

Psychology and Psychotherapy Redefined from the Viewpoint of the African Experience

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Abstract

This article argues for an African-conceived ‘psychology’ and ‘psychotherapy’. The thesis to be defended is that the dominant Western paradigm in terms of the definitions and practices of psychology and psychotherapy in their current form is at variance with the African experience and culture. African indigenous ways of knowing and doing, including the treatment of illness, derive from a non-transferable but communicable experience giving rise to an independent epistemology. To be consistent with the African epistemological paradigm Africans have the right to adopt and use indigenous concepts that congruently capture and represent their ways of knowing and doing. This applies to the teaching of psychology and psychotherapy in South African universities. Their curricula should include the concept of *moya*, an indigenous African concept that is crucial to the understanding of psychology and psychotherapy from the African viewpoint. We adopt a critical conceptual approach to the elaboration of our thesis.

Keywords: *moya*, ubuntu, epistemology, psychology, psychotherapy, African culture, pluriversality

Modu wa Taba

Taodišo ye e tšweletsa le go emelela mokgwa wa seAfrika wa tša thuto ya semoya. Maemo a tša sekgowa mo lefapeng la thuto ya tša semoya a kgahlanong le setšo sa seAfrika. Mothopo wa setšo sa seAfrika mabapi le go tseba le go diragatša ga dilo, go akaretša le kalafi ya malwetši, o laetsa gore se motho a se kwago ke seo motho a ka se laodišago. Seo se šupa gore tsebo e gona ebile ke ya mang le mang. MaAfrika ba na le tokelo ya go šomiša mantšu

a setšo ao a hlaolosago ka botlalo mekgwa le mephelelo ya bona. Seo se tiišeletša gore Afrika e na le lefapha la tsebo yeo e ikemetšego gore e sepedišane gabotse le pono ya tsebo ya setšo. Se se akaretša tsela yeo thuto ya tša semoya e rutwago ka gona didibeng tša thuto yeo e phagamego go la Afrika borwa. Lenaneo la thuto ye le swanetše go amogela tsebo ya go swana le ‘moya’ le ‘Ubuntu’. Tsebo ye ya setšo e bohlokwa go kwišišagaleng ga thuto ye ya semoya. Mo taodišong ye re tšeya kgato ya go fetleka dikgopolo ka setšo.

Introduction

Knowledge production and psychological formulations are based on certain philosophical conceptions and psychological presuppositions about the human being, experience and reality (Nobles 1986; 2006; Grills 2002; Mpofo 2002; Obasi 2002; Parham 2002; Mkhize 2004; Nwoye 2015). Western psychology is one way of theorizing, conceptualizing and producing knowledge. There are many other ‘psychologies’ globally which are premised on epistemological paradigms and traditional values of the people concerned. These ‘psychologies’ do not have a necessarily valid claim to pluriversal appeal and applicability to the whole human race. Historically, the Western epistemological paradigm achieved a great measure of universalization through unilateral imposition, especially upon the indigenous peoples conquered in the unjust wars of colonization. Modern psychology and psychotherapy in South Africa are based on the Western epistemological paradigm (Mkhize 2004; Matoane 2012; Baloyi & Makobe-Rabothata 2014; Mkhize & Ndimande-Hlongwa 2014; Nwoye 2015). On the basis of this historical background, Western psychology and psychotherapy cannot accurately and authentically represent and reflect indigenous realities, in particular African experiences. Western psychology and psychotherapy arbitrarily exclude and alienate other realities, particularly indigenous knowledge systems; in this case, the African. The result of this is that the legitimacy and meaning of the African construction of knowledge is always determined and measured by concepts, standards and experiences that distort African reality (Nobles 1986; 2006). This epistemological injustice is ethically unsustainable, and thus calls for rectification.

It is to be noted that the struggle for epistemological justice is hampered at the conceptual level precisely by the retention and use of the

concept *epistemology*. This problematic obstacle is acknowledged in the present essay. It is, however, not the intention here to deal with this specific problem at all. The retention and use of the concept, epistemology, or its variants will result in both tension and even paradox in our argument. For the present we shall bear with this.

Exclusion and its Consequences

In a pluriversal context like South Africa, the rejection and exclusion of indigenous concepts and languages in psychology prevent the broadening of the landscape of psychological discourses beyond Western theoretical confinements. This situation has created a distorted view that positions Western psychology and psychotherapy as the only legitimate ones. The truth is, however, that there is a pluriversality of psychologies and psychotherapies in South Africa (Mkhize 2004; Matoane 2012; Mkhize & Ndimande-Hlongwa 2014; Nwoye 2015). Indigenous African languages are an indispensable resource for the understanding of concepts current in psychology and psychotherapy from an African viewpoint. It is therefore necessary to problematize the concepts for the dual purpose of challenging their exclusion from the Western epistemological paradigm, and for using them in the construction of African psychology and psychotherapy. As Mkhize and Ndimande-Hlongwa (2014: 10) argue, ‘African languages and Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) are indispensable to the transformation of the higher education landscape.’ University curricula in all fields of study, including psychology and psychotherapy, should provide demonstrable evidence of the inclusion and use of indigenous African languages. This will be an important step in educational transformation in a multi-cultural South Africa (Mkhize & Ndimande-Hlongwa 2014). There is no doubt that the constitutional provision allowing the assertion of cultural rights, including the right to one’s own language, may weaken the thrust towards a fully representative educational transformation in South Africa. We now turn to this by reference to some indigenous African concepts.

The Concept of *Moya*

Moya is one of the basic concepts to be considered in the construction of African psychology and psychotherapy. In the Sotho group of Bantu

languages, *moya* has different meanings depending on the context. *Moya o a foka* translates into ‘the wind is blowing’, whereas *o na le moya o mobe* translates into ‘she or he has bad intentions’. Furthermore, *go na le moya o mobe* translates into ‘the atmosphere is bad’, meaning either that it is generally ominous, or that sickness is in the air. *O tsenwe ke moya* translates into ‘he or she is possessed by the spirit’, whereas *moya wa gagwe o ko fase* translates into ‘she or he is depressed’. All the translations, including the modification of the first one, are directly and immediately relevant to African psychology and psychotherapy. In order to understand the significance of this it is necessary to recognize that the concepts of life forces, *badimo*, *vhadzimu*, *abaphansi* and community are indispensable to a proper understanding of African ontology, epistemology and ethics. We now turn to an elaboration of this.

Moya as the wind becomes understandable only if it is interpreted as a life force. African ontology holds in part that life is comprised of two life forces, namely, the good and the evil ones. These life forces belong to the ‘ontology of invisible beings’. These forces are in perpetual struggle, manifesting themselves in human conduct, on the one hand, and through goodness or disaster in nature on the other. It is believed that without the intervention, protection and guidance of the life force of goodness, individual and collective survival will be impossible. Human beings can become agents of either of the forces. Those who are selected by the life force of goodness to be its agent are known as *nyanga* or *ngaka*. The *nyanga*, *ngaka* in African culture is someone – female or male – believed to have been selected by the life force of goodness to be its agent in spreading and maintaining goodness among human beings. As such, the *nyanga*, *ngaka* is a vital intermediary between the life force of goodness and the community (Iroegbu, in Okere & Nkwocha 2004). This is the reason why each family, including the royal family, has its own *ngaka*.

The Concept of *Ngaka/Nyanga*

Nyanga is the link between two interrelated ontologies constituting a oneness, namely, the invisible life force of goodness and the visible community of the living here and now. This latter is the first dimension of community, according to indigenous African ontology. The living actually do die at a certain point. It is believed that at death the departed become members of the community of

the living-dead, otherwise known as *badimo*, *vhadzimu*, *abaphansi*. These also become vital intermediaries between the life force of goodness and their family or clan. (There is division of opinion in African religion on whether or not each and every one of the deceased joins the *badimo* community. Some argue that only those who led a good and exemplary life become members of this community. Others disagree, arguing that this claim presupposes separate metaphysical homes for the good and the bad respectively. Such a presupposition, they argue, is a subtle Christianization of African religion. (In its own right, indigenous African religion does not generally entertain the prospect of either heaven or hell after death). *Badimo* forms the second dimension of the concept of community in African ontology. The third arm of community is formed by the yet-to-be-born. These are the responsibility of the living, but through the kindness of the life force of goodness. This means that having children in African culture is understood as a duty. The fulfilment of this duty could ultimately permit polygamy, for example, in the case of the barrenness of one of the partners (Bujo 1998: 101).

The three-dimensional understanding of community in African ontology reveals the centrality of *moya* understood as the life force of goodness. Understanding this is the gateway to comprehending African ontology, ethics and spirituality (religion). In traditional African religions – taken from the point of view of ‘family resemblances’ – god is the subject of religion, but not the object of theology. ‘At the same time, god is a necessary element in the African understanding of community’ (Bujo 1998: 16). Yet god remains a systematically unknowable being. For this reason, god is simply the ineffable about whom there should just be silence. We turn to elaborate briefly on this by reference to the god concept, *uMvelinqangi* in isiZulu.

uMvelinqangi

To properly understand *uMvelinqangi* it is appropriate to turn – with a critical eye – to the exposition provided by Nkumane and Masubelele: personal communication 2008; Masubelele 2009).

1. *um* = class 1 noun prefix of *magoro a /dithlopha tsa maina*. *U-* (*muntu*) or *mo-(tho)*, here the prefix refers to the possibility of a general abstract substantive noun. It remains abstract until it is filled

with content, for example, *Umntu* = person (concrete specific substantive noun); and *Ubuntu* = humanness (specific abstract substantive noun). It is important to distinguish between personal nouns and class 3 noun prefixes for impersonal nouns, which have the same *um-*, such as *umuthi* and *umfula*.

2. *vela(i)* = verb stem; *vela* means to come. If *um(veli)* = the comer, is used, then *umveli* becomes a concrete substantive noun. *Ukuvela* means to appear, and the one that appears is *umveli*.
3. *ngqangi* = adverbial stem describing the verb (*vela*). The action of coming, being everywhere, but at the same time having no particular somewhere from which one comes and no specific destination (nowhere). This accords with the *Ubuntu* ontological position that motion is the principle of be-ing. *uMvelingqangi* is present everywhere but nowhere, because it is unbound to space and time. *uMvelingqangi* is an object of cognition because it is possible to conceive or imagine it but impossible to grasp in tangible empirical terms. It follows, then, that *uMvelingqangi* is only ‘a metaphysical necessity but not a scientific probability’ (Gilson 1941: 141). On this basis, the existence or non-existence of *uMvelingqangi* cannot be subject to ‘proof’ upholding the principle of verification as it is enunciated in the empirical sciences.

The above exposition of the African conception of community, including the religious dimension, is necessary in order to comprehend and deal with the question of illness and its treatment. This includes mental illness, which is the province of psychology and psychotherapy respectively. The four translations of *moya* rendered above are dependent, for their full meaning, on this understanding of community. For example, causality in general and the cause of mental illness in particular must be understood at two levels. The empirical level of someone falling from a tree and sustaining brain injuries that lead to mental illness is readily understood. But the African goes further, inquiring into why the fall at that particular time, from that particular tree, and the specific injury. This is the level of: ‘Were the *badimo* pleased or displeased with something I had done and so they reprimand me in this way? For an answer to this question one turns to the *nyanga*. Sogolo refers to these two levels of understanding causality, especially with regard to illness, in terms of African ontology as the primary and secondary elaborations. The former refers

to ‘those predisposing factors not directly explicable in physical terms’, whereas the latter ‘involve direct causal connections similar to the cause-effect relations of the germ theory in orthodox modern medicine’ (Sogolo 2003: 196-197). We now turn to a discussion of sorcery and witchcraft.

Sorcery and Witchcraft

Those who align themselves with the forces of evil are known as sorcerers. It is crucial to distinguish sorcery from witchcraft. ‘Sorcery is an attempt to control nature, to produce good or evil results, generally by the aid of evil spirits. On the other hand, witchcraft embraces sorcery, but goes far beyond it, for the witch contracts with the Devil to work magic for the purpose of denying, repudiating, and scorning the Christian God’ (Somers, in Robbins 1959). On this definition, witchcraft may be construed as an invention of Christianity since it is in essence a crime against the Christian god. Hughes argues in this connection that:

Secondly, there exists its variant, the Catholic Orthodox approach. This represents the standard attitude towards the phenomenon of witchcraft held by the Church in the Middle Ages. Its creed was that witchcraft was the direct evidence of Antichrist. Witches were his servants, in league with him against Christendom, and witchcraft was the parody of Christianity. The Devil gave his agents supernatural powers of evil, as doctrine attested and evidence confirmed. Holy Church alone, it was felt, could combat their powers, and Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live (Hughes 1965: 12).

Does it follow that Africans who opt not to be Christian can be witches? What is the significance of the South African Witchcraft Suppression Act 3 of 1957 as amended by the Witchcraft Suppression Act 50 of 1970 and the Abolition of Corporal Punishment Act 33 of 1997, in view of the fact that not all the supposed witches – *nyangas* – are Christian? Even if the *nyanga* may be exempted from the application of the Act, does it follow that the exemption applies to the charge that African medicine is inspired by superstition? It is crucial to underline the point that the charge of superstition does not arise at all since the very concept, properly understood, ‘means the

arrogance of one religion arbitrarily elevating itself to the level of superiority over all other religions' (O'Neil, in Jones 2005: 864).

In the light of the foregoing, we suggest that the concepts of life forces and community as described above are crucial to the understanding of psychology and psychotherapy from an African philosophical standpoint. They also demonstrate the need to interrogate hegemonic cultural impositions that similarly exist within the Western paradigm of psychology and human behaviour. Although illness is individual, it is recognized also as a communal phenomenon involving the community. It comes as no surprise, therefore, that Devisch's study of the treatment of mental illness among the Yaka of the Congo takes this perspective seriously (Devisch, in Okere & Nkwocha 2004: 217-262).

The Current State of Psychology

In most psychology texts in Africa, and South Africa in particular, all theories of psychology are based on Western cultural experiences. The underlying psychological theories and terminology have remained profoundly rooted in Western conceptions of reality (Nobles 1986; Mkhize 2004). African experiences and reality are articulated through the use of foreign language expressions (Mkhize, Dumisa & Chitindingu 2014). This mostly results in the misrepresentation and misunderstanding of Africans. Indigenous knowledge systems, in particular African experiences, are used only as examples to justify the imposed universality, authenticity, applicability and usefulness of Western theories. The development of Africans is thus seen to be dependent on these foreign conceptions and truths. In our view, such theorizations are epistemologically flawed because they are premised on the translated Western notions of reality and concepts to fit and explain African experiences. The tendency to translate theories and concepts from Western epistemology and cultural contexts to local indigenous situations has proven to be very problematic and questionable. Ramose (1999: 68) argues that 'African linguistic expressions in this context are not readily translatable into non-African languages without a significant loss of some of the essential meaning of the word or expression used.'

Following from the preceding, the concept *psychology*, as conceived and understood from the Western cultural experience, cannot fully capture and

represent African experiences and theorization processes for at least two reasons. Firstly, it creates a distorted view that African experiences have no theoretical basis, and are therefore scientifically and linguistically inexpressible. This view is unsustainable. As Grills (2002: 10) argues, it is ‘an insult to traditional African therapeutic practices to assume that one could teach or learn its praxis within the confines of a book or book chapter’, and, we may add, theory. Freire (2003: 152) succinctly describes this act of domination and violation as cultural invasion, ‘[a] phenomenon in which the invaders penetrate the cultural context of another group, in disrespect of the latter’s potentialities; they impose their own view of the world upon those they invade and inhibit the creativity of the invaded by curbing their expression’. Secondly, it positions African languages as scientifically and academically inadequate. Contrary to this view, Dewey (1958), Nobles (1986) and Okere (2005), for example, argue that all people have experience, and that knowledge comes from [lived] experience ultimately translating into culture. Culture, therefore, becomes the background against which knowledge production and theorization have to be understood. Theory is a reflection of experiences about the most deeply held values and thinking of the theorist and theorizing community (Grills: 2002). Therefore, theory cannot be divorced from the cultural domain. Likewise, psychological practice and psychotherapeutic interventions are based on a particular philosophy of life (Nobles 1986; 2006; Mkhize 2004), and may not be separated from their cultural context.

The argument in the preceding paragraph implies that the method of any scientific discipline, in this case, psychology and psychotherapy, must answer to and be a reflection of the actual experience that it is investigating. The systematic exclusion, and even outright rejection, of African ways of knowing and doing speak to the necessity to construct and apply methodologies relevant to the African experience. For as long as this is not the case, African research methodologies will continue to be trapped in the Western colonial epistemological paradigm. We therefore support the view of Staeuble (2007: 87) that ‘the unfinished business of decolonising theories and methodologies requires a radical review of modernity and the power structure of academic knowledge production’. In Africa, the initiative by Africans to take the lead in the decolonization of methodologies and theories may not be thwarted by any attempt to stifle or weaken their leadership.

The struggle for the affirmation of indigenous methodologies as well as their theoretical perspectives requires, in the present case, a culturally

anchored and fairly precise understanding of the concept of psychology. The purpose of acquiring such an understanding is to explore whether or not there are similarities and differences between the Western understanding of psychology and the African indigenous concept of *moya*. It is to this that we now turn.

Etymology of the Concept Psychology

According to the *Dictionary of Key Words in Psychology* (1996: 180), the oldest definition of psychology is that 'it is the study of the *soul*'/ The *APA Dictionary of Psychology* (2007: 747) refers to the *psyche* as

the mind in its totality as distinguished from the physical organism. The term also refers to the *soul* or the very essence of life as derived from Greek mythology, in which *psyche* is a personification of the *soul* in the form of a beautiful girl who, having lost her divine lover, Eros, is eventually reunited with him and made immortal.

The immortality level of the *psyche* goes beyond the physicality of being. According to *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Volume 15: 152, the Hebrew term for 'soul' (*nefesh*, that which breathes), was used by Moses (c.13th century BC), signifying 'animated being', a man's life in which the *spirit* manifests itself and is applicable equally to nonhuman beings. The Hebrews used the term to apply to the entire personality, but reserved the concept *ruah*, 'spirit', to denote a principle of life, 'mind', and occasionally 'heart'. *Nefesh* was often used as if it were the seat of appetite, emotion, and passion, and conjoined with 'heart', was held to encompass intellect, will, and feeling. The New Testament usage of *psyche/soul* was comparable to *nefesh*. Since *nefesh* refers to that which 'breathes', 'wind' or 'blows', the *psyche/soul* therefore also entails the principle of life in its totality (visible and invisible). Therefore, the visible 'heart' and the invisible, 'mind', for example, constitute the *psyche*. The visible or physical form through which the *soul* or *psyche* manifests itself does not denote dualistic existence, but rather, a single existence in different forms. In its form as the body, the *psyche* is observable. Observability renders the body susceptible to empirical inquiry. The 'death' of the physical body does not mean the 'death' of the *psyche/soul* itself. Because

of its qualitative difference from the physicality of the body, the *psyche* cannot cease to exist at the 'death' of the physical being. According to Caso in Gracia (1986: 44), 'the purely physical nature of man is not sufficient for defining the concept of person. Over and above the physical being, he is also a spiritual being...human spirituality cannot be achieved in the isolation of the psyche'.

The current understanding and study of psychology does not attend to the spiritual being in the cosmic context. It only deals with the physical, knowable, measurable, observable and rational level which can be scientifically studied. Dr Kaunda, quoted in Biko (2004: 48), argues that

the Westerner has an aggressive mentality, ...when the Westerner is confronted with a problem he cannot rest until he has formulated some solution to it. He cannot leave with contradictory ideas in his mind; he must settle for one or the other, or else evolve the third idea in his idea which harmonises or reconciles the two. And he is vigorously scientific in rejecting solutions for which there is no basis in logic. He draws a sharp line between the natural and the supernatural, the rational and non-rational, and more often than not, he dismisses the supernatural and non-rational as superstition

How Western psychology fragmented this *spiritual being* and chose to concentrate mainly on the physical being is interesting. Kamalu (1990: 75) observes this one-dimensional character of science by arguing that

generally speaking, however, Western science, by its nature, chooses only to deal with the physical or material world and does not recognize the existence of anything beyond this. As a result of this position, the science of other cultures which do recognize forces of a psychic nature have been misnomered in the west as 'magic', as if these phenomena had no explicable cause.

The belief that when human beings die, their *spirit* or *soul* leaves the body and migrates to a different ontology where it exists independently of the body, is further illustration of the Western fragmentation of the physical and *spiritual/psyche*. An example in this regard is given in *The Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* (512), which identifies *psyche* on two different levels, 'the first means *life*, and then the *departed life* or *ghost*. On the first level, the *psyche*

refers to the mind and is seen as man's rational and immortal life, which possesses reason, emotions, and will'. From the above, we further observe the division of the *psyche* into two different levels, the living, breathing, feeling, and the mind, the reasoning level. The *psyche* is again here divided into two realities, the *spirit* and the body (soma). As the former, the *psyche* represents the mind, man's rational and immortal life, but this level is invisible. The body is physical and observable through observable aspects of the conduct of human beings such as their personalities, their interactional and thinking patterns, and discernable brain activity. This is the visible level of the *psyche*. Here the *psyche* together with the *soul* is forming a duality. However, it is important to note that the duality does not necessarily presuppose sameness between body/soma and *psyche*.

By appearing in the body as its animator, the *psyche/spirit* becomes embodied. It subsists as having a body. As such it is given both the observable and unobservable forms of existence. The heart is visible while the mind is invisible. This fragmented thinking conforms to the ancient Greek tradition (for example, Plato) of conceptualizing reality in terms of the visible (physical) and the invisible (metaphysical). Traditional African people do not conceive beingness primarily in terms of metaphysics. Their reality is ontologically characterized by different but interrelated spheres of be-ing.

If the *psyche* is about *the very essence of life in its totality*, then the *psyche* transcends the physicality and confinements of personalities and styles which can be scientifically studied. What psychology claims to be studying is not the *psyche* but the human body interacting with the soul. It is the human body which can be subjected to natural laws and science. The *psyche* cannot be limited and reduced only to the level of physical being. Although there are variations in the meaning of the *psyche* for different people, its use, applicability and meaning in different contexts should be the starting point if psychology is to be understood contextually. This will then pave the way for the appropriate linguistic expressions and theoretical propositions of the concept *psyche*. In this way possibilities emerge for people of the world to accurately use and articulate *psyche* in their own language without having to rely on translated meanings and external worldviews. In Southern Africa and South Africa in particular, we propose the concepts of *moya/umoya/mweya* as already discussed above.

In the literature, as we have observed above, the term *psyche-(ology)* is discussed from the perspective of the West. What is significant is that it is

understood as a ‘science’, that is, a *logos* of the *soul* or *spirit*. Indeed, the Afrikaans term for it, *sielkunde*, confirms this, though ‘kunde’ connotes more precisely art in contradistinction to *wetenskap*, denoting ‘science’. Furthermore, there is no doubt that the soul or spirit is understood in immaterial terms and is thus empirically intangible. It is precisely this aspect that raises the question: how does Western science establish the link between an immaterial spirit or soul and an embodied consciousness of the human being? An answer to this question is crucial for establishing the claim that psychology is a science in the sense of a disciplined endeavour investigating empirical phenomena, and the subjection of the investigation to the principle of verification. It is on this basis that we argue that the concept ‘psychology’ as understood by the West, does not, and cannot, contain the same meaning and understanding for Africans. The critical question that arises in this regard may be: is there an African psychology? We now turn to an answer to this question.

Is there an African ‘Psychology’?

The question of the existence or non-existence of an African ‘psychology’ (Nobles 1986; 2006; Grills 2002; Mpofu 2002; Parham 2002; Mkhize 2004; Baloyi 2008; Nyowe 2015) has been, and continues to be, a contestable intellectual, linguistic, socio-political and philosophical engagement. The tendency to question Africans’ ability to theorize and conceptualize has been observed in all the fields in which the West claimed the status of sole authority and standard-bearer (Nwoye 2015). All people have their experiences and knowledge system consistent with their context. This means that therefore Africans, too, can reflect upon and theorize the experiences they go through. In writing the current article, we have continuously been asked what *established* theory is our argument for *moya* based on. Our exposition of the concept of *moya* answers this question.

In contributing to the decolonial discourse, authors such as Grills (2002); Obasi (2002); Parham (2002); Mkhize (2004); Sigogo and Modipa (2004); Zeleza (2006); Kruger, Lifschitz and Baloyi (2007); Edwards (2010); Ezenwa, Ndokuba and Onebunne (2010); Lijtmaer (2010); Sodi, Esere, Gichinga and Hove (2010); Sutherland (2010); van Dyk and Matoane (2010); Dei (2012); Baloyi and Makobe–Rabothata (2014); Mkhize and Ndimande-Hlongwa (2014); and Nwoye (2015) have argued for the recognition,

appreciation and inclusion of indigenous African healing practices and approaches in the field of psychology. (It is noted that ‘decoloniality’ is itself not without historical and conceptual problems. Historically, the proponents of ‘decoloniality’ have yet to establish an incontrovertible argument that their seemingly new concept has no roots in decolonization. Conceptually, the protagonists of ‘decoloniality’ must show that there is absolutely no identity and continuity of insight between ‘decoloniality’ and ‘neo-colonialism’ as espoused, for example, by Kwame Nkrumah. Until these two issues are addressed by a sustainable argument, our apparent endorsement of ‘decoloniality’ is purely provisional.)

What is interesting in the overwhelming majority of African-related psychology literature is the fact that even Africans do not seem to move away from using concepts in Western psychology defined in the Euro-American Western worldview. The above authors remain loyal to the Western paradigm, wittingly or unwittingly, hence the difficulty in moving away from using the Western paradigm of psychology. This is precisely the tension as well as the paradox that we have referred to in the: ‘Introduction’. The question to be asked in this regard is, why is it difficult for Africans to conceptualise ‘psychology’ from their own epistemological and linguistic paradigm? One explanation could be the association of the concept psychology with science and the intellectual and linguistic superiority connotations associated with it. Any deviation from what is perceived as scientifically ‘established’ will be regarded as non-science or, as Biko (2004) puts it, a mere superstition. The fear to deviate from ‘established’ science is itself unscientific since science is by definition permanently open to change; change that may even break its fortified frontiers. It is salutary to note that African psychology does indeed exist since some Africanist scholars have already overcome the two fears we have just criticized.

Language as the Source of African Psychology

There are many African linguistic expressions that accurately capture the *psyche/spirit*. African languages are rich in modes of expression such as idioms, proverbs and metaphors. From the etymology of the *psyche* discussed above, *moya* is contextually the appropriate expression and concept to replace the term psychology, as we have already shown. Other studies on African-

Americans such as those of Grills (2002); Myers and Speight (2010); Nobles (1998; 2006); Obasi (2002); Parham (2002); Parham and Parham (2002); Wilson and Williams (2013) have also confirmed that Western-oriented psychology and psychotherapy are ineffective when applied to persons of African descent. This finding suggests that there is no justification for the dominance of Western psychology in the educational curriculum, particularly where adherents to Western civilization are a minority, as is the case in South Africa. Africans should avoid trying to understand, develop and advance the African knowledge base by using English or any Western language as a starting point (Gbadegesin, 2002). Heron (in P'Bitek, 1989: 1), in supporting this view, succinctly argues that 'African writers who choose to use English or French for themselves create certain problems. They wish to express African ideas, but they have chosen a non-African tool to express them. There is a grave danger that with the tool of language they will borrow other foreign things. Every language has its own stock of common images expressing a certain people's way of looking at things. Every language has its own set of literary forms which limit a writer's manner of expression. How many of these tools can a writer borrow before his African ideas are affected by the influence of foreign ideas implied in them? The richness of African languages, according to Mtimkulu (2002), lies in their use of metaphors, *diane* (proverbs), *direto* (praise songs) and idioms as forms of expression. Psychotherapists working within the African context should take note of these forms of expression, and use them to create an authentic way of connecting to and being with clients. The adoption of *moya* and the teaching of psychology in indigenous languages is therefore ethical and a human right imperative (Zezeza 2006; Mkhize & Ndimande-Hlongwa 2014). The irony in the South African context is that most heads of institutions and departments of psychology and teaching staff are black Africans, yet the theories and methods of treatment in our textbooks are still rooted in the Western epistemology. The University of KwaZulu-Natal has positively responded to this challenge by undertaking studies that consider the use of isiZulu in psychology (Mkhize, Dumisa & Chitindingu 2014). This augurs well for the much needed theoretical paradigm change, and the probability of satisfactory pass rates in psychology among black African students.

As this *moya*-informed curriculum is established, the question we should be asking ourselves is why more than 80% of Africans in South Africa continue to consult traditional healers, faith healers and indigenous African

churches for spiritual healing, as opposed to a negligible number that visit psychologists' consulting rooms (Edwards 2010). This trend is also reported among other indigenous people of the world such as those in Nigeria, Canada, and the USA (Ezenwa, Ndukuba & Onebunne 2010; Lijtmaer 2010; Sutherland 2010). Psychology, like other social sciences in a changing social and political system such as South Africa's, should reflect the social transformation, dynamics and developments consistent with social and cultural experiences by, for example, adopting the appropriate vernacular language expressions and belief systems of the indigenous communities. In support of this view, Teffo (2008) and Koza (2014) argue that culture must be the centre of identity and good education. Therefore, culture-based education should, according to Teffo (2008), do more to pass on norms, values and knowledge necessary for a creative and conscientious citizen.

Understanding language in a much broader sense than only the spoken word means that our educational institutions, libraries and conference presentations may no longer view traditional [African] artifacts, healing modalities and trajectories such as performance of rituals (Denzin, Lincoln & Smith 2008) (in our case *bongaka, go twasa, ku phahla, go tlhatlhoba*), as scientific aberrations in the knowledge production enterprise. Most of the time work that, for example, includes and situates traditional healers as partners with academics is dismissed as 'unscientific', and a lowering of standards. Under these conditions, it means that in practice there are tensions, conflict and inconsistencies between what is taught at universities and the cultural background from which most African psychologists, students and clients come. (Drummond 2006; Ogbo 2006). The adoption of indigenous vernacular languages in the study and practice of psychology therefore constitutes a further decolonizing discourse to give voice to and reclaim the identities of the oppressed, colonized people living in postcolonial situations of injustice (Denzin, Lincoln & Smith 2008). It is for this reason that we support Ramose's (2010: 1) argument that 'the meaning of experience, knowledge and truth in Africa is dominated by the successive refinement of the colonial conception of education'.

The basis of the exclusion and marginalization of indigenous African ways of knowing and doing rests on the untenable claim that only the West has the prior and superior knowledge to define psychology (Nwoye 2015) and psychotherapy, based on Western understanding of knowledge and science. By doing this, the West has established itself not only as the producer of

knowledge, but also as the sole authoritative voice of universal knowledge. We argue that this claim is both vacuous and unsustainable. Instead, we posit the imperative to rethink, redefine and abandon the concept ‘psychology’ in favour of *moya/mweya/umoya – nmor or mmor*, depending on the appropriate cultural term, in order to 1) affirm the validity of indigenous African ways of knowing and doing as epistemological realities that are second to none; and 2) show that African linguistic expressions, performances of rituals and their traditional healing practices are real and meaningful to Africans, and should therefore be at the centre of understanding and teaching of *moya* in Africa.

Argument for the Adoption of *Moya*

We have already argued for the adoption of *moya* under the rubric ‘exclusion and its consequences’. Here we will reinforce the argument without revisiting the exposition of the meaning of *moya*.

Most African traditional cultures conceive and understand *moya* as the embodied metaphysical being. It must be emphasized here that the use of the phrase ‘African traditional cultures’ in this instance does not deny the cultural and linguistic diversity that exists among African peoples’ (Wiredu 1980; Ramose 1999; Amuleru-Marshall & Amuleru-Marshall 2013; Nwoye 2015). In fact, the argument for the adoption of the term *moya* in its diverse cultural contexts is a call for the recognition and respect for the various African communities. We are mindful of commonalities among African cultures that create the Africanness or ‘family atmosphere’ and philosophical affinity and kinship among and between the indigenous peoples of Africa (Wiredu 1980; Skhakhane 1988; Ramose 1999). We are therefore not necessarily suggesting that all Africans throughout the continent use the term *moya*, but we are merely indicating that terms conceptually akin to *moya* are used. According to Skhakhane (1988), a common word used in the South of Zambezi languages to refer to the *spirit* is *moya*, *umoya* or *mweya*. Skhakhane (1988: 6-7) presents the following isiZulu connotative variations:

1. *umoya* obandayo = cold wind
2. ukuphuma *umoya* = the exit of the spirit, to die
3. ukufaza *umoya* = to sprinkle the spirit, to spread rumours
4. *umoya* umubi = bad spirit
5. *unomoya* = a person has a spirit

In the above example, the meaning of *moya* is varied and refers to different conditions and situations, depending on the context within which it is used. The point to be emphasized about these various meanings of *moya* is that this term cannot simply be translated into *spirit*, *psyche* or *soul* without losing its meaning (Skhakhane 1988; Ramose 1999). *Moya* in the sentences above is not separate from or independent of the human body. In the case of examples provided by Skhakhane, the appropriate meaning that is coterminous with the understanding of *moya* is Skhakhane's number 2, *ukuphuma umoya*, translated as *the exit of the spirit or to die*. The expression of *moya* in the context of this study can metaphorically be expressed (in Setswana) as *Moya o tswile nameng (mmeleng) = the spirit has deserted the flesh or body*; or *Moya o ile badimong or o iketse badimong = the spirit has gone to the living-dead or the spirit has transcended to a spirit world*.

These examples add to the varied meanings *moya* has in the African context. In the above examples, the first example passes no judgement as to where *moya* has gone; it just indicates that the person is dead. It is in this context that it is not known where *moya* has gone, or even further, that no one can empirically prove *where moya* has gone. In such an instance, we argue that no comment should be made, because, *ga re itse*, we do not know. The fact that *moya* has left the body means that it remains accessible even though it is in the realm of invisible beings.

In view of the above exposition of *moya*, it is clear that individualism, or claims that posit independent reality separate from the physical world, are contrary to the relational and wholeness ontology of most Africans' conception of human existence and be-ing. Contrary to the Western conception of the *spirit*, *moya* exists in an intricate network of a harmoniously interacting community of systems. Mkhize (2004: 44-47) supports this view by stating that

traditional African societies believe that there should be harmony and interdependence between elements in the cosmos. Disconnection between parts comprising the whole is undesirable and immoral or unethical. It must be emphasized that the African ethic rests on community and life at large as its basis. Thus, awareness of this framework is indispensable if one wants to understand people's conception of moral reasoning.

The argument for using the African term *moya* finds support in Bujo

(2003: 4), who contends that it ‘intends to demonstrate clearly the autonomy of the worldview of African thought, which cannot simply be subsumed under other modes of thought, but demands to be taken seriously as a dialogue partner’. It is in the light of this understanding that *moya* should be situated within the appropriate African epistemology and context. The arbitrary and insensitive translation of terms from one epistemology to the other without critically evaluating their etymology and the cultural context within which they are used tends to lead to gross misrepresentations and misconceptions. For this reason, we argue for the adoption and use of *moya*, which in our view accurately captures and defines what Grills (2002) describes as ‘African-centred psychology’. The affirmation of an autonomous African worldview – consistent with its dynamic changing context – constitutes what Mudimbe (1988: 179) succinctly refers to as ‘the construction of an authentic African episteme’. To be authentic, according to Quijano (cited in Ajei 2007: 153), means that ‘we have to stop being what we have not been, what we will never be, and what we do not have to be’.

Conclusion

The thesis defended in this article is that the dominant Western paradigm of scientific knowledge in general, and in psychology and psychotherapy in particular, is based on a defective claim to rationality, objectivity and universality. An integral part of the thesis is that the continuing exclusion of indigenous languages, cultural practices and experiences from psychology and psychotherapy is ethically unjustifiable and pedagogically unsustainable (Freire 2003). We have argued, therefore, for the affirmation of *moya* as a legitimate and pertinent concept for understanding and teaching psychology and psychotherapy in the context of cultural pluriversality, as is the case in South Africa.

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Interview

Nkumane, K. & M.R. Masubelele. Interview. 15 February 2008

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