

# THE PLACE OF INDIGENOUS AFRICAN LANGUAGES IN THE NEW CURRICULUM: AN AFRICAN PSYCHOLOGY CASE STUDY

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## ABSTRACT

The role of indigenous African language in teaching and learning in South Africa is something that has been explored widely in higher education. However, these works have only resulted in the usage of these languages only to make Western knowledges intelligible to those whose first language is not English. This article argues for the need to move beyond this limited usage of indigenous languages as mere translators of Western knowledge. It calls for the usage of indigenous African languages for epistemic purposes. Using a case example of African Psychology, the article illustrates how language carries its people's knowledges. Demonstrating that the prioritisation of colonial languages in education has cemented the myth that African people have no worthy knowledge from which to draw. This chapter illustrates the manner in which language has kept these indigenous African knowledges alive despite the epistemic violence meted against them.

**Keywords:** African Psychology, indigenous African languages, indigenous knowledge, Ubuntu, culture, epistemic value

## BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

Long before psychology asserted itself in the classroom, psychological work had begun in South Africa. The imposition of the Christian schooling system was the beginning of the mental and spiritual interception of Africans by the British colonizer. Here we note something interesting, that it was the church which facilitated the education. This could be read as an acknowledgement of the inseparable relationship between mind and spirit. This is something the British understood very well about African ontology. That the mind and the soul are a composite unit. It comes up in so many colonial writings and it is the foundation on which I build the argument that the missionaries needed to engage in Psychological work thus study the human functioning of African people. For them to make inroads they needed to understand what it means to be in the world to African people. In order for them to do that they needed the language of the people under study. This is explicitly put in the foreword of what was derogatory known as the Kaffir Dictionary. Justifying why the need for dictionary of isiZulu

and isiXhosa the colonizing missionary J. L. Dohne in 1857 stated;

“In the study of languages in general, and of barbarian language in particular, two objects are to be aimed at, – a philosophical and a practical. The philosophical object is the attainment of an insight into the character of a people, by means of an accurate acquaintance with the form into which its thoughts are moulded, – and which is invariably the true expression of the national spirit. As regards savages this is in an especial degree the fact. The investigation of the language discloses the secrets of national character, otherwise impenetrable, and reveals the origin of customs long since forgotten. The spirit of the nation is exhibited to our minds in the living words which have conveyed its ideas for ages, as clearly as its physical appearance is presented to our eyes. Thus the national language is the only safe exponent of the national character. The immediate practical object, as far as barbarous tribes are concerned, is that a literature should be created for the propagation of Christian truth and the extension of civilization.”

The above quote is a clear illustration of the psychological work the missionaries undertook in order to enable themselves a full grasp of African self-knowledge. This self-knowledge is rooted in spirituality. Dhone (1857) was aware that the language of the people would ensure an accurate grasp. He even acknowledges that the languages unlock the secrets thus coded information. It is in the language that the epistemology of a people is coded. He accurately states that language is the only safe exponent of who the people are. What we see in this excerpt is another acknowledgement of the spirit. The colonising missionaries were never illusioned about who Africans were but needed to counter that to recreate a new human. This is why the propagation of christian truth had to be conducted in a language of the African. First, they had to understand the language to understand African epistemology and secondly to use that language to spread their own worldview. A thorough study of the meaning of being human to Africans was thus conducted. We can therefore say a psychological exercise was engaged with. It is that exercise that gave the colonizer access to the ontology and the epistemology of African people. It also allowed them to turn it upside-down and replace it with propagation of christianity. Europeans who learnt indigenous languages did not do so with pure intentions of understanding African ways of life, but it was done in order to fulfil the colonial demands of subjugation. As Mtuze (1999, 9) states

“It is amply illustrated that a large part of the crisis in the case of South Africa was thanks to the fact that Christianity came coupled with colonization and imperialism. It, therefore, had a hidden agenda that went way beyond the spread of the Word of God. Cultural domination was part of that agenda.”

More than the individualistic Western gazed Psychology that is offered in the classroom, it is the psychological games played outside the classroom that laid a solid foundation for the self-rejection African people still experience to this day. Christianity was used to demonise African

ways of knowing and being. It was a tool to obliterate African cultures. It found a stable mate in Western education which equally served to undermine African knowledges.

When psychology hit the classroom, it became a tool to justify colonial dehumanization of people of Africa descent. The branch of psychology known as psychometry whose focus is on the measurement of intelligence and personality was used to justify the colonial claim aptly captured by Ramose (1999) that indigenous South Africans were subhuman at best but definitely not human. Intelligence and personality tests were used to support such claims that justified the relegation of Africans from landowners to labourers.

It is during the establishment of the Association for Black Psychologists in the United States of America in 1968 that we saw people of African descent give a coordinated response to the dehumanisation meted out by Euro-American Psychology. Among other efforts the direct speak back to the biased psychometric testing of Euro-American Psychology by Dr Robert L. Williams remains one of the major turning points. Dr Williams developed the intelligence test known as the Black Intelligence Scale of Cultural Homogeneity (BITCH). This according to Williams (1972) is a culture specific test used to determine the taker's ability to function symbolically or to think in terms of her or his own culture and environment. In this test, Williams (1972) used a combination of dialect and culture specific tests to ensure that the test is measuring what is inside the black child's head. Another key contribution by Dr. Williams was the problematisation of the slave master's language and the fight for the African American Vernacular English also referred to as Ebonics to occupy its rightful place as the language of the African American by Dr. L. Williams. These contributions support the argument that knowledge is based on the culture of its world of origin and relies on its language for transmission.

These developments led to Euro-American Psychology accommodating, in a very small-scale knowledge that emanate from societies that were outside of the its culture. This actually did more harm than good because these knowledges were not only gazed with a Western lens but also pushed to the back pages of the Psychology textbooks thus presenting them as alternative to the mainstreamed psychology that is founded on European cultures. The strides made by the Association for Black Psychologists encouraged similar developments both in the continent of Africa and the diaspora. Here in South Africa, although there have been scholarly contributions in the field of African/Black Psychology that are not foregrounded in the accommodative Euro-American Psychology, efforts to centre African/Black thought in the curriculum only gained traction as a result of nationwide students protests of 2015 that among other things demanded a decolonised quality education. It is however worth mentioning that at the University of South Africa (Unisa), decolonisation efforts precede the students demands.

The university had already embarked in decolonisation activities when the protests erupted. Such efforts include the exposure of staff members to decolonisation projects around the globe. This was followed by the introduction of Unisa's first decolonisation summer school in 2014 which cemented the university's commitment to being the African university in service of humanity. It is against this backdrop that the Psychology modules that centre African knowledge were developed. These modules are foregrounded on the notion that language is a critical aspect of knowledge transmission.

This article argues for the need to move beyond the limited usage of indigenous languages as mere translators of Western knowledge. It calls for the usage of indigenous African languages for epistemic purposes. Using a case example of a newly designed undergraduate Psychology course, the article illustrates how language carries its people's knowledges. Demonstrating that the prioritisation of colonial languages in education has cemented the myth that African people have no worthy knowledge from which to draw. This article illustrates the manner in which language has kept these indigenous African knowledges alive despite the epistemic violence meted against them. The epistemic violence alluded to above constitutes the unethical imposition of Western education which carried the assumption that indigenous people had no education of their own. This was in fact an imposition of the coloniser's culture. This is evident in all disciplines in higher learning including psychology which universalises Euro-American knowledge.

This article detours from the understanding that African Psychology still needs to be developed, debated and its positioning in learning spaces be negotiated. The notion that African knowledges and languages need to be developed for academic purposes carry colonial undertones that have always perceived African knowledge as not being enough. At issue here is the assumption that African knowledges and languages need to be modified to suit western pedagogic modalities. This is evident in the concerns raised by Prah (2017, 215–216) that; “the real challenge is how to intellectualise African languages and bring them up to speed with the linguistic techniques of modernity and advanced African thought”. This concern plays into the colonial stereotypes that African knowledges and languages are backward and they advance primitive thought. Encapsulated in this understanding is also the notion that western modalities are a universal standard all other ways of knowing should be modified to suit this standard.

Furthermore, I consider the debate by Moll (2002) (who engages with what he terms the possibility of an African Psychology), as very Westernised. I instead align my work with assertions about African Psychology as seen in the works of Nwoye (2015) (where he asks, “What is African Psychology the Psychology of?”) for their ability to illustrate a psychology as known and practised by people in various contexts of the African continent. Moll's (2002)

questions lean toward Western ethos of knowledge production where knowledge is engaged and eventually produced by individuals and not just individuals but those with Western education qualifications. This exercise minimises the role of indigenous knowledge custodians into research participants. The academic debates are contrary to the African understanding of knowledge experts and communal production of knowledge. Lastly, the debates seem to respond to colonial doubts and dismissal of African knowledge. A point Baloyi and Makobe-Rabothata (2014) dismiss when they argue that to an extent that there are African people, there is African knowledge from which Africans conceive and understand the world. Baloyi and Makobe-Rabothata (2014) further argue that this knowledge comprises unique ways in which Africans apply this knowledge to advance themselves. In this article I posit that African Psychology, which is the African people's conception of wellness, has always existed. Just like other indigenous knowledges, the validity of African Psychology does not hinge on their incorporation into learning institutions' curricula. It is in fact the learning institutions that stand to lose if they do not incorporate African Psychology into the curriculum. The failure to bring this knowledge into the education curricula will be detrimental to the society in that learning institutions will continue to produce graduates whose training is incongruent with the ways of the people they are meant to serve.

## **CONCEPTUAL APPROACH**

This article takes a conceptual approach to provide an illustration of what an African Psychology that draws from its people's language looks like. The conceptual approach advances theory and text instead of raw data as it is the case with empirical studies. This article engages with African text that explains Psychology from an African perspective. This text draws from isiXhosa concepts and the intention is to show that language is a great resource for African epistemologies because it encodes important information and experiences of its speakers (Maseko 2018). The psychological conceptualisations that are explored in this article illustrate how AmaXhosa conceive of their well-being. This article employs what I refer to as the conceptual synthesis which is the interweaving of indigenous concepts to produce an integrated conception of African psychology. The conceptual streams that are being integrated here are the indigenous conception of *umntu*, community and the cosmos to illustrate indigenous conception of wellness.

This article departs from wa Thiong'o (1986) assertion that language is not merely a tool for communication but also a tool to transmit a people's knowledge and culture. This assertion is the invitation for an exploration of two key questions which are;

- Why are indigenous languages critical for curriculum transformation?
- What are the over-arching indigenous concepts that anchor African Psychology?

These questions are critical in endeavours to transform the curriculum and to shift the university from being a Western university in Africa to being an African university that draws from African epistemologies and is able to respond to the realities of the people. For some time now the usage of indigenous African languages in universities has largely been more about translating Euro-[North]American knowledge into indigenous African languages. The current call to decolonise the curriculum present the opportunity to explore more in-depth ways of utilising indigenous languages. As carriers of its people's knowledges indigenous languages are a window into indigenous concepts that could help academia impart to its students an understanding of the world as experienced by the people for which they are trained to work. Furthermore, indigenous concepts, if brought to the classroom, could cause African students to relate to what is taught. It is important to note that this article limits its focus to what it means to draw psychological indigenous knowledge from indigenous concepts. Aspects related to pedagogic modalities are not explored in this offering.

### **KNOWLEDGE IMPOSITION IS CULTURAL IMPOSITION**

This article puts emphasis on the fact that all psychological knowledge has cultural point of reference. It communicates the culture of the world from which it was developed. Therefore, the normalised usage of Euro-American knowledge cannot be unchallenged. As it has been argued by numerous scholars, there is no universal knowledge (Nyamnjoh 2012; Mignolo 2011). Knowledge is based on the research conducted in specific geographical locations and it communicates the experiences of those locations. When knowledge derived from a particular culture is presented as universal it causes what Kambon (2002), refers to as cultural misorientation. According to Kambon (2002) cultural misorientation is a consequence of the insitutionalised superimposition of European cultures upon African people. By insitutionalised he meant that key institutions in society become founded on the European worldview and become normalised and legalised

Cultural misorientation affected people's personalities and ways of relating to self and others. The societal changes that were imposed by the colonisers caused a misalignment with which the colonised are still grappling to this day. Their altered ways of life that force them to exist in the dissonance we had earlier referred to as double consciousness affect their psychological state. As such they resort to unhealthy behaviours that numb their feelings of misalignment. Their relationship with materiality, with food and with those around them was

disrupted and could be said to be the reason for the milieu of the illnesses prevalent in today's society. Colonialism distorted indigenous people's relationship with their bodies and their communities. Their bodies were suddenly portrayed as sources of labour and symbols of everything bad (their skin colour determined their position in society). Their relations with the community became increasingly individualistic, mirroring the western lifestyle. These changes according to Manganyi (1973) also led to an altered value system. African people started to adopt a materialistic approach to objects which is an approach typical of individualistic societies. As Manganyi (1973) states under normal conditions people relate to material objects based both on their attractiveness and utility value but this gets violated when they have been robbed of their dignity, self-respect and spirituality. Their sense of being in the world with objects gets distorted and they tend to validate themselves in terms of external possessions. Akbar (1981) expands this notion by stating that this evaluation of wealth materially and evaluation of worth through material possessions is an indication of an assimilation of the western value system and the denial of historical factors that are responsible for one's dehumanization. Another consequence of being a colonised subject is what Akbar (1981) coined anti-self -attitude. This describes an attitude displayed by individuals who are motivated by the desire for approval from the white population. Their behaviour is mainly influenced by this desire and their standards are based on what is considered acceptable by white society and they tend to be more critical of the members of their own population group. Another important consequence of cultural mis-orientation is self-destructiveness. This according to Akbar (1981) entails engaging in self-defeating activities that result from frustrations of existing in a systematically oppressive society. Behaviours such as substance abuse and criminal activities could be associate with individuals suffering from self-destructiveness.

For Kambon (2002) these are a consequence of a Psychological disorder characterised by an internalised European worldview among Africans. Cultural misorientation is deliberate and ensures that the colonisers define and control the colonised. It suppresses the knowledges that have sustained people and introduced new knowledges that culturally displaces them. This article emanates from the demands of ordinary people to seize their right to define themselves. In the context of this article African Psychology is the example of using culturally relevant knowledge for self-definition.

## **AFRICAN PSYCHOLOGY**

If psychology, as alluded to above, communicates a culture of its place of origin, an African Psychology should therefore communicate a culture of the peoples of Africa in their varying ways of existing and experiencing the world. I define African Psychology as a holistic

understanding of wellness which draws from context specific African ways of being and doing that understand human existence from a relational ontology. African Psychology allows the people of Africa to rely on their own definition of human functioning which draws from their understanding of the meaning of being human. Being human for African people of *abantu* cultures means to be *umntu* which is not a mere denotation of biological existence. Being *umntu/motho* is an ethical standard above and beyond being a biological phenomenon. Ethical standard means upholding the prescripts of the way of being of *abantu* which is *Isintu*. *Isintu* is a culture that draws from the concept of ubuntu and is expanded on in ensuing section. *Isintu* communicates the interconnection between individuals and the world around them.

### **UNDERSTANDING UMNTU, UBUNTU AND ISINTU**

As alluded to above, the concept of *ubuntu/botho* is about balance and interconnection. *UBuntu/Botho* could be defined as an all-pervading ethic that informs and guides the behaviour of the people in a society. It is not only limited to certain behaviours but widely applied to ensure a harmonious life within a social setting. Ubuntu/Botho governs both the personal and communal aspects of life. This is done through cultural principles that are capsuled in *Isintu/Setho*. *Isintu/Setho* is the culture that draws from and is guided by *ubuntu/botho*, the ethic. This finds better expression in Dladla (2018) when he states that, the concept of *ubuntu/botho* is void without two components which is *abantu/batho* (the people) and *Isintu/Setho* (the culture on which *ubuntu* is based). *Ubuntu/Botho* can therefore be defined as both a human and humane centred way of being in the world. *Abantu* is a plural for *umntu*. *Umntu* is often translated to person but as stated earlier, in African epistemology to be *umntu* moves beyond biological denotation. It means you are living according to the prescripts of *ubuntu/botho*. One thus earns the status of being *umntu*. These prescripts are inscribed in the ways of doing of *abantu* and that is what is referred to as *isintu*. These ways of doing are evolving principles that communities agree upon. In this process it is the members of the culture who decide how to evolve. They are at liberty to decide what no longer serves their ways of life and what new ways of life to be adopted. *Isintu* then is a fluid process of continuously constructing ways of existing.

*Ubuntu/Botho* is a multifaceted concept that, according to Ramose (1999), is interwoven in philosophy, ontology and ethics. By that he means *Ubuntu/Botho* can be seen not only as a theoretical concept that foregrounds *isintu* but also as drawing from the people's conception of reality. *Ubuntu/Botho* according to Ramose (1999) communicates what it means to be a member of the society. Philosophy comprises knowledge that guides a culture. It is made up of the knowledges that better explain and inform fundamental aspects of a culture. These knowledges draw from the culture's ontology which is a way in which a people perceive their reality. It

addresses what it means to be human for a certain people. Such an understanding is then translated into a knowledge. For *abantu*, reality is perceived as relational, meaning a person does not only exist as themselves but in relation to other people (those alive and the departed) and to nature. Nature plays a crucial role in African ways of existence because plants and animals are seen as extended parts of existence. This is for the reason that all African families have what is known as totems. Totems are animals attached to certain clans as part of the ancestry. Just like the ancestors, they play a spiritual role in a person. Hence the ethical requirement to display responsibility to the people and the environment around us. The concept of ethics, which Ramose (1999) sees as integral to *ubuntu/botho* helps a people to adhere to the principles of *ubuntu/botho*. They inform behaviour and help deal with transgressions in ways that encourage societal harmony.

The synergy between *Ubuntu/Botho*, *Isintu/Sentho* and *Abantu/Batho* is best captured in the proverb *umntu ngumntu ngabantu/motho ke motho ka batho babang*, which means a person is a person through other people meaning, *Isintu* communicates a way of being *umntu* thus what is expected from you as a person. This includes ethical conduct that always takes into consideration the sensibilities of those around you. *Isintu/Setho* acknowledges ways of being around both the land and fellow human beings. *Ubuntu* therefore, as Zondi (2014) explains, can be seen as a set of ethics and values set out by *abantu* to make their society humane.

## **INTERCONNECTION AS A SPIRITUAL EXISTENCE**

The relations between the individual, family and community are rooted in an African understanding of human beings as spiritual beings. Africans assume an extended sense of self which transcends time to include all ancestors, the yet to be born, nature and the community (Myers 1987). The wellbeing of an individual is thus tied to the wellbeing of these interconnected entities. Among Africans there is no separation between the physical and the spiritual forms of being. The Western world's separation of body and spirit as captured by Myers (1987) assumes that the various segments of being human could be dealt with individually. In contrast, as Myers (1987) states, the African approach has a holistic orientation which is foregrounded in interrelatedness and interdependence of all things. Within this conception, highest value is placed on interpersonal relationships between individuals. This, therefore, means that one's status as a human being is earned through being divine or good to those around them (family, community, nature, ancestors and the future). The relationship with nature, the ancestors is inseparable as connecting with ancestors demands the wellbeing of the land. The health of plants, animals, the soil and the water is necessary for one to perform rituals that connect one with their ancestors. Through rituals, families have a primary responsibility to

ensure clear communication paths between kinship and its ancestors. This begins at birth through naming rituals and each important stage of a child's life is marked by a ceremony. For example, among the speakers of IsiXhosa language, *imbeleko* (baby introduction ceremony), *intonjane* (coming of age for a girl child), *ulwaluko* (coming of age for a boy child), *nokutshata* (marriage) are critical markers of development that require ancestral invocations. Diviners are also a dimension of spirituality that is necessary in ensuring the state of wellness among the people. In instances where there is a matter that threatens the wellness of the family and it is beyond the grasp of the family, the help of diviners would be sought. Diviners are people anointed with the gift of healing who are consulted to connect families and communities with the spiritual world. Healers, poets, herbalists and seers fall into this category.

African people's belief in interconnectedness and interrelatedness of life makes psychology a culturally embedded concept. Meaning that interpersonal relationships are considered healing relationships. This finds expression in the indigenous concept of *Ukuva/Ukuzwa/Ho utlwa* which centres the importance of being cognisant of the feelings and the voices of those around you. Africans believe illness is a consequence of disharmony resulting from a misalignment between the body and the psyche. In the healing process efforts are focused on re-alignment of the person to her/his whole self. This re-alignment centres on the sense called *Ukuva/Ho utlwa*. *Ukuva/ho utlwa* can be loosely translated to "to hear" but it is more about feeling than audition hence feelings are referred to as *maikutlo* (in Sesotho) /*imizwa* (in IsiZulu). *Maikutlo/imizwa* (feelings) are defined as that which you hear/feel when you are listening to your psyche/soul or that which your psyche/soul communicates with you. As such, Africans encourage people to take time to *ukuzimamela* (in IsiXhosa) *O aimamela* (in Sesotho) which means taking time to listen to one's self. This is a diagnostic activity and an illustration that African Psychology, as earlier articulated, is embedded in the culture. In African cosmology a healthy person is expected to be in conversation with the psyche/soul at all times. Hence when a person is not feeling well would say *andiziva kakuhle/ha ke ikutlwe hantle* meaning something has intercepted the connection between the individual and her/his psyche/soul. Healing is to return a person to the state of *ukuziva kakuhle* which means to hear one's self again or to re-align the body with one's psyche/soul. We wish to clarify that African spirituality is not delinked from the body. As we said earlier the body is simply the physical part of the spirit and it plays a critical role in the transmission of messages from the psyche.

*Ukuva/ho utlwa* is the crucial sense in African epistemology. It speaks to the interconnectedness of our being. *Ukuva/ho utlwa* is an all-pervading sense and this is evident in it's the usage of this term to describe various other senses such as taste, audition, physical sensation (see the illustration below. All of this means that African cosmology requires a person

to be in touch with the inner conversation with which the psyche/soul is constantly engaged.

## An all-encompassing sense

- Hear
  - Feel
  - Smell
  - Touch
  - Taste
- } **UKUVA**

*Ukuva/ho utlwa* branches out to explain other relational elements. These relational elements illustrate the practical ways in which Psychology is culturally embedded. By saying Psychology is culturally embedded we mean that people around you have a duty of ensuring your wellbeing. This is communicated in the greetings which insist on enquiring about the parson's inner state. The question "*uziva njani?*" how are you feeling which forms part and parcel of greetings seeks for a deeper understanding of one's feelings. This is an invitation for counsel and healing. A call for one to pour their soul. In so doing one is activating what is known as *uvelwano*. *Uvelwano* could be referred to as empathy in Western Psychology but in African ways of knowing it transcends to mean a reciprocal process which allows the listener to get into the pain of the troubled while the troubled benefits from the healing that is activated. *Uvelwano* means we are in a good space. It's the reassurance that the pain the next person is carrying matters.

Another relational element is the concept of *umvandedwa* – which loosely translates to that which only you sense. This is an unsettling feeling of anxiety and is often a sign that something is not well with one's spirit. The concept of *mvandedwa* helps us understand the soul has ways of communicating the need for re-alignment with the source. When you have *umvandedwa* you are being sensitized to your lack of balance.

The above illustrates that the functioning of the human beings to indigenous African people is grounded in spirituality. It also shows that this spiritual way of being is facilitated by healing interpersonal relationships which includes both family and the community. The critical role of the community is discussed in the ensuing section.

### **CONNECTING *UMNTU* (THE HUMAN) AND *ULUNTU* (THE COMMUNITY)**

As alluded to earlier, *isintu* has embedded ethics as a philosophical foregrounding of human

functioning. This functioning takes place where people dwell which brings forth the concept of *uluntu* (which is the isiXhosa word for community). Thus, community centres on *abantu/batho* (people) and what informs their ethics. *Isintu* is predicated on a balanced ecology of life. It is not only limited to human relations but also extends to being in communion with other life forms in the environment and beyond. Thus, the wellbeing of a community rests upon the inscribed ethics of the people's culture.

### **MOAHISANE/MAKHELWANE/MMELWANE: NEIGHBOURLINESS**

According to the principles of *isintu* by virtue of residing within the same radius, people are responsible for each other's wellbeing. Thus, *uluntu* is founded on the concept of belonging to those around you. This finds better expression in the ways in which indigenous languages refer to a neighbour as *moahisane/makhelwane/mmelwane*. This term is in Sesotho, IsiZulu and IsiXhosa respectively and all carry the same meaning of building together. The Sesotho term is derived from the word *aha*, while Isizulu is rooted from *ukwakha* which literally mean "build". This makes *moahisane* and *makhelwane* to loosely translate to "the one with whom I am building". The IsiXhosa term stems from the word *ima* which means stand and translates to "the one with whom I am standing". This brings to life the expression of *umntu ngumntu ngabantu* which means a person is a person through other people. This expression defines the concept of *Ubuntu/Botho*. This allows us to interconnect the concepts of community and *Ubuntu*. Thus, the concept of community to African people is a culturally enforceable concept by which people hold each other accountable to the precepts of *isintu*.

As shown in the previous section, language remains the most critical tool in efforts to ensure that education in Africa does not only speak with one voice, which is Eurocentric. As it has been evident with Psychology, once that happens the only knowledges that get to be properly communicated are those that are in the language of education. The misrepresentation of African ways of knowing and being especially in Psychology was made possible by the fact that they were not communicated in their languages. This was done deliberately by the coloniser to ensure that these languages and their knowledges occupy an inferior place. To this day, many African children believe that their African languages are inferior to colonising languages such as English and Afrikaans (in the case of South Africa). Language as wa Thiong'o (1986) argues is a people's way of defining themselves. The absence of these languages therefore in academia, where most definitions of things are constructed is a way of ensuring that even in this era Africans cannot bring their knowledges to academic spaces. Knowledge therefore remains gazed through a Eurocentric lens and attempts to bring African ways of understanding phenomena is within the gaze of that lens. For example, the talk about psychological services

in South Africa excludes indigenous ontology (ways of being) and epistemology (ways of knowing). Language remains a reliable source of uncovering African epistemologies.

Psychology is a concept rooted in Eurocentric understanding of being human. Psychological wellbeing to Africans is situated in a composite understanding of wellbeing that does not separate the mind, the body and the spirit. As highlighted in the preceding section, to most Africans cultures, services that concern the wellbeing of the person are situated in multiple but interconnected sites such as kinship, community and divinity.

## **AFRICAN PSYCHOLOGY IS AS OLD AS HUMANITY**

It is important to be cognisant of the fact that African Psychology did not begin when it was written about in academic institutions. We will be making a huge mistake if we argued that African Psychology has a beginning point. It is as old as African humanity itself, for whenever there are human beings, there are ways of making sense of their behavior. Some scholars who write about African Psychology often present it as having entered the world of thought at a particular point in history. They could be referring to a point where African Psychology started to get some traction in the subject of Psychology. This is not accurate and is caused by the colonial misconception that education in Africa was brought by the coloniser. Africans had their systems of education that did not resemble the Western structure of education. For example, in the Southern parts of Africa, most of the education was conducted orally and practically. From an African perspective, education, just like spirituality, is not separate from the everyday activities. Education was to ensure that all citizens are ethical, so every citizen had to be educated according to the principles of the people's culture. Rituals formed part of education system while they fulfil other needs. They introduced a people to the ways of being of the community. These ways of learning and teaching got undermined and distorted by the colonisers who wanted to impose their own ways of teaching and learning.

The recent recognition of African Psychology as a field of study in South Africa, albeit in a small way, does not mean that Africans never had their ways of knowing and understanding the human mind and behaviour thus Psychology. It only means that under colonialism and neo-colonialism such ways were/and still are dismissed, never regarded as valid Psychological knowledge and labelled as "culture".

The urge to want to ascribe a beginning point to African Psychology could also be emanating from the ethos of knowledge production which all South African universities have adopted from the West. This is despite the fact that Africa and the Western world follow completely different processes of knowledge production. Western education produces knowledge in individualized ways and the result is the production of expert individuals who

produce field/subject related knowledge. In Africa, knowledge is collectively produced and not referenced to individuals but to a people. Knowledge is also constructed with consultation with nature and often reflects in-depth understanding of nature. It will therefore not be accurate to argue that Africans only produced Psychological knowledge when they acquired Western education. In doing so we would be forcing African Psychology to be based on Western ethos of knowledge production that rely on their own methods, conceptualisations and formulations.

Having said that, it is important not to discard the efforts of the African-American Psychologists who worked hard to ensure that the Psychology of Black/African people occupies a prominent place in the academy. These efforts asserted the position of Black/African people as important contributors in Psychology knowledge production.

Similar efforts have been displayed at the University of South Africa through its endeavours for a transformed African university which is in service of humanity. In practicalising this endeavour, the university put in place curriculum transformation policies and frameworks that are deliberately aimed at decolonising and re-Africanising the curriculum. Waziyatawin and Yellow Bird (2012, 3) define decolonisation as “the meaningful and active resistance to forces of colonialism”. It is engaged for the ultimate purpose of overturning colonial structures and realizing indigenous liberation. Thus, for those in the African continent a dismantling of the imposed Western system would naturally yield a re-Africanisation of life including the education. In the field of education this will entail a deliberate centering of African knowledge that is informed by indigenous cultures, philosophies and languages, available but made invisible in the education sphere to create an illusion that Africa has no knowledge. The University of South Africa, therefore, undertook to ensure that this is translated in the curriculum.

## CONCLUSION

The content discussed in this article forms part of the curriculum transformation project. By centering indigenous epistemologies and their languages of transmission, the new curriculum shows that to indigenous people of South Africa, Psychology centres on three critical aspects which are; the *uluntu* (community), *ubuntu* and *isintu* (philosophy and culture) and the *umntu* (the human, for the lack of an English equivalent). These aspects inform the conceptualisation of both illness and wellness and how such a conceptualisation is founded on spirituality. As it has been alluded to in this article, wellbeing from an African perspective encompasses the physical, spiritual and social dimensions of an individual. The spiritual dimension foregrounds African existence. Therefore, the ancestors play a critical role in people’s lives. Ancestors are known to be people who were once mortal and thus able to provide guidance and healing to

those still in the earthly dimension. Hence, they are referred to as *baholo* (in Sesotho) or *Abantu abadala* in Isinguni languages. Meaning that they are the ancients with whom life is shared.

An important aspect to note is the way the speakers of isiZulu language also refer to *amadlozi* the ancients as *abaphansi*. The concept of *abaphansi* draws from the understanding that life is like a seed, it emerges from the ground. It also means that in African cosmology, the ancestors are like roots on which those still onto the earthly plane are holding. It is the detachment from the roots that causes illness of a “mental-spiritual nature”. I use the term mental-spiritual due to the lack of an expression of the interconnectedness between the mental and spiritual realms.

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