

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 (Ramose 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 issuesI 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 & Strauss 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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