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Sustainability of African Cultural Epistemology through Cultural Re-Appropriation in Selected Works of Emerging African Scholars

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ABSTRACT

This article explores indigenous cultural epistemology rooted in African culture and tradition through cultural re-appropriation presented in selected research projects by emerging African scholars. It seeks to contribute to the sustainable development of African knowledge systems and how they can be integrated into contemporary practice. This involves unpacking the unique perspectives, norms, values, and practices embedded in African cultures and how they relate to social justice and community well-being. Set within decolonial theories, it critically engages with postgraduate research conducted in collaboration with an academic supervisor to elucidate how Indigenous knowledge systems are being revitalized and positioned within contemporary scholarly discourses. It analyses and interprets a selection of collaborative projects to underscore the epistemic value of African cultural paradigms and the transformative potential of cultural re-appropriation in resisting colonial knowledge hierarchies. The findings highlight how the mutual metacognitive teaching and learning methodology applied in this research actively contributes to the sustainability of Indigenous cultural knowledge, offering a dynamic foundation for future academic inquiry where teaching and learning are reciprocal processes. Ultimately, the article asserts that the teaching and learning method applied in this research, as well as the constructive re-appropriation of African cultural epistemology, not only affirms identity and heritage but also

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challenges dominant global narratives, reinforcing the relevance of Indigenous thought within international academic contexts.

Keywords: Sustainability; Indigenous Knowledge; Mutual Metacognitive Method; African Cultural Epistemology; Cultural Re-Appropriation; Decolonial Theories; Indigenous Knowledge Systems

1. Introduction

The growing movement to reclaim and affirm African knowledge systems has become an important intellectual and cultural project in the wake of persistent colonial epistemic dominance. As Western paradigms continue to shape global academic discourse, African cultural epistemologies remain marginalized, often treated as secondary, anecdotal, or culturally bound rather than recognised as legitimate systems of thought. Alumona [1] asserts that:

"Western epistemology is presented foundationally as the epitome of epistemic systems, and the Cartesian foundationalist epistemology is at the heart of this epistemic epistemology. Whatever mode of knowing that seemingly deviates from it becomes an epistemology without foundations and does not worth the name" [1] (p. 12).

Contemporary African scholars are increasingly engaging in cultural re-appropriation as a methodological and conceptual strategy to reframe Indigenous knowledge as a resource for sustainable intellectual and social transformation. This process involves not only recovering suppressed cultural wisdom but also recontextualizing it to address contemporary social, political, and academic realities.

Within this scholarly resurgence, emerging African researchers, particularly those working in scholarly research contexts, play a crucial role in reshaping epistemic landscapes by integrating Indigenous cultural frameworks into formal research structures. These efforts are situated within broader decolonial theories that seek to dismantle entrenched hierarchies of knowledge and re-establish African ways of knowing as foundational rather than peripheral. By examining selected research projects that foreground African epistemic traditions, this article demonstrates how cultural re-appropriation serves both as an act of resistance and a form of academic innovation. Through this lens, Indigenous cultural epistemology is seen not merely as a subject of study but as a living, evolving practice capable of influencing contemporary scholarship, promoting social equity, and strengthening cultural identity.

This study asserts that sustaining African cultural epistemology requires active participation from emerging scholars, who operate at the intersection of tradition and modernity, critically engaging with inherited knowledge while navigating institutional systems shaped by colonial legacies. Through mutual metacognitive teaching and learning methodology, these scholars contribute to the creation of new academic spaces where Indigenous thought is recognized as dynamic, adaptive, and globally relevant. Metacognitive methodology shifts the teaching and learning dynamics from passive information transferring and receiving to a collaborative partnership focused on how to learn, not just what to learn [2]. Therefore, the article highlights cultural re-appropriation not simply as a recovery of the past, but as a transformative approach that repositions African knowledge as vital to the future of global scholarship.

2. The Rationale and Contextual Background

The continuous search for lost African cultural identities has led many emerging African scholars to reflect on and learn from their respective cultures and heritage. This is due to the historical and ongoing power imbalances resulting from colonialism, the imposition of Eurocentrism, and the prescription by Western-rooted knowledge of what constitutes valid and/or scientific knowledge. Thus, African indigenous epistemological practices were sidelined by Eurocentric knowledge formation and dissemination, thereby underscoring the need for redress by African scholars. Another important fact about this sidelining is the Western-rooted assertion that African knowledge is constructed primarily from observing nature and other natural occurrences, whether biological or environmental, and that

this process is facilitated and transmitted orally. It is important to note that African cultures observe nature closely, such as animal behavior, climatic changes, and their influence on vegetation, and use this information as a reference for their existence, transmitting it through enculturation to promote responsibility, honesty, discipline, failure prevention, danger avoidance, and hard work. This process thus enriches their understanding and knowledge of the world around them. However, this process aligns with empirical observation, which is used to discover and validate knowledge, even in Western and other nations globally; hence, the need for the merging scholars to discover these epistemological formations from the insiders' point of view as a decolonial process.

While African knowledge formation is undeniably authentic, rooted in lived experience, collective memory, and the intricate relationships between people, nature, and spirituality, its legitimacy has long been undermined by external interpretations. The framing of African epistemologies as merely "primitive", "mythical", or "unscientific" has historically stripped them of their methodological sophistication and philosophical depth [1,3]. Yet a closer examination reveals that these systems are grounded in systematic observation, social ethics, communal validation, and principles of iterative knowledge refinement, all of which mirror the principles of scientific inquiry worldwide. What is often missing, therefore, is not the authenticity of African knowledge but the scholarly recognition and articulation of its internal logic, conceptual categories, and ontological assumptions. To fully reclaim African epistemology as a legitimate knowledge system, emerging African scholars must continue to re-center it not as a derivative or explanatory adjunct to Western paradigms, but as an autonomous and self-sustaining intellectual tradition.

However, achieving this reclamation requires more rigorous work from insiders who possess cultural fluency and an embodied understanding of African worldviews. Outsider analyses, no matter how well intentioned, often impose external frameworks that distort the meanings, practices, and symbolism inherent in African knowledge systems. It is therefore essential for African scholars to employ methodologies that emerge from within their own cultural landscapes, methods grounded in indigenous languages, oral histories, ritual practices, spatial philosophies, and communal ways of knowing. This insider-driven approach does not seek to romanticize or essentialize African knowledge, but rather to interpret it through lenses that reflect its own epistemic priorities. By doing so, African scholars strengthen the intellectual sovereignty of the continent, disrupt long-standing misrepresentations, and contribute to a genuinely decolonial reconstruction of African epistemology in contemporary academic and practical contexts.

In the wake of decolonial debates and the intellectual reawakening across African universities, there has been a resurgence of interest in reclaiming and restoring cultural epistemologies that were previously dismissed, misrepresented, or undervalued. This shift represents a critical cultural and intellectual intervention aimed at reconstructing African knowledge systems on their own terms, rather than through inherited Western frameworks. Part of this transformation involves cultural re-appropriation, a process through which African scholars revisit, reinterpret, and reintegrate indigenous knowledge into contemporary academic and social discourse.

Furthermore, the urgency to sustain African cultural epistemologies is intensified by globalization, which, while offering opportunities for exchange, also threatens to homogenize knowledge and cultural expression. African scholars are therefore tasked not only with retrieving and preserving knowledge, but also with proving its contemporary relevance and adaptability. This approach is central to resisting epistemic erasure and reinforcing Africa's role as a producer, rather than a passive consumer, of knowledge.

Contextually, this movement aligns with growing scholarly efforts that seek to re-establish African intellectual sovereignty by grounding research methodologies, pedagogies, and theoretical frameworks in indigenous worldviews. By engaging with cultural symbols, oral traditions, languages, philosophies, and artistic practices, emerging scholars position themselves within a lineage of epistemic reclamation while contributing to the sustainable growth of African knowledge systems.

Ultimately, this rationale underscores the need to sustain African cultural epistemologies through deliberate, scholarly cultural re-appropriation, not only as an act of recovery but also as a strategy for intellectual empowerment, cultural continuity, and decolonial transformation.

3. Theoretical Underpinnings

Since the advent of Postcolonial discourses, African scholars have engaged in a deliberate process of revitalizing and empowering themselves, allowing African people whose practices were previously marginalized to have agency over their cultural identity and heritage. Thus, cultural re-appropriation was coined as a process by which a previously marginalized group reclaims and redefines ways of life that a dominant group had looked down upon or sidelined. "It is understood as a form of resistance, where the minority seeks to protest against domination and reclaim agency" [4] (p. 252). Cultural re-appropriation and the African Renaissance movement, both of which seek to restore African identity and dignity in broader terms, have been embraced by contemporary scholars alongside decolonial perspectives.

This article's objective is therefore to present the research projects of emerging scholars who have applied cultural re-appropriation and decolonial theories, highlighting their diverse African-revered cultural practices along with associated norms and values. It aims to contribute to the sustainable development of African knowledge systems and explore how they can be meaningfully integrated into contemporary practices. In this case, cultural re-appropriation is relevant to the continuous preservation and sustainability of African cultural heritage by acknowledging best practices and ensuring they are transmitted to future generations, thereby bridging the knowledge gaps caused by historical marginalization. Thus, in the African context, cultural re-appropriation can be a dynamic process of decolonization and a conscious return to noble and prestigious African principles, such as Ubuntu and respect for one another. Ubuntu embodies a culture in which moral values, human needs, interests, and the dignity of individuals are prioritized [3] (p. 3). Thus, Ubuntu presents itself as an epistemology for understanding and promoting inclusive practices within African cultural heritage [5] (p. 157).

In this article, decolonialization principles primarily draw on Walter Mignolo's [6] concept of epistemic disobedience. The author described epistemic disobedience as the delinking of knowledge production from colonial power structures and the challenging of assumptions embedded in modern knowledge systems, creating space for decolonial options and alternative ways of understanding the world [6]. From a broader perspective, decoloniality involves evoking previously overlooked or misrepresented African epistemologies and practices, highlighting their significance and placing them on equal footing with contemporary modes of knowledge production and dissemination.

This process includes, among other scholars, Ngugi wa Thiongo's [7] concept of decolonizing the mind [8], following Frantz Fanon's [9] discussion in *Black Skin, White Masks*, in which they described a "massive psycho-existential complex" resulting from racial and colonial oppression [8]. Ngugi wa Thiongo [7] advocated for reclaiming indigenous African languages as a crucial step toward genuine liberation and the development of a genuine African identity in the post-colonial era. Ngugi wa Thiongo [7] argued that the primary tool of colonization was not only physical force but also the imposition of European languages and culture, serving as a "cultural bomb" designed to annihilate people's belief in their own names, languages, heritage, and ultimately, themselves [7]. Finally, Thabo Mbeki's [10] concept of African Renaissance (cited in Cossa) [11] (p. 2) is applied in the research reported in this article, which calls for the "educated Africans to be primarily responsible for helping Africa to restore her dignity, to define her future, and to develop to a level of competitor in today's world economy". Thus, the selected emerging scholars' pursuit is to critically reflect on and investigate their respective culturally relevant ways of life, placing them within contemporary scholarly discourses.

4. Mutual Metacognitive Teaching and Learning Methodology

The selected research projects discussed in this article originate from Art-Based Research (ABR), facilitated through mutual metacognitive teaching and learning methodology. Through cultural re-appropriation, the art-based research projects arising from this study are rich in meaningful symbols and are imbued with multiple cultural perspectives. This is because art-based research involving indigenous people, by its nature, "generates holistic and evocative knowledge" through its realistic portrayal of reality and raises "critical consciousness" [12] (p. 261) when approached from an insider's point of view.

The researchers work collaboratively under the author's supervision, culminating in scholarly ABR projects in the form of dissertations or theses, accompanied by a jointly curated exhibition of practical works. This collaborative method (mutual metacognitive teaching and learning methodology) involves a dual focus, in which the supervisor/mentor and mentees monitor and "regulate their cognitive processes" [13] as they jointly discover new knowledge. It occurs through the cross-cultural sharing of common ideologies, learning new cultural obligations and values, and the synthesis of beliefs into a common understanding of African cultural practices within contemporary discourses. Thus, as the supervisor/promoter, I immerse myself in these projects, progressing from a full participant to an elite informant and co-investigator, learning alongside the student-artist-researchers.

Four projects were selected for this article because they consciously applied cultural re-appropriation to advocate for the preservation and sustainability of their respective cultural identity and heritage. In addition, the emergent visual artefacts carry layers of cultural meaning. In this study, the author plays multiple roles, including supervisor, teacher, mentor, coach, curator, evaluator, and co-researcher, which sometimes required her to conduct her own research to corroborate emerging knowledge, thereby ensuring epistemic rigor. This is necessary because although the student-artist-researchers and the supervisor are all black Africans or South Africans, they come from different tribes, and language can sometimes be a hindrance, hence the need to verify emerging knowledge to achieve a common understanding. As co-researchers, we learn from one another by reflecting and sharing our lived experiences as insiders to our respective cultural contexts. Thus, the mutual metacognitive teaching and learning methodology helps mitigate traditional academic hierarchies, leading to authentic, collaborative, reflective knowledge and epistemic agency. According to Broncano [14], epistemic agency refers to an individual's significant contribution to the achievement of knowledge.

Most importantly, all the student-artist-researchers conduct research on concerns and issues related to their cultural identities, which have intimately affected them either during their upbringing or in adulthood. They are encouraged to discover the theoretical underpinnings that support the arguments of their projects. Applying Ngugi wa Thiongo's [7] concept of reclaiming indigenous African languages as a crucial step towards genuine liberation, the student-artist-researchers are encouraged to use their vernacular languages when conceptualizing their projects. This includes thinking in their mother tongue and naming things as they are, and not borrowing English terms, even though the research reports are written in English. This is necessary to avoid distortion of meaning and to restore pride in their cultural knowledge and practices. Spivak [15], in agreement with wa Thiongo, asserts that language is never a neutral tool but rather a mental mold, assuming that the reader exists within a consolidated system of cultural representation. Thus, the use of the mother tongue is an act of decolonizing knowledge practices by asserting the values and histories of indigenous languages to understand the embedded cultural meanings. As a result, all the emergent practical projects presented in this article are in the vernacular languages of the respective student-artist-researchers. Another important aspect is to ensure their visual metaphors are accessible to all, so that the art serves as a communicative tool with messages meant for everyone.

In addition, the projects incorporate the views of student-artist-researchers, enabling them to rediscover and affirm their own epistemic ideals through art [16]. Furthermore, they are encouraged to seek authentic knowledge from primary sources or informants with insider knowledge and experience, such as their immediate relatives and/or knowledgeable community members. Ethnographic, phenomenological, and autoethnographic approaches are common methods used for data collection, analysis, and interpretation in these projects. Phenomenology and autoethnographic approaches are mainly used for analysis and interpretation throughout these projects, as they provide deep, context-rich insights, shifting the research paradigm from "studying" indigenous communities to understand, honor, and represent their lived experiences from within [17].

Furthermore, this research was facilitated through the implementation of Action Science Theory, which involves transforming a social practice into an inquiry. The practice of Action Science emphasizes the creation of "communities of inquiry in communities of social practice" [18] (p. 34). Thus, this mutual metacognitive teaching and

learning practice constitutes observable findings grounded in real-life situations. In this case, the researcher, as supervisor, mentor, and full participant, also monitors the entire teaching and learning process, observing how it unfolds as she learns alongside the student-artist-researchers. Consequently, this type of inquiry is capable of producing knowledge based on substantiated facts, thereby decolonizing traditional academic practices. Finally, ethical considerations are observed in the case of research involving human participants/informants, from both the student-artist-researchers' and the supervisor's roles as researchers. This involves applying to the University's College of Research Ethics Review Committee (CREC) for permission, and approval is acknowledged by the issuance of an ethical certificate.

5. Case Studies: Application of Cultural Re-Appropriation

5.1. Student-Artist-Researcher A

Student-Artist-Researcher A Calvin Mosekare's Art-based-Research offered an interpretation of the Basotho blanket as a revered and significant cultural object. Through cultural re-appropriation, his research presented the historical, cultural, and symbolic dimensions of the Basotho people, focusing on the evolution, uses, meanings, connotations, and overall importance of the Basotho blanket as a significant cultural artefact. Along with Cultural re-appropriation, his research project also incorporated Denis Ekpo's [19] concept of post-Africanism, which suggests that we must "seek newer, fresher conditions for a more performative African intellectual engagement with Africa, modernity and the West". Thus, Mosakare's [20] pursuit was to represent this cultural object as a symbol of pride, acknowledging his cultural identity while placing it on equal footing with other global forms of knowledge acquisition. Additionally, he applied Michel Foucault's [21] genealogical concept to interpret the cultural significance of the Basotho blanket and its intricately woven symbols. His study argued that the Basotho blanket, although initially borrowed, is not merely a functional object but is also imbued with cultural, historical, and significant knowledge that defines the Mosotho people's identity and heritage.

In his final exhibition installation, which featured primarily ceramic basins, he utilized Basotho blankets as prominent elements, either by appropriating their symbols and embellishing them into the basins or by integrating the actual blankets as physical components of the installation. Through his installations, he presented the Basotho Kingdom as a symbol of authority that guided and continues to guide the Basotho nation. In this case, the Basotho blanket, particularly its intricate designs and patterns, tells a holistic Basotho story of existence from time immemorial. Given its historical importance, many contemporary artists, fashion designers, and scholars, including Mosakare, have deemed it fitting to research the various meanings of this cultural object while situating its significance within contemporary academic discourse.

Figure 1, entitled "Modula Setulo", directly translates to the seat of the king. Suspended from the gallery ceiling and balanced by a PVC pipe, usually used in plumbing, the pipe serves as a conduit, facilitating its intended function. In this installation, the seat evokes the notion of a kingdom emanating from the heavens and carries several connotations [19]. First, it serves as a poignant reminder of King Moshoeshoe 1, the first recognized Basotho king, who united different clans to form the Basotho Kingdom. He was also the one who bestowed the Basotho blanket, replacing the animal skins that were previously used in the same way the blanket is used today [20]. This installation of this rich history highlights the pioneering spirit and adaptability of King Moshoeshoe 1 and his nation. It represents endurance and is an emblem of the Basotho people's remarkable achievements [20].

Several symbols are present in this installation, including water flowing from the main PVC pipe into the makeshift pond at the bottom of the piece, crushed ceramic rubble, and a blue blanket representing the ancestors, visible through the plastic sheet forming the pond's base, all enclosed in a hexagonal frame. These elements symbolize the transmission of cultural values and traditions from one generation to the next [20]. According to Mosakare [20], this installation also represents the unbroken lineage, a testament to the enduring legacy of the Basotho people through enculturation.

Figure 1. Calvin Mosakare, Modula Setulo, Installation, 2023.

Note: This image is an installation representing multiple culturally meaningful symbols, and acknowledging the important role of monarchy in the maintenance and sustenance of cultural identity and heritage.

Figure 2 illustrates an installation that pays tribute to women, specifically the Queen Mother, who takes care of the household while men work the land [20]. The blanket is displayed the same way women wear a blanket like a cape, with this particular one traditionally worn by Queens. This installation combines ceramic basins joined together with smaller pipes attached to a larger one, epitomizing the female figure. In this installation, the pipes serve as conduits transmitting knowledge from the Queen mother, who is portrayed as the source of information facilitated through enculturation, while the four ceramic basins represent children. Thus, by presenting these ephemeral installations, Mosakare is breaking away from the traditional Western museum approach to indigenous artefacts, applying Mingolo's [6] concept of epistemic disobedience through storytelling, thereby generating a holistic and evocative cultural knowledge [22].

Mosakare's emergent artworks are not only a display of symbolic artefacts but also open a whole new world through visual storytelling. It elevates these simple, everyday objects to a valuable encyclopaedia and calls viewers to see them as more than just functional items. Additionally, by embellishing contemporary, widely used objects such as sanitary ceramic ware, the installation deliberately reinforces the significance of this cultural object and its meaningful symbols, as another form of appreciating previously undervalued African cultural ways of knowing, placing them firmly in the current context.

Figure 2. Calvin Mosakare, MmaRona (Queen mother), Installation, 2023.

Note: This image illustrates the role of women/mothers as the nurturers of children.

5.2. Student-Artist-Researcher B

Student-Artist-Researcher B Sello Mahlangu's study recontextualized the value of a cultural artefact, a breastplate referred to as Iporiana. It is a breastplate made from animal skin, often decorated with beads around the top, and worn hanging from the wearer's neck. His project aimed to contribute to the preservation and sustainability of African cultural identity through art by researching the value of this breastplate as a revered cultural object among the amaNdebele men. AmaNdebele is one of the South African tribes known for its vibrant geometric homestead wall paintings and colorful women's attire. The project was also framed within the lens of cultural re-appropriation, facilitated through "genealogical" fact-finding [21]. It unpacked the symbolic importance of Iporiana in archiving and preserving the Ndebele cultural identity and heritage. It also paid tribute to the amaNdebele king, Ndzundza, who originally crafted the breastplate from the skin of a

serval cat, thereby establishing it as a significant cultural artefact.

The project examined the history of the two Ndebele groups residing in South Africa, one of which is the Ndzundza clan, from which Mahlangu is descended. In this project, Mahlangu not only unpacks the significance of the breastplate but also traces the origins of the two Ndebele groups as distinct clans. Through the adoption of a serval cat, he narrates the story of the two brothers and how the serval cat came to be adopted as the totem animal of the Ndzunza clan. His project highlights the significance of the insider perspective and oral knowledge in discovering, validating, and transmitting cultural knowledge and recommends archiving it. His visual story is presented as an animated video installation that traces how the two brothers fought for kingship after their father's death, ultimately

establishing their own clans with slightly different ideologies.

Figure 3 is a screenshot from Mahlangu's animation, which sought to capture the story of how iPoriana (the breastplate from a serval cat's skin) became a significant cultural artefact adopted to assert the cultural identity of amaNdebele men of the Ndzundza clan. The animation begins with the praise oration of the Ndzundza family lineage. According to Mahlangu [23], the visual interpretation in this video is a storytelling method that uses animated visuals to bring oral history to life. The animation first shows the two boys, sent by their sick father, the King, to hunt and live in the wilderness to learn survival skills. Upon their return, they found their father very sick, and later he died, opening the way for one of the boys to take the throne.

Figure 3. Sello Mahlangu, Iporiana kaNdzundza, Stills from the animation, 2024.

Note: The stills from the animation capture snippets of how the story develops, epitomizing the indigenous representation of fables.

Source: Link to the video: https://youtu.be/AOaRwO8iGa8.

Ndzundza, the younger brother, was the queen's preferred heir to the throne, and naturally, a split emerged as some followers favored the elder brother. After several upheavals, including fights between the two brothers, the younger brother, Ndzundza, exiled himself and lived in the wilderness, where he observed the survival strategies of wild animals. He was captivated by the serval cat's characteristics. These characteristics include the serval cat's elusive behavior, which allows it to escape and avoid danger

or enemies skillfully and cunningly [23].

Thus, the breastplate in Mahlangu's study is a valued cultural object with multiple meanings, including attributes of distinguished character assimilated from the serval cat. Mahlangu's projects demonstrate how cultural knowledge is formed, highlighting that the breastplate is not merely a simple cultural object but one imbued with important and meaningful information. The use of an indigenous language in the praise oration at the start of the animation,

and the message it carries, juxtaposed with the portrayal of traditional African culture from an insider's perspective through new media (animation), is yet another attempt to portray African people not as backward but as people living with purpose. This is because "language as culture is the collective memory bank of a people's experience in history" [7].

5.3. Student-Artist-Researcher C

Student-Artist-Researcher C Zimasa Fana's project explored how Xhosa children are enculturated in language development and critical thinking skills through traditional games and storytelling, referred to in isiXhosa as iintsomi (plural) and intsomi (singular). The Xhosa people are one of the indigenous groups in South Africa, primarily residing in the Eastern Cape and Western Cape provinces. Fana's study examined how these cultural activities promote the social, linguistic, and cognitive development of young children in the Xhosa communities, drawing on the concepts of constructivism and sociocultural theory [24]. In addition, her study focused on how games and iintsomi (oral narratives) promote critical engagement, active participation, and cultural identity. Through phenomenological and autoethnographic approaches, she explored how storytelling, folklore, and children's games can be used to transfer cultural knowledge that fosters problem-solving abilities and collaborative learning.

In her practical work, which was exhibited as part of her research project, Fana created artworks that visually represented the social background of iintsomi, particularly how oral traditions were communicated, and traditional games were played. She argued that these customs preserve Xhosa people's cultural history while offering a rich, contextual learning environment that fosters socialization, critical thinking, and language acquisition [24].

Figure 4 illustrates a traditional setup for a storytelling session, which typically takes place in the early evening. During this time, the family, under the care of a grandmother, would gather around a fire where dinner would be cooked. The grandmother is depicted as a large, womanly figure with a hen's head. The hen's head was deliberately chosen to reference the Xhosa expression of a "good and caring mother", exemplifying the way a hen protects and feeds her chicks. The grandchildren, who surround the grandmother, are presented with their hands and feet attached to a wire mesh. Some sit on wooden logs, some sleep under the grandmother's dress, epitomizing the mother hen as she protects her chicks by covering them with her body, while others sit on the floor around the pot and the grandmother.

Figure 4. Zimasa Fana, "Kwahla, kwahlala kwayintsomi" (once upon a time) installation, 2024.

Note: The image demonstrates how iintsomi (folklore) were presented in the traditional setting, highlighting their significance in the enculturation of children.

Part of the installation depicts a hawk hovering above a hen with three chicks, while those that have already been snatched are represented as black shadows. Another important aspect of Fana's graphical presentation is her interpretation of some traditional folklore stories she had listened to as a child. These stories are presented through animation designed to captivate today's children, using a method familiar to them, similar to contemporary children's films. The videos feature animated visuals that interpret some of the stories featured in her exhibition. Various grandmothers narrate stories in isiXhosa, with subtitles for viewers who do not understand the language, allowing them to follow the narratives.

- Link to the story: https://youtu.be/sDzL-1Gxw0c
- Link to the story: https://youtu.be/6Ay6EhJ2fMs
- Link to the story: https://youtu.be/f9qqN5nvhGw

Thus, Fana re-appropriated the cultural practice of enculturating children and recommended its adoption in the contemporary educational dispensation. Fana further suggests that folklore stories and traditional games can be developed to enhance moral reasoning, emotional intelligence, and problem-solving among modern children. Through the delinking of knowledge dominance in contemporary education, Zimasa is proposing these Xhosa cultural practices towards "survivance", "the continuance of native stories that are renunciations of Western dominance, …", as a constructive process of redressing the silencing of indigenous epistemic transmission [6,25,26].

5.4. Student-Artist-Researcher D

Student-Artist-Researcher D, through the cultural re-appropriation of traditional African healing practices, examined how these practices can be recognized and acknowledged alongside Western medicine. He juxtaposed their similarities and advocated harmonizing these healing practices, emphasizing a complementary rather than an oppositional relationship. Mbanya's study examined the historical and cultural dynamics that have shaped perceptions of healing in Africa, arguing that traditional healing, often overlooked by proponents of Western medicine, has deep roots in African culture and has historically served as the primary healthcare source for many African communities [27].

Figure 5 represents the ritualistic performance, *intlombe*, and a sample of natural plants used to treat ailments that were referenced in Mbanya's practical project. In his visual narratives, he not only displays the herbs used for healing but also illustrates the diagnostic procedures, facilitated through spiritual realms, that guide the traditional healer in identifying the cause or the type of illness. Another important aspect is the ritualistic performance called *intlombe*, a ritual dance that fosters a connection between the physical and spiritual realms, invoking the guiding spiritual powers [27]. The main visuals of the *intlombe* performance are hands for clapping and feet for stamping, in a rhythmic dance accompanied by drumming.

Figure 5. Pumlani Mbanya, Installation and natural plants used for healing, 2024.

Note: The installation presents the epitome of African traditional healing, emphasizing both the diagnostic and healing processes.

By applying phenomenology and autoethnography, Mbanya was able to weave personal narratives into academic discourse. Mbanya advocated for a more inclusive approach to healthcare that honors the rich traditions of indigenous communities and other peripheral cultures worldwide, while embracing Western medical advancements. His study proposed returning to the roots, suggesting that

African scholars conduct laboratory testing of these traditional herbs to identify their essential components and make informed recommendations. Thus, Mbanya's project not only re-appropriated Xhosa traditional healing practices but also highlighted how they can be harmonized with Western medicine by testing the herbs using methods similar to those of modern science. His practical work, presented in his final exhibition, was a visual manifestation of traditional healing practices, illustrating the spiritual emergence process and the cultural significance. The visual representation of the tangible function through human hands and feet, rather than the Western museum practice of preserving and archiving cultural ritual ceremonies, emphasizes the "indigenous creative making as an ontology conveyed through" visual narratives [28,29].

6. Synthesis of Findings in the Selected Projects

Through the application of the mutual metacognitive teaching and learning methodology and the rejuvenation of indigenous epistemologies, the emerging visual metaphors from this research challenge the dominant global narratives. Subsequently, it reinforces the relevance of indigenous thought within international academic contexts. The exploration of the indigenous knowledge system in this manner contrasts with the Western scientific systems of knowledge formation and transmission, highlighting the sustainable development of African thought and literature. Furthermore, the application of phenomenology and autoethnographic approaches in the analysis and interpretation of the projects makes "room for intersectionality, as well as making the knowledge from research findings valuable and explicit to the layman" [30].

This view addresses the "predicaments of virtue Epistemology in a naturalistic context by shifting the emphasis from representation to agency and by treating knowledge as an expression of achievement" [13] (p. 49). According to Kallestrup [31,32], Virtue Epistemology is a philosophical approach to knowledge that focuses on the person holding the belief rather than the belief itself, arguing for the centrality of our "cognitive virtues—our epistemic powers to epistemological theorizing". This approach emphasizes intellectual virtues such as curiosity, open-mindedness, and intellectual courage as important in acquiring genuine and tangible knowledge, seeing knowledge as successful belief emanating from virtual traits such as ethics for moral goodness.

Thus, the visual narratives from these projects become dynamic and enduring mechanisms for the portrayal and transmission of indigenous cultures' meaningful way of life, thereby preserving cultural identity and heritage. Through storytelling, the ephemeral nature of these installations provides multiple layers of significant cultural meaning. Therefore, the curatorial process becomes the epitome of storytelling in art-based research on indigenous cultures' knowledge formation and transmission, as it assimilates reality from insiders' perspectives.

7. Conclusions

The study demonstrates that the sustainability of African cultural epistemology is both possible and necessary when it is grounded in deliberate cultural re-appropriation aimed at decolonizing contemporary epistemic discourses [5]. Through an analysis of selected emerging African scholarly research projects, this article demonstrates that Indigenous knowledge systems are not static or relics of the past, but rather dynamic intellectual frameworks capable of addressing contemporary socio-cultural needs. These projects exemplify how African values, norms, and philosophical worldviews can be critically re-engaged to challenge colonial epistemic hierarchies and reposition African thought and literature as an indispensable contributor to global knowledge production.

The findings affirm that meaningful cultural re-appropriation fosters identity restoration, strengthens heritage consciousness, and expands scholarly spaces for Indigenous epistemologies within academic discourses. This process highlights the importance of decolonial theoretical perspectives, illustrating how African scholars working in collaboration can effectively contribute to progressively reshaping contemporary scholarship. The sustainability of African cultural epistemology, therefore, resides not only in reclaiming cultural expressions but also in embedding them within rigorous research methodologies, pedagogical practices, and socially responsive knowledge frameworks [5].

Ultimately, the study concludes that cultural re-appropriation serves as a transformative tool, enabling Indigenous knowledge systems to thrive in modern academic contexts. By foregrounding African epistemologies, emerging scholars contribute to a more inclusive and pluriversal intellectual environment, one that values diverse ways of knowing and supports the long-term preservation, revitalization, and integration of Indigenous knowledge in global discourse.

Recommendations

The study recommends that the emerging scholars should work closely with cultural custodians, elders, and local communities to ensure that the revitalization of Indigenous knowledge remains authentic, ethical, and grounded in lived experiences and insiders' perspectives. Such partnerships will strengthen the credibility and sustainability of research outcomes. Scholars should be encouraged to publish, exhibit, or present their work in African-led journals, conferences, and cultural spaces to amplify Indigenous epistemologies within and beyond academia. This would ensure wider recognition of African intellectual contributions. Institutions and researchers must develop strategies to archive, document, and preserve Indigenous knowledge practices in ways that protect cultural integrity. This would include digital repositories, community-driven documentation projects, and continuity plans for future research.

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Informed Consent Statement

Informed consent was obtained from all participants involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement

The catalogues have been embedded in the dissertations and thesis, which are provided as hyperlinks under the reference list of each student (co-researcher).

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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