

**PSYCHOLOGY AND PSYCHOTHERAPY REDEFINED FROM THE VIEWPOINT OF  
THE AFRICAN EXPERIENCE**

**by**

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## Declaration

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I declare that **Psychology and Psychotherapy Redefined from the Viewpoint of the African Experience** is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

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MR LESIBA J. BALOYI

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## Summary

To date, the vast literature on theories of psychology, and psychology as a practice, still remains a reflection of Western experiences and conceptions of reality. This is so despite “psychology” and “psychotherapy” being studied and implemented by Africans, dealing with Africa’s existential issues, in Africa. In this context, a distorted impression that positions psychology and psychotherapy as irreplaceable and irrefutable Western discoveries is created. This perception creates a tendency in which psychotherapists adopt and use universalised, foreign and imposed theories to explain and deal with African cultural experiences.

In recent years, African scholars’ quest to advance “African-brewed” conceptions, definitions and practices of “psychology” and “psychotherapy” is gaining momentum. Psychologists dealing with African clients are increasingly confronted with the difficulty, and in some instances the impossibility, of communicating with, and treating local clients using Western conceptions and theories. Adopting the dominant Western epistemological and scientific paradigms constitutes epistemological oppression and alienation. Instead, African conceptions, definitions and practices of “psychology” and “psychotherapy” based on African cultural experiences, epistemology and ontology are argued for.

The thesis defended in this study is that the dominant Western paradigm of scientific knowledge in general and, psychology in particular, is anchored in a defective claim to neutrality, objectivity and universality. To demonstrate this, indigenous ways of knowing and doing in the African experience are counterpoised against the Western understanding and construction of scientific knowledge in the fields of psychology and psychotherapy. The conclusion arising from our demonstration is the imperative to rethink psychology and psychotherapy in order to (i) affirm the validity of indigenous African ways of knowing and doing; (ii) show that the exclusion of the indigenous African ways of knowing and doing from the Western paradigm illustrates the tenuous and questionable character of its epistemological and methodological claims to neutrality, objectivity and universality. Indeed the Western claim to scientific knowledge, as described, speaks to its universality at the expense of the ineradicable as well as irreducible

ontological pluriversality of the human experience. This study's aim is to advance the argument for the sensitivity to pluriversality of be-ing and the imperative for wholistic thinking.

**Key words:** African epistemology, psychology, psychotherapy, indigenous knowledge, African experience, *moya*, *kalafi ya semowa*, *thuto ya semowa*, oral tradition and discourse, science, ontology, *ubuntu* and African philosophy.

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# CHAPTER 1

*It is easier to imitate the so-called scientific and universalist tradition, the established masters of classical Western thought than to try and break new ground toying with questionable assumptions inspired by African culture. So we expect to continue to read more commentaries on Kant and Hegel, more elucidations on the innumerable-isms of the history of philosophy, including the trendy but for us in Africa, most awkward anachronism called post-modernism.*

(Okere, 2005b, p. 19)

## Introduction

### Statement of the Problem

“Psychology” has for many decades been seen as a universal monolithic Western “science”. Being a Western construction, this “science” has always claimed supremacy over other forms of knowing and knowledge systems. Subsequently, Western “science” has become a partial representation of human experiences. Western science is constructed out of experiences and conventions of one sector of the human race, denying other forms of experiences and knowledge systems existence and expression. This “science” has established itself as the “absolute human norm” through which the whole world has to be understood and experienced. On the basis of this Western universal claim to “science”, other forms of knowing and experiences have been excluded and subjugated from the field of science as a universal human enterprise. Western “science” has therefore become problematic and highly questionable by those whose experiences are deemed inferior and insignificant, such as the African indigenous peoples. In this regard we therefore ask the following questions: “What science?”, “Whose science?” and “For whom?” Science constructed from an epistemology foreign to indigenous Africans for example, cannot therefore be seen as representative and reflective of their experiences. In such an instance, tension between Western “science” and African indigenous experience as a form of science exists. It is for this reason that the current conceptions of Western “science” need to be deconstructed to put “science” in its appropriate context. Such reconstructions and deconstructions demand a dialogical engagement (not a monologue) with these epistemologies to dispel the intellectual property right paradigm that the West claims over other worldviews. Kuokkanen (2006, p. 253)

strongly argues for this recognition by stating that: “In the process of dismantling the hegemony of the Eurocentric intellectual and philosophical conventions and the privileging of the Western systems of knowledge, indigenous epistemologies have an important role of raising questions of relevant research regarding indigenous communities and contribute to our understanding of different ways of knowing and theorizing.”

This call is certainly not new to the discourse of science. Feminists (for different reasons though) have been calling for the dismantling of the discriminatory and distortion-ridden Western conceptualisation and practice of science. Harding and Hinkikka (1983, p. ix) in challenging science in the feminist context posit that: “We must root out sexist distortions and perversions in epistemology ... metaphysics, and the philosophy of science – in the ‘hard core’ of abstract reasoning thought most immune to infiltration by social values”. Indigenous peoples of the world, the Maori and the Africans for example, are faced with the same struggle, to have their experiences and epistemological conventions recognised alongside Western epistemologies. It is for this reason that we will argue in this study that indigenous healing knowledge systems indeed represent scientific sites of knowledge, research and theory that are methodologically consistent with African indigenous experiences.

An attempt to answer questions such as “what science?” and “whose science?” and “for whom?” creates a much more interesting and complex scenario. Such an intellectual inquiry enterprise as a form of human knowledge generation process becomes a necessary reflective condition. Answering these questions is not as homogeneous and simple as the West claims. In this regard as well, the Western claim has seriously undermined the fundamental understanding that knowledge construction is both experience related and context bound. According to Okere, Njoku and Devisch (2005, p. 1), different cultures “need to be empowered to realise, work on and appropriate the riches embedded in their own local knowledge tracks and trajectories”. This observation by these authors is in direct contradiction to the old notion that authentic knowledge comes from Western scientific conventions only. From this Western “science” perspective, for knowledge to be “scientifically” justifiable and acceptable, it has to satisfy the following two broad conditions or demands: 1) to be linked or fall under “monolithism” of “science” as a Western discovery, and that, 2) by virtue of being of a Western discovery, it is therefore

“universal”. It is important to note that it is this Western “science” claim to universality that ought to be questioned. This claim has created a “myth” that only Western knowledge is “universally scientific” and representative of all other forms of knowledge systems. Dussel (1980, p. 8) questions this Western position of divinity in the absolutes by stating that “from this premise, the West established itself as the centre, the experience of centrality around which all ‘experiences’ are centered, considering itself the archetypal”. Okere et al. (2005, p. 5) describe this imposed hegemonic dichotomous relationship as consisting of “subject (the one who knows) versus object (the known, the measurable), ‘developed or modern’ versus ‘not-yet-developed or traditional’”. In this ‘othering’, rather than genuinely being an enriching centre for the dialogue of civilisations, the colonial school turned out to be a rigid institutional setting for entrenching monologue if not an *Invention of Africa*”.

#### Aims of this Study

The proposed tasks to be undertaken are therefore, first, to dispute the above Western claim to universal knowledge and science, and secondly to establish the authenticity of African indigenous “psychology” and ways of healing, “psychotherapy” even within the tenuous and restrictive Western notions of “science” or, outside of it. Thirdly, to construct and adopt appropriate indigenous vernacular concepts in “psychology” which are consistent with the African cultural experience and ontology. The African indigenous ways arising from this form of science must and should demand methods consistent with the indigenous knowledge systems and epistemology. “These indigenous philosophies, which consider and situate an individual in his or her community and knowledge as rooted in and stemming from a specific context, will expose the narrow conceptions of reason and rationality, by emphasizing their relation to social, cultural and historical frameworks” (Kuokkanen, 2006, p. 253). This dualistic rationalisation clearly serves and is employed to justify the self-imposed privileged colonial position, by relegating the indigenous peoples’ worldviews, values, histories and conceptions of knowledge to the periphery. As Kuokkanen, (2006, pp. 252-253) observes, “today, the legacy of this exclusion is reflected in views according to which indigenous theoretical and methodological practices are considered either a (unnecessary) supplement or having value only if they have something to offer to the Western discourse. Although we now ‘have’ indigenous studies programmes at many

universities, they still occupy a marginal position and remain in ‘academic’ reservations”. The “myth” and the mechanisms of exclusion by Western “science” as a “universal” knowledge discoverer have systematically presented other forms of knowledge systems such as those of indigenous Africans as inferior to those of the West. In Okere et al.’s (2005, p. 1) observation, “this deceptive myth about knowledge production, has had the negative impact of stereotyping, blackmailing, inferiorizing and derailing the production and sharing of knowledge and its artefacts in cultures other than the West. The colonial encounter, with its assumptions and presumptions, helped to rub in this vision of reformist modernity and to muffle the *voices* of the colonised cultures”.

The above statement draws our attention to what Ramose (2002) refers to as colonial epistemicide. Given that science, properly construed, is universal and open-ended, the Western “psychology’s” epistemological dominance is not justifiable, since neither the content nor the direction of science can be predetermined and foreclosed beforehand. Science must therefore recognise all realities. The aim of the process of colonisation has been to subject and to relegate other knowledge systems to second-class knowledge systems, whose very survival ought to be dependent on the recognition and approval by only itself (the West). It is this knowledge subjugation to the self-imposed Western dominance that has inaugurated the struggle for epistemological dialogue predicated on the principle of equality of cultures. The premise for such intercultural participation needs to be based on the position that all knowledge systems are unique and equally important in the construction of world knowledge pools.

Arguably, Okere et al. (2005) indicate the extent to which Western knowledge construction has been forcibly imposed on Africans. The implications of such an imposed dominant discourse need to be interrogated on three different levels, the *epistemological*, *ethical* and *methodological*, to demonstrate its problematic nature. At the level of epistemology, knowledge construction, cultural practices and truth from the West cannot be exclusively and wholly representative of the African experience. Africans have their own unique ways of doing and practicing things that are informed by their local knowledge, experiences and epistemologies. Keeney (1979) supports this view by arguing that it is impossible not to have an epistemology. It must be added that an epistemology is embedded in culture. In our understanding an epistemology to a very large extent

describes the cultural beingness, practices and existential experiences within a given environing context of the people concerned. Okere's (2005a, p. 22) analysis of Plato's definition of epistemology indicates the extent to which our epistemology is an indivisible part of our being, he summarises epistemology as "a study of a variety of the ways of knowing ..., man's peculiar activity in which there are levels of being which would form the object of knowledge – the non-living, the living, the vegetable world, the animal world, human beings and God". Clearly, given all these levels of being and knowing, there cannot be a single way of knowing, as the West claims. Therefore the Western claim of knowledge construction from an epistemological point of view is inconsistent with its very conception of "science", if this proceeds, as it must, from the position that science originates from experience. Dewey (1958, p. 3), points to this inseparability of "science" and "experience" by stating that "... everything designated by the word 'experience' is so adequately incorporated into the scientific procedures and subject-matter that to mention experience would be only to duplicate in a general term what is already covered in definite terms". Experience therefore includes amongst other things humans' acquired forms of knowledge, belief, morals, culture, history and one's relationship with the broader cosmology.

From an epistemological point of view, as Okere, (2005a, p. 25) observes, "all humans by nature desire to know, and therefore all humans do have some form of knowledge which is coloured by its own cultural structuring, according to the specifications of its own environment". It is clear therefore that the current Western claim as the sole generator of scientific knowledge does not stand. This claim presents an incomplete field of human knowledge because it does not acknowledge the contributions of the other branches of the human family to science (Okere, 2005a).

At the level of ethics, the forcible imposition by the West of its knowledge as a single reality on Africans is also problematic and should therefore be questioned. The question to be asked here is, can human relations and coexistence be run on the basis of force and manipulation? It is worth noting that the Western colonial epistemicide appealed to the "right of conquest" as justification for its imposition. In his interrogation of this "right of conquest by the West", Ramose (2002, pp. 464-470), "I conquer, therefore I am the sovereign..." demonstrates the philosophical and ideological foundations of conquest and how this is related to the exclusive Western claim to

reason, ... to land, to knowledge, ... and to the right to sovereignty. Dussel (1980, p. 8) refers to this archetypal “I” one-way relationship that we mentioned earlier on as the “I conquer”...“I enslave” and the “I vanquish”. Relations based on such forcible imposition have resulted in African knowledge systems being denied any meaningful existence or relegated to the periphery.

This imposition is both immoral and unethical because it takes away the Being of Africans, which is so central to all human existence. Dussel (1980, p. 53) maintains that “to alienate is to sell someone or something, to pass it on to another proprietor. The alienation of a people or of a single individual makes its victim lose their Being by incorporating them as a moment, an aspect, an instrument of another’s Being”. This kind of alienation has prompted scholars such as Oluwole (1997) to argue for the inclusion of African experiences in knowledge construction, such as the African oral tradition as a viable, reliable and scientific knowledge discourse. Drummond, (2006, p. 3) provides a very comprehensive indigenous understanding of knowledge conception and practice by observing that, “knowledge is also a shared treasure, not one solely for the benefit of an individual. It serves the interests of the group. Knowledge emerges from community experience and community history, passed on to new generations through stories, games, songs, incantations and genealogies: it is a community resource and individual discoveries must be taken back to the community to augment that resource”. It is with the above communal connectedness of the African people that we argue that, to import a factual generalised Western “scientific” norm or law into a context such as the above indigenous context is to engage in what Dewey, (1938, p. 444) sees as, “the fallacy vitiating the view that scientific laws are formulations of uniform unconditioned sequence of change arising from taking the function of the universal proposition as if it were part of the structural content of the existential proportions”.

The implication of this generalisation is interrogated by Okere (2005a, p. 20) who sees the Western “science” as having partially succeeded with indigenous people, by stating that, “the success of the West has tended to marginalise other forms of knowledge and other contributions to knowledge and, thus to impoverish an otherwise potentially rich and complex world knowledge landscape”. Although Okere thoroughly interrogates the “science” question on different levels and from different perspectives, we *do not* agree with his conclusion that the West has “succeeded” in marginalising African indigenous forms of knowledge systems. It is for

us imperative to question whether this is indeed “success” or coercion. In our view, the very act of forcible imposition indicates failure to persuade. Force in this instance is an ethics’ problem, because the product thereof is the result of forcible imposition. If the West succeeded as Okere (2005a) puts it, the effects would have created equal knowledge systems based on dialogical engagement and therefore acceptable to the indigenous people as well. Okere’s (2005a) own writings and many other contributions such as those of Sogolo, Ramose, Bujo, Wiredu, Oluwole, Ajei, Drummond, Kuokkanen, Nabudere and this very study to mention but a few, instead clearly indicate how discredited and unethical this “scientific” imposition has been and is continuing to be questioned.

An observation to be made here is that the “success” referred to was, and still is, a “monolithic” construction. There was no dialogue, nor was there any consideration of the context and experiences of Africans when what is regarded as “science” was conceptualised and subsequently “universalised”. The West unilaterally used her philosophical and cultural experiences to conceptualise what “science” is, and then imposed the formulated “meaning” onto other forms of knowledge systems. From an ethical point of view, African knowledge systems have been coerced into the dominant Western paradigm, and the assertion by Okere that this was a “success” does not therefore hold. An ethical question to be posed in the context of this study is, what moral position does the West hold to impose its definition and practice of “psychology” under the myth of “science” on Africans? In his discussion of the “science” question, Okere (2005a, p. 20) draws our attention to the fact that “science remains only one of many forms of knowledge and the West only one of its producers”. The methodology by which this science is constructed therefore also becomes questionable.

At the level of methodology, there are also problems associated with the Western methodology when applied to African issues and context. If we start from the premise that methodology arises from a particular experience, culture and epistemology, as argued by Okere et al. (2005) and Dewey (1958), then the Western methodology, acquired from Western experience and knowledge cannot account for and be consistent with African experiences. Knowledge and methodology cannot be separated since the former is constructed and acquired using the latter’s means. Therefore a critique of Western methodology informed by African experience is both

necessary and imperative. Methodological inquiry issues and problems will be discussed in detail in Chapter 2.

We have pointed out at the beginning of this discussion that “psychology” is predominantly seen as a Western product. “Psychology”, as we know and study it today within academic settings, is a branch of science emanating from the West. As a field of “science” that claims universality and objectivity, “psychology” cannot evade the perception that it carries the identity of Western “science” and therefore carries the reputation of its carrier, that is, “universal science”. By extension, “psychotherapy” is a branch of “psychology” and therefore also subscribes to the “universal science” claim and fraternity. It can therefore be argued that “psychotherapy” as seen from the West claims to be a universal reality. It is this mythical claim that has systematically denied a voice or space to other “psychotherapy” knowledge systems to coexist alongside other world psychotherapy realities. This somewhat selective, blind, narrow and rigidly defined Western “science” ironically denied the field of psychology and psychotherapy specifically, what we refer to as *an epistemology of interactive ecologies*, rooted in the wholistic approach of Africans to life issues. This topic will be discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

It is to us of critical importance to investigate why it is that “psychology”, having an inquiry and treatment method that result in a therapeutic effect, continues to be blind to the fact that therapeutic effects can also be achieved through other forms of therapeutic methods which are culturally and locally relevant, such as those of Africans. If we follow the argument that the method of inquiry in any given context arises from the knowledge systems and experiences of the people concerned, then the authenticity of local cultural knowledge systems as scientific enterprises cannot be denied. This argument is supported by Okere et al. (2005, p. 2), who state that, “such variegated approach to mining the wisdom and ecological advantages of various cultural groups will enhance the sharing of knowledge in a spirit of both vertical and horizontal border-linking exchanges of riches found in different cultural contexts and knowledge fields”.

The practical imperative expressed in the above articulation is that the construction of collaborative and respectful dialogical engagement platforms by all interacting forms of



psychotherapy knowledge systems, will most likely result in shared experiences and knowledge pools based on different cultural experiences. This is in our considered opinion, an indication that diversity is a necessary condition in human relations and needs to be recognised and respected, instead of being thwarted in the name of universality and homogeneity. In many “psychotherapy” training contexts, the group composition is culturally diverse. By their very nature, these training groups’ composition define the contexts as those of diverse cultural interactions from which group members can learn to embrace and deal with differences effectively. In our opinion, such equal engagement would broaden the knowledge landscape in the field of psychology.

### The Western Culture of Dominance and Psychology

The above scenario is far from being realised in the current contexts of psychotherapy training programmes. The dominant epistemology and inquiry frameworks in psychology and psychotherapy curricula in undergraduate, and postgraduate studies are still deeply and profoundly rooted in Western thinking. In South African universities, the content of current Master’s of clinical psychotherapy training programmes are decided and predominantly run by trainers of Western descent. Their Western training, philosophy, experiences and cultural background have entrenched and maintained theories and treatment methods based on, and adopted from, Western epistemologies and cultural experiences. It is not surprising therefore to find that more than eighty percent of trainees in Master’s clinical training programmes are of Western descent. In most previously white-dominated universities, these institutions still select on average one or two African students for training each year, fourteen years post-apartheid.

In one of the absurdities of our time, the staff of a training programme at a previously black university (now merged with a previously white university) situated in a black township consists of all-white trainers. Even more bizarre, the composition of trainees in this counselling training programme is 99% white. This domination is occurring despite the fact that such training is taking place in the African university context, where Africans are overwhelmingly in the majority. In this state of affairs, at best Africans continue to be consumers of foreign knowledge and, at worse, they are in a systematically orchestrated plan, totally excluded from psychology. Instead of psychology producing psychologists and knowledge systems which are consistent with

and relevant to the Africans' existential realities, much of the practice of psychology continue to be centred around and positioned as an elitist white middle class profession (Wilson, Richter, Durrheim, Surendorff, & Asafo-Agyei, 1999).

Under these circumstances, indigenous African communities serve the role of research subjects for academic qualifications and conference case presentations, rather than as contributors of an authentic knowledge base. Even universities which are supposed to promote diversity continue to enforce unitary modes of thinking. The absurdity of this scenario can be seen in the very name, *university*. Okere (2005a, p. 25) argues that “the *universitas studiorum*, the institution for all knowledge, the institution where the matter and business of science is most directly carried on, negates the claim of one unique science. The concept of *universitas studiorum* has been predicated on the need to cater for a plurality of sciences serving the promotion, preservation and enhancement of all human knowledge”. How universities came only to teach and represent *some selected* group and knowledge system, that is, Western knowledge and science is very interesting. A psychology that is premised on this kind of academic and cultural discrimination cannot claim to cater for the needs and challenges faced by the majority of black communities. This imbalance accounts for the grossly insignificant number of African psychologists trained through these programmes in the past six decades. No wonder then that African candidates and students are regarded as “incompetent” and of “low standard” in selection and training processes and programmes. The experiences, epistemologies and theories on which these selections for clinical master's training programmes are based, rely on content that is alien to the African experience. These training programmes are characterised by the selective proliferation of literature (certainly not African) on “psychotherapy”, and by controlled and very “carefully” chosen African students that are “trained” as “psychotherapists”.

The above sketched context is based on my experiences as a trainer, researcher and “psychotherapist” faced with inconsistencies and contradictions based on epistemological, theoretical and methodological conflicts and incongruities in my daily dealings with African students and clients. Consequently, I have found myself questioning the relevance and value of “psychology” and “psychotherapy” in the broader African context.

## Rationale for the Study

In this study, we would like to argue that the West (in the context of the psychotherapeutic domain), cannot claim to be universally objective based only on Western conventions of psychotherapy without, 1) recognising its subjectivity, 2) coming to terms with the reality that for peaceful future knowledge co-existence the emancipation of other knowledge modes and forms representative of all peoples of the world is a moral and scientific imperative. The case to be made here is that etiologically, epistemologically and methodologically psychotherapy may not exclusively be a Western product. Africans, like all the other peoples of the world, have their unique myths, stories, histories and rituals that give them identity and differentiate them from other peoples of the world. Their social circumstances, cultural practices and lived experiences define who they are, and logically define what “psychology” and “psychotherapy” are to them.

The direction to be followed in this line of reasoning is that the West has to admit that Africans have to reconstruct their own reality in respect of their healing practices, consistent with their lived experiences. Harding and Hintikka (1983, p. x) in support of this argument, maintain that “what counts as knowledge must be grounded on experience, because human experience differs according to the kinds of activities and social relations in which humans engage”. The experiences of some Africans differ from Western experiences upon which “psychotherapy” is grounded. Therefore the experiences of which current “psychology” and “psychotherapy” claims are made are exclusive and unrepresentative. There is no problem if the present Western conceptualisation and practices of “psychology” and “psychotherapy” are applied within their appropriate Western cultures and contexts. The problem is when “psychotherapy”, studied and formulated from a predominantly Western experience, is taken to be an all-inclusive reality.

Africans need “psychotherapy” training programmes that reflect their wholistic approach to life and experiences, which will otherwise be consistent with and relevant to African philosophy and cultural practices (Wiredu, 1980). To come to this level of understanding of one’s cultural background, philosophical reflections become imperative. Hermeneutically, Okere (2005b, p. 2) argues that “all that we ever understand is made possible by a prior understanding. We go from the known to the unknown and, prior to any new knowledge we pre-know”. It follows therefore

that prior to the present Western formulations and practice of “psychology” and “psychotherapy”, Africans pre-knew and had their “psychotherapeutic” practices that were consistent with their culture. In our considered opinion, philosophising as Okere (2005a, p. 3) argues, “becomes a personal, creative interpretation of one’s culture as inspired by that culture. And the culture becomes all the background one brings along – environment, history, language, education, worldview, and etcetera”. The questions we pose and grapple with in respect of “psychology” and “psychotherapy” in this study, are our attempts to understand the meaning of “psychology” and “psychotherapy”, what is therapeutic and indeed to articulate the meaning of this reality called “therapy” for Africans within the Africans’ enviroing culture.

### Thesis

The thesis to be posited in this study is that “psychology” and psychotherapeutic training programmes within the African context must be defined and practiced from the African viewpoint. These practices should be based on the relevant appropriation of African cultures and her rich heritage to facilitate the reshaping, re-acquiring and redesigning of such programmes. In our view, Africa, on this basis, can and must become the producer rather than the consumer of knowledge, truth and science based upon her own existential experiences. The African indigenous ways of healing arising from this foundation shall produce, among others, psychotherapy with a distinct African flavour. Being distinctly African, according to Boesak (2007, p. 22), “means that we must not be ashamed or afraid of our inborn African *spirituality*. That deep indescribable connectedness to our innermost selves and the world we live in, to the earth that feeds us, the rivers that rush with our deepest emotions, the winds that whisper with the voices beyond our imaginings, the life we share with every living and breathing thing”.

From an African perspective healing embodies our *spiritual* connectedness to our environment in an inextricable way and cannot therefore be seen or performed as an isolated activity. Healing is a ritual, which entails inclusiveness and togetherness that links Africans’ unbreakable bonds of their common humanity. How non-Africans define and practice “psychotherapy” does not represent African healing practices as has been claimed for centuries. It is therefore conceivable that the distinctiveness of African indigenous ways of healing might require the substitution or

abandonment of the term “psychology” and “psychotherapy”. The terms “psychology” and “psychotherapy” are epistemologically of Western origin and therefore their meaning within the Western context may not necessarily reflect and capture the African understanding of the healing process. We further argue that this would not dispense with the necessity for intercultural dialogue predicated on the principle of epistemological equality. The distinctiveness of African culture resides, in part, on the vital role of memory with particular reference to the onto-triadic conception and structure of Bei-ng. The onto-triadic conception of be-ing will be discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

In arguing the need for Africa’s self definition, Okere et al. (2005, p. 8), call for “a re-coupling of Africa’s dislocated and obnubilated knowledge resources and practices”. In our view, interrogating indigenous worldviews and the logic of deconstructing and reconstructing the imposed traditional mainstream Western scientific and psychotherapeutic paradigms are necessary conditions to re-Africanising “psychotherapy”. This process will enable indigenous people to reclaim their systems of knowledge and if necessary reject categories and labels imposed from outside. We firmly believe that these and other forms of on-going endeavours of decolonising knowledge, methodological inquiries, practices and the perceptions about indigenous knowledge systems are necessary in moving forward. Boesak (2007, p. 22) argues for a “distinctly African voice the determination and courage, insight and vision, self-critique and self-understanding, knowing our limitations and celebrating our possibilities, discerning our weaknesses and appreciating our strengths, recapturing and preserving our dignity”. In this sense, the need to name and the right to redefine concepts such as “psychotherapy” according to the needs and preferences of the indigenous African people themselves is highly imperative in advancing distinctly African “psychological” and “psychotherapy” practices and other forms of knowledge systems.

## CHAPTER 2

### Introduction

In this chapter, we will discuss methodological and social inquiry issues. Problems related to Western methodological conceptions that arise in view of their application to the African context will also be reflected upon. Such reflections are necessary because these methodological issues have serious implications. One such implication is that, in studying and researching psychotherapeutic activities and knowledge systems from Western epistemology, one has to conform to the scientific inquiry framework of the West. This method of knowledge inquiry is historically known for its claim as *the superior* means to understanding all forms of knowledge systems. The claim to superiority sustains the dogma of absoluteness as well as universality that cannot be left unchallenged. This claim emanates from one reality, which is based on Western experiences. Scientific claims to universality disregard diversity and context and standardises methodologies. It is for this reason, and many others to be discussed, that we need to understand what “science” is.

Currently, when we talk about science, we are referring to the predominant Western science. Western science claims to be transparent and objective on its own terms and by its own standards. Steiner (2002, p. 1) refers to this as “a scientific thinking”, whose influence comes from a technicity and scientism paradigm”. This thinking honours the scientific method and holds that it is universally applicable. It is deemed to be *the absolute* means through which knowledge is acquired and understood. However, the methodology that is followed in “rational science” is not necessarily consistent with peoples’ experiences and the historical context within which research is conducted. We argue that this lack of respect for other experiences or epistemologies leads to inconsistencies and is bound to create methodological problems. In our view, the method through which knowledge is produced and acquired is of critical importance. We therefore would like to situate knowledge within its appropriate context by distinguishing between common sense or general knowledge and scientific knowledge. For the purpose of this study, this distinction is crucial because both common sense and scientific knowledge constitute authentic realities in different contexts. Without this distinction, the argument for the inclusion of African knowledge

systems and psychotherapeutic modes in the psychology curriculum in our universities will be superficial, weak and tenuous.

### Common Sense and Scientific Knowledge

Very rarely do we spontaneously make a distinction between common sense or general knowledge and scientific knowledge in institutionalised contexts or our psychotherapeutic procedures. The former is associated with the pre-scientific era and activities. Common sense is characterised by *ordinary and incomplete* explanations without conclusive relevance to the facts. Scientific knowledge represents rational, identifiable and reliable cognitive claims in the knowledge inquiry enterprise (Nagel, 1961). From the above differentiation, an impression is created that scientific knowledge is superior and better than common sense. Nagel (1961) and Hindess (1977) have extensively written on both forms of knowledge. Hindess (1977) prefers the term metaphysics or non science to common sense.

In many social inquiry studies, knowledge is presented homogeneously, without due respect to the different levels of knowledge conceptualisations. Presenting knowledge in this undifferentiated manner creates serious conceptual and methodological problems in human behaviour studies. Hindess (1977, p. 177) does not however agree with this viewpoint and argues that “the difference between science and metaphysics is not a function of their concepts and relations between concepts. It is a function of how we decide to treat them”. In Hindess’ (1977) view, the classification of knowledge as either non science or common sense and scientific knowledge depends on how the interpreters of that knowledge treat it, and not the character of the concepts. In the above argument Hindess sensitises us to power issues when dealing with knowledge, that is, how those who claim to have the predetermined know-how can manipulate knowledge for their own benefits and motives. The process of knowledge production and acquisition is usually accepted or refuted on the basis of the reliability or unreliability of the methods followed. In other words, how scientific or unscientific the process is. One cannot therefore talk of knowledge production and acquisition without evaluating its scientificity. It is the scientificity of knowledge that differentiates common sense from scientific knowledge. According to Nagel (1961, pp. 2-3) “science is a label associated with how knowledge is

constructed and gathered. Modern science is associated with elaborate and intellectual acquisition of knowledge”. Implied in this argument is that scientific knowledge has some final truth to it. It is organised, systematic and reliable, characterised by controllable, measurable, predictable and repeatable processes.

The purpose of systematic science is according to Nagel (1961, p. 5) “to remove the incompleteness which common sense suffers from ... and to introduce the refinements into ordinary conceptions by the very process of exhibiting the systematic connections of propositions about matters of common sense”. According to Hindess (1977, pp. 176-177), the aim of science is “to get nearer to the truth and it does so by fulfilling the method of rational criticism”. Okere (2005a, p. 22) argues that the aim of science “includes acquaintance with, getting into the deep and true meaning of, having familiarity with and getting the real truth about something”. Okere’s understanding of the aim of science is unconditional, less restrictive and less prescriptive. His hermeneutic approach does not prescribe how and which conditions need to be met to get to the truth, but rather gives room for contextual interpretations and differences.

In our analyses of the above given aims, Nagel positions science as a *big-brother* or watchdog, whose aim is to correct and to improve on the *incomplete and unrefined* falsehoods of common sense. One does not therefore get the impression that there is an honest “scientific” attempt to get to “know” something here, except to monitor common sense’s views, conceptualisations and applications. Hindess takes us closer to the idea of getting to *know*, but introduces rationality as a criterion to scientific knowledge. In this instance as well, rationality is likely to exclude other ways of doing things as *irrational* if not carefully considered within a particular context. For example, observing and honouring ancestors in Africa is seen as logical, rational and therapeutic (healing) by ordinary people. To impose *rationality* and *proof* as assessment tools of their knowledge system and reality is methodologically flawed. The fact that there is no *rational proof* that the ancestors hear those that observe them does not mean that ancestors do not exist. Not everything exists on the basis of *proof* for its existence. The metaphysical or common sense world exists and is a reality to *ordinary* people, with or without the existence or approval of the scientific knowledge world. These ordinary people’s daily activities are moreover characterised by the desire to *know* their living circumstances. Okere takes us to the etymology of the word *to*



*know* from which *knowledge* comes. Okere (2005a, p. 22) reminds us that when Aristotle wrote *all men by nature desire to know*, “he was using the term *know* in the general, commonsensical understanding of the term, common to the people of his day and culture, to people of our day and apparently to all human beings”. In our time, the aim of science has shifted from every human being desiring to *know*, to proving right or wrong parameters using *rational* means. This Western criterion has restricted science to what Okere (2005a, p. 22) refers to as the “building of bodies or systems of truth about specific regions of reality, following defined methods of inquiry”. It does seem that there is nothing wrong in distinguishing between various levels of knowledge. The problem arises when this knowledge differentiation is used to create an impression that some levels are better and more important than others, without sensitivity to contexts and cultural background. After all, at any given time, both common sense and scientific knowledge are applicable and usable by all human beings, depending on the need and context.

From this observation, we can argue that although science does not include common sense, it derives its very existence from common sense. Common sense is therefore the *well* from which science derives its *rationality* and *scientificity*. Common sense and scientific knowledge are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Hindess (1977, p. 175) argues that “the content of scientific knowledge at any time is a function of intersubjective decisions based on methodological norms derived from *metaphysical* research programmes. The demarcation between science and non-science is an effect of the prevailing metaphysics”. It is important to note that the scientificity of knowledge depends on “methodological norms” that are put in place and determined by the *scientific community*. Clearly, certain exclusive predetermined criteria and standards are used to create an in-group and an out-group or *scientific community* and the *non scientific community*. This *scientific community* is characterised by certain conditions such as the knowledge bearer’s training, their epistemology, the aim of the task or research and so on. The “non scientific community” is excluded from the *scientific community* membership. This exclusion of some knowledge systems, by its very nature disqualifies the universality claim by Western *science*. We can therefore argue that the scientific statements and conclusions are not entirely objective and free of dogma as science claims. Hindess (1977, p. 175) states that “the results of any test and therefore the content of scientific knowledge, must depend on the forms of training which prevail within the scientific community at the time”. Training therefore provides the basis for creating

and validating “acceptable” basic statements within the in-group or the scientific community. The training, epistemology, context and so on of for example a traditional healer, will therefore enable him or her to make certain basic statements, assumptions or hypotheses which are acceptable to their *client community* and *cultural healing community*. A Western conceived *community of psychotherapists*, depending on what is defined as psychotherapeutic, will for example determine *acceptable* assessment and treatment procedures when dealing with bereavement. These procedures may not necessarily be applicable or used by a traditional healer within the African context, whose approach may be ecological rather than diagnostic. If looked at superficially, there is a clear demarcation between common sense and scientific knowledge conceptually. Epistemologically and pragmatically, however, there are serious methodological problems associated with differentiating between common sense and scientific knowledge. As Nagel (1961) observes, the acquisition of reliable knowledge is not the function of modern science ... and skills and competent information have been there before the advent of modern science.

It follows from our critique of common sense and scientific knowledge, that the insistence on proof through testing and falsifiability, controllability, measurability, rationality and so on as the sole criteria of the scientificity and non scientificity of knowledge cannot be sustained. Our argument for methodologies that are consistent with and are sensitive to Africans’ epistemologies, context, existential experiences and cultural practices must stand. Hindess (1977, pp. 3-4) articulates this need for the critical evaluation of methodologies by stating that “methodology lays down procedures to be used either in the generation or in the testing of propositions by those who wish to obtain valid knowledge ... It is clear that methodology’s claim to prescribe correct procedures to the sciences must presuppose a form of knowledge which is superior to that produced in the sciences”. Hindess goes on to suggest that, “if the claim of philosophy to a special kind of knowledge can be shown to be without foundation, if these claims are at best dogmatic or else incoherent, then methodology is an empty and futile pursuit and its prescriptions are vacuous”. Our view is that methodology should benefit and advance peoples’ material experiences or conditions and the growth of their pool of knowledge in a collaborative and sensitive manner.

Our argument thus far has indicated that common sense is not methodology, but it contains a method. Although common sense does not reflect on or possess the science of how things are done, it has a particular way of doing things. What is clear from our discussion, however, is that common sense and science are not at the same logical level. The Western differentiation of common sense and scientific knowledge seems to equate common sense to oral traditions, that is, that all oral traditions are reduced to the level of common sense. We firmly dispute this correlation and its “rational” basis as will be seen later when we discuss oral traditions. The method of inquiry should be consistent with and be legitimised by people’s experiential and cultural realities. Our further argument for the broadening of the methodology of conventional science calls for the need to take indigenous knowledge systems, in particular African knowledge systems, seriously. We will now briefly discuss other related methodological problems in the social inquiry enterprise that arise when scientific knowledge is considered *the* only way through which knowledge is generated.

#### Methodological Problems in the Social Inquiry Enterprise

Our observation and experience is that social sciences have sought to explain theories that employ “abstract” distinctions between scientific knowledge and methodologies, remote from the familiar experiences of the local people concerned. These discrepancies have resulted in questions being raised in methodological studies. Nagel’s (1961, pp. 448-449) argument, for example, is that “there are no reasonably satisfactory methodological explanations and procedures in social inquiry discourse, and if any, they are characterised by serious disagreements on methodological as well as substantive questions. The propriety of designating any extant branch of social inquiry as a *real science* has been repeatedly challenged – commonly on the ground that, although such inquiries have contributed large quantities of frequently reliable information about social matters, these contributions are primarily studies of special social facts in certain historically human groups and supply no strict laws about social phenomena”. The field of social sciences cannot “objectively” offer a uniform, rigidly defined set of explanatory systems of inquiry. Unlike the case in the natural sciences, there is strictly no *real* universal methodological prescription of inquiry in social inquiry phenomena. Methodological processes and issues within the social sciences have to be understood within their unique dynamic,

historical, individual and cultural contexts. In this sense, there cannot be universalised laws about the study of human experiences, practices and existence. It is within this understanding that Western methodologies cannot necessarily accurately and adequately account for and represent indigenous ideals and experiences, and in particular African indigenous knowledge systems. The attempt by the West to standardise and universalise their methodologies in social sciences for different contexts such as psychology and psychotherapy has created inconsistencies, conflict and methodological problems.

Most, if not all, African knowledge systems suffered and continue to be subjected to Western methodological criteria as justification for their scientificity and existence. The present study is a project in the critique of the claim to universality and superiority of the Western epistemological paradigm over all others. It is doing this through a specific focus upon African indigenous knowledge with particular reference to psychotherapy. With regard to the former leg of this project, we propose to focus upon Nagel's (1961) critique of methodology in the social sciences.

### Controlled Inquiry

Controlled inquiry is based on the assumption that in order to establish general laws that can serve as instruments for systematic explanations that are dependable and predictable, the process of inquiry should be confined to a certain process of controlled experimentation. Controlled experimentation refers to the notion that the world, and knowledge for that matter, is "describable, and explicable in mechanically predictable and rigidly governed by discoverable laws" (Ryle, 1949, p. 75). One of the shortcomings of controlled inquiry in the social sciences is that human behaviour cannot be accurately predicted as one would predict the temperature at which a certain metal would melt in the natural sciences. The continuing conflict in Iraq is an example of the unpredictability of human behaviour. The predictions, calculations, and control measures that were planned for the Iraqi war have been modified and challenged by the very fact that human behaviour cannot be accurately predicted. The "predicted" and "standardised" effects inaugurated by the United States of America and Britain have to date not been achieved. Human *free will* (Ryle, 1949) has probably played an important role in tampering with the said predictions. In controlled experiments, the researcher controls variables to achieve certain

standardised effects. According to Nagel (1961), it is not always usually clear whether the observed changes are due to the researcher's influence or the variations of the conditions under which the experiment takes place. Within the context of the present study, African experiences, cultures and their practices cannot be measured and conclusions drawn about their therapeutic value or meanings based on controlled Western systems of inquiry. If this is done, conflict and misrepresentations become the predominant features of such research.

### Cultural Relativity and Social Laws

Cultural relativity refers to the idea that every community or cultural group will behave and shape its practices in accordance with their cultural background, inherent to and consistent with the historical social character of that community. Nagel (1961, p. 459) refers to cultural relativity as the “historically determined character of the social phenomena”. According to Nagel this means that all communities have certain forms of analogous institutions such as the family organisation, forms of education, and ways of maintaining law and order, that have been developed in response to different environments. These responses have crystallised into different cultural traditions. It is these cultural differences that we argue have limited and restricted generalisability and which are obstacles to establishing general laws in social inquiry processes. Accordingly, as Nagel (1961, p. 459) argues, “human social behaviour depends not only on the immediate occasions that call forth the behaviour but also on the culturally instituted habits and interpretations of events involved in the response to the occasions, the patterns of social behaviour will vary with the society in which the behaviour occurs and with the character of its institutions at a given historical period”. No social behaviour or practice should therefore be interpreted outside of its cultural context. This does not however preclude the desirability of comparison. It is for this reason that Okere (2005b, pp. 2-3) argues for a hermeneutic approach to social phenomena because “all that we ever understand is made possible by a prior understanding. We go from the known to the unknown and, prior to any new knowledge, we pre-knew”. The “pre-knew” of a particular people is simultaneously their point of departure and their means or method in the search for new knowledge. Social research must take this seriously in order to make its claims to “abstract universality” significant, credible and reliable. For this reason we submit that a sensitive culturally-relative approach should be adopted when dealing

with indigenous knowledge social systems. The West's generalised and control oriented social inquiry procedures that have been invariably applied to indigenous people's practices cannot therefore unconditionally sustain their claim to be true and accurate reflections of indigenous cultures.

### Knowledge of Social Phenomena as a Social Variable

The role of the knowledge possessed by either the interviewer/researcher or interviewee/researched constitutes a confounding variable in the social inquiry process. The fact that the knowledge gatherer/researcher knows what his or her intentions are may manipulate the process, thereby creating methodological inconsistencies. It may also only lead to the intended results. Conversely, when the knowledge givers/researched know that they are being studied, their behaviour during and after the process is likely to vary. The results or findings and the investigation process will always be questionable. According to Nagel (1961, p. 466), "the manner in which experiments on social subject matter are conducted may introduce changes of unknown magnitude into the material under study, and may therefore vitiate from the outset the conclusions advanced on the basis of strictly experimental inquiries". The West has for example reached certain empirical conclusions about African healing practices (for example, that these treatment methods are not scientific) using predetermined methodologies, with the full knowledge of what it intended to achieve. Such results cannot necessarily be conclusive due to prior knowledge of the investigators and their methods of inquiry. Within the social inquiry framework, researchers are therefore methodologically faced with the problem of their knowledge of social phenomena, and should therefore be aware of this dilemma. The illusion that this confounding variable can be controlled constitutes denial of social reality, is culturally indefensible and methodologically inconsistent. At best this confirms the "unwitting rigidity and manipulation" that always accompany social inquiry processes.

### The Subjective Nature of Social Subject Matter

The subjectivity-objectivity argument has dominated past and present methodological discourses and will continue to be an area of contention in the future. The purpose of this section

is not to engage in the above controversy, but to indicate the methodologically problematic nature of the subjective nature of the social subject matter. Nagel (1961) identifies the subject matter as purposive human action, directed to attaining various ends or “values”. Nagel (1961, p. 474) argues that “motives, dispositions, intended goals and values are matters not open to sensory inspection, and can be neither made familiar nor identified by way of an exclusive use of procedures that are suitable for exploring the publicly observable subject matter of the ‘I’ (or natural) sciences .... Accordingly, the various ‘things’ that may need to be mentioned in explaining purposive actions must be construed in terms of what the human actors *themselves believe* about those things, rather than in terms of what can be discovered about the way of the objective methods of natural sciences”. Most of the prevailing conventional Western methodologies upon which categories of describing and explaining African social practices are based therefore represent Western subjective constructions. These constructions are clouded by the Western cultural historical influences that are inherent in most social inquiry processes. Due to the subjective nature of the social subject matter, the West cannot therefore claim to have objectively represented African experiences and reality completely. Appeals to objective evidence and knowledge in social contexts do not necessarily constitute authentic knowledge. Such unauthentic knowledge, based on “science”, often functions as a social control mechanism. This is the reason why most African healing practices are degraded and excluded from the body of scientific knowledge. We therefore see objective “verification” within social inquiry processes as an attempt to exclude, subjugate, maintain and control the status quo. Freire (2003, p. 50) argues that “one cannot conceive of objectivity without subjectivity. Neither can exist without the other, nor can they be dichotomised. The separation of objectivity from subjectivity, the denial of the latter when analysing reality or acting upon it, is objectivism. On the other hand, the denial of objectivity in analysis or action, resulting in a subjectivism which leads to solipsistic positions, denies action itself by denying objective reality”. According to Freire objectivity and subjectivity are in constant dialectical relationship. Science therefore, on the basis of its own “objective” methodology, cannot sustain the denial of other realities to the indigenous people.

## The Value-oriented Bias of Social Inquiry

Social inquiry processes are not free from the social value systems from which researchers come and are committed to. This bias does not only affect the contents of their finding but also their assessment of the evidence on which they base their conclusions (Nagel, 1961). The argument to be advanced here is that there is no such thing as “value neutrality” in social inquiry processes. Those who subscribe to the notion of “value-neutrality” are denying the ontological and epistemological phenomena of indigenous knowledge. Researchers are intrinsically enmeshed in what they are investigating, and also affected by their own notions of what constitutes a satisfactory social order. Accordingly, in any social inquiry process, the researcher’s own personal standards and sense of social justice come into play (Nagel, 1961). On the basis of this argument, we can see that Western methodological formulations and applications are biased towards Africans, because they are clouded by Europeans’ own standards and conceptualisations of what constitutes a “good” social order. It is within this context that we should question the Western methodological bias in respect of Africans’ cultural healing practices and experiences. We have demonstrated that it is methodologically impossible to claim objective, a value-free and unbiased position in a social science such as psychotherapy. The argument that methodology followed in social research formulations will inevitably be influenced by peoples’ experiences, their historical contexts and epistemologies, should therefore stand. We will now discuss how experience, historical cultural context and methodologies relate to the concept and practice of science.

## Experience, Historical Context and Methodology

On the face of it, there is merit to rational inquiry as a “scientific” gathering process. However, on closer scrutiny, if we agree with Dewey (1958), Okere (2005a & b), Drummond (2006), Kuokkanen (2006), Coates, Gray and Hetherington (2006), Okere et al. (2005) and Hindess (1977) that knowledge comes from experience, then, the methodology by which this experience is translated into “scientific” knowledge becomes crucial. Different people have different experiences, methodologies and various conceptualisations of what “science” is to them. Osuagwu (1999, p. 57) argues that “the meaning, operation and purpose of method depends very



much on the object (its nature: material or immaterial) of the science in question. Because if the object is distinct, then its science will *grosso modo*, equally require a distinct method. Thus there are as many methods as there are objects of sciences: mathematical, moral, natural, physical, mental, spiritual, etc. History attracts our present attention”. We cannot therefore talk of a universal science constructed out of a foreign epistemology. This viewpoint is strongly supported by Okere’s (2005a, p. 21) argument that, “ it is clear that all philosophy is local and even individual before it can be universal; and nothing can be genuinely universally valid unless it was first authentically personal and inserted within a given culture and context”. A similar viewpoint can be found among the indigenous Maori people in New Zealand. Drummond (2006, p. 3) presents it in this way: “ For Maori, acquiring knowledge is not an isolated activity that takes place in a library or a classroom, but a learning process that takes place in a human and geographical context. It is cultural learning, placing the individual in a framework of spiritual beliefs, a practical economic structure, a geographical context and network of family and community structures based around named individuals ancestral and living.” These experiences and context-bound indigenous viewpoints on knowledge systems therefore render the idea of Western rationality as the only scientific criterion for knowledge production questionable.

Within the context of this study, psychotherapy as a field of study, a reality and a form of practice needs to be situated within the African experiential discourse. The view of Ramose (2002, p. 1) is that, “it is still necessary to assert and to uphold the right of Africans to define the meaning of experience and truth in their own right. In order to achieve this, one of the requirements is that Africans should take the opportunity to speak for and about themselves and in that way construct an authentic and truly African discourse about Africa”. From the above arguments, methodology arises from a particular history and experience and therefore needs to be consistent with the epistemology and cultural experiences of the people concerned, in this instance, Africans. Mbeki (2006, p. 23) affirms Ramose’s view by stating that “perspectives on Africa must also be based on information, whether correct or otherwise, events and processes about Africa and in Africa”. Most of the information about Africa such as African healing practices is formulated, interpreted and concluded using Western perspectives. This imposition of Western perspectives and misappropriation is what results in various distortions about African history and the reality around her.

The above argument is often disregarded within the Western scientific paradigm. As Osuagwu (1999, p. 26) observed, “African philosophy has been very much denied, rejected and neglected on grounds of its controverted genuine historicity, scientificity and authentic Africanity”. Western science has a history of excluding other realities, prescribing and defining rules for acceptable knowledge and practice on behalf of others. Mbeki’s (2006, p. 23) argument on the West’s denial of other realities is that “by denying people the cultural and the social traits of the ‘civilised’, the powerful could denigrate a people’s history. Coupled with a continued process of indoctrination this could eventually also erode the self-worth and sense of humanity of ‘the other’”. According to Coates, Gray and Hetherington (2006, p. 382), “these Euro-American paradigms have contributed not only to intellectual colonisation, but also to the devaluing and marginalisation of indigenous and local knowledge”. One of the prime aims of the process of colonisation has been to distort, dominate and subjugate other forms of knowledge systems. We therefore agree with Mbeki that in dealing with perspectives on and of Africa, we have to ask certain critical questions such as, what past and present information is available on Africa? Who gathers and disseminates such information? Who interprets events and processes in Africa? From what point of view are these interpretations made? Whose views dominate the daily discourse in our country and the rest of the continent? If we effectively ask these questions we are likely to critically reflect on processes and ideas that dominate our curricula, history and social discourse. In this way we will be able to position ourselves (Africans) as important producers and conduits of knowledge. In this connection Okere (2005a, p. 20) maintains that “this has enabled the development of false superiority over other forms of knowledge and real power hegemony of the West over other peoples”. It is for this reason that the concept of diversity is somewhat opprobrious to Western thought and practice. It is on the basis of this narrowly limited approach and scope of the Western scientific paradigm that we argue for a dialogical engagement between the Western and the African methods of acquiring and validating knowledge.

According to Freire (2003, p. 17), “dialogue does not represent a somewhat false path that involves the ingenuity of the other. On the contrary, dialogue characterises an epistemological relationship. Thus dialogue is a way of knowing...The fundamental goal of dialogue is to create a process of learning and knowing that invariably involves theorising about the experiences shared

in the dialogue process”. This equal engagement of knowledge systems will go a long way in dealing with what Okere (2005a, pp. 26-29) describes as follows: “We alone-know-it-all claims made in the name of the West ... and bring about the acknowledgement that the degree of ‘scientificness’ is debatable and will always be variable ... that different people do have their own science and bodies of knowledge”. To come to this level and process of dialogical engagement between the West and Africa, philosophical reflections on their methodologies are both necessary and imperative. A question to be asked in this regard is, why philosophical reflections? Why philosophising in a psychology study?

An attempt to understand this question must be situated in the conceptualisation of what philosophy is. Okere’s (2005b, pp. 2-4) argument is that “all philosophy is hermeneutic in nature, meaning simply that all philosophy is an effort of interpretive understanding, understanding one’s world, one’s environment, one’s culture or one’s reality”. If this view is admitted, we can therefore see that a comprehensive understanding of the concept of psychotherapy within the African context needs philosophising. This process will enable us to reflect on the experiences, cultures, history, biases, and ideals when dealing with Africans within therapeutic contexts. Okere (2005a, p. 21) broadly defines philosophy as “the assumption and then the questioning and critical interpretation of one’s culture at the level of ultimacy and finality of being. Or put in a different way, it is trying to find answers to the deep questions of meaning and existence posed by and within one’s enviroing culture”. Osuagwu (1999, p. 29) defines philosophy as “a systematic and critical enterprise of the human reason in the interpretative search and discovery of the primordial and essential or substantial meaning of things as they are in themselves”. It is within the context of these definitions that the methodological and social inquiry issues in the field of psychotherapy should be interrogated.

The main focus of psychotherapy is to attend to diverse relational being (emotional, behavioural, cognitive, spiritual, interactional, ecological, cosmic, etc.), human and inanimate (water, minerals, mountains) experiences in a dialogical manner. This means that Africans view human beings as relationally engaged in a constant, respectful dialogue and interaction with their environment and nature. Ajei’s (2000, p. 103) conceptualisation of nature is “the wholistic realm of being, that includes both the physical and other forces and energies which are not ordinarily

susceptible to sense-experience”. This understanding of nature therefore represents the wholistic complexity of collaboration, connectedness and being. According to Bujo (1998, p. 209) “the human person and the cosmos complement each other to such an extent that they cannot exist without this interdependence”. From this understanding, we can see that philosophy seeks to critically and wholistically deal with human existence, its meaning and human knowledge systems in different cultural contexts. The aim of philosophising is to legitimise and include through dialogue, other forms of knowledge and knowing. Ramose (2002, p. 6) refers to this as “the curiosity to understand those who don’t think as we do...” Coates, Gray and Hetherington (2006, p. 389) describe it as “the search for meaning and sustainability, and acknowledging the need to accept and value alternative perspectives, a welcoming and an inclusive context enabling the celebration of diversity and the sharing of knowledge”. The above argument clearly forms part of the research paradigm and the methodological conceptualisations and practices of different people in their different contexts. A reflection on the Western science and indigenous cultures calls for diversified methodological approaches to knowledge systems.

### Western Science and the Indigenous Cultures

The historical evolutionary nature of “science” emanates from the European boundaries and gained its power in the world through conquest. The history of “science” cannot be separated from the Western broader expeditions of colonisation and imperialism. Although these were ostensibly driven by material and political power, they also included intellectual, epistemological and paradigmatic colonisation. It is through this process of colonisation that the Western dominance was imposed. Okere et al. (2005, p. 5) point out the adverse effects of this lopsided relationship by stating that “African societies have since colonisation and still today been marked by ‘othering’ from the North. Its great civilisational traditions (in particular political, medical, biological, commercial and religious ones) and *healing practices* (our addition) have been inferiorised and subdued in particular during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries’ colonial and missionary enterprise... Ostensibly propagated for ‘the good of the colonised peoples’, this Western civilisational *version* of knowledge was being imposed on several levels, in particular through the colonial and missionary schools”.

Western ideological supremacy translated into the colonisers deciding on what was good and what not for the colonised. (Biko, 2002, pp. 80-82) succinctly articulates this Western dominance mentality and attitude within the South African context, by arguing that “so immersed are they in prejudice that they do not believe that blacks can formulate their thoughts without white guidance and trusteeship... In all aspects of black-white relationship, now and in the past, we see a constant tendency by whites to depict blacks as of an inferior status. Our culture, our history and indeed all aspects of the black man’s life have been battered nearly out of shape in the great collision between the indigenous values and the Anglo-Boer culture.”

It is within the above supremacy mentality that we should understand how all other areas of *being* of the indigenous people, values, and history, education systems, cultural healing practices and so on were devalued and relegated to the periphery. Mbeki (2006, p. 23) puts this supremacy mentality within the historical evolutionary context by arguing that “the European historians of the 19<sup>th</sup> century were consumed by the cancer of racism and the firm belief that there were no human beings on earth who were divinely endowed with intelligence fortitude and wisdom than those who populated European countries. About blacks they were absolutely sure that these were not only incapable of making any significant contribution to human civilisation but were in fact sub-human who needed the tutelage, on everything, of the matured European peoples”. It is in the same attitude of undermining other forms of practices and knowledge systems that the self-imposed Western “science” should be understood. Therefore “science” as we study and understand it today, is a history of the European evolution of ideas as well as practices and cannot therefore claim to be a universal representative of all knowledge systems. Ajei (2000, p. 139) articulates the Western dominance by arguing that “physical science cannot arrogate to itself the status of ‘the only discoverer of truth in nature’ because the epistemological framework of physical science is just one of the many legitimate epistemological frameworks”. Western “science” is not necessarily consistent with the existential experiences of the indigenous peoples of Africa. It is therefore out of synchrony with the local cultural knowledge (Okere, et al., 2005). Disregarding this historical and cultural hegemony and dissonance, the West continues to claim and demand universal “scientific” supremacy over all knowledge systems, “under the guise of ‘methodological’ objections” (Ramose, 2002, p. 7). It is on the basis of the indigenous people’s research paradigms and methodologies that we would like to engage the West by pointing out the

inherent problems associated with the attempt to understand knowledge from a foreign framework.

From the epistemological, ontological and practical point of view, one cannot therefore undertake authentic and congruent scientific research through total, complete and exclusive reliance upon an alien research paradigm and methodology. If this is done, as the West has insisted over centuries, then tension is inevitable. These inconsistencies and lack of fit between the research paradigm, methodologies and peoples' experiences are essentially due to the West's imposition of its epistemological paradigm over indigenous knowledge systems. Bondy (1986) maintains that the aim of research is to give expression and to reflect on reality in relation to people's existential circumstances. People's historical existence and cultural practices therefore form an integral part of their research paradigm and methodology. One's epistemology influences the research paradigm and methodology.

The method by which one gathers knowledge, evaluates data and interprets the world is influenced by one's epistemology. Researchers cannot therefore separate themselves from their epistemological paradigm. Subjectivity is an inextricable part of the researcher's reality. Hindess (1977, pp. 16-17) defines positivist methodology as "a distinctive type of epistemology characterised by its insistence that we can know reality only on the basis of experience. Positivism asserts the claim of experience as the ultimate foundation of human knowledge and denies the possibility of meaningful discourses concerning super sensible objects ... there can be no foundation for the ontological doctrines which underlie the rationalist demarcation between the sciences of nature and those of history and culture". This is where the notion of objectivity comes from, the belief that research is free from socio-political, epistemological and existential cultural influences. Consequently, indigenous people have come to associate research with alienation, loss of self-identity, loss of one's cultural being-ness and connectedness. Ramose (2002, p. 5). argues that "individual and collective identity is very important in the formation of self-knowledge, thus self-knowledge can never be complete without reference to one's roots, to the past which is one's history". Osuagwu (1999, pp. 27-30) further states that "to understand the issues of historicity and the scientificity of African historical methodology, we need to employ deconstruction and reconstruction approaches". He further argues that to do this properly, "our

investigations must take into account our historical origins/originals: contexts, times, places, persons, events, projects, problems, influences, doctrines, schools, literature, etcetera. We must get back to the origins and originals – to the remote ancient times in North Africa – to discover in their proper purity, identity, integrity, differences and merit which were distorted, denied, omitted and forgotten by later historians. Reconstruction comes into play, to co-ordinately and complementarily, put things into their proper perspective. This proper reconstructive placement implies the creative moment of construction”. The current methodological tensions and inconsistencies between the Western and indigenous peoples, Africans in this case, is a justifiable attempt by Africans to deconstruct and reconstruct the deformed African identity. The history of our psychotherapeutic practices and their cultural heritage and their dynamism to a very large extent defines Africa’s uniqueness. On this reasoning, the study of history is both necessary and imperative (Ramose, 2002).

The above sketched background gives rise to the need to critically evaluate how both a research paradigm and methodology can be unauthentically exploited. The West has used its “definitions” of research, paradigm and methodology to subjugate and undermine indigenous cultural practices. There has therefore been a conventional tendency that has created a closed and rigid system of knowing that only permitted the self-certifying discoveries and claim to absoluteness in the name of science. The essential problem inherent in this way of thinking is that it generalises and globalises standards, assuming that the Western paradigm should be treated as a universal constant. Okere (2005b, pp. 8-9) argues that “those who preach universalism thinking that the West has discovered the *only* universalistic themes of all philosophy and for all time can be likened to those who imagine that the whole world should join the bandwagon of globalisation since it is not only the inevitable future, but indeed the only true future for all”. In the light of this universalised and institutionalised thinking, diversity is seen as deviancy that needs to be strictly controlled. Anything that does not fit what Steiner (2002, p. 2) calls the “rule and law of science (paradigm)”. It is this identity deformation, gross injustice and historical prejudice against African research methodologies, by Western science that indigenous people are questioning and resisting.

Smith (1999, p. 1) reminds us that “from the vantage point of the colonised, the term research is inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism, therefore the word ‘research’ is one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world vocabulary. The way in which scientific research is implicated in the worst excesses of colonialism remains a powerful remembered history for many of the world’s colonised people”. Okere (2005a, pp. 21-22) supports Smith’s argument, but further argues that even the words “science and Western are emotionally charged words invoking intense feelings of partisanship and, for some, even resentment”. Embedded in Smith and Okere’s observations is the extent to which research and science have been and are still exploited, to subjugate indigenous people. S. Lifschitz (personal communication, March 16, 2006) argues that scientific inquiry or research reduces experience as a form of knowledge to the periphery and therefore anything that does not “fit” this “scientific inquiry” is not regarded as science. It is on the basis of this lack of “fit” with the predominant paradigm that we see indigenous knowledge systems being marginalised because they do not “fit” the universal Western “scientific” paradigm. Similarly, the acceptance of any research results and the methodology followed must “fit” with the Western paradigm; otherwise they do not constitute “authentic scientific knowledge”. This generalistic, scientific and rationalistic thinking does not differentiate people according to their historical and cultural experiences and contexts. The Western scientific paradigm has demonstrated that it does not have the will and interest to understand historical realities from indigenous peoples’ cultural frame of reference. The one common Western universal way of interacting with other knowledge systems is to subjugate and displace them through bureaucratic and rationalistic research methodologies. On the basis of the above argument, it is thus appropriate to conclude that Western science cannot deal with differences and diversity (Coates, Gray & Hetherington, 2006). Anything that goes beyond the comprehension of the Western conceptual framework does not seem to form any meaningful body of knowledge and therefore it is regarded as unscientific. In this way different, unfamiliar and non-compliant realities are thus reduced to no knowledge or less significant status. Despite this rigid arrogance by the Western methodologies and knowledge interpretation, indigenous people are more and more collectively reclaiming their identities by researching and practising their culture. Methodologies used here are consistent with the indigenous epistemologies and forms of social inquiries.



According to Bondy (1986, p. 237), people have “multiple variety of *historical* existential realities about the world” and this makes it difficult to create normative standardised definitions. Steiner (2002, p. 9) emphasises the importance and uniqueness of history as personal experience by stating that “... history is what we experience, it is not a theoretical filter through which we interpret experience, history is what we experience immediately. History is present to us and is experienced as future possibilities ... it presents the dimensions of culture, research themes and the being of researchers and others, history is the milieu in which we live our lives, it is the source of our experience and what makes us meaningful”. The word history is here placed within a different conceptual level and framework. Whether we are referring to his-*story* or her-*story*, this relates to a -*story*, a narrative which is at the level of experience. This experience constitutes knowledge. But such knowledge is not “science” as understood in terms of the Western epistemological paradigm. To be *science* such knowledge must appeal to the etymology of this term derived from the Latin; Scire- in Latin means to know. It is knowledge, any kind of knowledge arising from experience. And this knowledge is referred to as reality. It is in this sense that reality is science.

In recent years, the understanding of history as experience, knowledge, and reality has gained momentum and prominence especially among the indigenous people, whose history was not seen as authentic knowledge or science. In his interrogation of *the question of science*, Okere (2005a, p. 25) discusses science on two different levels; first level science (science as knowledge in general) and science as one and as many. The latter level is informed by the notion that all human beings by nature desire to know. Okere argues that “to claim such a prerogative exclusively for one people or culture or to deny it to others would be to disqualify those others from a class of humans. As such all human beings as a matter of fact, somehow do have some knowledge. Many in the sense that, since such basic knowledge is human activity par excellence, it is also supremely historical in a supremely pluralistic world. That is why, as in human activity, there must be more than one way, in fact many ways of doing it, each human group/culture structuring and colouring its own knowledge according to the specificities on its own environment”. This understanding of science departs radically from the Western rational meaning of science. At this level of conceptualisation, according to Okere (2005a, p. 22), “science or knowledge is a special

activity or mode of being of man by which man relates to reality from the perspective of the truth, truth here meaning getting reality as it is”.

A complementary understanding to Okere’s view of science is provided by Osuagwu’s conceptualisation. Osuagwu (1999, p. 51) defines science as "formally a rational, systematic, rigorous, logical, critical, creative and objective enterprise; that aims at investigating, understanding and discovering reality in its veracity or falsehood”. Osuagwu (1999, p. 52) goes on to argue that “our foregoing position does not intend to neglect the serious caveats noted by African critics against erroneous Europeanism in African scholarship, ... we must moderate the unscientific aspect of the recommendation for the total rupture with or isolation from the basic, common or international scientific rules of open-mindedness, partnership, complementarity, collaboration or community. The correct understanding of science recognises its autonomy and objectivity which operates supremely over particular persons, peoples, places, times cultures and histories”. Clearly, Osuagwu’s understanding of science honours universality and objectivity. It is prescriptive. Freire (2003, p. 47) succinctly describes this “Western scientific methodological” prescription, by arguing that “every prescription represents the imposition of one individual’s choice upon another, transforming the consciousness of the person prescribed to into one that conforms with the prescriber’s consciousness”. A prescription by its very nature creates norms, standards and laws which set exclusionary conditions to the one that must conform to the prescription. The acceptability and effectiveness of the prescription depend on the parameters laid down by the one who prescribes the rules.

The argument that we would like to advance here is that the proposed “basics” and “international scientific rules” criteria must take into account indigenous peoples’ experiences. These “methodological standards” should be formulated through dialogical engagement, and not exclude the contributions of other cultures and systems of thought. According to Okere (2005a), there are different ways of being and of relating, therefore there are equally various ways of knowledge or science. This understanding of science is accommodative of different experiences and contexts. Western “science” is “often limited both in its subject area and approach, restricted to the building of bodies or systems of truth about specific regions of reality, following certain well defined methods of inquiry” (Okere, 2005a, pp. 22-23). The above divergent views on

science therefore show that “science” is prejudiced and biased when it becomes unilaterally prescriptive and universally applied, thereby excluding vast areas or “pools” of knowledge or experiences and their corresponding methods of inquiry. Okere’s redefinition above has provided us with an expanded meaning of history. Our understanding of history as a systematic, old and ever growing creation of bodies of truths and significant dates’ recordings and analysis in academic settings is challenged. A new expanded conceptualisation and meaning of history as narratives, realities, experiences and science has therefore emerged. We would like to align ourselves with Okere’s latter definition. We have argued that all knowledge has forms of science to it, and science comes from experience, and experience constitutes history, and history is a source of reality. We therefore conclude that knowledge, experience, history and reality are constructed through different scientific means. Science in this context includes and represents lived experiences that manifest in both the visible and invisible worlds.

We will now turn to the definitions of the concepts *research, paradigm and methodology* and briefly show how each one of them fits in the main argument advanced above. These concepts will then briefly be reflected upon to create the context for a critical discussion of the methodological problems of psychotherapy as a social inquiry field. Critical reflections on these concepts and how they are misused by the West to create a myth of universal “science” will be provided.

### Research, Paradigm and Methodology

The conceptual relationship between research, paradigm and methodology is very complex and to a very large extent defines what “science” is. Yet this inextricably connected relationship does not receive the necessary interrogation it deserves in social inquiry and in particular, in psychotherapy literature. The unjustifiable Western dominance and use of the concepts research, paradigm and methodology in modern and post-modern scientific enterprises needs to be seriously explored. The basis on which Western “authentic scientific” research is proclaimed universal is backed up by these concepts. In our view, these concepts are indeed necessary to guiding the social inquiry process. The problem we have has an ethical and methodological dimension to it. That is, when these concepts are manipulated and used not to the benefit of all

humanity, but for the exclusion of other knowledge systems. Bondy (1986, p. 244) sees this methodological imposition as “the alienation of being, which is more serious in the dominated nations, among which the Hispanic American countries must be counted”. This state of affairs means that indigenous discourses are dominated by non-indigenous epistemologies. Osuagwu (1999, p. 56) argues that “scientific methods are not ready-made and self-evident. They need to be, at least informally, but better formally, discovered and established for comprehensive and effective employment”. It is this self-imposed, expansionary and inappropriate application of research, paradigm and methodology that we will question on both moral and “scientific” grounds.

### Research “Defined”

In a philosophical paper entitled, *the technicity paradigm and scientism in qualitative research* Steiner (2002, pp. 1-2) critically contrasts *research* and *reflection*, and defines research as “a special way of making, acquiring and evaluating knowledge based on specialisation, efficiency of knowledge production and detachment of what is studied from its usual context so that researchers can focus on the area of special interest and be most efficient. A rigorous, institutionalised pursuit of certainty through rational, objective representation of experience ... research involves the frantic accumulation of specialist data for its own sake, as the basis for expertise and for the power to control the territory defined as the specialist discipline”. Steiner goes on to disagree with this conceptualisation by arguing that such research relies on agreed and controllable methods for accumulating and evaluating knowledge to permit division of labour and a faster aggregation of a body of knowledge valuable to the discipline. This definition, which we have become used to associating with “authentic and credible” research, resembles the typical Western thinking about research. Steiner (2002, p. 2) refers to this research conceptualisation as “research-driven knowledge making in the epoch of technicity, scientism, specialisation, abstraction and rationalism”. The problem with this objective, globalised and standardised Western definition is that abstraction and rationality as defined by Western thought are assumed to be the universal and ultimate scientific criteria. If we adhere to this definition, we will inevitably exclude other ways of knowledge gathering that do not fall under these criteria. Within this context, tension and disagreements in terms of cultural diversity, beliefs and values develop

between the Western and the African ways of knowledge construction. As we have demonstrated with the notion of science, we would like to rather think of research as a systematic process of knowledge acquisition through which different people in different contexts come to know, represent and reflect their experiences and the world. This understanding of research does not provide rigidly defined rules, but allows and supports various methodological approaches and creates conditions for self-criticism as well as criticism from the outsider's viewpoint.

Our argument above clearly shows that research is not a detached, specialised, institutionalised pursuit of knowledge through certainty, narrowly defined rationality and standardised objective presentation of knowledge. The conditions for such research are mostly created by the economic and political interests of the research funders. On the contrary, *research is a diverse and broad-based human pursuit of knowledge permitting comparison and dialogue among the multiple ways of knowing and doing*. A return to a more diverse, inclusive and context-sensitive praxis that will effectively situate research in its appropriate and meaningful context is therefore preferred. An understanding of research as a culturally dynamic process of interrogating, questioning, conceptualising and interpreting knowledge with the view to creating meaning about the world is therefore argued for.

Germane to our definition of research is the proposition that the researcher is free to choose and pursue the topic of research. However, in practice it is the case that research is often bound to respond to political and business interests. For example, Lysenkoism in the former Soviet Union was the kind of research in pursuit of political objectives and so was the funding of the Humanities and the Social Sciences in the West during the Cold War. The ascent of economic globalisation took precedence over the Humanities and the Social Sciences and has now placed greater emphasis on funding science, technology and business management sciences. Accordingly, companies such as Monsanto would fund research that promotes business interests, as was the case with the *brown bean* episode. The close alliance between scientific and academic research with business interests has compromised academic freedom and downgraded the quality of research. It is in the light of this unfolding experience that many scientists and academics continue to plead for the "dis-establishment of science". The support and realisation of this plea

in practice is essential to upholding academic freedom in particular and, human freedom in general. It is vital to the human right to give meaning to life and pursue happiness independently.

### Paradigm “Defined”

Kuhn’s (1962) famous publication, *The structure of scientific revolutions*, deals extensively with the concept of “paradigm”. Kuhn (in Reason & Bradbury, 2001, p. 4) defines a paradigm as “an overarching framework which organises our whole approach to being in the world ... a framework which organises all perceptions and thinking”. Broadly defined, a paradigm is, according to Ajei (2007, p. 134), “theoretical and practical background which members of a scientific community share”. Paradigm here represents a worldview. Worldviews are depicted in peoples’ ways of living, including their cultural practices, belief systems and experiences. All people irrespective of who they are or where they come from therefore hold particular worldviews. Since all people have worldviews, all people have a paradigm. This implies that different people have their own unique ways of viewing and dealing with the world. If paradigms reflect peoples’ worldviews, these reflections must be viewed in their respective cultural contexts. All people have their unique own ways of philosophising about their existential experiences. A paradigm is a systematised, organised and meaningful way of knowing, experiencing and explaining the world, irrespective of who is engaged in the “knowing”. Kuhn advances the argument that scientific inquiry always takes place within a certain conceptual framework, regulated by theoretical and methodological assumptions and interpretations that are consistent with that practice. The West cannot therefore claim to have a superior paradigm to those of indigenous people or claim to be the only ones who “know”. Our experience has been that the West has developed a tendency of presenting the Western paradigm as *the* universal and objective paradigm, and this we regard as a distortion, misunderstanding and a narrow sense of what a paradigm is. Reason and Bradbury (2001) expand the understanding of a paradigm to mean a *cultural worldview*, which from time to time, depending on the culture and context, shifts as lived experiences breed new knowledge.

The above definition creates a diverse perspective, of understanding a paradigm as a flexible context-bound cultural framework of inquiry and questions the West’s limited rational, analytical

and absolute claim to all “scientific” knowledge. People’s existence in the world is understood through their epistemological existential inquiry processes predicated by their unique lived experiences. For example, most Africans’ existence is understood in the indivisible dimension of the visible world (Bujo, 1998). We will call this *an existential ethic*, which gives identity to people. From the above arguments, it is clear that undertaking research requires a particular paradigm (framework). A paradigm cannot therefore be prescribed and detached from the daily activities and meanings attached to these experiences, practices and beliefs of the people concerned. If the researcher shifts the “accent” of reality, then the result is what Hindess (1977, p. 66) describes as “detaching oneself from one’s biographical situation within the social world, and entering ‘a field of pre-organised knowledge, called the corpus of his science’”. *A paradigm is therefore an individual, community and cultural way of constructing, interpreting and understanding the world.* This worldview is shaped by the past and present conceptual view of events and processes of that particular historical cultural context.

### Methodology “Defined”

In our observation, methodology and method are in many instances used interchangeably in research work. These two concepts are not on the same logical level and are therefore not the same. Method refers to the procedure followed, and methodology is science or knowledge about the procedure. Methodology therefore refers to a higher order reflection of the research method in the production of knowledge. Osuagwu (1999, p. 56) defines scientific method as “an inevitable condition for the possibility of science, it is, indeed, a categorical imperative for science’s discovery of truth and meaning of reality. Negatively defined, method is an effective condition for the detection, correction and avoidance of error or falsehood”. Our argument for the rejection of this latter definition is that we see this definition of methodology as inflexible, limited, controlled as well as a mechanical conditioning. In what can be seen as a broad social sciences view Hindess, (1977, p. 2) conceptualises methodology as a “discipline, bordering on philosophy, whose function is to examine the methods which are used or which should be used to produce valid knowledge”. In Hindess’ conceptualisation, methodology is a field of study that entails philosophical reflections on the methods that are used in the production of knowledge. In a more operational and specific definition of methodology, Hindess (1977, p. 3) rejects any view that

sees methodology as “the claim to correct procedures to the sciences ... the scientific knowledge produced and thought to be valid only if its production conforms to the prescribed procedures”. Methodology as a philosophical “reflection” critiques what is already “laid down”. This is contrary to the limited “scientific” sense where methodology lays down procedures to either generate or to test propositions by those who wish to obtain valid knowledge. Our argument is that methodologically, the process of knowledge production must be consistent with the cultural orientation and the material contexts of the people concerned. Within the educational context for example, according to Olukoshi and Zeleza (2004, p. 12), “there is a need for African universities and their processes of knowledge production to have their cultural orientation ... which entails the appropriation and transformation of ‘external’ factors and influences to the ‘internal’ principles and priorities that define orientation, values and practices”. When a method is seen as a standardised prescription whose role is to complete, prove, detect, correct, avoid falsehood and devalues other knowledge systems, then it is devoid of reality and tension is inevitable. Hindess (1977, p. 66) contextualises methodic relevance by arguing that “the world of scientific theorising is distinguished from other provinces of meaning – in particular, from the paramount reality, the world of daily life” by a specific tension of the consciousness and “... a specific epoch, a specific form of spontaneity, a specific form of self-experience, a specific form of sociality, and a specific time perspective”. Hindess (1977, p. 3) accurately captures this scientific inflexibility in method by arguing that “scientific knowledge is thought to be valid only if its production conforms to the prescribed procedures; it follows that the prescriptions of methodology cannot be validated by scientific knowledge”.

Our attempt to “define” the concepts research, paradigm and methodology has been cautious. This tentative approach has been informed by the awareness that these concepts cannot be rigidly and universally defined. Within the realm of this study, research, paradigm and methodology “definitions” on studies in the African context must take into account the socio-political and cultural worldviews of the indigenous people as epistemological points of departure. These “definitions” must be broadened to accommodate other forms of producing and preserving knowledge. Among the many varied ways in which Africans construct, gather, preserve and pass on knowledge is oral tradition. This takes us to a highly contested debate on whether oral



discourse is and can be regarded as an authentic, viable and scientific method in the scientific enterprise.

### Oral Traditions and Western Thought

Properly construed and analysed, science has to be sensitive, respectful and accommodative of all realities, including African indigenous oral tradition. Any method of social inquiry that claims to be scientific must also appreciate and deal with oral tradition as an authentic, viable and scientific method. Oral traditions are usually defined as “illiterate” and “non-text” knowledge production and preservation methods. They are usually juxtaposed with “texts” which are used as disqualifiers for Indigenous and, in particular, African claims to authentic scientific knowledge. We will now expound indigenous African oral traditions and argue for their reinstatement as viable, intellectual and authentic scientific methods of knowledge production and dissemination in scientific paradigms.

### Oral Discourse

Oral discourses refer to the unwritten philosophical and methodological traditions used for producing, preserving and disseminating knowledge. The fact that information or knowledge is here not written down does not necessarily mean that such knowledge is less significant than “texts”. However, as Okere (2005b, p. 12) points out, the added advantage of texts is to “help to identify, to consolidate, to preserve and to disseminate philosophy, but they do not make it any more than they make poetry”. The unwritten nature of oral discourse is regarded by Okere (2005b) as an inconvenience and challenge to African knowledge bearers and producers, whom he encourages to establish written traditions. Oluwole (1997), in her book, *Philosophy and Oral tradition*, critically discusses “texts” and oral traditions and the value and contributions each has in the process of knowledge production, preservation and dissemination. In support of Okere’s (2005b) view, Oluwole (1997) also emphasises that writing helps to document individual thought, provides immense opportunity for clearer explanations, detailed analysis and self-criticism, all of which may raise the level of discussion. Oluwole (1997, p. 6) argues that “the acts of reflection, criticism, analysis, argument and discussion can all be carried out in a purely

oral form. And since the formulation of poetry, discursive prose, verse, narrative, etc. did not depend on the art of writing, the creation of these literary styles and structures cannot be said to depend on the mastery of writing”. The argument for mastery of writing as a precondition for knowledge to be regarded as scientific therefore does not hold. Both the written texts and oral discourse are forms of expression. However, according to Western thought, only that which is written and recorded is preferred as scientifically legitimate. Our considered submission here is not to prove which form of expression is “more rational”, “better”, or “more civilised” than the other, but to indicate their unique role and significant contributions as methods of inquiry in the social sciences. Oluwole (1979, p. xviii) argues that “what is important is that there are no universal paradigms which all forms of thought must adopt everywhere in the world, philosophy belongs to a social group that gives it identity in a place and time”.

In the context of this study, psychology and psychotherapeutic practice in particular are identified, defined and agreed upon by given indigenous African groups. Rituals which involve the use of proverbs, epic poems, songs, dance, stories and drumming are regarded by many Africans as therapeutic. The definition of what is therapeutic is usually conceptualised around those activities. They are subsequently preserved and disseminated in that form. These rituals then, become the expressions of those peoples’ thoughts, emotions, social organisation, their cultural identities and therefore viable scientific methods of connections and dialogue. The large scale manner in which Expressive and Art therapies are practised by many indigenous people in Latin America, Africa, Scandinavian countries, New Zealand and Australia to mention but a few, indicate the importance and relevance of these oral traditions in contemporary societies.

### Oral and Written Discourses as Scientific Narratives

As alluded to by Okere (2005b) in our discussion earlier on, oral discourse is often disqualified for its non-reputability and “unscientificity” status in most Western thought. Those who subscribe to the mainstream Western science “written-evidence framework” as the only viable scientific data, continue to persist in their denial of existence to oral dialogue as a form of scientific narrative. Wiredu (1980) argues that philosophising is not necessarily tied to literacy and text material. It has to be borne in mind that even the Bible did not originate in a text form.

We are told that “God” initially communicated His command to His prophets such as Moses orally. The written versions were the subsequent results of thoughts initially expressed orally. The process of learning and development which we acquire through our interaction with other people and our environment is not strictly and rigidly limited to written materials. If one for example considers the educational social dimension of riddles, proverbs, fairy tales and poems, then it can be argued that oral expressions embrace every sphere of learning and knowledge in life (Bujo, 2003). These materials and processes therefore constitute authentic knowledge or reality of the people involved in such narratives. Dialogue as a predominant African system of interaction and being is also capable of revealing, explaining and presenting reality or knowledge like any so-called organised scientific activity. Oluwole (1997, p. 13) reminds us that “language is a product of peoples’ experience. When used for educational purposes, it involves learning a body of guiding rules and principles, not only of grammar but of conceptual formats”. These conceptual formats include peoples’ ability to express different forms of experiences and/or abstracting thought within particular contexts. In our view, experiences can sufficiently be expressed and represented through language, which in most cases takes the form of oral dialogue. The conventional tendency has however been to see the condition of orality as the determinant not just of the quality of individual thought within specific non-literate cultures of the world but also as a crucial element in an entire development. Oluwole (1997, p. 20) observes that “to refer to as an illiterate is to convey the ideas of being rural, traditional, unenlightened, uneducated, primitive, pre-scientific, pre-logical and subsequently liable to be a man or woman of low mentality”. Although Oluwole is arguing for the reinstatement and recognition of oral tradition in the scientific discourse, this does not mean that she does not recognise the immense contribution that written texts have in knowledge production. Oluwole (1997) in fact goes to great lengths to point out the shortcomings of oral traditions, and also their tremendous value and contribution to human knowledge. What she is rather arguing against is the created perception that written texts represent a more rational and civilised discourse than oral traditions.

We have indicated that oral traditions are and can indeed enhance our scientific social inquiry processes. Oral discourse presents rationally coherent systems of thought that are no less than the conventional written texts. Oral traditions are important sites of knowledge that need to be approached and understood within their appropriate cultural contexts (Nabudere, 2003).

Consistent with indigenous African societies, our proposed method of data collection will take the form of oral narrative, in the form of interviews (Kvale, 1996). In the context of this study, psychotherapy arising from this form of philosophy demands methodologies that are consistent with indigenous knowledge systems' epistemological paradigm. The researcher will therefore dialogue with participants in their own preferred indigenous language. These dialogues will focus on the participants' definitions and views of psychotherapy to reflect their experiences of this process of healing. Consistent with the African epistemology, these voices will then be invited to the dialogical space to form part of *whole* dialogical discourse, rather than be seen as separate "attachments" to this research text as is commonly the case with Western ways of conducting research.

In Chapter 3 we will critically interrogate the definition of the terms psychology and psychotherapy in the context of modern and post-modern thinking respectively. This reflection will take us to concepts empiricism, rationalism, universality and objectivity, and how this thinking has influence the current dualistic predominant discourse in psychology as a discipline and psychotherapy as a healing process.

## CHAPTER 3

### Introduction

The definitions of the concepts psychology and psychotherapy are as philosophically debatable as the field of psychology itself. There is no one definition, nor is there one conception of psychology and psychotherapy that fits with and is shared by all cultural groups. Psychology and psychotherapy are not value-free. The definition of fields of social inquiry such as psychology cannot be separated from the historical and cultural influence of their origin. Any suggestion that psychology and psychotherapy are value-free and independent of the epistemology that informs their definition and practice only serves to create a distorted impression of these social sciences. The idea of a value-free inquiry process presupposes that the therapist or researcher is conducting the inquiry in an “objective” manner. “Objectivity” has been questioned on the basis of its tendency to render disciplines and research processes’ subjective nature invisible and turn their diversity into uniformity (Steiner, 2002). Vorster’s (2003, p. 74) claim that psychology and psychotherapy can be studied in an “objective” and empirical manner is an example of how researchers and practitioners tend to present knowledge and social phenomena as being free from the influence of the researcher or therapist and their enviroing context.

Psychology and its treatment modalities as we know and practice it today, is inextricably linked to and influenced by the traditions of empiricism, objectivity and rationalism in the West. As a result, the many definitions of psychology and psychotherapy found in psychological literature reflect and adhere to these Western presuppositions. The problem experienced in psychology currently, is that these definitions and presuppositions are perceived to be universally applicable to all cultures. We object to this situation, because universalist approaches tend to simplify the diverse cultural landscape into fragmented specialised entities. These fragmented forms of knowing cannot claim to represent the many existing forms of “psychologies” and “psychotherapies” of the world. The world is a reflection of diverse cultural experiences inhabited by people with unique ways of dealing with life experiences, including indigenous knowledge systems. Understood in this sense, universalist approaches grossly misrepresent some

of these indigenous realities. These approaches categorise and divide reality and people into an artificial sameness.

Contrary to this fragmented universalist view, most Africans believe that the universe consists of both visible and invisible beings. This conception evokes the idea of coherently linked and interacting systems that represent the wholeness of being. It is for this reason that we argue that the current psychology and psychotherapy curricula that split the totality of being into fragmented realities, disguised as specialities, are alien to the African idea of wholeness. Such approaches cannot claim legitimacy and relevance in the African context. In support of this view, Mkhize (2004, p. 25) argues that “traditional Western approaches to psychology are based on certain presuppositions about the person and the world ... Western-derived psychology theories, which are assumed to be universal, have been imposed on non-Western populations. Indigenous theoretical frameworks on the other hand, have been marginalized”. This marginalisation has been unjustly maintained by the distorted thinking that presents psychology and psychotherapy conceptions as universal realities. Universality presupposes that knowledge, in this case psychology and psychotherapy, remain the same and are applicable to all people’s life experiences.

In this chapter, we will challenge the claim that psychology is value-free. This argument will be pursued with special reference to modern and postmodern paradigmatic presuppositions.

### Modern Thinking, Psychology and Psychotherapy

Modern thinking conceptualises the world or reality as having a “*true*” nature which can be studied and understood in a “neutral” and “objective” manner (Fourie, 1998). Such a world or reality is perceived and believed to be a well-structured and visible, controllable, predictable and measurable entity that can be comprehensibly, rationally and empirically defined in terms of mechanical laws. The “objectivity” referred to here is determined by experts who by virtue of their specialisation are supposedly able to operate from a “neutral” and “knowing” position. The “knowing” position that modern experts assume to be correct, reduces life experiences into fragmented specialisation entities. In support of this view, Lyotard (1979, p. 72), argues that “if

modernity has failed, it is in allowing the totality of life to be splintered into independent specialities which are left to the narrow competencies of the expert, while the concrete individual experiences ‘desublimated meaning’ and ‘destructured form’ not as a liberation but in the mode of that immense *ennui* described by Baudelaire described over a century ago”. Clearly, modern thinking attends and gives weight to the simplification and control of experiences through knowledge categorisation under the guise of specialisations.

Modern conceptions of psychology and psychotherapy are also underlined by Western philosophical scientific presuppositions such as objectivity, universalism, rationalism, and empiricism, which are executed by specialist independent experts. These presuppositions are from the perspective of modern thinking seen as core determinants of what is seen as authentic psychology, psychotherapy, scientific research and knowledge in general. From the perspective of modern thinking, for knowledge to be scientifically legitimate, these conditions have to be met irrespective of its historical trajectories and epistemological paradigm. The authenticity and scientificity of any psychology and psychotherapy and interventions that are not deemed universally objective, rational and empirical are marginalised. On this basis, objectivity, rationality and empiricism are research prescriptions that must be adhered to by any therapist, researcher or observer, irrespective of cultural context and epistemology within which such activity is undertaken. We argue that these conformity-prone presuppositions have rendered modern theorisations and conceptions of psychology mechanical, limited and devoid of lived experiences and originality. We will now explore these presuppositions.

### Objectivity

According to Mouton (1990, p. 40), “the central assumption in the naturalistic of objectivity is that research can only be valid and reliable if all subjective ‘variables’ – all presuppositions, preconceived notions and values – are bracketed. The scientist must approach reality with an open mind and allow the facts to speak for themselves. According to this notion of objective research, it is assumed that there is a ‘distance’ between scientist and object of research in the sense that no involvement between them should be allowed since such an involvement could lead to biased and prejudiced research. Proponents of ‘objectivity’ assume that one can only know the

*'true'* and *'accurate'* nature of what an object or phenomenon is like if one 'does not influence it'. The observer, according to this thinking, should not influence and, conversely not be influenced by what they are observing or studying. Objectivity therefore forms the fundamental basis of what is seen as 'scientific research' as understood by the modern Western thinking". By the same logic, psychology from the modern perspective assumes that there is a "true" nature of experiences and behaviour which can be "objectively" studied. The therapist or researcher here claims that their formulations, assumptions and conclusions about "true knowledge" are based on value and interest-free "scientifically" controllable and justifiable processes of inquiry.

Those who subscribe to modern thinking maintain that the processes of knowledge inquiry should be "objectively" constructed for it to be considered as "scientifically" and authentically viable research, experience or knowledge. The concept of "objectivity" has become a must-be-present condition that characterises most psychotherapeutic engagements and research in the field of psychology. What those who subscribe to "objectivity" have difficulty in acknowledging is that social sciences, are about understanding diversity and meaning-making processes in respect of concrete individual experiences, values, ethics and nature of the universe, culture and people's lived experiences. These experiences define people's identities and are deeply rooted in their histories and cultures and cannot therefore claim to be value-free.

From the psychotherapeutic viewpoint, the prime aim of "objectivity" is to generate efficient researcher value and interest-free generalisable knowledge by limiting or eliminating the influence of the therapist/observer from the therapeutic space. In our view and experience, no one can claim to come to the therapeutic domain without carrying a cloud of their epistemological and ontological background to such a space. The therapist cannot be separated from the methodology and the research process, because all these are influenced by the epistemological paradigm of the therapist. As we have argued in Chapter 1, no one can claim to have no epistemology. Any attempt to separate the researcher or psychotherapist from the research or therapeutic process and its methodology constitutes a very serious epistemological inconsistency. Despite this, some practitioners, such as Vorster (2003, p. 120), argue that "objectivity" is a pre-requisite to what he calls "scientific research" and "clinical observation". In Vorster's reasoning,



without “objective observation”, there cannot be any credible, “scientific” and effective psychotherapeutic intervention.

Modernity further assumes that the (therapist) observer and the (client) observed are two ontologically distinct and independent entities. This distinction is in sharp contrast to the African conception of reality. To further support this distinction, Vorster (2003) argues that the therapist, by virtue of being “objective” and “trained”, operates at a much higher logical level than the client, who is being studied or helped, at a “lower logical position”. Vorster believes that when there is clear distinction, “lack of influence” or distance between the therapist and the client, then this is a necessary and sufficient condition for “true” knowledge to be discovered about the client’s situation. This then, clearly demonstrates that the “objective” position that the therapist or observer takes invariably dictates how knowledge or people’s experiences are dealt with in modern therapeutic conceptions. Accordingly, the therapeutic system consists of the knowledge bearer, the therapist and the “psychologically” troubled client, couple, family or community whose well-being depends on the “objectively”, “trained” and skillful intervention of the “value-free” therapist.

In our view, the limitation of using “objectivity” as the only standard way to define or analyse the therapeutic relationship or any other experience, is that it reduces the complexity, meaning and the concrete relational dimension of such an experience to mere controllable and objectifiable physical constructs. This simplistic, fragmented and limited view tends to undermine the diverse and subjective nature of experience or reality between people, the environment and their cosmology. People’s lived experiences cannot necessarily be subjected to, and be understood only in terms of “objectivity”. Objectivity is therefore some form of self-justifying rationalism, which claims that the separation between the object of study and the expert in the field concerned emerges from the “knowing” position.

### Rationalism

Hindess (1977, p. 8) defines rationalist thinking as “an epistemology that conceives of the world as a rational order in the sense that its parts and the relations between them conform to

concepts and the relations between them, the concepts giving the essence of the real". Rationalism stems from the notion that there must be some explainable reason to reality, knowledge or experience. For knowledge to be seen as authentic and scientific, there must be a logical demonstration on the part of the knower or producer that they "know" something and that they are in control because they can give the only "real" explanation of the experience or knowledge. Teffo and Roux (2002, p. 162) succinctly argue that "rationality has been seen as a universal inherent ability of mankind to determine the truth ... rationality, therefore, is seen as the only avenue towards reliable knowledge, and also as being certain of success in yielding correct, final answers if its methods are promptly followed". Proponents of rationality construe it as an accurate measure through which the "logical" method of investigation or intervention will determine the true nature of things. Rationality therefore creates a sense of control and reliability of knowledge. In this way, an impression that reality or the true nature of things is known is created through knowledge categorisation in the form of specialisations. This then serves as proof for the existence of such "reality", based on the notion that for "something" or reality to exist, there must be reason for its existence. "Reality", in terms of this thinking, must be apprehensible and be subjected to the manipulation of the specific "objective" predetermined Western control or treatment procedures.

From the modern scientific point of view, a rational decision implies that there must be an evaluation of the relevant evidence, experience or knowledge that must be arrived at using established rules or laws. According to Meyerson and Banfield (1955, p. 314), a rational decision is arrived at in the following manner:

1. the decision-maker considers all the alternatives (courses of action) open to him, that is, he (she) considers what courses of action are possible within the conditions of the situation and in the light of the ends he seeks to attain;
2. he (she) identifies and evaluates all of the consequences of which would follow from the adoption of each alternative; that is, he (she) predicts how the total situation would be changed by each course of action adopted, and
3. he (she) selects that alternative the probable consequences of which would be preferable in terms of his most valued ends.

Clearly, the above is based on the reductionist assumption that the world or reality is a discoverable entity which when studied under certain “objectively” established conditions and laws, can be understood in a predictable and universalised manner. Most indigenous people, African people included, for example, believe that reality is not limited to linear reasoning (Grills & Ajei, 2002). Rather, reality is composed of visible and invisible beings and these are complex systems that are not necessarily accessible only through rational laws and rules.

Our view is that laws and rules entail a measure of judgment that determines the rational model or thinking people subscribe to. In this sense rationality is limited to a particular social interest group and is therefore in our view problematic if applied universally. The social interest group creates what Harding (1997, p. 46) refers to as “the internalist epistemology, the claim that events of nature do not happen at random but follow an unvarying pattern, which can be discovered by applying the laws that govern these regularities in order to successfully predict regularities in nature and social phenomenon”. By implication, this social interest group or the in-group has the power to determine the rules and laws according to which something is to be judged as rational or irrational. Applying such rational standards is informed by the firm belief that being able to provide logical rational explanation to phenomena will enable the expert to predict subsequent similar processes in other contexts. The problem of applying rules universally is according to Van Niekerk (1990, p. 185) that “our ability to act as rational agents is limited by our expertise... Rational decision-making is a socially mediated rather than a rule-guided process. For a belief based on judgment to be a rational one, it must be submitted to the community of those who share the relevant expertise for evaluation against their own judgment”. The implication of this view is that, as rational agents, therapists or people in general cannot claim that their rationality is all-inclusive of human experience. Rather, rationality represents just one way of conceiving reality by one section of the human race.

The argument that presents rationality as a universally acceptable rule to all experiences without sensitivity to diversity and the rules that govern that system is flawed. What is perceived as rational by one community may not be perceived as such by the other community. In this regard, Steiner (2002, p. 6) argues that “each person has the ontological potential to experience

the world from a unique perspective”. The behaviour of a rugby fan that runs in the field of play naked out of excitement or dissatisfaction may be seen as a rational expression of feelings within the rugby-loving community. The same behaviour may be seen as insanity or irrational by another community. The fact that something is perceived as “irrational” does not imply that it does not exist. Therefore certain realities exist and are meaningful to specific contexts irrespective of whether they are deemed rational or irrational. Our view is that such behaviour still possesses significant meaning for certain people in particular contexts.

Viewed within the realm of the above sketched context, the rationalist paradigm has a tendency to deny the meaning and existence of phenomena, experience or knowledge that do not conform to the approved “rationalist” vision and prescriptions of the legitimisation process. On this point, Ajei (2007, p. 112) is of the view that “scientific processes claim to possess inherent rationality, unique logic of justification, universal language and ‘objective-achieving method’”. Experiences and knowledge systems that do not conform or cannot be explained in terms of these predetermined rational prescriptions are marginalised. When experience is seen as rational, this gives an impression of being in control. Understood in this sense, rationality represents a false impression of control and is an internal-legitimation process. The fixation with creating a sense of control and the need to explain and “know” everything has resulted in either the denial of certain experiences or simplification and “rational” explanation of every experience (even if it is not possible, such as in the case of witchcraft) because of “fear of not knowing”.

Viewed in this context, an exclusive claim to rational status is insensitive to cultural diversity, ontology, history and context. It reduces lived experiences and their meanings into simple controllable constructs devoid of cultural influence. Culture provides an important lens through which an understanding of human psychological and social functioning can be attained (Grills & Ajei, 2002). On this basis experience will differ from culture to culture, and each culture will have its own way of knowing. In support of this view, Grills and Ajei (2002, p. 76) argue that “reality does not limit itself to the five senses and rational logic as the only means for securing information and understanding. Knowing is not limited to linear reasoning. Knowing is not bound by space, time, the senses, cognition and tangible verification or control of that which is

known.” Despite this understanding, modern perspectives still continue to construe rationality as a normative explanatory prescription to almost every situation, knowledge or experience.

Psychology subscribes to modern science and therefore regards rationality as a crucial presupposition in the science discourse. It is partially for this reason that psychology and psychotherapy have come to be associated with an elitist, educated middle class (Wilson et al. 1999), with little relevance to people’s material and lived conditions. We therefore support Baerveldt’s (2007, pp. 105-106) argument that, “required is a psychology that is indeed intrinsically social... social and cultural realities – like ‘motherhood’, or ‘honour’- cannot be detached from people’s personal beliefs in and commitment to those entities”. These arguments therefore call for the revision and redefinition of psychology and psychotherapy, to include experiences that transcend modern and postmodern conceptualisations.

The rational approach equates knowledge with science and disregards the social dimension of experience and being. Knowledge is a reflection of society’s narratives in all its forms and manifestations. In this regard, any performance of cultural rituals, art expressions and ancestral connections represent the social narratives and identity of that community. An inclusive psychology should therefore acknowledge, respect and accommodate all the different social narratives. The continuous presentation of rationality by modernity as a universal normative prescription (determinism and application of criteria of efficacy) is therefore indefensible and unsustainable.

### Empiricism

Empiricism is another positivist scientific presupposition. Empiricism holds that for knowledge to be regarded as scientific, its existence has to be justifiable and provable in rational and experimental ways. In methodological terms, “the emphasis of empiricism is on concrete, practical, tangible and observable phenomena” (Muller, 1990, p. 511). In line with objectivity, empiricists claim that there is a “true” nature of concrete knowledge which when exposed to certain controlled conditions, can be empirically explained and proven in systematically “rational” ways. Such empirical explanations must follow “true” universal statements and laws of

nature in order to create “empirical” conditions through rational evidence. Hindess (1977, p. 167) posits that “it is possible to derive predictions as to what may be observed in particular regions of space and time”. In our view, this argument is problematic when dealing with human experience. Human experience is not only limited to the physical or human empiricism based on presuppositions or concepts which are deemed essential by scientific laws. The basis of our argument here is that, if knowledge is based on experience (Okere, 2005a, Dewey, 1958 & Hindess, 1977), then there cannot be any rational explanation that one action leads to the other in a linear causality. On the basis of the unpredictability and freedom of choice (Hindes, 1977 & Ryle, 1949) inherent in human behaviour, then other forms of knowledge production and explanation are possible, which cannot necessarily be the object of empiricism. In support of this view, Lyotard (1979, p. 7) argues that “scientific knowledge does not represent the totality of knowledge; it has always existed in addition to, and in competition and conflict with, another kind of knowledge”. Lyotard sensitises us to the fact that science is not the only way of knowing, but rather, just one way of the many different ways of knowing embodied in people’s experiences. If we move from the view that knowledge comes from experience and other invisible ways of being, then scientific knowledge cannot be the only standard through which all forms of knowledge are discovered and known. By the same logic, modern conceptions of psychology and psychotherapy as “tributaries” of science, cannot claim to represent all people’s ways of doing things and understanding human behaviour. On this basis, legitimisation of the existence of psychology and psychotherapy cannot only be defined and described through empiricism. There are other existing forms of “psychologies” and “psychotherapies” in existence beyond the bounds of modern thinking.

In African traditional thought, for example, human relationships have several levels of connections that transcend the “tangible”, “observable” and empirical level. In our view, the connectedness of these elements or subsystems is not only limited to their physicality, but extends to other levels of relatedness. In this traditional thinking, the “therapeutic” system physically includes all those people who are involved, related or influenced by the client’s problems. Each of these systems is seen as influencing one another, and they are inter-dependent and co-dependent. Contrary to this perspective, *therapeutic influence* within modern thinking and more specifically modern psychotherapeutic conceptions are measured in terms of observations

that are “tangible”, “predictable”, and “accessible” in particular conditions. Here empiricism emphasises authentically observable, “provable” means of establishing the “reliability” and “validity” of statements, and knowledge justification in predetermined structures as judged by experts. Slattery and Daigle (1994, p. 459) argue that “...such structures promote order, harmony, homogeneous sociopolitical structures, and shared Western values in society. The irony, as we have seen, is that what it actually produced, are individuals who have lost the ability to approach experiences in life with a sense of context”. Within the social science context, and more specifically within psychology, empiricism creates conditions for people or behaviour to be mechanically controlled, predictable and therefore estranged from their life experiences and ecology.

The presuppositions and modern scientific concepts presented above clearly demonstrate that modernity’s conceptions of psychology and psychotherapy are very limited and thus exclude other knowledge conceptions and practices. Consequently, an alternative voice, under the guise of postmodernism, came into being as a result of the growing dissatisfaction with modern thinking, to address the incompleteness and inadequacies of modernity. We now turn our attention to postmodern conceptions of psychology and psychotherapy.

### Postmodern Thinking, Psychology and Psychotherapy

Lyotard (1979, pp. xxiv-xxv) defines postmodernism as “incredulity toward metanarratives... postmodern knowledge is not simply a tool of the authorities, it refines our sensitivity to differences and reinforces our ability to tolerate the incommensurable. Its principle is not the expert’s homology, but the inventor’s paralogy”. In the context of this study, Lyotard’s definition of postmodern directly challenges the current experimentation-based Western scientific discourses to explore the living historical situation in relation to people’s existential experiences. The challenge for psychology and psychotherapy is to also respond and address themselves to these experiences, rather than representing prescriptive, evaluative and performative conventions which legitimise unitary experimentation processes. The current conventions of psychology and psychotherapy are premised on the firm belief that social systems’ interactional patterns and narratives are “knowable”, “predictable” and “treatable”. In this sense, psychology and

psychotherapy seen in the context of philosophy, have reduced Lyotard's understanding of complex social systems' "sensitivity to differences and tolerance of the incommensurable", to mere mechanical behavioural constructs, measurable in terms of performance credits. This approach has reduced the field of psychology into solution-and-problem-focused practices, instead of meaning-making systems. The advent of postmodernism has been mediated by a keen interest in addressing these limitations in social systems.

It must be indicated from the outset that postmodern thinking, just like modern thinking, does not embody a homogenous group of thinkers. The postmodern epistemology comprises a range of thinkers whose conceptualisation and view of reality or therapy differ considerably. As a matter of fact, there are also vast differences even among postmodern scholars on which types of thinking, descriptions or psychology falls under the postmodern epistemological paradigm. For example, Becvar and Becvar (2006), classify cybernetics of cybernetics, constructionism, narrative therapy, and constructivism, deconstruction within the post modern thinking paradigm. Fourie (1998) sees constructivism as being central to second-order cybernetics, which includes a whole range of thinking such as ecosystemic thinking. Vorster (2003) classifies radical constructivism, social constructionism and narrative therapy as some of the postmodern paradigms. The argument pertaining to which theories form the postmodern movement does not form part of our discussion and we will not therefore pursue it.

Although postmodern thinking is perceived as a more culture-sensitive and inclusive way of thinking, it cannot, by any generalisation, provide legitimisation and argumentation for the claim to understand and represent all forms of knowing. Our immediate task here is to advance the argument that all these postmodern categorisations, together with modern conceptions, fall within the same historical-cultural context. This cultural context exerts an inescapable influence on the conceptualisation and practice of psychology and psychotherapy. Therefore even if postmodern conceptualisations of psychotherapy reject objectivity, and are on different levels of construction and abstraction, their view of a *person* is for example conceived out of the individualistic epistemological paradigm. Conversely, how a *person* is understood and treated will be determined by the very same scientific and individualistic paradigm's conceptions of a person and reality.



Psychotherapists cannot therefore see the world or reality in any other way except through their framework. Framework in this instance may be their ways of thinking, doing, cultural belief systems and theoretical paradigms. Fourie (1998, p. 11) supports this view by stating that, “whenever one thinks, one makes assumptions. It is not possible to think in a neutral way without being directed by the ways we had learned to think”. Postmodern psychology and psychotherapy cannot deny that their presuppositions and treatment modes are deeply rooted in, and influenced by, Western epistemology. On this basis, any form of psychology, psychotherapy or theory that claims to be non-biased is at the same time denying its cultural context and identity. Understanding this inherent social dynamic of systems, postmodernists reject the modernist claim to “objectivity”, “universalism”, “rationalism” and “empiricism”. In postmodern terms, social systems are seen as being in continuous dialogical engagement with other related systems and as meaning-creating contexts rather than as problem-ridden and treatment-prone systems. It is for this reason that modern thinking became increasingly rejected, not only by postmodern thinkers, but more recently by Africans as it is seen to be motivated by the colonial imperative of dominance, a reflection of Western intolerance to differences and cultural insensitivity to other people’s cultural experiences.

To their credit, postmodern thinkers perceive and acknowledge differences not as a threat, but as other meta-narrative voices or alternative realities, whose presence provide new meaning and knowledge diversification. In social systems, the view that categorises knowledge in terms of superior/ inferior, good/ bad or valuable/less valuable ranking is bound to be challenged on the basis that all knowledge has meaning and a contribution to make. People always bring their own unique cultural background in the process of inquiry, therapy and interpretation of others or their experiences. Becvar and Becvar (2006), Fourie (1998), Foster and Froman (2002), Goldenberg and Goldenberg (2004), Sigogo and Modipa (2004) and Drummond (2006) also support the impossibility of “objective”, “neutral” thinking.

We would like further to argue that this inclusive and sensitive thinking does not change when one thinks in or “shifts” to the so-called “scientific” mode of thinking. We take our thinking into the “scientific” domain. It is in terms of this reasoning that we argue that both modern and

postmodern psychology and psychotherapy are subsidiaries of science, and cannot therefore claim to be free from their cultural influence. Many scholars, such as those mentioned above, have argued against the notion of “objectivity”, in favour of a culture-sensitive psychology. Our view is that the idea of cultural sensitivity is in most cases approached very superficially. In the vast citable literature and research on traditional Western psychology’s views on cultural sensitivity, it is assumed that clinical and counseling skills acquired during training are sufficient conditions for one to function adequately and effectively in diverse contexts. As Parham (2002) accurately observed, our new-found sensitivity to more culturally sensitive counseling methods should challenge this unsustainable claim.

From the perspective of postmodern thinking, reality is not a “pre-determined” constant to be “discovered”. Both the therapist and the client contribute towards the *co-creation* of “reality”. Therefore the client and the therapist influence each other in a mutual manner, as no one is in control (Becvar & Becvar, 2006; Fourie, 1998; Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2004). While modern therapists believe in changing the behaviour of the patient using pre-determined acquired skills and controlled measures, in what they term “objective” interventions, postmodern thinkers reject the notion of “control” and “objectivity”, empiricism and rationalism. The claim here is that we will never “know or discover” the true nature of things; what we “know” is in fact a reflection of our “subjective” perceptual construction of “reality”.

A notable difference here is a shift from the emphasis on the (modern) *client system* where the therapist “knows” the “true” reality and how to “fix” it, to the (post modern) *therapeutic system* where both the therapist and the client “co-construct” “reality” and “co-evolve” (Becvar & Becvar, 2006; Fourie, 1998). Therapy takes place in a *therapeutic system* consisting of the therapist, the client and the context. The *client-therapist-context* system is therefore believed to be central to the therapeutic process. Contrary to this modern and postmodern conception of psychotherapy, we would like to argue that whether the therapist is “objective” or “subjective”, “in control” or “equal with the client”, whether “reality” is “discovered” or “co-created”, the emphasis remains rooted in common, shared Western values. It is for this reason that we argue that both modern and postmodern thinking put emphasis on *client-therapist-context* variables as necessary conditions for change in behaviour or alternative meaning. The client-therapist-context

interaction and engagement is bound and made possible through the language that is adopted in that context.

### The Language “Game” in Psychology and Psychotherapy

There are different levels and ways in which the concept language is conceptualised. To a positivist, language is a medium through which information is conveyed from one person to the other in a relationship, using different forms of expressions. To an artist, language is an expression of the state of being and of one’s reality in a particular context. In general terms, language represents an expression of behaviour within an interactional context. Language has a communicative value in all contexts at all relevant times. In this sense all behaviour is communication. Watzlawick, Bavelas and Jackson (1967, pp. 48-49) argue that “one cannot *not* behave. Now if it is accepted that all behaviour in an interactional situation has message value, that is, communication, it follows that no matter how one may try, one cannot *not* communicate”. There are different ways of language expressions such as verbal representations, non-verbal expressions, artwork such as music, sculpting and paintings. Simply put, language is an expression of people’s ontology, experiences and their envioning culture. It is a connecting device in interpersonal relationships. It therefore follows that every approach and context will have its terminology or linguistic expressions that are consistent with and acceptable to that context. The language used in any context determines the “rules” by which the communication “game” has to be conducted. In psychology and psychotherapy as well, language appropriate to the cultural context has to be adopted for meaningful communication. Therefore using language and concepts inappropriately in any context will create misunderstanding and misrepresentations resulting in confusion.

Modern and postmodern thinking are ontologically and epistemologically conceived from the same historical-cultural point of view. The philosophical difference between modern and postmodern thinking within the therapeutic context is their linguistic discourse. Modern and postmodern thinkers’ “language” is different on psychotherapeutic processes, techniques and position of the therapist, depending on their training, theoretical and cultural context. Our view is that modern and postmodern language prescriptions are construed from and, influenced by

Western understanding of reality and human beings. The use of language that is not consistent with and does not form the language tradition of a particular context tends to create miscommunication, confusion and logical inconsistencies. Language is very important in creating meaningful connections between clients and their therapists. Here are some of the examples of the differences in terms of language expressions of modern and postmodern thinking:

<b>Modern language</b>	<b>Postmodern language</b>
• Changing behaviour	Perturbing the system
• ‘objectivity’ is possible	‘subjectivity’ is inevitable
• Patient	Client system
• Symptom	Meaning making behavior
• New/changed behavior	Alternative meaning/reality
• Client system	Therapeutic system
• Therapist agent of change	Therapist is co-facilitator/co-creator
• Emphasis on therapeutic system	Context creates meaning

Consistent with the thinking from which one operates, the appropriate language is used. Such use of language does not however depart from the cultural lenses through which the therapist sees the world. Our language is a reflection of our thinking and cultural background. The way in which we language is therefore not only a linguistic argument, but also an ontological and a philosophical issue.

### Concluding Remarks

This chapter set out to discuss modern and postmodern conceptions of psychology and psychotherapy. We also interrogated some of the modern scientific presuppositions and the postmodern thinkers’ claims of positioning themselves as alternative shifts from traditional psychology and psychotherapy conceptions. Clearly, traditional modern scientific presuppositions such as objectivity, rationalism, empiricism and universalism have left the psychology fraternity firmly stuck in the Cartesian and value-free illusion thinking. This has been

legitimised by the firm belief in the existence of a universal representative experience, to the exclusion of other “non-universal” experiences and realities. All this is happening despite the accessibility and diverse cultural human knowledge landscape across the world. Our view in this regard is that research in psychology and psychotherapy has adopted conformist approaches that created conditions for uncritical and hastily generalised engagements. No doubt, the postmodern paradigm has created interesting shifts, alternative narratives and possibilities of understanding experiences and behaviour ecologically. In this sense, there is a lot to learn from both these paradigms.

Even though the postmodern perspective claims to have drastically shifted from modern thinking by adopting accommodative and non judgmental language, it has not succeeded in breaking “free” from the same cultural experiences that continue to define modern thinking conceptions and legitimisation prescriptions. The superficial “adaptation” strategy adopted by the postmodern paradigm under the guise of subjectivity does not help people from this perspective to comprehend the cultural dynamics required to construct culturally sensitive psychology and psychotherapy programmes. Both the modern and postmodern epistemological paradigms will continue to make significant contributions in the human sciences. Our argument is that these paradigms, however linguistically disguised they may be, have not, and cannot, devise appropriate psychology and psychotherapy treatment modalities that are sensitive to the African experience. On this basis, we argue that indigenous people must define what is to them “psychology” and “psychotherapy”, using their conventions and language expressions that accurately capture their healing practices, epistemology and ontology.

## CHAPTER 4

### Introduction

In this chapter we will present and critically examine the etymology of the term “psyche”. The APA Dictionary of Psychology (2006, p. 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”. If the “psyche” is about “the very essence of life”, then it is crucial to also recognise the specific social network structures and lived experiences of people in different cultural contexts. Therefore any definition and understanding of the concept *psyche* should be located within these socio-cultural organisational systems. In our view, concepts and terms represent linguistic expressions of people’s lived experiences and their reasoning as embodied in these cultural network systems. The variation in meaning of “psyche” has created interesting arguments for some scholars and researchers regarding its use and applicability in different contexts.

The term “psyche” will be analysed and interrogated in order to create the context in which our argument in this chapter for a culture-sensitive “psychology” can be based. To deepen our understanding of the “psyche” or “soul”, we have to take into account its etymology. Also, we will clarify key critical concepts, that is, *etymology*, *psyche* and *moya*. This will assist us in appropriately situating and understanding the term “psychology” and its practice in general and, in particular in the African context.

In most literature this term is superficially analysed or only presented from the superimposed Western dualistic conception of the human being. This understands the person as only consisting of “body” and “soul”. The implication of this superficial and dualistic analysis is the gross misunderstanding of the concept “psychology” when it is considered and practiced in contexts different from those of the West. This is partly due to the fact that the “informal” methods which guided indigenous people and in particular Africans’ practice of “psychology”, have *not* been

recognised as being equally legitimate and “scientific”. It is on this basis that we would like to investigate firstly, from the etymological point of view, if indeed “psychology”, as understood by the West, contains the same meaning and understanding for Africans. If we follow the view that the “psyche” is more than the physical organism, is immortal and is the very essence of life, then “psychology”, which as we will see is derived from the concept “psyche”, cannot be limited to the study of mind and people’s pathological behaviour as has been claimed in the vast psychology literature that exists. Secondly, we will further argue that “psychology”, like any field of study and practice, grows out of a people’s existential experiences and reality. In African traditional thought, “psychology” broadly represents the visible cultural being and practices in the community of the living, the living dead and the yet-to-be-born in the onto-triadic sense of existence (Ramosé, 1999, p. 51). Within this cultural-philosophic framework, the idea of a supreme being emerges. It is an interesting and problematical idea. As a problem it poses the question whether or not metaphysics can arise from a unitary ontology.

#### Clarification of Concepts

According to the Dictionary of Key Words in Psychology (1986, p. 180), the oldest definition of psychology is that “it is the study of the *soul*”. This definition immediately and already departs significantly from the everyday understanding of “psychology”. The tendency of the West to solipsistic claim to certain concepts while on the other hand denying other nations the right to such concepts is not uncommon. Ramosé’s (1999, pp. 15-17) critique of La Peyrere’s thesis that “God” who created Africans, Amerindians and the Australasians was not the same “God” who created descendants of Adam and Eve is an illustration of spiritual racism embedded in certain concepts. Ramosé goes on to argue that “... accordingly, if these other creatures had any soul at all it certainly could not be the same as that of descendants of Adam and Eve. This thesis suggested not only that these other creatures were most probably without a soul but if they were at all ensouled then theirs was certainly not a rational soul” (p. 15). If we, however, go by the definition of psychology above, then all people have “psychology” because all human beings must be presumed to have a “soul”, and not as La Peyrere implied. Different cultures conceptualise and understand the “soul” from their own epistemological paradigm. As such the understanding and practice of their knowledge of the “soul” cannot be generalised to other

cultures without creating serious epistemological tensions. On this basis, we will here argue that the Western dualistic view of a human being, which the Encyclopaedia of Psychology (1994. p. 386) maintains “was revived by the renewed interest in individual personality”, leads to gross misrepresentations of indigenous people’s cultures and their “psychology”. In addition, if the Western conception of “psychology” remains predominant under the guise of universality, then this leads to the suppression of other realities such as those of indigenous people, in particular Africans. Under these conditions, there cannot be any meaningful and mutually beneficial dialogical engagement between different knowledge systems. It is on this premise that we argue for a wholistic definition of “psychology” that recognises and includes the African conception of a human being.

### Terminology and Paradigm Construction

Etymologically, marrying the Western and the African understanding of the “soul” is not compatible. These are two distinct cultural experiences and languages that are conceived out of different epistemological paradigms, histories and cultural experiences. The terminology used in each perspective should therefore be consistent with the epistemological paradigm and etymology of the term in question. The argument for the use of the African terminology means that, where Western terms such as the “psyche” do not accurately capture the actual existential experiences of Africans, African terms should be used instead. We may go as far as arguing for the outright use of appropriate African terms, without first considering the translated version. The argument that there are no appropriate psychological terms in African languages is philosophically undermining the very existence of an African. Simply stated, this argument questions Africans’ ability to conceptualise and give expression to their experiences and their world. This thinking serves to maintain the superimposed colonial dominance (Wiredu, 2002, p. 33). Such dominance in our view precludes the possibility of any dialogical engagement between different cultures. The insistence on translating Western words or concepts to their “equivalent” African terms is a further universalisation of the “psychologies” of different cultures, to fit the criterion determined by the West. If we start from the premise that all people have their unique epistemology and cultural ways of be-ing, then there cannot be insufficient terminology for the self-definition and self-expression of a people. All people, and this includes Africans, have their linguistic self-



expressions that are consistent with their epistemology. Our argument for using African terms finds support in Bujo (2003, p. 14), who contends that this argument “intends to demonstrate clearly the autonomy of the worldview of the African thought, which cannot simply be subsumed under other modes of thought, but demands to be taken seriously as a dialogue partner”. Accordingly, the study and explanation of the “psyche” should be situated within the appropriate African context, using relevant African words or terms to match the philosophy and understanding. In this regard, reference will be made to some African languages in respect of these terms. In this way, the authentic use and application of these terms in scientific discourses will be established. We now turn to the definition of the term etymology.

### Etymology “Defined”

The Concise Oxford English Dictionary (1982, p. 331) defines etymology as “an account of or facts relating to the formation of a word and development of its meaning”. Etymology can therefore be seen as a linguistic science. According to Malkiel (1993, pp. 1-2), etymology embodied the “core meaning of a word that could be imagined as something wholly independent of the passage of time and endowed with magic or mystic overtones. With the gradual move of linguistic curiosity in the direction of time-dominant disciplines, principally history, a word’s etymology began to be tantamount to ‘previous meaning’, or ‘earlier actually attested meaning’ or else ‘earlier reconstructable meaning’ without the concomitant pretence that modern scholarship is invariably in a position to piece together primeval meanings, or, for that matter, pristine forms”.

From the point of view of linguistics, the “meaning” of words and what they represent necessitates their placement within their appropriate social context. It is however of critical importance to note that meaning can be created from and, represented by a variety of sources such as words and symbols. Different symbols and words have entirely different meanings to different people in various epistemologies and cultural contexts. Cultural contexts can therefore be construed as key to our understanding of the meaning of certain practices, belief systems and behaviour. Foster and Froman (2002, p. 529) in this respect argue that, “the most profound effect of culture lies in its foundation in the fabric of our thinking. Culture is not only the creative,

aesthetic product of the minds of people – the art, music and literature of civilisations – these are merely the peel of a much fleshier fruit. Culture is also the cause of how those minds think”. Of critical importance however, is the fact that attempts to understand such different meanings help to create contexts for understanding such differences and, to attach the appropriate meanings consistent with the epistemologies concerned. The etymology of words or symbols should therefore be seen in relation to their epistemological realm. Viewed in this context, hermeneutics helps to create sensitivity and respect for certain symbols, words or terms and, correlatively to people’s cultural practices and the meanings they attach to words, symbols and rituals.

### Etymology in Context

According to Malkiel (1993, pp. 1-2) etymology was peculiar to “Medieval Europe and is associated with the mystic approach of that time, involved in it was the widespread belief in symbolism and the practice of parables ... the appeal to etymology in a magic context may well have started with proper names and be as old as its roots in prehistory”. Malkiel’s conception of the word etymology should be understood within the cultural context from which he comes and operates, that is, the Western paradigm. It is within the Western bounds that he conceptualises etymology, hence his claim that etymology is one of the Western inventions. Our observation here gains support from the Encyclopaedia of Psychology (1982, volume 3, p. 165) “no human being can divorce his or her own personality from the topic investigated. Each investigator’s interests, prejudices, cultural background, qualifications, and abilities are interwoven with the topics chosen for investigation”. It is therefore logical to argue that etymologically, the concept “psyche” carries certain Western historical and cultural characteristics and cannot therefore loosely be translated to African languages without altering its meaning.

The West has, through systematic subjugation, marginalisation and suppression of other realities, created the false impression that etymologically, the “psyche” and “psychology” are its inventions. Mkhize (2004, p. 38) argues against this misrepresentation of reality by stating that “all *psychologies* are somehow connected to underlying metaphysical ontologies which ... order things in specific ways with regard to what is ‘good’ and ‘bad’, ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ about conditions of life”. We therefore do agree with Mkhize that all “psychologies” have their specific

ontological realities. In our view, the life conditions referred to by Mkhize can be represented by cultural activities such as symbols, art works, drumming, sculpting and rituals which are epistemologically linked to their existential experiences. These representations are a reflection of a people's culture. Our interest in this study and in particular this chapter, is to examine the etymology as well as the hermeneutics of the "psyche" and, by extension "psychology". Also, we will question the justification for using it in the African therapeutic context.

From the above exposition, it is evident that there is an inseparable relationship between etymology and hermeneutics. One cannot discuss the etymology of the "psyche" without situating it within its appropriate cultural context. The "psyche" assumes different shades of meaning in various cultural contexts.

### Epistemology and African Epistemologies

In this study we will advance the argument that supports the understanding of concepts and terms from our African epistemological paradigm. Over the years, the tendency of translating Western concepts to suit the African situation and experiences developed into a standard culture. Examples in this regard include the translation of the term "soul/spirit" into the assumed-equivalent African term *moya*. Given the various meanings attributed to the term *moya*, as discussed by Ramose (1999) and Skhakhane (1988), this concept cannot just arbitrarily and "blanketly" be translated to "soul/spirit". Such "blanket" translation creates ambiguity because the term "soul/spirit" does not necessarily mean *moya*, nor does it capture the essence of the experience embodied in *moya*, as understood by African indigenous people. The concept "soul/spirit" has its etymology and it is culture specific. It is not an original African vernacular. It may therefore not be implanted into the African cultural context without due regard for African terminology. The use or translation of alien concepts in the African context essentially represents the introduction of a foreign culture to Africa's experience. On this reasoning, it is critical to question the relevance and applicability of the concepts in the African context. The basis on which such random translatability is rooted is highly questionable and contestable (Kruger, Lifschitz & Baloyi, 2007). Similarly, use of the term "psyche" in the African context, or an attempt to translate "psyche" and "psychology" to African languages is another problematic area.

These translation tendencies can no longer be left unchallenged. Under these circumstances, establishing the etymology of the *psyche* becomes crucial, especially when considering its probable problematic implications within the African context. The current use of the term “psyche” in African “psychology” and in clinical applications does not take the philosophical, epistemological and cultural experiences of Africans into consideration. This has resulted in the meaning of “psyche” being confused, diffused and at times completely misplaced and irrelevant when it is applied to contexts other than those of the West.

### Etymology of the Term *Psyche* and its “Definition”

The interchangeable use of the concepts “soul” and “spirit” in the literature as observed in Setiloane (1975, p. 64) is mostly confusing and needs clarification. The focus of this chapter is on the “psyche”. Due to the current study’s “psychological” slant, a discussion of both the “soul” and “spirit” is unavoidable and imperative. Such a reflection will indicate whether or not there is any justification for the interchangeable normative use of these terms. The Encyclopaedia of Psychology (1994, p. 386), identifies “the social importance of psychology with the eighteenth century traces the history of psychology as a science to the nineteenth century, although its etymological roots are Greek, *psyche* (‘soul’) + *logos* (‘word’) = psychology... Instead, people wrote about a ‘science of human nature’ or ‘mental’ or ‘moral’ science”.

According to The New Westminster Dictionary of the Bible (1976, p. 901), the Hebrew word “*nephesh* refers to the living *soul*, and is applied to animals in a collective sense, and also to man as a living being. The *soul is not a separate entity apart from the body*, but forms a unity with it and animates the flesh”. Implicit in this inseparability of the *soul-body* relationship is that we cannot talk of being alive without the existence of the two indivisibly. This argument finds support in The New Westminster Dictionary of the Bible, which states that “the Hebrew word *ruah*, in Greek *pneuma* has an original meaning ‘breath’, ‘wind’ or ‘blow’, which contains the semantic meaning *spirit*, ‘blow’ or ‘breath’ derived from the Latin word *spiritus*. The *soul* (*nephesh*) is an essential characteristic of a human being’s existence and gives life to the body. Without the *soul*, it will be inconceivable to conceptualise the be-ing or existence of a human

being. Life and being are embodied in the *soul*. It is for this reason that the soul's animating power dissipates when the body dies because they are one".

According to The New Encyclopaedia Britannica (1978, volume 15, p. 152), "the Hebrew term for 'soul' (*nefesh*, that which breathes), was used by Moses (c.13<sup>th</sup> century B.C), signifying 'animated being', a man's life in which the *spirit* manifests itself and 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. 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 *soul* or *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 faces. In its face 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 *soul* itself. Because of its qualitative difference from the physicality of the body, the *soul* or *psyche* cannot cease to exist at the "death" of the physical being.

According to The New Encyclopaedia Britannica (1978, volume 15), "New Testament usage of *psyche* ('soul') was comparable to *nefesh*. Jesus' complete dualistic demarcation between flesh and spirit was quite evident, and St. Paul (died A.D 64) exceeded the dualism of Jesus to invent a triune man, regarding '*spirit*' (*pneuma*) in Greek, as a divinely inspired life principle, '*soul*' (*psyche*) as man's life in which '*spirit*' manifest itself, and body (*soma*) as the physical mechanism animated by '*soul*'". It must be noted that although there is Hebrew spelling difference between The New Encyclopaedia Britannica *nephesh*, and The New Westminster Dictionary *nefesh*, this difference does not change the substance and meaning of the term.

Clearly, the Christian fragmented conception of being played a significant role in dividing the soul into dual ontologies. 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 proof of the fragmentation of *body* and *soul*. An example in this regard is observed in The Encyclopaedia of Philosophy (1967, volume 5 p. 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”. On the basis of the above, we further observe the division of the *psyche* into two different levels, the living, breathing, feeling and the mind, reasoning level. The *psyche* divides reality into *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 the conduct of human beings. This is the visible level of the *psyche*. Here the *psyche* is together with the “*soul*” forming a duality. However, it is important to note that the duality does not necessarily presuppose sameness between body and “soul”.

By appearing in the body as its animator, the “*soul*” becomes embodied. It subsides as having a body and is thus embodied. As such it is given both the observable and unobservable forms of existence. The heart and personality are visible while the mind is invisible. This fragmented thinking conforms to the ancient Greek tradition (for example, Plato) of conceptualising reality in terms of the visible (physical) and the invisible (metaphysical). In Harding’s (1986, p. 363) observation, “in the Euro-American world view, there is a separation between the self and the nonself (phenomenal world). Through this process of separation, the phenomenal world becomes an Object, an ‘it’”. Moses used the term *soul* within the Biblical context to denote life giving *spirit*, the animated being. According to Hauck (1999, pp. 87-88), “both the Bible and the Koran equate this *spirit* with the *Wind*. In fact, in Hebrew, Arabic and Greek, the word for *wind* means both ‘breath’ and ‘spirit’. Thus the Wind carries the cosmic breath of God, the greatest spirit who at the beginning of the world ‘moved upon the face of the waters, bringing order to the watery world and life of Adam’”. Also, in the above sense, the *wind* is equated to *air* and is regarded as a life-giving force – the *spirit* – and is thus given Godly status (Good News Bible, 1977, John 3:8).

In some Old Testament books of the Bible, reference is also made to the *spirit* or *soul* as the *Holy Ghost* in several instances, to refer to God or Christ’s *spirit*, which breathes or blows life. The term *holy ghost* in reference to God has gradually been replaced with the *Holy Spirit*. Our

view in respect of this subterfuge is that the writers or editors of the Bible considered it “inappropriate” to call Christ or God a *ghost*, translated as *sepoko* in Sesotho. If the term *ghost* or *sepoko* were to be retained, then God would be at the same level of existence as his creatures. This situation would be undesirable. We can further argue that God is here presented as residing in a different ontology, aloof and at a different level to His creatures (Wiredu, 1980 & 2002).

The term *sepoko* is used in reference to the “person” or “*soul*” which during its “breathing” physical life, is believed to have done evil things on earth and, subsequently being refused entry to “heaven”. In this sense *sepoko* is conceptualised as an evil *spirit* or *soul*, translated as *moya o o mobe* in Sesotho. The *soul* does not cease to exist or influence the physical environment even after the actual physical death of the human being.

The question that arises in this regard is: Do Africans, for example, conceptualise and understand the “*soul*”/“*spirit*” to exist in both the physical and metaphysical ontologies? A further pressing and critical question in this line of reasoning is: Do concepts such as *soul/spirit*, *psyche* and *psychology* constitute applicable terminology in the African epistemology context?

#### African Conception of the “Soul”

African traditional thought does not conceptualise the “*soul*”/“*spirit*” (if we loosely translate it to *moya*), as an isolated entity belonging to invisible, non-responsive and non-living beings. The *spirit* or *spirituality* presupposes an interactive characteristic and a communicative value in a wholistic way. This means that life experiences are not viewed as separate from each other, outside of their encompassing context. Mkhize (2004, p. 44) refers to this principle of cosmic unity as “knowledge through participation... one does not know by standing and observing at a distance. To know is to participate in the dynamic process involving interaction between parts and the whole”. Viewed from this understanding, the “*spirit*” is not seen as a static and discrete concept. It is the deceased that is believed to be living in the ontology of the invisible intangible beings. This living deceased is conceived as being in a dynamically engaging, evolving state of existence and influence in the world of the animated beings. Implicit here is the view that the “*spirit*” or “*soul*” can be experienced and lived.

In Sesotho, *mewa ya badimo*, the *spirits of the living-dead*, in the African sense, for example, are invisible but exert immense influence on many African cultural daily activities. The challenge psychology and many disciplines which were previously colonised face is the language and concepts used in the African context. There has been little or no interest in adopting “psychological” indigenous languages and concepts that reflect and represent indigenous epistemological paradigms. This has inevitably caused serious translation difficulties, such as the assumption that Western concepts could adequately represent African expressions and lived experiences. The Afrikaans term for *soul* is *gees* or *siel* (translated as *spirit* or *soul*) Tweetalige Woordeboek/Bilingual Dictionary, (1984). We can see that based on this direct Afrikaans translation, the term *soul* is subsumed in the term *spirit*. It is this direct translation of terms from one Western language to the African languages that we are questioning.

### Psychology and the Problem of Translation

There is a growing tendency in the “psychology” literature to adopt concepts or words as used in one epistemology and to translate them to the other. The very use of the term “psychology” in many African communities and universities poses a serious problem. The term “psychology” is foreign to Africans because it is conceived out of a foreign epistemology and ontology. We rarely see an attempt in the literature to use the appropriate concept that accurately captures the African understanding and experience of what “psychology” is to them. The unconvincing argument advanced in such adoption of foreign concepts is that there are no terms in African languages equivalent to these Western concepts. Subsequently, Western concepts are then adopted and used as authentically representative of African understanding and meaning of “psychology”. This situation results in Western terms being imposed on indigenous conceptions of “psychological” constructs and meanings. This tendency compromises and denies indigenous languages equally recognisable space to define, explain and represent African experiences and realities using their own linguistic expressions. In most cases, it is assumed that English, Greek, Hebrew, Latin or any other Western languages that are used in “psychology”, are readily used or translatable to African languages. This assumption is etymologically and epistemologically flawed. Gbadegesin (2002, p. 175) suggests a practical way to deal with the confusion caused by translations in this



way: “one way to avoid or, at least, minimise confusion is not to start with English equivalents of these terms, but rather to describe their usages ...”. It must be borne in mind that the current imposed “psychology” as it is taught and practiced in the universities in Africa and clinical training programmes, does not use indigenous words to explain itself. This situation calls for serious reflection and interrogation on the relevance and usefulness of these training programmes to the African students and their cultures.

### The Relationship between the *Spirit* and the *Psyche*

Superficially conceived, it is taken for granted that the concepts *spirit* and the *psyche* are synonyms. However, a critical analysis of these terms indicates that there are some complex nuances in their conceptualisation, meaning and application. There is little problematisation in the psychology literature of the meaning and linguistic nuances embedded in these two concepts. This interchangeable superficial approach that is often seen in the use and application of the concept *spirit* and the *psyche* is in our view unjustifiable and cannot be sustained.

Since the focus of this study is on philosophical psychology, it is crucial to deal more specifically with the *psyche*, as it relates to “psychology”. The question relevant to this study in general and this chapter in particular is: How does the *spirit* relate to the *psyche*? This question is pertinent and can only be answered if we understand what the *psyche* means. The immediate challenge that we are faced with here is to establish whether the concepts *psyche* and *spirit* are different or reflect and represent similar meanings conceptually. The problematisation of the *spirit/soul* is well documented in fields such as religion, spirituality and politics and, has been the subject of controversy and argument by Plato and Aristotle, for example.

What seems to be lacking in psychology discourse is sufficient problematisation of the interchangeable use of the terms *psyche* and *soul/spirit*. It is taken for granted in some psychology, theology and philosophy literature that the *psyche* equals the *spirit/soul*. What is the basis for using the term *psyche* in psychology and not *spirit* or *soul*? Whichever way the *psyche* is defined, can it be empirically studied? This question has to situate the *psyche* in the sphere of the already defined context, that is, that *psychology* as we know and practice it can be empirically

studied. The empirical approach that is often adopted when studying the *psyche* is highly problematic because the *psyche*, which is mostly conceptualised as the mind, is not observable. It is the brain that is physically observable and it can be empirically studied. However, there seems to be confusion in the conceptualisation of the mind and the brain. At the level of physiology, which among the other areas also studies the brain, the *psyche* as the behaviour of the brain is observable. At the level of the *psyche* being described as the mind, then the *psyche* is invisible and unobservable. *Psychology is generally defined as “the study of or applied science of ‘mind’ and behaviour, without invoking a supernatural soul”* Encyclopaedia of Psychology (1994, volume 6, p. 386). This broad definition situates *psyche* in the visible, empirical domain. Even within the Western conceptualisation, the question of whether the *psyche* can be empirically studied or not, creates very serious ambiguities. If the *psyche* or mind is not accessible to empirical observation and studies, then how do we empirically study “psychology”? The *psyche* and “psychology” as construed by the West are at variance with the African cultural understanding of be-ing and is therefore a misfit in the African context. The *psyche* or mind is not observable physically. It is a “dispositional concept, manifesting itself through concrete behaviour” (Ryle, 1949, pp. 117-118). In the same logic, the *psyche* from which psychology is derived, by virtue of its unobservable nature, falls in the invisible ontology. In terms of this reasoning, we may go as far as arguing that at this level of conceptualisation, “*psychology*” belongs to the metaphysical world and there cannot be any logical claim for its empiricism. The interchangeable use of the *spirit* and the *psyche* and its empirical and “scientific” claim that is so often observed in the literature then becomes a debatable issue. On the other hand, the contradiction that needs to be exposed here is that if the West’s claim that the *psyche* or *spirit* exists in the invisible “Godly” ontology, and then we can insist on the “scientific” empirical proof of God’s existence. But “God”, as (Gilson, 1941, p. 141) argued plausibly, “is not a scientific probability but a metaphysical necessity”. The conclusion to be drawn here is that the claim that situates the *psyche* in metaphysics, excludes the possibility of psychology being a field that belongs to the social sciences’ domain. Psychology as an empirical science proceeds from the premise that the *psyche*, like the *soul/spirit*, embodies lived experience and belongs to the visible ontology. On this basis, we can see why the *spirit* and the *psyche* are mostly used interchangeably.

Does death necessarily imply a separate ontological existence, or does it imply physical existence and experience on a different conceptual domain? These questions cannot, according to Ramose (1999, p. 68), be fully answered without reference to, and an understanding of some African languages with regard to the concept of *death* and *spirit*. In this regard he sees the function of language here as intended to demonstrate 1) “that linguistic expressions about death carry a definite meaning underpinned by specific metaphysical presuppositions and that these latter pertain to a particular world-view, and 2) 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”. On the basis of this argument, it is clear that we cannot uncritically resort to the use of alien concepts and expressions to represent the African worldview. Furthermore, we cannot continue to fragment reality into metaphysical and physical ontologies because such a split is inconsistent with the traditional African epistemological paradigm. According to our view, both *death* and “*spirit*” is inseparable reflections and representations of people’s visible ontological conceptions of reality and existence. Death and “*spirit*” are therefore inseparably linked. Therefore the “*spirit*” or “*soul*” is, from the perspective of traditional African thinking, present and real in both the living and the dead person. They are not abstracts that are only available in the metaphysical world after death. From the African perspective, “*spirit*” and “*psyche*” are lived experienced existential realities. It is on this basis that we also speak of African *spirituality*. *Spirituality* in African traditional thought is not thought of as a separate entity. The *psyche/spirit(uality)* is a member of *a community of life forces* that constitutes the wholeness of the cosmic unity.

Several African scholars such as Mkhize (2004), Teffo and Roux (2002), Sogolo (2002), Wiredu, (2002) and Gbadegesin (2002) uphold and defend the wholistic cosmic unity of existence. *Spirituality*, in terms of traditional African thought, forms an integral part of this cosmic ontological unity. Loosely translated, *spirit* or *soul* means *umoya* in Zulu or *moya* in Sesotho. It will be misleading and insufficient to assume that *spirit* or *soul* succinctly captures the meaning of *moya* as understood by traditional African thought. It is for this reason that the *psyche* or *spirit* in the Western sense cannot simply be translated to *moya*. We now discuss the different meanings and shades of the concept *moya* from the perspective of traditional African thinking.

## Conceptions of *Moya* in Traditional African Thought

*Moya* in African traditional thought is ontologically experienced and expressed through different conditions, situations and behaviours. These conditions, situations and behaviours are not removed or independent from the visible world in which people live. Instead, they are an integral part of the context in which they occur. The experiences are not alien to African traditional thought, but constitute the world of their lived experiences. The unknown and untestable notion of reality, in this case *moya*, that is assumed to be in the metaphysical world, alienates people from their context and results in fragmented thinking and a distorted worldview. African traditional thought does not fragment *moya* into dualistic realities. Dualism is contrary to the African understanding of be-ing, which sees the world as a continuous interactive network of the living, the living dead, the still-to-be-born and the cosmic world. Be-ing in our view represents the coherent and unbroken network of interactions and relatedness between these different subsystems. *Moya* is also present and experienced in these different levels of connections. The different ways in which *moya* can be experienced and expressed are discussed with specific reference to Ramose's and Skhakhane's conceptions later in the chapter.

Our discussion of *moya* as an inextricable part of the cosmic unity above does not necessarily dispute and deny the diverse conceptions of *moya* even among indigenous African scholars themselves. Setiloane (1975) and Bujo (1998, 2003) can be cited as examples in this regard. There are those people who hold that *moya* cannot be observed and therefore belongs to the metaphysical sphere. On the other hand there are those who hold the view that *moya* ceases to exist at death. For example, Wiredu (2002, p. 32) argues that "whether by way of inconsistency or doctrinal fecundity ... there is, a diversity of thought on the problem. This discussion, then, demonstrates a vitality of philosophical thought in an African traditional society that the generality of colonial studies of African thought, intending to give an impression of monolithic unanimity, has tended to obscure". These misconceptions are in our opinion, firstly an indication of the differences in how reality is constructed. Secondly, it shows the extent to which some Africans have copied and translated Western paradigmatic linguistic versions and attempted to assimilate them into the African worldview. The latter has resulted in some confusion arising from the argument among some Africans about the existence or non existence of the

metaphysical world. Wiredu (2002, p. 24) refers to this tendency to adapt and copy the Western thought formations as the “quintessence of conceptual colonisation”.

*Moya*'s existence only in the observable ontology does not necessarily mean that Africans do not differentiate between dead matter and living things. Even human beings die and depart from the material world, but after death they are not objectified, that is, they are not regarded as non living, non participatory and non feeling objects. The living dead's *moya* remains connected and influential in the lives of the living and their environment. The living dead are instead still communicated and related to as being part of the ontology of the living. The identity of personhood (being human) stays with them long after their burial. It is for this reason that the living continues to inform and involve the living-dead of all the activities affecting them, their plans, sorrows and achievements in the form of rituals as means to maintain the connection with them. Africans are therefore against the objectification of dead people on the basis of their physical death.

Another interesting dimension about the relationship between the living and the living dead is the respect that characterises this relationship. When going for some visitation ritual to the cemetery the *Tswanas* or *Sothos* usually say, *re ya go tlhola/go bua le rre, mme, mmemogolo, rremogolo, we are going to visit our father, mother, grandmother or grandfather*, whoever the person may be. There is never reference to *re ya go tlhola moya wa ga rre. Hi ya ku kambeni tatani*, in Shangaan, *we are visiting our father*, and not the “spirit” or *moya* of our father. A dead person is not referred to as *se se tlhokafetseng*, (it) *that which died*, but, *yo o tlhokofetseng, the person that died*. There is no expression such as *ke ya go bua le moya wa ga mme, rre or moya wa ga monnamogolo, I am going to talk to the “spirit” of my mother, father or grandfather*, whoever the deceased is. In African traditional thought *moya* continues to be inseparably associated with the dead body at all relevant times and context, and this becomes an inherent characteristic of “life” to the deceased. They still possess “life” and control over earthly processes even in their “dead” state. It is for this reason that they are referred to as the living dead.

In African traditional thought, it is uncommon and unheard of to talk to *moya* “spirit”, in isolation from the person who is intrinsically subsumed in *moya*. The dead are not talked about in

an objectified manner. They remain personified even in their dead state. Ramose (1999, p. 68) argues that “this attribution of life to the deceased person is recognition of the belief that personhood is much more and larger than the physical body is expressed in African traditional thought as the living-dead. But such ascription of life to the deceased obviously does not mean that the person is alive in the same way as it was before death. So it is that life, however conceived, is believed to be present on this (the ontology of the visible beings) as well as on the other side (the ontology of the invisible beings) of death according to African traditional thought”. It is very important to note the *both/and* convergence embodied in Ramose’s argument. He does not present one ontology over the other, nor does he present them as *either* the one *or* the other. The two ontologies are not contradictory to each other, instead, they are complementary. There is no implication for the existence of *either* in the visible *or* invisible ontology, but rather, a coexistence of the two as a wholeness. The saying *lefatshe la ba ba ithobaletseng* or *tiku ra lava va nga etlela*, *the world of the deceased* in Sesotho/Sepedi and Xitsonga respectively does not refer to two different worlds ontologically, but to the interconnected way in which the living and the dead co-exist on the same ontological plane. Bujo (1998, 2003) supports this view by stating that the visible and invisible worlds imply each other. Ajei (2007, p. 116) succinctly argues for this inseparable conception of ontology from the metaphysical foundations of a modern natural science point of view by stating that “if science is culture-dependent, then metaphysics and cultural values are necessarily prior and foundational to its knowledge claim. This must be the case since ontology and epistemology are intimately and inextricably linked by mutual implication ... If ontology is the theory of being, and epistemology a theory of the justification of knowledge, then each must imply the other because claiming that that something exists rationally implies the question: ‘how do you know?’; and claiming to know that x implies admitting the existence of x”. This complementarity is a clear demonstration that Africans do not conceptualise reality in dichotomous Cartesian terms. Wiredu, (2002, p. 24) in his discussion of the Akan cosmology argues that “... no such categories will be fitted into the conceptual framework of the Akan thought. Again, that Africans are constantly said to believe in *spiritual* entities in the immaterial sense can be put down to conceptual imposition in the colonising accounts of African thought in colonial times and their post-colonial aftermath”. Most African traditional communities share the Akan view of the integrated *both/and* conceptions of the cosmology, which *moya* forms part of.

### African Cosmology and *Both/And* Thinking

At this point it is crucial to interrogate the meaning and significance of Bujo's statement that "the visible and the invisible worlds imply each other", in view of the mind-body and physical and metaphysical dichotomy. To attend to this statement we would like to align ourselves with Bujo's (2003, p. 19) argument that Africans do not think in "*either/or*", but rather in "*both /and*" categories. This view is further sustained by Mkhize's (2004) argument that indigenous societies, for the most part, do not view the world in a mechanical cause-effect manner. Instead, they tend to subscribe to a wholistic view of the world in which each system influences and is mutually influenced by the other life forces. In African traditional thought, the living, the living-dead, the yet-to-be-born, "God" and the context constitute the African cosmic unity. These communities are conceptualised as interconnected, interdependent and in constant coherent interaction with one another. None is better than or superior to the other. However, this community of systems is organised hierarchically to denote the dynamic of respect and harmony. Mkhize (2004, p. 51) argues that "these elements are capable of influencing and being influenced by others ... and that this dynamism means that reality can be understood by studying the system as a whole, rather than isolated parts". Implicit in this argument is that approaching African cosmology from the *either/or* fragmented perspective will not provide a comprehensive and integrated understanding of such reality. The *both/and* thinking goes beyond the diversity of the individual forms of the world. It is inclusive, evolving and recognises the value, contribution and complementarity embodied in interacting systems. It is for this reason that in African thought, *moya* (*spirit*) is seen in a complementary relation to the *body, matter* and context.

On the contrary, the West, which adheres to Descartes' notion of dualism, is most likely to position "*moya*" (*spirit*) against the *body* (*mmele*). It has also imposed a putative hierarchy, making the soul superior to the body. The *self* is in Cartesian thinking the centre around which everything revolves and depends. Therefore the *self* is superior to anything else. The "I" endowed with reason, is seen as fundamentally key to understanding the world. The person's existence is upon their reasoning capacity, "I think, therefore I am". Rationality here becomes the condition by which reality is conceived and determined. As Teffo and Roux (2002, p. 162) observed,

“rationality has been seen as a universal inherent ability of humankind to determine *the* truth”. According to this theory, rationality is based upon logical deductions and strict rules of evidence; the distorting tendencies of affect must be avoided at all costs. This provides a method of investigation in which correct answers are thought to be rationally determined, that is, true. Rationality, therefore, is seen as the only avenue towards reliable knowledge, and also as being certain of success in yielding correct, final answers if its methods are promptly followed”.

The conception of the self that is determined by rationality is in opposition to the African conception of the *self*, which is and can only be understood in relation to the other members of the all-embracing cosmology. Even within the African traditional community thinking, the question of whether there is African metaphysics or not continues to be vigorously interrogated. This is so because “African metaphysics” as a monolithic universe is philosophically problematic. Also, the “metaphysical” conceptions in the African context are as varied as the different conceptions of reality among different socio-cultural groups. We are therefore mindful of the fact that Africa does not consist of undifferentiated homogeneous groups (Ramose, 1999; Teffo & Roux, 2002; Wiredu, 1980).

Our argument, however, is that the concept of metaphysics as understood by the West is inconsistent with the African conception of the “metaphysical” world. This is so because as Teffo and Roux (2002, p. 165) argue, “metaphysical discourse in Africa must be based on the African perceptions of reality as determined by a history, geographical circumstances, and such cultural phenomena as religion, thought systems and linguistic conventions entrenched in the Africa world-view”. In terms of this reasoning, we therefore posit that African “metaphysics” cannot simply be reduced to and understood in terms of dualistic natural and occult abstractions. African “metaphysics” is conceptualised in wholeness terms in which there is coherent interaction of forces of the different systems, such as “God”, the living-dead, the living, the yet-to-be-born and the material things. This general African “metaphysical” conception indicates that Africans conceptualise reality based on the lived experiential interaction.

The adoption of the use of the term “metaphysics” in African discourse is a further example of some Africans trying to explain the African cosmology using Western conventions of thinking



and concepts. We are therefore reminded of Okere's (2005a) argument that all cultures have developed their forms of knowledge, and that every form of knowledge must be situated or generated within that culture. In the same logic, concepts or the terminology used in any culture should be bounded and informed by lived experiences, presuppositions and the enviroing cultural linguistic conventions. The adoption and interpretation of the concept "metaphysics" using Western frameworks and conventions to understand Africa's indigenous knowledge systems will result in miscommunication and simplification of vastly complex African ontology and epistemology.

Most scholars who try to articulate the African ontology have intentionally or unintentionally applied Western concepts to represent the African worldview. This has led to what Wiredu (2002, p. 26), sees as not only superficiality, but "... an illustration of one of the things that the uncritical assimilation of African categories to Western ones has done to an African self-image". To talk of physical and metaphysical systems in traditional African thought is grossly misleading. Furthermore, the "arbitrary" use of terms from one epistemology to the other without critically evaluating their etymology and the cultural context within which they are used leads to gross misrepresentation such as in the case of *spirit* in the African languages. Kruger et al. (2007, p. 327) argue against this random and arbitrary tendency of translating words and concepts from one worldview to the other; "when comparing the worldviews of different cultural groups, the meanings of some words and concepts are 'untranslatable', as they are grounded in different understanding of the physical, psychological and spiritual worlds. They are immersed in different semantic fields that metaphorically call different worlds into being". African thought sees both *moya* and the *body* in wholeness terms.

It follows then that there is reason and place for the adoption and use of indigenous African concepts in the discourse of psychology. Even this latter term should be expressed in indigenous vernaculars or be expanded in meaning through indigenous African vernaculars. Without this, "science" will violate its self-imposed norm of representativity (objectivity) and thus become unscientific.

## Is the *Psyche* a Universal “Scientific” Concept?

The “science” question was raised and dealt with in detail in Chapter 1. We will in this section limit our discussion to the *psyche* and its relationship and susceptibility to “scientific” study. We will also question if the *psyche* is a universal “scientific” concept that is applicable to different cultural contexts. On this basis, the crucial questions to be asked are: Can the *psyche* be studied “scientifically”? By what conception of “science” is the *psyche* susceptible to “scientific” study? From the Western paradigm, the logical way to deal with this question is to adopt the empirical approach. Empirical in this context implies fragmenting the *psyche* into observable, measurable smaller activities. On the first question, our argument is that the *psyche* can, from the perspective of the Western paradigm, be “scientifically” studied in the observable sense of analysing behaviour. In this way the metaphysical dimension is reduced to the level and domain of the empirical. The argument to be advanced here is that the body that occupies space in Europe is different in experience to that which occupies space in Africa. What Europe calls the *psyche* may not necessarily be adequately translatable to an African term (Ajei, 2007; Dewey, 1958; Okere, 2005; Wiredu, 1980). The African equivalent term for “*psyche*” should be deeply and inextricably representative of the everyday experiences of the African life. The concept *moya*, experientially and conceptually represents the African ontology and lived experiences. Clearly, the adoption and use of indigenous African vernaculars is congruent with the African epistemological paradigm. The dominant paradigm of psychotherapy does not respond to this requirement. We therefore submit that the *psyche* as currently understood within the psychology and psychotherapy context, is both epistemologically and ontologically a Western imposition.

## Cartesianism and the *Psyche*

Reductionism is traceable to the positivist-empirical scientific tradition of Rene Descartes, Isaac Newton and Francis Bacon, to mention but a few of the pioneers of this thinking. According to Ajei (2007, p. 113), “the insistence on a unique rationality and logic of justification for the explanatory framework of modern Western science is a relic of its origins and initial preoccupations”. What is clear though, is that the proponents of rationality have proclaimed it as the only method of knowledge production. In this sense, rationality has claimed objectivity and

by implication, universal validity status. Becvar and Becvar (2006, p. 4), describe reductionism as “reducing the sequences of reality, which are out there, into their smallest possible components ... to uncover the laws according to which the world operates ... the discovery of which will reveal some absolute truths about reality”. Reductionism is a way of thinking that involves the breaking of a complex world or reality into smaller, more manageable pieces within controlled contexts.

Cartesian thinking has claimed successes and exerted influence over many fields of studies and research such as philosophy, natural sciences and mathematics. The dualistic study of the *psyche* by the West in a rational, controlled and measurable manner indicates the perceived effectiveness and successes of Cartesian thinking. The fundamental thinking of Cartesianism is succinctly articulated by Foster and Froman (2002, p. 529) who argue that “Cartesian thinking creates separateness in one’s personhood and the self relative to others”. Capra (1983, p. 42) in this regard notes that: “Since the seventeenth century physics has been the example of an ‘exact’ science, and has served as the model for all other sciences”. It is for this reason that Shearman (1994, p. 2) argues that “because our thinking is in itself Cartesian and therefore we cannot think ourselves out of the Cartesian thinking”.

Shearman’s generalised view should be seen and understood within the Western background because not all people of the world are necessarily entrapped in the Cartesian rationalist and reductionist thinking. So, “*our thinking ...*” above does not necessarily speak for and represent traditional African thinking and experiences. This generalisation is a clear illustration of the developed tendency of the West to generalise its experiences and dualistic thinking to all people. In this framework, the mind for example, is studied independently. In the same logic, an individual or a human being is viewed as independent and capable of self regulatory, self-controlled and independent behaviour within the influence of their community. The rationale behind this dualistic thinking lies in the belief that if we can control, explain, prove and measure the separate smaller elements of the complex system, we can then combine this knowledge to fully comprehend the complexity of the whole. On this reasoning, reductionism holds that the functioning of the system or organism can be explained by understanding its smaller elements (Fourie, 1998). It is for this reason that we argue that training psychotherapists in the Western

epistemology, which is what all psychotherapists in South African universities are trained in, essentially follows Cartesian conceptualisation, theorising and practice. The question is, within the African context, how legitimate and ethical are such training programmes? What is the function and purpose of continuing to “train” or “indoctrinate” Africans in philosophical frameworks that are alien to their cultural and existential realities? These questions are somewhat rhetorical because we have dealt with them already in the preceding sections. Their purpose here is to serve as the bridge for crossing over into African concepts proper. We shall begin with an exposition of the concept of *umoya*, *moya* or *mowa*.

### The African Conception of *Moya*

In African traditional thought, *moya* is not seen as isolated and independent from other life forces. The visible and the invisible ontology levels of *moya* coexist. These two levels, according to the African traditional thought, coherently link the different levels of existence. The prevalence of these levels rests in 1) the recognition that in African traditional thought there is no relational hierarchy, but horizontal existential connectedness of different systems, that is, human beings, the living dead, the yet-to-be-born and “God” (*Xikwembu*, *Mudzimu* or *uNkulunkulu*) and, 2) the uninterrupted continuity of existence or life. This expression finds support in Bujo (1998, p. 16), who argues that “according to the African people’s belief, not only human beings can influence each other, but all forces pose a causal and ontological interdependence. Accordingly, natural forces can influence men and women ontologically and vice versa”. This is what is broadly understood as the cosmic unity which *moya* forms part of.

The concept *moya* will probably resonate with and capture the true meaning of these complex forms of human existence. We therefore have to make reference to some African languages’ expressions of the concept *moya*.

Does the term *psyche* as understood in Western thinking necessarily have the same meaning as *umoya*, *mweya*, *mowa* or *moya* in African traditional thought? It must be emphasised here that our use of the phrase *African traditional thought* in this instance does not deny the cultural and linguistic diversity that exists among African peoples. In fact, the argument for the adoption of

the term *moya*, is a call for the recognition and respect for diversity. However, we are mindful of commonalities among African cultures that create the African or “family atmosphere” and philosophical affinity and kinship among and between the indigenous people of Africa (Ramose, 1999; Skhakhane, 1988; Wiredu, 1980). We are not suggesting that all Africans throughout the continent use the term *umoya* or *moya* for *psyche*.

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, pp. 6-7) on the other hand presents the following Zulu connotative variations:

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

Ramose (1999, p. 69), for example, draws our attention to the different (Sesotho) meanings of *moya*, *moea* or *mowa* applicable to different contexts, as follows:

1. *moya* o a foka = the wind is blowing
2. O na le *moya* o mobe = he has bad intentions
3. Go na le *moya* o mobe = the atmosphere is bad
4. O tsenwe ke *moya* o mobe = he is possessed by bad spirit
5. *Moya* wa gagwe o ko fase = he is low spirited or depressed

In the above examples, 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 emphasised about these various meanings of *moya* or *umoya*, is that this term cannot simply be translated into *spirit* without losing its meaning (Ramose, 1999; Skhakhane, 1988). *Moya* in the sentences above, except where it refers to *wind*, is not separate or independent of the human body. In the case of examples provided by Skhakhane and Ramose above, the appropriate meaning that is

coterminous in this study 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 Sesotho) 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 died.*

These examples add to the varied meanings *moya* has in the African context. In the above examples, the first example passes no judgment as to where *moya* has gone it just indicates that the person is dead. It is in this context that since it is not known where *moya*, "*spirit*" 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*. We also observe that there is no distinct separation in terms of the physical and "metaphysical" worlds in which the departed *body* and *moya* reside. The fact that *moya* has left the body means that it remains accessible even though it is in the sphere of the ontology of invisible beings.

In the second example, there is a belief that *moya* and the living-dead are ontologically interconnected. Also, the fact that *moya* goes to *badimo*, the living-dead, indicates the inseparable characteristic between *moya*, *badimo* and the *cosmic* world. In traditional African thought, one cannot therefore talk of *moya* without recognising *badimo*, that is, those who are deemed to be present and influencing the life of the living at all relevant times. It is with the meanings embodied in the above examples in mind that we further argue against any arbitrary translation of terms from one epistemology to the other. In support of this argument, Ramose (1999, p. 69) posits that "the point about these various meanings of *moya* is that the word is not simply translated into *spirit* or *soul* without further ado. Accordingly, the notion of *spirit* or *soul* as a separate and distinct substance- in the Platonic sense subsisting independently of the body does not readily fit into African traditional thought".

From the perspective of African traditional thought, *moya* is seen as an inextricable part of the human being. In the wholistic conception of the human being, *moya* is oneness with the body. In view of the above exposition of *moya*, it is clear that individualism or claims that purport

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 harmoniously interacting community of systems. Mkhize (2004, p. 44) 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 emphasised that the African ethic rests on community and life at large as its basis. Thus, awareness of this framework is indispensable if one were wanting to understand people's conception of moral reasoning". From the African traditional thought, *moya* can therefore be "defined" as:

*Ways in which people culturally define and interpret their existence and be-ing in relation to the others and the cosmos, using methods of communication and connections such as rituals and cultural rites of passage.*

The understanding of *moya* will not be fully comprehended unless and only if it is situated within the Africa ontology.

#### Ubuntu, Personhood and Be-ing as Embodiments of *Moya*

In the African traditional thought, we cannot conceive personhood outside the ubuntu/botho philosophy. According to Ramose (1999, p. 40), "ubuntu then, is the wellspring flowing with African ontology and epistemology ... and ubuntu may be seen as the basis of African philosophy". Ubuntu can be described as humanness, be-ing human, knowing one's fellow human beings and taking a keen interest in their well-being. This is the awareness that we are people because of our inextricable and dialogical relationships with the others. Our self-definition is a reflection of the others. Ubuntu then gives Africans their special identity, which is characterised by what Mangcu (2008, p. 78) refers to as "a fellow-feeling for justice towards others". This philosophy is the foundation of the African ethic. This community-oriented way of living seems to be shared by most indigenous people, for example Drummond (2006, p. 3) states that in the Maori tradition of New Zealand, "knowledge is a shared treasure and a community

resource ... service is in the interest of the group, and individual discoveries are taken back to the community". The saying *Motho ke motho ka batho* in Sesotho captures the essence of ubuntu philosophy. Mkhize's (2004) and Ramose's (1999) analysis of ubuntu converge, although they use different approaches. They argue that ubuntu comprises of two words, *ubu-* and *-ntu*. *Ubu-* being indicative of an orientation towards the process of be-ing and becoming or unfoldment, while *-ntu* indicates a concrete substantive. "Umuntu is the specific entity which continues to conduct an inquiry into be-ing, experience, knowledge and truth. This is an activity rather than an act. It is an ongoing process impossible to stop unless motion itself is stopped. On this reasoning, *ubu-* may be regarded as be-ing becoming and this evidently implies the idea of motion" (Ramose, 1999, p. 41). Hermeneutically, inquiry and knowledge result from this experience of be-ing-in-motion, searching for meaning. Be-ing as an ontological and epistemological entity does not stop inquiring and interacting because it is perceived to be continuously in motion with other life forces. It is inconceivable to define the individual being without considering that the motion and unfolding in the be-ing is sustained by the dialogical context.

Ubuntu philosophy has different dimensions from which it can be approached and understood, for example the philosophical exposition and the interpretation and practical implementation levels. Both Ramose (1999) and Mkhize's (2004) analyses of the concept ubuntu above are examples of the philosophical expositions of ubuntu philosophy. D.S. Matjila's (personal communication, April 17, 2007) views of the philosophy of ubuntu below represent the practical and implementation dimension. Although ubuntu philosophy is in both instances seen within the dialogical context, when approached from these different viewpoints (the philosophical exposition and the practical and interpretation), the logic and themes that result from such analyses are different.

D.S. Matjila (personal communication, April 17, 2007), for example, raises dissatisfaction on how ubuntu is often portrayed as only reflecting the positive side of human beings, that is, caring, being empathic and being compassionate with fellow human beings. He argues that ubuntu philosophy also includes negative attributes such as witchcraft and jealousy. He maintains that since ubuntu embodies people's daily ways of interacting with their environment, including their spiritual connectedness, its conceptualisation should reflect people's daily realities such as



witchcraft and jealousy. People, and not animals, D.S. Matjila (personal communication, April 17, 2007) argues, are the ones that are jealous and bewitching fellow human beings. D.S. Matjila (personal communication, April 17, 2007) does not draw a clear distinction between *moya* and *serithi* (commonly referred to as integrity), but instead uses them interchangeably. In this regard he argues for example that: *motho o bolokwa or patiwa ka tlotlo ka gone a na le serithi or moya* (a human being is buried with respect because of their integrity, soul or spirit). It is for this reason that any person, irrespective of their social, political or economic status, will be buried with *serithi* (integrity) and, not allowed to rot unattended like animals. *Serithi* here is not used to denote a person's status such as wealth or education, but to indicate that they carry the *spirit* or *soul*. *Serithi* accords human beings with a different existential presence to, for example, animals. This does not however mean that animals are less important or inferior species. In certain African cultures animals are highly respected and carry the family name or totem and in some instances dictate the fortunes and misfortunes of the family. We can here give an example of my family in Xitsonga culture.

In our culture, there will in most of the cases be a chosen cow (*homu ya swikwembu, the cow of the living-dead*) which is treated with the greatest "human" respect. The respect does not cease to exist when this cow dies because the respect and status is passed on to other generations of cattle when the chosen one dies. *Homu ya swikwembu* (the living-dead) is regarded as a link between the living and the living-dead, and that is why it is named after the respected late member of the family or clan. The cow, which is regarded as *Modimo* or *Xikwembu* ("God"), then carries the *serithi* (integrity) of the family. The behaviour of the cow is therefore carefully monitored because "it" is seen as a carrier of messages or communicating significant information from the living-dead. If, for example, the cow behaves violently, the behaviour can be interpreted as unhappiness about something on the part of the living-dead. The cow is then used as a messenger, a go-between or "diagnostic" means between the dead and the living. This is why the cow carries such *serithi* and respect. In this sense, *serithi* is used to represent *moya* which is connecting the living and the living-dead. In our view, for example, the *Sesotho* expression: *ga a tlotle batho bangwe* or *ga a tlhomphe batho bangwe* (he does not treat others with respect or integrity) in Xitsonga, *a nga hloniphi vanhu va ngwani*, means that *the person does not treat others humanly, with respect or in accordance with the spirit of be-ing motho or umuntu*. The

saying in Xitsonga, *munhu wa tika* or *motho o boima* in Sesotho captures a person's integrity in the sense of *moya* that a person carries, even if they are dead.

Let us further illustrate *serithi* or *moya* of a person as understood above with the example of elephants. According to D.S. Matjila (personal communication, April 17, 2007), if an elephant has killed a human being, it does not mix with other elephants, it goes into seclusion for at least seven days (*e a ikilela*) to observe *a moment of darkness or filthiness*, because of the heaviness (*boima* or *ku tika*) of *moya* or *serithi* that a human being carries.

If we move from the view that the *psyche* is the embodiment of the *spirit*, then the *psyche* cannot be conceived and understood in fragmented, divisible and simple measurable units of study. Conversely, *moya*, which connotes the concept of respect and integrity, cannot be understood outside the wholeness and collective cultural experiences of Africans and their environment. The division of the *psyche* into *body* and *mind* is alien to the African conception of the human being. It belongs to the legacy emanating from the Western fragmentation of *be-ing*. We therefore submit that *moya*, which represents the respectful spiritual *be-ingness*, collective and wholistic engagement between people and their cultural environment and supernatural powers, is ontologically and epistemologically consistent with the African philosophy of ubuntu. *Moya* should therefore be adopted as an ontologically and epistemologically legitimate term in understanding the human being in the African context. The exclusion of the concept *moya* from the Western scientific framework does not deprive it of its ontological and epistemological attributes. Instead, the exclusion speaks to the limits of Western "science". It constitutes some of the core concepts in the construction and interpretation of indigenous psychology in dialogue with Western psychology

The use of *moya* or *serithi* in psychology speaks to the African understanding of the human being as the subject of healing in general and psychotherapy in particular. Through the concept of *moya*, African philosophy calls into question the exclusivity of Western scientism. For "psychology" and "psychotherapy" in the African ontology to be meaningful and to be taken seriously, *moya* has to become an indispensable concept of "mainstream" psychology.

## Concluding Remarks

Viewed within its etymological context, the concept *psyche*, from which *psychology* is derived, is deeply rooted in the Western epistemological paradigm, more specifically the Greek and Hebrew traditions. The *psyche* has interchangeably been used with the concepts *soul* or the *spirit*. Whichever way the *psyche* is called, this concept is etymologically and ontologically conceived and understood within the rationalism of Western philosophies, theories, epistemologies and cultural experiences. On this basis, this concept cannot be universally applied to all indigenous languages without philosophical, conceptual and practical misrepresentations. Using the term *psyche*, *soul* or *spirit* in the African context only constitutes epistemologically and conceptually disguised cosmetic linguistic adaptations which continue to be at variance with the African socio-cultural experiences. Further, the dualistic way in which the *psyche* is conceptualised, is inconsistent with the wholistic African unitary ontology and philosophy.

Hardly, then, can Africans be coerced into submitting to translations and universalisation of Western concepts as “authentically scientific virtues”. To be authentic according to Quijano cited in Ajei (2007, p. 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”. To advance this congruent level of being, appropriate African terminology must be adopted and used as scientifically authentic linguistic expressions and self-representations. This must be premised on the African philosophy of Ubuntu, which according to Ramose (2002) and Mkhize (2004) conceives being and knowledge as indivisibly linked. We subscribe to the view that knowledge and being cannot be understood outside the bounds of *moya*. We cannot exist and know unless we have *moya* which qualifies our being and existence in the ontology of the living and the transcendent. *Moya* is at variance with a dualistic philosophical framework. It is sustained by the African dialogical context that appreciates the interconnectedness between all the ontological cosmic forces. The understanding and practice of “psychology” and “psychotherapy” in the African context must accordingly be based on the philosophical, epistemological and ontological conceptions of personhood and being with *moya* as the core concept. We turn our focus to the African conceptions of “psychology” and “psychotherapy” in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 5

*In the mist of a vast amount of citable literature that clearly illustrates traditional Western psychology's shortcomings when applied to the clients of African descent, it is now time for African scholars to redirect their energy towards the African deep structure in which African philosophical assumptions, worldviews, ethos, and ideology serve as a foundation for much needed paradigm shift ... one of the challenges of African psychology is to wield core African concepts that can be used to heal people of African descent today.*

(Obasi, 2002, p. 52).

### Introduction

Western psychology is based on certain philosophical and psychological presuppositions and conceptions about the human being and reality. Historically, these Western derived presuppositions and conceptions have achieved a great measure of universalisation and have been assumed to represent indigenous people's experiences. Modern psychology, and we may add psychotherapy, as we study and practice them, have been conceived from this Western epistemology (Mkhize, 2004). On the basis of this historical background, such psychology and psychotherapy cannot accurately and authentically represent and reflect indigenous realities, in particular African experiences. The systematic exclusion of indigenous experiences as legitimate sources of knowledge and corresponding practice was the marginalisation and subjugation of the African conception of "psychology" and "psychotherapy". This exclusion prevented the broadening of the landscape of psychological discourses. As such, the literature on psychology and psychotherapy has come to be associated with only the West.

In most psychology texts in South Africa, the underlying psychological theories have remained profoundly rooted in Western conceptions of reality, language expressions and experiences. Theory is a reflection of most deeply held values and thinking of the theorist and theorising community (Grills, 2002). Therefore theory cannot be divorced from the cultural domain within which the theorising process is conceived and construed. In terms of the same logic, psychological practice and psychotherapeutic interventions are based on a particular philosophy of life and cannot be separated from their philosophising context. As psychology currently stands in South Africa and Africa in general, it is theorised and languaged from a

foreign epistemology. In an attempt to address this epistemological and theoretical inconsistency, most texts have provided and, occasionally used South African life experiences as examples filled with Western theories and boldly claimed and presented these cosmetically disguised alterations as “South African psychology and psychotherapy perspectives”. This disguised and superficial tendency offers no paradigm shift at all. It does not speak to the African experience, nor does it take into account the African languages as central to the effective self-representation and healing process. Psychology that is based on these precarious claims and misrepresentations cannot therefore claim to embrace the African ethos and reality. It does not have a legitimate African identity, effects and meaning in the lives of Africans. In essence, the effect of such psychology, as Grills (2002, p. 10) argues, will be “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”.

In this chapter, we argue for the establishment of African “psychology” and “psychotherapy” consistent with the African experience, knowledge systems and linguistic expressions. It will be based upon the underlying philosophical African understanding of the human being, illness and healing. To be consistent with African thinking, the “psychology” we are arguing for here should be understood and expressed using proper African history, culture and languages. We will start by presenting the conception of the African view of “psychology”, followed by that of “psychotherapy”. Before we can present such African conceptions, a crucial question to be interrogated and answered is whether this thing called African “psychology” does exist at all.

### Is there an African “Psychology”?

The question of the existence or non-existence of an African “psychology” is fast becoming a contestable intellectual, linguistic, socio-political and philosophical discourse. The tendency to question Africans’ ability to conceptualise has been observed in all the fields in which the West claimed the status of sole championship, for example in philosophy. It is therefore not uncommon to hear of questions such as: Can Africans theorise, philosophise or psychologise? In the current study, I have continuously been asked what *established* theory is this research based on. The implication of this question is two-pronged; firstly, that the African lived experiences, cultural

identities, philosophies and presuppositions advanced in this study do not constitute “developed” authentic theory. Secondly, that, indigenous African knowledge systems, socio-political systems and practices cannot “authentically” and “scientifically” explain themselves unless they are based on Western “established” theories. We have come to see many studies on African experiences such as poetry, philosophy and drama being twisted to fit with and being explained in terms of Western theories and concepts. The use of expressions such as *African psychology* and *African physical and metaphysical ontologies* in the so-called African “psychology” texts without first questioning whether the terms *psychology* and *metaphysics* exist and apply to Africans’ conceptions are examples of such linguistic difficulties. In most cases this has been done by Africans themselves. In questioning this tendency, African philosophers such as Laleye (2002), Ramose (2002), Wiredu (1980, 2002), Kaphagawani and Malherbe (2002) and Outlaw (2002) have gone to great lengths arguing for the existence and recognition of African philosophy.

In recent times psychologists such as Mkhize (2004) Sigogo and Modipa (2004), Grills (2002), Obasi (2002), Parham (2002), and Kruger et al. (2007) have argued for the recognition of African healing practices and “psychology”. If there is African experience and thought, there can be no doubt that there is African “psychology”. However, to answer this question, it is important to define the term “psychology” in the African context. Evidently, the need for African “psychology” for Africans is not only limited to the African continent. Other studies on African Americans such as those of Parham (2002), Grills (2002), Parham and Parham (2002) and Obasi (2002) have also confirmed that Western oriented psychology and psychotherapy are ineffective when applied to persons of African descent. There is therefore no justifiable reason why Western psychology is still taught and remains dominant in our curriculum because it is clearly at variance with the African experience. In terms of this reasoning, our view is that African “psychology” should be at the centre of curriculum development and teaching in learning institutions in South Africa. It is grossly inconceivable and unethical to teach African students meaningful “psychology”, if such psychology does not adopt African languages to express their experiences. If this trend continues to prevail, as is the case at the moment, psychology will continue to be perceived as a theoretical subject that bears no practical and healing relevance to African communities.

Psychology, like other social sciences in a changing social system such as South Africa, should reflect the social transformation, dynamics and developments consistent with the social and cultural experiences such as the adoption of appropriate language expressions of the indigenous communities. In this sense, Teffo (2008, p. 2) argues that “good education should do more than pass on norms, values and knowledge necessary for a creative and conscientious citizen whose ethos are rooted in the African culture as it changes”. The fact that the experience, content and language used to express and represent this reality in South Africa remains deeply rooted in the Western experience and ontology is indicative of very serious problems in our education system. One such problem is demonstrated by the fact that our educational institutions do not recognise traditional African artifacts, trajectories and other forms of knowledge production and preservation as authentic knowledge. Most of the time this kind of work is dismissed as being “unscientific”. Under these conditions, it means that in practice there are tensions and inconsistencies between what is taught and the cultural background and experience within which this teaching and learning take place. On this basis, the prevailing claim that there is transformation remains an illusion.

The basis of the exclusion and marginalisation of indigenous African ways of knowing and doing is the untenable claim that only the West has a prior and superior knowledge to define “science”. We have challenged and shown this claim to be vacuous and unsustainable in Chapter 1 and it will therefore not be pursued here.

### Towards a Definition of African “Psychology”

In our view, to ask if there is an African “psychology” is tantamount to questioning the very existence of an African. The root of this question can be traced to the West’s exclusive claim to knowledge production, positioning itself as the only discoverer of authentic and scientific knowledge. Okere (2005a) has argued against this absurd claim to unique possession of scientific knowledge on the basis that all human cultures have experiences and possess some knowledge. This ability to experience and possess knowledge presupposes the ability to philosophise, theorise and to psychologise.

The existence of Africans is an existential reality. The very existence of Africans presupposes African culture and experience, which give rise to indigenous African knowledge systems. It is on this knowledge system and experiences that African “psychology” should be based and defined. Grills (2002, pp. 13-14) defines African-centred psychology as “a perspective that reflects an African orientation to the meaning of life, the world, and relationships with others and oneself ... African-centred psychology is ultimately concerned with understanding the system of meaning of human beingness, the features of human functioning, and the restoration of normal/natural order to human development. It is used to resolve personal and social problems and to promote optimal functioning”.

Grills’ definition goes far beyond an individual’s behaviour and cognitive processes within a particular context. Contrary to modern and post modern definitions of psychotherapy that are limited to the interaction between the therapist and the client, the African conception takes “psychology” and “psychotherapy” to the integrated and wholeness of entire ways of living. “Psychology” is for Africans about a people’s way of living and being in relation to their cosmic world. It incorporates all interacting and connected life systems, as well as the supreme beings and how these systems constitute meaning in life. These systems of knowledge embody all life experiences and processes, written and non-written, rational and irrational, controlled and non-controllable, observable (physical) and non-observable (non-physical), living and non-living as well as known and unknown. On this basis, Africans’ conceptions of “psychology” represent very complex and yet coherent systems of networks. These systems cannot necessarily be reduced to, and limited by the confinements of a mentality that seeks to explain every experience and process in a rational way.

In the context of psychology, rationality claims that human behaviour and the events of nature do not happen at random but follow an unvarying pattern which needs a rational explanatory mode. In this sense, rationality seeks to discover, control and apply these rational laws to control these interactive processes in order to successfully predict behaviour and social outcomes. This criterion constitutes the praxis of the West’s conception of how psychology should be defined and practised. This criterion is in our view limited, and by its very nature excludes indigenous ontological conceptions.



In Africa, a more culture and context sensitive praxis that will resonate with the African ontological conceptions of “psychology” and healing practices is therefore argued for. African “psychology” and “psychotherapy” must also be based on the African understanding of reality and experience.

The following are, according to Grills (2002, p. 14), the core features of African centred “psychology”:

1. *Self-definition*. The understanding and awareness that being defined in terms of otherness, other-defended and other-reliant is inaccurate and misplaced. Real self-definition for Africans means a conscious centring of perspective, analysis, theory and praxis in an African frame of reference. The African understanding of *self-definition* here situates the individual in the context of the community, with strong emphasis on inter-dependency.
2. *Spirit*. That incorporeal, animating principle and energy that reflects the essence and sustenance of all matter. The *spirit* is both the holding space for life itself and a precondition for the existence of all matter.
3. *Nature*. Consisting of all elements contained within the natural environment, that provides rules for living peacefully in society and provides a window to the inner working of the person ... providing lessons on human functioning, the rhythms of life, and order of things.
4. *Metaphysical interconnectedness*. The metaphysical component to the person that requires certain social and natural obligations that are accompanied by (ritual in life). The understanding that human beings do not exist alone in the universe, but are always interacting with and under the influence other forces.
5. *Communal order and self-knowledge*. The understanding that we can only know ourselves through our relationships with others. In traditional African thought, being human is to belong to the whole community. Individuals exist because of the community they belong to and the community contributes to the conduct of its individual community members.

We would like to add another feature, which is in our view also very important and applicable to most African cultures, namely:

6. *Ancestor worship*. This entails different forms of ritual in which the living communicate and connect with their living-dead through dialogue and other forms of expressions. African traditional thought does not view dying as the end of life and experience. The living-dead continue to be indivisibly connected to the living and the Supreme Being through dialogical engagement. Those who die transcend to a different form of existence and continue to communicate and influence the living. The living-dead are also expected to communicate the issues of the living to *uMvelinqangi*. A disturbance in these relationships is seen as a cause of misery, illness and unhappiness in people's lives.

The above definition of African "psychology" is not coterminous with current discrete definitions, conceptualisations and practices of categories of psychology that are detailed in our university textbooks and curricula. This definition does not only cover some parts, for example the mind and behaviour of the human being, but a person's life in its entirety and, in relation to the community, natural context and the Supreme Being. If the above core features are to be adopted as the conceptual basis of an African "psychology", then psychology as it currently stands is far from reflecting the African experience. These misconceptions then, calls for the Africanisation of "psychology" and "psychotherapy". The concept Africanisation is so often negatively perceived by Western dogmatism on the naïve assumption that this imperative represents essentialism. In essence, such an instinctive attack on, and rejection of, Africanisation of the psychology curriculum for example, is motivated by the blind passion to protect the essentialism of Western epistemology under the guise of objectivity and universalism. Suttner (2008, p. 1), succinctly describes the fear associated with Africanisation in this way: "The notion of Africanisation is not an abstract question and has quantitative and qualitative implications. It is controversial for many because it is seen along with affirmative action and 'playing the race card' as one of the ways of devaluing merit and often also undermining the ethical basis that should guide a democratic order and educational system". Contrary to these misguided fears, our view is that, the Africanisation of "psychology" and "psychotherapy" will create a praxis that will fully reflect the use of African languages, history, experiences, culture, their analyses and ways of understanding people and treatment modes of illnesses and healing. The understanding of "psychology" in Africa should integrate and situate the above African definition of "psychology" in the realm of *moya* and *ubuntu*, imbued with all human experiences within broader community.

Practically, this means that we have to adopt appropriate African vernaculars' terminology, rather than rely on translations or foreign concepts to explain even African cultural experiences.

### Argument for African “Psychology” and “Psychotherapy”

In Chapter 4 we have questioned the authenticity of translating and universalising the concept *psyche* in the African context. We also argued that from the etymological and ontological point of view, the continued Western use of the concept *psyche* under the guise of objectivity and universality in the African context has no scientific basis and cannot be sustained. We subsequently argued for the reinstatement and use of African concepts such as *moya* and *ubuntu* that are inextricably linked to the process of be-ing and personhood in the African epistemology. We will therefore adopt appropriate concepts in defining as well as understanding African “psychology” and “psychotherapy”. Secondly, the practical applicability of these concepts in the African ontological, epistemological and philosophical conceptions of being, and personhood in relation to illness and healing will also be presented.

Our primary aim here is to deconstruct and reconstruct, through the voices and lived experiences of Africans or *sites of knowledge* that I visited through dialogical engagements, what Mudimbe (1988, p. 179) succinctly refers to as “the construction of an authentic African episteme”. The basis of such an episteme should be the African experience and ontology proper. Such construction requires that 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 (P'Bitek, 1989, p. 1) in supporting this view succinctly argues that “African writers who choose to use English or French set themselves 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, proverbs, phrases 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 connection with clients.

In our view, it is self-delusional and intellectually dishonest to try to understand oneself and culture by using others and their culture as both a starting and a reference point. Rather, local knowledge systems and other cultural forms of expressions such as *ku phahla swikwembu*, cultural dances, praise songs, sculpting should inform our conceptualisation processes. In support of this view, Okere et al. (2005), argue that authentic knowledge is first of all local. Local in our view embodies the use of vernacular languages, cultural practices such as local conceptions of illness and treatment modalities as practiced by African indigenous communities. In the current study and in this chapter in particular, the imperative is to employ the terminology and languages that best represent local conceptions of *thuto ya semowa* “psychology”.

### *Thuto ya semowa* “Psychology”

In Setswana, Sesotho or Sepedi, *thuto* in *thuto ya semowa*, *dzondyo* in Xitsonga, means *education* in a broad sense. The education process referred to here is not only limited to formal school knowledge imparting or acquisition in a mechanical sense. It means learning and being educated in life issues in general as well. *Thuto* or education in this sense means that a person is capable of assimilating knowledge or information from different sources and contexts other than those of the school orientation and to use it to handle and deal with life issues effectively. This effectiveness includes interacting, communicating and connecting with the self, other people and one’s environment in a respectful manner.

In *thuto ya semowa* above, *ya-* means *of*, it describes the kind of *thuto*, and *semowa* means *spiritual* (life) matters. *Spirituality* embodies life forces’ interactions with all matter. The meaning derived from this life principle then guides one’s relationships with their ecology.

Ecology embodies one’s relationships with the others and the environment in a respectful and balanced manner. It is virtually impossible to respect others unless people *respect* or *know* or are *aware* of themselves, the others and their environment. It is for this reason that *health* from the

African viewpoint is defined in terms of a harmonious balance between one's relationship with the others, their environment and supreme beings. Self respect and self knowledge as we have seen in Grills' definition of African centred "psychology" entails self awareness. One cannot be aware of the self unless one is alive and therefore has *moya* which gives life. It is when we are alive and have *moya* that *thuto*, education or learning can take place. Therefore the state of being alive and subsequently being able to learn or become educated is made possible by the presence of *moya*. *Moya* in this case represents the very essence of life which manifests in our being or existence, the energy force that enables us to experience life. *Thuto ya semowa* thus means *being in a healthy relationship between the self, the others, the environment and the Supreme Being*. For this reason "psychology" from an African worldview cannot be relegated to fragment "objective" and rationalised units of study such as cognitive, emotional and behavioural entities. By the same logic, *thuto ya semowa* cannot be fully comprehended if it is fragmented into individual units. As a phrase, *thuto ya semowa* captures the essence of its meaning, that is, a wholistic study of life. On this basis, the understanding of psychology when it is limited to the mind and behaviour is grossly misleading. This view is far from representing the African conception and understanding of *thuto ya semowa* or *dyondzo ya moya*.

In most African languages, when concepts are viewed in isolation, such concepts are mostly inadequate to capture the essential meaning of certain expressions. *Thuto ya semowa* should therefore be seen as a whole phrase that represents the process of being and becoming integrated with one's ontology. It means that the self, together with other natural forces, are continuously conserving or transforming with the view to experiencing peaceful and meaningful coexistence in the interest of all systems. Capturing and representing these processes sufficiently and accurately requires sensitivity and the use of relevant expressions on the part of *baalafi ba semowa*, "psychotherapists".

#### What then, is "Psychotherapy" from the African Experience?

If we take the African definition of *thuto ya semowa* suggested by Grills (2002) as the basis for our argument for authentic African "psychology" and "psychotherapy", then the various traditional Western conceived psychotherapy definitions such as those discussed in Chapter 3 are

at variance with the African conceptions of healing. On this basis, a more culturally sensitive definition of *kalafi ya semowa* “psychotherapy”, which reflects the lived experiences of Africans is called for. To effectively construe such a definition, Grills’ (2002) core features of an African-centred “psychology”, namely *self-definition, spirit, nature, metaphysical interconnectedness, communal order*, and we may add, *ancestral worship*, should form the foundation of such a construction. These features should be accompanied by the healer’s sensitivity and understanding of the African conception of *being and becoming, reality, the self and ontology*. On the basis of the above understanding of being, *Kalafi ya semowa*, “psychotherapy” from the African experience can be defined as:

*The sensitive facilitation and creation of a healing space or ritual between the healer and individuals, families and communities, to define themselves with a view to establishing meaningful connections with the others, nature and other cosmic beings such as badimo/amadlozi, ancestors and uMvelinqangi, the Supreme Being.*

The facilitation of this healing ritual takes different expressive and linguistic forms such as poetry, dance, songs and *mophaso*, depending on the specific cultural belief system of the client. The exact applications of some of these different modes of healing rituals in therapy do not form part of our interest in this study and will therefore not be pursued here. It is, however, necessary to point out at the “therapeutic” effects and importance embedded in the *connection* between the client and the healer. Language forms a very critical connection tool and asset between the healer and the client. Different linguistic expressions and forms convey different meanings and have particular effects in the healing process.

In a study on the applicability and accuracy of reflecting of emotions using English in an African therapeutic context, Mtimkulu (2002) found that the Western understanding of reflections of emotive words such as love, anger, frustration, sadness in Rogerian therapy differ considerably with the understanding and reflections of such words in Setswana. In Rogerian therapy, for example, a reflection, *you are feeling sad*, is from the African viewpoint accurately captured by the phrase *o utlwile bothhoko mo moweng, o tshwenyegile mo moweng* or *o dubegile mo moweng kgotsa maikutlong*. The direct translation of “*you are feeling sad*” would be o

*tshwenyegile* or *o nyamile mmoko*. This direct translation could be misleading and incomplete because it does not necessarily imply that a person's life is affected in totality. In most indigenous languages, when reflecting sadness, *kutlobothoko*, in someone, the level and extent to which a person is *sad* (affected) is qualified by for example *mo moweng* or *mo maikutlong*. If we revert back to our earlier argument that *mowa* is inextricably linked to life itself, if a person is angry their life is invariably affected, *semowa sa gagwe se a amega* P.M. Sebate (personal communication, May 7, 2008). Therefore we cannot understand sadness in discrete and fragmented terms, separate from one's whole life. Sadness or *kutlobothoko* affects one's life.

On the other hand, *feeling sad* may mean *feeling low-spirited*, *mowa o o kwa tlase*, in which case it may mean feeling *depressed*. The latter changes the former meaning completely from *sadness* to *depression*. In this instance, caution must be exercised when translating feelings directly from English to African languages as this may result in inaccuracies and misrepresentations. From an African point of view, despite the difference in meaning between *mowa o o kwa tlase* and *go tshwenyega mo mowing*. S. Shole (personal communication, September 22, 2008), argues that the idea of one's *mowa* as the embodiment of life force being affected is carried through and maintained in both phrases. This then, further illustrates that fragmenting *mowa* from the total life experience is not consistent with African thinking. In most African languages emotive concepts cannot simply be captured by a single concept because in many instances these concepts have different meanings depending on the context.

Although Mtimkulu's study was on reflections of feelings in Setswana in Rogerian therapy, the root of the problem of inappropriateness and ineffectiveness of such endeavours lies in the notion of translatability. For many years, and even currently, African clients have had to speak to their therapists in English due to the feeble claim that it is difficult or even impossible to conduct effective therapy using vernacular languages. Mtimkulu's findings dispelled the misconception that African languages are limited in vocabulary in the therapeutic context. The inappropriateness of reflecting emotions using Western emotive concepts supports our argument against the view that Western concepts can readily be translated into African languages without linguistic and context related nuances (Kruger, et al. 2007; Ramose, 1999). Any attempt to translate Western concepts to African ones will inevitably erode the intensity and meaning of such concepts. The

overall conclusion reached in Mtimkulu's study revealed that the intensity and meaning of words or concepts in African languages is embedded in explanatory phrases, proverbs, metaphors and idioms and the context within which these concepts are used. Given these African modes of expression, the argument that African languages are limited in therapeutic vocabulary cannot be sustained. Instead, therapeutic processes should explore and find expression in these rich modes of communicative expressions. By this reasoning, the logical practical step to be taken is to replace the concept "psychotherapist" with the appropriate African term.

### Towards African "Psychology", *Dyondzo ya swa Moya* or *Go ithuta ka tsa Semowa*

The concept "psychology" is both inappropriate and inconsistent with the understanding of *dyondzo ya moya* in *Xitsonga* or *go ithuta ka ga semowa* in *Setswana*, loosely translated as *the study of the psyche* or *the soul*. In traditional African communities, *ku dyondza hi swa moya* or *go ithuta ka tsa semowa* entails an attempt to understand different interacting systems of life in broad and wholeness sense. According to Grills (2002) such "psychology" entails self-definition, spirit, nature, metaphysical interconnectedness and communal order and self-knowledge. *Ku ti dyondza hi swa moya* or *go ithuta ka tsa semowa* encompasses various cultural practices, knowledge systems, religion as well as ways of responding to life's issues in the world. *Dyondzo ya moya* or *thuto ya semowa* embodies education and learning about life, or the study of life in its totality and intricate forms, understood as *dyondzo ya swa vutomi* or *thuto ya tsa botshelo*. *Dyondzo ya moya* or *thuto ya semowa* is not a subject or course that intellectually deals with some areas of functioning in people, which can be studied in isolation, devoid of lived experiences. It represents Africans' communal day-to-day life experiences which are inextricably linked to their cosmology. When we talk *dyondzo ya moya* or *thuto ya semowa* in the African sense we are referring to *moya* as it relates to *vutomi* or *botshelo*, or *impilo*, life. P.M. Sebate (personal communication, May 7, 2008), in supporting this indivisible relationship between *moya* and *botshelo* posits that "*semowa sa motho se tsamaisana le botshelo jwa gagwe*", the soul of a person is linked to his/ her life. *Vutomi* or *botshelo* cannot be experienced unless there is *moya*, therefore *moya* is a necessary condition for one *ku hanya* or *go tshela*, to be alive. However, how people lead and experience their life is based on certain belief systems and these beliefs guide their cultural practices and rituals. *Dyondzo ya moya* or *thuto ya semowa*, "psychology", forms



part of this community of ritual practices and belief systems. In this sense *tumelo ya semowa*, “*spiritual belief*”, is inextricably linked to people’s religion. *Spirit(uality)/ psyche religion* shapes ways by which people conduct their *impilo*, *vutomi* or *botshelo*. *Spirituality* and religion are deeply embedded in people’s cultures based on a specific social ecology. One cannot fully comprehend peoples’ *thuto ya semowa* or *dyondzo ya swa moya*, “psychology” and *go alafa semowa*, “psychotherapy” unless such understanding is situated within their culture, religion, and belief systems. We now turn to the relationship between *spirit(uality)* and religion.

### The Concept of “God” and Religion in the African Ontology

B.L.M. Motsatsi (personal communication, May 9, 2008), M.D. Mothoagae (personal communication, May 13, 2008) and N. Masuku (personal communication, May 13, 2008) argue that Africans have their own unique conception of religion and belief systems that guide their existence and ways of responding to life issues. Accordingly, Africans’ conception of “God” is totally different from that of the West. According to Masubelele (in press), traditional Zulu people used the terms *uNkulunkulu* (the Great-Great) or *uMvelingqangi* (the First-to-Appear) interchangeably to refer to the Supreme Being. *Swa moya* or *tsa semoya*, “*spirituality*”, cannot be understood without relating it to people’s conception of their Supreme Being. This Supreme Being is believed to be responsible for the provision of *umoya* or *moya* which gives human beings their *vutomi*, *botshelo*, *impilo* or life status. The Western conception of this Supreme Being is of the invisible “God” who is the creator of the world, and exists in a separate and different ontology ... the omnipotent, omniscient, omnibenevolent, all-wise and eternal “God” (Wiredu, 2002).

On the contrary, Wiredu (2002, p. 21) argues that the African conception of this Supreme Being is “... that He, together with the world constitutes the spatio-temporal ‘totality’ of existence ... because he is not apart from the universe”. For Africans, interdependence in the form of communal and cosmic co-existence is the driving force behind effective relations between people, their environment and this Supreme Being (the First-to-Appear). Byaruhanga-Akiiki (1988) and Bujo (1998) do not focus on the linguistic nuances of the Supreme Being, they used the term “God”. However, they also support the African understanding that views “God” to

exist among and with the people. He is not aloof and separate from his subjects. According to Byaruhanga-Akiiki, “God” is seen as the ancestor number one in West Africa. It is important to note that Bujo and Byaruhanga-Akiiki’s understanding of the concept “God” correlates with *Modimo* in Setswana or Sesotho, *Xikwembu* in Xitsonga, *Uthixo* in Xhosa, *Mudzimu* in Venda or *uNkulunkulu* in Zulu.

In the context of this study and the ontological linguistic argument advanced in this chapter, we would like to argue that the Western conception of “God” is not the same as the African conception of *uMvelingqangi* in Zulu or *Lowe* in Setswana. Essentially, Bujo and Byaruhanga-Akiiki have adopted the Western concept “God”, and translated it into the African equivalence. This is misleading because the First-to-Appear is not “God” of the West. The translation or the avoidance of using vernacular terms in reference to the Supreme Being has to be viewed within the West’s missionary colonial preoccupation to conquer Africa. In this regard Masubelele (in press), argues that “the concept of the Supreme Being was originally known by the Zulu people and was changed and cast into a Christian mould, using foreign terms, on the basis that using vernacular terms might convey unbiblical connotations about God ... . The missionaries perceived the use of traditional terms as inappropriate, and that their use would contaminate the Christian concept of God of the Bible because of their association with Zulu religious practices such as ancestor worship and creation myths”. It is on this basis that we argue that the Biblical conception of God is not and cannot be equated to *Lowe/uMvelingqangi*.

*uMvelingqangi* or *Lowe* (the First-to-Appear) is believed to be the “father” of Africans’ *tumelo ya ntlha*, the first belief, and is at the core of the African religion M. Aphane (personal communication, November 16, 2007), B.L.M. Motsatsi (personal communication, May 9, 2008) and N. Masuku (personal communication, May 13, 2008). Legend and stories have it that *uMvelingqangi* or *Lowe* is the first Supreme Being to appear on earth from time immemorial. He co-exists with His people and the living-dead on the same horizontal relational plane. *uMvelingqangi* is human, *munhu* or *motho*, whose origin nobody knows. His existence and influence on the cosmos is believed to be imminent and real.

This religious dimension of the African understanding of reality means that “God” is always linked to all attempts to explain experience including the healing of affected individuals. In this way illness from the African perspective is conceived as a spiritual affliction manifesting itself in physical pain or sentimental discomfort. Accordingly, healing can be complete only if it treats both the spiritual and the physical aspects of illness.

To advance the African belief of the existence of The First-to-Appear above, the morphological analysis of the term *uMvelingqangi* (personal noun) by M.R. Masubelele (personal communication, August 14, 2008) and K.G. Nkumane (personal communication, August 14, 2008) is provided:

1. *um* = class 1 noun prefix of *magoro a /ditlhopha tsa maina*. *U-(muntu)* or *mo-(tho)*, here the prefix a substantive noun = person. 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. 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 at the same time, *ukuvela* from nowhere, is evoked. Appearing from nowhere is ubiquitous. *uMvelingqangi* is present everywhere but nowhere, if He were to be found this would bind Him to the limits of space, place and time. The place/space where *umveli* comes from and the time at which He appeared is not known by anyone.
4. Since nobody knows, then we talk about the unknown unknowable.

When we consider the idea of present everywhere from nowhere in 3 above, and unknown unknowable in 4 together, it emerges that *Lowe* is coterminous with time and space. The space inhabited by *Lowe* is therefore larger and older than that of our planet “earth” as it cannot be tied to a particular time frame. Thus *Lowe* does not come from somewhere to planet “earth”. He is, instead, already IN and through planet earth. Understood in this way, *Lowe/uMvelingqangi* is the African philosophic way to anthropologise the Supreme Being, making Him a *motho*, a person, and thereafter ascribing to Him qualities that no other human being has, for example,

- a) infinity
- b) eternity
- c) ubiquitousness (omnipresence).

Thus the Supreme Being in this understanding is the ineffable that may not be spoken of.

*Lowe* or *uMvelinqqangi*'s presence cannot be proved in Western rational terms, but is visible through His dialogical and relational influence on His subjects and their environment. It is for this reason that we argue that the African *uMvelinqqangi* relates and heals through dialogical engagement, not mystery. *uMvelinqqangi* and *tsa semowa* or "spirituality" are inextricably linked and constitute the foundation of the African conception of religion. According to traditional African thought, there is no one above *Lowe*. He commands such respect that *ga a rogiwe* B.L.M. Motsatsi (personal communication, May 9, 2008), cannot be sworn at or ridiculed. Therefore *uMvelinqqangi* or *Lowe* is an integral part of the community of human beings. Although powerful and highly respected, *uMvelinqqangi* does not possess the power to punish, but he inflicts pain to the living as a way of communicating something significant. The African *uMvelinqqangi* takes no pleasure in killing because, whoever dies, and their *moya* will join Him in the form of the "living-dead".

#### Bosemowa, "Spirituality" "Defined"

Byaruhanga-Akiiki (1988, p. 15) defines "spirituality" as "a total life experience of a people such as their religious, social, political and economic sphere of life, their entire culture". Accordingly, these human dimensions, as Byaruhanga-Akiiki argues, are not in themselves separated one from the other in Africa. It is rather believed that, to the Africans, their *bosemoya*, "spirituality", is indivisibly linked to their fore-fathers, known as *badimo* or *amadlozi*. Traditional Africans do not conceive reality in a divided physical and *bosemoya* dualism. In this instance, *bosemowa* defines people's total engagement and relationship with their fellow human beings, the living-dead and *uMvelinqqangi*.

Contrary to this understanding, Tshenkeng (1988, p. 29) defines *spirituality* as “the belief, attitudes and practices of believers, during their endeavour to reach out towards super-natural beings ... *spirituality* simply means ones relationship with ones God or spirits”. According to *A dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, quoted in Skhakhane (1988, p. 4) the word *spirituality* describes “those attitudes, beliefs and practices which animate people’s lives and help them to reach out towards super-sensible realities...interior life and life of the soul”. The problem we have with Tshenkeng’s definition is that he approaches and presents “*spirituality*” in an *either/or* dualistic manner, in which “God” and “spirits” are distinctly separate from each other, and in a way that positions “God” above *bosemowa*. *A Dictionary of Spirituality* divides “*spirituality*” into “interior life” and “life of the soul”. Traditional African thought sees “*uMvelinqqangi or Lowe*” and “*bosemoya*” in wholeness terms, where *uMvelinqqangi* the Supreme Being, is above the living and the living-dead. On this basis, *Lowe* or *uMvelinqqangi* is an invisible Being inhabiting the ontology of invisible beings.

In the same logic, if *spirit(uality)* describes those attitudes, beliefs and practices which animate people’s lives and help them to reach out to those supersensible realities, then to fragment them constitutes dualism and contradicts the idea of wholeness as conceived by Africans. In a much more inclusive and consistent definition, Skhakhane (1988, p. 13) posits that “*spirituality* is not a reflection of God and Trinity, *spirituality* is what each community has accepted as a basic principle for the welfare and therefore a driving force of their action in an attempt to attain that very goal in life”

In all the above definitions of “*spirit(uality)*”, the key concepts are *wholeness*, *life experiences*, *visible ontology* and *relationships*. Life can only be experienced in a relationship at the ontological level. If “*spirituality*” were to be divided into “interior life” and “life of the soul”, then “*bosemoya*” would have to be “divided” into two contradictory and irreconcilable ontologies.

P.H. Nkuna (personal communication, May 27, 2008), argues that “Africans do not conceptualise *moya* outside life itself, therefore *ku dyondza hi swa moya*, the study of the *spirit* or *psyche* embodies *kudyondza hi swa vutomi* and *moya*”. Therefore *dyondzo ya swa moya* is more

than the study of the *psyche* (mind and body) in the Western sense. The Western fragmented view of healing does not resonate with the African concept of healing, *kalafi ya semowa, ukwelaswa ko moya, ku tshunguriwa/horisiwa moya*, loosely translated as *spiritual rehabilitation* or *healing* or what is referred to as “psychotherapy”. The African conception of *dyondzo ya swa moya* encompasses people’s understanding of life issues, including their religion, culture, traditional practices and rituals in the broader cosmic networks of relationships. In this sense, *thuto ya semoya* or *dyondzo ya moya* refers to the intricate networks of people’s interaction with their cosmology. A disturbance in these networks of relationships constitutes *bolwetse/vuvabyi*, ill-health. B.L.M. Motsatsi (personal communication, May 9, 2008), argues that “*go alafa go tsamaelana le tumelo le meetlo e e rileng mo MaAferikeng*”, *spiritual* healing is consistent with certain religious beliefs and cultural practices among Africans. *Swa moya* or *tsa semowa* is in our view the daily driving force towards people’s peaceful co-existence with themselves, the others and their environment. *uMvelangqangi* or *Lowe* forms an indivisible part of this ontology. We will now discuss the African conception and practice of the healing process, *ku alaphiwa moya* or *kalafi ya semowa*.

#### The African Conception of *ku alaphiwa moya/ kalafi ya semowa*

In traditional African thought, *moya, bolwetse* or *vuvabyi*, illness, and *go alafa* or *ku alapha*, healing, is relationally conceived. *Ku alaphiwa moya* or *kalafi ya semowa* from the African epistemological paradigm is much broader than the Western professional definition of psychotherapy. Healing of any kind, emotional, physical, cognitive and behavioural, is always understood in relation to their context and the influence of higher cosmic forces. *Bolwetse* or *vuvabyi*, illness or “*spiritual*” disturbance of any kind, is seen by traditional Africans as a representation of relationships in distress and unpleasant human experiences. These human experiences are indivisibly linked to their ecology in such a way that a disturbance in one of these areas or parts will inevitably affect *bosemoya* of that person. *Bosemoya* represents the overall existence of a human being and is inextricably linked to people’s relationships with fellow human beings and their cosmic world. Similarly, healing or intervention is located within a network of intricate and interdependent relationships at different levels.

The above conception of be-ing constitutes the basis on which Africans understand healing and respond to illness. For traditional Africans healing and illness are the results of troubled relationships. Invariably, troubled relationships affect *bosemowa* of a person. Therefore an afflicted person is likely to have his/her *moya* disturbed. A disturbed or hurt *moya* requires *kalafi ya semowa*, spiritual healing by *ngaka ya semowa*, a spiritual healer M.D. Mothoagae (personal communication, May 13, 2008).

According to P.H. Nkuna (personal communication, May 27, 2008), there are different levels and ways of responding to a fellow human being's misery, pain and hurt. The empathic, supportive and humane way of helping or visiting a person in distress is known as *ku chavelela* in Xitsonga. Nkuna maintains that *ku chavelela* provides the "spiritual" healing experience or *kalafi ya semowa* and takes different forms on different levels. During difficult times such as when one's house has been broken into and goods stolen, the *Shangaan* people would respond to such situations by *hi ku chavelela*, a supportive visit to a person in distress. Nkuna identifies three levels of *ku chavelela*:

1. *Ku vulavula /the conversational level*. At this level, friends and neighbours visit the victim of crime and provide a conversational space. A close relative or neighbour may come for a sleep over to spend time talking to the victim. This allows the victim to vent his or her feelings resulting from and associated with the traumatic experience.
2. *Ku pfunana/the helping-hand level*. At this level, people literally bring items that will serve as consolation or replacements for some of the stolen goods. A friend may for example bring a radio or a television set which will assist the victim to still experience some comfort despite the loss.
3. *Ku phahla level*. This level entails the belief that the misery or break-in happened as a form of punishment meted by the living-dead. Visitors perform the ritual *yo phahla*, appeasing the living dead, singing and beating drums. In this way, they are responding to the living-dead, communicating with them at an interactive level. Nkuna argues that these levels of intervention *swi horisa moya*, are very "therapeutic" and are premised on the philosophy of ubuntu, a genuine concern and empathy for fellow human beings.

M.D. Mothoagae (personal communication, May 13, 2008) gives yet another intervention of *kalafi ya semowa*, by citing an example of how most Africans would help very young children whose mother died. He further adds that in this case, an old lady would whisper in the ears of these children when they are fast asleep at night: “*Mmalona ga a yo, o tseerwe ke phiri*”, your mother is not here, she has been taken away by a wolf. It is believed that once this ritual has been performed, these children would never ask of their late mother’s whereabouts again. Mothoagae also supports Nkuna’s conversational level intervention, but he gives the example of a woman whose husband passed away. According to traditional African culture, the widower does not stay alone because such an act *ga se botho*, it is inhuman. In such a situation, designated women would keep the widower company for days, weeks and in some instances months to provide the necessary conversational support day and night. During this time, the deceased learns new coping skills while she gets the support of experienced women. It is precisely for this reason that in traditional African thinking, ethically, the elderly are not taken to old age homes because they are seen as providing guidance and life wisdom to the younger generations (Bujo, 1998).

*Ku ongola/alaphiwa moya*, in Xitsonga, *kalafi ya semowa* in Setswana or *ukwelapha ko moya* in Zulu and Western *psychotherapy* are two totally different procedures. The conception of illness and *kalafi ya semowa* from the African perspective and Western therapy suggest two diverse cultural philosophic systems. For traditional Africans, healing is a complex process of connectedness between various cosmic forces and is inextricably linked to people’s belief system and religion. An illness or disturbance in one’s *moya* needs *kalafi ya semowa*, *ku alaphiwa moya*, “*spiritual*” intervention.

From the traditional African belief system, no meaningful and effective healing will take place, unless the intervention recognises and integrates all systems in the network of relationships. Healing is therefore much broader than relieving the individual body from its physical and emotive pain. Illness is not understood only in terms of its physicality, but as a symptom of disturbed relationships between people, people and their environment and between people and their supreme cosmic forces. Heavy emphasis is put on the relational quality between these interacting systems (Sogolo, 2002; Van Wolputte et al. 2002). Let us consider the following expressions to demonstrate this point. In Northern Sotho or Setswana, when a person is receiving



treatment, the expression is, *Motho o a alafiwa*, in Xitsonga, *Munhu wa alaphiwa*, in Zulu, *umuntu uyelaswa*, translated as, *a person is receiving treatment*. There is no such thing as *tlhogo e a alafiwa* or *nhloko ya alaphiwa*, translated as *the headache is treated*. Even if the person has a headache, it is the person's headache that is treated, not headache in isolation from the person. It is for this reason for example, that Africans do not treat part of the human being, but the wholistic, relational, historical-cultural and contextual being. A traditional healer will for example not treat the "body" or the "mind" of a patient, but the living person. On the basis of the foregoing, *kalafi ya semowa* or *ukulaphiwa ko moya* "psychotherapy" in African philosophic terms is inconceivable and meaningless without the recognition and inclusion of *badimo* or *the living-dead*. The living-dead are seen as the intermediaries between the living and *uMvelinqangi* or *Lowe*. This chain of unbreakable networks of relatedness is seen as key to healthy and harmonious co-existence of this triadic existence.

Clearly, if we were to limit and conceptualise *kalafi ya semowa* in the Western psychotherapy conception sense, the levels and processes of engagement and healing indicated by P.H. Nkuna (personal communication, May 27, 2008) and M.D. Mothoagae (personal communication, May 13, 2008) would be reduced to technocratic and mechanical intervention techniques. In the final analysis, *kalafi ya semowa* does not dispense with the Western conception of psychotherapy. Nkuna and Mothoagae's wholistic approach to illness or life trauma form the nerve fibre of the African conception of the healing process.

### Construction and Adoption of Appropriate Terminology in the Healing Process

The university setup, for example its buildings, administrative procedures, graduation ceremonies, curriculum, library, lecturing methods, and examination processes to mention but a few, defines and determines the epistemology upon which the university is based. Similarly, the conceptualisation of learning, the content of the learning material, theories to be taught and academic standards have to be consistent with the epistemological foundations on which the university is established. However, in many African universities and in South Africa in particular, the content in the psychology curriculum is disproportionately alien to the African existential realities and worldview. The prescribed learning materials in most South African universities are

based on American and European cultural experiences. It is for this reason that we argue against the alienation of indigenous African experience from the learning curriculum.

During colonial and apartheid rule years and, ironically, even in the democratic era, the content of psychology learning and training material continues to use Western conventions, prescriptions and standards of teaching and learning. This status quo remains because, as the claim goes, there are little or no written “psychotherapy” books on Africans. We dispute this dubious argument about “little or insufficient” written materials on indigenous experiences. The many artworks, sculptures, trajectories, stories and songs which have such important teaching values, meaning and healing effect, just prove the abundant traditional knowledge base we have. This claim suggests that indigenous people do not possess knowledge, experience and culture. This can only be true if we use Western standards and methods of knowledge production and preservation, to evaluate Africa’s existence and worth. This view is maintained in the unsubstantiated claim that Africans “do not write adequately”. The more than 70% of Africans who “consult” *dingaka* and practice their cultural traditions in their households is enough evidence that indigenous healing practices constitute a greater part of African *kalafi ya semowa* or *ku alaphiwa ka moya*.

Consistent with the African understanding of *bolwetse* or *vuvabyi*, illness and healing, we propose the use of the Sesotho term *ngaka ya semowa* or in Xitsonga *nganga ya ximoya* (and not psychologist or psychotherapist) when dealing with issues pertaining to *bosemowa* or “spirituality”. *Ngaka ya semowa* or *nganga ya ximoya* should be used because *psychotherapist* and *ngaka ya semowa* conceptually and operationally refer to two different ontological realities and healing processes.

### *Bongaka* or *byinganga* in the African Context

The Western conception of doctor, loosely translated as *inyanga/ngaka* is fragmented according to specialities. An example provided by Gordon (2001, p. 171) of “the Zulu noun *inyanga* used for ‘traditional’ doctor and *udokotela* for ‘modern’ doctor” indicates this fragmentation embodied in some linguistic translations. Gordon argues that usually Bantu

languages have different nouns for African “traditional” and “modern” doctors. What Gordon seems not to realise is that *inyanga* is a Zulu concept conceptualised from within lived Zulu cultural experiences. It is therefore a word consistent with the Zulu culture and ontology. *Udokotela* on the other hand is not a Zulu concept, it is Zulunised and translated from the English term “doctor”. *Inyanga* and *doctor* are conceived from two distinctly different ontologies and epistemological paradigms, and cannot therefore mean the same thing. To position *inyanga* at the level of *udokotela* is to underestimate the real meaning and intensity of *inyanga* and the healing practice embodied in the Zulu traditional culture. This systematic subjugation, downgrading and simplification of the richness embodied in traditional African concepts should no longer find expression in our *thuto ya semowa* or *dyondzo ya swa moya* texts.

At this stage it is both vital and appropriate to clarify the use of the term *ngaka*, *inyanga* or *nganga*. Although the Zulu *inyanga* and *uDocokotela* may mean different things operationally, it is interesting that in Setswana, the concept *ngaka* captures the Western meaning of doctor, depending on the context within which it is used. The phrase *ke ya ngakeng* may mean I am going to the doctor or traditional healer. We are also fully aware of the different classifications of “types of (di)ngaka” in the African context (Setiloane, 1975, p. 46). However, in the interest of the scope of this study, we will discuss *bongaka* as a generic term. M.K. Mothoagae (personal communication, September 13, 2007) argues that the different classifications of *dingaka*, for example those that use *ditaola* (bones) and those that use *bo semowa* and relational influences, *ngaka ya sedupe* or *ngaka e tshojwa*, do not necessarily suggest that some are more effective than others, but rather indicates different approaches to healing. The process of *bongaka* is here not fragmented into specialties as in the Western conception of the term, that is, those “professionals” that only specialise in the treatment of the “body”, the “emotions”, the “spirit” or the “mind” of the person. These specialities fragment a human being into separate entities of studies and treatment and are therefore not wholistic. The realisation of this cultural imperative requires that Africans revert back to practising and engaging in community rituals that connect them with their *badimo/amdlozi* and ontology.

## Community Rituals and the Healing Process

The essence of healing rituals can best be illustrated by observing two systems, the Western graduation degree awarding ceremony and the *African go tswa* in Setswana, or in Xitsonga *Ku teke nyongo*, “Coming out ceremony”. It is common these days for a university or college graduate to attend a graduation ceremony with just one member of the family in attendance or alone for that matter to receive the certificate. The certificate then becomes a confirmation of the graduate’s success. In most cases no rituals are performed, except the ostensibly uninvolved mechanical awarding of the certificate, accompanied by the controlled and, at times incongruent and staged, clapping of hands. For argument’s sake, let us assume that the graduation ceremony is in itself a ritual. This ritual or achievement is often seen as the graduate’s individual efforts. The complex connections and contributions of other systems that have constituted the immediate and *bo semowa*, “spiritual” world of the graduate are recognised, but they are not regarded as necessary conditions for the accomplishments of the individual, the graduate, the *self*. According to this Western paradigm, the individual or self in isolation has certainly used his/her thoughts and ideas, which were translated into knowledge that resulted in the individual obtaining the certificate or qualification. This view is maintained by the modern tendency of defining a person in terms of self-actualisation and individual performance. In this individualistic approach, the person takes precedence over community influence and contribution.

By contrast, in traditional African thought, achievement can never be attributed to an individual, but to the family and community. The relational dimension and dynamic of being forms an important ethic in the person’s existence, because as Bujo (2003, p. 22) states, “to be human always means sharing life with others”. According to Placide Tempels quoted in Bujo (2003, p. 113), “the Bantu cannot conceive of ... the human person as an independent being standing on his own. Every human person, every individual is as it were one link in a chain of vital forces; a living link both exercising and receiving influence, a link that establishes the bond with previous generations and with the forces that support his own existence. The individual is necessarily an individual adhering to the clan”. Any achievement finds symbolic expression through family, clan and community rituals such as *mphahlo* in Xitsonga or *ukuphahla* in Zulu,

appeasing the living-dead or showing appreciation for their support and influence in the achievement.

Most indigenous people locate achievement within its particular social context. The individual is defined in terms of genealogy, family, tribe, community and clan. Therefore individuals carry the clan, community and family identity with them and, in this sense their behaviour, good or bad, is attributed to these levels of communal organisations. If an individual achieves good things or does bad things, the question mostly asked is *ke ngwana wa ga mang?* translated as, whose child is she/he? This question seeks to relate the individual's behaviour, achievement or mischief in their family of origin, community or clan. In Southern Africa, the term *ubuntu* indicates the way in which individual identity is identified and acknowledged in terms of the community to which the individual belongs (Drummond, 2006; Mkhize, 2004). In the same way, knowledge is not understood as an abstract isolated activity, but rather as a lived experience that reflects the cultural network structures such as politics, economics and *ditumelo* or cultural beliefs. Life events such as birth giving and training as *ngaka ya semowa* are celebrated in the form of family and community rituals. In some communities these rituals imply the coming into being or the introduction of a new person in the family, clan, community and cosmic network. We will use the ritual of *ku teka nyongo*, "the coming out" ceremony, to demonstrate the communal nature of rituals. *Rituals are cultural beliefs and forms of expressions and connections performed by individuals, groups of people or communities in communication with the living-dead and the Supreme Being.*

#### *Ku teka nyongo by rithwasana as a Ritual*

Contrary to the earlier Western university scenario we sketched, B. Semanya (personal communication, April 25, 2007), states that the "Coming out ceremony", *go tswa* or *ku teka nyongo (the final test)* is seen by most Africans as a healing ritual which gives birth to new meaning and direction to the social discourse of the family and community. *Go tswa* or *ku teka nyongo* is an intense and rigorous ritual of introducing a person that has just gone through the process of *go thwasa* to the family, clan and community. The knowledge that *lethwasana* possesses is not his or her personal achievement, instead, it is to be used for the benefit of the

community. This is how knowledge has to be understood in traditional African healing contexts. Knowledge is a shared treasure that emerges from community experience that must enrich community stability and health. *Lethwasana* is thus a servant of the people. This introductory ritual serves to declare to the community that there is a newly transformed member who will serve as a link or agent between the community and the living-dead.

*Ku teka nyongo* is the final “examination” to determine if *lethwasana* is indeed connected ka *boosedimo* with the living-dead. *Ku teka nyongo* means *go tsaya sedimo*, that is, to incorporate the spiritual beingness passed onto *lethwasana* by the living-dead. In traditional African thought there are two significant parts in an animal that are designated for *ku teka nyongo* or *go tsaya nyoko*, and these are blood and gall bladder. According to B. Semanya (personal communication, October 24, 2008), Africans do not shy away from blood because blood signifies life and gall bladder signifies *sedimo*, “spirituality”. The gall bladder therefore connects *xingomantanda* “spiritually” with the living-dead. By finding the hidden gall bladder, this becomes proof and an indication that *lethwasana* is successfully accepted and connected with the living-dead. On the other hand, if *lethwasana* does not locate the hidden gall bladder this is, according to Semanya, an indication that *swikwembu swi ti fihlele xingomantanda* or *badimo ba iphitlhetse lethwasana*, ancestors do not want to reveal themselves to *lethwasana*. *Ku teka nyongo* successfully depends on the connection *lethwasana* has with the living-dead. It is for this reason that when Africans communicate and appeal to the living-dead to reveal themselves *bosemowa* will say, “*lona ke lona le bonang*”, meaning, the ancestors are the ones who know and can see beyond the naked eye, the invisible. Therefore the slaughtering of an animal has communal *bosemowa*, (spiritual) significance beyond the mere physical activity, the intention of which is to end up in people eating the meat.

The ritual is characterised by the collective involvement of family members, community members, the masters, *govelas*, qualified *dingaka*, those who have been there before and *moya ya swikwembu* in Xitsonga or *mewa ya badimo* in Setswana. This process follows a very long time of initiation, which we will not discuss in detail here. The training to become *ngaka* can take anything between two to six years, during which the apprentice or *lethwasana* stays with and gets supervision from the *govela* or master (Setiloane, 1975). *Lethwasana* stays in training until

he/she can start working independently and *appear*, “*go tlhaga*”. At this point he/she is called *letlhagana*. As part of an ongoing evaluation process which continually takes place during training, a gall bladder is hidden for the *lethwasana* or *xingomantanda* or *rithwasana* in Xitsonga, to identify and reveal to the community audience.

It must be pointed out here that although *xingomantanda* and *rithwasani* are synonyms, one cannot directly use the word *xingomantanda* when addressing the *rithwasani* since this word has a derogatory meaning towards the *rithwasani*. It is, however, permissible for two people to refer to *rithwasana* as *xingomantanda* in their absence. *Swikwembu* or *badimo* are invited to join the ceremony through the sacrificial offering such as slaughtering an animal and spilling of blood. This ritual includes drumming, dancing, singing and ululations. This process does not follow any predetermined formula and behavioural prescriptions. It is not a mechanically manipulated and controlled process. It is for this reason, for example, that during this ritual, it is not known who of the *dingaka* that previously went through *twasa* training will go into a trance. It is therefore possible, depending on the memories that the drums and songs evoke, that several people may go into a trance simultaneously, and start speaking in “tongues”. *Dingaka* and some of the relatives do, however, understand these languages as they are connected by *moya* to *badimo*. Messages from the living-dead are thus conveyed to appropriate people during this phase of the trance. The drums and dance have a communication value to the audience and participants. They create a context of connections, because the living-dead or *badimo* hear and connect with the *govelas* and *lethwasana* through drumming as their communication mode. For *lethwasana* to successfully identify the gall bladder, she or he needs very strong relationship connections with their *semowa*. It is presumed that these connections will give *lethwasana* clues and guidance to the hidden gall bladder. This process constitutes the *invivo* evaluation of *lethwasana* in the presence of the community. In this way, *lethwasana*’s transition to become *ngaka* is witnessed and endorsed by the community the *lethwasana* will be serving. Community thus becomes the context that defines *bongaka* and healing. Being *ngaka* and the healing activities cannot be performed outside family and community context. The knowledge and expertise that *ngaka* possesses are a shared community treasure that places *ngaka* in a framework of family, community and *bosemowa* networks.

## The Meaning of the Hidden Gall Bladder Ritual

The belief here is that *moya*, which is an essential life force, connects *lethwasana* the community, the living-dead and *uMvelinqangi*. Through *bosemoya* or “spiritual guide”, which connects *lethwasana*, the living-dead and *uMvelinqangi*, then *lethwasana*, will be guided by these higher forces to locate the hidden gall bladder. In this sense, *lethwasana* or *xingomantanda* power to locate the gall bladder rests with the living-dead. *Xingomantanda* is a messenger who performs what the living-dead want, who direct him/her what to do. The living-dead’s power is experienced and revealed through *xingomantanda* whose task is to carry their wishes and directives. Finding a gall bladder will firstly be indicative of their prospective healing competencies, and secondly, it demonstrates their unbreakable connections with the living-dead and *uMvelinqangi* or *Lowe* as their Great-Great Ancestor. Thirdly, the gall bladder is then tied on their head, as a sign of recognition, identification and an entry into the field of healers. But their training continues as they are expected to work closely with an experienced *govela* for several years after training. The gall bladder on the head symbolises a rebirth and “professional” identification of the newly qualified *ngaka*. Failure to identify the gall bladder during the evaluation ritual or ceremony implies that *lethwasana* will be taken back to the *govela* or *inyanga* for further training, until a satisfactory level of healing proficiency is achieved, finding the hidden gall bladder being a prerequisite. On the other hand, success in identifying the gall bladder intensifies the belief that this *bosemoya* “ancestral spirits” will guide *lethwasana* to effectively identify, “diagnose” and treat clients or patients’ undisclosed diseases or problems effectively in practice.

*Lethwasana* or *xingomantanda* remains unqualified until he/she has taken the *examination* “in vivo”, and experientially demonstrated through this *ritual of transformation that they are effective and competent*. This ceremony then becomes a collective confirmation that the *lethwasana* or *xingomantanda* is now a qualified *ngaka*, *nganga*, or *inyanga*. It is important to state that this ceremony is not only for *go tswa* or *ku teka nyongo* of the *rithwasana*. It is also used as a means to communicate, celebrate, heal, connect all these different levels of the systems, *ku phahla swikwembu* or *go phasa badimo*, and to celebrate the *emergence of a transformed* new individual, *ngaka*. The community then rejoice in the bonds of their connected common



humanity. The practical indication of the existence of these connections manifests and takes place through the rituals of *ku phahla swikwembu* or *go phasa badimo*.

### *Ku Phahla Swikwembu* or *Go Phasa Badimo* Ritual

It is also critical to indicate that in the African traditional belief system, the process of *go phasa badimo* or *ku phahla swikwembu*, translated as *to appease ancestors*, is not only carried out at the graveside where the ancestors are buried. It can also be performed at home in a designated place. However, someone from the family must drag *rihlampfu* in Xitsonga, a branch of a tree from the grave-side to this designated place called *gandzelo*. The belief in this ritual is that by dragging the tree branch, *ku koka rihlampfu*, the ancestors are *physically* brought home, to be among family members and to be accessible. This is how the living, the living-dead and *uMvelingqangi* live in the same ontology. The *gandzelo* is then treated as a very sacred place, visited only on special occasions when performing rituals that require the attention, participation and endorsement of the living-dead. This kind of ritual locates and connects *lethwasana* with the community of the living, the living dead and the cosmic realm. It positions community at the centre of all ritual activities. The ritual is also a further indication that in the traditional African thinking, we do not heal the individual but the relationship between people. Gatherings such as *ku phahla swikwembu* have healing effects, and are “therapeutic” and meaningful to most Africans.

### Rituals in Relation to Personhood and Community

To fully understand and appreciate the process of healing in traditional African thought, it is critical to explain how personhood and community are conceptualised in this epistemological paradigm. Unlike Western fragmented modes of thinking, relatedness, collaboration and interdependence are central in locating personhood in community. This relatedness extends beyond people’s interaction and further includes their engagement with the community of the living-dead and *uMvelangqangi*. According to Mkhize (2004, p. 47) “because of the interdependence between individuals and the community, personhood cannot be defined solely in terms of physical and psychological attributes. It is through participation in a community that a

person finds meaning in life”. In the above discussion, a human being is relationally as well as contextually defined and understood in wholeness terms. Relational in the African understanding means being in space in a three dimensional way, that is, being connected to the yet-to-be-born, the living and the living-dead. Ramose (1999, p. 64) argues that “African traditional thought defines personhood in terms of wholeness. The African concept of a person as wholeness does not deny human individuality as an ontological fact, as an analytic finitude, but ascribes ontological primacy to the community through which the human individual comes to know both himself and the world around him”.

The ritualistic process as discussed above does not evolve through mystery. All the activities described occur through active dialogical engagement of the different ontologically connected systems. We now discuss the process of *bongaka*, and healing.

### Bongaka and Healing

Illness or *vuvabyi* in Xitsonga, from the point of view of *nganga* or *ngaka* is not, in the first place, interpreted as some accidental *foreign moya*, or any other physical bacteria or virus that invades the individual’s *body* or *spirit*. Illness is interpreted in terms of its relatedness to other life forces. In support of this view Mkhize (2004, p. 43) argues that “life forces are constantly in interaction with each other. It is possible for unknown forces to intervene in the order of events without our awareness”.

The practice of *bongaka* or *byinganga* entails healing people through relationship influence. Even if medication is used, the aim is sometimes to protect bad relationship influences that manifest in physical ailments or behavioural symptoms. From the traditional African ontology, illness is a symptom of disturbed or dysfunctional relationships with one’s ecology. To be *ngaka* or *inyanga* is not an individual’s prerogative; it is a sacred choice made by the living-dead and has a very strong communicative value in the family system. *Ngaka* is an agent of the living-dead who are assumed to have all the powers to dictate the failures and successes of the healing process. It is for this reason that when the afflicted *va yima-yima* or *ba batlisisa*, the first step is to pay what is in Northern Sotho called *khunolla moraba*, in Tshivenda, *luputulula thevhele*. This

is not the Western consultation fee, but a symbolic gesture. Here permission is sought from the living-dead to enter the healing space that connects the *ku yima-yima* context with the invisible ontology. Only after this can *ngaka* proceed with the divination of *go laola* and *go tlhatlhoba* or *ku hlahluba*.

The process of becoming *ngaka* is identifiable in many different ways such as getting sick, behaving in an odd manner or even becoming psychotic. Such behaviour is interpreted as an indication that the afflicted person has been chosen by the living-dead to be *nganga*. As such, the sacred healing knowledge is therefore not accessible to everyone through theoretical knowledge, science-oriented thought system and technical textbook training (Bodibe, 1988; Chavunduka, 1994; D.K. Koka (personal communication, September 22, 2004). A deeper understanding of the value and meaning that imbue relationships is very critical in becoming *inyanga*.

From the African philosophy viewpoint, this engagement implies that the relationship between the living and the living-dead is relationally and existentially defined. Secondly, this understanding of relating is not readily available to controllability, measurability and provability generally offered by categories of explanation associated with rational scientific systems of thought. On this basis, it may well be seen as misleading, irrational, meaningless or untrue by those who subscribe to the rationality-driven Western thinking. We do not necessarily see these different conceptions of relationships as negative. On the contrary, our view is that since every culture has its own model of explanation, the African conception of relationships creates possibilities for a context sensitive praxis, more inclusive and comprehensive of alternative explanations.

If we move from this premise, the West and Africa can each use their different and preferred models of explanation of consultation, diagnosis and healing, thereby render the superiority of one over the other irrelevant (Sogolo, 2002). Under such conditions, the ideal situation would be for these knowledge systems to appreciate their differences and the richness embodied in diversity. In this way their engagement would be respectful and at equal dialogical levels, and not as in the current situation where the West has imposed itself as the only superior and authentic psychotherapy explanatory model over other indigenous knowledge systems.

## Explanatory Modes of Problems and the Healing Context

To consult, in the general use of the word, means seeking information or advice from someone, who supposedly has some higher competencies and knowledge in the area of one's interest. From the Western paradigm, consultation is motivated by the need for explanation, prediction and control of the situation, in this instance illness. In the realm of psychotherapy, consulting implies that clients seek explanations for the causes and possible control measures of the illness or situation confronting them. The aim and function of psychotherapy is, from the perspective of Western thinking, to aid the client to function optimally as a social being, to behave and communicate differently, develop alternative understandings or meanings of their situation (Fourie, 1998; Snyders, 1985; Swart & Wiehahn, 1979). Clearly, consulting psychotherapeutically according to the above authors implies seeking explanations or interventions that will create order and regularity where there is discord and disorderliness of the client's situation or system. Therefore the aim of psychotherapy is to assist and create new meaning in the individual or family system. In this sense psychotherapy is limited to and confined to the individual and family system.

Traditional African *dingaka tsa semowa* and their models of explanation, on the contrary, are not necessarily governed by the preoccupation to rationally control or stop illness phenomena or situations. The aim of *ngaka ya semowa* is to bring balance and harmony between different interacting systems in relation to their ontology. Interventions here go far beyond the individual and family systems, to include even the living-dead. The focus is on the communicative and symbolic value of the information that they obtain from *ngaka ya semowa* or spiritual healer. The information gathered here provides the afflicted with much broader explanations and meaning of the situation in relational and cosmic terms.

According to Sogolo (2002) there are varying explanatory models in traditional African thought which are personal in nature. These explanatory models are mainly concerned with explanation, prediction and control of natural phenomena, and secondly they involve theoretical entities albeit of different kinds. Sogolo examines the nature and function of these explanatory models basing his discussion on two basic notions of causality, the primary (non-mechanistic)

and secondary (mechanistic) discourses. Both are concerned with prediction and explanation, but Sogolo disagrees that traditional African explanatory models put emphasis on control of natural phenomena. His criticism of Horton's argument that the former is more successful in achieving and providing predictions, explanations and control than secondary ones is motivated by his firm belief that not all Africans' explanations are control-driven. We support Sogolo in this view on the basis that Africans are rather interested in the interdependence and coexistence of all living systems and making meaning out of such processes. He further argues that the interpretation of a phenomenon will depend on the functional interest of the person interpreting the situation. Let us consider the current poverty and economic situation in South Africa, to demonstrate Sogolo's primary and secondary explanatory models. Due to high levels of poverty, poor living conditions, poor service delivery, unemployment and high food price increases caused by amongst other things the world economic dynamics, social and political conditions, most people seek to explain the causes of their conditions or situations through primary or non-mechanistic explanatory models. The West will rationally explain and predict the possible effects on people's lives, and then devise means to curb or control the phenomena concerned. The current Western and European rational and control driven response to the economic crisis clearly indicates this control based epistemology. On the contrary, traditional African thinkers may see this crisis as communication of punishment from the living-dead concerning bad things people are engaged in the world. Traditional Africans may not in this instance be interested in stopping this punishment but rather in understanding the phenomena, and relating it to all other systems. For Africans, such explanation may be sufficient to provide *kalafi ya semowa* to the people affected by the above material conditions. Depending on how people understand and interpret the phenomena, both primary and secondary explanations may provide adequate answers that match the material conditions and interests of each group (for example, poverty, financial stress, lack of jobs) that the afflicted are faced with.

Faced with these conditions, the West will seek different explanatory models for their situations, most likely giving rational explanations and the possible control measures necessary to deal with the situation. Africans may respond by calling for the cleansing of the nation by calling *dingaka* to perform rituals, for example slaughtering animals, to communicate with the living-dead to avoid future predisposition to such harsh conditions. Our view is that indeed primary and

secondary explanatory models are applicable to both the West and traditional African, but the motivation behind their application is not always control-driven. It is important to realise that neither explanatory model is better than the other because as Horton, cited in Sogolo (2002), points out, “the prevalent explanatory models adopted by a given culture are determined by the peculiarities of that culture”. Whether outsiders regard these explanations as “scientific”, primitive or “psychologically appropriate” or not is irrelevant, so long as they are meaning-making rituals and consistent with the culture and belief systems of the people concerned. Sogolo’s (2002, p. 197) observation in this regard is that “normally, any explanation that draws on supernatural forces is regarded as incompatible with the principle of science upon which modern medicine rests. In fact, the scientist would see such an explanation (sacred healing gift for example) as a direct violation of the principles of science”. In order to be compatible with the principle of science, the psychotherapist will during consultation do an “objective” interactional analysis of the client (Vorster, 2003), provide a rational systematic explanation of the client’s profile, in most cases using tests in order to arrive at a diagnosis. We cannot therefore, on the basis of the above explanatory model equate *consultation* with *go itlhola* in Setswana or *ku lavisisa* or *kambisisa* in Xitsonga. *Go itlhola* or *Ku lavisisa* entails the idea of seeking information about one’s *botshelo* or *vutomi/rihanyo* and matters relating to *swa moya* or *tsa semowa*. But dealing with life issues, *botshelo* and *tsa semowa*, “spiritual” matters entails one’s relationships with other people, the living-dead and *uMvelingqangi*.

The context sketched above cannot be equated or translated to consulting in the Western sense. The process of consulting in the Western sense and *ku lavisisa* or *go batlisisa* are conceived from two ontologically distinct paradigms and they cannot therefore be implemented in the same way on the same level of intervention and healing. The two philosophies are not and cannot be identical since to be identical they must dissolve into one philosophy (Ramose, 1999). It is for this reason that we argue that an attempt to translate *go batlisisa* or *ku lavisisa* into the Western understanding of consulting will completely erode the meaning and process of *go itlhola* in the African sense.

### Go Itlhola or Ku Lavisisa, “Consultation” Process

The process of *go itlhola*, “checking oneself” in most cases, if one is not a target of mischief or witchcraft is informed by Africans’ firm belief that human beings are by nature capable of negatively affecting others through relationships or other mechanisms such as *muti*. It is for this reason that most Africans situate health and illness within the realm of relationships and between people. Illness does not therefore happen by chance, but has a communicative value for the afflicted. Illness may for example be due to jealousy, hatred, feelings of inadequacy and competition. When illness or problems are experienced, the afflicted will, for example, suspect the discord or disturbance in their relationships with family members, neighbours, co-workers or the living-dead. According to Van Wolputte et al. (2002, p. 24), “health is not defined as the absence of disease, and not even as the well-being of the individual body. Health is a relational quality.” When the afflicted goes to *go itlhola*, their relationship with the onto-triadic nature of being, that is, the living, the living-dead and *uMvelinqangi* will mostly be reflected upon. In support of this argument, Sigogo and Modipa (2004, p. 323) indicate that “it is a common understanding that physical and mental illness is a result of a distortion or disturbance in the harmony between human nature and the cosmos”.

*Go itlhola*, or *ku lavisisa* with *ngaka* in the African view is not openly shared with everybody due to the respect accorded to this triad. Sharing with every one may upset the living-dead who are perceived to be the protectors of life of the living. According to Setiloane (1975, p. 58), “it is considered improper for anyone to go to *go itlhola* ‘consult’, ‘*ditaola*’ alone. One should always be accompanied by a friend or relative. If a person goes alone, he/she is suspected of planning some *boloi*” (to bewitch). In most cases, a person will take someone with to *ngaka*, who is not necessarily affected. If one has not been accompanied for whatever reason, they would tell someone close, a trusted friend or relative that, *ke ne e ke ile go itlhola, a ni yile ku tilavisiseni*, I went to check myself. This is uncommon in the Western consultation sense.

Another striking feature of the *go itlhola* process is that there are “no visible” filing systems, yet *ngaka* does not mix or lose the afflicted persons’ information. The afflicted person’s file rests with *badimo*. This is because such information is, through *moya*, stored by the supernatural

power of *badimo* because the power to heal rests only with *swikwembu* or *badimo* for guidance. It is for this reason that we are not talking of patients but the afflicted in this context. They are called the afflicted because whatever sickness or problems it brings them to *lavisisa* or *ku yima-yima* is considered to be due to disturbed relationships. Most Africans will understand when one says *Ke ya go itlhola/ke ya go ipatlisisa*, translated as: “I am going to investigate or check my situation”. *Ku yima-yimani* or *tsamaya o ye go batlisisa* literally means to “visit” the traditional healer or *ngaka*. It is for this reason that we cannot translate *go batlisisa* to the Western understanding of consulting because if we do, the meaning of the process of *ku yima-yima* changes completely. The process of *go batlisisa* or *ku yima-yima* as carried out by *ngaka* is completely different to the Western consultation procedure. *Ku lavisisa* does not only entail the process of checking oneself or disturbed relationships, it also means reinforcing one’s proactive stance of protecting oneself against being possibly bewitched in future. It is therefore common for Africans to *go itlhola* even if there are no problems in their lives. For most African communities, it is common practise, for example, to *go itlhola* before getting married, starting a family and performing a ritual or if there is a function such as a wedding in the family. *Go itlhola* is therefore not only problem-directed but also protection-driven.

#### The African Conception of *Go Tlathloba* or *Ku Hlahluba* “Diagnosis”

The traditional African conception of *go tlathloba* or *ku hlahluba*, “diagnosis” identifying the client’s problem or complaint, emanates from the view that the problem does not reside inside the individual but within relationships. It is from this understanding that the healer, *ngaka ya semowa*, does not “diagnose” the individual or problem, but rather *identifies the disturbed relationship*. It is with this understanding, according to D.K. Koka (personal communication, September 22, 2004) and A.T. Mohale (personal communication, September 22, 2004), that there is no such thing as “individual therapy” in African traditional thought, since healing is directed at the relationship level of the system. Accordingly, *ku hlahluviwa* or *go tlathobiwa*, is directed at the relationship and not the individual. An individual is merely the bearer or messenger of the problems or “symptoms” of the relationship in the system.



To put this relational quality and *ku yima-yima* or *go itlholo* practice aspect into perspective, let us consider an example of a traumatised man who came for *thuso ya semowa* due to the experience of having been hijacked at gun point. *After expressing his fears and trauma resulting from this experience, this man insisted that he was going to Venda over the weekend to perform certain rituals related to the hijack incident. His reasons for performing the rituals were that: 1) He had to check with his vhadzimu what he did wrong to be punished in this way, 2) to appease vhadzimu and to thank them for having spared his life.*

The interpretation of the problem above is relationally defined. The communication values and meanings embedded in different relationships, good or bad, aid in formulating a wholistic plan to assist the afflicted. For any treatment to succeed, *tumelo*, belief system of the afflicted should be acknowledged and appreciated. There is a very close link between *thuta-botshelo* and religion. This shows how people's *bosemoya* and *kalafi ya semowa* as well as their subsequent healing are influenced by their belief system.

### Conclusion

In our introduction to this chapter we set out to investigate if indeed there is an African “psychology” and “psychotherapy”. Our discussion has revealed that these Western concepts are at variance with the African conceptions and practice of healing and should therefore be replaced with appropriate African concepts. The implication of this is that there will be consistency between how “psychotherapists” train and practice, and the cultural experiences within which they train. At the moment, theories and treatment interventions taught to students in “psychotherapy” training programmes are irrelevant to the cultural experiences of Africans. Under these conditions, there cannot be any logical and sustainable reason to continue to use alien concepts in training students to be “psychotherapists” in the African context. No doubt studying these Western concepts could be educationally rewarding as a matter of comparison.

There is certainly a point in alerting students to other and different conceptions of psychology and psychotherapy. Doing so will broaden their knowledge base and enable them to learn from others as well as to teach others new things. The African concepts *bosemoya*, *thuto ya semowa*,

*kalafi ya semowa, go thlatlhoba, ngaka, ubuntu and uMvelingqangi* talk to the African existential experiences and culture and should therefore be adopted and used in the training of “psychologists”. Training is in our view a ritual. Therefore African rituals should form part of training context in our training institutions. The implication of this approach for indigenous people will be that the complex African meaning of *bosemowa, thuto ya semowa, and kalafi ya mowa and ubuntu* will become central in the healing processes of clients. This will pave the way and set appropriate contexts within which “psychotherapists” can use metaphors, idioms, proverbs and phrases that African clients understand and relate to.

In the light of the arguments presented in the above discussions, there is an urgent need for the development and adoption of the relevant terminology in the psychology and psychotherapy curriculum which reflects the cultural experiences of Africans. The basis of such *thuto ya semowa*, “psychology” should be that:

1. The content of the training material used should be premised on the indigenous African experiences and culture as its point of departure.
2. The training programme in *thuto ya semowa* should recognise and include in its content and process, traditional healers and their healing processes and, oral tradition as a viable scientific method of knowledge production, preservation and dissemination.
3. This *dyondzo ya swa moya* should be flexible to accommodate the plurality of voices (such as how we have adopted different African languages in this study), since there are vast differences even among Africans themselves.
4. The theoretical and philosophical basis of such *dyondzo ya swa moya* training programmes must be the philosophy of ubuntu.

## CHAPTER 6

### Rethinking Psychology and Psychotherapy

#### Introduction

The thesis defended in this study is that the dominant Western paradigm of scientific knowledge in general and, psychology as well as psychotherapy in particular, is anchored in a defective claim to neutrality, objectivity and universality. To demonstrate this, indigenous ways of knowing and doing in the African experience were counterpoised against the Western understanding and construction of scientific knowledge in the fields of psychology and psychotherapy. The cumulative conclusion arising from our demonstration is the imperative to rethink psychology and psychotherapy in order (i) to affirm the validity of indigenous African ways of knowing and doing as epistemological claims that are second to none; (ii) to show that the exclusion of the indigenous African ways of knowing and doing from the Western paradigm of scientific knowledge illustrates the tenuous and questionable character of its epistemological and methodological claims to neutrality, objectivity and universality. Indeed the Western claim to scientific knowledge as described speaks to its universality at the expense of the ineradicable as well as irreducible ontological pluriversality of the human experience. This chapter aims to put together in summary form the pathway to the substantiation and demonstration of the thesis defended in this study.

#### Dialogues with Participants in Context

Researchers used to regard participants as “subjects” from whom research data is collected for analysis and possibly for deriving some guidance for future activities. This approach positions participants as controlled “research tools” that are not supposed to influence or be influenced by the researcher or the research process. This thinking, as Mouton (1990) argues, is a necessary prescription for research activities that qualify knowledge as “objective” and “scientific”. Perceived failure to adhere to this superficial and unspontaneous interaction with participants is regarded by most Western thinkers as “unscientific”. Our view in this regard is that, if science is

to be true and congruent to its claim, that is, that it represents a “universal mirror”, then we have to see a plurality of voices and realities recognised by, and reflected in, this “mirror”. In the post-colonial era, and closer to home the post-apartheid era, the “mirror of science” continues to reflect only selected truths, experiences and realities, under the guise of science. This thinking privileges Western science as the only legitimately advanced knowledge system, advanced to the extent that it can homogeneously represent other knowledge systems. This is contrary to the principle of “universality” and “objectivity”, even within the Western understanding of these concepts. Properly construed, universality implies that all knowledge systems, irrespective of where they come from and who constructs them, will be represented in the “mirror” of pluriversal knowledge systems. What is clear though, is that thus far Western science has largely refrained from acknowledging that there are other forms of knowing and doing.

The dialogues with participants in this study have clearly indicated that knowledge and experience transcend these purportedly universalistic and empiricist prescriptions. For science to be taken seriously and to be respected, these Western presuppositions need to be deconstructed and reconstructed. They must be considered and applied in a culture-sensitive manner rather than in accordance with their current unilateralism.

In keeping with the epistemological paradigm and ontology of African experience, participants in this study are seen as *sites of knowledge* with which the researcher must establish dialogue with the view to enriching and deepening our conceptualisation and understanding of African indigenous knowledge systems. In this sense, our dialogue with carefully selected participants in this study – namely, chiefs, traditional healers, academics and ordinary people in seven provinces of South Africa – provided very provocative and insightful knowledge. Furthermore, these dialogues indicate that knowledge, irrespective of where it comes from and who generates it, is useful and meaningful within particular contexts and cultures. Indeed, scientific knowledge is found in libraries and books, but convention-free and uncoded knowledge is embodied in people’s different forms of expressions and performances, rituals, metaphors and cultural practices. To transmit and appreciate these African knowledge systems and forms of learning, education is necessary as a mode of transmission. Education in Africa, and South Africa in particular, should reflect the dialogical character of the encounter of multiple realities. This

underlines the need for heightened sensitivity to the pluriversality of being and the imperative for wholistic thinking. The education enterprise, even beyond the boundaries of Africa, is yet to attain this status.

In our critical analysis of the etymology of the concept of *psyche*, we discovered that one cannot talk of the *psyche*, *the very essence of life*, without reflecting on a people's culture, religion, belief system, ontology, spirituality, language and their relationship with the cosmic world. The concept *psyche*, psychology as understood within the narrow individual mind-body-context that characterises the current thrust of the Western conception of psychology, does not adequately discern the wholistic understanding of *life*. Instead, it talks to the Western paradigm of scientific knowledge, with its foundation firmly confined to rationalism and empiricism. This limited understanding calls for the imperative to rethink psychology and psychotherapy. On this basis, the phrase *thuto ya semowa/ dyondzo ya swa moya* is deemed to embody life issues in their entirety. Understood in this way, *kalafi ya semowa*, and not psychotherapy, will attend to people's cultural, spiritual, religious and belief system using their preferred linguistic expression. The untenable view that advances the argument that there are no appropriate "scientific" terms in African languages is, on this reasoning, misplaced. *Dyondzo ya swa moya* (the study of life/*mowa* in its entirety) and *kalafi ya semowa* are more suited to the African conceptions of reality and being, and should therefore replace psychology and psychotherapy in the African context.

### Eurocentric Paradigms and African Languages

In Chapters 4 and 5 we described the dominance of Western paradigms in determining the African experience. We argued that any attempt to first think of psychology and psychotherapy from the Western paradigm, and then to try and translate these concepts into the so-called "equivalent" African concepts, creates philosophical, epistemological, ontological, cultural and linguistic incompatibilities. Existing literature on psychology, including texts that claim to argue for African-based "psychology" and "psychotherapy", continue to privilege Western concepts.

In our view, the usage of the concept Africa in each of the above scenarios does not change the meaning of "psychology". What is interesting though, is the fact that the concept psychology

is never tampered with and remains a constant in these texts. Keeping the concept psychology constant in these so-called African “psychology” texts presupposes that Africans and Westerners understand psychology in the same way. This study has systematically indicated that this is not necessarily true. There are significant differences between psychology and *thuto ya semowa* and psychotherapy and *kalafi ya semowa*.

### African Languages and Development

Unlike what has happened in the field of psychology in the post-colonial period, we have witnessed more and more African philosophy scholars in countries such as Ghana and Nigeria using their indigenous Akan, Yoruba and Igbo cultures and languages to present, express and advance different philosophical arguments. Their philosophical presentations in these native indigenous languages have proven that local languages’ vocabulary is sufficiently equipped with concepts that advance any form of knowledge, experience and thought. There is therefore no reason why Africans should still use foreign concepts in “psychology” to develop and present their knowledge systems. In support of indigenous language use, Mangena (2008, p. 26) argues that “most citizens of many countries that are advanced in education generally and science and technology in particular do not speak English. They learn and work through their languages. On the African continent, except for the Arabic north, a foreign language is a precondition for almost all facets of human development. The education system, the learning of trades, the conduct of business and the administration of affairs of states are conducted in a foreign language. This is the legacy of our colonial past. This might explain in part why the African continent lags behind in development”. This self-degrading and low opinion of ourselves, our culture and our languages’ ability to present and teach from our indigenous language perspective, seems to be a serious drag in our attempt to develop our knowledge systems.

We have argued in this study that knowledge and experience are culture-based. Similarly, any model of development or advancement of a people’s culture must be based on their framework of reality if it is to be meaningful and successful. Any kind of human interaction and communication takes place in a specific cultural context, and this includes business, educational and psychological activities. It is this cultural context that creates the rules and dynamics

according to which such activities have to be conducted, interpreted and developed. Development does not comprise of only the physical dimension, it also has cultural as well as *bosemowa* dynamics. We subscribe to this view on the basis that Africans do not necessarily have to understand and develop “psychology” from the Western perspective. They can and are entitled to use local indigenous languages to conceptualise and develop their own understanding of the practice and field of *thuto ya semowa moya/dyondzo ya swa moya* which is consistent with their paradigm and cultural experiences.

Our view is that in South Africa, the reason why fields of study such as psychology, sociology and philosophy are not conceptualised, developed, taught and practiced using indigenous languages is a function and reflection of the distinctly fragmented Western approach to knowledge. Our education system is still Eurocentric in its approach and therefore at variance with African ways of knowing and doing. The organisation of our education systems, which is one of the many knowledge producers, is also based on this fragmented paradigm. Over the years, the so-called “content” subjects have been kept separate from vernacular languages. This approach has created a distorted view that languages deal only with language issues, with little or no relationship and relevance to “content” subjects. It is on this basis that we observe a clear separation, lack of dialogue and mutual engagement between psychology and vernacular language departments in our higher institutions of learning. Since the introduction of a new political dispensation in 1994, vernacular languages have ironically come to be seen as a liability rather than a useful resource. In our considered opinion, the move to the opposite is not only desired but an imperative. Not doing this will delay the Africanisation of higher learning institutions in general.

Contrary to the current lack of (or at best fragmented) inter-disciplinary relations that characterise psychology and indigenous languages, a more collaborative, consultative, inter-dependent culture between traditionally fragmented disciplines is argued for. This will go a long way towards Africanising “psychology”. There is therefore an urgent need to recognise the value embodied in inter-departmental and inter-faculty research collaborations. As the dialogues in this study have shown, the same collaborations need to be forged between academics, *dingaka* and

ordinary community members because these subsystems or sites of knowledge constitute very useful cultural experiences and knowledge landscapes.

### Conclusion

The above is the delineation of the pathway pursued in this study to support and substantiate our thesis. The method, insight and argument we have advanced have pertinently demonstrated our thesis and defended its sustainability.



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### **Personal communications**

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