Pan African Humanness and Sakhu Djaer as Praxis for Indigenous Knowledge Systems

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Abstract

This paper will explore the notion of *Sakhu Djaer* (*Skh Djr*) as a further refinement and deeper extension of Black Psychology's African essence. Through an exposition of the thinking and beliefs about African knowing and being, the discussion will further unpack the necessary link between UbuNtu, African language and logic, epistemic justice, and indigenous knowledge systems as central to an understanding of African existence and being. In representing a requisite paradigm shift from Eurocentric to African-centred analyses, this discussion will demonstrate the adoption of African notions of Pan African Humanness, indigenous knowledge systems and terminology (*Sumunu, Kizungu Zongu, etc.)* as key to the illumination and reframing of a Pan African therapeutic engagement and the teaching and training of psychologists in the African worldview, ontology and culture.

Keywords: African centred, Indigenous Knowledge Systems, Pan African Humanism, Sakhu Djaer (Skh Djr), Spirit, Ubuntu

Introduction

The healing of the African mind and the worldwide development of African people has been an ongoing conversation throughout the African world[1]. The

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[1] African scholars (both continental and diasporan) have continually engaged in thinking deeply about the question of African humanity and the praxis of

meeting of Black psychologists from around the world at the 30th International Congress of Psychologists in Cape Town, South Africa in 2012, and again in New Orleans in 2013 at the ABPsi International Conference where the ABPsi Pan African Global Initiative was authorized, and at the 1st International Congress of the Forum of African Psychology in 2014, represents a continuation of this historical initiative. Part of the Global Initiative's work was the further development of the ABPsi/FAP joint educational task force and the establishment of five Pan African Black Psychology learning communities or work group/design teams. One of these work groups, the indigenous knowing work group/design team, agreed to give attention to the collaborative 'mining' of indigenous epistemologies and healing techniques. The impetus for this paper is part and parcel of this ongoing Pan African collaboration.

The concept of *Sakhu* (Sah koo), first introduced by Na'im Akbar (1985), and later refined as *Skh Djr* (Sahkoo Jear) by Nobles (2013) will serve as the springboard for interrogating the emerging African psychology/African centred psychology as praxis and application of indigenous knowledge systems. *Skh Djr* has been defined as the process of understanding, examining, and explicating the meaning, nature, and functioning of being human for African people by conducting a profound and penetrating search, study, and mastery of the process of 'illuminating' the human spirit or essence, as well as all human experience and phenomena. It is further believed that to fully understand the complexity of the *Skh Djr* (illumination of the spirit) one must explore the African antecedent comprehension of what it means to be human

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human problematics. This deep thought has in common the recognition that it is only when we first think deeply about what it means to be a human being— and subsequently how that meaning shapes our responses and reactions to the problematics of education/socialization and conditions of life and living will we learn or know anything of value. The reader is invited to examine the works of continental scholars like Abimbola 1976; Abraham 1970; Armah 1973; Ba Amadou 1981; Chinweizu 1978; Diop 1959; 1974; 1991; Nkrumah 1964; Obenga 1992; Opoku 1978; and Diasporan African American scholars like Adams 1979; Akbar 1994; Ani 1991; Ankh 1995; Asante 1990; Ben-Jochanan 1971; Carruthers 1999; 1995; Clarke 1986b; Kambon 1992; Karenga 1984; 1990; Mazama 2001; Myers 1988; V.L. Nobles 1996; W.W. Nobles 1972; 1985; 1986a; 1986b; 2006; Sizemore 1990; Spight 1977; T'Shaka 1995; Van Sertima 1985; 1989; Wilson 1993.

or to be a person. In so doing, *Skh Djr* requires one to think deeply about African meanings and understandings about being human. We believe this can only be accomplished by interrogating the language and logic of traditional African people which, in turn, will allow us to gain insight into the functioning of contemporary African peoples.

Pan African Humanness

One has to recognize also the idea of a 'Pan African Humanness'[2] wherein African humanity worldwide and its intellectual and cultural developments have greater commonality (than difference), and are seen as a particular state of being. Pan African Humanness should, therefore, serve as an orientation for the study of the psycho-cultural, geopolitical, intellectual and artistic history of African peoples in both its historical unfoldings and contemporary expressions worldwide across time and place. Pan African Humanness would require engagement with all forms of African intellectual, literary and artistic production across time and space and in relationship to the differing realms of reality.

Accordingly, Pan African Humanness is used here to support the use of an African-centred paradigm that privileges the life experiences, history and traditions of people of African ancestry as the centre of analyses, ergo, African-centred psychology. Such a paradigm would give licence to scientifically understanding an African-centred way of knowing, e.g. episteme, that represents the core and fundamental qualities of the 'Being', 'Belonging' and 'Becoming' of people of African ancestry (Nobles 2006: 331).

An African Episteme

The call for asserting an African episteme is, in part, rooted in the fact that the

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[2] In previous discussions (Nobles 2015) the term Pan African Humanism has been used. However, the suffix 'ism' connotes the manner or practice or quality relative to something. The suffix 'ness' indicates the actual state or condition. Hence, wherein Humanism represents the way or manner of being human, Humanness represents the actual state of being human. Accordingly, and for greater accuracy, we now choose to use the term Pan African Humanness to represent the actual state of being human for African people worldwide.

Western grand narrative has supported a mindset that is grounded in ideations that privilege difference, aristocracy, elitism, classism, racism, sexism, genetic inferiority and caste attribution, resulting in a 'grand narrative' that, in fact, reflects deep intrinsic Western beliefs (both descriptive and explanative discourse) as universal. What is essential to the Western grand narrative is the idea of a 'linear hierarchical oppositional structure' that is the implicit legacy of the Western mindset as epistemic certainty (Dompere 2006: 54-57). Falsely accepted as universal, the idea of a 'linear hierarchical oppositional structure' is the core problematic in the quest to define, describe and explain African notions of human functioning.

Though seldom recognized as a particular and even equivalent conception of reality, the African ways of knowing are different from those found in the Western world. African reality is often described as being made up of three interrelated (not oppositional) hierarchical worlds consisting of the immediate perceptible world (the microcosmos); the intermediate world of spirits, genies, and beneficial/malevolent forces (the mesocosmos); and the world beyond the senses, the realm of the Divine, ancestors and spirit beings (the macrocosmos) (Sow 1980: 48). In the African structure, it is believed that there is constant, perpetual, perceivable and continuous relationship between those who dwell in the multiple realms of reality (humans, spirits and the Divine). Hence, an African episteme must include considerations and comprehension relative to all three realms. With the centrality or essentiality of spirit, the African process of knowing and comprehension may be better understood as the interplay of radiations, vibrations, fields, planes, waves and points of energy between and amongst the realms of reality. In *Seeking the Sakhu*, Nobles (2006: 349-350) suggests that spirit or spiritness is the belief that the complexity of being a person (as immaterial and material) gives one an intrinsic human value, and that the person is, in fact, a process characterized by the divinely governed laws of essence, appearing, perfecting and compassion. The concept of 'spirit' or 'essence' as defined by African thought further suggests that the examination of African-American psychology should be guided by strategies of knowing that allow for the examination of the continuation and refinement, across time, space and place, of the African conceptualization of human beingness. In this regard, Nobles (2015: 407-409) has offered a radical refinement of the African conception of reality wherein he posits that all is spirit or energy with different expressions and experiences. Those beings and entities that dwell in the microcosmos, mesocosmos and

macrocosmos are all spirit defined and spirit driven.

Accordingly, it is believed that African people experience spirit or 'spiritness' (Nobles 1997: 203-213; Grills 2002: 10-24) simultaneously as a metaphysical state and an ethereal extension or connection into and between the supra world of the Deities, the interworld of other beings, and the inner world of oneself. As such, as intellectual mindset the African epistemic reflection would posit that real(ity) is spirit made manifest, which, in turn, would allow for the framing of the process of knowing with constructs like commonality, centredness, transformation, transcendence, improvisation, inspiration, agency, will, revelation, invocation, intention, and the 'power of the word'.

Hence, rather than posit an 'ambivalent, oppositional' dialectic, African- centred theorists and practitioners should consider the differing and special relationship between and amongst the various expressions of spirit within and between the realms of reality.

By adopting African-centred epistemic reflections, cultural appreciations, and apperceptions about reality, our knowing framework and intellectual mindset would allow for further recognition and recordings that make better sense of African events and experiences. It is the understanding of the fullness or completeness of African being, becoming and belonging, ergo. Africanness, that is central to the understanding of indigenous knowledge systems as praxis.

Before exploring indigenous African knowledge systems, it may be helpful to clarify the deep epistemological issues buried in this discourse. What, in fact, is embedded in this discussion is nothing short of a change in the thought and beliefs about African knowing and being that is equivalent to a Copernican scientific revolution in the social universe, i.e. a shift from Europe as the centre and standard bearer of human understanding.

Language, and the knowing it represents, reflects and represents a people's culture. When African people use non-African concepts (i.e. Greek, Roman, Anglo-Saxon, etc.), they unknowingly distort the phenomena associated with the reality identified by the concept. Africans should at every possibility use African concepts to describe and give meaning to African phenomena (Nobles 2002). This is true, for instance, in the distortion brought about by the Belgian Franciscan missionary, Rev. Placide Temples' attempt to capture the centrality of 'Life' in the African episteme with the Western notion of 'vital force'. In so doing, the intellectual understanding of African being and

existence was wrongfully marred in the Western mechanistic, individualistic understanding of human existence, rather than African 'Life', as central to human existence and being.

The term 'Life', however, rightly directs us to the underlying core principle of African being and becoming, that is, TO BE. The Lingala phrase, *Na Zali Na Ezaleli*, from the Bantu-Congo peoples of Central Africa, means 'I am with existence or essence'. *Na ezaleli* literally means 'with existence' or to be mixed inextricably with your own essence (Obenga 2001). The existence of everything is in (Be)ing. In discussing the cosmology of the Jolah People, Thomas (1960; 1961) points out that the Senegalese philosophical system fundamentally asserts that the universe is living, mobile and dynamic, and that in (Be)ing there is an intense complementary rhythmic connection between the person and all of reality. TO BE as represented by the idea of 'LIFE' is the human imperative. If it (life) doesn't Be, it doesn't exist (be).

The substitution of 'Vital Force' with 'Life', which we think should be adopted, is, nevertheless, no small matter. The exchange requires the vetting of Western thought. Our unchallenged acceptance of our intellectual inheritance would require the etymological determination of every term used. The length of this discussion will, however, not allow for either the etymological determination or the illumination of the full danger in uncritically adopting non-African explanations of things African.

It is important, however, to note, in this regard, that the attempt to take Africa out of our mouths[3], especially in intellectual or scientific discussions, was (is) a political act designed to curtail the African's ability to think African, and in so doing proscribe African knowing and knowledge, and thereby determine African being and doing. Amilcar Cabral (1974) fully recognized this relationship between indigenous culture in the practice of freedom. He saw that only by the organized, systematic and effective repression of a people's

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[3] The fight against the forced imposition of the language of Afrikaans in South Africa and the struggle for the legitimation of Ebonics as a mother tongue for African Americans in the United States are both evidence of the key importance of language in the illumination of human beingness. Regarding the language of Ebonics, the reader is invited to see Nobles, V.L. 2015. *Ebonics: The Retention of African Tongues*; Smith, E. 1998. *What is Black English? What is Ebonics?* and Williams, R. L. 1975. *Ebonics: The True Language of Black Folks.*

culture and language could a foreign or alien power dominate a native or culturally distinct population. Conquerors are fully aware of the power of history, language and culture. Indigenous culture is a source of resistance to alien domination. So too, we believe that indigenous knowledge praxis is an untapped source for illuminating the full meaning of being human for African people. While this discussion will not allow us to conduct the appropriate etymological review for the terminology found in indigenous knowledge systems, it will reflect the necessary link between *UbuNtu*, African language, episteme and the requisite paradigm shift from Eurocentric to African-centred analyses.

The underlying logic of *UbuNtu* and African language and logic is exemplamatic of African deep thought and philosophy. In terms of *UbuNtu*, the construct *Ntu* is thought to be the universal expression of force or spirit. *Ntu*, inseparable from *Umu*, is 'Being' itself (Kagame 1989). '*UbuNtu*' is, therefore, spirit in which Being and beings coalesce. It is the cosmic universal force. Conceptually, *Ntu*, as a modal point at which being assumes concrete form, is reflected in four categories of expression in *BaNtu* philosophy. In effect there is one essence with four categories of expression. Human beings (*Mu Ntu* or Muntu) are an expression of spirit or force (*Ntu*). Place and Time (*Ha Ntu* or Hantu) are equally expressions of spirit or force (*Ntu*). All the material objects (*Ki Ntu* or Kintu) like mountains, other animals, rivers, and so on, are spirit expressions (*Ntu*). Joy, beauty, laughter, love, emotions, and so on (*Ku Ntu* or Kuntu) are equally spirit expressions (*Ntu*).

All that exists are, therefore, different concrete expressions of *Ntu*. In effect, 'Being' is being spirit in a reality of spirit. FuKiau (2003: 8) further clarifies that, as a rising sun, the human being or *MuNtu* is a 'threefold unfolding' experience in the realms of yet-to-live, living, and after living. He notes that a human being is a living sun (energy), possessing 'knowing and knowable' spirit (energy) through which spirit in human form has an enduring relationship with the total perceptible and ponderable universe.

Mkhize (2004) argues that *UbuNtu* (personhood) is a concrete and practical realization and manifestation of one's responsibilities and duties within the context of a community that has social and cultural values that govern relationships. *UbuNtu* is therefore associated with a number of positive values such as caring, hospitality, compassion, humaneness and being human. It is the expression of a sense of connectedness (Nussbaum 2003; Gade 2011) that is manifested in the quality of being with others and relating to them within

a socio-cultural context (Edwards 2015). This is eloquently captured in the isiXhosa expression that says *Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* (loosely translated to mean 'A person is a person through other persons' (Tutu 2013: 21).

UbuNtu (personhood) is a relational attribute that should be understood within the framework of the community of which a person is a member (Mkhize 2004; Edwards 2015). Given that the self in the African worldview is relationally defined in terms of a family and community, personhood cannot be defined only in terms of physical or psychological attributes. Rather than infer personhood from internal attributes, it is inferred from a person's relationship with others in a socio-cultural context. 'Personhood' is an ontological affirmation of the existence of and connection to other persons as the pinnacle of what it ultimately means to be HUMAN.

Thus a person does not become a person in isolation as an individual, but rather through participation and engagement in a community of persons. Introducing an element of dynamism, Mkhize (2004) views personhood as *'a becoming'*. It is an open-ended process in which personhood may be achieved, lost and regained in response to contextual dynamics.

African Language and Logic

African people (both continental and diasporan), though often disrespected and/or unrecognized, have always possessed a full language and systems of beliefs (logic) about what it means to be human, and to whom and whose they were and why they existed. The importance of language is fundamental. In fact, in discussing the African origins of civilization. Diop (1974) noted that the cultural unity of Africa can only be understood and obtained by examining the domains of language, history, and psyche. As noted elsewhere (Nobles 2015), the notion of *Skh Djr* requires that one interrogate the language and logic of traditional African people in order to gain insight into the functioning of contemporary African peoples. Traditional language is particularly important because in the language of traditional philosophy[4] is found ancient words and

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[4] Note: In establishing the Interim Traditional Health Practitioners Council of South Africa, South Africa passed into law the Traditional Health Practitioners Act, No. 35, 2004, wherein it is stated that '**traditional philosophy'** means indigenous African techniques, principles, theories, ideologies, beliefs, opinions and customs and uses of traditional medicines communicated from

phrases that illuminate the psyche.

Yet, one of the most contestable issues in Western psychology is the view that African languages are not sufficiently developed to be used in science. Science is, however, not value free, nor is it apolitical (Nagel 1961; Hindess 1977; Mkhize 2004). To reason things African or Asian, using a foreign language is problematic. This is because any language is the bearer of a specific epistemological paradigm. The reasoning that underlies a particular language espouses an epistemological paradigm that is not necessarily the same for all existing paradigms. In this sense, rendering African experiences in a foreign language such as English is potentially opening the door for a clash of epistemological paradigms. This clash is not the basis for affirming the one language as scientific and the other as non-scientific.

It is through the penetrating reinterpretation of the language and logic of our African ancestry, that Africans (both Continental and Diasporan) will be able to rescue and remember our humanity, wholeness, and wellness. The language and logic of Africa, particularly the *BaNtu-Kongo* languages, are replete with examples of concepts that represent both language and logic. For instance, the word *khotso* means a wish for peace for the community, starting with the greeted person and the greeting self for peace of body, spirit, and mind. The word *Bushukudi/kushukula* represents an intellectual activity which is realized in the language from the verb *ku-shuku-la*, from which two words are derived: first, the abstract word *bushu-kudi* or *bu-di-juku*, which means 'clarification', 'laid bare', 'elucidation', 'enlightenment', and so on. The second word, *shushukulu* (var. *mujukudi*), denotes 'one who knows the foundations of something', 'one that can release the 'tap root: of a fact or a problem'. The word *Nkindi* refers to both *subject* and *object*. When applied to the subject, it means *shushukulu*, or specialist in the creation and development of deep 'thought', or an 'idea'. *Nkindi* is a specialist or a scholar in the art/way of thinking.

ancestors to descendants or from generation to generation, with or without written documentation, whether supported by science or not, and which are generally used in traditional health practice.

Epistemic justice[5] recognizes that within every language there is embedded the logic of the people's understanding of human roles, relationships and responsibilities. Epistemic justice demands that appropriate language must be used if one is to conduct a profound and penetrating search, study and mastery of the process of 'illuminating' the human spirit or essence, ergo, *Skh Djr*.

Bunseki K.K. Fukiau (2012) agrees that 'illuminating' the human spirit can be found in the language of the *BaNtu-Kongo*. He noted, for instance, that when members of the community violate or have violated the sacredness of their Kingongo (Inner Divine Presence), a condition called Sumunu happens. Sumunu is caused directly by the breaking of taboos, cultural precepts, and ancestral traditions. He notes that any human relations, especially those that demean, denigrate, and dehumanize, that violate the sacred inner self, result in *Sumunu* which, in turn, creates a condition called *Kizungu Zongu* (tornadoes of the mind). Tornadoes of the mind (a form of insanity), it is believed, should be thought of as a kind of 'spirit defilement', or damage for African people. It is defilement in the sense of being disconnected from one's spirit and having a sense of not being truly or completely human by internalizing an unchallenged belief in one's human inferiority that violates one's self-sacredness.

The isiZulu term *ukufakwabantu*[6] is thought to literally mean 'diseases of the people' (Friend-du Preez 2009). However, *uku* means 'to' and *kwabantu* refers to the ancestors. Hence, the underlying logic of the language here would lead us to understand the word, *ukufakwabantu*, to refer to more than diseases of a people, but to spirit-related illnesses or spirit damage found amongst the ancestors (in the invisible realm, the macrocosmos), as well as amongst the people in the visible realm, the microcosmos.

African salutations or greetings have an implicit logic within African language. A deeper understanding of African salutations or greetings is further demonstrative of African reality and its importance in the context of therapy. Concepts such as *ditumediso* (greetings), *ubuntu/botho/vunhu* (humanness),

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[5] By 'epistemic justice' we mean to respect and hold the African episteme as equally genuine in the human family of ways of knowing.

[6] In South Africa, *ukufa kwabantu* can be equated to *ukufa kwamaXhosa* in isiXhosa, *Malwetsi a Batho* in Northern Sotho and *Mafu a Batho* in Southern Sotho.

badimo (living-dead), *semoya* (spirituality) are informative. In *seSotho* and *seTswana ditumediso* (greetings) have an ontologically meaningful role in the lives of African people. One way in which Africans demonstrate their *Ubuntu/botho/vunhu* (humanity) is through *ditumediso* (greetings). All things are inseparably connected (Nobles 1986a:58; Akbar 2015:18). In the Twi language of the Fante/Asante people the greeting *Wohotesen* (wo-ho-te-sen) means more than 'Hello', or 'How are you?' Its deeper meaning is 'I lower myself before you', or 'I bow down before your essence'. It demonstrates that in meeting, I recognize, respect and honour the value of your essence or spirit. *Ditumediso* function as a practical recognition of this inseparable connectedness. They do so by acknowledging the triadic structure of community understood from an African perspective, namely, the living, the living-dead and the yet-to-be-born (Ramose 2002:77) When Africans greet each other, the health of *setshaba* or community is the basic concern. For Africans, greetings cannot be divorced from the living dead, *badimo/abaphansi,* who are believed to be responsible ontologically.

  Dumelang, which translates to 'agree', or *sanibonani* in *isiZulu*, literally means that *we see you*. The **–ng** and **sani-** denote the plural of 'agree', and 'we see you' is already in the plural. The 'we' refers to the triadic conception of community. The addressee of the greeting responds, for example, by either *ahe* or *le lena dumelang*. The former means that the greeting is acknowledged. The latter is the reciprocation of the greeting requesting the initial interlocutor to also 'agree', again in the plural sense. This is then followed by *le kae*? Literally translated as: *where are you*? *Le kae* recognizes the immediate locative position of *motho,* the human being. *'Where are you?'* is redundant because the person greeted is seen literally to be in the specific physical location in which she or he is. This leads to the subtle and critical meaning of '*le kae*?' The ethical meaning of '*le kae*?' is precisely 'Where do you stand?' or, 'How is your relationship with the community at present'? The point of this question is that harmonious relations with the community amount to good health, whereas ill-health is the experience of disharmony (pathology) in one's relations with the community. The addressee affirms good health when she or he responds: **re gona/teng,** literally translated as '*We are here.*' However, the ethical meaning of **re gona** is that harmony prevails in the communal relations, and this means we are enjoying good health. The respondent will, consistent with reciprocity, return the same *le kae* to the one who initiated the greeting.

The above salutation format shows that the 'we' philosophy is basic to *ditumediso*. As has been shown above, ethics is the foundation of *ditumediso* in African philosophy. The ethical dimension may be construed as suggested by Nobles (2006:105) 'Black behavior is most clearly understood by Black people as extensions of a spiritual core. An assumption of a spiritual core implies the existence of an irreducible element in man which has a divine origin, an eternal fate and a moral function'.

The African understanding of greeting is the affirmation of our spirit and interconnectedness. To greet is therefore to affirm one's relationship with other human beings, the environment, and levels of reality. A relationship is deemed good if one has a healthy connection with *badimo*. However, *badimo* do not live and act in a vacuum. They live in the invisible ontology but continue to, punish or protect the lives and health of the living. If *badimo* are unhappy then their relationship with the living is seen as dis-eased and there is thus no harmony and peace between the person and *badimo*. On the other hand, if *badimo* are satisfied and happy, their relationship with the living is seen as healthy. To greet is *ke botho/vunhu (xiTsonga)/Ubuntu* (humanness). It is not uncommon to hear Africans referring to someone who does not greet as *ga se motho*, (s/he is not human). Eliastam (2015) uses the word *'un-botho'* to refer to *'go hloka botho'* (not to have *botho*). The High Sanusi of South Africa, Baba Credo Mutwa, says a human being is a story, *motho ke taba*. This story finds expression and meaning through *ditumediso* and unfolding conversations between the community of living beings (Mesocosmos), the yet-to-be born and the living-dead (macrocosmos).

Indigenous Knowledge as Praxis

African language and logic is the doorway into the new room of indigenous knowledge as praxis. As noted above, restoration or healing must involve the experience of being human; the expression of being human, and the essence of being human itself. These three domains or paths represent the arenas of both healing and recovery, i.e. wellness or spirit suffering, and imbalance or disharmony. The word for 'spirit' in isiZulu is *umoya*, which also means 'wind'. The deeper meaning for wind is that which has force and direction; which cannot be restrained and is fundamental to life, i.e. breathing. Hence to be a spirit being would be to be a being with force and direction (destiny) who cannot be restrained (or enslaved), and is fundamental to itself. As noted above,

Kingongo is a *BaNtu* term representing the idea of 'inner divine presence'; in isiZulu 'inner divine presence' is called *umphefumulo*. *Ngolo* is a term representing the 'self-healing power' of all beings (Fukiau 2001). Additional traditional African notions or ideas that represent the idea of spirit suffering are *abaphansi basifulathele* – withdrawal of ancestral protection; *akom ko* – without spirit; *sikere folo* –To act without spiritual connection; and *elenini* – spirit defilement.

In terms of indigenous knowledge praxis, *Kingongo* could be used here as a term representing spirit wellness or well-being, and *Ngolo* as the element needed to be activated in order for wellness to be managed and maintained. As praxis, Spirit well-being would be achieved when *Kingongo* (the inner divine presence) is in harmony (blends) with the *Ngolo* as expressed in all forms of being through each realm of reality.

Kingongo (spirit well-being) exists when the community's 'inner divine presence' is in harmony. That is to say the inner divine presence of the members of the community is in harmony with the inner divine presence of others as well as the *Ngolo* as expressed in other living beings; i.e. trees, animals, land, water, air, etc.

African Reality in the Context of Therapy: A Sample Case

The case study below provides us with a window to look through to see both African praxis and the presence and power of the 'introductory moment' (greetings) as evidence of the African way of being human, as well as our spiritness and interconnectedness to the realms of being in the therapeutic process.

> *Noluthando (pseudonym) is a 28-year-old single sangoma who is also a qualified Western-trained clinical psychologist. She originally comes from the rural KwaZulu-Natal province in South Africa. She currently resides in a rented apartment in the eastern suburbs of Pretoria. Before she relocated to Pretoria, she was staying with her aunt in Soweto. Noluthando and her aunt were constantly in conflict because she (Noluthando) refused to meet with her father who left her mother for another woman when she was two years old. She has no memories of her father since she was brought up by her single mother.*

Her father died two years ago before they could meet, and her aunt blames Noluthando's relationships break-ups on her father's unfinished business with her. According to her aunt, her father died an unhappy man because he wanted to meet his child and apologize for abandoning her.

Noluthando further reports that her three previous relationships did not work because her ancestors are unhappy with the choice of boyfriends she makes. She reports that she has been experiencing concentration and sleeping problems. As a result, she has not been studying, and thus has made little progress in her PhD studies. Apparently, when she is possessed by spirits, she has to perform certain rituals and abstain from sexual encounters for a stipulated period. She sees this as a source of frustration in her relationships. Noluthando has tried two white clinical psychologists for help, but feels they could not understand her situation because of cultural differences. She consulted a black male psychologist because she now strongly believes that her problems are related to her father's unhappy spirit.

The conversation below was the very first encounter between the therapist and the client.

T: *Dumelang*. (agree/**we** see you)
N: *Thokozani/**Sani**bonani* doctor (Agree/**we** see you doctor)
T: *Le kae*? where do **you** stand or how is **your** relationship with the community?
N: *Re gona, lena le kae*? (**we** are here, **we** are enjoying / **we** are in good health, and where do **you** stand/how is your relationship/health with the community?
T: *Le **rena re** gona* (**we** are also here/**we** are also enjoying/**we** are also in good health

The first and second session mainly focused on getting to know and understand the client's background and her different relationships with the significant people (father, boyfriends, *badimo*, mother and aunt) she was experiencing difficulties with. The demonstration of spirit and connectedness

dimension of the African humanness and be-ingness between the therapist and the client occurred in the third session.

> **N:** I see an old man, he is your father. As I speak to you, he is developing two heads; one is my grandfather's, and the other is your grandfather's….
>
> **T**: what are they saying?
>
> **N**: They both say I am at the right place, and I am healed now. They both say you and I can continue working together, we are in a good space.

In the next three sessions Noluthando explored and focused on her relationships with her family and ancestors, and the meanings these have in her life. She decided to focus more on her pain caused by the spiritual disconnections with her significant people, through the performance of rituals. At the time of our last session, she was dating someone who she reported was very understanding, supporting and respectful of her calling of *bongaka* (spiritual healer). She also reported having started studying and writing her PhD chapters with more motivation and coherence.

Examining the Therapeutic Process with African Eyes: A Reflection

This case redefined and broadened our understanding of therapy, beyond textbook mechanical definitions and prescripts which limit the process to only the client and therapist. The restoration of wellness, i.e. therapy is deep and complex. This case espouses the complexity of the process of *kalafi ya bosemoya* (spiritual healing) as inclusive of the multiple realms of reality. The African restorative process of therapy is multidimensional because it locates healing within the interconnectedness of systems: the client, therapist and the community (the microcosmos) of the yet-to-be born and the living-dead (the macrocosmos), in order to restore harmony and good health.

The main aim of therapy is, therefore, to restore the connections in order to bring about good health and harmony. This case is a clear illustration of the living dead as the custodians of healing spiritually. As therapists who are rooted in the African philosophy and healing systems, our role is not necessarily to provide logical explanation of healing, but to trust in the flow of

energy and guidance as provided by the living-dead. It is okay not to know (to feel incompetent and overwhelmed) by the enormity and complexity of the healing process, rather than being consumed by the expert-role obsession to take the easy way and diagnose people/phenomena as pathological when, in fact, it is the therapist who does not understand the depth and complexity of the healing process. We have also learnt about the unpredictability of the therapeutic process, which requires flexibility and openness on the part of the therapist to accommodate the unknown, unexpected, living-dead' sacredness influence in the process. The therapist-client's *Ngolo* (energy of self-healing power-spiritual healing) is enormous in the therapeutic process. In fact, when viewed as an indigenous knowledge system and praxis, the so-called therapy session is revealed as an elegant interplay between the dwellers in the invisible realm and those of the world of the living (see the restoration of wellness, the therapeutic process, graphic representation below).

The Restoration of Wellness (Therapeutic) Process
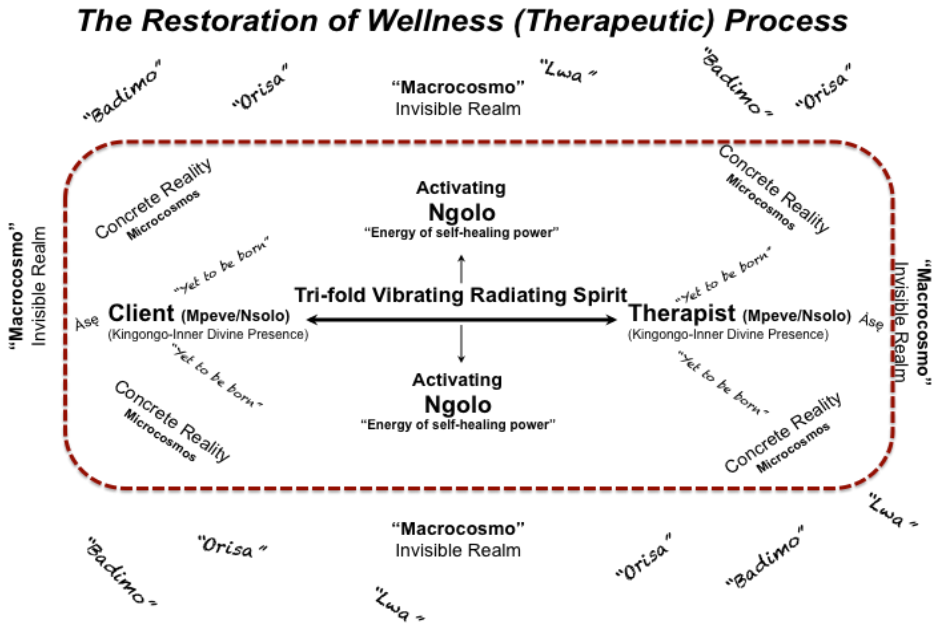
Originally developed by Wade W. Nobles, 2015, refined, 2016

In the case example, the presence or appearance of the *Badimo* (grandparents) of both the therapist and the client should be seen as agents needed to reactivate the inner divine presence of both the client and the therapist, and by so doing possibly restore the *Ngolo* of the living and the dwellers in the invisible realm. Note that one of the presenting problems for the client was the belief that her being in constant conflict (relationships break-ups) was because she refused to meet with her father, who in passing had 'unfinished business' with her.

The praxis of healing in this session may very well include the restoration of harmony between the daughter and father, the therapist and client and the two *Badimos*[7]. Grounded in 'spiritness', it would include the activation of the tri-fold (multi-realms of reality) vibrating, radiating spirit of the self-healing potential spirit being in a reality of spirit. The return and respect for the performance of rituals and taboos must also be explored as key to the therapeutic success. This will require a real paradigm shift and adoption of a new therapeutic praxis.

In support of this call for change, Nobles and Cooper (2013:347) have noted that,

> our training and education in Western thought, particularly Euro-American psychology, has made it difficult for us to contemplate traditional African thought as scientific and our traditional spiritual and knowledge systems as nothing more than untested religious beliefs and/or quaint native folk practices.

Yet, in spite of these challenges, Javangwe (2013: 340), speaking from a Zimbabwean lens, foresees a formidable awakening of Black minds and the emergence of a foreseeable array of Black psychologists equipped with enough Black African psychological ammunition to fight Western conceptualizations about human nature and behaviour and to take Black African psychology to dizzy heights.

The exploration and application of indigenous knowledge systems and praxis congruent with the global African co-creation of *Skh Djr* will be critical

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[7] It should also be noted here that throughout the continent and the diaspora, there are many forms and words, i.e, Lwas, Orisas, spirits, etc. for those spirits who have transitioned to the after-life, i.e. Badimos.

to the liberation of the African mind and the full and complete understanding of the human functioning of African people worldwide. Accordingly, in this preliminary *Skh Djr* exploration of Pan African Humanness and the praxis of indigenous African knowledge systems, we conclude by inviting our colleagues to learn to recognize, respect and appreciate the symbolic language and its representation; for example, the grandfather whose head developed into two heads which represent grandfathers of both the therapist and the client. As was noted above, *Sumunu* is caused directly by the breaking of taboos, cultural precepts, and ancestral traditions. While the outcome of this case shows some positivity, the exploration of ancestral taboos, ergo, *Sumunu*, and its consequential *Kizungu Zongu* (tornadoes of the mind) may be warranted and could establish greater restoration of healing.

At another level, and requiring a great deal of deeper study and analyses, from the lens of *Skh Djr*, one could examine, for example, the government- sanctioned killings of Black boys and men in the United States and Brazil[8] as the violation of the inner divine presence, i.e. *Kingongo*, of those respective communities. Is *Kizungu Zongu* evidence of *ukufakwabantu*? How does the violation of the inner divine presence of a community impact on interpersonal relations, family dynamics, political governance or a people's future aspirations? When conceived as energy fields or waves of spirit, the societal question becomes where is treatment needed; who or what is infected with *Kizungu Zongu*, the organized policing force or the community being terrorized?

As trainers and teachers, we, at a minimum, have to appreciate the significance of exposing trainee therapists and psychologists to the African worldview, ontology and culture, e.g. *Ubuntu*, spiritual matters, living dead, performance of rituals, indigenous languages and meanings, etc. as core courses for psychologists of African descent working with African communities to avoid harming clients and to achieve epistemological justice. In addition, we need to realize that, in moving from individual patient-client therapy and training to societal healing within and between realms of reality, the illumination of the spirit, *Skh Djr* and indigenous knowledge praxis, in fact,

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[8] Over a ten-year period (between 1988 and 1991), almost 6 000 street children, mostly Black children, were killed in Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo by Brazilian police. In 2015 1 134 young black men were killed by law enforcement officers in the United States

will allow us to see, through an African episteme, the reality of a paradigm shift that calls forth a whole new horizon of mental health practice (spirit-defined and spirit-driven) and work throughout the African world.

In summary, as an investigatory examination of indigenous knowledge praxis that honours African reality that includes the yet-to-be-born, the living and those in the after-life, this discussion gives licence to an understanding of African human functioning that goes beyond the individualistic and pathology-driven paradigm of Western psychology. In going beyond this limitation, Asa Hilliard (2007) noted: 'Our acute problem is this. How do we gain sufficient influence and leverage to change the course for our children? How can research and evaluation be used to change our trajectory, reframe the problem, and guide us to valid solutions'. The implications of this work clearly go beyond reframing therapy. It suggests that we have to also examine the questions of diagnosis, assessment, testing, evaluation and research method and methodology for African phenomena. In the fundamental task and challenge of Black psychology, Nobles (2013) suggested that as method, the illumination of the spirit, ergo, Sakhu Sdi, requires one to (1) clarify the African definition, meaning and resolute position/purpose in the world; (2) analyse and describe the concrete human conditions that affect and influence African human development and consciousness; and (3) prescribe and excite solutions and actions that will free African humanity from both material and spiritual degradation. Hence, this discussion concludes by suggesting that in using African language and terminology, required by epistemic justice, when embraced, the ideas found in this discussion will offer unlimited opportunities to explore and address a whole unique, new and original set of questions designed to illuminate the human spirit, and treat and transform spirit damaged at both the visible and invisible levels of reality.

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Pan African Humanness and Sakhu Djaer as Praxis for IKS

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