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RACE, POWER AND INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE SYSTEMS



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Alternation

**Interdisciplinary Journal for the Study of the
Arts and Humanities in
Southern Africa**

Race, Power and Indigenous Knowledge Systems

Guest Editors
Alison Jones
and
Khondlo Mtshali

2013

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Editorial: Race, Power and Indigenous Knowledge Systems

Alison Jones
Khondlo Mtshali

This project on ‘Race, Power and Indigenous Knowledge Systems’ has its origins in a series of themed discussions by Pietermaritzburg-based staff in what was then the School of Politics at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. These discussions were a regular feature of our Friday afternoons in 2011, with staff taking it in turns to suggest discussion themes for any given Friday. On one particular afternoon, a participant had recently returned from a series of workshops hosted by the Makerere Institute of Social Research. He cited an important contribution to the Makerere debate, namely, Mamdani’s argument that subordination to Western paradigms dehistoricizes and decontextualizes African experience. In light of this abiding problematic, what is needed in Africa is,

a scholarly community that is equipped to rethink – in both intellectual and institutional terms – the very nature of the university and of the function it is meant to serve locally and globally (Mamdani 2011).

Interestingly, a speaker at an ‘Africa Day’ workshop hosted by the University of Cape Town in 2011 argues along similar lines. According to Olukoshi, local embeddedness is a prerequisite for construction of a significant African presence in the global community. The addition of a distinctively African contribution to global discourses should be conceptualized ‘as a self-confident project, not a reactive project’ (Olukoshi 2011).

At a subsequent discussion, a participant suggested that we incorporate African Indigenous Knowledge Systems (AIKS) in our discursive trajectory, bearing in mind Kom’s articulation of,

the desire on the part of Africans themselves to create an autonomous framework for the validation and appropriation of a local body of knowledge which could help them better to perceive their environment and construct a context for living which is suited to their own aspirations (Kom 2000).

In an historically and cognitively complex quest for internal legitimation that does not by definition isolate and 'exoticize' Africa, the question of what constitutes indigenous knowledge is seminal, and cannot be abstracted from the legacy of colonialism. For Masolo (2010), the colonial meaning of indigenous is based on the dichotomy of the subject, the colonial administrator or researcher, and the colonized object. Fanon (2001) argues that this dichotomy is racialized such that the object is black and the subject is white.

A third, and related discursive theme suggested by a participant targeted the interface between power and knowledge which, given Africa's history of exogenous appropriation and exploitation, too often incorporates dichotomized constructions of racial identity in tandem with the binary division of knowledge systems into superior/inferior categories. The subjugation of local or indigenous ways of doing and knowing was a major component of the colonial and slaver modes of production. The dichotomized world view that imperialism brought to Africa was contingent on a bifurcated theory of knowledge. In its crusade for certainty, Cartesian rationality disembedded and petrified its object. The result was a subject who was alive but disembodied, and an object that was embodied but dead. Philosophers such as Polanyi (1962), Bourdieu (1990), Marglin (1996) and Masolo (2010) claim that this is only one form of knowledge system. According to these philosophers, knowledge systems can be broadly divided into two: explicit (*episteme*) and tacit or implicit (*techne*) knowledge systems. These two categories of knowledge are evident in the fictional and poetic writings of Armah (1979), Kunene (1981) and Ngugi (1985), among others. Armah, Kunene, Marglin and Masolo argue that the ideal is the unity of these two categories.

The advent and dominance of Trans-Atlantic slavery, West European industrialization and colonialism was accompanied by the hegemony of Cartesian rationality or *episteme* and the marginalization of *techne* or implicit knowledge. The dominant knowledge system joined forces with religion to

fuel industrial revolution in Western Europe and colonialism in South America, Asia and Africa (Armah 1979; Kunene 1982; Toulmin 1990; Tambiah 1990). For the colonized, the civilization that was guided by exogenous knowledge lacked humanness. Thus, anti-colonial struggles were attempts by the colonized to reclaim not only their territory but also their humanness or Ubuntu. That the struggle continues in the 21st century is a testament to the persistent mission of the (neo) imperial centre to define Euro-North American epistemes as the only forms of globally legitimate knowledge, thereby relegating other forms of knowledge, whether spiritual or temporal, to a disempowered periphery.

That said, the re-creation (or re-invention) of a ‘golden age’ of idealized African societies and cultural traditions blighted and pillaged by the traumas of the slave trade and colonialism is not the path we should take to a re-apprehension of Africa and ourselves. As we gaze into the past, Ayi Kwei Armah advises us not to fall into the trap of limiting the past of these societies to their slavery and colonial past. He argues that we should not,

focus so exclusively on the trauma of genocide as to forget that there was life before trauma ... [we should] look at what was there before trauma, and incorporate a knowledge of that too, deep and real, into a historically accurate, inclusive apprehension [of our identity] (2006:253).

This ‘deep and real’ knowledge is what Masolo (2010) calls indigenous knowledge. Yet, as Masolo warns, we should not succumb to an extremely restricted perception of identity in the postcolonial era. The imposition of a monolithic ‘African identity’ in a postcolonial era is a problematic inherited from resistance discourses in which it is assumed,

first, that all formerly colonized persons ought to have one view of colonialism behind which they ought to unite to overthrow it; second, that the overthrow of colonialism be replaced with another, liberated and assumedly authentic identity.

Thus, an outcome of the ‘deeply political gist of the colonial/postcolonial discourse’ is that ‘we have come to think of our identities as natural rather than imagined and politically driven’ (Eze 1997). In similar vein, Appiah

(1992) advises us not to succumb to the ‘reverse discourse’ of nativism and cultural nationalism. To engage in reverse discourse is to mimic imperial techniques of harnessing ‘authentic’ knowledge and cultural heritage in service to power¹.

After successive Friday afternoons engaged in these thematically inter-linked debates, members of the Politics discussion group decided to expand our discursive vistas, cast our net wider, and thus to organize a conference (funded by the College of Humanities) with the aim of attracting diverse and wide-ranging contributions from scholars in a variety of academic disciplines. The conference was held in July 2012 on the Pietermaritzburg campus; it provided the inter-disciplinary material for this themed issue of *Alternation*.

We have arranged the contributions to the journal in three categories: race and identity; Indigenous knowledges (epistemological connotations and social transformation); Indigenous knowledges (pre-colonial, colonial and postcolonial). In the spirit of Armah’s 1984 essay we believe these essays contribute to Africa’s being as ‘circular or even a spherical continuum’ (37). Like points on a seamless ball, they all make their individual but different contribution to the whole.

We begin with four articles which all, in their different ways, creatively and critically address perceptions of race and identity. The transition to democracy in South Africa promised a non-racial society. After almost two decades of ‘transition’ there are still questions about the effectiveness of the government policies used, beneficiaries, losers, and identities of post-apartheid subjects. Using Kopano Matlwa’s novel, *Coconut*, Gugu Hlongwane interrogates the pitfalls of the black elite post-apartheid project. Colonialism devalued indigenous ways of being while purveying ‘whiteness’ as social ideal. Inferiority complex is thus a key component of the post-apartheid black person’s personality. Educational institutions,

¹ For literature in this genre, see for instance Abraham (1962). An ardent supporter of independent Ghana’s first President, Kwame Nkrumah, Abraham argues in favour of the politically instrumental uses of culture. ‘I wish to put forward culture as that knock-down rhetoric by means of which political objectives are sold’ (1962:37). See also Chinwizu (1987) who advocates the conscious and selective use of African traditions in nation building projects, engineered by political and intellectual elites.

especially private schools, are seen by the black elite as a means to achieve material goals. While these institutions may enhance the black elite's human capital, the ahistorical and negrophobic curricula kill them spiritually.

In *Township Textualities*, Megan Jones explores the complex manner in which the social landscape of post-apartheid South Africa is both altered and unchanged. Following Chipkin, she argues that class aspirations do not erase race identification. While suburbia no longer is necessarily a white domain, townships – and their 'architectures of intimacy' – continue to be a black domain. Drawing on three major conurbations – Johannesburg, Cape Town and Durban – Jones affirms the symbolic energies and mutualities of urban life while also recognizing persisting structures of difference.

Using Lawrence Blum's understanding of racism, Bernard Matolino interrogates the claims of black racism in post-apartheid South Africa. For Blum, racism is primarily about inferiorizing and antipathy. Matolino seeks to ascertain the impact that black racism might have on white people. Given power dynamics between blacks and whites, Matolino concludes by claiming that blacks can only be ineffective racists.

Ted Sommerville utilises Ogbu's socio-historical theory in his investigation of the academic performance and perceptions of a cohort of medical students at the University of KwaZulu-Natal's Nelson R Mandela School of Medicine. While statistical analysis of students' marks show apparent race-based differences, Sommerville argues that these differences are a surrogate for other inequities such as class, family background, and language. The study's findings have significant implications for government's and educational institutions' equity policies.

The issue then moves on to four articles loosely grouped together in the category of Indigenous Knowledges (epistemological connotations and social transformation). The articles offer individually distinct but equally innovative perspectives and findings. Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Nontyatyambo Dastile expound the advantages of decolonial epistemic perspectives, which they denote a Pan-African antidote to - and method of combating – (neo) imperial technologies of subjectivation. Decolonial epistemic perspectives, they argue, embodies thinking that calls for the opening up of a plurality of epistemologies to enrich and transform human experiences. They locate their preferred episteme in Africa and the Global South, and argue that it is a viable and liberating alternative to (a crisis-ridden) Euro-American epistemology.

H.O. Kaya uses secondary sources and experiences of North-West University (South Africa) and the University of KwaZulu-Natal to interrogate the challenges and prospects of integrating African Indigenous Knowledge Systems (AIKS) into higher education. The article notes that the integration of AIKS into higher education faces challenges such as inadequate AIKS qualified staff, reference material, and limited institutional support among others. In spite of these challenges, Kaya acknowledges emergence of an understanding among different stakeholders of the importance of AIKS for sustainable livelihood and development.

Using multilogical framework and a sample of seventeen custodians of isiZulu culture, Nadaraj Govender, Ronicka Mudaly and Angela James argue that this integration of AIKS into higher education can be and should be facilitated through the participation of the custodians of indigenous knowledges such as *amakhosi* (chiefs), *izangoma* (diviner-spiritualists) and *izinyanga* (diviner-herbalists) among others. The result of this research, a critical appraisal of scientific and spiritual practices among some KwaZulu-Natal communities, poses challenges to academic communities.

Ronicka Mudaly and Raesa Ismail deploy the sociocultural theory of learning and Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development to address these challenges. Using a sample of thirty pre-service science teachers, Mudaly and Ismail interrogate different themes associated with educating culturally sensitive science teachers. These themes include: what to teach, rationale for choosing specific topics to teach, and the conditions that enable culturally inclusive education to be effective.

Five articles in the final category – Indigenous Knowledge Systems (precolonial, colonial and postcolonial) – showcase an enlightening combination of philosophical critique and empirical research. Oritsegbubemi Anthony Oyowe investigates the link between social power and communitarian conception of personhood. Oyowe argues that the search for and the articulation of a distinctive African conception of personhood are motivated by a struggle for power. Given that the communitarian conception of personhood depends on social power, the co-existence of a socially engendered personhood and communitarian egalitarianism is questionable.

Sakiemi Idoniboye-obu and Ayo Whetho point to the ambiguity embedded in the idiom that underlies Ubuntu, which is, 'a person is a person through others'. In every day practice this can be interpreted in at least two ways. The first way is, 'You are because I am', while the second way is 'I am

because you are'. The first interpretation leads to a socially sensitive worldview, while the second interpretation leads to a narrow and ego-centric worldview. The authors argue that the latter interpretation underlies the behavior and practice of the post-colonial political elite.

Utilising the Rwandese tradition of *Umuganda* as a case study, Penine Uwimbabazi and Ralph Lawrence point to the distortion of *Umuganda* by colonial and postcolonial regimes. *Umuganda* is a Rwandese 'traditional practice and cultural value of working together to solve social and economic problems for mutual benefits'. Turned into forced labour under colonialism, and into an exploitative developmental ideology by post-colonial states, *Umuganda* was used as an essentialist ideology that facilitated the 1994 genocide. The post-genocide regime in Rwanda continues to use it as a tool both for nation building and compulsory labour.

Nicola Jacobs, Desireé Manicom and Kevin Durrheim reference post-apartheid South Africa's domestic labour market as a case study to explore the ideological use of a key nodal point of Ubuntu to justify exploitation. Undergirding Ubuntu as an ontology, epistemology and an ethic is relationality. In post-apartheid South Africa, this communal ethos of helping others as helping oneself is used to justify unpaid labour.

Finally, heeding Armah's advice that no society's story begins with trauma, we conclude this issue with Ndubuisi Christian Ani's article. Commencing with a critique of imperial epistemologies, Ani excavates Africa's ways of being and knowing that existed before slavery and colonialism. Ani uses religion and intuitive knowledges as examples of Africa's holistic ways of knowing. This theme of holistic ways of being and knowing reverberates in most of the essays in this issue. Ani suggests that we re-evaluate these ways of being and knowing that were subjugated by slave and colonial modes of production.

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‘In Every Classroom Children Are Dying’: Race, Power and Nervous Conditions in Kopano Matlwa’s *Coconut*

Gugu Hlongwane

Abstract

The article investigates the power of whiteness in South Africa despite the efforts being made in the burgeoning field of whiteness studies to deconstruct whiteness and white privilege. I argue that Kopano Matlwa’s *Coconut* offers a timely investigation of the power of whiteness, even in a South Africa where the black majority now governs. According to Sam Raditlhalo, this is a society of people ‘suffer[ing] from a debilitating sickness of whiteache, in which they do not wish to “pass” for white but to “be white”’. Indeed, Matlwa’s characters are not only culturally lost and painfully ashamed of their blackness, they live in a country where they are seemingly not allowed to be black. As a result of this state of affairs, black children in South Africa die every day in classrooms where their history and their blackness are not validated. Thus when Matlwa forces her characters to undergo a detox of sorts, she urges those lost South Africans to come home to themselves and to their cultures.

While Henry Giroux urges us to ‘move beyond the view of “whiteness” as simply a trope of domination’, Albie Sachs, in his famous discussion article delivered in Lusaka in 1989, declares: ‘Black is beautiful, Brown is beautiful, White is beautiful’. I argue in the article that the overwhelming images of an influential whiteness, both locally and globally, make it difficult for many black folk to see themselves as beautiful. As Jean-Paul Sartre wrote in the preface to Frantz Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth*, ‘[t]he status of “native” is a nervous condition ...’. Matlwa’s characters – who are educated in predominantly white private schools – experience a racialized nervousness similar to that experienced by Tsitsi Dangarembga’s characters in a colonial Rhodesia. In *Nervous Conditions*, Dangarembga’s

character Nyasha suffers a mental and physical breakdown as she lashes out against the white society that confines her. The theories of Sartre and Fanon that relate to the psychic scars of oppression are therefore central to the article. Matlwa's plot unfolds in a supposedly free, post-apartheid society, but her characters are hardly free even as they enjoy a comfortable middle-class lifestyle. The South Africa that Matlwa presents us with is one that is racially divided rather than mixed in the way suggested by Sarah Nuttall in *Entanglement: Literary and Cultural Reflections on Post-Apartheid*. However, I agree with Nuttall that both "whiteness" and "blackness" are 'ideas, lived experiences, and practices in the making. New studies now are needed urgently in order to help us understand the complexity of both and to deconstruct the somewhat ossified versions of each'.

Keywords: Race, South African Literature, Education, Whiteness, Post-apartheid

This article investigates both the power and psychological effects of race in South Africa. I argue here that Kopano Matlwa's *Coconut* offers a timely investigation of the power of whiteness even in a black governed South Africa. In his review of *Coconut* Tlhalo Sam Raditlhalo, borrowing Ngugi waThiong'o's term whiteache (wa Thiong'o 2007: 180), contends that Matlwa's black characters are reflective of a South African society 'suffer[ing] from a debilitating sickness of whiteache, in which they do not wish to "pass for white" but to "be white"' (Raditlhalo 2010: 21). Indeed, Matlwa's characters are not only culturally lost and painfully ashamed of their blackness, they seemingly live in a country where they are not allowed to be black. As a result of this state of affairs, black children in South Africa die every day in classrooms where their history and their blackness are not validated. Thus when Matlwa forces her characters to undergo a detoxification of sorts, she urges those lost South Africans to come home to themselves and to their cultures.

Matlwa's novel is an important investigation of whiteness, what Paul Kivel describes as the 'constantly shifting boundary separating those who are entitled to have certain privileges from those whose exploitation and vulnerability to violence are justified by their not being White' (1995: 17). In

post-apartheid South Africa what is a problem is no longer the violence of apartheid – with its crude institutionalized racism –but the repercussions of apartheid manifested in a nation that is impoverished economically, educationally, spiritually and psychologically. While Henry Giroux calls for a ‘rearticulating of “whiteness” rather than either simply accepting its dominant normative assumptions or rejecting it as a racist form of identity’ (Giroux 1997: 293), Njabulo Ndebele in his interview with Mary West is of the mind that, both locally and globally, the ‘hegemony of whiteness is on a slippery slope’. For Ndebele with ‘the emergence of China and India’ and other ‘middle-level powers’ such as South Africa, Iran and Brazil, ‘[i]t’s no longer open season for colonial whiteness and how it, in the past, shaped the global environment’ (West 2010:118). As much as I agree with Ndebele and with Albie Sachs’ 1989 declaration – a paraphrase from a Mozambican former guerilla and poet – that ‘Black is beautiful, Brown is beautiful, White is beautiful’ (1991: 192), the influence of whiteness in its domineering and therefore ugly form – and not necessarily Englishness as West suggests – cannot be denied, even as Sarah Nuttall rightly says that ‘privilege is something that has to be paid for, and is also something, in its structural white form, which will end’ (Nuttall 2009: 69). The truth is that Frantz Fanon’s influential anti-colonial and anti-racist books, *The Wretched of the Earth* and *Black Skin, White Masks*, remain relevant today. Matlwa’s depressed and suicidal characters evidence the psychological nervousness that Fanon wrote about so long ago. Uncomfortable in their own black skins, they desire the very whiteness that is the cause of their agonizing identity complexes. Clearly, in the so-called ‘new’ South Africa ‘the old rules remain and the old sentiments are unchanged’ (Matlwa 2007: 32). Or as Raditlhalo asserts,

[f]or all the high praise South Africa has garnered in terms of nonracialism as a creed, it is near impossible to think that a declaration of multiculturalism is easy to put in practice, as the text by Matlwa clearly shows (2010:21).

Arguing in a similar vein as Matlwa and Raditlhalo, Michelle Booth observes that ‘[i]n South Africa, given our apartheid past, we are aware of “race” – but we do not share that burden equally’. “Race”, for “whites”, is not a burden in the same way that “blackness” is, mostly because the experience of being “white” is still largely that of privilege’ (2004: 116).

Durrheim *et al.* highlight a well-known issue, namely that South Africa is still a very segregated place, with exclusive and affluent neighbourhoods throughout the country ‘which are not “whites only” but “whites mostly”’ (2011: 52). Richard Ballard (2004), on the other hand, paints a picture of angry and negrophobic white South Africans who have lost their former comfort zones – an anger at the status quo clearly evident in *Coconut*, specifically with regard to the exclusive and predominantly white private schools where the minority black students are treated as aliens.

Like Dangarembga’s *Nervous Conditions* and the sequel *The Book of Not*, Matlwa turns her attention specifically to the race wars that are fought in the turf of racially integrated schools in South Africa rather than in Dangarembga’s colonial Rhodesia. There is no shortage of research conducted on these types of schools, popularly known in South Africa as ‘model C’ schools, which were financially aided by the then apartheid government. While Mark Wilmot and Devika Naidoo (2011) examine the racist and sexist attitudes of some white teachers in ‘model C schools’, Nadine Dolby focuses on race relations between black and white students at Fernwood school, a once all-white school in Durban which now has a black majority. Of course Fernwood is typical of what is happening all across South Africa, a scenario which, according to Dolby, produces resentment from white students and teachers who have had to realise that, at least in some quarters, ‘whiteness is no longer in control in South Africa’ (2001: 9). Dolby observes that for some of the white students at this particular school, ‘Blacks are positioned as morally inferior beings, who are only interested in retaliation and revenge. Yet, not surprisingly, the morals and behaviour of whites under apartheid (or in contemporary South Africa) are not questioned’ (2001: 9). It should be noted that many white students from the semi-private ‘model C’ schools, where in many cases black students outnumber white students, are fleeing to fully private schools – which remain predominantly white institutions with a mostly white teaching staff. It is therefore important that more research be conducted on these oases of privilege which are the specific point of reference in Matlwa’s novel.

Jonathan Jansen, however, argues: ‘For a long time to come, the majority of black learners will receive their formal education within the confines of all-black schools. In some ways, a disproportionate amount of research and political energy has been spent discussing racial integration in a small minority of former white schools’ (2004: 127). While I fully agree with

Jansen, the psychological state of the black students who are educated in these very white spaces of learning are worthy of study. To research private schools, in particular, is to research the children of the black elite who are running the country – youngsters who will themselves grow up to take important positions at the helm of government. Jansen is not against private schools per se, for he admits: ‘When tens of thousands of students in well-resourced private schools do well, this is good for the country, the economy and democracy’ (1995: 85). While the reviews of *Coconut* by Aretha Phiri, Raditlhalo, Jessica Murray and Lynda Spencer do not dwell specifically on the effects of a private school education on black students, the reviews are nonetheless important in foregrounding what Pumla Gqola calls the ‘complex, and sometimes uncomfortable, mental landscapes rather than the spectacular ... contest between dominant and disempowered’ (2009: 62).

Matlwa's plot unfolds in a supposedly free, post-apartheid country, but her characters are hardly free both at school and in the wider society. The South Africa that Matlwa presents us with is one that is racially divided rather than culturally entangled in the way suggested by Nuttall (2009). Richard Dyer, who shares my pessimism about ‘race’, argues:

We are often told that we are living now in a world of multiple identities, of hybridity, of decentredness and fragmentation Yet we have not yet reached a situation in which white people and white cultural agendas are no longer in the ascendant. The media, politics, education are still in the hands of white people, still speak for white claims – and sometimes sincerely aiming – to speak for humanity (1997:3).

Matlwa, then, would probably agree with Dyer and particularly with Mandla Mncwabe who insists that ‘[n]on-segregated schooling [in South Africa] is a preoccupation of a minority; the number of children who will even in a post-apartheid education system ever attend a racially mixed school will be relatively small’ (1993:194) – because these types of schools are largely unaffordable for most black South Africans and also because many whites in South Africa would like to keep the old divisions in place. While Mncwabe suggests that the solution to South Africa's educational inequities lies ‘in the creation of a single ministry’ which will ensure that ‘every child enters school

on an equal footing' (1993: 228), Jansen sounds an even more desperate alarm:

I hate the metaphor, but we are definitely sitting on a time bomb. **I warn all South Africans: there is racial trouble ahead if we do not solve the crisis of having two school systems in a sea of inequality** – a small, elite, well-functioning system for the black and white middle classes, and a massive, dysfunctional, impoverished system for the majority of poor black children (2011: 10-11; e.i.o.).

One of the important points of *Coconut* is that the private school system Matlwa describes in her novel is not necessarily 'well-functioning' in the sense that her characters are spiritually dysfunctional and impoverished even as they learn in the lap of luxury. Because these characters are not taught a positive African history, they die in white environments where they are of the right class but the 'wrong' skin colour. Matlwa's black characters – both young and old – are dazzled by perceptions of a radiant whiteness. To read the tension-filled relationship between Matlwa's main characters – Ofilwe and her alter-ego Fikile who each narrate the two parts of the novel – is to understand quite thoroughly the psychic scars of oppression. The level of hatred that both young women demonstrate towards each other is very disturbing. Ironically Fikile comes from the other side of the class divide and works at the Silver Spoon Coffee Shop where she has to serve Ofilwe, a symbol of the black elite *par excellence*. Although they come from opposite sides of the economic fence, they have much in common in that they both hate themselves. While Ofilwe's blackness makes her suicidal, Fikile – who considers herself brown rather than black – wants to be white when she grows up. Not only do these young women struggle to establish their identities in their respective white environments, they both have negative experiences at school and at home. While Fikile drops out of her black township school, Ofilwe can barely tolerate her so-called privileged private school education. With regard to their domestic relationships Ofilwe has an unhealthy relationship with her unattentive mother, while Fikile – who witnesses the gruesome suicide of her abusive mother – suffers repeated sexual molestation at the hands of her uncle who raises her in his one-room shack. Ultimately both women realize that their souls are damaged and that they need help. Jansen is right, then, when he maintains that '*we may be more*

traumatized than we think. Because of the longevity and intensity of apartheid brutality, we did not recover' (2011: 5, e.i.o.). Ofilwe and Fikile grow up in a post-apartheid South Africa and yet they still show signs of trauma induced by this very environment.

Coconut effectively highlights the scars of colonialism and apartheid. This type of 'everyday ... distress' may not 'produce dead bodies or even, necessarily, damaged ones' (Cvetkovich 2003: 3), but the damage is nonetheless there in the mental and emotional spheres of the traumatized. Judith Butler's argument about the internal sources of oppression is relevant to the characters in Matlwa's text who turn on themselves:

We are used to thinking of power as what presses on the subject from the outside, as what subordinates, sets underneath, and relegates to a lower order. This is surely a fair description of part of what power does. But if, following Foucault, we understand power as *forming* the subject as well, as providing the very condition of its existence and the trajectory of its desire, then power is not simply what we oppose but also, in a strong sense, what we depend on for our existence and what we harbour and preserve in the beings that we are (Butler 1997:2).

To avoid this hazardous pressure the oppressed, according to Butler, must 'account for ... [their] own becoming. That "becoming" is no simple and continuous affair, but an uneasy practice of repetition and its risks, compelled yet incomplete, wavering on the horizon of social being' (1997: 30). In the postapartheid context the act of assuming agency and 'becoming' a new person rather than the confined object of apartheid is complicated by the paucity of signs that point to that freedom. The fact is that the majority of South African blacks live in grinding poverty while the minority upper-class blacks suffer an inferiority complex that leads to a turning away from their black selves. I would argue that there is, for black South Africans in particular, a tortured identity that may need to be recognized as such so that it can be mourned and recovered in different ways. Butler puts it this way in the forward to *Loss: The Politics of Mourning*:

... the loss of loss itself: somewhere, sometime, something was lost, but no story can be told about it; no memory can retrieve it; a fractured horizon looms in which to make one's way as a spectral

agency, one for whom a full ‘recovery’ is impossible, one for whom the irrevocable becomes, paradoxically, the condition of a new political agency (2003: 467).

Matlwa is part of a long tradition of writers, both past and present, who tell the story for the sake of this ‘new political agency’.

In the novel’s opening page Ofilwe, whose agency is severely compromised, lusts over the hair of a white classmate named Kate Jones. The realization that Kate may in fact be desiring her African hair surprises her. But the ‘compliment’ is actually a joke because Kate has no intentions of being turned native even as she asks Ofilwe to braid her hair in African style. Ofilwe’s Africanness is a joke and both white student and white teacher who chastise Ofilwe for interfering with Kate’s lovely burnt amber locks of hair, are in on the joke. The loud and clear message of *Coconut*, then, is that black people can seemingly never measure up to their white counterparts. Raditlhali puts it sardonically in his review of *Coconut*, ‘To “act black” [or to practice aspects of your culture] in contemporary South Africa is a great mistake; it is to make nonsense of the mirage underscoring the national motto, *unity in diversity*’ (2010: 36). Ofilwe cannot even feel comfortable in church where she is overwhelmed by the white images of beauty that surround her (Matlwa 2007: 1).

For some members of white society and even for black people who have bought into notions of racial differences, ‘acting black’ means using fingers instead of utensils and slaughtering livestock in the suburbs, for example. In her frustration Ofilwe asks her heavenly Father what it means to ‘act black’ given that she is black (Matlwa 2007: 31). She balks at the fact that ‘[w]e may not be black in restaurants, in suburbs and in schools. Oh, how it nauseates them if we even fantasise about being black, truly black’ (Matlwa 2007: 31-32). While I agree with Ndebele’s notion of multiple blacknesses which problematize Matlwa’s notion of a ‘truly black’ self, I disagree with Phiri who implies that Raditlhali’s reading of *Coconut* is essentialist. Phiri argues that ‘*Coconut*’s use of humour and satire, its ambivalent posture, consistently undermines racial absolutism and authority’ (7 n.d.). When Raditlhali and indeed Matlwa do not qualify blackness, they use the kind of strategic essentialism described by Helene Strauss: ‘In the context of “racial” and cultural overdetermination, where a subject’s location on axes of privilege limits his or her choices, essentialist claims to identity are made for

various reasons, ranging from the strategic to the reactionary' (Strauss 2004:35). The argument can be rightly made that South Africans now have choices in the new dispensation and that this type of essentialism has had its day. But in South Africa where the economic status quo remains more or less the same as before – with continuing acts of racism throughout the country, even in hallowed places of learning – such essentialism is necessary. While the novel implicates those black characters who have lost touch with their blackness, it also points an accusing finger at those white characters – both students and teachers alike – who see themselves as superior to black people. Matlwa's address of white South Africans, although salient, is not as direct as Antjie Krog's, who pleads: 'I need all whites, all of us so obviously unbent between country and chasm. If we don't repair, we will be forced to live with the mashed-in distortions and wrath of an uprooted, wounded and devastated community' (2009: 264-265). While both Ofilwe and Fikile direct their anger at a God who has created an unequal society, there is never really a direct confrontation of white society in the novel. The only character who comes close to this is Fikile's co-worker at Silver Spoons Café, Ayanda, who tells a racist white customer, 'Fuck you, Ma'am! Fuck you!' (2007: 151). The bigoted lady, however, does not hear the rest of his important rant, which occurs in the kitchen, about the continuing economic injustices of the 'rainbow nation'.

Ofilwe's parents – who do not question their own privileging of whiteness – are useless guides because they themselves need direction in how to discard an apartheid mentality; but unlike her parents Ofilwe at least begins to question the status quo. For instance she is very interested in African belief systems before the arrival of missionaries. Although her mother dismisses her important nagging questions, Ofilwe remains curious about notions of a supposedly insignificant African past (2007: 9). As she watches her paternal grandmother mourn the death of Princess Diana more thoroughly than the death of her own husband, she ponders: 'who is my own Princess Di? Does my royal family still exist, some place out there in a barren, rural South Africa' (2007: 18). Ofilwe has no answers to these questions as her knowledge of this particular history goes only as far back as 'the Dutch East India Company in grade two' (2007: 18). She wonders if there's any truth to the rumours that these African royals 'sit with swollen bellies and emaciated limbs under a merciless sun, waiting for government grants' (2007: 18). Sadly she also questions what it means that when she

imagines her future children, they ‘are painted in shades of pink’ (2007:19). It is interesting, however, that while she is attracted to a street vendor with jet-black skin, she despises her own mother who has a similar complexion. Jessica Murray, who focuses on the gender aspects of *Coconut*, specifically black women’s subscription to Eurocentric standards of beauty, argues that ‘Ofilwe gains some acceptance and access to the popular social circles at school. However, this is explicitly linked to the fact that she is regarded as less black because of her ability to mute her ethnicity in service of the Eurocentric ideal’ (2012: 98). Yet Ofilwe realizes when she plays the kissing game spin-the-bottle, with her white friends, that she will always be considered ‘too black’ by her white school-mates. Her white ‘friend’ refuses to kiss her as required by the game, which means that no matter how much she may perfect her English accent, she will always suffer her peers’ negrophobia. As Spencer asserts, ‘it is not only language but also accent (the way in which one pronounces words) that is used as a mechanism of exclusion and inclusion’ (2009: 70).

Ofilwe clearly vacillates between questioning and accepting the status quo. When she thinks critically about her so-called privileged education, she sees herself as a traitor, a sell-out, a coconut who is sleeping with the enemy. At bottom, she knows that she is not being true to herself, especially in those instances where she plays the part that her white friends expect her to play. While I agree with Phiri’s assertion that ‘it is precisely the point of *Coconut* that Ofilwe does not know who she is’ (7 n.d.), she yearns for a more coherent rather than fixed sense of identity. The term coconut – that rather scathing euphemism for ‘blacks’ who act ‘white’ – is pervasive in South Africa. Nuttall explains that,

the idea of the coconut represents a first wave in the negotiation of inter- and cross-cultural social life, more specifically the cross currents, and increasingly splits and contradictions, within ‘blackness’ as it has been lived and interpreted so far’ (2009: 101).

It seems that the term ‘coconut’ – or Auntie Jemima, the term that Ofilwe’s brother Tshepo (2007: 60) uses to describe her – is applied too hurriedly, especially in Ofilwe’s case, because she earnestly embarks on a search for a healthier identity. I would disagree with definitions of coconut that are

applied to westernized black South Africans, for example – or even black South Africans who speak more English than their native tongue. That should not necessarily make one a coconut because one can be a conscious and proud African regardless of the language one speaks, even as we remain cognizant of language as an important carrier of culture. Ndebele I think alludes to this when he argues that the,

usual reading of the 'coconut' image, both in the novel and in South African life, revolves around the old polarising theme of 'civilized' black people versus 'savage' black people, or those who went to school and were educated, as opposed to the uneducated ones. From this perspective, 'coconuts' are those from black communities who have betrayed their roots by becoming 'white', through attending model C schools, and who perhaps may now even be living in neighbourhoods where such schools are located. They are perceived to have lost their black identity. But in *Coconut*, the old theme has taken on a new dimension, the 'coconut' does not apologise for that condition. I like that. In not apologising, the 'coconut' asserts the notion that there are not only multiple 'whitenesses', but also multiple 'blacknesses' (West 2010: 119).

I believe that Ofilwe, however, is apologetic about some of her unfortunate attempts to escape her blackness. But it is her consciousness of herself as a young black woman that makes the label of coconut an awkward fit. Ofilwe is smart enough to know when she is pandering to white people especially because she feels the pain of assimilation.

Corrine Meier argues that schools such as the one Ofilwe attended 'adopt an assimilationist approach. Learners who are exposed to this approach are expected to adapt to the existing ethos of the school and to curricula that have been developed for a different learner population' (2005: 171). Ofilwe adapts because she doesn't want to die. Her self-doubt is so deep that she wonders, as she goes through security sensors at a store, if she might 'have an innate proclivity for theft' (2007: 44). Unlike Fikile who is forced by poverty to steal from a store a pair of jeans required for her waitressing job, Ofilwe is no thug but a victim of a global white society which criminalizes blackness. Yet at her school a white student named Stuart Simons accuses Ofilwe of having a thief for a father. Stuart is certain that her

father hijacked the luxury car he drives. What is even more painful about *Coconut* is that the few black students who are at Ofilwe's school despise each other to the extent that they cannot even form an alternative community (2007: 49).

Ofilwe finds it difficult to make herself whole because of all the negative stereotypes of blackness that she has to contend with on a daily basis. The stereotype of the dumb black person has a long, global history. But Ofilwe is an intelligent scholar, just like her brother. But white society often refuses to accept this kind of black person. Tshepo, for example, has to repeat grade one (2007: 6) 'because he did not speak English as well as his new, elite, all-boys' school would have liked' (2007: 6). Ofilwe internalizes this racism when she calls her own mother dumb – a dynamic that also plays out in Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*. But Matlwa's novel is set in a supposedly free, postcolonial society and yet Matlwa's characters seem to be shackled in many ways. If Ofilwe was a free person, she would come to the defense of her household helper, Old Virginia, when she is constantly called dumb by Ofilwe's white friends. Yet Old Virginia is probably the smartest character in the novel – a compelling storyteller who plays a crucial role in giving Tshepo an identity anchored in the rich oral traditions of his culture. But as much as Tshepo tries to bring his sister home, as it were, she remains a severely fragmented person who hates her various body parts: her African nose; her ears which fill up with toxic messages of her supposed inferiority; and her toes which she would like to cut because, as she rationalizes, 'I do not know where I am going anyway' (2007: 62). As I have indicated already, the black parents in the novel are largely absent parents and the teachers are also problematic. The only black teacher mentioned in the novel, who stereotypically teaches physical education, is unsupportive of black students like Ofilwe.

It is fitting that the novel ends with the actual physical journey to enlightenment of Fikile, who is not as close to finding herself as Ofilwe is. At the end of the novel Fikile meets a black man, a stranger on the train, whose reflection on race can potentially put her on a healthier track. But I'm not sure if I agree with Murray's reading of Fikile as an empowered woman who 'works within overwhelmingly powerful structures to access at least some power' (2012: 102), and that a 'more nuanced reading of their experiences [Fikile's and Ofilwe's] also reveals agency and resilience that elevate them beyond the status of mere victims of racist and patriarchal power structures'

(2012: 101). While Ofilwe reflects importantly on her so-called 'coconut' status, Fikile is still at war with herself – and far from the empowered character mentioned above. But at least she has an opportunity, whether she takes it or not, to spring-clean the mess in her head. As she puts it, '*I am fearful of the cluttered floor, the dusty shelves, the locked cases, the stuffed drawers, the broken bulbs and the cracked windows*' (2007: 177). Her fear is an indicator that she is at least still alive and may be open to a more constructive and stimulating education. On this route, she may be spared the fate that Jansen argues awaits high school drop-outs: 'As I have regularly argued, young people do not just drop out, they drop into lives of desperation, poverty, anger, hatred, crime and violence. Those layers of angry youth have been piling up steadily before and since 1994' (2011: 10).

But the unnamed character at the end of *Coconut*, who is educated and gainfully employed, complicates education in the 'new' South Africa. He is so disgruntled about an education system that seemingly teaches young black kids to hate themselves – and alienates them from their African cultures – that he contemplates home-schooling his little girl who refuses to speak isiXhosa. Students are dying in classrooms because they lack useful guides like this responsible black father. They are also dying because of teachers who fail to nurture the minds and hearts of these students. But it is important to say here that Matlwa is a perceptive writer who refuses a surface understanding of things. For her, as is the case with her characters, there is no easy solution to South Africa's education system. An education in a predominantly white private school is seemingly just as problematic as an education in the afro-centric, all-black school she creates in her second novel, *Spilt Milk* (2010). The students at the latter school, who are the sons and daughters of the black elite, feel abandoned by their superficial parents who care more for their material wealth and overseas travels. These students are just as depressed and suicidal as the students in *Coconut*. In *Spilt Milk*, the teachers are all black except one white visiting and fallen white priest who ends up having the most meaningful relationship with the black students he supervises in detention. It seems that the black teachers here fail to give their students a healthy education on race because some of the students are presented as racists. The teachers are also clueless about how to provide an effective education on sexuality. The point that Matlwa seems to be making in both these novels is that all teachers – and indeed parents – should be investigated if there is suspicion of poor guidance. In the case of *Coconut*, the

culprits are both the black parents and white teachers who neglect the pressing needs of their black students.

In Ian Marshall's and Wendy Ryden's important conversation about racism within academic institutions, they write about the construction of whiteness as a silent but potent epistemology in the West. Their discussion is applicable to the South Africa situation. Marshall argues that while white teachers attempt to make,

their own whiteness invisible, but not inconsequential, [they in fact] reproduce the values, culture, and language of the elite. This occurs most obviously when a non-white student brings up issues of racism in the classroom and is often met with silence or avoidance from the [white] teacher and others'.

According to Marshall,

[t]his pedagogical strategy, although it may be unintentional, does two things: first, it suppresses an interrogation of the teacher who often has power and authority invested in their whiteness, and second, it shuts down dialogue, thereby affirming racism as good (2000: 241).

Clearly, as suggested by Mokubung Nkomo and Nadine Dolby, 'the desire to "escape" race – to somehow transcend or mute its power in a search for a common national identity' (2004: 5), is problematic. In *Coconut* there is this shutting down of dialogue and characters like Ofilwe and Fikile can only suffer in silence. But by penning her novel, which is dedicated to the child of her country, Matlwa insists that educators in South Africa conduct frequent conversations on race in their schools and classrooms. This dialogue is crucial because ultimately we should all desire the type of world envisioned by Paul Gilroy (2000), where the dubious nineteenth-century scientific notions of racial typology will be irrelevant. Right now the patterns of racial thinking are still very much with us.

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Township Textualities

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Abstract

The article is part literature review and part critique. It begins with an analysis of recent theorizations emerging in local and international urban studies before moving to a consideration of the ways in which the township has been historically engaged across literature and criticism. Noting the absence of substantial work on the township in post-apartheid literary criticism, it seeks to address both the reasons for this aporia and to map the themes and socialities that surface in contemporary township representation.

Keywords: township, cultural production, representation, intimacy, unpredictability

Township Textualities

An online search of the word ‘township’ yields the following in the *Oxford English Dictionary*:

Noun

1 (in South Africa) a suburb or city of predominantly black occupation, formerly officially designated for black occupation by apartheid legislation:

a Johannesburg township

[as modifier]:

township theatre

2 *South African* a new area being developed for residential or industrial use by speculators.

I begin with this rather dry definition because it offers layers of utility and meaning I wish to work through in my article. The dictionary starts where we expect, in the material and racial ecologies of apartheid South Africa.

Although black South Africans had been marginalized throughout the colonial period, under apartheid segregation was systematized and formalized. In accordance with the Group Areas Act of 1950 black, coloured and Indian South Africans were forcibly removed from central metropolitan areas to the outskirts of towns and cities where they were housed in government run locations or ‘townships’; satellite settlements providing cheap labour for the cities. Such are the historical conditions to which the first bulletin refers. But this temporal delineation is not uncomplicated. The following point extends the application of ‘township’ into the on-going construction of residential and industrial sites ‘by speculators’. This is private development and suggests the gated complexes that are a feature of the South African cityscape. While I am not arguing for a reading that conflates private property with the specific histories of the township, the referential overlap encourages us to reconsider figurations of township space and how they speak to the present. Do the social and geographical lexicons of the past retain their relevance today? How do contemporary claims to the township intersect with genealogies of displacement and struggle? What arrangements of commonality, difference and mobility are generated once we recognize the confluence of seemingly discrete spaces?

A study written by Ivor Chipkin of the Public Affairs Research Institute (PARI), considers the ways in which the social relations of the township manifest in the experiences of the black middle class (2012). The report deliberates on the clusters of townhouse developments spread across Johannesburg’s West Rand. Historically white and Afrikaans, the area is now racially mixed (Chipkin 2012: 31-41). The development, named ‘The Milky Way’, indexes the complex manner in which the social landscape of South Africa is both altered and unchanged. For many of its black inhabitants, living in the townhouse cluster represents the consolidation of, or entry into modes of middle class accumulation (Chipkin 2012: 46). However, Chipkin argues that class aspirations do not erase race identification (Chipkin 2012: 66). Black residents continue to situate their sense of blackness vis-à-vis the township. For some this means the freedom to fashion oneself by leaving and disavowal, but for the majority it remains a site of deep nostalgia, family and belonging (Chipkin 2012: 66-67).

My concern is to engage these significations of the township and to sift through the meanings allotted to its spaces by tracing textual histories. Accordingly, I will review some of the critical literature and attempt to think

with and beyond it. Grappling with the questions outlined above, I broadly sketch the themes emerging in contemporary cultural production laying claim to township lifeworlds. Before turning to the creative strategies of text, I want to linger on the frictions, possibilities and ideas that have shaped this study.

Architectures of Intimacy

Articulations of reminiscence are reflected in Nsizwa Dlamini and Grace Khunou's conversation with Achille Mbembe (2008: 239-247) in the essay 'Soweto Now'. Here, the women discuss the phenomenon of 'weekending' in the township subsequent to a move to the formerly white suburbs (Mbembe 2008: 246). In suburbia one escapes surveillance by one's neighbours and the financial expectations of extended family. Yet it is the township that provides encounters of companionship and affect so important to everyday life. Hence spending one's weekends with family and friends in Soweto. The interpolation of the material by the personal reveals contours of conflict and commonality in which townships are not and never have been places of homogenous experience. While, as numerous accounts of the apartheid township attest, conditions were overcrowded, impoverished and oppressive (see for example Mphahlele 1959; and Kuzwayo 1985) the 'structure of feeling' that Raymond Williams (1983: 19-21) allies with a communal sense of place was forged against apartheid's impositions. Confines of space meant greater intimacy with neighbours, interdependence, shared playtime in the streets – forms of sociality fondly recalled by Chipkin's (2012) interviewees.

In his quasi-autobiographical *Native Nostalgia* (2009), Jacob Dlamini explores the implications of remembering life in the apartheid township with affection. To do so, he argues, is to contest the reification of the township as a site of suffering and to acknowledge the knotty continuities between the past and the present (Dlamini 2009: 12). It is to recognize that all communities, regardless of location, are composed of lines of alliance and fracture exceeding their particular topographies. The township is wound up in the imaginative and physical terrain of South Africa in ways complicating its designation as a periphery. This is perhaps clearer in the present, as the dismantling of racial segregation has engendered more flexible trajectories between the formerly 'white' city and 'black' location. Yet the boundaries between the two were never entirely stable. In their book on Johannesburg, Sarah Nuttall and Achille Mbembe (2008: 13) argue that the township should

be read as traversing the city across nodes of mobility and hybridity. The bifurcation of urban spaces into ‘centre’ city and ‘marginal’ township belies the shifts in the latter’s spaces, some of which have come to replicate the kinds of consumption traditionally associated with suburbia (Nuttall & Mbembe 2008:13).

Expanding upon ideas of intersection, Nuttall’s book *Entanglement*, deploys a conception of enmeshment to think through the dialogical formation of the South African social:

Entanglement ... is a means by which we draw into our analyses those sites once thought of as separate – identities, spaces, histories – come together or find points of intersection in unexpected ways (Nuttall 2009: 11).

Nuttall admits the troubled and often conflictual conditions of the South African cityscape but her primary focus resides in the poetics of mutuality as they emerge in cultural production (Nuttall 2009:11). Here, her work enters into conversation with Paul Gilroy’s notion of conviviality. In *Postcolonial Melancholia*, he describes this as radically open ‘processes of cohabitation and interaction’ (Gilroy 2005:xv) against rigid declamations of identity politics. Gilroy is writing about the perceived failure of multiculturalism in contemporary Britain, but his theorization has value in the South African context. It reminds us that while the conditions of the township are exceptional, they speak to formations of place and belonging elsewhere in the world. Conviviality enables modes of engagement that start from a position of what is shared rather than what is excluded; it prompts us to think through how the affective shapes space as much as the ideological or economic (see Lefebvre 1992).

Indeed, architectures of intimacy ask us to consider alternate economies of relation. In his work on Sundumbili township in Northern KwaZulu-Natal, Mark Hunter (2010) limns the conjunction of money, sex and love to argue for modes of personal connection permeating the circulation of power and gender in the township. Hunter’s study reflects upon the diversification of township space; the inhabitants of expanding informal housing on the township’s edges do not experience Sundimbili in the same way as those occupying houses constructed under apartheid. Lindsay Bremner (2010:271), in an essay on ‘insurgent urbanisms’, writes of

Kliptown, Soweto as a thickly textured ‘tapestry’ of association and invention that punctures its perception as ‘lacking or underdeveloped’. To read the urban thusly is to affirm its constitution through everyday encounters and improvisations that spill over the official organization of space. As Abdoumalig Simone (2009:3,9) maintains, urban spaces are ‘in the making’ and as such are inflected by memories, desires and forms of resilience which resist regulation.

Tenses and Tension

Alongside articulations of syncreticism and density, the township remains a space to which particular designations accrue. Let us return to the first definition offered by the *OED* and its confirmation in bureaucratic discourse. As of October 2012, the 2011 South African census has yet to be published. If we peruse the classifications of 2001 census however, we read the following under the *township*:

Historically, ‘township’ in South Africa referred to an urban residential area created for black migrant labour, usually beyond the town or city limits. Reference is sometimes made to ‘black township’, ‘coloured township’ and ‘Indian township’, meaning that these settlements were created for these population groups. By contrast, the white population resided in suburbs’ (*Census 2001: Concepts and Definitions, Statistics South Africa* 2004:15).

An intriguing friction inheres in uses of tense; the township is defined as a racially specific historical formation, an artefact of the past. But the past is not yet past. Suburbia may no longer be the domain of whiteness but townships remain, as Chipkin’s (2012) interviews suggest, the domain of blackness.

What the census points to are structures of spatial racialization imbedded in the history of colonialism and apartheid and persisting under current economic disparity. It is worth bearing in mind that poor white communities have also taken up residence in townships. But such examples are rare and, as disputes over the allocation of Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) houses in Kagiso, Gauteng illustrate, widely contested (*The Sowetan* 2010). And so while the township is valorised and

mobilised as a place of identity production, it remains deeply marked by race and a lack of resources. Sites of aspirational consumption such as Maponya Mall in Pimville, Soweto, sit uneasily alongside shacks of corrugated iron. The entrenchment of poverty, violence and poor service delivery has been documented in recent studies by historians Philip Bonner and Noor Nieftagodien (2008) and the journalist Anton Harber (2011). The logic of racial capitalism reduced black South Africans to what Achille Mbembe has described as superfluous people. That is, the production of wealth was contingent upon rendering poor black labour disposable (Mbembe 2011:11, 7-8). The production of the poor as waste continues in post-apartheid, as unemployment and struggles for basic survival are masked by spectacular consumption and discourses of neo-liberalism (Mbembe 2011. See also Mbembe 2008: 38-67). Notwithstanding the rise of a substantial black middle-class, the majority of black South Africans remain trapped in ill-equipped rural or urban locales.

The overlap between the rural and the urban has been comprehensively traced by South African scholars. Under apartheid, the migrant labour system compelled black men into urban areas while denying them citizenship (Bonner 1995). Until the influx of women into the cities in the 1940s and 50s they and their children often remained behind, resulting in fractured families. However, as Belinda Bozzoli examined in her study of female migrancy, there were reasons for moving to the city anchored in pursuit of independence and status which pressurized conceptions of the urban as a 'white' (1991). The perception of cities as dreamscapes of possibility is as old as cities themselves. As in the past, the rural exists in the contemporary urban palimpsest as home, obligation and identification. Thus Simone writes of the ways in which urban spaces are crisscrossed by multiple 'elsewheres' of origin and aspiration that may be real or imagined (2001: 25). To speak of Umlazi or Langa or KwaThema is to speak of sites beyond and within the city, local and global, which animate the efforts and hopes of their inhabitants.

The continuing delineation of townships as racialised has had other implications for this project. My concern is to think through modes of representation across South Africa's three major conurbations: Johannesburg, Cape Town and Durban. This entails an affirmation of the symbolic energies of urban life and possibilities of mutuality while recognising persisting structures of difference. Mediations of townships are inclined to fix on

Soweto as an archetype. Given its proximity to Johannesburg and central role in the struggle, this is not surprising. With a population of more than a million people, Soweto is South Africa's largest township – so large it straddles the demarcation of township and city (Roberts 2004: 1-21). The trends and socialites surfacing in Soweto filter down to the rest of the country. Yet Soweto's hegemony in national and international imaginaries has a flattening effect. Historically black townships retain far more public purchase than, for example, the Indian locations of Lenasia in Johannesburg or Chatsworth in Durban, an unevenness which my project has been unable to avoid. Partly this is a question of numbers, but one must remain cognizant that 'township' is a variegated and capacious term. Although townships share defining features, they are neither equivalent nor homogenous. The social relations prevalent in the Cape Flats are not identical to those in Soweto (see Jensen 2008).

Media representations seeking to invoke a sentimental South African nationalism tend to appropriate black townships in particular as sites of authenticity. Discussing the commodification of ethnicity, Jean and John Comaroff have demonstrated that it is, 'increasingly claimed as property by its living heirs, who proceed to manage it by palpably corporate means: to brand it and to sell it ... in self-consciously consumable forms' (2009: 29). Marketing ethnicity bleeds into the ways in which identity politics are staged and consumed. It is now possible to take tours of Soweto or Gugulethu and thus to purchase an experience of the 'real' and legitimate South Africa. The staging of authenticity renders the communities inhabiting these spaces objects of interest and smothers their particularity. On the other, these communities may well depend on tourism to sustain themselves. This double bind discloses the fraught relationship with the real as it pervades mediations of township forms and selves, a feature I consider in more detail below.

Race definitions permeate the exercise of critique in ways which should be acknowledged here. Andile Mngxitama's review of Harber's book *Diepsloot* for the *Mail and Guardian* is worth introducing as an interrogation of the politics of positionality and voice. Mngxitama eschews analytical subtlety for polemics but he does make a useful challenge: Why does critical scholarship on black experience continue to be dominated by white people? (2011). Certainly his question is resonant for a study on township identities written by a white woman of British ancestry who has never lived in one. My response draws on Ania Loomba's illuminative discussion of histories from

below. In a dissection of Gaytri's Spivak's well-known 1988 essay 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', Loomba warns of the risks of ventriloquising the subjects of representation (2002:243). Concomitantly she suggests that narrative is composed of multiple perspectives; that categories of identification 'are not unitary categories' (2002:239). Following Loomba, this article makes no claim to totality in its analysis of township forms; its aim is to engender diverse vocabularies about how the township might be theorized and its mapping onto narratives of reciprocity and division in contemporary South Africa.

Histories

The textual forms of the township present are conversant with those of the past and I turn now to a brief genealogy of black urban writing in order to trace its continuities and disjunctures. The growth of black communities in South Africa's cities attended the surge of the industrialization in the first half of the 20th century. In Johannesburg particularly, the discovery of gold in the 1880s witnessed its rapid expansion from small prospect town to frenetic metropolis (Mabin 2007: 33-63). Declared a city in 1928, Johannesburg has dominated the economic and social landscape of Southern Africa ever since and this reflects in depictions of black urbanism. The text widely accredited with first affirming the presence of Africans in the city is Peter Abrahams's *Mine Boy*, published in 1946. The novel tracks the coming into class consciousness of rural migrant Xuma in Johannesburg's mines and the inner city ghetto of Fordsburg.

Abrahams would serialise his subsequent novel *Paths of Thunder* (1948) in *Drum* magazine. Famously and throughout the 1950s, *Drum* captured on page the dynamism of Johannesburg's freehold suburb, Sophiatown. Unlike the government run locations, in freehold areas such as Sophiatown or Cape Town's District Six, individual property owners held title deeds to land regardless of their race. Consequently these were creolised spaces which, though marked by poverty and often violence, lent themselves to a vividly articulated modernity which remains iconographic (Nixon 1994). Beginning in the 1950s and continuing into the 70s, sites such as Sophiatown were systematically destroyed, their inhabitants relocated and their land designated 'whites only'. The richly textured worlds of *Drum* collapsed.

In the wake of forced removals a marked juxtaposition emerges –

that of the vibrant, heterogeneous freehold areas against the wasteland of government controlled locations. In their spatiality too, these sites intimated entanglement or atomization. The literatures produced from Sophiatown convey its layered, tightly woven streets and diverse traditions (Chapman 2001). In contradistinction, the rows of match box houses that defined the township were designed to be readily accessible to the panopticon of the white state. Keith Beavon describes Soweto as, '[L]ittle more than a bleak residential outpost on the veld' (2004: 121). Soweto became the focus of opposition to apartheid during the 1970s and 1980s, mirrored by a poetic turn which drew on the ideas espoused by Biko's Black Consciousness movement. The influence of new forms of political expression on black literature was substantial; as blackness became political, so too did black cultural production. Literature was a tool in the processes of conscientisation and an enabling enunciation of black experience (Attwell 2005).

As I have argued above, perceptions of the apartheid township as a site only of immiseration are under pressure. Dlamini's feeling for the possibilities of everyday encounter in *Native Nostalgia*, repeats Njabulo Ndebele's influential call in 1984 for a return to the ordinary in representations of blackness. As a means of interrogating the spectacular oppressions of the state, black writers deployed a documentary style realism, condemning the fiction of *Drum* predecessors as escapist or apolitical (Chapman 2007). Stylistically, their writing was vulnerable to critique. The contemporary review of poet Lionel Abrahams acknowledges the difficult conditions facing black writers but nonetheless describes their work as 'by and large aesthetically underdeveloped' (Chapman 2007:142).

For many engaged in black cultural production at the time, this application of Eurocentric literary aesthetics was simply irrelevant when compared to the exigencies of community politics and 'going to the people'. Hence Mothobi Mutlaotse was able to write the now infamous, '[W]e will have to 'donder' conventional literature: old-fashioned critic and reader alike. We are going to pee, spit and shit on literary criticism before we are through: we are going to kick and pull and drag literature into the form we prefer' (Mutlaotse 1980:5). However, criticisms of protest literature's instrumentalism were not confined to white scholars. Contending that the 'history of black South African literature has largely been the history of the representation of spectacle', Ndebele (1991: 31) called for a move away from the genre's reliance on exteriority towards the interiorities of the everyday,

‘Rediscovering the ordinary ... remind(s) us necessarily that the problems of the South African social formation are complex and all-embracing; that they cannot be reduced to a simple, single formulation’ (Ndebele 1991:51). Dlamini’s recent appeal to the ordinary suggests that the parameters of the township remain conceptually suspended in the weave of the everyday and the excessive.

The end of racial apartheid –economic apartheid endures – and the election to power of the African National Congress in 1994 engendered something of a crisis in the modalities and agendas of South African cultural production on the left. No longer was culture a weapon in the struggle, but writers and artists were exhorted to explore those themes they had ostensibly abandoned as politically irrelevant (Sachs 1989). What have the consequences of this move been for literature and literary criticism? In the literature, a complication of the categories of the past, a more oblique take on the processes of self-construction, wariness about summoning truths and a focus on transnational exchange. Simultaneously, vectors of class, race and gender and negotiations of space and belonging continue to have valency (Frenkel & MacKenzie 2010). The tension between deconstructive practice and identity politics mirrors in the scholarship. If, under apartheid, this was dominated by a commitment to materialism and suspicion of post-structuralism, then there has been a turn towards textual hermeneutics expressed through histories of convergence rather than segregation. Witness for example, Nuttall’s theory of entanglement or Leon de Kock’s evocation of ‘the seam’. Yet other scholars insist upon historicity against the perceived vagaries of discursivity (see Parry 2004; Lazarus 2011). Congruent with the position outlined in the preceding pages, my research locates itself in the join between reading for textual elasticity and a mindfulness of evermore pronounced inequity.

Naturally, the robustness of criticism is enabled and sustained by an expanding market – more books by South African writers are published locally than ever before. Drawing on Isabel Hofmeyr’s study of the transnational circulation of the book (2003), Andrew van der Vlies has written about how textual production and reception constructed the field of ‘South African literature’ (2008). Van der Vlies’s timely intervention reminds us texts themselves have material histories in ways consonant for this article. My contention is that while post-apartheid literatures may generate new vocabularies of the self, race continues to inflect decisions of publication and

circulation. Books by young black writers especially are marketed in quite knowing ways that fetishise their capacity to stand in for ‘the real’. And yet the upsurge of recent narratives on township life is not matched in the critical literature. Against the substantial body of work produced on township forms the 1970s and 1980s, there has been what might be described as a withering away of interest. While the township remains the subject of sociological work, investigations in the humanities are relatively scarce (Mbembe 2008). Included in the scope of my project is an interrogation of this aporia. Why does the township register dimly on the radar of South African literary studies?

Michael Titlestad (2012: 676-694) illustrates that part of the answer resides in the deregulation of cities and emergence of more fluid habitations and imaginaries of urban space. It may also be that, as Sam Raditlhlahlo objects in a review of Kgebetli Moele’s 2006 novel *Room 207*, ‘critics still discount black writers at the level of ‘technique’, and thus continually read new writing with a deeply ingrained pre-judgmental attitude’ (Moele 2006: 93). Black writers are under-theorised when compared to their white colleagues, although David Attwell’s reading of South African postcoloniality through black modernities (*Re-writing modernity* 2005) and Duncan Brown’s often poetic navigation of identity *To Speak of this Land* (2006) are sustained and significant examples of complex theoretical work. My sense is the confines of the literary insufficiently engage broad practices of representation proliferating from and about the township. As Nuttall has shown, these often dwell outside conventional textual analyses (2009). Township residents deploy multiple registers of expression, some of which are more suited to capturing immediacies of experience than others.

Lastly, an intriguing and provocative supposition for the dearth of recent literary criticism on the township can be extrapolated from the intersection of the academy with other publics. In his book *Complicities*, Mark Sanders maintains that attempts to write against apartheid had the unforeseen effect of ensnaring the intellectual in a constellation of complicities with the system. Thus, he describes the intellectual ‘as a figure of responsibility-in-complicity, a figure between complicity and complicities’ (2002:19). Sanders’s (2002:1) subtle critique suggests intellectuals may inadvertently reproduce the paradigms they seek to eradicate. Moreover, it provokes thoughtfulness *vis-a-vis* knowledge production and its subject(s). Why does intellectual capital accrue to some areas of study over others?

What is at stake, and is the absence of the township tied to its availability for the kinds of readings academics want to undertake?

Text

Earlier iterations of township identities and their narrative strategies have left a lasting imprint on textual production about townships. Questions of authenticity and belonging, of realism versus more opaque expressivities, and of the ordinary and the spectacular have retained their cogency. Simultaneously, shifts in social and political formations mean that one has to ask new questions about township spaces. In an attempt to enter into a conversation with the concerns mapped above, I suggest domains of representation speaking to the experiences of township constituents. For the sake of coherence, I have theorized these under overlying sub-headings which are by no means exhaustive: Emergent languages of blackness; patterns of consumption and destruction; threatening and threatened youth; dystopias; the predominance of 'the real'; and modes of satire as thriving sites of contestation.

The Terms of Blackness

The problematics of how and why to constitute blackness in post-apartheid are articulated in contemporary black self-writing. During apartheid, autobiography countered the erasure of black voices from the public sphere, relying on the invocation of truth and the unified self as prerequisites for social action (Nuttall 1998). The self was in turn tied to ideas about collective resistance and suffering which tended to erode variances played out across class, gender or age. The erasure of difference registered in critique too; as Lewis Nkosi discussed, the need for iconic struggle figures tended to obstruct critical analyses of black writing (1981). As Nuttall observes, representations of the black self after 1994 remained informed by discourses of shared suffering and resistance. Recent autobiographical engagements with the township have sought to complicate the kinds of identity production evident in previous works. Dlamini's *Native Nostalgia* blurs delineations of genre by positioning itself as a hybrid of memoir and ethnography, examining the intricate effects of wistfulness for the past. Where Dlamini disturbs commu-

nal narratives in order to propose different kinds of publics, Fred Khumalo's more conventionally told *Touch My Blood* (2006), struggles to instantiate meaningful communities in the present (Daymond & Visagie 2012: 730). In the tradition of Bloke Modisane's *Blame Me on History* (1963), Khumalo deploys humour to resist one-dimensional readings of the township. Dlamini and Khumalo's tactics imply that the township cannot be reduced to monolithic narratives of suffering, or solidarity or straightforward resistance. How then might constructions of blackness be similarly complicated?

Autobiographical historicity intersects with novelistic form and intention. For example, scepticism about the promises of the past and successes of the democratic present emerge in Zakes Mda's *Black Diamond* (2009) and Niq Mhlongo's *After Tears* (2006). Mda's earlier *Ways of Dying* (1995) captures the hopeful potentiality of the mid-nineties in a playful and luminous depiction of urbanization in which the ghetto is imagined as fluid and polyphonic (Barnard 2006). Contrastingly *Black Diamond*, written originally as a film script and retaining a spare filmic quality, evacuates the heroics of the struggle by presenting the disillusionment of struggle veterans and the affective fetishisation of township space by a black middle class which has moved elsewhere. Mda's somewhat bleak depiction is matched by Mhlongo's novel, where terse realism conveys deep cynicism about the rhetoric of change. Mhlongo's Soweto is marked by inequality, disenchantment and jaded criminality. If the realist aesthetics of Mda and Mhlongo tend to abridge the complexities of township experience, K. Sello Duiker's children's book *The Hidden Star* (2006), deploys fantastical imagery to deepen the intimacies of everyday relationships in Phola Park, and which are anchored in past acts of resistance. Duiker's enmeshment of the historical and the magical parallels the mosaic of style and remembering in Dlamini's text, pointing to configurations of black selves which are various and subtle.

Conspicuous Destruction

The capacity to craft the self against the echoes of history and confines of the present manifests in bodily practice. In her work on consumption by black youth in Johannesburg, Nuttall theorizes the ways in which the body is remade across a series of surfaces – architectures, music, clothes and magazines – to forge identities that simultaneously reference and escape the past (2009:108-132). Paralleling these acts of 'self-styling' (2009:109)

through conspicuous consumption are modalities which might be described as conspicuous destruction. *I'khothane*, or *izikhothane*, is mode of self-enunciation depending upon the disposability of expensive possessions. Young people gather in large numbers to watch competitors perform dance moves that mirror the stylised commodity of 'swanking' in the 1930s and 40s and mapantsula in the 1950s (Ballantine 1993). Designer labels and wads of money are flaunted before being burnt in a gesture of indifference. Cars too, are aspirational commodities that seem to provide traction in the neo-liberal landscape of contemporary South Africa. As much the legal or illegal ownership of cars operates as self-affirmation, so does the destruction or spoiling of high-end vehicles. The spinning and burning of cars began as a ritual at the funerals of Soweto gangsters in the 1980s, and the former is now a mode of performance across South Africa's townships. Spinning remains widely associated with criminality and youthful deviance, although attempts have been made to assimilate it into the mainstream.

Destruction as play on physical and social mobility emerges in two recent novels about the township; Sifiso Mzobe's *Young Blood* (2010) and David Dinwoodie-Irving's *African Cookboy* (2010). In these fictions, criminality organizes the lives of their protagonists and points to the imbrication of official and illegal discourse. Both novels stress the mobility of their male characters across local and international landscapes via the vehicular, and both contain scenes of vehicular destruction. Iterations of spectacular consumption and the disposability of the commodity enable socially excised voices to penetrate the public sphere at large. However, the increasingly acquisitive trajectories of Mzobe and Dinwoodie-Irving's characters are halted through death and filial compliance. Thus, though the performance of wastefulness ruptures the elision of the poor, it simultaneously demonstrates its inability to effect deep structures of inequality.

Old Youth

In an essay on the music of kwaito, Bheki Petersen notes that alignment of genre with criminality omits the social vulnerabilities out which its performers emerged. The kwaito star, writes Petersen, 'seems more endangered than dangerous' (2003: 207). The spectre of threatening yet threatened youth points to historical formations that reverberate in the present. In the South African context, the word youth has a particular

genealogy and political resonance. During the 1940s and 1950s the ANC Youth League gained influence both within party circles and among its supporters. Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu and Oliver Thambo are all political icons who came to prominence through the Youth League and who sought to differentiate themselves from the older, more conservative leadership. In the 1970s and 80s young people played a pivotal role in the struggle and were willing to take significant risks against the policy of Bantu Education. The Soweto Uprising of 1976 was initiated by school children, who also bore the brunt of violent police response (Lodge 1992).

The term youth has a fairly wide application, designating anyone between eighteen and thirty five. The majority of South Africa's unemployed are drawn from this group (National Youth Development Agency 2011:6). The fact is that young people in South Africa often die young, are made old by scarcity, crime and illness. The fraught correlation of black youth who do not live to be old; of poverty, polemic and desire is forcefully embodied in Julius Malema, president of the Youth League from 2008 until his expulsion in 2012. Malema is a highly provocative figure, reviled and admired for his canny populism, regarded as dangerous by most white South Africans. Fiona Forde's excellent biography *An Inconvenient Youth*, tracks his birth in the township of Seshego, Limpopo, through his early involvement in the ANC, to his trial for hate speech in 2010 (2011). Malema's self-perception registers as a kind of epic, an account of heroic overcoming which is a signifier for the struggles of ordinary black South Africans. In this regard, it is not unlike the origins narrative of the ANC. Contrastingly, Forde's investigation suggests that epic is not an adequate narrative mode with which to capture the contradictory and even opaque manoeuvres of identity construction. The 'threat' of Malema reveals itself as a slippery assemblage of influences and agendas which escapes both his own narrative intent and that of others.

The dialogism of identity production is explored by Muff Andersson (2010) in her work on the hugely popular television series *Yizo Yizo*. Running between 1990 and 2004, *Yizo Yizo* staged a re-articulation of youthful selves through the students of Supatsela High, a fictional high school set in Daveyton township near Johannesburg (Andersson 2010). The plot lines of *Yizo Yizo* acknowledge the Fanonian implications of apartheid while excavating the lived experiences of post-apartheid township youth through scenes of despair, love, aspiration and violence. In Andersson's view, the portrayal of violence specifically is interwoven with textual references and

histories that complicate its reception as merely offensive or gratuitous (2010:60). Scenes of violence reflect its everyday occurrence in the township but are also nodes through which the interiorities of *Yizo Yizo*'s characters are laid bare. Thus are discourses of dangerous youth unravelled into multihued threads of potentiality and vulnerability.

Ruins and Rituals

If *Yizo Yizo* and Forde unpack the leitmotiv of threatening youth, it is also the case that violence stalks townships in real and imagined ways. The dystopian landscape of Mhlongo's *After Tears* is darkly rendered elsewhere in literature and popular culture. Deathliness is mediated through symbols working at the level of foreclosure – graves, coffins, mourning attire – conjuring forms of social hauntedness theorised by Derrida (*Spectres of Marx* 1993). More than this though, they offer up radical avenues for remembrance and critique. Following the disclosures of the country's Truth and Reconciliation Commission between 1995 and 2000, the margins of memory in the private and public sphere have been shown to be entangled (Sanders 2002; and Nuttall & Bystrom forthcoming 2012). The politically motivated but profoundly intimate consequences of murder and assassination under apartheid ruptured the surface of public life with personal loss that made us all culpable.

In the contemporary moment, death and grieving are strewn across the public imaginary. Sindiwe Magona's novel *Beauty's Gift* (2008) reads sexism and the HIV/AIDS crisis through female friendship. The death of Beauty, who has been infected by an unfaithful husband, and her burial in Gugulethu cemetery outside Cape Town, prompts her friends to instantiate change in their own lives. Echoing Magona's analysis of gender relationships in the township, the video for Kanyi Mavi's 2012 hip-hop single *Ingoma* (song) evokes death to explore abuse and affirm female power. The song's densely metaphorical lyrics draw on isiXhosa *iimbongi*, a form of highly stylised praise poetry. Ritualistic scenes of dancing reveal Kanyi in the white clothing of *iqgirha*, a traditional healer. Juxtaposed against these colourful and hectic scenes are black and white shots of graves being dug, of ruined buildings and wasteland in the Cape Flats. Kanyi's aggressive rapping style and ferocious gaze unsettle the silencing of women and mobilises conventions of ritual to forge counter-voices.

Spook Mathambo's dark house cover of the Joy Division single,

She's Lost Control is filmed in an almost identical landscape, that of Langa township, slightly closer to Cape Town. The video, shot entirely in black and white, lingers on a cemetery and a series of abandoned buildings in order to reference Zionism, gangsterism and witchcraft. Ritual is made uncanny, and the zombie-esque movements of the children pursuing Spoek defamiliarize textures of body and skin. Modes of the ritual and the gothic point to the imbrications of private and public spheres and the defamiliarization of space through uncanny bodies. Ritual is a site for the intersection of diverse traditions, offering possibilities for forging alternative modernities. By making the social landscape strange, ritual resists typification while mapping the uneven experience of death and wellbeing in contemporary South Africa. It is worth noting, unfortunately only briefly here, that the latest project of the video's director, South African photographer Pieter Hugo, entitled *The Bereaved*, engages 'spaces of mourning' through images of AIDS victims taken at Khayelitsha morgue. The men are shown in their coffins, carefully prepared for transport for burial in the Eastern Cape (<http://www.pieterhugo.com>). This weaving together of death, memory and space makes private grief viscerally public.

Finally, the intersection of sex and death as a form of ritual encounter is performed in Mpumelelo Paul Grootboom's 2009 production *Foreplay*. *Foreplay*'s intertextual plotting, Grootboom adapts Arthur Schnitzler's sexual morality tale *La Ronde*, universalizes and localizes the exploitation of desire and power. Set between the township and the city, the play stages sex as commodity exchange across class lines. The transferral of HIV/AIDS between the characters, all of whom practice unsafe sex, is ceremonialized through red bubblegum passed from actor to actor. If Grootboom's techniques understate the complex economy of sex and affect explored in Hunter's study, his sharp and often humorous writing mocks sanctimonious moralising too frequently coded with race and class. Everyone, says the play's archetypal prostitute, 'is a fucking whore' (2009:78).

Satirising the Self

Grootboom's tart critique of societal corruption is extended into full-blown satire in other forms of media, most evidently stand-up comedy. Dustin Griffin, in a broad ranging study of satire, observes its resistance to containment within any single theory or form (1994:3). Its slipperiness means

satire is an ideal site from which to disarticulate farcical but persistent prejudices around race and place. During his stand-up shows, Cape Town comedian Marc Lottering performs an array of characters normatively associated with the city's Cape Flats. The Flats has a history of segregation distinct from townships in South Africa's other provinces and bears the residue of apartheid paternalism that saw coloured South Africans elevated relative to their African contemporaries (Salo 2003). Himself coloured, Lottering's parody of 'Aunty Merle' the housewife and 'Smiley' the taxi gaartjie inject irreverence into habitual racial stereotyping. On the one hand, Lottering's enmeshment of English with *Kaaps*, an Afrikaans dialect originating with Malay slaves imported to the Cape in the 17th and 18th centuries, reframes Afrikaans as polyglot, shaped by voices residing outside its conventionally white, Protestant register. The recasting of language undermines social scripts in which the Flats figure as marginal. However, Lottering's reliance on the alignment of *Kaaps*, and indeed colouredness, with the comical may tonally flatten coloured identity and its edgy relationship with place (see Oppelt 2012).

Stand-up Trevor Noah exploits (mis)readings of skin typography to produce race as a gaffe. Simply by virtue of his skin, Noah is widely assumed to be Cape Coloured and Afrikaans speaking. In fact he was raised in Soweto, the child of a Xhosa mother and Swiss father. Noah has achieved widespread popularity in South Africa, suggesting that his comedic take on the slippages of identity politics resonates across local audiences. Concomitantly, he draws on painful experiences of poverty marking his childhood in Soweto. In a recent documentary on Noah's life he addresses the camera: 'I'm no stranger to poverty ... I know how to be poor ... so ... if ever this comedy thing doesn't work out I've got poverty to fall back on' (Meyer 2012). This witty puncturing of rhetoric about the bleak emotional lives of 'the poor' is reinforced by the fusion of pathos and humour in film's title; township life is as affectively dense and capable of comedy as anywhere and everywhere else.

Being the Real

Representations of township life as *funny* are outweighed by its couching in social realism. Here, the highly successful and volubly discussed film *District 9* suggests itself. Although the film is punctuated with comedic moments,

most significantly in its hapless protagonist Wikus Van der Merwe, John Marx observes a dedication to experiential legitimacy hinging upon the township as squalor (2010: 164-167). Many of the scenes were shot in the informal settlement of Chiawelo, Soweto, described by director Neill Blomkamp as ‘unbelievably disgusting’ in an interview with British newspaper *The Guardian* (Marx 2010: 164). Accordingly, the crew’s grim encounters in Chiawelo concretised the value and weight of the filmic process. The piles of waste scavenged upon by the ostracised prawns are recognisable metaphors for social exclusion. The film’s visual coda is a clever composite of science-fiction, tragedy and journalistic documentary, but its approach to the township is less subtle, as this is compressed into a desolate slice of realism, made all the more authentic by its misery.

In counterpoint to the unforgiving gaze of his novels and *District 9*, Niq Mhlongo writes of everyday affective interaction in his introduction to Jodi Bieber’s (2010:13) photographic collection *Soweto*,

Our house in Chiawelo hosted those interesting *stokvel* gigs on a monthly basis, and my brother’s friends would come and drink beer and listen to the jazz music of Miles Davis or John Coltrane, or The Soul Brothers on his Tempest Hi-Fi.

Mhlongo’s insistence that Soweto, alternatively and affectionately known as *Msawawa*, is both variable and byzantine is reinforced by Bieber’s beautiful and often unexpected pictures. Bieber’s training is in photojournalism – she has covered local and international conflict zones and in 2011 was awarded the World Press Photo of the Year Award for her image of Afghani refugee Bibi Aisha (<http://www.jodibieber.com>). Her images are marked by social realism in echoes of David Goldblatt, their subjects face the lens eye to eye. Where her photographs differ is their luminous colour and the intense, almost hyper-reality this confers upon ordinary life. The friction between the real and technicolour does much to dislocate the township as locat(e)ion and free it from narratives of violence and paucity. Bieber and Blomkamp’s very different visions of the township throw up challenging questions about *why* it continues to be demarcated as ‘real’, even when this is playful or fantastical.

The difficulty of imaging the township through the real is thoughtfully worked through by Louise Green in a paper on South African advertising (2010). Green discusses an advert flighted in 2003 on SABC 1,

that presented itself as an attempt to disarticulate race. The focaliser is a young white man who wakes in Soweto and whose day leads us through a landscape in which white South Africans are township residents, catch mini-bus taxis, are stereotyped as criminal, and black South Africans take township tours, hire (white) domestic workers and own expensive private property in suburbia. The advert's symbolic register and tagline *Ya Mampela* (the real thing) project the city through modalities which, she argues, are in conflict (Green 2010: 3). On the one hand, the advert's resonance draws on its stated authenticity (Green 2010:4). On the other, this claim to 'the real' has been forged through meticulous artifice (Green 2010: 4). The advert's representational weakness resides, says Green, in a disconnect between its invocation of 'the real' and unequal circulations of value shaping space and sociality in contemporary South Africa (Green 2010:8).

As a way of engaging Green's critique, I want to travel full circle to the work of Njabulo Ndebele. Writing on the pop star Brenda Fassie, also known as 'The Queen of the Townships', Ndebele describes powerful tropes of unruliness and ungovernability. 'Thinking of Brenda: the desire to be' was first presented in Grahamstown 1996, and reworked and published in different arenas three times since: *Chimurenga* in 2002, after her death in *This Day* in 2004 and finally in an anthology of his essays titled *Fine Lines from the Box* in 2007. The several permutations of the essay speak, I think, to the elusive, transmutable traits of the singer herself. Brenda, writes Ndebele, had a 'talent for the art of reversal' (2007:209), overturning statements about her into oppositional truths, 'some people say that I am ugly ... I don't want to be beautiful. My ugliness has taken me to the top' (Ndebele 2007: 209).

Brenda's lifestyle choices unsettled the social norms of her fanbase; her hedonism, bisexuality and outspokenness positioning her well outside convention. Simultaneously, she resisted delineation as 'other', adopting a strategy of narrative distance from declamations about her lesbianism (Ndebele 2009:209). Such strategies were a form of evasive enunciation that capture her many contradictory qualities. Like her music, Brenda was an amalgam of styles, of hardship and glamour (Ndebele 2009:213). Her songs signal everyday sadness and exuberance alongside trenchant socio-political critique. Brenda's refusal of fixity and her desire to inhabit the moment of being, meant that her voice, 'enter(s) the public arena as ungovernable, the ultimate expression of personal freedom' (Ndebele 2009:213). Ndebele maps

Brenda's boisterousness onto anti-apartheid, but we can use it to read for resilience in the face of disparity *and* the startling possibilities of aesthetic spontaneity.

Brenda makes us read the township creatively.

Conclusion

This article has tracked texts and genealogies of township lifeworlds and embraced the richness of their forms. It has tried to cover extensive terrain across modes of cultural representation and any gaps in its analysis are my own, not that of the work. In conclusion, I want to draw out three sites of intersection that pervade the essay; unpredictability, affect and race. Let's begin with the last. Living in South Africa, reading South Africa, writing South Africa: all of these force encounter with the profound racialization of our society and its persistent structuring of our material and social lives. Public discourse is saturated with race talk and, frankly, racism. This study recognises the continuing effects of race. Indeed, its very premise is rooted in articulations of being black and their ties to geographies subject to recent neglect in the humanities.

Concomitantly, though I hope not contrarily, it wants to push against essentialism via imaginaries that complicate the township and conceptions of what it means to black, and by extension coloured or Indian or white. Following Lauren Berlant's theorization of the 'intimate public sphere' (1997), I argue that aesthetic circulations of affect intersect with and inform public life in South Africa. Such reading has critical precedent in the work of Nuttall (2009) and Neville Hoad, whose book *African Intimacies* interrogates formations of race and sexuality through the prism of the personal (2007). Approaching texts through the rubric of intimacy as well as difference allows for the latter's perforation by unpredictability and invention.

These articulations have significance outside the South African context. As Christopher Warnes shows in an essay on Mhlongo, township space is interpolated by and in conversation with international cultures not only of the South (2011). Sites in Khayelitsha, Langa and Gugulethu for example, bear the imprint of residents' engagements with global spaces and events – Kuwait is a taxi rank known for violence during the taxi wars in the 1990s and 2000s; Kosovo was named after the peace agreement signed there in 1999 and Europe references the establishment of the European Union in

1993*. Rob Nixon's recent work on the convergence of postcolonialism and ecocriticism serves as an inspirational template for transnational critique. Tracking incremental environmental violence perpetrated against poor communities across the globe, Nixon mines opposition in literatures from Africa, Asia, North America, Europe and the Caribbean (2011). In so doing, he enacts a reading strategy that rethinks the parameters of discursive intervention and activism. The environment is only one point through which to read across and between geographies and temporalities. How do urban communities at 'the margin' – and I use the term with an awareness of its limitations – challenge discourses of privilege through affective and material strategies? If we agree with Mike Davis (2007) that the global future is slums, then to critique them as symptomatic of widening inequality is only half the work. Returning, finally, to the dictionary definition offered at the beginning of this article, I argue that we are compelled to look beyond the surface structures of etymology to deep connective strata of creativity and resilience.

* I want to thank Mvuyisi Mbono for his insights on this matter.

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‘There is a racist on my stoep and he is black’: A Philosophical Analysis of Black Racism in Post-apartheid South Africa

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Abstract

In the history of South African racial relations, perpetrators of racism appear to have been largely white while the victims have been largely black. In post-independent South Africa white people appear to condemn racism and all practices and institutions that seek to defend or promote it. The end of colonialism and apartheid together with the introduction of equality among all citizens, the successful debunking of racial difference and the attainment of power by black people – levels the race field so to speak. While it would have been unimaginable to think of a black person as a racist in the past – particularly against white people – it has now become common both in the public political sphere and in private interactions, for white people to accuse black people of being racist. This article seeks to appraise the charge of black racism. I seek to investigate whether as a concept the notion of black racism is sound. Secondly, since racism is an act that is offensive to the victims, I seek to establish the kind of impact that the assumed black racism might have on white people.

Keywords: White racism, effective racism, black racism, racial hierarchy, South Africa

Introduction

I think it is useful to start with a disclaimer as to the scope of the article. Whilst racism is a universal problem, my article seeks to restrict its investigation to the South African context. I have two reasons for that: firstly, it is generally agreed that apartheid was a very vicious form of racism and

blacks suffered immeasurably under this system – even up to this day there are good reasons to think that some black people still suffer as a result of the effects of apartheid¹. Since the end apartheid in 1994, with some of its perpetrators and beneficiaries still around, it is important to investigate whether the victims have sought to mete out the same racism to their former oppressors and where they have been accused of attempting to do so, it is equally important to investigate what effect their assumed black racism have had on the white population. Secondly, much against the spirit of racial reconciliation advocated by South Africa's well-known iconic and spiritual leaders, former president Nelson Mandela and Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu, there have been growing complaints emanating from the white section of the population, about certain important black political figures in this country. These complaints have largely charged that certain utterances by important black leaders either amount to racism² or racial incitement. In other words black people are seen as being racist against white people. Closely related to this some white people feel that policies such as affirmative action and broad-based black economic empowerment are racist as they seek to exclude white people from benefitting from job and business opportunities (Herman 2008: 6; Goga n.d.). It is against this background that this article

¹ The kind of suffering I have in mind is that which was caused by the systematic denial to black people of access to social goods such as education, decent housing, water and electricity supplies, health and any other social goods that would have not only made their lives enjoyable but would have provided a platform for black people to improve their lives and secure their own future and the future of their own descendants (see May 1998: 2-4; Christopher 2001: 459; Fiske & Ladd 2004: 17-39).

² The most intriguing case of a charge of black racism was made by an important minister in the presidency in charge of the National Planning Commission against an important civil servant who heads government communication. In an open letter Minister Trevor Manuel described Jimmy Manyi as the worst kind of racist comparing him to the architect of apartheid HF Verwoed; this after the latter had made unsavoury remarks about the need for coloured (mixed race) people to move to other parts of the country instead of confining themselves to the Western Cape Province. To read the actual letter see: <http://www.politicsweb.co.za/politicsweb/view/politicsweb/en/page71656?oid=224062&sn=Detail> (Accessed 4 September 2013.)

seeks to investigate whether black people could be racist and if so what kind³ of racists they could be. Another concern that the article does not cover, is that of racial incitement and how we need to approach this matter⁴.

This article is divided into three sections. In the first section I sketch what I take racism to mean philosophically speaking. In the second section I look at the possible scenarios in which black people could be said to be racists. In the third section I look at the role of historical and social factors in the impact that the victim may feel or experience as a result of the perpetrator's racist behaviour. But first I need to set out my methodological procedure of my attempt at investigating the plausibility of the charge of black racism.

Method

In this article I eschew an approach that involves explicitly assessing or investigating the racist connotation of known black practices/ cases against white people. On the contrary, I seek to follow a philosophical method known as thought experiment(s). My reasons for following this route are twofold.

³ My use of the word 'kind' is very specific. It refers to the histories and legacies of racism as experienced during the periods of colonialism and apartheid over more than three hundred years. It is not simply about whether one's actions are of a sort that has a harmful effect or not in the present. Since racism is essentially harmful to the victims in terms of the racist systems and institutions that were created for white advancement at the cost of black well-being, it is this legacy that makes white racism of a different kind.

⁴ An organisation known as Afriforum, that appears to be largely white and that has arrogated itself the task of defending what it takes to be white interests, took Julius Malema, the former leader of the Youth League of the African National Congress Youth League (which is not only the ruling party – but the party that was at the forefront of fighting apartheid), to court for singing a song that was sung during the struggle against apartheid. Afriforum interpreted some of the words in that song as hate speech targeted at white people. The judge in the case found that some of the words did constitute hate speech and ordered that they not be used both in public and private. (See the decided case of *Afri-Forum and Another v Malema and Others* 2011 (12) BCLR 1289 (EqC) (12 September 2011.)

Firstly, it appears to me that it is difficult to make the necessary philosophical argument I seek to advance if I were to consider in a case-by-case way – or a myriad of known cases of – white complaints against black racism. My argument is that while these cases may be seen either to merit the charge or not to merit the charge of black racism, my argument might get bogged down in delineating the exact instances in which the said racism is taken to have arisen or not. I argue that such an investigation is not particularly useful as it fails to cover the range of theoretical considerations that I think important to account for what we may term racism. Secondly, I wish to set out, in line with the purpose of my article, a broader outline of the conditions under which black racism can be said to have obtained – hence my method of thought experiments. My intended project is succinctly captured in the description of the challenges and purposes of thought experiments as stated in the *Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*:

The primary philosophical challenge of thought experiments is simple: How can we learn about reality (if we can at all), just by thinking? More precisely, are there thought experiments that enable us to acquire new knowledge about the intended realm of investigation without new data? If so, where does the new information come from if not from direct contact with the realm of investigation under consideration?⁵

While there may be objections to the efficacy of the method of thought experiments, Simon Beck (2006: 29) provides justification for this method when he writes:

Although it is by no means the only method available to philosophers, the use of thought-experiments to argue for a position seems a particularly *philosophical* way of going about things. It is not a peculiarly philosophical way (although many of those used are extremely peculiar, as are some of the positions they are used to defend).

⁵ Cf. <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/thought-experiment/> (Accessed 1 October 2013.)

I do not wish to pursue the merit of thought experiments in philosophical discourse. What I wish to achieve by using thought experiments is invoking instances in which it could be argued that black people would have behaved in ways that are patently racist or at the very least appear to be racist. By so doing we can begin to capture a sense of what it may mean in reality for a black person to be said to have acted in a racist manner against, for instance, a white person. In all the imaginary cases that follow below, my attempt is to capture and draw out some of our intuitions about the possibility or efficacy of black racism. Thus my article generally follows two strategies; firstly it engages philosophical debate on the nature and efficacy of racism by one racial group and, secondly, juxtaposes that discussion with what we may imagine to be instances of black racism.

Racism

As Paul C. Taylor (2004: 33) notes, defining

‘racism’ is difficult in part because we use the word to describe many different things. Some of us speak of racist people, actions, attitudes, and beliefs; others speak of racist practices, ideologies, and institutions. Some of us refuse to complain of racism unless there is some intentional discrimination; others are willing to set aside intentions and focus on consequences. Some of us want to think of racism as a matter of prejudice in individual interactions; others insist that it is about social systems and structures of power.

It is not my intention to go into the details of the debate around the definition of racism. That is beyond the scope of my current concern. For the purposes of my article I will accept Taylor’s (2004: 33-34) definition of racism that,

[W]hen we complain of racism in any of these senses, we seem to be complaining about an ethical disregard for people who belong to a particular race. ‘Disregard’ in this context means the withholding of respect, concern, goodwill, or care from members of a race. We might do this because we dislike people with certain traits, and

because we believe that membership in the race in question involves possessing these undesirable traits.

He further explains that this disregard may be based on either extrinsic or intrinsic racism. Although the term disregard may seem quite tame, Taylor argues, its use has several advantages.

First, speaking of disregard (and of disrespect and the rest) allows us to cover a range of attitudes all at once, from outright hatred, to the simple failure to notice that someone is suffering, to the related failure to notice that there is a person in front of you, as opposed to the personification of a pre-existing stereotype. I disregard you when I assume that racial stereotype accurately describes you (Taylor 2004: 34).

I suggest that it is possible for us to imagine this disregard coming in different forms. An individual may, for instance, come to exhibit that disregard as a result of prejudices that she has acquired. She may believe that certain races or a certain race is inferior to her own. She may then proceed to act in ways that show a disregard for the welfare of the members of that particular race. She may think less of them, dislike or hate them, discriminate against them or have ill-will against them. Disregard, let us imagine, may also occur at the institutional level. At this level racial discrimination, either overtly or covertly, is against a particular racial group. If it is overt it would be supported by discriminatory policies or legislation that would bar members of the victimised group from either participating or fully benefitting from the services and products of that institution. If it is covert it relies on a number of social structures and reality to ensure that the members of the victimised group are kept out of the concerned institutions. Johannes Andreas Smit, for instance, gives a detailed description of the machinations of segregation and oppression perpetrated and perpetuated by the apartheid state at the institutional level. Smit shows how all facets of life were regulated by various pieces of legislation that sought to disadvantage blacks while advantaging white people (Smit 2010: 12-20).

At the core of interpreting racism as disregard is the idea of exclusion. People of other races or of a particular race are excluded from partaking and benefitting from either interpersonal relations or institutional

services on the grounds that they are different by virtue of their skin colour. In recent times, race has come to refer to skin colour, while in previous historical epochs, race referred to a wider range of indices of difference: of ethnicity, language, nationality, etc. (Reiss 2005: 17; Boxill 2001: 1). The usage I deploy in this article refers to discrimination based on skin colour (Zack 2001: 47 – 52). The difference in skin colour is then taken as proof of inferiority. Perpetrators of racism will take it to be the case that every black person (or whatever different race) is likely to exhibit certain key character or behaviour traits. Normally these traits are taken as undesirable and to represent the inferiority of the black person. This may lead to the formation of the belief that blacks are genetically predisposed to be of such an inferior nature. That belief in itself may lead to two possible reactions which need not necessarily be mutually exclusive. Firstly, it may be believed that because of that inferiority black people ought to be treated as second class citizens who are not deserving of any respect and recognition. Secondly, it may lead to the belief that black people are poor souls who cannot escape their terribly handicapped station and hence ought to be pitied. However, the pity is not identical to the pity that one feels for another person of her racial group. It is a depraved and scornful form of pity that decries blackness seeing it as a pathetic station – a sad reality for anyone to be black. Effectively, either way blacks – who are people of another race in that instance – are excluded from the full definition of humanity. They are seen as lacking something, as inflicted by inadequacies and unqualified to be taken as equals. Scientific explanations and empirical evidence are then sought to explain the black condition. For instance Charles W. Mills (2005: 172 -183) provides a detailed analysis of David Hume and Immanuel Kant's so called scientific racism, which led to the latter's dubious conclusion that humanity comes in varying degrees with whites being more able to attain full humanity. On the other hand Lucius Outlaw (2001: 63 - 70) provides a detailed outline of how and why racial classification and its associated racial traits grew out of the sciences and how it was later to be successfully debunked.

The notion of disregard can also be explained in terms articulated by Lawrence Blum when he considers racism to be essentially about inferiorisation and antipathy. Blum shows that there are many meanings and usages of racism. However, he argues, all forms of racism can be related to one of the two general paradigms of inferiorisation or antipathy (Blum 2008: 8). He claims that inferiorisation is linked to racist doctrines and systems

such as slavery, segregation, imperialism, apartheid and Nazism. In these systems other groups are treated as inferior to the dominant group by virtue of their biological nature. Antipathy, on the other hand is currently understood to be less related to the original concept of racism. It is understood to encompass racial bigotry, hostility and hatred (Blum 2008: 8). Further, he adds that there are three other general categories of racism which he outlines as follows:

Personal racism consists in racist acts, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviour on the part of individual persons. *Social* (or sociocultural) *racism* comprises racist beliefs, attitudes, and stereotypes widely shared within a given population and expressed in cultural and social modes such as religion, popular entertainment, advertisements, and other media. *Institutional racism* refers to racial inferiorising or antipathy perpetrated by specific social institutions such as schools, corporations, hospitals, or the criminal justice system as a totality (Blum 2008: 9).

According to Blum each of these categories interacts in a complex manner with the other categories. Blum then seeks to further elaborate the nature of inferiorising and antipathy racism:

Inferiorising personal racism is expressed in various attitudes and behaviour-disrespect, contempt, derision, derogation, demeaning. It can also involve a developed set of beliefs about a biologically based hierarchy of races, but it need not do so. For one thing, an individual may be racist against only one racial group and have no views about others. An individual can be contemptuous toward another racial group without really believing that it and its members are inferior (Blum 2008: 10).

Hence, he holds, an inferiorising racist is one who thinks that a person of another race is inferior to her own group. Antipathy, on the other hand, is quite distinct from inferiorisation. The major difference lies in that inferiorising racists do not necessarily hate the targets of their beliefs. They may have paternalistic attitudes towards their targets. They may even have feelings of concern and kindness for persons they consider to be their

inferiors. Antipathy, in contrast, is characterised by feelings of resentment and fear. However, these two types of racism do not operate in entirely separate forms (Blum 2008:10).

Blum's intention is primarily aimed at not only defining racism but at showing that characterising certain acts as racism is problematic for two important reasons. Firstly, he suggests that certain acts are not racist in essence – they could exhibit a certain ignorance or some misconception that the perpetrator has against the other racial group. From this Blum argues that a perpetrator of racism based on his or her own ignorance or misconception should not be condemned as racist. For Blum such condemnation would impoverish the efficacy of identifying a person's actions as racist. Thus for him the term must be used only in instances where a person has shown clear malice against persons of another race. Secondly, using the term racism to instances that are not racist reduces the power that the rebuke of truly identifying racists as such has. Blum argues that when we call someone a racist we are pointing to the manifest moral failure of that individual. Being called a racist must ideally make people very uncomfortable as it points to something serious about their failures. Using the term loosely or erroneously erodes the condemning power of the word. Thus he seeks to define a racist strictly as follows:

A racist *person* is not merely someone who commits one racist act or acts on a racist motive on a small number of occasions. Motives and attitudes such as bigotry, antipathy, and contempt must be embedded in the person's psychological makeup as traits of character. In this sense, being racist is like being hateful, dishonest, or cruel in implying an ingrained pattern of thought and feeling as well as action (Blum 2008: 14-15).

He claims there is a difference between saying a person is a racist and saying that some of her actions are racist. I take this to mean that a racist is a person who is deeply embedded in her ways that mark her as a racist. These ways and feelings are so central to the person's identity that if she were to give up such thoughts and feelings we could say she would have lost her identity.

I suggest that for our present purpose, in order to understand whether blacks could be racists, we could combine Taylor and Blum's definitions of racism to go thus: Racism is a disregard for another person on the basis of

that person's race. Such a disregard involves historically entrenched beliefs, prejudices, systems and structures that construct and propagate the other person's inferiority hierarchically which leads to actions that actively discriminate against the racial other. Such discrimination may lead to the victim suffering either from institutional exclusion or interpersonal disregard. On the institutional front, the victim is denied social and other amenities that are received and enjoyed by other members of the same society. On the interpersonal front the individual is denied the benefit of full and meaningful interaction with other members of society as she is seen as an inferior other. Hence she could be denied the benefit of care, concern and even friendship on the basis of her skin colour.

With this definition in mind, I wish to shift my discussion to what form black racism in post-apartheid South Africa could take. Secondly, I will seek to investigate whether black racism is of such a vicious nature that it can be considered to be historically effective to cause serious harm to white people.

Black Racism

On the face of it, the question whether blacks could be racists or not appears rhetorical. Of course any human being of any race can be a racist. Some black people could even declare themselves to be racist and might as well fit the profile of racists through their attitudes towards whites or people of other races. For example, black people could form organisations⁶ that seek to

⁶ For example in South Africa the Black Management Forum states, on its website under the who we are section, that they are a non-racial organization that is non-partisan; under their mission section they state: 'The Black Management Forum stands for the development and empowerment of managerial leadership primarily amongst black people within organisations and the creation of managerial structures and processes which reflect the demographics and values of the wider society' (see http://www.bmfonline.co.za/?page=who_we_are) (Accessed 1 October 2013). This can effectively be taken to mean that they are pro-black by virtue of seeking to animate accurate demographic representation in managerial positions. That being the case, we can imagine, they will seek to defend and champion the black cause and not a non-racial cause.

promote 'black causes'. Such organisations would not admit to their membership any person of any race, or particularly white people. Routinely they might reflect on the black condition and come to the conclusion that most things that are wrong with the black condition is directly traceable to white people's history of oppressing the black race. They, again routinely, could blame whites for the condition of black people and, routinely again, profess their hatred for white people. The ties that bind them could be based on their hatred for white people. But interestingly their hatred would only be based on their sense or understanding of history. They merely associate whiteness either with a history of being the oppressor or being associated by race with oppressors. They could even extend their reasoning to conclude that all white people would be oppressors if given the chance.

A second sense in which black people could be racists would be cases where black people engage in acts of violence against white people. An easy example would be that of an individual or group of individuals who engage in criminal activity. They could decide that their victims are going to be drawn solely from the white population⁷. Thus they will frequent white areas and scout out their victims in such areas. They might also execute their theft or robbery with violence that clearly sends a message to their victims that they have been chosen and treated in such an awful manner because they are white⁸. The criminals may deliberately spare blacks who live in white areas from experiencing their criminality and brutality. These criminals may even go to the extent of letting their victims go or withdrawing from a house they intend to rob once they discover that their intended victims are black. In this case they could or could not have an elaborate theory or explanation of

⁷ Although the claim is disputed, the popular and controversial Afrikaans performer Steve Hofmeyr believes this to be the case (see Brodie 2013 at: <http://www.africacheck.org/reports/are-white-afrikaners-really-being-killed-like-flies/>) (Accessed 1 October 2013.)

⁸ See <http://www.censorbugbear.org/farmitracker/reports/view/1192> with the dramatic title 'Hatecrimes summaries in South Africa: Black Aggressors against White South African Victims archived from Jan 2012 to July 2013'. This website seeks to provide detailed information ranging from legislation that discriminates against whites, to ANC policies of discrimination and crimes perpetrated by black people against white people. (Accessed 1 October 2013.)

why they target whites. I imagine that on one hand they could come up with an explanation that seeks to argue that white people have been oppressors and beneficiaries of the country's wealth⁹ hence it is only fair that they (the criminals) engage in some kind of Robin Hood exercise in the redistribution of wealth. They could argue that their hatred for white people is based on what they perceive to be the essence of white people – an essence that expresses itself as oppressive, greedy, accumulative and arrogant.

The theory might even end with a detailed historical account of black oppression at the hands of white people and the criminals concerned might just as well use that to justify why they target white people¹⁰. On the other extreme, the criminals, being rightly of little education and grossly lacking in historical accounts of oppression, might only see white targets as worthwhile targets simply because they tend to have lots of money and other valuables in their houses and on their person. They might simply say targeting a white person is a sure way of getting a valuable return in every criminal venture. Chances are much higher that you will get something valuable from targeting a white person as opposed to a black person or any person of another colour. As a result they choose white people; when they act violently towards white people, in the course of committing their crimes, they do so because they do not care about white people. They have a sort of disregard for the welfare of white people, they do not care about it, and it means nothing to them whether white people suffer or not. When the criminals, for example, pour boiling water on their white victims to obtain pin numbers to bank cards or secret numbers to safes, they do so because they have a certain disregard for the well-being of white people. They might not even see them as deserving of any mercy. They might only see them as people who must be shocked into cooperating with their criminal schemes. In both instances we could say there is a deliberate disregard for the well-being of whites based on the historical experience of their race. They are targeted for it, are victimised for it and the violence meted against them is driven by the belief that they are not worthy being treated with dignity in the same manner that the criminals would treat

⁹ This seems to be the case with white farm attacks (see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/South_African_farm_attacks) (Accessed 1 October 2013.)

¹⁰ See Mann (2013) available at: <http://www.thesouthafrican.com/news/red-october-to-protest-against-genocide-of-white-south-africans-in-london.htm> (Accessed 1 October 2013.)

members of their own race. This in a sense can be said to be reciprocation – ill-defined as it may be – in the face of the devastating legacy of white racism.

The problem with the two foregoing examples is that they fall foul of a definition of racism that sees racism effectively as historically produced prejudice plus power. Indeed the members of the exclusive group of blacks have power to form their own organisation and guide their plans and projects for the benefit of black people. They also have the power to exclude other races from joining their organisation. In the same vein it can be said that the criminals, in the second example, have power over their choices of their victims. They may decide who to target as victims as well as the nature of their violence against their victims – to merely humiliate them or to treat them viciously and inhumanely. However, we may say this is not real power. There could be some amount of prejudice¹¹ involved against white people and it could be justifiably said that the black protagonists, in both instances, might hold some convictions (though varying in sophistication) against white people. Though this is power, it is only so in a very limited sense. It cannot affect those beyond the immediate reach of the protagonists and if the perpetrators are found, particularly in the second instance, they are likely to be punished severely – even by black authorities. In the first example, it is hardly implausible to imagine other black sections of society objecting to such exclusive construal of membership based on race. In both instances, and in each case for its own reasons, this is not real power.

Hence I propose a third consideration of black racism. Let us suppose that there is a black person or a group of black people, who either in their official capacity effect official policy that seeks to discriminate against white people or as a result of their positions seek to discriminate against white people. In the former, we assume that there is a government that, much like the apartheid regime, openly states that it advocates separate development that favours blacks and discriminates against white people. Its policies and laws may be formulated in a manner that openly states their objective as oppressing, excluding or disenfranchising white people in order to advance and give in preferential treatment to black people. All its public officials

¹¹ Later I will seek to assess whether black prejudice has the same force as white prejudice in racism. While it may appear easy to say prejudice is the same the situation is not as simple as it appears.

routinely make statements to explain, support or justify such a policy. In the latter, we can imagine a public official who deliberately resolves and then acts in ways that discriminate against white people. Such a person could have power to do so. In the course of executing her duties, the public official may animate her prejudices against white people by talking them down, refusing them public service positions or promotion which is due to them, denying them justice or humiliating them or even taking time to insult them for being white. The white people, or the victims, may not have recourse to the ill-treatment because of reasons such as fear, poverty, and a sense of powerlessness or may give up pursuing their abusers merely because they think that it is time for blacks to be racist, immoral and corrupt.

I wish to argue that all the foregoing senses of black racism are not well positioned to qualify as instances of effective racism. In order for racism to be effective, it must be of such a nature that the victim and other members of her group feel the impact of the perpetrator's behaviour as truly significant to cause them genuine discomfort, fear or feelings of real exclusion. I think that in order for racism to be effective there should be other historical social dynamics that work to support the racist behaviour that any of the individuals above exhibit. Since it is widely accepted that the notion of race is a social construct – racism has to be understood in the context of the social dynamics at play that may either be in favour or against it. The reason for this is well articulated by Taylor (2004: 83) when he writes:

We have for a long time valued different races differently, and we have expressed and refined this valuation in a social mythology of stereotypes and stock images. You know the system of ideas that I'm thinking of. Whites, at the top, are civilised but soulless, with rational men and beautiful women; blacks, at the bottom, are physically gifted but oversexed brutes; American Indians, sort of in the middle but really off the scale, somewhere to the side, are noble savages, virtuously free of civilised impulses but childishly incontinent; and Asians, squarely in the middle, are a model but irreducibly alien and perhaps devious minority, composed of asexual men and submissive women. More broadly, whites embody Reason and Beauty, blacks represent The Body and Ugliness, American Indians are Primitive Nature, and Asians are the Inscrutable Other.

The same point of the inferiority of the social position of blacks is also made by Wasserstrom (2003: 273). On the other hand, Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze aptly shows how the black race is dismissed from modern philosophy by some of the most influential modern philosophers (1997; 2001: 5-25). Although Taylor's characterisation may be said to be restricted to the American experience, it holds true for whatever situation where there are different races. In other words in any society where there are different races there will be a hierarchical organisation and understanding of the importance of each race. I suggest the same applies to the context of South Africa which is the main concern of my article. I also suggest that at no stage of the existence of South Africa, as a society with various races, has the black race ever found itself at the top of the order. Morally, financially, socially and racially – blacks have had to deal with being valued as the worst kind of race.

Further, there were and still are differences made between the so-called black races¹². For example the Indians are seen as cunning and rich, the coloureds are generally seen as an oddity, and Africans are seen as lazy and corrupt. These perceptions are confirmed and animated in the social structures such as the economy, housing and health provision. Even during apartheid Indians and coloureds were afforded minimal privileges that served to distinguish them from Africans and inferiorise Africans. Through a systematic housing programme that created Bantustans and townships exclusively for black people, not only was the institutional discrimination physical and dehumanising but it also served to affirm the different valuations of races that Taylor refers to.

When the majority of black people look at their living conditions in comparison to those of white people they can't help but be filled with admiration for the lifestyle of white people. When white people occasionally venture into the townships and are faced with the grim reality of black existence – the poverty, squalor, filth, deprivation, and lack of services and basic infra-structure – they can't help but develop a range of negative reactions. They may feel sorry for the black population and may even blame the black government for concentrating on furthering corruption and self-

¹² Black in South Africa has been taken during the apartheid period to encompass people of Indian origin, Africans, mixed race/ coloured people – but here it must be understood to primarily refer to Africans. Chinese for example were classified as white.

enrichment at the expense of improving black living conditions. They may hold black people responsible for their own condition due to their lack of personal virtue, hard work and thrift. Or they may conclude that a combination of these factors has led to the black condition. Or they could shrug and simply say blacks are savages – an aberration of true humanhood. When black people look at the achievements of white society, their material possessions, their sophistication, their culture (encompassing religious and social practice), their achievements (academic, financial, leadership, influence), their standing in society, their restrained behaviour, their apparent meaningful care for each other, their general sophistication in worldly affairs ranging from knowledge of fine cuisine and wines to their knowledge of history, the sciences and other issues – they can't help but admire whites for being whites. When white people look at the culture of black people; their traditional religious practices, their dances, their food (tripe/offal), their conversations (both the content and ability to express their thoughts), their practical living conditions (township and rural), their rampant sexuality and diseases (HIV/AIDS), their political parties, their work ethic, their lack of knowledge in worldly affairs, their profligacy, and just the way they are as black people – whites can't help but notice that blacks are radically different from them. And the difference is of such a nature that it makes the black standard compare very badly to the white standard¹³.

Although this unfavourable outcome of the comparison between the two groups should not lead the white to formulate racist attitudes towards black people – what it does is that it might lead white people to develop either a scornful or condescending attitude towards black people. They may come to genuinely believe that they are rather superior to black people. That belief in itself need not necessarily lead to any discrimination against black people or hatred of blacks or a disregard of black people. It may only see black people as not quite a match to white people. Such a view then leads

¹³ While a plausible objection may run thus: these are mere stereotypes about so-called black people, they should not be taken seriously as they run foul to what has been scientifically proven about the non-importance of differences in race and they should be merely seen as stereotypes of sorts – my argument seeks not to dismiss race as improperly grounded. Rather I seek to secure a more fundamental point that seeks to show race as a serious moral and social philosophical conception and problem as it is produced institutionally.

white people to form the opinion that black people cannot be taken seriously as they are not equals. They might have power, they might have prejudice and they might say things that have been reflected on to deliberately harm white people – but all these utterances and actions have little weight since whites perceive them as somewhat occupying an inferior position on several fronts. Whites may see the ways of blacks as somehow less refined and in need of enlightenment or advancement. They may precisely come to see black racism as an occasional rant or act from a politician doing what black politicians do best – trying to blame others for their misdeeds.

The point I seek to make here is that society has been structured and institutionalised in such a manner that people do not only see the differences that exist between white and black people. They also see those differences to be determinants of who is at the top and who is at the bottom of the social scale. When people interact with each other they tend to respect and take seriously the words and actions of those who are their equals and peers. If, for example, a word of ridicule or praise is uttered by one of my colleagues in my school, I am most likely to be either positively or negatively affected by that word in a far much more significant manner than when the same utterance is made by most brilliant first year student. If a first year student ridicules my teaching that has very little impact on me compared to the same ridicule being made by one of my colleagues. If my first year student praises an article I have written as the most brilliant piece she has ever read and glorifies my intelligence – that adulation has limited impact compared to the same adulation being made by an erudite colleague. This is not to suggest that I see the first year as less of a human being than my colleague. It simply shows that I don't think a first year remark on the quality of my work as worth of serious attention as my colleague's remark. The reason for that is simply that I take my colleague to be my peer, a person of sophistication and experience far removed from the first year student's knowledge. I take my colleague far much more seriously than my first year student.

I suggest that the same applies to the dynamic of the relation between white and black people and how they view each other not as racial groups but how each group understands the importance of the reflections and racial utterances of the other group. If white people do not take black people seriously in all other issues, by virtue of white belief that blacks are inferior, they are not likely to take black racism that seriously. Even if they were to take such racism seriously and even if there were visible damaging

consequences, white people would take it as an aberration of sorts or the madness of the perpetrator. A person who occupies a superior position is normally not bothered by what those in inferior positions really get up to including their views of her.

The perpetrator of black racism also seems to be at a distinct disadvantage in her quest to be racist or achieve her racist ends. If we return to Taylor and Blum's terminology above, we find that the black racist's position in our conception of the racial structure effectively incapacitates his desire to be an effective racist. It appears as if the black person cannot develop any disregard for the white person based on inferiorisation or antipathy without running the risk of bad faith (Satre). Racist theories that backed inferiorisation as expressed in slavery, colonialism and apartheid seem to be a white creation specific to those times. For example, we do not have an equivalent to Humean, Nietzschean and Hegelian rants coming from blacks targeted at whites. If anyone was to utter equal rants, that is attempting to develop a theory that would show the inferiority of the white person and the superiority of the black person such a person would not be taken seriously. The reason is based on the evidence we have thanks to the history of race and because the proposal would be completely ahistorical and backed by no evidence save misguided speculation. Erroneously blacks have always been made to believe whites to be somewhat at the top of the racial structure. White civilisation and achievements are largely responsible for the modernisation and lifestyle that we now know and all enjoy – albeit to varying degrees. Even this, though is the result of the history of white racism to varying degrees.

If a black person was ever to complain about ill treatment by white people, particularly if she is close to them, this could cause offence. They may complain that white people do not take black people seriously or are patronising towards blacks or they are pretentious towards black people or that they do not want to befriend black people¹⁴. I think we must understand this complaint for what it precisely is – it is a complaint about racial difference or a complaint about how the two races fail or fake their

¹⁴ Again this must be understood as a general sketch of the nature of perceptions of the black race of the white race. It does not mean that there are exceptions to the described state of affairs for there are many white people who exhibit attitudes and behavior that is contrary to the ones described.

interactions. It is a complaint that says things would be much better if we could remove these hindrances to effective and equal interaction. It could be a middle class and educated black person's complaint claiming that even though she has done as well as whites and moves in their circles, she still feels excluded by virtue of her race. This complaint could just as well be justified or a result of a misperception on the part of the black person. That is beside the point, but the most important thing to note here is that such a feeling and complaint do not lead to the development of the black inferiorising the white. The black does not develop any theories that then seek to subjugate the white person or to change the white person into more of a human being. The black does not develop a mission to civilise as many colonial authorities sought to do with black people. Neither does the black person develop antipathy towards white people as a result of her observations or in spite of those observations. The black person does not develop bigotry, hatred or intense dislike for white people. To my mind antipathy is based on the belief that the targeted group is inferior or somewhat inadequate and less of human beings. It is probably based on the belief that the targeted group must be eliminated in order to maintain the pristine essence of humanity which is encapsulated by the other race(s) besides the targeted group. Such bigotry as suffered by black people during slavery, apartheid and colonialism is of such a serious nature that even the most self-proclaimed black bigot will never come close to its status and effects. If the black person was to develop such bigotry and even act on it not only would her actions be isolated but also quite meaningless as they run against the current of the power of the history of white bigotry. The reason for this is that the social construct of the hierarchical nature of races denies the importance of black racism. While white racism is taken seriously because it is seen to be emanating from the top of the racial structure, black racism of any form lacks the proper ingredients of disregard, inferiorisation and antipathy. The black person does not have the social history of being effective racists.

If we return to the examples I provided above of possible instances of black racism, we see that they are all eerily similar in that they are driven by the black person's perception of white history of injustice against black people. While this may be seen as racism, we must also see it for its kind. It is not of the same kind as for example, the racism defended and perpetrated in systems such as slavery, colonialism and apartheid. Blum suggests that what is normally described as racism on the part of blacks is only prejudice, hatred

and bigotry. ‘Inferiorising forms of racism are rarer among groups lower in the racial status order’ (Blum 2002: 36). Further, Blum notes that while prejudice and bigotry are bad, their badness is incomparable to that of inferiorising perpetrated historically by white racism.

My argument is slightly different from Blum’s in two respects. While I would agree with him that bigotry, prejudice and hatred are bad, I would argue that these instances of prejudice, hatred and bigotry are also rare among black people. Wherever they arise they seem to be mostly associated with what is believed to be some problems with white people either in the history of white interactions with black people or how they continue to behave indifferently towards black people. Secondly, these prejudices, hatred and bigotries sometimes arise mainly because of black people’s impatience with what they perceive to be a lack of transformation, slow transformation, or hijacked transformation. In essence while black people are actively agitating for serious changes not only in racial relations and perceptions but in other important social, economic and education fronts – white interests may be perceived to be blocking such efforts. Blacks then feel disenfranchised, in South Africa, in a country of their own birth and a country bequeathed to them by their forefathers. As a result they come to resent and hate whites not for being whites but for what they represent and the perceived greed they have become associated with. At times black people seek to make a distinction between their hatred for a particular action and their lack of hatred for the actual perpetrator of that action. Many freedom fighters and revolutionaries on the African continent declared that they did not hate whites but only hated the system they represented. This makes the prejudice that black people may have remarkably weakened by the fact that it is formed by their understanding of what they perceive to be white oppression. Such prejudice is understandable and in the context of where it occurs it could be said that such prejudice would not have arisen were it not for the fact that white people instigated a system that privileged their station to the exclusion of black people. Now that black people demand a redress they are met with resistance and an attempt at preserving white privilege without regard to the conditions of the black wrought by social injustices of historical white racism.

Blum’s Moral Asymmetries

In this third section, I reflect on the significance of the historical and social

factors in the impact or results of a perpetrator's racist behaviour on a victim. I wish to especially refer to Blum's work on what he calls moral asymmetries. It is important to note that Blum argues that not all racism is equal as well as that not all acts or beliefs or racism are the same. For example, murder is not equal to name calling. Hence he argues that he shall work with what he calls asymmetries between equivalent acts among the races; for example we shall take murder as equal to murder. However, he rejects this view as incorrect arguing in fact that the identity of the victim and the perpetrator are the most important.

Everything else being equal, greater moral opprobrium rightly attaches to racism by whites against people of colour than the reverse. This is the most important moral asymmetry in racism (Blum 2002: 43-44).

He claims that there are four sources of moral asymmetry among forms of racism differentiated by perpetrator and target groups.

The *first* is historical legacy. Blum argues that acts that remind the victim of the legacy of racism are the worst kind. Although whites can be victims of racism they do not have a historical legacy of being victims of racism, hence they do not carry the burden of such victimhood. For African Americans, on the other hand, the history of slavery and segregation is real and an undeniable part of their history. This history is something that no African-American can deny or escape. Analogically, the same can be said of blacks who have suffered under the racist regimes of colonisation and apartheid in (South) Africa. There is a historical legacy of the social and cultural victimhood and marginalisation of black people. This legacy is something that underlies much of the racism still perpetrated by whites – who continue to see themselves as superior – and the black experiences of racism, even after the end of apartheid.

Secondly, Blum argues that positional inferiority is important in these asymmetries. He notes that whites have superior positions, politically and economically. Their racism directed at inferior groups has greater power to shame the victim than vice-versa. 'It shames by reminding the target that the inferiority declared in the message is reflected in the social order itself' (Blum 2002: 46). For many blacks the positional inferiority is evident in their daily experiences of inferior social and cultural positions, their inferior job

opportunities, and the general inferior living conditions and opportunities for improving the quality of their lives.

The *third* is the pattern and prevalence of racist acts. Blum argues that subordinate and vulnerable groups are more likely to experience racism than dominant groups. In the American context some marginal groups such as Norwegian Americans, when they experience racism, are most likely to shrug it off while blacks as vulnerable group are not likely to be able to do that. In comparison with vulnerable groups in South Africa, we may refer to the different groups of African migrants who experience xenophobia in South Africa. These different migrant groups to various degrees experience certain forms of racism – not only from the legacy of white superiority but also from fellow South African blacks. In addition – and to pick up on Blum's argument on racial hierarchy – Polish immigrants in South Africa, for example, may receive less ill-treatment at the hands of white people than black South Africans who are fellow citizens. Polish immigrants, similarly, will also not receive any ill-treatment from black South Africans.

The *fourth* and final asymmetry is the contribution to the maintenance of racial injustice that acts of racism have. Racism that is directed towards a member of a subordinate group is much more objectionable compared to one directed at a member of a dominant group. From this perspective, Blum holds that what the moral asymmetries show is that not all racisms are equal.

More specifically, racism of whites against people of colour is, everything else being equal, of greater moral concern than the reverse. It is closer to the historical systems of racial oppression and injustice that provide the defining context of 'racism' (Blum 2002: 50).

In evaluating racist acts, Blum contends that because of the social and historical legacy attached to racism, when perpetrated by a white it should be of much greater moral concern than when perpetrated by a black. The main reason is that blacks just do not have the historical and cultural capital that is associated with racism that white people have. In the interests of the nurturing of equality, white racism should therefore be treated much more seriously than black racism – if it exists.

Blum then urges that the discourse of racism must be put in its proper

social and historical context¹⁵. He also notes that passing legislation that is anti-racist will not necessarily result in the elimination of the barriers that black people face.

The four forms of moral asymmetry work the same way. Though a white individual is not more racist or more morally evil in harbouring racial prejudice than is a black individual, the moral asymmetry makes the consequences of her prejudices, and of the acts expressing them, worse than those of the black individual. In this sense they are worthy of greater concern (Blum 2002: 51).

While I agree with Blum's argument I wish to reiterate that my project here has not been aimed at dismissing black racism on account of white racism. What I have sought to argue, which is also close to Blum's claims is that the act of racism by a black person against a white person faces considerable impediments to make it a successful and effective act of racial discrimination in the senses of my integrated definition above. Acts of racism by black people against white people are of such a negligible nature as they lack the historical and social infrastructure to be effective.

Conclusion

My argument has not sought to define or analyse the terms of race and racism. I have also not aimed at analysing and evaluating specific instances of so-called black racism. What I have sought to do is to analyse how these terms are understood and used as social constructs of the differences in skin colour and appearance. I have sought to argue that these terms are effective when understood against the background of how different races are seen in a hierarchical form, for instance in terms of the legacies of racism in the world.

¹⁵ Although Blum's work is primarily conceived as relevant in North America it also has relevance in South Africa. His categorization may be seen as more pertinent to the American situation, yet, since a hierarchy of races exists in all places, it is also applicable to South Africa. By virtue of the fact that certain races were regarded as superior in the past such a residue remains alive even after the demise of the structural ordering of the hierarchy of races, such as came about due to the end of apartheid.

Historically, the black race has not known a position that is superior, in social and cultural standing, to the white race. From this brute historical and social fact I have sought to argue that however black racism is conceived, it does not succeed in attaining the same level of racism as white racism since it stands at odds with the notion of racial hierarchies and the historical legacies of racism in the world. Even when implemented on an official scale (as was the case of Uganda under the dictator Idi Amin for instance), because of their unprecedented nature and the accepted lower position of black people in the hierarchy of races – such acts become nothing more than short-lived somewhat amusing buffoonery. Hence in conclusion we may say while blacks may be racists they can only be ineffective racists if not altogether a strange kind.

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Race, Power, Performance and Perception: Practical and Theoretical Observations in Higher Education at the University of KwaZulu-Natal

Thomas Edward Sommerville

Abstract

A mixed-methods investigation of the academic performance and perceptions of a cohort of medical students was undertaken. Marks achieved in academic work were analysed in terms of eight demographic factors, including race. In addition a stratified sample of students and staff was interviewed.

Statistical comparison revealed a significant difference between performance by Black and Indian students when measured in terms of race alone. However, when all eight demographic factors were analysed *together*, race did *not* independently influence performance.

Racial differences were ascribed to quality of schooling. Black students experienced financial and family problems to a greater extent than other groups. Indian families set great store by education, expecting excellence. Home background was a universally important influence.

A consequence of the practice of race-based admissions was revealed. Those groups selected in greater numbers displayed a wider range of academic ability and thus would tend to attain lower average marks.

Minority groups were revealed as tending to excel above the majority. While the long-lasting dynamics of apartheid education explain this South African anomaly, Ogbu's socio-historical theory supplies an alternative: 'voluntary immigrants' commonly interact with the educational system more positively than 'involuntarily conquered/enslaved' groups.

A combination of statistics, personal experiences, and insights from other unequal societies, suggests reasons behind racial disempowerment in education and its manifestation as surrogate for other inequities.

Keywords: Race, Higher Education, quota, schooling, socio-historical theory

Introduction

The black-white score gap does not appear to be an inevitable fact of nature. It is true that the gap shrinks only a little when black and white children attend the same schools. It is also true that the gap shrinks only a little when black and white families have the same amount of schooling, the same income, and the same wealth. But despite endless speculation, no one has found genetic evidence indicating that blacks have less innate intellectual ability than whites (Jencks & Phillips 1998: 2).

This statement, written in America several years ago, reflects conventional wisdom about – and something of the frustration engendered by – oft-observed disparities between the academic achievements of different racial groups. South Africa has its own experience, its own frustrations, its own explanations, and its own proposals as to how to close the gap. Without denying or minimising the gap under scrutiny, it must be noted that the majority of studies are based on performance in schools, and have generally used either quantitative or qualitative methodologies exclusively. Furthermore, in almost every country from which studies have emanated, white students represent the majority, and students of other races the minority. The communities from which students – albeit of different races – are drawn for those studies, although they reflect the changes and insecurities experienced throughout the world at present, have enjoyed periods of relative social and political stability compared to the circumstances obtaining in South Africa and other countries still in a state of flux.

This article describes a mixed-methods study undertaken at a higher education institution in a developing country. It examines the academic performance and personal perceptions of a cohort of medical students. It establishes that, for this group, race was seen by some to be an issue, although for the majority it was not of primary importance; regarding students' assessment marks, race proved not to be a significant factor in comparison with other demographic variables.

Literature Overview

Given that ‘race’ can be defined in as many ways as there are experts on the subject, I have used the term, for the purposes of the study this article describes, in the sense in which the previous apartheid government and the current democratic government of South Africa have categorised the various population groups: Black (of African descent), White (of European descent), Indian (of Indian descent) and ‘Coloured’ (of mixed descent). This is not to condone an arbitrary categorisation made without scientific basis. It is, however, necessary to note that the practical outworking of apartheid included differential expenditure and provision of resources to schools segregated according to the abovementioned conceptions of race. Moreover, the categorisation is still used for the purpose of attempts to redress the racially-based inequities of the past. It is indeed directly from just such a reparative measure that this study, in part, arose.

The Nelson R Mandela School of Medicine of the University of KwaZulu-Natal selects students for its undergraduate medical degree course (MB, ChB) primarily on the basis of the four racial categories listed above. Places are granted to each group in proportion to its representation in the community. A student’s prior academic record is given weight secondary to that of race.

The study undertaken, as part of a doctoral thesis, entailed examination of aspects of student diversity as embodied in demographic characteristics – including race – and whether or not these may have influenced students’ academic performance.

The literature on race and education frequently conflates race with class and/or socioeconomic status. Henig *et al.* (1999), in the USA, document inequalities in the provision of resources by education authorities and in the achievements of scholars subject to these authorities, and a corresponding perception that these inequalities were both racially based and economically driven. Apple (2001: vi), says of political influences on education in the USA ‘People are classed and gendered and raced all at the same time’, noting that to isolate one single aspect is almost impossible. Landry (2007), similarly, claims that race, gender and class may be additive or multiplicative, but not separate, influences on individuals. Alexander *et al.* (2007) and Dixon-Román *et al.* (2013) link race and socioeconomic circumstances in explanations of poor academic performance. Dr. Verwoerd, one of the chief architects of apartheid, evidently linked race and class:

There is no place for [Blacks] in the European community above the level of certain forms of labour What is the use of teaching the [Black] child mathematics when it [*sic*] cannot use it in practice? That is quite absurd. Education must train people in accordance with their opportunities in life, according to the sphere in which they live (Lapping 1986: 109).

It can be argued not only that racial differences have often given rise to class – and thus socioeconomic – differences, but that apartheid was designed to create, on a racial basis, an economic underclass.

Moving from considerations of social class to those of dynamics pertaining to the classroom, Gibson (1991: 376, 377) urges school teachers,

[T]o convey a sense of positive expectation for individual and group achievement [and to] raise expectations and ... increase knowledge about the options young people have available to them if they persist with their schooling.

However, at the same time, she notes:

Many minority students are reluctant to excel academically if it appears that they are leaving their peers behind [and that] Racial prejudice ... is a major problem for both immigrant and involuntary minority students (Gibson 1991: 377).

Osborne (1997) also refers to the social aspect of schooling, quoting studies suggesting that scholastic success could be related to the extent to which scholars identified with their teachers, and finding that African American boys were particularly prone to ‘disidentify’. This finding is largely echoed – in other terms – by Sontam and Gabriel (2012), Parker (2012), and also by McCain (2010), who takes pains to emphasise that students can overcome racial prejudice. Jenks and Phillips (1998), also pursuing the theme of social influences, debunk the notion that family background accounts for racial differences in academic performance, on the basis that the correlation between biological siblings rarely rises above 0.5, and between adopted children is even lower. Phillips (2012: 7) asserts:

These achievement gaps [between White and Latino or African American students] emerge long before students enter high school, and can be traced to students' experiences both inside and outside of schools.

Paradoxically, but perhaps understandably in terms of low teacher expectations, Harber *et al.* (2012) note that White teachers are apt to give more praise and less criticism to Black and Latino than to White students. While this may operate – consciously or unconsciously – in order to avoid charges of racism, it may have the unwanted effect of failing to provide sufficient challenge to minority students to do better. Brown & Brown (2012) critique some of the widespread deficit-oriented discourses that both express and shape perceptions of racial differences in academic achievement. They also express a paradox – namely that theories which usefully challenge deficit-based beliefs can themselves dangerously entrench negative patterns of thought about African-American students. Warren (2012), writing in the USA's euphoria after having elected an African American to its highest office, warns against assuming that race is no longer an issue in education (and other fields). He contends that racial inequality is still a significant consideration, and that abolishing conceptions of race, under the banner of 'Americanism', deprives minorities of their own racial pride and self-esteem, which buffer the negative effects of racism.

In South Africa, racial differences in academic achievement have been noted at school level (Ball 2006; Bloch 2009) and in higher education (Breier & Wildschut 2006). A number of studies have delineated the social, economic and linguistic backgrounds to such differences (Aldous-Mycock 2008; Christie, Butler & Potterton 2007; Heugh, Diedericks, Prinsloo, Herbst, & Winnaar 2007; Howie, Venter & van Staden 2006; Lam, Ardington, Branson, Goostrey & Leibrandt 2010; Mwamwenda 1995; Simkins & Paterson 2005). As is the case in more developed countries, the apparent racial factor is evidently an amalgam of other influences.

The prevailing view that racial minorities generally fail to achieve the same academic standards as the majority has been challenged. Gillborn and Misra (2000: 21) in Britain, while noting that 'ethnic inequalities persist even when class differences are taken into account' observe that Black children for a time were the most successful group within a particular social class, and that Indian children tend consistently to outperform all other race groups.

Ogbu (1990), interestingly, has investigated minority groups in various countries, and has found minorities, distinguished sometimes by class or caste rather than race, who underperform academically, and, conversely, minorities who outperform other groups. He rehearses the standard explanations – genetic differences, home environment and socialisation, socioeconomic status – but proposes that education is problematic if dispensed in an unfamiliar cultural and/or linguistic environment from that of the home. Dividing minorities into ‘immigrant’ and ‘involuntary’ groups, he suggests that ‘discontinuities in culture, language and power relations’ are not invariably the explanation for groups’ academic performance (Ogbu 1991: 4).

Immigrants who have entered a country seeking a better life view the barriers they face as temporary problems to be overcome, according to Ogbu. He compares these immigrant groups with involuntary minorities who do not see themselves as better off than previously, but rather as worse off than the majority, and feel that the system is biased against them. ‘Autonomous minorities’ – religious subgroups (for example Jews, or Mormons in America) – and refugees, are seen as somewhat different, but he draws a strong contrast between the viewpoints, and interactions with the educational system, of immigrants with positive expectations and ‘those groups that are a part of ... society because of slavery, conquest or colonization, rather than by choice’ (Ogbu 1992: 290). Examination of societies in the United States, Britain, Israel, India, Japan and New Zealand confirmed the role of community forces in differences in academic achievement (Ogbu 2003).

This survey of the literature has not covered the whole of the historical record of theories of racial differences in educational achievement. The convoluted explanations of innate intellectual inferiority once current in the American South, Nazi Germany and apartheid South Africa are as well-known as they are unhelpful. The more itemised, evidence-based contemporary research is more difficult to interpret than bald assertions of racial supremacy or degeneracy, but contributes better to our understanding of a complex phenomenon.

The question arises as to whether findings from other countries would be applicable here in South Africa or not – and if so, to what extent. The majority of such findings are derived from studies in schools; most use wholly quantitative or wholly qualitative methodologies, thus potentially

missing the extent or the detail of what they seek to elucidate. Almost invariably, studies are based on an observation at a particular time, rather than looking for trends over an extended period.

Additionally, in almost every country from which studies have emanated, minority students rarely triumph academically; however, in South Africa and at this medical school, minorities are high achievers.

This country also represents a society in ferment, with learner communities that embody a degree of diversity and transformation unlike those relatively stable societies in which previous studies have been performed. It thus seems appropriate to report on a mixed-methods study performed in a South African medical school in the 21st century.

Methods

While working in an interpretive paradigm overall, I used both quantitative and qualitative methods, in order to explore the extent of the influences on students' learning and to investigate students' and teachers' perceptions of those influences.

The first-year medical students in 2007 were followed for the duration of their five-year course. To allow representation of developments over that time, and to enable direct comparisons of assessment marks, those students who fell out of the cohort and repeated a year with a subsequent cohort were not followed further; nor were those who had failed a preceding year and then fell into this cohort.

These students' assessment marks were gathered, collated in an Excel® spreadsheet, to which was added a number of demographic characteristics suggested by the literature to be of potential significance, and the whole was rendered anonymous. The following demographic features were included:

- Sex
- Age in 2007
- 'Race' (categorised according to the apartheid system: Black / White / Indian / Coloured)

- First language
- Academic status (fresh out of school / repeating 1st year / higher education experience / graduate)
- High school (categorised by socioeconomic quintile¹)
- Source of finance (self or family / scholarship or bursary / NSFAS² support)
- ‘Matric points’ (UKZN ranking system on school-leaving examination marks)

The spreadsheet contents were uploaded into SPSS®, v19, for statistical analysis. The general linear model (GLM) – a form of ANOVA applied to multiple observations (Field 2009) – was used to compare students’ marks in various separate categories, for instance sex, race, etc. To compare the interaction of demographic features taking all eight into account, a generalised estimating equation (GEE) was used. This is similar to linear regression modelling, but like the GLM allows for multiple observations over time (Hardin & Hilbe 2008).

In 2009, when the student cohort under study was in the 3rd year, a purposive sample of 19 students, representing a spread of the demographic features listed above, and six of the teaching staff, representing medical

¹ An indication of the socioeconomic status of the community surrounding the school – used by the government in calculating differential funding of schools based on ‘income, unemployment rates and the level of education of the community’ (http://www.create-rpc.org/pdf_documents/Policy_Brief_7.pdf).

² The National Student Financial Aid Scheme of South Africa was established in 1999 ‘to ensure that students, who have the potential, but cannot afford to fund their own studies, will have access to funding for tertiary education’ https://www.nsfas.org.za/web/view/students/student_home/studenthome).

scientists and clinicians, was interviewed. They were asked to comment on a series of graphs showing previous students' marks depicted according to similar demographic characteristics. These interviews, after transcription, checking, and being rendered anonymous, were analysed thematically, using Nvivo®. This article reports on the aspect of race alone. (Other aspects are discussed elsewhere; cf. Sommerville 2012.)

Results

Over five years, the 202 students in 1st year in 2007 gradually dwindled to 148 students in 5th year, of whom all but one graduated in 2011, having sat 32 assessments along the way.

Of the original 202, 112 could be categorised as Black (55.4 %), 70 as Indian (34.7 %), 11 as White (5.4 %) and 9 as Coloured (4.5 %).

As regards race, students' marks overlapped over the course of their studies (see Figure 1 below).

This in itself denotes a change from a previous (unreported) study, in which a clear difference of *ca.* 10 % separated Black and Coloured students from Indian and White.

The graph also shows over the five-year period a narrowing of the initial differences of *ca.* 5 % between lower and upper groups.

Despite the overlap, GLM analysis showed significant differences ($p < 0.001$), which on post-hoc testing proved to be between Black and Indian students.

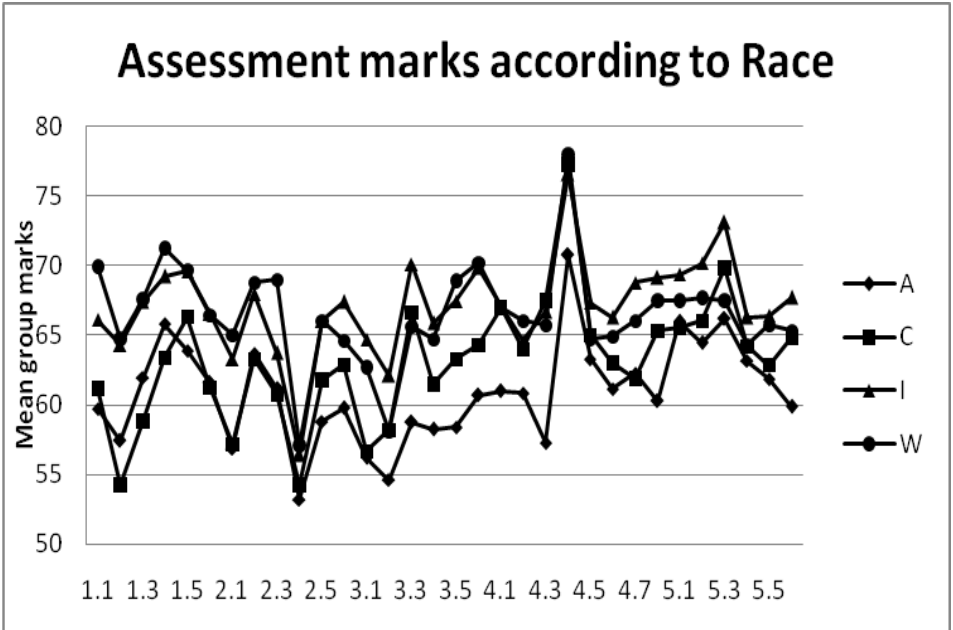


Figure 1 Assessment results over five years according to the race of the students

A = Black African
C = Coloured
I = Indian
W = White

Axes: x: Successive assessments from 1st to 5th year
y: Average marks (%) per group at each assessment point

Respondents made various comments about the apparent racial differences in assessment marks. They generally rejected the idea that race itself accounted for the differences seen in the stimulus graph.

I think it's all based on your social background and not at all on skin colour (Osane 6:893 – 894).

I don't think it's all black and white, as you say, because some people have high-achieving parents and family members, and then in fact they'll be so well off that they'll say 'I don't need to work hard, this is my life, I'm sorted out' and then others, who have maybe not so high-achieving parents, and they're struggling, and they're like 'I'm not going to struggle like this in my life; I'm going to work hard and get a good job and earn enough money to be comfortable'. So I think it's a very broad spectrum (Bala 6: 896-900).

And it's also dependent on the raw material – the ore that's coming through from high school. I don't mean in racial terms; I mean in general terms (Patel 12:914-916).

Patel was not the only respondent to ascribe racially-perceived differences to education.

Children that are going to these Model C schools and that do form part of the black community – they have it easier, I guess, and it's not that much of motivation. You know you've got back-up; you know you have your parents that are doing certain things for you and those who are in the rural schools, they really need – they would take any chance to get out and do something with themselves so that they can bring something home (Zodwa 1:626-630).

Well, the obvious thing here is the difference in the education and background and where we come from (Lungi 3:575-576).

Lungi, as she raised the aspect of schooling, at the same time implied that there is more to the differences than schooling alone.

[I]f there's one thing I like about the Indian culture it's – they have more of a *ubuntu* spirit than we actually do, and we're supposed to have it. They'll have the uncles or the aunts who're the doctors who will come in and help the nieces and the nephews – you know, they

have that togetherness thing, which would explain why they succeed so much.

And then you get me where I go home and my mother works at Checkers and she doesn't know anything about medicine and I need to figure it out and see in the textbook (Lungi 3:755-758, 782-784).

Kathrodia echoed the thought that the commitment of different communities to schooling was different.

My mother-in-law was such a typical Indian old lady; now, the kids *had to go to school* (Kathrodia 10:448-449).

Patel speculated on the nature of the Indian community's emphasis on education.

[A]partheid was actually protecting them, ensuring the maintenance of their culture, traditions, home values, language, religion and racial purity.

Indians came here to work under appalling conditions akin to slavery. But one thing they did was, they ensured, with no support from the government at the time, that they educated their offspring (Patel 12:906-907; 1024-1025).

As regards negative influences, Hlubi attributed different levels of achievement to different amounts of academic effort; however, he granted that African students might have more difficulties than other students.

I don't think an average African student doesn't understand when they read a book on diabetes, or goitre, but I think it depends how frequently that student has been to the library or has looked at the book. I think that's more important than – er – but why they haven't been – they haven't done the reading is the question. Is it because they've got other issues that they're thinking about or not, or is it because they are having an easy time? I don't know; it's difficult to say (Hlubi 13:457-462).

Susan voiced a similar thought.

[I]t might also have to do with other responsibilities and things as well. [Mm-hm] Indian families and whites tend to have less responsibilities because they're more well off (Susan 1:599-600).

The matter of language was raised as a possible contributor to racial differences.

[W]e Indians don't go for English classes. You know what I mean? [Mm] I mean you get a lot of people who are black that go for these English classes. So it's a problem – that means what I'm reading and what they're reading is two different things (Ahmed 2:420-422).

Look, we all understand English but – um – I think for someone coming from a more rural area, who's just grasped the concepts of English, to do medicine, which is like another language itself – there's no way you don't experience difficulty (Lungi 3:585-588).

Despite language being an obvious hindrance to many Black students, it was generally felt amongst Blacks *not* to be a major problem – as Lungi said, the technical discourse of medicine was more of a problem than was the language of teaching and learning. Hlubi pointed out that all of the students had a degree of proficiency in English, and Zulu speakers unanimously concurred with Lungi that they would find it more difficult to learn in Zulu.

I don't think that is a problem. [Mm?] I think the students have been conversing in this language from high school. Most of them – *all* of them have been learning in English, although it may not have been their first language (Hlubi 13:71-73).

But it's not to say that you want to change everything in Zulu because I promise you even all of them would not agree because Zulu's actually a very difficult language in terms of writing. Speaking is easier (Lungi 3:616-618).

Considering apparent racial differences in purely numerical terms, rather than those of social, motivational, school, family support or language, Ahmed, pragmatically, referred to the medical school's racial quota system of selecting students. This automatically ensured that those race groups comprising relatively small numbers, chosen from the top of the academic listings, would tend to achieve better academically. Those race groups comprising larger numbers – also selected from the top down – necessitated reaching further down the list ('more variability'), resulting in the likelihood *ab initio* that their achievement would be lower ('not challenging on the same level').

There's only a handful of whites in my class, so when they qualified from matric – what was their category of pass? Did they get an A+ pass and come here say ... and did that guy, because he was allowed more variability, he came with a B pass. So they're not challenging on the same level (Ahmed 2:428-432).

After pointing out an unexpected negative effect of the quota system, Ahmed went on to suggest that racial differences might arise from students' childhood backgrounds. Others also suggested that students' upbringing influences the way they think.

And so – where does the problem start? Right down when you're small (Ahmed 2:506-507).

You can say that the white students get somehow an unfair advantage over the black students that are coming from – not just school-wise but – um, just the way of thinking – how you were raised (Zodwa 1:571-573).

In a black family, the child is essentially on their own because half the time the parents are not educated themselves, like my parents weren't educated, to follow me up and to say 'Have you done this? What needs to be done? Do you need extra lessons?' You know – no facilities to go for extra lessons; so you're on your own from that culture (Lungi 4:762-766).

So maybe, maybe it's our background but for, for me it was a lot of, a lot of hard work that I had to do, to start understanding these things (Mandla 4:277-278).

[S]chools do play a role in all of this, but I also think it's the setting and mindsets of the different ethnic groups that do really play a role because you may find that – um – a black person from a rural area, they get into varsity and they're now in the same class as a white person, and they've never been in class with a white person, and suddenly they become intimidated for no reason, and all that stuff (Mbali 6:858-861).

Hlubi revealed something of these issues in his perception of relatively well-resourced schools but resource-poor homes.

[S]tudents will be given assignments by the school, while they're still at school, before they even come to university; now *these* [White, Indian] will go home and look at the newspapers, look at the internet and look in the library and do their assignments and be better prepared; *these* ones [Black] will go back to the township, although they are studying in a Model C school, which is a good school, but they go back to the township; it's not easy to get a newspaper, no computers, no Internet therefore, and no libraries, so *these*, it wouldn't be so easy for *these* to prepare that assignment than *this one*, therefore *these* will be better prepared for university than *these* (Hlubi 13:496-502).

The range of opinions on what appear to be race-based differences in achievement mirror the spectrum revealed by the literature on race and education emanating from elsewhere in the world.

Moving from respondents' direct statements about race, a number made remarks that were significant in terms of the race of the speaker. Just as Bala, an Indian student quoted above, said 'I'm going to work hard and get a good job and earn enough money to be comfortable', so other Indians provided glimpses of their underlying thought patterns.

[W]hen the Indians arrived here in South Africa in 1860, what they

came as? They didn't come as immigrants, or getting away from turmoil in their country, they came here as indentured labourers (Patel 12:1019-1021 [Indian]).

Orientalists were doing far better than the local indigenous [Australasians] ... why the Orientalists were doing better was because, number one: they had excellent parental support and family support; number two: they spent an inordinate amount of time – longer than the other students – doing their homework and tuition and so on; and thirdly: they were regular attenders at schools and formal activities (Patel 12:1093-1098).

HoD³ schools – I can talk for them – they are generally the ones that are living in the townships. They don't have the money; they go into school and they are very high achievers in terms of academia, because that's the only thing that they have (Kathrodia 11:533-536 [Indian]).

A number of Indian respondents spoke of the impulse of that group to come to South Africa originally to seek employment and, once here, to better their lot through the only means open to them. They were also aware of one of the necessities of striving for a better lot: the importance of the individual's attitude and his/her family and community's support.

[T]hose people who are high achievers, no matter what type of system there is, they're going to try and achieve up above whatever the bar is set at, and those that are lower achievers, no matter what the system tells them, they're still going to be below the bar that's set for them. So it doesn't – I don't think that changes – um – the dynamic of whether that person's going to do better because of the different system they're in; it's coming from – stemming from the attitude of the person in the first place (Bala 6:924-928).

³ House of Delegates – an experiment in the last years of apartheid with separate parliaments for Indians (and Coloureds: House of Representatives) who controlled their own schools.

No, no; it's not the school, it's the parenting: a lot is on the parenting; a lot is on the family background. This is why I'm saying that if I look at the difference in the [Blacks], and my own experience will tell me the backgrounds that these youngsters come from are so horrendous that it disadvantaged them: lots of them have to go and work to educate themselves; to buy themselves the basics, you know, part-time: weekends; after hours – they have to work because they come from very very difficult backgrounds in terms of family upbringing. It's not just the schools; you can put them in the best of schools, but if they don't have the family support, the parenting support, the community support, etc. (Kathrodia 11:603-610).

This awareness was reflected by members of other groups.

[I]f you live in a lower economic state and I can say you are either conscious to work harder like they were saying, or you just stay where you are as well. It depends on the individual, and family, and a lot of stuff (Mbali 6:908-910 [Black]).

However, in startling contrast to the outlook of Indian respondents was another comment by the same student, Mbali, who was struggling academically.

Well, another thing about black people I notice is that it's not that they're not smart in life – they're just lazy, and it's – it's a – like ... we're that way because – ah – we expect things to be done for us. [D'you think so?] I'm generalising – yes I think so; I think black people are just less interested, and generally are just lazy beings – not all of them, but I think it's a trait that maybe most of us have: just generally lazy and we expect things to be done for you – the government this, the government that – whereas white people I think – I think it's – it may have to do with the apartheid system when they grew up having the best, they know they're the best, they're taught at home that they are the best (Mbali 6:868-874).

Another Black student related a contrast of a different kind: that between traditional beliefs about healing and those to which he was now being exposed.

[J]a, that part of the abdomen which was painful was like scarified by *umcabo*⁴ – by *umcabo*. So it's kind of like, you know – for me it was like OK, some, some of the things that traditional medicine has taught me as I was growing up are in conflict with what western medicine says, you know. So to some areas it adds to general knowledge and to some areas it brings conflict you know (S'bu 4:260-264).

It was generally Black students who expressed a relatively passive role in the small-group discussions that form an important part of their course.

I really really do think that the facilitator has a pivotal role to play, in the sense that – I mean, we could wrestle out what we know from rote learning, but it's up to them to actually like pursue that knowledge and actually see if we do understand it (Vusi 6:42-46).

I just feel as if there isn't some sort of – I wouldn't – there's no alarm bells; there's no buffer system that would help someone like that in terms of them – challenging them to get rid of their – for the sake of a better word – bad habits (Vusi 6:71-73).

[S]he will motivate you from first day you met her until the last day of your theme (Sipho 6:89).

I think teachers will help to guide you as a person how much do you – how much work do you need to know for how long (Sipho 6:382-383).

⁴ *Umcabo*: the tradition of making incisions in the skin over an affected part of the body and rubbing in herbal material.

Black students also experienced extremely negative interactions with clinicians in the wards.

[I]t's like there's that thing that you need to know that there's – you need to know that [You're small] that you need to know that you're a medical student; you need to know that I'm a consultant (Keketso [& S'bu] 4:649-651).

[W]hen maybe [the consultant]'s asking something, then we answer the question, then he or she says 'That is bullshit'; then that is when you see yourself 'No, I'm inferior' (Sipho:637-638).

In the face of all the perceived advantages and disadvantages of belonging to a particular 'race' group, when the parameter of 'race' was entered into the GEE and compared with the seven others, it disappeared as a significant influence on learning ($p = 0.376 - 0.713$ for different race groups).

Discussion

Examined in isolation, these students' racial groupings – however crude and unscientific – appear statistically to relate to their assessment marks. However, the literature, respondents' comments, and comparative analysis taking other factors into account, all refute that initial impression. 'Race' may subsume a wide range of other factors, but is not *per se* a significant factor.

The variety of respondents' opinions on the effect of students' race is remarkable: from those who averred that race was not itself an influence on academic achievement to those who felt that particular races had advantages which contributed to their better performance. It does appear that Indian families particularly appreciate the benefits of education and that their children have a corresponding drive to excel. This perhaps corresponds to the finding in Britain that Indian children do well compared to other race groups. The lower average marks of Black students may reflect the fact that the quota-based selection implies that their larger number yields a lower average.

There was a sense in which education and family and/or community effort interacted. The resources available to students were seen as lying within the community – provision of libraries and schools of an acceptable quality – and the family – being able to afford a more privileged school, easy access to books and computers, establishment of an intellectually encouraging home environment, and coaching by healthcare professionals from the wider family.

Motivation also appeared to act at various levels: for example, an individual's drive to succeed, a family's pride in the first member to reach higher education, and a community's sense of a member being able to make something better of himself/ herself.

Some shades of opinion seemed to vary according to the speaker's race. Indians spoke of coming to South Africa to work, and of improving their lot through education. One Black spoke of a sense of reliance on the government to provide facilities, another of the clash of cultures; others of reliance on their small-group facilitator to guide them, and still others of being demeaned by certain consultants. (Although not quoted here, White students were aware of their privileged position in comparison to others; the single Coloured student interviewed regarded himself as privileged relative to others of his 'race'.)

With reference to these seemingly race-specific perceptions, Ogbu's socio-historical theory (1992) is helpful in understanding their basis. Ogbu relates the achievements of different groups to optimistic or pessimistic interactions with the educational system (Gibson 1991; Ogbu 1991). Whites, Indians and Coloureds represent minorities in South Africa. Ogbu's theory would regard Whites as a voluntary (immigrant) minority (and of course it was their educational system that was imposed on South Africa). In terms of their initial entry as indentured labourers, Indians would, I suggest, also be thought of as a voluntary minority. Coloureds, having originated from settlers' liaisons with slaves, would be regarded as an involuntary (enslaved) minority. Blacks too would be regarded as an involuntary (conquered) minority (that is to say, a 'minority' in terms of power, not numbers). This classification, while counterintuitive with respect to the relative size of each race group, helps to explain the academic ascendancy of Indian and White students over their Coloured and Black counterparts. It also goes some way to explain the sense of disempowerment conveyed by some of the Black respondents.

That student diversity may in fact offer the possibility of stimulating transformative learning (in Mezirow's terms) has been explored elsewhere (Singaram & Sommerville 2011). Small-group learning has been used in the medical curriculum as a means of throwing together students who might, if left to their own devices, have separated out into enclaves of race, or geography, or wealth (noting that in South Africa, these divisions may well overlap to a large extent). We deliberately mix the composition of our small groups, and students have commented on their surprise that The Other is at least bearable, at best a source of expansive and unexpected learning. In training the facilitators who guide these small groups, we make the point that process is as important as product. We try to equip facilitators with the insights and the skills to help them deal with the disparities in their groups and to assist students in dealing positively with conflicting viewpoints and opinions.

The proportions of the different race groups in the cohort under study resulted from the medical faculty's conscious selection of students according to a quota system that seeks principally to represent community demographics, rather than being based on academic ability. While the logic is currently unassailable that a quota system guarantees that those groups that are numerically larger will include a wider spread of abilities and thus a wider (and lower) range of marks, this need not be so in perpetuity. If all the schools in the country were offering equal educational value, the pool of scholastic ability in the larger race groups should be expected to be wider, not deeper. There should eventually be many more top achievers in the Black pool than, for example, in the Indian pool, proportionate to the relative sizes of each. To fulfil the Black quota would no longer require dipping *deeper* into that pool; the numbers at the top of the academic rankings would be proportionate, and consequently the differences between groups due to their relative numbers alone, would diminish.

This relatively small sample, while chosen so as to characterise the student and staff body, may not in fact represent the opinions of the majority of the medical school community. Furthermore, medical students are a highly-selected group of learners, so may not represent the community at large. On the other hand, these are successful students who have overcome barriers of race, class, schooling and other limitations on academic progress in order to gain access to higher education. This in turn begs the question: How much *more* may these barriers restrict other *less* gifted learners?

Conclusion

The world literature, this study's GEE comparison of race with other demographic factors, and respondents' opinions, do not sustain 'race' as an independent influence on academic performance. This is not to say, as do the 'post-racialists', that race can now be ignored. Because race stands as a surrogate for so many other factors, it serves as a potent indicator of these potential advantages or handicaps; nonetheless, the areas of attention should be these other factors, not race itself.

Among these other factors, recent literature links class, or socioeconomic status, family, peer and cultural influence, lack of identification with the predominant educational system, and language, with race. The shift, over many decades, from a closed, dismissive racism to a more explicit, nuanced exploration of the root causes of racial differences in academic achievement finds echoes in South African respondents' views in the 21st century.

Analysis of students' marks over their five-year degree showed apparent race-based differences, which disappeared when compared to other influences. This too finds echoes in respondents' views: other than race itself, they discussed educational background, community motivation, differing extracurricular pressures, grasp of terminology (rather than language *per se*), the effects of quota-based selection, family intellectual and material resources, and students' perceptions of agency or disempowerment in the face of apparently adverse attitudes of staff members interacting with them.

This study suggests that, while 'race' as a construct is a hollow shell, it may contain – and often conceal – numerous important determinants of academic wellbeing. It carries implications, both for staff development and for student mentoring, of raising to consciousness perceptions that may significantly affect teaching and learning. As noted above, we have documented that small-group learning's interaction between and within students and staff members lends itself to the constructive resolution of conflict in small groups. The implications for the more distanced interaction of lectures are less obvious, but possibly more radical. If a large-group session is to be more than a unidirectional lecture, the lecturer has to understand that students do not respond uniformly to an invitation to interrupt and to question the authority figure. This would require a major shift in understanding the teaching and learning interaction on both sides. Further research with a view to confirming the validity of Ogbu's theory in the South

African setting, exploring other possible sources of academic variance that might be subsumed under the label of race, and widening the range and level of students studied, is recommended.

This longitudinal observational mixed-methods study amongst a select group of higher education students in a developing country confirms and supplements a number of findings made elsewhere in different settings. It applies an established theory to a novel setting. It acknowledges the past and present ‘black-white score gap’ referred to in the introduction, and affirms that this gap is not ‘an inevitable fact of nature’, but is composed of a complex interplay of factors. It looks forward to a future when medical – and other – students, like those interviewed in a study on successful African-American males,

are somehow debunking longstanding caricatures of [students] as lazy, unmotivated, underprepared for college, intellectually incompetent, and disengaged. Find them. Ask them how they got there. Understand what keeps them enrolled at the institution from year-to-year; why they are so engaged inside and outside the classroom; what strategies they employ to earn good grades and cultivate substantive relationships with professors; and how they manage to transcend environmental, social, cultural, economic, and academic barriers that typically undermine achievement for others like them (Harper 2012: 25).

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Power, Knowledge and Being: Decolonial Combative Discourse as a Survival Kit for Pan-Africanists in the 21st Century

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Abstract

The fact that modernity has created modern problems for which it has no easy modern solutions, and the outbreak of the global financial crisis that has shaken the confidence of the capitalist system, have provoked a new search for alternative knowledges, alternative methodologies, and alternative imaginations of the world. In the first place, this article seeks to project the value of decolonial epistemic perspective as a combative discourse, a redemptive methodology and a survival kit for pan-Africanists during the present moment dominated by phenomenology of uncertainty. In the second place, it also offers fresh reflections on the invisible imperial global technologies of subjectivation that continue to underpin and enable asymmetrical global power relations to persist and to contribute towards dilution of efforts to achieve pan-African unity. In the third place, it uses the case study of the disagreements over methodology of institutionalization of pan-Africanism as represented by Kwame Nkrumah and Julius Nyerere in the 1960s, revealing how these disagreements were informed by global imperial designs that hovered below and above the decolonization project. The significance of the article lies in its projection of decolonial epistemic perspective not only to reveal epistemicides that resulted in colonization of the minds of Africans, but also to systematically visibilise the invisible colonial matrices of power that need to be clearly understood by pan-Africanists as they struggle to extricate Africa from global coloniality.

Keywords: decolonial epistemic perspective, pan-Africanism, power, knowledge, being

Introduction

The conditions that brought about the crisis of modernity have not yet become the conditions to overcome the crisis beyond modernity. Hence the complexity of our transitional period portrayed by oppositional postmodern theory: we are facing modern problems for which there are no modern solutions. The search for a postmodern solution is what I call oppositional postmodernism What is necessary is to start from the disjunction between the modernity of the problems and the postmodernity of the possible solutions, and to turn such disjunction into the urge to ground theories and practices capable of reinventing social emancipation out of the wrecked emancipatory promises of modernity (Santos 2000:4).

In their seminal work on the empire, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri argued that the notion of international order that European modernity created and continually recreated is now riddled by a deep crisis. They added that since its emergence as a European construction ‘it has in fact always been in crisis, and this crisis has been one of the motors that has continuously pushed towards Empire’ (Hardt & Negri 2004:4). This point has been amplified and reinforced by other scholars such as Slavoj Žižek who dramatized the unfolding of the current global crisis in his *First As Tragedy, Then As Farce*, noting that a combination of the 9/11 disaster and the global credit crunch delivered a double-death to liberal capitalism as a political doctrine and as an economic theory (Žižek 2009).

It is important to remember that modernity has been driven by a strong belief in perpetual betterment and overcoming of all obstacles and problems that stood in the way of the Cartesian subject as a marker of the modern world order. This strong belief is today unsustainable in the face of the failure of modernity to deliver human development, to eradicate poverty,

to enable human freedom, and even to predict the recent global credit crunch as well as the Arab Spring. Under the brave modern world human rationality had substituted God. As noted by Arturo Escobar, currently, ‘modernity’s ability to provide solutions to modern problems has been increasingly compromised’ and ‘in this modern incapacity lie both a hyper-technification of rationality and a hyper-marketisation of social life’ (Escobar 2005:212). This became the essence of capitalist neoliberalism, of which David Harvey argued that: ‘The internal economic and political contradictions of neoliberalisation are impossible to contain except through financial crises’ (Harvey 2005:188).

What is clear is that there is ‘great deal of uncertainty and acrimony in the way we understand the world, as well as the way human beings understand each other in different environments and cultural contexts’ and mainstream Euro-American ‘scientific knowledge is unable to explain’ the crisis (Nabudere 2011A:1). This is why it is important to explore the potential of decolonial epistemic perspective as an alternative way of knowing, producing knowledge and imagining the world. Decolonial epistemic perspective has a long history in global history in general and African history in particular. Its genealogy is traceable to human political and intellectual struggles against the dark aspects of modernity such as mercantilism, the slave trade, imperialism, colonialism, apartheid, neocolonialism, underdevelopment, structural adjustment programmes, neoliberalism and even globalization.

At the centre of decolonial epistemic perspective are multi-faceted struggles over subjectivity and negative representations, over imposition of Euro-American epistemologies, over domination and repression, and over exploitation and dispossession. Decolonial epistemic perspective’s mission is to forge new categories of thought, construction of new subjectivities and creation of new modes of being and becoming (Fanon 1986:1). Decolonial struggle is a vast one. It cannot be fought in one site. The decolonization project must not be reduced to seeking political kingdom. It must encompass various domains and realms simultaneously, simply because global imperial designs and colonial matrices of power have permeated and infiltrated every institution and every social, political, economic, spiritual, aesthetic, and cognitive arena of African life (Ngugi wa Thiong’o 1986). At one major level, the African struggles involve challenging Euro-American epistemology and this dimension was well captured by Fanon, when he said:

We must leave our dreams and abandon our old beliefs and friendships of the time before life began. Let us waste no time in sterile litanies and nauseating mimicry. Leave this Europe where they are never done talking of Man, yet murder men everywhere they find them, at the corner of every one of their streets, in all the corners of the globe So, my brothers, how is it that we do not understand that we have better things to do than to follow that same Europe? Come, then, comrades, the European game has finally ended; we must find something different (Fanon 1986:251).

This article is organised into four main sections. The first section maps out the key contours of decolonial epistemic perspective. The second section analyses the essence of global imperial designs as technologies of subjectivation and their impact on Africa. The third section revisits the ‘Kwame Nkrumah-Julius Nyerere curse’ that unfolded in the 1960s in the midst of neocolonialism to reveal how disagreements over methodologies of institutionalization of pan-Africanism reflected entrapment of Africa postcolonial projects within colonial matrices of power. The final section briefly explains the current state of the pan-African agenda in the process demonstrating how the Nkrumah-Nyerere curse continues to hang on the minds of present day pan-Africanists like a nightmare.

Decolonial Epistemic Perspective as Survival Kit for Pan-Africanism

Nelson Maldonado-Torres a leading Latin American decolonial theorist clearly differentiates colonialism from coloniality in these revealing words:

Coloniality is different colonialism. Colonialism denotes a political and economic relation in which the sovereignty of a nation or a people rests on the power of another nation, which makes such a nation an empire. Coloniality, instead, refers to a long-standing patterns of power that emerged as result of colonialism, but that define culture, labour, intersubjectivity relations, and knowledge production well beyond the strict limits of colonial administrations. Thus, coloniality survives colonialism. It is maintained alive in

books, in the criteria for academic performance, in cultural patterns, in common sense, in the self-image of peoples, in aspirations of self, and so many other aspects of our modern experience. In a way, as modern subjects we breathe coloniality as the time and every day (Maldonado-Torres 2007: 243).

Decolonial epistemic perspective is ranged against coloniality. Whereas postmodernism and postcolonialism have contributed to the repudiation of totalizing Western discourses in the process opening spaces for previously silenced voices and highlighting plurality, multiplicity and difference; decolonial epistemic perspective unmask the very constitution of the modern world system dated to 1492 (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013). In other words, decolonial epistemic perspective builds on decolonization discourse but adds the concepts of power, being and knowledge as constitutive of modernity/coloniality. This is why we say that decolonial epistemic perspective stands on four concepts. The first concept being that of coloniality of power which is a description of how the current modern global Euro-American-centric and capitalist structure was organized, configured, and articulated according to imperatives of global imperial designs. Coloniality of power unpacks coloniality as that broad but specific and constitutive element of global model of capitalist order that continues to underpin global coloniality after the end of direct colonialism (Quijano 2000:342).

Coloniality of power describes modern global power as a network of relations of exploitation, domination, and control of labour, nature and its productive resources, gender and its reproductive species, subjectivity and its material and intersubjective products, as well as knowledge and authority (Quijano 2007). At the centre of coloniality of power are technologies of domination, exploitation and violence known as ‘colonial matrix of power’ that affects all dimensions of social existence ranging from sexuality, authority, subjectivity, politics, economy, spirituality, language and race (Quijano 2000:342-380). As articulated by Castro-Gomez:

The concept of the ‘coloniality of power’ broadens and corrects the Foucauldian concept of ‘disciplinary power’ by demonstrating that the panoptic constructions erected by the modern state are inscribed in a wider structure of power/knowledge. This global structure is

configured by the colonial relation between centre and periphery that is at the root of European expansion (Castro-Gomez 2002: 276).

The importance of the concept of coloniality of power for present-day pan-Africanists is that it enables them to gain a deeper understanding of two crucial realities. The first being that the achievement of political independence and the withdrawal of direct colonial administrations; did not produce a postcolonial world. What it produced were vulnerable post-colonial nation-states with a modicum of juridical freedom. Decolonially speaking, African people still live under global Euro-American domination and exploitation. Coloniality of power, therefore, allows pan-Africanists to understand the continuity of colonial forms of domination after the end of direct colonial administrations (Grosfoguel 2007:219). The second is that it enables pan-Africanists to notice the strong hierarchies of present modern global power structure, whereby at the apex are the USA and NATO partners and at the subaltern bottom is Africa and its people. This structure can only be changed if Africans fully embraced pan-Africanism not only as an ideological shield but also as enabler of economic freedom.

Decolonial epistemic perspective differs from neo-colonial critique which emphasises political and economic hierarchies of domination and exploitation. The former identifies 'heterarchies' (multiple, vertical and horizontal) forms of domination and exploitation. For example, Ramon Grosfoguel isolates nine of these consisting of race, class, gender, sexuality, religious, ethnic, politico-military, epistemic and linguistic forms (Grosfoguel 2007: 216-217).

Therefore the second concept on which decolonial epistemic perspective is built is called coloniality of knowledge. It is intimately tied to coloniality of power as power and knowledge operate as inseparable twins within global imperial designs. But coloniality of knowledge speaks directly to epistemological colonization whereby Euro-American techno-scientific knowledge managed to displace, discipline, destroy alternative knowledges it found outside the Euro-American zones (colonies) while at the same time appropriating what it considered useful to global imperial designs. Combinations of natural and human sciences were used to back up racist theories and to rank and organise people according to binaries of inferior-superior relations (Castro-Gomez 2002:217). Santos elaborated that in the name of introducing modern science, alternative knowledge and science

found in Africa were destroyed and the social groups that relied on these systems to support their own autonomous path of development have been humiliated as epistemicides were being committed (Santos 2007: xviii).

Schools, churches, and universities, contributed towards the invention of the 'other' as they operated as epistemic sites as well as technologies of subjectivation that naturalised Euro-American epistemology as universal. On the other hand, the same institutions became nurseries for the production of African educated elites and African nationalists who exposed hypocrisy and double standards hidden within global imperial designs (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2001:53-82). While not totally opposed to Euro-American values, the African educated elites and nationalists railed against exploitative and repressive aspects contained within Western order of knowledge. But what ensued as a darkest aspect of coloniality of knowledge were 'epistemicides' which manifested in various ways: first is academic mimetism/intellectual mimicry dominant in African scholarship; destruction of indigenous African knowledges; and a plethora of crises plaguing universities in Africa (crisis of identity, crisis of legitimacy, crisis of relevance, crisis of authority, epistemological crisis, crisis of student politics and crisis of historical mission) (Lebakeng, Phalane & Dalindyebo 2006).

Coloniality of knowledge is very important because it speaks directly to the dilemmas of invasion of imagination and colonization of the minds of Africans, which constitutes epistemological colonization. This colonization of consciousness and modes of knowing is pervasive in discourses of development, technologies of organising people into nations and states, as well as imaginations of the future.

How coloniality of knowledge unfolded is well articulated by Anibal Quijano who argued that in the beginning colonialism assumed the form of systematic repression of the specific beliefs, ideas, images, symbols, and knowledges that were considered not useful for the global imperial designs and the colonial process (Quijano 2007:169). This same process involved appropriating from the colonized their knowledge especially in mining, and agriculture as well as their products and work.

But the important form of colonial invasion and repression is that which targeted modes of knowing, of producing knowledge, and of producing perspectives. This was followed by imposition of the coloniser's own Euro-American epistemology, own patterns of expression, and their own beliefs and images (Quijano 2007:169). This analysis speaks to the core issues of

colonization of imaginations and minds of Africans that need decolonial epistemic perspective as a therapy.

The third pillar of decolonial epistemic perspective is coloniality of being. It directly addresses the physical and psychological predicament of colonised beings. It enables appreciation of the impact of colonial technologies of subjectivation on the life, body, and mind of the colonized people. It speaks to the lived experiences of colonized which can be described as phenomenology of subjectivity (Maldonado-Torres 2007:242). Drawing on scientific racism thinking, colonialists doubted the very humanity of colonized people and doubted whether they had souls. This racist thinking informed politics of ‘Othering’ of the colonized people which culminated in what Nelson Maldonado-Torres termed ‘imperial Manichean misanthropic skepticism’ as a form of ‘questioning the very humanity of colonized peoples’ (Maldonado-Torres 2007:245). The being of the colonized became that of a ‘racialised self’ open to all sorts of abuses and living a hellish life.

Slavery, war, conquest, violence, rape and even genocide constituted the way the colonial conquerors related to the colonized. Ethics that governed human relations in Europe were suspended in Africa where Africans were designated as ‘those outside the human ocumene’ (Maldonado-Torres 2007:247). Death itself was never an extra-ordinary affair among colonized and those racialised into non-beings, but a constitutive feature of their life. In short, the concept of coloniality of being is very useful because it links with the Fanonian concept of the wretched of the earth (*the damne*) – the ideas of black people as condemned people whose being amounts to ‘nothingness’. Maldonado-Torres wrote that: ‘*Indeed, coloniality of Being primarily refers to normalization of the extraordinary events that take place in war*’ (Maldonado-Torres 2007:255; e.i.o.). The list of ‘extraordinary events’ that have been normalised (making them appear as though they are constitutive of the ontology of being African) in Africa is endless, ranging from hunger, epidemics like HIV/AIDS, living in shacks (*imikhukhu* in South Africa and other parts of Africa), homelessness, political violence, communal violence, rape, to being killed by lightning every rainy season.

Just like coloniality of power and coloniality of knowledge, coloniality of being is very important for pan-Africanists because it enables a process of making visible the invisible. It also becomes a useful tool for deciphering the mechanisms that produce the dire conditions within which poor Africans are enmeshed. Finally, the three concepts so far presented

demonstrate the importance of pushing the unfinished agenda of decolonization forwards concurrently with the equally significant unfinished democratic agenda.

The last concept is that of coloniality of nature. This one is not yet fully developed but it seeks to address the pertinent issues of ecology, environment and climate. Arturo Escobar (2005), William M. Adams and Martin Mulligan (2003) and others are working on this concept. How did modernity and the capitalist system impact on human relations with environment? What can be gained by pan-Africanists if they thought about ecological and environmental problems from 'colonial difference' as a privileged epistemological and political space for social transformation rather than merely imbibing discourses from the global metropolitan centres? What emerges from such an approach is how modernity and its epistemology suppressed non-Euro-American thought, histories and forms of knowledge that had enabled Africans to coexist harmoniously with environment. The underside of modernity that includes mercantilism, the slave trade, imperialism, colonialism and apartheid, had a debilitating impact on ecology and environment (Escobar 2005).

Modernity's push for subordination of body and nature to mind opened floodgates to reduction of the products of nature to products of labour as well as opening nature to human-driven markets. The result has been an epistemic rift between local people's episteme and modern episteme on understanding of nature and its preservation (Escobar 2007). Nature, body, mind and spirit's relationship was ruptured with serious consequences for the environment, and what is needed is to restore the linkages. This can only be done if African peoples' own understanding and knowledge of environment is taken seriously in the context of the current threat of environmental catastrophe rooted in Euro-American ways of exploiting nature informed by the exploitative capitalist thought.

Decolonial epistemic perspective carries the totality of the above four concepts in its agenda to critique Euro-American epistemology that is currently in crisis. It inaugurates thinking that calls for opening up of plurality of epistemologies to enrich human experience from different vantage points. Decolonial epistemic perspective is a critical social theory encompassing the totality of critical thoughts emerging from the ex-colonised world informed by imperatives of resisting colonialism and imperialism in

their multifaceted forms. It contributes towards imagination and construction of a different future (Riberom 2011).

Like all critical social theories of society, decolonial epistemic perspective aims to critique and possibly overcome the epistemological injustices put in place by imperial global designs, and questions and challenges the long standing claims of Euro-American epistemology to be universal, neutral, objective, disembodied, as well as being the only mode of knowing (Mignolo 2007). It is ‘an-other thought’ that seeks to inaugurate ‘an-other logic,’ ‘an-other language,’ and ‘an-other thinking’ that has the potential to liberate ex-colonised people’s minds from Euro-American hegemony (Mignolo 2007:56).

What distinguishes decolonial epistemic perspective is its clear African and Global South locus of enunciation. A locus of enunciation is a reference to a particular location from which human beings speak within the power structures. Its importance lies in capturing that there is absolutely nobody who is able to escape the class, sexual, gender, spiritual, linguistic, geographical and racial hierarchies fashioned by the modern world system (Grosfoguel 2007:213). Unlike the Euro-American epistemology, it is not fundamentalist in its outlook as it concedes space for other knowledges emerging from different geo-historical sites and different human experiences. Decolonial epistemic differs from postmodern perspective in the sense that the later constitute a critique of modernity from within. Decolonial epistemic perspective is a critique from without. It is genealogically traceable to the peripheries of modernity. But it does not even attempt to claim universality, neutrality, and singular truthfulness. It is decidedly and deliberately situated in Global South in general and Africa in particular. It privileges decolonial thinking as a form of liberation.

Decolonial epistemic perspective helps in unveiling epistemic silences, conspiracies, and epistemic violence hidden within Euro-American epistemology and to affirm the epistemic rights of the African people that enable them to transcend global imperial designs. Unless coloniality of power, coloniality of knowledge, coloniality of being, and coloniality of nature are clearly understood as enabling intellectual unveiling of colonial matrices of power and technologies of subjectivation that underpin the continued subalternization of Africa and its people since the time of colonial encounters, the pan-African agenda would not be pushed as vigorously and as urgently as it deserves.

Read from decolonial epistemic perspective, pan-Africanism forms part of decolonial horizons involving Africans taking charge of their destiny and search for new humanism. In this context pan-Africanism becomes a singular connector of a diversity of ex-colonized African people. This must begin with epistemic and cognitive freedom. It has become clear in recent years and months the whole Euro-American structure of power in place since the fifteenth century has been undergoing a profound crisis. The Euro-American epistemology is undergoing a profound crisis of confidence. It failed even to predict the current financial crisis that is rocking the world. It has also become clear that what was universalised by global imperial designs as a universal science is in fact a Western particularism, which assumed power to define all rival forms of knowledge as particular, local, contextual and situational, while claiming universality (Santos 2007:xviii).

Decolonial epistemic perspective builds on this realisation to inaugurate and push forward a ‘decolonial turn’ that calls for recognition of alternative knowledges and alternative ways of knowing, as part of re-opening vistas of liberation from global imperial designs and colonial matrices of power. The world in general and Africa in particular finds itself in a phase of paradigmatic shift that necessitates re-invention of the decolonial liberation agenda within a context in which Euro-American civilization is devouring not only its promises of progress, liberty, equality, non-discrimination and rationality, but is repudiating and criminalising the very idea of struggle for these objectives (Santos 2007: xxi).

Global Imperial Designs and Technologies of Subjectivation

Global imperial designs refer to the core technologies of modernity that underpinned its expansion into the non-Western parts of the world from the fifteenth century onwards. Race and Euro-American epistemology particularly its techno-scientific knowledge claims were used to classify and name the world according to Euro-Christian-Modernist imaginary. African peoples and others whose cultures and ways of life were not informed by imperatives of Euro-Christian modernity, were deemed to be barbarians – a people who did not belong to history and had no history. Following Christian cosmology the cartography of the world into continents had to be followed by assigning each part to one of the three sons of Noah: Europe to Japheth;

Africa to Ham; and Asia to Shem in some of the early maps like that from Isidore (Mignolo 2007: 24). Besides this mapping of the global geocultural identities into continents, a conception of humanity according to race resulted in its differentiation into inferior and superior, irrational and rational, primitive and civilized, traditional and modern (Quijano 2000; 2007).

The idea of race was deployed to justify such inimical processes as the slave trade, mercantilism, imperialism, colonialism, apartheid as well as authoritarian and brutal colonial governance systems and styles. This constituted the ugly and dangerous face of modernity and these inimical processes were unleashed on the non-Western world. Race was also used as a fundamental criterion for distribution of world population into ranks, places, and roles. Boaventura de Sousa Santos depicted the bifurcated face of modernity as informed by ‘abyssal thinking’ (Santos 2007).

This thinking was constituted by ‘visible and invisible distinctions, the invisible ones being the foundation of the visible ones’ (Santos 2007:45). Abyssal thinking’s invisible distinctions culminated in the division of global social reality into two realms – the realm of ‘this side of the line’ (Euro-America world) and realm of ‘the other side of the line’ (Africa and other non-Western part of the world). Ramon Grosfoguel clearly expressed how the logic of superiority-inferiority that informed ‘this side’ and the ‘other side’ informed a particular rendition of human global human experience:

We went from the sixteenth century characterization of ‘people without writing’ to the eighteenth and nineteenth century characterization of ‘people without history,’ to the twentieth century characterization of ‘people without development’ and more recently, to the early twenty-first century of ‘people without democracy’ (Grosfoguel 2007:214).

This was a presentation of how the human trajectories on the ‘other side’ (the colonial zone) was assumed to have unfolded since the dawn of modernity. On ‘this side of the line’ (Euro-American zone), the trajectory was rendered this way:

We went from the sixteenth century ‘rights of people’ to the eighteenth century ‘rights of man’ ... and to the late twentieth century ‘human rights’ (Grosfoguel 2007:214).

Harmonious coexistence was imagined as incomprehensible and impossible. In short, the two sides were characterized by ‘impossibility of the co-presence’ (Santos 2007:45). This conception and division of the world into this side and that side authorized those from ‘this side’ to assume superiority and to arrogate order, civility, law and rights, to themselves, while denying the existence of the same on the ‘other side’. Violence, lawlessness, primitivism, superstition, strange beliefs, and retrogressive knowledges distinguished the ‘other side’ (Santos 2007:47). This became the colonial zone where canons of ethics, law, rights, civility and other forms that underpinned human comfort in the Euro-American world were suspended, and war, violence, and appropriation constituted colonial governance (Maldonado-Torres 2004; Maldonado-Torres 2007).

With specific reference to Africa, Achille Mbembe categorized colonial forms of violence into three. The first was foundational violence that authorized the right of conquest while simultaneously creating the object (Africans) of its violence (Mbembe 2000). It had an instituting function. The second was legitimization violence and this one became a form of colonial language and transformed foundational violence into an ‘authorizing authority’ (Mbembe 2000:6-7). The third was maintenance violence and it ensured permanence of colonial sovereignty. Its function according to Mbembe was to ‘ratify and reiterate’ (Mbembe 2007:7). Violence and race occupied a central place within global imperial designs.

Global imperial designs are shorthand for how ‘It was from the West that the rest of the world is described, conceptualized, and ranked: that is, modernity is the self-description of Europe’s role in history rather than an ontological historical process (Mignolo 2007:35). Simply put, global imperial designs are those processes that drove the making of a Capitalist, Patriarchal, Euro-American-centric, Christian-centric, Imperial, Colonial, Hetero-normative and Modern-world system (Grosfoguel 2011). A catalogue of identifiable historical processes that produced the current unequal world order includes the European Renaissance and Christianization in the 15/16th century.

This was followed by the Enlightenment, Mercantilism and Maritime Trade in the 16/17th century. Industrialism, Imperialism and Colonialism in the 18/19th Century commenced. This was followed by Modernization and Developmentalism in the mid-20th century. Neocolonialism, Neoliberalism, Washington Consensus and the Structural Adjustment Programmes dominated in the late-20th century. Today, United States of America (USA)

super-power imperialism and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) driven imperial designs are hidden behind the mantras of humanitarian interventions and fighting global terrorism. Discourses of exporting democracy and human rights dominate at the beginning of the 21st century (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2012a).

The key problem in Africa is that there is an illusion of freedom and a myth of decolonization. There can be no freedom and decolonization as long as global imperial designs are in place since conquest still shapes and informs the character of the modern world system. This point is well captured by Grosfoguel who argued that:

One of the most powerful myths of twentieth century was the notion that the elimination of colonial administrations amounted to the decolonization of the world. This led to the myth of a ‘postcolonial’ world. The heterogeneous and multiple global structures put in place over a period of 450 years did not evaporate with the juridical-political decolonization of the periphery over the past 50 years. We continue to live under the same ‘colonial power matrix’. With juridical-political decolonization we moved from a period of ‘global colonialism’ to the current period of ‘global coloniality’ (Grosfoguel 2007:219).

This critical analysis of the present condition of those people residing in peripheral ex-colonized world is in no way meant to down play the sacrifices they made towards achievement of decolonization. As Zeleza argues, while the decolonization period constituted the ‘proudest moment’ of African nationalism, Africans must not therefore relax and think that the struggle is over (Zeleza 2003:vi). The postcolonial states have remained operating like colonial states, unleashing violence on African people. African people are still often treated like subjects rather than citizens by their leaders. Juridical freedom has not been translated into popular freedom. Territorial nationalism informed by colonial matrices of power is proving difficult to convert into pan-Africanism and pan-African unity (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2012b:71-89).

Ngugi wa Thiong’o not only identified that colonization of the mind remained the most successful realm where colonialism deeply inscribed itself, but also that colonialism is a vast process requiring decolonization to assume the character of an equally vast process to respond and fight colonialism in its

multifaceted forms (Ngugi wa Thiong'o 1986). Decolonization has to assume global proportions for it to deal effectively with global imperial designs. Ngugi wa Thiong'o emphasised that imperialism is not just a slogan 'It is real, it is palpable in content and form and in its methods and effects ... Imperialism is total: it has economic, political, military, cultural and psychological consequences for people of the world. It could even lead to holocaust' (Ngugi wa Thiong'o 1986:2).

This unmasking of the imperialism, colonialism and colonality is necessary because there are several forms of colonizations such as colonization of consciousness, colonization of sexuality; colonization of gender, colonization of language, colonization of aesthetics, colonization of epistemology and other forms (Ngugi wa Thiong'o 1986:6-12). Decolonization must respond to all these forms of colonization if Africa is to be free. Decolonial epistemic perspective is therefore a necessary survival kit for continuation of the decolonization project in the present age of global colonality that is informed and underpinned by invisible colonial matrices of power. Decolonization processes of the 21st century must also deal with the problem of predatory postcolonial states and authoritarian leaders in Africa as well as push for democratization of global power structures.

Today, global imperial designs have assumed the form of neo-liberal imperialism with latent discourses of re-colonization of Africa. At the centre of this neo-imperialism is the idea that such 'beneficent nations' like Britain, American and others should recruit local African leaders and guide them to embrace free markets, rule of law, and liberal democracy in order to enable the smooth functioning of the global economic system (Mbeki 2012). These ideas were expressed openly by Robert Cooper, a British diplomat, former adviser to Prime Minister Tony Blair, current adviser to EU Foreign Affairs Chief Baroness Catherine Ashton, and a strong advocate of neoliberal imperialism. This is how he put it:

What is needed then is new kind of imperialism, one acceptable to a world of human rights and cosmopolitan values. We already discern its outline: an imperialism which, like all imperialism, aims to bring order and organization but which rests today on voluntary principle (Cooper 2000:8).

Hillary Clinton the US Secretary of State also emphasised the preference for

use of ‘smart power’ that include deployment of democracy and human rights to disguise geo-strategic goals (Mbeki 2012:7). In short, democracy and human rights have been appropriated into levers of global imperial designs, leading some scholars like Chinweizu (1987) and leaders like Robert Mugabe to despise them as part of cultural imperialism. The attempt by the Western powers to use a combination of war and ideology to continue dominating the world is also captured in Tony Blair’s 1999 Chicago speech that set out the premises of liberal imperial interventions as part of British foreign policy. With reference to terrorism, Blair said the world was facing an unconventional kind of war which could not be won in a conventional way. He emphasized the need to win the battle of values – the battle for hearts and minds. This is how he put it:

To succeed, we have to win the battle of values, as much as the battle of arms. We have to show that these are not western, still less American or Anglo-Saxon values, but values in the common ownership, of humanity, universal values that should be the right of the global citizen (Blair 2006:21).

Blair explained that beyond those like terrorists who according to him ‘truly hate us,’ there are many who were skeptical of the Euro-American world’s ‘motives, our good faith, our even-handedness,’ but could be persuaded (Blair 2006:22). What both Blair and Clinton were simply saying is that Euro-American strategic interests must be articulated in terms of struggles for justice, fairness, human rights, democracy, security and prosperity. But John Pilger saw through this conspiracy, when he said:

‘Democracy’ is now the free market – a concept bereft of freedom. ‘Reform’ is now the denial of reform. ‘Economics’ is the relegation of most human endeavour to material value, a bottom line. Alternative models that relate to the needs of the majority of humanity end up in the memory hole. And ‘governance’ – so fashionable these days, means an economic approval in Washington, Brussels and Davos. ‘Foreign policy’ is service to dominant power. Conquest is ‘humanitarian intervention’. Invasion is ‘nation-building’. Every day, we breathe the hot air of these pseudo ideas with their pseudo truths and pseudo experts (Pilger 2008:4).

These are the invisible realities that decolonial epistemic perspective seek to visibilise as part of equipping pan-Africanists with knowledge to deal with global issues.

The Curse of African Founding Fathers

Ideally, the pan-Africanist movement was a redemptive project that embodied ideals of freedom from slavery; freedom from racism; freedom from colonialism; equality of human beings, right of black races to unite under a pan-African nation, right of black races to own resources in Africa, self-determination of black races and the building of Africa into an economic and political giant capable of rivalling Europe and America. Pan-Africanism arose not only as part of humankind's quest for liberty, freedom, justice and liberation but also as a direct response to the historical reality enslavement of black races (Geiss 1974; Shivji 2011).

It must be noted that up to 1945, the preceding four congresses were organised and dominated by members of the African diaspora. Therefore fifth Pan-African Congress held on 15 October 1945 in Manchester was the first that brought together prominent black leaders like Kwame Nkrumah, Julius Nyerere, Jomo Kenyatta, Peter Abrahams and many others. It also brought together Anglophone and Francophone African leaders as well as bringing together continental Africans and those from the Diaspora. The involvement of continental Africans heralded the beginnings of the migration of hosting of the Pan-African Congress to the African soil. In 1958 the first All African Peoples' Congress was held in Ghana. This congress marked the handing over of the leadership of the movement from William E. B. DuBois to Nkrumah (Abraham 2003:49). But soon the pan-African movement under Nkrumah became affected by differing ideas on the best route and pace it should take to arrive at continental political unity. The problem began with Ghana pushing for a political union of Africa and Nigeria resisting such an approach. The question of the path to be followed in search of pan-African unity particularly its institutionalization raised animated debates with leaders like Nyerere preferring a gradualist approach.

The tentacles and influence of global imperial designs were becoming a hindrance to the realization of pan-African unity as early as 1960. Such newly independent countries as Nigeria, Tunisia, Kenya, Tanzania and the Francophone states, preferred to maintain closer links with the West.

Francophone states with the exception of Guinea under Sekou Toure had voted to remain within the tutelage of France (Martin 1995:163-188). Ghana, Guinea, Morocco, and Mali pushed for a political union of African states. They justified this move as a necessary shield against neo-colonialism (Abraham 2003:49). But other African leaders saw maintenance of close ranks with the West as a redeeming move and a counter to infiltration of communism. But the danger of neo-colonialism soon took a concrete form in Congo in 1960. A pan-Africanist leader Patrice Lumumba had just assumed power and was working towards empowerment of Congolese people at home and forging pan-African unity at the continental level. Lumumba was vehemently opposed to any vestiges of coloniality. Therefore the former colonial power (Belgium) worked in close alliance with such leaders as Moise Tshombe and Kasavubu to torpedo Lumumba's pan-African project. The secession by Katanga under Tshombe became the first counter-revolutionary crisis facing Lumumba's government (Abraham 2003:50).

The Congo crisis of 1960 split African countries into rival camps of conflicting alliances. Some supported the founding father of Congo, Lumumba (first Prime Minister of Congo) who was facing secession and Western infiltration; others supported Kasavubu (the first President of Congo), and others the secessionist leader Tshombe (see Campbell 2012 on invasion of Libya and assassination of Gaddafi). The divisions were exacerbated by Western interference in support of secessionist leader Tshombe and Kasavubu who was considered to be pro-West. The pan-Africanist and pro-East Lumumba had to be isolated and then physically destroyed according to the logic of global imperial designs. Ghana, Mali, Guinea and Morocco formed the Casablanca bloc and vehemently denounced Western intervention in Congo. Those African states that assumed considered a moderate stance in the eyes of the West, supported Kasavubu. They later met in Abidjan in October 1960 to form the Brazzaville bloc. A third grouping called the Monrovia bloc consisting of Cote d'Ivoire, Liberia and Senegal emerged which tried to harmonise relations between the belligerent groups, but failed (Mazrui 1982:1-28; Mazrui 1999:105-126).

The early founding fathers of Africa's divisions symbolised a divided house whose fate was destruction. The launch of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in May 1963 came within a context of divisions among African leaders over what kind of union was to be formed. Nkrumah's book *Africa Must Unite* which he distributed widely to African leaders before the historic

founding of OAU did not unite the divided African house. Nkrumah's book carried the message:

We need the strength of our combined numbers and resources to protect ourselves from the very positive dangers of returning colonialism in disguised forms. We need it to combat the entrenched forces dividing our continent and still holding back millions of our brothers. We need it to secure total African liberation At present most of the independent states are moving in directions which expose us to dangers of imperialism and neo-colonialism (Nkrumah 1970 :217).

Julius Nyerere can best be characterised as a reluctant pan-Africanist who emphasised dilemmas and problems that hindered pan-African unity while ignoring those positive factors that could be used to quicken the pace of realisation of political continental unity. He criticised Nkrumah and all those who were pushing for political union of Africa as using this pan-African idea for the purpose of propaganda. In 1966, he argued that:

Indeed I believe that a real dilemma faces the Pan-Africanist. One is the fact that Pan-Africanism demands an African consciousness and an African loyalty; on the other hand is the fact that each Pan-Africanist must also concern himself with the freedom and development of one of the nations of Africa. These things can conflict. Let us be honest and admit that they have already conflicted (Nyerere 1966:1).

While Nyerere was seen by some scholars and commentators as a realist and pragmatist, he introduced a discourse of impossibility that culminated in criticism of Nkrumah who wanted a quickened pace towards political continental unity as a survival kit in the context of vicious neo-colonial forces that worked against African progress (B'beri & Louw 2011:335-346). The irony in Nyerere's thinking on development in Africa is that he urged Africans as 'late, late comers' to 'run while others walked' so as to catch up with the rest of the world. But when it came to the issue of pan-African unity, he suggested 'walking' (gradualism) and opposed Nkrumah who suggested 'running' (Mkandawire 2011:1-36).

Broadly speaking, Nkrumah and Nyerere's thoughts on nationalism and pan-Africanism provide a unique entry point into understanding the complexities of implementing the national projects while pushing forward the pan-African agenda. Even when Nkrumah made efforts to explain what the structures and institutions of a political union would look like, Nyerere remained in a dismissive mood saying: 'To rule out a step by step progress towards African Unity is to hope that the Almighty will one day say "Let there be unity in Africa," and there shall be unity'. He even tried to dismiss the interference of imperialists when he charged that 'to say that step by step method was invented by the imperialists is to reach the limits of absurdity' (Nyerere 1967:320).

Despite Nyerere's attempt to dampen Nkrumah's spirit, he continued at the 1965 OAU Conference to urge his fellow African leaders to realize that the political and economic crises bedeviling Africa were a clear testimony of the dangers of neo-colonialism and pan-African unity (Biney 2008). There is no doubt that Nkrumah and Nyerere operated within a complex postcolonial terrain that exacerbated tensions among African leaders. The immediate postcolonial period was dominated by popular expectations that needed to be fulfilled and political turmoil emanating from outside that needed to be avoided. The question of regime survival in the midst of the Cold War impinged on national and social transformational agendas of the world's youngest states (Nkrumah 1965).

Julius Ihonvbere has roundly blamed African founding fathers, for numerous betrayals of the national project(s). He blamed them for failure to restructure the state; to empower Africans; to challenge foreign domination and exploitation of Africans; and to challenge the cultural bastardization in the continent (Ihonvbere 1994:5). However, Nkrumah's national project embodied both a nationalist and a pan-African vision. To him, there were complementarities rather than tensions between nationalism and pan-Africanism. This vision was clearly expressed in three of his widely quoted statements: 'Seek ye first the political kingdom and all else shall be added unto it' (Mazrui 1999:105-126). He also made it clear that 'The independence of Ghana is meaningless unless linked to the total liberation of the African continent'. He elaborated that 'The independence of Ghana was the first crack in the seemingly impregnable armour of imperialism in Africa. It created and furnished the bridgehead for organised assaults upon colonialism' (Nkrumah 1965:xiv).

Nkrumah interpreted the attainment of political independence by African states as a beginning of a political trajectory to real freedom predicated on pan-African unity. Territorial nationalism was to him a means to pan-Africanism. This is why he placed the independence of Ghana at the centre of the pan-African project, linking its sovereignty to the total liberation of the continent. Nkrumah identified two core problems that faced postcolonial Africa. The first was lack of pan-African unity. The second was the danger of neo-colonialism. His analysis of these problems was that no African country stood a chance of pursuing an independent national project without inviting the wrath of neo-colonialism (Nkrumah 1965:5-12).

To Nkrumah pan-African unity was a nationalist survival shield rather than a threat to sovereignty as Nyerere insinuated when he said: 'It is some curious animal to which our individual state do not surrender sovereignty, and yet somehow becomes the strong instrument which we require to fulfill the purposes of modern states' (Nyerere 1967: 303). To Nkrumah pan-African unity was the only real African protection from vulnerability to neo-colonialism. Pan-African unity was also an enabling factor for Africans to own their natural resources and pursue independent economic policies. Nkrumah concluded that 'The socio-economic development and progress of Africa will come only within the political kingdom not the other way round' (Nkrumah 1965:10).

Unfortunately in 1966, Nkrumah had to prematurely exit the political stage as consequence of a military coup that was funded by the CIA. By this time Nkrumah was allying more closely with the Soviet Union and China. He was toppled just four months after the publication of his *Neo-Colonialism* (October 1965). Its publication had elicited an immediate protest from the US government, which promptly cancelled US\$35 million aid to Ghana (Shivji 2009:152). One of the architects of the coup, Colonel A. A. Afrifa wrote a revealing book about the coup, vilifying Nkrumah's pan-Africanism and support for the liberation movements. He stated that:

At the attainment of independence, the British handed over to us a decent system of government in which everyone had a say Organization of African unity or no Organization of African unity, I will claim my citizenship of Ghana and the Commonwealth in any part of the world. I have been trained in the United Kingdom as a soldier, and I am ever prepared to fight alongside my friends in the

United Kingdom in the same way as Canadians and Australians will do (Afrifa 1966:11).

This was a clear case of embracing the former colonial power as a friend rather than a neo-colonialist formation. By 1966 Nkrumah's dream of continental political unity had not materialized. His vision of turning Ghana into an economic paradise had not succeeded either. The coup removed from power a committed pan-Africanist who had even predicted his political demise at the historic founding of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in 1963. He told his fellow African leaders that:

If we do not come together, if we do not unite, we shall all be thrown out, all of us one by one – and I also will go. [...] The OAU must face a choice now – we can either move forward to progress through our effective African Union or step backward into stagnation, instability and confusion – an easy prey for foreign intervention, interference and subversion (Batsa 1985:30).

Nkrumah's foresight was confirmed by the fact that the second decade of independence became the age of military coups in Africa as well as rehabilitation of imperialism.

While Nyerere claimed that like Nkrumah he believed in the pan-Africanist project as the ultimate end of the African struggle for freedom, he did not push the pan-African agenda with the same zeal he pushed forward his Tanzanian national socialist project predicated on Ujamaa villages (Hyden 1980). He emphasised tensions between territorial nationalism and pan-Africanism, while in principle agreeing with Nkrumah that realization of an African continental government was 'our greatest dream of all'. He explained that:

For it was as Africans that we dreamed of freedom; and we thought of it for Africa. Our real ambition was African freedom and African government. The fact that we fought area by area was merely a tactical necessity. We organised ourselves into Convention People's Party, the Tanganyika African National Union, the United National Independence Party, and so on, simply because each local colonial government had to be dealt with separately. The question we now

have to answer is whether Africa shall maintain this internal separation as we defeat colonialism, or whether our earlier proud boast – I am an African’ –shall become a reality (Nkrumah 1970:2).

Nyerere interpreted the dilemma of the pan-Africanist as that of how to deal with territorial nationalisms that were diverging and moving away from pan-Africanism. The divergences were motivated by local realities such as promotion of nationhood to contain imperatives of disunity, economic imperatives that dictated inter-country competition over attracting foreign capital and investments, and promises to the people that needed to be fulfilled. He concluded that:

And the truth is that as each of us develops his own state we raise more and more barriers between ourselves. We entrench differences which we have inherited from the colonial periods and develop new ones. Most of all, we develop a national pride which could easily be inimical to the development of a pride in Africa (Nyerere 1966:2).

Unlike Nkrumah, Nyerere privileged the agenda of ‘grappling with serious and urgent problems within our states’ and dangers from outside over ‘serious thinking about the way forward to Pan-Africanism partly because ‘we are always assailed for “wasting money on conferences,” or being “unrealistic” in our determination to build roads or railways to link our nations’ (Nyerere 1966:7).

Nyerere became one of the most eloquent exponents of the gradualist approach to continental political unity. He pushed forward for step by step progress towards pan-African unity, beginning with strengthening individual states’ sovereignties and building of regional economic communities (Nyerere 1967: 300-306). His gradualist approach informed the formation of the OAU with a limited mandate of ensuring the total decolonization of Africa as the first step towards achievement of continental political unity. It would seem that unlike Nkrumah, Nyerere underestimated the colonial matrices of power that made it impossible for him to achieve self-reliance in one country. Nyerere had to live with a tenuous relationship with the Bretton Wood institutions, critiquing their conditionalities and prescriptions, while seeking their funding. In 1997 at the 7th Pan African Congress that coincided with the 40th anniversary of Ghana’s independence, Nyerere argued that:

Kwame Nkrumah was the state crusader for African unity. He wanted the Accra summit of 1965 to establish Union Government for the whole of independent Africa. But we failed. The one minor reason is that Kwame, like all great believers, underestimated the degree of suspicion and animosity, which his crusading passion had created among a substantial number of his fellow Heads of State. The major reason was linked to the first: already too many of us had a vested interest in keeping Africa divided (Nyerere cited in Biney 2008:147).

Nyerere added that after Nkrumah, ‘We of the first generation leaders of independent Africa have not pursued the objective of African Unity with vigour, commitment and sincerity that it deserves. Yet that does not mean that unity is now irrelevant’ (Nyerere cited in Biney 2008:147).

The Nkrumah-Nyerere debates highlight the difficulties of pushing forward the pan-African agenda without consensus at the political level of leadership. It also magnifies in the case of Nyerere how those leaders how did not put pan-African unity first could torpedo the efforts of committed pan-Africanists and derail the whole project. Instead of present day pan-Africanists degenerating into another Nkrumah-Nyerere curse, they must learn from it what not to do.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that advances have been made on institutionalization of the pan-African agenda at the beginning of the new millennium. Since the launch of the African Union (AU) in July 2002, Africa seemed to be awakening from the crisis of pan-African ideas that dominated the period from the 1970s to the 1990s, when the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) under the leadership of Adebayo Adedeji had to fill the gap. UNECA did so by producing plans that embodied pan-African thought. The case in point was the formulation of the the Lagos Plan of Action of 1980 which was informed by a clear decolonial epistemic perspective as it projected towards an autonomous development trajectory informed by ideas of self-reliance. Unfortunately it was never fully implemented, partly because the realities on the ground were dominated by neoliberal structural adjustment programmes that were hostile to pan-Africanism and any traces of

decolonial epistemic perspective (Khadiagala 2010:375-387). Structural adjustment programmes were nothing other than another global imperial design that worked towards opening up African economies to Euro-American capital.

But despite the triumphalism of global imperial designs in the 1990s, some African leaders like the late Colonel Murmur Gaddafi of Libya, former president Thabo Mbeki of South Africa, Olusegun Obasanjo of Nigeria, Abdul-Aziz Bouteflika of Algeria, and Abdoulaye Wade of Senegal – the ‘African Renaissance coalition’ worked hard in trying to revive the pan-African agenda at the beginning of 2000s. Gilbert Khadiagala noted that this coalition emerged ‘at a vital historical juncture when a leadership vacuum had developed on continental issues’ (Khadiagala 2010:382). They took advantage of the new millenarian optimism to launch the African Renaissance as the philosophical anchor for renewal of Africa. Despite differences among ‘Renaissance coalition’ particularly with Gaddafi who wanted a United States of Africa to be declared immediately, it initiated and shepherded an impressive process of building pan-African institutions and formulation of plans for Africa. Examples include the Pan-African Parliament (PAP), the controversial New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD), the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) and most recently the launch of the Pan African University (PAU) in December 2011.

The challenge facing these pan-Africanists has been how to circumvent the long shadow of global imperial designs whose agents continue to intervene in African issues and initiatives, disciplining and channeling these to serve Western interests. NEPAD is a typical example of an initiative that indicated how colonial matrices of power were still active in shaping fake partnerships that do not work practically. What is most disappointing though is the failure by proponents of NEPAD to learn any lesson from Nkrumah’s long standing argument about neo-colonialism as a major threat to Africa’s struggles to take charge of its destiny. If Nkrumah’s ideas were taken seriously, he never believed in a partnership between Africa and the Euro-American world as long as global imperial designs informed the current world order. Adebayo Olukoshi and Yao Graham correctly noted that:

If domestic SAPs in Africa tore up the post-colonial nationalist compact, NEPAD gutted the long-held belief that a pan-African economic strategy should promote *less* not *more* dependence on

foreign capital (Olukoshi 2006 cited in Adesina, Graham & Olukoshi 2006:xv).

This policy mistake that rehabilitates global imperial designs could have been averted if current pan-Africanists could have armed themselves with the armour of decolonial epistemic perspective that is consistently alert to the snares of colonial matrices of power. African discourses on African Union Government have proven to be stuck within the confines of ‘gradualists’ versus ‘immediatists’. Wade and Gaddafi appropriated the Nkrumah position and pushed for fast-tracked Union Government that would be a precursor to the United States of Africa. Khadiagala categorized their position as that of ‘unionists/continentalists’ as opposed to Mbeki, Obasanjo and others who can be correctly labelled as disciples of Nyerere’s gradualism (Khadiagala 2010:383 - 384).

The return of this curse in the 21st century is a reminder that perhaps the graduation of nationalism into pan-Africanism is taking time to materialize, in the process dictating the necessity for caution and gradualism, according to which it is not known when there will be an atmosphere conducive to a Union Government. The future of Africa lies in effective deployment of decolonial epistemic perspective as a combative discourse, a redemptive methodology, and a survival kit in the face of invisible global imperial designs. Decolonial epistemic perspective teaches pan-Africanists to be always vigilant and never to adopt a complacent view towards the persistence of global imperial designs underpinning asymmetrical global power relations.

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Integration of African Indigenous Knowledge Systems into Higher Education in South Africa: Prospects and Challenges

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Abstract

The article uses secondary sources and the experiences of two higher educational institutions in South Africa to interrogate the challenges and prospects of integrating African Indigenous Knowledge Systems (AIKS) into higher education. The community-based nature of AIKS enables graduates to appreciate the role of culture in education and to be sensitive to the developmental challenges of local communities. The interrogation reveals the challenges of inadequate AIKS qualified staff, reference materials and limited institutional management support due to lack of knowledge and awareness on the importance of AIKS in the modern world. There is also lack of a conceptual framework to provide a clear African perspective and understanding of the concept 'knowledge'. This could have provided a guide for developing methodologies of integrating AIKS into higher education. However, in spite of these limitations, there is currently an increasing knowledge and awareness among different stakeholders on the role of AIKS in sustainable livelihood and development. This works in the advantage of IKS graduates in terms of job opportunities and promotion of an Africa-led globalization.

Keywords: African Indigenous Knowledge Systems, Higher Education, community engagement, relevance

Introduction

At a conference on the future development of higher education in post-independence East Africa, held at Makerere University in Kampala in 1966, the late and former President of the United Republic of Tanzania, Mwalimu Julius Nyerere, then Chancellor of the University of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, advocated two principles to guide the future of higher education in post-independence East Africa, namely; '*relevance and excellence*', in that order of priority. According to him, should there be a conflict between the two, he would rather go for relevance. In his opinion, what is excellent is not necessarily good, if it is not relevant. The concern was on the role and relevance of higher education in the developmental goals and national identity of a developing country characterized by poverty and social inequalities. The issue was whether such a country can afford pure academics emphasized by the western philosophy of intellectual concentration, i.e. to be scholarly and scientific involves freedom from external interference, especially from political demands and community engagements. This article makes a critical interrogation of the role of African indigenous knowledge systems and ways of knowing in promoting the relevance of higher education in Africa and South Africa in particular.

In the context of this discussion, the concept African Indigenous Knowledge Systems (AIKS) refer to the long standing traditions and practices of cultural specific local communities. This encompasses the skills, innovations, wisdom, teachings, experiences, beliefs, language and insights of the people, produced, and accumulated over years and applied to maintain or improve their livelihood. AIKS form the basis of the community's decision-making in agriculture, health, natural resource management, conflict resolution, governance and leadership, and other livelihood activities. These bodies of knowledge are developed and adapted continuously to gradually changing circumstances and orally passed on from generation to generation and closely interwoven with people's cultural values. Some forms of AIKS such as experiences, wisdom, beliefs, etc. are expressed through stories, legends, proverbs, folklores, rituals, songs, etc. (Cuthbert 2007).

The South African National IKS Policy (2004) has identified the promotion of IKS in higher education as a key component of human capital and transformation dimension of higher education to meet the developmental challenges of the country. The holistic nature of AIKS is recognized by the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) Agency as an

important strategy for tackling the challenges of sustainable development in Africa. South African academic and research institutions in line with the aspirations of the National IKS Office (2004) and the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) are increasingly taking initiatives to integrate AIKS into their core businesses, i.e. research, teaching, learning and community engagement. The objective is to make higher education more relevant to the developmental challenges of the country and contribute to an Africa-led globalization using African ways of knowing and knowledge production. However, the process faces a number of contestations which are discussed in detail in the following sections.

The Contestations on African Indigenous Knowledge Systems in Higher Education

The need for a critical analysis of the role of AIKS in promoting the relevance of higher education in Africa and South Africa in particular is based on the argument that although the use of what is considered to be indigenous knowledge in Africa goes back to the history of humankind in the continent, its promotion in the formal education system, especially higher education is a recent phenomenon. It has only gained conceptual significance as a subject of discussion in the last past two decade or so (Horschemke 2013). In the context of higher educational transformation inherited from colonialism and apartheid in South Africa, there are certain questions which need to be critically interrogated, i.e. what does African indigenous know-ledge as a concept mean ? What are its objectives with regard to making the higher educational system in South Africa and Africa in general more relevant to community and national challenges, especially poverty eradication?

These considerations arise due to a number of factors which need to be clarified to assist the conceptual and methodological integration of AIKS into higher education. These include: First, there has been various definitions of the concept 'indigenous knowledge' as applied to a variety of livelihood situations in South Africa such as i.e. food security, environment conservation, health, natural resource management, conflict transformation, education, governance, etc. Second, in the context of promoting AIKS for sustainable livelihood, it has generally been propagated to incorporate non-western beliefs, practices, customs, worldviews, including informal forms of educa-

tion. For instance, in the works of scholars such as Odora-Hoppers (2002); Hountondji (2002); and Semali (1999), it has been contrasted with global dominant knowledge systems produced in research and academic institutions.

However, the critique levelled against the above Afro-centric conceptualization of what constitutes African indigenous knowledge is that there has been limited effort among the African scholars who promote these knowledge systems to provide their own clear definition and understanding of the concept 'knowledge' based on Africa's own history of ideas and intellectual development. This could have provided an indigenous theoretical framework for developing methodologies of incorporating African ways of knowing and knowledge production into the post-colonial education system, especially higher education (Silvester 2007).

The response to this criticism is that it portrays western cultural and intellectual arrogance including a lack of understanding of the holistic nature of AIKS. It perceives AIKS as mere repetition of practices without any conceptual framework to explain those practices. For example, an African traditional healer who has over years been able to help her/his local community to cure a particular disease using specific local herbs, must also have the knowledge and theory of the plant species she/he uses (Nkondo 2012).

Moreover, the limitations of western knowledge systems in understanding AIKS and knowledge production are illustrated by Johnston, (2009) who states that there are no better examples of explaining the disjunction between western higher education and public perception of relevant knowledge in African traditional societies than its teaching of psychology. She argues that the teaching of psychology in African higher education has been predominantly Eurocentric, i.e. it derives its insights from a Western, middle class value system that tends to marginalize the concerns of other social groups, especially the poor. Kimwaga (2009) adds that Eurocentricism in psychology has little understanding on the role African indigenous cultures and languages play in the counselling process. Michael, (2008) argues further that if the teaching of psychology in African higher education is wholly North American, the field of social theory is wholly Eurocentric. It is entrenched in the methods, concerns, beliefs and experiences of the 18th and 19th Century Western Europe. This makes it socially and culturally inappropriate for African conditions and developmental concerns (Sadiki 2009).

The article also raises the concern that on the basis of the above discussion higher educational institutions in Africa have reduced themselves to copying the intellectual output of the western social and educational thinkers including the approach to selection of research problems, methodologies and research priorities. There is little attention given to African indigenous literary and philosophical traditions. They tend to be neglected and viewed as not proper sources for social and educational thought. This is accompanied by the inability of African scientists to generate their own indigenous theories and methods while working in their research fields. This is attributed to lack of confidence and hence the tendency to adopt and apply western models or theoretical frameworks uncritically in African cultural settings which render them irrelevant. They tend to produce essentialist constructions of African societies, thus ‘confirming’ that they are the opposite of what Western Europe represented and for this reason can be labeled ‘barbaric’ and ‘irrational’ (Muya 2008; Weisheit 2007). This has made African higher education distant from community developmental challenges.

It is on the basis of this concern that the article interrogates the various western perceptions leveled against the integration of AIKS into African higher education:

- (i) It is against the view that AIKS lack universal usage because of their localized and community-based nature. This is a simplistic view of the nature of knowledge production and use because all knowledge systems are initially created and utilized locally, but with a potential to be used universally. Latour (1993) argues that all knowledge is local but becomes universal through processes of conquest and colonialism. Some knowledge systems due to historical power relations have become more dominant than others hence perceived to be universal. Therefore, Africans need to acknowledge that their indigenous processes of knowing and knowledge production may not only enhance and sustain them as a people, but could also contribute to global pool of knowledge in the search for sustainable solutions to global challenges such as climate change, HIV/AIDS, etc.). This implies that Africa cannot be excluded from global influences; neither should Africa be guided only by her past because no

civilization (culturally) can manage to develop and prosper in isolation from the 'others' (Vilakazi 1999).

- (ii) The article refutes the Eurocentric view that Africa was a *tabula rasa* before colonization, i.e. it is a continent with no history of civilization. Therefore, western cultural systems of knowledge should be regarded as the only means to validate the value of Africa's ideas, beliefs and general way of life. They are considered unscientific, primitive and incompatible with formal education, especially higher education. They are not able to produce a human capital capable of meeting the challenges of modern science and technology associated with globalization (McCarthy 1994).
- (iii) The article also argues that Eurocentricism in Africa has distorted the real meaning of the concept 'education'. It has created and propagated the belief that 'education' means western formal systems of schooling introduced to Africa by colonialism. However, an examination of the original meaning of the western conceptualization of 'education' shows something quite different from the colonial view. The word 'education' is derived from two Latin words: *educare*, 'to rear or foster', and *educere*, 'to draw out or develop'. Thus 'education' according to this original conceptualization incorporates all the processes of raising up young people to adulthood, and drawing out or developing their potential to contribute to society (Mmola 2010).

Therefore, in the African indigenous perspective of education, learning to hunt wild game or herd livestock, prepare food or weave cloth, search for wild honey or distinguish medicinal and food plants from poisonous ones, is arguably closer to the original western meaning of 'education' than its current western limitation to academic and theoretical meaning propagated in African higher education institutions (Walter 2002). Muya (2008) elaborates that in most African traditional societies, children learn in a variety of ways, including free play or interaction with multiple children, immersion in nature, and directly helping adults with work and communal activities. They learn through practice by experimentation, trial and error, independent observation of nature and human behaviour, and through voluntary community sharing of

information, story, proverbs, song, and ritual. This made education more relevant to the needs of the learner and her/his respective community. Whereas, western education puts emphasis on individual success in a broader consumer culture instead of on the learner's or student's ability to survive and contribute to society (Simon 2008).

This view should not be interpreted as meaning that literacy, numeracy and the acquisition of new languages are unnecessary. There is no society or culture that can exist in isolation. This has never been more important than it is today in the era of globalization and increasing interdependence. Nevertheless, what is currently missing, in most modern societies in Africa, is a system of teaching and learning that can combine the two. Raymond (2011) rightly points out that, presently, African children are either kept in their home environments, missing out on the 'modern' aspects of education, or increasingly, forced into full-time formal schooling, missing out on the African 'traditional' education. The western formal education perpetuates the neo-colonial mentality by building aspirations of modern urban life and encouraging the youth to believe that they have no future in rural communities as African indigenous knowledge including indigenous languages are obsolete and incapable of preparing them to meet the challenges of the modern world of science and technology.

Kimwaga (2009) elaborates further that the integration of AIKS into higher education enables African students and educators to re-evaluate the inherent hierarchy of knowledge systems because historically AIKS were denigrated. Therefore, their inclusion in the formal education systems, especially at tertiary level requires an acknowledgement of the existence of multiple forms of knowledge rather than one, standard, benchmark system.

Sanders (2008) states that the arrogance of Eurocentricism has led to its failure to understand the holistic nature of African traditional education which does separate theory from practice. Cuthbert (2008) argues that it is this lack of understanding of the holistic nature of traditional education that has led to the radical shift in the locus of power and control over learning from children, families, and communities to ever more centralized systems of authority. The integration of AIKS at all levels of education in Africa will therefore be beneficial to learners and students because it will enhance the relevance and effectiveness of education by providing them with an education that adheres to their own inherent perspectives, experiences, language, and customs. In terms of educational content, the inclusion and interfacing of

AIKS with other knowledge systems in the curricula, instructional materials, and textbooks will help to prepare African students and learners for their contribution to the global pool of knowledge.

This is important due to the increasing realization that despite decades of self-rule, African scholars have not succeeded in empowering the continent to develop its own educational theoretical and methodological framework for knowledge production and sustainable development. There could be several reasons for this but the article argues that one of the key factors is that education, especially higher education, in Africa has not been relevant to the needs and concerns of African societies.

This perverse situation is compounded by the fact that links between African institutions themselves are largely neglected in favour of partnerships with the western countries which perpetuate the colonial legacy. Currently, there are more research and academic linkages between African and western institutions than among African institutions themselves and most academic and research activities are still carried out in western languages, especially English, French and Portuguese, thus undermining the development of African indigenous methodological and theoretical framework to guide educational transformation (Simon 2008).

Nevertheless, the article argues that in spite of this extraversion, there is still great potentiality in the continent for promotion of AIKS in African higher education. The unfortunate history of the continent (slavery, colonization and Apartheid) has not completely destroyed the African intellectual, cultural and spiritual heritage of the continent. Indigenous institutions of knowledge production, conservation and sharing such as initiation schools, indigenous games, agricultural systems, dances and songs, storytelling, proverbs, etc. still remain pillars of indigenous African ways of knowing. The wealth of indigenous knowledge that still exists among the elders and other knowledge holders in local communities demonstrates the vibrant intellectualism to which African researchers and intellectuals should turn. It needs to be documented, affirmed/validated and shared with the African youth for sustainability.

African intellectuals should help Africa close the gap created by over four hundred years of domination and marginalization of AIKS, by rejecting the dominance western knowledge systems in higher education as the only way of knowing and knowledge production. This concern was well articulated by Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1986) in his seminal work on:

‘Decolonizing the mind’. African indigenous knowledge should not only be seen as an ‘alternative’ knowledge but as one domain of knowledge among others. The implications for African higher education are that research in higher education can no longer be conducted with local communities as if their views and personal experiences are of no significance. Taking into consideration the extraversion of African knowledge systems, research should not be taken as an innocent academic exercise but an activity that occurs in a particular set of ideological, political and social framework. This is due to the fact that much of the existing educational and research in African communities is still dominated by Euro-centric prejudices (Hountondji 2002).

It is on the basis of the above discussion that the article examines the experiences of the North-West University and University of Kwazulu-Natal in South Africa in their effort to integrate AIKS into their core businesses, i.e. research, teaching and community engagement.

The Indigenous Knowledge Systems Teaching Programme at North-West University (South Africa): Prospects and Challenges

The development and incorporation of the IKS into research, teaching, learning and community engagement at North-West University at both under and post-graduate levels began in 2001. The rationale of integrating IKS into the core business of the institution was motivated by institutional, national, continental and global imperatives. It was in line with the vision and missions of the institution, the aspirations of the National IKS Policy (2004) and New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD) i.e. promote the role of Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) in sustainable development and contribute to Africa-led globalization.

A study conducted by Mmola (2010) on Students’ and Lecturers’ Perceptions Towards the IKS Programme at the North-West University showed that more than 80% of the respondent students had the opinion that lecturers who incorporated Africa indigenous cultural elements in teaching, especially the use of the local language, i.e. Setswana, were highly appreciated by students. They also indicated that such lecturers made them experience a feeling of autonomy by getting the opportunity to learn

university education in their mother tongue. Interviews with both respondent students and lecturers (the majority of them being Setswana speaking) revealed that the lecturers who used Setswana in their teaching and interaction with students also incorporated local examples and practices into the lectures.

Interview with various heads of departments which incorporated IKS modules in their teaching programmes showed that when AIKS was included into the curriculum, student achievement improved. This was due to the fact that students could relate to what was taught with their own home and community experiences. The respondent heads of departments also indicated that the building of strong relationships between students, researchers, and lecturers with student families and local communities created meaningful and positive learning outcomes for the students. It reinforced the holistic nature of AIKS and exposed the students to diverse knowledge and practical experiences. Respondent students felt that they had benefited from the IKS programme in many ways. The benefits included (in order of most commonly mentioned) gaining new multi- and trans-disciplinary knowledge and skills, especially cultural skills, which could assist them to fit into a wide range of career choices, developing networks for future employment opportunities, and helped them to increase self-esteem or selfworth. It also made them sensitive to the challenges of community livelihood and development.

Interviews with parents and community elders showed that their involvement in the IKS programme and curriculum made them feel needed by the formal educational system as they were actively participating in the higher education of their children. This is due to the fact that the IKS Programme at North-West University often used Indigenous Knowledge Holders and Practitioners from the surrounding local communities and beyond, as resource persons in specific teaching and learning fields such as traditional medicine and healing systems, traditional governance and leadership systems, natural resource management, etc. This provided the students with an opportunity to learn across generations hence making them appreciate and respect the knowledge of these elders and community members.

A study by Raymond (2011) on the use of Multi-media Technology in teaching IKS found that IKS lecturers used this method to encourage students to integrate Indigenous knowledge into research and learning. Students used multi-media technology in understanding local knowledge and

history through interviews with elders and other community knowledge holders and practitioners. For example, a project on Tswana Indigenous Pathways to Health was developed through collaborative efforts between the postgraduate students at the University and the North-West Provincial Department of Health. It enabled the students to use digital video to document a specific area of Indigenous Knowledge, i.e. community health practices, from a community perspective. One IKS postgraduate student stated that the use of digital cameras to document community knowledge holders contributed to a holistic understanding of science from the community perspective. A number of aspects related to the field could be captured and analysed.

An important element in the research project was to assist the students in developing research skills and values that enhanced respect for community knowledge of the community members. The strong cultural focus of the IKS Programme also engaged students in a variety of activities and relationships with local artists including poets, dancers, writers, etc. from the local cultural centre known as Mmabana.

This multi and trans-disciplinary character and strong cultural focus of the IKS Programme attracted an increasing number of students at both under- and postgraduate levels, from different parts of Africa including South Africa, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Nigeria, Cameroon, etc. Until April 2012 more than 25 Masters and 3 PhD students have graduated from the Programmes and are employed in various sectors (public and private) within and outside South Africa. These sectors include education, tourism, community development, Arts and Culture, Science and Technology, health, agriculture, rural development, communication, etc.

Moreover, as part of its community engagement the IKS Teaching and Research programme at North-West University has facilitated the establishment of various IKS community projects such as indigenous knowledge - based gardens in schools and local communities in the North-West Province. These IKS projects generated income, and contributed to food security and nutrition for learners and community members. It has also helped the institution to build networks and partnerships for IKS development with various institutions, schools, communities, civic organizations and policy makers.

However, in spite of these successes the development of the IKS Programme at North-West University has over the years encountered a

number of challenges. Although the systemic and holistic inclusion of Indigenous knowledge throughout educational practices and curriculum is a recommendation that appears continuously in the literature and policy statements, unfortunately, like in other African institutions of higher learning this recommendation has been difficult to implement in all campuses of the North-West University, especially in the previous historically white campuses. This was attributed to the existing institutional structures and expectations emanating from Eurocentric and colonial educational ideals which have been hostile to the promotion of AIKS . The institution is faced with the challenge of developing a system of education for all students that respects the epistemological and pedagogical foundations provided by both African indigenous as well as western cultural traditions.

Furthermore, IKS as a research, teaching, learning and community engagement programme is a new research and teaching field in South Africa and the continent at large. The North-West University is the only institution in the country and perhaps in the whole of Africa with an accredited IKS Teaching programme at both under- and postgraduate levels. Therefore, the institution is faced with the problem of shortage of IKS qualified staff to teach and supervise IKS research, especially at the postgraduate levels and lack of relevant teaching and learning materials. There is also the challenge of lack of support from some sections of the institutional management due to limited knowledge and awareness on the importance of IKS in meeting the developmental challenges of the 21st Century. For instance, most academics at the institution still do not understand the relationship between IKS and other fields of knowledge, especially in areas of Science and Technology.

In order to meet these challenges there was need for more aggressive marketing and awareness campaigns on the programmes. The Programme coordinators in collaboration with the National IKS Office (Department of Science and Technology) and South African Qualification Authority worked together to register a professional four year Bachelor of IKS (BIKS) which integrates both the natural and social sciences. This was meant to ensure that IKS is not limited to the humanities. The existing programme was mostly composed of human and social science modules. Moreover, the SADC Ministerial Conference on IKS Policy which met in the Seychelles in August 2009 adopted the BIKS Programme as a regional programme. This will promote IKS regionally and establish a network of staff and other resources for promoting the teaching, research and community engagement in the programme.

The Integration of AIKS into Research and Teaching Programme at University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN)

The rationale and motivation to integrate Indigenous African Knowledge Systems (IAKS) at UKZN took into consideration the historical background of the institution and its vision and mission of being a new institution coming out of a merger process involving diverse institutional cultures of the post-apartheid legacy. According to the UKZN Institutional Review Portfolio (2008) Chapter One, the historical context surrounding the merger of the Universities of Durban-Westville and Natal was complex and potentially divisive. It involved bringing together not two, but three institutions, because the former University of Natal operated in two centres more than 80 kilometres apart, i.e. Durban and Pietermaritzburg. The two almost functioned autonomously, each with a different ethos, and independent faculties which were duplicated on both sites.

In terms of organizational culture the merging institutions were quite different. The University of Natal, though having a diverse student body in terms of demographics, was categorized as historically advantaged-white institution. The University of Durban – Westville was one of the institutions set up according to the Extension of University Education Act 45 of 1959 to serve primarily Indian population in terms of the apartheid social engineering. Paradoxically, it later became the site of anti-apartheid struggle with a diverse student body and a legacy of relative disadvantage. The UKZN, therefore, is a diverse five-campus institution that required imaginative and innovative structures and programmes within which to operate effectively and to achieve a unity of purpose in order to overcome the apartheid divide between a historically white and historically black institution.

The promotion of African scholarship, including AIKS, therefore, was identified as one of the strategies to give definition and form needed to the concept of ‘a truly South African scholarship’. The centrality of African scholarship for UKZN was demonstrated by its inclusion in the UKZN Strategic Plan as a strategy for the achievement of the goal of Excellence in Teaching and Learning, i.e. to re-design curricula in creative and innovative ways that foreground African scholarship. The importance of AIKS at UKZ was signaled when the institution commissioned a Review on IKS Capacity at UKZN (2009) to assess the institutional capacity in terms of teaching,

research and community engagement resources (physical, human and financial) as they relate to promotion of African scholarship. In 2012 the institution appointed a Research Leader in Indigenous African Knowledge Systems. His responsibility is to provide leadership and coordination in the development of AIKS through research, postgraduate training, and curriculum transformation.

The integration process of AIKS into the core business of the institution involves the following parallel activities: stakeholder consultation with objective of getting a buy-in from the different stakeholders and assist in identification of AIKS champions and potential research and teaching staff; recruitment of AIKS champions from the different teaching and research units of the institution who will constitute a working group for the integration and programmes development process; establishment of an inter-college multi-disciplinary advisory team composed of stakeholders from within and outside the institution to advise and provide leadership in the integration process; create a database of AIKS initiatives, facilities, institutions, personnel, teaching materials, etc. to provide AIKS resources for research, teaching and building networks and partnerships.

This is based on the realization that there are a lot of scattered AIKS scattered programmes, modules, reference materials, etc. at UKZN which need consolidation into institutional programmes to avoid duplication of efforts and for network and partnership building; organize a national workshop on AIKS research and teaching methodologies to create awareness among stakeholders on AIKS research, teaching and community engagement methodologies as a paradigm shift; facilitate the development of an institutional AIKS policy to provide conceptual framework for IKS development and protection; promote AIKS network and partnership building at UKZN so that UKZN can be a hub and able to capacitate other institutions within and outside South Africa in AIKS development; development of AIKS teaching programmes at under and postgraduate in order to build a critical mass of AIKS and African scholarship expertise for research, teaching and community engagement; recruitment of appropriate AIKS teaching staff as the availability of appropriate and qualified staff is one of the major challenges of integrating AIKS into teaching and learning; development and production of IKS teaching and learning reference materials as another major challenge of integrating AIKS into teaching and learning; conduct institutional wide AIKS awareness campaigns to build a common

institutional understanding of AIKS; promoting the use of African indigenous languages into research, teaching and community engagement through their incorporation publications, research reports, markets, reference materials, etc. African Indigenous languages are central to the promotion of African scholarship as they provide relevance to AIKS, African scholarship including Africa led globalization.

The AIKS as signature project of UKZN has managed to register the following achievements since 2012: Establishment of a Coordinating Office (Westville Campus Library) which also hosts the DST/ IKS Documentation Centre; a Multi-disciplinary Advisory Team composed of internal and external members including IK holders and practitioners; a multi- and trans-disciplinary Working Group of IKS Champions from the various institutional colleges/schools; development of a Draft Institutional AIKS Policy; a successful Regional Colloquium on: Methodologies and Epistemologies of Integrating IKS into Research, Teaching, Learning and Community Engagement (23 November 2012); recruit 6 Doctorate and 4 Masters IKS Students for the academic year 2013. Their recruitment is in line with the university mission and vision of promoting African scholarship including AIKS institutional research focus areas as their research themes range from African Indigenous Food Security, AIKS and Climate Change; Indigenous Environmental Governance; Traditional Governance and Leadership; and African Indigenous Languages; the students are distributed across the various institutional colleges/ schools;

The formation of a multi-disciplinary team of colleagues from within and outside UKZN to supervise the students; managed to bring the hub of the DST/NRF Centre of Excellence in IKS to UKZN. The Centre will be partnership with other institutions such as North-West University, University of South Africa, Universities of Venda and Limpopo; formation of an institutional research team on Indigenous Food Security Systems and Climate Change; coordination of the UNESCO Worldviews Initiative on: Developing An African Convention On Environmental Ethics For Sustainable Livelihood.

Conclusion

This article made a critical analysis of the challenges and prospects of integrating AIKS into higher education in South Africa and Africa at large.

Experiences were drawn from the North-West University and University of KwaZulu-Natal. It showed that in spite of the dominance of western perspectives of higher education, there is an increasing realization among different stakeholders on the importance of AIKS in promoting the relevance of higher education for sustainable development. African higher educational institutions are an ideal platform for promoting AIKS due to their vast human resources and experiences in all fields of research and learning. They also command intellectual respect in society and globally. However, the experience of North-West University and University of KwaZulu-Natal revealed that the process of integrating AIKS into higher education has challenges and prospects. The challenges include lack of a conceptual framework to provide a clear African indigenous perspective and definition of the concept 'knowledge'. This could have provided a theoretical and methodological guide for the integration process; there is shortage of qualified AIKS staff to teach and supervise research; inadequate reference materials for both students and lecturers; lack of support from various institutional stakeholders including some sections of the institutional management due to limited knowledge and awareness on the importance of AIKS in a modern society, especially in science and technology.

The prospects include increasing knowledge and awareness among policy makers, developmental agencies, researchers, etc. on the role of AIKS in sustainable livelihood and development. This creates employment opportunities for IKS graduates. This also provides support for integration of AIKS into the formal education system.

This article suggests that in order to meet the challenges, there is need for more aggressive marketing, knowledge and awareness campaigns on the AIKS programmes and initiatives within and outside South Africa; the SADC Ministerial Conference on IKS Policy which met in the Seychelles in August 2009 adopted the Bachelor of Indigenous Knowledge Systems Programme developed by South Africa as a regional teaching programme. This will help to promote IKS regionally and establish a network of identifying teaching and research expertise and other resources AIKS development.

The SADC Ministerial Conference on IKS Policy also urged South Africa to assist other countries in the region to develop national IKS policies which will provide a conceptual and policy framework for promoting and protecting IKS; the example of UKZN should be followed by other

educational institutions of identifying IKS champions in different fields; building institutional databases of IKS initiatives and resources for research, teaching and building networks and partnerships; consolidation of scattered AIKS initiatives and resources into shared programmes to avoid duplication of efforts; promotion of the role African Indigenous languages in higher education because they provide relevance to AIKS, African scholarship and Africa-led globalization. This could be done by giving African Indigenous languages a prominent position in research and publication, teaching, marketing of programmes and other institutional initiatives.

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Indigenous Knowledge of Custodians of Zulu Culture – Implications for Multilogical Dialogue in the Academy

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Abstract

South African academic institutions and the government have recognized the importance of Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) in the development of the country. The role of traditional kings, traditional chiefs and medicinal healers in the social, economic and political development of communities and the environment are recognized for their value in society. While there are new developments of IKS research in South Africa (SA), little has been done in academia to bridge the gap between students and lecturers at the tertiary level, to link them to the local community on an equal footing. This article explores through interviews and dialogues with chiefs (*amakhosi*), headmen (*izinduna*), diviners-spiritualists (*izangoma*) and diviners-herbalists (*izinyanga*) their concerns about the state and future of IKS, and their aspirations for the inclusion of IKS into formal societal structures like universities. More specifically, the article explores their experiential knowledge that can be incorporated in formal education, and their values and ethics linked to spirituality. An interpretive paradigm, using multilogical dialogue was used to frame this study. Seventeen African custodians of Zulu culture from rural KwaZulu-Natal were purposively selected to participate in the research. The data was inductively analysed by searching for themes. The interviews with the custodians also focussed on the attitude of the youth towards IKS, and the influence of religion on indigenous knowledge and practices. The implications of the findings offer new insights regarding the content of curricula in tertiary education and also pose challenges for how academia should respond to the inclusion of IKS in the curriculum.

Keywords: Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS), Zulu custodians, multilogicality, academia, culture

Introduction

Indigenous Knowledge (IK) refers to traditional, cultural, local and community knowledge (Sillitoe Dixon & Barr 2005:3). It is a body of knowledge produced and owned by local people in their specific communities and passed on from generation to generation, through practice and oral channels. By indigenous knowledge we mean the kind of localized knowledge that ‘historically has been considered to originate from a particular place’ (Manzini 2000:20). While IKS, as an aspect of culture, belong to all who participate, the guardians of traditional Nguni culture have been the kings, chiefs, headmen, traditional healers and elders. The term Nguni refers to an ‘aggregate of Bantu-speaking peoples who live on the eastern coast of southern Africa’ and who organized themselves in ‘patrilineal, mostly pastoral, chiefdoms at the turn of the 19th century...’ (Bargna 2007:106). This group, in particular, retain a substantial body of folklore and traditional knowledge transmitted to them via memory and this is sustained through leadership structures, rituals and celebrations. This includes indigenous knowledge of weather, agriculture, ethnoastronomy, and socio-political administration.

Historically and currently, IKS has been undermined in an era of modernization and globalization, and continues to be under threat of being lost in many parts of the world (Carter 2008; McKinley 2005). South African indigenous communities, in particular, are facing enormous Western challenges after colonization and apartheid, resulting in drastic changes that impact individual and community identity, leading to a loss related to cultural, language, traditional management and knowledge structures (Masoga 2005). In this regard the SA government with its National Department of Traditional Affairs - a legally recognized Council for Traditional Leaders of South Africa (CONTRALESA) and with parliamentary representations, play a significant role in ensuring that at the highest political level, the aspirations and problems of indigenous communities are addressed. Part of the CONTRALESA mandate is to restore traditional norms, values and knowledge consistent with SA democratic principles (Ray & Reddy 2003).

Recently there has been a mounting call for the role of humanities and social sciences (HSS) in South African universities to be strengthened in the development of our society, our economy and in our intellectual life (Govender 2012; Sitas, Mosoetsa, Tame & Lorgat 2011). The recent South African report on the Charter for Humanities and Social Sciences (CHSS) points to the ‘absence of a large and relatively coherent social movement striving to attain a common goal, resulting in a rupture between popular struggles and the social sciences’ (Sitas, Mosoetsa, Tame & Lorgat 2011:5). The report also suggests that critical questions, some requiring meta-analysis of several small scale studies that many academics are already doing, seek elucidation, analysis and coherence and perceives the role of the higher education system as pivotal to the ‘modalities of development of the African continent and its manifold forms of heritage’ (Sitas *et al.* 2011:6). Studies of IK systems and African indigenusness aim to promote a holistic understanding of knowledge as a shared responsibility that will stand in sharp contrast to the present compartmentalization of knowledge as entrenched in isolated disciplines at universities (Govender 2012). Sefa Dei (2008) suggests that the examination of African indigenusness is an alternative way of knowing the world, and he expands on this concept as follows:

Different knowledges represent different points on a continuum; they involve ways that peoples perceive the world and act on it. Through daily practice, societies ‘import’ and ‘adapt’ freely whatever from ‘outside’ will enrich their accumulated knowledge. In this sense, ‘modernity’ is embedded in indigenous knowledges (Sefa Dei 2008:73).

This paradigm allows space for a holistic and critical discussion of the challenges of African education, and assigns the idea that there are ‘... commonalities in African peoples’ culture(s) that should be interrogated and investigated to serve as the basis for Afrocentric unity’ (Sefa Dei 1994:7). In this regard, the South African government and a few universities have focused on African scholarship to promote high quality research within the African context including Indigenous Knowledge Systems; Maritime Studies; Agriculture and Food Security; and Astronomy as niche areas for research development.

Indigenous Knowledges

In order to make a deeper sense of traditional knowledge and its evolution in the current Western and global context, both, the explicit and implicit aspects involving its custodians and community members need to be unravelled. IKS is indeed a complex human system comprising of trial and error experiences, practical wisdom, applied knowledge and historically acquired experiences, embedded and shared locally through collective structures via diverse learning modes (Govender 2012; Sefa Dei, Hall & Rosenberg 2008). While IKS and its philosophy have made inroads into critical pedagogy theory and indigenous methodologists can ‘speak to the oppressed, colonized persons living in postcolonial situations of injustice ...’ (Denzin, Lincoln & Smith 2008: x), IKS is still in its development stages and requires greater research at universities and more practical input into school and tertiary curricula. On the other hand, IKS is a dynamic and evolutionary system of knowledge, leading to an autopoietic (self-generation) network (Govender 2012), and functions on the ‘boundaries’ of holistic practices that can, involve the following aspects (Cilliers 2000:19):

- psychological (e.g. a sense of safety),
- social (e.g. rules of interaction),
- cultural (e.g. rituals and stories),
- technological (e.g. building structures),
- physical and structural (e.g. locality, chiefdoms, workplace etc.), and
- morality (*ubuntu*) and spirituality (connection to ancestors, etc.).

Exploring these shifting boundaries in IKS communities is a crucial step towards understanding how IKS evolves in the South African society, which is subjected to Western social influences. While historically the roles of chiefs and diviners have been dominant in the daily lives of the community, urbanization and mass conversion mostly to Christianity have led to the diminished value and role of IKS. Sometimes traditional healers acting as unscrupulous ‘witchdoctors’ or wizards (*abathakathi*) are looked upon negatively as they are feared ‘of causing things to go wrong’ (Alcock 2010:577). Media reports of sensational involvement of ‘witchdoctors’ linked to crime where, the medicinal use of human body parts has led to community witch-hunts. The danger lies in society tending to attribute negative labels to

authentic traditional healers such as diviners - izangoma and izinyanga as 'witchdoctors' (Schons 2011).

The recognition of traditional knowledge in the economic, agricultural, health and educational spheres is gaining widespread momentum especially because these areas have practical and economic value for communities (Mander, Ntuli, Diederichs & Mavundla 2007). The SA school curriculum (Department of Basic Education 2011) also encourages some aspects of IKS (particularly African and other IKS) to be incorporated in teaching and learning.

Over the years, the traditional educative role of the custodians of indigenous culture and their languages have been marginalized by Western system of education and globalization (McKinley 2005). School and university curricula tend to entrench and reward only one historically privileged way of knowing - the Western-Eurocentric knowledge, which permeates Africa and the rest of the globe (Bear 2009). Why is this so? How can educational institutions address the marginalization of IKS? The first question is analysed by Diamond (1997) in his book 'Guns, germs and steel' where he outlines how the West colonized and attained power and controlled of many indigenous communities through the use of guns, germs and steel production. The second question is more relevant to our current context of education and politics where policy, research and implementation of IKS issues are being addressed in South Africa. Our role as science teacher educators participating in IK research is to address the second question to some extent and to seek redress through partnerships, by creating an IK-academia community (Gupta 2011). The issues then for this article are three-fold: First, how do we meaningfully and critically contextualize the current roles of the custodians of indigenous knowledge? Second, how do we use their different ways of knowing - learning, teaching and practice of IKS, without demeaning the important role of these custodians operating in a Western environment, and where Western values, ethics and practices are privileged? Third, how can academia be involved in the recording and dissemination of IK for it to be integrated with current knowledge on an equal educational platform?

This article is based upon data obtained from an ethnographic study conducted with the custodians of Zulu culture and raises issues of IKS practices as observed in the daily lives of African-Zulu indigenous-rural communities within the Northern (Kwangwanase, Newcastle, and Greytown),

Central (Valley of Thousand Hills) and Southern districts (Port Shepstone and Ixopo) of KwaZulu-Natal. The data from fieldwork was gathered from their daily experiences and issues and provided a basis to generate a narrative framework in IKS of *knowing* as learning, understanding, transmission, and wisdom using a multilogical theoretical lens.

Multilogicality: A Theoretical Frame to Inform Democratic Curricula

The framework of ‘multilogicality’ espoused by Kincheloe (2008:4) is defined as ‘exploring the world ... from diverse perspectives’, including those which are ‘forged by pain, suffering and degradation’. This model is useful to initiate processes of dialoguing in our educational system at all levels. Multilogicality is also used to understand the epistemological decolonization of the African continent, and to explore ways of bringing indigenous knowledge into the mainstream of knowledge production in and about Africa. This theory calls for a greater awareness of ‘ways of seeing and being’ (Villaverde, Kincheloe & Helyar 2006:324). It calls for a ‘critical ontological awareness’ of how one’s positioning as a result of one’s race, political views, religion, sexual orientation and gender, are shaped by hegemonic cultural perspectives (Kincheloe 2006:334). A critical reflection of selfhood entails examining how ubiquitous cultural perspectives impact who we are and the possibilities of who we can become. According to the theory of multilogicality,

ways of being reflect cultural contexts, and influence production of knowledge (who you are in the world is influenced by the knowledge system of the dominant cultural group, and this, in turn, influences the knowledge that you produce). The lines, then, between ontology and epistemology, become hazy (Kincheloe 2006:334).

Teachers who are aware of how multiple influences of dominant groups influence the lives of students can ‘help students connect to the civic web of the political domain, the biotic web of the natural world, the social web of human life, and the epistemological web of knowledge production’ (Kincheloe 2006: 335).

A critical ontological reflection reveals ways in which the normalization of the knowledge and cultural practices of dominant social groups as ‘official knowledge’ have paved the way for dominant groups to exert a controlling influence on society (Kanu 2006:5). Formal education in schools and universities bestow ‘cultural legitimacy’ on the knowledge of dominant groups, and then becomes the vehicle through which leading social groups exercise power. The intellectual challenge for researchers in education, then, is to understand and address the effects of colonization by creating curricula which are informed by, and are sensitive and responsive to a variety of cultures, both of Western and Non-Western origin (Aikenhead & Ogawa 2007:584).

The value of critical ontological awareness, a central theoretical construct of multilogicality, is that it enables the researcher to recognise reductionist views postulated by Cartesianism, which have resulted in the separation of the individual human being from the inanimate, the disconnect between the human being and the cosmos. This has led to an ontological unevenness, which can be addressed by looking to knowledge generated by indigenous educators, knowledge which re-joins people to social, metaphysical and physical systems of reality. This reconnection can lead to a restructuring of African identity into one that is positive, powerful and self-dependent. A pluralistic epistemology endows multilogical researchers with higher order seeing and listening skills, as they attempt to understand practices across different cultures. Researchers who are critically aware about the intersecting influences of ontology and epistemology, and who engage with research participants, who are different from themselves, undergo a fundamental change. Far from reproducing the Cartesian practice of making conclusions about universal truths, they view themselves as part of a dynamic ‘intercultural conversation’ (Kincheloe 2006:337). They acknowledge the legitimacy of diverse knowledges, as well as the variety of ways employed by different people to perceive the world. This enables researchers who work with indigenous knowledge to seek multiple perspectives, in a variety of spaces, and to embrace the power of difference. Education researchers who embrace the multilogical approach with a view to striving towards culturally inclusive curricula through dialogue with custodians of indigenous knowledge promote legitimization of indigenous knowledge and, what Hooley (2009:133) refers to as ‘democratic reconciliation’.

Zulu (2006:44) expands on the notion of multilogicality beyond just

recognition of IKS towards building a ‘theoretical construct’ of African education that must be able to meet local and global demands. This implies that education policy makers need to consider several key points, namely:

- a theory of African education (epistemology) that moves beyond problematic analysis to a constructive critique of internal and external forces that impede progressive social change,
- a research methodology that will continuously include a study of how indigenous knowledge, education and learning techniques can inform modern social, economic and political reality,
- a curriculum to maximize human resource potential to advance national and international development, and
- a creation and sustenance of an active group of independent thinkers/leaders to address common educational and social issues throughout the continent.

This article focuses on the second aspect of Zulu's proposition, namely, a study of IK methodology informing reality. The notion of multilogicality suggests an engagement with issues to pertaining indigenous knowledge practices and its preservation. The contributions in this regard by the Zulu custodians of culture can be incorporated in studies in formal education thus linking knowledge of informal structures to formal established disciplines.

Methodology

The sample consisted of seventeen custodians from the Zulu community in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) province. Three of these were chiefs, two were headmen, three were traditional healers, five were elder women and four were elder men. The sample was purposefully selected as it was based on our students’ knowledge of, and interaction with elders, traditional healers, and chiefs in their communities. The students as research assistants were also involved in the interview process, translations and discussions with researchers and custodians. Multilogical conversations, using face-to-face interviews with the custodians of Zulu culture facilitated the engagement of how indigenous knowledges are embedded in ‘ways of knowing’ arising from

observations, thought and cultural practices. The analysis of data includes using the socio-cultural theory which presents a holistic understanding of the roles, links and interconnections of custodians of culture that can interface with formal structures like academia and schooling. Semali and Kincheloe (1999) outline the distinctions between Indigenous African knowledge and other forms of knowledge to report that Indigenous African Knowledge (IAK) does not derive its origins or standing from the individual but from the collective epistemological understanding and rationalization of a community – hence a socio-cultural perspective.

The qualitative analysis of data is supported by three major anthropological books on Zulu culture in KZN, namely, Bryant (1967); Callaway (1970); and Krige (1965); and a recent book on South African indigenous weather knowledge by Alcock (2010). Fieldwork included observations, individual interviews, focus group interviews that explored holistic 'ways of knowing' through oral histories, story-telling, anecdotes and examples of long ago and current Zulu practices. The researcher and student-research assistant first presented their background and the nature of their study to the custodians. From the interview questions we then proceeded to getting to know the clan's *isiBongo*. The word *isiBongo* refers to two terms that are distinct etymologically (Bryant 1969:436) - it can mean praise-names or clan-names providing ancestral roots. It was customary in regard to persons of quality to add their fathers, grandfathers, and many more of their ancestors as one could remember. We encountered many elders and even middle-aged people who could remember and recall their ancestry.

The researcher then asked questions relating to politics, African cosmology-spirituality, agriculture and traditional notions of education and ethics (respect-*ubuntu*). Questions included an exploration of our custodians' experiences of daily phenomena such as farming, lightning, rain, and their vision of how IK can be recognized in institutional structures. While our bilingual Zulu-speaking rural students helped us with the interpretation of the data, we can make no explicit claims as to the complex and holistic way of how indigenous experiences are deeply rooted and embedded. The thematic ideas are interpreted from the data obtained, from our own experiences, and from literature research, and with interviews conducted with our five Zulu research-assistant students' about their cultural experiences. Thus we discovered that the method of multilogicality - that of passionate outsiders (three academics with scientific knowledge and pursuing indigenous

knowledge understandings) and insider-outsider connections (five science education student-teachers who live in the rural communities) provided a wholesome perspective to help us to make sense of the IKS practices in Nguni culture. The data was finally sorted into four major emerging knowledge areas or broad thematic categories, namely, cultural environment and survival strategies, Zulu cosmology, health and medicine and ethnoastronomy for presentation but the reader needs to be aware that IKS is a complex phenomenon (Govender 2012) and such selected categorizations are for the purpose of presenting the data and reflect only partial knowledge.

Emerging Knowledge Areas

1. Cultural Environment and Survival Strategies

Indigenous African Knowledge (IAK) is about what local people know and do and what local communities have known. IAK has been accrued for generations in utilizing and preserving the environment. Since IAK is the ability to use community knowledge produced from local history that encompasses important literacy skills critical for survival in an African context, this implies that what local communities know about their environment must be acknowledged, included in the planning and implementation process of education at all levels (Semali & Kincheloe 1999). Semali and Kincheloe (1999:307-308) introduced the idea of indigenous literacy as information communicated via local culture and languages that reflect local innovations and techniques in activities such as fishing, pest control, plant and animal usage to manage local diseases. In the South African school curriculum, such a concept is already in place at schools and in teacher education courses, albeit at a basic introductory level (Department of Basic Education 2011). Indigenous Zulu communities in SA working with their chiefs and elders have over the years developed keen powers of observations and orally recorded the types of soils, weather patterns (Alcock 2010), birds and other animal life, herbs, plants and trees (Krige 1965). Nature's sounds (birds and animals) are well imitated indicating powers of listening and learning skills (Alcock 2010:434-435). Most of this knowledge is passed through interesting and dramatic oral tradition and story-telling techniques. Thus story-telling developed into an art that embodies careful use of language, words, ideas and connections so that data is formatted, shared

and presented through generations and ‘in maintaining social structures ... and oral tradition in protecting knowledge necessary for the survival of society’ (McIsaac 2008:93).

Another significant survival strategy involves food (Bryant 1967: 264-295). The preparing and storing of traditional food required some basic chemistry knowledge (fermentation, catalyst agent, storage, concentrations, filtration etc.) and trial runs until the final process and edible product developed (Gupta 2011). The food recipes have been passed down from generation to generation through cultural and spiritual activities. The community’s cultural feasts (the Royal Reed Dance-*uMkosi woMhlanga*, the Harvest Celebration-*ukuNyatela* etc.) involve youth and sexuality education, skills taught (slaughtering, tanning etc.), and social cohesion (Alcock 2010:141-142). While the traditional village is headed by the chief (*induna*), the elders (*abadala*) also command authority and hold deeply rooted IK practices (Brindley 1982). Table 1 indicates the activities of an elderly grandmother in her household.

Interviewers: How did you know that it is time to plant crops?	Gogo: We used to see plants germinating from the soil; we used to hear the rain bird (Red-chested Cuckoo - <i>Cuculus solitarius</i>) singing a beautiful song (<i>phezu komkhono</i>) (Alcock 2010:434), then we knew that is time to plough sorghum (<i>amabele</i>). The sorghum is traditional grain used to make Zulu alcoholic beer (<i>Utshwala besizulu</i>) and we use it for ancestral prayers and cultural functions.
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Table 1: Interview with ‘Gogo’ in Newcastle – Northern KZN village on subsistence farming

As subsistence farming is dominant in rural areas, knowledge of grain sowing and appropriate use of seeds (sorghum, maize, pumpkin, calabash etc.) for beverage-making and a daily source of food (Table 2) requires knowledge of planting, harvesting, preservation and storage (Alcock 2010). This knowledge is crucial for survival during seasonal droughts and winter months. The Zulu-

beer is important in daily Zulu life, especially in ancestral worship, and serves as a beverage for guests as well. It is also symbolic in most cultural functions (Bryant 1967). ‘The method of making it is an old traditional one which is basically common to most of the tribes of Southern Africa’ (Elliott 1978:129). The brewing methods have been adapted in different areas to suit the species of grain growing in the local climatic conditions (Bryant 1967:274-275). Prior to engaging with spiritual ritual worship with the ancestors, the beer must be prepared well and is placed in the ancestral prayer hut as an offering to ancestral spirits (see Table 1).

Interviewers: How do you make Zulu beer?	Gogo: You take grounded mealies (<i>impuphu</i>) and put it in water until it ferments (<i>amahewu</i>), you cook it and then take sorghum grain (<i>amabele</i>) and then mix with the fermented mealies.
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Table 2: Basic recipe for Zulu-beer

Intimate knowledge of the environment was crucial to daily survival. Hence, weather, changes in weather patterns, water distribution areas, landscapes and environmental education were ‘natural’ learning environments where mentorship in the form of expert-novice or apprenticeship system was essential to teach the youth skills and knowledge of living (Alcock 2010). The sangoma or Zulu diviner spiritualist is the main link between the ancestors and those who are living and is the only person with the power to make known the will of the spirits and to interpret their messages and as such becomes the protector of society. The sangoma is said to possess power to be able to control the elements, to ward off lightning, to control hail and to make rain (Krige 1965:297-320). Rain is an important requirement for agriculture and the community’s survival. Hence, observation of the skies, noticing the types of clouds, listening to bird sounds (Table 3), predicting rainfall and cyclones are valuable skills to be learnt. The izangoma are most knowledgeable in this area and are often sought to induce rain. Krige (1965:298) notes that the sangoma is ‘one of the pivots upon which the welfare of society rests, and she is for this reason most highly respected’.

Interviewers: How do you know when it's going to rain?	Sangoma: We used a black-brown bird (Burchell's Coucal- <i>Centropus burchellii-umGugwane</i>) that symbolizes rain to see if it's going to rain (The bird call is used to forecast rain). We used to see clouds, when there were dark clouds underneath and white clouds on top then we would detect that it was going to be a storm and it was going to rain hail stones. We also prayed asking the ancestors for rain but we used some umuthi (traditional medicines for rituals).
Interviewers: What can you tell us about the rainbow?	Sangoma: We see the rainbow usually after the rain and when the rainbow comes out it symbolizes that the sun will come out on the next day and the skies will be clear.
Interviewers: What did you believe about the water-snake in the sky?	Sangoma: The cyclone (water-snake- <i>inyokayamanzi</i>) is too rough and violent; where ever it goes it causes destruction. It can shrink the corrugated iron in the houses to a very small size (<i>modelling with her fist</i>).

Table 3: Sangoma using weather observation skills to predict rain

The use of modern chemical fertilizers, while essential to meet the current societal food needs, has done great damage to the rivers and soils (Gruhn, Goletti & Yudelman 2000) . The use of natural composting - animal and plant materials is now encouraged by environmentalists but has been practiced and is still practiced by Zulu community subsistence farmers (Table 4). The concepts of recycling and wise use of natural resources are not new ideas and are part of IAK for many generations. The storage of food in rural areas

lacking electricity is still a problem and ingenious ways to preserve and store food have evolved across generations. Table 4 illustrates some of the traditional practices still in vogue in some rural areas.

Interviewers: How did they keep the food for a long time?	Gogo: We used to dig a big hole in the middle of the cattle kraal (<i>modelling</i>) where we put mealies and other food we harvested. We store these foods. During summer we eat fruits and then in the winter we use this stored food. This hole acted as a food storage tank to us. The food did not get rotten because we covered the hole with wet cow dung such that the food is not in the soil but protected by the cow dung which made the food stay longer. We ate green field herbs (<i>imbuya</i>) which grows as a result of dried cow dung (<i>umquba</i>), it is usually found in the kraal and in the ploughing grounds, and we also ate another <i>imbuya</i> which grew from the flowers of pumpkins. We did not know about cabbages and spinaches. We used to hear people coming from the town saying that we saw round things big like this (<i>modelling with her hand</i>) and those who work in the towns will say oh!!!! Those are cabbages (<i>amaklabishi</i>).
Interviewers: When you planted, what did you use to make the soil rich?	Gogo: We used the cow dung (<i>umquba</i>).

Table 4: IK practices of food storage and soil enrichment

2. Zulu Cosmology – Nature’s Force in Lightning and Cyclones

Throughout the history of humankind’s survival, the search has been to protect, understand and possibly transform nature’s forces into valuable energy resources. In Zulu community IK (Table 5 for lightning) and even in Western society’s knowledge systems, explanations and protection mechanisms were sought against the forces of nature and these were wrapped around stories of survival, triumph and sorrow.

Interviewers: Lightning is often an important and dangerous natural event. What can you tell us about the practice of lightning?	Induna: When the lightning (<i>ummbani</i>) strikes we used to hide the container which stored soured milk (<i>igula</i>). When you sleep you do not fold your feet (as part of respect of nature). We used to burn incense grass (<i>Helichrysum petiolare</i> - <i>Impepho</i>). We also use the lightning sticks (<i>abafana</i>) that are black and charred from other lightning strikes for protection. We also see the lightning bird (Hammerkop - <i>Thekwane</i>).
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Table 5: Zulu protection measures during lightning strikes

The early Zulu notion that lightning could conduct through liquids was observed through lightning mishaps and experiences and translated into protection measures during lightning strikes. We do the same now when we insulate or ground metal conductors, metal water pipes etc. through scientific understanding of conductors and charges. Protection measures which can be rationalized are taken when out in the fields and in the huts before, during and after lightning strikes. Observation of the lightning birds and even the rain birds (Tables 3 and 5) were early warning indicators and natural detection tools for imminent dangers (Krige 1965). It is well-observed by indigenous communities that animals are ultra-sensitive to small changes in the environment. As an example, in the 2004 Tsunamis in Sri Lanka, India and Bangladesh, wild and domesticated animals with more acute senses

began to react much quicker than humans. However scientists are sceptical of this anecdotal information as a reproducible connection between a specific behaviour of an animal and the occurrence of a quake has not been made as yet (Mott 2005).

The control of lightning was managed by the Zulu diviners (*izangoma*). The diviners played a significant role in the political scenario due to their inherent powers of foretelling as well as their link with ancestors (*amadlozi*) (Flint & Parle 2008). They were sometimes used by the chiefs to gain dominance over their folk. The diviners were commanded to seek trouble-makers or witches out through their skills of ‘sniffing’ out the culprit. This and other ritualistic practices, however led to the role of African diviners being often misunderstood under colonial rule in Africa. As in much of Africa, ‘most healers in Natal and Zululand were outlawed’ in the 19th and 20th C, and white missionaries ‘misunderstood the nature of many local therapeutic practices’ (Flint & Parle 2008:313) and mistakenly believed that the Zulu diviners practised the evils of witchcraft. In some cases, some folk performed witchcraft and used witchcraft medicines (*ubuthakathi*) which was quite a ‘bane to both Africans and whites alike’ (Flint & Parle 2008:313).

The notion that some diviners (*izangoma*) can control lightning is still widely believed by many elders and even by some scientific literate students in the African communities. However, many report having heard about this from their elders but they themselves have not witnessed lightning control. Currently there is no recorded scientific evidence that *izangoma* can indeed control lightning and scientifically this is not possible due to the randomness and high voltages of lightning strikes.

3. Health - Zulu Medicines and the Treatment of Diseases

As Table 6 shows, diviners-herbalists (*izinyanga*) still play an important role in health issues while diviners-spiritualists (*izangoma*) are still valued by their communities for their psycho-spiritual healing powers. *Izinyanga*, which were recognized and registered by the early twentieth century Natal colonial government (Flint & Parle 2008:313) are incorporated into South Africa’s health system.

Interviewers: Do you still go to Zulu traditional spiritual healers (<i>izangoma</i>) and herbalists (<i>izinyanga</i>)?	Gogo: Yes, when I'm sick, it's part of my culture. I strongly believe that sangoma or traditional healer (<i>inyanga</i>) will help me but I also go to the clinic and doctors.
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Table 6: Health care practices

In general, the Zulu diviners (*izangoma* and *izinyanga*) played an important role in their earlier societies. Approximately 72% of Black South Africans still use traditional medicines supplemented by allopathic medicines from chemists and clinics (Mander, Ntuli, Diederichs & Mavundla 2007). The concept of 'like' treatment for countering lightning strikes and many traditional treatments may seem archaic but no more different from the current use of anti-venoms, flu-vaccines etc.

Krige (1965) reported that medicines played a dual role – often used to combat magic and/or illnesses either due to wizardry or natural sickness. Bryant (1909) recorded the medicinal value of several hundreds of plants, herbs, barks, and their roots that have real use in Zulu treatment of diseases. In the interview with an *inyanga* in the rural Valley of Thousand Hills, KZN, the *inyanga* explained how he learnt the art of herbal healing. This *inyanga* informed us that most of his knowledge was obtained through apprenticeship with his uncle, a well-known *inyanga*. He also demonstrated to us how plants, barks, and roots are to be used sparingly and he showed us his conservation garden of common and rare plants that he used. In addition to plants, he also uses other diverse ingredients from fats, bones etc. Although each diviner has his/her own special medicines and methods of treating patients, there are certain general methods of treating many common ailments, 'some of which are surprisingly simple and scientific' (Krige 1965:331). For example, clay and hides are used to re-set broken arms, ointments for sprains, paste of nightshade or milky juice of *euphorbia* for ringworms, poultices for wounds, and a paste of leaf over the wound reducing inflammation, protection and ensures healing.

For boils, leaves of a tree (*umHlankosi*) are crushed and applied to draw out the matter. Lotions are also used and there are treatments for ear

infections, headaches etc. The use of an enema is a common technique for internal cleansing in Zulu culture as the belief that both internal body and external body must be thoroughly cleansed before engaging in spiritual practices in ancestral worship. Other methods include incisions, cupping, and snuffing for headaches and neuralgia. In addition, natural purifying aromatic herbs served to clean the air in the largely enclosed thatched huts and as natural insecticides for killing harmful insects-mosquitoes etc. were part of the survival and health strategies (Brindley 1882; Krige 1965). There are other medicinal practices used for magic and in rituals but in reality have 'no curative' effect at all. In Zulu cosmology, medicine (*umuthi*) and magic go hand in hand and the izangoma has to be well-versed in both.

4. Ethnoastronomy

Even the skies in terms of ethnoastronomical observations and understandings have been integrated into the African daily practical way of life (Govender 2009 2011; Snedegar 2007) and into spiritual symbols like the rainbow and the 'Princess of Heaven' (Nomkhubulwane). Nomkhubulwane is also described as the goddess of corn, 'the Zulu fertility goddess' (Lambert 2008:545), and as 'robed with light as a garment' (Krige 1965:197). She has the power to bring rain and she is described as coming from heaven to teach people to harvest. The Zulus have developed distinct concepts of the universe and arising from their keen powers of observations they describe and provide explanations for the origins and movement of the sky, sun, moon, stars, rainbow, eclipse, calendar and months (Govender 2011; Krige 1965:410-412). Table 7 provides some evidence of current conceptions of ethnoastronomy embedded in Zulu culture. The data indicate that they have keen powers of observation of the phases of the Moon linked to predicting rainfall. The 'iKhwezi stars' are linked to time. iKhwezi is actually the planet Venus and commonly referred to as Morning and Evening 'stars'. The Zulus viewed these as two different objects, the evening 'star' as iCelankobe and the morning 'star' as iKhwezi (Krige 1967:411). The 'iKhwezi stars' provides a meaningful calendar for daily and seasonal activities (Table 7). The familiar observation of a 'lady on the Moon' by the Zulus is also linked with religious injunctions of Basotho's as well (Govender 2009). These observations are embedded into oral-stories that make interesting and exciting presentations and are an easy way to record and pass down

knowledge. An in-depth description on Zulu ethnoastronomy can be found in Krige (1965) and in Govender (2009; 2011).

Interviewers: Can you recall any Zulu stories related to the Moon?	Gogo: When the crescent Moon has faced Swaziland (modelling with her fingers) we believed that it was going to rain if it faced downwards and if it faced upwards (modelling with her hand), there will be no rain. In the Moon there is a picture of a woman who worked on the Sunday, the women is carrying her baby and a burden of logs which she was coming to collect from the bushes. It is believed God cursed that woman and took her to the Moon. My grandparents told me this story and they warned me that I mustn't work on Sundays.
Interviewers: Are there any Zulu stories about the stars?	Chief: The <i>iKhwezi</i> 'stars' are different, there is a small <i>iKhwezi</i> and there is a big <i>iKhwezi</i> . When the small <i>iKwezi iCelankobe</i> shines it symbolizes the evening and the big <i>iKhwezi</i> symbolized the morning star (<i>iKhwezi</i>). I used to measure time and know seasons with the <i>iKhwezi</i> 'stars'.

Table 7: Snippets of Zulu Ethnoastronomy

Discussion and Conclusion

As academics and Zulu-students, we have interacted with seventeen custodians of the Zulu community in KZN – chiefs (amakhosi), headmen (*izinDuna*), diviners (*izangoma* and *izinyanga*) and elders (*abadala*) regarding their Indigenous knowledge and practices through a process of ‘multilogical’ conversations. We believe that the knowledge that emerged in this small-scale ethnographic study points to deeper fountains of knowledge

into the areas of Zulu culture, cosmology, medicine and ethnoastronomy and more nuanced understandings needs to be recorded and shared. Tables 1-7 show snippets of evidence of such holistic and experiential indigenous knowledge that should be acknowledged, critically engaged with and accounted for IKS inclusion into the academy in several of its disciplines.

While the different ways of knowing have emerged in broad thematic categories that we have classified for discussion to support the notion of multilogicality – this involves the endorsement of adopting multidisciplinary, multiperspectival approaches in knowledge generation (Kincheloe 2008), we are fully cognizant that indigenous knowledge and experiences are holistic in context, place, time and manner. IK when engaged in a trustworthy multilogical process can be rewarding for both the academy and the indigenous communities (Kincheloe 2006). Several spinoffs can arise when multilogicality conversations occurs with equal mindedness striving towards parity of IK communities, democracy and a caring interwoven society that begins to recognize the several ways of knowing, understanding and being. The spinoffs of multilogical engagement can lead to a ‘rethinking of our purpose as educators’ and ‘producing new levels of insight’ (Kincheloe & Steinberg 2008:147), tolerance, improved use of multi-skills and raising the self-esteem of marginalized communities and their indigenous knowledge in a predominantly hegemonic Western system.

While currently, there are many challenges facing education in Africa, contemporary African education needs a critical examination of its mission, goals and objectives that are needed ‘to extract the best of indigenous African knowledge thought and practice to present research-based alternatives and solutions to current educational challenges in Africa’ (Zulu 2006:41). The challenge then will be to encompass and legitimize IK in formal structures with positive critiques from academics from different disciplines leading to a transformative educational and cultural system. In some cases, there has been appreciation and recognition, primarily due to economic necessities in this 21st century of IK in areas of agriculture and medicine. This article recognizes that the cultural knowledge of the custodians of Zulu culture is still valuable knowledge that can contribute to IK in the academia and hence provide recognition of the community’s contribution to knowledge development.

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Teacher Learning through Tapping into Indigenous Knowledge Systems in the Science Classroom

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Abstract

This article reports on a qualitative study that involved re-thinking and re-doing teaching, by exploring the value of incorporating practices and knowledge embedded in indigenous knowledge systems. It begins by troubling the notion that all knowledge systems not rooted in the western mode of thinking are ‘naturally’ subaltern. The article focuses on pre-service science teachers who experience challenges when they engage with different epistemologies to inform their practice. Their responses to these challenges are explored through the following research question: How do pre-service teachers learn to teach culturally inclusive science? Drawing on the constructs of sociocultural theory and the Zone of Proximal Development, the way in which pre-service teachers learn was explored. A sample of 30 pre-service science teacher volunteers, who are part of a total population of 98 individuals that study a pedagogic content module at a tertiary institution in South Africa, participated in this study. The methodology describes how the pre-service teachers were trained, through module activities, to teach culturally inclusive science. The participants worked co-operatively in groups and generated lesson plans, as well as written reflections on their activities, which served as the data. The findings reveal that pre-service teachers can, through module activities, be enabled to refer to multiple sources of information, including custodians of indigenous knowledges, as legitimate, relevant and valuable holders of knowledge. Collaborative work among pre-service teachers can increase their confidence to draw on different knowledge systems, by transcending familiar pedagogical boundaries when they train to teach school science. Included among the recommendations is pre-service

teachers' call for modules taught at tertiary institutions to include IKS as a compulsory component. The article concludes by revealing how the incorporation of IK into mainstream knowledge production can contribute to epistemological decolonisation and the restoration of African identity.

Keywords: Pre-service science teachers, indigenous knowledge systems, Zone of Proximal Development, western school science, teacher training

Introduction

Historically, the knowledges of indigenous people have been devalued (Corsiglia & Snively 2001). This is attributed in no small part to socio-political ambitions of their colonisers. Colonial education was transmitted in a way that stifled the engagement with a gamut of different epistemologies. The imposition of the curriculum of colonisers, which was foreign to many autochtons, muted critical thinking in its quest to re-mould what were seen as 'uncivilized natives' so that this Other may bear some, but never complete, resemblance to the colonisers (Kanu 2008). One vehicle used by colonisers to subjugate indigenous knowledges in their attempt to eradicate the identity of indigenous people was the school curriculum. The postcolonial era has heralded critique of the curriculum as a means to 'cultural superiority, ideological indoctrination, power and control over others' (Kanu 2008:9), and this has resulted in a fundamental re-thinking of the curriculum. This has led to a move beyond the representation of western, eurocentric knowledge, by creating spaces for the re-emergence of indigenous knowledges in school curricula.

Globally, many teachers are expected to adapt to changes in curriculum policy. The South African educational context has witnessed multiple shifts in curriculum policy during the past two decades, due to political, social and economic influences that emerged at the dawn of its democratic era. The curriculum transitioned from the form dictated by Christian National Education, which promoted the values and knowledge of the dominant (mainly white) racial group, and which conceptualised this as 'official knowledge' (Kanu 2006:5), to the National Curriculum Statement (NCS), which aimed to confer cultural legitimacy on the knowledges and values of all South Africans.

The National Curriculum Statement was based on the notion of ‘science for all’, and in keeping with the transforming socio-political environment, adopted a more humanistic approach. This was enshrined in the school curriculum policy for Natural Sciences as Learning Outcome 3, which promotes the teaching of indigenous knowledge systems (IKS) in the science classroom (Naidoo 2010:23). A more recent policy document, the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) for Natural Sciences, aims at ensuring that ‘learners acquire and apply knowledge and skills in ways that are meaningful to their own lives. In this regard, the curriculum promotes the idea of grounding knowledge in local contexts’ (Department of Basic Education, DBE 2011:3). The CAPS document underscores the following principle: ‘Valuing indigenous knowledge systems, acknowledging the rich history and heritage of this country as important contributors to nurturing the values contained in the Constitution’ (DBE 2011:3). The principles and aims of the curriculum are formulated to be achieved through specific aims, which outline those cognitive competencies to be developed by learners. These policy changes signal a route towards curriculum reform, a way to reconceptualise the curriculum to make it more sensitive and responsive to the ‘multiplicity, difference and identity affirmation that conditions the postcolonial’ (Kanu 2006:7).

Many practicing South African teachers, however, are not in favour of the change in curriculum, because this new curriculum expects more of teachers (Hewson, Javu & Holtman 2009). Teachers indicate that there is minimal support in terms of the actual content and pedagogic content knowledge (PCK) of IKS integration in the science curriculum. Ogunniyi (2007) and Govender (2009) confirm this, by asserting that many science teachers do not implement curricula which include IKS, because they lack the relevant knowledge and skills. This brings to mind the following observation that curriculum reform is ‘not a neat, linear movement from one curriculum space to another. Rather, it is fraught with tensions, conflicts and contradictions that are indeed necessary for change to occur’ (Maistry 2011:119).

Responses of practicing teachers to a changing curriculum have been widely documented. However, there is a paucity of research about how pre-service teachers respond to changes in curriculum, especially in terms of incorporating IKS into the science curriculum. In South African schools, the Natural Sciences learning area emphasises conceptual development, which

should be linked to learners' contexts. This presupposes that pre-service teachers would develop a deep understanding of learners' contexts, including indigeneity, alongside mastering school science concepts, the latter which are grounded in a western worldview. This situation is a complex one. The Nature of Science (NOS), in which school science is embedded, is characterised by a parochial conceptualisation, compared to the holistic, plural, redemptive views of human experiences promulgated by IKS; and this presents a challenge to pre-service teachers (Ogunniyi 2007). We address here the challenge related to how pre-service teachers incorporate IKS into Natural Sciences lessons, given the different philosophical underpinnings of the nature of science and indigenous knowledges. We use the lens of an interpretive paradigm to approach the following research question: How do pre-service teachers learn to teach culturally inclusive science? In this article, culturally inclusive science is taken to refer to school science that engages with alternate knowledge rooted in indigenous knowledge systems. The data set informing this study includes pre-service teachers' lesson preparations, the resources that they choose to teach IKS in the Natural Sciences classroom, and their reflections on their practice.

South African School Science Education and IKS

IKS is conceptualised as a dynamic, complex human system comprising experiences of trial and error, practical wisdom, applied knowledge and historically acquired experiences, embedded and shared locally through collective structures and diverse learning modes. The marginalisation of IKS is acknowledged by Ogunniyi (2004) and Corsiglia *et al.* (2001), who emphasise that there is the perception that only the knowledge rooted in western systems of thought is regarded as valid. Ogunniyi (2004) argues that the practices which are embedded in the cultural values of African people have begun to wear away, because of the influence of western science in the education system of schools. Bishop (1990) states that the re-emergence of ethno-science has resulted in the revival of IKS in education. In one dictionary, ethno-science is defined as 'the study of the systems of knowledge and classification of material objects and concepts by primitive and non-Western peoples' (www.dictionary.com). Embedded within this definition is the notion that knowledge systems which are held by non-western people are

subaltern; it is this perception that creates difficulties when ethno-science is alluded to in the science curriculum. Ogunniyi (2004; 2007) points out that because the re-emergence of IKS is still in its elementary stage, the insight into and experience of IKS is limited, and this poses challenges for its inclusion in curricula. This challenge is compounded by linguistic barriers, because the same word can be interpreted differently by different cultural groups.

A critical analysis of the NCS by Botha (2010) has resulted in the authors' conclusion that western science dominates the NCS and that the worldviews of indigenous people of South Africa in education continue to be relegated to the margins. Botha (2010) calls for the South African education system to represent the demographics of the country, and to be more inclusive of and responsive to African traditions and culture. It is argued here that this can be achieved by adopting a more collaborative approach to science teaching and learning, where indigenous knowledge and western science are combined. The review of the literature indicates that while IKS and its philosophy have made inroads into critical pedagogy theory and that indigenous methodologists can 'speak to the oppressed, colonized persons living in postcolonial situations of injustice ...' (Denzin, Lincoln, & Smith 2008: x), IKS is still in its development stages, which require more sustained research into school and university curricula.

South African Universities and IKS

Amongst the principles and aims of the NCS is the requirement that school science should take cognisance of the learner's social context, in order to be meaningful (Department of Education 2002). This has implications for the type of training which teachers receive at higher education institutions. Currently, higher education institutions are considering the potential value of IKS and are re-designing courses/modules to recognise IKS. Naidoo (2010:14) alludes to the establishment of IKS faculties in certain South African universities; this signals a heightened awareness of the importance of focusing on IKS in tertiary education. Some universities have introduced a Bachelor of IKS degree, which confirms the endorsement of other ways of knowing by these institutions. The University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) has the vision of being 'the Premier University of African Scholarship' (UKZN

vision and mission 2013). This university aspires to achieve this vision by promoting Indigenous African Knowledge Systems (IAKS) through the establishment of a dedicated office. The IAKS office at UKZN aims to, among other things, achieve the following: advance the development of teaching multidisciplinary undergraduate and postgraduate programmes, design an institutional policy for IKS development and protection, promote institutional awareness of IKS, plan research based workshops on IKS methodologies, and conduct institutional audits to generate a database of research projects and academics working in the field of IKS (Kaya 2012). At the University of KwaZulu-Natal's School of Education, pre-service teachers are given an 'indigenous voice', whereby culture and indigenous knowledge are included in the teaching of a science concept, astronomy (Govender 2009). According to Govender (2009), pre-service teachers are aware that indigenous practices are not simply ways of doing, but that they involve intellectual engagement, and this motivates these teachers to create ways to incorporate IKS in the science classroom. A theoretical understanding of how pre-service teachers learn to teach IKS is vital in order to advance African scholarship.

Theory

We engage with constructs from the sociocultural theory of learning and the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) as advanced by Vygotsky (Wersch 1985; Williams & Burden 1997; Ellis 2000; Shayer 2002; Lantolf 2002), in order to understand how pre-service teachers learn to teach IKS. Turuk (2008) states that sociocultural theory advances the notion that learners acquire knowledge by interacting with other role players (for example, teachers and their peers). This knowledge first develops in the 'interpsychological plane', after which this knowledge is assimilated and augmented with personal value, representing knowledge development at the 'intrapsychological plane' (Turuk 2008:245). According to sociocultural theory, the learner does not replicate the teacher's knowledge, but during appropriation, transforms and internalises knowledge. This marks the shift from social to personal knowledge.

Proponents of the sociocultural theory of learning argue for 'learning in interaction', as opposed to 'learning through interaction' (Turuk

2008:248). When they encounter a new task, learners interact with their peers or teachers (engage in social interaction), are then assisted by them, and eventually succeed in performing the task independently (Turuk 2008). Vygotsky (1978) extended the sociocultural theory of learning by arguing that consideration ought to be given to learners' potential ability to learn, beyond that which matches their actual level of development. This he referred to as the ZPD. A fundamental tenet of Vygotsky's ZPD is that developmental processes associated with learning are activated when learners interact with other people in a collaborative way. The ZPD is contingent, therefore, on the role of instruction (from the teacher), as well as the learners' biological development. Drawing on Vygotsky's ZPD, Turuk (2008) concludes that instruction which leads to meaningful learning should be more advanced and superior to the learner's actual intellectual development stage; such instruction will galvanize multiple functions, which are in the ZPD and are associated with learning.

This theory is relevant to this study because we explore how pre-service teachers learn to teach IKS in a subject called Natural Sciences, through mediation and scaffolding. We examine how they extend their familiar lesson plans, which involve the teaching of knowledge and skills in school science located in western ways of knowing, to teaching science that includes alternative knowledge systems.

Training to Teach Culturally Inclusive Science

The participants who were pre-service teachers in their third year of study engaged with a PCK module, which included integrating IKS into the teaching of science. These pre-service teachers were identified as a suitable group, because they were familiar with the school curriculum policy, and they had engaged in teaching at schools. Their experience of school-based teaching gave them unique insight into how teachers implement curriculum policy and how learners respond to the curriculum. In addition, the module template included constructivism as a learning theory, as well as IKS. The teaching of both topics was facilitated by creating the opportunity for pre-service teachers to think deeply about how learners can actively construct knowledge by tapping into their indigenous knowledge systems. The following is a synopsis of the lecture activities dedicated to training pre-

service science teachers to teach culturally inclusive science:

Table 1: Work Plan of Part of a PCK module

	Theme	Method of teaching	Resources
	Definitions of IKS	Peer discussion and group discussion to verbally respond to provocative questions	Power point presentation Articles/excerpts from Odora Hoppers and Makhale-Mahlangu (1998).
Part A	Composition of Indigenous knowledge	Peer discussion and group discussion to provide written responses to provocative questions	Selections from article by Onwu & Mosimege (2004).
	Differences and similarities between IKS and Western modern science	Individual interpretation, individual responses to questions	Schematic representation by Barnhardt & Kawagle (2005). <i>Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Alaska Native Ways of Knowing</i> .
	Reasons for and consequences of marginalizing IKS	Peer work: research task Report back to class Class discussion and debate	Internet Journals Community knowledge holders
Part B	Role of the science teacher in facilitating appropriation of indigenous knowledge	Individual responses to questions based on interpretation of an article Application of methods of teaching culturally inclusive science	Article: <i>Rejoinder: Infusing Indigenous Science into Western Modern Science for a Sustainable Future</i> by Corsiglia and Snively (2001).
Part C	Curriculum policy and the Science teacher	Group discussion to respond to question: Describe how Indigenous Knowledge has been made a part of this policy document.	Natural Sciences Curriculum Assessment Policy document Statements

<p>Part D</p>	<p>Science teaching</p> <p>(1) Planning a lesson: cognizance of context and use of resources</p> <p>(2) Teaching Methods</p> <p>(3) Subject content</p> <p>(4) Assessment</p>	<p>Group work to respond to central instruction related to a project:</p> <p>Include knowledge area, specific aims and assessments which apply to the lesson. Describe how you will facilitate learning of the topic.</p> <p>‘Design a lesson of one hour duration, in which Indigenous Knowledge is integrated. A theme and a topic should be selected from the Natural Sciences learning area.</p> <p>(Refer to the relevant CAPS documents http://talcm.ukzn.ac.za/curriculum.aspx).</p> <p>Describe how learners are expected to construct knowledge about the topic. Include a strategy for assessment. Include all resource materials.</p> <p>Present your lesson as a group. Submit a lesson plan which does not exceed 2 typed pages in length. Submit resource/ assessment pages which are relevant to the lesson’.</p>	<p>Internet</p> <p>Community knowledge holders</p> <p>Policy documents</p> <p>Peers</p>
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Methodology

This study was located in the interpretive paradigm, and sought to understand how pre-service teachers ‘appropriate cultural and social heritages’ (Turuk 2008:245) by means of a qualitative exploration of their written responses to a task (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2009). It sought to understand pre-service teachers’ choices of knowledge, skills and values when they plan lessons, and relates to Part D, numbers (1) to (4) on Table 1. Convenience sampling was used to admit the responses of 30 pre-service teachers, who volunteered to participate after being informed of the purpose of the study. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011) assert that convenience sampling is used to work with participants who are nearby and easily accessible; our participants were engaging with our module on our campus. The 30 pre-service teacher participants were selected because they compiled comprehensive reflective journals, in addition to designing lesson plans which were closely aligned to the module instructions. We engage with documents, namely, policy documents and lesson plans, the latter which were generated by pre-service teachers, as well as pre-service teachers’ reflections, in order to frame the results.

Cohen *et al.* (2009) assert that strong validity is associated with an analysis of documents written for a particular purpose, especially if it resonates with the purpose of the research. They suggest that validity and reliability are able to be enhanced by augmenting the data set with other documents. Lesson plans were used as one set of documents, because they provide insight into the action of teaching. The insight that we as researchers offer in the next section is based on our interpretation of lesson plans to which pre-service teachers have already ascribed meaning. We decided to enhance reliability and validity by using their reflective journals to corroborate findings from the analysis of lesson plans. The pre-service teachers completed their reflective journals, which were semi-structured, to provide an intellectual space in which they could independently reflect on their experiences of learning to teach. This encouraged deep reflection and contributed to their metacognition. The process of reflection enabled participants to make sense of their decisions to teach specific content in particular ways (Moon 2006).

Results and Findings

We explored the following activities of the pre-service teachers, in order to chart their learning to teach culturally inclusive science. First, we explored

what topics/ areas of study pre-service science teachers choose to teach culturally inclusive science, and why they choose these topics; second, the type of learning activities pre-service teachers design for learners to enable learners to learn culture in the science classroom; and third, how pre-service teachers learn to teach culturally inclusive science. Finally, we explored pre-service teachers' views on how they can be enabled to learn to teach culturally inclusive science more effectively.

Each of the groups worked with the CAPS document for Natural Sciences (Senior Phase) (DBE 2011), which comprises four knowledge areas conceptually and progressively linked to subjects in the Further Education and Training (FET) band for grades 10, 11 and 12. The knowledge areas for Natural Sciences are:

- *Life and Living*: linked to Life Sciences in the FET band.
- *Matter and Materials*: linked to Physical Sciences in the FET band.
- *Energy and Change*: linked to Life Sciences and Physical Sciences in FET band.
- *Earth and Beyond*: linked to Geography and Life Sciences in the FET band.

Based on the knowledge area, the participants designed lessons to articulate with Specific Aims 1, 2 or 3 (see Table 2), which are stipulated in the CAPS document (DBE 2011). The profile of the participants and the topics they selected to teach under the category of culturally inclusive science are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Synopsis of lesson plans and participants

Group	Ethnic group			Specific Aim(s)	Topic	Primary teaching and learning activities (in addition to question and answer methods and class discussions)	Worldview in which knowledge is embedded
	African	Indian	European				

Teacher Learning through Indigenous Knowledge Systems

A	5			1 2 3	Sustainable use of plants as medicine and food	(1) Group work: Match photographs of medicinal plants with a list of uses of medicinal plants (2) Individual work: Read note sheet about medicinal plants. Answer questions based on their uses and sustainability.	African
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B		3	1	1 2 3	Soil pollution and conservation	(1) Group work: Microscopy: Preparation of wet mount of soil organisms (2) Group work: Effect of soil pollution on soil organisms (3) Individual work: Read notes about methods used by farmers in the past to facilitate soil conservation.	European
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C		4		1 3	Tumeric as a medicinal plant	Group work (1) Case study of medicinal properties of turmeric (2) Uses of turmeric by different cultural groups (3) Current uses of turmeric in cosmetic industry (4) Research on health benefits of turmeric by US National Institute of Health	Indian
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D		4	1	1	Indigenous medicinal plants	(1)Group work: research project: Research one indigenous African medicinal plant. Describe its external anatomy, use in the past, present use, including medicinal, and sustainability.	African
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Teacher Learning through Indigenous Knowledge Systems

E		5		1 2 3	Nutrition	<p>Group work</p> <p>(1) Analysis of food labels, nutritional value of ingredients listed on food labels</p> <p>(2) Analysis of diets of Indian and African people who lived a century ago, and comparison of these with present day diets.</p> <p>(3) Developing a nutritional vegetable garden at school.</p>	African Indian
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F	3			1 3	Fertilisers	<p>(1) Group work: draw on knowledge from holders of IK and local farmers about use of cow dung as fertiliser.</p> <p>(2) Individual work: Demonstrate how cow dung is prepared to be used as fertiliser. Describe advantages and disadvantages of organic and artificial fertilisers.</p>	African
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G	4			1 3	Medicinal plants	(1) Group work Discuss importance of traditional medicine used globally (2) Answer questions based on the use of Ginseng tea. Discuss side effects of Ginseng. Prepare Ginseng tea.	Chinese
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What to Teach in Order to be a Culturally Inclusive Science Teacher

All the participants in this study selected topics from the Life and Living knowledge area. Groups B and F selected topics associated with the disruption of ecosystems, concerning pollution in general, and chemical pollution (as a result of the use of artificial fertilisers) in particular. Groups A, C, D, E and G focused on indigenous plants as a source of food and/or medicine and healthy living. Central to the plan developed by Group E was healthy living, as it is associated with the alimentary canal, nutrition and a balanced diet. The sustainable use of resources was a common theme underscored by the pre-service teachers.

The participants were guided by curriculum policy, which stipulates the three specific aims in Natural Sciences (DBE 2011: 58-63), namely:

- ‘Specific Aim 1: Acquiring knowledge of Natural Sciences’
The cognitive competencies to assess achievement of this aim are determined by the learner’s ability to recall knowledge, to describe, to analyse and to evaluate.
- ‘Specific Aim 2: Investigating phenomena in the Natural Sciences’
The cognitive skills which are developed are related mainly to practical work, which is of an investigative nature, and which include

science process skills, such as following instructions, handling equipment, making observations, recording information, measuring, interpreting results and designing investigations.

- ‘Specific Aim 3: Appreciating and understanding the importance and applications of Natural Sciences in society’
The skills developed through this aim can be measured by the learner’s ability to access, describe and evaluate history of discoveries from past and current cultures. An associated sub-specific aim is the relationship of indigenous knowledge to Natural Sciences. The document emphasises two conditions when addressing this sub-specific aim: first, that the examples which are selected should be from practices of the different cultural groups in South Africa, and second, that the examples be linked to the Natural Sciences subject content, which is specified in the various knowledge areas.

Each of the groups expanded on topics in the CAPS document (DBE 2011: 52-79) in order to plan their lessons.

Why do pre-service teachers choose specific topics to teach culturally inclusive science?

Several participants indicated that their choice of topic was contingent on easy access to information, motivation to inculcate healthy eating habits, curiosity about dietary practices of different cultural groups, or resonance with their own culture. The following reflections attest to this:

Group E member: *The members of the group and I found the topic interesting and important. We felt that children in today’s society do not seem to pay much attention to their diets. We also wanted to see what [the] diets of different cultures consisted of, and the reason for their diets [sic].*

Group F member: *It [preparation of fertilisers] is part of my culture. We already knew some things about fertilisers [sic]. Together with my group, we could access information easily.*

An interest in the way in which cultural preference informed the diet of others was what motivated Group E to select nutrition as a topic to study. In addition, they wanted to plan lessons that would impact positively and generate healthy lifestyle choices among their learners. For Group F, familiarity with the topic, together with easy access to information, resulted in their choice of topic.

What Type of Learning Activities do Pre-service Teachers Plan in Order to Teach Culturally Inclusive Science

Each group of pre-service teachers planned extensive group activities for their learners in order to achieve the specific aims. Groups B, E, F and G planned investigative activities that were related to Specific Aim 2. Group B elected to engage learners with microscope work, to enable them to conduct hands on investigations, by preparing and examining wet mounts of soil organisms. They had to follow instructions on a practical worksheet, handle the microscope, observe and draw the organisms in question. Through this activity, the pre-service teachers planned to facilitate knowledge construction of the value of soil organisms in farming; the effect of pollutants on soil organisms and consequently on sustainable farming; as well as examining those sustainable farming methods used by different cultural groups who lived in the past. In this way, these pre-service teachers addressed Specific Aims 1 and 3, and they engaged with indigenous wisdom about natural resource management.

Group E planned a research-based investigation, in which their learners were expected to conduct research by determining the following about planting vegetable gardens: Demarcating a suitable area for the garden; preparing/building the soil; sowing seeds; irrigation; and caring for seedlings. They applied the knowledge of Natural Sciences to society (Specific Aim 3), and sought ways of sustainable food production by learners and for learners. This group emphasised indigenous wisdom in planting crops and selecting food, which formed the diet of past cultural groups. They also aimed to deal with social challenges such as poverty, disease, lack of education, and the effects of these on nutrition, through their teaching. In addition, they adopted an agentic stance by not simply advocating that learners become self-sufficient in food production, but by planning lessons which support learner

empowerment. Group F required their learners to consult with holders of cultural knowledge in their communities, as well as other sources, in order to determine how cow dung can be prepared as a fertiliser. Learners were required to develop steps in the method for production of the fertiliser and develop skills such as measurement, following instructions and observation. Precautions related to methane production and the flammability of methane were also covered. The pre-service teachers in group G designed a traditional practical with recipe-like steps for learners to follow in the preparation of Ginseng tea.

How Pre-service Teachers Learn to Teach Culturally Inclusive Science

Pre-service teachers had to construct knowledge related to two main pedagogical tasks. First, they familiarised themselves with the content of the topic. Second, they designed apposite teaching strategies in order to learn to teach. The participants learnt to teach by tapping into various resources. Several groups were assisted with the content by their ‘elders’, who were traditional knowledge holders. The following reflections describe this:

Group C member: *We did a survey in our local community, targeting elder members as part of the research.*

Group F member: *Elders showed us how to make manure [by][...] mixing old dry cow dung with dried plants. They told us which time of the year to do it.*

Pre-service teachers learned about methods, and seasonal implications, alongside the content, from traditional knowledge holders. Other sources of knowledge were also accessed and applied, as is revealed by the following reflections:

Group C member: *We did research in library books, the internet, and saw what the CAPS document required.*

Group F member: *Working with my group mates [sic], we [shared task of] accessing information.*

Group A: *Through research from the internet we were assisted by fellow group members. We, as pre-service teachers, had a chance to learn how to do an IKS lesson with assistance from group members, whereas, as practicing teachers, we would have been facing this alone in the real situation [sic].*

Pre-service teachers underscored the value of working collaboratively when engaging with the complex task of incorporating IKS into school science lessons. They were able to distribute tasks among themselves and learn from one another; this enhanced their confidence in engaging with IKS in the science classroom.

The participants also drew on their learning experiences from other modules that they had completed, in order to design teaching strategies. The following excerpt reveals this:

Group A: *We learnt how to teach through other modules such as Professional Studies, Learning Area Studies, Natural Science Method 1, and so on.*

How can Pre-service Teachers be Enabled to Teach Culturally Inclusive Science more Effectively?

Several participants emphasised the active role that tertiary institutions can assume to facilitate training of teachers to incorporate culture into their lessons. The following views were voiced by some participants:

Group C member: *Tertiary institutions should offer at least one compulsory module to teach the necessary IKS and ways of teaching culturally inclusive science. [The] government must provide mentorship programs in partnership with tertiary institutions [in order] to assist teachers in using innovative ways to teach culturally inclusive science.*

Group F member: *I think each and every specialisation module should play its part and [ought to] have a section on indigenous knowledge. Perhaps tertiary institutions could suggest that IKS be examined in the Grade 9 Annual National Assessment tests. IKS should be taught once a week at school level - this would really help, especially because we are running out of fertile land, and [because] aquatic life forms get destroyed due to artificial fertilisers which run off [into water bodies].*

The excerpts reflect the participants' call for training in culturally inclusive content and teaching strategies. The Group C participant viewed this as essential, and therefore suggested the need for a 'compulsory' module. The participant suggested a collaboration between the government and tertiary institutions in order to train teachers who will serve as mentors in teaching culturally inclusive science.

The Group F member called on tertiary institutions to include IKS in all modules. In addition, this participant highlighted the need for IKS to be examined at school level. The participant endorses the need for indigenous knowledge to be taught in classrooms in order to address the challenge of chemical pollution.

This study reveals that PCK modules at tertiary institutions can be designed to enable pre-service teachers to work creatively with curriculum policy documents, while simultaneously embracing practices and concepts located in indigenous knowledge systems. Pre-service teachers can transcend familiar knowledge boundaries by working with multiple knowledge holders, to generate new ways of learning to teach school science. The study shows how a space can be created for pre-service teachers to explore the reservoir of knowledge embedded in cultural diversity and their biological heritage, to plan their lessons. An unexpected finding was the emphasis on self-sufficiency, which was embedded in the lesson designs. Pre-service teachers sought to move beyond incorporating IKS as legitimate knowledge in science classrooms. They integrated indigenous knowledge with science process skills to facilitate knowledge construction about disease prevention and health promotion, and in doing this, designed lessons to empower learners.

Discussion

The lessons developed by the pre-service teachers required them to work in unfamiliar terrain, to look to unconventional sources for designing their lessons, and to broaden their epistemological and pedagogical horizons as teachers of school science. They engaged in ‘previously unknown ways of conceptualizing phenomena in the world’ (Turuk 2008:245). The participants interacted with members of their groups, community holders of cultural knowledge and the lecturer, and appropriated knowledge related to teaching culturally inclusive science. They learned to teach collaboratively, because their learning was assisted and mediated by members of their group.

Pre-service teachers selected topics in the Life and Living knowledge area because these topics were socially meaningful. Education for relevance accompanied by education for self-reliance, such as that proposed by Julius Nyerere (Kaya 2012), underpinned the work of the participants. The pre-service teachers revealed their potential as African intellectuals, who were able to incorporate IK into western science lessons, and apply skills learned in western science education to use IK to address social challenges.

Teachers’ greater familiarity with western science over that of IKS is attributed to their training (Ogunnyi 2007). This results in teachers drawing on the thought systems of western science when they design lessons. This study has revealed how a teacher training module may be developed in order to address teachers’ inadequate views, especially of IKS. The module was developed to enable pre-service teachers to look for ways in which the two systems of thought (western school science and IKS) may be used to complement each other, in order to successfully implement what Ogunnyi (2007:963) refers to as ‘Science-IKS curricula’. Aikenhead and Ogawa (2007) assert that the terms IKS and Science are used in overly simplistic ways, and that this conceals the similarities between the two systems of thought. The PCK module described in this article reveals how pre-service teachers may be supported in reconciling aspects of both systems of thought as a route toward effective and relevant teaching. This resonates with the view expressed by Aikenhead *et al.* (2007:540) that ‘science educators [ought to] build bridges between their own Eurocentric knowledge systems and other ways of knowing.’ Instead of viewing indigenous knowledge systems and those which are embedded in western science as ‘disparate’ (Nakata 2007) or impossible to reconcile (Russel 2005) pre-service teachers were supported by

one another as well as by the module task, to design lessons which draw on *both* systems of thought in a complementary way.

Conclusion

This study argued for pre-service teachers to re-think how they learn to teach by recognizing IKS as legitimate and valuable in the science classroom. It reveals how pre-service science teachers, when directed by relevant instructions, can become enabled to disrupt the linearity of thought and practice, to move beyond the familiar pedagogical boundaries into new spaces, and to learn to integrate IKS in their lessons. Given the intellectual space and opportunity, pre-service teachers can be guided to explore how indigenous knowledges can be taught in the science classroom. Multiple sources of information can be accessed from written information and people who are holders and practitioners of cultural knowledge. This form of collaboration can facilitate learning across generations, and can engender a new respect for indigenous knowledge, especially among young people.

It was observed that the engagement of participant pre-service teachers in activities that call for them to think deeply about how they teach, conscientised them about the value of IKS. It enabled them to advocate for a more serious consideration of IKS in school and university curricula, which are based on policy. Their call for indigenous knowledge to be examinable at national level, and for the compulsory inclusion of IKS at tertiary institutions, has implications for policy makers in education. Science teacher educators at tertiary institutions need to develop modules which include IKS in order to equip teachers to implement the science curriculum more effectively. It is crucial for teacher training institutions to recognise teachers as fundamental agents in the process of implementing school curricula. This study reveals ways in which science education programmes can be designed in order to enable teachers to meet the needs of the new curriculum. Articulation of university curriculum policy which informs modules intended for pre-service teachers, with school curriculum policy, is crucial to the effective teacher training process. The practice of university educators, which, when informed by appropriate learning theories, such as Vygotsky's sociocultural learning theory and ZPD, has the potential to enhance pre-service teachers' ability to deliver a culturally inclusive curriculum.

It is upheld here that effective, apposite teacher training programmes can promote the epistemological decolonisation of African people, by supporting them as they navigate new ways to bring IK into the mainstream of knowledge production in Africa. A reconnection with IK can lead to the restoration of the African identity into one which is self-sufficient, self-aware, proud and powerful.

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Personhood and Social Power in African Thought

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Abstract

The paper is based on the hypothesis that received meanings of personhood in any social context are almost always associated with notions of power. Drawing on some interesting insights from the quite recent history of African philosophy as a counter-colonial practice as well as from available evidence in social anthropology, the paper specifically investigates the link between social power and a widely received conception of personhood namely, the communitarian/ normative conception of personhood. Two central claims are advanced. First, the paper suggests that the search for and the articulation of a distinctive African conception of personhood are strongly motivated by some non-epistemic motive, which the paper identifies as a struggle for power. Second, the paper argues that the communitarian/normative conception of personhood is deeply contingent upon social power differentials among individuals in community and, relatedly, this feature of socially engendered personhood is sufficient to cast a shadow of doubt on the much vaunted egalitarian nature of the social space in which individuals are believed to acquire personhood.

Keywords: African, Personhood, Communitarianism, Power, Egalitarianism

Introduction

Anthropologist Paul Riesman has noted that ‘the creation of meaning in a society – including the meanings of womanhood, manhood, personhood, etc. – may usually or even always involve a power struggle’ (1996: 91). In making this observation, it is not entirely clear that Riesman was offering a criticism of the emerging conceptions of personhood, womanhood and

manhood. What is clear is that that observation is borne out by the available anthropological evidence he samples. The evidence unambiguously points very broadly to the deep connections between ‘the creation of meaning’ and power. My aim is to explore one aspect of this connection – I wish to explore specifically the relationship between a widely received conception of personhood and power. I have in mind the idea that personhood is socially acquired or that it is something that can be had in concert with others. This idea of personhood is the upshot of the communitarian valuation of community as ontologically, morally and epistemological prior to the individual¹.

This conception of personhood has received substantial treatment by African philosophers. But although significant contributions have been made by way of illuminating that idea of personhood, its connection to power remains underexplored. I intend, by means of a careful application of philosophy to anthropology, to make sense of Riesman’s observation and thereby attempt to repair this obvious lack.

I pursue two distinct lines of exploration in order to establish the connection between personhood and power. In section II, I suggest that a non-epistemic motivation, which I identify as a struggle for power, underlies the search for and articulation of a distinctive African conception of personhood. I try to achieve this by showing that when examined through the prism of African philosophy as a ‘counter-colonial practice’, theorizing about a distinctively African (socially engendered) view of personhood betrays a struggle for power. Or, alternatively, a struggle to reaffirm a distinctive African meaning of what it means to be a person against colonial definitions. In section III, I provide details of the relevant conception of personhood and then show that it is contingent upon the social power differentials among individuals along familiar lines of social class, seniority and gender. Throughout this section, I assume that personhood as socially engendered

¹ The thesis is powerfully expressed by Menkiti who asserts that in African thought ‘... the reality of the communal world takes precedence over the reality of the individual life histories, whatever these may be’ (Menkiti 1984: 171). See also, Kenyatta 1965: 180 and Senghor 1964: 49, 93–94. Many other African philosophers subscribe quite generally to the view that community, rather than individual, is the axiomatic principle around which all other facts revolve.

cannot be abstracted independent of the actual social relations that constitute the social space in which individuals evolve into persons.

Beyond these empirical generalizations, I argue in the final section that recognizing the deep connections between power and personhood, especially the fact that the relevant conception of personhood is contingent on unequal power relations, shouldn't leave unaffected our judgment about that conception of personhood. Accordingly, I draw attention to something I find paradoxical in the attempt to define personhood as socially conditioned. More specifically, the view of personhood as contingent upon social power differentials among individuals in community flies in the face of the tacit assumption, by proponents of the relevant conception of personhood, of an egalitarian social context in which individuals acquire personhood. In the end, I suggest that equality is a basic moral ideal that cannot plausibly be grounded on empirical facts regarding the power status of individuals in community—that is to say, on basic facts assumed by proponents of the communitarian/normative conception of personhood.

A Non-Epistemic Basis for Communal Selfhood

Rosalind Shaw (2002: 25) has pointed out that African notions of personhood have often been used as foils for Western notions of personhood. The primary motivation for this is in part couched in the long history of Western denigration of African modes of thought. As a reaction, African intellectuals rallied around the idea of difference in giving content to the theories and philosophies that emerge in the period ushering in independence and beyond. One subject matter in which this assertion of difference is especially noticeable is in the theorization of selfhood².

One widely received conception of personhood is the communitarian/normative conception. It has often been used as a foil against Western notions of personhood. Descartes' attempt to locate personhood in some static quality, namely the capacity for thought, has frequently been chosen as representative of Western conception of personhood. What's important, though, isn't so much the content of Descartes' conception of personhood as such but the methodological approach within which it figures. That approach to the question of personhood follows an easily recognizable pattern. This

² Throughout, I use the terms 'selfhood' and 'personhood' interchangeably.

involves the identification of some isolated quality of which the human being is in possession. This quality is taken to be definitive of what it means to be a person, such that an entity lacking said characteristic is by virtue of that lack excluded from the community of persons. Take, for instance, Frankfurt's (1971) view of person as an entity with the capacity for second-order volition or the capacity to form effective second-order desires. An entity lacking this specific capacity is not a person, in Frankfurt's view, since it lacks the essential feature that matters for personhood. Many African thinkers believe that this methodological approach to accounting for personhood stands in sharp contrast to the African one, which, they insist is sensitive not to intrinsic facts about personal constitution but to other facts.

In this connection, Placide Tempels' project, which aimed at articulating a distinctive theory of personhood on behalf of the *Baluba*, marks the beginning of a major shift away from the Western approach to personhood. The motivation for the project has been called into question by several philosophers; in particular, some take it to be fundamentally aligned to the colonialist agenda³. Beyond these concerns, however, Tempels' *Bantu* philosophy remains historically relevant, being crucial to the emergence of contemporary African philosophy, and the content of the philosophy he articulates has provoked several exciting philosophical debates. At the end of this section, I shall briefly discuss some of the very lively protestations against Tempels' Bantu philosophy, which, along with other similar philosophical approaches, has been condescendingly branded ethnophilosophy by the Beninois philosopher, Paulin Hountondji. In the meantime, it is worth noting that Tempels interpreted the *Baluba* as holding the belief that personhood depends on the possession of vital force and that the measure of one's vital force ultimately depends on the quality of relationships one has with others. On this approach, then, personhood isn't merely the result of possessing some specific quality, as is the case in Western philosophy, particularly the Cartesian variety, but is defined essentially in reference to others.

Notice, then, the substantial modification to the Western approach. The value of personhood no longer depends on the mere possession of some characteristic internal to the constitution of the individual; the basis of

³ See, for instance, Aimé Césaire's political criticism of Ethnophilosophy as an attempt to create a diversion away from the real political issues that confronted Africans.

personhood is ultimately located in something extrinsic viz. the quality of one's relationships with others. Here is Tempels (1959: 58) on the idea that being a person is at bottom a function of the quality of relationships the person maintains with others:

The concept of separate being ... entirely independent of one another, is foreign to Bantu thought. Bantu hold that created beings preserve a bond one with another, an intimate ontological relationship For the Bantu there is interaction of being, that is to say, of force with force.

But Tempels is not alone in thinking that the African meaning of personhood differs substantially from Western one or that in contrast to the latter, personhood in African thought is defined in reference to others. Perhaps, the clearest expression of that idea is Mbiti's widely cited play on the Cartesian *cogito ergo sum* (I think therefore I am). Since personhood is not dependent on the mere possession of the capacity for thought but is a function of maintaining vital relationships with others in community, the individual, according to Mbiti, must say 'I am because we are; and since we are therefore I am' (1969: 109). In this way, he locates the individual person, contra Descartes, not in the isolated occurrence of thought, but in dynamic relationships with others thus reinforcing the view that personhood is something that can only be had in concert with others – that is to say, in community.

But Mbiti's rather captivating phrase would be believable if only it were plausible. As far as I am aware, it was the Malawian philosopher Didier Kaphagawani who first stumbled upon the incoherence of Mbiti's claim. Holding it up to its Cartesian counterpart, Kaphagawani ingeniously observed that although the Cartesian *cogito ergo sum* retains a certain pretence to logical validity, since a supporting premiss can be plausibly constructed to establish its conclusion, the same cannot be said of Mbiti's claim. The point is that Mbiti's widely cited claim fails the simple test of validity since there couldn't possibly be a coherent helping premise to establish the conclusion the argument seeks to reach. Here is Kaphagawani,

[a]lthough the *cogito* argument could have pretensions of validity when provided 'Whatever thinks exists as a suppressed premise I find it difficult to imagine quite what suppressed premise would

render Mbiti's argument valid (2004: 337 - 338).

It should go without saying that Kaphagawani's criticism of Mbiti's claim is a very powerful one⁴. Yet, my interest is not so much in Mbiti's incoherence as such but rather in the implication of that incoherence on the idea that personhood is ultimately a function of individual dependence on community—something which Mbiti's claim sought to capture. For if Kaphagawani is right, then the least one would expect from proponents of this view of personhood is an attempt to rescue the thesis from the apparent illogicality. Anything short of rescue would imply a total rejection of the thesis. What we notice, however, is a total disregard of the problematic captured in Kaphagawani's criticism. Subsequent defenders of Tempels' and Mbiti's original idea have conveniently sidestepped the problem of establishing the validity of the thesis, preferring instead to expatiate on the logically dubious claim. Perhaps, this is what Masolo had in mind when he pointed out that African philosophers do not 'give an analytical account of their claim that African societies were communitarian in their social-political ethic. Instead, it is merely asserted as an abiding truth ...' (2004: 490). Although the claim fails the simplest test of logic (i.e. validity) and in spite of its obvious illogic, it is uncritically embraced and still widely employed. The claim 'I am because we are' is bandied everywhere as a distinctive African contribution to knowledge.

But why is this so in spite of its failure to stand the test of logic? I diagnose this apparent indifference to the logical status of the claim as facilitated by a non-epistemic motivation. I begin from what I deem to be an uncontroversial premise that what has come to be known as African philosophy, at least in its contemporary and written form, is situated within

⁴ The point being made here should be readily available to those who already understand the basics of logic. For those who may not fully grasp the point, it is crucial to closely consider Descartes' *cogito ergo sum*, to clearly illustrate the point. The proposition, 'I think therefore I am' is a valid (as opposed to sound) argument when a helping premise is added to it. That helping premise is, 'whatever thinks exists'. It is the truth of the claims, 'I think' and 'whatever thinks exists' that makes possible the conclusion 'I am' or 'I exist'. Kaphagawani's criticism of Mbiti is that unlike Descartes' there is no coherent helping premise that can be added to give validity to Mbiti's claim.

the historically strained relationship between Africa and the West—a relationship that is characterized by various unpleasant moments, including especially colonialism, which typifies the encounter between the two. As a result, then, contemporary African philosophy, which is a product of this encounter, exists first and foremost as a ‘counter colonial practice’ since it is in part the response by the colonized to the negative effects of colonialism. This idea is firmly rooted in Emmanuel Eze’s view on African philosophy:

The idea of ‘African philosophy’ as a field of inquiry thus has its contemporary roots in the effort of African thinkers to combat political and economic exploitations, and to examine, question, and contest identities imposed upon them by Europeans. The claims and counter-claims, justifications and alienations that characterize such historical and conceptual protests and contestations indelibly mark the discipline of African philosophy (1998: 217).

If African philosophy is born out of these protestations and contestations, then negritude as a philosophical movement typifies this feature of African philosophy, for not only does it elevate to the status of philosophy the quest of the once subjugated to free themselves completely from the grip of imperialism, but more importantly, it opens up an avenue for its proponents to sustain the resistance against the metaphysical and cultural misidentification to which Africa and Africans have been subjected by the forces of imperialism. In other words, negritude addresses itself at once as an ideology of difference and resistance, albeit one that implicitly accepts the very Eurocentric assumptions to which it is opposed. Similar remarks apply to the practice of what has come to be known as ethnophilosophy, which reflects a retreat, a ‘return to the source’ as a way of validating and reaffirming the African identity. In both cases, it is hard to miss the fact that these ideologies are not merely driven by a search for truth but instead by a powerful desire to resist and assert difference. Unsurprisingly, then, those who champion Mbiti’s claim as definitive of African personhood are less likely to substantiate it since the primary function of that assertion is merely to relocate the African in a perceived power struggle between Africa and the West. But if the motive behind these philosophical movements had its justification in history, their philosophical status remained suspect as shown by the varied criticisms leveled against them. What this reveals, of course, is

that the creation of meaning is not always at the service of truth; it can sometimes draw its force from non-epistemic sources, particularly, as in this case, the motive of resistance and cultural reaffirmation.

The point I wish to make is that if the history and practice of African philosophy itself reflects a struggle for power, and if that philosophy was largely sustained, at least in its early stages, by this non-epistemic motive, then it seems likely that even the content of that philosophy should also reflect this struggle for power. Indeed, my submission is that the search for a unique and distinctive theory of African personhood and the overall preoccupation with difference that characterizes the often strident defense of the communitarian and normative conception of personhood betrays the same kind of motivation that spurred the articulation and defense of negritude and ethnophilosophy. There is good reason to think that it is the need for cultural reaffirmation of the African identity and a power struggle against the forces of imperialism, which once had a powerful hold on meaning, are what underlie at least in part the view of personhood as culturally and communally engendered. Although this motive may have acquired its legitimacy in history, it is nevertheless true that its utility in current discourse is now defunct.

I have been arguing that since proponents of the communitarian conception of self endorsed their assertions not by appealing to the epistemic validity of the claim (for example, Mbiti's communitarian dictum 'I am because we are') underlying the view that selfhood is socially engendered, but by appealing to the need to reassert the African identity, which was thoroughly decimated by the intellectual forces of imperialism. But it is worth adding that much of the protestations against ethnophilosophy, which, as I indicated earlier, was precipitated by Tempels' Bantu Philosophy, mirror my central point—that is, that the notion of a communal self (or alternatively, the communalism that underlie that notion of selfhood) lacked theoretical justification, but was propelled almost entirely by some non-epistemic motive, which I have identified as a struggle for power. Let me briefly review some of the critical comments on ethnophilosophy with the aim of showing that the denunciation of ethnophilosophical method was in part due to the fact that some of its assumptions lacked epistemic validity. One such assumption involves the idea of collectivity upon which ethnophilosophy hinges.

Consider, for instance, Hountondji's theoretical criticism of ethnophilosophy, which at bottom is a refutation of the unanimity that underlay it. If ethnophilosophy, as Appiah intimated, was founded on two central

assumptions – the factual one, which attributes ‘some central body of ideas that is shared by Black Africans quite generally’ and the evaluative one, which is the view that ‘the recovery of this tradition is worthwhile’ (Appiah 1992: 95), then Hountondji’s seemingly uncompromising theoretical censure of ethnophilosophy may be described as a repudiation of these two assumptions. A good part of Hountondji’s dissatisfaction targets the first assumption – the assumption of unanimity. He was keen to register the point that ethnophilosophy employed a vulgar use of the term philosophy, as indicating a collective, implicit and even unconscious belief system, and that behind this meaning of philosophy ‘there is a myth at work, the myth of primitive unanimity, with its suggestion that in ‘primitive societies’... everyone always agrees with everyone else’ (Hountondji 1983:60). For Hountondji, philosophy in its true sense cannot be found in the collective consciousness of a people, as an established body of truisms but in the discursive activity of individuals. In ethnophilosophical unanimism, Hountondji detected a certain acquiescence to a reified notion of the collective, the quite absurd inference that philosophy was a function of a collective consciousness or whole communities and a subsequent relegation of individual consciousness, which, on his view, should be the springboard for the emergence of a responsible discourse and of authentic philosophizing.

Importantly, Hountondji’s attack on the foundations of ethnophilosophical reason leaves us in no doubt whatsoever as to the underlying motive compelling the idea of a collective, unanimous philosophy. In his view, the motive was primarily non-epistemic and it explains why ‘so many African authors, in various tones and moods, struck up the Tempelsian theme ...’ (1983: 48). Here is Hountondji (1983: 48),

We have already identified this desire: African intellectuals wanted at all costs to rehabilitate themselves in their own eyes and in the eyes of Europe. To do so, they were prepared to leave no stone unturned, and they were only too happy to discover, through Tempels’ notorious Bantu Philosophy, a type of argumentation that could, despite its ambiguities (or, rather, thanks to them), serve as one way of ensuring this rehabilitation.

Hountondji’s reference to ambiguities is worth noting. For, despite its theoretical inadequacies or ambiguities, which Hountondji locates in its

assumption of unanimism, ethnophilosophical reason survived propelled by this non-epistemic motive: the desire to rehabilitate. Yet, Hountondji is not alone in holding ethnophilosophy up to scrutiny.

In his recent book, *Self and Community in a Changing World* (2010), DA Masolo devotes considerable attention to the same subject. His contribution to the debate on the status of ethnophilosophy is chiefly mediated through his interest in the role of indigenous knowledge systems in the global project of knowledge production. He shares this interest with Hountondji, who over the years has been the target of criticisms regarding what his critics perceived to be his refusal to accord any significance to local knowledge forms, which they believed ethnophilosophy exemplified. For the most part, Masolo and Hountondji are in agreement about the indispensability of indigenous knowledge forms as the basis for authentic development. Consequently, Masolo shows a deep appreciation for the idea that ethnophilosophical data provides an interesting starting point for philosophical analysis, while spurning the idea that that body of ideas constitutes a philosophy. Hountondji's more recent clarification in his *Struggle for Meaning* (2002) comes very close to Masolo's position, which, I believe, is also shared by Kwasi Wiredu (1980) and Kwame Anthony Appiah (1992). The latter notes that,

if philosophers are to contribute – at the conceptual level – to the solution of Africa's real problems, then they need to begin with a deep understanding of the traditional conceptual worlds the vast majority of their fellow nationals inhabit ... what is wrong with the ethnophilosophers is that they have never gone beyond this essentially preliminary step (Appiah 1992: 106).

Notwithstanding, these scholars, in particular Masolo and Appiah, argue that the core assumption of an African world construed as a metaphysical entity upon which claims of unanimity are advanced represents a 'myth', an impulse that should be rejected. Masolo, recounting this aspect of Hountondji's criticism of ethnophilosophy, argues that,

because it is unlikely that a whole community or nation will desire the same thing or desire any one thing for the same reason and goals, the notion of development as driven by unanimity about the objects

of desire can only be [an] ideal at best (2010: 27).

If the assumption of unanimity was a problematic feature in ethnophilosophical thought, and if, as we find in Hountondji and Appiah, that assumption derives from the belief in a collective consciousness or an African world metaphysically construed, then it seems to follow that the protestations against ethnophilosophy were in part protestations against not just unanimism but more importantly the idea of collectivity that engenders it. My contention is that this idea of collectivity undergirds the African communitarian conception of personhood under consideration. Put differently, Mbiti's dictum can best be understood as applying an idea of the collective as a metaphysical aggregate upon which individual persons depend. And just as this idea in the context of personhood is not advanced on the basis of its epistemic merit but on what I have been calling a non-epistemic motive, so also the unanimism of ethnophilosophical thought.

By way of summary, then, there are two reasons motivating the hypothesis that the widely received communitarian notion of personhood is in part a reflection of a struggle for power. First, that conception of personhood hinges on a philosophically disputed claim about the ontological dependence of the individual on the community. Mbiti's claim, I have suggested, fails the test of validity and so its plausibility couldn't be the motivation behind the defense of the resulting communitarian and normative conception of personhood. I have tried to corroborate this claim by drawing attention to some of the vigorous criticisms of ethnophilosophical reason, in particular that strand of the trend that revolves around the idea of collective unanimism. Second, the need to assert difference and to reaffirm African culture emerges as a strong motive-candidate for the communitarian and normative conception of personhood. Combining these two insights, we arrive at the conclusion that the primary motivation of that conception of personhood is non-epistemic—a struggle for power and the need for cultural reaffirmation. It seems to me that this is one way we may make sense of Riesman's assertion that the creation of meaning, in this case the meaning personhood, almost always involves a struggle for power.

The Social Basis of Personhood

The idea that personhood is socially engendered operates on the basic assum-

ption that personhood, whatever it is, cannot be abstracted from social or communal facts. In other words, personhood cannot be conceived as separable from certain facts about how the social world of individuals is constituted. I intend to examine some of these social facts that are held to be person-determining with the aim of pointing out their direct link to social power. I take this as an alternative way of establishing the link between the relevant notion of personhood and power; it will require examining closely the content of that conception.

If Placide Tempels and John Mbiti set out the metaphysical groundwork for the conception of personhood as socially engendered, then it was the Nigerian philosopher Ifeanyi Menkiti who provided the essential details regarding its content. His seminal paper 'Person and Community in African Thought' (1984) may be regarded as a *locus classicus* in the African literature on personhood. In this widely cited work, Menkiti laid out in remarkable clarity and some detail not only the worldview that gives metaphysical prop to the communitarian and normative conception of personhood but also the processes of how individuals are held to come to acquire and ultimately lose personhood.

Taking Mbiti's claim as his starting point, Menkiti distinguishes between African and Western conceptions of personhood, broadly labeling the latter as minimal and the former as maximal. The terminologies he employs in articulating the distinction are quite appropriate given what he has to say about the two approaches to personhood. Western conceptions are minimal precisely because they identify personhood with some static and isolated characteristic of which the human being is in possession. By definition, then, personhood in Western thought is a metaphysical given and the idea of its later acquisition makes little or no sense. It appears that Menkiti takes this possession criterion for determining personhood to be minimal because it sets the bar for personhood rather low by giving short shrift to the role community plays in shaping personal identity. By contrast, Menkiti believes that the African conception of personhood offers a maximal criterion insofar as it does not merely assert that personhood is something that is metaphysically given but instead locates the criterion for full personhood in the active role the community plays in evolving individuals into persons.

This leads Menkiti to the conclusion that the African conception corresponds to the social production of persons: individuals start out as non-persons presumably and through prescribed processes of induction into

society and socialization through various stages of development become persons. And Menkiti makes light work of the point arguing that,

it is not enough to have before us the biological organism, with whatever rudimentary psychological characteristics are seen as attaching to it. We must also conceive of this organism as going through a long process of social and ritual transformation until it attains the full complement of excellencies seen as truly definitive of [a person] (1984: 172).

The mere possession of some metaphysically given attribute doesn't automatically qualify one as a member of the community of persons—a point Menkiti labours for most of the paper by alluding to the status of children as non-persons who through various predefined social processes come to attain the status of person. All these beg the question of what transpires in the intervening points in the personhood continuum.

Menkiti's paper may be read as a direct response to the question—indeed, what is particularly fascinating about the paper is the manner in which he details the process by which individuals make the transition to personhood. To my mind, and for my present purposes, it is this aspect of Menkiti's undertaking that elicit philosophical interest as it opens up opportunities for exploring from a different angle the connection between this notion of personhood and power. For in detailing the route to acquiring personhood in community, Menkiti may have inadvertently revealed not only the conditions of individuals in community but more importantly the nature of the social space in which individuals through established cultural practices come to acquire personhood. Exploring the structure of that social space, which ostensibly engenders personhood, as well as the various processes involved in the acquisition of personhood in the sense at issue, is the key to working out the interplay between personhood and power. I should reiterate that my aim in this section is merely to demonstrate that the view of personhood as socially engendered rests heavily on the social power differentials among individuals in community.

In demonstrating this hypothesis, my strategy is to identify various constitutive elements of social space and to establish the varied relations each one bears to the notion of personhood under consideration. Take, for instance, the connection Menkiti draws between personhood and seniority, which,

coupled with epistemic access, is a necessary condition for acquiring maximal personhood. In his view, it is impossible to make the transition from the status of non-person to person without having epistemic access to the values and overall knowledge base of one's culture:

[t]hat full personhood is not perceived as simply given at the very beginning of one's life, but is attained after one is well along in society, indicates straight away that the older an individual gets the more of a person he becomes. As an Igbo proverb has it, 'What an old man sees sitting down, a young man cannot see standing up (1984: 173).

It is worth noting that this alleged link between age (and/or seniority) and personhood has been questioned⁵. Yet, my immediate aim is not to develop a criticism of the conception of personhood but rather to point out how that conception of personhood treads on the differentials in social power among individuals.

The point here is related to Kaphagawani's suggestion that the conception of personhood as socially engendered relies heavily on the 'epistemological monopoly' of the old over the young (2004: 338). For if knowledge is power in the sense that being in its possession affords individuals epistemic access to culture as the ultimate prescriber of norms, then individuals who have knowledge occupy a position of power relative to individuals who don't (i.e. lack epistemic access). This means that personhood, which is dependent on seniority, which is itself necessary for acquiring social power in the form of epistemic access, must ultimately depend on the differentials of social power. But while this observation doesn't by itself raise specific difficulties for this conception of personhood, it is enough to demonstrate that the relevant conception of personhood is contingent on the differential in social power—in this case, the social determinant being seniority and epistemic access.

Another aspect of culture that is causally linked to personhood is an individual's social standing, since according to Menkiti one's station in community plays some crucial role in the notion of personhood as socially acquired (1984: 172). This connection is borne out by the evidence put

⁵ See Kwame Gyekye (1997).

forward by social anthropologists. Among the Lugbara, for instance, the title of personhood is determined by social standing, the determining factor being whether or not individuals occupy social positions that will allow them to transit into ancestorhood after death. Similarly, among the Songhay an individual's social standing determines the set of standards to which that individual must comply and consequently the expectations society has of that individual. Thus, as Riesman notes, the,

stereotypically 'noble,' 'dignified' behaviour of the master, and the 'shameless' behaviour of the captive are thus understood as an expression of their different social statuses (1996: 100).

But there are other ways in which individual social standing in community can be cashed out. I have in mind individual belonging to particular social class. For example, people who are wealthy or are so perceived would naturally be more powerful than those who are not since personhood is contingent upon intragroup recognition, which those in esteemed social class are more likely to enjoy than those who are not. A slave is less likely than his master to receive social recognition and affirmation because of his social standing in community, and if these factors are constitutive of social structure, then a view of personhood as socially engendered must be contingent upon them⁶.

The point here is that if personhood is a function of individual standing in society and if that social space reflects deep differences in the social standing of individuals, whether economic or otherwise, then the resulting conception of personhood must be grounded on such differences.

One final relation worth considering is that between ritual/socialization practices and personhood – a relation Menkiti suggests is necessary, if not sufficient, for personhood in the maximal sense. He claims that,

the African emphasized the rituals of incorporation and the overarch-

⁶ See Gail Presbey's 'Massai Concepts of Personhood: the Roles of Recognition, Community, and Individuality' (2002) for a detailed discussion of the point that personhood in African thought is fundamentally a matter of intragroup recognition.

ing necessity of learning the social rules by which the community lives, so that what was initially biologically given can ... become a person with all the inbuilt excellencies implied by the term (1984: 173).

He is even more strident when making the point that, 'Without incorporation into this or that community, individuals are considered to be mere dangles to whom the description 'person' does not fully apply' (1984:172). All this implies that one couldn't possibly be a person without undergoing certain prescribed processes of induction, through rites of initiation and other socialization processes, into some actual community. But not only is the relation between rituals/socialization practices and personhood a necessary one, according to Menkiti, it is also causal since these processes can transform the individual as it were from the status of non-person to person, thus executing a qualitative change in the individual.

Yet, the received wisdom in social anthropology is that even these processes of ritual incorporation and socialization cannot be easily cast in gender-neutral terms. Consider, for example, Herbert's suggestion that rites of initiation are structured with a special sensitivity to gender. She suggests that in general various rites of passage are typically overseen by full-fledged members of community of comparable gender. Thus, the ritualistic passage from boyhood to manhood falls primarily within the province of the men in the community. It is under their tutelage that a young boy learns the requisite social skills and rules of behavior befitting a man as his culture defines it. According to Herbert, this is also true in the case of 'girl's initiation, which as a rebirth into adult womanhood, orchestrated by women, falls entirely within their natural domain' (1993:229). The practice of ritual incorporation and the on-going socialization processes in community are not gender neutral, and so being necessarily related to these social determinants, personhood must also be contingent on them. But that's not all. The structure of social space also reveals other forms of distinctions along the lines of gender.

As Riesman recounts,

[I]n Nuer social life, men and women observe not only a strict division of labour in connection with cattle and religion but also a differentiated code of behaviour in which the man is always supposed to show greater self-mastery than woman (1996: 98).

What this clearly implies is that rules of behaviour and social expectations, and by extension individual responsibilities that are expressive of them, are couched in a language that is sensitive to gender. Here one is reminded of Achebe's portrayal of a fictional African culture that is socially organized mainly on the basis of gender, such that individual responsibilities are correspondingly gendered. For instance, in one passage we are informed that in Umuofia the responsibility of carrying a man's stool is the male preserve of a son (Achebe 1994: 31). Yet, if compliance to these gendered social rules of behaviour and expectations constitute a necessary condition for acquiring personhood in community, as Menkiti suggests, then it seems to follow once again that this notion of personhood treads on the distinctions between the genders.

Another way to express the role of gender in the formation of social personhood is to indicate that the practice of acquiring personhood takes place in the public domain of ritualistic induction into community, socialization, compliance to social rules of behaviour and communal recognition of success and accomplishments. Although the view doesn't categorically rule out private efforts towards the acquisition of personhood, it seems clear that intra-group recognition is a necessary condition. However, intra-group recognition is a public practice and therefore a feature not of the private world of individuals but of the public domain. But if personhood is essentially acquired in public sphere, and if individuals in community are identified by their roles, then it seems to follow straightforwardly that those individuals whose roles are predominantly suited to the private domain, and as such are not active players in the public domain, are *ipso facto* constrained in terms of their capacity to attain maximal personhood.

The point I wish to emphasize is that when considered from a normative point of view, gendered relations connote a hierarchy of some sort indicating that power relations are implicit in gender relations. In particular, individuals gendered as male are usually seen as having more access to social power than their female counterparts. Thus what is implied is not the mere observation that the distinctive African view of personhood as socially acquired is necessarily gendered, but more importantly that that conception of personhood necessarily depends on a hierarchical ordering and distribution of social power facilitated by gender. The point should now be obvious. Since these cultural practices bear a necessary and causal relation to acquired personhood, it must be the case that the ensuing notion of personhood is

contingent upon the social power differentials instantiated by these gendered practices. In particular, if social power is favourably distributed to individuals who are implicitly or explicitly gendered as male, then it appears to be given that the resulting notion of personhood must be sensitive to these differences.

In summary, the manner in which social space is organized plays a critical role in the emergence of the differentiation in individual access to power. That is to say, the nature of social space impacts heavily on individual capacity to affect the other, thus conditioning the possibilities of individuals for attaining social personhood. Since the organization of social space conditions the possibilities of individual chances of acquiring maximal personhood and since gendered spaces are integral to organizing social space, then it seems that an individual's gender grouping can substantially impact that individual's success as a person-candidate, or so I maintain. Indeed, women and men as representatives of two broad gender categories are often identified by their roles, the latter being predominantly identified by roles and responsibilities that figure in the private and domestic sphere. This constrains the active participation in the public domain, thus significantly impacting unfavourably on whatever chances of success at maximal personhood they may have had. In addition, individual social standing and epistemic access which privileges the elderly also constrain individuals as far as acquiring personhood is concerned.

All these—seniority, social class and gender—represent distinct modes by which power relations are constituted. Importantly, each one seem to bear a necessary relation to the idea of personhood as socially acquired—i.e. the communitarian/normative conception of personhood. Since this is the case, it should follow that a theoretical interpretation of how persons are socially produced cannot be divorced from the actual power relations that constitute the social structure on which the production of persons take place. Thus this conception of personhood treads dangerously on the actual differences in social power distribution among individuals in community.

Personhood and the Moral Equality of Persons

A plausible theory of personhood should be able to explain why it is the case that we intuitively believe that all persons are morally equal. This intuition is one I deem to be uncontroversial – that is, in spite of the obvious differences

among individuals it seems true that morally we can assert a basic equality among persons. My suspicion is that a conception of personhood that is grounded on contingent facts about the ideology of seniority and epistemic access; the specifics of ritual incorporation and socialization processes, which I argue are almost always gendered; and social standing, cannot adequately explain what it is about persons that makes them equal morally since it takes these basic social differences among individuals to be constitutive of personhood.

In the preceding section, I have already suggested that the social space in which persons are produced is, on the conception under consideration, constituted by power relations, thus indicating that study in concepts of socially engendered personhood will need to consider power differentials among individuals. Along the way, I argued that gender alongside seniority and social standing as categories of social organization play a crucial role in determining individual access to social power and so is a useful tool in analyzing the differentials of power that characterize social context in which personhood is believed to be acquired. One probable objection to this submission would be to undercut the connection I make between gender relations and social power differentials among individuals in community.

The objection may be formulated in two distinct ways. First, it could be framed in terms of a total rejection of the thesis that gender constitutes a principle around which African communities are organized. This rejection would imply that in traditional African societies individual access to power was not determined on the basis of gender, precisely because the category of gender was non-existent and as such never the primary organizing social principle. On this probable objection, then, any attempt to establish a connection between personhood and social power distribution on the basis of gender is highly speculative. I take this to be Oyeronke Oyewumi's response to the suggestion that inequalities in power, facilitated by gender distinctions, were deeply entrenched in traditional African societies. Beginning with an examination of the structure of Yoruba language, she reaches the conclusion that the concept of gender is entirely foreign to the Yoruba social system; it is a category that was imported to Africa through colonialism. The absence of gender in language, she maintains, should indicate straightaway the absence of actual power differentials along the lines of gender in traditional Yoruba society. If this is right, then it seems that the claim that the communitarian

and normative conception of personhood rests on gendered disparities in access to power is mistaken precisely because there were no such inequalities (Oyewumi 1997).

The argument seems persuasive enough. However, it quickly begins to lose its initial appeal as soon as it is pointed out that it must rely heavily on the dubious assumption that social reality is entirely reducible to the configurations of language in such a way that what is not captured in the latter cannot by reason of that fact be constitutive of social reality. This is hard to believe⁷. A more plausible claim can be made it seems, and this is the second way to formulate the objection, that a gendered social structure does not straightforwardly entail inequalities in social power between members of the relevant gendered groups. That is to say, even if it is conceded that gendered spaces are a pervasive feature of social structure, this fact doesn't by itself establish that there are inequalities and power differentials structured along the lines of gender. Perhaps, the gender divisions are more fluid, permitting individuals to assume roles across gender. This way of formulating the objection comes very close to the point Ifi Amadiume makes in her book, *Male Daughters, Female Husbands*. There she maintains that gender is a pervasive feature of *Nnobi* society but nevertheless insists on a certain degree of flexibility that ensured that social power wasn't necessarily distributed on the basis of maleness or femaleness. Employing the concepts of 'male daughters' and 'female husbands', she attempts to establish how social roles and the benefits attached to them can be available to individuals irrespective of gender. Consider, for instance, the practice of 'female husbands', which allowed women who are economically able to assume the role, traditionally associated with men, of marrying a woman or paying for her fertility in cases where they are barren and cannot fulfill the responsibilities of motherhood (1987: 72).

Suppose, then, that one was opposed to the idea that the communitarian and normative account of personhood rests on social power differentials among individuals, and argued along with Amadiume, that gendered relations do not necessarily connote unequal power relations, there are two possible replies that can be furnished. First, the position defended here doesn't rely solely on gender in establishing the unequal distribution of social power among individuals. Other modes of power relations have been

⁷ See Bakare-Yusuf (2003).

explored including those generated by social class or position and the ideology of seniority. So, even if it were conceded that the category of gender is not a particularly useful tool for exploring these differentials in social power, it could still be maintained that other forms of power relations exist within social space. These other forms of power can provide as it were a substructure upon which the concept of socially engendered personhood depends, thus leaving the central claim of this paper impervious to Amadiume's contentions. Yet, I do not make that concession. This leads me to the second point, which is that Amadiume's attempt to show the flexible nature of gender relations ultimately leads her to counterintuitively support the thesis that social power distribution is in fact a function of both gender and social class. This is so because of the twofold reason that Amadiume already explicitly claimed that there is evidence of asymmetry between the genders in *Nnobi* society and implicitly suggested that the so-called 'female husbands' are represented as powerful not merely because they are women but because they fitted into a particular social class (i.e. they are rich). This means that Amadiume's arguments do not succeed in showing that there is asymmetry of power between male and female genders in *Nnobi* society, but merely that social class is one of the important ways in which social power is mediated in that society.

As it turns out, then, gender, seniority and social class represent multiple forms of power relations that constitute social structure. Consequently, the concept of personhood as socially engendered must rest on these modes of power relations. Indeed, it seems impossible to construe this notion of personhood otherwise. Yet, this is merely an observation that finds support in social anthropology; it doesn't yet constitute a criticism of the conception of personhood. In what follows, I suggest what I think are a philosopher's reasons for adopting an epistemic posture of suspicion about the idea that personhood is socially engendered.

The first is that proponents of this conception of personhood often gloss over these inequalities in social power when conceptualizing the social nature of personhood. As a result, theorizing about personhood, although originally premised on these actual social differences, is ultimately abstracted from the realities. This is so because the term personhood indicates something all individuals share or have in common – either in its actuality or, as in the case of personhood as acquired, its potentiality. That is, it is a common feature about individuals like you and me that we have the potential

to become persons in a social context, if we are not already so. In this sense, the capacity for acquiring personhood is a distinctive mark of human individuals as opposed to other kinds of individual existences. Therefore, theorizing about personhood turns out to be a way of conceptualizing what we all have in common. But in theorizing about what we all as human individuals share proponents of the communitarian and normative conception of personhood run the risk of glossing over the actual differences in social power and other forms of inequalities that characterize the actual lives of individuals in social space. This risk is particularly more acute for the proponent of the view that personhood is contingent on the nature of specific social contexts, since this would imply that actual social inequalities that characterize the relevant social context must reflect in the degrees of personhood individuals acquire.

For example, if it is a feature of social space that individuals gendered as female have little access to social power and it is true that personhood being socially engendered must be sensitive to actual differences in social power, then the degree of personhood a female member of community can acquire is socially conditioned by her gender⁸. Conversely, an individual implicitly or explicitly gendered as male should enjoy a higher degree of personhood since personhood on this view is socially determined. Yet, if 'person' picks out the ultimate bearer of moral value, such a distinction in degrees of personhood based on gender (seniority or social class) is particularly troubling from a moral point of view, since it could

⁸ Indeed, if we press the issue of the gendered nature of social personhood what we find is that the person-status of women vis-à-vis men in a social context is suspect – although proponents of this conception of person fail to acknowledge it. One way this is clear is the near, if not total absence of women in the world of ancestors. But if personhood is a phase in the continuum of human development according to the relevant conception of personhood and ancestorhood represents the apogee of the human career, as Menkiti claims, then it seems the absence of women in the world of ancestors in African thought may have something to do with their lower person-status vis-à-vis men who populate the ancestral world. This is so because one must be a full person in the sense being considered in this article in order to be an ancestor, but if women are not members of the ancestral world, then perhaps they do not enjoy the status of full personhood.

justify unequal treatment of individuals depending on the degree of personhood they have acquired.

The point I wish to make here is that proponents of the view that personhood is socially determined run the risk of employing 'person' as a blanket term that is applicable to all individuals in society, thus giving short shrift to their primary supposition, which is that personhood must be grounded on the actual social conditions in which individuals find themselves. Defenders of the thesis that personhood is socially determined must take the idea to its logical conclusion by explicitly affirming not only that older members of community have a higher degree of personhood relative to younger members of the community (as Menkiti claims) but also that individuals gendered as male and those in highly recognized social ranks (e.g. the rich) have by virtue of their genders and social position a higher degree of personhood relative to other individuals in social context who are not similarly placed. But if this is done, then, it would seem that proponents of this notion of personhood would have a hard time explaining what it is about persons that make them morally equal. My intuition is that equality of persons is a moral ideal that cannot be fully explained by a theory of personhood that appeals to contingencies about gender, the ideology of seniority or epistemic access and social standing—in short, facts that the communitarian and normative conception of personhood take to be fundamental.

This leads me to a second and related point, which is that proponents of the view of personhood as socially engendered tacitly assume an egalitarian social space in which the acquisition of personhood takes place. They do this by insisting that this conception of personhood being relational connotes reciprocity among individuals – this is based on the idea that one cannot be a person without others, indicating that individuals in a social context mutually influence each other towards attaining personhood. Rather than conceive the individual as an isolated and autonomous subject who stands apart from others and independently acts upon the world around her, impinging, as it were, her will on others, proponents of this conception of personhood theoretically depict an individual as already embedded in a network of constitutive relationships so that the individual is as much impacted upon as she impacts on others as well. Thus, on this relational picture of personhood, the exercise of social power is very much dynamic and mutually influencing rather than static and one dimensional.

Yet, in order for this sort of mutual influence to be possible, it must

be the case that the social context is in an important sense egalitarian and the relationships in which individuals are embedded are relations of equality – a supposition that flies in the face of the available evidence in social anthropology, some of which I have been exploring. So, there seem to be a paradox. This notion of personhood as socially determined must rest on the social power differentials among individuals that are constitutive of social relations and yet it must also assume an egalitarian social order, an equal playing field, as it were, in which agents mutually impact on one another towards the attainment of personhood. This seems quite odd. At best, then, this conception of personhood is expressive of a wish. If the actual social realities and relations in which individuals are located are not egalitarian, and if proponents of the view of personhood must implicitly assume an egalitarian social structure for the acquisition of personhood, then that conception of personhood must be expressive of the wish that society and social relations were in fact egalitarian. That is, this view of personhood seems to be rooted in our desire for an egalitarian society.

Although in principle there is nothing wrong for a theory of personhood to articulate a wish—in particular, our wish for a social space that is characterized by relations of equality, it has to be pointed out that there is a logical gap between what is and what we wish were the case. The idea of personhood as socially engendered in a system of social relations that are unequal is fundamentally different to one involving the social production of persons in an egalitarian social context. The point here is that this conception of personhood proceeds as though the latter were in fact the case and, as a result, glosses over the actual nature of the social space in which personhood is acquired. Until the social space in which personhood is acquired is sufficiently expressive of equal power distribution among individuals, the idea of personhood as socially engendered remains an expression of wishful thinking, if, that is, the moral equality of all persons is to be adequately accounted for.

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Ubuntu: 'You are because I am' or 'I am because you are'?

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Abstract

The concept of Ubuntu has become very popular in democratic South Africa and is all things to all people. It is seen as good in itself and of itself and is advocated as an indigenous and better alternative to imported ideologies from outside the continent. It comprises world views, economic systems, political order, culture, and social praxis. However, the concept is not yet fully articulated; neither is the phenomenon fully circumscribed and mapped. In other words, Ubuntu is an evolving concept and phenomenon. Current debates on Ubuntu focus on its collective or community dimensions and responsibilities and emphasize reciprocity as fundamental to an Ubuntu worldview. There is also an implied and expected indebtedness of persons to the community which gives them their identities.

This article examines the implications of Ubuntu at the level of the individual and the likely direction in which it will propel political behaviour in South Africa. The article argues that how Ubuntu is conceptualized at the personal level is important for any society professing it as an ideology. It is important whether the individual reads Ubuntu as 'You are because I am' or 'I am because you are'. The article argues that the perspective to/of the self is critical for what kind of political order Ubuntu will generate, nurture and sustain.

Keywords: Ubuntu, individuality, collectivity, community, personal leadership

Introduction

Ubuntu is many things to many people including social scientists, historians and historians of ideas, philosophers of ideas, software developers, politicians, and community members. It is also different things to different people. It has been seen as an African worldview, doctrine, ideology (McAllister 2009), philosophy, ethic, community-based mind-set (Olinger *et al.* 2007), and culture among others. It is said to be the ‘basis of African communal cultural life’ (Tambulasi & Kayuni 2005: 147). It has been advanced as underpinning politics, business, corporate governance, justice, conflict resolution and reconciliation in South Africa (Olinger *et al.* 2007). It is both an ideology of justification and an aspirational idea.

As a worldview, Ubuntu is characterised by such basic values as

humanness, caring, sharing, respect and compassion ... warmth, empathy, giving, commitment and love ... alms-giving, sympathy, care, sensitivity to the needs of others, respect, consideration, patience and kindness (Msila 2008: 69-70).

In this article we view Ubuntu as a value system expected to inform human behaviour in the context of the treatment of others, especially the treatment of the governed by political leaders.

This article is divided into seven sections. Given that the article interrogates the implication of the conceptualisation of Ubuntu for political behaviour, the first section – as a logical necessity – provides a working definition of Ubuntu. The definition draws from the multiple meanings and contending perspectives of the notion. Arising from the definitional imprecision and complexities associated with Ubuntu, section two attempts a synthesis of the core elements of the idea. The third section briefly highlights the aspects of individuality and collectivity in the narratives on (the contextualisation of) Ubuntu. In section four, the article briefly explores the interface between individuality (i.e. the self) and collectivity (i.e. the community). Section five focuses on the applicability of Ubuntu to politics in South Africa with reference to its articulation in the fundamental charter for societal organisation – the constitution. In section six, we examine the connection of Ubuntu to personal leadership as a prelude to the final section which explicates how the conceptualisation of Ubuntu (especially by leaders) engenders differentiated political outcomes.

Ubuntu: Definitional Complexity

Ubuntu is a complex and polysemous concept; or is it a term? A concept is an abstraction from reality; 'an abstract or general idea inferred or derived from specific instances' (*The Free Dictionary* 2012). If a concept, what reality does Ubuntu refer to or represent? What are the instances from which we may infer or derive Ubuntu? If a term, how can it be transformed or formulated into a concept? Definitions of Ubuntu run the gamut from the denotative, connotative to constitutive dimensions. The definitions of Ubuntu are also largely imprecise if not outright vague; often cast in terms that themselves need to be defined. Be that as it may, we will make the effort to highlight some of the ways in which the concept has been defined. Words have their origins in language; therefore the place to begin the exploration of the definitional complexity of Ubuntu is the languages of east and southern Africa that birthed the concept.

Ubuntu or its equivalents are said to be indigenous to the languages of east and southern Africa even as the phenomenon itself is claimed to be original to these regions. Ubuntu is a word from the Nguni language family comprising isiZulu, isiXhosa, isiSwati and isiNdebele spoken in southern Africa (Binsbergen 2001). Still in the southern African region Ubuntu has a Shona equivalent, *hunhu* (Binsbergen 2001). Ubuntu counterparts in East and Central Africa include,

umundu in Kikuyu and *umuntu* in Kimeru, both languages spoken in Kenya; *bumuntu* in kiSukuma and kiHaya, both spoken in Tanzania; *vumuntu* in shiTsonga and shiTswa of Mozambique; *bomoto* in Bobangi, spoken in the Democratic Republic of Congo; *gimuntu* in kiKongo and giKwese, spoken in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Angola (Kamwangamalu 1999: 25).

Ubuntu lacks a simple and a generally agreed upon definition. Over the years Ubuntu has been described as 'human nature', 'humanity', 'humanness', 'manhood', 'goodness of nature', 'good moral disposition', 'virtue', 'the sense of common humanity', 'true humanity', 'reverence for human nature', 'essential humanity', 'the kindly simple feeling for persons as persons', 'manliness', 'liberality', 'a person's own human nature', 'generosity', 'human feeling', 'good disposition', 'good moral nature', 'personhood',

‘politeness’, ‘kindness’, ‘real humanity’, ‘personality’, ‘the characteristic of being truly human’, ‘greatness of soul’, ‘a feeling of wellbeing’, and ‘capacity of social self-sacrifice on behalf of others’ (Gade 2011: 307-308). Gade (2011) shows that Ubuntu has been written about for over a century; however, this has not made the definition of the concept less problematic as the various terms in which it has been described indicate. Gade identifies five broad phases in the definition of Ubuntu: from 1840-1960 Ubuntu was defined as a human quality; from 1960-1980 Ubuntu was defined as something either connected to, or identical to, a philosophy or an ethic; in the period 1980-1990 Ubuntu was defined as African humanism; and from the late 1990s Ubuntu became seen as a worldview. Ubuntu became connected to and defined in terms of the proverb ‘*umuntu umuntu ngabantu*’ translated as ‘a person is a person through other people’ only from 1993. Since then Ubuntu has been associated with variants of this proverb in various southern African languages.

The South African Ubuntu Foundation defines Ubuntu by means of a list of the various things/aspects of the phenomenon. It holds that Ubuntu

Is the potential for being human.

Is to value the good of community above self-interest.

Is to strive to help people in the spirit of service.

Is to show respect to others and to be honest and trustworthy.

Ubuntu regards humanity as an integral part of the eco-systems that lead to a communal responsibility to sustain life.

Ubuntu shares natural resources on a principle of equity among and between generations.

Ubuntu is fair to all.

Ubuntu is compassionate.

Ubuntu is a collective respect for human dignity.

Ubuntu refers to people.

Ubuntu is one of the things that you recognize when you experience it (Foundation 2012a).

It argues that Ubuntu ‘embodies a distinctive worldview of the human community and the identities, values, rights, and responsibilities of its members. in one short word, it is about “WE” – not “me”’ (Foundation 2012b). The core belief of Ubuntu is that ‘people are people through other

people', this being of Ubuntu from isiXhosa in which it is expressed as '*umuntu ngumuntu ngabanye abantu*'. This way of defining the concept leaves it too broad and open-ended. It tells what Ubuntu is about and what Ubuntu does or is expected to do more than it does what Ubuntu is.

Scholars have not fared much better in defining Ubuntu. One scholar who set out to address the question, 'What is Ubuntu?' declared at the end of his exposition that there is no 'definitive answer to the question' (Praeg 2008: 384). After reviewing definitions of Ubuntu from different perspectives Kamwangamalu (1999: 27) offers the following definition:

Ubuntu is a value system which governs societies across the African continent. It is a system against whose values the members of a community measure their 'humanness'. These values, like the Ubuntu system from which they flow, are not innate but are rather acquired in society and are transmitted from one generation to another by means of oral genres such as fables, proverbs, myths, riddles, and story-telling.

We can surmise from this definition that Ubuntu is a standard of measure by which the members of a community evaluate individual and collective behaviour or conduct in the dimension of humanness and that it is an acquired or learned value; no one is born with Ubuntu. Among the core elements of the Ubuntu value system are communalism and interdependence.

Ubuntu has also been defined as a capacity, a consciousness and a natural desire besides being a value system. Thus Nussbaum (2003a: 2) holds that

Ubuntu is the capacity in African culture to express compassion, reciprocity, dignity, harmony and humanity in the interests of building and maintaining community with justice and mutual caring. *Ubuntu*, an Nguni word from South Africa, speaks to our interconnectedness, our common humanity and the responsibility to each other that flows from our deeply felt connection. *Ubuntu* is consciousness of our natural desire to affirm our fellow human beings and to work and act towards each other with the communal good in the forefront of our minds.

An Attempt at Synthesis: The Core Elements of Ubuntu

The enumeration of the elements of Ubuntu points to various dimensions of the concept. Ubuntu is a belief system and comprises an indeterminate set of values, principles, goals, strategies, technology, and methodologies. Among the core values of Ubuntu are communalism, interdependence, compassion, empathy, respect, and dignity. Ubuntu also espouses principles such as equity, fairness, reciprocity, inclusivity, ‘sense of shared destiny between peoples’ (Murithi 2007: 282), hospitality, responsiveness, and harmony. The cardinal goal of Ubuntu is harmonious relationship among peoples and generations for the good of all. Ubuntu aims at community building, bonding people in a network of reciprocal relationships.

Contextualising Ubuntu: Individuality and Collectivity

In Cartesian thought individuality is contrasted with collectivity and identity entails not only uniqueness but also separateness from the community. Ubuntu discourses also juxtapose collectivism and individualism, but not as incompatible opposites. Rather the purpose in Ubuntu discourses is to emphasize the relatedness of the individual and the group and how each finds meaning and fulfilment through the other. Psychologists refer to the process whereby an individual becomes separate from the community and develops an identifiable and distinctive personality as individuation. According to Brooke (2008: 39), individuation in Jungian psychology has two meanings. It refers to

a process in which one becomes increasingly undivided against oneself, complete rather than perfect and a ‘separate, indivisible unity or whole’... individuation is a process in which one becomes separate from identification with the collective – both the collective unconscious of childhood and the collective consciousness of one’s culture, to the extent that this is merely the collective unconscious made visible.

Individuation involves the withdrawal of projections and ‘taking personal responsibility for one’s psychic life and recognizing that the greatest moral and spiritual conflicts are within one’s own soul’ (Brooke 2008: 39).

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One becomes an individual by proper incorporation into the community through initiation rites and participation. Individuation is the formation of personhood. This process is critical not only because from it emerges the individual members of a community but also because the content of values on which relationship with the other is based are acquired in the course of this process. Community solidarity does not detract from individual dignity, the right of a person to respect from others.

The most common interpretation of Ubuntu as 'a person is a person through other persons' has important implications of personal responsibility. First, the individual must define himself in relation to other people and his relationships with them. This will entail a delicate balancing act in which he will ensure that all parties in relationship with him and whose contributions make him are accorded the regard and credit due to them. This weighting or balancing act is most difficult to say the least, but no less difficult, is the distribution of rewards such that none feels cheated or betrayed. Let us take one example. In Zulu culture children born out of wedlock belong to their mother's family and their upbringing often turns out to be the responsibility of their maternal family.

A second implication is that the individual must avail himself to making others become persons through him. In making himself available to make others become persons does the individual do so on the terms of 'the others' or does he do so on his own terms? Is the relationship communally defined and determined or does the individual have any moral autonomy? Kwame Gyekye (2002) argues that the community is prior to the person and provides the context in which the individual person relates with others. According to Gyekye (2002: 301),

[t]he community alone constitutes the context, the social or cultural space, in which the actualization of the possibilities of the individual person can take place, providing the individual person the opportunity to express his/her personality, to acquire and develop his/her personality and to fully become the kind of person he/she wants to be.

In his influential work, *Politics*, Aristotle argues that the community is prior to the citizen and that without the community there is no citizenship. According to Aristotle (1999: 6),

the state is by nature clearly prior to the family and the individual, since the whole is of necessity prior to the part; for example if the whole body be destroyed there will be no foot or hand except in an equivocal sense as we might speak of a stone hand; for when destroyed the hand will be no better than that.

A situation in which the community determines what the part of the individual person in the community is, and what he can become does not seem to leave much room for self-expression. However, this will be a wrong reading of the situation. We should understand both Aristotle and Gyekye to mean that an individual realises her/his fullest potential only as a member of a community, that is, in the context of relationships with other individuals. As Aristotle adds '[t]he proof that the state is a creation of nature and prior to the individual is that the individual, when isolated, is not self-sufficing; and therefore he is like a part in relation to the whole' (Aristotle 1999: 6). But what is the nexus between the part (self/individuality) and the whole (community/collectivity)?

Exploring Ubuntu: The Interconnectedness of Self and Community

In Ubuntu discourse self and community are inextricably connected but also somewhat contrasted. Thus one writer has opined that 'Ubuntu sees community rather than self-determination as the essential aspect of personhood. People are distinctive beings, able to recognize and acknowledge each other through mutual encounter and cultural integration' (Nussbaum 2003b: 22).

The individual is involved in different layers of relationships, spreading outward in concentric circles from the self through family, community, and various layers of non-ascriptive and spatial relationships to the world at large. While the community is taken to be paramount in Ubuntu literature, it is our contention that relationship to the self is critical to being a proper and well-rounded member of the human community, whether primary or secondary. The relationships emphasized in the Ubuntu literature are characterized by reciprocity. While relationship to the self has not received the effort it deserves, it has been captured in the idea of respect for the other

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and the demand that all be accorded dignity as human beings. The relationship of a person to the self does not deny interdependence; neither does it posit independent self-sufficiency. Rather it can be described as autonomy of the individual to act according to his convictions and interpretations regarding the values of the community.

Ubuntu and Politics in South Africa

Does Ubuntu constitute a foundation of politics in South Africa? Is it a factor in South African politics? According to Nkondo (2007: 88),

[t]hough many of South Africa's national policies are concerned about the cultivation of humanity, nowhere do they make *Ubuntu* central to the foundation, process and goal of economic growth and social development; nowhere are *Ubuntu* principles the principal context and focus of the business of the state.

However Olinger, Britz and Olivier (2007) make a contrary argument and point out that Ubuntu has informed politics, business, corporate governance, restorative justice and conflict resolution and reconciliation.

To answer the first question it is necessary to refer to official documents including the constitution of the country while the second question requires an examination of the behaviour of public office holders.

Ubuntu does not appear in the 1996 Constitution of the Republic of South Africa but appeared in Chapter 15 of the Interim Constitution of 1993 dealing with general and transitional provisions under a postscript titled national unity and reconciliation.

This Constitution provides a historic bridge between the past of a deeply divided society characterised by strife, conflict, untold suffering and injustice, and a future founded on the recognition of human rights, democracy and peaceful co-existence and development opportunities for all South Africans, irrespective of colour, race, class, belief or sex. The pursuit of national unity, the well-being of all South African citizens and peace require

reconciliation between the people of South Africa and the reconstruction of society.

The adoption of this Constitution lays the secure foundation for the people of South Africa to transcend the divisions and strife of the past, which generated gross violations of human rights, the transgression of humanitarian principles in violent conflicts and a legacy of hatred, fear, guilt and revenge.

These can now be addressed on the basis that there is a need for understanding but not for vengeance, a need for reparation but not for retaliation, a need for *Ubuntu* but not for victimisation (Constitutional Court of South Africa n.d.).

This epilogue to the Interim Constitution has become a fundamental aspect of the jurisprudence of South Africa (Bennett 2011).

However, it remains to be seen how much ubuntu is accepted as a basis for political action among the majority African population. The racial divide remains and is being reinforced and inequality is rising rather than abating. Could Ramose be right in holding that ubuntu is an imposition by the political leadership as a price for majority rule? According to Ramose (2003: 487),

ubuntu was included in the interim constitution to justify the necessity for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Yet, the necessity for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission cannot be to be the expression of the will of the conquered people of South Africa. This is because the necessity was a unilateral decision by the political leadership of the conquered people. The people themselves were not consulted

So though the Constitutional Court anchors decisions on ubuntu, ubuntu does not appear in the constitution neither was it debated among the black population as a basis for action in post-apartheid South Africa. Ramose (2003: 487) actually claims that the appeal to ubuntu came from the 'conqueror' who 'used it tactfully to remove the cause of its own fear'. Some recent comments in the media echo a feeling of a sense of betrayal among some blacks regarding the terms of the settlement that ended apartheid rule in South Africa. For example, an open letter to former President Nelson

Mandela by a certain 'Youngster', claims that Mandela sold out the blacks (Youngster 2012). According to Sam Ditshego of the Pan African Research Institute, the claim 'that Nelson Mandela sold us out, is true' (Ditshego 2012). Linda Ndebele and Batho Makhubo (2012) shared similar sentiments in an open letter to Mandela published in 2009, arguing that 'the ANC government, since your presidency of the country ... is sustain apartheid settler colonialist war machinery against the African masses'. There also seems to be prevalent in the population a desire for retributive justice instead of the restorative justice principle that underpinned the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Ubuntu may therefore not be the widely held belief among the people of South Africa that President Jacob Zuma's recent use of the term suggests.

Ubuntu: Personal Leadership

Leadership is an activity; it is the activity of leading. In general, leading presupposes following, and leadership presupposes followership. Generally speaking, leadership entails another, who must accept to be led before there can be a leadership relationship. This concept of leadership requires an organisation as a context for performance and a position in the hierarchy of such organisation. This kind of leadership derives from one's designation or role in the organisation and is therefore positional. Within the framework of organisations, personal leadership is one of many styles of leadership – the way an individual manager exercises his authority and power.

Personal leadership does not refer to the personalisation of leadership position, rulership, or political power by presidents and prime ministers. It is not self-entrenchment or the perpetuation of self in public office as so often happens in Africa. It is also not the concentration of the powers and resources of the state in the hands of rulers and their families and supporters (cronies). Actually *personal leadership does not require a formal organisation to operate*. Personal leadership is also not limited to the political sphere or the national level. Essentially, personal leadership entails acting on one's convictions and taking responsibility for the consequences and outcomes of one's conduct. It means setting examples for others to follow rather than waiting for others. In the context of meeting the needs of a community, personal leadership means taking action in that regard. Personal leadership is leading by example.

Personal leadership may refer to the behaviour of people in leadership positions in organisations. It may also apply to individual conduct at the personal level. This latter concept makes it very similar to personal responsibility. Let us state a few definitions of personal leadership as a background to establishing how the Ubuntu construct depends on it.

According to Kempker (2009: 6), ‘personal leadership is not about the position that you might hold – it is about how you choose to act’. In other words, it refers to the personal behavior of leaders in performing the responsibilities of professional leadership, including demonstrating expertise, building trust, caring and sharing for people, and acting in a moral way (Mastrangelo *et al.* 2004: 436). Personal leadership ‘focuses on authentic self-expression that creates value’; it ‘proposes a principle-centred, character-based, inside-out approach to change and leadership’; and ‘reiterates the truth that there are universal laws and principles which govern one’s natural and social existence. These principles are an integral part of every individual. Honesty, fairness, dignity, service and excellence are examples of such principles’ (Verrier & Smith 2005: 52).

From the above definitions personal leadership, though exercised in relationships, is not about reciprocity. Personal leadership involves taking autonomous action, choosing to act in a particular way instead of another, not in reaction to what another has done but on the basis of values held dear. The fact that Ubuntu manifests in relationships and emphasizes communalism and interdependence should not obfuscate the dangers inherent in reciprocity. Ubuntu is about responsiveness more than reciprocation. This is why it emphasizes forgiveness, reconciliation, harmony, and restorative rather than retributive justice. And this is why every community member needs to live an Ubuntu life style for there to be a culture of Ubuntu.

Leadership is fundamental to the practice of Ubuntu. The current scholarly and popular attention Ubuntu enjoys is partly the result of political leaders articulating Ubuntu as the basis of African humanity and as a key instrument of forgiveness and national reconciliation. There is a growing body of literature on Ubuntu as a management and leadership principle. Ubuntu is also cardinal to the exercise of leadership especially in developing societies such as those in Africa. However, only a few African leaders have availed themselves of Ubuntu as a doctrine of leadership (Ncube 2010). This perhaps accounts for the endemic corruption and kleptomania found across the length and breadth of the continent as well as the sit-tight syndrome of

many political leaders, which have contributed significantly to the underdevelopment of African states. Therefore, ethical and transformational leadership can contribute immensely to the attainment of community, national and continental developmental goals and objectives. African nations have not lagged in goal setting as their various national development plans, white articles, and public policies show. The problems of Africa have been with the execution of plans. In the realm of responsibility, the (in)actions of political leaders and public servants may be indicative of the extent to which they have internalised the elements of Ubuntu and whether or not they are guided by these elements. For example, the dumping of textbooks in rivers in Limpopo Province of South Africa in 2012 and the provision of the open toilet system in the Western Cape and Free State provinces also in South Africa speak volumes about how much Ubuntu values inform the behaviour of some public officials in South Africa. In the context of this article, these actions raise a fundamental question: if these public officials understand or profess Ubuntu, is there a conceptualisation of Ubuntu (as explained in the next section) that offers insights into their behaviour?

‘You’ or ‘I’? Implications of the Conceptualisation of Ubuntu

The phrase ‘you are because I am’ registered only 99 hits on Google Scholar while ‘I am because you are’ registered 467 hits. Neither phrase appears in the title of any article or book; they appear only in the body of the text. It is clear going by the hits that the latter phrase is in more popular use than the former. It is also clear that these phrases are not in wide use in academic writings. ‘I am because we are’ is a bit more popular, registering 1,740 hits on Google Scholar. However, Google search engine registered over 1.28 billion hits for ‘I am because you are’ and about 6 million hits for ‘you are because I am’. ‘I am because we are’ recorded close to 4 billion hits. But why are we making this digression into statistics? We want to suggest that the lack of scholarly engagement with our key terms belies the importance of these terms in a proper appreciation of the conception of the self in Ubuntu political practice and constitutes a cause for concern.

It is instructive that the phrase ‘you are because I am’ is the least popular of the three but the politics of most African countries, especially when it comes to resource allocation, conceives the ‘self’ to be more

important and deserving of attention than 'the other'. It has been argued that governance that is based on Ubuntu will be characterised by accountability and transparency, equality, promotion of peace, self-reliance, and a commitment to the promotion of the public good in the disbursement of public resources (Tambulasi & Kayuni 2005). Indeed Tambulasi and Kayuni (2005) hold that Ubuntu political practice is very much compatible with democratic governance and the promotion of social welfare.

The expression 'I am because you are' can be interpreted as 'I am who I am because of you or who you are', acknowledging the contribution of the other in the making of the self. The emphasis is on the role of the other in the becoming of the self. Operating on this concept, one will prefer the other to the self because without the other there is no self. In contrast, the concept 'you are because I am' makes the existence of the other dependent on the self (me) and therefore for the other to become, I must be. In other words, if I am not, the other is not also and cannot be. The valuation I place on the other in these two concepts are different. In 'I am because you are' the other (you) is the essence of my existence and being while in 'you are because I am' the self (I) is the centre of one's existence and being. These concepts will impact differently on decisions one makes as a person; which of the two concepts I hold will be reflected in what I give consideration to in the choices I make. It will also determine the position I will take with respect to the consequences of the outcomes of my decisions and choices.

The other may also view the choices I make with reference to whether they benefit me more than they should. Ethical principles will likely easily be invoked to show how partial or balanced my choices are, depending on whether and how the commentators will be affected by the benefits accruing from the choices and decisions I make. With respect to holders of public office, their allocation of resources among the various interests in society will very much be viewed in terms not only of efficiency but also fairness and equity; in particular whether they directly benefit from the performance of the duties of their office through family members, business associates, and friends.

The popular notion of Ubuntu as 'I am because we are' skirts around the problem of responsibility among community members. Who does 'we' refer to? Does it refer to all the members of the community? The traditional African community comprises the dead, the living and the unborn. Does 'we' refer to the three segments of the membership of the community or does it

refer only to the living in reality? We are of the opinion that the notion of 'I am because we are' needs to be broken down into its key elements for a proper articulation of Ubuntu as a way of life. It will not be going too far to suggest that African historiography emphasizes individual achievements as well as individual rights to positions.

Furthermore, the conceptualisation of Ubuntu by members of society, if at all they subscribe to it, impinges on one's humanity and the forms that interpersonal and intergroup relations take. It has repercussions for the exercise of and respect for personal rights/civil liberties. It accentuates or undermines commitment towards the execution of responsibilities associated with one's position in society. Fundamentally, it determines the dominant character that the society assumes. It is instructive to note how South Africa's president, Jacob Zuma, emphasized the implication of the lack of Ubuntu for society. Zuma argues that '[w]ithout respect and *ubuntu*, members of society become hooligans'. With reference to the recurrence of violent protests in South Africa, Zuma notes:

We believe that all human beings are equal and important ... that they must be respected by virtue of their humanity Once we lose respect for one another and ubuntu, what type of society will we be? If we build a society without these two, we are building a society of hooligans If we do not agree as people, let us argue with respect and not by violence, saying whatever we like to people ... That does not build a nation. South Africans are not hooligans. We are a nation of very proud respectful people who stand up for their rights but do so without losing dignity and Ubuntu (*Mail & Guardian* 22 September 2012).

Zuma's remarks presuppose that one's perception and treatment of the 'other' is reflective of one's belief in and acceptance of Ubuntu and the extent to which it informs one's behaviour in private and public spheres. However, as we have argued here, it is necessary to interrogate not just the individual's acceptance of Ubuntu and its utility as a guiding principle, but the individual's conceptualisation of the notion with reference to the relative emphasis on the self in relation to the 'other'. His remarks also assume that there is a common understanding of ubuntu among the people of South Africa. This assumption is very far from the truth regarding people's

understanding of ubuntu as the often disparate meanings adopted by different scholars indicate.

Conclusion

This article has examined the implications of the conceptualisation of Ubuntu at the personal level and how it propels behaviour. As noted earlier, Ubuntu is plagued by definitional imprecision; it is used to describe an assortment of values. This makes Ubuntu susceptible to politicisation. That said, the core elements of Ubuntu suggest that it could serve as a moral compass and as a guide for political behaviour, especially in the South African context. However, as we have argued here, the extent to which Ubuntu serves these ends is a function of an individual's conceptualisation of Ubuntu and how such formulation finds expression in action. Incidents such as the dumping of textbook in rivers and the provision of open toilets, which the South African Human Rights Commission construed as a violation of human dignity (Rawoot 2011) may well illustrate the lack of (appreciation for) Ubuntu, or a rhetorical commitment to it. Or it may be that the relevant public officials do not define their own humanity or dignity through the humanity and living conditions of those affected by their actions. Clearly, the contradictions of resounding Ubuntu rhetoric in South Africa and (political) behaviour that detracts from the humanity of others underscore the need for critical reflection on Ubuntu and how it is conceptualised.

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Indigenous Practice, Power and Social Control: The Paradox of the Practice of *Umuganda* in Rwanda

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Abstract

Most of the recent research on Rwanda has concentrated on reconciliation, recovery and economic development following the genocide of 1994. This article focuses on the practice of community work, known as *umuganda* in the local language, Kinyarwanda. The article examines how its early traditional social practice has been transformed from an emphasis on social well-being to being used for state building and infrastructure advancement. Based on interviews and focus group discussions, and supported by theories on community development and participation, the article is able to identify extensive power and control by the state over community work in Rwanda.

Keywords: *Umuganda*, sustainable development, traditional practice, local government

Introduction

In principle, Rwanda cherishes its indigenous traditions, especially those relating to developmental practice. Among them is the practice of ‘community work’ known as *umuganda* in Kinyarwanda, the local language spoken throughout Rwanda. Therefore the term *umuganda* will be used throughout this study, instead of ‘community work’ or ‘indigenous practice’. *Umuganda* is a traditional practice dating back in the pre-colonial period, which was manipulated later on and used to strengthen and exercise power and control over ordinary people (Mukarubuga 2006: 7).

Currently, *umuganda* is compulsory for everyone and is generally undertaken on the last Saturday of every month. *Umuganda*, in general, is currently used as a platform to implement governmental programmes, such as those of decentralisation and economic development plans. Its practice is considered to be a significant element in the government's poverty eradication plans as well as in promoting unity and reconciliation in a society that has been devastated by conflict, genocide and poverty. Nevertheless, these aspects of *umuganda* have hardly been investigated. Few scholars have written on *umuganda*, and have looked at it as an ideology which was used to divide Rwandans after independence and then continued to genocide in 1994. Consequently, the very idea of *umuganda* became distasteful to many, which is probably why ordinary Rwandans alike have tended to avoid the topic.

The task of this article is to analyse indigenous practice of *umuganda*, to show how it has been transformed. How a community owned and controlled practice turned into a form of state control? What impact has this had on Rwandans? The article addresses these questions by drawing on fieldwork which was conducted in two communities in Rwanda, one in urban Kigali and the other in rural, Western Province. Based on interviews and focus group discussions¹ in 2010, supported by the community development and participation theories, the analysis reveals extensive power and control by the state over community work in Rwanda. The argument falls into three sections. The first one presents an overview of the practice of *umuganda* from pre-colonial period up to and including the genocide. The second section concentrates on the practice of *umuganda* after genocide, while the third section investigates the impact of state control over the practice of *umuganda*.

¹ Three groups of respondents were selected. One group of interviewees was a group of sixteen elders found in both Kigali and Western Province.

A second group of interviews was with thirteen government officials at all levels in the Ministry of Local Administration, Good Governance, Community Development and Social Affairs.

The third group of interviewees was a group of thirty ordinary people from the same villages and cells, who did not participate in the focus groups. These respondents were chosen using random sampling.

1. An Overview of the Practice of *Umuganda*

In pre-colonial Rwanda, *umuganda* was a traditional practice and cultural value of working together to solve social and economic problems for mutual benefit. Notably, this practice was extended to those who were very poor or incapacitated to take part in collective action. The activities of *umuganda* as traditionally practised included, for instance, farming for those who were unable to do so due to either physical handicap or old age, building houses for the poor and providing transportation to medical facilities to those who were in need (Mukarubuga 2006: 20). A group of households used to come together to share the burden of the work, making sure that everyone in the community had shelter and had their farms ready in time for the planting season (2006: 21). This played a significant role in protecting human security and increasing household income.

Traditionally, *umuganda* was informed by the understanding that individual belonging and the well-being of society were central to its practice. The concept is related to the idea of solidarity and a communal sense of living, which can in turn be related to the South African philosophy of *ubuntu*. A translation from the Nguni proverb ‘*Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*’ (often translated as ‘a person is a person through other persons’ (Gade 2011: 303). The spirit of *umuganda* may also be interpreted as: ‘if a neighbour is hungry I am also hungry, if s/he is homeless I am homeless’. It is an idea that emphasises the essence of human togetherness (Interview: Kigali 22 December 2011). Interviewees thought that this understanding drove Banyarwanda in the early days to join efforts to identify and solve their neighbour’s problems whenever required (Interview: 14 December 2010). Until the arrival of missionaries, toward the end of the 1880s, *umuganda* grew from being a household and community initiative to one that incorporated the entire system under the kingdom’s administration.

This practice continued even during the colonial period. However, with the arrival of missionaries and colonialism, the mutual relationship became highly exploitative and the term used was not *umuganda* but *uburetwa* (forced labour). The policy of forced labour was adopted officially by the colonial administration in the 1940s (IRDP 2005). Thereafter every family had to provide compulsory communal work for 60 days of the year. This was divided into several blocks of twelve days per month and was meant for the construction of roads and schools, working in coffee and tea plantations and in the mines in the Congo (IRDP 2005). According to

Lemarchand (1970: 22) under the Belgian administration, *uburetwa* was determined by the local chiefs to require two or even three days labour out of six. This meant that people had little time to work for their own survival. Pottier (2002: 9) notes that *uburetwa* undermined the security of the majority and made survival more difficult.

Indigenous people who depended on each other for cultivation, for example, had little time for their survival, as a result of less food production. Given this experience, people were obliged by colonial masters to cultivate food and finally the obligations extended to afforestation and fighting soil-erosion (IRDP 2005: 27). Failure to complete cultivation on time resulted in punishment, usually corporal punishment². The punishment was both very painful and shameful and was dreaded by all Rwandans, as the victim had to undress in public and be flogged naked (Mukarubuga 2006: 5). Those who were taken to work in mines in the Congo and on coffee and tea plantations were uprooted from their families and lived in labour camps.

After independence from Belgium, the traditional practice of *umuganda* turned into a political philosophy. While there is no record found on the practice of *umuganda* in the first republic, between 1962 and the 1973, it is well documented that the policy of *umuganda* was formally launched by President Habyarimana in February 1974 (Mamdani 2001: 146), and it was often explained in the literature as co-operative communal labour (2001:146). Driven by the regime's developmental ideology, the policy aimed to boost the development and the economy of the country. In similar fashion to the colonial era, coffee and tea continued to be cash crops and people were required to work in the plantations (Des Forges 1999: 57-58).

Verwimp (2005: 320) explains how the post-colonial government declared the purpose of *umuganda* as beneficial for economic development and in providing state services to the community. Nevertheless, Verwimp (2005: 321) notes that *umuganda* really served the elite's economic and political interests, by fulfilling their political goals and garnering greater political power for them, rather than attending to the needs of the entire population.

Although in the early 1960s and 1970s *umuganda* included building schools, repairing roads, constructing bridges, digging anti-erosion ditches

² Corporal punishment consisted of 8 strokes of *ikiboko*: 'a long cylindrical piece of dried hippopotamus hide' (see Mukarubuga 2006).

and other state projects, people were consistently taught about citizenship (Straus 2006: 23). People were always reminded of their heritage as cultivators, that they should be proud of it and show this by using their skills. According to Lemarchand (1970: 94-95), this practice grew from the type of social hierarchy of *ubukonde*, a traditional lineage based on land ownership and their patron-client relations³.

Although the post-colonial regime claimed to introduce *umuganda* as a traditional practice, it actually retained many aspects of the Belgian colonial model (Schaefer 2001). For example, the government emphasized the colonial concept of Rwandan identity. The practice of *umuganda* made efforts to distinguish 'indigenous' ba-Hutu from 'non indigenous' ba-Tutsi (Mamdani 2001: 193-194). '*Umuganda* in the post-colonial period is best understood in the context of the mythical peasant, with the ideology that only the Hutus were the real peasants of Rwanda' (Verwimp 2000: 326). This ideology also explained who was a true munya-Rwandan, which was in turn used against the Tutsi, who were not known as cultivators but aliens pastoralist (Verwimp 2000: 343). Hatred that led to divisions was increasingly planted under the stream of development during *umuganda*.

Umuganda then turned into a means of promoting oppression and exclusion among Rwandans. This was done through colonial legacy of ethnic construction. For instance, in 1994 the idea of *umuganda* was used and served as a means of mass mobilisation during the genocide, where more than one million people are recorded to have been killed within three months. Those in power argued then that only one particular group of people, the Hutus, had the right to exist, and other groups, Tutsis, were targeted for extermination in the name of *umuganda* (Verwimp 2004: 328-329). In period leading to genocide, the traditional practice of *umuganda* was emphasized as a way of giving voice and recognition to the Hutu majority (Verwimp 2003: 12).

Mamdani (2001: 145) examines the organisation and practice of *umuganda* during this time and explains that the practice was directed at political ends rather than community development and thus excluded the participation of the population in the management process of their affairs (Ministry of Local Government and Social Affairs 2001: 7). *Umuganda* then

³ With the coming of Europeans, a genuine identity eventually developed between the *ubukonde* cultivation system and *umuheto*, the cattle system (Lemarchand 1970: 95).

fell into the category of manipulative participation. Within this particular context, participation signifies involvement of the people only in terms of their contributing labour and resources as well as making a firm commitment to the state's political ideology (Hall 1986: 97). According to Hall, this kind of participation has little to do with freedom of decision-making or the encouragement of independent initiatives by autonomous groups (1986: 97). 'Local politicians and administrators were the ones responsible for the organisation of the weekly *umuganda*, which gave the officials great discretionary power to decide who did and who did not have to participate' (Verwimp 2000: 349).

Verwimp (2000: 345) argues that the question of whether or not *umuganda* helped in the development of the country depends to a large extent on the definition of development one is using:

In order to understand the actions of dictatorial regimes, one should not only look at their 'developmental' outcomes but also at the intentions of the regime. What particular kind of development did they want to achieve for their country? In order to discover the intentions of the regime, 'development' in Rwanda is studied as an ideology with particular emphasis on agriculture and on the restrictions of movement imposed by the regime (2000: 325-361).

According to Verwimp (2000:346-347), 'when dictatorial political power is legitimized with a peasant ideology, genocide becomes a political option because a peasant society does not tolerate the existence of non-peasants, in the same way as a communist society does not tolerate the existence of a capitalist class'. Although the colonial image of the Tutsi has been that of a noble aristocracy, the post-genocide had changed that to one of laziness, those who could not cultivate (Hitjens 1999: 255).

In the early 1990s, government propaganda gave no choice to Rwandans other than to attend *umuganda* for political mobilisation. Those who could not attend were regarded as enemies of the country who ran the risk of being brutalised and killed (Thomson 2009: 119). The situation became yet more tense when a group of Rwandans who were in exile invaded Rwanda from Uganda, on 1st September 1990. This attack provided the perfect pretext for President Habyarimana to propagate the idea that Tutsis were preparing to 'enslave' Hutus again (Chrétien 2000: 331). The ideology

was not new to Rwandans. They had known it since the late 1920s when an ethnic identity card was introduced and were reminded of this during the performance of weekly *umuganda* under post-colonial government (see Pottier 1996; Chetien 2000; Mamdani 2001). The government then sponsored the creation of youth militias, known as *Interahamwe* (meaning, those who act together) to counter the threat. The increasingly tense climate in the country was reflected in the political arena, and from 1990 to early 1994 negotiation was unsuccessful (2000: 332).

On the night of April 6, 1994, a plane returning President Habyarimana from signing a peace agreement in Da-es-Salaam was shot down at Kigali airport. In this atmosphere, patrols and barriers were set up immediately. An order from the government was given to all Hutu and *interahamwe* through a National Radio broadcast, to kill all Tutsi, men, women and children. According to the actual meaning of '*interahamwe*', the killings were instructed to be done in the form of 'acting together as communal work' (Chrétien 2000: 332). The actual killing started on 7 April 1994 (Chrétien 2000: 332). More than one million Tutsi and a few moderate Hutu are estimated to have been killed, in less than three months (Thomson 2009: 119).

Examining the reasons why perpetrators committed genocide, Straus (2006: 109) found that 88% took part in weekly *umuganda*. Strauss is not suggesting that participating in *umuganda* by definition predisposed people to commit genocide, but the finding indicates that with *umuganda* the state had mobilized a significant proportion of perpetrators before the genocide (2006: 110). Learning from the peasant ideology (only Hutus are peasants and children of the soil) and the everyday propaganda during *umuganda* had also motivated people to see their fellow ba-Tutsi as enemies. Thus, Hintjens (1999: 245) argues that the bonds in civil society were completely broken.

People were told by government officials that participating in the attacks was their requirement for *umuganda* (1999: 89). Administrators were responsible for informing their superiors about all important developments within their jurisdictions (Des Forges 1999: 233). Under the pretext of the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) invasion from exile⁴, the government

⁴ The majority of those in the RPF were the Tutsi diaspora who fled the country in the 1959.

distributed guns to every tenth household (Pottier 2002: 135). The term, ‘to work’, referred to killing; most of the local leaders told their people that their welfare depended on killing. They were told to come with every possible tool to work with (tools that are used for *umuganda*), including machetes, and hoes (Diamond 2005: 313).

During the genocide, *umuganda* did not involve planting trees but ‘clearing out the weeds’ – a phrase used by the *genocidaires* to mean the killing of Tutsis. Chopping up men was referred to as ‘bush clearing’ and slaughtering women and children as ‘pulling out the roots of the bad weeds’ (Prunier 1995: 138-142; Mamdani 2001: 194). The slogan, ‘clearing bushes and removing bad weeds’, were familiar terms used in the course of ordinary agricultural labour undertaken in *umuganda*. Moreover, Des Forges argues that authorities summoned people for *umuganda* which consisted of stuffing bodies down latrines, tossing them in pits, throwing them into rivers or lakes or digging mass graves in which to bury them (Des Forges 1999: 241).

The meaning of collective action and togetherness then lost its original positive sense in Rwanda. Despite these changes and distasteful experiences, *umuganda* has remained a type of collective action which is at the centre of government policy and practice (Ministry of Local Governance, 2001: 9-10). After all these experiences what was the reason for the post-genocide government to re-establish *umuganda*? What does the population think of participating in an indigenous practice that has been violated by political interests? What mostly motivates them to participate in *umuganda* today? In the emerging of global economic growth knowledge, how does the practice of *umuganda* contribute to local people’s social economic growth? The accounts of participants in this study contribute to respond these questions. We begin by investigating how *umuganda* has been practised after the genocide of 1994.

2. The Practice of *Umuganda* in Rwanda after the Genocide

Locating *umuganda* at the centre of community development policy, the current government reasons that the policy is drawn from the traditions, rules and norms of how Rwandans relate to one another. The government’s community development policy aims at empowering the Rwandan community by involving them in the decision-making process. Therefore the

policy and practice of *umuganda* are considered a means of expression to encourage good governance, while implementing community development and other government policies such as that of decentralisation. Moreover, *umuganda* is seen as an important policy in the process of unity and reconciliation (Republic of Rwanda, Ministry of Local Government 2008).

After the genocide, Rwanda faced many challenges, ranging from human security to infrastructure and a lack of public and private sector professionals. Political leaders believed that returning to their traditional norms and values could help solve socio-economic problems. *Umuganda* was then re-established in 2001 by the government through the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning (MINECOFIN) and institutionalised as a government policy, Law No. 53/2007, in 2008, under the administration of the Ministry of Local Government, Good Governance, Community Development and Social Affairs (MINALOC).

With so much to do, especially regarding poverty reduction and the reconciliation process, the government of Rwanda has emphasised *umuganda* as a common development and national rebuilding strategy. *Umuganda* falls into a more general policy framework of community development, which was designed by drawing on the tradition, rules, and norms of how Rwandans relate to one another in order to promote good governance and the rebuilding of Rwandan society (Straus 2006: 109; MINALOC - Procedures Manual for Local Government in Rwanda 2007). *Umuganda* is carried out once a month countrywide and involves the participation of all, including the president and other government officials (*The New Times* 2006).

The literature on community development emphasizes the empowerment of people at the grassroots level, social mobilization and bottom-up planning processes, especially in efforts to improve the quality of life of the poor (Swanepoel 1992: 17). Although in theory, the policy of *umuganda* offers room for dialogue between the local authority and communities, some have found little interaction in practice, with the government mostly issuing top-down directives (Mukarubuga 2006: 21). Scholars like Brinkerhoff and Crosby (2002: 6) have already noted that designing a policy is relatively easy but managing their implementation is always challenging. This problem can be seen in how the policy of *umuganda* is being implemented. Good intentions for the policy of *umuganda* may have been adopted but good management and implementation are central to its success.

2.1 The Main Reason for Establishing *Umuganda* as a State Policy

Results from Kigali and Western Province, presented in Table 1, indicate the reasons respondents gave for why *umuganda* is practised nowadays.

Table 1: The main reason for establishing *umuganda*

Location		Post-genocide	
		n	%
Kigali	Main reason for establishing <i>umuganda</i>	76	100
	Cheap labour force	9	12
	To train the population for Self-solving problems	26	34
	Maintain unity	8	11
	To create a channel of communication	31	41
	Other responses	2	3
Western Province		n	%
	Main reason for establishing <i>umuganda</i>	63	100
	To obtain a cheap labour force	16	25
	To train the population for self- solving problems ⁵	17	27
	To maintain unity of the population	9	14
	To create a channel of communication	20	32
	Other responses	1	2

Respondents stated that after the genocide the reason for establishing *umuganda* is to create a channel for communication (41% in Kigali, 32% in Western Province). One of the respondents explained that:

⁵ During the meeting after *umuganda*, local people are encouraged to form and join group associations that will facilitate in reducing any social and economic challenges.

The reason for establishing *umuganda* is for the government to implement their plans easily through citizens because that is how they can control and make a follow-up of what they have told them to do (interview: Ordinary Community Member 2-a 17 Dec 2010).

An *umudugudu* leader (village leader⁶) in Western Province shared his view on the reason for establishing *umuganda* in the post-colonial and post-genocide periods. He pointed out that ‘the main reason is to get to the people easily because *umuganda* helps to mobilise people to make them understand and implement government’s plans’ (interview: Local Leader-2b 24 Dec 2010). Although he condemned this, the local leader explains this phenomenon by giving an example of the post-colonial government’s achievement in using *umuganda* to divide the people and to bring about the genocide in 1994 (interview: Local Leader-2b 24 Dec 2010). What is seen here is the state using citizens to serve its purpose as well as requiring citizens to meet their obligations to the state. This raises issues about the implications for state-society relations, community development, and the continuity of social practices; for example, how does the community relate to the policy and practice of *umuganda*?

Moreover, 34% in Kigali and 27% in Western Province responded that the reason for pursuing *umuganda* in the post-genocide era is to train people to solve problems for themselves, such as encouraging them to form or join small income generation groups. While 12% participants in Kigali and 25% in Western Province believed that the reason for establishing *umuganda* is to obtain cheap labour, 11% in Kigali and in Western Province 14% thought that the main reason is to maintain unity of the population. A few other responses in Western Province indicated that the aim of *umuganda* is to control people.

It is, however, noted that twice as many in Western Province (25% compared to 12%) in Kigali viewed *umuganda* as a source of cheap labour. This is perhaps due to the overwhelming days of *umuganda* (weekly and sometimes twice a week) and activities involved. This is different from Kigali where *umuganda* is done by many once a month, and possibly where it is easier to avoid *umuganda* in the city than in the rural areas. Nevertheless, the

⁶ Village leaders are not traditional leaders rather, local government leaders under decentralization policy.

majority response both Kigali and Western Province were of the view that *umuganda* is primarily a means of communication.

2.2 General Understanding of *Umuganda*

Those in Kigali thought that in the post-genocide period *umuganda* is voluntary and beneficial public work (46%), whereas 43% regard it as forced but beneficial (see Table 2.) This beneficial version of *umuganda* is to be distinguished from the colonially-imposed forced labour where the state diverted *umuganda* to obtain labour on plantations. Although the current practice of *umuganda* is certainly different from that of the colonial period, an elder from Western Province did not see much difference. He noted:

They [Rwandans] asked for independence but they did not know what they were doing because if you look closely, you find that colonial masters have gone nowhere. They have chased them but they have not gone. They have left every single side of their mind and behaviour. I mean in the early days, *umuganda* was for the community self-solving its problems but now it is for solving political problems (EL 9-b 22 Dec 2010).

The current practice of *umuganda* does not compel people to work on tea or coffee plantations but they are, in effect, ‘forced’, for example, to build additional classrooms and to build and maintain roads.

Table 2: How the population understands *umuganda*

Location		Post-genocide	
		n	%
Kigali	How the population understand <i>umuganda</i>	76	100
	A forced and non-beneficial labour	4	5
	A forced but beneficial public work	33	43
	A voluntary and beneficial public work	35	46
	A tool of oppression by leaders	1	1
	Other	3	4

		n	%
Western Province	How the population understand <i>umuganda</i>	63	100
	A forced and non-beneficial labour	7	11
	A forced but beneficial public work	35	56
	A voluntary and beneficial public work	18	29
	A tool of oppression by leaders	3	5
	Other	0	0

The population currently attend *umuganda* because they are forced to.

For example, if you take five people from one family and ask them to attend *umuganda*, it is forced because the household has their own way of sharing responsibility if they have the power. It is also found to be a feasible way for government to communicate to citizens, either for the sake of informing them or to enforce them to do something (Interview: Kigali 23 02 Jan 2011).

This was explained by one respondent who said that in the *umuganda* gathering, ‘we can’t address to the people what is not on the program (*kurigahunda*), we speak according to the theme that the government has sent to us’ (Interview: Western Province, 01 Jan 2011).

Participants felt that *umuganda* has become a project for nation building instead of community building. Nonetheless, one respondent from the elders association⁷ did not think that it is beneficial for national building either. He explained:

Currently, *umuganda* is more a socialising event than working. I always see people putting their hands in their pockets from the beginning to the end of *umuganda*. How can more than thirty people spend three hours in one place and not see any tangible work? You can see that people are not ready for *umuganda* because many come

⁷ Elders refer to their association as *intekoizilikana*, with has the aim of preserving Rwandan culture.

with no tools to use for *umuganda*. I see others coming in white tracksuits as if you are going for sports or a meeting! (Interviews: Kigali 15 Dec 2010).

From this observation, the very presence of people seems to be more meaningful and important than actual work. Some come so as to avoid being accused of avoiding *umuganda* which might be interpreted as being anti-government.

Although not joining others for *umuganda* was not illegal in the early days, it was regarded by the community members as self-isolation from the rest of the community, which could result in not receiving any assistance from neighbours when needed. But from the colonial period onward *umuganda* has been required by law and not participating is still regarded as a crime. According to the present policy of *umuganda*, a person who does not carry out *umuganda* can be fined FRW. 5000 (almost \$10). Currently, people are required to have an attendance card which has to be signed every time *umuganda* is performed. Cards are organised by the government and people are required to buy them for FRW.100. This card also has to be presented whenever the bearer needs services from local government.

2.3 Why People Participate in *Umuganda*

According to Table 3, after the genocide people are motivated to participate in *umuganda* for various reasons: mutual help; meeting friends; neighbours and socialising; pleasing leaders; getting information about the government's plans; and because of the fear of punishment or prosecution (39% in Kigali and 32% in Western Province). Another 24% from Kigali indicated that obtaining information about government's plans is their main motivation. By contrast, 21% from Western Province were concerned about being fined or prosecuted, whereas 19% suggested that they attend *umuganda* just to get information about the government's plans. 11% in Kigali and 16% in Western Province attended *umuganda* in order to meet friends, neighbours and socialise. One of the respondents explained:

I go to *umuganda* to meet people, to get to know new people in my community and to make myself known in the neighbourhood (Interview: Kigali 01 Jan 2011).

Interestingly, among the 2% from Western Province who participated in *umuganda* for different reasons altogether, they said that they are motivated by a feeling of ownership and mutual help. More generally, what emerged was that, ‘currently the feeling of ownership and mutual help was what drove most pre-colonial *umuganda* practices but ownership has given way to insecurity, sociality, and the need for belonging’ (Interview: Kigali 16 Dec 2011).

Table 3: Motivation to participate in *umuganda*

Location		Post-genocide	
		N	%
Kigali	Motivation to participate in <i>umuganda</i>	76	100
	Mutual help	9	12
	Meet friends, neighbours and socialize	8	11
	Please leaders	1	1
	Get information about government's plans	18	24
	Fear of fine or prosecution	9	12
	All the above assertions are valid	30	39
	Other	0	0
Western Province	Motivations to participate in <i>umuganda</i>	63	100
	Mutual help	5	8
	Meet friends, neighbour and socialise with	10	16
	Please leaders	2	3
	Get information about government's plans	12	19
	Fear of fine or prosecution	13	21
	All the above assertions are valid	20	32
	Other	1	2

As already identified, from the post-colonial period until the present, *umuganda* was used as an avenue for government to communicate with the people. *Umuganda* provided an assembly-point that government functionaries

used and still use to communicate its policies, programs, decrees and demands. People were and are still being forced to attend *umuganda*.

We have seen that everyone is required to buy an attendance card that people have to keep on themselves, and have it signed as proof of attendance. It was also learned that some people attend *umuganda* merely to have their card signed so as to avoid problems when needing any government service. Moreover, serious complaints of prejudice were heard since, apparently, some people are asked to present their *umuganda* card and others are not. A young lady wanting to apply to register her *marriage civile*⁸, discovered that the executive secretary at the sector office required her first to produce her *umuganda* card in order to see whether she has performed *umuganda*. Someone else who happened to be present commented,

this is not fair, why didn't he [executive] ask the other person for a card? *Mhuuuu!* These people look at you, and they know how to respond to your request depending on how you appear to them. It is not every one that they ask to present *umuganda* card (interview: 15 Dec 2010).

There are various opinions in relation to the punishment that is given to those who do not participate in *umuganda*. While both participants in Kigali (58%) and Western Province (41%) thought that people are fined, 25% in Kigali and 40% in Western Province reported that there is no punishment for those who do not attend. Even though the current policy of *umuganda* states clearly that those who do not participate in *umuganda* will be fined with a fixed amount of FRW. 5000, this has not been implemented in many places, especially in relation to the monthly *umuganda*. Although there was no reason given to why the policy is not implemented, in practice it would be difficult for residents in rural areas who have little income.

However, leaders of *umuganda* in Kigali are strict about attendance. The transport association in Kigali is one example. On a further visit to Rwanda, in December 2011, the researcher used a motor bike as a means of transport from home to the local suburban market in Kigali. As we arrived, the rider was warned by his other taxis that he was going to be in trouble

⁸ A civil wedding in Rwanda is officiated by the executive secretary of the sector at the local sector office.

since he did not go to *umuganda* and have his *umuganda* card signed. Security guards in the areas were enquiring. Curiously I asked him what he would do. His answer is that he would have no choice but to pay a fine. Continuing the conversation, the researcher asked the motor rider what activities they had to perform for *umuganda* that day. With an unhappy face one of them responded: '*Imirimoyihe – se! ko arukudutesha umwanya gusa*' 'What activities! It is only wasting our time'.

Why then go to *umuganda* if it is a waste of time? Do leaders know that people feel it is a waste of time? Some participants mentioned that there are instances in rural areas where the local defence force arrests people, beat them and put them in jail for not participating in *umuganda*.

It emerged from the interviews that people also complied with the requirement of *umuganda* in their anxiety to avoid being seen as suspicious members of the community who could be regarded as a source of insecurity and then become isolated. In other words, the motivation to carry out *umuganda* is mixed with fear which can be conveyed in questions such as: 'How can people hear that I have remained home while others are doing *umuganda*? Would I be regarded as a rebel or a criminal or anti-social?'

Is there any relationship between participating in *umuganda* and a sense of nationalism? The need for belonging and the fear of government sanctions have a security dimension which could emanate from the violence, conflict and the legacy of the genocide. However, why should community participation be combined by threats of punitive sanctions?

Disagreeing with the idea of punishing people who do not attend *umuganda*, a community member argued:

Normally, *umuganda's* main objectives are for the community to volunteer their time to the country and also to bring together people living in the same community, as it is in our culture to help, share and socialize. But this is done as law and order, which one has to follow or otherwise be punished or pay a fine. Charging or punishing people for not attending *umuganda* sounds like looking for too much from people rather than sensitizing them to do it willingly. This makes *umuganda* turn from its primary definition and it becomes a mandatory forceful activity (Interview: Kigali 02 Jan 2011).

Because of seeing *umuganda* as mandatory, some people have resented participating. One respondent said:

This is why I don't go to *umuganda*, because I don't like to do something just because I am forced to it. Even that card; I have not bought it and I don't carry it. I like to help and I like the idea of *umuganda* but I don't like the way it is being brought to us (Interview: Western Province 26 Dec 2010).

With such mixed reactions from participants in the focus group discussion one gave her opinion of what this means:

To be denied services means that, 'I cried for help you did not show up, when you cry for help I am not going to show up'. When the government does not see your hand when it needs it, you shouldn't expect its (government's) hand when you need it (Focus group discussion: Western Province 17 Dec 2010).

Both in Kigali and Western Province participants insisted that they do not agree with punishment by law for not participating in *umuganda*. However, one of the respondents explained:

I believe in the FRW 5,000 fine charged for missing *umuganda* but only as long as that fine is paid in the context of correcting someone. This will be like an act of discrediting someone for not socializing with others and not volunteering for the good of your country but not really a crime when put in the proper context (Focus group discussion: Kigali 30 Dec 2010).

A local leader in charge of *umuganda* and community mobilization explained that, 'When we find that the person does not participate in *umuganda*, we ask the person to pay the fine before we give him or her a requested document because if we don't do that, people will take *umuganda* lightly' (Interview: Kigali 17 Dec 2010).

Recalling that *umuganda* was initially indigenous practice, owned and organised by local community members, what, then, is the impact of government and political control of *umuganda*?

3. The Impact of Political Control on the Practice of *Umuganda*

While *umuganda* in its traditional form responded directly to the needs of the people, this study established that from the colonial period to the present *umuganda* has been and is used by government(s) to respond to political interests that are not necessarily beneficial to the ordinary people. Starting from the colonial period, *umuganda* was converted not only into a form of forced labour but also became a divisive tool that identified those who had to do extensive labour and were subjected to sanctions. This transformation of *umuganda* made life difficult for Rwandan society.

Currently, ordinary community members hardly initiate *umuganda*. The state has usurped *umuganda*, turning it into mandatory work, whether it benefits the population or not. Post-colonial regimes, including during the period after the genocide, have not restored *umuganda* to its original cultural value and practice. Instead, post-independence governments have enjoyed exercising their power and earning loyalty by maintaining colonial structures of governing free labour practice. This has led to three general problems.

- The first problem is with the governance of *umuganda* as it has become a state-owned and controlled program.

Umuganda has been state policy since the period of colonial rule. It was re-established in 1974, almost a decade after independence with different objectives, which continued until the period of genocide in 1994. After the genocide, *umuganda* was adopted by government once again in 2007 as a different policy with different objectives. It is currently found to be a system whereby the government propagates its different strategies to be implemented by locals.

Although some activities which are required for *umuganda* are found to be positive for the state's well-being, less attention is given to individuals' and communities' well-being. This is especially so for the rural population who are required to perform many hours of *umuganda* while having little time for their own activities. Respondents in this study, both from Kigali and Western Province, made it clear that ordinary people play a limited role in planning, organising and supervising *umuganda*.

The study indicated that the government of Rwanda has a history of intruding deeply into people's lives. It was learned that under colonial and post-colonial governments citizens had only limited freedom to speak, to challenge authority, to build a new and different life. The post-genocide government is still struggling with the same issues. This failure to deal with the legacy of the past has resulted in both leaders and ordinary citizens coming to live under fear, suspicion and mistrust.

The control of the practice of *umuganda* is more related to the state's own insecurity which, in turn, is rooted in past social and political instability. One cannot ignore the impact of colonialism and now globalisation on how the policies, especially for development, are conceived and implemented. While *umuganda* is expected to offer opportunities to the local people to interact with the authorities and to pose questions on matters that affect the local community and nation as a whole, this can mean the opposite as well. Government has used *umuganda* as a quick and efficient way to exert control. *Umuganda* has been used to sound out new laws and policies such as the Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Strategy (EDPRS), and then to force local people to implement them.

- The second problem is that *umuganda* is compulsory, with little benefit to ordinary people.

The compulsory nature of *umuganda* is evident in how it is organised and supervised, as well as in the use of sanctions to enforce participation. Most of the activities performed during *umuganda* are defined by government as community needs, which is not necessarily the case. While set objectives for any policy need to be respected, should not government officials listen to the community in order to assess the community's needs instead of making assumptions about what these needs are? The way in which the practice of *umuganda* is governed gives the supposed beneficiaries the sense of being forced to carry out government orders. This has resulted in local people's reluctance to participate as much as they might.

Explaining the state-imposed projects of change, Scott (1999: 3) notes that the state creates administrative orderings that grossly simplify nature and society to make complex issues more manageable. The system imposed in the governance of *umuganda* is clearly seen in its organization

and supervision by state functionaries, which in essence ensures that the state is able to enforce *umuganda*, yet it is not supposed to be enforced by any authority. *Umuganda* has thus been eroded of its non-authoritative component to become a signaller of state authority and to control functions which are embodied in governmental agencies.

The practice of *umuganda* is a law-enforced policy. Even though the policy of *umuganda* is formulated and approved by the elected representatives of the people in parliament, the punitive sanctions that accompany its implementation are not well received by many. It raises a question as to why Rwandans should be forced to participate in state development. Furthermore, the attendance card that needs to be presented and signed after undertaking *umuganda* determines who should have access to government services, such as travelling documents or official certificate. But every citizen in Rwanda has a right to government services. What then does the denial of services mean to those who do not attend *umuganda*?

This suggests a need to rethink certain punitive sanctions that are involved in the practice of *umuganda*. Perhaps local people should be allowed to decide what kind of punishments should be given to those who do not attend *umuganda*, with the aim of deciding what is fair to fellow citizens.

- The third problem is the utilization of *umuganda* to achieve free service delivery.

The practice of *umuganda* challenges the dominant notion of government delivering services through paid public servants. It was learnt that Kigali benefits from free and compulsory labour, which saves government revenue on opening city water channels, cleaning streets, building roads, schools, and health centres and so on. This implies that such social development practices are dictated by government at the expense of people's time and labour. Yet, services like these are found to be of little value in rural areas such as in the Western Province, where the majority of the population depends on domestic agricultural production for their everyday living. Should free, compulsory labour not be for the sake of meeting rural people's immediate needs to feed their families? There is a need for the policy of *umuganda* to be managed in providing services that not only restore the state's infrastructure but also improve the community's well-being in the long run.

Conclusion

Based on historical factors, it is observed that the essence, purpose, participation, and activities of *umuganda* changed during the arrival of missionaries and the colonial period. In the 1970s, the post-colonial government tried to re-emphasise and revitalise *umuganda*, but in a way that took a different path. While the initial idea was to maintain Rwandan cohesion and security and to increase household income, such public benefits were dominated by political interests, thus undermining the well-being of households and leading to more control and exploitation by those in power (Pottier 2006: 513).

Building on the precedent of the colonial period, the current government has used *umuganda* as an instrument of power to control the Rwandan people. Based on the past experience, the management and administration of *umuganda* is politically defined to respond to many various challenges that are facing post-genocide government. Among these are poverty reduction as well as unity and reconciliation. Nevertheless, the practice of *umuganda* is hardly meeting any of these challenges.

The present government's terminology in its policy on *umuganda* draws on an understanding of *umuganda's* traditional practice. In learning of the evolution of *umuganda*, from a voluntary household activity to a national state program, we see not only a considerable change in the original purpose of *umuganda* but also a change in understanding what the needs of the people are. Instead of the people defining their own needs, they are now being defined by the state.

Arguably, the government and political leaders have not stopped indigenous peoples from organising themselves for their own *umuganda* but their self-esteem has been swallowed by the consistent understanding that political leaders know what best is for the people. Thus, people sit and wait for the government leaders to identify and organise solutions for their problems and then claim government-generated and imposed solutions to be *umuganda*. This is not *umuganda* but is a means of social control, for society is no longer the organiser, initiator and implementer. The higher authority of the state is now able to sustain its control over society through organising *umuganda*.

The weakness of the practice of *umuganda* in the post-genocide regime is found in the governance of *umuganda* and the punitive sanctions

associated with its practice. These weaknesses are seen as stumbling blocks to community development in Rwanda, since a community does not grow because of government control but it grows by itself. This depends on the degree to which members of the community share values, especially the idea that they belong to a common entity that supersedes the interests of its individual members.

This study identified the occurrence of a spirit of suspicion among and within community members is transmitted into searching for identity and belonging. This is revealed when people decide to participate in *umuganda* because of fear that their neighbours will regard them as antigovernment, which again is translated by some indigenous as a genocide ideology. Hence, currently, the practice of *umuganda* presents both a sense of a combined consciousness of nation –building (governance) and genocide ideology. The two allow people to live in fear, to participate even when they might not wish to, in order to escape punishment and being put under suspicious status. Living and acting out of fear has huge consequences for people's development.

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‘Help somebody who help you’: The Effect of the Domestic Labour Relationship on South African Domestic Workers’ Ability to Exercise their Rights

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Abstract

Domestic labour is widely recognised as one of the most vulnerable labour sectors, both nationally and internationally. In South Africa, Sectoral Determination 7 (S.D.7) was specifically promulgated to protect domestic workers’ rights and provide them with the means to negotiate with and hold employers to account. However, research over the past decade has demonstrated that while some areas of domestic labour have improved, many workers are still locked in exploitative labour relationships. This article explores the dynamics of the domestic labour relationship using extracts from interviews with domestic workers. It argues that paternalistic relationships can have as limiting an effect on workers’ ability to exercise their rights, as fear and exploitation.

Keywords: domestic labour, South African labour policy, Sectoral Determination 7, paternalism

Introduction: Domestic Work in Context

Domestic work is defined as any labour performed in and for private households, and domestic workers as persons employed to perform this work, who receive or are ‘entitled to receive’ remuneration for their labour

(Republic of South Africa, R.S.A. 2002:30). In South Africa, this definition has been extended to include housekeepers, gardeners, personal drivers, and care givers (R.S.A. 2002), whether ‘independent contractors’ (du Toit 2010:215) or employed or supplied by employment services (R.S.A. 2002). Domestic work is typically gendered, and is a major source of employment for women from marginalised and/or disadvantaged backgrounds (International Labour Office, I.L.O. 2012). Globally, there are an estimated 52.6 million domestic workers, 83% of whom are women (I.L.O. 2012). In South Africa, the estimated number of domestic workers range between 861,000 (Statistics South Africa 2013:xi) and 1.15 million (South African Institute of Race Relations, 2013), 96% of whom are women (Statistics South Africa 2013). Put another way, domestic work provides employment for approximately 1 in 5 South African women (du Toit 2010). However, local and global figures are generally believed to be underestimates and real figures are likely to be somewhat higher (Grobler 2012; I.L.O. 2012).

Legislative Framework

Both locally and abroad, domestic labour is decried as being a vulnerable and marginalised labour sector (I.L.O. 2012:2). Globally, domestic workers’ conditions of employment are characterised by low wages; long and irregular hours of work; tenuous security of employment; discrimination or personal abuse; and difficulty in enforcing employment benefits such as overtime, minimum wage, maternity leave and so forth, where these are provided for in the local legal framework (De Waal 2012; Horton & Vilana 2001; Magwaza 2008, Motala 2010). According to the I.L.O., domestic labour is often ‘explicitly or implicitly’ excluded from states’ labour policies, as it is viewed as falling outside of the “‘productive’ labour market” (I.L.O. 2012: 2). As a result of this exclusion, domestic workers are made more vulnerable to exploitation (I.L.O. 2012: 2). In recognition of this, the I.L.O. recently adopted the Domestic Workers Convention (No. 189) and supplementary Recommendations (No. 201), aimed at encouraging member states to develop policy to protect the labour rights of domestic workers. In justification, the I.L.O. argues:

Bringing domestic workers, who are to a large majority women and

migrants, under the protection of labour legislation is a matter of gender equality and equal protection under the law: *a question of human rights* (2012: 3 e.a.).

South Africa's current policies on domestic labour compare very favourably to those of other states' and are viewed as extremely progressive (Ally 2010). During apartheid, domestic labour was 'situated in a legal vacuum' (Cock 1989:6), as there was no legislation to regulate working conditions or to protect domestic workers. As a result, hours were long and leave irregular (Cock 1989), and wages were not subject to rulings by the Wage Board and thus were 'notoriously bad' (Posel 1991:173). The system of influx control made it extremely difficult for a domestic worker to change their place of employment if working conditions were bad, effectively binding the domestic worker to her employer (Cock 1989). Conversely, due to the lack of legal protection, domestic workers could be instantly dismissed at the employer's whim (Cock 1989). Live-in domestic workers were commonly housed in outside rooms that were 'small ... simple and ... crude', often without electricity or hot water, and furnished with the employer's castoffs (Ginsburg 2000:84). Workers were provided with 'servant's rations' – food products that were distinctly inferior to that consumed by the employer and her family – and were expected to eat their meals in their room or outside, using inferior utensils reserved for their private use (Archer 2011). In sum, 'paid domestic work under apartheid (was) defined by exploitative pay, oppressive working conditions, and dehumanising racism and sexism' (Ally 2010:2; Cock 1989).

After 1994, a series of post-apartheid labour legislation¹ was promulgated to extend the human rights enshrined in the Constitution (R.S.A. 1996: Chapter 1) to all workers. Initially, domestic labour was governed by these general labour policies. However, due to problems with regulating domestic workers' conditions of employment under the general provisions of the B.C.E.A., Sectoral Determination 7 (S.D.7; R.S.A. 2002) was specifically enacted to regulate the minimum conditions of employment for domestic workers. As a result, South African domestic workers are now protected by,

¹ The Labour Relations Act (L.R.A.) 66 of 1995, the Basic Conditions of Employment Act (B.C.E.A.) 75 of 1997 and the Employment Equity Act (E.E.A.) 55 of 1998.

a national minimum wage²; mandatory formal contracts of employment³; state-legislated annual increases; extensive leave⁴; severance pay⁵; formal registration⁶; a government-sponsored pension fund; access to unemployment insurance benefits (a world first); and a national certificate and qualification in domestic work through government-sponsored training (another world first) (Ally 2010:3).

Thus, S.D.7 was specifically designed to bring domestic workers under the protection of the law, and to extend human rights to this particular labour sector. Policy makers tried to balance competing imperatives in the development of S.D.7: on the one hand, to assure the rights of domestic workers, in terms of a rights-based discourse and the stipulations laid down by the Constitution; and on the other hand, to make provision for the particular social and historical context of domestic labour. Hence, in S.D.7 we find clauses that are absent from the B.C.E.A.; for example, the recognition of payment in kind, the provision of food at the work place, and regulations around the provision of accommodation for live-in domestic workers. S.D.7 also provides explicit regulation of the duration of “shifts” and the permissible frequency of “overtime” and “standby” duties. These latter examples demonstrate how the creators of S.D.7 imported regulations from other labour legislation and incorporated these into domestic labour legislation, in an effort to address live-in workers’ existing circumstances and limit exploitation.

Enforcement of S.D.7 is to be carried out by inspectors from the Department of Labour, who handle contraventions of the Act. If an inspector

² Part B, S.D.7 (R.S.A. 2002:6 – 13). Rates are determined according to how many hours per week a domestic worker works (more than 27 hours, or less than 27 hours), and where this labour is performed (urban or rural areas). As of December 1 2012, this minimum wage was increased by 7%.

³ Part C, S.D.7 (R.S.A. 2002:14-15).

⁴ Family leave in particular has been increased, in recognition of the gendered nature of domestic labour (du Toit 2010).

⁵ Section 25, S.D.7 (R.S.A. 2002:27)

⁶ This allows workers to claim from the Unemployment Insurance Act (U.I.F.) on termination of employment.

cannot resolve the issue, it is referred to the Labour Court. S.D.7 thus aims to provide for minimum conditions of employment while managing the vulnerability of this sector, without precluding any benefits offered to individual workers by employers.

Impact of S.D.7

Studies examining the impact of S.D.7 have had mixed findings. There is some evidence that domestic workers have used the legislation to challenge their employers in the labour courts or through the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration (C.C.M.A.; Magwaza 2008). Magwaza (2008:85) argues that this demonstrates that 'the introduction of the Act has empowered some domestic workers and encourages them to demand their rights'. The nominal wages of domestic workers has risen since 2002 (Hertz 2004 in du Toit 2010; C.A.S.E.⁷ 2010), indicating another positive effect of S.D.7. In addition, leave is now regulated, and domestic workers have reported improvements in this regard (Magwaza 2008). S.D.7 also provides regulations concerning the forms of accommodation that may be provided to live-in domestic workers, and seeks to regulate the standards of accommodation; limit the deductions that can be made from the worker's salary for this accommodation; and provide for equitable means of eviction upon termination of the worker's contract (S.D.7 2002). In these ways, it has been argued that S.D.7 has improved the situation of domestic workers in South Africa (C.A.S.E. 2010).

However, it has also been found that S.D.7 has had some unintended, negative consequences. The first of these is that S.D.7 has in some cases negatively affected relations between workers and employers. For example, one of Magwaza's participants reported that her employer was so 'angry' at being "raided" by a Department of Labour officer that she refused to give her worker a customary annual increase, arguing that the worker was already 'far too above the minimum wage' (2008:88, *sic*). Domestic workers in Magwaza's study stated that some employers perceive S.D.7 to be a 'government imposition that brought about an unnecessary intrusion', resulting in 'strained relations between employers and employees' (2008:87).

⁷ Community Agency for Social Enquiry.

Secondly, S.D.7 makes provision for “payment in kind” by stipulating that (where relevant) it should be provided for in the terms of the employment contract. “Payment in kind”, a practice stemming from colonialism and apartheid, refers to the provision of items such as food, clothing, pensions, transport costs, unwanted household items, leftovers, or medical care, in addition to a minimum wage (Cock 1989; Durrheim, Jacobs & Dixon, under review; R.S.A. 2002; Sylvain 2001). Beyond the stipulation stated above, S.D.7 does not regulate these practices or provide a means of assessing the maximum percentage of the domestic worker’s wage it may lawfully constitute. As a result, studies investigating “payment in kind” have had mixed findings. One study showed that domestic workers feel that “payment in kind” is an important element of their working relationship with their employers (C.A.S.E. 2010). Sylvain (2001:734) argues that “payments in kind” are constructed by workers as “gifts”, which serve to make the relationship more palatable as they ‘maintain a perceived bond of reciprocity and mutual assistance’.

In terms of food provision in particular, C.A.S.E. (2010) and Archer (2011) demonstrated that the end of apartheid and the introduction of S.D.7 has also had a mixed effect. Archer (2011:79) found that while some (live-out) domestic workers report that the quality of food they receive has improved since 1994, domestic workers generally receive ‘less food in total than they did during apartheid’ (2011:79). Additionally, Archer (2011) argues that food provision – while seemingly in line with S.D.7 – is often regulated by implicit rules reminiscent of the apartheid-era practice of “servants’ rations”, which discriminate against domestic workers. Some participants in the C.A.S.E. (2010) study felt they were worse off after the introduction of S.D.7, as employers are no longer permitted to deduct money for food and thus began providing less and/or poorer quality food for their domestic workers.

A third issue concerns restraints placed on Department of Labour officials expected to monitor the working conditions of domestic workers. Labour officials are prevented from ‘entering domestic premises without the home-owner’s consent’, and thus are unable to monitor working conditions where employers are absent or unwilling to allow them entry (Bamu 2011; du Toit 2010:223). Labour officials cite this as a ‘major obstacle’ to the effective monitoring of working conditions for domestic workers, and have called for this to be amended in S.D.7 (du Toit 2010:223).

A final area of concern is around the number of working hours, and the provisions regarding overtime, night work and “standby”. S.D.7 provides explicit regulations of the number of working hours a domestic worker may be required to work, but allows for overtime, night work and standby duty, where this is ‘in accordance with an agreement concluded by the employer and the domestic worker’, and if this agreement is made in writing (R.S.A. 2002:16). These clauses are aimed particularly at protecting live-in domestic workers, who are more vulnerable to exploitation in this regard. However, studies (C.A.S.E. 2010; Magwaza 2008) have suggested that these regulations are not easily negotiated by domestic workers. The C.A.S.E. study found that while live-out domestic workers’ hours fell within the stipulations of S.D.7, live-in domestic workers’ hours ‘often seemed to be in sharp contradiction to the law’ (2010:33). In addition, C.A.S.E.’s (2010) findings suggest that live-out domestic workers found it easier to negotiate overtime pay, as there is a clear distinction between normal working hours and overtime; while these boundaries are blurred for live-in domestic workers, making them more vulnerable to exploitation in this regard (C.A.S.E. 2010).

The Limitations of S.D.7

Several explanations for the continuing exploitation of South African domestic workers have been explored in the literature. One factor that has been identified concerns the matter of implementation of S.D.7, and the fact that this is dependent on individual employers in private contexts (Bamu 2011; du Toit 2010). Firstly, the ‘indifference or resistance’ of employers to implementing the changes brought about by S.D.7 has been identified as a key issue (du Toit 2010:224). This ‘indifference or resistance’ is heightened by the nature of the domestic labour space, a space conflated with the private home space of the employer (Cock 1989; Fish 2006). As it is a private space, it is ‘hidden’ from the public eye (Fish 2006:116), rendering the employer “sovereign” in her own space. Archer (2011) found that her sample of South African female employers rarely discussed the nature of their relationship with their domestic worker with friends or partners, suggesting there may be a lack of social pressure to enact fair labour practices in the home. As a result, Fish has suggested that ‘official labour policies (are rendered) *virtually*

meaningless within the private or hidden household work space’ (2006:116 e.a.), as this space ‘is difficult to monitor’ (2006:117).

Another explanation linked to the issue of the domestic labour space is the geographical isolation of domestic workers as a labour force (Ally 2008; du Toit 2010). Due to this geographic isolation, domestic workers are essentially ‘atomised’ (Cock 1989:22), meaning that there is no “shop floor” in which to share grievances, build moral support, or rally around injustices. As such, domestic workers’ unions have in the past had difficulty in rallying workers to their cause (although see Fish 2006 for a case study of successful lobbying by a domestic worker union). Even at the height of its popularity during apartheid, the South African Domestic Workers Union (S.A.D.W.U.) had 85,000 members of approximately 1 million workers nation-wide – less than 10% (Ally 2008). Paradoxically, in the democratic climate of post-apartheid South Africa, the only *national* domestic worker union’s⁸ membership has dropped from 11% at its launch in 2000 to 3% by 2001 (Fish 2006:121), and in 2011, S.A.D.S.A.W.U. was deregistered by the Department of Labour. While S.A.D.S.A.W.U. remains active, its deregistration means that its efficacy as a lobbying power for domestic workers is limited. For example, it cannot refer members’ disputes to the C.C.M.A. and is prevented from forming a Bargaining Council, to bargain at a national level for domestic workers’ rights (Kruger 2008). Research has suggested that domestic workers may have “lost faith” in domestic worker unions: Ally’s (2008) participants preferred to spend wages on insurance policies providing private legal assistance, than on union fees; and Magwaza’s (2008:88) participants stated that ‘membership does not guarantee you anything’, and that union fees are a ‘waste of money’. Additionally, some studies have reported that domestic workers may come under “fire” from their employers, should they openly affiliate themselves with a union (Ally 2008; C.A.S.E 2010; Fish 2006). Issues around unionisation may be compounded by the geographical isolation of workers, which results in there being ‘no single typical domestic worker experience in South Africa’ (C.A.S.E. 2010:64). This absence of a communal “shop floor” is hence one of the difficulties in rallying workers around the enforcement of laws regulating domestic labour.

A third barrier to implementing S.D.7 legislation is workers’ “limited

⁸ The South African Domestic Service and Allied Workers Union (S.A.D.S.A.W.U.)

Knowledge” of their rights and their capacity to enforce them. It has been found that workers’ general knowledge of their rights has increased since the introduction of S.D.7, but that their knowledge of specific provisions is ‘poor’, ‘contradictory’, or ‘incorrect’ (C.A.S.E 2010:64; Horton & Vilana 2001; Magwaza 2008). It has also been found that workers’ capacity to enforce these rights may be limited by fear of backlash or reprisal by employers (Horton & Vilana 2001; Magwaza 2008). As Magwaza argues, ‘*knowledge* about one’s rights and labour laws applicable to a job *is not enough* because most participants said they would prefer not to ... risk the possibility of losing their jobs’ (2008:88, e.a.). Thus, the spectre of poverty and unemployment is believed to limit domestic workers’ capacity to insist on their rights (du Toit 2010). In addition, du Toit (2010) argues that the devalued conception of domestic work results in the low self-esteem of domestic workers, which acts as a barrier to reducing power imbalances between domestic workers and their employers.

In sum, domestic labour is perceived – nationally and internationally – as a vulnerable labour sector, characterised by exploitation, poor working conditions and gender inequality. Nationally, and internationally, it has been argued that this can be addressed through legislation which entrenches human rights and an ethos of ‘decent work’ for domestic workers (du Toit 2010; I.L.O. 2012). S.D.7 demonstrates how South African policy makers attempted to weld a rights-based labour framework onto a problematic socio-historical context to promote and protect domestic workers’ rights. While S.D.7 has gone some way in improving working conditions for domestic workers, research has demonstrated that many domestic workers are still locked in exploitative working relationships. Explanations for why this is the case have centred on the perceived lack of access to legislated rights and/or a lack of compliance with S.D.7. The recommendations made to address these limitations have, for the most part, focussed on ways of enforcing the rights promulgated by S.D.7 and educating domestic workers about these rights (Bamu 2011; C.A.S.E. 2010; du Toit 2010). Both these explanations and recommendations can therefore be said to be informed by a rights-based approach.

The Limits of Rights-based Approaches

The barriers to implementing domestic labour legislation suggest that there

may be features of the institution and practice of domestic labour that are difficult to reach by way of the worker rights-based approach that informs S.D.7. The legislation recognised that workers are vulnerable, subject to exploitation, and in need of protection from the state (Ally 2008). In addition, the legislation also addresses the domestic worker as an agent, someone who is able to access her rights, negotiate with her employer, and use the legislation to hold her employer to account. The primary thrust of the legislation is to empower workers to exercise their rights and to protect themselves as they do so. Most important, the legislation seeks to protect the worker from being unfairly dismissed in the event that they challenge their employer.

However, the application of worker rights legislation reaches its limits in the domestic labour context where it is not only the fear of dismissal that prevents workers from exercising their rights. The longstanding, intimate and caring relations that often develop between workers and employers can also serve to undermine the ability of domestic workers to recognise exploitation and to take steps to change the status quo. Many domestic workers feel that they are “part of the family” and prefer not to enforce their legal rights in order to maintain “personalized relations” with their employers (Ally 2010). Such relationships are often characterized by paternalistic care in which beliefs, affections, and feelings of gratitude develop in a relationship which is perceived to be caring, fair and symbiotic (Durrheim *et al.* under review; Cock 1989; Hickson & Strous 1993; Sylvian 2001).

In addition to the fear of dismissal, social psychological features of these interpersonal relationships might affect the ability of workers to recognise and exercise their rights. Paternalistic relationships are governed by powerful group members who portray subordinates as weak (in need of care) and warm (deserving of care) (cf. the Stereotype Content Model in Fiske, Cuddy, Glick & Xu 2002). Jackman (1994) argued that for these relationships to endure, subordinate group members must be convinced of its logic – that they *need* the dominant group’s protection and assistance, and that acts of ‘caring’ demonstrate the dominant group’s affection for them. These relationships are therefore difficult to resist, as subordinate group members are recruited into a system of care and affection, which engenders gratitude and loyalty. Conflict between groups is thus circumvented, as the subordinate group is ‘bound emotionally and cognitively in a framework that is of the dominant group’s definition’ (Jackman 1994:15). Thus, the paternalistic

expression of care serves to shore up the privileged status of the dominant group⁹.

In the remainder of this article we demonstrate the effect domestic worker *relationships* can have on the way in which workers talk about problematic features of their relationships with their employers. We present five brief narratives in which domestic workers describe their relationships with their employers in an extremely positive way and use this to discount or minimise instances of discrimination that are reminiscent of apartheid-era practices (examples 1 and 2); and instances where their rights as workers were directly infringed (examples 3, 4 and 5). Research Masters students (2009 - 2010) under the supervision of the third author conducted interviews with 11 black female domestic workers (part of their course requirement.)

Narratives of Discrimination

Example 1

Thandeka is an older domestic worker, who has had years of domestic

⁹ Note on the authors' use of "paternalism": Paternalism serves the interests of privileged men and women by framing unequal or exploitative relationships as caring or protective, making them more difficult to resist. This is illustrated by domestic labour relations between 'maids' and 'madams' in South Africa (Ally 2008; Cock 1989; Sylvain 2001). While South African domestic labour relationships are typically between women, we would argue that "paternalistic" describes these relationships more accurately than "maternalistic" does. The institution of domestic labour supports a broader patriarchal framework where it is *women* who are responsible for the care of households. Domestic labour allows privileged women to 'buy out of' their domestic duties by employing less privileged women to do it for them (Cock 1989). While this labour relationship enables these more privileged women to compete with men in the labour market, ultimately it is women who largely remain responsible for the care of households, thus supporting the patriarchal status quo. Olive Schreiner describes this as 'female parasitism' (as cited in Cock 1989:11), and Cock (1989:1) as the 'oppression of women by women' (see also Ally 2010). Domestic labour in South Africa has often been referred to as paternalistic (Ally 2010; Cock 1989; Sylvain 2001) and hence we refer to this relationship as thus.

experience and specialises in the care of young infants. Thandeka portrayed herself as “spunky”, regaling the interviewer with humorous stories of her resistance to white employers who are portrayed as racist and discriminatory. In contrast, Thandeka presents her current employer of eight years as egalitarian and compassionate, describing her as ‘nice, she’s helping me, she’s same as my mother now’. Thandeka describes some of the ways her employer helps her:

they go to my home and see ‘what happened, what’s wrong?’ with my home and they help me. Uh, even my parents, even my- my family, check them. Even me, if I’m sick, I- he’ll-she’ll, they was a first person that I tell them I’m not well in my life and then they help me nicely. They give me the nice things to help me and now I’m feel comfortable, to my boss and my Madam.

Thandeka emphasises that her employers regularly return home from work to eat ‘my lunch... they eat what I’m cooking, phutu, rice, everything’, further emphasising the affectionate and non-discriminatory attitude of her employers towards her. However, she then reveals, problematically, that she waits for them to finish eating, cleans up after them, and then eats, which disrupts the portrayal of this equal relationship. The interviewer, on hearing this, asks Thandeka to explain this further (and by doing so, highlights that this information could be heard as problematic). Thandeka explains that,

We choose by s- our- ourself to- to take this time We’re changing by ourself because we see that it’s - it’s not n- nice time to eat the time they’re eating ... because there’s, already the boss is - is standing out and h - he’s going to work and we’re still sitting We just give the time to- to go out and then we’re sitting, how long, w- we like to sit. [Interviewer: Okay, *laughs*] We decide by ourself.

Thandeka thus presents herself as agentic, emphasising that it is her choice to not sit and eat with her employer.

Example 2

Like Thandeka, Mpumi has numerous years of experience working as a

domestic worker. She describes having worked in a number of places which she perceived as being exploitative or unpleasant. For example, the accommodation provided by her previous employer was 'cold, not (a) thing for people ... nothing inside', and she describes how the neighbour of this employer allowed her to sleep in 'her maid's room... to save me from the bad people, you see'. Through the intervention of this neighbour, Mpumi was found a new job with her current employer, Alice, and has worked for her for eleven years. Mpumi, in a similar way to Thandeka, portrays herself as a valued, appreciated member of the family, states that she views her employer as a 'sister'. Mpumi explains this to the interviewer:

I take Alice just like my, sister, you know? ... Because when you come in front of your sister ... And cry and say. Maybe I have got such problems like this and this. [Interviewer: Mm] Your sister will help you. But when you work to a person... and ask help. And then he doesn't or she doesn't help you... It's not nice you just say, 'I work because I am poor'.

This construction of the 'help' that Mpumi receives from Alice brings some kind of meaning or substance to their relationship, beyond working only 'because I am poor'. In return, Mpumi describes the loyalty, gratitude and affection she feels towards her 'madam', saying 'I always say ... maybe there can be fighting here, and then they [black people] say 'white people must go' ... I can take them and ... I will die with them at my house, because I know they have been good to me'.

Mpumi does a lot of discursive work to present Alice as being different to past apartheid-era employers, who typically treated their domestic workers as if 'this one has got lice ... this one have got some diseases'. However, she reveals to the interviewer that she and the 'gardener' use separate and inferior dishes when they eat. Mpumi provides justification for this by emphasising that it is *her choice* to eat from inferior dishes. She tells the interviewer that it is not Alice that says 'this is for you', but rather that it is Mpumi's choice to use a 'plastic plate' so that the 'gardener' does not feel that 'Mpumi use the better things' in comparison to him. In other words, Alice (theoretically) allows Mpumi to use 'a glass plate', but provides the 'gardener' with a 'plastic' dish. In order to manage her relationship with the 'gardener' Mpumi says she chooses to eat off of the same, saying she does so

to show ‘because I am like them I take so that they mustn’t worry’. She then emphasises that Alice has ‘got no apartheid this lady (.) has got not that heart She’s open for everybody’.

Both of these examples highlight instances which could be heard as problematic, due to their referencing of apartheid-era practices¹⁰. In both cases, however, the workers emphatically assert their role in creating these problematic instances. Rather than presenting their employers as discriminatory, Thandeka and Mpumi argue that it is their choice which creates these problematic instances, and as such, should not be viewed as problematic or discriminatory. In effect, this justificatory rhetoric around worker agency acts to discursively ‘argue away’ the problematic nature of these instances. While this ensures that the workers are not perceived as exploited, it transforms these instances from something that is discriminatory and a cause for concern, to something that it is unnecessary to resist.

Example 3

Nonku currently works for three different families, all of whom, she says, are very warm and welcoming and treat her as a valued member of the family. She presents herself as being happy to be a domestic worker despite the stigma associated with it, because she is ‘so free’, is ‘able to support (her) kids’ and is in a position where she can ‘learn a lot’. While Nonku also describes the physical ways she is cared for her by her employers (they ‘can give me what I don’t have with no problem’), she focuses more on the emotional care and respect she is shown by one of the families in particular (the Smiths) – for example, ‘she likes for us to come... and sit with her around the table and talk’; and ‘even during weekends they call and ask what we are doing and then they come to fetch us, go to their place for dinner’. The other families, Nonku states, also include her as a member of the family (while not to this level), but specifies that the Smiths, she ‘really enjoys’.

Nonku tells the interviewer that she is trusted completely in her employers’ homes, and is able to ‘go in every room’. However, Nonku then reveals that one of the families, the Johnsons, lock her indoors when they go out, and do not leave a key for her. This instance of being locked in, then,

¹⁰ That is, waiting on the family before eating their own food; being given inferior (and separate) dishes to eat off of.

could work against the utopian, egalitarian construction of her employers that dominate the rest of Nonku's interview. However, while Nonku tells the interviewer that 'at first it worried me', she subsequently dismisses the experience of being locked in through the repeated use of 'never'; for example, 'I'm *never* in any hurry', 'it's *never* occurred to me to ask her', 'I've *never* been upset with her for doing that' (e.a.). This dismisses any potential reading of the experience of being "locked in" as a form of discrimination. By minimising it and by justifying her employer's action through the suggestion that 'maybe someone stole from her', Nonku rationalises her employer's actions in a way which does not attribute blame to herself or her employer. This positions "being locked in" as justifiable and non-discriminatory. However, as with examples 1 and 2, if a discriminatory instance is not recognised as discriminatory, it cannot be resisted or negotiated.

Example 4

Rachel has worked for her current employers for thirteen years. Like the previous examples, Rachel described her employers in a very positive way: as treating her as a member of the family, and assisting her in various ways, such as putting her on their medical aid; driving her to the doctor; giving her unwanted household items; et cetera. In return, Rachel is expected to assist with the care of her employer's disabled adult son, in addition to her domestic responsibilities. This includes assisting her employer in putting the son to bed when the employer's husband is away from home, and requires Rachel to be "on standby" between 8 – 10pm at night. Earlier in the interview she described how she was not paid for this extra work: 'they didn't give me the money, that one I don't like... and I don't know why'. However, later in Rachel's interview this problematic "extra work" is reconstituted as a non-problematic "favour". Rachel tells the interviewer how her employer requests her "assistance":

when the people say 'please Rachel', you say 'alright well'. 'Ple-please help me'. Since by please, so I please them, because sometimes they please me a lot... they say 'please Rachel won't you come to help me'. So I'm coming to help. But I a-, they said 'no, Rachel, please could you please help me'.

In this part of the interview Rachel moves away from the earlier portrayal of limited agency ('they didn't give me the money ... and I don't know why'). She reframes herself through the repeated use of 'please', as being empowered and agentic, able to dispense help/favours to her employer. This agency is further emphasised through her control over *when* her assistance is given - 'at five o'clock, I'm going to my room, maybe I'm coming at nine o'clock to put them to the bed, it depends what time I want, sometimes half past nine sometimes ten, you see'. Immediately following this reframing of her agency, Rachel shares how she is normally paid for this assistance: 'sometime they give me Cane (laughs), you see, drink, sometimes they give 'O-oh Rachel, airtime', you see, they bought me airtime and things in the house'. In other words, (re)payment "in kind" is made informally, through the giving of items such as alcohol, air time, and household goods. This example illustrates how Rachel is drawn into a system of reciprocated favours, which is facilitated through the intimacy and gratitude she feels for their assistance ('so I please them because sometimes they please me a lot'). But by glossing Rachel's labour as "help" or "favours", instead of as overtime, Rachel is unable to negotiate payment for these hours. Instead she is paid "in kind" – with favours determined by the employer, such as alcohol or air time.

Example 5

Mpumi (discussed earlier in example 2) also gives an example of how she is drawn into a system of negotiated "favours". Mpumi describes how she is required to stay with her employer's children until the employers return home from work – sometimes until 7pm, which means she works up to 12 hour shifts on these days. Mpumi argues that 'I don't mind', despite feelings of frustration ('when I want to stop my job at a time and then they didn't stop their work. Oh, it's hard'). Mpumi tells the interviewer that when she feels 'it's hard', she tells herself:

I must remember. This people. As I take them as my brother and sister [Interviewer: Mm] They help me with my children. They pay for my children at school. They don't ask me anything. I take them, just like that. I must help them, as they help me.

In other words, Mpumi draws on the “gifts”, “favours” and assistance her employer provides her with to help her to dismiss feelings of frustration at her long working hours. The provision of these gifts is used to justify her resolve to ‘help them as they help me’. Mpumi adds, ‘This people help me. They don’t say ‘no’. [Interviewer: Mm] ‘It’s time up now’ (laughs) ‘we cannot help you’ [Interviewer: Oh ja] Help [Interviewer: Ja] Somebody. Who help you’. As with Rachel, Mpumi is drawn into a system of reciprocation, where she feels she is required to offer “help” over and above her normal duties, to recompense her employer for the “help” she receives from her.

Discussion and Conclusion

Legislation that has been developed in South Africa to protect the rights of domestic workers typically portrays workers as agents who are motivated to challenge exploitation while being in need of support as they do so. In this article we have argued that the limited success of this approach may also be attributed to the lack of motivation on the part of domestic workers to challenge exploitation and unfair treatment. In particular, the paternalistic nature of the domestic labour relationship undermines resistance to exploitation in a number of ways.

The paternalistic imperative to ‘help somebody who helps you’ draws workers into a system of reciprocated favours. This system glosses domestic labour relationships as equal and non-exploitative, and enables domestic workers to dismiss instances of exploitation as “help” offered in return for the employers’ paternalistic care. As such, the workers are not seen as victims (of exploitation) but as agents in an exchange economy.

Six of our eleven interviewees described their relationship in terms of mutual or reciprocated helping. As the narratives presented here show, the gloss of mutual assistance works to render exploitation as non-problematic and thus not a matter of undue concern or a cause for resistance. Hence paternalistic relationships – as much as the spectre of poverty, unemployment, lack of knowledge of their rights, weak organisational capacity, et cetera– can also undermine and act to constrain the ability of domestic workers to negotiate their labour rights.

Nonetheless, the idea of reciprocated exchange entrenches inequality. Although the exchange may be glossed as mutually beneficial, this conceals the fact that the “help” the domestic worker offers is often *required* in terms

of their working arrangement; while the “help” offered by the employer is often constituted as “extras” or “gifts”. Paternalistic care values the person of the domestic worker, but devalues the labour, for example, making an evening of after-hours work appear to have the value of an occasional shot of Cane.

Moreover, there is no legal requirement to provide these “gifts” to the domestic worker. S.D.7 states only that payment in kind, *where relevant*, should be included in the written contract along with their value. The construction of payments in kind as “gifts” and “extras” was common in the data set and works to negate any obligation to include them in the contract. Hence, there would be no recourse for the domestic worker should the provision of these “gifts” be revoked, as these “gifts” are, in terms of S.D.7, a private act of generosity, and not a right, despite forming a much-needed supplement for low wages. Therefore, while these narratives of mutual helping and paternalistic care gloss the relationship as equal, we argue that this discourse serves to shore up the inequalities between employer and worker, by maintaining the power differentials between them (Durrheim *et al.* under review).

Workers, then, are bound in a system of discrimination and affection, of exploitation and care. Paternalism provides a ‘sweet persuasion’ to accept one’s place in an unequal system (Jackman 1994:2). The problem is that these “supplements” or “gifts” occur outside of the formal labour relationship and cannot easily be regulated even though S.D.7 makes allowances for the disclosure of payments in ‘kind’. While paternalistic care may well concede a measure of humanity and dignity to workers (through feeling they are appreciated and loved) and salve the conscience of employers, it also undermines resistance and entrenches inequality. By dismissing instances of exploitation and providing “help” or “favours” for their employers, domestic workers maintain the harmony in an unequal relationship at the cost of their ability to resist or negotiate with employers.

This may partly account for the reason that the ostensibly progressive domestic labour legislation in South Africa (Ally, 2010; Fish, 2006; R.S.A. 2002) has not translated easily onto social justice in reality. Paternalism serves to reinforce hierarchy, devalue domestic labour and blunt motivation to resist. And yet, by adopting the rights based-approach, current policy provides no way of regulating this informal economy of favour and exchange which limit the ability of workers to negotiate their rights. As such,

paternalism serves to lock domestic workers into relationships that are strongly reminiscent of apartheid; while still allowing domestic workers to feel that they are a valued and respected “member of the family”.

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Appraisal of African Epistemology in the Global System

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Abstract

Prior to colonialism, Africans as every other people with common identity and culture had their peculiar way of attaining knowledge and confronting life issues. However, with the dawn of western expansionism, western-oriented mode of behaviour and knowledge acquisition became objectified and universalized. Consequently, any form of knowledge that did not conform to the western model was deemed irrational and unworthy of scholarship. Since the ostensible decolonization of the continent after independence, education in Africa remains western oriented. Outsiders, as well as some Africans, dismiss African-oriented epistemology as being unscientific and delusory. Albeit the debasement of African epistemology has become somewhat obsolete, mainstream epistemological considerations rely hugely on western oriented and universalized form of knowledge acquisition. Beyond the purported ‘unscientific’ nature of African epistemology, this research underscores that powerful nations delineate what constitute valid knowledge worthy of pursuit and what is not. Beside its holistic nature, the intuitive, religious and mythological perspectives in the consideration of African epistemology are justified and deserving to be considered in contemporary education system and epistemological discourses. Any attempt at considering knowledge under the lens of western-oriented epistemology alone, is a procrustean reductionism. A better decolonization of the continent can be achieved with the transformation of the mindset of Africans to appreciate their indigenous form of knowledge and incorporate it in contemporary education and epistemological discourses. Additionally, Africans ought to develop their socio-economic and political system to give the continent a reasonable power-base to assert itself and its epistemological views in the global system.

Keywords: African epistemology, Western epistemology, rationality, intuition, myth, religious knowledge

0. Introduction

It is rather unfortunate that contemporary epistemological¹ discourses rarely capture the plural indigenous knowledge systems which had made meaning to individuals, peoples as well as cultural groups in the past. These indigenous knowledge systems continue to make profound meaning to people in the face of the limitations of mainstream scientific epistemological traditions. Although it shares commonalities with other non-African people, African indigenous knowledge in particular, continues to have profound and meaningful bearing on the lives, behaviour and thinking of people of African descent. Yet, in the academia and epistemological discourses, African-oriented knowledge systems are deemed unworthy of academic considerations – if not by design, then by default. African indigenous forms of knowledge acquisition (with its commonalities and particularities) have virtually been dislodged for a strictly western-oriented² scientific form of knowledge acquisition in the continent. The denigration of African-oriented epistemology in contemporary academic considerations in Africa is consequent from a long history of racial debasement of the humanity and rationality of Africans as well as the historical western superiority context.

Munyadrazi Mawere (2011:1) notes that,

there is monumental literature by philosophers like David Hume,

¹ Epistemology is construed as ‘the study of theories about the nature and scope of knowledge, the evaluation of the presuppositions and basis of knowledge, and the scrutiny of knowledge claims’ (Kaphagawani & Malherbe 2002:220).

² A dominant epistemological tradition espoused by western powers which regard scientific methods as the genuine and universal means of knowledge acquisition. Although virtually every culture has scientific means of knowledge acquisition, science is not considered by some indigenous knowledge systems (especially African indigenous knowledge systems) as the only genuine means of knowledge acquisition.

George W.F. Hegel, Immanuel Kant, Lucien Levy-Bruhl and Diedrich Westermann that describe Africans as ‘tabula rasa’, a people with no reason/rationality; hence without a history and worse still philosophy.

In the context of the colonial relationship between Africa and the west, African epistemology was degradingly deemed irrational and unscientific because it was allegedly opined to be muddled with emotions, religious beliefs, intuitions and myths (Hallen 2004:29; Laleye 2002:87). The superiority context of western colonial powers meant that they were unwilling to find meaning in the ideas, values and systems that run athwart to theirs. In line with the educational legacy imposed on the continent, African-oriented knowledge systems and values were regarded as unworthy of academic pursuit – except for studies by some anthropologists, colonial officials and mission-oriented personnel from mission organisations. The majority of these people regarded African knowledge systems as of a lesser form and not important for the developing of an Africa-based modern knowledge system.

Apart from the denigration of African indigenous knowledge, debates on the validity of African epistemological views were shrouded by underlying impressions of the inferiority of African minds. Western philosophers had been sceptical about the existence, if not certain of the absence, of rationality and reflective thought in African minds (Odhiambo 2010:9). Besides the role of slave trade and colonialism in institutionalizing the inferiority of Africans, the works of renowned European academic thinkers such as that of Immanuel Kant and David Hume, among many others, reinforced the idea of the inferiority of African minds and serviced Western expansionist agenda. In his *Essay ‘Of National Characters’* (1776:152), Hume (1997:33) in a footnote states, ‘I am apt to suspect the Negroes and in general all other species of men (for there are four or five different kinds) to be naturally inferior to the whites’. While referring to a statement made by a Negro carpenter, Kant (1997:57) in his *On National Characteristics* (1724) avers, ‘this fellow was quite black from head to foot, a clear proof that what he said was stupid’. This judgement was made not in assessment of the value of the Negro’s statement but based on his colour. For Kant, blacks are inherently stupid or rather irrational. Such claims provided theoretical groundings and justification for the subjugation, exploitation,

oppression and ill-treatment of Africans who were construed to be less human than their Western counterparts.

This research notes from the outset that the use of the terms *African* and *Western* is not used in a racial sense. As noted by Ron Mallon (2006:529), the fact that racial essences do not exist is an ontological consensus. In his essay, 'Race, Culture, Identity: Misunderstood Connections' (1994), Anthony Kwame Appiah frees us from the shackles of racial distinctions. As a racial skeptic, Appiah (1994:64) contends that race does not exist because racial terms and concepts fail to describe or refer to anything real. For Appiah, since racial identities, terms and concepts are derivative of the false conception of racial essences, it follows that they are false as well. It becomes corollary to argue that racial identities, terms and concepts be abrogated in the understanding and activities of society (Mallon 2006:529). Nonetheless, there exist groups of people with shared culture, historical experience, believe and value system, etc. Far from racializing the terms *African* and *western*, this study contends that the cultural, historical and geographical background of Africans, Westerners and people of other different regions have led to variances in epistemological views.

Against this backdrop, the research aims at appraising African-oriented epistemology in the global system dominated by western-oriented³ epistemological views. Although science is also considered as a means of knowledge acquisition in Africa, it does not account as the only valid and genuine means of knowledge acquisition as propagated by the western tradition. African indigenous knowledge systems have a multifaceted means of acquiring knowledge (Kaphagawani & Malherbe 2002). This study contends with the African-oriented principles and forms of knowledge acquisition such as the intuitive, religious and mythological means, which are easily dismissed in mainstream western epistemological discourses. Albeit sharing common traits with other forms of knowledge, African indigenous forms of knowledge acquisition – with its particularities – ought to be considered seriously in the academic and epistemological milieu. This will go a long way in promoting the values entrenched in African indigenous

³ The use of western-oriented scientific epistemology is meant to denote that the scientific epistemology which has become the mainstream epistemological tradition has resulted from the western objectification and universalization of scientific form of knowledge.

knowledge systems which has been marginalized in mainstream epistemological debates.

The first section of this article engages African epistemology in crises. It examines whether there are divergent rationalities about how things ought to be amongst peoples. It goes further to explore the bearing of power relations on the constitution of what is valid knowledge and what is not. The second section considers the nature of African-oriented epistemology. The third section examines some perspectives in the consideration of African epistemology such as the intuitive, religious and mythological perspectives⁴. The fourth section culminates the study with recommendations for the appraisal of African epistemology in the global system.

1.0 African Epistemology in Crisis

Over the years, Western philosophers tend to consider knowledge to be strongly tied to a universal truth. Western philosophers such as Renê Descartes, Francis Bacon, Augustus Comte, David Hume, John Locke, Bishop George Berkeley, etc. have all sought to attain absolute certainty in knowledge. In their obsession for absolute certainty, they adjudge whatever they ‘clearly’ conceive as knowledge or the right means of attaining knowledge to be indubitable and universal truth. Significantly, the deep seated quest in western philosophers for certainty was realized with the scientific revolution in the seventeenth century CE. The heralds of the emerging science such as Francis Bacon (1561-1626), Sir Isaac Newton (1643-1727), Pierre Simon de Laplace (1749-1827)⁵, etc. laid great stress on observation, experiments and mathematical reasoning as the right means of obtaining information about reality (Copleston 1963:89). Science yielded

⁴ This study observes that the foregoing perspectives of African epistemology share common traits with non-African indigenous epistemologies. Yet, such commonalities are varied in the African context. The study aims therefore to ensure that African epistemology (with its commonalities and particularities) is incorporated in the academic and epistemological discourses in Africa as well as the globe.

⁵ Pierre Simon de Laplace (1749-1827) acclaimed that the ‘universe is deterministic’ and that scientific laws could help us ‘predict everything that would happen in the universe including human behavior’ (Hawking 1988:53).

(and continues to yield) tremendous effect in our world. An intellectual fanaticism grew in the western world acclaiming science as having utmost authority in the interpretations of life over other forms of interpretations such as philosophical, religious, mythical, spiritual, humanistic and social (Franz 1953:822). If we are to attain any true knowledge at all, the scientific method of inquiry is considered the only means of attaining genuine knowledge and the best way of explaining reality meaningfully.

Albeit the foregoing *scientistic* view has been criticized severally in the face of scientific limitations, this view continues to hold subtle and implicit sway in western epistemological and academic discourses. Via western expansionism, scientific epistemological and academic traditions have been imposed and universalized as the proper means of attaining valid knowledge. Any form of knowledge that does not conform to scientific standards is considered delusory and unworthy of consideration in the academic milieu. With the colonial relationship between Africans and Westerners in particular, Western-driven scientific epistemology came to predominate the education and epistemological discourses in Africa as well as the globe. Traditional African view and rationality regarding what constitute adequate knowledge became dislodged for that prescribed by western powers.

Interestingly, Stephen Theron (1995:16) in his 1995 work entitled *Africa, Philosophy and the Western Tradition*, contends that rationality and spirituality is common to humans but westerners developed this tradition first. Hence, it is their (westerners) prerogative to share those riches with others (Theron 1995:26). Such western supremacist view was confidently surmised by Hume (1997:33) as follows:

There never was a civilized nation of any other complexion than white, nor even any individual eminent either in action or speculation. No ingenious manufactures amongst them, no arts, no sciences.

As insisted by Theron (1995:27), Westerners ‘having a variety of gifts’ must help others in ‘the dissemination and appropriation of philosophical and scientific culture’. Thus, Africans, as well as other people with non-western views, should strive to adopt and imbibe the prototypic western way of life

and scientific epistemological views⁶. For Theron, western rationality, views and judgments are supreme and universal.

Studies have shown however that rationality is many-sided (Nel 2005; Gyekye 1987; Langdon 2009; Foucault 1977; etc.). While grappling with the fact that there are plural and divergent views about issues between peoples, Kwame Gyekye (1987:25) holds aptly that rationality is essentially a cultural phenomenon that reflects the cultural experience and background of people. Despite the rigorous efforts of reasoning made in the hope of arriving at a single answer that everyone will resonate with, rational discourses end up creating different possible answers that may be incommensurable with each other. As noted by Hofstede (1980:25), culture is ‘the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one human group from another’. People who belong to a cultural group perceive the world in a certain way that may be different from the worldview of others and their peculiar worldview binds them together. Yet, no culture can claim superiority over another (Browaey & Price 2008:10).

In tandem with Gyekye (1987), reasoning, knowledge, attitudes, behaviours and living standards are determined by the socio-cultural milieu, environmental background, and the specific period of time and space in which people live in. Thus, ‘the philosophy of an individual thinker’ cannot be divorced ‘from the ideas current among the people’ (Gyekye 1987:25)⁷.

People have a predilection to consider or interpret things in different ways according to their cultural, religious, emotional, educational and epochal background in such a way that their conclusions may be entirely different from the conclusions of people of a different background confronted with similar issues⁸. Relativist as it is, the complexity of the universe could

⁶ Although, non-westerners resonate with scientific epistemology, Westerners – in a bid to highlight their supremacist ideologies – tend to focus on scientific form of knowledge acquisition as the only valid means of acquiring knowledge thereby debasing other ways of acquiring knowledge.

⁷ For instance, a Christian may view reality from a different spiritual perspective from a Muslim or a pagan given their different spiritual tenets and convictions. The difference in perception and worldview also affect one’s reasoning with regards to issues of life.

⁸ Hence, although epistemology is about the study of knowledge, the means by which people derive knowledge vary from one milieu to another.

hardly be explicable from an absolute paradigm. Wiredu (2004:13) argues that the advantage of relativism is that it entertains differences between cultures but it does not remain there because it provides grounds for dialogues between them. Hence, on what basis should western rationality and views be objectified and universalized to the detriment of the rationality and views of non-westerners? In this regard it is important to note that culture inevitably articulates with knowledge. The question is whether this is acknowledged and accommodated or not⁹.

Michel Montaigne (2013) maintains that clinging tenaciously to one's views while ignoring that of others is being irrational. Marie-Joelle Browaeys and Roger Price (2008:9) note that 'each society defines its own norms and the ways in which they are realized'. Every culture has the right to conceive the world in its own image (Wiredu 1980:60). Although African epistemology reckons with the scientific means of knowing, it does not consider scientific methods to be the only valid and reliable means of knowledge acquisition. Based on what yardstick should western view of what should constitute a valid epistemology enjoy monopoly and universality at the expense of the African one?

In a world characterized by power relations, Foucault aptly contends that power makes absolute knowledge. For Foucault:

Truth is a thing of this world. 'Truth' is linked in a circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain it, and to effects of power which induce and which extend it (Foucault 1977: 131 - 132).

Whatever is seen as an absolute truth is a social construct determined by powerful and influential people (Foucault 1977:131). Using their resources e.g. wealth, ideas with universalizing tendencies, and technologies, few people (in this study, the Western academy) who wield power and influence over other people coerce them to accept their views and rationality as true. In accord with Dare Arowolo (2010:1) 'colonialism, slave trade and

⁹ Philip Nel (2005:8) in line with Edward Wadie Said, notes that 'rationality and truth are related to local conditions and are culture-bound, and it is a myth that truth claimed by the Western world is free from preconditions, historical locality, and non-political'.

missionaries are the bastions of Western civilization and culture in Africa'. Intentionally and unintentionally, colonialism and western civilization suppressed African ways of life and thought processes. Marais Rogas (1994) argues that the colonialists did not only find raw materials in lands, they also found raw materials in human beings who they could impose their structures and ideologies on. African ways of life and epistemological views became considered as archaic, obsolete, primitive, savage and unworthy of academic pursuit. Colonially imposed western systems gradually permeated the socio-economic and political aspects of Africa¹⁰.

In line with Martin Odei Ajei (2007:112), 'western science has portrayed itself as the only universally valid framework for the explanation and prediction of natural and social phenomena'. Any form of knowledge that does not meet the standards of science is deemed irrational, nonsensical and unworthy of being referred to as knowledge at all. Despite the supposed decolonization of the continent in post-colonial Africa, African education systems remain largely modelled and dependent on western systems of education that are largely informed by western-based scientific methodologies. As products of western education, some post-colonial African scholars deem African rationality and knowledge systems as primitive, superstitious, and unacceptable. Besides, the strict western mode of censorship in the education sector forces African scholars to write scholarly works in tandem with mainstream western-oriented epistemologies (Mawere 2011:2). One has to be nurtured in western education and epistemologies to survive and fit in the western imposed political, economic and social system. Subsequent sections shall discuss African epistemology emphasizing the limits of western scientifically-based epistemology.

2.0 African Epistemology in Context

Bert Hamminga (2005:57) is instructive in noting that the African epistemological view is immediately social. In African epistemology, an individual is insufficient to attain knowledge alone without doing so in a social context (Ajei 2007:191). Ernest A. Ruch (1984:47) notes that the

¹⁰ For Theron (1995:12) the rest of humanity are mere users and beneficiaries of the '... Western movement of technology, natural and social science, philosophy and, even or especially, religion ...'.

African Knower thinks in, for and through his/her society. Via one's participation in the social context, one knows. In this respect, knowledge comes as a given via tradition, ancestors and heritage. Here, the acquisition of knowledge becomes a 'we' enterprise (Hamminga 2005:58). In the western system on the other hand, knowledge is predominantly an individual quest. The individual sets oneself apart and analyzes objects independently.

African epistemology is often indicted for being a communal venture that denies individuals the ability to reason and come up with knowledge that is uninfluenced by society and the irrationality of the community. However, western epistemology, steeped in the scientific tradition as noted by Theron (1995:16), is oblivious that one is inevitably influenced by societal factors in one's interpretations and judgements of reality. Francis Bacon envisioned a science that derives its knowledge and its explanation of reality solely from empirical observation without speculations and social influences (Sahakian 1968:125). In tandem with Francis Bacon, logical positivists claim that scientists approach nature with an innocent and uncorrupted eye devoid of background assumptions before making theories in a bid to understand and explain reality.

However, Sandra Hardings à la Thomas Kuhn (1922-1996) and Paul Feyerabend (1924-1994) contends that scientific theories are socially constructed and ordered (Ajei 2007:112; Kuhn 1962:53). The problems and things that need focus in our environments, e.g. the problems of cancer, HIV/AIDS, security, etc., and our attempt to solve those problems, determine and direct scientific observations. Anthony O'Hear (1989:16) insists that we cannot make any observation without some unverified point of view or some ideas concerning the nature of what we are observing. A scientist making observations would ignore some facts because he or she inevitably has some idea of what kind of thing he or she wants to observe. So, scientific judgments about reality inevitably reflect the background myths, biases, beliefs, values and imaginations of the people who engage in the observation of reality. African epistemology is not faced with the challenge involved in the denial of societal influence in one's knowledge and interpretation of things. The participation and efforts of Individuals in society also contribute to the derivation of knowledge in its social dimension as well. Zulu M. Itibari (2006:37) rightly observes that Indigenous African knowledge is not based or derivative from individuals alone but it is a communal or collective understanding and rationalization of community. Such collective

understanding emphasizes the dialectics, cooperation and togetherness involved in knowledge acquisition as against the individualistic or rather self-glorifying means that ignores the social element in acquiring knowledge.

Placide Tempels (1959:40) contends that in African epistemology, there is an intimate ontological bond and relationship between every being. Tempels (1959:41) posits that the African view of a *world of forces (beings)* is like ‘a spider’s web of which no single thread can be caused to vibrate without shaking the whole network’. Hence, African-oriented knowledge is derivative from a chain of relationships. Like a spider’s web, the knowledge of one aspect of reality is intertwined with the knowledge of other aspects (Onyewuenyi 1991; Tempels 1959:41) ¹¹. Ruch (1984:36) affirms that in African epistemology, knowledge is an integrative grasp of reality. It entails the recognition that the whole universe is a single whole. Every aspect of reality is interdependent on each other. Thus, in the vision of totality, Africans conceive reality to be in harmony. According to Ruch (1984), an African seeks the order that ought to be in the universe and uses his/her findings to give meaning to his/her existence and the existence of the whole of reality. In this respect, African epistemology takes on a holistic approach that encompasses experiential, rational, religious, intuitive, symbolic, mythical, and emotional aspects of reality.

Western epistemological tradition is prominent for being technical and analytical in such a way that our world outlook is subjected to systematic scrutiny through rigorous rational analytic methods (Wiredu 1991:87). Westerners contend with reality by making methodological, mathematical and logical formations that aid scholars to differentiate between what is rational, empirical or mystical. Sogolo (2002:264) argues that Westerners have only managed to bypass, ‘not resolve’, the problem of the one and many by only comprehending reality fragmentarily. Reflective of René Descartes’ works, westerners abstract and fragment mind and body, spirit and material, etc. to acquire ‘indubitable’ knowledge. Yet, as argued by Ajei (2007:190),

¹¹ Placide Tempels’s *Bantu Philosophy* is seminal as it sparked the debates and interests on the existence and nature of African philosophy (Odhiambo 2010:26). However, Tempels’ work *Bantu Philosophy* is also criticized – mainly for being a study to aid westerners in their efforts and strategies to civilize and Christianize Africans who were still considered savage and primitive (Odhiambo 2010:26).

western fragmentation of knowledge has yielded unnecessary distinctions in reality. It has created distinctions between objectivism and subjectivism, rationalism and empiricism. In such dichotomized epistemological system, human beings are separated from nature. Humans become objective analysers of nature. The disconnection between humans and other parts of nature has led humans to act as superiors and exploiters of nature.

However, in African-oriented epistemology, such dichotomy rarely exists. Reflective of its holistic nature, there is no such division as rationalism and empiricism, subjectivism and objectivism, secular and the supernatural among many other western-driven dichotomies (Ajei 2007:190). Humans and nature are inextricable in such a way that we (humans) cannot know the object (nature) if detached (Ajei 2007:191). This connected form of knowledge is a knowledge that is conscious of the hierarchy, interaction and cohesion of things (Odhiambo 2010; Tempels 1959:48). One identifies and respects the position and role of various forces in the universe. Tempels (1995:47) emphasizes that true wisdom for Africans lies in ontological knowledge, the discernment of the nature of forces and their reciprocal relationship. Thus, in an intrinsic relationship with human forces and with all other forces, the knowing person does not isolate other facets of reality in trying to make meaning of things¹².

In African epistemology, knowledge has an intrinsic link with wisdom. The African knower does not only seek a science of reality – a pragmatist knowledge of how to address particular issues. Rather, he or she seeks wisdom of life and this wisdom is achieved via a multidimensional approach to life (Ruch 1984:46). Given the holistic and complex nature of

¹² African epistemological tradition faces the challenge of being more critical so as to ensure that African epistemological claims are subject to improvement in line with contemporary social, economic and political circumstances. Trends in African philosophy such as philosophic sagacity as propagated by Odera Oruka, Hermeneutic philosophy espoused by Tsenay Serequeherhan as well as professional philosophy advocated by Paulin Hountondji have emerged to emphasize and improve on the critical aspect of African epistemology as against the trend of ethno-philosophy which tends to uphold uncritical traditional views. As argued by Wiredu (1980:x), as social circumstances change so too must people's philosophy and outlook in life undergo critical evaluation and transition.

knowledge, ancestors¹³ and elders are deemed repositories of knowledge. As noted by Tempels (1959:48), wisdom for Africans is a practical and experiential one that gives consideration to age. In a special way, Africans accord proper knowledge, which is holistic in nature, to elders. It will be a misconception to think that all elders are wise given that there are some elders who are not seen as custodians of knowledge and they are not consulted. But on a general basis, elders have gone through different stages of life and they have experienced life at a broader scale than the young.

This does not entail that young people cannot know as people could learn via formal education and the study and experience of phenomena. Rather, knowledge and wisdom for Africans go hand in hand. The accord of proper knowledge to elders only implies that the young can hardly comprehend the proper interaction and cohesion of things given their limited stage of life and experiences even though they (young people as well as any person) can know about how to handle some particular situations. Onyewuenyi (1991:43) observes that 'there are many talents and clever skills that remain far short of wisdom'. It is in recognition of the complexity of African epistemology that Ruch (1984:27) maintains that philosophizing is the interest of few people (elders) with intuitive sights and rational stamina to probe deeper into challenging problems. This people (elders) who are the repositories of knowledge serve the needs of others – the masses of people – in the overall human quest to attain deeper knowledge of reality¹⁴. If the ancestors and elders have lived long then it follows that they must have known a lot in the course of their existence. Such considerations serve as the basis of inquiry for scholars of philosophic sagacity, a trend in African philosophy which examines the insights of wise elders. Wise elders¹⁵ do not only derive knowledge from experience or serve as custodians of knowledge

¹³ Ancestors provide a knowledge link between the living and the dead.

¹⁴ However, some superior knowledge is bequeathed to some members of the community for the special purposes in the community e.g. the knowledge of traditional healers (Tempels 1959:56).

¹⁵ To accord proper knowledge to elders is an in-built mechanism of ensuring a broad dimension to knowledge; emphasizing on-going stride towards the attainment of knowledge which goes beyond technical know-how and limited comprehensions; and a way of ensuring the harmonious and united progression of the community under the guidance of experienced minds.

from one generation to another. They also criticize, reject, add and/or modify traditional ideas (Wiredu 1980:21). In his works, Odera Oruka (1983) identified intelligent and adventurous-minded sages that do not only disseminate critical traditional ideas but also proffer recommendations on how to improve them. The knowledge of the elders guides and directs the affairs of the community.

In terms of accessibility and education, Gyekye (1987:13) contends that philosophical thought in Africa is reflected in the practices, oral literature and minds of the people, and not the minds and practices of a few. This is because knowledge and wisdom is circulated in African societies via rituals, proverbs, myths, folktales, folk songs, moral values, beliefs, customs, traditions music, art symbols, institutions and practices of the people (Gyekye 1987:13; Itibari 2006:36). These provide a multidimensional background for the acquisition of knowledge. Such multipronged approach to education aids one to develop wisdom of life that does not only concentrate on studying a given phenomenon at the expense of other important areas of knowing.

It is disturbing that in our contemporary Westernized-world, people tend to be satisfied with only acquiring knowledge about specific aspects of life while being terribly under-informed and immature in terms of other areas of study and development. Such practice, rooted in Western job-oriented approach debases the quality of human life and reduces humans to machines that are meant to only fill in particular gaps of knowledge and expertise at the expense of a holistic human development (Ajei 2007). Taking a cue from African system of education, specialization in one aspect of life does not preclude one from a thorough grounding in other facets of life as well. Here, for instance, one who is focusing on the study of physics is not only assessed by his/her ability in that field alone but also in respect to other aspects of life such as the psychological, political, social and moral aspects.

3.0 Perspectives on African Epistemology

Despite its holistic and integrative nature, African epistemology can be considered from different dimensions. I shall discuss three of the different dimensions to African epistemology: the intuitive, religious and mythological aspects of African epistemology.

3.1 Intuitive Knowledge

Ruch (1984:46) argues that African indigenous knowledge ‘does not follow the fragmenting activity of abstractive knowledge, its contact with the real is more immediate and involves the whole man (sic.) and not only his intellect’. In other words, the African knows through all his/her faculties; senses, emotions and intellect. Consistent with Nasseem ‘b Zubairi (1991:1), knowledge, for Africans, is a ‘co-operation of all human faculties and experiences’, a global reaction. In African epistemology, knowledge is not considered in terms of the traditional western notion of mind’s conformity to reality or the Kantian notion of reality conforming to mind. Rather, in African epistemology, knowledge is a co-operation of all human faculties and experiences, a co-operation that does not just consider one’s immediate experience but one that goes beyond that to consider one’s experience in its entirety. Thus, at the same time, an African sees, feels, imagines, reasons, thinks and intuit. Everything comes together in a single whole in African thought. Thus, in one act of intuition, one grasps the totality of reality.

3.2 Religious Knowledge

According to Stephen Ellis and Gerrie ter Haar (2007:387), ‘religion in ... Africa is best considered as a belief in the existence of an invisible world, distinct but not separate from the visible one’. In the socio-political and economic mindset of a holistic knower, religion is not divorced from one’s epistemic vision. Via religious prism, Africans make sense of existence (Ellis & ter Haar 2007:387). In the epistemic experience of Africans, religion provides a room for the transcendental being that sheds more light on material existence and experiences of humans. Given that philosophy is a quest for ultimate existence, African epistemology tied to religion fulfils that quest by its reference to supernatural beings (Gyekye 1987:8). Tempels (1959:48) notes that God, who is wisdom and knowledge in itself endows human beings with the power to know. Here, divine beings are actively engaged in the epistemic experience of humans as they directly or indirectly reveal things to human beings in their experiences (dreams and life experiences).

Wiredu (1980:38) notes that ‘the ubiquity of references to gods and all sorts of spirits in traditional African explanations of things’ perplexes western epistemological thinkers. Yet, it is true that one cannot claim that

because ‘something cannot be seen, it therefore does not exist’ (Ellis & ter Haar, 2007:387). Levy Jaki (2000:19) asserts that ‘human knowledge comes from two realms, quantities and non-quantities, and these two realms are irreducible to one another’. It is a plus that African epistemology strives to know by noting the intrinsic relationship between the quantitative (material) and non-quantitative (spiritual) aspects of reality. For Africans, there is no dichotomy between the secular and the spiritual world. According to Wiredu (1980:41), the western belief in abstract entities is ‘no better than the traditional African belief in ancestor spirits’. In western-oriented scientific epistemology, it is only a matter of belief and probability that the experiment conducted today will yield the same result another day. John Polkinghorne (1996:6) contends that there is no cogent reason to hold tenaciously that past experience would guide future behaviour. The sun may have risen today but it is not enough to argue that since the sun rose today, it will rise tomorrow. Suffice it to contend that in science, it is only a matter of hope and belief to posit that the natural phenomena that gave rise to a certain event or result will do so in the future. Thus, western-driven science makes sense of reality based on belief just as in religious knowledge.

In Africa, physical phenomena are understood in conjunction with the belief in the spiritual. Illness, for instance, is not just a mere material or physical issue. Illness for an African denotes a lack of well-being in the physical, mental and spiritual as well as the personal and social aspects of reality that affects a person, family, community etc. For the fact that beings inevitably influence each other, Africans believe that things do not just happen without the influence of another force (Hamminga 2005:58). Any mishap or disorder in the nature of things can be traced to one’s relationship with the ancestors, other human beings or even to one’s personal morality. Thus, to restore and maintain a well-being, one ought to ensure right relationships with the ancestral, spiritual, and natural worlds (Martin 2008:219). Denise Martin (2008:221) notes that ‘a Yoruba diagnosis of illness (*arun*), would include divination to inquire whether any potential spiritual causes are responsible for the ailment’ so that they can be addressed in the treatment and healing processes. Thus, medical examination in Africa involves a multidimensional approach. The African knower does not engage in a reductionist approach to physical sicknesses as spiritual factors can affect the material and vice versa. Nevertheless, there is a tendency for African traditional healers to focus so much on the spiritual dimension given the

belief that the spiritual could override material efforts. Such limitation as observed by Wiredu (1980:12) has led to the failure of traditional African culture to pay closer attention to medical and technological advancements because physical issues tend to be spiritualized easily. Beyond the foregoing limitation, the principle underlying African epistemological investigation provides ground for the consideration of the spiritual in conjunction with the physical aspect which predominate contemporary medical examinations.

3.3 Mythological Knowledge

In tandem with Ruch (1984:27), Africans contend with life questions – questions about their origin, nature and destiny – and try to interpret and make sense of their existence via mythical consciousness. Ruch (1984:35) defines myth as ‘a complex set of signs, both verbal and gestural, which aim at accounting for some of the most fundamental problems of life and existence’. He argues that the rationality of,

the myth bypasses the abstract conceptualization of experience by symbolically expressing the totality of an existential situation which speaks from and to the whole person, body and soul, intellect, emotions and desires (1984:39).

Myths symbolically express deep issues that lie beyond the comprehension of human minds (Gyekye 1987:15). Myths negotiate between material and supernatural existence thereby satisfying the physical and spiritual elements in the human desire to know. Via myth, Africans deal with the issues of eschatology, origin, Sup-reme Being, evil, providence, nature of reality, life, stages of life, death, etc.

That myth is ‘unscientific’ does not mean that it is inferior to scientific knowledge. Western-oriented science often prides itself as being logical and productive of certain knowledge. However, it fails to note that it has only ended up producing more myths in its attempts to explain reality. Scientific endeavours seeking to explain the origin of the universe without first-hand experience, takes the place of myths. The scientific view of the universe as a machine or as a product of chance is nothing but an imaginative

vision of reality. Moreover, the scientific big bang theory and the evolution theory is a continuation of the mythical or imaginative quest of the ancient philosophers to discover the basic stuff out of which everything was made. Using concrete realities and anthropomorphically comprehensible elements, science seeks to explain deep issues.

Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) argues aptly that the beginning of the universe can only be comprehended by revelation or belief (cited in Jaki 2000:103). Science cannot demonstrate the transition from non-existence to the existence of the atom that exploded during the big bang. The comprehension of the origin of the universe is far from scientific comprehension because scientists cannot go outside the universe to observe the whole of it and give a supreme objective and genuine knowledge about it (Jaki 2000:13). Defining the whole by the knowledge of some part of reality is inherently mythological. Thus, based on what yardstick should one myth (e.g. Western-oriented scientific myths of origin) be accepted over other myths (African-oriented myths of origin)? Though science tends to provide verifiable and exact explanations of natural phenomena, it has its limitations and imperfections as will be discussed further below.

Yet, it remains a question of how relevant and useful mythical knowledge is for Africans in the contemporary world. For Ruch (1984:45), myth is more philosophical in the sense that it transcends mere doctrine and theory and becomes a mode of life not determined by a theory but by intuitive and concrete experience of being. Myth extends its causal explanations beyond empirical data to the farthest metaphysical causes. Through myth, the African accesses the region of reality that lies beyond the reach of science. Myth gives humans the reason for hoping when it seems that all hope is lost based on rational or scientific judgement. Thus, labouring on concrete and spiritual dimensions of life, myths satisfy the desires of the masses to know.

Given the inability of western-oriented scientific logic and rationality to comprehend the mythical, religious and intuitive nature of African epistemology, African philosophy is often dismissed as subjective and uncertain. However, western-oriented science cannot claim dogmatic and certain knowledge. In its quest to solve the problems that had challenged it over the years, science has changed its concepts over time. For instance, the mechanical or absolute conception of reality in classical science was abandoned for the theory of relativity in modern science. Many concepts of classical science like atom, mass, force, etc. have undergone piece-meal

revision in such a way that their present-day conception is incompatible with prior ones. Thus, it is possible that the scientific assumptions of present scientists will be falsified in future by other findings. If scientific theories of the past have been discovered to be mistaken and have been abandoned in the past, it is most likely that the present theories may be discovered to be mistaken and abandoned in the future¹⁶ (Audi 2003:263).

To claim the perfection of science or the conclusiveness of scientific findings is to thwart its efforts in making further inquiries about nature. In this respect, science cannot claim dogmatic, certain and irrefutable knowledge (Jaki 2000:5). Here, science happens to be a field of knowledge struggling to comprehend reality for pragmatic purposes. Thus, why must every other form of knowledge conform to the scientific mode of knowing that is not objective and flawless as depicted? It is no doubt that scientific ventures have led to numerous advances in our contemporary epoch and have shed light and at times shattered our uncritical views about reality as well as things that we readily attribute to supernatural forces. Yet, it is important to note the limitations of scientific based knowledge, which somewhat reinforces the imperative for considering other forms of knowledge that complements or reinforces it. Knowledge should not be limited to the theoretical, scientific and individualistic mode of philosophizing in the West (Ellis & ter Haar 2007:386). Nkurunziza (2007) insists that African epistemology ‘cannot be transformed to fit in with western forms of logic because it has its own logic and its own set of rules to follow’.

4.0 Recommendations and Conclusions

Thus far, this study has engaged with African epistemology in the context of the mainstream western-driven scientific epistemology. Beyond the purported ‘unscientific’ nature of African-oriented epistemology, the power-knowledge nexus relations play a crucial role in determining what constitute valid knowledge and what is not. Via western expansionism, western powers have objectified and universalized scientific epistemology in such a way that other forms of epistemology are considered delusory and irrational. Nevertheless,

¹⁶ Foucault (1966) contends that knowledge means different things from culture to culture and epoch to epoch. There is no external position of certainty, no universal understanding that is beyond history and society.

the research has argued that African-driven epistemology has its authentic logic and set of rules that cannot be subordinated to or transformed to fit in the narrow western-oriented scientific forms of logic and rules. Any attempt at considering knowledge under the lens of western-oriented scientific epistemology alone is a procrustean reductionism.

Underdevelopment, poverty, political instability and conflict that constitute the current reality of the continent create difficulties for Africans to promulgate their epistemological views assertively. Despite the purported decolonization of the continent, foreign objectified models continue to inform and dominate the lifestyle, education and governance system in Africa. The Akans of Ghana and Ivory Coast have a saying noting that ‘the hand that begs is always beneath that which gives’ (Ajei 2007:200). Given African dependency on foreign aid, assistance and affirmation, Africans are unable to assert their ideologies and values in the globe. Africans continue to fail in making effective contributions to global debates – as well as making strategic changes in the continent – due to the predominance of Eurocentric ideas that dictate how things ought to be.

It is against this distorted and ungrounded reality of Africans that W.E.B. du Bois (2007:12) insists, in his *The Conversation of Races*, that Africans should strive to enhance their mode of existence. Far from essentializing the African, the foregoing phrase enjoins Africans, like every other people with a common culture and belief system, to promote their values and ideologies in a plural and globalizing world. This would ensure that African ideologies and values, as well as their notion of what epistemology should be, are not subsumed by the views, ideologies and values of others. Independence, self-rule and self-determination entails the contextualization of the socio-economic, political and education system of the continent to suit the condition of the continent and to assert African ideologies in domestic and global debates. In the context of cultural pluralism, it is procrustean to hold tenaciously that one cultural-oriented epistemological system is universal and objective. Africans are constantly challenged to be subjects of history not objects merely trailing the dictates of foreign powers or a globalization that is predominated by western thought processes, worldview and values.

Due to western education systems, Africans tend to view education as impossible without adhering to the western model of education. African states depend on western curricula, methodologies and ideas to run its

education institutions while marginalizing their epistemological system (Itibari 2003:38). The trailing of western dictates and modes of existence have created many African schizophrenics who fail to reconcile indigenous value systems and foreign values. For instance, the monopoly of western education systems has produced African graduates that fail to reconcile the academia and other aspects of life given the fragmentary and job-orientated western system of education. African students experience disintegration due to the divide between the narrow foreign education system and the indigenous reality and values of the continent. In an attempt to cope with the situation, some scholars merely seek skills and qualification papers for employment purposes while neglecting other aspects of life such as spiritual and moral formation. Yet, in traditional African society, education is an all-inclusive and integrative experience.

Thus, Africans need to decolonize their minds from western objectifications and universalizations by appreciating their indigenous values and systems. In line with Hegel, Hans-Georg Gadamar (1975:15) maintains that ‘a people gives itself its existence It works out from itself and thus exteriorises what it is in itself’. This underscores that people shape themselves, articulate their differences and externalize their values and norms in a pluralistic world. A Swahili proverb states that ‘when you want peanuts, get yourself a roasting pan’ (Ajei 2007:200). Thus, it is imperative for Africans to develop their socio-political and economic system so as to give the continent a reasonable power-base to assert itself and its epistemological views in the global system. The development referred here does not necessarily mean that which is defined based solely on the standards of dominant powers. Rather, it is a development that captures the interests, values and goals of a group people.

George J. Sefa Dei and Marlon Simmons (2009:16) observe that the current use of the term *development* is anchored in ‘economic, technological and material constraints and possibilities, with little emphasis on the spiritual, emotional and social-cultural dimensions’¹⁷. Undoubtedly, economic,

¹⁷ Wiredu (1980:43) argues that ‘technological sophistication is only an aspect, and that not the core, or development’. According to Dei and Simmons (2009:16) ‘development must be about how local peoples are using their own creativity and resourcefulness to respond to major economic and ecological stressors’.

technological and material based development has led to huge advances that make our lives and work much easier. Over the years however, developments based on such mainstream emphasis have led to disastrous consequences such as ecological destruction and global warming consequent from industrial revolution; mass killings and genocides consequent from the production of weapons of mass destruction; the attenuation of the value of human life given the over reliance on technology; deep-rooted corruption and killings in the quest for wealth accumulation; etc. However, in line with Dei and Simmons (2009), discussions about development ought to be holistic to guard against evil outcomes in other spheres of life. In its emphasis on the holistic, African-oriented epistemology has a lot to ensure the holistic development of the continent as well as the globe. For Ajei (2007:11), development should be about ‘... the preservation and improvement of human dignity and welfare ...’.

To consolidate and propagate African values, Africans need to step out of their dependencies and work out things for themselves. This entails a political will and dedication to the progress and growth of the continent. Africans ought to acknowledge that African-oriented epistemology and education system are vital, valuable and worthy of academic pursuit. In the contemporary era, traditional African values and systems of the past needs to be negotiated with present global and domestic realities of the continent. This is not about jettisoning foreign ideologies, values and systems or returning back to a purported ‘essential’ African way of life in the past. Rather, it is about bringing alive the worthy principles and values of Africans in the contemporary era. Rooted in the communal-mindedness of Africans, indigenous African principles and values are to be confidently and boldly put to synergistic negotiation with other principles and values. Here, African scholars are encouraged to explore, critique and elicit indigenous values and systems that ought to be promulgated in the present-day continent as well as in global issues.

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