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## **African Indigenous Knowledge Systems (AIKS) in Mental Health, African Literature, and Education**

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# *Alternation*

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## **African Indigenous Knowledge Systems (AIKS) in Mental Health, African Literature, and Education**

Guest Editors

Nhlanhla Mkhize  
Nobuhle Ndimande-Hlongwa  
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# **Editorial: African Indigenous Knowledge Systems (AIKS) in Mental Health, African Literature, and Education**

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**Augustine Nwoye**

**Vincent Luxolo Mtyende**

**Olagoke Akintola**

This special edition focuses on African Indigenous Knowledge Systems (AIKS) in Mental Health, African Literature, and Education. Although there is no single definition of IKS, there is a consensus that the term refers to the local knowledge that is used by communities as a basis for making decisions in a range of activities such as education, agriculture, health care, and food preparation (Warren 1991). Flavier *et al.* (1995: 479) define indigenous knowledge as ‘the information base for a society, which facilitates communication and decision-making’. They also point out that ‘indigenous information systems are dynamic, and are continually influenced by internal creativity and experimentation as well as by contact with external systems’ (Flavier *et al.* 1995: 479). We are of the view that IKS is part of international or world knowledge, the exception being that it has been underdeveloped or marginalized, as a result of colonialism.

African indigenous knowledge systems take as their point of departure the experiential and epistemological frameworks of the peoples of the African continent, and those of African descent globally. It is important to note from the beginning that we are aware of the complexity of Africa, as espoused by scholars such as Zeleza, amongst others. Although Zeleza (2006: 14) is of the view that ‘Africa is as much a reality as it is a construct whose boundaries ... have shifted according to prevailing conceptions and configurations of global

racial identities and power' (Zeleza 2006:14), he concedes that the social invention of Africa does not mean that it is not real.

There has been a resurgence of interest in African indigenous knowledge systems as a resource for development and mental emancipation (e.g. Ramose 1999). Scholars such as Nabudere (2011) and Vilakazi (1991) have argued that the African university, and by extension, the education system in general, was profoundly and negatively affected by the interaction between the colonizer and the colonized, leading to the marginalization of African indigenous ways of knowing and being in the world (indigenous subjectivities). Although direct colonial rule has come to an end, the former colonizers continue to have a major impact on the former colonies, as far as knowledge construction is concerned. South American scholar, Quijano (2007), refers to this process as the coloniality of power. The term refers to the colonization of the imagination of the dominated peoples, the modes by means of which they produce knowledge, as well as their cultural images and artifacts.

The papers in this special edition reject the imposition of colonial forms of knowledge in fields such as mental health, African literature, and education. The papers critique the dominant, Western ways by means of which we relate to each other. Generally, the papers are critical of the Western European idea of individual rationality, the *cogito ergo sum*. This view, which is embedded in dominant Western philosophy, prizes the idea of individualism, what has been referred to as self-contained individualism, or alternatively, an atomistic view of the self, as a container of psychological attributes and emotions (Markus & Kitayama 1991). From this perspective, the self exists 'out there' and is separate from others. The papers, especially those that are devoted to issues of mental health, take as their point of departure, the understanding that individualism is not the dominant mode of relating with others and one's surroundings, in most of the world's cultures. Instead, these papers posit the idea that relationality, or interdependence, is an important component of what it means to be a person, in most indigenous societies. Being, therefore, is not static (see Baloyi & Ramose, this edition). Rather, it is an ongoing process by means of which we engage with other human beings and our surroundings. Many of the authors in this edition refer to the idea of Umuntu/Ubuntu (Nguni) or, Motho/Botho (Sotho/Tswana). Although the direct translation of the word 'Umuntu' means human beings, the authors argue that the word refers to something beyond the mere existent; it is meant to capture the range of social and ethical attributes that are considered to be the

quintessence of being human. Hence the saying, *Umuntu Ngumuntu Ngabantu*, or *Motho ke Motho ka Batho*, roughly translated as, ‘a human being is a human being because of other human beings’.

Embedded in the idea of being human, therefore, is the ethical and moral imperative to recognize other human beings, without whom, self-understanding is almost inconceivable, from an African indigenous world view, that is. This is one of the primary pre-suppositions of African indigenous knowledge systems. By extension, this points towards the complementarity of knowledge systems, that no knowledge system can be complete, if it continues to turn a deaf ear to the knowledges and experiential realities of others. Complementarity, the quest for the mutual co-existence of what may seem to be incompatible ideas, is another key feature of AIKS. In Nguni languages, the word *ububini/ububili* (twin-ness), meaning that nothing is complete while it is standing on its own, captures this understanding.

Ramose (1999) and Nabudere (2011) have argued that no knowledge system is, *a priori* superior to other knowledge traditions. Nabudere aptly captures this understanding using a Bantu (Kiganda) saying, *amagesi sigomu* which, roughly, means that no one (culture) owns the exclusive right to produce knowledge. The quest to develop AIKS, therefore, does not amount to a wholesale rejection of other knowledge traditions. Rather, it is a vindication that all forms of knowledge are based on epistemological assumptions concerning the nature of knowledge, what it means to be a knower, as well the relationship between the knower and the subject of his or her knowledge. Holism, the quest to establish affinities, even between contradictory points of view, is the hallmark of African indigenous knowledge systems. Kolawole (1997) refers to a Yoruba proverb, which state that there is no absolute way of knowing, to illustrate this point. In the African worldview, opines Kolawole (1997: 35):

The world is conceived as a negotiation of values, as a continuum, an intersection between the past, the present, and the future. The world is conceived as a negotiation of diverse convictions and so heteroglossia is more valid to any African thoughts as opposed to monovocality. No wonder the market in most traditional African settings is an open place, a space characterized by active dialogues and negotiation. It is also a place characterized by fluid boundaries as each person’s space is not rigidly divided but the borders of one woman’s space marks the

beginning of another with hardly any fixed dividing walls. The numerous points of entry and exit make room for everyone to confirm the Yoruba belief that there are diversities of routes into the market place.

From the above discussion, it can be deduced that plurivocality, as opposed to monovocality, is an important aspect of AIKS. De Sousa Santos (2014), in his book, *Ecologies of the South*, refers to the struggle to recognize alternative voices as the quest for global cognitive justice. This is by no means a neutral struggle. In defence of the need to interrogate different epistemologies, De Sousa Santos argues that ‘at the core of ecologies of knowledge is the idea that different types of knowledge are incomplete in different ways and that raising the consciousness of such reciprocal incompleteness (rather than looking for completeness) will be a precondition for achieving cognitive justice’ (De Sousa Santos 2014: 212). By the same token, the argument advancing AIKS is by no means an indication that it is a complete system of knowledge. Indeed, this would be contrary to one of the key philosophical underpinnings of African indigenous societies, that of motion (becoming). Ramose (1999:51), captures this understanding very well in his book, *African Philosophy through Ubuntu*. He argues that ‘*umuntu* (human being) is the specific entity which continues to conduct an inquiry into experience, knowledge and truth. This is an activity rather than an act. *It is an ongoing process impossible to stop. On this reasoning, ubu may be regarded as be-ing becoming and this evidently implies the idea of motion*’ (emphasis added).

The first group of papers in this edition are concerned with African indigenous healing traditions. The thrust of the authors’ arguments is that healing in African indigenous thought is not concerned with the individual *per se*, but the system as a whole. This is in line with the wholistic, African indigenous worldview, which does not draw radical distinctions between the mind and the body, matter and non-matter, and the living (life) and the deceased (death). The authors argue that healing should take into account African indigenous epistemologies and metaphysics (theory about the nature of humans and the world in which we live), axiologies (value systems) and ontology (the nature of being). The papers argue that life does not end with physical death. Rather, being human entails a series of transformations from one state of being to another, leading to ancestorhood and unity with the

Divine, *Umvelinqangi*. Human beings, like other categories of existence, are ultimately One with the Creator, in whose life force they participate. Indigenous diviners have the ability to access this energy or life force, in order to use it for healing purposes. Spirituality is, therefore, an important aspect of healing, as is the need to maintain the balance of life forces. Illness results from the disruption of the equilibrium of life forces. The equilibrium can be restored by means of ritual and other processes, leading to good health (Mkhize 2008). The papers are in agreement that healing should indeed take into account the illness explanatory models of the peoples concerned.

The first paper, by Baloyi and Ramose, conceptualizes psychology from an African experience and worldview. The authors argue that African experiences should be taken into account, in developing knowledge. They urge scholars to move away from the limited Western conceptualizations of psychology by interrogating ideas and concepts of a psychological nature, that are embedded in African indigenous languages. Through an analysis of African indigenous concepts, the authors conclude that the concept of *Moya* (Spirit) is the foundation of an African indigenous approach to psychology. They argue that universities should incorporate this concept in teaching psychology and psychotherapy. The second paper by Nobles *et al.* continues on this theme. They argue that the concept of *Sakhu* (Sah koo) should serve as a basis for the examination of African psychology/African-centred psychology as praxis and application of indigenous knowledge systems. The term *Sakhu* refers to the process of understanding, examining, and explicating the meaning, nature and functioning of being human for African people, by conducting a profound, penetrating process of 'illuminating the human spirit or essence', as well as all human spirit and phenomena. The illumination of the spirit (Skh Dir) requires us to undertake a comprehensive analysis of what it means to be a person, from an indigenous African point of view, and this requires us to interrogate the language and logic of African people. It is only then that we can gain insight into the functioning of contemporary African peoples continentally and in the diaspora. The link between *UbuNtu*, African language and logic, epistemic justice, and indigenous knowledge systems, is central to an understanding of African existence and being, the authors argue.

In his paper, Ramose notes that, from time immemorial, African peoples have associated bodily and spiritual healing to their relationship with the living-dead. Hence communication between the living and the living-dead has always been vital. Ramose's essay examines the epistemological and

cultural tension between the bones (African diviner's diagnostic tools) and the stethoscope (diagnostic tool of western medicine). The tension between the bones and the stethoscope ensues from different and contending paradigms of healing, none of which has prior and unquestionable superiority over the other, argues Ramose. The paper is presented deliberately in narrative form, to challenge the view that there is only one way of knowing, that represented by 'science'.

While the first three papers lay the theoretical and philosophical foundations of AIKS, the next set of papers as well as the last one, are concerned with interventions and empirical issues.

Chitindingu and Mkhize explored black African qualified and intern psychologists' experiences of academic and social inclusion during their professional training. They also investigated how and if indigenous knowledge systems were part of the curriculum of professional psychological training, as well as the group dynamics during training. They found that the participants were not exposed to African indigenous knowledge systems during their training, and this made it difficult for them to translate their training to their practices with black African communities. The participants experienced social exclusion during training. The authors argue that the incorporation of IKS into the curriculum should proceed from a wholistic approach, which will take into account the historic contribution of the peoples of Africa, to world knowledge. Mutambara *et al.* conducted a qualitative study in order to understand the meanings that patients with cervical cancer give to their illness as well as their perception of non-medical causes of the condition. The women understood cancer as an opportunity to strengthen their relationship with God, and as an opportunity to make things right in the present. The perceived causes of the illness, as explained by the women, revolved around witchcraft and contamination by evil forces. The study concludes by offering recommendations for counselling and psychotherapy with cervical cancer patients in Zimbabwe

Bomoyi and Mkhize explored how a tertiary institution in South Africa was responding to the mental health needs of students from traditional African backgrounds. They explored the unique contribution of a traditional healing service that was made available to students who desired to consult with a *sangoma* (diviner). The participants regarded the traditional healer as a useful member of an interdisciplinary, mental health team. Her primary role was to identify the spiritual causes of illness, and to treat identity issues, arising from

being born out of wedlock. The authors provide recommendations to address the logistic and ethical challenges, associated with the practice of traditional healing, in spaces that were meant for western forms of psychotherapy.

Spirit possession is another common feature of and way of knowing in African indigenous knowledge systems. The paper by Vambe, marks the transition between the first set of articles, primarily concerned with African healing systems, to the second group of articles, which are based on the analysis of African indigenous, written and oral texts. Vambe analyzed the spiritual voices of dead guerrillas as published narratives contained in the book, *Ndangariro dzeHondo dzeVachakabvu muZimbabwe* or *Reflections on War by the Dead in Zimbabwe*. The main objective of the article is to explore what happens when oral stories drawn from the context of spirit possession are fixed as written narratives. The author also explored the agency of spirit possession in identifying the remains of dead guerrillas for decent reburials. The article argues that the modernity of spirit possession is that it asserts the presence of the departed in human life and that the possessed speak the language of national reconciliation, attack greed, corruption and bemoan the shrinking democratic spaces of freedom in Zimbabwe. The article asserts that spiritual voices in spirit possession mark the existence of an indigenous knowledge system that can generate political narratives, which can be used to counter and alter officially-sanctioned monolithic narratives of war and peace.

Occult imaginaries have remained a constant feature in numerous publications ever since the nascent period of isiZulu literary tradition. According to Mhlambi, occult imaginaries not only provide us with rare insights into complex entanglements of socio-economic transformations in the African society, but also the political and economic anomies, particularly of post-colonial Africa, and how these anomies derive their articulations from Africa's entanglements with the uncertainties produced by global capitalism. Mhlambi draws from the anthropology of witchcraft to explore the 'modernity of witchcraft' in contemporary South Africa as explored in Zulu fiction.

The use of foreign versus local languages for the purposes of education has been another hotly debated issue regarding African IKS (Mkhize & Ndimande-Hlongwa 2014). Mtyende's paper explores the extent to which the use of transliterated proverbs in African writing contributes to the rekindling of African value systems as well as the affirmation of African indigenous knowledge systems. He confines his analysis to two texts, Achebe's *No Longer at Ease* and Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman*.

He argues that the two texts project African worldviews in a manner that can contribute to the current debate on the 'decolonisation of education' in South Africa as they negate the subordination of African values and cultures. The author argues that African literary works contribute significantly to African indigenous knowledge systems. He concludes that writing in European languages led to the transliteration (as opposed to translation) of African speech acts. The main objective of transliteration, in Anglophone African literature, was to leave an African footprint on the English language. This 'imprinting' of Africanity in African literatures, argues the author, is more poignantly manifested in the employment of proverbs.

Zungu explored the relationship between how women are portrayed in selected Zulu proverbs, and gender oppression. She argues that in most African societies language reflects the subordination of women to men, and the respect they must show to men and their elders. She discusses a number of proverbs to show that Zulu society perceives men as intelligent in conflict resolution and skilled in societal disputes. There is a perception, on the other hand, that African women have to behave in a manner which makes them eligible for marriage. They have to show respect to their elders while at home, and respect their in-laws when they are married. The paper argues that, although Zulu culture has not remained static over time, the perception persists that women need to be groomed to be nurturers and protectors of their families. Men, on the other hand, are portrayed as intelligent problem solvers and are further warned against weakness in their dealings with women. The paper contributes to the much-needed debate on understandings of gender relationships in African indigenous thought.

The next two papers are concerned with African indigenous education. Kahyana's paper examines the depiction of African indigenous formal and informal education and instruction in Akiki K. Nyabongo's novel, *Africa Answers Back*, and how his African characters try to protect the norms, customs and beliefs they have learnt from their elders, at a time when they are threatened by the activities of European missionaries. The author examines how Nyabongo portrays the threats, mostly through confrontations between his main character, Mujungu (the Chief's son and heir apparent) and Reverend Jeremiah Randolph Hubert (the missionary who propagates Western notions with the aim of destroying African indigenous ones). The author concludes that, while Nyabongo sees Western education as a threat to the survival of African indigenous education, as well as the norms, customs and beliefs it

passes from one generation to another, at the same time, he presents this hallmark of Western culture as having something positive that African people need to acquire in order to improve their living standards, that is to say, Western medicine.

The paper by Sithole, explores what can be learnt and gleaned from indigenous technologies that add to the theoretical conception of African Indigenous Knowledge in general and indigenous Physics in particular. Using a descriptive research design, the study illustrates how African Physics based knowledge can be incorporated into conventional physics in order to enhance African students' appreciation of physics. The author argues that Physics has always been generated in order to solve societal and natural challenges like weather changes, shelter, communication, food and diseases. He shows that African societies had and still have Physics concepts, which resemble formal school Physics. Therefore, it makes sense to use the existing African physics to develop the conventional concepts. The study suggests that Physics learners can apply their prior African related physics knowledge in order to reduce the seemingly mystifying nature of conceptualization of physics concepts, as experienced by some learners.

The last paper by Jackson reports on a study that used a group intervention, based on Nobles' (1986) seminal work on 'path of life development', to address the violence that impacts on the social fabric of Black society and young African-American men. He proposes an African-centred organization of mixed media, as a component of the intervention, to address the lingering psychological effects of chattel slavery. He is of the view that Black identity and African consciousness has been corrupted and distorted by what he terms 'memetic infection' and its outgrowth, the 'Three-Headed Dragon'—depression, frustration tolerance, and anger. He further argues that the spiritual psyche of Black youth worldwide has been killed by the falsification of their historical reality. Although the results of the mixed media intervention are not statistically significant, perhaps due to the small sample size, the qualitative findings shed some light into the impact of negative media images on the psyche of Black youth.

## **Conclusion**

The papers in this special edition contribute to our understanding of African indigenous knowledge systems in mental health, African literature, and

education. They also point towards an urgent need to engage critically with the knowledge-power matrix (Quijano 2007) and to introduce new epistemologies and worldviews into our curricula. This calls for an inclusive paradigm that not only recognizes the Other, with whom one needs to engage with on an equal basis (Nabudere 2011), but also the understanding that there are diverse ways to the market place, as Olawole (1997) teaches us. We hereby conclude by calling for an interdisciplinary approach towards the study of African indigenous knowledge systems, as it is evident that AIKS cannot be meaningfully pursued while one is located within one discipline. African universities and African communities in general have a major role to play in developing AIKS so that it becomes part and parcel of global world knowledge. Although AIKS is part of the global dialogue on what constitutes international knowledge, in the first instance, it needs to be salvaged from marginalization, so that it can enter the dialogue about universal knowledge, as an equal partner.

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# Psychology and Psychotherapy Redefined from the Viewpoint of the African Experience

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**Mogobe Bernard Ramose**

## 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.13<sup>th</sup> 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 pluriversity, 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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# 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<sup>1</sup>. The

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

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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’<sup>2</sup> 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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<sup>2</sup> 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<sup>3</sup>, 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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<sup>3</sup> 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 exemplaric 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<sup>4</sup> is found ancient words and

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<sup>4</sup> 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.

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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.

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Epistemic justice<sup>5</sup> 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*<sup>6</sup> 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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<sup>5</sup> By 'epistemic justice' we mean to respect and hold the African episteme as equally genuine in the human family of ways of knowing.

<sup>6</sup> 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/Sanibonani* 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.

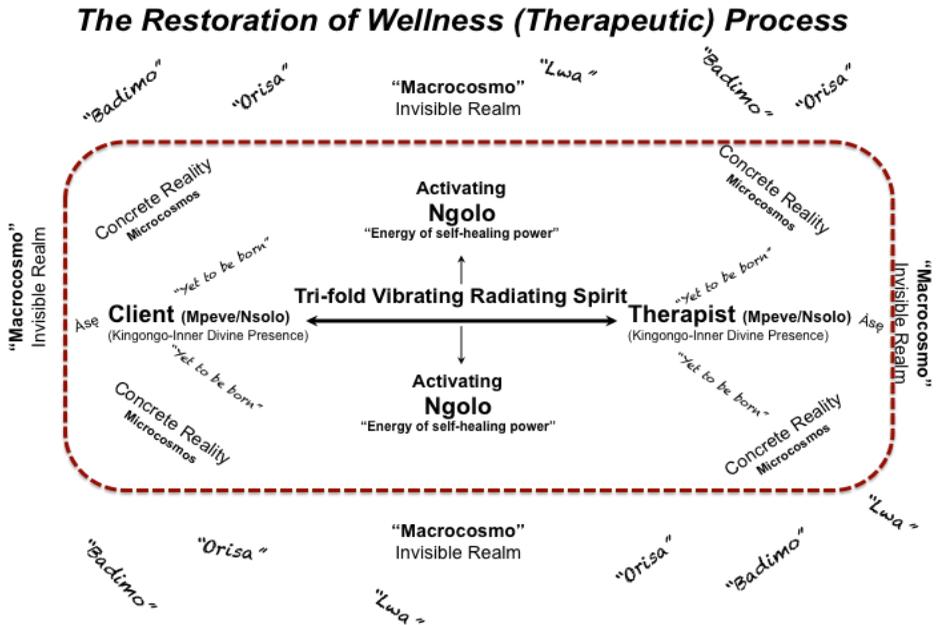
In the next three sessions Noluthando explored and focused on her relationships with her family and ancestors, and the meanings these have in her life. She decided to focus more on her pain caused by the spiritual disconnections with her significant people, through the performance of rituals. At the 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).



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*<sup>7</sup>. 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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<sup>7</sup> 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<sup>8</sup> 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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<sup>8</sup> 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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# But the Man Does Not Throw Bones

**Mogobe Bernard Ramose**

## **Abstract**

From time immemorial some African peoples associated bodily and spiritual healing with their relationship with the living-dead and communication with them. The use of selected animal bones by a special healer was one of the means of communication with the living-dead in the process of determining the cause of illness and receiving advice on its cure. This practice endures in some parts of Africa today. Our cane spirit- addicted white boss incurred the wrath of his white colleagues in the South Africa of the seventies by submitting himself to medical examination by a Western-trained Bantu medical practitioner operating in a Bantustan. In defence of his decision our white boss declared: 'But the man does not throw bones!' By this he contrasted the bones to the stethoscope; the latter being the symbol and reality of the assumed superiority of Western medicine over African ways of healing based on African culture. At the same time he challenged the racism of his time by accepting that he could be examined by a Bantu medical doctor. The purpose of this essay is to examine the ensuing epistemological and cultural tension between the bones and the stethoscope, and argue that the tension is based on different and contending paradigms of healing, none of which has prior and unquestionable superiority over the other. This argument is reflected in part by the somewhat unconventional style of our presentation, that is, storytelling, as a way of challenging the contentious dogma that there is only one 'science'.

**Keywords:** bones, experience, epistemology, knowledge, racism, psychology, tension, science, stethoscope.

## **Introduction**

The point of departure for the paper is that all ways of knowing and doing aim to understand experience so that it can be used to ameliorate, strengthen and

protect especially human life on earth. The pursuit of this aim under the guise of 'science' has resulted in the exclusion of other ways of knowing and doing and the classification as well as the hierarchisation of the human race in terms of 'superior' and 'inferior' on the one hand, and the elevation of 'science' to the position of judge as to what constitutes 'objective' knowledge on the other. Unsurprisingly, feminist epistemology, for example, has questioned both the classification and hierarchisation of the human race and the elevated status of 'science', together with its claim to 'objectivity'. This paper is written as a critique of the exclusion of other ways of knowing and doing. It is a contribution to the unfolding challenge to the classification as well as the hierarchisation of the human race into 'superior' and 'inferior', and it questions the dogma of one 'science' as the sole claimant to 'objectivity'. As part of the challenge the paper is written deliberately in the form of a story, a real story to which the writer was witness, in order to underline the point. Other ways of knowing and doing, excluded by 'science', have advanced the triple aim of the amelioration, strengthening and protection of human life. They are therefore worth listening to. Like history which for a long time has remained 'his-story' the time has come for it to recognise 'her-story' if it wants to make a credible claim to the elusive criterion of 'objectivity'. Similarly, it is now time to listen to the stories of the marginalised.

First will be the contextualisation of the story. The context is racism in South Africa inaugurated by the unjust wars of the colonisation of the country. There certainly is no attempt in the paper to provide a comprehensive history of colonial racism in South Africa. Only an outline of selected features of this history relevant to the story will be highlighted. Second will be the story itself. Although the author is reporting on a true story, care has been taken to avoid mentioning the identity of specific places and persons. It does not follow from this that the story is fictitious. The third step will be an analysis of the story. The language and style of writing here will be somewhat different from that through which the story was narrated. Even so, care shall be taken to avoid technical language so that the analysis will hopefully be comprehensible to most of the readers. The analysis will be followed by the fourth step, the conclusion.

## **The Context**

It was in 1972 when the unjustified privileges of colonial racism seemed im-

mutable and the granite structure of the apartheid construction seemed eternal. In those days there was no need to ask who was the boss at work. It was known that skin colour determined one's destiny. Those born with pink skins were mysteriously defined as white. Surely, their skin colour was not like white chalk! The definition did not quite fit the ordinary perception of the colour pink. And yet, pink is the colour that seemed an appropriate description of those privileged human beings in South Africa. There was tension between the definition 'white' and the description 'pink'. The same tension was extended to the indigenous peoples of South Africa conquered in the unjust wars of colonisation. These peoples were defined as black. Yet, some of them had a taint of brown, while others indeed were as black as soot. How does one explain this option to ignore or misinterpret accurate description in preference for a definition which has only a dubious connection with the object it claims to define? Part of the answer lies in colonised South Africa's apparently novel ascent to colour-oriented reasoning with regard to human beings.

In the aftermath of colonial conquest, the distinction between coloniser and colonised was maintained by identifying the latter as 'natives' or 'Non-Europeans'. This was subsequently abolished, apparently because it reminded the 'European' coloniser that its claim to title of the conquered territory was questionable. And so, the colonised were now identified as the Bantu and the coloniser as white. The Black consciousness philosophy contributed towards the political rejection of the identification Bantu in preference to black (Biko 2003). The rejection was not recognised by the rulers of South Africa as their intellectual alliance focused on colour-oriented reasoning. Why was this so? The focus upon colour-oriented reasoning does not necessarily originate from the same experiences in the same life-worlds giving rise to inevitably shared norms and moral values. For the Black Consciousness philosophy, the term black was an existential index pointing to all peoples oppressed and discriminated against by the successors in title to colonial racism in South Africa. It is precisely this meaning that the rulers of the country objected to, and so they did not regard the Black Consciousness philosophy as an intellectual ally. Instead, they considered it a threat to the dominant political ideology of apartheid. It was in the context of this social and political situation in 1972 that I was employed as a clerk in the Department of Bantu Administration and Development. I was located in Bophuthatswana Bantustan, also known as a Bantu homeland. Together with other colleagues, we were working under a white boss with the official designation of Superintendent.

I will use the terms white and black for ease of communication, but bear in mind the tension between description and definition. I use them also to underline their vital importance in the construction and constitution of social and political relations between the peoples so defined. Their importance is vital since it ultimately touches upon the question of justice in South Africa and human relations in general where colour-oriented reasoning is the regulative principle.

### **Our White Bosses**

We had many and different white male bosses, each with their own idiosyncracies. However, they were united in the belief that being white qualified them naturally to be the superiors of blacks. Thus they understood their occupational mission to be the development of the Bantu peoples by giving them training that would change them into objects quite close to human beings. They deliberately maintained an eccentric comportment to ensure the necessary distance between themselves and the objects of their training. They hardly smiled or laughed except when they came together every Wednesday lunchtime to have their *braai*, that is, hard porridge (*pap*) with meat or some special sausage rolls known locally as *boerewors*. We were not sure if their stomachs were the same as ours, despite the fact that they contained the very *pap* which was our staple food. By chance we got to know that some had wives and others partners. They never talked about their other halves, probably because of the Immorality Act then in force. We could not resist the thought that perhaps their studied silence on their spouses or lovers was based on the mythical fear that the libidinous, licentious sexuality of the black males could enable them to rape their beloved from whatever distance. Seemingly, it did not occur to them that despite the Miscegenous Marriages and Immorality Acts, their ancestors had long recognised the colonised as human beings by impregnating indigenous black women, perhaps even by rape. The children born of such sexual copulation were neither ants, lizards, whales nor elephants. Instead, they were wholesome human beings second to none. Yet, colour-oriented thinking preferred to baptise them as 'Coloured'. This identification preserved the illusion of the purity of being white. It ensured that whites would avoid paying *lobola* (dowry), thereby denying themselves the status of being sons-in-law to blacks.

As one white boss was replaced by another, I ventured to ask one of them exactly when we would be fully trained to become Superintendents. Invariably, each replied that this would happen ‘after ten years’. Having heard this refrain so frequently, I decided to ask if we were to start counting anew as each one of them came or should we rather continue from where we left off when the predecessor departed. I was told rather curtly that I should avoid politics.

Then came another new white boss. He did not make any secret of his excessive love for cane spirit. He gulped it each day like a hungry baby clutching at its mother’s breast for milk. One of his vaunted credentials for being a Superintendent was his experience in the gold mines where he learnt *Fanakalo*, the special language of the mines. Whenever he made a suggestion, he asked, ‘What does your *umhlizo* say,’ meaning, what is your feeling about it? By this he illustrated his knowledge of *Fanakalo*. I often wondered if he understood the philosophical meaning of this term, the heart, among the Bantu-speaking or Yoruba peoples (Eniyan 2003). As he rattled another *Fanakalo* expression, ‘*four nyao six mabele*’, and told us it means a female prostitute, I pondered if he understood that poverty as structural political and economic violence could condemn a decent lady to wear skirts without underwear (Althaus-Reid 1998). In the meantime, the cane spirit consumption took its toll and one good Wednesday, our white boss fell ill. This did not halt preparations for the routine *braai*.

### **But the Man Does not Throw Bones**

Our white boss requested that a doctor be found right in the township, to attend to him. One of my colleagues undertook the search for a doctor. The first doctor refused to come, claiming that he could not by law examine a white person. The second one obliged and was chauffeured by our colleague to the patient. As the medical examination was going on in private in the office of our white boss, another young Superintendent came for a chat with his colleague. We told him please not to enter the office, but he did not even have the decency to ask why we made such a request. He knocked casually on the door and entered before he got the come in response. Lo and behold! The unimaginable spectacle of seeing a white man being examined by a black medical doctor! He staggered back as if planet Earth was out of joint. He suddenly looked old, trying to overcome the swoon arising from the vision of a white man examined by a

black medical doctor. Without a word he drove away, apparently to contemplate the mystery of this spectacle.

Meanwhile, the black doctor completed his examination and provided appropriate treatment. He was then driven back to his surgery. Our white boss slept. Hardly an hour after the departure of the young Superintendent another one came for a visit, evidently informed about the mystery. No talk with us. He opened the door and found our white boss asleep. Before he could leave, the Senior Superintendent arrived. They walked outside and after a brief discussion, decided to ask us what happened. We gave them the information. After a while the Senior Superintendent returned alone and informed us that we could have the food for their routine Wednesday *braai*. Few would refuse a delicious free lunch. We were grateful for the opportunity to save some money since we were acutely aware that we were, as black people, purposely but seriously underpaid.

Under the influence of hysterical, irrational anger, the Senior Superintendent compromised conviction to convenience. He called the black district medical surgeon and asked him to examine our white boss. Underlying this frenzy was the rational intention to have our white boss dismissed if he were to be certified drunk during working hours. The district surgeon called his colleague. After their discussion he reported to the Senior Superintendent that it was unnecessary to re-examine the patient unless expressly requested to do so by the patient himself. Furthermore, he informed the Senior Superintendent that the medical condition of our white boss was a confidential matter between himself and the doctor who examined him. Frustration turned the Senior Superintendent to contact the police, asking them to find out if a charge could be laid against the black doctor who examined our white boss. But the police were not lawyers, and so they could not provide him with a specific law under which the black doctor could be charged.

By the time the accountant came to collect money from our office, our white boss was slightly awake. The accountant decided to engage him in discussion showing that it was wrong for him to have submitted himself to medical examination by a black doctor. The discussion turned into a debate. Their voices grew louder and heavier as the debate intensified. Our white boss finally declared in his native Afrikaans, '*Maar die man gooi nie dolosse nie!*' (but the man does not throw bones). The seventh edition of the *Explanatory Afrikaans Dictionary* states that '*dolosse*' means 'the knee bone of an animal used by witchdoctors to foretell events'. The declaration of our white boss did

not close the debate. Instead, it cast into sharp relief the contrast between the bones and the stethoscope. The former was regarded as the symbol and the reality of 'non-science' (Horton 1970), 'magic' (Jarvie & Agassi 1970), and 'witchcraft', whereas the latter was the veritable symbol and, indeed, the reality of 'science' and 'rationality'. This contrast raises a number of questions deserving the attention of scholars. I propose to turn to some of the questions.

### **Analysis: The Tension between Description and Definition**

I have already suggested that colour-oriented thinking seemed, and only seemed, to be a novelty in South Africa. One of the points of the suggestion is that colour-oriented thinking as well as the classification and hierarchisation of human beings has deep roots in the Western philosophical tradition. The tradition spans from Aristotle through to the Enlightenment (Outlaw 1996), to Modernity and right into our time (Ramosé 1999). Armed with Aristotle's famous definition of 'man' as 'a rational animal', colonisation preferred a restricted interpretation of this so that the peoples of Africa, the Amerindians and the Australasians were excluded. The effect of the exclusion was to render these peoples subhuman and therefore deserving of slavery. The same definition was used to establish the subordination of women to men (McMillan 1982). The violence of colonisation and the enslavement of the colonised were justified on the questionable Western philosophic classification and hierarchisation of human beings. The literary world assisted this endeavour through its use of the terms white and black. The former was construed as the symbol and the reality of purity, goodness, brightness and even superiority, while the latter was interpreted as ugliness, darkness, inferiority and even sinfulness or evil, theologically. It is this philosophical tradition that was implanted in South Africa at colonisation. Although the terms 'native', 'non-European' and 'Bantu' were used initially, this did not detract from the Western philosophical tradition on race. The ascent to the use of the term white in South Africa was thus the implantation and affirmation of the tradition of philosophical and practical racism. No wonder, then, that our white bosses assumed that ontologically they were superior to us.

From the declaration of *Sublimis Deus* that 'all men are rational animals' (Hanke 1937), 'The Declaration on the Rights of Man' in France, somewhat oblivious of the rights of women (de Gouges 1983), through to the

United Nations Universal Declaration on Human Rights, including the contemporary veneration of 'human rights', the ancient virus of racism subsists with seeming immortality. These declarations affirmed the necessity to eliminate racism and the oppression of women. This is yet to be realised even in the 'new' post-1994 South Africa, with its putative 'non-racial' constitution. Accordingly, this moral imperative to eliminate racism and the oppression of women is a continuing challenge to scholars. The question here is whether or not colour-oriented thinking is necessary or desirable. The answer I prefer is stated by Outlaw in these terms:

For me, raciality and ethnicity (and gender) are constitutive of the personal and social being of persons, thus are not secondary, unessential matters: they make up the historically mediated structural features of human life-worlds and inform lived experience. Further, they have both absolute (i.e., in themselves) and relative (i.e., in relation to other racial, ethnic, gender groups) value *to the extent that, and for as long as, persons take them to be constitutive of who they are.* ... In searching for new terrain and terms on and through which to fashion new theoretical and practical agendas, I am committed to two basic beliefs. First, that a full appreciation of what it means to be human requires that we take proper note of human groupings the definitive characteristics of which are constitutive, in varying degrees, of the persons in the group. Second, that the principles on which we would base both the organization of socio-political life, and those intellectual enterprises whose objects are living human beings, must take explicit account of these constitutive differences (Outlaw 1996: 174).

Significant prior attempts to deal with the question whether or not colour-oriented reasoning is necessary or desirable have been made both in South Africa and elsewhere. For example, in South Africa the Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act (Act No 24 of 1995) was enacted. It was an effort to eliminate colour-oriented thinking and replace it with 'non-racialism', thereby achieving one of the aims of the 1996 constitution. The body established by the Act referred to is commonly known as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). It is curious that the formal wording of the Act does not contain the term 'truth', and yet the Commission based on this

Act is known more by the term ‘truth’ rather than ‘national unity’. It is also odd that the term ‘truth’ was preferred to ‘justice’ (Mamdani 2002). The preference is ahistorical and a somewhat arbitrary choice of ‘truth’.

### **Analysis: The Bones and the Logic of Exclusion**

The Afrikaans dictionary already referred to explains ‘*dolosse*’, the bones, in relation to what it terms the ‘witchdoctor’. According to this explanation, the ‘witchdoctor’ is a participant in witchcraft (Oluwole 1992). The underlying presupposition here is that witchcraft is distinguishable from, and is therefore not ‘science’. On this distinction, the black doctor who examined our white boss was the true doctor by virtue of his training and assimilation into the Western paradigm of science. He was not a ‘witchdoctor’ who, by necessity of a false white superiority complex, is excluded from ‘science’. Of course, the white superiority complex appreciates magic, superstition or witchcraft only when oracle Paul (*Pretoria News* 2010), a white, predicts the winning teams of the FIFA 2010 World Cup in South Africa.

This logic of exclusion in the name of white superiority permeates all relations between blacks and whites, but it falters in the sphere of human sexuality. In the sphere of religion, classification and hierarchisation occurs, identifying some as ‘World religions’ (Kung 1997), and others as sheer experiences of ‘pagan superstition’. This rather transparent attempt to preserve the myth of white superiority must be tempered with the recognition that ‘God’, however conceived, is never a scientific probability, but only a metaphysical necessity (Gilson 1941).

In the domain of ‘science’ the logic of exclusion speaks to deficient democracy in the construction of knowledge. The systematic and sustained exclusion of other sites of knowledge and peoples renders the knowledge acquired and elevated to the status of ‘science’ unrepresentative. Mindful of the fact that, ultimately, ‘science’ is a mutable conventional agreement on what is reasonable and acceptable (Nagel 1959), the unrepresentative, undemocratic character of the Western scientific paradigm undermines its claim to science and the hallowed criterion of objectivity. Democratising knowledge and science means the practical recognition of the *sangoma*, *ngaka*, *chiremba* or *nyanga* as authentic doctors in their own right, doing so in terms of their healing paradigm second to none. On this reasoning, the identification,

‘traditional healer’, is somewhat inept and rather infelicitous. So it is that the idea of one ‘science’, and only one ‘science’, becomes the apotheosis of a false universalism and an abstract essentialism (Northrop 1947). To cure this defect it is vital to strive consciously for democratisation in the construction of knowledge and science. The pursuit of this goal must be tempered with some caveats.

First, it is crucial to remember that even in the natural sciences, ‘objectivity’ can be compromised, as Lysenkoism has shown. In our time, we have echoes of Lysenkoism in, for example, the contest between ‘star wars’ and ‘star peace’ in the sphere of nuclear armament. ‘Star wars’ and ‘star peace’ cannot be possible at the same time by the very same scientific methods using the same means or data.

Second, it is important to remember the arguments for the de-establishment of science. These, unfortunately, have not carried the day. As a result, science and the educational enterprise as a whole are, to a large extent, under the firm grip and control of the interests of money. The surreptitious transition from democracy (Hertz 2001) to timocracy has to a very large extent placed knowledge and science under the supreme governance of money. This contemporary condition is reminiscent of Protagoras (Ajei & Ramose 2008), but this time we must invert his insight and declare that ‘money is the measure of all things, of life that is that it may die and of things that are not that they may come to be’. In this situation, the life-worlds of the rich and the poor, symbolised and coloured in black and white, will subsist into the indefinite future.

## **Conclusion**

Racism is not automatically and necessarily the reason for colour-orientated thinking defining human beings as blacks or whites, even Coloureds or mulattos. Life-worlds as sites where human beings live and die are the seedbeds of experiences giving rise to norms and values including colour-oriented thinking. The attempt to eliminate life-worlds merely by assimilating them into a false universalism and an abstract essentialism is unlikely to succeed. Furthermore, the insistence upon one science and, only one science undermines the very idea of science by suppressing representativity and compromising the criterion of objectivity. Accordingly, the bones are neither

superior nor inferior to the stethoscope. Both are simply different ways of healing human illnesses.

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# **Listening to Black African Psychologists' Experiences of Social and Academic Inclusion: Incorporating Indigenous Knowledge Systems into the Curriculum**

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## **Abstract**

The aim of the current study was to explore Black African registered and intern psychologists' experiences of academic and social inclusion during their professional training. In particular, the study examined how and if indigenous knowledge systems (IKS) were part of the curriculum. The participants' experiences of social and cultural inclusion during professional training were also explored. Fourteen registered and intern psychologists participated in the study: 10 females and four males. Purposive and snowball sampling were used. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and were analysed using thematic analysis. The majority of the participants expressed a deep sense of academic and social exclusion during their training. They indicated that there was little coverage of indigenous knowledge systems in their training, with limited or no exposure to psychological perspectives that derive from Africentric or African-centred theoretical, epistemological or axiological frameworks. They detailed the challenges they experienced due to the complex group/racial dynamics between the black and white students, where the majority of the training staff are white. Another challenge was the use of English as the language of instruction, both in terms of their understanding of psychological concepts and their ability to translate these concepts into practice. This resulted in young psychologists experiencing difficulties with their professional identity during and after training. The paper discusses these findings and makes recommendations for the meaningful incorporation of indigenous knowledge systems (IKS), into professional training.

**Keywords:** African-Centred Psychology, Black African, Epistemology, Indigenous Knowledge Systems, Professional Psychological Training

## **Introduction and Background**

South Africa is a culturally complex and diverse country, this diversity resulting in its being referred to as the 'rainbow nation'. The country has a population of over 50 million inhabitants, of whom approximately 40.21 million are classified as Black African, 4.57 million are White, 4.54 million are 'Coloured', and 1.27 million are Indian (StatsSA 2011). Despite the acknowledgement of this diversity, which has been affirmed by the country's constitution, the hues comprising the country's 'rainbow' remain unequal and differentially valued. This is more so when it comes to the incorporation of indigenous knowledge systems (IKS), as well as African indigenous modes of being-in-the-world, into the curricula of the country's educational institutions, including higher education. It is against this background that the study aims to understand registered and intern Black (African) psychologists' experiences of academic and social inclusion during their professional training. It does this by exploring how and if IKS was incorporated into the curriculum, their experiences of social and cultural inclusion during training, and the perceived relevance or applicability of their training in their work with African clientele. This task calls for a brief overview of the origins of South African Psychology, as well as its complicity with apartheid, which has been established beyond rational doubt (Barnes & Cooper 2014; Cooper & Nicholas 2012).

## **Review of Literature**

The historical origins of the discipline of Psychology in the Western world, and how it was transferred to non-Western countries, is well documented (Mkhize 2004; Sinha 1984, 1990). Painter and Terre Blanche (2004) discuss the establishment of Psychology in South African universities, its embeddedness in and reliance on dominant European epistemologies and philosophical thought, as well as its non-progressive or reactionary orientation. In what must be one of the earliest critiques of South African Psychology's failure to respond to its local context, Holdstock (1981) challenged the

Eurocentric assumptions of South African Psychology, noting that the discipline remained deeply ensconced in colonial era discourses about Africa and its peoples. The 1980s were dominated by the relevance debate, with most of the scholars critiquing the scientific objectivity and neutrality of Psychology in a country that was bedevilled by social and political inequalities of apartheid South Africa (cf. Anonymous 1986; Dawes 1985; 1986; Macleod 2004). While Psychology in the international and local context has theoretically taken a safe position behind a veil of scientific neutrality and objectivity, in practice the discipline has also been used to achieve political ends (Barnes & Cooper 2014).

Among the many criticisms that have been levelled against Psychology in South Africa and globally, or rather at the institutions responsible for training psychologists, is that they turn a deaf ear towards the vast reservoir of knowledge systems that are rooted in the historical and experiential realities of the indigenous peoples. As a result of this systematic neglect of the views of non-Western peoples, Psychology is dominated by Eurocentric perspectives that privilege an atomistic and decontextualized view of the person. Psychology's dependence on Eurocentric modes of self-understanding and scholarship finds evidence in the fact that, at least until recently, most textbooks and scholarly journals used to train South African psychologists were imported from the West, the United States and the UK in particular. Similarly, psychological testing, which is one of the bedrocks of the Psychology profession, relies on tests that are developed and standardised for Western (Euro-American) populations. Tests that are translated and adapted to local settings do not necessarily erase the philosophic assumptions, values, epistemologies and communicative practices that reflect the way of life of the peoples for whom the tests were originally developed (Greenfield 1997). In addition, the atomistic view of the person and the individualistic approach to Psychology, Sue and Sue (1999) and Markus and Kitayama (1991) argue, promote competition and recognition at the expense of interdependence and cooperation, which are some of the preferred modes of relating to others in most indigenous societies.

The atomistic view of the person, with its orientation towards abstraction and personal insight, is in sharp contrast to the communal and relational, context-sensitive understanding of the human person (Baldwin 1986; Nwoye 2006; 2015; Schiele 1996; Sue & Sue 1999). The latter is the dominant and preferred mode of understanding what it means to be a person in most indigenous societies, including South Africa (Ramosé 1999). This mode of

self-understanding, which is captured by African maxims such as the Nguni saying: *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* or the Sotho-Tswana *motho ke motho ka batho* (i.e. a person is a person because of other people), point towards the open-ended and dialogic flow of be-ing. It is by virtue of one's participation in this ceaseless flow, comprising other peoples and the surrounding environs, that one attains the excellences that are truly definitive of what it means to be a human person (Mkhize 2004; Ramose 1999). True to this understanding, and commensurate with the di-unital and dialogic (Dixon 1970), as opposed to the unitary and monological view of understanding, the critique that indigenous knowledge or African-centred psychology subordinates the individual to the dictates of the community, disappears. Instead, a dynamic, interdependent, and mutually enriching relationship between the individual and the community/society, emerges (Menkiti 1984; Mkhize 2004). As Ogbonnaya (1994) eloquently argued, this mode of self-understanding incorporates an appreciation of the human person as an intrapsychic community of selves (i.e. a community of selves within, as opposed to without, the person), which is an endorsement of a fully dialogical, as opposed to a monologic account of the human person (Mkhize 2004; Nabudere 2011; Ramose 1999). This fluid understanding of the self in indigenous African thought is aptly captured by Ramose (1991: 51) in the following quotation:

[Umuntu] is the specific entity which continues to conduct an inquiry into experience, knowledge, and truth. *This is an activity rather than an act. It is an ongoing process impossible to stop. On this reasoning, ubuntu may be regarded as be-ing becoming and this evidently implies the idea of motion* (emphasis added).

Contrary to popular belief, that the 'self' in indigenous African thought subordinates the individual to the community, this understanding eschews the individualism-collectivism antimony in favour of a dynamic, mutually enhancing interdependence between the individual and the community (see Zahan 1979). This understanding also does not rule out the existence or periodic surfacing of an abstract view of the self (in the Western sense) amongst the many possible selves, even amongst people of African ancestry. Tensions and rivalries between selves also occur (Mkhize 2004; Ogbonnaya 1994).

It has also been argued in the literature that the transfer of mainstream

Western Psychology to non-Western countries is problematic due to different worldviews, the theory of knowledge (epistemology), and ontology (Grills 2002, 2004). In dominant Western epistemology, for example, the knower is a solitary subject: he or she is positioned at a distance from that which is to be known. This form of knowing, from a distance, as well as the knowledge derived by means of this process, is considered to be universal and free of biases arising from the historically particular metaphysical ontologies from which it is derived (Mkhize 2004). It is also characterised by a fragmented rather than an holistic and spiritual worldview that is the primary mode of understanding the self and the world in most non-Western countries (Dei 1994, 2002; Grills 2002; 2004; Myers 1985).

In South Africa, the relevance of Psychology continues to be debated more than 20 years after the country's first democratic dispensation (Long 2013; 2014; Long & Foster 2013; Sher & Long 2012). Long (2013) notes that Psychology has been severely criticised by various South African government ministries and leading figures in the discipline for failing to develop comprehensive and socially responsive interventions aimed at addressing the social and psychological ills in the country. He laments the fact that the debate has moved away from social relevance that characterised the 1980s towards the discourse on market relevance. It is therefore not surprising that a concerted effort has gone into the demarcation and policing of professional/disciplinary boundaries (Scope of Practice) during the last five years. The 'Scope of Practice' discourse is of limited or no use to the vast majority of the rural and poor people who have no access to any professional psychological services.

Psychologists continue to reflect on their profession as the country enters the third decade of democracy. Cooper and Nicholas (2012) and Long (2014) provide a comprehensive overview of the development of South African psychology, its collusion with Apartheid, and the transition from racially defined to unified professional societies (e.g. PsySSA) in 1994). In an interview with Barnes (Barnes & Cooper 2014), the latter details how the South African Apartheid government relied on professional psychological expertise to achieve its objectives in managing political prisoners on Robben Island. Against this unfortunate historical background, and recognising the numerous efforts to redeem South African Psychology (e.g. Hook, Mkhize, Kiguwa & Collins 2004; Naidoo 1996; Macleod 2004; Nwoye 2015; Ratele 2016; Watson & Fouche 2007), there is still a long road ahead regarding the development of the discipline so that it represents the knowledge traditions of other cultures of

the world (cf. Ramose 1999). Against this background, the current study explored Black African intern and qualified psychologists' experiences of academic and social inclusion during professional training. In this study, academic inclusion is defined in a narrower sense: it refers to the incorporation of indigenous knowledge systems and African languages into the Psychology curriculum.

## **Theoretical Framework**

The current study takes the Africentric paradigm as its point of departure, which critiques the colonially imposed hierarchies and inequities in knowledge construction. These inequities have led to the marginalisation of indigenous knowledge perspectives, as well as the psychological decentring of African peoples (Asante 1988). Africentric theoretical perspectives urge scholars to take Africa and its peoples as the point of departure, inasmuch as it is important to engage with other world narratives. Africentric analyses place African peoples at the centre, and not the margins, of scholarly thought (Asante 1988, 1991; Ramose 1999). In this sense they resonate with Afrikology, as propounded by Nabudere (2011). Afrikology is grounded in African cosmology; it seeks to trace the historical contribution of African knowledge traditions from the Cradle of Humankind to world knowledge in order to counter the fragmentation and seeming incompatibilities amongst different knowledge traditions. With the Cradle of Humankind as its important departure point, Afrikology endorses an inclusive epistemology, and aims to create a synthesis, or wholeness.

Building on Nabudere's (ibid.) work, the privileging of African thought in this paper does not amount to an exclusion of other world traditions, as such a stance would be contrary to the inclusive indigenous African epistemology (Grills 2002). According to this perspective, to be human (*umuntu* or *motho*) calls upon the adoption of a stance of openness in order to listen to the views of others, no matter how inconsequential or nonsensical these views may seem to be (Ramose 1999). Listening is an ethical imperative: one ceases to be a human being (an ethical self) at the point when one stops listening. Hence the understanding, *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*, which can also be translated as: one becomes a human (ethical) being by virtue of participation in a community of other ethical selves (Mkhize 2004). The ethical imperative to adopt a stance of silence, in order to listen to and recognise the

other as someone worthy to agree or disagree with, derives from the hermeneutic mode of understanding in indigenous African thought (Nabudere 2011).

Africentric and Afrikological analyses contest the historical and ongoing erasure of unique African contributions to world knowledge (Diop 1974). This erasure is accompanied by the distancing of indigenous peoples from the self-enhancing intellectual and cultural heritage, leading to a sense of inferiority and world domination (Shockley 2003). The initiative to return to the source in order to 'retrieve that which was lost during the period of African destruction' (Shockley 2003: 21) cannot succeed without a critical evaluation and re-orientation of the education system. This is not a call for a return to a mythical past, but rather an attempt to interrogate, de-construct and re-construct the past, thereby imagining a future that is free of the mental shackles that were imposed by colonialism and Apartheid. Africentric paradigms seek to develop an inclusive Psychology that will resonate with the values, epistemologies, philosophies, worldviews of the peoples of African ancestry, whose views have been marginalised. At the same time it remains cognisant of how different epistemologies and value orientations continue to permeate each other. Hence Nabudere's (2011) quest for wholeness and synthesis as opposed to fragmentation in knowledge construction.

There is a paucity of literature on the experiences of Black African psychologists regarding their professional training, as well as the integration of indigenous knowledge systems as one of the key outcomes of professional training. Local literature has tended to prioritise the under-representation of Black people in the training programmes (Ahmed & Pillay 2004; Pillay, Ahmed & Bawa 2013). Pillay and Johnston (2011) examined clinical psychologists' experiences of their training and internship placement, with a particular focus on the key outcomes of training, including research training. Although the participants were generally satisfied with their training, gaps were noted, particularly in terms of their readiness to practise across different cultural and linguistic contexts. In a study exploring the experiences of Black students who trained in 'White' institutions, Christian, Mokutu and Rankoe (2002) found that the students felt marginalised by what they considered to be tokenism. The study also highlighted intense racial dynamics involving black versus white, as well as black versus black interactions during counselling. As the authors indicate, the fact that the generic category of *Black* (i.e. Indian, Coloured and African students) was used was one of the study weaknesses, as

the critical *between* and *within* groups differences were overlooked. Although almost all the studies conclude by calling for the inclusion of African languages and traditional or indigenous health models into the curriculum, the specific experiences of African psychologists, and in particular, their views on the integration of IKS into the curriculum, has received scant attention. The studies also do not spell out what the inclusion of IKS into the curriculum might entail in practice.

## **Aim and Objectives**

South Africa's new democratic dispensation highlights the importance of inclusion in academic and other spheres of social, economic and political life. *The Rhodes Must Fall* movement (Nyamnjoh 2016) has in time metamorphosed into a call for the Africanisation or democratisation (transformation) of the curriculum. This paper does not attempt to engage the meaning of transformation, as a number of CHE (Council on Higher Education) documents have been devoted to that task (CHE 2015, 2016). Instead, in order to achieve the study's aim of examining academic and social inclusion in professional psychological training, from the perspective of qualified and intern Black African psychologists, three study objectives were addressed. These were:

- 1) To interrogate how and if African indigenous knowledge systems were incorporated into the Psychology curriculum;
- 2) To explore African qualified and intern psychologists' experiences of social inclusion during their professional training; and
- 3) To explore the participants' perceived relevance of their training in their practices.

The above aim and objectives resonate with the call by scholars aligned with the African-centred paradigm (e.g. Dei 1994; Graham 2004; Parham, White & Ajamu 2000), namely, to document the educational and other experiences of African peoples, from their own perspectives, thus moving them from the margins to the centre of educational and scholarly discourse. Not only will the findings provide insight into the experiences of this group, they will also enable Psychology programmes to train psychologists who are well equipped to respond to the needs of South Africa's diverse population.

## **Method**

### ***Study Design***

As the purpose of the study was to understand participants' lived experiences of a particular phenomenon, a qualitative, non-experimental research design using in-depth interviews was used. This research design allowed the researchers to explore the participants' experiences (Neuman 2006), thus enabling a deeper understanding of the social phenomena being studied. Several researchers support the use of qualitative research designs to study lived human experiences, from the perspective of the authors concerned (Barden 2013; Burrell 1997).

### ***Participants and Sampling***

Fourteen Black African psychologists in the private and public health sectors in KwaZulu-Natal Province were interviewed, of whom seven were qualified psychologists who were registered in the following categories: clinical, educational, research and counselling. The remaining seven had completed their first year of professional training and were in the process of doing their internships. The participants consisted of 10 females and four males, and their ages ranged from 25 to 55 years. They had received training from various institutions in the country, while one had trained abroad, his comments being based on his observations of and involvement in professional psychological training in South Africa. Purposeful and snowball sampling techniques were used. Only Black Africans who were qualified as psychologists, or those who were in the process of qualifying, were sampled.

### ***Data Collection and Procedure***

Permission to conduct the study was provided by the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee of the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Data were collected by means of a semi-structured interview protocol that had been designed for this purpose. In the first instance, the participants were invited to describe their experiences of professional psychological training, the diversity of the curriculum (i.e. inclusion of indigenous knowledge systems), as well as the use of indigenous languages during and after training. Probes were then used to explore emerging issues. The duration of the interviews was

one hour on average. Participants were interviewed in their respective work environments after they had consented to participate in the study.

### **Data Analysis**

The data, comprising the audiotapes as well as the notes taken during the interviews, were transcribed as soon as this was practically possible. Thematic analysis was used, as it allows the researcher to report patterns in the data, while staying as closely as possible to the participants' experiences (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane 2006; Kerwin *et al.* 1993). The process involved reading and re-reading the transcripts to become familiar with the data and to supplement it with the research notes that were taken during the interviews. In a procedure similar to the one adopted by Burrell (1997), five stages were followed in sorting out the data. The stages involved: 1) sorting and organising important information from the data; 2) identifying logical relationships and contradictions in the data; 3) re-examination of the transcripts to verify or disconfirm emerging trends; 4) identifying and sorting out themes for each interview; and 5) categorisation and comparison of themes across cases (Kerwin *et al.* 1993).

### **Findings**

The findings are reported with reference to the three objectives. With respect to the first objective, which was to explore how and if indigenous knowledge systems were incorporated into the curriculum, two dominant themes emerged. There was a total absence of IKS in the curriculum, or alternatively it was given a token status, while language of instruction emerged as a barrier to the meaningful understanding of concepts. As far as the second objective was concerned, namely the participants' experiences of social and cultural inclusion, the participants experienced a deep sense of social isolation during their professional studies. In some instances, this led to some participants doubting their abilities and if they were selected on merit. Finally, with respect to the third objective, namely the perceived relevance of training to professional practice, the non-equivalence or non-transferability of psychological concepts, from one language to another, made practice difficult. Each of these themes are presented and discussed in the sections that follow.

### ***Objective 1: Incorporation of IKS into the Curriculum***

There was a paucity of IKS during professional training, as the majority of the participants had not been exposed to indigenous epistemologies or philosophies. In addition, the language of instruction, in this case English, made access to the curriculum difficult, leading to rote learning in some cases.

### ***Theme One: Paucity or Token Status of IKS***

Limited or lack of exposure to indigenous knowledge systems recurred persistently from the responses of all the participants. The extracts below support this theme.

#### *Extract 1*

*...[During] my time there was no [training in] indigenous knowledge systems... When it comes to theories, Psychology theories, its difficult to really kind of.....understand what they are saying...you can't relate to what they are saying because most of them really are not found [locally] like there are not indigenous.....So it's like stuff that is just from Jung, Freud and somewhere overseas...*

#### *Extract 2*

*Well [during] my time...most of them [theories] really are not found like---like there was no indigenous course....I like just learned them to pass them but I could not relate.*

Some participants, however, indicated that they had been briefly exposed to traditional healing or indigenous knowledge systems by means of seminars or invited lectures at the Masters level, even though there were no designated courses dealing with the subject. The scarcity of courses at the Honours and undergraduate levels is concerning as this means that the students were not well-grounded in indigenous African and other epistemologies of non-Western peoples, to enable them to use these knowledge traditions to make sense of the lived experiences of their clientele. It is also evident from Extract 2 that the participants' estrangement from the curriculum promoted rote as opposed to deep learning. Hence the tendency to learn the concepts in order to pass. The foreign-trained psychologist, who as a result had taken it upon

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himself to fill the gap by developing IKS modules, also echoed the absence of IKS or alternative epistemologies in the curriculum:

### *Extract 3*

*[Where I trained] There was ... was no separate course called indigenous healing systems [and that is] why I have been trying... to change the balance. All my writings, all my researches are focused on redressing that limitation, that absence, and that is why I have been writing in the area of African Psychology.*

Although one cannot generalise the current study findings, there seems to be a consensus in the literature that Psychology has failed to incorporate the experiences and worldviews of minorities into the curriculum (Blokland-Eskell 2005; Long 2013; Pillay & Kramers 2003).

## ***Theme Two: Language as a Barrier to Professional Training***

All participants expressed the difficulties that they faced in their attempts to understand and explain complex psychological concepts in a language that was not their mother tongue. This was not only a challenge as far as learning Psychology was concerned; English as a medium of instruction also compromised the participants' ability to express themselves, as well as their ability to use the concepts in practice.

### *Extract 4*

*....and if I was reading in my own language I bet I might have felt much confident eee with my theory by the end of the year of my M1 [First Year of the Masters Course]. I am more comfortable speaking in my own language. I may understand and be fluent in other languages, but I am comfortable in my own language. I will find an expression in my language to communicate what I want to say um more easily than I can do in another language. So the language of instruction and of the content was a barrier.*

### *Extract 5*

*I think that links to... I would have needed 2 years to go through the theory and all that literature...- because one needs to-to-to master [English ] to... to*

*be familiar with e-e [content] in M1. Because you are just, yah, um, as an IsiZulu-speaking person, learning all concepts in English that entails ...a lot of reading and e-ee rereading before one understands, and that takes a long time.*

*Extract 6*

*Well, I was privileged to study in my country [states African country outside South Africa]. So at times my lecturer is from my own community, my own ethnic group, so in some cases he use[d] my language and [drew] our attention to related [cultural] stories to bring home the issue. But that is not what happens in other training [programmes]. People who are trained abroad most of them were numbered, [they] are training in a place where there is no way of translating, ...only English is used, [there is] no way of giving you an alternative, no way of giving you some kind of translation.*

As the extracts above indicate, the participants struggled to translate their training from English to their mother tongue in order to make sense of it. In practice this means that they spend more time digesting and making sense of what they are learning. In a demanding and hurried one-year course, this means that the African language students lose valuable time while mother-tongue English speakers are making progress. The participant in Extract 6 above also alludes that there are cultural tales and narratives that are imbued with psychological meaning. These cultural narratives or folk tales can serve as a basis for bridging the cultural divide, thus bringing indigenous voices to the core, and not the periphery, of professional training. This, however, requires the teaching staff to be familiar with such cultural tales, as they are expressed in African folklore and legends, including the current written literature (e.g Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Tsitsi Dangaremba's *Nervous Conditions*).

### ***Objective Two: Participants' Experiences of Social and Cultural Belongingness***

With respect to the second objective, namely the participants' experiences of social and cultural inclusion, group/racial dynamics and self-doubt were

intertwined, and for that reason they are presented as a single, over-arching theme.

### ***Group/Racial Dynamics and Self-Doubt***

Group/racial dynamics between students and between students and their lecturers emerged as an overarching theme. In general, the participants experienced social exclusion and isolation during their training. This sense of isolation was intertwined with self-doubt. This is perhaps not surprising, given South Africa's racially segregated past. Black African students felt isolated and in some cases they even questioned their capabilities as students. The following extracts talk to concerns of this nature.

#### *Extract 7*

*I think South Africa is just a difficult country to live in to begin with because of its past, and from First Year there has always been issues in class. It begins with walking in a class as a new student and Whites are standing and sitting in one place, Blacks and Indians in one place, Coloureds [as well]. It just begins there and you are like o-oh does it mean I am Black I must go sit in the black corner? It begins there. I have experienced class dynamics all the time and it's just difficult...I mean when it comes to race have I ever felt like part of the class? No! I will be lying. I have never felt part of the class.*

#### *Extract 8*

*There was so much segregation in class and **I honestly don't want to talk about it but it wasn't a good experience at all. Being Black in the department was like [Black students were] an adopted system, there was so much segregation...it was really bad.** (Emphasis added)*

#### *Extract 9*

*But for the first time in South Africa I realised I was Black because of the issues .....I was battling a lot in terms of my skin colour and having to adapt as a Black person **and starting to question myself, in terms of, am I good enough.** (Emphasis added)*

As the extracts indicate, Black African students who trained in predominantly

or historically White institutions did not experience a sense of belonging; the majority felt excluded from the class. Space was one of the significant markers of difference, with students tending to spontaneously self-organise according to their racial categorisation. South Africa's historical division according to race (Robus & Macleod 2005) seems to have continued well into the post-apartheid era as 'spaces continue to be racialised, not only through the history of higher education, but also through socialisation, staffing composition and the politics of space' (Duncan 2005, cited in Robus & Macleod 2005: 471).

### ***Objective Three: Participants' Perceived Relevance of Psychology***

The third objective explored participants' perceived relevance of their training by examining their ability to apply what they had learned to their work with clients from indigenous African communities. Conceptual non-equivalence or the non-transferability of psychological terms emerged as a major theme.

### ***Non-Transferability/Non-Equivalence of Concepts***

According to Greenfield (1997), non-equivalence or non-transferability emanates from the fact that most psychological concepts were developed in the West, and as a result they reflect the worldview, assumptions and communicative practices of their origin. This seems to have been one of the major obstacles experienced by the participants and for that reason we have quoted at length from their interviews:

#### *Extract 10*

*Because you've got to come out with your own kind of concepts, because if you understand that you are trained in English and you work with clientele that don't speak English ...and have never had equivalence um at least in an African language of those terms that you are taught, **in half the time you are walking in the dark hoping that you are being accurate.** (Emphasis added.)*

#### *Extract 11*

*It's really difficult because one of the things is that some of the concepts, some of them don't even exist in the language in Zulu that are in English, [terms]*

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such as Psychology. **Like [the term] 'Psychology' is a non-existent concept and only when you explain it and say like well I work with people's behaviour and I try to understand their mind and their behaviour and that's when you [get understood] ...** (Emphasis added)

*Extract 12*

*Oh yah, you find that there are no words that you can use... for some of the concepts in my language or in the African languages because it's just that some of the words just don't exist even if you were to translate [the term] 'psychologist' in Zulu what would you say? I don't know.* (Emphasis added)

*Extract 13*

*I think this is a problem 'coz we learn everything in English and when a patient comes we have to talk in the patient's language, and the problem comes when you want to translate emotions, particularly if you want to talk to black people... I guess the difficulty is translating the language, the concepts which we learn in English ... into the [African] languages.*

*Extract 14*

*Believe me, it's very difficult to talk about, to actually talk to people of African descent about Psychology; they just simply don't know what you are talking about. So you come to a point where you try and explain... maybe that will be the closest [you will come] to--to help them understand, but it's difficult. **The simple answer is that it's very difficult to talk to Africans about that.*** (Emphasis added)

*Extract 15*

*With other [African] cultures that I have worked with it is difficult to tell somebody that this person has depression, you know. So [you] have to find something, that is, a word that they would understand. So in the process you have to create your own vocabulary and find analogies that you can [refer to] ...[Rather than use] the concept 'you are depressed' or 'you are schizophrenic' or 'you have personality disorder', I would rather explain the dynamics of [that condition].*

The above extracts raise serious concerns given the resources that are invested in training psychologists, and this is more so if one takes into

consideration the dire need for African- trained psychologists to deal with the massive traumas in our society. If institutions are training students who are unable to express themselves in their own mother tongue and hence, one would presume, be more effective in working with their own communities, then what is the relevance of the call to increase the number of Black African psychologists? It is also evident from the extracts above that the participants' point of departure is the deficiency narrative, namely that African languages are not equipped to deal with a range of psychological concepts, rather than the fact that they have not been trained well enough to traverse different cultures and epistemological domains. Hence one learns from Extract 8 that 'the concepts don't exist' in the Zulu language. Extracts 8 – 12 express similar concerns. The practitioners' failure to deploy Psychology in the service of their communities is attributed to the poverty of African languages. Non-equivalence, in our view, has nothing to do with the conceptual poverty of African languages, but rather the fact that the English concepts, which were derived from a different background life world or linguistic community, do not find resonance in a life world that is premised on a different horizon of understanding, to use Gadamer's (1975) term.

## **Discussion**

The participants in this study expressed a deep sense of isolation during their professional training in Psychology. This sense of cultural isolation and lack of social belonging echoes the findings that have been observed with minority (mainly African-American) students in historically white universities in the US and the UK (Adetimole, Afuape & Vara 2005; Barden 2013; Burrell 1997; Guiffrieda & Douthit 2010; Wells 2008; Wright 2008). Internationally, overt and covert experiences of racism, problematic relationships with professors, limited or lowered academic expectations from students of African ancestry, being 'invisible' in class, vicarious experiences of racism, have been amongst the consistent themes in this line of research (Adetimole *et al.* 2005; Burrell 1997; Patel & Fatimilehin 2005). Similar forms of alienation have been reported about African students in South Africa's historically white tertiary institutions, where it has been noted that this group presents with poorer social and emotional adjustment (Sennet, Finchilescu, Gibson & Straus 2003). The current study findings corroborate Christian *et al.*'s (2002) observations about racial tensions and social isolation that were felt by Black (Indian, African and

Coloured) students during their training in Psychology. Nair (2008) has also reported that racial dynamics and identity issues were an important feature during training for South Africa's clinical psychologists, most of whom felt unprepared to work in diverse multicultural contexts. That the alienation and cultural isolation that was experienced by the participants in this study was so deeply felt, in some cases even after years of completing their training, is a cause for concern. This is more so if one takes into account that the participants were being trained to become psychologists: i.e. to practise a discipline that is devoted to the psychological and social well-being of individuals and communities.

The observation above draws our attention to the fact that demographic representation and even the majority status of African students in historically white institutions are not appropriate indices of inclusion (CHE 2016). It is rather the transformation of institutional cultural codes (Suransky & van der Merwe 2014), in a way that reflects the lived (existential) experiences of African students, that is important (CHE 2015). One way of doing this, as we show in the section below, is by transforming the curriculum so that it includes the historical contributions of the peoples of African ancestry to world knowledge (Nabudere 2011). In line with the interdisciplinary orientation of Afrikology and African Studies in general, this requires a grounding in diverse disciplines such as (African-Centred) Theology, Philosophy, History and Literature, to mention a few. Mukuka's (2013) analysis of Kapwepwe's *Shalapo Canicandala* (a novel in isiBemba, a language spoken in Zambia) in order to identify concepts that bear on Africentric Psychology, is an excellent example. Similarly, Baloyi (2008) relies on philosophical analysis as well as expertise in Nguni and Sotho languages to show that to understand African Psychology, one needs to begin with the concept of *Moya* or *Mowa* (Spirit). In this he finds support in Nobles' analysis of *Sakhu* (hence the term *Psyche*, and Psychology) and its origin in the ancient Bantu/Kemetic (Egyptian) thought. Grills' (2002; 2004) work in West Africa also shows the psychological richness of indigenous African languages. The participants' concerns in this study, that there are no words to explain psychological states in African languages, is not a reflection of reality. It is rather a sad outcome of their mis- or under-education. This is a challenge to African psychologists, those working on the continent in particular, to strengthen the culture of research (Mpofu 2002) in order to play the role other intelligentsia have played for their respective countries.

It is equally disconcerting that, more than two decades after the first democratic dispensation, the Professional Board for Psychology has given no directions regarding the indigenisation of the curriculum and proficiency in African languages. This leads to a default situation whereby white students are by and large not trained to service African populations (Mkhize, Dumisa & Chitindingu 2014). Failure to attend to the language of training in Psychology (Pillay & Kramers 2003; Pillay & Siyothula 2008) does not impede communication with the client *per se*—this too is important—it also means that the background life world, or the horizon of understanding against which the clients make sense of their world, and their place in it, cannot be grasped by the psychologist (cf. Gadamer 1975; Mkhize 2004). The participants' comments, that there are no words in African languages to express critical psychological phenomena, lend credence to the view that their training has estranged them from their own linguistic communities and their deep cultural heritage. 'Uneducated', or rural, organic intellectuals continue to keep this heritage alive. It is about time that Western-educated psychologists listen to and collaborate with these cultural experts.

From the findings discussed above, it is apparent that the training received by the students alienates them from a deep understanding of their own cultures. We will use an example to illustrate this further. In an oral examination of professional students that was attended by one of the authors, a candidate was asked how an analysis that is informed by African-centred psychology would make sense of a case study of an African child who was presenting with psychological and educational problems. He replied confidently and without hesitation as follows: 'I would advise the parents to slaughter a goat'. While we have great respect for and do practise African rituals, a critical analysis that is informed by Afrikology or Africentric thought calls upon us to move away from surface thinking to a deeper engagement with the text or ritual, in the tradition of African hermeneutic inquiry (Nabudere 2011). An analysis that is informed by African hermeneutics would have pointed out how the (*imbeleko*) ritual and its accompaniments situate the child within the family of those that have come before him or her and those that are yet to be born, and in so doing, affirming the child's identity.

We are of the view that Afrikology presents a useful framework for the transformation of Psychology as well as the inclusion of IKS into the curriculum. This entails the study of rituals as well as classics such as the works of Freud, Jung, and Credo Muthwa, and the Nile Valley civilisations, to

mention a few, in order to tease out ideas that may be of African origin that remain deeply hidden in these texts. That might sound like a pipedream, at the superficial level of analysis, if it were not for the precedents that have been set by scholars such as Bakan (1990) and Bynum (1999), to mention only two. Bakan (1990) shows how Jewish mystical thought might have influenced Freud's psychoanalytic theorising, while Bynum's (1999) brilliant work on the *African Unconscious* makes a strong case for the African and Jewish origins of Freud's theorising. This is not to detract from Freud's brilliant and unprecedented synthesis of the diverse range of ideas, leading to the development of his theory. Nobles' (2006) work on *Sakhu* (see this edition) does something similar as well with respect to the worthy contributions of ideas from the Nile valley, towards the development of Psychology. Analyses of this nature, together with a critical examination of African proverbs, songs, novels, as well as the scholarly works of Fanon (1986), Biko (1978), Manganyi (1973, 1979, 1981) and Ramose (1999), to mention a few, should form the foundation of African-centred Psychology. This is an inescapably interdisciplinary and ongoing project, and not a finalised product. Hence we are confident that the recent engagements between Nwoye (2015) and Ratele (2016), on the subject of African or Africentric Psychology, will have the positive spinoff of enriching the debate and the furtherance of new knowledge in the field.

## **Conclusion**

In this paper we have explored Black African qualified and intern psychologists' experiences of academic and social inclusion during professional training. Using a qualitative research design, we interviewed a small sample of participants, focusing on the inclusion of IKS or African-centred psychology into the curriculum, their social and cultural experiences during training, and the psychologists' views on their ability to use their training in indigenous African contexts. The findings affirm the social and cultural isolation of Black African students during professional training, and this was more so in historically White institutions. Although progress has been made in terms of the representation of Black African students in professional Psychology programmes, social exclusion and isolation remain amongst the major barriers. This calls for institutions of higher learning to move beyond racial representativity in terms of numbers; the social and cultural spaces of universities also need to be transformed. The participants experienced major

challenges in their attempts to translate and apply their training in order to serve communities speaking African languages.

Apart from the usual but rarely implemented recommendation that psychologists should have a working knowledge of an African language (e.g. Drennan 1999; Swartz & Killan 2014), we have argued that the curriculum needs to be transformed along the principles of Afrikology as advanced by Nabudere (2011), not only to ensure that students are grounded in the historical contributions of Africa to world knowledge, but also in order to develop critical scholars that can contribute to the ongoing dialogue to create new knowledge. The study of African novels and proverbs (amongst others) is also highlighted as an important aspect in the quest to develop Africentric Psychology. We, however, acknowledge the study's limitations, amongst which is the small purposive sample comprised of psychologists working in only one province. Due to the nature of the sampling techniques that were employed, namely purposive and snowball sampling, it is possible that the study attracted those who had strong views about the topic at hand. Future studies should make use of mixed methods designs and the random sampling of participants from different provinces. They should also involve interviews with university lecturers and programme directors of Psychology, as well as an analysis of actual curricula material.

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# **‘Goblins left dirt in my birth canal’: Perceived Cultural Beliefs on the Causes and Meaning Making among Women with Cervical Cancer in Zimbabwe**

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James January**

## **Abstract**

This qualitative inquiry sought to understand the meanings that patients with cervical cancer give to their illness as well as their perception of non-medical causes of the condition. An interpretive phenomenological research design was adopted where twelve patients living with cervical cancer attending two medical institutions were purposively sampled on their first visit. The researchers used in-depth interviews to collect information from the participants. Thematic content analysis was used to analyse data. Results revealed the following themes that explain what cancer meant to women: strengthening of their relationship with God, traditional meanings, and the drive to make things right in the present. The perceived causes that were reported by the study participants were centred around witchcraft and contamination by evil creatures. The study has implications for those who offer psychotherapy and counselling for women with cervical cancer in this population.

**Keywords:** women, cervical cancer, meaning-making, Zimbabwe

## **Introduction**

Cancer is a chronic and deadly condition, and those who are diagnosed with it

usually live in fear of death and pain (Lekhuleni & Mothiba 2013). Although modern advances have led to improved cancer outcomes and symptom management, a cancer diagnosis evokes images of pain, suffering, and death (Lee 2008), especially in developing countries where, because of their low socio-economic status, patients are unable to access state of the art treatments. The unavoidability of death leads patients to always ruminate about their mortality (Lee 2008). In relation to this, a cancer diagnosis leads to discouragement, despair, defencelessness, doubt and a general feeling that the future is meaningless (Lehto & Therrien 2010). The meanings that individuals attach to chronic medical conditions, and their beliefs on symptom causation usually have a strong relationship with the coping strategies and the health-seeking behaviour they may engage in. According to Kleinman (1978), beliefs about diseases have a bearing on treatment decision making, symptoms presentation and healing. Cervical cancer is a chronic condition that is subject to various interpretations by patients, and is associated with a high mortality rate in different parts of the world.

Cervical cancer is the second most common cancer in women globally, and ranks as the most common cancer in most of sub-Saharan Africa and parts of Asia (Bray, Ren, Masuyer, & Ferlay 2013). In Zimbabwe it remains the most prevalent cancer among women and has been suggested to have increased at a rate of 3.3% per year from 1991 to 2010 (Chokunonga *et al.* 2013). However, research evidence from the country has shown that access to screening, diagnostic and palliative care services is limited ( Tarwireyi 2005; Nyakabau 2014 ), and that most women lack knowledge of screening services for cancers (Mupepi, Sampselle, & Johnson 2011, Munyaradzi, January, & Maradzika 2014 ).

Owing to lack of knowledge or little knowledge, and the chronic nature of the condition, victims and caregivers usually develop their own explanatory models. According to Park *et al.* (2008) these meanings and beliefs have a bearing on the patients` treatment-seeking behaviours and their health in general. It is therefore important to gain knowledge of what it means to be a cervical cancer patient, and the perceived traditional causes of the condition. It is important to note that finding meaning is particularly important when a person is facing a serious illness, because the illness itself causes permanent changes in life that force a re-evaluation in any previously assumed meaning (Fryback & Reinert 1999; Sorajjakool & Seyle 2005). Meaning making is very

important in understanding health behaviours as it has a heavy bearing on treatment seeking and treatment outcome.

Kleinman *et al.* (1978) noted that awareness of the patient's model helps the medical practitioner to educate the patient and the significant others so as to resolve conflicts emanating from different values and interests. Kleinman and Benson (2006) reiterated the need to be aware of the lived experience of those who are ill, since patients have socially constructed and ingrained core beliefs about their illness. Kleinman, Eisenberg and Good (1978) distinguished between disease and illness. They stated that disease is a malfunction in the body's physiology as given by the medical paradigm, while illness represents personal, interpersonal and cultural reactions to disease and discomfort. Illness is therefore culturally constructed in that how people perceive, experience and cope with disease is shaped by the meanings that people derive from the illness. This observation is very important in the current study as the authors try to unpack the illness behaviour of women diagnosed with cervical cancer in Zimbabwe. Understanding the cultural construction of the women's meanings and beliefs on the causes of cancer of the cervix is thus crucial.

It has been noted that having a debilitating illness like cervical cancer may lead individuals to go against vital global beliefs: for example, in justice, generosity and the predictability of the world and personal control (Holland & Reznik 2005; Jim & Jacobsen 2008 ). Feeling that one's life has meaning is a result of an individual's belief that he/she is fulfilling a unique role or purpose in life by living to the full potential (Breitbart 2005). Park and Folkman (1997) noted that people use a set of beliefs, goals and sense of purpose to structure their lives and give meaning to experiences. Holland and Reznik (2005) observed that receiving a diagnosis of cancer has the potential of disturbing the global meaning, i.e. former important viewpoints and beliefs. In a cross-sectional study of cancer survivors, Jim and Andersen (2007) found meaning to be a partial mediator for the effects of both physical and social functioning impairments on heightened distress.

In traditional African families there is a strong belief that illness is caused by witchcraft, punishments from ancestors and other non-material beings (January & Sodi 2006; Peltzer & Mngqundaniso 2008; Sodi 2009). Chipfakacha (1997) notes that black Africans attribute illness to superstitious causes, and therefore believe that disease can be due to magic and evil spirits and other conditions for which causes have not been empirically determined.

In Zimbabwe medical pluralism is common, and individuals afflicted with illness may consult biomedical services, at the same time receiving help from non-biomedical entities (January & Sodi 2006). This behaviour may then lead to doing away with biomedical drugs, and in the case of cancer, individuals may cease going for chemotherapy. The situation is compounded by the fact that the chronic nature of the disease and failure in the remission of symptoms may result in a number of explanatory styles being constructed.

The aim of the study was to find out the meanings that women with cervical cancer give to their ailments, and the cultural beliefs that are related to cervical cancer among these women. The meaning-making model was used to explore what having cervical cancer meant to the women in an African setting. Kleinman (1978) noted that it is important to be aware of the lay non-professional, non-specialist culture in which illness is defined. In this entity illness is marked by personal, social and cultural meanings of a given disease. Kleinman also reiterates that individuals have explanatory models that help them make sense of illness episodes. These explanatory episodes may help to answer questions like ‘Why did this happen to me?’ Such questions call on various explanations, and these greatly influence the coping strategies.

## **Methods**

### ***Design and Setting***

The focus of the study was to explore patients’ experiences of cervical cancer. A qualitative approach was considered to be the most appropriate to adopt, since it allows for richer data to be gathered. It is a subjective approach that is used to describe life experiences and give them meaning, and is often credited for its ability to effectively obtain information that is specific to cultural groupings and the social environments of individual populaces (Camic, Rhodes, & Yardley 2003). The interpretive phenomenological research design was adopted for use in this study. An interpretive phenomenological research design aims at bringing to the core the ‘lived experiences’ or the ‘life-world’ of cancer patients. This approach helps the researcher to gain an appreciation of individuals’ subjective experience of an illness, and an important awareness of their motivations, behaviours and misconceptions (Camic *et al.* 2003). It also aids the gathering of meaningful data through inductive, qualitative methods (Lester 1999). In phenomenology participants are given the freedom

to choose their own examples of lived experiences and perceptions of reality (Leedy & Ormrod 2001).

### ***Participants***

The target population was comprised partly of patients living with cancer who visited an institution that offers palliative care for cancer, and some who visited a general hospital. These participants were interviewed at initial contact, that is, before receiving any services from the two institutions. Usually these women were referred by their local clinics for further management. Altogether, 12 women took part in the research. Seven patients were recruited in 2012, and the other five in 2016 at a different site. The number of participants was low because the centres serve very few people per month, and the participants were interviewed on their first visit. Moreover, such low numbers have been known to be particularly useful in interpretive phenomenological analysis as the case-by-case analysis provides for a richer, deeper and more thorough understanding of the phenomena under study (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin 2009). Purposive sampling was used to select participants who had received a diagnosis of cervical cancer, and were willing to take part in the study. To be included in the study the participants had to fulfil the following conditions: a) have had their diagnosis at least five months before b) should have been new patients at the institution, and should not have begun the palliative care programme. The participants were aged 27-43 years. Eight participants were married, three were widows, and one was single.

### ***Research Instrument***

Twelve in-depth interviews, which were semi-structured were conducted. An interviewer guide was used to steer the direction of the interview, and probing was employed where necessary. The interview schedule contained the following themes: experiences of women when they were diagnosed with cancer; their understanding and explications regarding the condition; how cervical cancer had affected their day-to-day lives; how other people and support structures reacted to their diagnosis; perceptions of control; and feelings about how having cancer had changed their lives. Each interview took between 30 to 45 minutes, and all interviews were tape- recorded and

transcribed verbatim. The central question that was proffered to the respondents was, ‘What does having cervical cancer mean to you?’

### ***Procedure***

The administrators at the two institutions gave permission for the researchers to carry out the study. All the participants agreed to take part in the study and signed individual consent forms. The interviews were scheduled for a time when the participants felt comfortable to talk to the researchers. Participants were given information about the research, well before the interviews, which clearly explained its purpose, procedures, risks and benefits, including the rights of the participants. Ethical clearance for the study was granted by the institutional review board of the Midlands State University.

### ***Data Analysis***

Collected data were analysed categorically, using thematic content analysis. Thematic analysis help researchers to identify patterns across the entire data, and offers an accessible and theoretically flexible approach to analysing qualitative data (Braun & Clarke 2006). Verbatim transcriptions from the twelve in-depth interviews were analysed to identify common themes. To ensure reliability of the coding process, the authors independently completed the multistage thematic process (Braun & Clarke 2006). This involved transcribing data, reading out each in-depth interview to familiarise and search for meaning in data and identify potential codes. Codes helped to identify a feature of the data that was interesting to the analysts (Boyatzis 1998). Codes were later divided and grouped according to similar concepts to come up with the themes.

### **Results**

The study results focused on the patients` beliefs on what it meant for them to be suffering from cervical cancer. The following themes were derived from the patients` narratives. Participants said having cervical cancer meant:

- An enhanced or stronger relationship with God
- Making things right in the present

The in-depth interviews with the study participants revealed themes that pointed to their beliefs about the non-medical causes of cervical cancer. These were:

- Attack by an evil spirit (*mubobobo*)
- Use of traditional herbs
- An animal entering the body (*Nhuta*)

These themes will be discussed below.

**An enhanced or stronger relationship with God:** Some of the participants reported that having cancer helped them to develop spiritually, and they now had a close relationship with God. The participants also believed that God was going to heal them. The following extracts from the narratives of the participants illustrate that having cervical cancer helped them to have a better relationship with God, and to enhance their spirituality.

*My beliefs have been strengthened as a result of having cervical cancer. I have been reading several articles on cancer on the internet, and I am now convinced that only God can help me since the disease cannot be treated. So I always pray for God's deliverance. Participant 1.*

*I know that with God everything is possible, and that God can heal my condition. I always watch religious channels on television, and I have seen people being healed from their cancers. I just wish I could travel and meet the prophets that I see on television. Maybe they may be used by God to help me. Participant 4.*

*Having cancer had helped me to reevaluate my priorities. I spend most of my time in prayer. I believe the spirit needs to be strengthened when you have...because the flesh will be failing. The inner man needs strength. Participant 12.*

*I know that cancer is almost like a death sentence. I have seen many relatives dying from cervical cancer even when they went through*

*chemotherapy, radiotherapy and all the other different types of treatments that are available. So with my condition I have come to a point that I am no longer worried about earthly things. I pray every day, and ask God that I can go to heaven when I die. I know that it will be soon and I better prepare my soul for eternal life. Participant 8.*

The cervical cancer diagnosis therefore had a spiritual meaning to most of the study participants. They felt a stronger connection to God and helped them to face their fear of death and dying. They prayed most of the time, and this helped them to cope with their condition.

**Making things right in the present:** Women in this study reported that cervical cancer was more than an illness since it reminded them of the need to mend relations with their significant others, and to have an opportunity to be close to their children. The excerpts below illustrate that having cervical cancer meant changes in lifestyle and behaviour for the study participants:

*... having cancer has taught me that no one is special before the eyes of God, and that people should not waste time looking down upon other people. I was once a person who would hold grudges, but now I have learnt to let go and to be good to everyone ... Participant 2.*

*This illness reminds me of my mortality, and I am trying as much as possible to have such a close relationship with my children. They are afraid that I will one day leave them, and have seen me wearing off because of cancer. I thus try to be jovial all the time .... Participant 3.*

*I used to be a person who enjoyed solitude and would rarely go out. After being diagnosed with cervical cancer I feel the need to reach out to other people, to make other people happy and to help those in need. I have volunteered at a children's home, I go there once a week to help with cleaning and I also play with the children. I feel that when I die they will always remember me, and I believe that's what everyone should strive to do. Participant 9.*

Participant 7 reported that sometimes she felt angry that there was no cure for her cervical cancer that was now at an advanced stage. She felt that she would sometimes put too much pressure on her children so that they could understand life and be hardworking all the time. *'I always tell my children to put their things in order because life is full of problems'*.

The study participants reported that they felt an urge to be different people, to have a positive impact on other people's lives, and use their time wisely. This helped to enhance their self-esteem, and they felt valued when they were able to contribute positively to other people's lives.

### **Perceived Non-medical Causes of Cervical Cancer**

The study participants revealed three themes that centred on their beliefs about the traditional causes of cervical cancer. These were: attack by an evil spirit (*mubobobo*); use of traditional herbs, and an animal entering the body (*Nhuta*).

***Attack by an evil spirit:*** Some study participants believed that cancer was the result of an attack by an evil spirit. They believed that the evil spirits would come and possess an individual's body, and lead to ill health. Most of the participants mentioned that these evil spirits were sent by witches, especially those who were related to the individual, or who knew the individual's totem. The belief was that during the process of bewitching, an individual's (the victim's) totem has to be called out so that her ancestors can allow the evil to happen. However, some participants believed that for some types of evil spirit that caused cervical cancer there was no need for the victim to be a close acquaintance or relative of the perpetrator. Participants also said that attack by the evil spirits was through use of *mubobobo* or goblins.

Some participants believed that their illness was the result of *mubobobo* (a traditional belief whereby a man has sex with a woman spiritually without the knowledge of the woman). The participants believed that *mubobobo* could happen even when people are standing in a queue, or when the woman is asleep.

Four of the study participants believed that their condition was the result of goblins that were sent by evil relatives to afflict them and have sex with them. They believed that these male goblins were obtained from traditional healers. Goblins were said to help make their owner very rich. Parti-

Participants said sometimes the goblin may be acquired from the traditional healer in the form of a flower, but this will just be a disguise. The flower would later turn into a small male that would demand a wife to have sexual intercourse with. When this happens, the owner of the goblin will then designate the victim (the patient) as the possible wife, and she ends up having cervical cancer after having sexual intercourse with the goblins during sleep. The narratives below were given by women who believed that cervical cancer was a result of *mubobobo* and goblins:

*I just believe I am a victim of mubobobo. At my rural area there is a man who uses juju (evil magic) to sleep with women. I believe these are the people who are spreading this disease. Last year a woman from my village also died from the same illness ...* Participant 5.

*I believe that cancer is an illness caused by bad spirits from dark forces that surround people. I was told by a certain prophet that my mother's brother had a 'chikwambo' a goblin. That goblin is now like my spiritual husband. The prophet said that the goblin always has sex with me while I am asleep... as a result the dirt that it left in my birth canal caused this illness.* Participant 3.

*...tokoloshies (goblins) can also cause cancer since they are made to sleep with many women. They can pass the ailment from one individual to the next.* Participant 1.

*If witches make you have sex with goblins you will end up having cervical cancer. It's possible because the goblin may have several other wives, so the cancer may be passed from one wife to the next.* Participant 12.

The narratives reveal that traditional causes of cervical cancer are strong among women with the condition. It is interesting to note that spiritual healers also contribute to the ingraining of the belief that cervical cancer is caused by evil spirits.

***Use of traditional herbs:*** Some study participants attributed their condition to the herbs that they had inserted into their vaginas to enhance sexual

gratification, and enlarge the birth canal when they were pregnant (*masuwo*). Those who were of this view said they had consulted traditional healers when their husbands were being promiscuous, and they were told that it was because their vaginas were always wet, making sexual intercourse distasteful. They were then given herbs to dry their vaginal areas so that their husbands would be more interested in them. Another viewpoint given by the participants was that they used herbs to enlarge the birth canal and have less pain during childbirth. They said they would insert elephant dung mixed with black leaves from wild plants. One of the participants who believed that cervical cancer was a result of herbs indicated that she was advised by traditional midwives to insert a combination of herbs and soap into her vagina to enhance her fertility since she was childless for more than five years after marriage. The following are the excerpts from the women who believed that cervical cancer was caused by traditional herbs:

*Some people have told me that the cancer that I have is a result of the herbs that I used to insert into my vagina. I usually used these herbs to dry the vaginal area as well as to constrict it. I strongly feel that I am to blame as far as this illness is concerned. Participant 4.*

*I have six children, and whenever I was pregnant I would insert various substances like elephant dung and green leaves into my vagina so that I could give birth easily. I believe that these could have led to the cancer that I am suffering from now. These herbs could also have made me a victim of 'mubobobo.' Participant 7.*

*I have been married for five years, and I don't have any children. I had three miscarriages, and this is very painful to me. Since I was looking for a child I consulted many traditional healers, and all of them would give me herbs to insert into my vagina so that I would open my uterus which they said was closed, thus making me infertile. Some traditional healers said my uterus was tilted sideways, and inserting the herbs would make it go back to its original position. I believe that the dirt from these herbs has led to this disease because sometimes I would spend a week wearing the same herb. Participant 10.*

Thus some women who took part in the study strongly believed that the traditional herbs that they had used contributed immensely to the problem that they were experiencing. As told by the study participants, traditional herbs were mainly used to enhance sexual gratification, reduce the pain of labour, and improve fertility.

***An animal entering the body (Nhuta):*** Some women in this study strongly believed that their condition was a result of *nhuta* (a Shona name that means that the condition is a result of a small animal that enters the body). The small animal is placed in the body of the victim by witches at night. This animal eats away body flesh, and can move from one area of the body to another until the victim dies. The excerpts below illustrate the views of the participants who believed that their cervical cancer was a result of small animals getting into their bodies.

*Having cancer to me means I am cursed and bewitched. I went to so many traditional healers, but nothing came out of it. I was told that I was bewitched and the condition that I have is a result of 'nhuta'. Even doctors have confirmed that I have lost some tissues in my cervical area. If only I could get someone who can remove this animal before it eats me up. Participant 6.*

*My mother told me that my grandmother died from cancer. She said the condition is a result of an animal that goes into the body after a person wears clothes that have been bewitched by bad people. As soon as you wear such clothes the animal goes into the body, and starts eating the area that they have been instructed to eat until a person dies. I heard that when my grandmother died she was bleeding heavily, meaning that some damage was taking place inside her, most likely showing that an animal was eating her inside. Participant 8.*

*I sometimes feel something moving in my body. It could start in the upper body and move down to the lower body. I was told that it's a small animal put into my body by witches and has led to my illness. Participant 11.*

Thus some study participants were convinced that cervical cancer was a result

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of *nhuta*, a small animal that lived in their body. Some said the animal would end up eating their flesh. It was evident that important people in the participants' lives reinforced this belief.

## **Discussion**

This inquiry provided qualitative insights into cervical cancer patients' perceptions as to the cause of their condition. These perceptions tended to have robust overlays with religion, spirituality and traditional/superstitious beliefs. Women with cervical cancer who participated in the study reported that their condition led them to deeply connect with God, and to develop spiritually. Other researchers found that spirituality aids in coping, and contributes to the quality of life and well-being among cancer patients (Krupski *et al.* 2006). In a study by Mattis and Jagers (2001), participants indicated that religion and spirituality helped them to accept reality, to mature, become aware of their value in life, become resilient, draw lessons from their experience, and have faith in a higher power. The sentiments on having a deeper connection with God that were reported in this study have previously been echoed by patients elsewhere, who revealed that having cancer had strengthened their relationship with God (Schulz *et al.* 2008; Holt *et al.* 2009 ), which also contributed positively to coping. Researchers have observed that religion and spirituality are related to a higher physical quality of life, including reduced pain and better overall functioning (Krupski *et al.* 2006).

Some patients felt that since cervical cancer could not be treated, and they were destined to die someday, they felt that they had to live to the full, to mend any broken relationships in the present, and prepare for their children's future. Other studies have also reported that participants felt that they had become better people through the process of surviving cancer. (Schulz *et al.* 2008). Experiencing positive outcomes from a traumatic event echoes Park's (2009) assertion that negative life events may result in traumatic stress growth, which is characterised by positive changes in one's social relationships, personal resources and life philosophies.

Some of the patients believed that their illness was a result of witchcraft or failing to please the ancestors. Some of these women had obtained this information from the traditional healers they had consulted, which is proof that patients used both biomedical and alternative forms of medicine. In a study conducted in Ethiopia, community perceptions around the occurrence of cervi-

cal cancer were that the condition is caused mostly by breach of social taboos, witchcraft, or God's punishment (Birhanu *et al.* 2012). Kleinman (1978) noted that patients do not just seek symptom treatment, but also personally and socially meaningful meanings and psychosocial treatment for illness.

As has been noted, some of the study participants believed that their illness was caused by the evil spirits and evil animals that were eating up their flesh. Traditional beliefs in illness causation in African settings help individuals to temporarily cope with their conditions, especially those of a chronic nature. Since some patients may not be improving as a result of the medical attention they are receiving, their belief in a just world is shattered (Jim & Jacobsen 2008), and the traditional beliefs help them to consult alternative sources of healing that may bring hope. This coping may only be beneficial in the short term, but after some time people may realise the chronic nature of their ailments, and move on to accept reality. Unfortunately, these beliefs may result in delays in seeking treatment (Birhanu *et al.* 2012), and may explain why most cancer cases are presented late. Educational campaigns that are culture-sensitive should be carried out in areas that have strong beliefs in non-medical causes of symptoms.

In this study cervical cancer was also attributed to failure to carry out proper traditional rituals and rites, a finding which complements earlier results (Birhanu *et al.* 2012). Belief in supernatural causes determines people's health-seeking behaviours in African settings. Patients may use both traditional and Western treatments, since they believe that in addition to the germ theory there are other supernatural causes of illness. Thus ensuring services are culturally appropriate is important for all care providers in Zimbabwe. According to Kleinman (1978) a country's culture affects people's cognitive processes; that is, the way people perceive, label and cope with disease.

## **Limitations of the Study**

While the authors adopted an approach that has been proven to explicate 'lived experiences' of cancer survivors, the lack of triangulation in the methods is a limitation in this study. Although the small sample sizes may be argued to allow for only tentative conclusions to be drawn, the authors feel that the information from in-depth interviews reflects a sufficient diversity of views of the respondents. In addition, future research on meaning making may employ longitudinal designs that show changes in meaning over time.

## **Conclusions**

The meanings that an individual attaches to a condition have a strong relationship with the coping strategies and health-seeking behaviours that the patient may use. Furthermore, understanding the deep-seated meanings can help understand the turmoil that the patient may be experiencing. To a large extent, meanings attached to a condition may help counsellors and other paraprofessionals who may be tasked to offer psychological as well as medical help to patients who may be suffering from cervical cancer. It is of particular importance to note that women who enter therapy sessions believing that their symptoms have a supernatural cause may be very difficult to deal with if the therapist adopts a Eurocentric view. The obligation for therapists who work with clients who attribute traditional and spiritual causes to their ailments is not to downplay the patients' beliefs, but to acknowledge these beliefs by showing unconditional positive regard at the same time moving on to provide tailor-made therapies. Therapies that uphold traditional African views need to be developed to cater for African clients in a holistic manner. The study helps to understand the illness experience of people with cervical cancer in Zimbabwe.

## **Implications of the Study**

The implication of the above findings is that health care providers should consider cultural differences so that they can fully understand the impact of this disease on patients' physical, spiritual and mental well-being. Understanding of cultural differences is a key to encouraging people's willingness to participate in health care and to improve cancer outcomes. In line with policy development the study calls for the Ministry of Health in Zimbabwe to ensure the availability of alternative care in addition to biomedicine for patients with cervical cancer.

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# **Incorporating African Indigenous Healing into the Counselling Services in Tertiary Institutions: A Preliminary Exploration**

**Zininzi Anele Bomoyi  
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## **Abstract**

The study explored how a tertiary institution was responding to the challenge to meet the mental health needs of students from traditional African backgrounds. The study explored the unique contribution of a traditional healing service that was availed to the students. Collaboration between the traditional healer, and psychologically trained counsellors, and the obstacles towards integration, were also explored. A qualitative research design was used. Data were collected by means of individual interviews and focus group discussions. Thirty-five, purposefully chosen stakeholders participated: African undergraduate and post-graduate students, student counsellors, leaders of the student services division, and a traditional diviner (isangoma). The findings indicate that the campus-based traditional healer specialized in treating spiritual illnesses and students' family identity issues. All participants identified the traditional healer as an indispensable member of an interdisciplinary health care team. Infrastructural and ethical/logical issues pose a major challenge towards integration.

**Keywords:** Indigenous knowledge systems, isangoma, higher education, student counseling, traditional healing, spiritual illness

## **Introduction**

The dawn of the new democratic era in South Africa has been accompanied by rapid changes in the demographic profiles of students attending higher

education institutions. Higher education institutions that were previously demarcated along racial lines have become increasingly diverse. According to the reports from the Council on Higher Education, the number of black African students enrolling in higher education institutions has increased (CHE 2015; 2016). Rapid demographic transformation has also been observed in historically white institutions. It is important, however, that the transformation of higher education institutions is not limited to student demographics. According to the Council on Higher Education (CHE 2015), transformation is a broad term; it incorporates social inclusion and social cohesion, diversity, institutional culture, teaching and learning, research, and the curriculum. In view of the broad meaning of transformation, it is evident that the social and cultural spaces of the university need to be rethought if the inequalities of the past are to be comprehensively addressed. The current study explored the use of traditional/indigenous healing to complement the counselling services offered by university counselling centres. The paper proceeds from the premise that indigenous/traditional healing has the potential to improve the psychological and social well-being of the students (cf. Solomon & Wane 2005).

## **Review of Literature**

The transition to university is a stressful experience for most students (Bojuwoye 2002). This is more so for black African students, most of whom are likely to be the first in their families to attend a tertiary institution. According to Bojuwoye (2002), the poor financial background of black South Africans is one of the factors that make the transition from school to university a very stressful experience. Petersen, Louw and Dumont (2009) studied the transition to university as well as the academic performance of South African students from disadvantaged backgrounds. They found that first-year students who were able to adjust to the social and emotional demands of university life performed well compared to those who were not able to negotiate this transition. Petersen, Louw, Dumont and Malope (2010) have also shown that the successful negotiation of the first year at the university is a good predictor of future academic performance. Sennett, Finchilescu, Gibson and Strauss (2003) studied black African and white students' adjustment at a historically white tertiary institution. They found that although the two groups of students

did not differ in terms of academic adjustment, black students reported poorer levels of personal, social and emotional adjustment. A range of factors accounted for this outcome, amongst which were the transition from small and supportive rural communities to an impersonal urban environment and the multiple stressful events such as the death of family members.

The changes in the student demographics over the past two decades require student counselling centres not only to be demographically representative in terms of their staffing; it is also important that the worldviews and experiential realities of the students are taken into consideration. The profession of counselling in general, as well as in South Africa, has been criticized for its over-reliance on individualism (Naidoo 1996). Individualism incorporates the understanding that the goal of psychological development is to individuate and to stand apart from other people. Consistent with the dominant Western paradigm, student counsellors see their clients individually in the former's offices. Self-realization and personal insight are some of the primary goals of counselling (Chuenyane 1990; Crossman 2004). The idea of the person as an isolated, atomistic individual is, however, not the universal basis of societal organization, as a number of African and Asian societies privilege an interdependent view of the self (Mkhize 2004; 2008). From this perspective, the defining characteristic of being a human being is how the person harmonizes his or her interests with those of others: to be is to belong, and not to stand apart from others. Hence Karenga's (2004) view that being human is a project; it is a practice in relationships. In Southern Africa, this idea of the person is captured by sayings such as *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* (a human being is a human being because of other human beings), or *muthu ubebelwa munwe* (a person is born for the other) in Tshivenda (Mkhize 2004). The sayings point to an inescapably relational and interdependent character of being, an interdependence that extends to relationships between the living and the living-dead (the ancestors), those who are yet to be born, nature, the community, as well as other animate and inanimate entities (Holdstock 2000; Mkhize 2004; Nussbaum 2003).

Counselling needs to be reconfigured so that it caters for the psychological and social needs of a diverse range of students, their ideas about personhood, and their worldviews about health and illness, what is generally referred to as illness explanatory models in the literature (Kleinman 1978, 1980; Patel 1995). The term 'explanatory models' refers to the social and cultural construction of illness: it includes people's ideas about the causes of

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illness (aetiology), the typical symptoms associated with the illness, the preferred treatment options as well as the expected outcomes. Eliciting patients' explanatory models of illness is an important aspect of treatment (Bhui & Bhugra 2002; Patel 1995). There is a wealth of literature indicating that mental health services need to be sensitive to the social and clinical realities of the clients (Eagle 2004; Kleinman 1978, 1980; Knight & Iran 2004; Lu, Lim & Mezzich 1995). Henry (1993) argues that the academic performance and the social experiences of African students can be improved by affirming their background life-worlds. This includes the recognition of their cultures, histories, myths, symbols, epistemologies, and the contradictions that are inherent in their cultures (Maila & Loubser 2003; Masoga 2005; Ntuli 1999).

In South Africa, traditional healers are recognized as health professionals in terms of the South African Traditional Health Practitioners Act, Number 22 of 2007 (Government Gazette 2008, cited in Sodi *et al.* 2011). The Act stipulates that 'traditional healing means the performance of a function, activity, process or service based on a traditional philosophy that includes utilisation of traditional medicine' (cited in Sodi *et al.* 2011: 101). According to the World Health Organization (WHO 1978: 3), traditional medicine constitutes:

*the totality of all knowledge and practices, whether explicable or not, used in diagnosis, prevention and elimination of physical, mental or social equilibrium and relying exclusively on practical experience and observation handed down from generation to generation, verbally or in writing.*

The WHO (1978: 41) goes on to define traditional healers as,

*...a group of persons recognized by the community in which they live as being competent to provide health care by using vegetable, animal and mineral substances and other methods based on the social, cultural and religious backgrounds as well as the knowledge, attitudes and beliefs that are prevalent in the community regarding physical, mental and social well-being and the causation of disease and disability.*

There are a number of categories of traditional healers, chief amongst

whom are the traditional doctors, *izinyanga or amagqirha*, who specialize in the use of herbs for treatment purposes, and the diviners, *izangoma*, who are able to communicate with the ancestors in order to diagnose the causes of illness (Campbell 1998; Sodi *et al.* 2011). Other common categories of traditional healers include the faith healers, or *abathandazi*, who heal by means of prayer and holy water, the traditional birth attendants (*ababelethisi*), who are usually elderly women who treat pregnant women and assist with childbirth/delivery, and the traditional surgeons (*iingcibi*), who perform circumcision. The current study focused on *izangoma*, the first category of traditional healers mentioned above.

The infusion of traditional healing into the counselling services offered by tertiary institutions can be beneficial to students of diverse cultural backgrounds (Bojuwoye 2005; Moodley, Sutherland & Oulanova 2008). This is more so if one takes into consideration that, even in post-apartheid South Africa, black African students seek counselling predominantly for academic, not personal issues (Bowman & Payne 2011). It has been reported that some black African students in historically white institutions experience social isolation (Sennett *et al.* 2003). It is our contention that traditional healing is a potentially useful but unexplored source of help for some of these students. Several authors support the use of indigenous healing nationally and internationally (Moodley & Sutherland 2010; Moodley *et al.* 2008, Sodi & Bojuwoye 2011). Previous research (Norris 2008) suggests that students in tertiary institutions do seek alternative methods of healing. Norris assessed the personal, career and learning needs of first-year psychology students. Out of a sample of 159 first-year psychology students, 10% reported that traditional healers were their preferred means of health assistance, despite the absence of traditional healers on university campuses. Motau (2015) also found that tertiary students do seek the services of traditional healers, although the percentage of students doing so was small. The fact that tertiary students do use the services of traditional healers, even though they are not visible on university campuses, means that it is something that should be considered.

Recently, the University of KwaZulu-Natal initiated a pilot project whereby students were offered the option to consult with a campus-based traditional healer (*isangoma* or diviner) (Ogana, Ngidi & Zulu 2009). The current study constitutes a preliminary exploration into how traditional healing is being infused into mainstream counselling services at a tertiary institution. The study seeks to illuminate the unique contributions of traditional healers in

such settings, their relationship with psychologically trained counsellors, and the challenges associated with the introduction of such services.

## **Theoretical Framework: African Indigenous Worldview of Health and Illness**

Healing systems across the world, argues Waldron (2010), are based on epistemologies that are different from the rationalistic and positivistic orientation of Western biomedical science. African indigenous models of health and illness, as well as Africentric conceptual frameworks, guide the study. From an African indigenous worldview, health is not the absence of disease *per se*. This follows from the African worldview and cosmology, which considers all phenomena to be dynamically interconnected and interdependent. Human beings, animals and inanimate objects are not apart from each other as they all share in the life force or essence, which emanates from the Divine element (Karenga 2004; Myers 1988). African spirituality refers to this invisible life force (or energy) that is the quintessential essence of being human. Life force also connects human beings to each other and to the Divine element (*UMvelinqangi*, the One of First Emergence or Self-Created, the Creator) (Graham 1990; Schiele 1996). All phenomena are in a dynamic state of flux; they interact constantly and influence one another (Bynum 1999). From this understanding is derived the African indigenous worldview that it is the interrelationship between human beings (the living) and the living-dead (ancestors) that is the indication of good health.

In order to fully understand this worldview, it is important to point out that the family in African indigenous thought is defined in very broad terms: it includes the living, those who are yet to be born, and the ancestors (*abaphansi*: the living-dead) (Mkhize 2004). The living-dead, however, are not uninterested in their families' affairs. Rather, as Waldron (2010: 55) points out, '...deceased individuals transform into invisible ancestral spirits and involve themselves in all aspects of life, including assisting individuals in obtaining good fortune, assisting with interpersonal relationships, and promoting good health and preventing illness'. Several authors support this conceptualization of health and illness, which has been shown to be a common feature amongst a number of indigenous communities (Levers 2006; Sodi, Mudhovozi, Mashamba, Radzilani-Makatu, Takalani & Mabunda 2011; Vukic, Gregory, Martin-Mise-

ner & Etowa 2011).

It is envisaged that people should live in a state of balance with nature and all their surroundings. Anything that disturbs this balance, such as individuals' failure to observe their obligations towards other people, the ancestors, and the natural environment, results in a condition of disequilibrium or ill-health. For example, if the head of the household fails to make appropriate libations to the ancestors, this might anger the latter and they may as a result withdraw their protection. This in turn results in the family as a whole experiencing one misfortune after the other (Mkhize 2004). It is important to highlight that the illness is located at the level of the system (e.g. family or community), and not the individual, who is considered to be a mere vehicle by means of which the imbalance is manifested. The equilibrium is re-established should the family members act accordingly by remembering their ancestors (e.g. offering libations). The idea of balance versus imbalance, or equilibrium versus disequilibrium, is a fundamental one in African indigenous understandings of health and illness. It is in this vein that Mkhize (2008) has argued that African indigenous ethical systems are premised on the idea of the disturbance (of the balance), followed by the restoration of the equilibrium at a higher level of understanding. The restoration is contingent upon the relevant parties undertaking their obligations according to their status (e.g. as head of household or village head). This does not mean, however, that the idea of physical illness does not exist. Rather, health is conceptualized in a holistic manner; it includes interrelationships between the mind, the body, the spiritual and the social and cultural, to mention a few dimensions. Even when an individual is afflicted with a bodily illness, which is treated by the *inyanga* (herbalist or traditional pharmacist), it is still important to establish the reason why the bodily affliction, or car accident, for that matter, happened at this point in time, and why the target person was chosen as a vehicle to manifest the illness. While this understanding of illness recognizes the biological or neurophysiological basis of disease and illness, it places a greater premium on spiritual or teleological explanations, and not the former. The net effect is that treatment of the physical symptoms is not sufficient if the underlying spiritual cause has not been addressed.

## **Aim and Objectives**

The student demographics in South African tertiary institutions have changed

(Crossman 2004; CHE 2015; 2016). The thrust of this study is on how student services divisions are responding to the challenge of meeting the mental health needs of students from traditional African backgrounds. The study aims to investigate how African indigenous healing is being infused into the counselling process in order to cater for students from traditional African backgrounds. While there is preliminary research on the integration of traditional healing into the services offered by student counselling centres in tertiary institutions (Ogana *et al.* 2009), there is limited research on how best interventions of this nature could be integrated into the already existing services. The challenges of bringing together two healing traditions, one privileged (psychotherapeutic counselling) and the other underprivileged (traditional healing), into one space, have not been addressed. The objectives of the current study were therefore (a) to identify the specific gap or niche area to be filled by traditional healing within a tertiary institution, (b) to explore the nature of the collaboration between psychologically trained counsellors and traditional healers, and (c) to identify the challenges and ethical dilemmas that might be associated with this process, and how best they might be addressed.

## **Method**

### ***Research Design***

The study relied on a qualitative research design, as its main objective was to explore and understand the participants' experience of and views on a phenomenon of interest. The primary aim of qualitative research is to understand the world from the point of view of those who live in it, thereby grasping the meaning of social phenomena from the perspective of the local actors themselves (Doucet 1995; Denzil & Lincoln 2000). Qualitative research designs are useful in studying issues that involve conflicting interpretations and different approaches towards life in general (Graneheim & Lundman 2003). The introduction of a traditional healing service into the spaces that have been historically reserved for psychologically trained counsellors is one such issue. Maxwell's (1996;1998) model of a qualitative research design, which spells out the interactive relationship between the study objectives, the

conceptual framework, the research questions and the appropriateness of the methods that are used to collect the data, guided the study.

### ***Sampling and Participants***

As the primary objective of the study was to gain an in-depth understanding of how traditional healing was being infused into the counselling services offered by a tertiary institution, the participants were selected through purposeful, snowball, and heterogeneous sampling methods (Miles & Huberman 1994; Patton 1994). The purpose was to access different groups of students, including those who had made use of the services of the traditional healer, as well as those who had not done so. Critical stakeholders such as psychologists and the leadership of student services were also sampled, as they deal with the psychosocial well-being of students on a regular basis. In total there were 35 participants, most of whom were black African undergraduate students (26 participants). The balance of the sample comprised three postgraduate students, three psychologists employed as student counsellors, two senior members of staff in the student services division, and the traditional healer, who was working in collaboration with the student counselling division. The data collection method and procedures are described in the next section.

### ***Data Collection Methods: Interviews and Focus Group Discussions***

Individual interviews and focus group discussions were conducted primarily in English, although the participants had an option to speak in any of the Nguni languages if they chose to do so. The interview with the traditional healer was held primarily in isiZulu. Psychologists, the leadership of student services, and the traditional healer were interviewed individually. The student data were collected primarily by means of focus group discussions. Not only do non-restrictive, open-ended interviews constitute a good tool to gain access to the participants' subjective experiences and perceptions about social phenomena, they also yield rich qualitative data (Denzil & Lincoln 2000). Qualitative interviewing involves a dynamic process: the researcher is able to crosscheck understanding with the participants, thus enhancing the validity of the study (Henwood & Pidgeon 1994). The focus groups enabled the participants to

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engage in a robust discussion amongst themselves, with the researcher chipping in to seek clarity on a few issues and to direct the group where it was necessary. During the discussions participants shared their views freely and were open to learning from each other (cf. Kruger & Casey 2000). The enthusiasm with which the participants engaged with the topic was refreshing. During the conversations, the researcher was able to record non-verbal responses, such as gestures, where this added value to the discussion.

### ***Procedure***

Ethical clearance to conduct the study was obtained from an ethics committee at a local higher education institution. Students were recruited to participate in the study by means of posters that were placed strategically on the noticeboards on campus, the student services division, and at residences. Those who agreed to participate were then requested to invite other potential participants. Psychologists and the leadership of student services were invited to participate by means of email. Interviews and focus groups were held in a quiet office provided by the university. The few postgraduate students that were involved in the study opted not to participate in the focus groups, but to be interviewed in their rooms in residence instead. All the university personnel participating in the study were interviewed in their respective offices. The duration of the interviews varied depending on the participants' involvement with the topic, the average interview lasting approximately one hour. Two focus groups were held, each comprising 13 undergraduate students and lasting approximately two hours.

### **Data Analysis**

Once the interview and focus group data had been collected, it was transcribed and then translated by the first author, with the assistance of two senior students who were completing their Master's degrees in isiZulu Studies. The process of analysis involved the first author reading the transcripts several times in order to familiarize herself with the data. The author also listened carefully to the tapes in order to cross-validate the printed transcripts, and to supplement them with the notes that were taken during the interviews and the focus group discussions. The analysis itself was conducted by means of thematic analysis,

using the procedures that were recommended by Braun and Clarke (2006) and Clarke and Braun (2013). Inductive thematic analysis was used, as the themes were derived from the data (Braun & Clarke 2006; Patton 1990). The process started as early as the data collection phase, where the researcher began to identify and take note of the patterns in the data (Braun & Clarke 2006). Once the data had been transcribed and translated, the researchers started to familiarize themselves with it by reading it over and over again, in search for meanings and patterns (Phase One). Phase Two involved the process of generating the codes manually from the data. The third phase involved sorting the codes into themes and identifying the extracts in support of the themes. In the next phase (Phase Four), the themes were reviewed and collapsed where there was insufficient data in support of the stand-alone themes. In Phase Five the themes were refined further and accompanying extracts and supporting narrative were reviewed. Phase Six, the writing up of the research report, involved relating the themes and extracts back to the study objectives (Braun & Clarke 2006; Clarke & Brown 2013).

## **Findings and Discussion**

In the sections that follow the research report provides findings in relation to the three main study objectives: (a) the unique contribution of traditional healing to counselling services in tertiary institutions, (b) the participants' views on the relationship between psychologists/counsellors and traditional healers, and (c) the potential challenges to the successful integration of traditional healing with counselling services provided in tertiary institutions.

### ***Unique Contribution of Traditional Healing***

With regard to the first objective, namely the unique contributions of traditional healing to counselling services provided in tertiary institutions, it was established that traditional healers are uniquely positioned to identify and treat culturally-defined illnesses, by restoring balance in the clients' lives. Traditional healers were also identified as the appropriate professionals to assist the students to negotiate cultural identity issues. The extracts that follow provide examples that illustrate these themes.

### ***Culturally Defined Illnesses: Restoration of Balance***

Participants considered the introduction of traditional healing into the counselling services in higher education counselling centres in positive terms, as it would assist the multidisciplinary team of professionals to deal with culturally defined illnesses, or alternatively, the illnesses that were explained in terms of cultural explanatory models (cf. Kleinman 1980).

The traditional healer saw herself as uniquely positioned to identify the appropriate cause of illness, and to restore harmony or balance in the lives of the students whose problems were emanating from a disequilibrium between the students and the ancestors.

*Participant 1, Traditional Healer: Some cases are of students having left home for a long time without informing their ancestors and this causes disharmony and imbalance in the student's life. In some cases students suffer from issues related to their ancestors, and if this is neglected the ancestors might get upset and there is disharmony in the student's life. If a student comes and sees me early and in good time I am able to offer help.*

One of the psychologists that were interviewed confirmed that sometimes students do request time off from their studies in order to consult traditional healers about culturally-defined forms of illness. This often causes conflicts between the student and the university teaching staff, who may see no need for such services. Psychologists find themselves caught in the middle between students and their lecturers.

*Participant 2, Psychologist: Last year a student presented [with symptoms of] schizophrenia in a Western way, but really the student needed to perform some cultural rituals and ceremonies, and that came out when I called the family for collateral information. The issue was that he had to leave campus and go and see an isangoma, and he needed a month off. There was lots of conflict... with my supervisors: it was difficult for them to understand; and the question was, 'Why can't you refer the student to hospital so that psychiatrists can evaluate him and give medicine, and the student can continue or let the student withdraw from the programme altogether'. Some have to miss classes*

*and tests because they have to go home and attend cultural ceremonies. The issue in these cases is: do we as psychologists condone absence? Therefore I think if we had someone who is more knowledgeable in these issues it would make the life of everyone involved easier.*

The citation above shows that students who present with culturally defined forms of illness and social phenomena are at risk of being misunderstood and misdiagnosed by the practitioners, who have received the standard psychological or psychiatric training. Psychologists dealing with such students find themselves in a dilemma: while their primary ethical obligation is towards the students (their clients), the demands of the academic departments are sometimes at odds with this role. Hence the view that psychologists ‘condone absence’ by giving students leave to complete cultural rituals. The gap in the counselling services seems to emanate from the fact that African indigenous views about health and illness are absent or underrepresented, amongst the services provided to students. These findings are supported by the literature, which shows that healing needs to take into consideration the patients’ cultural construction of illness, if it is to be effective (Akomolafe 2012; Edwards, Hlongwane, Thwala & Robinson 2011; McCabe 2008; Moodley & Sutherland 2010). In most African indigenous societies, healing involves ‘a holistic conceptualization of health wherein spiritual, physical, emotional, and mental wellness is regarded as inseparable’ (Moodley *et al.* 2008). Moodley and Sutherland (2010: 271) argue that traditional healers use their knowledge of the patient’s culture to ‘enter into the ‘psychic space’ of the client where the specific pain or distress is experienced and held and subsequently, becomes immersed in the inner experiences of the client’. Through a process of empathy, they then assist the client to work through the cultural narratives or beliefs behind the illness. By virtue of their training, as well as their ability to act as mediums to communicate messages between the living and the living-dead (ancestors), traditional healers are considered to be uniquely positioned to treat spiritual disorders or culture-based illnesses. Their profession is, however, viewed with prejudice and is marginalized in tertiary spaces, which are modeled on Western ideas of what a university ought to be (Akomolafe 2012; Summerton 2006; Vilakazi 1999).

### ***Alternative Voices: Christian Influence***

It should be highlighted that not all participants viewed the introduction of traditional healing services in a positive light. Some participants were ambivalent about this service, and this was often associated with Christian influence. In a diverse student environment, this is to be expected. The following extract, from an interview with a student who had not consulted the traditional healer, captures this point.

*Researcher: I know you have said you do not believe in traditional healing because you are a Christian. You also mentioned that some students do sometimes believe that they are bewitched. What are your views about bewitchment?*

*Participant 3: I actually believe that people can get bewitched, although I do not necessarily believe in traditional healing. Researcher: Will you tell me more about that? Let's say a student here on campus believes that he or she is bewitched, how should that be dealt with?*

*Participant 3: I know people say traditional healers are best at dealing with issues of bewitchment, but I believe if that person is a Christian, the church could assist them to pray, and there are priests who are very strong spiritually who can take demons out.*

What stands out in the extracts above, is that even those students who did not believe in traditional healing, because of their Christian worldview, were of the opinion that spirituality (prayer) is an important part of healing. Spirituality is not a major component of professional psychological training; this means that the students with such a worldview may not be served well by student counselling centres. Van Rensburg and his colleagues (Van Rensburg 2014; Van Rensburg, Poggenpoel, Myburgh & Szabo 2012a) have argued that mental health professionals should be competent to deal with the spiritual dimensions of their clients' problems. They provide guidelines for the integration of spirituality into mental health practice (Van Rensburg, Poggenpoel, Myburgh & Szabo 2012b).

### ***Cultural and Identity Issues***

The participants also felt that traditional healers were adequately trained to understand the plight of African clients, who had identity issues arising from the circumstances of their birth. In most instances, these problems were related to the students' sense of belonging. The following extract was cited from an interview with one of the leaders of the student services divisions.

*Participant 4, Student Services Leader: You find that issues of self-identity do affect students, and these issues are also useful from the point of view of students knowing their true identity and being assisted, because that is a major crisis, because students lack self-identity without them being aware. For instance, a student could be born a Ngcobo [surname], the father is Ngcobo, the mother is Mkhize. Then, because he is a boy, he chooses to be Ngcobo, whereas the father and the mother were not married. Actually that one is not a Ngcobo; he is a Mkhize, and the Mkhize family should do some rituals for that one to be a part of the Mkhize family, [the same rituals that would be performed] if he was to be a Ngcobo. If that doesn't happen, then there are problems, which affect learning, as it were. Unfortunately, these things aren't written and some people are in a state of denial about their existence and yet we know that they affect students.*

The traditional healer expressed a similar view:

*Researcher: What kind of issues do students present with [in your practice]?*

*Traditional Healer: The biggest issue is the issue of identity; i.e. the use of incorrect surnames. Students who are born out of wedlock often use their father's surnames without the families having done the necessary cultural rituals relevant for the ancestors for the child to be properly accepted.*

All the extracts above highlight the importance of bringing students' cultural backgrounds to the fore in counselling. In indigenous African contexts, the family, including the extended family as well as the ancestral family, is the most important aspect of one's identity. Apart from the family, personhood is

almost inconceivable (Mkhize 2004). Studies have shown that there has been a radical decline in marriages amongst the African people in South Africa (Hosegood, McGrath, & Moultrie 2009). Moore and Govender (2013) have shown that cohabitation has increased in South Africa, especially amongst the African population. Several factors, such as the high rate of unemployment and the commodification of *ilobolo*, account for this trend. With the ongoing challenges to the extended family, as well as the number of children born outside wedlock, without the necessary rituals of incorporation, be it to the mother or the father's side of the family, identity construction becomes problematic, and these are some of the issues that require indigenous counselling methods (Ogana *et al.* 2009). When these rituals are not performed, disharmony with the ancestors occurs and this might cause illness (Gumede 1990). Such issues need the attention of well-trained professionals who are familiar with the students' meaning-making systems or explanatory frameworks.

Although the traditional healer was identified as the appropriate person to deal with cultural identity issues, on the other hand, some psychologists felt they had adequate training and cultural exposure to address these concerns in counselling.

*Participant 5, Psychologist: I remember one of my first cases in my internship was around traditional issues.... I was working at a Technikon [University of Technology] and I saw a male African student, and he was concerned about what he perceived as a failed circumcision and what that meant culturally; and the step [he took was] he actually went and had a medical circumcision. He was a Xhosa student. He felt inadequate because the traditional circumcision had not removed enough [of the foreskin] and so he didn't feel that he was a man, and needed, and really had to make arrangements for it to have it completed at a hospital. Which is a traditional issue, I think, but I don't think I felt unprepared for that because I could understand issues around masculinity and gender and identity from my training at that point. I do think I handled, oh, I would like to think I handled it well. I think over the years I have been exposed to more types of traditional issues and so [I] have started to feel more confident in working with what's presented.*

The issues that are raised in the extract above are concerned with culturally-defined notions of what it means to be a man in one's society. The circumcision rite is an important aspect of becoming a responsible man in Xhosa and other African societies (Ntombana 2009). The failure of the ritual, as indicated in the extract, has a bearing on the identity of the man concerned, how he is perceived in his society.

### ***The Relationship between Psychologists and Traditional Healers***

The study also explored the nature of the relationship between traditional healers, psychologists and other providers involved in student services. The participants were of the view that traditional healers and psychologically trained counsellors complement one another, each providing services to students according to their area of specialization. The participants also felt that the traditional healer should be a member of an interdisciplinary team comprising other professionals.

### ***Cross-referrals according to Specializations***

The participating psychologists, the students, and the traditional healer shared this theme. The participants indicated that psychologists deal with students' psycho-emotional problems, while the traditional healer assists the students to identify the cause of illness, in line with their worldview.

*Traditional Healer: It is very useful to work with the Student Counselling Centre, for example with a student who has experienced the death of a loved one, I am able to explain the cause of death to the student, but it is often useful to work together with the Student Counselling Centre. Another example is when I can see that a person is experiencing intense mental problems I would sometimes refer to the doctors so that they can give an injection to calm the person down. Although African indigenous medication is useful, I have found that in some cases the Western medication is much quicker. Whilst the student is being taken care of by the doctors... the parents and family could consult a traditional healer to get a better understanding of the cause of their child's illness. Therefore not only do I work with the Student*

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*Counseling Centre, I also work with the medical clinic which can be very useful.*

*Participant 6, Psychologist: I think psychologists and traditional healers should be within the same space. We should be together but having different specializations. When it comes to emotional difficulties and career difficulties then a student should see a psychologist, but when it comes to any difficulty that may be informed by culture or holistic make-up [worldview], then a student should have the choice to see a[n] [i]sangoma [traditional healer].*

*Participant 7, Student Services Leader: These should work ... in a complimentary fashion. There are cases that are referred to a makhosi [traditional healer: diviner] and there are cases that a makhosi refers to the [Student Counselling] Centre. So there has got to be some harmonious working relationship based on respect for each [profession].*

In the extract above, the psychologists and the traditional healer are in agreement that both specializations have a role to play in the well-being of students. The traditional healer's primary role is to identify the spiritual cause of illness. She recognizes her shortcomings in dealing with specific forms of illnesses and readily refers cases of this nature to psychologists and the hospital. Perhaps in line with her training, the psychologist sees her role as that of dealing with the students' emotional problems, while the traditional healer attends to cultural issues. The distinction that is drawn between emotional issues and 'cultural problems' is an artificial one, as the two are intertwined. It is our hypothesis that this distinction is a useful indicator of the boundaries of each profession as well as the 'scope of practice' of those involved.

### *The Traditional Healer as a Member of a Multidisciplinary Team*

All the participants considered the traditional healer to be an important member of an interdisciplinary team that is providing for the needs of the students in a holistic manner.

*Participant 8, Student: Their relationship, I think, must be embedded*

*under Student Counselling so they [traditional healers] must be part of student counselling. There should be a very good relationship between the two, and then they should also have a relationship with the campus medical clinic because it's part of the healing process mentally and physically. So I think all three (Student Counselling Centre, medical clinic and traditional healers) should work together.*

*Participant 9, Psychologist: As I speak the Student Counselling Centre has the disability unit, a sub-office; they are part of us, we are together, and I don't understand why a traditional healer should be far from us [in terms of location] because we are all working around the well-being of the students. We should have a relationship which makes the referral relationship fluent, and which makes us learn from each other in a more convenient way.*

Both the participants above indicate that the traditional healer should be an integral part of the services that are provided to students. Participant 9 questions the location of the traditional healer's office away from the student services division, implying that such services may not be considered to be part of mainstream counselling (and hence the spatial marginalization). In countries such as China, traditional healing has been integrated into the national health system (Summerton 2009). South Africa needs to study the Chinese model, and take what is useful from it, if the marginalization of traditional healing is to be addressed.

### ***Challenges to Incorporation***

Limited knowledge about the specific needs of black African students, stigma, religious intolerance, and ethical and logistical considerations emerged as the most important challenges to the integration of traditional healing with counselling services in tertiary institutions.

### ***Lack of Knowledge about Unique Needs of African Students***

The university community's general lack of knowledge about the specific needs of African students, was cited as a challenge.

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*Participant 10 (Student): Really the biggest challenge probably is just the lack of knowledge [of the specific needs of black students].*

*Participant 11 (Student): Because it is not like we do not have the facilities or resources, we do have resources, we do have facilities, the problem is it's almost as if there is a lack of knowledge, that there are specific things that black students want in terms of mental health.*

### ***Peer Pressure, Stigma and Religious Intolerance***

Peer pressure, stigma and religious intolerance were also cited as some of the factors that make it difficult to integrate traditional healing with the counselling services that are offered to students. The following long extract aptly captures these points.

*Participant 12, Student Services: The other [challenge] becomes the perception of those who do not want the service. That is equally important; we live in an environment of peer pressure and we work in an environment of peer pressure, just as there is peer pressure on people seeking psychological counselling. At times it seems you are seeing a shrink (you know all these negative words). I am still unsure of what will be the peer pressure on such young people seeking such a service [traditional healing]. .. So, I will not know what academics say to the students. ... Remember the bulk of the time the students are interacting with their lecturers, course coordinators and administrators in their academic programmes. What messages do they give to such students? So in a sense (there) are questions of stigma ...The last [issue] is that of religious intolerance. There are those who may believe, for whatever religious reason, ....[that] they may have a right to ...campaign against a sangoma on campus – that is a challenge.*

The lack of religious and cultural diversity could possibly pose major challenges to the introduction of traditional healing services in tertiary institutions, which are modeled according to Western institutions (Vilakazi 1999). The findings resonate with the issues raised by McCabe (2008), Mkabela (2005), and Moodley *et al.* (2008), among others, who have called for

a critical dialogue on how best to accommodate African indigenous and Western/European ways of life. Moodley *et al.* (2008) argue that patients use traditional medicine alongside Western medicine, and this calls for an urgent dialogue between these two systems of health care. In South Africa, we argue that higher education institutions need to take into consideration the psychological and spiritual well-being of African students, who hold indigenous views about health and illness.

## **Logistical Considerations**

The participants expressed a concern that the counselling environment in higher education institutions was not designed with the traditional healers in mind. In most instances the environment is suitable for individual or, at best, group counselling. Participants also raised concerns about the logistical implications of practicing traditional healing, in an environment that was not typically designed for such purposes. University office spaces were not designed with traditional healers in mind, and the specifications may differ, depending on each traditional healer's unique needs and calling.

*Researcher: What in your view are the challenges to having traditional counselling services on campus?*

*Participant 13, Student Services: The challenges for me, I am guessing, if you want to start a counselling service or a medical practice you know what the specifications for what a surgery should be. I don't know if we understand what the specifics are for the kind of room a traditional practitioner requires to do [his or her] work. Or will we just accommodate [traditional practitioners] because we already have free space, ... and so they must just fit in and continue to work? ... In traditional healing you need to sit on the floor and burn incense; So there are certain things we need to adapt to make them more comfortable.*

The participant is alluding to the fact that, in traditional (Western) psychological counselling, the counsellors see clients within the confines of their offices. Consultation is usually time-bound, with most sessions averaging between 50 to 60 minutes. The parameters of the counselling sessions are clear-

ly defined. On the other hand, in traditional healing, the relationship is guided by the ancestors: the healer is the medium through which the ancestors communicate appropriate forms of healing that are required for each individual client. The burning of incense may thus be necessary in order to connect with the ancestors, so that they guide the traditional healer to provide client-specific treatment. The process, which often incorporates the entire family, is not bound by time and may require the patient to take leave of absence while undergoing intense treatment under the traditional healer's guidance (Ogana *et al.* 2009). Several rituals of short or long term duration may have to be undertaken by the patient and his or her family (Edwards *et al.* 2011). The expectation that traditional healers should operate within an environment that was initially designed for Western forms of counselling, is a challenge. There is an urgent need, therefore, to assist traditional healers to develop their practices in line with their profession. Traditional healers have called for assistance with office space and other administrative infrastructure to practice their profession (Thornton 2009).

### **Legal and Ethical Accountability**

The participants also raised issues about the legal and ethical accountability of traditional healers who operate within tertiary institutions. The following extract from one of the student participants captures this point:

*Researcher: In your view, what are the main challenges to incorporating traditional healing into the counselling services offered in tertiary institutions?*

*Student Participant 14: Probably this big issue of ethics, how do we begin to incorporate traditional or African healers into a Westernized system? So it is very hard for most traditional black students' needs to be met in [the current] academic setting. Because there's the whole issue of legal issues, [and] ethical challenges, you know... We take this to be a academic and professional setting, 'professional' in brackets, because in a sense I believe that there is a lot of discrimination around, uhmm, on traditional healing, it is not really seen to be... what is called a professional way of doing things.*

The participant in the extract cited above raises one of the issues that

have been debated in the literature, namely the ethical and legal accountability of traditional healers (Moodley *et al.* 2008; Sodi *et al.* 2011; Summerton 2006). Psychologists and counsellors are guided by their codes of ethics; they are sanctioned by their professional societies in the event of malpractice. It is often assumed that traditional healers do not have a body to which they are ethically accountable. This is erroneous: ideally, traditional healers are accountable to the ancestors, the community of other traditional healers, as well as the members of the community in which the traditional healer practices. This is in line with the definition of a traditional healer as someone who has a socially designated status within his or her community: it is this community that sanctions the traditional healer's practice (cf. Gumede 1990). Sodi *et al.* (2011) argue that, apart from the provisions of the Traditional Health Practitioners' Act, traditional healers are aware of ethics. They believe that 'should they malpractice, their power to heal will be withdrawn by the ancestors' (Sodi *et al.* 2011: 104). Like all professionals who work with patients who are in pain, however, traditional healers need to engage on the dialogue on how best to manage ethical issues in the context of healing, on an ongoing basis. This is more so given the fact that 'many of the therapeutic techniques of traditional healers involve direct contact with the body in terms of acquiring information, ... as ... they believe that the body is a container which channels the energy for healing' (Moodley *et al.* 2008: 158). According to Summerton (2006), enforcing the registration of traditional healers with the Traditional Health Practitioners' Association will help to address the problem of poorly qualified or unaccountable practitioners. It is envisaged that this might help to address the marginalization of traditional healing (Akomolafe 2012; Summerton 2006) that is alluded to in the extracts above.

## **Conclusion**

The rapid changes in the demographic profile of higher education students in South Africa, calls for a re-examination of the type of counselling services that are offered to the students. It has been shown that black African students do not adjust well to the transition from high school to university. This is more so for the students that are studying in previously white institutions. The research also shows that African students consult student counsellors primarily for academic problems. This is despite the fact that they report higher levels of

social and cultural alienation at university, compared to their white counterparts. Despite the demographic changes that have been observed in higher education, social inclusion and social cohesion continue to be elusive (CHE 2015; 2016). The current study explored the unique contribution of alternative (indigenous) forms of healing, in a university that has been experimenting with the provision of traditional healing services to some of its students. Avenues of collaboration between the traditional healer and psychologically trained counsellors were also explored, as were the challenges. The participants considered the traditional healer to be well-qualified to provide treatment for spiritual illnesses. Issues of belonging and identity, arising from children being born out of wedlock, were also seen to be an appropriate area of intervention for traditional healers. The participating psychologists and the traditional healer were open to collaboration, according to their professional expertise. Inadequate infrastructure, stigmatization of the practice, and legal and ethical considerations, were some of the key obstacles that were identified. It is important to examine other models of collaboration, such as the Chinese model (Summerton 2009), to ensure that traditional healers become equal health care partners in higher education settings.

The current study had several limitations. Sampling was purposive, and it is possible that this attracted participants with a positive attitude towards traditional healing. The only traditional healer participating in the study, the diviner, had an established relationship with the psychological counsellors in the Centre. The findings cannot be generalized to other categories of traditional healers, as they were not part of the sample. It is therefore important to conduct studies with bigger samples, using mixed methods designs, in order to access a diverse range of stakeholders. The families of the students also need to be sampled, given the holistic understanding of health and illness in African indigenous societies. This is also important because, in African indigenous societies, the decision to consult a traditional healer, on matters that have relevance for the family as a whole, cannot be taken by an individual in isolation, let alone a minor.

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# **Alterity, and Recharging ‘Othered’ Voices: The Agency of Spirit Possession in Identifying Dead Guerrillas for Reburial as Depicted in Makanda and Vambe’s *Ndangariro dzeHondo dzeVachakabvu muZimbabwe (Reflections of War from the Dead in Zimbabwe)***

**Maurice Taonezvi Vambe**

## **Abstract**

After the controversial 2008 presidential elections in Zimbabwe, there was a flurry of claims from children, young adults and some ex-combatants possessed by the spirits of guerrillas who died in Zimbabwe’s Liberation of the 1970s. Some members of political opposition parties in the country dismissed this cultural and spiritual phenomenon as another example of the ruling Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (ZANU PF) party’s gimmick to create new narratives with which to perpetuate the party’s monopoly of power (which began in 1980). Some Christian and Pentecostal churches dismissed the spiritual phenomena as either faked, works of quacks or the doing and manifestation of the handiwork of demonic spirits despite the fact that spirit possession is not new to Shona people. Since time immemorial, spirit possession announced its authority as another way of knowing, explaining and arriving at contested historical and religious truths. The aim of this article is to critically interrogate oral stories narrated by the dead combatants through the agency of spirit possession. I do not focus on the original stories in their oral forms. Instead, I analyse the spiritual voices of dead guerrillas as published narratives contained in the book, *Ndangariro dzeHondo dzeVachakabvu muZimbabwe* (hereafter, NDDM) or *Reflections on War by the Dead in Zimbabwe* (Makanda & Vambe, eds, 2015). The main objective of the

article is to explore what happens when oral stories drawn from the context of spirit possession are fixed as written narratives. This central objective informs other objectives of the article which are related to the agency of spirit possession in identifying the remains of dead guerrillas for decent reburials. The article argues that the modernity of spirit possession is that it asserts the presence of the departed in human life and that the possessed speak the language of national reconciliation, attack greed, corruption and bemoan the shrinking democratic spaces of freedom in Zimbabwe. Other themes that are voiced through narratives of spirit possession in the book relate to the voices of the forgotten dead combatants: voices viewed in the book as cultural sites of public memory and remembrance. The article asserts that spiritual voices in spirit possession mark the existence of an indigenous knowledge system that can generate political narratives which can be used to counter and alter officially-sanctioned monolithic narratives of war and peace. Furthermore, the possession of children and young adults as represented in the book complicates the very cultural practice normally associated with established adult mediumistic practices built around clan authorities in Zimbabwe.

**Keywords:** deceased guerrillas, spirit possession, memories archive, alterity, Otherness, post independent Zimbabwe

## **Methodology and Theoretical Framework**

Between 2008 and 2015, with the approval of the Ministry of Culture of the Government of Zimbabwe, some surviving ex-combatants of the Zimbabwe liberation struggle began a program of recording, on celluloid tape, the spiritual voices of dead combatants who manifested through children, young adults and some surviving ex-combatants who had participated in the struggle to liberate Zimbabwe of the 1970s. Surviving ex-combatants worked with the department of the Museum of Zimbabwe to record, collect and gather the spiritual voices of the dead speaking through spirit possession of people in different parts of Zimbabwe and Mozambique. The teams of ex-combatants and villagers visited rural areas in the province of Mashonaland central, such as Chesa and Chibondo in Mount Darwin, North East of Zimbabwe. Other teams composed of ex-combatants worked in the province of Manicaland in the rural areas of Rusape, and Chipinge in East of Zimbabwe, in Chimoio, in Mozambique.

Some ex-combatants visited the province of Mashonaland Central in the Guruve rural area which is in North-west Zimbabwe. The encounters and conversations between the surviving ex-combatants and the spiritual voices of the ‘dead’ ex-combatants were recorded on tape. I was not part of the recording exercise and so it is not easy for me to know how the surviving ex-combatants and the villages obtained ethical clearance from the government authorities which in part approved this program.

However, in 2015, a Harare publishing company called Africa Institute for Culture, Peace Dialogue and Tolerance Studies obtained the recorded materials and proceeded to transcribe them. The end result was the publication of a book called *Ndangariro dzeHondo dzeVachakabvu muZimbabwe (Reflections on War by the Dead in Zimbabwe)* (Makanda & Vambe, eds, 2015), hereafter abbreviated as NDDM. This book is circulating in the Zimbabwean public sphere, and it is the printed or published version of the recordings contained in the form of the book that my article aims to analyse as a primary source. Since the oral recordings now exist as a written document of the physical copies of the above cited book, the shift from the oral to a fixed written format is noteworthy. What is lost from the oral recordings are the paralinguistic features such as sound, gestures, pictures of real people associated with the vibrancy of the context of oral performance. As such, an oral text is hypostasised when made into a book. Notwithstanding this loss, what is gained when oral texts are transformed into published texts is that the oral text assumes a new permanent existence in the form of a book. A book can circulate more widely than oral texts, and books can be read and interpreted by readers not directly involved in the creation of the original oral text. While the oral recordings remain a significant source of oral archive, a book extends the idea of archive in the form of a written document that enables future scholars to intellectually reflect on it in different contexts, and to emerge with potentially alternative meanings that require a different methodological approach to tease out the meanings from the content of narrative conversations and exchanges between the surviving ex-combatants and the spiritual voices of the dead ex-combatants. A book does not necessary cease to become a source of indigenous knowledge because it is a published text. In fact, the oral stories recorded by the ex-combatants become narratives, socially constructed precisely at the moment that the oral stories formed the basis of the book. .

Although the stories in the book analysed in this article retain their original verbatim words as in the oral recordings, the very act of transcribing

the stories involved some level of creative stylisation which introduced the idea that the stories in the present book form are ordered in ways that conformed to the aims of the publisher. To the extent that oral stories are narrated from certain perspectives, the oral stories make use of images and become depictions or representations of some meanings other than those meanings simply imagined or intended by the dead ex-combatants at the point of performance. This view is supported by the cultural critic, Stuart Hall who observes that events, relations and structures do exist separately from the discursive, but ironically, it is only within the discursive that oral words and events around them are constructed within meaning. In Stuart Hall's (in Bobo 1992: 66) words, 'how things are represented and the machineries and regime of representation play a formative, not simply an expression or reflective, place in the constitution of social and political life'. When the above idea is put differently, and as observed by the critic of historiography, Hayden White (1978: 82), 'stories are verbal fictions, the contents of which are as much *invented as found*...'. In other words, oral narratives may claim to represent the actual, but in the process of storytelling what also emerges is the possible and the imaginable. Thus, any act of translating knowing into telling implies, paradoxically, the artifactualisation of facts, because 'events are *made* into a story by the suppression or subordination of certain of them, and the highlighting of others, by characterisation, motific repetition, variation of tone and point of view [and] alternative descriptive strategies...'.(White, 1978:84).

Thus it follows that NDDM (2015) is by virtue of the argument above, a work of art. It is a collage and pastiche because it contains multiple genres such as conversation, testimony, witness accounts by surviving combatants, spiritual voices of the dead, documentary evidence sites where atrocities were committed that can be verified, prose, popular songs and myths of eternal death and rebirths. The book is an instance of secondary orality in which the primarily oral and spiritual voices of the dead ex-combatants are now mediated through another form- the written form. I analyse the instances of spirit possession as narratives in the book representing alternative sites to recuperate indigenous knowledge systems related to other forensic ways of coming to terms with the trauma of war on the dead who vocalised their pain and that of surviving ex-combatants through whom this traumatic experiences was now being nationalised and re-signified with new meanings. My methodological approach is therefore, to describe NDDM (2015) as the primary source for analysis.

The act of narrating involves creative imagination and stylisation, and, therefore, in my view such a work of art can only be sufficiently explained using qualitative methods. Qualitative methods accept the premise that interpretation of narratives is subjective since there is no one uniform objective reality to which everybody can accede. Furthermore, the appropriateness of a textual analysis of the narratives in NDDM also derives from an understanding that there is heterogeneity even within a cultural phenomenon such as spirit possession that is assumed to have similar values of a group of people or congeries of spiritual voices that take themselves as representing the subaltern classes in society. The task of the critic is to account for or explain the variations in views, ideas and ideals as manifested in the stories by the dead ex-combatants. This article is also informed by secondary sources, in particular, the works by Agamben (1998) on oral and written imaginative works as forms of witness and archive. Theoretical views on reburial, mourning and views that complicate notions based on assumptions of uniformity of values expressed through family/community/nation are also borrowed from the works of Butler (2006), Burnet (2012), Shoko (2006) and Fontein (2006). Depelchin's (2005) theory of deconstructing silences in African history is of particular significance as it suggests that oral institutions such as spirit possession can be sites of potential recuperation of African voices.

Historical accounts 'written' or 'narrated' from the bowels of earth can confirm themselves as witness and archive (Agamben 1998) of the war and its aftermath. Such narratives also sometimes refuse to be manipulated into positive official uplifting narratives of the heroic myths of war and peace. The themes that dominate the narratives of the voices of the fallen combatants are varied: desire for official recognition; demand for decent burial; desire for reunification and reconciliation with families, communities and nationhood. The voices of the dead also critique pathologies of greed and corruption among the country's leaders which run contrary to the vision the 'dead' combatants fought and died for. But, before analysing the stories in NDDM (2015) ) as narratives of spiritual challenge to the self-serving nationalist historiography authored by officials and commissioned academics, it is important to briefly comment on Zimbabwe's cultural policy, if only to enable the article to broaden an understanding of the intellectual context within which to evaluate the agency of spirit possession in new identity formations in post-independent Zimbabwe.

## **Cultural Policy of Zimbabwe Document of 2015**

The cultural policy document of Zimbabwe recognises traditional knowledge systems and recommends that 'Our traditional knowledge systems should provide sources for the curriculum needs to our societies and such knowledge should be infused into the main school curricula' (2015, 15). However, what this document lacks is a nuanced description of a knowledge system. The insistence that African knowledge is 'traditional' recalls the colonialist negation of the contemporaneity of African knowledge systems. Alternative non-material knowledge systems such as spirit possession are not fully recognised in the cultural policy document and this is evidence that the Suppression Act of 1898 has not been repealed. That is why Mbembe (2002: 19) can get away with cultural murder when he incorrectly writes that when one is refiguring the archive, we should remember that:

The term 'archives' first refers to a building, a symbol of a public institution, which is one of the organs of a constitutional state. However, by 'archives' is also understood a collection of documents – normally written documents – kept in this building. There cannot therefore be a definition of 'archive' that does not encompass both the building itself and the documents.

The above passage shows the limitations of Afro-pessimistic approaches to Africa's Indigenous knowledge systems. It is not true that an archive is the sum total of a building and documents. Oral literature does not necessarily need buildings to exist. Its structures are the very people who live it as they perform it. Not all of what is selected by a 'constitutional state' and consecrated as *the* knowledge, amounts to all known or knowable knowledge. To the extent that in modernist terms an archive is a status conferred on certain facts and not others, there is reason to believe that not all forms of Africa's knowledge have been acknowledged or need to be recognised by official recognition in order to be validated as knowledge. Depelchin (2005: 4) argues convincingly that 'silences are facts which have not been accorded the status of facts' and to break out of these silences, one needs to go to an oral culture which never entirely fell apart, one and which could be recovered, though not in an intact form.

The fact that NDDM (2015) is based on a transcription of oral narrated

initially in the oral medium by dead combatants and then recorded on tape reveals that Africans continue to resort to their time tested knowledge economies to solve their pressing problems. Africa's knowledge systems that thrive on alternative moral economy of spirit possession are based on philosophical links between the living humanity to the unborn, and then the ancestors who are believed to be 'alive.'

### **Spirit Possession as Religious and Cultural Practice**

David Lan (1985:98) argues that the people whose ancestors can conjure rain, the source of fertility and life, 'own the land'. Although spirit possession is at the centre of Shona people, since time immemorial, it was associated with clan and national spirits called Mhondoros, mostly drawn from dead chiefs. During the Zimbabwean liberation struggle in the 1970s, mhondoros or national spirits forged amicable relations with the African freedom fighters and after independence in 1980, spirit mediums and families welcomed surviving freedom fighters and, 'cleansing them had become family and sometimes community obligations' (David et al, 2014: 37). David et al further observe that the manifestations of spirit possession were also occasioned by the fact that; 'The new government did not take seriously the need to cleanse its combatants who had now returned neither was it responsible for the restitution of those who had been offended by guerrillas or their collaborators' (ibid, 37).

Some of the dead guerrillas and surviving war collaborators had also committed atrocities against the ordinary populace during the war; as a result, some of the young men and children were possessed by the spirits of those ordinary citizens who had been 'offended' by their political kith and kin. This picture is complex because it suggests that the spiritual voices of the dead people were not in every situation ex-combatants. But the less serious approach to the welfare of the guerrillas changes in post-independent Zimbabwe when war veterans 'spearheaded activities of reburial of fallen heroes' (Shoko 2006:1). The perspectives on the relationship between spirit medium and guerrillas reviewed above are normative explanations that do not provide satisfactory answers to questions related to the agency of children, young adults and some ex-combatants who experienced intensified possession by the spirits of dead heroes, especially after 2008.

David Lan's (1985) anthropological study has now been overtaken by

events especially where he argues that spirit possession is a phenomenon associated with *mhondoro* spirits of chiefs. After 2008, children, young adults and some guerrillas not at all biologically related to fallen heroes became hosts of the voices of the dead combatants. Daneel (1988:52) suggests that the phenomenon of spirit possession was a 'kind of spontaneous war-mediumship' because it unusually manifested itself through children, young adults and some surviving ex-combatants and best describes the intrusion of the narratives of 'dead' combatants in post independent Zimbabwe. In other words, critics like Lan (1985) who have relied on narratives of the surviving combatants, written from officially sanctioned perspectives are partial. The spirit possessions of children, youth and surviving ex-combatants that occurred spontaneously after 2008, (published in NDDM, 2015) are not from chiefly backgrounds associated with original ancestors of the *mhondoros*. The above book, however, is not the first in Zimbabwe to embed spirit possession. In the novel, *Chaminuka: Prophet of Zimbabwe* (1985), Mutswairo recounts a moment in which one Pasipamire is possessed by the spirit of Chaminuka, one of the great ancestors of the Shona people. While in that trance, Pasipamire goes back in time to the origins of the Shona people. In the process, Pasipamire mentions Nehanda, Chaminuka, Murenga Soro ReNzou, Tobela and Mbire as the original ancestors responsible for protecting the Shona people. In reviving ancestors, Pasipamire populates the spiritual landscape of Zimbabwe, making the claim that Zimbabwe belongs to the Shona people. In that state of possession, Pasipamire ascribes Shona ancestors with the capacity to conjure rain. In other words when spirit possession is captured in the written form of the book or novel, it serves other ideological interests not anticipated in the narratives of voices of the dead ex-combatants.

A further point to consider before analysing the spiritual voices in NDDM (2015) is that the spiritual voices of dead ex combatants represent themselves as the new subaltern 'historians' in Zimbabwe. Their spiritual voices contest the official view that fifty thousand people died in the struggle. Accounts written by the combatants speaking from below earth in shallow graves and others whose bones are not buried but are scattered in different locations within the country refuse to be marginalised in the nation's narratives of war and peace. This fact alone offers what the critic, Fontein, describes as opportunities for 'radical alternative imaginations of the state' (2006: 167). Spirit possession itself is a competing cultural institution offering an alternative system of African indigenous knowledge production which indicates a possible

new dimension, namely that ‘true witnesses have perished’ (Maclean, 2008: 36). However, the fact that the ‘dead’ combatants chose to manifest their presence at a time of their own, and in their own language, may cast doubt on the official narratives of the state written by surviving guerrillas and professional historians’ textbooks for schools as the only authentic narratives of the Zimbabwean liberation war.

### **Spirit Manifestation as Cultural Forensics in NDDM (2015)**

One of the major themes that manifest in the conversations between the surviving ex-combatants and the voices of the dead combatants is the need by the dead combatants to have their remains remembered and recovered. In one of the songs, one comrade Mauya enjoins the villagers to sit down and remember the fallen heroes:

Garai pasi murangarire magamba vese vakafira paNyadzonya  
Zendekera mukoma  
Garai pasi tirangarire magamba akafira paChimoio  
Zendekera mukoma  
Garai pasi tirangarire magamba maimwana ka zvinogumbura  
Zendekera mukoma  
Sit down so we can remember all heroes who died at Nyadzonya  
Lean on your brother  
Sit down so we remember heroes who died at Chimoio  
Lean on your brother  
Sit down so we heroes, my wife, its pain to remember the dead  
Lean on your brother (NDDM:109)

In the above lines, Chimoio and Nyadzonia are sites of memory in Mozambique and Tanzania where Zimbabwean combatants died during the liberation. While these two sites have been officially memorialized in Zimbabwean history, the song also indirectly pays homage to those combatants whose remains have not yet been recovered. Another song suggests that the spirits of dead combatants still roam the forests without decent burial:

Tinongoti mberere mberere nenyika

Vamwe vakagarika zvavo mudzimba umo  
We just wander and wander in the forests  
While others are enjoying in their homes (NDDM: 146).

This song was sung during liberation struggle in the 1970s as a critique of the whites and some blacks who were enjoying themselves under colonialism. However, the re-deployment of the song in post-independence period, and the song's appearing in the context of the resurgence of spiritual voices of dead, re-signifies their narratives. The song becomes a critique of the officials who have 'forgotten' the dead ex-combatants, some of whose bones lie scattered in the forests. According to Shoko,

The exhumation and identification of the fighters is made possible through the cooperation of the burial committee, spirit mediums, prophets and local people who witnessed the massacres during the liberation war. The spirit mediums acts as host of a national spirit. He leads a group of young male mediums who call themselves 'comrades'. They sniff out the graves and imitate guerrilla fighters during the war. They declare that war is still on until land is redistributed to the landless blacks (2006: 7).

The account above largely links surviving combatants and established spirit mediums to the conversations with the spirits of dead combatants, and argues that these were critical in identification of the dead combatants. Also, and as argued by Kazembe (2008), women were possessed by the spirits of the dead combatants and greatly assisted in identifying unknown grave sites. In one rural area called Mapanzure in the Chipinge district of Eastern Zimbabwe one woman is possessed by the spirit of a dead chief. This chief who is referred to as Mambo (king) Chivhanga was not a combatant. However, as recorded in NDDM, Chivhanga was poisoned at guerrilla base called Hwiri base in Mapanzure by the Rhodesian forces as retribution for his support of the combatants. In an exchange between the spirit of Chivhanga and some of the surviving combatants, it emerges that the voice of the dead chief cries out to have its body identified. The spiritual voice remembers its human brothers, 'Soromoni naJabhusoni' (NDDM, 55), and advises the surviving combatants to be in touch with these two people so as to lead villagers to the spot where the body of Chief Chivhanga was dumped:

Surviving combatant: ‘Akakutorai nguvai mabhunu aya’? (‘What time did the Boers take you’?)

Possessed Woman: Mabhunu akanditora husiku a-a-a-a, akandisunga handichazive pandiri’. ‘The Boers (soldiers) took me at night and tied me and I don’t know where I am.’

Surviving combatant: ‘Aiwa tinokutorai mambo, saka imimi chichemo chenyu ndechekuti mutorwe muradzikwe zvakana nedzinza renyu’ (‘Anyway, we will take you, chief, so your wish is to be taken so that you are buried decently by your people.’)

Possessed Woman: Ndozvishuwiro hakuna chimwe, unoziva icho chinondisika ndichochine shungu wekuda kuwona mutumbi (That is the one only wish, you know the spiritual voice that possesses me is eager to see its body recovered (NDDM: 54).

In the dialogue above, which is extracted from NDDM (2015), a woman is possessed by the spirit of chief Chivhanga. First, here, a woman contradicts the age-old assumption that spirit possession was only the realm of male Mhondoros. Second, it is only through the agency of spirit possession that the possessed woman is able to direct the surviving ex combatants and the villagers to where the remains of Chief Chivhanga were left to rot by the Rhodesian soldiers. Third, the spiritual voice makes it clear that its wish is for the bones of Chief Chivhanga to be recovered and decently buried by its blood relatives identified as ‘Soromoni and naJabhusoni’ (Solomon and Jabson’) (NDDM, 2015:55) who are said to be alive and in Chipinge district in the east of Zimbabwe.

In the rural area of Chibondo in Mount Darwin, in the northern part of Zimbabwe, another possessed woman bemoans the fact that the remains of combatant has not been offered decent burial. According to the spirit of the possessed woman, many of the surviving combatants, both in and outside post-independence government, seem not to care about the whereabouts of this combatants who disappeared and whose remains have not been located and identified. (NDDM, 86). One of the concerns raised by the spiritual voice is that it has been many years since they died and no one seems to care. The spiritual voice requests the surviving combatant to show remorse and

camaraderie with those who died presumably for the same cause, namely, to liberate Zimbabwe from the clutches of colonial rule. The spiritual voice lashes out at surviving combatants: 'Titoreiwo mutichengetedzewo makore mangani makasununguka muchigara zvakanaka'. (Take us and accord us decent burial. How many years have gone by while we are dead and while you are free and yet you are living comfortably enjoying what we fought for) (NDDM, 2015: 87). Official amnesia is attacked by the spiritual voice of the dead combatant. In the Chesa area in Mount Darwin another possessed woman indicate that the dead combatant that possessed the woman died in Ruwombwe in the rural area in Mutare, near the eastern border with Mozambique, and that there were other dead comrades who had not yet manifested themselves (NDDM, 2015: 147). Although another dead combatant had died in the rural area of Rushinga, the spirit manifested in the Chesa rural area in Mount Darwin where some burials of combatants were taking place. This occasion enabled the reburial committee to go to Rushinga rural area to identify the dead combatant. In the Guruve rural area in north-west of Zimbabwe, the possessing spirit of a dead combatant justified possessing children in its belief that this would make the surviving guerrillas take the spirit voices of dead combatants seriously. In the words of the spirit of the dead combatant,

Chandaisvikira pamwana, ndakaona kuti ndikabuda pamunhu mukuru kudai, anhu, anoramba, ndosaka ndaakubudira pamwana apa' (Why I possessed the child is because I saw that if I possessed an old person, the villagers and surviving guerrillas/combatants would refuse to heed my call, that is why I manifested myself in death through a child (NDDM, 2015: 316).

From the rural area of Chimoio in Mozambique, the spirit of Grace Chimurenga manifested itself and linked her death to one woman called Monica who sold out the combatants to the Rhodesian forces. Unlike most spiritual voices whose stories appear in NDDM, the spirit of Grace Chimurenga wanted retributive justice. The spirit wanted Monica to tell the community where she had buried the bodies of the deceased combatants. The spiritual voice of the dead combatant, Grace Chimurenga, also wanted Monica to take Grace Chimurenga's bones to her parents. In the absence of official forensic scientists, the spirits led the living to identify the spot where the combatants that included Grace Chimurenga were killed and buried. In this

instance, the agency of the spiritual voice of Grace Chimurenga used the cultural institution of spirit possession to communicate the whereabouts of Grace Chimurenga's remains. Spirit possession is utilised here as an alternative mode of arriving at a kind of human knowledge that the surviving combatants and villagers did not possess. In other words, the modernity of spirit possession as an African indigenous knowledge system is that the institution is capable of leading the living to arrive at cultural/political truths. Considered from this perspective, spirit possession is a self-validating knowledge system even though living witnesses also corroborate its truths.

The spiritual voices of dead combatants manifested themselves as new ancestors of a long tradition of clan mediumistic cultures (Lan, 1985, Shoko, 2006). The same spiritual voices of dead are a recent phenomenon of 'spontaneous [post] war-mediumship' (Fontein, 2006: 171) using children and youth as its agency. In Zimbabwean cultural history, the spirit possession is not a new phenomenon. Spirit possession manifested itself as political institution to reckon with through a woman called Charwe who was possessed by the spirit of Nehanda and who resisted colonialism between 1890 and 1889 when the country of Zimbabwe was being invaded by British colonists. Although Charwe was hanged by the British settlers in 1898, the spirit of Nehanda uttered through its host, Charwe, that her bones would in due course rise to fight white settlerism in Rhodesia. And the bones rose in the form of the African nationalist forces that came together to fight white settlerism in Zimbabwe in the liberation struggle called the Second Chimurenga in the 1970s. In the discursive narratives authorised by spirit possession, politics, religion and African philosophy, the 'living dead' can manifest themselves and intercede in human affairs to advise the living on certain cultural and political issues. In oral narratives published in NDDM, (2015) the spiritual voices of dead combatants and non-combatants were not called upon to reveal themselves; the spiritual voices re-entered the public sphere of humans in ways that generated knowledge that shows that the dead combatants could still rise and manifest their agency in a manner that introduces different agendas in post independent Zimbabwe.

## **Reburial, Mourning the Dead and the Myth of Eternal Return**

Spirit possessions that led to identifications of dead combatants and subse-

quently facilitated reburials of dead combatants also revealed existential themes such as the need for decent burial amongst one's own people. This demand by the spirits is a constant refrain in almost all the rural areas mentioned in the oral stories contained in NDDM (2015). For example, in the Chipinge district in Eastern Zimbabwe, the spiritual voices of dead combatants that possessed youths and guerrillas wished to have a decent reburial. One of the dead combatants said:

Tichiri kusango namanje tichirikungotambura...Isu vamwe torambatchingotambura chete taakuda kuti tichigadzikanawo zvakanaka. Imi makakunda mukararama mogadzikanawo. 'Zvakanaka kuti mukwanisewo kutichengetedzawo isusu takasara handiti...'.(We are still in the forest up to now. We are suffering. We continue to suffer but now we want to be united by our families and have stability in the community. It is good that the surviving people be able to re-bury the remains of the combatants of those who remained in the forest, isn't it so') (NDDM: 1)

The request made above suggests a certain uneasiness that spiritual voices feel, namely that they seem to have been rejected by their own people for as long as their remains continue to be scattered 'kusango' or in the forest. The voices of the dead combatants want their families to know where they are. In rural area of Nyazura, in the eastern part of Zimbabwe, one manifesting spirit of the dead combatant said that its aim for revealing itself was to be assisted to go back to its home where the dead combatant had left parents when she/he went to fight Ian Smith, the Rhodesian Prime Minister. In another area called Rusape Gutu in eastern Zimbabwe, 'the remains of Comrade Black Hood were taken to Gutu and were received by relatives and friends in his homeland' (NDDM: 241). Other dead combatants, identified and reburied amongst their families in Masvingo province in the south west of Zimbabwe were Constain Tutai Kudakwashe, Thomas Dambari, and Genetsai Vitori from Chiredzi (ibid: 242). In the Gwanda district in Matabeleland South in Zimbabwe, the local leadership witnessed scattered bones of Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army (ZIPRA) freedom fighters and requested the government to assist with funds to locate the families and villages from which the combatants had come. In the Guruve area, in the north-west part of

Zimbabwe, the spirits of dead combatants said they were happy that they were going to their homes and people.

From the above statements by spiritual voices of dead combatants, it becomes pertinent to suggest that within the discourses of spirit possession, reburial of dead bodies confirms that somebody once existed. It allows the community to bring the spirit of the dead back into the pantheon of family, community and nation's ancestors. And as Shoko (2006) points out, in Shona culture in particular and African traditions in general, reburials of bones that relatives of the deceased can see, re-sacralises the political order which derives legitimacy from the biographies of the dead. In Zimbabwe, the 11th of August of each year is celebrated as the Heroes day. But the heroes often remembered are those who are surviving and those who are dead but which the government can account for. This leaves out recognition of the role played by the dead combatants whose whereabouts cannot be ascertained. According to Blaauw and Lahteenmaki (2002:771),

Many of the disappeared persons have been breadwinners and their families have faced a loss of income. Where there is no official acknowledgment of the missing person's status, the family might not be given the support that members normally receive in cases of death.

In other words, the dead combatants that the state does not remember 'lose' out because the families of the disappeared do not receive monthly gratuities. This causes 'arrested grief or atypical reactions' (ibid: 771) as was expressed by the spirits of the dead combatants.

But if we take spirit possession as a rhetorical way of remembering combatants lying in unmarked graves, then it is arguable that spirit possession ensures that the voices of the dead combatants are assured a place among the living and the dead through spiritual manifestation. Through spirit possession, scientific evidence of crimes of genocide are uncovered and, after documentation, this knowledge should be used to prosecute and prevent crimes in future. Reburials of dead combatants aided by spirit possession can bring some form of closure through memorialisation.

Reburial of the remains of dead combatants in Zimbabwe also centres on the concept of mourning so important in African communities. Spirit possession tackled the problem of 'unresolved mourning' (CSVR 2005: 16) because it confirmed that dead guerrilla in unknown graves constitute loss to

communal and individual lives. By manifesting their voices through possession of the youth and ex-combatants, the previously unacknowledged dead combatants insisted that their lives are grievable. Butler (2006:20) states that although it is not entirely known 'when mourning is successful, or when one has fully mourned another human being', mourning dead combatants during ceremonies of reburials is 'another way of imagining community' (ibid, 27) because human beings 'as bodies outside ourselves [are] for one another' (ibid). These views on the importance of mourning dead combatants through reburials are acknowledged in Burnet's (2012) study of the Rwandan genocide in which national mourning is viewed as another way of resisting silence by remembering. But Burnet (2012:93) warns that amnesia can be promoted through

Nationalised mourning [that] minimizes and even denies the multiplicity of truths about the genocide. Nationalised mourning poses difficulties for genocide survivors who find that the dominant discourses do not fit with their own experiences... While attempting to forge a new, unified national identity around a single understanding of the genocide and a single version of history, national mourning homogenizes the diverse experiences of victims of the genocide, the civil war, and afterward. In this way, individual mourning becomes political and managed by the state.

This account of the paradox of mourning that Burnet found in Rwanda also is apparent in post-independent Zimbabwe. To begin with, the fact alone that there were voices of dead combatants that erupted from unmarked graves in the bowels of earth, and other voices emerging from scattered bones of dead combatants, complicates the official narrative of a definite political closure. That dead combatants had to possess unsuspecting youth, many of whom did not go to war, is another form of resisting being forgotten. And the dead combatants' narratives of national healing that manifested through spirit possession sometimes brought officially sanctioned political narratives of the state into crisis. This happens in the section discussed below where the nationalist narrative that insists on describing former Rhodesian whites as the enemy of African people in post-independence Zimbabwe ruled by black elites is questioned by the voices of dead combatants.

## **Cleansing, Communal Reconciliation and the Paradox of National Healing in Zimbabwe**

So far, I have argued that within the discourses of spirit possession, identifying bones of dead combatants and non-combatants in the war, the process of reburials and mourning can by themselves assure or foster a certain degree of unity amongst the spirits of the dead and the spirits of the living. It is therefore true, as Shoko states, that ‘reburial activities reflect Zimbabwe’s appropriation of religion into political discourse’ (Shoko 2006: 1) especially when linked to the land question. One might argue further that politics associated with visible movements are sometimes absorbed and critiqued in the cultural practices of spirit possession. The everyday lives of people who believe in spirit possession are mundane; the dead and the living like to be respected. In other words, there are other contexts which are not political in their manifestations through millennia movements, but are political in the implications of how they shape, order and articulate themselves in the cultural lives of people. Spirit possession as an African indigenous knowledge system also lends itself to interpretation in alternative ways, namely, the ways in which the very ideas that people have about communal healing and reconciliation are questioned. In my research, the complex orders of spirit possession were manifested through underlying paradoxes of national and communal healing between the spirits of the dead combatants and non-combatants in post independent Zimbabwe. However, spirit possession also complicates the notion of a single collective black identity with a unitary vision of post war society.

In the rural area of Buhera, the spirit of a dead combatant manifested through his son. Other spiritual voices of dead combatants continued to struggle to be heard but no one would recognise them (NDDM, 2015: 274-5). This view is supported by Jimmy Motsi, a surviving combatant and witness of death of some combatants. Jimmy Motsi commented that in rural area of Chesa in Mount Darwin, national healing between the dead combatants and the villagers had to begin with the recognition of all the dead who perished fighting for independence, whether these were armed combatants or the ordinary people who provided the material and human resources to the liberation forces. For Jimmy Motsi, ‘Yamava kuti national healing ingatangire kupi national healing, ini ndinoti ava ndivo vanhu vanofanira kutangwa ne national healing’ (What you are calling national healing, where would it begin? I say these dead combatants and villagers and the people who should be addressed by national

healing (NDDM, 2015: 139). In the area of Mount Darwin, north of Zimbabwe, the children born and left by the dead combatants while they were fighting in the liberation struggle were introduced to their unfamiliar relatives. However, readjusting to this new reality of family reconciliation was a problem for both the children and the families. The spiritual voice of Comrade Bruce manifested and told villagers that its actual name was of Eswath Chipazi who was killed and buried in the veld. Jimmy Motsi, one of the surviving combatants confirmed to the relatives of Comrade Bruce saying:

Eswath, ambuya akadanana nemusikana muhondo, adanana nemusikana muhondo, akaita mwana, saka mwana wacho aripano'(Grandmother, Eswath fell in love with a lady during the war and the relationship resulted with a child born, and the child of the dead combatant is here present at the reburial of his father's remains) (NDDM, 2015:116).

In this statement, African cultural belief systems triumph over some ideologies which emphasised that combatants should not co-habit with women during the war. It is through spirit possession that Comrade Bruce's lineage is reasserted and kept alive. But the irony is that this narrative of surviving children of dead combatants does not sit well with post-colonial leaders who are too eager to forget the war, and the children that war brought back into the lives of people who had psychologically 'settled' many years with the belief that their loved ones were indeed dead for good.

In NDDM (2015), some narratives by surviving combatants mentioned that the new black government was not eager to assist the children and young men who were being possessed by the spirits of dead combatants. One surviving combatant, Anna Garikai, bemoaned the fact that the government was half-hearted in its participation in the reburials of dead combatants lying in unmarked graves. She implored that:

Chirongwa chedu kubva zvatachitanga chirikufamba zvakanaka kusvika parizvino ma Comrades atkwanisa kufukunura a 1025 asi nyaya iripo inogonetsa pachirongwa chedu, ndeyekuti hatisati tawana rutsigiro rwakakwana kubva kuhurumende yedu toti vana ava vakaenda kuhondo...tinenge tichifunga kuti izvi zvinhu zvinofanirwa kunge zvichiitwa neHurumende yedu kuti tikwanise kunge tichiviga

vana vese vakasara mumasango tivavige zvakanaka kumisha yavo pakarara madzibaba avo...Dai Hurumende yedu yatinzwisisa yapindira yabatsira nezvekufambisa kubatsirawo nezvekudya yabatsirawo nemacoffins ekuisira vakafa yangatora chironywa ichi yachiita chayoo..? (Our program, since we begun is going on well until now we have exhumed 1025 comrades but the real story/issue which is there as a problem about this program is that we have not received enough support from the government to assist children who went to war. We will be thinking that things should be done by the government so that we are able to bury all the children (combatants) who were left behind in the forest, we should bury them in their own community where their forefathers are buried. I wish the government should understand, intervene and assist with food, and with coffins to put the remains of the combatants and make this program its own. (NDDM, 2015: 250-251)

Garikai also said many of the families of the deceased do not have money with which to honor their fallen sons and daughters through a decent burial. The question of noncommittal attitude of the government of the day to the reburials was also echoed in the area of Buhera by one surviving witness who said that the guerrillas assisting in reburials have had no respite since they are continuing to fight a war to recover their comrades (NDDM, 273). The possessed youths who were deprived of school attendance while they were attending reburial sessions have also not been looked after by the government. Many youths had left school and would walk with guerrillas exhuming the dead combatants. In Mount Darwin, village elders such as Sabhukus, were happy that dead combatants had left surviving children, but the elders quickly pointed out that the state needed to also look after these children orphaned by war (NDDM, 2015:127). In the area of Chipinge, eastern Zimbabwe, the spirit of Comrade Gary manifested itself, warning that the dead combatants do not want the country to slide into civil war:

Zvatirikuda ndezvekuti nyika haifaniri kuramba ichtambudzika. Hatisirikuda kuti nyika irambe ichidhonzeranwa zvekubatirana mabachi muhuro hatichada, tirikuda kuti tinyatsogara zvakadzikama zvatakafira (What we want is that the country should not keep on suffering. We do not like the country to continue in

conflict with people removing their jackets holding each other's throats, we want to live peacefully for which we died in the war (NDDM, 2015: 1).

In addition to wishing the country to move out of 'bare' (Agamben, 1998) living imposed by bad governance of the country, the spirit of Comrade Gary criticised the government for including many pythons - reference to people who did not participate in the struggle to run the structures of government. On one occasion, the spirit of the dead combatant acknowledges Robert Mugabe as the legitimate leader who derives his powers to rule from the efforts of the dead combatants:

VaMugabe tinovatsigira chaizvo. Tinovapa simba rakawanda. Musafunge kuti kuchembera kusvika paari paya kusimba kwake, hazvisi. Tinotovaka ipo paye. Mitswe inenge yatsemuka tinotinoma tichivitira kuti zvinhu zvfambe'(We support Mr Mugabe. We give him more power. Do not think being old where Mr Mugabe is, is because he is strong. We are there with him. When he feels weak, we repair it, defending him so that things move well') (NDDM, 2015:7).

On another occasion the spiritual voices at Mwandeka, in Mount Darwin introduce what one might describe as a discordant political narrative of the heroism of Ndabaningi Sithole and the assumed necessity for Didymus Mutasa to take over the leadership of ZANU PF in Manicaland (NDDM, 2015: 47).

Put differently, the voices of the spirit of dead combatants introduce subversive narratives that the present government has hunted down and banished from national site. To the extent that the spirits of dead combatants buried in unmarked graves can authorise alternative political identities of the nation, this reveals the distinctive nature of spirit possession as a cultural institution that can produce knowledge that it validates in the face of other contesting narratives of the nation. While David et al (2014) believe that the Zimbabwe government has tended to sideline spirit possession and mediums in the post war period, Shoko (2006) states that the State has only shown interest in reburials of dead combatants in unmarked graves when officials want to manipulate guerrillas in the land reform programme so that what is memorialised is a partial and patriotic history (Ranger: 2007).

Other critics of reburials in Zimbabwe do not mince words as when

Blaauw and Lahteenmaki openly suggest that the levels of denial, silence and refusal to acknowledge or disclose the role of guerrillas or non-guerrillas in nation-building is manifested in the fear instilled in the people in whose name the war was fought, since, according to the scholars, ‘In Zimbabwe, funerals of people killed during political unrest often take place in secret, involving only a few family members’ (2002, 774). These critical views are echoed by the spirit of comrade Gary from Chipinge that openly attacked the government for promoting a narrow ethnic agenda following the succession battles which intensified in 2014 within ZANU PF and resulted in the political axing of Joyce Mujuru and Didymus Mutasa, both former ZANU PF senior politicians. Spirits of dead combatants point out that national healing and reconciliation are difficult to achieve partly because of the government’s negative attitude towards the spirit of dead combatants in unmarked graves. Because these spirits are not yet known, they exist in a grey or liminal space that the government cannot entirely control. The narratives authorised from these spiritual voices provide evidence of a different kind of archive of knowledge which does not necessarily correspond to what official narratives of political correctness would want all Zimbabweans to affirm.

But more dramatic complications of national healing and reconciliation arise from unresolved issues of betrayal within African communities which the spirits of dead combatants manifested. In Rusape, one witness at the reburials confirmed that a man named Chigabe (NDDM: 202), was responsible for the death of several guerrillas and non-guerrillas as he worked with the Rhodesian forces. Such revelations confirm the difficulties of thinking of the liberation struggle as moved by people with a single vision. Sellouts who caused the deaths of people still live in the same communities with their relatives: and this often heightens tensions within the communities. These tensions manifest in different ways.

This article has already mentioned the killer of Comrade Chimurenga. Her killer, one Monica, was supposed to take Chimurenga’s bones to her family. The possibility that disharmony could be continued in the lives of the community in post war Zimbabwe is signalled when Chimurenga says that:

Ndoda kuti vabereki vangu vazive kuti uyu ndiye muvengi wangu. Ehe zve ndoda kuti muvengi wangu, andichere nekuti ndiye ari kuziva paakandiisa.... Achanditakura ipapo, ndiye, kusvika kumusha kwedu, nemota isina kana hwindo. Handidi futi kupinda mubokisi ndichibva

uku dakuenda ndiri mujira, rake raachatenga iye Monica nemari yake (I want my parents to know it is the enemy. I also want my enemy to exhume me because she alone knows where she buried me. She will carry me from there until I get to my home using a car without a window. I do not want to be put in a coffin, I want to go wrapped in cloth that she will have bought using her own money (NDDM, 2015: 361)

Spirits of dead combatants who believed they were wronged and whose death was caused by fellow Africans, could seek retribution as a form of justice. The spiritual voice of the dead Grace Chimurenga wishes that, as punishment, Monica should submit herself to the parents of the dead guerrilla. In other words, through spirit possession, notions of restorative justice are negotiated. But as Blaauw and Lahteenmaki (2002) argue, when the disappeared or dead combatants are denied a place among the living and also denied a place among the dead, this results in arrested grief and the spirits of the dead combatants can become angry, restless and vengeful. The institution of spirit possession, when viewed as another way of arriving at the moral economy of an alternative knowledge system, does challenge some assumptions of the so-called mainstream knowledge. Spirit possession authorises new ways of translating knowing into telling: in the process, it assists in resolving community and national problems. This understanding of spirit possession credits it with the capacity to handle conflicting values in a community. One therefore is forced to refute Craffet's (2015) view of possession as a demonic manifestation of a neurological disease for which exorcism is the solution, or Keener's (2010) linking of possession to 'self-destructive behaviour of possessed persons [mentioned] in Mark 5:5 and 9:22'(216).

### **Spiritual Voices as Cultural Critique of Politics of Official Betrayal and Selective Mourning in NDDM**

The immediate aim of the manifestations of the spiritual voices of dead combatants and non-combatants was the need to have remains of guerrillas identified, recovered and buried with decency among their relatives. The spiritual voices of combatants and non-combatants also possessed children,

youths, and surviving combatants in order to authorize a discourse of family, community and national reconciliation between and among families that may have been at opposed political camps during the liberation struggle. However, in a post-colonial Zimbabwean context in which the political structures of the ruling party are becoming increasingly authoritarian and anti-pluralistic and where the democratic spaces are fast shrinking, the spiritual voices of the dead combatants and non-combatants manifest themselves and represent themselves as the new subalterns with alternative views about the potential future development of the country. In NDDM (2015) some surviving combatants who witnessed the death of their comrades believe that the killing of combatants and non-combatants by the Rhodesian war machinery amounted to genocide. Happison Muchechetere believes that genocide was committed in Rhodesia by the Smith regime [and] by the settler farmers (NDDM, 2015: 110). The ex-combatant is supported by the Chairperson of Fallen Heroes Trust who also pointed at the mass killings of ordinary people in Rusape, a small town in the east of Zimbabwe (NDDM, 2015: 190-192). Both the spiritual voices and the surviving combatants believe that the post-colonial government has never held to account the perpetrators of genocide that caused the death of combatants and innocent ordinary people. The post-colonial government is also blamed for fomenting ethnic tensions in post independence Zimbabwe. Some voices of the dead combatants in the area of Mwaneka in the district of Chipinge in eastern Zimbabwe believe that the Manyika ethnic group is being sidelined from occupying important political posts in a black government perceived to be dominated by the Zezuru clan (NDDM, 2015: 47). Furthermore, some reporters and commentators who worked closely with the surviving combatants and villagers to offer decent burial to remains of dead combatants, also believe that the government is noncommittal about assisting in accelerating the program of reburial of dead combatants and non-combatants who have not been found and given decent burials. The fact that the spiritual voices of dead fighters and non-fighters have had to manifest of their own accord suggests that there are other narratives of the war and peace, in post-independence Zimbabwe that have been suppressed by the ruling elites. Put in different words, spiritual voices of dead combatants and non-combatants project themselves as witness and archive. The corroborating voices of surviving combatants and non-combatants who do not form part of the mainstream politics of patronage of the ruling class, also indicate that there are narratives that are struggling to be heard. The agency of spirit possession of

children, youths and some combatants in suggesting alterity or alternative strategies of making Zimbabwe stable imply that there are forms of indigenous knowledge systems whose forms of rationalities leads to alternative politics in the Zimbabwean post-colony.

## **Conclusion**

The aim of this article was to explore the agency of the institutional practice of spirit possession in identifying unmarked graves of dead combatants for reburial. It was argued that the official number of fifty thousand African people who died in Zimbabwe's liberation war is far less than the reality on the ground. When spirits spoke from unmarked graves, they reversed our notion of writing history. The spirits' narratives countermanded official narratives of dead guerrillas authorised by surviving guerrillas and professional historians. To this extent, as an institution of memory, spirit possession provides an alternative speaking position. What was spoken from this privileged position of alterity and otherness confirmed as well as critiqued mainstream narratives on war and peace. Spirits of dead combatants openly named their pain and how they died as a result of genocidal violence unlike official accounts that describe the war as a civil conflict. The article revealed that reburials reunited dead combatants with their families and communities and ensured that the dead were accepted by the living into the pantheon of African ancestors based on their biographies as war heroes and heroines. Reburial also allowed the living to mourn their dead loved ones. Mourning the dead has a transformative effect in that it allows the living to reflect on reasons for which their sons and daughters died fighting in the war. Reburial of fallen heroes also revealed that not all who died were guerrillas; ordinary Africans were also killed and this point deconstructs the culture of entitlement that the living guerrillas insist on when dealing with ordinary people in post independent Zimbabwe. Spirits of dead combatants manifested through young men, and women and critiqued the government for turning their sacrifice into a culture of corruption.

The fact that the spirits spoke from the bowels of the earth means their narratives were not patrolled by the government. It was possible for the spirits to re-introduce alternative political narratives that had been expunged from public view by the state. However, like any other knowledge system, spirit possession reflected chasms in the meanings of community and national

healing and reconciliation. Part of the problem that the spirits manifested is that most of the people who sold out guerrillas to the enemy have captured the postcolonial state and are ruling today. In some rural villages in Zimbabwe, some ordinary people who led guerrillas to their death are still surviving and living in the same space with families of dead combatants. Suspicion and anger is still prevalent in the spirit world and this often manifests in the social tensions in the African communities. Sometimes cleansing processes have had to be carried out by spirit mediums to reconcile the past of violence and the presence of continued violence. The spiritual voices also criticised the post-colonial government for its slow and non-committal attitude towards reclaiming the remains of the dead combatants and non-combatants so as to provide the remains of the dead with decent burials amongst their relatives.

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# **Occult Imaginaries in IsiZulu Fictional Works: The Dialogic of the Global Political Economy and Local Socio-economic Transformations**

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## **Abstract**

Occult imaginaries have remained a constant feature in numerous publications ever since the nascent period of isiZulu literary tradition. Recurrent prismic refractions of this theme in isiZulu fictional works through different political epochs in South Africa are beginning to advance a sense of a continuous dialogical engagement with the global political economy in ways that put forward local understandings of wealth accumulation within those of international capitalist flows. Scholarship in anthropology has shown how proliferation of witchcraft in Africa is the result of contemporary inequalities among Africans, capitalist/neoliberal penetration, and postcolonial political economies that have produced wealth by means beyond the comprehension and control of most ordinary people. Wealth accumulation through ‘hidden secrets’ has thus become a major aspect animating the popular imagination in Africa, the African diaspora and beyond. Nonetheless, popular understandings of this phenomenon, especially within the South African context, have mainly proceeded from understandings shaped by Christian morality, a religious stance that has thoroughly percolated Africans’ perception of their contemporary world. Within such modalities of thought, representations of the occult associate it with the diabolical instead of being seen as a site to explore the repressed, unarticulated criticisms they embody regarding principles of global capitalist accumulation. I argue in the discussion that occult imaginaries not only provide us with rare insights into complex entanglements of socio-economic transformations in the African society, but also the political and economic anomies, particularly of post-colonial Africa, and how these anomies derive their articulations from Africa’s entanglements with the

uncertainties produced by global capitalism. This discussion will draw from the anthropology of witchcraft to explore the ‘modernity of witchcraft’ in contemporary South Africa as explored in Zulu fiction. The focus will be on the popular dialogues they engender, and how these are situated within the ‘basic coordinates of lived-experiences’.

**Keywords:** Economic Transformation, occult imaginaries, Zulu fiction

## **Introduction**

Fantastic stories about power and wealth gained immorally through ‘hidden secrets’ of the world of the occult have dominated not only modern urban popular stories circulating in the public domain, but also modern African literatures. While these modern narratives take on contemporary significations relating to postcolonial power and political economy, they also show how the ‘modernity’ in witchcraft shares ontological repertoires with precolonial traditions of witchcraft among Africans. The sampled isiZulu fictional narratives in this discussion – considered in a historical timeline as well as against macro-economic realities through different political epochs – illustrate the thought modalities and imaginaries about the occult in the South African social and cultural space and time. These narratives pervade, feed off and entangle with Africans’ lived experiences, share perceptions with other similar popular narratives across the continent and diasporic public spheres, and reveal repressed complex engagements with issues of power and economy in postcolonial states. The narratives further register statements about continuities of colonial and postcolonial political economies in African nation-states or in the African diaspora, and how these economic and political structural constructions engender a cycle of inequality, deprivation and exclusion for some, and the privileging of a few others who are connected to state organs, sources of power and incongruous wealth.

I argue that these narratives advance a conscious, continuous dialogical engagement with the global political economy as introduced in South Africa by colonialism, racial capitalism and now neoliberal capitalism in ways that put forward local understandings of the location of power and wealth accumulation within those of international capitalist flows. Further, I

argue that occult imaginaries not only provide us with rare insights into complex entanglements of socio-economic transformations in the African society, but also critique political and economic anomies, particularly in postcolonial Africa, and how these anomies derive their articulations from Africa's entanglements with uncertainties produced by global capitalism. Linked to these aspects is the location of wealthy black women within a neoliberal post-1994 economic framework. I argue that heteropatriarchal anxieties sit uncomfortably with affluent women because they do not fit an African patriarchal heteronormative mould. Following Garritano's (2012) views, I demonstrate that these narratives not only critique capricious desires for attainment of wealth before human life, but also address the economic anxieties about obscure bases of political power and wealth's mysterious foundations in a global context where power unpredictably attaches itself to and detaches itself from certain personalities, and prosperity seems removed from the work and production ethic. I will concentrate on four themes to illustrate interpretations of power and wealth accumulation in the African societies depicted: 1) how modern significations introduced by Christianity convoluted Christian dogma and Western entrapments, resulting in the bifurcation and conflation of good and evil in pursuit of wealth; 2) the capitalist-occultist connections versus the dispensation of law and justice; 3) the 'hidden' sources of political power in an African postcolony; and 4) locating the occult in the post-1994 *nouveaux riche* within the context of heteropatriarchal anxieties in occult women. Four novels will be deployed to illustrate understandings of the entanglements of African repertoires of wealth accumulation with those of capitalism. These are Bhengu's *UPhuya WaseMshwathi* (1983), Dhlomo's *Izwi Nesithunzi* (1977), Lukhele's *Nakho Phela* (1981), and Nxaba's *Kufeziwe* (2010).

## **Old-New Empires: Capitalism/Neoliberalism and the Protestant Work Ethic**

Precolonial Africa has had its fair share of beliefs in supernatural mediums, spirits and magic, and that powers could be accessed by powerful individuals who would in turn prepare charms and concoctions for clients who need them for a range of reasons. Colonial sensibilities, predicated on Christianity and the rationality of Western civilization and modernity, changed African worldviews

from ‘inside out’ and from the ‘ground up’. Western dogmas were regarded as ideal normative models for negating African ‘primitiveness’, ‘paganism’, ‘savagery’, ‘degenerate morals’ and ‘obsession with witchcraft’. Earlier anthropologists believed that these African ‘states of being’ would disappear when Africans took to urbanizing and the dissolution of traditional family groups, given that witchcraft is the dark side of kinship. Conversely, colonialism brought along a new set of challenges that saw the migration of witchcraft from close family/community networks to a broader societal sphere. Colonial modernity went hand in hand with a process of disenchantment, the kind of disillusionment that brought along insecurities that made people submit to the patronage of more powerful groups or individuals. The moral and political panic occasioned by these major transformations saw the transposition of certain precolonial beliefs in the hidden world into everyday domains of ordinary people, and gradually typified popular imaginations around acquisition of fantastic wealth when African states gained independence.

With regard to the missionary enterprise, the commodity economy introduced among converts promised greater prospects of prosperity, an aspect that would have helped converts reconstruct their shattered lives after *Umfecane* wars and colonial invasion. These notions about commodities and acquisition were strictly linked to Christian discourses, and were distilled from biblical teachings. Missionaries applied themselves to these doctrines, and so did their converts, the result of which saw members of the African Christian converts’ ‘normative’ progression to visible distinction in terms of social and economic mobility, as is the case with nineteenth-century African petty bourgeoisie class in missionary stations of Natal, Makapansgat, Mafikeng, among the Southern Batswana, and elsewhere in the country. As Hofmeyr (1993), and Leah and John Comaroff (1997) illustrate, the association of social and economic mobility with inevitable socio-economic progress after conversion to Christian life among converts in missionary stations revealed complex African responses to missionary tutelage and attraction to Western economic systems. Africans’ interest in the commodity economy revealed that fascination with these enterprises was multivalent; it was not Christian teachings, but aspirations to prosperity which served as major attractions to becoming a convert. Nonetheless, the perception of wealth being a predestined progression flowing from self-application with regard to work, commerce and production became a way of life for modernizing Africans socialized in

Christian morality, though this ethic was doubted and contested by other sectors of the African society and the unfolding colonial reality.

The pressures to bring more Africans ‘into the demands of capitalist modernity’ had dire effects with regard to missionary teachings. Many Africans, turned out from traditional lands and thrust into white employment, were exploited, denigrated and dehumanized. Uncertainty in the future loomed large, and alternative sources of stability were sought. For some Africans outside the missionary enclaves, and other Christian converts who secretly sought the services of the powerful medicine men, the protection and security offered by the occult world became ubiquitous in their minds. For this cohort, continued existence and security depended on spirit mediums believed to be powerful enough to ward off personal misfortunes, real or imagined malicious intentions by foes, as well as bring prosperity. The missionary work ethic was soon to be overtaken by racial capitalism which missionaries (un)wittingly helped to prepare and institute. Polarized divides which translated to white and whiteness associated with affluence, and black and blackness with poverty, led to new perceptions about acquisition of wealth. These perceptions held sway across all classes in African society. The absence of a visible work and production ethic in a racialized capitalist economy led to complex associations of Western lifestyle with enjoyment of the finer things in life without industriousness, but with brute legislative force, and as such called into question earlier missionary teachings about the work ethic.

While some Africans worked in major sectors of white employment such as the mining, industrial or domestic service, many more were unemployed and had to negotiate their social and economic hardships and mediate their survival through the informal economy and cultural activities. Life in appalling conditions in the cities began to fuel visions of a better life, and aspirations to social and economic mobility which could be attained, not only through change in politics, but also in unprecedented illicit measures, since it was apparent that legitimate, formal labour would not yield expected outcomes. It is precisely the outlandish nature of segregationist and apartheid laws, the squalor and outrageous living conditions of Africans in rural and urban areas, which led to a number of them to be drawn to alternative, illicit economies of survival which generated in their wake an outlaw culture that has since absorbed Africa’s national, political and economic life.

At the height of counterhegemonic struggles against apartheid, the ANC-led administration rallied the masses’ political consciousness with

socialist imperatives which promised immediate change to their material life conditions. The change from this utopian ideal to a dystopian, neo-liberal one in 1996 had negative effects. While the lives of the African masses remained unchanged, that of the new super-affluent African elite – the *nouveaux riche* – was marked by its conspicuous consumption and a clinging to sources of power and material wealth procured through political positions and government tenders. The African *nouveaux riche*'s consumption style in South Africa – driven by desires for distinction and differentiation – invariably engendered disgruntlement and envy from the excluded and remarginalized majority. The major difference between the post-1994 middle class and earlier versions of it is that, while during the colonial and apartheid times, African elites have had mainly their education and nascent mercantile drives as legitimate claims to social distinction, the post-1994 African *nouveaux riche* not only embody all these features, but a greater number of its members are at the centre of the sources of 'glocal' capital structures as black capitalists or black aristocrats.

South Africa's neoliberal turn created a new class of the super affluent whose source of wealth does not proceed from the visible ethic of work and commerce, but is beyond the comprehension of the remarginalized African majority. This African empowerment entrepreneur's class, characterized by spectacular theatrical displays of consumption practices, shared not more than twenty years ago the same historical and geographical spaces with the rest of the African majority. Within the first ten years of democracy, the black aristocratic class/black capitalist amassed wealth listed at the Johannesburg Stock Exchange as worth 67 billion rand by the end of 1999 (Iheduru 2004). According to Greenblo (1994, cited in Randall 1996), the South African black aristocratic/black capitalist class has no independent base of its own, but instead it has risen on 'expedient structures'. In Greenblo's analysis expedient structures entail production for profit through government dependency for capital accumulation, dependency on the banking system for capital procurement, dependency on multinational corporate joint ventures for capital accumulation in exchange for political capital, and exploitation of one's own. The latest statistics by Stats SA indicate that the unemployment rate, especially among the African majority in South Africa, has reached national crisis proportions<sup>1</sup>. The rise in unemployment occurs against the background of

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/News/ramaphosa-apologises-for-buffalo-bid-20120920>.

twenty years of capital accumulation by the black capitalists whose wealth combined within such a short space of time far surpasses the GDPs of some African states (Seekings & Nattrass 2002:12-13; Iheduru 2004:15-17). The ANC-led government, following postcolonial governments on the continent, slavishly followed the IMF's inspired indigenization of capital programmes which produced no true capitalists who are able to develop African entrepreneurship in post-1994 South Africa. However the downside effect is that the preferred macro-economic policies that prepared the ground for the growth of this class overlooked growth-seeking paths for the African majority which would have reduced intra-black inequality. Post-1994 South Africa has become one of the most unequal societies in the world, with its African citizens being the poorest and most economically inactive.

### **‘The Modernity of Witchcraft’: The Occult and Western Entrapments**

Scholarship on witchcraft, the occult and other modern magic (Geschiere 1997; Ferguson 2006; Smith 2007) is increasingly attributing the re-emergence of the hidden world to unpredictability of power, hidden sources of wealth and the decline in personal and societal security in postcolonial states. Although the issues cited above are the basic principles of agreement in this scholarship, divergent views prevail regarding the sources of decline. Most Western anthropological literature points to general moral decline – a moral crisis – in postcolonial states. The overall discourse of this scholarship gives impressions that are in line with the rationale and justification of colonialism. In this kind of view, it is noted that pre-civilization European societies also experienced almost similar events, but the institutionalization of power in the form of a modern state, and the innovations brought about by modernity saw to the advancement of European societies. This advancement was to such an extent that issues of witchcraft and sorcery are no longer plaguing these societies. The strengthening of democratic institutions, science and the rule of law eventually effaced these problems, and it was believed the same could occur in Africa.

Contrariwise, these Western-driven anthropological studies are increasingly overtaken by scholarship that links witchcraft, occultism and modern black magic to capitalism and neoliberal imperatives in postcolonial African states. The most recent study of Nigerian state decline and the re-

emergence of the occult are revealing (Harnischfeger 2006). According to Ellis and Ter Haar (2003), the large-scale challenge of regulating power in postcolonial Africa has made power to become unpredictable and has made it to be perceived as connected to hidden forces, engendering a desire in everyone in society to have an interest in manipulating these forces. In all spheres of life, it now seems advisable to take occult influences into consideration, because despite the introduction of ‘democracy’, the use of power has not become more transparent; rather, power is located in other localities than where the law proclaims it to be (Harnischfeger 2006). This development compares with past beliefs and practices where witchcraft accusations focused on marginal persons (Harnischfeger 2006:72-73). Today people in ruling circles are also implicated. These contemporary accusations attest to the perceived loss of legitimate authority and power among upper classes. Of course, this should be the logical development in popular imagination, because when the masses are becoming impoverished while the ruling elite and businessmen openly display their wealth, it is inevitable that in such a cultural milieu the power of the elites is seen to be located in illegitimate, demonic sources.

Harnischfeger’s views above bring in another aspect to occultism in postcolonial Africa: its economic dimension. The nature of capitalist and neoliberal capitalist imperatives are considered predatory and incomprehensible; while undergirded by the rationalities of progress, civilization and democracy, they allow catastrophic abuses and atrocities that result in a large majority of the world’s population having to live in abject poverty and a few to not only lead lavish lives, but also control the resources of production and wealth accumulation. Comaroff and Comaroff (1999:279-303) point out that in the African context, the occult has become linked through a range of ‘magical technologies’ to the incoherence and obscene inequalities of the ‘free’ market. Furthermore, the economic anxieties plaguing postcolonial Africa have created uncertainties, where wealth, because of its separation from formal, discernible labour practices, appears through seemingly supernatural or mysterious networks. Barbara Frank (2008, cited in Lindsey Green-Simms 2012:39) adds that fraud, speculation, pyramid schemes, and scams are also sources that are inscrutable, and wealth in these economies appears as if by magic, even when magic per se is not involved.

As can be noted above, much of the literature discussed focuses on what Geschiere (1997) has phrased ‘the modernity of witchcraft’. According

to Auslander (1993:168), occultism, witchcraft and black magic and the dialogues about them,

are not archaic or exotic phenomena, somehow isolated or disjointed from historical processes of global political and economic transformation. Rather, these are moral discourses alive to the basic coordinates of experience, highly sensitive to contradictions in economy and society.

Witchcraft traditions, beliefs and practices are not archaic, but are firmly located within the dynamism of modern life experiences, even though they tend to draw from a host of older African archives. This is an aspect raised by Comaroff and Comaroff (1993; 1999), who argue that modernity and witchcraft must be understood within their historical and economic contexts. The notion of ‘the modernity of witchcraft’ presupposes ‘the antiquity of modernity in Africa’, where witchcraft traditions become relevant responses to modern social dynamics while simultaneously establishing historical continuities with the past. Scholarship on this notion, such as espoused by Fisiy and Geschiere (1991), Geschiere (1997), and Comaroff and Comaroff (1999), concurs that the spread of witchcraft in postcolonial Africa is directly connected to the infiltration of neoliberal capitalism and the position of local political economy vis-à-vis the global capitalist sensibilities. The inequality that results from this relationship gives rise to simultaneous resentment and attraction, where people resent the gross inequalities of wealth in modern African societies, but they also wish that they could be recipients of this fantastic wealth themselves (Smith 2001).

### ***UPhuya WaseMshwathi*: Wealth’s Conflation of Binaries of the Christian Doctrine**

The portrayals of the phenomenon of *ukuthwala* among commoners as described by Turrell (2001) abound in the novel *UPhuya WaseMshwathi*. The plot of *UPhuya WaseMshwathi* is about the life of a country lad, Mbizeni, whose torpid rural life is transformed when he gets to the city. Responding to a longstanding Shepstonian principle of inducing young Zulu men into exploitative labour in the cities, that is, accruing enough money to pay *ilobolo*

(bride-wealth), he joins the file of other young men who hope for greener pastures in the mining, industrial and domestic service sectors of white employment. His work at a hotel for a pittance under heavy managerial control and unfavourable conditions ends shortly with his dismissal. He ends up living in the dead end of the city, where informal economic survival schemes throw him into the world of fast wealth accumulation through the occult. In return for fast wealth, he promises his daughter, Tholakele, as sacrifice to the dual Christian-Satanic priest, Mkhokhobi. He finds after years of enjoying this wealth, he cannot keep the promise of his sacrifice, and attempts to hide his daughter among strangers. For by this time, his only son, the twin to Tholakele, and his wife have long since died. The journey of his downward spiral begins as he transforms into a 'subhuman' lunatic, hiding in caves, forests and the havens of 'good-spirits' to elude capture by evil forces that have been sent out to seize him in lieu of his daughter, because on the verge of Tholakele's sacrifice, it is discovered by Mkhokhobi that she has become impure. By this time his wealth has suddenly disappeared, with a major part of it having been stolen by his trusted cousin, Nhlamvu, and the rest of it by his bosom friend, Nombolo, who initiated him into the occult world.

Published toward the close of the twentieth century, during the years when the positive feelings toward colonial modernity and African modernity have sobered up in the popular imagination, and the effects of colonialism and civilization discourses were unambiguously and ubiquitously imprinted in the dire African cultural and socio-political landscape, *UPhuya WaseMshwathi* registers crudely the appalling life conditions of urbanizing Africans. It also conveys discontent with the exclusionary nature of South Africa's racial economy. Notable about Bhengu's social influences is that he is mission-schooled and has been subjected to missionary discourses of the commodity and mercantile economies the missionaries introduced among Zulu converts of Natal. However, land expropriation, forced labour and the marked decline of African moral and social life, together with precarious transformations in the political economy legislated by colonialism and apartheid, and supported by Christianity, inevitably induced an awakening and a need to give a realistic picture of African life in the cities.

In his critique of Africans' desire for fantastic wealth, Bhengu presents as central criticism the blurred Janus-face of missionary morality. On the one hand, money is perceived to be the source of all evil, and on the other, it is associated with prosperity, and good, pious, Christian life (Comaroff &

Comaroff 1997). By the time of Bhengu's writing, when the realities of colonial/apartheid capitalism have made their mark on the social and moral fabric of Africans, these missionary instructions were found to be wanting and dismissed by different sectors of African society. For example, while Mbizeni carries the moral of the surface theme, there is tacit understanding in his portrayal regarding his decisions for fast wealth, which are portrayed as the natural consequence of life experiences of structural racial exclusion and deprivation. On the contrary, Mkhokhobi, the occultist, who is an embodiment of evil in the narrative, is ambiguously represented as a Christian prophet and a diabolical angel of Lucifer. In his temple, paraphernalia relating to Christian worship landscapes characterize his sanctuary; and symbolic figurations such as the priestly clothes, the cross, the altar and liturgical vocabulary and demeanour punctuate his practice and ritual performances. However, these symbolic configurations have been subverted, at once signalling an ambiguity in the reading – that they are two sides of the same coin and vacillations of the same thing (Bhengu: 65-72). This is attested to by the description of the sacrificial process which echoes biblical vocabularies of the sacrifices Israelites offered to God, and, notably, the sacrificial rituals from African traditions of witchcraft. The cutting of body parts is not part of the biblical discourse, but firmly located in Africans' occult vocabularies:

*Njengoba wayesezandleni zikaMkhokhobi wasemdlulisile emigilingwaneni yokulungiselwa ukuba wumhlatsshelo omsulwa. Kwase kusele ukuba ayiswe ethempeleni likaLusifa, amiswe phambi kwe-alithari enqunu, aboshwe amehlo, nomlomo, ngendwangu emnyama, kusondezwe izitsha zakhona zokukhongozela igazi. Wayezoboshwa izandla, nezinyawo, alaliswe phezu kwe-alithari bese kuqalwa ngokusika ulimi, ukuze angakhulumi amazwi angajivaza, noma aqanganise umsebenzi kaLusifa, kugcinwe ngokukhishwa kwegazi enhliziyweni, elalizophophozela ezitsheni ezimnyama. Umzimba wakhe wawuzocwiywa izitho ezithile.*

As she was already in the hands of Mkhokhobi, she had already been made to observe the rituals preparing her for a sacrifice that was pure. What remained was that she should be taken to Lucifer's temple, and made to stand in front of the altar naked, her eyes and mouth were to be bound with a black cloth, black dishes that served as blood receptacles be brought nearer. She was to be bound hand and foot, laid

on top of the altar and then started off by having her tongue cut out so that she would not utter words of condemnation, or curse the work of Lucifer; and then the ritual would be ended by letting out her blood from her heart, which was to collect into the black dishes. In her body certain body parts were to be cut off as well (Bhengu: 166).

The complicity of the two traditions is castigated, as is the complicity of all the characters involved and who supported Mbizeni's daring decision, which is undergirded by insatiability and avarice. However, the Christian morality becomes even more critiqued because its introduction to Africans was meant to root out continuities of the very 'barbarism' – pagan practices – which are the dialectics of capitalist modernity. As can be noted from the sacrificial ritual above, the performance of it is not an antiquated vestige of a primitive past, but located in the ever-evolving dynamism of everyday life and the influences of Western religious beliefs as ordinary people articulate their life experiences vis-à-vis the capitalist economy. Bhengu's criticism of witchcraft is couched within the capitalist ideology and praxis which aim to accumulate wealth through exploitation of the innocent. In the narrative Tholakele, the innocent, needed to be exploited; sacrificed to the devil for her father to lead a lavish life supported by riches whose sources are unknown, just as capitalism is predicated upon the exploitation of the labour of innocent marginalized people to benefit and prop up the lifestyle of owners of capital and production.

### ***Izwi Nesithunzi: The Marauding Capitalists-Cultists and the Western Justice System***

The notion that occult narratives are compelling because they articulate resistance to Africa's 'initiation into capitalism' (Medley & Carroll 2011:283) also finds credence in the depiction of blood-money rituals to access wealth depicted in Dhlomo's *Izwi Nesithunzi*, published in the middle of the last century. In this novel, Ncibijane Zuma, a proud, haughty, unsociable young man, becomes a traditional doctor upon the death of his uncle, and after years of being an apprentice to his dead uncle's craft of traditional healing. Because of his conceited demeanour, offending patients all the time, he loses their patronage and runs the practice down. He thereafter seeks the services of an

occult master, Shibasa Mfulamfula, from Thongaland, to help him restart his business, and access a fantastic fortune in the process. In return for the riches he is to murder people to appease the ‘shadow’ and the ‘voice’, which protect him from discovery and supply him with wealth. The first victim is his beautiful, modern wife, Zenzile. Police investigate, but do not have convincing proof to put him behind bars yet. His second victim is a daughter of a client, and this time around, there are witnesses, but the charges cannot be directly connected to him. When Zuma is visiting one evening, MaNkosi, the mother of Zuma’s second victim, discovers the protective medicine-laced snake-belt that Zuma wears around his waist, and tears it away from him. The belt, which has been the source of Zuma’s power, is destroyed, as is his power that drives him to commit murder, and the supposed protection. The law closes in on him, and he is incarcerated. During his court hearing he denies the charges laid against him, claiming he was not responsible for the crimes he was said to have committed. He only acted on the instructions of the ‘shadow’ and the ‘voice’.

*Wema ephuzwini elithi zonke izenzo lezi okuthiwa wayezenza zazenziwa umoya omubi ongutikoloshe abuya naye eButhonga. Yena uqobo kazange abulale noyedwa ngesandla sakhe...’Konke engangikwenza ngangithunywa Izwi elalikhuluma nami bangalizwa engihlezi nabo. Kodwa babone ukuthi kukhona okungehlelayo. Ngiphenduke omunye umuntu ngoba ngikwesaba okwakushiwo Izwi lelo. Ofakazi laba bayesaba ukukhuluma iqiniso lokuthi ukhona ngempela umoya omubi emhlabeni...Usiza ababulali, amasela, abaphangi, izinswelaboya njalonjalo. Bonke bafuna imali eningi ngezindlela ezimbi.’*

He stood on the position that all the murderous acts it has been said he has committed were not of his own doing, but that of an evil spirit, a witch’s familiar (*utikoloshe*) he brought back with him from Buthonga....’Everything that I did was because I was instructed by the Voice which spoke to me alone and not anyone else with whom I was. However, they would realize that there is something wrong with me. I would turn into a different person because I was afraid of what the Voice said to me. These witnesses are afraid of telling the truth, that there is an evil spirit such as that flowing in the world...It helps murderers, thieves, plunderers, people without conscience, etc. All these people want fantastic wealth through evil means’ (Dhlomo 152).

Ideally, Zuma's portrayal provides an example of a classic replay of the Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde cognitive psychological disorder. When he commits his murderous acts, he assumes a different personality, one possessed by evil, and outside this possessed state he is a changed being, a thorough drunk. Of course, Western legality does not have any doubts as to what has to be done with such social miscreants. They are convicted and jailed. Scholarship, though, indicates that the Cameroon justice system makes provision for witchcraft cases. However, the manner in which the legal process is handled makes the entire provision a farce and a miscarriage of justice (Harnischfeger 2006; Obiwulu 2010). Nonetheless, Dhlomo's stance is against the nature of Western legal justice as it relates to capitalist sensibilities. For instance, Zuma's testimony indicates that there are many like him who are fuelled by imaginaries of fantastic wealth and fame to kill, thus his death sentence does not solve the problem. Interestingly, though, in his testimony about numerous social miscreants like him, he invokes and provokes grammars with which the historicity of global capitalist acts has been perceived by victims of capitalism who have been on the receiving end of old, colonial and new, global capitalist empires' aggression all over the world. It would seem that therein lies Dhlomo's criticism of the Western legal system. It is able to make insignificant individuals, who are on the lowest rung of the capitalist ladder to face retribution even though their actions have been founded on designs and aspirations similar to those who are on the highest rungs of its hierarchy. Accordingly, small-time thieves and murderous cultists are not in any way different from capitalists – all want to amass enormous wealth, all are fuelled by greed, all want to splash out in their lavish lives – and the path to accrue this wealth is immoral and destructive to humanity.

Dhlomo's criticism of Western justice is even more profound when he points out that because of its dismissive attitude, it falls short of understanding worldviews that would have contributed to capitalism's inward criticism. Succumbing to enchantments of wealth cuts across two traditions, Western and African, in equal measure as far as the juxtapositions of capitalism and occultism are concerned in this narrative, just as the vocabularies describing capitalists and cultists as covetous and insatiable are the same. Nonetheless, in Western law, only those frames of reference falling within its ideological views are embodied, and those outside it are dismissed. Dhlomo draws from tropes common to older African discourses about witchcraft to stake a claim for the relevance of their effects on black people within a Western legal framework:

*Ngangenziwa umuthi owaboshelwa okhalweni lwami nguSibasha Mfulamfula ukuba ngicebe. Uma nina Makhosi amhlophe niyihleka imithi yaBantu nokusebenza kwayo nithi yimbudane, kodwa yona ikhona. Iyasebenza futhi ngezindlela nina uqobo beLungu eningeke nizihaqhe*

I have been made by medicine that was tied on my waist by Sibasha Mfulamfula so that I get wealthy. If you, my white Lords, laugh at Black medicine and the manner in which it works, saying that it is nonsense, you should know that it exists. It works in ways you yourselves, White people, will never understand (Dhlomo 154).

In this narrative, the Western legal system becomes a symbol of concealment, an institutionalized censoring system covering up the designs of capitalism, and through its prison system, its excesses. This symbol also works in similar ways to others that are central in both *UPhuya WaseMshwathi* and *Izwi Nesithunzi*. In these narratives capitalist metaphors of exchange and transformation are used to link the neoliberal individualizing ideologies predicated upon relentless pursuit of success and prosperity. In both texts, the altar in Mkhokhobi's shrine in the former novel, and the medicine-laced snake-belt in the latter novel, stand in exchange and transformation of human subjects in a manner that Comaroff and Comaroff (2002:782) labelled 'the experiential contradiction at the core of neoliberal capitalism'. Capitalism appears to offer up enormous, instantaneous riches to those who control its technologies, and simultaneously, threaten the very livelihood of those who do not. The altar and the belt in these isiZulu narratives are metaphors for the mysteries of wealth's sources, whereby one experiences riches without work or production, but extracted from human life – an allegorical reference to capitalism.

### ***Nakho Phela: The Sources of Political Power in a Postcolony***

*Nakho Phela* also invokes and provokes the metaphors of capitalism described above, but explores its dialectic – political power – in a fictional postcolony named Shamba, whose capital city is Dodo. In this postcolonial state, the white colonial government, which had an iron hand in its enforcement of the rule of law, has left the institution of the government in the hands of African traditionalists and conservatives who are uneducated and lack a systematic

understanding of running the country lawfully. Now governance through witchcraft and ritual murders, by the ruling elite, has become the basis of law and political succession. Nonetheless, the state is 'progressive', with all the markings of a democratic constitution and governance. The state of Shamba is constituted by a monarchy – not absolute, but King Bhunga III has ultimate powers over the constitution, the judiciary and the law when he unilaterally deems it fit to protect vested interests. There are to be elections in Shamba, and it seems a new, progressive Congress Party is poised to overtake the anachronistic, backward-looking Isiko Party of the conservatives, which is in power. After the King and his traditionalist, conservative party realize that they have lost political power, King Bhunga III declares that the current constitution is being dissolved so that all powers revert to the monarchy, making Shamba an absolute monarchy but which has a modern democratic constitution. When re-establishing the constitution, the King announces a right to monarchical pardon, which entails that some of those convicted to die because of involvement in witchcraft and ritual murders are pardoned. These Ministers are thereafter freed by the re-establishment of an arbitrarily constituted traditional council which in the past has been and now still appointed by the King himself.

In the depictions of the disbanding of parliament, Lukhele echoes a well-known aspect about issues of political power in postcolonial Africa; cliques of powerful politicians, and businessmen arrange among themselves who will fit which positions, as whoever wins any power must defend it tirelessly since the possession of it is no longer guaranteed by institutions (Harnischfeger 2006:7). Lukhele's concerns with the political dimension of the occult in this narrative are not a conceit. For Harnischfeger, as he describes with the Nigerian example, just as much as for Lukhele, issues of state decline and the unpredictability of power as linked to fast wealth in a postcolony are significant in as much as they explain the collective traumas resulting from Africa's collusion with capitalism by way of colonialism.

The delegitimization of state institutions that are based on Western systems have unleashed among some of the postcolonial ruling elite and upper classes, too, a frenzy to engage in ritual killings to gain access to this invisible power which is believed to help them cling to political power. In *Nakho Phela*, the ritual murders and cutting of victims' body parts undergird the view that power is located in invisible sources. On the surface level, these murders are fuelled by visions of loss of political power and the ascendancy of political opposition. However, there are underlying concerns, and these are echoed by

the popular view that ‘...siseAfrika. Ngesinye isikhathi ivoti alisho lutho. Kusebenza isibhamu’ (Lukhele 55), which directly speaks to the limits of Westernized institutions. This statement points to undercurrents of instability, uncertainty and lack of vision for the future prospects for Shamba state in the narrative, and for the African continent generally, where violence in the usurpation of political power might be the only way to rid the state of greedy, corrupt and wicked individuals as seen in the Ministers of the traditional council and the monarch. It is an indictment against the powers that be that are prepared to bring political mayhem in the state in order to protect selfish, narrow interests at the expense of the African majority. It is against such realities that violent coups are deemed an alternative (Lukhele 55-56) which at some point characterized the postcolonial political landscape in many African states. The lack of trust not only in the leadership of the state but also in all state organs, just as depicted in the novel, is the basis on which people think that an alternative form of taking on the sitting political power is justified, thus making power unpredictable and uncontrollable. For in the novel, parliament is dissolved in order to absolve Minister Shiba, whom the law and the justice system of Shamba state have proven beyond doubt is guilty and therefore deserves to be punished. However, as it emerged in the court proceedings, the Minister is the ‘Government’ itself, and therefore he is the ‘Law’ unto himself (Lukhele 86, 87, 89, 90, 92). Further, these politicians, as exemplified by Minister Shiba’s demeanour towards the underclasses, are characterized by some sort of undermining of the masses’ intelligence, exploiting normative observances of cultural ruler-ruled relations, as well as devaluation of their lives as human beings. Wendy Brown (2010:115) talks about this: she phrases it as ‘the mystified nature of production of value’ under capitalism where human life is transformed into surplus, and the human costs of prosperity depend on the exploitation of another, by making them purchasable. The events leading to the murder of the boy and countless other people by the cabinet ministers of Shamba state illustrate the purchasability of human life in an African postcolony.

The reversal of the gains of modernity, and the uncontrollability of institutionalized power in Shamba state, demonstrate Harnischfeger’s (2006:59) views that ‘Power that defies institutional regulations grows out of public control. It becomes unpredictable and appears to be linked to invisible forces that may be manipulated by secret techniques’; in the same way wealth accumulation in capitalist sensibilities is linked to invisible sources. This view

captures Lukhele's moral panic about postcolonial states in Africa. Political power and wealth have become synonyms and both reconfigure traditionalism as they engage the modern. In the novel, in spite of Shamba being a 'democracy', a foundational tenet of modernism, Western rationality is turned upside down as beliefs in traditions considered to be anachronistic are made to engage modern politics as they affect power, wealth and prestige for the ruling elite and the upper classes. In this state of affairs the promises embodied in democratic discourses are actively delegitimized.

The allegorical dimension of this narrative can never be overstated. The context of the novel is after independence and the fruits of independence were crudely felt throughout the continent as many African states attained independence from colonial rule. South Africa's political turmoil around the publication of the novel clearly demonstrated that it was just a matter of time before it gained its independence. It is precisely on this Janus-faced dimension of political power and its relation to the erosion of human morality and democratic gains that Lukhele stakes his criticism of the African postcolony. The postcolonial elite invokes grammars of tradition, in many instances, to hold onto interests linked to colonial and capitalist imperatives, thereby un(der)developing the continent.

### ***Kufeziwe: Corruption and Occultism in Post-1994 African Nouveaux Riche and Heteropatriarchal Anxieties in Occult Women***

The invocation of witchcraft traditions for African elites' socio-economic mobility in a state that is avowedly neoliberal is also what is explored in Nxaba's *Kufeziwe*. Vuka, a married man and a high-end political figure, keeps a lover, Gabisile, whom he plies with government contracts procured through corruption. Gabisile quickly rises through the ranks and becomes extremely wealthy. She wills all she owns to her only son, Thulebona. It is only upon Thulebona's death, and in the event that Thulebona has no progeny, that Vuka can have the inheritance diverted to him. He discovers this secret will, and it does not sit well with him. Just at that moment, Gabisile's handyman, Mkhize, who is a traditional herbalist, informs him that Gabisile has been bewitching him with medicine she procured from a female occultist, Sithombe, who is also preparing her with wealth medicine. Mkhize reassures Vuka, as he, an expert

in hidden powers, has altered the positionalities of Gabisile's ancestors' spirit and delinked her from them. Vuka thereafter kills Gabisile and her son, but the execution of the latter act is clumsy as he leaves many clues that make it easy for the investigating officer to link him with the murder. He is arrested, but Mkhize is able to stem the tide for a while, and his court case never sits as Mkhize bewitches the proceedings. Mkhize later dies when searching for potent medicine in the forest at a point when Vuka's managers are investigating the manner in which he awarded government tenders. Mkhize's death before Vuka's strengthening ritual portends ill-fate for him. On the day he is to reappear in court, Vuka learns that Thulebona's death occurred after he had impregnated a girl. It dawns on Vuka that all his attempts to get at Gabisile's wealth have been to no avail, but merely cost him jail time.

The fabulous claims for the occult in this narrative sit precariously and uncomfortably with realistic views of the world. For example, Gabisile's car crash, the corruption case Vuka is investigated for at work, and the first court hearing for his murder case can be ascribed to causes other than bewitchment, which Mkhize claims for his medicine. Yet, the belief in the influence of charms to alter the course of life's events is paramount in the lives of characters in the novel, and reflects sentiments proliferating in the popular imagination. The novel could easily be dismissed by following Obiwulu's (2010:81) conclusions:

Traditional medicine men who claim to have the power of making people rich do not really have such power. Even people who join secret societies and clubs do not become wealthy on account of the occult power which they have 'acquired', rather the association with highly connected and wealthy people helps them get money for their business and opens to them other avenues to financial growth...If the ability to have and manipulate occult powers is very widespread and efficacious, why have Africans not used them to solve their socio-political and socio-economic problems?

A pertinent conclusion, but which does not damper the historicity of fast wealth sensibilities in the popular imagination. Yet the question remains: the post-apartheid *nouveaux riche* and some of the ruling elites are being suspected to not only engage in corrupt activities, but also to be consorting with the occultists. Of course the expediency with which this class transformed from a

state of poverty to that of affluence within a very short time after the advent South Africa's democracy shatters the myth of hard work leading to wealth. Their acquisitions are set against unprecedented intra-African inequality, deprivation and high rates of unemployment, while the consumption practices of the upper classes are on a scale of First World economies. There is thus a subtle demonization of their acquired wealth and social distinction.

Complicating the matter further in this novel is that it is a woman character who has not only gained prestige by the use of her female charms – 'bottom power' – to drain off favours from her lover, but she also bewitches her lover and uses wealth medicine. The novel exudes senses that tend to underline heteropatriarchal anxieties regarding women who do not fit the heteronormative moulds. As Doane (1991) observes, such women are never really what they seem to be, and are never 'entirely legible, predictable, or manageable'. Gabisile, as an occult woman, embodies these extremes of moral corruption in ways that men do not. According to Mkhize's justification of his unsolicited assistance, it is precisely the unpredictability of Gabisile's moral transgressions, and their threat to social integrity, which spurred him to save Vuka from total domination by a woman (Nxaba 24-34). Since she seems to be out of the control of the power – physical, ideological and supernatural – patriarchy can control, she is deemed not fit to live.

## **Conclusion**

Several observations can be made regarding the representations of the occult in these novels. Firstly, all are modern reactions to issues of political economies designed to exclude the majority of people from economic participation, thereby causing inequality and desperation in the African society. Lukhele's *Nakho Phela* and Nxaba's *Kufeziwe* are amongst a few fictional accounts of how power and the economy illustrate that witchcraft, the occult and black magic are not anachronistic vestiges of a tribal, primitive past, but their currency is invested in modern moral and political economies at the macro-economic policies of a postcolonial state. Secondly, the popular view that in contemporary times wealth and power are detached from traditional notions of engagement and a work ethic have led people to seek their sources in alternative, invisible locations. Thirdly, the economic anxieties brought about by massive transformations which result in uncertainty, insecurity and

reversals of the gains of modernity and progress have spurred on the proliferating – to precolonial proportions – of beliefs in witchcraft, occultism and other modern black magic. Linked to reversals of the gains of modernity is the delegitimization of Western institutions of the state such as democracy, law and order. These rational institutions of modernity are shown to have been undermined by their collusion with capitalist dogmas. The rigour of criticism directed at capitalist thinking has established perceptions that are beginning to link – at least in African anthropology and social studies – capitalist foundational thought to the occult world. And lastly, the subjectivity of women continue in capitalist practices and thinking to embody moral anxieties and panic in ways male identities do not, even though all are subjected in equal measure to massive social transformations which affect their daily lives. Within a neoliberal African context, wealthy women are extraordinarily different. They have to contend, in ways dissimilar to men, with resentment which once characterized older, precolonial views about ‘odd’ women who were perceived as witches.

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# The Language Question and the Use of Paremiography in Modern African Literature: A Case Study of Achebe's *No Longer at Ease* and Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman*

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## Abstract

This paper endeavours to shed some light on the issue of language and the modern African writer. The core concern of this paper is not, however, whether it is significant for African writers to use European languages or African languages in their creative works. On the main, the paper wishes to explore the extent to which the use of transliterated proverbs in African writing contribute to the rekindling of African value systems as well as the affirmation of African indigenous knowledge systems. The analysis of the two texts will be confined to how Achebe and Soyinka abrogate the English language to infuse African speech acts as well as African cosmology through the extensive use of paremiography (proverbial language). The selection of these two texts is intentional in that they project African worldviews in a manner that can contribute to the current debate on the 'decolonisation of education' in South Africa as they negate the subordination of African values and cultures.

**Keywords:** African literature, paremiography, proverbs, African languages, African Renaissance, decolonisation of education.

## Introduction

Can African Literature truly be called 'African' when it is written in a foreign language? The corollary to this perennial question is the ostensible tautology

in the appellation ‘African literature in African languages’ (Owomoyela 1993: 347). Some are of the view that ‘naturally’ African literatures should be written in African languages because ‘African literature in English or French or Portuguese’ is a contradiction in terms (Wali 1963: 14). The use of the signifiers ‘English’, ‘French’ and ‘Portuguese’ poses a serious challenge for the critics of African literature regarding what is being read and analysed in African literature that is written in Europhonic languages.

This paper argues that there is no simple answer to the impasse over which language should be used to express the African cosmology better. The paper notes that as Africa is a continent and not a country (Adesanmi 2011), there is no single ‘African’ language (Kunene 1992: 7), due to the multi-ethnic composition of its peoples (Amuta 1989: 113; Saro-Wiwa 1992: 155), as well as the legacy of colonialism and the retention of the Berlin-drawn borders (Arnove 1993; Breytenbach 1999). My argument is couched in Achebe’s adage that even though he uses the English language to convey his message to a wider (albeit Anglophone) African audience, he does so in a language that carries the burden of his African experience.

To explore this notion of ‘Africanising’ the English language, I examine the use of paremiography in Chinua Achebe’s novel, *No Longer at Ease*, and Wole Soyinka’s play, *Death and the King’s Horseman*. The analysis of these two texts will be confined to issues that pertain to the use of paremiography and *transliterated* proverbs from the Igbo and Yoruba languages that are used by Achebe and Soyinka respectively. In the background section the paper will also consider the avoidance of ‘epistemic violence’ in university curricular offering through the process of ‘decolonisation’ of the university curricula.

## **Background, Aims and Rationale**

There is currently a growing interests in *reviving*<sup>1</sup> African indigenous knowledge systems (AIKS), especially so in African academies. This move is

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<sup>1</sup> The prefix ‘re’ is of special significance here, since it symbolises the rediscovery of lost or suppressed indigenous knowledge and to divest it of any distortions expressed in the colonial education system and the colonial project at large. It also points out to the regeneration of African knowledge systems from the caverns of obscurity.

consonant with the concerns raised by some scholars in endeavouring to ‘decolonise’ the Eurocentric ‘epistemic violence’ wrought about by a curriculum ‘which remains largely Eurocentric and continues to reinforce white and Western dominance and privilege while at the same time being full of stereotypes, prejudices and patronising views about Africa and its people’ (Heleta 2016: 2).

Most researchers in the area of AIKS often cite the former president of South Africa’s momentous speech ‘I am an African’ (Mbeki 1998), which set the tone for identity and cultural *rediscovery* and *reflection* for Africans. Mbeki’s speech centres on the concept of African *Renaissance*. Initially enunciated by the Senegalese scholar and philosopher, Cheik Anta Diop, the ideals of African Renaissance ‘envisaged a marked shift in the form of African consciousness on which African unity, *renewal* and development can be based’ (Maposa 2016: 5). The keywords worth noting in the preceding quotation are ‘consciousness’ and ‘renewal’. The purpose of raising a people’s awareness about their contribution to ancient and modern civilisations will inexorably lead to the *renewal* and *regeneration* of their sense of *Being*, and disavow the distortion and description of their history as a ‘void’ prior to the advent of Europeans, as Hegel put it (Hughes-Warrington 2008: 149). This, it is hoped, will result in the *restoration* and *revival* of their human dignity, the belief in themselves as intelligent beings. This will further raise their self-esteem, and obliterate the resultant inferiority complexes that are (arguably) instilled by the extant discursive practices of the geopolitical West and further propagated by the colonial education, the purpose of which, ‘was to promote white supremacy and develop the white youth to maintain and further expand colonial society’ (Heleta 2016: 2). In concurrence with Heleta (2016), Appiah (1992) notes:

When the colonialist attempted to tame the threatening cultural alterity of the African (whether through what the French call *assimilation* or through the agency of missionary ‘conversion’), the instrument of pedagogy was their formidable weapon.... Colonial education, in short, produced a generation immersed in the literature of the colonizers, a literature that often reflected and transmitted the imperialist vision (55).

Currently, advocates of ‘decolonisation of education’ stress the need

to ‘completely rethink, reframe and reconstruct the Eurocentric and colonial curriculum and teaching methods at universities’ (Heleta 2016: 2). Heleta’s sentiments are akin to the experience that the ‘colonial subjects’ faced when required to absorb ‘the colonial world of knowledge acquisition’ at school as a prerequisite for them to enter into the ‘gentry’ world of ‘scientific’ discovery and ‘progress’. ‘We forget such inanities’ Nnaemeka (2002: 365) recalls, ‘at the peril of our educational advancement’. By implication, their worldviews and culture were subordinated to the cultural imperialism of Western values they had to ‘absorb’, as Nnaemeka (2002: 366) further attests:

No one bothered to ask us how we view knowledge, its formation and articulation; no one bothered to find out if we draw frames for knowledge (framework); no one cared to find out if our journey with and into knowledge is an ever-evolving, boundless love affair that sweeps us along with our neighbors, our ancestors, and those we have neither met nor ‘read’ (*‘ndi banyi si/our people said’* not *‘ndi banyi delu/our people wrote’*).

Even though, Nnaemeka (2002) reminisces about the educational system of the colonial past, the current education system still upholds Western ethos, in curricular offering, while propagating patronising and paternalist (Jeyifo 1990) views about African indigenous knowledge systems. This results in the production of African educated elite who are ‘complicit’ in the ‘oppression of traditional African knowledge systems’ (Mkhize 2004: 33). Nnaemeka (1995: 86) calls them, ‘Africans who are well-groomed by Western universities in the magic of Western thought but who have deliberately refused to register in the university of the African village’. The root cause of the latter assertion may be largely attributed to the fact that although ‘educated’, the African elite were (and remain) excluded from participating in advancing a critical discourse of their own culture and civilisation, what Nnaemeka (1995) allegorically refers to as the ‘university of the African village’. This often results in what Vilakazi (1999) conceives as the ‘Europeanisation of the educated African’. ‘Europeans in Africa’, Vilakazi (1999: 203) argues, ‘remained European, and educated Africans became Europeanised’.

A case in point was the persistent refusal to publish A.C. Jordan’s seminal novel, *Ingqumbo Yeminyanya*, by the missionary-controlled Lovedale Press, under the directorship and editorship of Robert H.W. Shepherd. The

‘reasoning’ behind the reluctance to publish this novel is that it propounded and apotheosised ‘heathen’ ideas (Opland 1990). The manuscript was submitted in 1938, and after its eventual publication in 1940, *Inqumbo* was still castigated for ‘apparently’ foregrounding ‘certainly [a] triumph... for the backward people’ over and above ‘the progressive Christian party’ (Opland 1990: 141). Some held the view that the novel’s ‘weakness’ is registered in its ending, wherein ‘forces of evil, paganism and reaction, win ...’ (Shepherd 1955: 179). Indigenous African readers of this novel are likely to hold a divergent view, in that what is perceived by the European missionaries as ‘pagan’ or ‘backwardness’ is, in fact, what is called *situatedness*, a concept first broached by Jeyifo that entails ‘a political grounding... of critical discourse’ (qtd. in Nnaemeka 1995: 81).

In my opinion, ‘situatedness’ goes further than the views expressed by Jeyifo, and encapsulates an entire cosmology of a people, and propagates an indigenous system of thought and culture from the insiders who are firmly rooted in their cultural world. What I read in the novel is neither barbaric nor atavistic, but consonant with what is common cultural practice in my ‘situatedness’ in African systems of thought. I also read the historical aspect of the novel in its *revisioning* of African traditional precepts from an insider who is immersed in his cultural location. In short, the novel showcases the dire consequences of the degeneration of African worldviews and belief systems by the educated elite. The ultimate committing of suicide by the ‘schooled’ protagonist and his equally ‘educated’ wife is merely a metaphor that speaks to the eclipse of African indigenous knowledge systems propagated by those who uncritically embrace Western value systems, the African educated elite, ‘who readily assimilated missionary education in the hope of joining the millenarian society implicit in the promise of civilisation and Christianity...’ (de Kock 1996: 27).

Jordan therefore writes and projects what he knows and, in the novel, shows his ‘deep knowledge of the [amaXhosa] custom and ways of speech’ (Opland 1990: 141). It is probable that the complaint that both the missionaries and the then Cape Province Education Administration had with the novel emanated from the fact that it depicts African cosmology positively in its avowal of the ‘contribution of African literature’ to the African Renaissance project in ‘affirming positive values for Africans’ (see Vambe 2010: 258). In addition, Jordan’s novel showcases the complexity of the African worldview, and a politically ordered and democratic society, which is at variance with

colonists' and imperialists' condescending attitudes to Africa's sophisticated (read: *civilised*) culture, governance, and economic systems prior to the 'civilising mission', thought to have been introduced by the benevolent missionaries (see de Kock 1996: 65). Consequently *Ingqumbo* received,

... a less enthusiastic response from official sources: on November 21, 1940, the Controller of Stores in the Department of the Administrator, Cape Province, writes with regret to inform Shepherd that 'the Department is not prepared to accept for inclusion in the catalogue of books and requisites approved for use in the primary schools your publication 'Ingqumbo Yeminyanya' [*sic*]...' (Opland 1990: 141).

Undaunted by these negative reviews, in his reply to numerous implorations and his resolute refusal to alter the ending of this epic novel 'to give it a different and more happy ending' (Shepherd 1955: 179), Jordan gave this curt response: 'This is how it came to me' (in Shepherd 1955: 179).

It is, therefore, on the basis of the views expressed in the preceding paragraphs that this paper seeks to explore how African literary texts of fiction have been instrumental in *re*visioning history, and contributing quite significantly in the advancement of AIKS by educing the prodigious education of the African child through proverbs and aphorisms. African literature is one of the disciplines in AIKS that have been at the forefront of the battle to *re*store and *re*novate indigenous knowledge systems, especially so the earlier (often read: 'canonical') writers. As one commentator puts it, 'Pre-independence literature was largely characterised by [a] concern with Africa's plight in relation to European influence and consisted of protest against domination, calls for unity against the oppressor and assertion of the African's right to self-determination' (Jones 1996: 1). The main objectives of earlier African literature were, by-and-large, about (w)ri(gh)ting the wrongs of the past, as Ogude (1999: 1) asserts: 'Earlier African narratives have always been seen as writing against colonial discursive practices in an attempt to validate Africa's historiography denied by colonialism'. Hence this project entailed '*recovery or reaffirmation of [African] values*' (Harrow 1994: 75&76).

This paper also intends to demonstrate that the African child's education prior to centuries of slavery and colonialism, and contrary to popular belief, was very intricate, sophisticated, rational, substantive, visionary, philosophical and, in many ways, universal in its dissection of human essence

and life in general. Both texts to be analysed in this paper contain all these elements of indigenous education. The reference to these ‘canonical’ texts (as opposed to more recent/contemporary ones) is deliberate, as both Achebe and Soyinka belong to the generation of writers whose project was to *rekindle* the (almost) lost knowledge of indigenes, and to shatter the chains of mental slavery and colonisation, especially as far as African indigenous youth are concerned. In both texts, the main characters are young people, suggesting that they are largely aimed at changing the mind-set of Africa’s youth from the negative purviews they may have imbibed regarding indigenous wisdom and education through the curriculum of ‘colonial’ education, which remains a challenge (Heleta 2016; Mkhize 2004).

The other symbolic factor is that both protagonists are educated in England, ironically, the very centre of imperialism. Upon their return from England, their reactions to indigenous traditional values and cultural mores are diametrically opposed. Obi, the tragic hero of Achebe’s *No Longer at Ease*, is portrayed as having subliminally espoused Western values and, as a consequence, abandons the traditional values and the indigenous wisdom of his society, which results in his perilous downfall. Olunde, the hero of Soyinka’s *Death and the King’s Horseman*, although in the process of training as a doctor in England, *regenerates*, supports and adheres to the age-old traditional cultural practices of his community, as opposed to Obi’s *degeneration* of the self-same.

In the next section, I give a summarised background on the educational and practical uses of proverbs in traditional (or indigenous) settings, using African traditional contexts as an example. I then explore the most prominent features of proverbial language used in Achebe’s novel and Soyinka’s play.

## **The Educational and Practical Uses of Paremiography in Traditional Settings**

Proverbs in traditional/indigenous (African) settings are a way of instructing people against vices and to direct them towards virtuous living. Before the Western-styled schooling system was implemented, children and the young acquired and learnt by listening to their elders (Adedimeji n.d.). The purpose of proverbs is varied, as it encapsulates children’s education, arguing legal matters and providing advice (Ngalande 2014). More elaborately, proverbs can function as tools of language that can be categorised as **rhetorical** (to persuade,

impress or influence), **axiological**, (to tell a story or incident that imparts cultural values to the listener), **didactic** (moral lessons about virtues and vices) and **analytic/epistemological** (imparting of verifiable cosmological and philosophical knowledge) (Adedimeji n.d.: 14; Nwachukwu-Agbada 1994: 194; Soares 2010: 161-62).

At a more global level, proverbs are seen as windows to the broader cosmology of a given society ‘through which we can view a particular society’ (Ngalande 2014: 53), and that the ‘meaning evoked’ is ‘always socially constituted and context related’ (Simelane-Kalumba *et al.* 2014: 54). Furthermore, ‘The use of proverbs is a social mode of communication which has a dominant role in most African societies’ (Penfield and Duru 1988: 119). It would be a grave oversight, however, to confine or relegate the study of proverbs in African literary arts to a ‘quasi-anthropological perspective... in search of preserved traditional African values, very much perceived as immutable’ (Vambe and Rwafa 2011: 1). Proverbs, like languages, are dynamic, and new proverbs are often coined to respond to various contemporary societal processes. One such example is the critiquing of gender relations, as demonstrated by Helen Yitah (2012: 9) about how northern Ghanaian women from the Kasena community ‘take advantage of a socially sanctioned medium, the joking relationship that pertains between a Kasena woman and her husband’s kin, to subvert and contradict existing Kasem proverbs or create new ones’. More than this, ‘Like stories and legends, proverbs have been a source of literary inspiration for modern African writers’ (Wautheir in Tae-Sang 1999: 84), and ‘In no aspect of its form is the African novel more ‘oral’ and ‘traditional’ than in its use of proverbs’ (Obiechina 1993: 124).

In the subsequent subsections, I review some of the prominent proverbs used in *No Longer at Ease* and *Death and the King’s Horseman*. The purpose of reviewing the paremiographical use is twofold: (1) to demonstrate the extent to which Anglophone African literary works borrow and rely on African traditional wisdom, and (2) the manner in which English language had to be twisted to accommodate the source language from which these proverbs emanate.

### **‘A man should not, out of pride and etiquette, swallow his phlegm’: *No Longer at Ease***

Achebe’s second novel, *No Longer at Ease*, appraised as ‘greatly inferior to

his first [*Things Fall Apart*] in range of conception and intensity of realisation' by Eustace Palmer (1972: 63), is set in the three years preceding independence in Nigeria, and was published in the year of its 'independence' from Britain (1960). The plot revolves around the tragic hero, Obi, who is, symbolically, the grandson of Okwonkwo, the tragic hero of *Things Fall Apart*. The tragic circumstances of these two characters are different, yet in some significant ways, very similar. Okwonkwo's downfall is due largely to his pride and pig-headedness, as is that of Obi in *No Longer at Ease*, of whom the villagers have come to accept that he is 'a very foolish and self-willed young man' (5). The extreme pride they both exhibit 'violate the basic communal values' of their societies (Shelton 1969: 90). The difference between the two characters is only in the circumstances and contextual setting rather than in substance. They exhibit similar hubris in their arrogance and stubbornness. This further demonstrates that their downfall is not due to situational factors, but rather to their own flawed character disposition, which manifests more poignantly in the character portrayal of Obi.

As much as he desires to obliterate the vices (corruption in particular) endemic in his society, Obi is, ironically, a character who is neither *influenced* nor *influential*. First, he is sent on a scholarship organised by Umuofia Progressive Union to study law 'so that when he returned he could handle all their land cases against their neighbours' (6). Instead, without soliciting anyone's views and advice, he changes his study to English literature. The villagers acquiesce to this, despite their indignation, as 'his self-will was not new' to them (6).

On his return, after just under four years in England, he comes back armed, not only with an honours degree in English, but also with a 'theory that the public service of Nigeria would remain corrupt until the old Africans at the top were replaced by young men from the universities' (35). In his impetuosity to change the Nigerian society, he forgets one fundamental Igbo proverb that, '*Whenever Something Stands, Something Else Will Stand Beside It*' (Achebe 2011: 6). This proverb is meant to caution people against both individualism and extremism. Extremism, Achebe (2011) notes, leads to an action that isolates a person from the cultural source of his or her very being, whereas the middle ground is more communal and accommodating of divergent views. Achebe (2011) further notes: 'When the Igbo encounter human conflict, their first impulse is not to determine who is right but quickly to restore harmony' (6), and to achieve amicable resolution to any form of conflict that may bring

discord to the harmony of the larger community (Agbájé 2002).

In contrast, Obi's extreme individualism often results in discordance rather than harmony. The elders of Umuofia are, however, always willing to make amends with Obi's waywardness. When he is in dire financial straits and unable to afford his standard of living, he requests further financial assistance from the Umuofia Progressive Union, which results in other members being quite indignant that 'there was no reason why the Union should worry itself over the trouble of a prodigal son who had shown great disrespect to it only a little while ago' as well as that they 'have already done too much for him' (4). To woo the hearts and minds of the people, the Chairman of the Union falls back on the didacticism and wisdom of the Igbo proverb: '*Anger against a brother [is] felt in the flesh not in the bone*' (4; see also 87); and that '*The fox must be chased away first; after that the hen might be warned against wandering into the bush*' (5).

These proverbs are used to establish harmony and to maintain social cohesion in the community, rather than to cast aspersion on Obi. Despite this wealth of wisdom, Obi's endeavours to root out corruption in his community and country at large are to no avail, because he does not learn from the wisdom of his people, despite the view that, 'When the time for warning comes the men of Umuofia could be trusted to give it in full measure, pressed down and flowing over' (5). This wisdom lies in the use of proverbs, which Obi understands, but is 'not at ease' with most aspects of his society due to the consequence of him being a 'been-to' (Palmer 1979: 76) who 'has adopted some alien ideals, such as extreme individualism' and this character trait causing him to 'become personally alienated from the *values* of his people' (Shelton 1969: 92). The 'values' from which he has alienated himself are captured in the aphorisms used throughout the novel.

One of the traits in Obi's character is his impetuosity, which is highlighted throughout the novel, which the people of Umuofia warn him about early on in the novel, during his farewell party to England: '*Do not be in any hurry to rush into the pleasures of the world like the young antelope who danced herself lame when the main dance was yet to come*' (10). This proverb is also proleptic, as it foreshadows Obi's alacrity to assert his extreme individualism, which he assumes throughout the novel and which becomes a contributing factor to his downfall. For instance, when he is caught taking a bribe, one elder points out: '*Obi tried to do what everyone does without finding out how it was done*' (5); and that he behaved like the proverbial 'house

*rat who went swimming with his friend the lizard and dies from cold, for while the lizard's scales kept him dry the rat's hairy body remained wet*' (5). This proverb alludes to Obi's self-will and his inability to listen to the advice of others, therefore remaining *uninfluenced*.

Like all conventional tragic heroes, Obi is fully aware of the dangers of extreme pride and individualism, as he ironically notes during one of his speeches to the Union:

*Our fathers also have a saying about the danger of living apart. They say it is the curse of the snake. If all snakes live together in one place, who would approach them? But they live everyone unto himself and so fall easy prey to man* (73).

His individualism is at odds with the principles and values of his society, and while being aware of this weakness, he pays very little heed to it due to his flawed character disposition. This is also brought up in a number of proverbs used in the novel, prime among which are: '*He who has people is richer than he who has money*' (72); '*in a strange land one should always move near one's kinsmen*' (119); '*He that has a brother must hold him to his heart,/For a kinsman cannot be bought in the market,/Neither is a brother bought with money*' (117). These proverbs signify the African philosophy known in Southern African Bantu language group as 'ubuntu'/'botho' (Pityana 1999: 144; Teffo 1999: 149-54). That a person is a person because of other people, what Mbiti calls the notion of, 'I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am' (qtd. in Teffo 1999: 153).

It is also emphasised in the novel that a man who refuses to take the advice from others cannot expect others to take his advice, thus also remaining *uninfluential*. Joseph, his 'less educated' friend reminds him: '*You know more book than I, but I am older and wiser. And I can tell you that a man does not challenge his chi to a wrestling match*' (37). Joseph also warns Obi that he is not an island unto himself, that in whatever he does, he must think of the consequences of his action on the wider society and future generations: '*What you are going to do [marry the osu girl] concerns not only yourself but your whole family and future generations. If one finger brings oil it soils all the others*' (67-68). This highlights two aspects of Obi's character in relation to his grandfather in *Things Fall Apart*: 'he turns out to be the culmination of Okonkwo's disastrous **individualism** and **disregard** for **Chukwu** (*chi* in

himself as a person)' (Shelton 1964: 37 [my emphasis]).

Even Obi's 'educated' friend, Christopher feels that it is too rash for anyone to break with traditions in such a radical manner: 'You may say that I am not broad-minded, but I don't think we have reached the stage where we can ignore *all* our customs' (130). Christopher's assertion also points to the idea of Obi's inability to *influence* people, because his radical and rash moves shock rather than encourage people to follow in his footsteps. It is not so much that Obi has been overseas that is problematic, it is only his lack of discriminating between what may be suitable for one context and not the other. One elder quips: '*But it is like the palm-wine we drink. Some people can drink it and remain wise. Others lose all their senses*' (44). Obi's espousal of Western ways and his forsaking of traditional systems of thought and behaviour is the target of this proverb. His education in England has made him to lose the 'sense' of who he is as well as his alienating himself from his African roots.

As stated earlier, prototypically, a tragic hero is fully aware of his tragic circumstances, but falls prey to temptation due to his fatal flaw or weakness. One of the many ironies about Obi is that he is fully aware of the significance of the proverbs and their didactic function in his community, but either goes against them or realises their usefulness at a point of no return, when it is too late to amend the damage done. Towards the end of the novel, Obi ponders over the 'root cause' of his problems quite lucidly:

The chief result of the crisis in Obi's life was that it made him examine critically for the first time the mainspring of his actions. And in doing so he uncovered a good deal that he could only regard as sheer humbug. Take this matter of twenty pounds every month to his town union, which in the final analysis was the root cause of all his troubles. Why had he not swallowed his pride and accepted the four months' exemption which he had been allowed, albeit with a bad grace? Could a person in his position afford that kind of pride? Was it not common saying among his people that *a man should not, out of pride and etiquette, swallow his phlegm?* (141).

Although he is 'no longer at ease' with most of his own cultural belief systems, he invokes one of their teachings when he finally realises the magnitude of his difficulties. He paraphrases an earlier stated proverb that

‘anger against a kinsman was felt in the flesh, not in the marrow’ (89). He concludes that he will forthwith stop making repayments to the Union until his financial situation improves, but he will not tell them and ‘give them another opportunity to pry in his affairs’ (141-42). With his pride still a significant hindrance, he uses the proverbial teachings for his selfish ends: ‘They would not take a *kinsman* to court, not for that kind reason anyway’ (142).

Throughout the novel, the attitude of Obi’s kinsmen towards his wilfulness is always reconciliatory and seeks to maintain harmony at all costs. The kinsmen’s major concern is not Obi as an individual, but rather what he represents, the collective Umuofia as ‘*an only palm-fruit*’ that must ‘*not get lost in the fire*’ (6). They are fully aware, as Shelton (1969: 94) correctly observes, that ‘when a person causes trouble, it affects his entire group, his extended family’ as well as his entire community. This is succinctly captured in Joseph’s advice to Obi: ‘*If one finger brings oil it soils all the others*’ (68).

Most of the proverbs used in *No Longer at Ease* fall within the category of educating and giving advice, and provide insight into the ‘spiritual, social, political, and economic characteristics’ (Ngalande 2014: 53) of the Igbo traditional society, as portrayed in the novel. We are also informed that names in Igbo have significant relevance, not only as markers of events, but as rooted in proverbial meaning. We are told that Obi’s full name, Obiajulu, means ‘the mind at last is at rest’, ‘the mind being his father’s of course, who his wife, having borne him four daughters before Obi, was naturally becoming anxious’ (6). Onomasticians have come to note that ‘each proverbial name has an anchor found in proverbs, and if this anchor is lost or forgotten, the meaning is muted’ (Simelane-Kalumba et al. 2014: 54). However, as in the case of Achebe’s novel, the fear of muting this ‘anchor’ of African cosmology may cease to be a constant threat to African traditions if African writers continue to infuse oral traditions in the form of proverbs in their writing, and if critics do not overlook the analysis of this aspect in African literary works.

As I will demonstrate in the following section, proverbs are as important to understanding indigenous knowledge systems as Western philosophy is in understanding the Cartesian individualism of Europeans, *cogito ergo sum*. What African proverbs emphasise and contribute to the understanding of African indigenous knowledge systems, as indicated in Achebe’s novel, is in stark contrast to the Cartesian view of humanity. In an African setting, as demonstrated in Achebe’s novel, ‘proverbs underscore the idea of people – irrespective of gender, race or class – working together, and

in the process supporting, educating and learning from one another' (Nkealah 2016: 67).

**'When the wind blows cold from behind, that's when the fowl knows his true friends': *Death and the King's Horseman***

Soyinka's drama is described by David Kerr (1995: 121) as often characterised by a 'strong feeling for history and dialectical conflict'. Consequently, Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* is a tragic play that is based on a historical event that took place in Oyo, Western Nigeria, in 1946. The playwright uses his poetic licence to recreate the event and give it a tragic twist at the end. Historically, the king's horseman, Olokum Esin Jinadu, was delivering a speech in the village of Ikoye, Lagos, when the news of the death of the King of Oyo State, the Alafin Oba Siyenbola Oladigbolu 1, reached him. As a King's horseman who had 'led a traditionally privileged life' (Plastow 2013: xxvii), Olokum was expected to come back and commit ritual suicide to accompany the monarch to the next world. During the festivities of a build-up to the ritual suicide, the British colonial officer heard of the intentions of this festive mood and ordered that Olokum be arrested in a bid to stomp out this 'primitive practice'. However, when word of Olokum's arrest reached his son, Murana, he committed ritual suicide in the place of his father.

The plot is similar to the actual historical event, the only difference is registered in the details of the event. The play opens with Elesin getting ready to commit ritual suicide in order to be buried with the king and accompany him into the next world. He enters the market at its closing stages, '*pursued by his drummers and praise-singers*' (7). A moment later he is draped in 'rich' attire; 'damask and *alari*' by the women, as per custom (7&15). The role of women is both significant and symbolic. It is their duty to pamper Elesin as he transitions into the next world. In the Yoruba cosmology of life cycles, life has no end. It is a cyclical process through which the human spirit evolves through three dimensions: the world of **the living**, the world of **the ancestors** and the world of **the unborn**. Since it is through women that humans move from the world of the unborn to that of the living, according to Yoruba cosmology, they should play a similar critical role when a person journeys from the world of the living to that of the cosmic ancestors. There are, as usual, festivities to the built-up to the ritual suicide, drumming and dancing.

It is at this point that Simon Pilkings, the Colonial District Officer, hears of the ritual about to take place. He enquires from his 'houseboy' Joseph the cause behind this celebration. Joseph responds that a prominent chief is 'going to kill himself'(29). Earlier on, Amusa, the native colonial sergeant intimidates the same: 'I have to report that... a prominent chief, namely, the Elesin Oba, is to commit death tonight as a results of native custom...' (27). Since it is not a crime to commit suicide, ritual or otherwise, Simon Pilkings thinks that both Amusa and Joseph actually intend to say 'murder' or 'kill' someone (27&28). The emphasis on the deliberate misinterpretation by the Colonial District Officer of concepts: 'kill himself' and 'commit murder' is of symbolic significance. It not only functions as a means to 'criminalise' a culturally sanctioned practice using foreign legal precepts. It also highlights how colonial intrusion not only unleashed on Africans **physical violence** (what Fanon calls 'la violence *visible*') it also inflicted on the psyche of the African **cultural violence** (which Fanon refers to as, 'la violence *invisible*') (in Ilunga-Kabongo 1970: 93 [my emphasis]).

Soyinka's use of proverbs closer to the source-language than the more mellowed proverbs used by Achebe and has more depth, gravitas and complexity. 'A substantial part of this complexity', Adebayo Williams (1993: 68) explains, 'derives from [Soyinka's] deep communion with the cultural paradigm of his people, the Yoruba: their mores, their myths, and above all their ritual'. Soyinka's 'deep communion' with his Yoruba culture finds its way in the manner in which he imbues his Yoruba characters, not just with Yoruba proverbs, but also with 'the rich use of riddles, sayings, similes and paraphrases' (Gilbertova 1995: 93).

Soyinka employs an amalgam of rhetorical, epistemological and axiological proverbs. This is largely because, unlike Obi, Elesin is steeped within the matrix of his culture and is thus infused with acute and exceptional knowledge of the traditional mores of the Yoruba cosmology. Elesin, however, uses this insider knowledge to his advantage and for his selfish gains. The abrogation of proverbs in the play also reveal Elesin's slyness, in that he turns most proverbs from working *against* him to working *for* him instead: 'The same proverb, in fact', Figueiredo (2013: 93-94) explains,

can be an ordinary beast of burden or a rare racing thoroughbred, depending on its use and user. To do this, he must be in complete control of their movement at all times, harnessing their versatile

energies with such skill that they cannot bolt off in directions he did not intend. He must be an expert wrangler with words.

Elesin's expertise at wrangling with the proverbs shows the extent of his situatedness within the matrix of his own cultural milieu, as well as possessing profound knowledge of his culture Elesin uses this knowledge to his advantage to achieve his personal goals, as opposed to the expected collective goals of his people. He engages in verbal jousting with the bewildered Praise-Singer (7):

**Elesin:** *When the horse sniffs the stable does he not strain at the bridle?* The market is the long-suffering home of my spirit and the women are packing up to go. *The Esu-harassed day slipped into the stewpot while we feasted. We ate it up with the rest of the meat. I have neglected my women.*

**Praise-Singer:** We know all that. *Still it's no reason for shedding your tail on this day of all days. I know the women will cover you in damask and alari but when the wind blows cold from behind, that's when the fowl knows his true friends.*

Elesin's knowledge of the Yoruba customs allows him to circumvent his duty in a way that even impresses (but also dupes) most, including Iyaloja and the Praise-Singer. When he asks for Iyaloja's soon-to-be daughter-in-law, Iyaloja evokes the cosmic proverb: *'Only the curses of the departed are to be feared. The claims of one whose foot is on the threshold of their abode surpasses even the claims of blood it is impiety even to place hindrance in their way'* (22). The Praise-Singer is also impressed with Elesin's showmanship and exaggerated bravado: *'Elesin's riddles are not merely the nut in the kernel that breaks human teeth; he also buries the kernel in hot ambers and dares a man's finger to draw it out'* (9).

Elesin is eventually arrested by the colonial administrators. This is despite the successful intervention of the market women and their daughters to prevent Amusa from arresting Elesin at the command of Simon Pilkings. What results in Elesin's arrest and eventual downfall can be solely attributed to his internal conflict and not the external or situational factors. He has overwhelming support from his people and community at large, who are even willing to be arrested in his stead. The prison used to be a holding cell for slaves

before being transported on the middle-passage to the Americas, which symbolises that Elesin is a 'slave' pleasures of the flesh. He realises, like all tragic heroes, that he is the cause of his downfall and shame, he tells his new bride:

I needed you as the abyss across which my body must be drawn, I filled it with earth and dropped my seed in at the moment of preparedness for my crossing. You were the final gift of the living to their emissary to the land of ancestors, and perhaps your warmth and youth brought new insight of this world to me and turned my feet leaden on this side of the abyss. For I confess to you, daughter, my weakness came not merely from the abomination of the white man... there was also a weight of longing on my earth-led limbs... (71).

The qualities Elesin lacks are ascribed to his son, Olunde, who takes his father's place and commits the ritual suicide. Ogundele (1994) aptly points out that although Olunde has been in England for four years, and therefore disowned by his father, he shows no sign of assimilating Western ethos, as depicted in the extract below:

**Olunde** Mrs Pilkings, I came home to bury my father. As soon as I heard the news [of the King's death] I booked my passage home. In fact we were fortunate. We travelled in the same convoy as your Prince, so we had excellent protection.

**Jane** But you don't think your father is also entitled to whatever protection is available to him?

**Olunde** How can I make you understand? He *has* protection. No one can undertake what he does tonight without the deepest protection the mind can conceive. What can you offer him in place of his peace of mind, in place of the honour and veneration of his own people? What would you think of your Prince if he refused to accept the risk of losing his life on this voyage? This ... showing-the-flag tour of colonial possessions.

**Jane** I see. So it isn't just medicine you studied in England.

**Olunde** Yet another error into which your people fall. You believe that everything which appears to make sense was learnt from you.

**Jane** Not so fast Olunde. You have learnt to argue I can tell that, but I

never said you made sense. However clearly you try to put it, it is still a barbaric custom. It is even worse – it's feudal! The King dies and a chieftain must be buried with him. How feudalistic can you get!

[.....]

**Olunde** Others would call it decadence. However, it doesn't really interest me. You white races know how to survive; I've seen proof of that. By all logical and natural laws this war should end with all the white races wiping out one another, wiping out their so-called civilisation for all time and reverting to a state of primitivism the like of which has so far only existed in your imagination when you thought of us. I thought of all that at the beginning. Then I slowly realised that your greatest art is the art of survival. But at least have the humility to let others survive in their own way.

**Jane** Through ritual suicide?

**Olunde** Is that worse than mass suicide? Mrs Pilkings, what do you call what those young men are sent to do by their generals in this war? Of course you have also mastered the art of calling things by names which don't remotely describe them.

[.....]

**Jane** (*hesitantly*) Was it the ... colour thing? I know there is some discrimination.

**Olunde** Don't make it so simple, Mrs Pilkings. You make it sound as if when I left, I took nothing at all with me (57-59).

Olunde's erudition and perceptiveness displayed in the above quote suggests that he is in fact at ease with both cultures, traditional and 'modern'. This suggests that people can live in both cosmic worlds without favouring one over the other (as per the dictates of colonised curriculum, which estranged many an African youth from their cultural roots). It further implies that it is incumbent upon each succeeding generation to safeguard and perpetuate indigenous cultures for posterity.

Olunde's final act of committing ritual suicidal in his father's stead 'shows tremendous will-power and even proves pristine, if residual, strength, of the culture's worldview' (Ogundele 1994: 57); 'as well as the role of the committed individual in such rites of passage' (Osofisan 1994: 56). It also proves that Olunde is 'Strong-willed, austere, introspective and deep, he shows traits of self-renunciation and asceticism' (Ogundele 1994: 57-50), qualities

that his father lacks. In contrast to Obi in *No Longer at Ease*, the character portrayal of Olunde shows that ‘the reaction against colonialism [can be] achieved through an intellectual adherence to indigenous culture, associated with a younger generation of educated Nigerians’ (Kerr 1995: 121).

The above views notwithstanding, from my reading of the play, Olunde becomes the hero, not simply because he committed ritual suicide, but rather due to his adherence to the traditional values of his culture. It is worth taking into cognisance that Olunde does not die a *cowardly* death like his father, who commit suicide as an escape the shame he has brought upon himself, which is outside the precepts of the cultural ritual. Olunde commits the culturally sanctioned ritual suicide and as a consequence, his is a *heroic* death. It is due to this sole criterion that he survives (in spiritual terms), his name being inscribed on the plaque of valour as the venerated ancestor who will live for ever in the memory of his society for generations to come, despite his age and education.

### **Concluding Remarks**

This paper argued that African literary works contribute significantly to African indigenous knowledge systems. Since language is a *sine qua non* of literature, some critics have questioned the logic behind using European languages to project African value systems (Ngũgĩ 1986; 2000; Wali 1963; 1964). As it has been noted in the introductory section of this paper, the issue of language is a moot point in Africa. While acknowledging the indispensability of language in the categorisation of any literary corpus, Irele (2001: 5) also concedes to the ‘unique’ nature of literature in Africa:

The association between language and literature can be ‘natural’ insofar as language constitutes the grounding structure of all literary expression, so that the unity of a body of literature is mostly perceived in terms of its language of expression rather than by any other criterion. For historical reason, with which we are familiar, the term African literature does not obey this convention. The corpus is in fact multilingual. The variety of languages covered by the term can be appreciated by a consideration of the range of literatures in Africa.

As a result, writing in European languages led to the *transliteration* (as opposed to *translation*) of African speech acts. The main objective of transliteration, in Anglophone African literature, was to leave an African footprint on the English language. ‘The aim of the advice [to transliterate] was to condition the writers to imprint the ‘signatures’ of their natal tongues or cultures on their English-language literary expressions’ (Onwuemene 1999: 1057).

More pointedly:

Engaging such heavy subjects [i.e. imperialism, slavery, independence, gender, racism etc.] while at the same time trying to create a unique and authentic African literary tradition would mean that some of us would decide to use the colonizer’s tools: his language, altered sufficiently to bear the weight of an African creative aesthetic, infused with elements of the African tradition. I borrowed proverbs from our culture and history, colloquialisms and African expressive language from the ancient griots, the worldviews, perspectives, and customs from my Igbo tradition and cosmology, and the sensibilities of everyday people (Achebe 2012: 54-55).

The ‘imprinting’ of Africanity in African literatures is more poignantly manifested in the employment of proverbs. Proverbs, like orality, advance ‘the knowledge of the African worldview as inscribed in proverbs’ (Nnaemeka 2002: 376).

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# Defining Feminine Roles: A ‘Gendered’ Depiction of Women through Zulu Proverbs

**Evangeline Bonisiwe Zungu**

## **Abstract**

In most African societies language reflects the subordination of women to men and the respect they must show to men and their elders. This paper is a preliminary investigation which aims to examine how women are portrayed in selected Zulu proverbs. The proverbs discussed in this article reflect how Zulu society perceives men as intelligent in conflict resolution and skilled in societal disputes. Proverbs discussed in this paper are informed by the way Zulu men are socialised and the manner in which young girls are brought up. Men are socialised into thinking that women need to start preparing themselves for marriage from a young age. Female behaviour needs to be socially acceptable, as every person encountered by an unmarried female is a potential husband and potential in-law. This grooming is evident in the proverbs frequently used in Zulu society. This article uses the African womanism theory which argues for a feminist critique of gender that draws from the experiences of African women, and also rejects the male dominance in African societies.

**Keywords:** Proverbs, Women, African womanism, Subordination, Patriarchy, Culture

## **Introduction**

There is a perception within African cultures that African women have to behave in a manner which makes them eligible for marriage. They have to show respect to their elders while at home, and respect their in-laws when they are married. The proverbs in this paper demonstrate the way in which

traditional societies think of women's behaviour in terms of preparation and sustainability for marriage. These proverbs are employed in a manner which paints men as providers and women as nurturers. The aim of this paper is to highlight the perception of women's gendered roles within traditional societies. It argues that women's choices are limited, when it comes to issues of marriage, to being a wife and a mother. This is in no way saying that Zulu culture is static; it has evolved immensely over the years owing to culture contact and globalisation. This paper is a preliminary investigation which aims to examine how women are portrayed in selected Zulu proverbs. The proverbs discussed in this article reflect how Zulu society perceives men as intelligent in conflict resolution, and skilled in societal disputes. These proverbs are informed by the way in which Zulu men are socialised, and the manner in which young girls are brought up. Proverbs portray women not only as nurturers, as mentioned above, but also as protectors of their families. They warn men against weakness in their dealings with women.

This paper looks at how women's choices are limited when it comes to polygynous, sororate and levirate marriages. This may sound somewhat bizarre in a modern society, but in rural traditional societies women have limited say about their fate in terms of ending a marriage through death of their spouse, or their husbands' taking on more wives. There is also an emphasis on men being providers in their households, and having the intelligence to come up with solutions to any problems that may arise within them. The language people speak informs and shapes the way they think or reason. This paper aims to 'help the reader discover the impact of the language used in African proverbs on the thinking of Africans about their women' (Dickson & Mbosowo 2014:633). Proverbs are intelligent, metaphorical sayings passed from generation to generation. They are a well of knowledge which sheds light on the Zulu way of life. They give reasons for why people do what they do. Ogbalu (1956:2) comments thus on the Igbo proverbs:

Proverbs constitute a language of diplomacy among the Igbos ... the language of settling disputes among towns ... settling bride price, commerce and short oracy ... Igbo proverbs are the accumulation of Igbo experience throughout the history of the Igbos.

According to the *Oxford Dictionary of English Proverbs* (Wilson 1970), proverbs are a crystallised summary of popular wisdom. Medier, cited in John-

son and Ekpenyong (2013:62), defines a proverb as:

A short, generally known sentence of the folk, which contains wisdom, truth, morals and traditional views in a metaphorically fixed and memorisable form ... handed down from generation to generation.

The proverbs were harvested randomly from existing literature, mainly *Inqolobane Yesizwe*, by C.L.S. Nyembezi and O.E.H.M. Nxumalo (1966). The selection focused on proverbs defining women's gendered roles as wives and mothers. Through these proverbs women are depicted as creatures that must be respectful and submissive in preparation for marriage. The proverbs also warn women about difficult situations they will encounter in marriage, and advise them to persevere. The sample of the proverbs used in this paper involves only proverbs relating to marriage and what the society perceives as suitable behaviour for women of marriageable age.

## **Theoretical Frameworks**

This paper employs two important theories for the analysis of the proverbs chosen. It adopts a feminist approach for data analysis purposes. Feminism as a movement 'aims to eradicate sexist domination' (Masuku 2005:5), and thereby change the way most patriarchal societies view women. Billington (cited in Kramarea & Treichler 1985:158) defines feminism as 'A movement seeking the reorganisation of the world upon a basis of sex-equality in all human relations'.

Hudson-Weems (2007: 289) has observed that 'African Women, documented their reality, and refined a paradigm relative to who they are, what they do, and what they believe in as a people'. The African womanist is a self-definer, is family oriented and also promotes positive male-female relationships as one of the vehicles to ensure the survival of people of African descent and humanity in general (Aldridge 2004, cited in Mangena 2013). Mangena (2013:2) comments thus on the applicability of the theory:

The theory does not only isolate African women from the rest of the woman category, it also allows women of African descent an

opportunity to link with each other and build strength from their shared conditions in exploring the link that binds them, leading into international solidarity. This is the case because the theory refers to the realities of African women in the continent as well as in its diaspora.

Commenting on Zulu proverbs, Masuku (2005:3) says that they 'reflect the philosophy of life of the people, especially when it relates to women and young girls'. In the light of what Masuku is arguing, this paper recognises the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis (Whorf 1939:57), which in this context shapes the way the proverbs are interpreted within the society. This is a linguistic relativity principle which theorises that thought and behaviour are determined and partially influenced by language. It is founded on two main ideas: the first is a theory of determinism that states that the language you speak determines the way you will interpret the world around you. The second states that language influences your thoughts about the real world. Whorf saw a clear connection between language, culture and psychology, and he expresses this as follows (Whorf 1939:75):

Human beings do not live in the objective world alone, nor alone in the world of social activity as ordinarily understood, but are very much at the mercy of the particular language which has become the medium of expression for the society. It is quite an illusion to imagine that one adjusts to reality essentially without the use of language and that language is merely an incidental means of solving specific problems of communication or reflection. The fact of the matter is that the 'real' world is to a large extent unconsciously built up on the language habits of the group. We see and hear and otherwise experience very largely as we do because the language habits of our community predispose certain choices of interpretation.

The feminist movement worldwide came as a result of the patriarchal nature of global societies, African womanism is specifically created for African women, and takes into cognisance their experiences as opposed to Western feminism. Ongunyemi (1985:64) defines womanism as:

a philosophy that celebrates black roots, the ideals of black life, while giving a balanced presentation of black womandom. It concerns itself

as much with the black sexual power tussle as with the world power structure that subjugates blacks. A womanist will recognise that along with her consciousness of sexual issues, she must incorporate racial, cultural, national economic and political considerations into her philosophy.

The focus of the paper is on the perception of proverbs through womanism and the emphasis is on the attitude of the speaker and listener. Mokitimi (1991:18) mentions that:

Proverbs reveal the feelings, emotions and attitude of the speaker. They are later used in situations bearing relevance to the original one. At this stage, there is a speaker and listener and if these expressions make an impact on the listener, he too uses them in other situations. In this manner, the use of these statements, as expressions of observation and experiences, moves from speaker to speaker until the society accepts them as part and parcel of its collective lore.

Proverbs discussed here reflect and demonstrate the mindset, feelings, beliefs and important views in African societies. Most African societies either support or condone patriarchy through the socialisation of the population from a young age. This is depicted in the language spoken. Through the selection of proverbs discussed here the paper will show how women are positioned as inferior to men. The proverbs depict women as creatures that must be respectful and submissive in preparation for marriage.

### **Meaning of Proverbs and their Function in the Society**

Proverbs are the core of the Zulu society's language, thought-pattern and interpretation of the world. According to Msimang (1991:79), a proverb in isiZulu:

*Siqondene nokwethulwa kwamaqiniso athile ngolimi olugigiyelayo, ulimi olungathekisayo luzekelise ... Uma sizihlolisisa izaga lezi, okokuqala ngqa esikuphawulayo ngazo wukuthi ziyinkulumo*

*engumphumela wezinto ezenzeka empilweni yethu. ... Izaga zingamaqiniso athile empilweni yethu.*

is related to the introduction of certain facts in an ambiguous language, metaphorical language. When we analyse these proverbs the first thing we notice is that they are a result of things that are happening in our lives. Proverbs are truths in our lives.

The following proverbs paint a vivid picture of what Zulu society expects from women. They also warn women about difficult situations they will encounter in marriage.

*Umendo ngumkhumulansika* (Marriage is not for the faint-hearted).

*Ukwenda wukuzilahla* (Getting married is throwing one's life away).

*Akuqhalahala lahlula isidwaba* (Even the most assertive woman surrenders in marriage).

The above examples attest to the fact that women need to expect radical changes in their lives after their marriage. They have to change their behaviour from an assertive stance to a more submissive one. Proverbs are a big part of the language people speak and the culture they believe in. African religion provides regulations for daily life through language. One has access to many hints and advice about getting on with fellow humans and the community at large in the form of sayings and proverbs (e.g. *kuhlonishwana kabili*, meaning, respect is a two-way process). Another category of proverbs warn against bad behaviour – proverbs like '*Ukwesutha kwakhumbuza uNoshinga ukuthakatha*' (When a person has everything they become ungrateful).

## **Background and Contextualisation**

There are some peculiarities that are unique to the proverbs discussed in this paper; for instance, proverbs which reflect patriarchy and male chauvinism. There is an obvious reference to the power of men over women; and how men place themselves above women in these proverbs brings to mind a socio-cultural pattern in Zulu society. This paper will demonstrate that most of the proverbs that relate to human behaviour, the attributes verging on power and accomplishments, are reserved for men.

The extension of the male chauvinism in these proverbs pertains to the 'gendering' of proverbs, resulting in a situation in which females are regarded with limited respect, more specifically in terms of assigning negative traits. The gender issues (demeaning females) are represented by the following proverbs: **Insakavukela umchilo wesidwaba** (Irritating thing that you do on a daily basis) – this proverb refers to a woman's attire (a skirt made out of cowhide) with which, each and every time she puts it on, she has to use a particular belt made out of grass, failing which it may fall from her body. This becomes a tedious task to women because they have to cover themselves appropriately each time they go out in public. In some communities, beautiful women are perceived to have a loose character. Women have to tame their beauty. The proverb, **ikhiwane elihle ligcwala izimpethu** – *ubukeka emuhle ngaphandle kanti unesimilo esibi* (referring to a ripe, eye-catching fruit of a fig tree that is usually infested with maggots) is a warning that beautiful women usually have a loose character. It can be argued that this proverb also cautions people not to judge each other on the basis of external beauty, but to consider their character. What is of interest for the purposes of this paper, however, is the association between women's beauty, and loose character. Zulu society sanctions promiscuity but this is directed at women, and not men. In the proverb, **indlebe yisifebe** – *indlebe icosha konke nokungafanele ikuzwe* (an ear hears everything), the ear is likened to a loose woman. The question is, why woman? In Zulu culture men are never regarded as promiscuous, they are called *amasoka* (someone with a lot of girlfriends), yet a woman is labelled a slut or a whore if she has a lot of boyfriends. The polygamous nature of Zulu society allows men to date and marry as many women as they possibly can afford, but women are not given the same latitude.

## **Men's Socialisation as a Cultural Phenomenon**

The language people speak within the Zulu community shows that men are always depicted as the binding agent within the society (e.g. **Okwehlula amadoda kuyabikwa** – men never fail). Men are depicted as decision-makers (e.g. **Injobo ithungelwa ebandla** – one can get a solution in the presence of council). They are depicted as the intelligent species (**izwi lendoda liyabhekwa** – you must heed a man's advice). It is also a common utterance that men in this society must be respected at all costs (e.g. **ikhanda**

**elixegaxegayo lofulela abafazi** – a man must put his foot down when it comes to women). This is a reflection of day-to-day socialisation and teachings given to young men and how they are ‘placed by society in a position that uses features of the formal culture, which mobilises around a number of sociocultural constructs such as control’ (Hadebe 2010:14). The above proverbs are about men, but they refer to women and their position in a Zulu cultural context. As heads of their households men are perceived to be providers and good advisers.

Socialisation of both men and women in Zulu communities emphasises the preparation of women for marriage and men to assume their position of authority within the family and the community at large. This type of socialisation is deeply rooted in traditional Zulu society<sup>1</sup>. Culture is ‘something shared by a group of people and learned by an individual from the society. It is made out of patterns which guide behaviour and which are transmitted in tradition’ (Bate 1995:220). According to Cowan, Dembour and Wilson (2001:41):

Culture is now understood as historically produced rather than static; unbounded rather than bounded and integrated; contested rather than consensual, incorporated within structures of power such as the construction of hegemony; rooted in practices; symbols, habits, patterns of practical mastery and practical rationality within cultural categories of meaning rather than any simple dichotomy between ideas and behaviour; and negotiated and constructed through human action rather than super-organic forces.

Patriarchy is a large part of the Zulu culture and has been perceived by many as a gendered power system. It is a network of social, political and economic relationships through which men dominate and control female labour, reproduction and sexuality as well as define women’s status, privileges and rights in a society. It is a successful system because those that gain this privilege are often unaware of it, and therefore inadvertently perpetuate the ill

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<sup>1</sup> This is in no way saying that Zulu culture is static, **but** it highlights the fact that in traditional societies the thinking still revolves around preparing women for marriage.

treatment of the people in this society whose suffering is the fulcrum upon which this society turns (Hadebe 2010).

The language we speak affects our perception and interpretation of situations, and 'we see and hear and otherwise experience very largely as we do because the language habits of our community predispose certain choices of interpretation' (Sapir 1929:210). Language and culture are interdependent entities. 'Culture' for African people is deeply embedded in the language they speak, which means that culture is part of language. Culture is transmitted to future generations through use of language. In addition language allows one to teach other people the results of experiences they might never undergo themselves. Similarly, proverbs are good examples to showcase this relationship between language and culture.

## **Women's Subordination**

In Zulu culture, the society puts great emphasis on women demonstrating respectful behaviour towards any male and elders within the clan. Sennett (2002:3) mentions that:

Lack of respect, though less aggressive than an outright insult, can take an equally wounding form. No insult is offered another person, but neither is recognition extended; he or she is not seen as a full being whose presence matters.

Words like *indoda(kazi)* and *inkosi(kazi)* ('kazi' meaning that which is great) are femininity markers in the Zulu and other Nguni languages. Women in traditional societies are more respected within their families, but they seem to lose that respect when they get married. There is usually a shift in gender relations as soon as the woman gets married and moves into her husband's homestead.

Rudwick (2008:153) argues that:

a certain standard of respect is laid down in the nuclear family, while more general principles of respectful social and linguistic behaviour are acquired in the immediate environment, the larger society and in private and public interaction. Hence, the understanding of what

constitutes respectful behaviour is embedded in one's culture, but also significantly in one's personal upbringing and socialisation.

Theories of patriarchy by Walby (1990:24) show 'two distinct forms of patriarchy – private and public patriarchy'. In a Zulu context, patriarchy is something that happens in the public domain because it is endorsed by the community as part of culture. This paper is in no way saying that women have had no prominent role to play in Zulu traditional society. In Zulu traditional society certain women took important roles of leadership. Ntombazi, the mother of the Chief of the Ndwandwe clan, Zwide, was micro-managing Zwide's reign. Similarly, Princess Mkabayi of the Zulu royal family played a huge role in keeping the monarchy within her family by organising for Mthaniya (a woman from the Sibiya clan) to marry her father. This act of bravery saw her father married in his old age, and bearing a son (Senzangakhona). When Jama died, Mkabayi took over as Queen Regent because Senzangakhona was too young to ascend the throne. She ruled with an iron fist, which was unheard of for a woman of the time. She was also the mastermind behind the plot to assassinate King Shaka. She was a powerful, strategising woman and feared by most men. Evidently, in traditional Zulu society women have had some prominent positions, although it was largely patriarchal. Sultana (2011: 7) mentions that,

Patriarchal society gives absolute priority to men and to some extent limits women's human rights also. Patriarchy refers to the male domination both in public and private spheres. In this way, feminists use the term 'patriarchy' to describe the power relationship between men and women as well as to find out the root cause of women's subordination.

On the other hand, the term 'women's subordination' refers to the inferior position of women, their lack of access to resources and decision making, etc., and to the patriarchal domination that women are subjected to in most traditional societies. So women's subordination means the inferior position of women. The feeling of powerlessness, discrimination and experience of limited self-esteem and self-confidence jointly contribute to the subordination of women. Both housework and wage labour are important sites of women's exploitation by men. Within the field of paid work, occupational

segregation in capitalist society is used by male managers to keep access to the best paid jobs for themselves at the expense of women. In traditional societies women ploughed the land, and looked after livestock, which belonged solely to women without their husbands' authority or intervention. Within the household women did more work than men, even if they also had paid employment (Hartmann 1981).

Women end up belonging to the husband's family as soon as they are married. It is worth noting that, in Zulu culture, *ilobolo* was not as commercialised as it has become in recent times. It used to be what a man could afford to get married until Theophilus Shepstone<sup>2</sup> decided to fix it at eleven cows. Shepstone distorted a rather noble practice. This was viewed as part of a bigger and nefarious agenda of depleting the cattle herds of Zulu men who were then forced to pay various demeaning taxes and to later submit to the demands for cheap labour. This interfered with what was a flexible custom, and changed it to a rigid and unaffordable practice. The new and commercialised payment of *ilobolo* as a business transaction does not give the husband unlimited rights over his wife: she may claim divorce for ill-treatment. In many African communities, women are very independent; but marriage is a permanent phenomenon in Zulu culture: the woman, with the support and intervention of her family, has to protect her marriage at all costs because,

divorce is a stigma in many African societies. If the marriage fails, the woman is often perceived as the culprit. She is looked down upon by friends and family. Therefore, there is societal pressure on the woman to hang in there and make her marriage succeed (Dickson & Mbosowo 2014:636).

The practice of levirate and sororate marriages is still prevalent in Zulu society. In Zulu culture a marriage is a permanent contract between the couple and their families. The proverb, **ukwenda wukuzilahla** (getting married equals throwing away one's life), recognises that when a woman gets married her life changes completely. She leaves her own home to go and live with strangers who may or may not like her, and sometimes make her life a living hell.

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<sup>2</sup> Theophilus Shepstone was born in 1817 in England. He later became the Diplomatic Agent to the Native Tribes in Natal.

### **Levirate Marriage (*Ukungena*)**

In African communities, including Zulu communities, death does not constitute an end to a marriage. The paying of *ilobolo* and the slaughtering of a goat to accept the wife into the family is an eternal binding bond between the surviving spouse and the in-laws' family. When a husband dies, his brother has to take over all his wives and bear the responsibilities of a husband, taking care of his late brother's wives and children. *Ukungena* is when the man moves into his late brother's house and becomes the husband to the widows. Radcliffe-Brown and Farole (1950:183) argues that when the husband dies and an approved relative of his lives with the widow and the children, he begets more children for the dead man. This is the leviratic family. The pro-husband does not pay *ilobolo*. According to Krige and Comaroff (1981:4), marriage, for a Zulu woman, is a long-drawn-out process, whereby she is detached from her native *umndeni* and incorporated gradually into the family of her husband. According to Radcliffe-Brown and Farole (1950:185), Zulu marriage thus constitutes a long-enduring union between the spouses, which extends to their kin, above all their agnatic lineages. Parrinder (1954:97) says that marriage in Africa is a social affair, concerned as much with the contracting families as with the man and wife.

### **Sororate Marriage (*ukuvus' amabele*)**

When the wife dies, her husband can, and does, in many cases, marry his late wife's younger sister or cousin to take care of the children<sup>3</sup>. It is believed that the children's aunt treats them better than a total stranger whom the man can marry on his own without the intervention of the family. Mbiti (1969:141) says:

Fewer societies have sororate marriages, i.e. when a wife dies the husband marries one of her sisters. . . . The 'sister' in this case must be understood in the wider usage of that term, within the kinship system. If the wife does not bear children, it is occasionally arranged that the husband takes her sister to be his wife whether or not the first is dead. In still fewer societies, two sisters are married to the same man. These are other meanings and practices of sororate marriages.

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<sup>3</sup> The evolution of the Zulu social system makes this unlikely to be true in the society as a whole. It still holds true only in deep rural traditional societies.

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## **Polygyny**

Polygyny<sup>4</sup> is one of the customs which enforce the subordination of women in African societies. Although it can be argued that some women choose to enter into polygynous marriages of their own accord, for most it is not up to them to decide, but to the husband, who is usually a breadwinner. The argument that polygamy kerbs a man's appetite and prevents him from having extramarital affairs is still used in all African societies to defend plural marriages. Harris (1988:311) argues that polygamy overlooks the fact that plural marriages create domestic situations that are behaviourally and mentally very different from those created by monogamous (one husband, one wife) marriages. Mbiti (1969:139) mentions that:

Polygamy also raises the social status of the family concerned. It is instilled in the minds of African peoples that a big family earns its head great respect in the eyes of the community. ... If the first wife has no children or only daughters, it follows almost without exception that her husband will add another wife, partly to remedy the immediate concern of childlessness, and partly to remove the shame and anxiety of apparent unproductivity. To be productive, in terms of having children, is one of the essential attributes of being a mature being.

## **Marriage and the Depiction of Women through Proverbs**

There are a lot of proverbs which refer to marriage and women's behaviour towards their in-laws in Zulu culture. The argument regarding marriage seems to lean towards the fact that women need to get married not only to fulfil the requirement of procreation, but also to make sure that the family name is carried down through giving birth to a son.

When a woman gets married, she marries the whole clan, and she becomes part of the family she is marrying into. From *ukukhonga* (lobola negotiations) to *umgcagco* (the wedding), things are done for the whole family,

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<sup>4</sup> It must be noted that in a Zulu cultural context, only polygyny is accepted as a form of plural marriage; polyandry (a women taking more than one husband) is unheard of.

and not solely for the couple. Hence, you would hear the groom saying ‘*ngivusa umuzi kababa*’ (I am rebuilding my father’s household), or ‘*ngifuna umuntu ozophekela umama*’ (I want someone who will cook for my mother). The slaughtering of a goat to report the arrival of the bride is a sign that she is part of the family from then onwards. Mbiti (1969:144) says:

Marriage then, is a religious responsibility for everyone. It forms the focal point where departed, present and coming members of society meet. It is the point of hope and expectation for the unmarried and their relatives, once it has been reached and procreation takes place.

I concur with Mbiti’s reasoning here, because in most African societies people who fail to secure a partner to marry them are given nicknames, as in the name *Zendazamshiya* (everybody is getting married and you are left behind), *Mjendevu* (an old maid) or *Mpohlo* (an unmarried man). In most African societies it is a shame for women of marriageable age to be in a relationship, or not to get married. It is said, for example, that **ingungu yale ntombi kayikhali** – *intombi eneshwa lokuba yisaliwa*, which means the woman is unfortunate in the love department. The proverb, **inja yabuyela ebuhlanzweni bayo** (*uphindele entweni abese eyilahlile njengentombi eyala isoka kodwa ibuye iphindele kulo*), refers to a woman who dumps a man and goes back to him, having failed to attract other suitors. Another proverb, **yayithi iyokwendela eNkosini** (*wakweya okwakumlingene*) is used when a woman thinks she is marrying a rich man, and discovers he is a pauper. On the other hand, the proverb, **akukho okungebele lantombi** (*umuntu wesifazane noma emubi uba nabo abamkhulumisayo*), means that even the ugliest of women have courters. The above proverb gives hope to women who are not lucky in the love department that even if they are ugly, they will get married as long as they have the qualities of a good wife.

Most proverbs about women deal with stereotypical issues directed at women, which include: respect, submission, nurturing children and getting married. In African societies marriage is a religious occurrence where the clan and the community meet. Every member has a role to play and it becomes their focus of existence. Mbiti (1969:130) mentions that marriage,

is the point where all the members of a given community meet: the departed, the living and those yet to be born. All the dimensions of

time meet here, and the whole drama of history is repeated, renewed and revitalised. Marriage is a drama in which everyone becomes an actor or actress and not just a spectator. Therefore, marriage is a duty, a requirement from the corporate society, and a rhythm of life in which everyone must participate. Otherwise, he who does not participate in it is a curse to the community, he is a rebel and a law-breaker, he is not only abnormal but also 'underhuman'.

Proverbs are used in everyday life, and even in African fiction. 'Like stories and legends, proverbs have been a source of literary inspiration for modern African writers' (Wautheir, in Jaradat 2007:84). These proverbs 'depict gender bias and discrimination prevalent in African societies' (Dickson & Mbosowo 2014:634). For instance, women are taught to be respectful to everyone they meet because they might end up marrying into that particular family. The following proverbs are good examples:

**Ihlonipha nala ingeyukwendela khona** – (Women must always be respectful to strangers because they do not know the family they are going to end up marrying into).

**Igeja lithengwa ngokubonwa** – (The groom-to-be must get to know his bride before marriage).

The emphasis is on women being respectful to everybody, but the same principle does not apply to men because they do not leave their families when they get married. It is the man's privilege to get to know the person he is about to marry, but the woman does not enjoy the same. Women have to make sure that they are able to integrate into their husband's family.

Some proverbs reflect the way marriages treat women, which is usually unfairly. Women need to be strong and endure the hardships.

**Indolwane yaxosha umakoti egoyile** (A new bride left because of ill-treatment). Women are expected to endure any difficulty they encounter in their married lives. It is impossible to predict how a woman will be treated by her husband and her in-laws. She therefore needs to prepare herself to persevere and make her marriage work. The way in which women behave drastically changes after getting married.

**Umendo awuthunyelwa gundane** (No woman knows how she will be treated by her in-laws after marriage). This is evident in the following examples:

**Umlobokazi uhamba esagcobile** (A married woman must leave before she outstays her welcome).

**Zala abantu ziye ebantwini; akuntombi yagana inyambazane** (A woman dumps a man for another). This proverb demonstrates that a woman must always have a man or be in a relationship because each relationship may lead to marriage.

**Intombi kayedlulwa** (A man must propose to every girl he meets). This proverb gives men permission to court many women and marry them if they so wish.

**Inhlwanyelo yethkelwa kubangane** (When arranging a marriage for his/her children the parent must consider friends' children as potential spouses).

**Umswani wembabala awungeniswa ekhaya** (A man should never marry a woman from the wrong family). Women must come from a good family in order to be married. If she comes from a family of sorcerers she cannot be married by anyone.

## **Women and Parenting**

Parenting is regarded solely as a woman's job as women are always considered better parents than men. Their nurturing nature enables them to be better caregivers to their children. Below are a number of proverbs that illustrate attitudes towards women and parenting:

**Intandane enhle umakhothwa ngunina** – *Kungcono umntwana oyintandane asale nonina kunokuba asale noyise. Unina unothando olujulile kunolukayise futhi ukwazi kangcono ukubheka abantwana* (An orphaned child is better off left with the mother). A mother's love cannot be compared to anything on earth. Children left with their mothers owing to a husband dying or relationships ending are better off, as a mother will do everything in her power to provide for her children.

**Unina ngunina maZulu** (Nobody compares to a mother).

**Ingane igaba ngonina** (A child can behave anyhow when it has the mother's protection).

**Inkonyane yenye iyayiqhubusha, eyayo iyayikhotha** (The mother treats her children better than anyone else's).

**Imbuzi ilele phezu kwezinyane** (The parent is protecting his/her child).

The above proverbs praise the way in which women love and care for their children. This is the reason why most women in traditional societies end up being stuck at home taking care of their children. There are those who want to further their education and build careers, but are discouraged by their family members. These proverbs are sometimes used against women to persuade them to submit.

The paper has shown that indeed proverbs, 'reveal feelings, emotions and attitudes of the speaker' (Guma 1967:65). The didactic nature of the proverbs is what causes them to be taken as uncontested truths, and they have contributed a great deal in the socialisation of both male and female. Proverbs have succinctly defined gender roles in Zulu society of men as providers (e.g. **Umkhwenyana yisigodo sokuqhuzula** – *umkhwenyana yilapho bezikhalela khona abakubo kankosikazi lapho behluphekile*). This proverb means that the groom provides for her inlaws during the times of difficulty (e.g. hunger or famine). This proverb takes into cognisance the fact that before *ilobolo* was introduced and set at eleven cows by Shepstone, the groom only paid what he could afford, and then the marriage process would follow. This was done in order to embrace the groom and to establish and maintain the good mutual relationship between the two families. Hence, in times of draught and hardship the bride's family could appeal to *umkhwenyana* (*the husband*) for help at any time. In contrast to viewing men as providers, women are portrayed as nurturers. In Zulu culture they are always under the control of the men in their families, such as their fathers, uncles, brothers and later their husbands. The role of men renders women unable to take decisions on their own. In traditional tribal societies a woman is still not allowed to buy land unless they are married or have grown sons. The rationale behind these proverbs is that women need men to survive and gain recognition in society (e.g. **Ikhanda elixegaxegayo lofulela abafazi**: A man's law must be adhered to at this house). This example reinforces the patriarchal beliefs regarding women, such as seeing them as subordinates to their male counterparts. Some proverbs appear to be about

men, but they are, in fact, reflecting women's inability to stand up for themselves, thus depicting women as people who rely on men for provision and advice in life. For instance, the proverb, **okwehlula amadoda kuyabikwa**, means that men are capable of fixing anything and everything in life.

Assertive women are always warned that their assertiveness (which is sometimes perceived as stubbornness and disrespect) will be their downfall. They are always warned that their behaviour will have to be toned down, or else marriage will do that for them (e.g. **Uyofika kwamkhathali isidwaba siyokuhaga**: When you get married things change, sometimes for the worse). The proverbs do not refer to a state of affairs that used to exist in the past, as Dickson and Mbosowo (2014) mention that gender inequality remains prevalent in villages and communities.

## **Conclusion**

From this discussion it is clear that in Zulu proverbs, and traditional societies, women are subordinated through male domination, exploitation through chores and generally unequal treatment. Zulu proverbs reflect the importance of getting married for women of marriageable age. Men are put on a pedestal, and are treated as providers rather than equal partners in a marriage. Polygyny and the importance of bearing a male child have always been the two main contributors in suppressing women in traditional African societies. These imbalances clearly define the gendered roles women are expected to fulfil in these societies.

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# Depiction of African Indigenous Education in Akiki Nyabongo's *Africa Answers Back* (1936)

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## Abstract

This paper examines the depiction of African indigenous formal and informal education and instruction in Akiki K. Nyabongo's novel, *Africa Answers Back* (1936), and how his African characters try to protect what they have learnt from their elders (norms, customs and beliefs) at a time when they are threatened by the activities of European missionaries.. I examine how Nyabongo portrays the threats, mostly through confrontations between his main character, Mujungu (the Chief's son and heir apparent) and Reverend Jeremiah Randolph Hubert (the missionary who propagates Western notions with the aim of destroying African indigenous ones). The major finding of the paper is that while Nyabongo sees Western education as a threat to the survival of African indigenous education, as well as the norms, customs and beliefs it passes from one generation to another, at the same time, he presents this hallmark of Western culture as having something positive that African people need to acquire in order to improve their living standards, that is to say, Western medicine.

**Keywords:** Mission, Hubert, Mujungu, education

## Introduction

*Africa Answers Back* is a novel by Akiki K. Nyabongo, who was born in 1904 to Omukama (King) Kasagama, King of Toro Kingdom, which had come under Britain's influence in 1891 when Captain Fredrick Lugard of the

Imperial British East Africa Company signed a treaty with the monarch, in which he promised to ‘protect’ him against Kabarega, the powerful king of the Bunyoro-Kitara kingdom, from whose forces he had fled (Kabwegyere 1995: 23-27). Nyabongo studied at Harvard University for an MA and Oxford University for a PhD in Philosophy, and worked at Tuskegee University and North Carolina A&T University in the 1940s and 1950s, returning to Uganda after the country became independent in 1962 (Gikandi & Mwangi 2007: 126-127). It can be seen from this biographical sketch that this pioneering Ugandan novelist lived during a dramatic period, when pre-colonial Ugandan kingdoms lost their sovereignty and became ‘protected’ dominions of imperial Britain, which ruled Uganda from 1894 to 8<sup>th</sup> October 1962<sup>1</sup>. This rule, which was marketed in colonial parlance as a civilizing mission, used education as one of its major weapons to produce particular subjects who would serve the interests of the British Empire (see Fabian 1983: 70-74; Comaroff & Comaroff 1986: 13). These subjects would look at Britain’s presence in the country as an act of philanthropy, or, to use Empire poet Rudyard Kipling’s oft-quoted phrase, as a ‘white man’s burden’ (1977: 128).

The novel contains four parts. Part I is an account of Europe’s incursion into Buganda, starting with the arrival of Henry Morton Stanley at Kabaka Mutesa’s court in 1875, and of the missionaries, specifically the Reverend Alexander Mackay of the Church Missionary Society in 1877 and Father Lourdel Mourpel of the White Fathers in 1879. In this section, we see how the Buganda Kingdom is soon plunged into chaos as different religious groups strive to control the Kabaka’s court, leading to the 1892 religious wars between Christians and Muslims, and later, between Anglicans and Catholics, in which a powerful chief, Ati, fights on the side of the Anglicans. Part II depicts Ati’s return from the war and the birth of his son, Abala, whom he also names Stanley (after Henry Morton Stanley) and Mujungu (after the missionaries who, to him, ‘roam’ throughout the land).

Part III centres on missionary education in Buganda, and details how ten-year old Mujungu’s receives education at the Reverend Randolph Jeremiah Hubert’s school. Whilst there, the young Mujungu constantly challenges the missionary about what he believes to be incorrect subject matter (e.g. the missionary’s view that Africans are savages) and authoritarian pedagogy (e.g.

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<sup>1</sup> Uganda became independent on 9<sup>th</sup> October 1962.

the missionary's unwillingness to listen to his students' views).<sup>2</sup> Hubert eventually dismisses him from the missionary school, and Ati takes him to a private school where he completes his secondary education. The last part of the novel depicts a chiefdom in crisis: there is a smallpox epidemic that Ati does not survive. With the help of European medical personnel, Mujungu manages to contain the epidemic, and after being installed as his father's successor, he tries to introduce far-ranging reforms in the kingdom, which his wife and other subjects resent.

The author portrays an African society that is rich in indigenous knowledge, which is communicated through a 'curriculum' that includes oral literary performances (telling folktales and actively participating in riddling sessions, for instance), playing traditional games, and socializing with relatives, among others. In the section that follows, I explain how Nyabongo portrays this education, particularly its usefulness and the mode of its transmission from one generation to another.

### **African Knowledge Education as Portrayed in the Novel**

African indigenous education refers to the 'process through which the mature members of the society sought to prepare their children and adolescents for the responsibilities and opportunities which existed in their environment or society' (Ocitti 1973: 90). Aliu Babatunde Fafunwa (cited in Adeyemi & Adeyinka 2003: 429) identifies the following as the cardinal goals of African indigenous education: developing the child's latent physical skills; developing character; inculcating respect for elders and those in position of authority; developing intellectual skills; acquiring specific vocational training and developing a healthy attitude towards honest labour; developing a sense of belonging and participating actively in family and community affairs; and understanding, appreciating and promoting the cultural heritage of the community at large.

In *Africa Answers Back*, traditional indigenous education is portrayed as happening at any time and in any place, not necessarily in a home since, as Mark Bolak Funteh (2015: 139) observes, the process of traditional education in Africa 'was intimately integrated with the social, cultural, artistic, religious

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<sup>2</sup> Nyabongo portrays Mujungu as a preconscious child, which is why he is able to engage Hubert in arguments although he is young.

and recreational life of the people', which is to say that 'the learning of skills, societal values and norms were hardly separated from other spheres of life'. This is why, in the reading I offer below, I find instances of African Indigenous education in diverse situations, such as Mujungu's visits to his uncle and to the King of Buganda, the killing of a lion during the walk to his uncle's home, the rebuke he receives from one of the men accompanying him from school, and another rebuke from his mother later in the novel. In other words, I see instruction and learning as taking place whenever Mujungu is in communion with other people: his parents, his relatives, his King, his friends, and his people.

The visits that Mujungu makes to his relatives during the school holidays are portrayed as a form of training in keeping him one with the ethos of his people, despite his Mission education. The visits are portrayed as a big inconvenience to him and his father: to him, because he hardly gets time to rest, as he is required by one relative or another to visit him/her; to his father, because Ati hardly gets time to talk with his son. However, the visits are portrayed as very important for at least two reasons, two being important; the first being that they allay his people's fears that the Mission education may be corrupting him, and the second that he is able to demonstrate to the relatives he visits that despite the Mission education, he has remained one with them as far as language use and respect for them, are concerned. In all the visits, Mujungu treats everyone graciously and receives compliments and the acknowledgement that Mission education has not changed his regard for his people and their values, norms, customs and beliefs. Mujungu does not commit a crime against his culture, such as imprisoning a sacred python (the way Oduche, son to the priest of Ulu, Ezeulu, does in Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God* [1964: 42]), or against his race, and be ashamed of his black skin, as does Okot p'Bitek's University-educated Ocol, who cries out in pain, 'Mother, mother, / Why, / Why was I born / Black?' (1984: 126). Instead, he remains deeply steeped into the traditions of his people, as several illustrations show.

Two of the visits Mujungu makes during a holiday are to his uncle and to the King of Buganda, the former becoming an occasion for learning about animal life. As he and his men walk through the countryside, one of them tells him, 'Wait! There is an animal in front of us' (1936: 178). When Mujungu asks him how he knows this, the man gives him this lesson: 'Did you hear that noise? Whenever you are in the woods and hear that noise, always be careful. You'll know then that there is something nearby' (Nyabongo 1936: 178). Indeed, after about twenty yards, they see three lions charging towards them.

When Mujungu suggests that they should climb a tree, the men explain to him that if they do this, they will certainly be devoured by the animals for they (the lions) will 'pee-pee' on the men till they fall down, as their pee itches so much that one cannot continue holding onto a branch. They kill one of the lions, which allows Mujungu to see how men protect themselves from dangerous wild animals, and is a practical lesson in human survival. A python attempts to attack them during the same journey, which becomes an occasion for Mujungu to learn that when a python swallows an animal or a human being, it remains in one spot for many days as it digests its prey.

The novel also shows that Mujungu is educated in the area of social etiquette. When he meets his uncle after the arduous journey, he goes into 'a complicated procedure in greeting him . . . because he had not seen his uncle for a long time' (Nyabongo 1936: 185). The narrator renders this procedure thus:

First they embraced each other, each resting his chin on the other's shoulder, and shifting shoulders with each word.

*Uncle:* 'Ndaba kuki, who is it I see?'

*Mujungu:* 'Kunzesebo, it is I you see, Sir.'

*Uncle:* 'Otyanosebo, how dost thou do, sir?'

*Mujungu,* in deprecation: 'Aa. No, No.'

*Uncle:* 'Otyano, how dost thou do, son?'

*Mujungu:* 'Ye sebo, yes, sir. Osibyeotyano, how dost thou do, sir?'

*Uncle:* 'Bulungi, well.'

*Mujungu:* 'Agafaeno, what is news?'

*Uncle:* 'Nungi, good news.'

*Mujungu:* 'Aa.'

*Uncle:* 'Aa.'

*Mujungu:* 'Um!'

*Uncle:* 'Um!'

And so they went on, grunting at each other loudly, then in a lower tone, until at length they were scarcely audible, although their lips kept working (Nyabongo 1936: 185-186).

This greeting, in my view, serves at least three purposes. First, it is a sign of affection and respect that the uncle accords Mujungu, as he greets him in the formal way he would have used to greet his brother, Chief Ati. Second,

it helps the Uncle to find out if Mujungu remembers how to greet his people in a formal way, despite the Mission education he is receiving. Most importantly, the greeting is a form of training in social etiquette offered by his uncle. His wonderful performance at the greeting (just as at telling folktales, answering riddles and remembering proverbs as I explain later) is further proof that he is not alienated: he is still one with the people. He is not like Okot p'Bitek's University-educated and brainwashed Ocol, whose wife, Lawino, ridicules thus:

And you cannot sing one song  
You cannot sing a solo  
In the arena.  
You cannot beat a rhythm on the half-gourd  
Or shake the rattle-gourd  
To the rhythm of the *orak* dance!  
And there is not a single *bwola* song  
That you can dance,  
You do not play the drum  
Or do the mock-fight;  
At the funeral dance  
Or at the war dance  
You cannot wield the shield! (p'Bitek 1984: 50).

Likewise, his active participation in storytelling evenings, both as a listener and storyteller, shows that all is still well with Mujungu. He continues to hold his oral literary tradition with high regard, even after being introduced to the works of William Shakespeare, for instance *The Merchant of Venice* and *Romeo and Juliet* (Nyabongo 1936: 209). The message in the folktales he hears or tells is one befitting an heir-apparent to the chieftainship. In one of the folktales entitled 'How Kyikaraba Killed a Cannibal', two children, who are abandoned by their parents on account of their disabilities (the girl has a bump on her belly-button while the boy has a rash on his face), end up becoming royalty upon killing a witch who devoured newly born males. The folktale proposes that people should be treated equally, irrespective of their physical abilities, the lesson being that the abandoned boy and girl distinguish themselves even when they are physically challenged. In another folktale, parrots pay homage to a certain King because he makes their wish of having

their tails turn red come to pass. Not only does this show Kings to be benevolent people who are concerned about their subjects' wishes (contrary to the missionaries' and colonialists' views that they were evil people), it also extols the important virtue of loyalty to the monarchy.

In both cases, the tales can be considered a medium through which important lessons on Kingship are passed from one generation to another. They also provide a practice in language use through which Mujungu is able to hone his skill of public speaking, a skill that later becomes important when he mobilizes his people to fight the smallpox epidemic that kills his father and many subjects. Had he been alienated from the language of his people, he would not have been able to communicate, through drum language, to the medical doctors from Kilimi (Tanganyika), Mombasa (Kenya) and Zanzibar and request that they come to Uganda and fight the epidemic. Likewise, he would not have been able to convince his people to accept being treated by strangers using European medicine. Owing to his knowledge of how to talk to people in a persuasive way, he explains to his people that it is important to listen to the western doctors' advice, such as banning visits among people during the epidemic. 'I'm not asking you to do a thing which I'm not doing myself,' he informs them: 'Everything we do, we will do together' (Nyabongo 1936: 248). All his listeners reply to him, 'Yes, yes, yes, we will support you . . . Yes, yes, yes, yes. We are all willing to be scratched. Anything you do, we will do' (Nyabongo 1936: 249). In addition, the novel demonstrates how language is central to the survival of a community in the sense that it is 'the producer of a community, for it is language after all which enables humans to negotiate effectively their way into and out of nature and indeed that which makes possible their multifaceted evolution' (Ngugi 2000: 2). 'Without a language,' George J. Sefa (2014: 62) observes, 'a people are stripped of an identity, a culture and sense of self, collective and history'.

Apart from using the indigenous education he has received to deal with people politely, according to established social etiquette, there are other uses to which Mujungu puts what he has learned from his people. One of these is to defend African values, norms and traditions from the onslaught directed against them by European colonialists, who are represented in the novel by the missionary, the Reverend Jeremiah Randolph Hubert. It is to this use of indigenous education – defending African values, norms and traditions – that I now turn.

## The Portrayal of Threats to African Indigenous Education

There are at least two threats to the practice and survival of African indigenous education that Nyabongo identifies in his novel, these being the activities of the missionaries (represented by the Reverend Hubert, who runs a boarding school) and the people's conservatism. The first threat arises from Chief Ati's decision to take his son and heir-apparent to a Mission school with the hope that he will learn knowledge and skills which will be helpful to the chiefdom. His decision is similar to that of Chege, an old man in Ngũgĩ wa Thiongo's second novel, *The River Between*, who takes his son, Waiyaki, to a Mission School and urges him to '[l]earn all the wisdom and all the secrets of the white man. But do not follow his vices. Be true to your people and the ancient rites' (1965: 24).

Generally, Nyabongo portrays Mujungu's people as being suspicious that the Mission education he is receiving is doing him more harm than good. For instance, when one of the men sent to accompany him from school to his father's home slips off a log he is walking on and falls into a river, Mujungu laughs instead of sympathizing with him. The man attributes this attitude to the education he is receiving at the Mission school for after asking him, 'Why do you laugh at me?' and he adds: 'You never did that before. You used to have pity for everyone who suffered misfortune. What kind of learning did you receive in school? I'm sure we never taught you that – to laugh at anybody who gets in trouble over an accident' (Nyabongo 1936: 145).

Another incident that shows the people's mistrust of Western education occurs later in the novel, when Mujungu insists on having sweet wine before a meal, and his mother rebukes him. 'I don't want you to talk back,' she tells him, 'I know what is best for you. You didn't go to school just to argue with your mother. You went to school to learn something, not just to argue' (1936: 147). In other words, to the mother, Mujungu's insistence has something to do with some habits he may have picked up from school, such as arguing with, and talking back to elders. When we remember that unquestioning obedience to elders was a pillar of indigenous education (Ocitti 1973: 90, Adeyemi & Adeyinka 2003: 434), we can surmise the gravity of the charge that Mujungu's mother is making against the Mission education's corrupting influence.

Indeed, the views expressed by Hubert on his purpose as a missionary give the reader cause to worry about the kind of person Mujungu will become

when he completes his Western education. For instance, when Mujungu hurts a playmate during a kicking game, Hubert bans African games on the pretext that they are dangerous. When a boy argues that European games are as dangerous, as his brother broke his arm while playing football, Hubert forecloses the debate in his characteristic way: 'I don't want to discuss the matter with you children,' he rules, 'I am giving my order and if you don't obey, you'll be put out of school' (Nyabongo 1936: 136). He then tells the children what his school is meant to do: 'You, all of you are being trained away from your African habits, and towards Western ideals' (1936: 136). This is an important statement in the novel, for it makes the mission of the school clear: training Africans to turn away from their 'habits', by which Hubert means their traditions and cultures, so that they may wholly embrace western values and lifestyles. It is a statement that shows the link between Western education and colonialism, for as Ado K. Tiberondwa (1998: vi) argues, 'the very act of providing Western education to the Africans and the replacement of certain African cultural institutions by foreign ones is, in itself, an act of cultural imperialism'.

Furthermore, Hubert's lessons on Christianity are tied to denigrating specific aspects of African culture, for instance he elaborates on the healing miracles in the New Testament to 'prove that Jesus was superior to the medicine-men' (Nyabongo 1936: 225). The idea is to discredit African medicine, so that the students and their relatives abandon it and replace it with western treatment. This educational aim brings to mind Thomas Babington Macaulay's infamous 'Minute on Indian Education', which colonial educators of Hubert's kind were most likely to have read, with India, as Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o observes, being 'the major English imperial centre from where many social experiments were exported to other British possessions' (2012: 37).<sup>3</sup> In this Minute, Macaulay, who was a member of the Supreme Court of India from 1834 to 1838, calls upon colonial educators to use the English language as the medium of instruction in Indian schools, as he contended that no Indian

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<sup>3</sup>Thomas R. Metcalf elaborates this point thus: 'The practice of empire was, as well, shaped by structures of governance devised in British India. From Macaulay's law codes to the paired creation of the Collector in the district and the Resident at the princely court, from the classifying of ethnic groups to the working of 'divide and rule', the India of the Raj was the touchstone around which colonial administrative systems were put together' (2007: 2).

language is civilized enough to play this role. Macaulay's ethnocentrism prefigures Hubert's disdain for African games on the grounds that they are 'savage'. When the boys protest and try to teach him an African game to show him how good it is, he declares, 'I don't care if the game's as good as European games. You are not going to be permitted to play those savage games' (141). Hubert's unwillingness to learn an African game, and his confession that he does not care if it is as good as a European game, betrays what V. Y. Mudimbe (1988: 15) calls the West's 'epistemological ethnocentrism', 'the belief that scientifically there is nothing to be learned from 'them' unless it is already 'ours' or comes from 'us'.

By conceiving his role as being to train Africans away from their traditions and towards the western lifestyle, Hubert is following the pedagogy Macaulay championed, captured in the ominous words:

We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect. To that class we may leave it to refine the vernacular dialects of the country, to enrich those dialects with terms of science borrowed from the Western nomenclature, and to render them by degrees fit vehicles for conveying knowledge to the great mass of the population (2006: 375).

Mujungu resists Hubert's attempts at destroying African norms, customs and beliefs, and continues to challenge him, until he is expelled from the Mission school. I suggest that this challenging of Hubert's ethnocentrism at every opportunity points to the efficacy of African indigenous education as a force to reckon with, in the sense that its 'graduates' can see through the intentions of western education and work towards protecting their traditions and lifestyles against western onslaught. They are able to compare what they are taught by European teachers with what they have received from their parents and communities and to raise critical questions, as demonstrated above. This way, the novel portrays African indigenous education as serving as an antidote to Western/European education by producing 'graduates' who are able to appreciate the beauty of what they have received, and who are ready to defend this beauty against anybody who attempts to ridicule and supplant it.

It should be emphasized that what Mujungu is resisting is not western

education per se, but the Reverend Hubert's ethnocentrism and his 'hermeneutic monopoly', as Tobias Döring calls it (1996:145). By resisting indoctrination, the students are asking for a better pedagogy, one that respects their traditions and initiatives. Mujungu makes this clear later in the novel when he addresses Hubert thus:

Sir, we appreciate what you have done for us. But your attitude has been fixed. If you will change your mind – not suddenly but gradually – with a view of soothing us ... then all of us will see that you are different from what we have thought. If you view us in this new light, surely you will change your notion of us and we will think of you in new light (Nyabongo 1936: 263).

The above quotation highlights Nyabongo's project in the novel, that of advocating dialogue between European and African worldviews, with the aim of getting the best from both. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o calls this 'building bridges' between cultures, so that each can 'illuminate the other' (2006: 389) for '[i]t is only when we see real connections that we can meaningfully talk about differences, similarities, and identities' (2006: 391). While Mujungu values European institutions, such as schools and hospitals, the missionary sees nothing worth valuing among the Africans.

There is another challenge to African indigenous education that Nyabongo alerts us too, a challenge related to the above, that of the conservatism of African people. The novel shows that Mujungu's going to a Mission school has some advantages, the most pronounced being his appreciation of Western medicine as being complimentary to African medicine. While African bone-setting offers better healing for fractures than Western medicine, Mujungu acknowledges that in the area of fighting smallpox, Western medicine is more effective. When a smallpox epidemic breaks out and kills many people, including his father, Mujungu therefore calls upon European doctors to come to his aid, which they do, and eradicate the disease. Rather than being thankful to Mujungu for enlisting the doctors' invaluable assistance, his people consider him to be a radical who does not deserve the Chieftaincy he inherited from his father. Predictably, the African doctor is not happy that his European counterparts are considered more effective than him, and claims that the 'new doctors are making all the people sick – and that their medicines are not as good as his' (Nyabongo 1936: 276-277).

That Mujungu's people refuse to recognise the positive aspects of Western medicine that helped to eradicate smallpox shows that they are not willing to accept the hybridity that Western education and medicine have occasioned. That is if we agree with Homi K. Bhabha's view that the notion of hybridity is 'about the fact that in any particular political struggle [or cultural struggle, in our case], new sites are always being opened up, and if you keep referring those new sites to old principles, then you are not actually able to participate in them fully and productively and creatively' (1990: 216). In other words, their conservatism robs Mujungu's people of the opportunity and possibility of enriching African medicine by learning from its Western counterpart. In the novel, Nyabongo suggests that while appropriate and relevant indigenous African practices need to be preserved, those from other traditions, such as Western medicine, need to be acknowledged. In other words, it can be beneficial to keep open the dialogue between cultures: in this instance, African indigenous and its Western counterpart.

## Conclusion

While many scholars have studied the portrayal of Western education in African Literature, the emphasis has usually been on canonical writers, such as Cheikh Hamidou Kane, Chinua Achebe, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, Wole Soyinka, and Mongo Beti, to mention a few (see, Mathuray 2003; George 2005; and Paustian 2014). These studies give the impression that African writers' engagement with Western education, particularly the Mission type, started with these canonical authors. Consequently, the contribution made by an earlier generation of writers, such as Akiki Nyabongo, is ignored, yet his novel, *Africa Answers Back*, preceded the canonical works by decades, being published in 1935, twenty three years before *Things Fall Apart* (1958), and thirty years before *The River Between* (1965). Not only is this unfair to Nyabongo, whose efforts have largely gone unrecognized, but it robs readers of the opportunity to know that other authors had preceded Achebe and other eminent African writers on the issue of Mission education, although not with the same insightfulness, depth of analysis and finesse of style that the later writers were to bring to their work. By examining how Nyabongo portrays African indigenous education, I have argued that while he sees Western education as a threat to its survival, as well as the norms, customs and beliefs that it passes from one generation to another, he also understands the need for

discernment when encountering other cultures, and engaging with those components that stand for the greater good, and possibly enable the survival of a people, albeit with change. Given the context within which it was written in 1936, with growing resentment to colonial authority in Africa and elsewhere, the author shows great courage and maturity in presenting a story about indigenous African culture, highlighting the points of conflict and opportunities for engagement without judgement.

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# Opportunities of Incorporating African Indigenous Knowledge Systems (AIKS) in the Physics Curriculum

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## **Abstract**

The need for economic and physical survival has been identified as a primary motivating force for technological advancement (Clark 1997). This study explores what can be learnt and gleaned from indigenous technologies that add to the theoretical conception of African Indigenous Knowledge in general and indigenous Physics in particular. The descriptive research design was used to illustrate how this can be done. Documentary, experiential and observation methods were used to gather data. The study reveals that African Physics based knowledge can be incorporated into conventional physics in order to enhance African students' appreciation of physics. Physics has always been generated in order to solve societal and natural challenges like weather changes, shelter, communication, food and diseases. The study also argues that African societies had and still have Physics concepts which resemble formal school Physics. Therefore, it makes sense to use the existing African physics to develop the conventional concepts. The study suggests that Physics learners can apply their prior African related physics knowledge in order to reduce the seemingly mystifying nature of conceptualisation of physics concepts as experienced by some learners. The study encourages curriculum developers to incorporate African Physics knowledge into the Physics curriculum. The study concludes that if African physics is taken seriously, it can help in the regeneration and enhancement of knowledge.

**Keywords:** Indigenous Physics Education, African Indigenous Knowledge Systems

## **Introduction**

Contributions made by Africa and her people to history and civilisation are conspicuously missing from text books for formal education and remain unknown to many (Abiodun 1998; Ngara 2007; Keane 2013). Research has shown that it is against this background that the various aspects of indigenous physics knowledge systems (IPKS) should be resuscitated. Therefore, the paper analyses some aspects of IPKS in a Zimbabwean context. The study intends to focus attention on the existence of physics aspects in Zimbabwean culture, with specific reference to southern Manicaland Province. . The study also argues that IPKS, as defined by Mapara (2009), are still in existence. When learners acquire new knowledge at school, they already have pre-conceptions based on their daily experiences and what they learn from those around them (Gwekwerere in Shizha & Emeagwali 2016). Such experiences represent learner prior knowledge. Within a constructivist approach to learning physics, prior knowledge had been found to underpin learning in a significant way – either as a hindering or helping factor. The major concern is to identify the reason why learners fail to see the connection between school physics and their real life experiences.

One key issue that impacts on effective learning of science in Africa has been the controversial status of prior knowledge that learners bring into the classroom. Further, this study's thrust is to heighten awareness, stimulate new thoughts and generate discussion on the wealth of IPKS. According to Mapara (in Sithole2016), there have been many ongoing discussions on IKS. It is the intention of this paper to contribute to critical discourse about identifying IPKS and incorporating it in the physics curriculum.

Knowledge of 'Physics' and its methods of investigation cannot be divorced from a people's history, cultural context and worldview (Gwekwerere in Shizha & Emeagwali 2016). Society acquired physics concepts through its cultural values and norms. As Mapara (2009) notes, worldviews shape consciousness and form the theoretical framework within which knowledge is sought, critiqued and understood. . It is indeed most gratifying to see that some African scholars believe that African indigenous knowledge systems have much to contribute to existing Western knowledge and methodologies, and therefore have taken on the important yet daunting task of making knowledge relevant to African realities. . The theories include those related to knowledge acquisition, readiness of the mind to assimilate the information as well as the

methodologies used to transfer information from generation to generation.

## **The Contextual Meaning of Terms**

Physics and Physics education do not mean exactly the same thing. Physics involves the study of matter and energy in its different forms, and the transformation of matter and energy (WordPress 2011; Wikipedia Feb. 2016). Some examples of physics concepts include heat, electricity, flotation, gravity, magnetism, kinetic theory, robotics and elasticity. Such examples indicate natural dimension of nature in which human beings exist as well as co-exist. Physics constitutes a curriculum given that ‘curriculum’ is a concept that includes knowledge and content (Gumbo 2016).

Unlike Physics, Physics education refers both to the methods currently used to teach physics and to an area of pedagogical research that seeks to improve the methods (Wikipedia Feb. 2016;). For instance, Wikipedia indicates that when physics is initially taught primarily by the lecture method to confirm concepts, the lectures should be accompanied with demonstration, hand-on experiments, and questions for students to ponder what will happen in an experiment and why. This helps students to learn by trial and error they learn to change their preconceptions about phenomena in physics and discover the underlying concepts. Furthermore Wikipedia indicates recitation and lecture-cum-demonstration, as other methods of teaching physics. The second term, ‘indigenous’, refers to any knowledge naturally existing in a place. For this discourse indigenous is a large body of knowledge and skills developed outside the formal education system in pre-colonial societies.

IKS are located within a certain cultural context (Muchenje, Gora & Makuvaza 2016). Warren (1991) and Flavier (1995) define Indigenous Knowledge (IK) as the local knowledge – knowledge that is unique to a given culture or society. IK empowers members of society with abilities and capabilities to deploy and employ practical techniques and skills to manage their natural environment and to find ways to solve human problems (Emeagwali & Shizha 2016). For that reason IK is mostly concerned with the utility, accessibility and practicability of knowledge. IK contrasts with the international knowledge system generated by universities, research institutions and private firms. Warren (1991) adds that IK is the basis for local-level decision making in agriculture, health care, food preparation, education, natural-resource management, and a host of other activities in rural communities.

The term ‘Indigenous Physics’ denotes the study of knowledge of matter, energy, forces, skills and philosophies developed by societies during interaction with their natural surroundings (Sithole 2016). Indigenous Physics constituted the local knowledge which was critical in decision-making and fundamental aspects of day-to-day life. The community needed Indigenous Physics so as to develop technology viewed as a communal necessity and enterprise (Shizha in Shizha & Emeagwali 2016).

### **Indigenous Physics Knowledge as a Tool for Societal Survival**

Research has shown that African indigenous knowledge systems are based on the natural environment and human sustainable development (Emeagwali & Shizha 2016). In other words, the society had to succumb to the dictates of the environment in order to survive. Horsthemke (2008) argues that indigenous science is holistic as it draws on all the senses, including the spiritual and psychic. Therefore a holistic understanding of indigenous knowledge systems should uphold an integrated perspective that includes both the spiritual and material aspect of a society as well as the complex relationship between them (Hewson and Ogunniyi 2011). Consequently, people remain embedded in the natural world. In addition, Hewson and Ogunniyi indicate that indigenous knowledge is the local knowledge (knowledge is unique to a given culture or society). From this analysis, indigenous knowledge is the information foundation for the public which enables easy exchange of ideas and choice making. Indigenous knowledge systems are dynamic and are continually influenced by internal creativity and experimentation as well as by contact with external systems. There has been improvement in the various forms of technology because people have the inherent behaviour of making comparisons when they interact with others.

Ellen and Harris (1996) argue that indigenous knowledge is also the social ‘capital’ of the poor, their main asset to invest in the struggle for survival, to produce food, to provide for shelter or to achieve control of their own life. Furthermore, Ellen and Harris indicate that indigenous knowledge is part of the lives of the rural poor; their livelihood depends almost entirely on specific skills and knowledge essential for their survival. Indigenous knowledge is relevant to a particular society; it forms part of global knowledge, and should be recognized, valued and appreciated.

African Indigenous knowledge Systems (AIKS), are critical components in the quest for the provision of quality education for all. AIKS are rooted in traditional systems of beliefs, which indigenous people use to understand and interpret their biophysical environment (Abiodun 1998). Abiodun further observes that AIKS embodies a wealth of wisdom and experience of nature gained over millennia from direct observations, and transmitted (most often orally) over generations.

Economic and physical survival have been identified as significant motivations for technological advancement (Clark 1997). Indigenous Physics knowledge was generated in order to solve societal and natural challenges. Therefore, indigenous or conventional physics is meaningless unless it solves societal problems. Physics notions have been there from *time immemorial because they were solutions to societal challenges*. For that reason, no one can claim to have generated physics knowledge and passed it on to other societies (Mapara 2009). It was naturally available to all societies in different forms and stages of advancement because every society faced life challenges like weather changes, shelter, communication, food, diseases and war, among many.

Citing several examples and scenarios, this article argues that the notion of present-day Physics taught in educational institutions existed in African society and many other societies prior to its introduction by imperialist powers. However, when it appeared in text books for African learners, it was not entirely new to them. It makes great sense to use the locally understood physics concepts (or ‘native physics’) to develop the conventional laboratory based physics concepts. This article aims to continue the discussion along the above lines but with the express objective illustrating how Physics teachers/lectures can draw on indigenous (African) knowledge as they teach concepts and introduce terminologies in the physics curriculum.

## **How Indigenous Physics Technologies can be Incorporated into The Physics Curriculum**

According to Sithole (in Shizha & Emeagwali 2016), IPKS are observable in innumerable ways. It is crucial to navigate in which ways IPKS are available in society. First, the practice of archery is shown by figure 1.

***The Bow and Arrow (Archery)***

**Figure 1: Bow and arrow**



**Source: Photographed by the author (2015)**

Sithole (in Shizha & Emeagwali 2016), explains that during pre- historical times, indigenous people used bows and arrows to hunt for wild game and defend themselves in times of war. The choice of a particular wood type involved critical craftsmanship as well as problem solving skills. The shape of the arrow shows high level of physics. The feather attached gave direction to the arrow. The curved shape of the bow was able to withstand compression forces, thus demonstrating its strength and speed. Strong fibre or animal hide material was chosen to make a string of the bow which had to resist tension forces. Sithole (2016) points out that the string had a high elasticity, making it not stretch easily. This allowed the bow to bend. Thus the potential energy in the bow-string system increased. As a result there was energy conversion. The potential energy turns into kinetic energy in the fast moving string. There is a very interesting physical phenomenon in the physics behind archery, known as Archer's paradox. When an arrow is released to the left (or right) of a bow and is deliberately aimed off target, it will straighten out during release and hit the target. Hence in order to hit the intended target, hunters would deliberately aim away knowing that the arrow would straighten out. Though they learnt this from experience, they still managed to display profound knowledge of

Archer's paradox. Sithole (2016) further argues that the bow and arrow as well as the archer can be used to teach physics concepts and well understood by many learners. Physics concepts like acceleration, force and gravity, among other related concepts can be best understood through use of the bow and arrow. A teacher can discuss such concepts prior to conducting the following experiments:

- Conducting a centre of gravity experiment
- An object falling through water reaches a constant terminal velocity after falling relatively small distances. This terminal velocity can be seen and measured.

The concept of bow and arrow was deliberately and orally passed from generation to generation for certain reasons (Sabinet 2015). Equally important to note is that great research occurred towards improvement of the bow and arrow. Users of such technology kept on sharpening their skills to make the bow and arrow better in both performance and durability. The practical design skills developed here can be incorporated in the physics curriculum.

### ***Spears***

The spears were normally used in tandem with bows and arrows to aid in both hunting and war (Sithole in Shizha & Emeagwali 2016). The spear had to be light and strong. The choice of the appropriate material was a result of critical thinking. The two most important factors involving the physics of throwing a spear are the centre of gravity and centre of pressure. The centre of gravity is near the grip and does not change during throw. Master hunters learnt to utilize these concepts and attack angles to produce the maximum spear distance with greatest impact. Throwing at the optimal attack angle is throwing the spear at the angle at which the air flows most efficiently around the spear. To produce maximum distance, the spear must be thrown at the attack angle to minimize drag and maximize lift and speed. The attack angle for throwing in a head wind is slightly more down causing less lift than when a spear is thrown into a tail wind. According to McGrath (2010), children acquire science concepts through enquiry about the proper usage the spear. This is a demonstration of critical and problem skills. Sithole sees science as a process of identifying properties, discovering relationships and searching for answers. Examples of such objects can be incorporated in the physics curriculum (Sithole in Shizha

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& Emeagwali 2016). Some of the experiments that link with these ideas are as follows:

- Defying gravity experiment; and
- Verifying the principle of moments.

**Figure 2: A spear**



**Source: Photographed by the author (2015)**

### ***The Catapult***

Sithole (in Shizha & Emeagwali 2016) argues that the catapult was made up of a piece of a hide attached to string of fibre string. It was used to throw stones as illustrated in Figure 3 above or at a tangent after a circular motion. Today circular motion appears as a physics concept (for instance  $F = mv^2/r$ ). The concept of catapult design and use was again passed on from one generation to the next. For that reason, catapult physics concept became a life science. The catapult concept can be linked to elasticity notion. A teacher can mention it before learners do elasticity experiments such as:

- Conducting a bouncing experiment to determine elasticity of materials such as rubber, ping pong, and marble;
- Conservation of momentum; and
- Investigation momentum during collision.

**Figure 3: The catapult**



**Source: Photographed by the author (2015)**

Sithole also indicates that the concepts of elasticity, linear and parabolic motion constitute indigenous African Physics knowledge. Such theoretical and practical skills acquired in the use of the catapult could be incorporated in the Physics curriculum.

### ***Sound Communication***

According to Sithole (in Shizha & Emeagwali 2016) communication challenges caused some local people to practise mouth whistling. The mouth was slightly closed to produce sound. Whistles were used as call signals as well as alert signals to each other. Dogs made howling sounds if lost. The shepherd gave direction to animals through a whistle. The drum made of animal hide was used to give signals of impending events such as war and important meetings. People knew how to give variance to drum volume. In African culture, the drum is a means of communication and self expression. Its broad variety of users includes early African tribes and Native Alaskan tribes: both

tribes used drums Africans brought drums with them to the Americas and helped to develop their popularity among American musicians.

**Figure 4: The drum**



**Source: Photographed by the author (2015)**

Drums use physics concepts to do with waves and resonance. The sound waves for an open ended and stringed instrument is fairly straight forward. However, for a closed end instrument, such as a drum, the sound waves are different. A lot of the energy is dissipated through the shell of the drum, which is the reason for the variance in drum construction. Many different kinds of wood are used to generate different sounds or a different amount of energy absorption. The heaviest wood that dissipates the most amount of energy is oak, creating a lower, flat sound. Such observations support the view that indigenous knowledge is expressed in a variety of ways including stories, legends, folklore, rituals, songs, games and even laws (Nyota & Mapara 2008). This information can be incorporated into the Physics curriculum to help learners relate theory to practice.

Sticks and logs were utilized as musical instruments at traditional dances. When a song was started, women with their light voices, men with their deep voices and children with their soft voices joined in the song. The result was a perfect natural combination of voices. Music was formed. Through observations, imitations and practice such physics knowledge was passed from

generation to generation even though it was not in written form. Again, some people clapped their hands and stamped on the ground heavily to produced sound during traditional dances. Here, physics knowledge is seen to be disseminated through a hands-on approach as well as being organised in a systematic way. This is succinctly summarized by Charlesworth and Lind (2000) who maintain that concepts are the building blocks of knowledge which allow people to organise information. This preconceived knowledge can be included in the Physics curriculum at a suitable level, thus helping learners to marry theory with practice. A teacher as a facilitator can discuss these ideas with the class prior to carrying out the following experiments on sound:

- To investigate whether sound travels better through solids or gas
- To examine sound vibrations
- To make a hydrophone and examine whether or not sound waves can travel under water
- To make a plastic drum
- To make a rubber guitar
- To make bottle pipes
- To make reed instruments

### ***Use of Friction***

On a cold day, it is a common practice for some people to rub their hands to generate heat needed for warmth. In the past was friction at play. Heat was also felt in other instances. For example, when two stones hit each other at an angle, sparks were observed. The fire discovery came as result of a need for warmth. It solved the challenges of cold weather. Eventually the need to roast and cook different types of food arose (Sithole in Shizha & Emeagwali 2016).

Additionally, societies knew that friction was a nuisance and had to be removed. The use of rollers was common in different societies to move goods from place to place. Parts of the sleigh was smoothed to reduce friction: hence, the effort required to move the load was significantly reduced. The arrows were sharpened to penetrate faster on shooting the target. Barks were removed from wooden poles and used as rollers to reduce friction and increase mobility. Other objects were roughened to increase the grip. Thus, the soles of wooden shoes were engraved so that they could grip when a person moved. Khupe (2014) indicates that experiences in science are uniquely suited to the

development of thinking and problem solving. Thus, the acquiring and usage of friction notions by learners entail both the thinking and problem solving cognitive processes. The indigenous knowledge on friction concepts can be used as prior knowledge such as use of rollers and grease reduce friction. The teacher is encouraged to discuss the preconceived notions on sound before learners do the following experiments:

- How to increase friction
- How to decrease friction
- Friction between rough and smooth surfaces
- Friction between rough and rough surfaces

**Figure 5: Fire making method**



**Source: Photographed by the author (2015)**

### ***Food***

According to Sithole (in Shizha & Emeagwali 2016), people knew that food in their communities could not last forever and that preservative methods were

essential. Meat and vegetables were sun-dried to avoid decay. Thus they knew that moisture had to be evaporated to preserve food.



**Figure 6: A mouse trap**

**Source:**

**[https://www.google.co.zw/?gws\\_rd=cr&ei=qdxxWIntHYfiU7bwjZAO#q=african+mouse+trap+images](https://www.google.co.zw/?gws_rd=cr&ei=qdxxWIntHYfiU7bwjZAO#q=african+mouse+trap+images)**

Again, people required body building food such as protein. They knew protein had to come from animals and so they devised trapping devices. Indeed, the physics of evaporation of moisture in order to preserve food constitute a significant aspect of indigenous physics per se. The acquisition of such information is interactive physics pedagogy. According to McGrath (2010) scientists such as Albert Einstein believed that in teaching science, learners

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must interact with materials, collect data and make some order of that data in what they call the learning cycle. Children learn with understanding when the learning takes place in meaningful and familiar situations. For that reason, indigenous physics concepts transfer was done through games stories and play, among many other methods. Such ideas can be incorporated into Physics curriculum. Equally important is to encourage physics teachers to ask learners to construct a mouse trap and then link it to experiments such as the following experiments:

- Hooke's law verification
- Determination of spring constant

***Riva***

**Figure 7: Riva**



**Source: Photographed by the author (2015)**

The 'riva' was used to trap mice, birds and lizards (Sithole in Shizha & Emeagwali 2016). In the 'riva' exists the concept of levers. This did not come

from outside but from within. The idea was to enable support survival skills by fulfilling the protein needs of the body. Thus it was imperative to inculcate indigenous physics knowledge in members of the society so they understood the importance of satisfying protein requirements. McGrath (2010) argues that one of the roles of the teacher is to support learners as they move to higher levels of understanding through being engaged in learning experiences. Thus, the riva example can be used in the physics curriculum to help learners conceptualize the lever ideas. The teacher can link the ‘riva’ concept to lever experiments such as removing objects using crow bars.

***Materials and Technology***

**Figure 8: The hut**



**Source: Photographed by the author (2015)**

An African hut has a round shape. This shape has been maintained because circular shapes resist compression forces through reflecting and spread pressure on their surfaces. The kraals of animals are also circular to resist

compression forces. The same principle was applied to block the flow of water in a river. Thus African engineers existed before they were known and acknowledged in the western world (Sithole in Shizha & Emeagwali 2016). In the study of hydrology, some relevant and practical examples can be drawn from locally and naturally acquired physics. It is however understood that the hard mathematical aspect of physics is absent in indigenous physics and should be used to improve the quality of locally acquired physics concepts. Again the circular hut example can be used in an engineering lesson. The teacher may think of reflection scenario in society one of which could be,

- Reflection with mirrors; and
- Reflection water bodies.

The indigenous people made nets to trap fish and wild animals. The net material has strength and the holes in it could not allow passage of certain sizes of animals. Equally significant was the use of clay. The water pot was made of clay. The clay material surface allowed seepage of more energetic water molecules to escape. The less energetic water molecules remained. Hence water was cooled. Thus a large surface area increases the rate of evaporation. Again, keeping water in the pot for a long time caused some bacteria to die. Thus, the water became safe for drinking. The pot was and is used to heat water slowly and to radiate heat fast since black surfaces are good radiators of heat. All such examples serve to show the richness of indigenous physics and that when it is properly taught to student, learning becomes interesting and meaningful. The examples can be incorporated into the physics curriculum.

### ***Measurements***

Measurement of distance was evident in traditional African societies (Sithole in Shizha & Emeagwali 2016). The hand and pace were used to determine sizes of meat and fields respectively. There are other means through which measurements are taken. These include the foot size and fixed length of sticks and strings. The precision of the equidistance between circular walls and the maintenance of the circular shape of the walls is an indication of the respect for the mathematical rigors involved in the architecture. This is revealed in figure 10.

**Figure 9: Use of hand and figures to record length size**



**Source: Photographed by the author (2015)**

**Figure 10: The Great Zimbabwe wall**



**Source: Photographed by the author (2016)**

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Temperature was simply defined as being hot and cold or too hot or too cold. The same principle, although it lacks precision, can be used to develop physics concepts such as estimated calculations and measurements. Such societal based methods of recording measurements were learnt in an informal way. According to Mulligan (2003), informal learning experiences are initiated by the adults as they engage children in naturalistic experiences. Such a method of imparting indigenous physics can assist the learner to acquire more complex physics concepts. Therefore the physics educator needs to understand how learners think and learn the concepts and use this information in the planning and structuring experiences for students' learning and in evaluating their learning (Clements 2001).

### **Colours**

**Figure 11: Different soil colours**



**Source: Photographed by the author (2015)**

People chose specific soil types to smear their hut floors and walls. Coloured soils were used to paint huts, human faces and wooden plates. Colour is a physics concept and the use of it was known to bring the aspect of beauty

(Sithole in Shizha & Emeagwali 2016). Plant extracts as well as dried ground tree barks of different colours were used to tint baskets, mats and wooden items that were used in the kitchen. The rock paintings seen in national museums and shrines give evidence of the pre-historic existence of indigenous physics in specific societies. People knew how to use it and the occasions appropriate for their use. According to Vygotsky (1978) learning is situated within a particular culture and society which enables knowledge to become contextually defined and relevant. To this end, the utilisation of indigenous knowledge systems in Physics would contribute immensely to the development of the learners as content should be culturally relevant, (Gordon & Browne 2011). Indigenous knowledge of colours has some advantages. One of the advantages is that it is frequently transmitted through the mother language and this maximises concept understanding. The colour concept exists in the Physics curriculum and therefore examples can be drawn from the indigenous knowledge with which some learners are familiar. Lecturers can discuss such useful ideas before conducting an experiment such as:

- Mixing colours and observing the resulting colours

### ***Mechanical Structures***

To clamp higher and reach objects beyond their reach, people made ladders. The ladders were placed at an inclined angle. Thus people reasoned that at an inclined angle less effort was used. People moved objects from place to place to make way for cultivations and settlements. The lever idea was used. The lever concept was also used to remove water from deep rivers and wells. Here less effort was used to lift heavy loads. Although such information can be infused in several physics laboratory lessons, research indicates that formal education in some African countries, including Zimbabwe, undervalues the importance of indigenous knowledge (Shizha 2007). In addition, studies have acknowledged the complexities involved in incorporating indigenous knowledge in the school curriculum (Shizha 2006; 2007; 2008; and 2013). The reason for undervaluing indigenous knowledge is that it is mainly oral and not written and easily ‘measurable’ (Emeagwali 2003). It often has been misrepresented as simplistic and not amenable to systematic scientific investigation.

***Thermal Physics***

**Figure 12: Glass cooling effect**



**Source: Photographed by the author (2015)**

The grass thatched hut as well as a sleeping mat made of reed were cool. Grass (Figure 12) and the reed (Figure 13) are poor conductors of heat. In addition, thatched layers of grass piled on each other do not allow water to pass through during rainfall. The native people also weaved mats using tree fibres and reeds. That was prompted by the necessity to minimise the cold. Indigenous people also made sleeping mats of woven reeds to prevent crawling insects like ants from stinging them (Sithole in Shizha & Emeagwali 2016). It is suggested in this paper that a physics teacher can link the building and weaving practises described above to the following experiments:

- How conductors are used at home to protect you from injury
- To investigate how the start temperature affects the rate of cooling

- To see how the cooling rate of a water container is affected by the surface area
- To investigate cooling factors

**Figure 13: Reeds cooling effect**



**Source: Photographed by the author (2015)**

Sun dried animal hides were also used as mats to sit and sleep on. The use of animal hides prevented crawling and stinging insects. The hide was also used by women to carry babies on their backs. Besides these uses, the hides were used to cover male and female buttocks and private parts.

When people suffered from cold the treatment was simply covering the head with a mat and a hot stone was placed inside a pot with very hot water. The idea was to produce steam which could raise the body temperature of the patient. This resulted in dilation of blood vessels and blood began to flow fast, relieving the patient's discomfort. Likewise, the steam breathed by a patient opened the air passages as well as killing bacteria found in the air passages. Thus it had a healing effect too.

Wood was shaped into plates, spoons and cooking sticks. The most noteworthy tool was ‘rusika’ particle size reducing device. It was used during ‘sadza’ African dish preparation. The concept of reducing particle size to mix completely still stands up to now. It has similar functions in conventional physics. In addition, stones and other available heavy objects were used to crush hard shelled fruits (Sithole in Shizha & Emeagwali 2016). Thus such objects can still be used to perform the same jobs instead of conventional hammers. Similar objects, after they had been sharpened, were used as digging devices. Here the principle of force required to crush objects and to dig the soil in order to get underground roots, was known to the local people as a way of solving environmental challenges. This information can be incorporated into the Physics curriculum. There is a danger that influential people will impose their indigenous knowledge on the local people leading to the displacement of the local people’s existing knowledge (Hewson & Ogunniyi 2011). This is likely to result in loss of crucial indigenous physics before it is recorded.

### ***Gravity***

‘Gravity is the force that causes bodies to fall towards the earth’ (Sithole in Bilali *et al.* 199:238). The idea of gravity was observed in African society as in many other societies. People knew that if an arrow is shot upwards, if a stone is thrown upwards, if a fruit falls from a tree branch, and if a person jumps upwards, sooner or later, the destination is the ground. People knew that the lighter the object was, the more time it remained in air. Thus the arrow was made narrow. Pieces of logs used to hit fruits and animals on tree branches had to be made as light as possible (Sithole in Shizha & Emeagwali 2016). Additionally, people observed water flowing from high ground to low ground by means of gravity. Such was indigenous physics. It is however correct to observe that there are several pitfalls in indigenous physics. The mathematical rigours needed in the further illustration of physics concepts are absent. One of the reasons the development of physics in many societies has been slow is the seemingly imposed abstraction by conventional physics in which learners are obliged to follow a formulaic physics perception. In view of examples cited above, it can be concluded that indigenous physics has a role to play in conventional physics. The reason is that indigenous African physics, as in other societies, increases and broadens learners’ abilities to be innovative, imaginative, and creative. Nevertheless, Horsthemke (2008) appears to suggest

that such indigenous knowledge involves at best an incomplete, partial or, at worst, a questionable understanding or conception of knowledge; and indigenous knowledge is largely inappropriate. This implies that indigenous knowledge such as Physics is viewed as not being complete without external influence and knowledge. The fundamental premise of this paper is not that indigenous knowledge is infallible but that the ideas with which learners are familiar should be incorporated into the Physics curriculum.

### ***Oxygen Supply***

Mvuto (an oxygen supply device) was used to keep fire burning when extracting iron from iron ore. Supplying oxygen using the mouth was a tiresome process and was replaced by the mvuto device. Today the same device can be used in the laboratory in the reduction of copper ore and iron ore. The information can be incorporated into the school Physics curriculum to help learners marry theory with practice.

### ***Seiving Device***

**Figure 14: Sieve mat ‘tsero/hluzo’**



**Source: Photographed by the author (2015)**

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According to Sithole, the sieve mat made out of either the reeds or the bark fibre was used for separation of beer, honey and milk substances from their mixtures by a filtration process (in Shizha & Emeagwali 2016). It acted as a sieve. Again, the fractional distillation method was used to separate substances before it was made public in written form. Thus the society had distilled beer. The wind was also used to separate seeds from chaff. The same principle can be used in laboratories located in remote area where the traditional laboratory equipment is scarce. Here it can be argued that indigenous physics which learners experienced at home can help the same learners to understand conventional physics. For that reason indigenous Physics should be incorporated into the Physics curriculum.

### **Ash Usage**

Ash was used for the sedimentation of dust particles in water. This is parallel to the process of settling dust particles in water using aluminium sulphate in water works. This can be taken as assumed knowledge in a conventional physics lesson. That is the knowledge learners bring to the laboratory and the physics teacher can take advantage of such preconceived knowledge. This will enhance learning.

### **Cooling Effect In Heat**

**Figure 15: The roof structure**



**Source: Photographed by the author (2015)**

Ceilings made out of reeds trapped air (Sithole in Shizha & Emeagwali 2016). Air is a poor conductor of heat. This made the rooms cool. The modern ceiling board uses the same principle. So learners' experiences on cooling can be used in the physics lesson.

### **Turning Effect in Moments and Mechanical Structures**

**Figure 16: The hoe handle**



**Source: Photographed by the author (2015)**

The long handles on hoes and axes reduced effort used. Another example is the use of crow bars which was used to make work easy. The same principle is still being used in the contemporary physics (Sithole in Shizha & Emeagwali 2016). The position of house door and car door handles to name a few examples serve to illustrate the application of the turning effect in everyday situations. So the indigenous physics works very well and can be incorporated into physics syllabi.

## **Balance**

**Figure 17: The ox yoke**



**Source: Photographed by the author (2015)**

Another illustration of indigenous physics is manifested in the ox yoke shown in figure 17 above. The head rest wooden pillow is another good example which can be used to demonstrate the idea of head balance. The different types of wooden stools also illustrate sense of the physical balance. The fire place had three stones to give support to the pot. Again this indicates the sense of equilibrium and balance. Examples drawn from such experiences can be used in the conventional physics laboratory. Some experiments which can be done to link learner prior existing knowledge to conventional physics are:

- How to balance a pencil on its tip;
- Defying gravity while balancing forks; and
- How to balance a potato.

**Figure 18: Stool parts dismantled**



**Source: Photographed by the author (2015)**

**Figure 19: Stool parts assembled**



**Source: Photographed by the author (2015)**

The above images (Figure 17 and Figure 18) indicate that local people made use of locally found resources for particular functions. . The photo images also serve to prove that the concept of problem solving was an important survival skill which was inherent in indigenous people globally. However, it was locally centred since specific areas had unique challenges and resources. Learners can be helped to acquire design experimental skills when they practise to assemble apparatus before being engaged in Physics lesson experiments. For this reason this exercise can be incorporated into Physics syllabi as experiments and tutorials.

**Use of Games as a Physics Teaching Approach**  
**Figure 20: Tsoro yemutatu (The three piece game)**



**Source: Photographed by the author (2016)**

Problem solving skill of avoiding defeat was embedded in all aspects of indigenous physics. The ‘tsoro yematatu’ game was quite often played by men to enhance thinking skills (Sithole in Shizha & Emeagwali 2016). Pupils played ‘mudodo’ (Figure 20) to instil competitive skills, as well as managing stress caused by defeat. Not only did the two games develop problem solving skills, they instilled counting. Counting is one of the physics process skills in contemporary physics. These can be incorporated into the Physics syllabi as experiments and tutorials.

### **The Floating Ability of Wooden Boats and Rafters**

Ancient fishermen used logs of wood to construct boats. Wood is a material which is less dense than water. For this reason, wood floats in water. Thus the floating ability of wood was known in ancient times. It indicates the application of the principle of buoyancy. Some indigenous people designed and built boats out of wood that would float in water, and then refined their designs so that their boats would carry as great a load (in some instances fish or even people) as possible. Building a wooden boat to hold as much weight as possible was an engineering design problem. The use of equipment in the laboratory to illustrate indigenous application of conventional physics concepts is therefore justifiable. Vygotsky (1978) argues that development and learning is strongly entrenched in culture. Culture is the people’s total way of life, their food, knowledge, norms and values (Giddens 1993). Hence, Vygotsky’s theory becomes important in informing the argument that indigenous knowledge is embedded in a given community’s way of life, such as fishing activities, and indigenous flotation knowledge becomes an essential part of learners’ physics courses. Some of the experiments which have a linkage to what some learners already know are:

#### ***Flotation Experiments***

- To do an ***experiment*** to see which of the objects sink down when they are placed into water and which ones ***float***; and
- ***Floating eggs in salt water experiment.***

## Tension and Compression Strength of Materials

**Figure 21: Use of hand and figures to record length size**



**Source: Photographed by the author (2016)**

A closer look at Great Zimbabwe reveals the physics nature of indigenous knowledge. What is amazing is the remarkable similarity between past construction structures and those used in our daily lives. Indeed, today builders put reinforced concrete on door and window frames to withstand tensile and compressive forces. In the past, indigenous people typically chose wood or stone bars and placed them at ingress and egress points as indicated by figure 20. This indicates the creative design capacity of of indigenous physics.

## **The Conical Tower at Great Zimbabwe**

The exact identity of the Great Zimbabwe builders is still a matter of debate. However, the majority of scholars believe that it was built by members of the Gokomere people, who were ancestors of the modern Shona in Zimbabwe. Whatever the case might be, there was notable mathematical intelligence in the construction of the conical tower by indigenous inhabitants of Great Zimbabwe. This reinforces the notion that learners are not blank slates upon which knowledge should be etched. The wisdom we get from the past construction of such a remarkable structure provides evidence that learners should be allowed to apply what they already have in their minds to new knowledge. The construction of the conical tower is such that it clearly points to indigenous people who thought like physicists and mathematicians. Mathematics as the language for physics such as that used to design the conical tower. The remarkable fact is that the values of these numbers seem to have been very finely adjusted to make possible the construction of the conical tower at Great Zimbabwe.

**Figure 22: The conical tower**



**Source: Photographed by the author (2016)**

From the foregoing scenarios the following aspects of indigenous physics learning can be deduced and recommended:

- Learners construct their own understanding and knowledge of the world through their experience and through and reflecting on those experiences. When we encounter something new, we have to reconcile it with our previous ideas and experiences,
- The teacher makes sure she understands the students' pre-existing conceptions, and guides activities designed to address them and then build on them.
- When they continuously reflect on their experiences, learners find their ideas gaining in complexity and power, and they develop increasingly strong abilities to integrate new information with preceding information.
- The teacher is encouraged to prompt each learner to reflect on and examine his or her current knowledge.
- The teacher should talk about what learners have learned, and how their observations and experiments helped (or did not help) them to better understand the concept. This helps learners to construct knowledge rather than to reproduce a series of facts.
- Always guided by the teacher, learners construct their knowledge actively rather than just mechanically ingesting knowledge from the teacher or the textbook.
- Learners become engaged by applying their existing knowledge and real-world experience, learning to hypothesize, testing their theories, and ultimately drawing conclusions from their findings.
- Learners are not a blank slate and knowledge cannot be imparted without the recipient of new knowledge making sense of it according to his or her current conceptions. Therefore, learners learn best when they are allowed to construct a personal understanding based on their experiences and reflecting on those experiences.

## **Rationale for Teaching Indigenous Physics in Schools**

What becomes apparent is the amazing resemblance between indigenous physics and some of the insights that are emerging from modern physics. There

is a congruence that is as enlightening about the physical universe as it is about the circular evolution of man's understanding. Physics teachers and lectures can draw on indigenous African knowledge as they teach concepts and introduce terminology and nomenclature in the physics curriculum (Abiodun 1998).

The question often asked is: What is Indigenous physics? It is a large body of physics knowledge and skills developed outside the formal education system in pre-colonial societies. However one can argue that physics is physics. In this world we live in, the teaching of physics must comply with international standards that are accepted by the international community. If learners are to compete in the global job market they must learn the universally appropriate, acceptable technology and engineering, to cite two examples of physics concepts. Thus, to all intents and purposes, learners need to be taught physics subject concepts properly.

Localized and societal oriented physics has been mistakenly associated with 'cultural' physics. This perspective ignores that culture permeates everything we do. According to Ngara (2007) indigenous knowledge system complexities are found in community ceremonies and rituals which include story-telling, proverbs, folktales, recitation, demonstration, sport, epic poetry, riddles, praise songs, word games, puzzles, tongue-twisters, dance, music, beliefs and other education-centred activities. According to Ken (2009) we do not fully know the world directly but perceive it through frameworks of ideas and beliefs, which act as filters on what we see and how we see it. This includes physics concepts taking into account the integrated nature of knowledge that society acquires and transfers.

Within a constructivist approach to learning physics, prior knowledge has been found to underpin learning in a significant way – either as a hindering or helping factor. It is hindering in the sense that one can feel crippled in one's ability to indigenise Western acquired knowledge and skills within the African cultural context (Nsamenang 1995). Again, the tendency to adhere to Western tools and methodologies in African research could be one hurdle in the process of indigenisation and integration (Azuma 1984). Educators should take such problematics into consideration when planning what indigenous physics knowledge to teach to physics learners as prerequisites to their comprehension of western and internationally recognized physics.

Equally significant is what research has shown. One key issue that affects learning of physics in Africa has been the controversial status of prior

knowledge that learners bring into the classroom. When they come to school, they bring with them built up knowledge about what they will be taught. Hence, to say that precolonial African societies had no sense of education and therefore no education is not only a mockery but also a gross misrepresentation of facts (Mapara 2009). According to Mapara, African indigenous education had utility value. Youngsters were taught skills such as hunting, fishing, fish traps, and hoe handle making. Nevertheless, he acknowledges the significance of Western knowledge by arguing that indigenous knowledge system researchers must not negate existing Western methods of investigation. Mapara (2009) argues that IKS researchers must respect all forms and sources of knowledge. This is because each methodology, however seemingly different, can add value and enhance the process of creation of new knowledge as each provides insights and tools which enable perception and interpretation of the world.

The debate highlights that indigenous physics exists in its own right; it does not need to explain itself to anyone such as the western knowledge system advocates. It therefore needs no justification outside itself. Furthermore, indigenous physics presents a valid understanding of nature in its own right. It does not employ experiment in the scientific Western sense. The indigenous physics dealt with connections, harmony and relationships rather than with mechanical influence on forces on bodies. People were and are able to make use of certain processes in order to bring desired results. The stress is laid upon direct objective experience and upon closeness to nature. The application of physics principles in the development of our indigenous technologies will help in the productions of more valuable goods that conform to modern standards and can be marketed beyond our traditional communities (Abiodun 1998), succinctly stressed.

In addition, Gallenstein (2003) emphasises that the physical environment created by teachers for learning have implications for learners' involvement and interaction. Therefore for learners to effectively acquire physics concepts, the learning environment should have the following features:

- provide resources that encourage active learning, involvement, negotiation and collaboration;
- consider learners' cognitive abilities, emerging social skills and provide sufficient resources to alleviate disputes while at the same time assisting learners to negotiate with their peers;

- provide opportunities for learners to make choices and provide sufficient resources that are accessible to learners. This procedure empowers learners to be in control of their own learning and to become deeply engaged in learning experiences;
- provide on-going experiences using learning projects to facilitate in-depth investigations and promote collaborative learning; and
- expose learners to science experiences that provide appropriate levels of challenge and provide the teacher's guidance to promote success and build feelings of competence.

Physics educators need to be resourceful and be ready to answer a wide range of questions that arise from physics learners. The teacher should have the following aims in mind, which assume learner experience knowledge of indigenous knowledge:

- To arouse learners' curiosity and interest in the world around them.
- To help learners develop their observation and discovery skills.
- To help learners develop the required science language that enables them to develop and record their observations, clarify their findings and to describe their discoveries accurately.
- To help learners develop appreciation for use of science in their daily lives.

### **The Importance of Including Indigenous Physics**

The importance of indigenous knowledge systems is supported by the United Nations article 14 (1) (2007) which argues that indigenous people have the right to establish and control their education systems and institutions in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning. Chisholm (2005) cites critics such as Muller (2000; 2001) as arguing that education that focuses on the local, known and every day is not education, for at the heart of the instructive effort is a leading away from the known, familiar and every day into universal processes. However, the debate indicates that Westerners succeeded in imposing knowledge developed in the west on local people, thus displacing the local people's existing knowledge (Hewson & Ogunniyi 2011). It can therefore be argued that indigenous knowledge existed

in both western and non-western worlds, and that while indigenous knowledge has not achieved universal status it nonetheless still exists among different ethnic groups in Zimbabwe, in particular and other societies in general.

In a nutshell, Khupe (2014) argues that if the motive for indigenous knowledge (physics) is inclusive, then all indigenous knowledge (western and non-western) should be taken into consideration since not to do so defeats the principle of inclusion. The debate on indigenous knowledge recognises the importance of the learning context which is fertile ground for indigenous knowledge as a way to make learning relevant and avoid discord between what is learnt in school and everyday life (Khupe 2014). Khupe's (2014) argument supports the contention that indigenous physics has a significant role in the conventional physics laboratory.

Indigenous knowledge is relevant to a particular society; it forms part of global knowledge, and should be recognized, valued and appreciated. It should be preserved, transferred, adopted elsewhere. A sound understanding of indigenous knowledge is needed. African IKS are critical components in the quest for the provision of quality education for all (Mapara 2008).

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, reiterating earlier points, the term Physics refers to the study of matter and energy in its different forms, and the transformation of matter and energy. Indigenous physics may be perceived as a way of knowing and a way of life which is experienced by members of a given society. The discussion also highlighted the fact that physics teachers and lecturers can draw on indigenous African knowledge as they teach western based physics concepts.

The article explores the capacity of indigenous physics knowledge to promote social development. The exploration was undertaken in order to emphasise that it is time to see the necessity for the curriculum development planners to take into account accumulated indigenous knowledge and traditional skills. This is because indigenous physics knowledge, whether institutionalized or not, structured or unstructured, has specific implications for democratization, community empowerment and nation building.

Equally significant is the notion that indigenous physics knowledge should not be distorted, trivialized and neglected by western education. Instead, it should be preserved, transferred and adopted since any form of

knowledge is meaningful only within its own cultural situation. Indeed there should be shared meanings which are key factors in binding people and societies together as vehicles of social cohabitation (Mapara 2009). The application of physics principles in the development of our indigenous physics related technologies will help in the productions of more valuable goods that conform to modern standards and can be marketed beyond our traditional communities. The discussion also indicated the inclusive nature of indigenous physics knowledge systems. Indeed, contributions of indigenous physics to recognition of the passions and interests of different members of society cannot be overemphasised. To support such a standpoint, a few examples of prominent individuals and their revolutionary innovations were mentioned.

Finally, the intention of this paper is to show that poor analysis of indigenous physics knowledge systems threatens traditional knowledge with dispossession and carries the risk of distorting such systems in the process. For this reason indigenous physics knowledge makes sense only within its own cultural context. Also emphasised in the paper is that modern science can gain a lot from indigenous physics knowledge systems. This is demonstrated in the paper by examples showing application of indigenous physics concepts in a cultural setting which could be used to enhance African student's appreciation of Physics. Indeed, Physics experiments could be developed from practical situations in African students' cultural environments. We must change our position and start embracing indigenous physics into the curriculum. There is need to demystify the notion that indigenous physics knowledge systems are by definition unscientific. There is no doubt that a parallel exists between indigenous physics and conventional physics learnt at school. We should not scoff at indigenous physics, but admit that it plays a part in existing conventional physics.

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# Slaying the Three-Headed Dragon: Spirit Healing from Memetic Infection

**P. Tony Jackson**

## **Abstract**

Violence has a tremendous impact on the social fabric of the Black community at large and on society as a whole. This paper provides an overview of a brief group intervention based on Afrocentric methodology and the seminal work of Dr. Nobles (1986c) on ‘path-of-life development’. Three of Dr. Nobles’ four stages (decomposition, germination and transformation) establish a framework for the intervention presented in this paper as well as an organizing theme for addressing what Dr. Nobles (2015) refers to as ‘memetic infection’.

The paper further proposes an African-centred organization of mixed media, as a component of the intervention, to address the lingering psychological effects of chattel slavery, including those that have corrupted and distorted Black identity and African consciousness, owing to ‘memetic infection’ and its outgrowth, the ‘Three-Headed Dragon’. Addressing the ‘Three-Headed Dragon’ – depression, frustration tolerance, anger, cognitive/emotive factors highly correlated with violent behaviour – has not been central to the efforts of the United States to reduce violence among young men of African descent (Jackson 2015). Finally, Dr. Nobles’ concept of ‘Kinzungu Zongu’ (tornadoes of the mind), and his identification of toxic ‘sensoria information structures’, along with Akbar’s (1986b) assertion that the spiritual psyche of Black youth has been killed by a deliberate falsification of their historical reality, help establish a template for understanding and conceptualizing treatment of ‘spirit illness’ in diaspora as well as continental Africans.

**Keywords:** Memes, African centred, Trauma, Police Terror, Violence, 3-Headed Dragon, Spirit Illness

If we do not ever challenge the cultural ground we stand on and the intellectual categories or categorical conceptualizations we utilize, then we will simply continue the process of being victims of “violence beyond violence” and never knowing that we are victims (Dr. Wade Nobles).

## **Introduction**

Violence is not new to America. It has been on an upward spiral since this country’s inception. It is endemic to American society (despite a white American mythological view of the ‘good old days’), and is currently an epidemic in American society at large. In no other US population is the impact of violent crime and disparity in imprisonment rates more evident than in young Black males. This segment of our populace ‘bears the brunt’ of the tragic and destructive outcome of violence and violent crime (Fitzpatrick & Boldizar 1993).

However, violence against Black females is not far behind as rates of sexual assault, intimate partner homicide and, more recently, violence by law enforcement continue to occur at a much higher rate for Black women than any other ethnic group (BJS 2009; Violence Policy Center 2013).

Statistics on violent crime, as they relate to the Black community, reveal that the problem is even more profound than it appears on the surface. Not only does the victimization of Black communities pose serious mental and physical health problems, but also the incarceration rates for Black males have devastating economic and social impact on this already vulnerable ethnic community. The overrepresentation of Black males within the prison systems inside the US renders a staggering number of men unavailable as fathers and family/community leaders. Their prison histories also serve to reduce community resources because these men subsequently find it difficult to find credible employment, pursue advanced education, attain professional licensure, and contribute to community defence against discriminatory policy and practices.

Unfortunately, largely owing to the growth of the for-profit prison industry, its lobbying power and the development of policies designed to disproportionately affect people of colour, especially Black men (Pew Report

2009; ACLU Report 2011; Gopnik 2012), rates of imprisonment have only worsened. It is telling, that the US imprisons more human beings than any other nation on earth, including Russia, China and Iran (ACLU Report 2011; Misplaced Priorities 2011). US prisons, also, are often a final receiving point for many Black males who have endured a lifetime of discriminatory treatment.

Eberhardt *et al.* (2004), in a Stanford study, where the participants were police officers and undergraduate students, investigated the influence of stereotyped associations on visual processing, and found that when the faces of Black people were introduced, participants immediately perceived criminality and/or threat at a level that would impact their decisions and behaviour.

Many Black youth are socially, economically and politically disenfranchised. Sensitivity to problems in their families, schools and communities is evidenced by the disproportionate rates of behavioural and learning disorders, the high incidence of emotional disturbance in delinquents, and the high rates of necessary psychiatric treatment among young Black males (Gibbs 1988; Holzman 2006). Gibbs (1998:237) states:

Since studies suggest that Black male children as compared to females are given less nurturing by their parents, treated more harshly by their teachers, discriminated against more by employers, and treated less favourably by nearly every other institution in American society, it is reasonable to infer that their lower level of self-esteem is the inevitable outcome of their persistent, differential and demeaning treatment.

Whether conscious or unconscious in its motivation, the assault and battery of the young teenager, Darren Manning, by Philadelphia police is but another example of racially driven violence. It is the type of violence that clearly stems from hatred and quite possibly from a fear of genetic annihilation. Darren Manning, on January 7, 2014, was on his way with some teammates to play in a high school basketball game. They were wearing their team uniforms, hats and scarves. Darren was a 16-year-old model student at the Mathematics, Civic and Sciences Charter School. The boys were approached by police and started to run. However, Darren started to run and stopped because, as he reported, he 'had done nothing wrong'. What followed was an unnecessary

beating and groping session at the hands of the Philadelphia police. He was cuffed by the officers, groped and grabbed by his testicles by a female officer who squeezed and pulled so hard she ruptured one of his testicles, requiring that he go to the hospital where surgery was performed the next day. Doctors warned his mother of the distinct possibility that he may never have children.

Of course, as is usually the case in the inner cities of America, the officers charged this straight 'A' student, who, according to the school's principal, had never had a disciplinary problem in his high school career, with resisting arrest. Witnesses at the scene have corroborated the young man's story, and Darren's mother, Ikea Coney, blamed herself for teaching him to respect the police and not to fear them, reasoning that perhaps if he had run his life would've been different. She was quoted as saying 'I'm just grateful they didn't kill him.'

In a more recent American Psychological Association published study, titled 'The Essence of Innocence', Goff *et al.* (2014) found that Black boys as young as 10 may not be viewed in the same way as their white peers relative to childhood innocence. In a four-part study including police officers and non-police officers, researchers found a disturbing picture of the effects of racism on Black children in the US. The study provides evidence that Black children are afforded the benefit of innocence to a lesser extent than children of other races.

Black boys are misperceived as older and seen as more censurable for their actions relative to peers of other races, and evidence points to these racial disparities being tied to implicit dehumanization of Black people. This tendency to dehumanize Blacks was not only predictive of racially disparate perceptions of Black boys, but predicted racial disparity in police violence toward Black children in the real world. Finally, regarding what the research suggests, the authors state: 'If, as Alice Walker says, "The most important question in the world is, "Why is the child crying?"', then for Black children, the most important answer may be that they cry because they are not allowed to be children at all.'

Whether we are discussing the attack on Darren Manning in Philadelphia or the murders of Amidou Diallo, Oscar Grant, Treyvon Martin, Tamir Rice, Eric Gardner, Sandra Bland, LaTasha Harlings, Troy Davis, Renisha McBride, Kendrick Johnson, Freddy Gray, Michael Brown, Mario Woods, Philando Castile, Alton Sterling, Delwan Small, and countless others, this demeaning, abusive and deadly treatment does, in fact, have

psychiatric consequences for its victims (including family, friends and community).

Such treatment is part and parcel of an ideation that is a necessary component of an extremely racist and systemic substructure. Dr. Welsing draws from the work of Neely Fuller Jr. as she functionally defines racism:

The local and global power system structured and maintained by persons who classify themselves as white, whether consciously or subconsciously determined; this system consists of patterns of perception, logic, symbol formation, thought, speech, action and emotional response, as conducted simultaneously in all areas of people activity (economics, education, entertainment, labor, law, politics, religion, sex and war). The ultimate purpose of the system is to prevent white genetic annihilation on Earth – a planet in which the overwhelming majority of people are classified as non-white (black, brown, red and yellow) by white-skinned people. All of the non-white people are genetically dominant (in terms of skin coloration) compared to the genetically recessive white-skinned people. (ii)

It is important to understand that such a system necessitates the creation of negative, denigrating and destructive images about Black/African people. Even more devastating has been the instillation of the mindset of devaluing Black life, and the evolution of the mentality of self-hatred; a memetic infection resulting in a condition Nobles (2015) has described as ‘Kinzungu Zongu’ (tornadoes of the mind). Western media as a structural system, unfortunately, have had a long and devastating history of propagating imagery responsible for such debilitating programming. However, Europe and its outgrowth of Western culture have not always viewed Africa and Africans in such pejorative ways.

Nobles (1989: 5) thus describes Europe’s orientation toward Africa (ns):

Literally, from the beginning of human consciousness to the advent of ‘the Negro’ the position of the Black man and woman and the relationship between the African and the non-African was the opposite of what it is now. The meaning of the African in the historical consciousness of the European, for instance, was (up until the advent

of the ‘Negro’) associated with high culture, superior civilization and sophisticated human systems of organization (i.e. governance, commerce, family, religion, etc.

Nobles (2015) in *The Island of Memes: Haiti’s Unfinished Revolution*, considers Europe’s brutal and savage colonization of Africa and the equally brutal chattel enslavement of diaspora Africans the ‘unaddressed twin evils; infecting the modern world.

European contact with Africa has always been driven by the desire to transform or rearrange African phenomena into fundamental European constructs in the service of domination and exploitation...there are three methods of colonial reorganization. The first is that colonial reorganization always has to deal with the domination of the physical space. Secondly [it] requires the managing of the indigenous modes of production .... The third method, which is perhaps the most important aspect of colonization, has to do with the reformation...of the African mind...which is done by replacing African indigenous education, religious, and psychological systems. (37-38)

It is to this third method we turn our attention; to this invisible destructive and ever-present force Franz Fanon described as ‘Violence beyond violence’. Fanon observed the significance of the outright denial of Africa’s historical contributions to the world as the first volley of violence beyond violence. Europe’s position of dominance through trickery, deceit and a willingness to sanction and commit horrendous violent acts and crimes against humanity forced a perverse and pervasive view of Europe as a universal standard-bearer for humanity. For continental and diaspora Africans, it is the inculcation of alien and enemy values and norms that lead to ‘spirit illness’.

African-American people, in general, and young African-American males, in particular, suffer from a cultural void, which, for them, means spiritual death, in that culturally the two are inseparable. This negation of the history and intellectual realization of African people is tantamount to a cultural and mental death (Akbar 1986a).

Akbar has long proposed that part of the difficulty in effective functioning for young African-American males is that their spiritual psyche, and/or soul, and that of Africans in general, have been killed by a deliberate

falsification of their historical reality, which destroys the foundation of reasonably human self-esteem. This has paved the way for self-hatred and self-destruction. Therefore restoring the spirit becomes a therapeutic necessity for young African males, and in order to restore the spirit one must restore the history.

Nobles *et al.* (1987) have also proposed that ‘When the symbols, rituals and rites of one’s culture lose their legitimacy and power to compel thought and action, then disruption occurs with the cultural orientation and reflects itself as pathology in the psychology of the people belonging to that culture’ (p.12). This psycho-spiritual pathology can be understood as resulting from ‘memetic infection’. It may be useful here to explore Nobles’ (2015) discussion of memes as it relates to ‘memetic infection’.

In furthering Dawkins’ ideas, memes could also be thought of as contagious symbiotic reproductive sensoria-information structures and patterns, including all of the senses that influence human knowing and awareness. In doing so, the sensoria-information structure/patterns can alter behavior and propagate patterns of behavior to be consistent with the sensoria-information structures/patterns....Sensoria-information structures/patterns, like memes, should be thought of as orienting ideas, which act like a self-replicating nexus for the propagation and legitimation of behavioral dispositions and functioning....In effect, memes are ideas and information, which are the substance of behavior. Fundamentally or foundationally memes serve as ‘epistemic memetic nodes,’ which shape and support a particular aesthetic, moral code, and behavioral norms *The Island of Memes: Haiti’s Unfinished Revolution* (2015).

According to Nobles, the process by which sensorial information structures symbiotically infect consciousness resulting in the reinforcement of the sensorial is called ‘memetic ideation’. Memes can exist in the form of ideas, symbols, images, feelings, words, customs, etc....and can be clustered and organized to represent ‘meme complex’ in the form of political dogma, religion, artistic styles, culture etc....They must be transferred from one generation to the next with their core content intact, ensuring the ability to preserve the altered behaviour. As such, memes represent ‘orienting ideas acting as self-replicating nexus’ for the growth, sustenance and legitimation

of certain behavioural dispositions.

Memetic infection, therefore, would imply that devastating sensorial-information structures that infected the minds of enslaved Africans were complexes that supported the African as merely a chattel, with no human value and without worth.

Certainly, it can be argued that European memetic ideations retained in Haitian consciousness can be seen in Africans throughout the diaspora as well as in continental Africans. These ideas and beliefs include the belief in aristocracy and class privilege, elitism, subjugation, life-long slavery, racial inferiority, genetic inferiority, apostolic authority, exaltation of Christ and Christianity and the belief in the sacredness, superiority and power of 'whiteness' (or Frenchness in the case of Haitians) (Nobles 2015). The resulting mental state is that of 'shattered African consciousness' and 'fractured Black identity', symptoms of contact with White people and their worldview, which requires the dehumanization and 'de-Africanization' of Africans at home and abroad.

In stark contrast, African memetic ideations retained in Haitian consciousness can also be seen in diaspora and continental Africans as represented in numerous revolutionary movements (Cuba, Haiti, South Africa, United States, Brazil, Mexico etc.).

These ideas and beliefs include respect for elders, the belief in the power of spirit, personal responsibility, ancestor veneration, Nommo, divine destiny, interdependence and the nature of reality and human meaning as spirit and energy (Nobles 2015).

Reintroducing, elucidating and/or retaining African memetic ideation may provide a bridge to reconnecting with the ancestral spirit and to health for many African youth.

Programmes based upon sharing these values have been beneficial for youth.

Mentoring and 'rites-of-passage' programmes historically imbue young men and women with cultural philosophy, values and principles to develop in ways consistent with cultural models of manhood and womanhood. Indications are that such programmes increase social and intellectual competencies, increase positive attitudes toward African-American people and culture, and are associated with healthy racial identity (Bethea 2012). Although very important research on the concepts of racial respect and racial socialization (DeGruy, Kjellstrand, Briggs & Brennan 2012) indicate both are

significant as moderators for harm reduction in African-American youth who experience routine neighbourhood violence, little is known about which cognitive or affective mechanisms are affected. There is also still much to explore regarding memetic ideations that support destructive disposition. A key issue for the implementation of components of such programmes within the field of psychology is the question of their clinical relevance, which the study outlined below attempted to address.

## **Background**

As a legacy of slavery, Black-on-Black violence is a common response to the frustration, internalized anger, and depression felt by many African-Americans. Hutchinson (1990) notes that, historically, no matter how much Blacks were victimized by White violence, retaliation was not permitted. Black males who attempted to protect themselves and their families were frequently and severely maimed or even murdered. Men and women who resisted or questioned authority were treated harshly to serve as examples to the rest of the Black community. Outlets for the tremendous frustration, anger and rage that grew out of this experience were found in work, at home, or within the Black community, thereby forcing Blacks to internalize their anger and displace their aggression onto each other (DeGruy-Leary 2005). Penalties for Black violence against other Blacks were far different from those assessed for violent acts toward Caucasians, which instilled the belief that violence and repression against other Blacks was a socially approved behaviour (Stampp, 1956; Hutchinson, 1990). An outcome of these inculcated belief systems can be seen in the high incidence of Black-on-Black crime.

Cultural and ethnic factors must be considered in any discussion related to violence owing to their influence on the expression of aggression and anger; truly ‘tornadoes of the mind’, or as stated previously, Kizungu Zongu. Violence among young Black males can be viewed as emanating from skewed self-perceptions – solely as descendants of slaves, ‘Niggas for life!’, ‘Pimps up, hoes down’ – as well as skewed perceptions of European others leading to distorted beliefs surrounding personal potential (Akbar, 2001). Such negative self-image illustrates the devastating and dehumanizing effect of systemic, institutional and interpersonal racism in American society, and how it has manifested into intense self-hatred and self-destructive behaviour

patterns in Black youth.

Although the relative number of violence-prevention programmes designed specifically for young African-American men are few, they have shown some evidence of success in decreasing violent/aggressive behaviour (Wilson-Brewer 1992; Hammond & Yung 1993). However, very little research has been conducted on culturally sensitive interventions aimed at reducing the 'Three Headed Dragon' of depression and frustration, and mediating anger in Black adolescent males (Baggio 1987; Davies 1989; Muran, Kassinove, Ross & Muran 1989; Jackson 2015). Focusing on the effects of Afrocentric methodological approaches to these three factors may hold important keys to developing crucial treatment modalities for victims of violent experience, as well as for those who perpetrate the violence. Toward this end, an ecological framework (Gordon 1992) was used in this study. Studies of the individual experience within the social ecological context include those analysing family systems, communities, and cultural contexts. An ecological model considers the history of violence in America, including its impact on African-Americans during slavery, and the cultural context, which includes how norms and personal belief systems and values are shaped. Cultural context also encompasses the historical, political, social and economic realities influencing society, which compromise and, in some cases, determine quality of life for many African-Americans.

There is great need for the discipline of psychology to face the challenge of designing, implementing and evaluating programmes and techniques aimed at influencing nonviolent behaviour. If the task of the mental health system is to facilitate the return to a state of mental/emotional health and balance of any individual, then there are two options for managing the state of imbalance and disorder:

1. The mental health system can attempt to control the situation externally, colluding with the criminal-justice system. In doing so, it will characterize and label violent offenders as deviant personalities, which like a cancer, must be 'cut off' from a society of 'normal', 'peace-loving' people (Wilson 1993).
2. Alternatively, the mental health system can assist troubled individuals by adding a level of order to their internal world, with the possibility of facilitating eventual health and balance to their lives.

To engage in the latter, the entire current framework of mental health delivery couched in the Western narrative must be challenged and replaced with that of an Afro-centric perspective, a perspective that may include theories that fall along the lines of what Azibo has described as positivist theories, or what Kambon has proposed as Afrocentric theories (Jackson 2015). Prime examples can be found in the works of Abraham (1962), Nobles (1986a), Azibo (1991), Akbar (1996), Kambon (1998) and Fu-Kia (2003). Such theories of African personality primarily attempt to describe the process by which Africans develop a positive identity out of a negative, denigrated and belittled African identity. These theories, though they do not purport to address personality per se, can be regarded within the conceptual framework of advanced African personality theory.

It is this author's belief that when developing methodology for African-Americans such methodology should be supported and structured by a framework that is itself Afrocentric.

The use of such a framework not only incorporates African worldviews, and the dynamics of African personality, but it offers a means of conceptualizing the 'problem' of young African-American males along a time continuum or path. It informs the methodology in a way that allows for much more than the extinguishing of certain destructive behaviour. Such a framework allows for the development of methods that deal with deeper psychological issues that underlie problem behaviour, and encounter the African-American male on the path of life development. The stages of this path can be seen as occurring on four levels: (1) decomposition, (2) germination, (3) transformation, and (4) transcendence (Nobles 1986c).

The 'germination' stage may also be considered from the Bantu, Kikongo concepts of Sengumunwa or Vulumunwa – conceived ideologically from their root verbs of sengumuka or vulumuka (to emerge, to rise, to come to be) as a process that gives birth to a vital principle (N'kingu wangudi/N'kingu wavumuna) of double directional motion, Kala ye Zima (Fu-Kiau 2003). Movement at this stage is critical in striving toward the deep and multilayered Bantu concept of Kinenga (or balance). To the ancient Africans, language was symbolic, full of signs and symbols. This is important in the development of treatment/intervention models that aim at affecting the attitudes, beliefs, and ideas of people of African ancestry, including Americans of African ancestry, in an effort to impact on behaviour.

The 'transformation' stage may also be considered from the concept

of African self-consciousness (Kambon 2012), in that a strong African self-consciousness represents psychological health in the movement towards balance, for Africans in general and Americans of African ancestry in particular. In addition, the Kemetian concept of ‘Putah’ as a characteristic of mental maturity captures this stage. In the context of Kemetic metaphysics, Putah is one of seven dimensions that help form the basis for human growth and development in ancient African psychology (Nobles 1986; Akbar 1994). The seven interrelated dimensions as described by Parham (2009) are as follows:

1. The Ka – the physical body (also understood as the sum of the following dimensions).
2. The Ba – the breath of life; energy or life force transmitted by the Creator and ancestor to each individual.
3. The Khaba – the emotions and rhythmic movement/pattern of life.
4. The Akhu – our intellect or capacity for thought and perception.
5. The Seb – the eternal soul; at pubescence, one’s ability to self-create/reproduce.
6. The Putah – the union of the brain with conscious mind reflecting mental maturity.
7. The Atmu – the divine or eternal soul.

Finally, the stage of ‘transcendence’ can be seen as aligned with the Kemetian concept of the ‘KA’, the summative aspect of all seven (Ka, Ba, Khaba, Akhu, Seb, Putah, Atmu) interrelated dimensions of the psyche or soul (Nobles 1986b).

Our mandate as healers, relative to Black youth, can be seen as assisting them in addressing certain questions in the context of therapeutic intervention. What is their path? At what stage do they presently exist? What is their human potential? What is the meaning of their collective being? How do their perceptions create reality?

Again, the task of the therapist can be seen as the task of changing the inappropriate behaviour, which is, in effect, a task of cultural realignment; realigning the adolescent's behaviour with Afrocentric principles of conduct, which are consistent with the highest level of human functioning. Violent, self-destructive and deviant behaviour, based on culturally distorted ideas, offer little resiliency to states of depression and frustration, and destructive

mediation of anger. Such ideation must be realigned with culturally accurate and appropriate ideas, which can lead to faith and hope in tomorrow, motivation to achieve, and intellectual development.

## **Study Objectives**

Currently there is a dearth of information on studies focusing on treatment that directly addresses cognitive factors associated with violence among young African-American males, which made this study all the more critical. The current article locates these cognitive factors in what the author believes to be their appropriate context of memetic infection and resultant programming. The stated research hypotheses were as follows:

## **Research Hypotheses**

- (1) Exposure to historically based/culturally relevant material will have a significant effect on the level of frustration tolerance in young African-American males as measured by the Survey of Personal Beliefs (SPB).
- (2) Exposure to historically based/culturally relevant material will have a significant effect on the level of depression in young African-American males as measured by the Reynolds Adolescent Depression Scale (RADS).
- 3) Exposure to historically based/culturally relevant material will have a significant effect on mediation of anger in young African-American males as measured by the State-Trait Anger Expression Inventory (STAXI).

## **Null Hypothesis**

- (1) Exposure to historically based/culturally relevant material will have no significant effect on the level of frustration tolerance in young African-American males as measured by the Survey of Personal Beliefs (SPB).
- (2) Exposure to historically based/culturally relevant material will have no significant effect on the level of depression in young African-American males as measured by the Reynolds Adolescent Depression Scale (RADS).
- (3) Exposure to historically based/culturally relevant material will have no significant effect on mediation of anger in young African-American males as measured by the State-Trait Anger Expression Inventory (STAXI).

## **Study Overview**

The study entitled *The Effect of Exposure to Culturally/Historically Based Material on Level of Frustration Tolerance, Level of Depression and Mediation of Anger in African-American Young Males* (Jackson 1997) was conducted to test the effectiveness of a brief group intervention, based on Afrocentric methodology, on the level of frustration tolerance, depression, and mediation of anger in African-American young men. Initially, 20 subjects were pretested using the Reynolds Adolescent Depression Scale, Survey of Personal Beliefs, and the State-Trait Anger Expression Inventory. Fourteen subjects remained at the time of post-testing.

A repeated-measures ANOVA was performed on mean test scores for experimental and control groups. Also Cochran's C, Bartlett-Box F and Box's M were conducted on pre- and post-test scores to evaluate the homogeneity of variance and normality.

While there was no significance found, qualitative trends indicate a reduction of depressive symptoms endorsed and reduction in level of state anger. For example, the repeated-measures ANOVA showed significant differences between and within the groups and over time (see Table 4). However, the significant differences were found in both the control and experimental groups. The reduction in the level of depression may be due to a variety of factors, and therefore cannot be solely attributed to the culturally relevant intervention designed for this study. The null hypothesis of no significant difference in the level of depression can be rejected. However, ANCOVA results did not confirm that PRERADS is a significant predictor of POSTRADS, regardless of group (experimental or control).

As expected, subjects did not indicate an increase in their level of overall anger or an exacerbation of long-standing anger as a result of the intervention. A critical limitation of this study was the problem of small sample size, which compromised the assumption of homogeneity of variance and normality, affecting significance.

## **Treatment Materials**

The criteria for the development of treatment protocol required that the materials (a) reflect Afrocentric thought, and (b) reflect a 'true' or accurate representation of history according to Afrocentric historians. The materials were selected for their potential impact on participant attitudes of perceived

hopelessness and/or helplessness, as well as their anticipated effectiveness in motivating cultural/spiritual realignment, as defined by Parham, Ajamu and White (2011).

The methodology was designed to affect deeper psychological issues that underlie problem behaviour, and that are typically encountered by the African-American male on his path-of-life development. The concept, documented by Nobles (1986), of 'path-of-life development' entailed the following stages: decomposition, germination, transformation, and transcendence. This manner of delineation was useful in establishing a framework for the intervention presented in this current study, and the former three stages were incorporated in anticipation of the existing decompositional status of African-American young men. The decomposition-related material was expected to produce results involving the expression of anger and surprise, as well as amusement and disgust. Upon review of this material, the participants responded with overwhelming anger and a sense of injustice.

## **Decomposition material**

Treatment material related to decomposition reflected the current status of socio-psychological racism, Black identity formation, and violence within the Black community – all within a historical context. This material was presented to facilitate the expression of emotions relative to the socio-economic and psychosocial condition of Black males in America. Videotaped material was also selected with this function in mind for its utility in enhancing the joining process. This material was also selected with consideration for the level of respect for, familiarity with, and relative influence of the speakers/artists in the study sample.

## ***Sample Decomposition Material***

### **Session #1:**

Lusane, G, *Pipe Dream Blues*. 'Black youth, attacked, abandoned, angry and addicted' (pg. 22-24) (Discussion); 'Racism and the drug crisis/ (pg. 25-38) (hand out).

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Farrakhan, L. (Speaker), Nation of Islam (Producer). *Stop the Killing* [Video] (2:14 - 4:15 / 43:00 - 58:00 min.).

Jackson, P. (Editor) News excerpts on Rodney King aftermath [Video] (1:20-1:46/2:08-2:24/2:47-6:38 min.).

Riggs, M. (Producer) *Ethnic Notions* [Video] (0-3:09/ 4:44-8:30/ 9:35-14:43/15:48-20:58).

Ice Cube (Vocals), Priority Records (1991, 1992). 'Bird in the Hand' / 'Tear this MF up' [CD Recording].

### Instructions:

- a) Play 'Bird in the Hand' as introduction to segment.
- b) Distribute and introduce the outline for 'Pipe Dream Blues' and review for 10 minutes.
- c) Have group view videotape of selection from *Ethnic Notions*.
- d) Have group view videotape of news excerpts from Rodney King beating and L.A. rebellion.
- e) Play 'Tear this MF up.'
- f) Have group view videotape of *Stop the Killing*.
- g) Conduct brief discussion on information presented.

The stage of germination was crucial in this study. It was hoped that the participants would begin to challenge some of their preconceived negative perceptions through this stage. Their response to the germination-related material was one of interest. They expressed surprise, wonder, and a sense of pride. Additionally, they demonstrated germinating signs of recognizing African pictures and artifacts, and objected when shown a video segment that misrepresented historical facts. Participants verbally expressed their anger and were able to cite information introduced earlier in the study.

### ***Germination Material***

Germination treatment material offered new ideas regarding the origins of civilization and the historical contributions of African people in an attempt to

challenge existing negative perceptions that could block participants from realizing their full potential. This material also focused on the concept of collective being as it relates to African-American young men.

### Sample Germination Material

#### **Session #4:**

Karenga, M., Ivan Van Sertima (Producer). *African Contribution to World Science* [Audiotape Recording]. (12-30 min.)

Goody Mob (Vocals), La Face Records (1995). 'Cell Therapy' on Soul Food [Audiotape Recording].

'Free Your Mind, Return to the Source: African Origins' Video: Dr. Asa Hilliard III and Listervelt Middleton. Producer: Waset Educational Productions. (41 - 55/ 56:40 - 1:07.30 / 1:18.30 - 1:28 min.)

#### Instructions:

- a) Play 'Cell Therapy'. Briefly discuss.
- b) Play 'African Contribution to World Science' audiotape. Briefly discuss.
- c) View 'Free Your Mind' videotape. Discuss.

The stage of transformation attempted to challenge culturally distorted ideas and begin the process of realigning thought patterns with Afrocentric principles. Behavioural changes were noted in the following three broad areas: (a) level of attention during sessions, (b) verbal responses, and (c) within-group behaviour. By the ninth session, earlier problems with attentiveness were negligible. Even when participants demonstrated the most difficulty with attention – during the presentation of audiotaped information – their attempts were visibly noticeable. They began to reflect upon their own past behaviour as they evaluated material challenging destructive behaviour in general. Fewer unplanned breaks were necessary during group sessions, and participants

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began to raise interesting questions and comments regarding their anger at never having learned this information in school.

### ***Transformation Material***

Transformation material focused on questions relative to the participants. What is their path? At what stage do they presently exist? How do their perceptions create reality? This material challenged culturally distorted ideas surrounding self, and motivated participants to realign their behaviour with Afrocentric principles of conduct (Nobles 1986).

### **Sample Transformation Material**

#### **Session #9**

‘African Origins of Judeo-Christianity’ video: Ashrwa Kwesi (1-10 min.)

‘Keynote Address’: 1986 Conference of the Association of Black Psychologists Audiotape: Dr. Ivan Van Sertima (10-43 min.)

‘Save the Family’ Video: Min. Farrakhan (30-45 min.) Instructions:

- a) View videotape.
- b) Listen to ‘Keynote Address’ audiotape.
- c) View segment of ‘Save the Family’ videotape. Discuss.

Goals toward changed attitudes and/or improved understanding surrounding individual situations were appropriate for the use of a short-term cognitive approach where specific memetic ideation represented as cognitions (i.e. thoughts or images) and/or schemata (i.e. silent assumptions) account for the onset and persistence of symptoms or memetic infection (Ursano & Hales 1986; Nobles 2015). Participants were made aware of stereotyped views and schemata they brought to situations, and were able to recognize and adjust such views toward a more objective reality.

## Statistical Findings

**Table 1.**

Descriptive statistics for the Survey of Personal Beliefs (SPB, Pre-test and Post-test, for the Groups: Experimental and Control

	Experimental Group (N=6)		Control Group (N=8)	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
<b>Pretest</b>	34.67	10.25	31.75	4.03
<b>Posttest</b>	30.50	5.36	29.63	3.78

**Table 2.**

Summary Table of Repeated-Measures ANOVA Performed on Mean Test Scores from the Survey of Personal Beliefs (SPB) Pre-test and Post-test between Groups

Source of Variance	df	SS	MS	F
Between Subjects	13	617.00		
Groups	1	24.65	24.65	0.05
S(G)	12	592.35	49.36	
Within Subjects	14	364.86		
Test	1	67.86	67.36	2.81
Group X Test	1	7.15	7.15	0.31
Residual	<u>12</u>	<u>289.85</u>	24.15	
Total	27	981.86		

**Table 3.**

Descriptive Statistics for the Reynolds Adolescent Depression Scale (RADs), Pre-test and Post-test, for the Groups: Experimental and Control

	Experimental Group (N=6)		Control Group (N=8)	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
<b>Pretest</b>	74.17	8.33	81.75	6.56
<b>Posttest</b>	69.00	6.32	75.75	8.83

**Table 4.**

Summary Table of Repeated-Measures ANOVA Performed on Mean Test Scores from the Reynolds Adolescent Depression Scale (RADS) Pre-test and Post-test between Groups

Source of Variance	df	SS	MS	F
Between Subjects	13	1223.61		
Groups	1	352.19	352.19	4.85 <sup>a</sup>
S(G)	12	871.42	76.62	
Within Subjects	14	741.37		
Test	1	231.76	213.76	4.87 <sup>a</sup>
Group X Test	1	1.19	1.19	0.03
Residual	<u>12</u>	526.42	43.87	
Total	27	1964.98		

a=p.<0.05

**Figure 1.**

Analysis of covariance results for experimental and control groups where dependent variable is post-test Reynolds Adolescent Depression scale and covariate is pre-test Reynolds Adolescent Depression scale

*Model Summary* <sup>a, b</sup>

Model	Variables		R.	R. Square	Adjusted R. Square	St. Error of the Estimate
	Entered	Removed				
1	PRERADS GROUP c,d		.473	.224	0.083	7.9766

- a. Dependent Variable: POSTRADS
- b. B. Method: Enter
- c. Independent Variable: (Constant), PRERADS, GROUP
- d. All requested variables entered

*Anova<sup>a</sup>*

Model	SS	df	MS	F	p.
1. Regression	201.829	2	100.915	1.586	.248b
Residual	699.885	11	63.626		
Total	901.714	13			

- a. Dependent Variable: POSTRADS
- b. Independent Variable: (Constant), PRERADS, GROUP

*Coefficients<sup>a</sup>*

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval for B	
	B	St. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1.Constant	54.13	25.686		2.107	.059	-2.403	110.668
GROUP	-4.74	4.916	-.293	-.965	.355	-15.56	6.075
PRERADS	.264	.312	.257	.847	.415	-.423	.952

- a. Dependent Variable: POSTRADS

**Table 5.**

Descriptive Statistics for the State Anger Scale (SANG), Pre-test and Post-test, for the Groups

	Experimental Group (N=6)		Control Group (N=8)	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
<b>Pretest</b>	26.67	9.46	17.38	4.04
<b>Posttest</b>	23.50	5.32	19.38	4.27

**Table 6.**

Table of Repeated-Measures ANOVA Performed on Mean Test Scores from the state Anger Scale (SANG) Pre-test and Post-test between Groups

Source of Variance	df	SS	MS	F
Between Subjects	13	723.29		
Groups	1	308.58	308.58	8.94a
S(G)	12	414.71	34.51	
Within Subjects	14	470.51		
Test	1	2.33	2.33	0.07
Group X Test	1	45.76	45.76	1.30
Residual	<u>12</u>	<u>422.42</u>	35.20	
Total	27	1193.80		

a=p.<0.05

## **Discussion**

The study findings provide a measure of qualitative support for use of a brief therapeutic intervention developed from an Afrocentric methodological base. Minimal research exists related to culturally relevant treatment strategies addressing factors associated with violence in young men of African descent, rendering the present study an even more critical addition to the literature.

The tested intervention was designed to produce more than an impact on destructive behaviours. It was also modelled to effectively deal with psychological issues underlying the behaviour, motivating discussion surrounding the following fundamental questions:

1. At what stage do the young African-American males in this study presently exist?
2. What is their human potential?
3. What is their path?
4. What is the meaning of their collective being?

5. How do their perceptions create reality?

Responses clearly indicated cultural realignment of the negative and destructive attitudes and beliefs of the participants. Culturally accurate and appropriate ideas and beliefs had also become apparent. For example, an indication of initial negative attitudes and beliefs was the high level of intolerance for the views of peers. Participants would initially respond to other group members with derogatory and inflammatory statements and excessive argument while chiming lyrics to rap songs condoning and glorifying Black-on-Black violence, as well as denigrating women. For example, participants would respond to other group members by making statements like, ‘Shut the fuck up!’ ‘Man, fuck that!’ or ‘You don't know shit.’ Also participants would rap or reiterate the lyrics to rap songs like ‘Niggas ain’t shit’, ‘I’ll bust a nigga in the dome’, signifying Black-on- Black violence, and would consistently refer to women as ‘bitches’ and Black men as ‘niggers/niggas’.

Midway through the intervention, the participants began to question these negative practices and to concern themselves with why this type of material was disseminated within their communities. By the sixth session, behavioural change in group movement, expression, and unity emerged. They began to become more interactive as they began to develop a sense of ownership and defensiveness for the project. For example, on occasion when interrupted by a staff member, the group members would become angry and say things like, ‘They always wanna fuck something up. This is *our* shit!’. Also, experimental group participants were initially reluctant to be on time. This changed as they began to show more interest in the information presented.

By the ninth session, earlier problems with attentiveness were negligible.

Group members at this stage would attempt to keep each other quiet, even where participants had the most difficult time with attention to audiotaped information.

When seeing the gold artifacts and symbols in ancient Kemet they responded immediately with amazement. They also expressed amazement at seeing black people all around the world, and they began to verbally associate their love for gold with their ancestors, as they discussed their gold teeth and jewelry. Participants paid particular attention to the Minister Farrakhan videotape, which featured speakers who challenged the destructive actions of Black youth, some of which the group members had participated in. They

began to laughingly joke about different speakers, saying things like: ‘He’s fat!’ ‘Look at that hair!’ and ‘Damn, he’s pissed.’ Then, in more serious tones, they expressed their agreement with the speakers, saying, for example, ‘Niggas need to chill on all that violence.’ ‘You know they right!’ ‘You know that shit is real!’ (You know they are telling the truth). As a group, we experienced fewer unplanned breaks, and they began to raise interesting questions and comments regarding their anger at never having learned this information in school. Some discussed going to school once they are able to leave the institution, and others discussed simply not returning to be institutionalized.

Although it is difficult to measure the construct of ‘spirit’ using empirical methods, this study attempted to offer a structured format for restoring the spirit (Azibo 1996; Parham *et al.* 2011) expected to impact self-respecting consciousness. This attitude of self-respect is essential in developing a reasonable foundation for healthy self-esteem (Akbar 1986; DeGruy-Leary 2005). Differences in the level of depressive symptoms endorsed between the control and experimental groups were expected to indicate a noticeable impact on the level of self-respecting consciousness. Half of the participants within the experimental group expressed strong differences in critical items endorsed across the pre-testing and post-testing on the RADS. For example, item #14 indicating self-harm or suicidality: ‘I feel like hurting myself’ was endorsed pre-test as 2 (Hardly Ever), 3 (Sometimes), and endorsed post-test as 1 (Almost Never). Item #26: ‘I feel worried’ was endorsed pre-test as 3 (Sometimes) and post-test as 1 (Almost Never) and 2 (Hardly Ever). All the experimental group members endorsed a critical self-efficacy item: ‘I feel like nothing I do helps any more’ pretest as 4 (Most of the Time), 3 (Sometimes), and 2 (Hardly Ever), and post-test as 1 (Almost Never), with one exception of 2 (Hardly Ever). These trends were not surprising given Akbar’s description of the role of historical reality and the impact of its destruction on people of African descent in general Support for the intervention’s impact on motivating cognitive processes which serve as protective barriers to environmental factors that normally result in increased levels of anger and depression, although not statistically significant, was evidenced by RADS and STAXI results. When examining individual RADS scores we found a noticeable group difference in the number of participants who moved from a score well above the cutoff score for serious depression to a score below that of the cutoff. Pretest scores for

the experimental group indicated a total of three participants who scored above the cut-off, while control group scores indicated five participants scoring above the cut-off score. However, post-test results revealed that one of six experimental group members scored in the critical range for serious depression, whereas seven of eight control group members scored in the critical range for serious depression.

### **Clinical Implications**

Differences in pre-test and post-test depression scores suggest an impact was indeed made upon the participants' sense of perceived powerlessness, which, if internalized, often leads to depression. The risk for increased anger expression, and/or otherwise deviant behaviour as a result of exposure to treatment, was minimal. These findings present strong implications for future use of such treatment material in both educational and mental-health arenas where identity formation and individual sense of self are socially driven. These results underscore the importance of positive imagery in the development of youth of African descent, suggesting the possible clinical relevancy of rites-of-passage programmes.

The potential for effective treatment of delinquent and/or incarcerated young men of colour, using exposure to similar material or culturally based programmes, seems quite strong. Both the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of this brief group-therapy design has wide implications for the field of mental health as well as for the development of crime- and violence-prevention programmes. Finally, this study makes a strong case for the inclusion of Afrocentric methodology and further development of culturally sensitive models toward violence prevention and intervention among people of African descent.

The participants in this study represent one of the most difficult populations to support within the field of clinical psychology. Young men who are incarcerated at this age have already internalized much of the destructive and negative imagery this society attributes to their culture. Regardless, the intervention model presented in this study, which was based upon Afrocentric methodology including an Afrocentric understanding and conceptualization of the problems confronted by African-descended youth within this culture, was able to produce noticeable change in important cognitive areas. Perhaps further

study of similar interventions will reduce the need to wait for behavioural outcome as a primary means of evaluation. For some youth, the wait is too long, and the evaluation comes too late.

## **Limitations of the Study**

This study was not free of difficulties. Logistical problems and conflicts between the probation and education departments emerged that posed numerous challenges. Access to participants, as well as to facilities, was sometimes problematic. Behavioural problems, though anticipated, occurred on an ongoing basis in the initial phase of the research. When considering the generalization of findings to the total population of young African-American males, careful consideration of the breadth of experience among such populations is recommended. Although individuals may share many of the same experiences and stressors, given the inherent racism in American society, they tend to differ across lines of class, cultural orientation, and familial stability.

The small sample size was a limitation of this study. Both the experimental and control groups began with 15 members – a total of 30 participants. It was necessary to eliminate 10 individuals immediately, owing to incomplete testing. Both groups were subsequently reduced as adolescents dropped out of the study, or were involved in incidents of unauthorized absence from the institution. Consequently, attrition resulted in an insufficient number of participants to avoid violating the assumption of homogeneity of variance and normality.

Other possible limitations of this study included the fact that the pre-test and post-test differences may have been minimized, thereby reducing effect size. The method of evaluation may also have presented a limitation. Adding a qualitative approach could have been valuable in measuring change. Perhaps critical changes occurred that were not detected by the instruments used. Finally, a strong limitation to this study was the lack of funding for its design and implementation. Use of more updated technology would have enhanced editing capability, and minimized delays in the transition from audio to audiovisual treatment material. Merging musical selections with visual images holds potential for reducing problems related to participant attention and concentration.

## **Recommendations for Future Research**

An important issue relative to this research is whether the inclusion of culturally relevant, socio-historically based materials in mainstream therapies could prove efficacious for young, African-American men, in particular, as well as African-Americans in general. This question certainly deserves closer analysis. The results of this study were profoundly limited by the choice of evaluation parameters (i.e. quantitative vs qualitative), the dynamics between the subsystems at the study site, and sample size. Perhaps an evaluative approach that balances quantitative with qualitative data would be more appropriate for future study.

In addition, future study would be greatly advanced by using assessments developed within the context of an African-centred framework (as none of the instruments used in this study had been). Use of instruments like the African Self-Consciousness Scale (ASCS) and the Cultural Misorientation Scale (CMS) in assessing ASC and CM may be critical (Kambon 2003; Kambon & Rackley 2005; Kambon & Bowen-Reid 2010) to meaningfully evaluating African-American behaviour and mental health. These instruments have been used in various studies involving salient variables such as personal causation, psychological well-being and health promoting behaviours vs anti-Black behaviour. Both instruments have been shown to be reliable and valid.

In conclusion, qualitative findings suggest that the use of culturally relevant and socio-historically based information in the treatment of young men of African descent impacts factors antecedent to violent behaviour. This has important implications for the practice of psychotherapy and for the future development and use of Afrocentric models and methodology in the treatment of youth within this culture where access to mental-health services is often restricted owing to a lack of resources. Brief-therapy and group-therapy models become important cost-effective approaches under such circumstances. Given the indicated group movement through the stages of decomposition, germination, and transformation, future research would be best served by a detailed investigation of the path stages (Nobles 1986c). Developing criteria for each stage could promote development of a framework with the potential of being highly effective in conceptualizing issues and challenges that confront youth of African descent. This study endeavoured to 'bridge the gap' between psychological and sociological

conceptualization of issues related to the mental health of young men of African descent. The applied nature of this research shows great promise for future psychological treatment of high-risk populations in general.

It should be noted that given the myriad consequences of cultural derailment, development of treatment methodology for young African-American males is an extremely sensitive and challenging task. Young African-American males represent a significant portion of urban youth. Urban youth culture is characterized as an 'oppositional culture' (MEE Report 1992), and as a culture, is highly suspicious of messages perceived to represent mainstream culture. This poses a significant challenge for those who wish to disseminate information or ideas to this population through the use of popular media, i.e. television, film, music (radio), or the internet. Music videos, in particular, have been identified as possibly having the ability to be more current and to penetrate more quickly and completely than other forms of media, while maintaining an acceptance as part of the culture. In addition, music videos, via internet platforms like YouTube and Vimeo, or that show up on Facebook, etc. give the impression of being more shaped by the culture and are perceived as coming from within the culture, taking a role in defining it. Reflection on these factors could only enhance the development of future treatment methods.

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Manuscripts should range between 5000-8000 and book reviews between 500-1000 words. However, longer articles may be considered for publication.

Attach a cover page to one manuscript containing the following information: Author's full name, address, e-mail address, position, department, university/ institution, telephone/ fax numbers as well as a list of previous publications. Authors must also submit a brief academic biographical sketch of about sixty words, indicating institutional affiliation, main scholarly focus, books published, significant articles, and/ or academic journals regularly contributing too.

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Use footnotes sparingly. In order to enhance the value of the interaction between notes and text, we use footnotes and not endnotes.

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