and the Life Cycle

The fourth theme concerns ritual as a form of moral praxis. Traditional rituals were not empty ceremonies. They put into practice theories about personhood, responsibility, harm and restoration.

The Acholi process of **mato oput** (drinking the bitter root) is a well-known example. After a killing, the clans of the offender and the victim engage in mediation led by elders. The offender acknowledges responsibility, compensation is agreed, and the parties share a drink made from the bitter root of the oput tree, symbolising the acceptance of the bitterness of the past and the restoration of relations (Latigo, 2008). The underlying theory is restorative: harm damages relationships between groups, and justice consists in repairing those relationships, not only in punishing the individual. After the long conflict in northern Uganda, mato oput and related rituals attracted national and international attention as possible complements to formal justice. Baines (2007) showed their value in local reconciliation, but also their limits in dealing with mass atrocities, cases where the perpetrator is unknown and the experiences of women and girls.

Rites of passage offer another example. Among the Bamasaba of eastern Uganda, **imbalu** circumcision, held in even-numbered years, marks the transition of boys to manhood. The ceremony is preceded by weeks of preparation, dancing and instruction in the responsibilities of adulthood, and the boy's courage during the ritual is taken as evidence of his readiness. The ritual is praxis informed by a theory of what adulthood requires. The practice has also been debated, particularly regarding health risks and the pressure it places on young men, showing that ritual praxis is open to scrutiny and reform.

5.5 Theme Five: Ecological and Technical Praxis

The fifth theme concerns knowledge of nature and technology, which corresponds to Aristotle's poiesis and techne. Traditional societies developed sophisticated technical and ecological knowledge through generations of observation, experiment and refinement.

Iron working in the Great Lakes region is an important example. Schmidt (1997), studying the Haya of north-western Tanzania, showed that iron smelting combined advanced technical knowledge of furnace design and high temperatures with symbolic and ritual understandings of fertility and transformation. The technology and its theory were inseparable. In Uganda, barkcloth making by the Baganda depends on detailed knowledge of the mutuba tree, the timing of bark harvesting, and the beating technique that produces cloth of the right texture. UNESCO inscribed barkcloth making in Uganda on its Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2008, recognising it as a living body of skilled knowledge.

Ecological knowledge shows the same unity. Orlove et al. (2010) documented how farmers in southern Uganda forecast the onset of rains using indicators such as the behaviour of birds and insects, wind patterns and the flowering of trees, and how they combine this with radio forecasts when deciding when to plant. Pastoralists such as the Karimojong and the Bahima developed detailed theories of grazing, water and animal health, tested each season against the survival of their herds. In these cases, theory was continuously checked against practical results, a process not unlike scientific testing, though conducted within a different framework of meaning.

5.6 Theme Six: Dynamism, Critique and Colonial Disruption

The sixth theme cautions against romanticising tradition. The relationship between theory and praxis in traditional society was dynamic, open to internal critique and, in the colonial period, seriously disrupted.

Gyekye (1997) argued that traditions are not fixed. They are continually reinterpreted, and some elements deserve to be retained while others should be abandoned. Traditional praxis could be conservative, discouraging questions to elders and excluding women and young people from key decisions. Wiredu (1980) warned that African philosophy must distinguish between what is valuable and what is merely customary in traditional thought, and should not defend practices such as authoritarianism or superstition simply because they are traditional. Oruka's (1990) sages show that such critique existed within traditional society itself.

Colonialism introduced a sharper break. Missionary and colonial schools taught knowledge in foreign languages, based on foreign examples, and often condemned local practices as heathen or backward (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 1986). This produced what may be called a split between school theory and life praxis. Pupils learned theories that had little connection to the work of their parents, while the practical knowledge of their communities was excluded from formal education. Nyerere (1967), in *Education for Self-Reliance*, criticised this system for producing an elite detached from the needs of rural society. Okot p'Bitek's (1966) *Song of Lawino*, in which an Acholi wife mocks her Western-educated husband for despising his own culture, gave memorable literary form to this rupture.

The theme therefore suggests that the traditional unity of theory and praxis is both a resource and a challenge. It is a resource because it offers a model of knowledge that is practical, communal and tested in life. It is a challenge because recovering it requires critical selection, not uncritical revival.

Table 2: Summary of Themes on Theory and Praxis in Traditional Society

Theme	Core Proposition	Illustrative Examples	Key Sources
1. Theory embedded in everyday practice	Knowledge was acquired, expressed and validated through participation in daily tasks.	Acholi wang-oo fireside education; functional learning in herding and farming	Ocitti (1973); Fafunwa (1974); Bourdieu (1977)
2. Oral tradition as a vehicle of theory	Proverbs, myths and songs stored general explanations and applied them to practical cases.	Luganda proverbs; Kiganda clan histories and totems	Kagwa (1934); Hountondji (1983); Oruka (1990)
3. Communal praxis and collective ethics	Moral theory was shown in communal practice; personhood was achieved through community.	Bulungi bwansi; harambee; Ujamaa and its lessons	Menkiti (1984); Nyerere (1968); Gyekye (1997)
4. Ritual and moral praxis	Rituals enacted theories of harm, restoration and the obligations of adulthood.	Acholi mato oput; Bamasaba imbalu	Latigo (2008); Baines (2007)
5. Ecological and technical praxis	Technical and ecological theory was continuously tested against practical results.	Iron smelting; barkcloth making; indigenous weather forecasting	Schmidt (1997); Orlove et al. (2010)
6. Dynamism, critique and colonial disruption	Tradition was dynamic and open to critique; colonial schooling split theory from life.	Sage critique; Song of Lawino; Education for Self-Reliance	Wiredu (1980); Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986); Nyerere (1967)

6. Implications for Contemporary Education, Research and Development

6.1 Education

The themes suggest that education should reconnect theory and praxis. Traditional education integrated learning with community life, and this is precisely what Uganda's competence-based curriculum aims to achieve through projects, activities of integration and the development of skills and values (NCDC, 2020). Schools can draw on traditional practices, such as proverbs, local crafts, community service and indigenous ecological knowledge, as material for learning. Learners studying biology could investigate local herbal practices; those studying civics could examine bulungi bwansi and clan governance; and those studying literature could analyse oral traditions. Freire's (1970) call for education that unites reflection and action finds strong support in the traditional model.

6.2 Research

The themes also have implications for how research is done. Chilisa (2020) argues for indigenous research methodologies that respect local knowledge systems, involve communities as partners and recognise relational ways of knowing. Researchers should treat elders, healers, craftspeople and farmers as holders of theory, not merely as sources of data. Participatory and action research, which unite reflection and action, are particularly consistent with the traditional relationship between theory and praxis (Chambers, 1997).

6.3 Development and Governance

Development planning often fails when theories designed elsewhere are imposed without regard to local praxis. Chambers (1997) asked "whose reality counts?" and showed that rural people's knowledge often proves more accurate than that of outside experts. The Ujamaa experience shows the danger of turning traditional values into top-down policy. Development and governance are more likely to succeed when they build on existing communal institutions voluntarily,

involve communities in design, and combine traditional and modern knowledge, as in the case of Ugandan farmers who combine indigenous and scientific weather forecasts.

6.4 Justice and Reconciliation

In justice, the restorative theory embodied in practices such as mato oput offers resources for healing communities after conflict. Its limits, however, show the need for complementarity between traditional and formal justice, with safeguards for victims, women and the rights of the accused (Baines, 2007; Latigo, 2008).

7. Discussion and Recommendations

7.1 Discussion: Rethinking Theory and Praxis in Traditional Society

The analysis supports three broad conclusions.

First, traditional societies were societies of thought as well as of custom. Theory existed in traditional society, but it was expressed differently from the written theory of the modern academy. It lived in proverbs, myths, rituals, crafts and institutions, and it was taught at the fireside, in the field and in the ceremony. The debate between ethnophilosophy and its critics (Tempels, 1959; Hountondji, 1983; Oruka, 1990) need not end in a choice between collective worldview and individual reason. Traditional societies contained both shared theories and individual thinkers who reflected critically on them.

Second, theory and praxis were integrated rather than ranked. Aristotle placed contemplation above action, but traditional African societies tended to judge knowledge by its fruits in community life. This is closer to Freire's praxis than to Aristotle's theoria. A proverb, a healing method or a reconciliation ritual was valued because it worked to sustain relationships, livelihoods and moral order. This integration gave traditional knowledge its practical strength and its resilience.

Third, the integration was neither perfect nor permanent. Traditional praxis could be authoritarian, exclusionary and resistant to change, and colonial education deliberately separated formal theory from lived practice. The task for contemporary Africa is therefore not to return to the past but to learn from it critically, recovering the unity of theory and praxis while subjecting traditional practices to reasoned scrutiny, as Wiredu (1980) and Gyekye (1997) urged.

7.2 Recommendations

7.2.1 For Policy Makers and Curriculum Authorities

- Integrate indigenous knowledge, oral traditions and community practices into the national curriculum as subjects of study and sources of learning, not merely as cultural extras.
- Support the documentation and preservation of traditional knowledge, including oral histories, crafts and ecological knowledge, with fair recognition of the communities that hold it.
- Develop policies that allow traditional justice and reconciliation practices to complement formal justice, with clear safeguards for human rights and for women and children.

7.2.2 For Educators and Institutions of Learning

- Design teaching that unites reflection and action, using projects, community service and apprenticeship-style learning in addition to classroom instruction.
- Invite elders, craftspeople, healers and farmers into schools and universities as resource persons, and treat their knowledge as theory worth analysing.
- Teach African philosophy and indigenous knowledge critically, helping learners distinguish what is valuable from what should be reformed.

7.2.3 For Researchers

- Use indigenous and participatory research methodologies that treat communities as partners in producing knowledge.
- Conduct empirical studies on how traditional theory and praxis operate today in specific Ugandan communities, including how they are changing among young people and in urban areas.

7.2.4 For Cultural and Community Leaders

- Keep traditional institutions such as clan councils, communal work and rites of passage alive as spaces of learning, while reviewing practices that exclude or harm members of the community.
- Encourage open dialogue between elders and young people so that traditional knowledge is both transmitted and renewed.

8. Conclusion

This article set out to examine the relationship between theory and praxis in traditional society, with particular reference to African and Ugandan traditions. Drawing on Aristotle's distinctions, the praxis tradition of Marx and Freire, Bourdieu's theory of practice and African communitarian philosophy, and using a reflexive thematic analysis of the literature, it developed six themes. Theory in traditional society was embedded in everyday practice. It was carried and applied through oral tradition. It found expression in communal praxis guided by an ethics of the collective, and in rituals of justice and passage that put moral theories into action. It was tested in ecological and technical practice. And it was dynamic, open to internal critique and disrupted by colonial education.

The central conclusion is that in traditional society theory and praxis formed a unity. Knowledge was reasoned, but it was

lived; it was practical, but it was reflective. This unity was the source of much of the strength of traditional knowledge, even though it coexisted with conservatism and exclusion that deserve critique. For contemporary Uganda and Africa, the lesson is that education, research, development and governance are most effective when they reconnect theory with practice, respect the knowledge that communities already hold, and subject both traditional and modern ideas to reasoned examination.

Future research should examine empirically how the relationship between theory and praxis operates in specific Ugandan communities today, how traditional knowledge is being transmitted or lost among young people, and how schools implementing the competence-based curriculum are drawing on community knowledge. Comparative studies across African societies would help identify shared patterns and important differences, and would strengthen the contribution of African thought to wider debates on the nature of knowledge and practice.

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