

**THE AMALGAMATION OF TRADITIONAL AFRICAN VALUES AND  
LIBERAL DEMOCRATIC VALUES IN SOUTH AFRICA:  
IMPLICATIONS FOR CONCEPTIONS OF EDUCATION**

**By**

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**Submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree of**

**DOCTOR OF EDUCATION**

**in the subject**

**PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION**

**at the**

**UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA**

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**2016**

## DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my late parents, my father Kopano Joseph Letseka, and my mother 'Maletseka Ernestina Letseka. I thank them for giving me life, and most importantly for their selfless faith in me to realise my goals and ambitions. May their souls rest in peace; *Robalang ka khotso Bafokeng.*

## DECLARATION

I declare that **THE AMALGAMATION OF TRADITIONAL AFRICAN VALUES AND LIBERAL DEMOCRATIC VALUES IN SOUTH AFRICA: IMPLICATIONS FOR CONCEPTIONS OF EDUCATION** is my own work. And that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of several overlapping loops and a long horizontal stroke extending to the right, positioned above a solid horizontal line.

SIGNATURE

25 April 2016

DATE

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, I would like to express my deepest gratitude and indebtedness to the following people without whose support, patience and understanding this study would probably not have seen the light of day:

- My supervisor, Professor Elza Venter and co-supervisor Professor Victor Pitsoe, for the mutual respect they afforded me during my study. At no point did I feel they were attempting to clone me in their different images. On the contrary, they meticulously read through my draft chapters and provided me with quality scholarly comments, remarks and suggestions;
- My dearest wife, Dr Matsephe Martha Letseka, who is also my closest friend, colleague and confidante. I thank her for her patience and tolerance. Her gentle cajoling to stay focused on completing the thesis anchored me. She was the voice of reason that encouraged me to transfer my doctoral studies from the Institute of Education, University of London to the University of South Africa (UNISA) because it was becoming financially unsustainable to travel to London for consultations with my promoter;
- I want to acknowledge my former promoter and mentor at the Institute of Education (IoE), University of London, emeritus Prof John White whose scholarly acumen and humility I deeply value. Prof White introduced me to various bookshops in and around London where I was able to purchase some of the rarest philosophy books which now adorn my office shelves and are the envy of many of my colleagues at UNISA;
- Chair of the Department of Educational Foundations, Prof Johannes Seroto for affording me the time and space to complete my thesis. He generously approved my requests for academic leave to work on my thesis;
- Former Executive Dean of the College of Education, Prof Kuzvinetsa Peter Dzvimbo, under whom I also served as Deputy-Editor in *Africa Education Review*. I want to acknowledge his support and understanding of my need to travel to London to consult with Prof White;
- UNISA's Department of Human Resources (HR), for the generous award of the HR Staff Bursary, which covered my tuition fees;

- UNISA's Research and Innovation Directorate, for the generous award of the Masters and Doctoral Support Programme (MDSP) grant, which covered all my language and technical editing, as well as thesis printing and binding expenses;
- I deeply appreciate all the friends and colleagues who chastised and reminded me that as someone who excels in research and publication I had no reason not to complete the doctoral thesis, and
- Mr Jack Chokwe, for a professional job in editing this thesis.

Second, I would like to acknowledge the following thirteen (13) national and international scholarly journals in which sections of my thesis that I adapted into papers were either submitted to be considered for publication, accepted for publication, or were already published:

- University of Waikato-based *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, in which the paper, "Jean-Paul Sartre and Ubuntu was submitted to be considered for publication.
- University of Kwazulu-Natal-based *South African Journal of Higher Education*, in which the paper, "Is talk of 'the end of Ubuntu' of any conceptual value was submitted to be considered for publication.
- Chhattisgarh, India-based *International Journal of Humanities & Social Studies* in which the article, "*Ubuntu, Jen, Bildung: A South, East, Continental nexus*", which is adapter from chapter 5, "Indigenous African epistemologies: a focus on *Ubuntu*", has been accepted for publication in 2016.
- Irvine, California-based *Open Journal of Philosophy* in which the paper "Do the notions such as 'research design' and 're-search methodology' pertain to philosophy of educational research?", has been accepted for publication in 2016. The paper is adapted from chapter 3, "Research design and research approach". I presented the paper at the 7<sup>th</sup> World Conference on Educational Science (WCES) in Athens, Greece, 6<sup>th</sup> February 2015.
- The Netherlands-based Elsevier's journal, *Procedia - Social and Behavioural Sciences*, 2014, volume 116, in which "The illusion of 'Education for All' in South Africa" appears. I presented the paper at the 5<sup>th</sup> World Conference on Educational Sciences (WCES), which was held as at Sapienza - Università di Roma, Italy, in February 2013. The paper was an early draft of a section on the

challenges facing education in South Africa, in Chapter 7, “Conceptions of education in a liberal democratic South Africa”;

- Paris-based *Pensee Journal*, 2014, volume 76, number 9, in which “How convincing is the claim that coexistence between traditional African values and liberal democratic values in South Africa is a contradiction?” appears. The paper is adapted from Chapter 6, “Amalgamation of traditional African values and liberal democratic values in South Africa”;
- The Rome-based *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, 2014, volume 5, number 9, for publishing “Ubuntu and Justice as Fairness”. The paper draws on a section from Chapter 5, “Indigenous African epistemologies: a focus on *Ubuntu*”.
- I was invited by the Managing Editor of the UNISA’s Corporate Communication and Marketing (CC&M)’s bi-annual in-house journal *UNISAWISE*, to contribute a paper for the Special Issue to commemorate 20-years of democracy in South Africa. The paper “SA education: 20-year report card”, which also draws on Chapter 7 of my thesis, appears in the winter Issue of 2014.
- *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, volume 4, number 3, in which “Liberalism vs. Marxism-Leninism and the future of education in South Africa” appears. The paper is an adaptation of a section from chapter 4, “Liberal democracy in South Africa”.
- *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, 2013, volume 4, number 3, in “Anchoring Ubuntu morality”, appears. The paper is an adaptation of a section from Chapter 5, “Indigenous African epistemologies: a focus on *Ubuntu*”;
- *Open Journal of Philosophy*, 2013, volume 3, number 2, in which “Educating for Ubuntu: lessons from Basotho indigenous education” appears. The paper is adapted from Chapter 7, “Conceptions of education in a liberal democratic South Africa”;
- It was an honour to be invited by the Managing Editor [Global Column] of Bloomington, Indiana-based *Phi Delta Kappan*, to contribute the article “South Africa’s education has promises to keep but miles to go”, which appears in volume 94, number 6, 2013. The article is adapted from Chapter 7, “Conceptions of education in a liberal democratic South Africa”;

- Utrecht, The Netherlands-based Springer journal, *Studies in Philosophy and Education*, 2012, volume 31, number 1, in which “In defence of Ubuntu” appears. The paper is adapted from Chapter 5, “Indigenous African epistemologies: a focus on *Ubuntu*”;

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AERA	American Educational Research Association
ANC	African National Congress
AU	African Union
BC	Before Christ
BCM	Black Consciousness Movement
BRICS	Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa
CC&M	Corporate Communication and Marketing
CDE	Centre for Development and Enterprise
CEE	Commission for Employment Equity
CODESRIA	Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa
COSATU	Congress of South African Trade Unions
CNE	Christian National Education
COSC	Cambridge Overseas School Certificate
CPI	Community of Philosophical Inquiry
CRT	Critical Race Theory
DBE	Department of Basic Education
D.Ed.	Doctor of Education
DoE	Department of Education
HET	Higher Education and Training
HIV/AIDS	Human Immunodeficiency Virus infection and Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
HSRC	Human Sciences Research Council
HR	Human Resource
IoE	Institute of Education [University of London]
IDR	Institute for Development Research
ISLS	International Society of the Learning Sciences
JC	Junior Certificate (JC)
JSC	Judicial Service Commission
JET	Joint Educational Trust
MDSP	Masters and Doctoral Support Programme

MerSETA	Manufacturing, Engineering and Related Services Sector Education and Training Authority
NEC	National Executive Committee
NRF	National Research Foundation
NUM	National Union of Mineworkers
NUMSA	National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa
PAK	Philosophical Association of Kenya
PESGB	Philosophy of Education Society of Great Britain
PhD	Doctor of Philosophy
SACMEQ	Southern and Eastern African Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality
SAHRC	South African Human Rights Commission
SACP	South African Communist Party
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SANYDLO	South African National Youth Leadership Development Organisation
TESOL	Teaching of English to Speakers of Other Languages
UCT	University of Cape Town
UK	United Kingdom
UKZN	University of KwaZulu-Natal
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural organisation
UNISA	University of South Africa
Wits	University of the Witwatersrand
WCES	World Conference of Educational Sciences

## ABSTRACT

This study investigated the seemingly conflicting and incompatible ideological positions that post-apartheid South Africa appears to straddle. On the one hand, South Africa is an aspiring liberal democracy courtesy of its constitution of 1996, which is liberal in that it enshrines a wide range of rights and freedoms for the individual. On the other hand, the same constitution recognises the institution of traditional leadership, whose claim to power is hereditary and not by popular vote. Thus the study established that South Africa is an aspiring liberal democracy that is also heavily steeped in African traditions and cultures. It offered a rebuttal of the view that existence and recognition of traditional institutions of politics and governance in a liberal democracy is a fundamental contradiction. Drawing on the literature the study showed that liberal democracies such as Japan, the United Kingdom (UK), Belgium, The Netherlands and Spain, have had monarchies from time immemorial. But their monarchies are not a hindrance to either liberalism or liberal democracy. The study underscored the importance of *Ubuntu* as a socio-cultural discourse in South Africa, more so given that South Africa is an African country whose population is 80 per cent African. Concomitantly the study proposed a philosophy of education that amalgamates some aspects of liberal education with some aspects of African traditional education. Aspects of liberal education that were found to pertain to the amalgamation are 'cultivating humanity' and 'narrative imagination', while aspects of African traditional education are the values and principles implicit in *Ubuntu*, the latter understood as a *humane* normative concept. At a practical classroom level the study proposed that such an amalgamated philosophy of education would be attained through storytelling and the teaching of history through chronology and causation. As a form of 'narrative', storytelling reveals the finite in its fragile uniqueness and illustrates how the past influences and shapes the present, and how the present determines aspects of the past that are useful and meaningful today. Similarly the teaching of history through chronology and causation enables the students to organise their historical thought processes and construct their own probable historical narratives. The teaching of history through chronology and causation therefore offers the students multiple opportunities to gain a better understanding of historical events, and lessons that can be learned from such events.

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APPENDIX B: Letseka, M. 2016. Is talk of ‘the end of *Ubuntu*’ of any conceptual value? Submitted to be considered for publication in *South African Journal of Philosophy*.

APPENDIX C: Letseka, M. *Ubuntu, Jen, Bildung: A South, East, Continental nexus*. Accepted for publication in *International Journal of Humanities & Social Studies* in 2016.

APPENDIX D: Letseka, M. Do the notions such as ‘research design’ and ‘re-search methodology’ pertain to philosophy of educational research? Accepted for publication in *Open Journal of Philosophy* in 2016.

APPENDIX E: Letseka, M. 2014. The illusion of ‘Education for All’ in South Africa, *Procedia - Social and Behavioural Sciences*, 116: 4864-4869.

APPENDIX F: Letseka, M. 2014. How convincing is the claim that coexistence between traditional African values and liberal democratic values in South Africa is a contradiction? *Pensee Journal*, 76 (9), 382-395.

APPENDIX G: Letseka, M. 2014. Ubuntu and Justice as Fairness. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, 5 (9), 544-551.

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APPENDIX K: Letseka, M. 2013. Educating for Ubuntu: lessons from Basotho indigenous education. *Open Journal of Philosophy*, 3 (2), 337-344.

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background to the study

Post-apartheid South Africa straddles two seemingly conflicting and incompatible ideological positions. On the one hand, South Africa is a liberal democracy thanks to the 1996 Constitution (Enslin, 1999). The Constitution has been described as a model liberal democratic constitution that bears all “the hallmarks of liberal democracy” (Enslin & Horsthemke, 2004:552; Dugard, 1998:23). In addition, it has been “widely hailed as liberal and egalitarian” (Deveaux, 2003:162), because “it values human dignity and frames human rights at its heart” (Robinson, 2012:2). Chapter 2 of the Constitution, The Bill of Rights, enshrines a wide variety of rights and freedoms for the individual - the right to equality, the right to dignity, to life, freedom and security, privacy; the right to freedom of religion, belief, opinion, conscience, and thought; the right to freedom of expression, of movement, and of association (Goldstone, 1997: 456-457). These rights and freedoms are protected by the ‘Limitation of Rights Clause’, whose main purpose is to ensure that “in no case may the core element of a basic right be encroached upon” (Sarkin, 1998-1999:186). The ‘Limitation of Rights Clause’ is premised on the assumption that “the *sine qua non* of the liberal state in all its varieties is that governmental power and authority be limited by a system of constitutional rules and practices in which individual liberty and the equality of persons under the rule of law are respected” (Gray, 1995:71-72).

Section 33 (1) of the Constitution of South Africa states that the rights entrenched in it may be limited by law of general application provided that such a limitation is permissible, reasonable, justifiable, and does not negate the essential content of the right in question (Goldstone, 1997: 460). Again section 9 (3), of the Bill of Rights is explicit that “[t]he state may not unfairly discriminate directly or indirectly against anyone on one or more grounds, including race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion,

conscience, belief, culture, language and birth". Waldron (1987:130) notes that "in politics, liberals are committed to intellectual freedom, freedom of speech, association, and civil liberties generally. In the realm of personal life, they raise their banners for freedom of religious belief and practice, freedom of lifestyle, and freedom (provided again that it *is* genuine freedom for everyone involved) in regard to sexual practices, marital affairs, pornography, the use of drugs and all those familiar liberal concerns". In addition, Wolfe (2009:11) posits that liberals "insist on the importance of rights, including the right of people to practice their religion as they see fit, to speak for and assemble around causes in which they believe, and to possess a significant degree of control over their personal livelihood". It is Wolfe's view that "liberals believe that individuals live within an ordered world that necessarily constraints the ability of people to do whatever they want whenever they want to do it". However, Wolfe is quick to caution that for liberals, "[s]uch constraints are not imposed by authorities over which people have no control or shaped by traditions they cannot influence; they are established instead by people themselves through some form of consent or social contract. Independence cannot exist without interdependence".

On the other hand, the same Constitution recognises the institution of traditional leadership. Section 211, titled "Recognition" states as follows:

- Subsection (1): the institution, status and role of traditional leadership, according to customary law, are recognised, subject to the Constitution.
- Subsection (2): a traditional authority that observes a system of customary law may function subject to any applicable legislation and customs, which includes amendments to, or repeal of, that legislation or those customs.
- Subsection (3): the courts must apply customary law when that law is applicable, subject to the Constitution and any legislation that specifically deals with customary law.

Section 212, titled “Role of traditional leaders” reads as follows:

- Subsection (1): National legislation may provide for a role for traditional leadership as an institution at local level on matters affecting local communities.
- Subsection (2): To deal with matters relating to traditional leadership, the role of traditional leaders, customary law and the customs of communities observing a system of customary law-
  - (a) National or provincial legislation may provide for the establishment of houses of traditional leaders; and
  - (b) National legislation may establish a council of traditional leaders.

Coexistence between the traditional African values, as in the institution of traditional leadership and liberal democracy values, is a highly contested issue. Beall (2006:459) argues that “chieftaincy operates on principles that are antithetical to democratic ideals. The selection of the office of the chief is not by popular vote, but is hereditary and usually for life”. But presumed in this argument is the view that traditional African values are incompatible with, and might even be contradictory to liberal democratic values. A similar argument is advanced by Ntsebeza (2005:2), who posits in his book *Democracy Compromised: Chiefs and the Politics of Land in South Africa*, that the Constitution of South Africa, along with emerging post-1994 legislation, advocate a form of democracy that is “based on the liberal principles of representation at all levels of government, including local government, while, at the same time, recognising a hereditary institution of traditional leadership for rural residents”. Arising from this observation, Ntsebeza (2005:23) argues that “a fundamental contradiction exists in the South African Constitution in attempts to accommodate the role of the institution of traditional leadership and its incumbents in a liberal democracy based on multi-party principles and representative government”. It is Ntsebeza’s (2005:256) view that “recognition of the hereditary institution of traditional leadership in the South African constitution while at the same time enshrining liberal democratic principles based on representative government in the same constitution is a fundamental contradiction”. He contends that “the two cannot exist at the same time for the simple reason that traditional authorities’ claim to power is by birth right and their subjects are not afforded the opportunity urban-based South Africans enjoy of choosing or electing their leaders”. In the same vein, Bentley (2005:49) argues that “the Constitution therefore recognises rights and institutions that may potentially be in conflict with one another,

and in particular, as far as cultural rights and the powers of traditional leadership are concerned, this is of particular concern for the declared equal rights of women”.

The two seemingly opposed ideological positions mapped above have profound implications for the debate on South Africa’s aims and conceptions of education. But how profound can these implications be? For instance, is South Africa the only liberal democracy that also embraces traditional institutions such as chieftaincy? Put differently, is the existence of chieftaincy in a liberal democracy a peculiarly South African phenomenon? The literature indicates that countries such as Japan (Ruoff, 2001; Fujitani, 1998), the United Kingdom (UK) (Harvey, 2004), Belgium (van Goethem, 2011), The Netherlands (Andeweg & Urwin, 2002) and Spain (Bogdanor, 1996), have had monarchies from time immemorial. And yet their monarchies are not a hindrance to liberal democracy. There is a tendency to privilege mainstream Western epistemological traditions and ideas of politics over indigenous African epistemological traditions and ideas of politics. This *modus operandi* is most explicit in Eurocentric fiction and historiographies. A typical example is Conrad (1999)’s highly celebrated work of fiction, *Heart of Darkness*. In *Heart of Darkness*, Conrad portrays the African continent as ‘dark’ both in symbolic and practical terms, and its inhabitants as patently barbaric and incorrigibly backward.

In the 1970s, Nigerian novelist Chinua Achebe was terribly disconcerted by Conrad’s portrayal of Africa as ‘the other world’; the antithesis of Europe and therefore of civilisation; the place where man’s vaunted intelligence and refinement are mocked by triumphant bestiality. Commenting on *Heart of Darkness*, Achebe (1978:9) wondered whether a “novel which celebrates this dehumanisation, which depersonalises a portion of the human race, can be called a great work of art”. He was mostly perturbed that *Heart of Darkness* continued to be the most commonly prescribed novel in twentieth-century literature courses in most African Universities’ English Departments (Achebe, 1978:11). In the same vein, Mudimbe (2005, 1988, 1985), who has written books such as *The Idea of Africa*, and *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge* ponders whether “the African *Weltanschauungen* [worldview] and the African traditional systems of thought are unthinkable and cannot be made explicit within the framework of their own rationality” (Mudimbe, 1988:10). It is his view that “thus far the ways in which the African *Weltanschauungen* and

traditional African epistemologies have been evaluated and the means used to explain them relate to theories and methods whose constraints, rules, and systems of operation suppose a non-African epistemological locus”.

German philosopher Friedrich Hegel (2001:109) has described Africa as “the land of childhood that is enveloped in the dark mantle of night”. Hegel agonised that “the peculiarly African character is difficult to comprehend for the simple reason that in reference to it, one must quite give up the principle which naturally accompanies one’s ideas of universality”. He argued that in ‘Negro’ life “the characteristic point is the fact that consciousness had not yet attained the realisation of any substantial objective existence” (Hegel, 2001:110-111). Interestingly, during apartheid, Article 15: ‘African (Bantu) Teaching and Education’, of the Christian National Education (CNE) Policy, justified the poor provision of education for blacks as follows: “on the grounds of cultural infancy of the native, we believe that it is the right and task of the state, in collaboration with the Christian churches, to give and control native education and training of the native teaching forces’ (Rose & Tunmer, 1975: 128). The above-mentioned incidents are attempts to privilege mainstream Western epistemological order over traditional African epistemologies and worldviews.

It is against the backdrop of the above exposition that in this study I attempt to mount a rebuttal of what I deem Eurocentric views that seek to denigrate indigenous African epistemologies and cast aspersion on the viability of such epistemologies as models of education and citizenship in African democracies. I shall defend the notion of *Ubuntu* as a philosophy or worldview; a normative principle or moral theory; a notion of African communal justice and fairness; a potential public policy, and a pedagogical principle.<sup>1</sup> My aim is to interrogate the view that traditional African values and ideas of politics are fundamentally incompatible with, and even contradictory to liberal democratic values and ideas of politics. Bottoci (2007:106) argues that among the

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<sup>1</sup> See Letseka, M. 2014. *Ubuntu* and Justice as Fairness. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, 5 (9), 544-551; Letseka, M. 2013a. Educating for Ubuntu/Botho: lessons from Basotho indigenous education. *Open Journal of Philosophy*, 3 (2), 337-344; Letseka, M. 2013b. Anchoring Ubuntu morality. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, 4 (3), 351- 359; Letseka, M. 2012. In defence of Ubuntu. *Studies in Philosophy and Education*, 31 (1), 47-60; Letseka, M. 2000. African Philosophy and Educational Discourse. In Philip Higgs, Ntombizolile Vakalisa, Tyobeka Mda, & N’dri Thérèse Assié-Lumumba (eds) *African Voices in Education*, Juta: Cape Town, 179-193.

characteristic features of myth that can be emphasised, “the most general is that the work on myth takes place within a network of symbols. In a sense, then, a myth is a symbol or, to be more precise, it involves a network of symbols. But while all myths employ symbols, not all symbols are myths”. Equally, “although symbols are everywhere, at least wherever there is language and communication, myths are not”.

I challenge perceptions of incompatibility between traditional African thought and modern ideas of politics. I shall raise and attempt to clarify the following questions:

- How plausible is the perceived binary or polarity between indigenous African values and ideas of politics and liberal democratic values and ideas of politics?
- How sustainable is the view that tradition is antithetical to innovation or modernity?
- Isn't it the case that modernity is always a refinement that grows out of the ashes of tradition (s)?
- Can it not be reasonably argued that even in the most advanced modern Western civilisations there will always be remnants of tradition that are preserved for posterity as evidence of where that particular civilisation comes from?

Gusfield (1967:352-353) argues that “what is seen today as a traditional society is often itself a product of change...the old is not necessarily *replaced* by the new. The acceptance of a new product, a new religion, a new mode of decision-making does not necessarily lead to the disappearance of the older form”. Gusfield (1967:355) insists that “the outcome of the modernising processes and traditional forms is often an admixture in which each derives a degree of support from the other, rather than a clash of opposites”. In concurrence, Gyekye (1997:217-218) contends that “no human culture is absolutely unchanging, totally refusing to take advantage of possible benefits that often accompany encounters with other cultures”.

## **1.2 Problem Statement**

There is a perception among sociologists and public law scholars in South Africa that indigenous African values and ideas of politics are incompatible with, and even contradictory to liberal democratic values and ideas of politics. According to this

perception, a socio-political order that seeks to amalgamate indigenous African values and liberal democratic values as South Africa does through its widely acclaimed liberal constitution is doomed to fail. Perceptions like these have profound implications for attempts to develop aims and conceptions of education that attempt to mediate the two value systems by producing young people who are citizens of the global, cosmopolitan world, and are also sensitive to their indigenous African traditional cultures and heritages.

As a philosopher of education, I am fascinated by perceptions. My fascination derives from the need to establish philosophical grounds as to whether perceptions have a conceptual content (Crane, 2009; Brewer, 2006, 2005; Byrne, 2005; McDowell, 1996). For instance, “how perception and reality are related, something sufficient to sustain the idea that the world reveals itself to a perceiving subject in different regions and aspects, in a way that depends on the subject’s movement through the world” (McDowell, 1996: 54). As Byrne (2005: 245) cogently puts it, “perceiving is very much like a traditional propositional attitude, such as believing or intending; the issue is whether the contents or propositions that perceiving is a relation to, are conceptual”. Byrne’s (2005: 247) conclusion is that “while we often know things by perception, experiences do not always justify beliefs”. Let me break this down by way of elaboration. The fact that an object looks blue on the surface does not necessarily mean it is blue. It could be blue-plated, when in fact its actual substance is black, like a coal rock. The perception that it is blue can be confirmed or disputed by applying Karl Popper’s ‘Principles of Falsification’, also known as the philosophy of ‘Critical Rationalism’. The latter requires taken-for-granted perceptions to be subjected to rigours of logical scrutiny and/or scientific testing in order to establish their validity or soundness. Tarnas (2010) reminds us that in classical Cartesian [flowing from the work of French philosopher René Descartes] philosophical perspective if the only reality that the human mind has direct access to is its own experience, then the world apprehended by mind is ultimately only the mind’s interpretation of the world.

Crane (2009:452-453) wonders whether there is “a way of talking about perception, or perceptual experience, which corresponds more closely with its metaphysics or its phenomenology”? In the same vein, Merleau-Ponty (1992: x) posits that “perception is not a science of the world; it is not even an act, a deliberate taking up of a position”.

Instead it is “the background from which all acts stand out, and is presupposed by them”. Merleau-Ponty (1992:58) suggests that “our perception ends in objects, and the object once constituted, appears as the reason for all the experiences of it which we have had or could have”. Often though, perception “presents itself as actual”. But is perception actual or simply imagined? For Tarnas (2010:418-419),

*“Every act of perception and cognition is contingent, mediated, situated, contextual, theory-soaked. Human language cannot establish its ground in an independent reality. Meaning is rendered by the mind and cannot be assumed to inhere in the object, in the world beyond the mind, for that world can never be contacted without having already been saturated by the mind’s own nature. That world cannot even be justifiably postulated. Radical uncertainty prevails, for in the end what one knows and experiences are to an indeterminate extent a projection.”*

It is Tarnas’ (2010:417) view that “the human mind can claim no direct mirror like knowledge of the objective world, for the object it experiences has already been structured by the subject’s own internal organisation. The human being knows not the world-in-itself but rather the world-as-rendered-by-the-human-mind”.

This study grew out of a philosophical struggle over whether perceptions of contradiction and incompatibility between indigenous African values and liberal democratic values have any semblance of validity. For quite some time I mulled over the claims that attempting to amalgamate indigenous African values and liberal democratic values can potentially paralyse South Africa’s liberal democratic ambitions, and by extension, efforts to conceive a philosophy of education that attempts to mediate the two value systems. With this in mind, what I attempt to do in this study is to mount a political philosophic rebuttal of the above-mentioned claims of contradiction and incompatibility. To that end I shall argue that there is no reason, whether conceptual or empirical, why South Africa cannot amalgamate indigenous African values and liberal democratic values. Concomitantly, there is no reason why South Africa cannot forge a philosophy of education that seeks to amalgamate indigenous African values and liberal democratic values. After all, the basic aim of education in a democratic state should be “the cultivation of ‘moral’ democratic citizenship” (Divala & Mathebuka, 2013: 279). And it is my contention that this is also the cherished aim of indigenous African philosophy and liberal democratic theory.

Ware (1992:140) argues that “the 'exporting' of liberal democracy to ex-colonies or to regimes which were conquered militarily, but which had no previous history of liberal democracy (such as Japan), transforms liberal democracy”. As a result, “there are today quite distinct types of liberal democracy” (Ware, 1992:137). In recognition of this proliferation some liberals have argued that there now exists “a family of liberalisms” (Simhony, 2003:283), “a multitude of liberalisms” (McKay, 2000:627), and “many liberalisms” (Rawls, 1996:223). Coming back to Japan, in his book *The Clash of Civilisation and the Remaking of World Order*, Huntington (1996:94) argues that “historically Japan has gone through ‘cycles of importation of external cultures’ and ‘indigenisation’ of those cultures through replication and refinement”. Consequently, “Japan has established a unique position for itself as an associate member of the West: it is in the West in some respects but clearly not of the West in important dimensions” (Huntington, 1993:45).

My own observation is that Japanese political culture resonates with most of Africa’s cultural orientation in that it is more oriented towards groups rather than individuals. As Fukuyama (1992: 231) observes, in Japanese culture “an individual does not work so much for his own short-term benefit, but for the well-being of the larger group or groups of which he is a member. His status is determined less by his performance as an individual, than by the performance of his group”. This observation resonates with *Ubuntu’s* maxim of *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*, or “a person is a person through other persons”. Mokgoro (1998:16) echoes similar views to Fukuyama’s (1992) above in her observation that *Ubuntu* is a metaphor that describes group solidarity in African cultures, whereby “the individual’s existence and wellbeing are relative to that of the group”. Against the backdrop of this exposition, it is my contention that South Africa’s appeal to liberalism manifests the extent to which the term liberalism has continued to proliferate worldwide. Enslin (1999:175) is in no doubt though that “the new democratic order in South Africa and its education system presuppose some central distinguishing features of liberalism”.

Centrally therefore, in this study I propose a conception of a philosophy of education that is rooted in Africa in a sense that it begins with “the affirmation and restoration of the dignity of peoples in all their diversity, hues and shapes, including those who were ‘dehumanised’ or seen as secondary citizens or non-citizens in South Africa and

Africa” (Lenka-Bula, 2011:10). Such a philosophy of education shall affirm the underlying values and principles of the Constitution of South Africa. For instance, Chapter 2, Bill of Rights, enshrines the rights of all people and affirms the democratic values of human dignity, equality and freedom”. Section 9 (1) states that “everyone is equal before the law and has the right to equal protection and benefit of the law”. Section 9 (2) conceives of equality as “the full enjoyment of all rights and freedoms”. As mentioned in the background section above, Section 9 (3) adds impetus to these provisions by limiting the state from encroaching on the individual’s fundamental rights and freedoms. Sections 10 and 11 affirm the right to respect, protection of everyone’s dignity, and the right to life. Consistent with the above-mentioned values and principles of the constitution, the proposed philosophy of education shall seek to initiate and anchor the young people in Ubuntu’s moral dispositions (Letseka, 2013a, 2013b) within a liberal democratic political dispensation.

### **1.3 Research questions**

Against the backdrop of the above-stated problem, this study shall be guided by the following main question:

#### *1.3.1 The main research question*

- Is the perception that indigenous African values and ideas of politics are incompatible with, and contradictory to liberal democratic values and ideas of politics necessarily valid?

#### *1.3.2 Sub-research questions*

- What is the basis of the claim that a liberal democratic state that attempts to shape its future political trajectory through the amalgamation of indigenous African values and liberal democratic values is doomed to fail?
- Is the amalgamation of indigenous African institutions such as chieftaincy and the monarchy peculiar to South Africa?
- What should a philosophy of education that amalgamates indigenous African values and liberal democratic values consist of?

## 1.4 Aim of the study

### 1.4.1 *The broad aim*

The primary aim of this study is to mount a rebuttal of perceptions that indigenous African values and ideas of politics are incompatible with, and may even be contradictory to liberal democratic values and ideas of politics. Additional to this rebuttal, the study shall propose a conception of a philosophy of education whose aims shall, on the one hand be rooted in Africa in that it shall draw on the African traditions and cultural heritages as well as the inherently communal and interdependent feature of most traditional African communities. On the other hand, such a philosophy shall seek to immerse and initiate the young people in the values that are associated with a globalised cosmopolitan environment of which we are all a part. Nussbaum (2002:9) neatly captures this local-global nexus in her observation that “to be a citizen of the world one does not need to give up local identifications, which can be a source of great richness in life”.

### 1.4.2 *The specific aims*

The specific aims of this study shall be:

- to articulate, at a philosophical level, the potential for the amalgamation of liberal democratic values and indigenous African values.
- to make a case for indigenous African epistemologies such as *Ubuntu* as viable models of education and citizenship in African democracies.
- to attempt to formulate a philosophy of education for post-apartheid South Africa whose aims and conceptions shall be to prepare the young people to embrace their indigenous African cultures while also cognisant of the wider, globalised and cosmopolitan environment.

## 1.5 Justification of the study

It is indeed an irony of colonisation and cultural imperialism that in a country like South Africa, with a population that is 80 per cent black and African (Statistics South Africa,

2010), some sections of society still entertain doubts about the viability of indigenous African epistemologies such as *Ubuntu* as models of education and citizenship (Enslin & Horsthemke, 2004; Horsthemke, 2004; Marx, 2002). This raises serious concerns, for instance, whether the country has been fully liberated from imperial cultural worldviews and Eurocentric historiographies. Amin (1989) contends that Eurocentrism claims that imitation of expression of the Western model by all people is the only solution to the challenges of our time. Of course this claim is premised on the unfortunate history of colonial conquest. Keita (2002: 288) observes that historically “Euro-Americans conquered the world, renamed places, rearranged economies, societies, and politics, and drove to the margins pre-modern ways of knowing space, time, and many other things”. He argues that “they [Euro-Americans] universalised history in such a way that the world as we know it today has become subject to racialised historiographies and epistemologies. The histories emerging from the nineteenth century onwards, whether written by Europeans or not, were decidedly Eurocentric”. With respect to ‘imperial cultural worldviews, Smith (2008:23) argues that Eurocentric scholars tend to view indigenous epistemologies ‘through imperial eyes’, which have denigrating undertones. I explore this issue in more detail in Chapter 3 below and shall therefore not dwell on it here.

To draw on Spivak’s (1988) landmark paper, “Can the subaltern speak?”, this study is a modest attempt to mount a counter-hegemonic discourse. It seeks to contribute new literature that celebrates and commemorates indigenous African epistemologies and other indigenous ways of knowing. The study testifies to what Fricker (2007) calls ‘epistemic injustice’, in her book *Epistemic Injustice: Power & The Ethics of Knowing*. Fricker (2007:5) writes that “any epistemic injustice wrongs someone in their capacity as a subject of knowledge, and thus in a capacity essential to human value”. Epistemic injustice can also take the form of *hermeneutical injustice* – wherein people participate unequally in the practices through which social meanings are generated, or as *testimonial injustice*, in which case “someone is wronged in their capacity as a giver of knowledge”. To be wronged in one’s capacity as a knower, Fricker (2007: 44) argues, “is to be wronged in a capacity essential to human value. When one is undermined or otherwise wronged in a capacity essential to human value, one suffers an intrinsic injustice”. It is Fricker’s (2007: 6) view that this sort of “marginalisation can mean that our collective forms of understanding are rendered structurally prejudicial

in respect of content and/or style: the social experiences of members of hermeneutically marginalised groups are left inadequately conceptualised and so ill-understood, perhaps even by the subjects themselves”. Fricker (2007:176) concludes that “combating epistemic injustice clearly calls for virtues of epistemic justice to be possessed by institutions as well as by individuals”. It is her contention that “the only way to fully understand the normative demands made on us in epistemic life is by changing the philosophical gaze so that we see through to the negative space that is epistemic injustice” (Fricker, 2007:177). Thus, what this study attempts to do is confront attacks on *Ubuntu* and other indigenous African epistemologies with a view to exposing their ‘epistemic injustice’, and to insert indigenous African epistemologies in mainstream philosophical discourses, thereby affirming their value and viability.

In the next section, I briefly describe the research methods through which this shall be driven. Given its philosophical orientation, this study shall be foregrounded by a ‘philosophical inquiry’. I deal with ‘philosophical inquiry’ in more detail in Chapter 3 below. Here I only make brief remarks. I employ ‘philosophical inquiry’ to interrogate Eurocentric paradigms whose intentions is to cast aspersion on, and to denigrate indigenous African epistemologies while simultaneously privileging mainstream Western epistemologies and worldviews. It is disconcerting that in an African country where the black African people constitute the majority population, negative and denigrating views on indigenous African worldviews by some English liberal scholars tend to receive more coverage and credibility than they ought to, or the so-called *credibility excess* (Fricker, 2003). One of my intentions in this study is to interrogate such an excess.

## **1.6 Research methodology and design**

This study is located in the fields of philosophy of education and African philosophy. By their very nature, philosophy of education and African philosophy are conceptual, reflective and speculative on the notions of knowledge, truth, and the meaning of life. Against the backdrop of the above understanding of philosophically inclined fields, this study shall be conducted through a philosophical inquiry. A characteristic feature of philosophic inquiry is the questioning of taken-for-granted assumptions whose truth or falsity might not be determined by appeal to scientific experimentation and/or observation. As Knight and Collins (2010:309) observe, “a philosophical inquiry is

inquiry in which data gathering makes up only a small part of the task". Instead a philosophical inquiry "is directed at issues whose resolution depends less on data gathering than on the formulation of arguments". It is a norm in philosophical inquiry for philosophers to ponder over questions such as: Are thoughts and feelings real? How did the world begin? What is friendship? And should society uphold divisions of labour along gender lines? With respect to this particular study the sort of questions elicited are the following: what would be the basis for privileging Eurocentric epistemologies over indigenous African epistemologies? How valid is the assumption that coexistence between indigenous African values and liberal democratic values is incompatible, contradictory, and therefore doomed to fail? How plausible is the view that indigenous African epistemologies are not viable as models of education and citizenship in African democracies? What would be the aims of a philosophy of education in a liberal democracy that is also heavily steeped in indigenous African cultures and traditions? Knight and Collins (2010:309) remind us that these questions "arise for all humans; they arise from the fact that humans are self-conscious, able to reflect on the content of our consciousness, and on the relationship between our experience and the rest of the world".

This study shall be underpinned by certain political and epistemological considerations that influence debates on education in South Africa. For instance, these include the fact that politically South Africa is a liberal democracy that is also heavily steeped in indigenous African cultures such as the pervasiveness of chieftaincy in the vastly rural areas, which is coupled with a deep commitment to particular cultural practices such as initiation of young men and women. The epistemological trajectory stands at a profoundly complex point. How, for instance, can a conception of education be framed that not only straddles the liberal democratic culture and indigenous African cultures, but also seeks to amalgamate the two while maintaining a constructive tension that might arise from the intended amalgamation? The study grapples with this seeming tension. It shall inquire into what ought to be taught and learned in South Africa where there are these contending hegemonic positions over whose knowledge ought to be of most worth. A philosophical inquiry is often used interchangeably with a 'dialectical philosophy'. Carr (1997: 205) argues that a 'dialectical philosophy' "allows the contradictions and illusions inherent in conventional knowledge and understanding to be exposed and transcended through critical dialogue and debate".

Thus, the study shall be conducted more as a ‘community of philosophical inquiry’ (CPI), which Kennedy (2004:744) defines as a way of practising philosophy “that is characterised by conversation; that creates its discussion agenda from questions posed by the conversants as a response to some stimulus (whether text or some other media); and that includes discussion of specific philosophers or philosophical traditions, if at all, only in order to develop its own ideas about the concepts under discussion”. Kennedy (2004:744-745) posits that “as a pedagogical form, CPI is dialogical and multi-logical rather than monological, constructivist rather than transmissional, and its curriculum is at least partially co-constructed and emergent. As a form of communal discourse, it aspires to an ideal speech situation in the sense that power is present in the discursive system, not as reified in role hierarchy or arguments from authority but in the transformative, systemic dynamics of dialogue”.

## **1.7 Consideration of research ethics**

Given that this study will be conducted under the auspices of the University of South Africa (UNISA), it shall be governed by the *UNISA Policy on Research Ethics*, which was approved by Council in September 2013. While this study shall not particularly involve human participants, in which case issues of vulnerability, the need for just and dignified treatment of participants, confidentiality and non-disclosure of participants’ identities arise, the policy discourages “unethical research practice” (section 3.1.2). The policy urges researchers to always “make ethics an integral part of planning and methodology of research” (section 3.1.5). While the policy recognises that “researchers have the fundamental right to academic freedom and freedom of scientific research” (section 5.1), it urges researchers to “be competent and accountable”; to “act in a responsible manner and to strive to achieve the highest possible level of excellence, integrity and scientific quality in their research” (section 5.2.1). Given that this study is a document-based philosophic inquiry, the *UNISA Policy on Research Ethics* cautions that “researchers may not commit plagiarism, piracy, falsification or the fabrication of results at any stage of the research. The findings of research should be reported accurately and truthfully, and historical records and study material should be preserved and protected” (section 5.2.9). In the conduct

of this study all the above-mentioned considerations of research ethics will be observed and adhered to.

## **1.8 Chapter outline**

### **Chapter 1: Introduction**

This introductory chapter sets the stage by providing a roadmap of how the study as a whole shall pen out. It sketches the key areas of contestation, the underlying assumptions, and the central arguments. It delineates the conceptual tools that will be employed and offers methodological justification for such conceptual tools. Finally, it sketches the major propositions that the study intends to make, and their envisaged impact.

### **Chapter 2: Introductory literature review**

This chapter shall provide a detailed review of the literature that frames this study. The literature comprises books and journal articles on traditional African epistemologies, traditional African ideas of politics and governance, liberalism, liberal democracy, and conceptions of education in South Africa. Given that South Africa is an aspiring liberal democracy that is also heavily steeped in local traditions and cultures, a detailed review of the literature that shapes the analysis of these different nuances cannot be overemphasised. As Boote and Beile (2005) remind us, a good literature review should be the basis of both theoretical and methodological sophistication, thereby improving the quality and usefulness of subsequent research. Such a literature review might recognise the methodological weaknesses of a field of study and propose new methodologies to compensate for those weaknesses.

### **Chapter 3: Research Design and Research Methodology**

This chapter shall describe the study's research method. Given that the study's focus is in philosophy of education and African philosophy, it shall therefore be conducted through the Socratic method of critical self-examination or philosophical inquiry (PI).

PI questions the underlying assumptions whose truth or falsity is not depended on experiment or observation, but on the formulation of critical arguments and an acknowledgement of the role of values in understanding one's notion of social reality. Concepts such as 'tradition and modernity', 'Ubuntu', 'liberalism', 'liberal democracy', African philosophy and 'philosophy of education' will be analysed using philosophy as qualitative research methodology.

#### **Chapter 4: Liberal Democracy in South Africa**

Nigerian political economist Claude Ake (1993) argues that the familiar assumptions and political arrangements of liberal democracy make little sense in Africa. In the same vein, South African historian Hermann Gilliomee (1995) doubts that South Africa represents enough of a common society to provide a sufficiently stable base for a well-functioning liberal democracy. The chapter is premised on the following assumptions: (a) liberal democracy is not the monopoly of Western societies. Struggles outside the West have shaped its content and contributed to its redefinition, (b) there is therefore not just one single view of liberalism that defines what it means to be a liberal, (c) instead there are 'many liberalisms'; 'a multitude of liberalisms', and 'a family of liberalisms'. The chapter mounts a rebuttal of the claims that liberal democracy is a Western construct that has no place in Africa. It argues that there is no reason why South Africa should not claim liberal democracy as its defining political theory and philosophy.

#### **Chapter 5: Indigenous African Epistemology: A Focus on *Ubuntu***

This chapter shall explore the enduring indigenous African traditions and cultures in South Africa, for instance, the institution of traditional leadership or chieftaincy, which is also known as *Ubukhosi*. Its focus shall be on the notion of *Ubuntu* as an indigenous African epistemology, or way of knowing. The chapter shall challenge Eurocentric views that tend to cast indigenous African epistemologies as devoid of value or capacity to serve as models for education, morality, democracy and citizenship in Africa. It shall argue that these views tend to regard indigenous epistemologies through 'imperial eyes' or through 'Eurocentric' lenses.

## **Chapter 6: Amalgamation of Traditional African Values and Liberal Democratic Values in South Africa**

The chapter sketches the potential for coexistence between traditional African values and liberal democratic values in post-apartheid South Africa. South Africa's Constitution of 1996 is hailed as liberal and egalitarian because it enshrines a wide range of rights and freedoms for the individual. And yet the same Constitution recognises the institution of traditional leadership, which is criticised for being hereditary and therefore conferring power on chiefs by birth right and not by democratic processes and procedures. This chapter explores the question whether 'traditional African values' and 'liberal democratic values' are necessarily a fundamental contradiction as critics claim.

## **Chapter 7: Conceptions of Education in a Liberal Democratic South Africa**

This chapter shall explore a conception of philosophy of education in post-apartheid South Africa, which is a liberal democracy that is also heavily steeped in African traditions and cultures. Such a conception of education shall be rooted in the African notion of reality while also cognisant of the cosmopolitan imperatives of living in a globalised environment. It shall endeavour to prepare young people who are rooted in their local traditions and cultures but are also comfortable to live and flourish in a globalised cosmopolitan environment. Thus, the chapter shall propose a philosophy of education that seeks to amalgamate traditional African values and liberal democratic values.

## **Chapter 8: Conclusion**

The first part of this final chapter shall weave together all the foregoing underlying assumptions, key arguments, areas of contestation and emergent trends with a view to providing a concise conclusion to the study. The second part shall provide suggestions on how to teach an Ubuntu-oriented liberal philosophy of education that endeavors to emerge the students in the capacity for 'cultivating humanity' and 'narrative imagination'. It shall propose storytelling and the teaching of history based on chronology and causation. The third part shall sketch areas for further research

that shall be taken up after the study in the form of papers to be presented at national and international conferences, to submit them to be considered for publication in national and internal scholarly journals.

## **1.9 Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have provided the roadmap that this study shall follow. I started with background information in which I sketched two conflicting and seemingly incompatible ideological positions that can be said to characterise post-apartheid South Africa. On the one hand, South Africa is a liberal democracy on account of its liberal and egalitarian Constitution. On the other hand, South Africa is an African country that is deeply steeped on African traditions and cultures. This feature of South Africa is more manifest in the fact that the country's widely acclaimed Constitution recognises the institution of traditional leadership and by extension the practices and procedures inherent in customary law. This latter point is at heart of the study's problem statement in that some scholars have found this feature to be not only incompatible with, but also to be contradictory to liberal democratic values. The question this raises is: What sort of conception of education would suit a socio-political culture of this nature? A view which I shall argue in this study, to which I only cursively hinted at in this introductory chapter, is that existence of institutions such as chieftaincy in a liberal democracy is not peculiar to South Africa. Liberal democracies such as Japan, the United Kingdom (UK), Belgium, The Netherlands and Spain have had monarchies. But their monarchies are not obstacles to their liberal democracies. Instead, there exists a symbiotic relationship between the two in which monarchies support the liberal democratic institutions, and concomitantly, the liberal democratic institutions confer democratic accountability on their monarchs. This is a powerful point that helps nullify claims that traditional African values are incompatible with, and might even be contradictory to liberal democratic values.

I briefly demarcated the study's main and sub-research questions, as well as the aim of the study. The key question that this study grapples with is whether there is validity in the claim that a liberal democratic state that attempts to shape its future political trajectory through the amalgamation of indigenous African values and liberal democratic values is doomed to fail? I showed that the study aims to map out the

potential for amalgamation of liberal democratic values and indigenous African values, and how this impacts conceptions of education.

I mapped out the study's research methodology. I pointed out that given that the study in the areas of philosophy of education and African philosophy, it shall be conducted through a philosophical inquiry. A characteristic feature of philosophic inquiry is to question the taken-for-granted assumptions about our notions of reality, 'truth' or knowledge. In the case of this study, it shall inquire about the conception of education that not only straddles the liberal democratic culture and indigenous African cultures, but also grapples with amalgamating the two while maintaining a constructive tension that might arise from the intended amalgamation. I closed the chapter by pointing out that while this study does not involve humans in that it is philosophical and speculative, however its conduct shall, at all times adhere to, and be governed by the *UNISA Policy on Research Ethics*. In the next chapter I review the literature from which I shall draw in this study.

## CHAPTER 2

### INTRODUCTORY LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.1 Introduction

In this chapter I provide a review of some of the literature on which I shall draw to support the arguments I advance in the study. Perhaps I should preface this introduction with brief remarks on conceptions and purposes of a literature review. In her recently published book *Conducting Research Literature Reviews*, Arlene Fink (2014:3) argues that “a research literature review is a systematic, explicit, and reproducible method for identifying, evaluating, and synthesizing the existing body of completed and recorded work produced by researchers, scholars, and practitioners”. For Fink (2014:77), by definition, a literature review should be “based on an analysis of the original studies”, given that “original studies allow the reviewer to report”. The reason for this is that “a research review bases its conclusions on the original work of scholars and researchers. Focusing on high quality original research rather than on interpretations of the findings is the only guarantee you have that the results of the review will be under your supervision and accurate” (Fink, 2014:3).

In the same vein, in his book *Doing a Literature Review: Releasing Social Science Research Imagination*, Hart (2002:13) defines a literature review as “the selection of available documents (both published and unpublished) on the topic, which contain information, ideas, data and evidence written from a particular standpoint to fulfil certain aims or express certain views on the nature of the topic and how it is to be investigated, and the effective evaluation of these documents in relation to the research being proposed”. Hart (2002:27) contends that the purposes of a literature review are, among others:

- To assist the researcher to distinguish what has been done from what needs to be done;
- To discover important variables relevant to the topic;
- To synthesise and gain a new perspective;
- To identify relationships between ideas and practice;

- To establish the context of the topic or problem;
- To rationalise the significance of the problem;
- To enhance the researcher's acquisition of the subject vocabulary;
- To enable the researcher to understand the structure of the subject;
- To assist the researcher to identify the main methodologies and research techniques that should be used; and
- To place the research in a historical context and to highlight familiarity with state-of-the-art developments in the chosen field of study.

Rudolph (2009:2) adds another, equally important purpose of a literature review, and that is, "it provides a framework for relating new findings to previous findings in the discussion section of a dissertation. Without establishing the state of the previous research, it is impossible to establish how the new research advances the previous research". Coming back to Hart (2002:27-28), it is his view that the above purposes of a literature review should not be seen as ranked in order of importance. This is because no other purpose is of greater significance than others. Instead, they are all equally important. Hart (2002:28) argues that at the very basic level "a thesis that duplicates what has already been done is of very little use and is a waste of resources". Knowing who is doing what, and where they are doing it enables the researcher to evaluate the relevance of their research. But how long should a literature review be? For Berg (2001: 275), "the basic rule of thumb in writing literature reviews is to keep them long enough to cover the area, but short enough to remain interesting".

This chapter is organised in five sections. In section one I briefly review the literature in philosophy of education that has influenced my views in the past 30 or so years and has a (in)direct bearing on this study. These include, but are not limited to the work of Richard Stanley Peters and his associates at the Institute of Education, University of London - Paul Hirst, John White, Patricia White, Graham Haydon, Richard Pring and R. F. Dearden. At the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits), Johannesburg, where I studied for my Master's degree in the mid-1980s the work of Wally Morrow and Penny Enslin influenced me immensely. A common feature that these scholars have is that they are both critical and analytically philosophical in their engagement with educational issues. My close association and working with some of relations with Morrow and Enslin in the late 1980s at the University of the Witwatersrand,

Johannesburg, and with Hirst, Haydon, John and Patricia White in the late 1990s at the Institute of Education (IoE), University of London afforded me the opportunity to acquire and internalise the skills of critical and philosophical analysis of educational issues as well. The Wednesday afternoon philosophy of education seminars at the IoE afforded me an invaluable opportunity to participate and interact in high level sessions and discussions with other philosophy of education scholars such as, for instance, Richard Pring from Cambridge University, Eamonn Callan from Stanford University, and to learn how they present their arguments and defend their positions. In section two I review the literature in political philosophy. This review is necessary because political philosophy also encompasses the notions liberalism, which is the one of the foci of this study. Reviewing the literature on political philosophy will allow me to touch on 'political representation' and 'the role of women' in the traditional African polity. In section three I review the literature in African Philosophy and *Ubuntu*. In section four I explore the literature on education. South Africa is a liberal democracy that is heavily steeped in African traditions and cultures. Can the two be reconciled or amalgamated? In the final section I provide some concluding remarks. I now turn to selected literature on philosophy of education.

## **2.2 Philosophy of Education**

As indicated above the work of R. S. Peters on philosophy of education is among those that left a lasting influence on my ability to engage in philosophical analysis of educational issues. It is no coincidence that Peters' work continues to have an enduring and powerful influence on contemporary philosophers of education. Some have credited Peters with establishing "a secure role for philosophy of education in the professional preparation of critical and reflective practising teachers" (Carr, 1994). While others have credited him with founding the Philosophy of Education Society of Great Britain (PESGB) and its official journal, the *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, which he edited for many years (Cooper, 1986). Peters (1980:2) believed that philosophy of education "draws on such established branches of philosophy and brings them together in ways which are relevant to educational issues. In this respect it is very much like political philosophy". He argued that in tackling "issues such as the rights of parents and children, punishment in schools, the freedom of the child, and

the authority of the teacher, it is possible to draw on and develop work done by philosophers on ‘rights’, ‘punishment’, ‘freedom’, and ‘authority’” (Peters, 1980:2). Peters was convinced that “philosophical work in other fields such as political philosophy, ethics, and the philosophy of mind had to be applied appropriately to educational issues, not in a mechanical way, but in a way that acknowledged the unique qualities of the educational context” (Katz, 2010:98).

Peters’ inaugural lecture, “Education as initiation”, which he delivered at the Institute of Education, University of London on 9<sup>th</sup> December 1963, as well as his seminal book *Ethics and Education* (1966) are the most sought after sources for philosophising about education. In subsequent publications, he raised critical philosophical questions on ‘the concept of education’; ‘the aims of education’; ‘conceptions of knowledge (epistemology)’, and ‘whether some forms of knowledge are more worthwhile teaching than others’ (Peters, 2010, 1981, 1980, 1973)? He argued that ‘education as initiation’ “consists in initiating others into activities, modes of conduct and thought which have standards written into them by reference to which it is possible to act, think, and feel with varying degrees of skill, relevance and taste” (Peters, 1973:102). Most importantly, he challenged educators’ taken-for-granted assumptions about the perceived goodness of education and ‘notions of knowledge’. He was concerned that “in exploring the concept of education, a territory is being entered where there are few signposts” (Peters, 2010:1). For instance, philosophically, there are disputes between rival proposals about what the ‘aims of education’ are. Some say that the aim of education is to prepare children for their future occupations; others say that the aim of education is growth; still some say that the aim of education is the transmission of culture; while others say that the aim of education is to preserve the *status quo* in society, or to contribute to a better society in the future (Morrow, 1989). These disparate views are not unusual. The word ‘aim’ “belongs to the same family of concepts as does ‘purpose’; so also do ‘intention’ and ‘motive’. They are all conceptually connected with actions and activities; but there are subtle differences between them in the ways in which they are so connected” (Peters, 1981:12).

Peters’ deepest worry was that the educational philosophy which was taught in the context of professional preparation “had been little more an uncritical survey of the doctrines of great past educators (Plato, Rousseau, Arnold, Dewey) - and that

professionals in both training and practice were ill-equipped with the analytical tools necessary for the critical appraisal of those modern educational theories and policy initiatives with which they were required to come to grips” (Carr, 1998:181). This observation has lately been made by Egan (2001; 1992). Egan argues that the dominant concept of education in most Western countries draws on Durkheim’s socialisation; Plato’s academic idea; and Rousseau’s developmental idea. However, when the three ideas are merged they yield a radically incoherent concept of education that is characterised by conceptual discordance. For instance, Durkheim’s main goal was to socialise learners and homogenise them; to make them alike in important ways. Plato’s Socratic pedagogy aimed to make students sceptical of prevailing norms and values: to develop a questioning mind-set. While Rousseau’s approach emphasised attention to individual differences, to individuals’ stages of development, learning styles and forms of motivation.

Peters’ philosophical insights have encouraged me to develop a philosophically questioning mind-set about the veracity of South Africa’s education policy. I have debated educational issues in South Africa in articles in which I challenge some of the taken-for-granted policy assumptions. For instance, in the article titled “The illusion of ‘Education for All’ in South Africa”, which appears in *Procedia - Social and Behavioural Sciences*, (2014b), volume 116, I rebut the rhetoric about the country’s capacity to attain the Millenium Development Goals in education. In the article titled “South Africa’s education has promises to keep but miles to go”, which appears in *Phi Delta Kappan*, (2013d), volume 94, number 6, I highlight some of the challenges of access to education with respect to some of the most rural and disadvantaged communities in South Africa. In the article titled “The challenges of university teaching in the era of managerialism”, which appears in *Africa Education Review*, (2008), volume 5, number 2, I grapple with the critical value of higher education at the time when higher education has become shackled to marketisation, neo-liberal values and state-sponsored conceptions of knowing. In the article titled, “Why Students leave: the problem of high university dropout rates”, which appears in *HSRC Review*, (2007), volume 5, number 3, I report on a study I conducted for the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) on student pathways and university dropout; in a co-authored article with Kingston Nyamapfene titled, “Problems of learning among first year students in South African universities”, which appears in *South African Journal of Higher Education*, (1995)

volume 9, number 1, we reported on the study we conducted on the impact of student under-preparedness for university teaching and learning.

My own initiation into philosophy of education at Wits University was predicated on the requirement to read, among others, Plato's (1985) book entitled, *The Republic*. This was premised on the assumption that the logical structure of Plato's educational proposals is not only essential for novice philosophers of education, but that it would equip novice philosophers of education with the requisite philosophical skills to be able to deal with the challenges they might face in the world of educational practice. *The Republic* presents a logical and coherent pedagogical package admired by most philosophers of education. This is because Plato's educational proposals follow "from a combination of value-judgements and assumptions about human nature". They seem perfectly exemplary in structure because Plato had "a worked-out theory of knowledge, a worked-out ethical theory and a worked-out theory of human nature" (Peters, 1981:4). As Peters (1981:5) points out, for Plato, "the problem of education is to produce people in whom reason is properly developed, who care about the objects of the theoretical life, who are not side-tracked by subjectivism, who know fully what they want, and who have the strength of character to carry it through". Plato referred to such a calibre of people as 'philosopher-kings'. In *The Republic* he posits that only those who possess the knowledge of ideas are qualified to make authoritative public statements about notions of the good life and to influence society's conceptions of education and governance. Plato (1985:263) was convinced that the ideal, well-ordered and disciplined society in true Spartan tradition would "never grow into a reality or see the light of day...till those we now call kings and rulers really and truly become philosophers, and political power and philosophy thus come into the same hands".

Hare (1982) notes that on this premise if the good life is to be lived, society's institutions would have to be structured in such a way as to further the education of philosopher-kings. We should be a little introspective though not to presume that Plato was conferring unfettered wisdom and unregulated power on 'philosopher-kings'. Because that is a recipe for all sorts of vices that can be attributed to bad governance - authoritarianism, lack of accountability, disregard for the rule of law, corruption, a sense entitlement and political impunity. I think Miller (2003:13) is spot-on in his

observation that “political philosophy does not involve endowing philosophers with a special kind of knowledge not available to other human beings”. The reason for this is that philosophers “think and reason in much the same way as everyone else, but they do so more critically and more systematically. They take less for granted: they ask whether our beliefs are consistent with one another, whether they are supported by evidence”. I will come back to Miller in more detail in the section on political philosophy below where I touch on some of his publications on the discipline.

One of the most important lessons I have learned as I developed a deeper grasp of philosophy of education is to avoid reading any philosophical piece hastily and refrain from making premature inferences. In “*Was Plato nearly right about education?*” Peters was sceptical of Plato’s central assumptions about education. He wanted to show that even the seemingly flawless and generally appealing educational proposals such as Plato’s will have some kind of flaws when their philosophical premises are tossed around and recast, along the lines of Karl Popper’s ‘principle of falsification’.<sup>2</sup> Peters (1981:12-13) noted that Plato was fascinated by Geometry’s capacity for certainty. There is no room for normal human bias and fallibility in Geometry. Instead Geometry provides “the basic understanding of the structure of the world”, as well as “some kind of certainty about moral issues”. But this is exactly where Peters found a flaw in some aspects of Plato’s educational proposals, especially with respect to moral issues. Moral issues are not mathematical theorems. They do not follow a linear predetermined trajectory. For instance, a mathematical formula such as: ‘*if x then y*’ cannot fully explain why someone acted in a particular way and not the other. This is because such a formula cannot offer a deeper understanding of things like ‘values’, ‘emotions’, ‘feelings’ or ‘aspirations’. And yet these are central to how people live their lives and make important choices and decisions every day. Peters (1981:13) made a case for the “stress on criticism and on humility, on the possibility of error, and on the co-operative nature of reason”, things that are not reducible, as it were, to Geometrical specificity or precision. He argued that “the political institutions in which reason is immanent must be fostered”. He insisted that “it is democracy, not meritocracy, which is the articulation of reason in its social form”, because “democracy at the very least involves ‘parlement’ or discussion in the making of public decisions”.

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<sup>2</sup> See “Falsifiability and Falsification”, in Karl Popper. 2005. *The Logic of Scientific Discovery*.

At this stage I want to pause and briefly acknowledge the contribution of Peters' countryman and fellow philosopher of education, John Wilson. Wilson (2010; 1988) also raised serious questions about the relationship between philosophy and education. For instance, in his book, *Preface to the Philosophy of Education*, which was initially published in 1979 and was republished in 2010, Wilson (2010:8) demarcates critical education questions that philosophy of education should commit to clarifying: what is it to learn something? What sorts of things are there to learn? Is there a criterion on *how much* education a man needs? What is it to be a *serious* learner? What are the obstacles to serious learning? Are there some things which can reasonably be given priority? Note that this final question resonates with Peters' inquiry into 'whether some forms of knowledge are [more] worthwhile teaching than others?

In a useful article entitled: "What philosophy can do for education?", which appears in *Canadian Journal of Education*, Wilson (1988:84) argues that the enterprise of philosophy consists of examining and trying to improve our understanding of our basic concepts and values and because on any serious account of education, that enterprise is inextricably bound up with concepts and values that are unclear, controversial, and hence in need of a critical examination. In concurrence, Holma (2009:325) argues that "philosophy is an academic discipline specialised in analysing and understanding the wider processes of the constructing of theories, questioning their hidden background premises, and revealing and examining the values affecting academic - as well as other - human practices". She further argues that "the perennial philosophical questions have straightforward connections to the world of education: for example, the ethical questions of responsibility and humanity, as well as the epistemological questions of knowledge and its justification cannot be escaped in educational thinking". In this study for example the hidden background assumptions of the work of South African scholars such as Enslin and Horsthemke (2004) on the viability of indigenous African epistemologies as models for education and democracy; and Ntsebeza's (2005) view that existence of traditional forms of politics and governance in a liberal democracy is both incompatible and contradictory, shall be critically analysed and rebutted.

In her book entitled, *Civic Virtues and Public Schooling: Educating Citizens for a Democratic Society*, Patricia White (1996) ventures into a whole gamut of civic virtues she believes pertain to education for citizenship and which philosophers of education should promote in schools through their teaching and research. These are 'hope and confidence', 'courage', 'self-respect and self-esteem', 'friendship', 'trust', 'honesty', and 'decency'. White's (1996:3) central assumption is that "things will go better in the polity if citizens acquire the appropriate democratic dispositions". To that end, "teachers have to encourage understanding of, and trust in, the political institutions of the wider society and at the same time teach the importance of distrust. These are delicate, necessarily tension-ridden tasks (White, 1996:4). White (1996:6) elaborates that "the aim is to give students some picture of the nature of different dispositions, their place in the ethical life, the tensions between them, how they might be changed over time, and why some people or groups of people might be particularly disposed to think and act in some ways rather than others". Having taught philosophy of education in South Africa for over two decades, during which time I also witnessed the historic transition from apartheid to democracy, it is my contention that the issues White grapples with in her book pertain to Europe as much as they also pertain to post-apartheid South Africa.

The issues White (1996) raises above resonate with Eamonn Callan's (1997) views, which he maps out in his book, *Creating Citizens: Political Education and Liberal Democracy*. Callan (1997:2) argues that "to believe in liberal democracy is to believe in free and equal citizenship". For him, "free and equal citizenship is also about the kind of people we become and the kind of people we encourage or allow our children to become". It is Callan's (1997:3) contention that education for liberal democratic citizenship can only occur in a political culture. In this political culture there is an active commitment to the good of the polity, confidence and competence in judgements. These judgements should be on how that good should be advanced, and a respect for fellow citizens as well as a sense of common fate with them that goes beyond the tribalisms of ethnicity and religion and is yet alive to the significance these will have in many people's lives. (Please read sentence again)

Against the backdrop of the above analysis, it can be reasonably argued that philosophers of education study the problems of education from a philosophical

perspective. They draw on “standard branches of philosophy such as epistemology (the theory of knowledge), philosophy of language, ethics, social or political philosophy, philosophy of science, and, perhaps, philosophy of mind and aesthetics” (Noddings, 1998:7). These should be to “foster understanding of the philosophical issues underlying contemporary debates” (Noddings, 1998:155). South Africa’s Wally Morrow, whose work I turn to below, endorses some of these views. For instance, he argues that “anyone trying to do philosophy is necessarily part of a community of enquirers, unified not by a prior commitment to particular doctrines, schools of thought, or modes of procedure, but simply by a determination to find out what is true about the grammar of human thought” (Morrow, 1989:58). Morrow (1989:51) contends that “philosophy is an investigation of the grammar of human thought (or some sphere of human thought)”; it is “a ‘metatheoretical’ enterprise – that is, philosophy tries to find theories about theories”. In the same vein, “philosophy of education is a theoretical discipline which has as its aim the critical investigation of forms of understanding relevant to education”. Morrow (1989: xiii) further states that “philosophy of education is a discipline which is concerned with issues which are of profound importance to everyone, not only to professional philosophers, and it is an aspect of public critical debate about education and schooling in society”.

In the introduction I mentioned that Morrow (2009; 2007; 1989) and Enslin (1993; 1984) influenced me immensely during my philosophy of education Masters student days at Wits in the mid-1980s. Let me briefly elaborate. When describing the title of his book, *Chains of Thought: Philosophical Essays in South African Education*, Morrow (1989: xvii) writes that “the ‘chains of thought’ which the essays set out to break are ‘restraints’ or ‘fetters’; the ‘chain of thought’ which the book itself is, is a ‘sequence’, a ‘connected series’ of thought”. Morrow’s use of the verb ‘break’ is instructive given that he taught philosophy of education at the height of the oppressive and repressive nature of apartheid in the 1980s. At the time, Wits was one of the few universities that were sanctuaries for counter hegemonic discourses. Morrow agonised about the naked exercise of brutal force by the apartheid regime and mulled over how philosophy of education might provide a platform for individuals to transcend their repressive material conditions of existence. As he puts it, the main purpose of the book was “to contribute to critical discussion about education in South Africa” (Morrow, 1989: xviii). Morrow argued that “neither education nor democracy can flourish until people learn

how to speak with their own voices, to appropriate the language they are using, and to mean what they say”.

In a subsequent publication entitled: *Learning to Teach in South Africa*, Morrow (2007:142) posited that as a consequence of apartheid “a shared moral discourse has not been able to develop in South Africa, and without a shared moral discourse it is not possible to have a significant discussion of the aims of education”. Morrow used his sharp philosophical vantage point to argue that apartheid was a form of oppression “that disempowered its victims”; that persistently treated them “as objects of policy”, and refused to see them “as wholly and rightfully human, as beings who have moral titles and standings”. For Morrow (2007:146), apartheid and apartheid education were based on moral relativism. He argued that “where moral relativism holds sway, a critical consideration of public moral issues is undermined, and a discussion of the aims of education becomes merely an assertion of incommensurable convictions”. Morrow (2007:146-47) appealed for a “rigorous critique and deconstruction of the forms of understanding that shape and maintain the institutions, relationships and practices that constitute apartheid education”. He argued that until such a project is undertaken “the effects of apartheid education will stretch forward into the future and hamper attempts to reconstruct South African society as a non-racial democratic polity”. It is ironic that Morrow’s philosophical predictions ring true to South Africa’s current educational system and its challenges, which pertain to conceptions of, and access to knowledge, or as he calls it, “lack of epistemological access”.

Enslin is a liberal philosopher of education. This can be gleaned from her doctoral thesis entitled: “In defence of liberal theory of education”, which she submitted at Wits in 1986. Enslin (1986) delineates the ideas and thoughts of English liberal philosopher John Stuart Mill on the notion of liberty. She makes a case for the centrality of personal autonomy to liberal philosophy. She finds resonance between Mill’s liberal philosophical thoughts and the work of University of London’s philosopher of education, John White (1982), which the latter maps out in his book *The Aims of Education Restated*. In a useful article entitled: “Are Hirst and Peters liberal philosophers of education?”, which appears in the *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, Enslin (1985) challenges the radical Marxist stances of Matthews (1980), Harris (1980,

1979) and Sarup (1978) which held that the liberal ideas of R. S. Peters and Paul Hirst were mere 'liberal rhetoric' and apologies for the 'liberal tradition'.

Enslin also featured prominently in the Wits team that drew on philosophy of education to interrogate the science claims of fundamental pedagogics. In a trenchant chapter entitled: "The role of fundamental pedagogics in the formulation of educational policy in South Africa", which appears in Peter Kallaway's inspiring book, *Apartheid and Education: The Education of Black South Africans*, Enslin (1984:139) draws on Louis Althusser's powerful thesis 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses' to argue that Althusser's ideas can "illuminate the function of fundamental pedagogics, ... a powerful doctrine in educational theory at several Afrikaans-medium universities", and help to "analyse the role of fundamental pedagogics in reproducing the ruling ideology in South Africa". Althusser's views can show that fundamental pedagogics was indeed the educational ideological state apparatus (ISA). Enslin (1984:144) argues that

*"While it is claimed that the science of Fundamental Pedagogics can offer us a means of establishing 'universally valid' knowledge about education, instead of 'ideology', 'metaphysics' and 'dogmatics', as philosophy of education used to do, the consequence of the practice of this science is to legitimate the CNE ideology".*

It is Enslin's (1984:145) contention that fundamental pedagogics distorted "the real relations between the 'superior' ruling class and the 'inferior' black culture in South Africa as represented in CNE, the real relations of exploitation being concealed, where the ideology is effective, from both exploiters and exploited". Thus, in fundamental pedagogics we have, in Althusserian terms, an ideological practice masquerading as theoretical practice.

One of the potential criticisms of the tradition of philosophy of education I have demarcated above might be that it is wholly based on the tradition of 'continental philosophy', also known as 'modern European philosophy'. In his book entitled: *Continental Philosophy: A very Short Introduction*, Critchley (2001) writes that continental philosophy is the name for a 200-year period in the history of philosophy that begins with the publication of Immanuel Kant's critical philosophy in the 1780s, and was followed by the German idealism and romanticism led by Fichte, Schelling, Hegel, Schlegel and Novalis, Schleiermacher, Schopenhauer; the critique of

metaphysics associated with Feuerbach, Marx, Nietzsche, Freud, Bergson; the Germanophone phenomenology and existential philosophy of Edmund Husserl, Max Scheler, Karl Jaspers and Martin Heidegger; the French phenomenology, Hegelianism, and anti-Hegelianism of Kojève, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, Levinas, Bataille, de Beauvoir; the Hermeneutics era of Dilthey, Gadamer, Ricoeur; the Western Marxism and the Frankfurt School traditions of Lukacs, Benjamin, Horkheimer, Adorno, Marcuse, Habermas; the French structuralism of Lévi-Strauss, Lacan and Althusser; the poststructuralism of Foucault, Derrida and Deleuze; the postmodernism era of Lyotard and Baudrillard, and feminism associated with Irigaray and Kristeva. My challenge in this study is whether this modern European philosophical paradigm can be reconciled with philosophising on education in South Africa, which has embraced Western liberal democratic principles and values, while still holding on to African traditions and cultures.

To briefly summarise, I have sketched selected pieces of the literature in philosophy of education that have left a lasting impression on me as a philosophy of education theorist and practitioner. I mentioned my fondness of the pioneering work of R. S. Peters of the University of London, showing that Peters ventured into a territory unheard of before in UK's educational theory and practice. In South Africa, I briefly sketched the philosophical contributions of Wally Morrow and Penny Enslin to my development as a philosopher of education. I showed that like their UK counterparts they too drew on mainstream philosophy to unpack education generally, and the philosophical pretensions of fundamental pedagogics and the CNE policy in particular. Given that philosophy of education grapples with education as a political, ideological, and hegemonic issue, in the next section I review the literature in political philosophy with a view to showing how an understanding of political philosophical concepts is symbiotically related to a deeper understanding of philosophy of educational issues.

### **2.3 Political Philosophy**

The discipline of political philosophy has a strong presence in this study. This is because some of the issues I grapple with include notions such as 'power', 'the exercise of power', 'social justice', and 'political representation' as it pertains to the

role of women in the traditional African polity. As a social science discipline, political philosophy has some connections with education. Pitkin (1972:193) argued that political philosophy deals with the familiar problems such as “the nature of culture, how an individual is shaped into a member of a particular society, how creativity and change take place, how personality and culture interact,...the relationship between private and public, the problem of political obligation, the nature of citizenship and of authority”. Perhaps I should preface this section with a brief clarification of my understanding of the discipline of political philosophy. In a short but lucidly written book entitled *Political Philosophy: A very Short Introduction*, Miller (2003:2) defines political philosophy as “an investigation into the nature, causes, and effects of good and bad government, and our picture not only encapsulates this quest, but expresses in striking visual form three ideas that stand at the very heart of the subject”. The three ideas are as follows:

- Good and bad government profoundly affect the quality of human lives. Therefore, people cannot turn their backs on politics, retreat into private life, and imagine that the way they are governed will not have profound effects on their personal happiness;
- The form a government takes is not predetermined: people have choices to make. A bad government is an indicator of what might happen if the rulers failed in their duty to the people, or if the people failed in *their* duty to keep a watchful eye on their representatives; and
- People can know what distinguishes good government from bad: they can trace the effects of different forms of government, and can learn what qualities go to make up the best form of government. A good ruler will be surrounded by figures representing the qualities that characterise good government.

In a later publication entitled, *Justice for Earthlings: Essays in Political Philosophy*, Miller (2013:34) argues that “political philosophy in democratic societies should be aimed at citizens generally, setting out principles that they might follow when supporting or changing their institutions and practices”. He further argues that it should be “in the business of changing political attitudes, of showing people what their convictions mean when applied consistently to political questions” (Miller, 2013:34).

In the same vein, in his book entitled, *Modern Political Philosophy: Theories of the Just Society*, Brown (1990) writes that the central questions of political philosophy concern the nature of the good or right organisation of society. He elaborates, “Traditionally conceived, political philosophy concerns itself with certain perennial problems involving the nature of justice, political obligations and, more generally, the good society” (Brown, 1990:14). In *Lectures on the History of Political Philosophy*, Rawls (2008:10) endorses Brown’s views above. He argues that “political philosophy may contribute to how a people think of their political and social institutions as a whole, of themselves as citizens, and of their basic aims and purposes as a society with a history”. However, I think Bufacchi (2012:27) neatly sums it up in his book entitled, *Social Injustice: Essays in Political Philosophy*:

*“The point of political philosophy is not merely to create an arena where professional academics and students can play an increasingly sophisticated intellectual game, which is as highly stimulating as it is increasingly insignificant. Instead political philosophy ought to strive for three main goals: to identify the nature of the social and political problems inflicting our societies, especially the problem of social injustice; to set the agenda for future social policies; and to indicate solutions to these problems”.*

Perhaps I should close this clarification of my take on political philosophy by briefly touching on the work of Jonathan Wolff. In a wonderfully written book entitled, *An Introduction to Political Philosophy*, Wolff (1996:2) argues that “political philosophy is a *normative* discipline, meaning that it tries to establish norms (rules or ideal standards). Thus “one task for the political philosopher.... is to determine the correct balance between autonomy and authority, or, in other words, to determine the proper distribution of political power”. I shall say more on the notion of ‘power’ below with reference to the work of Lukes (2001) and Poulantzas (1973).

The above clarification is necessary in order for me to indicate how I shall respond to political philosophy-related issues in the study - women’s representation in traditional African societies; the exercise of power, and co-existence between traditional African values and liberal democratic values. Women in South Africa were active in the drafting of the new Constitution that guarantees women a whole range of rights and freedoms (Tripp, 2001). Hence it has been argued that gender issues have been central to state restructuring to promote and maintain gender equality (McEwan, 2001). And yet others have expressed dissatisfaction with the much vaunted changes

in so far as they pertain to women. For instance, in the article entitled, “*Are the powers of traditional leaders in South Africa compatible with women’s equal rights?*”, three conceptual arguments”, which appears in the journal, *Human Rights Review*, Bentley (2005) argues that the much touted changes for many women have been ‘on paper’ only. In the same vein, Walker (2003) observes that instituting programmes that challenge unequal gender relations is difficult, partly because the subordinate status of rural women is embedded in multi-layered relationships that are not easily reduced to policy prescriptions.

There are concerns that women’s views in the traditional African polity might not have been sufficiently represented notwithstanding that there was tacit understanding that husbands represented their wives and/or households in the *pitso/imbizo* [public assembly] *pep pro* [as delegated representatives] or *pro bono publico* [as legal representatives acting for the public good]. It seems these concerns also pertain to post-apartheid South Africa. For instance, in her article entitled, “*Liberal constitutions and traditional cultures: The South African customary law debate*”, which appears in the journal *Citizenship Inquiry*, Deveaux (2003:161) contends that “liberal constitutions that protect citizens’ individual equality rights as well as their right to practice their culture run into difficulties where gender is concerned”. She wonders “whether the Bill of Rights should apply directly or indirectly to common law and to customary law” (Deveaux, 2003:164), because effectively, “this means that the question of how conflicts between constitutional provisions and practices associated with customary law will be treated in future is an open one”.

The place and role of liberalism and liberal democracy in the African political discourse have come under heavy scrutiny over the past years. And the trend continues even with the new generation of African scholars. For instance, in his book entitled, *Democracy and Development in Africa*, Ake (1996:130) argues that “liberal democracy is inimical to the idea of the people having effective decision making power. The essence of liberal democracy is precisely the abolition of popular power and the replacement of popular sovereignty with the rule of law”. In the article entitled, “*The unique case of African democracy*”, which appears in the journal *International Affairs*, Ake (1993:243) argues that “the familiar assumptions and political arrangements of liberal democracy make little sense in Africa”. For him, “most of Africa is still far from

liberal democracy and further still from the participative social democracy” (Ake, 1996:137). It is his contention that Africa needs the following:

- A democracy in which people have some real decision-making over and above the formal consent of electoral choice;
- A social democracy that places emphasis on concrete political, social, and economic rights, as opposed to a liberal democracy that emphasises abstract political rights;
- A democracy that puts as much emphasis on collective rights as it does on individual rights; and
- A democracy of incorporation. To be as inclusive as possible, the legislative bodies should have special representation of mass organisations, especially youth, the labour movement, and women's groups, which are usually marginalised. Without the active participation of these groups democracy is unlikely to occur.

In *Democracy Compromised: Chiefs and the Politics of Land in South Africa*, Ntsebeza (2005) takes issue with the South African Constitution’s recognition of the institution of traditional leadership or *Ubukhosi* – chieftaincy. For him such recognition constitutes a ‘fundamental contradiction’ because the institution of traditional leadership is hereditary and not democratic. This flies in the face of liberal democratic principles of freedom and the right to choose or elect leaders to public office. In addition, Jo Beall, who has conducted extensive research on the relationship between *Ubukhosi* and the wider governance structures in the province of KwaZulu-Natal, advances a similar argument to Ntsebeza’s. In the article entitled, “*Cultural weapons: traditions, inventions and the transition to democratic governance in Metropolitan Durban*”, which appears in the journal, *Urban Studies*, Beall (2006:495) argues that

*“Chieftaincy operates on principles that are antithetical to democratic ideals. Selection for the office of chief is not by popular vote, but is hereditary and usually for life. Traditional authority structures are hierarchical and patriarchal. Customary practices and laws are exclusionary and oppressive towards women. Under such a system, there are obvious limits to representation and downward accountability”.*

In an earlier co-authored article entitled: “*Emergent democracy and ‘resurgent’ tradition: institutions, chieftaincy and transition in KwaZulu-Natal*”, which appears in

the *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Beall, Mkhize., and Vawda (2005:756) argue that “the relationship between *Ubukhosi* (chieftaincy) and wider governance structures must be seen as part of a longer history, exhibiting both continuities and discontinuities”. They wonder whether “the institution of *Ubukhosi* might evolve or mutate through its encounter with more democratic institutions of governance” (Beall, *et al.* 2005: 767).

The debates sketched above highlight the centrality of the notion of ‘representation’, in particular ‘political representation’, to socio-political interactions. At stake here is how the notion of ‘representation’ might have been conceived in the traditional African polity, and how it ought to be conceived in post-apartheid South Africa. Pitkin’s (1967) ground-breaking book entitled, *The Concept of Representation*, provides the necessary conceptual tools for theorising the notion of ‘political representation’. And so are also some of the articles she published on the notion of representation, for instance, “*Hobbes’s concept of representation - I*”, which appears in *American Political Science Review*, and “*Commentary: The paradox of representation*”, which appears in *Nomos X, Representation* (Pitkin, 1968, 1964). In 1972 Pitkin published *Wittgenstein and Justice: The Significance of Ludwig Wittgenstein for Social and Political Thought*, in which she revisited her earlier views on the notion of representation, and responded to some of the criticisms of *The Concept of Representation*.

Pitkin (1967:1) is explicit that *The Concept of Representation* is “not a historical study of the way in which representative government has evolved, nor yet an empirical investigation of the behaviour of contemporary representatives or the expectations voters have about them”. Rather it “is primarily a conceptual analysis”. She contends that in philosophy “the function of the linguistic analysis of concepts is often taken to be the clearing up of certain characteristic ‘muddles’ or philosophical pseudo-problems arising out of the misuse of ordinary words” (Pitkin, 1967:7).

Briefly, Pitkin’s (1967:209) conceives of ‘representation’ as “acting in the interest of the represented, in a manner responsive to them”. She devotes specific chapters in her book to “*Standing for*”, which refers to ‘descriptive representation’ (chapter four);

'Symbolic Representation' (chapter five), and "Representing as Acting For" (chapter six). Pitkin's (1967:8) working assumption is that "representation does have an identifiable meaning, applied in different but controlled and discoverable ways in different contexts". She argues that "representation means, as the word's etymological origins indicate, *re-presentation*, a making present again". This implies "the making present in *some sense* of something which is nevertheless *not* present literally or in fact". Thus, the essence of representation' "is that the representatives - whatever the manner of their investiture - are authorised in advance to act conjointly on behalf of their constituents and bind them by their collective decisions" (Pitkin, 1967: 43). Pitkin (1967:155) posits that "the substance of the activity of representing seems to consist in promoting the interests of the represented, in a context where the latter is conceived as capable of action and judgment, but in such a way that he does not object to what is done in his name".

Contemporary political scientists who have drawn on Pitkin's work to contribute to the debate on the notion of representation include David Runciman. In the article entitled, "The paradox of political representation", which appears in the *Journal of Political Philosophy*, Runciman (2007:93) shares some of Pitkin's etymological observations on the notion of representation. But he goes further to highlight its paradoxical nature. As he puts it, "this is not a formal or logical paradox, but a linguistic one, and it has its roots in the etymology of the term: 're-presentation' implies that something must be present in order to be '*re-presented*' but also absent in order to be '*re-presented*'". The essence of Runciman's (2007:94) argument is to highlight "a fundamental dualism built into the meaning of representation". He argues that "the paradoxical character of the concept of representation derives from the simultaneity of this requirement of presence and non-presence, enabling contradictory conclusions to be drawn from any given use of the concept" (Runciman, 2007:95). However, Runciman acknowledges that Pitkin was unambiguous that the activity of representation is tied to the promotion of interests; it cannot simply be identified with the representation of interests, because it also has to allow for a kind of 'presence' on the part of those whose interests are represented. In a later article, entitled, "Representation and democracy: uneasy alliance", which appears in *Scandinavian Political Studies*, Pitkin (2004:336) offers a useful clarification of the paradox of representation:

*“The way a city or a mountain is ‘made present’ on a map differs totally from the way a litigant is ‘made present’ by an attorney. The way Macbeth is ‘made present’ on the stage differs from the way an ambassador represents a state, or the way one ‘makes representations about’ something, or what characterises representational art or a representative sample”.*

Concerns about women’s representation in political decision-making in the traditional African polity raise questions about power and how it is exercised. French philosopher Michel Foucault (1998; 1980; 1977) has written extensively on the notion of power and how power is exercised. But for my purpose in this study, I prefer Steven Lukes’ (2005) book, entitled: *Power; A Radical View*. Lukes (2005:30) argues that “the concept of power is, in consequence, what has been called an ‘essentially contested concept’ - one of those concepts which inevitably involve endless disputes about their proper uses on the part of their users”. To that extent, “to engage in such disputes is itself to engage in politics”. Lukes’ (2005:41) central project is to answer the questions “What is an exercise of power? What is it to exercise power?” He argues that effective exercise of power occurs when “A gets B to do what he [B] would not otherwise do” (Lukes, 2005:43). Lukes’ thesis on power is consistent with Althusserian theorist, Nicos Poulantzas’ conception of power. In his book entitled: *Political Power and Social Classes*, Poulantzas (1973:104) defines power as “the capacity of a social class to realise its specific objective interests”. Let me elaborate. When the Italian fascist regime of Benito Mussolini incarcerated communist party activist and general secretary Antonio Gramsci in 1926 for speaking out against fascism, and kept him in jail until his death in 1937, the aim was to stop Gramsci’s brain from “working for 20 years” (Monasta, 1993:599). Similarly, when South Africa’s apartheid regime banished Nelson Mandela to Robben Island in 1964, and kept him prisoner for twenty-seven (27) years, it was, like the Italian fascist regime trying to silence him for his counter-hegemonic stance. Against this backdrop my view is that we need a new lens on the debates on men, power and women in the traditional African polity. Such a lens should enable us to have a more nuanced understanding of how men and women related in traditional African societies.

To summarise, I prefaced this section with a clarification of my understanding of political philosophy. I argued that political philosophy is a normative discipline in that it seeks to determine the correct balance between autonomy and authority, and the proper distribution of political power. I showed that this conception of political

philosophy pertains to my purposes in this study given that it has the potential to enable me to unpack the concerns regarding women's representation in the traditional African polity. If we recall Pitkin's conception of 'representation', it remains to be seen whether it can be reasonably argued that in the traditional African polity men were authorised to act on behalf of women with a view to advancing the latter's interests. I touched on the exercise of power, and whether there is substance in the claim that traditional African values are fundamentally contradictory to liberal democratic values. In the next section I focus on the literature on African philosophy and *Ubuntu*.

## 2.4 African Philosophy and the notion of Ubuntu

The issue whether African philosophy exists or not (Letseka, 2012; Hallen, 2002; Bodunrin, 1981; Temples, 1959); whether it is still in the making (Gratton, 2003; Letseka, 2000; Wiredu, 1980, 1996), or whether it exists as mythologies or as a form of ethno-philosophy (Ochieng'-Odhiambo, 2006, 2002; Oruka, 2002, 1990, 1972; Hountondji, 1996), has been sufficiently exhausted by African philosophers. Therefore, I shall not dwell on it here. Instead, what I shall attempt to do in this section is to focus on the literature that explores the question whether African philosophy can add value to conceptions of education and social policy in South Africa, and how a modern African society might be ordered (Letseka, 2013a, 2013b; Gyekye, 1997; Wiredu, 1996).

In a provocative but denigrating article entitled, "Can *Ubuntu* provide a model for citizenship education in African democracies?", which appears in *Comparative Education*, Enslin and Horsthemke (2004) cast aspersion on the capacity of indigenous African epistemologies, including *Ubuntu*, to serve as models for citizenship education in African democracies. I shall show that in traditional African societies *Ubuntu* is widely embraced as a worldview, as a normative concept or a moral theory, as a public policy, as a notion of communal justice and social order, and as a pedagogical principle (Letseka, 2014a; 2013a; 2013b; 2012; 2000; Metz, 2011; 2007; Metz & Gaie, 2010; Broodryk, 2002; Ramose, 2002a, 2002b, 1999; Sindane, 1994; Mokgoro, 1998; Shutte, 1994). In her book entitled, *Decolonising Methodologies: Research and Indigenous People*, Waikado University scholar of

indigenous knowledge Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2008:56) coins the phrase research 'through imperial eyes', which she argues and describes “an approach which assumes that Western ideas about the most fundamental things are the only ideas possible to hold, certainly the only rational ideas, and the only ideas which can make sense of the world, of reality, of social life and of human beings”.

Smith's (2008) argument above resonates with Amin's (2009) critique of Eurocentrism in his book entitled, *Eurocentrism*. Amin (2009) argues that Eurocentrism is a culturalist phenomenon that assumes existence of irreducibly distinct cultural variants that shape the historical paths of different peoples. Its manifestations “are expressed in the most varied of areas: day-to-day relationships between individuals, political information and opinion, general views concerning society and culture, social science. These expressions are sometimes violent, leading all the way to racism, and sometimes subtle” (Amin, 2009: 179). Eurocentrism claims that imitation of expression of the Western model by all people is the only solution to the challenges of our time. Thus Eurocentrism “implies a theory of world history and, departing from it, a global political project” (Amin, 2009: 154).

My intention in this study is to highlight the importance of *Ubuntu* to the traditional African *lebenswelt* [world of lived experiences]. *Ubuntu* is a form of traditional knowledge [indigenous epistemology]. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO)'s (2003:2) report entitled, *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* defines 'intangible cultural heritage' as “the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognise as part of their cultural heritage”. The 'intangible cultural heritage' manifests in:

- Oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of the intangible cultural heritage;
- Performing arts;
- Social practices, rituals and festive events;
- Knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe; and
- Traditional craftsmanship.

These manifestations are transmitted from generation to generation, and are “constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity”.

Notwithstanding the vicious criticisms by Enslin and Horsthemke, (2004) and Marx (2002), *Ubuntu* has important normative, cultural and educational implications. This much is confirmed by the African scholars who have attempted to insert *Ubuntu* in mainstream philosophical discourses and to make a case for its epistemological viability and philosophical legitimacy. In my view, the work of Mogobe Ramose stands out in this endeavour. Ramose’s (1999) book entitled, *African Philosophy through Ubuntu*, and his chapter contributions that are specific to *Ubuntu* are worth mentioning. For instance, “The philosophy of *Ubuntu* and *Ubuntu* as a philosophy”, and “The ethics of *Ubuntu*”, both of which appear in *Philosophy from Africa: A Text with Readings*, which is edited by P. H. Coetzee and A. P. J. Roux (2003), provide useful insights into Ramose’s views and ideas on *Ubuntu*. Ramose (2002a:270) argues that understood as being human (humanness); a humane, respectful, and polite attitude towards others, “*Ubuntu* is the root of African philosophy. The being of an African in the universe is inseparably anchored upon *Ubuntu*”. In his book entitled, *Ubuntu: Life lessons from Africa*, Johann Broodryk (2002) conceives of *Ubuntu / botho* as a comprehensive ancient African worldview based on the values of humanness, caring, sharing, respect, compassion and associated values, ensuring a happy and qualitative human community life in a spirit of family.

I have elaborated on these aspects of *Ubuntu* in my own research. For instance, in a chapter contribution entitled, “*African philosophy and educational discourse*”, which appears in Phillip Higgs’ co-edited book *African Voices in Education*, I argue that “*Botho* or *Ubuntu* is therefore normative in that it prescribes desirable and accepted forms of human conduct in a particular community of people” (Letseka, 2000:186). I posit that “*Botho* or *Ubuntu* is treated as normative in that it encapsulates moral norms and virtues such as kindness, generosity, compassion, benevolence, courtesy, and respect and concern for others” (Letseka, 2000:179-180). In the article entitled, “*In defence of Ubuntu*”, which appears in *Studies in Philosophy and Education*, I argue

that “*Ubuntu* articulates our inter-connectedness, our common humanity and the responsibility to each that flows from our connection. It is a worldview that emphasises the communality and interdependence of the members of the community” (Letseka, 2012:54). Hence in South Africa *Ubuntu* is associated with the saying, *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* (Nguni), or its Sotho alternative *motho ke motho ka batho*. The English translation of this saying approximates: “a human being is a human being because of other human beings’.

In his books entitled, *African Religions and Philosophy* (1989) and *Introduction to African Religion* (1975) Mbiti (1989) coins the maxim: “*I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am*”. This maxim resonates with *Ubuntu*’s feature of ‘communal interdependence’ sketched above. Mbiti (1989:106) argues that according to this maxim, in Africa “the individual cannot exist alone except corporately. She owes her existence to other people, including those of past generations and her contemporaries”. Concomitantly, “whatever happens to the individual happens to the whole group, and whatever happens to the whole group happens to the individual”. In their article entitled, “*Studying morality within the African context: a model of moral analysis and construction*”, which appears in *Journal of Moral Education*, Verhoef and Michel (1997:396) argue that the ‘we’ of the African ethos “is a shared experience, a body of collective experience, an understanding that one’s experiences are never entirely one’s own”.

I have since moved the debate further from merely defending *Ubuntu* against those who attack it by fleshing out *Ubuntu*’s pedagogical implications in the article entitled, “*Educating for Ubuntu*”, which appears in *Open Journal of Philosophy* (Letseka, 2013a). In the article entitled, “*Anchoring Ubuntu morality*”, which appears in *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, I argue a case for anchoring *Ubuntu* morality in personhood, in the family, and in the community (Letseka, 2013b). I argue for *Ubuntu* to serve as a communal notion of ‘justice as fairness’ in the article entitled, “*Ubuntu and justice as fairness*”, which appears in *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences* (Letseka, 2014a).

To summarise, I have asserted from the outset that in this review I am not going to belabour the old debate on whether African philosophy exists or not, and in what it

exists. Instead I shall focus on the literature that contribute towards our understanding of the ways in which African philosophy and *Ubuntu* can add value to the role of education in Africa and contribute to social policy. I have sketched numerous pieces of literature that attest to the potential for *Ubuntu* to serve as a moral theory, that is, to have a normative upshot in traditional and modern African societies. In the next section I review the literature on conceptions of education in a South Africa that is a liberal democracy, but is also heavily steeped in African cultures and traditions.

## **2.5 Conceptions of education in South Africa**

In this penultimate section I broach the literature on conceptions of education in a post-apartheid South Africa. Post-apartheid South Africa is a fascinating political philosophy and philosophy of education laboratory. On the one hand, it is an African country that has embraced liberal democratic values and ideas of politics, thanks to its Constitution, which is hailed worldwide as liberal and egalitarian. Chapter two in particular, which is the Bill of Rights, enshrines a wide variety of rights and freedoms for the individual. For instance, section 9 (3) is very clear that even the state cannot unfairly discriminate against anyone on the grounds of race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language and birth. On the other hand, the same Constitution recognises the institution of traditional leadership, which implies that it recognises the place and role of traditions and cultures in South African society. While there were concerns after 1996 that the Constitution was silent on the legal and policy roles of traditional leaders in a liberal democracy, subsequent policies and legislation have eventually addressed these concerns, hopefully. For instance, the *White Paper on Local Government* of 1998; the *White Paper on Traditional Leadership and Governance* of 2003, as well as the *Traditional Leadership and Governance Framework Act* of 2003, and the *Communal Land Rights Act* of 2004, all provide the necessary details not stated in the Constitution by mapping out the roles and duties of traditional leaders while also emphasising the supremacy of the Constitution.

In this section I touch on the literature that might assist in working out a conception of education that reconciles and amalgamates the liberal democratic values and

traditional African values, while also supporting the cosmopolitanism that comes with teaching and learning in a constantly changing globalised world. In his book entitled, *Tradition and Modernity: Philosophical Reflections on the African Experience* (1997), and in an earlier chapter contribution entitled, “*Traditional political ideas: their relevance to developments in contemporary Africa*” (1992), which appears in *Person and Philosophy: Ghanaian Philosophical Studies I*, Gyekye (1992:242) sets out to

*“explore the traditional African values and ideas of government with a view to pointing out the democratic features of this indigenous system of government, and to examine whether or not, and in what ways, such features can be said to be harmonious with the ethics of contemporary culture and hence relevant to developments in political life and thought in modern Africa”.*

Taking cue from Gyekye above, in this section I shall touch on the literature that sheds light on the plausibility of educating the young people to live their lives in a modern cosmopolitan environment (Gitlin, 2006; Nussbaum, 2002), while still cognisant of their communal cultures and traditions (Gyekye, 1997, 1992). In a chapter entitled, “*Patriotism and cosmopolitanism*”, which appears in *For the Love of Country*, a book she has co-edited with Joshua Cohen, Martha Nussbaum (2002:8) advocates education for world citizenship. She argues that “to be a citizen of the world one does not need to give up local identifications, which can frequently be a source of great richness in life” (Nussbaum, 2002:9). Rather we should think of ourselves “not as devoid of local affiliations, but as surrounded by a series of concentric circles. The first one encircles the self, the next takes in the immediate family, then follows the extended family, then, in order, neighbours or local groups, fellow city-dwellers, and fellow countrymen”. A conception of multicultural cosmopolitan education in the globalised world we live in today cannot be overemphasised as it serves the purpose of making youngsters aware of the imperatives of our globally networked society (Castells, 2010).

How then do we conceive of an educational framework that taps into traditional African cultures, forms of knowledge, and skills and make these applicable to the social and cultural life of modern Africa? Gyekye (1992:245) is clear that traditional African ideas that are considered worthwhile “must be thoroughly and critically examined and sorted out in a sophisticated manner”. They must be “explored, refined, trimmed and given a modern translation”. This brings up the *BIG* question: which indigenous African forms

of education can be considered worthwhile and pertinent for “developments in the political life and thought in modern Africa?” Most of the literature on indigenous African education emphasises the centrality of moral values, ‘good’ human conduct and social etiquette, as well as the transmission of society’s cultures (Marah, 2006; Adeyemi & Adeyinka, 2003, 2002; Adeyinka & Ndwapi, 2002; Adeyinka, 2000, 1993). In their co-authored chapter entitled, “*What kinds of people are we? Values education after Apartheid*”, which appears in Aspin and Chapman’s book, *Values Education and Lifelong Learning*, Pendlebury and Enslin (2007) also contribute to the debate by reflecting on the role of values education in shaping the kind of personhood that is desirable in post-apartheid South Africa.

The Department of Education’s (2001) *Manifesto on Values, Education and Democracy* identifies ten (10) critical values that schools should promote. The values in question are, democracy, social justice and equity, equality, non-racism and non-sexism, *Ubuntu* or human dignity, an open society, accountability and responsibility, the rule of law, respect, and reconciliation. A question that might be asked at this stage is why such an emphasis on ‘values’? The answer is fairly simple: values are desirable characteristics because they are essential for life, and intertwine with morality. Critically though, the above-mentioned values are also entrenched in the country’s constitution. In a later report entitled, *Values and Human Rights in the Curriculum*, the Department of Education (DoE) (2005) provides a breakdown of how values education will be rolled out at different learning phases, and what the different emphases should be. The DoE (2005: 7) notes that

*“Human rights claim their roots as being simply in the humanness people ‘contain’, which cannot be separated from their being. Whilst some values may be specific to a culture or a religion, there are those which many would consider ‘universal’. Amongst these are the values which form the cornerstone of our own democracy: dignity, equality, justice and freedom”.*

In the closing section of the review I want to suggest that values are essential to the educational development of ‘the self’ and to desirable ‘personhood’. The notions of ‘the self’ and ‘personhood’ feature prominently in the work of Kenyan philosopher Dismas Masolo. In his book entitled, *Self and Community in a Changing World*, Masolo (2010:89) argues that “personhood is inter-subjectively constituted”. Thus “by means of communicative interaction we become more than just human beings: we *become*

persons” (Masolo, 2010: p. 142). In the same vein, in a chapter entitled, “On three normative conceptions of a person”, which appears in Kwasi Wiredu (ed) *A Companion to Africa Philosophy*, Menkiti (2004:326) argues that “in the stated journey of the individual toward personhood the community plays a vital role both as catalyst and as prescriber of norms”. Therefore, it follows that the notion of ‘personhood’ is at the epicentre of ‘what’, ‘why’, and ‘how’ we ought to teach the young people. The conception of education I shall propose in this study shall be one that embraces some assumptions of liberal democratic values and some assumptions of traditional African values. It shall be one that is rooted in communities where communally-inclined ‘selves’ and ‘personhood’ can be developed, but also recognises the importance of ‘world citizenship’.

To briefly summarise, in this section I have reviewed the literature that pertains to the formulation of an educational framework that addresses the twine foci of South African society, as an African liberal democracy that is also heavily steeped in African traditions and cultures. I suggested that such an educational framework would be one that endeavours to educate the young people to live and flourish in an African liberal democracy and at the same time be cognisant of their communal traditions and cultures. I argued that the proposed educational framework shall be informed by the cornerstones of the Constitution of South Africa - dignity, equality, justice and freedom.

## **2.6 Conclusion**

In this chapter I have presented a review of the literature from which I shall draw to support my central arguments. In section one I touched on the literature in philosophy of education that influenced my thoughts about the discipline. I particularly mentioned the work of University of London philosopher of education R. S Peters and his associates. In South Africa I singled out Wally Morrow and Penny Enslin who taught me philosophy of education while I was studying for my Masters’ degree at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. In the second section I reviewed the literature that assisted me to clarify my understanding of the discipline of political philosophy. The reason for this is that some of the issues that are central to my analysis in this study are of a political philosophy nature. Briefly, what the literature

highlighted is that political philosophy is a normative discipline. It tries to establish norms with a view to determining the correct balance between autonomy and authority, or the proper distribution of political power. I also touched on the literature in 'political representation' with a view to understanding how women's representation in public decision-making structures in the traditional Africa polity might be explained.

In section three I reviewed the literature on African philosophy and the notion of *Ubuntu*. The intention was to show that understood as being human (humanness); a humane, respectful, and polite attitude towards others, *Ubuntu* has important normative, cultural and educational implications. In the penultimate section above, I reviewed the literature that might assist in formulating an educational framework for educating the young people to live in a modern globalised cosmopolitan environment, without losing sight of their communal traditions and cultures. Such an educational framework would then serve as a tool for the amalgamation of traditional African values and liberal democratic values. In the next chapter I map out the study's research methodology.

## CHAPTER 3

### RESEARCH DESIGN AND RESEARCH APPROACH

#### 3.1 Introduction

This study is in the areas of philosophy of education and African philosophy, as well as some aspects of political theory and political philosophy. In Chapter 1 above I described the study's main research question and subsequent sub-questions. I should reiterate them here in order to establish a link between the research question and the research methodology by which the study shall be driven.

##### *3.1.1 The main research question*

- Is the perception that indigenous African values and ideas of politics are incompatible with, and contradictory to liberal democratic values and ideas of politics necessarily valid?

##### *3.1.2 Sub-research questions*

- What is the basis of the claim that a liberal democratic state that attempts to shape its future political trajectory through the amalgamation of indigenous African values and liberal democratic values is doomed to fail?
- Is the amalgamation of liberal democratic values and indigenous African institutions such as chieftaincy and the monarchy peculiar to South Africa?
- What should a philosophy of education that amalgamates liberal democratic values and indigenous African values consist of?

That this study straddles disciplines such as philosophy of education, African philosophy, and some aspects of political theory and political philosophy is not unusual. Rather it is testimony to the symbiotic relationship that exists between education and these various disciplines. Such a relationship also pertains to the need for exploring the plausible coexistence between, or the amalgamation of traditional African values and liberal democratic values in shaping conceptions of education in South Africa's new democratic dispensation, which is what this study seeks to do. That

coexistence or amalgamation is all the more necessary given that while South Africa is a liberal democracy on account of its liberal constitution (Robinson, 2012; Enslin & Horsthemke, 2004; Deveaux, 2003; Mattes, 2002); it is also heavily steeped in local traditions and cultures. These include, but are not limited to the notion of *Ubuntu* and the institution of traditional leadership - chieftaincy or *bokgosi*. In one of my earlier publications I made a case for African philosophy to speculate about the communality of the individual in the African setting; to provide the necessary conceptual frameworks for interpreting and analysing the humanness that *Botho* and *Ubuntu* capture; to provide the rational tools for critical reflection on personal wellbeing or human flourishing, on communal ethics and how these ought to frame human conduct (Letseka, 2000:182). One of the arguments I am advancing in this study is that central to traditional African values are semblances of liberal democratic values such as, for example, a deep concern for individual wellbeing (White, 2005).

The preoccupation of philosophy is neither simple nor simplistic. As Pring (2005:5) reminds us, “the job of philosophy is to remind the over-zealous theorist or politician, both of whom want to see things simply, of the complex way in which social reality is and has to be understood, and the network of interconnected concepts through which experience is sieved and made sense of”. It is Pring’s (2005:179) contention that “philosophy is more of an activity than a body of knowledge. It questions what very often goes unquestioned; it seeks justification where often people take the value for granted; it seeks clarity where often there is muddle”. In short,

*“a central tradition in philosophy has been to question received arguments and to seek the truth while knowing that the conclusions would always remain provisional; to respect those texts which encapsulate a well-argued position without regarding them as beyond criticism or improvement; to respect the giving of reasons while recognizing that the canons of good reasoning might evolve through criticism or vary according to type of discourse. Living with uncertainty is not the offshoot of postmodernism. It is the essence of the perennial philosophical tradition”* (Pring, 2005: 227).

In the 1980s, John Wilson made a case for an inevitably large overlap between education and philosophy. He argued that “on any serious account of philosophy, that enterprise consists at least of examining and trying to improve our understanding of our basic concepts and values and because on any serious account of education, that enterprise is inextricably bound up with concepts and values that are unclear,

controversial, and hence very much in need of such examination” (Wilson, 1988:84). Wilson posited that “discipline, learning, teaching, the curriculum, indoctrination, morality, politics, intelligence, the emotions, subject-titles (science, English, history, et cetera), administration, counselling, pastoral care – there is hardly a single concept in the world of education which does not fall into this category”. Recently Bridges (2003) distinguishes three sets of relationships between philosophy and educational research - (a) the role of philosophy in addressing, in particular, the epistemological and ethical underpinnings of that research - *philosophising about educational research*; (b) the sense in which philosophising about education itself constitutes a form of educational research - *philosophising as educational research*, and (c) the role of philosophy in the process of empirical research - *philosophising in educational research* (Bridges, 2003: 13). These relationships are based on the tacit understanding that philosophers possess demonstrable skills such as the close analysis of texts, critical assessment of arguments, as well as or the deployment of the tools of formal logic (Weinberg, Gonnerman, Buckner & Alexander, 2010).

In South Africa, the need to draw on philosophy to debate educational issues has been highlighted by Enslin (1993) and in Canada by Egan (2001; 1992). During her inaugural lecture at the University of the Witwatersrand, Enslin (1993:3) argued that the notion of education is complex and highly contested.

*“First, education is what is called a ‘contested concept’ because it is a concept of appraisal; in arguing about whether an activity is educative, we are concerned with a practice which we value. Education is a concept formed from the normative point of view; it is a moral concept. Secondly, the practice of education, like health and justice, is internally complex, in that it picks out a variety of activities – including centrally teaching and learning. Thirdly, education is a cluster concept, in that it has complex connections with a host of other concepts to which it is related so that clarifying the concept of education involves the elaboration of the broader conceptual scheme within which it is implicated”.*

Enslin’s description of education as a ‘contested concept’ and as ‘complex’ calls for further clarification. Carr (2005) supports some of Enslin’s views above on the contested nature of education. Firstly, he argues that, there is a clear enough relationship between education and *learning*. For instance, whatever is learned in the course of education or related enterprises could hardly be other than a matter of the *acquisition* of skills, capacities, dispositions or qualities not previously possessed.

Secondly, any learning surely presupposes *learners*. Thus insofar as there have to be subjects *of* education as well as education *in* subjects, it seems worth asking what kinds of agencies these are, and what benefits we would expect them to derive from education. Thirdly, there are apparent links between education, learning and *teaching*: learning is often assumed (rightly or wrongly) to be a causal or other consequence of teaching, and the terms 'education' and 'teaching' are sometimes used interchangeably. Fourthly, there is a fairly common association between education and *schooling*. There is a significant tendency to associate education with the sort of institutions in which education is held to occur – though the very idea of schools as sites of education cannot be taken as a given.

Regarding the complex nature of education, Davis and Sumara (2008:35) posit that as a discipline 'complexity thinking' "refuses tidy descriptions and unambiguous definitions". It is their view that "complexity thinking recognises that many phenomena are inherently stable, but also acknowledges that such stability is in some ways illusory, arising in the differences of evolutionary pace between human thought and the subjects/objects of human thought". They further contend that 'complexity thinking' "is a new attitude toward studying particular sorts of phenomena that is able to acknowledge the insights of other traditions without trapping itself in absolutes or universals" (Davis & Sumara, 2008:35-36). In the same vein, Mason (2008:6) posits that "complexity theory points to methodological, paradigmatic and theoretical pluralism". While Kuhn (2008:177) opines that "complexity offers a way of envisaging and working with complex phenomena", and "has implications for how we conceive of social interactions and institutions, such as educational endeavour".

Coming back to Egan (2001:923), it is his view that "the dominant concept of education that currently shapes our schools is not only difficult and contentious, but it is also incoherent". Egan suggests that "thinking about education during this century has almost entirely involved just three ideas - Durkheim's socialisation; Plato's academic idea, and Rousseau's developmental idea. While these three ideas have become entangled with each other throughout the centuries and produced our contemporary schools, curricular and teaching practices, they are mutually incompatible. Case in point, Durkheim's socialisation aims to *homogenise* children, initiate them into prevailing social norms and values, and make them alike in important ways. In

contrast, Plato's academic idea seeks to immerse students in those forms of knowledge that would give them a privileged rational view of reality and move them towards a better-informed understanding of the nature of the world and human experiences. The purpose of this privileged rational view is to make students sceptical of prevailing norms, values, and beliefs. Finally, Rousseau's developmental ideal requires the education of students to conform to their nature of learning, to attend to their individual differences, their stages of development, their learning styles, and forms of motivation. In an earlier publication, Egan (1992:646) argues that when we look closely at the implications of each of these ideas we run into problems of mutual incompatibility. Our general concept of education that has incorporated all three seems radically incoherent. Its most prominent features seem discordant. The critical challenge for a curriculum that tries to implement such a concept of education is that it endeavours to make people more alike while also attempting to make them more distinct, and to use knowledge to shape the nature of the individual while letting the nature of the individual determine what knowledge is relevant.

Against the backdrop of the above exposition of the complex and contested nature of educational theory and practice, in this study I attempt to *philosophise about education* in South Africa. I shall draw on the Socratic method of 'dialectical philosophy' or 'philosophic inquiry' to frame my thought processes. Socrates' 'dialectical philosophy' provides spaces for "the contradictions and illusions inherent in conventional knowledge and understanding to be exposed and transcended through critical dialogue and debate" (Carr, 1997:205). West (2004:16) argues that "the Socratic commitment to questioning requires a relentless self-examination and critique of authority, motivated by an endless quest for intellectual integrity and moral consistency. It is manifested? in fearless speech – *parrhesia* – that unsettles, unnerves, and unhouses people from their uncritical sleepwalking". There is resonance between Socrates' 'dialectical philosophy' and Critical Race Theory (CRT). CRT's aim is to unmask and expose continued colonisation within educational contexts and societal structures and to transform those contexts and structures (Dana-Sacco, 2010; Writer, 2008; Brayboy, 2005). I intend to challenge the validity of the claims that traditional African values and liberal democratic values are incompatible, and that by implication, they are contradictory. This is a contested ideological discourse that played itself out during the hectic era of African nationalism in the

1950s, and during the twin eras of independence in the 1960s and post-colonialism in the 1970s. Arising from this ideologically contested space, and as the study's educational upshot, I shall explore ways in which conceptions of education in contemporary South Africa might be framed. It should be clear by now that the research methodology that I shall employ in this study shall be unavoidably philosophical. As Papastephanou (2006:198) rightly observes, "the force of philosophy is at its peak when it turns to intellectual undercurrents, to the counterintuitive and the counterfactual, not in order to establish them as a new fashion but to seriously bring them into academic play. Philosophy is at its critical best when it helps people kick over the traces of intellectual hegemonic convergence". Consistent with Papastephanou's (2006) observations above, in this chapter I grapple with the vexing question of "how the notion of 'method' shapes the self-understanding in terms of which educational researchers make sense of what they are doing, define their cultural identities and legitimise their social role" (Carr, 1997:204).

Philosophically grounded educational research shall invariably be premised on the principle of argumentation. In this study I seek to advance a philosophical argument to rebut the perceptions and claims identified in the research questions above. Let me briefly state from the outset that my view of argumentation is that it is premised on reasoning. In a provocative article entitled: "Why do humans reason? Arguments for an argumentative theory", which appears in a scientific journal *Behavioural and Brain Sciences*, Mercier and Sperber (2011: 59) argue that "reasoning is best adapted for its role in argumentation, which should therefore be seen as its main function". It is their contention that "according to the argumentative theory, reasoning is most naturally used in the context of an exchange of arguments during a discussion" (Mercier & Sperber, 2011:66). They opine that "the main function of reasoning is argumentative: Reasoning has evolved and persisted mainly because it makes human communication more effective and advantageous" (Mercier & Sperber, 2011:60). Mercier and Sperber (2011: 62) posit that if one's goal is to convince others, "one should be looking first and foremost for supportive arguments". My goal in this study is to convince my readers that indigenous African epistemologies such as the notion of *Ubuntu* and African indigenous education ought to be defended against what appears to be colonialist and imperialist-inclined views and misconceptions.

In her book, *Decolonising Methodologies: Research and Indigenous People*, Smith (2008:23) argues that “colonialism became imperialism's outpost, the fort and the port of imperial outreach”. Colonial outposts became cultural sites which preserved the image or represented the image of what the West or 'civilisation' stood for. For Smith (2008), colonialism was, in part, an image of imperialism, a particular realisation of the imperial imagination. It was also, in part, an image of the future nation it would become. She argues that in this image also lie images of the *Other*, stark contrasts and subtle nuances of the ways in which the indigenous communities were perceived and dealt with, which makes the stories of colonialism part of the grander narrative and yet part also of a very local, very specific experience. Smith (2008:23) cautions against the reach of imperialism into 'our heads' which she argues, “challenges those who belong to colonised communities to understand how this occurred, partly because we perceive a need to decolonise our minds, to recover ourselves, to claim a space in which to develop a sense of authentic humanity”. It is her contention that a constant reworking of our understandings of the impact of imperialism and colonialism forms the basis of an indigenous language of critique.

This chapter is organised around three sections. I start with a brief sketching of my chosen research design. Considering that most “research in the social sciences is necessarily and ineliminably philosophical” (Bridges & Smith, 2006), I shall briefly comment on the basic tenets of philosophic inquiry as a form of qualitative research design. I shall also map out the research methodology, which is the foundation on which this study shall be anchored. I shall do this against the backdrop of the view that philosophers do not explicitly state a particular ‘research methodology’ in their research and writings given that philosophising, by its very nature, is a method by which philosophers articulate their research propositions and conceptual stances. Having said that, this study shall be conducted through two research methodological approaches, namely: first, philosophy as ‘qualitative research methodology’ and second, review of literature as ‘qualitative research methodology’. In the final section I shall provide some concluding remarks. I now turn to the notion of ‘research design’.

## **3.2 Research design**

The importance of research design in educational research cannot be taken lightly. One of the official journals of the American Educational Research Association (AERA), *Educational Researcher* dedicated volume 32, number 1, of 2003 as a special issue under the theme: “The Role of Design in Educational Research”. In the same vein, the official publication of the International Society of the Learning Sciences (ISLS), *Journal of the Learning Sciences* dedicated volume 13, number 1, of 2004 as a special issue under the theme: “Design-Based Research: Clarifying the Terms, Introduction to the Learning Sciences Methodology Strand”. It is probable that there are other journals I have not mentioned here that have also gone the route of focusing on the notion of research design. While some of the articles in these special issues are tilted more towards mathematics and the hard sciences, which conceive of research in terms of laboratory experiments, clinical trials and statistical quantification, their significance lies in the fact that they underscore the importance of clarifying one’s ‘research design’ before undertaking one’s research. It is worthwhile mentioning though that the language of research design and research methodology in philosophy of education raises more questions than answers. I shall come back to this issue in more detail in the section on ‘research methodology’ below.

A critical question to ask at this stage is what actually comprises a ‘research design’? Creswell (2009:3) argues that “research designs are plans and the procedures for research that span the decisions from broad assumptions to detailed methods of data collection and analysis”. Researchers are constantly making choices and decisions on what might work for their proposed research and what might not work. It is his contention that these choices and decisions involve which design should be used to study a topic? Informing these choices and decisions are worldviews and assumptions the researcher brings to the study. It seems to me though that another related question that should also be asked is what is the purpose of a ‘research design’? Gerring (2011: 626) is unequivocal that “the purpose of a research design is to test a hypothesis”. He opines that “a good research design allows one to prove the main hypothesis, while rejecting plausible rival hypotheses” (Gerring, 2011: 628). It is “a critically important element in the development of a research project” (Berg, 2001:23). In the last instance though, “a research design that allows us to effectively compare the truth-value of rival theories is generally a better research design”. That is to say, “a research design should not be any more complex than it needs to be” (Gerring, 2011: 629). In addition,

Gerring (2011:627-631) argues that “methodological criteria pertaining to research design fall into six general categories: theoretical fit, cumulation, the treatment, the outcome, the sample, and the practical constraints”.

I shall adopt the notion of ‘philosophy as educational research’. Philosophy as educational research implies “the kind of analysis that has been traditionally associated with philosophy of education, which is, in its own turn, a sub-area of philosophy that draws on the parent discipline to determine how to frame and analyse philosophical problems peculiar to education” (Moses, 2002:1). The pertinence of weaving philosophy into education cannot be overemphasised. As Archie and Archie (2004:5) point out, “philosophy is an investigation of the fundamental questions of human existence. Such questions include wondering about such things as the meaning of life, what kinds of things the universe is made of, whether there can be a theory of everything, how we can know what’s the right thing to do, and what is the beautiful in life and art”. The reason why philosophers tend to ask these searching and fundamentally complex questions is that “philosophy can be characterised as an attitude, an approach, or perhaps, even a calling, to ask, answer, or even just comment upon certain kinds of questions” (Archie & Archie, 2004:20). This might explain why ‘philosophic inquiry’ is so critical to all activities that fall under the broad umbrella of any discourse that might be deemed to be philosophical. Indeed McKeon (1990:243) neatly sums it up in the observation: “philosophic inquiry is an examination of common issues to which different philosophic resolutions may be found”. In my research, I have inquired on the philosophical implications of indigenous education in Africa in general, and in South Africa in particular (Letseka, 2013a). I have argued that “indigenous education in Africa was intimately integrated with the social, cultural, artistic, religious, and recreational life of the ethnic group”. That through the *lebollo* [the institution of initiation], Basotho indigenous education sought to instil in the young people competencies such as *thuto-kelello* or cognitive engagement; respect for *makunutu a sechaba* - national secrets or classified information.

If I were to invoke Thomas Kuhn’s notion of ‘paradigm’ to declare my preferred paradigm or stance in this study, my response would no doubt be that it is the ‘Socratic method’ of dialectical philosophy, also known as ‘philosophic inquiry’ or ‘philosophy as qualitative research methodology’. I will come back to Kuhn in more detail in section

3.3 below when I broach the notion of ‘research methodology’. However, I should hasten to mention that the adjective ‘qualitative’ is neither homogenous nor can it be presumed to possess a fixed meaning. Instead it can be spread out wide to include, among others, interpretive, critical, feminist, phenomenological or postmodern forms of research. Given that this study is “necessarily and ineliminably philosophical” (Bridges & Smith, 2006), I shall therefore state my version of qualitative research as ‘critical’. I have touched on the ‘Socratic dialectical inquiry’ in section 3.1 above, which is an example of a ‘critical’ approach to research (West, 2004; Carr, 1997), and here I shall only make cursory remarks. Bridges (1997:179) posits that “the notion of enquiry suggests some initial puzzlement or curiosity, a question which the individual seeks to clarify and answer”. It is his contention that “inquiry counts as research to the extent that it is systematic, but even more to the extent that it can claim to be conscientiously self-critical” (Bridges, 1997:180). In the same vein, Watts (2007:7) argues that inquiry counts as properly philosophical if it is both critical and reflexive. He opines that “an inquiry is critical in the required sense just to the extent that each and every aspect of the inquiry is treated as appropriate for discursive appraisal”. And it is reflexive “in the required sense just to the extent that it proceeds, at least in the first instance, by means of an investigation into whatever is necessarily implicated in the process of taking up and conducting a critical inquiry” (Watts, 2007:8). For Richard Rorty (2007: 188), “All inquiry is a matter of reweaving our webs of beliefs and desires in such a way as to give ourselves more happiness and richer and freer lives”.

Drawing on various works by John Dewey, Biesta and Burbules (2003:58) argue that ‘inquiry’ begins with a problem. For instance, “to see that a situation requires inquiry is the initial step in inquiry”. Thus, “inquiry is the controlled or directed transformation of an indeterminate situation into one that is so determinate in its constituent distinctions and relations as to convert the elements of the original situation into a unified whole” (Biesta & Burbules, 2003:59). Furthermore, Biesta and Burbules (2003:57) argue that “inquiry does not solve problems by returning to a previous, stable situation, but by means of a transformation of the current situation into a *new* situation. There is, therefore, no absolute end to inquiry”. They caution though that “just as our understanding of knowledge can only come from a reconstruction of actual processes of knowledge acquisition, so can our methods of inquiry only be criticised, improved, and validated in and through the process of inquiry itself” (Biesta &

Burbules, 2003:56). Indeed in one of his classic treatises entitled: *How We Think*, Dewey (2010:6) notes that “active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it, and the further conclusions to which it tends, constitutes reflective thought”. For Biesta and Burbules (2003:59), inquiry is not just a mental process; not simply something that happens in the human mind, instead it is the actual transformation of a situation - where a situation always denotes the transaction of organism and environment. It is their contention that what distinguishes inquiry from trial and error is the fact that the transformation of the situation is *controlled* or *directed* by means of reflection or thinking. Thus, the process of inquiry consists of the cooperation of two kinds of operations: *existential operations* (the actual transformation of the situation) and *conceptual operations* (reflection or thinking).

How then do I envisage ‘philosophic inquiry’ will play itself out in practice in this study? Below I briefly describe selected pieces of literature that I shall interrogate through the application of ‘philosophic inquiry’. These include books and journal articles whose central assumptions and arguments I challenge and rebut. The intention is to recast the assumptions and arguments with a view to positioning indigenous African epistemologies within the philosophical space occupied by the taken-for-granted dominant and often privileged Western meta-narratives and worldviews. In the last instance, this interrogation is necessary for engaging in debates on how conceptions of education in post-apartheid South Africa might be framed.

### 3.2.1 *The application of ‘philosophic inquiry’*

Millett and Tapper (2012:548) remind us that “Philosophic inquiry is an educational approach that has its origins in philosophical pragmatism”. They argue that pragmatism “holds that knowledge is the product of inquiry, that ‘knowing’ is not merely the acquisition of facts external to the knower, but comes through a problem-solving exercise that moves from doubt to belief on the basis of evidence and inference”. For Millett and Tapper (2012:551), philosophic inquiry is

- ‘thinking about thinking’.
- ‘the quest for meaning’.
- ‘conversation as dialogue’.

- 'asking open questions'.
- 'creative thinking'.
- 'value-laden thinking'.

As it is evident from this multifaceted description, philosophic inquiry is a reflective process that has as its major goal a transformative ending or outcome. It is Millett and Tapper's (2012:552) contention that reflection is "a persistent ordered act of inquiry building towards considered (reflective) judgement. Such inquiry is a creative process". Below I touch on some of the texts that I shall challenge, interrogate and rebut drawing on 'philosophic inquiry'.

A. *Penny Enslin & Kai Horsthemke (2004)*

In a provocative article entitled: "Can *Ubuntu* provide a model for citizenship education in African democracies?", which appears in the journal, *Comparative Education*, Enslin and Horsthemke (2004) express doubts on the viability of *Ubuntu* as a model for citizenship education in African democracies. They argue that the Africanist/Afrocentrist project, in which the philosophy of *Ubuntu* is central, faces numerous problems, involves substantial political, moral, epistemological and educational errors, and should therefore not be the basis for education for democratic citizenship in the South African context. Drawing on the literature, I offer a rebuttal of these claims and assumptions for their Eurocentric and imperialist orientation.

In my research I centre *Ubuntu* in African indigenous education to argue that in African traditional societies youngsters were initiated in a wide variety of virtues, known in Sesotho language as *makhabane* (Letseka, 2013a 2012). Thus given that *Ubuntu* has normative implications as well as constitutional value (Letseka, 2013b; Chaskalson, 2003; Mokgoro, 1998; Goldstone, 1997), it can be argued that *Ubuntu* is a moral theory (Metz & Gaie, 2010; Metz, 2007; Teffo, 1994). Regarding Enslin and Horsthemke's (2004) attempt to cast doubt over *Ubuntu's* viability as a model for citizenship education in African democracies, Mamdani (2002:505) is unequivocal that democracy is about expanding citizenship. He argues that in terms of citizenship in territories that are struggling to come to terms with the colonial political legacy critical questions that need to be asked are: "Who is indigenous? Who is a settler? When do settlers become natives, and how? What should be the basis of rights in a political

community? How do we reform the state from one that divides its population into settlers and natives into one that takes the distinction between residents and visitors as key to defining rights?" Mamdani (2002:506) suggests that "we problematise, rather than canonise, politically sacred cows like civil society and democracy". For instance, whose democracy are Enslin and Horsthemke (2004) really worried about? Is it democracy as seen through the eyes of the previously privileged minority or democracy as seen through the eyes of the previously marginalised and under-privileged majority African natives of South Africa? There is no doubt in my mind that Enslin and Horsthemke's notion of democracy borders on the previously privileged minority.

In his book entitled: *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge*, Mudimbe (1988) observes that Western interpreters as well as African analysts have been using categories and conceptual systems which depend on a Western epistemological order. He argues that even in the most explicitly 'Afrocentric' descriptions, models of analysis explicitly or implicitly, knowingly or unknowingly, refer to the same order. Mudimbe (1988: x) asks what seems to me the most pertinent question: "Does this mean that African *Weltanschauungen* and African traditional systems of thought are unthinkable and cannot be made explicit within the framework of their own rationality?" Smith (2008:39) argues that part of the exercise of research for any indigenous researcher should be about recovering our own stories of the past. She argues that the issue is about "reconciling and reprioritizing what is really important about the past with what is important about the present" Her view on the paradigms that look at indigenous epistemologies 'through imperial eyes' is that "the methodologies and methods of research, the theories that inform them, the questions which they generate and the writing styles they employ, all become significant acts which need to be considered carefully and critically", in other words, to be 'decolonised'.

*B. Lungisile Ntsebeza (2005) and Kristina Bentley (2005)*

In his book entitled: *Democracy Compromised: Chiefs and the Politics of Land in South Africa*, Ntsebeza (2005) argues that a fundamental contradiction exists in the South African Constitution in attempts to accommodate the role of the institution of traditional

leadership and its incumbents in a liberal democracy based on multi-party principles and representative government. For him, recognising the hereditary institution of traditional leadership while at the same time enshrining liberal democratic principles based on representative government in the same Constitution constitutes a fundamental contradiction. In the same vein, Bentley (2005) worries about conflicts of rights in South Africa's new democratic dispensation, and the particularly difficult challenges that such conflicts present when they entail women's equality and claims of cultural recognition. She notes that the South African Constitution recognises civil and political, and social and economic (individual) rights *and* cultural (corporate or group) rights. However, she is concerned that "the accommodation of the claims of traditional leadership and the recognition of traditional communities in South Africa pose a great challenge to democracy and human rights" (Bentley, 2005:49).

Philosophic inquiry' prompts me to doubt the validity and soundness of Ntsebeza and Bentley's assumptions above. And here is why. Enduring liberal democracies such as the United Kingdom (UK), the Netherlands, Denmark, and Japan have had monarchies from time immemorial. But their monarchies are in no way fundamentally contradictory to liberal democratic principles. For instance, the UK is a liberal democracy that has strong monarchical roots, with the Queen serving as a [ceremonial] head of state who has the power to instruct the prime minister-elect to either form or dissolve government. Ginsburg (2009:87) writes that as head of state the monarch is highly respected and will limit his or her interventions in the political sphere. Japan is a good example of a non-Western liberal democracy that is also heavily steeped in monarchical traditions and cultures (Ruoff, 2001; Fujitani, 1998). In Chapter 1 above, I showed that historically Japan has gone through 'cycles of importation of external cultures' and 'indigenisation' of those cultures through replication and refinement. Indeed Japan can be said to be the first East Asian state to modernise and to achieve a stable liberal democracy". And yet, as Fukuyama (1992: 231) points out, "Japanese culture...is much more oriented toward groups rather than individuals". He elaborates: "An individual's identity is to a very high degree smothered in that of the group: he does not work so much for his own short-term benefit, but for the well-being of the larger group or groups of which he is a member. His status is determined less by his performance as an individual, than by the performance of his group". In this regard, Japan has established a unique position for itself as an associate

member of the West: it is in the West in some respects but clearly not of the West in important dimensions (Huntington, 1996; Fukuyama, 1992).

I find Bentley's (2005) challenge of the Constitution's recognition of traditional communities puzzling given that South Africa is an African country whose population is 79.8% African; 9% Coloured; 8.7% White, and 2.5% Indian/Asian (Statistics South Africa, 2013). The majority of black Africans live in homesteads that are located in the most rural and traditional communities. Bentley (2005) seems to imply that the black people's traditional communities are a danger to democracy as well as to their own human rights. This view is fundamentally inconsistent with Mamdani's (2002) argument that democracy's role is to expand citizenship.

To briefly summarise, I have sketched the 'research design' for this study. While I am not really charmed by the positivist and technicist research culture that is inclined towards clearly specifying a linear approach to research – designing a research sample, data collection, data analysis and discussion, I acknowledged that some international scholarly journals have devoted special issues to debating and unpacking the notion of 'research design', perhaps as acknowledgement of the importance of getting clear from the outset about one's research direction before embarking on one's research endeavour. I noted that research designs are plans and procedures for research, and stated that my preferred 'research design' is 'Socrates' 'dialectical philosophy' or 'philosophical inquiry'. In the penultimate section below, I turn to the study's 'research methodology'.

### **3.3 Research approach**

Like 'research design' above, the notion of 'research methodology' in education has generated much interest among the various educational and research associations, which have also dedicated special issues of their journals to debating its various nuances. For instance, volume 31, number 3 of May 2012 of *Studies in Philosophy and Education* was a special issue dedicated to the theme, "The Theory Question in Education and the Education Question in Theory". The *International Journal of Research and Method in Education* dedicated volume 32, number 3 of 2009 as a special issue under to the theme: "European Philosophy and Theory: Some New

Bearings in Educational Research Methodology". Similarly, *Journal of Philosophy of Education* dedicated two issues, volume 43, number 3, of 2009 as a special issue under the theme "The Question of Method in Philosophy of Education", and volume 40, number 2 of 2006 under the theme: "Philosophy, Methodology and Educational Research". Firstly, Carr (1997:205) argues that the use of the term 'method' often refers to technical skills and modes of practice which are deemed necessary to protect inquiry from the intrusions of personal knowledge, subjective preferences and ideological beliefs. Secondly, the use of 'method' always requires the internalisation of an ethical consciousness in which, on the one hand, detachment, disinterest and neutrality are the major virtues, and on the other, the moral, political and educational commitments are the major vices. Thirdly, conforming to the requirements of 'method' entails diffidence to philosophy, history and tradition and hence to the neglect of that form of historical self-consciousness which any adequate understanding of the relationship between the pre-modern philosophical form of educational inquiry and its modern methodical successor presupposes and requires.

The etymology of the word 'method', from which the noun 'methodology' derives, has its origins in *methodus* (Latin) and *methodos* (Greek), both of which imply chasing, going after something and ultimately finding the route towards it. Ruitenburg (2009:316) contends that 'method' "refers to the various ways and modes in which philosophers of education think, read, write, speak and listen, that make their work systematic, purposeful and responsive to past and present philosophical and educational concerns and conversations". This implies that it is probably not really necessary for a philosopher of education to explicitly state his or her methodology given that the very act of philosophising about education is itself a method by which philosophers debate ideas and articulate their educational propositions and conceptual frames. For Bridges (1997:179), it follows that "it is certainly not a standard requirement of philosophical writing that the author explains and defends his or her methodology".

Hammersley (2006) argues that in most social science research there is "a crude distinction between methodology-as-technique and methodology-as-philosophy". On the one hand, 'Methodology-as-technique' tends to portray research as the deployment of particular methods or procedures that are taken to be scientific, and

therefore capable of yielding objective knowledge. According to this logic, scientific principles and procedures are deemed “capable of demonstrating empirical conclusions and building knowledge, by contrast with the endless disputes and lack of cumulation characteristic of non-scientific fields. By definition, from this point of view, any science must break away from philosophy and no longer be dependent upon it” (Hammersley, 2006:274). But as Thompson (2012:240) points out, “the generation of scientific or objective knowledge is from the very beginning confronted with ‘limitations’. These limitations have on the one hand to do with the ‘hypothetical’ quality of scientific knowledge in the modern era: Every conclusion remains bound to its related premises and methodological positions and is thus not unconditionally true”.

It is therefore no coincidence that “in many universities the paradigm of research which is best understood and most powerful is the scientific paradigm, with all its socio-cultural baggage of expensive equipment, large scale funding, international teams and half a page of collaborating authors in *Nature*, as well as its more intrinsic positivistic features of data gathering, hypothesis testing and replicability” (Bridges, 2003:21). Bridges’ (1997:178) major concern is that “it is easy for research to become defined in terms of this paradigm in a way which makes the work of social scientists look like a poor imitation of ‘proper’ science”. But as Hammersley (2006) points out, the tendency with ‘methodology-as-technique’ is that it overlooks the fact that doing research necessarily involves assumptions that sometimes require philosophical attention. For him, ‘methodology-as-technique’ assumes that the relevant philosophical problems have all been satisfactorily resolved. But this is often not the case. Quite often some philosophical view from the past is simply taken for granted, without recognising subsequent challenges to it and the methodological implications of such challenges.

On the other hand, ‘methodology-as-philosophy’, which I endorse, “raises fundamental questions about the very pursuit of social and educational research, challenging the goal of knowledge, the ideal of truth and the possibility of objectivity” (Hammersley, 2006:274). For instance, Hammersley (2006:276) argues that it “highlights the role of philosophical assumptions in research”, and recognises that educational research is always framed in terms of certain values. ‘Methodology-as-philosophy’ requires researchers to be explicit about what those values are, and their implications. It draws “the attention of educational researchers to the logical grammar of the various value-

laden concepts that can set the framework for their research, and the relationship of these to matters of fact” (Hammersley, 2006:282), or what is known as ‘values clarification’. ‘Values clarification’ is premised on the following key assumptions: no goal could count as a value unless it is (1) freely chosen (2) from a number of alternatives (3) after thoughtful consideration of the consequences of each alternative; unless (4) one prized the choice and (5) was willing to affirm it publicly; and unless (6) one acted upon the choice (7) in repeated situation” (Simpson, 1986: 273).

Thus contrary to the assumptions of ‘methodology-as-technique’, which are predicated on positivistic principles of value-free ‘objective knowledge’, ‘methodology-as-philosophy’ is predicated on ‘values clarification’. It supports certain types of thinking, feeling, choosing, communicating, and acting. For instance, “thinking critically is regarded as better than thinking non-critically. Considering consequences is regarded as better than choosing glibly or thoughtlessly. Choosing freely is considered better than simply yielding to authority or peer pressure. If we urge critical thinking, then we value rationality. If we support moral reasoning, then we value justice; if we advocate divergent thinking, then we value autonomy or freedom” (Simpson, 1986:282). ‘Methodology-as-philosophy’ resonates with Brazilian philosopher of education Paulo Freire’s notion of ‘dialogical education’ as well as Socrates’s method of ‘critical self-examination’, or *parrhesia* - fearless speech. In one of my publications I draw on West’s (2004) book entitled: *Democracy Matters* to argue that Socratic questioning “wrestles with basic questions such as: What is justice? What is courage? What is piety? What is love? It yields intellectual integrity, philosophical humility, and personal sincerity” (Letseka, 2008:313). Socratic questioning and ‘methodology-as-philosophy’ both seek a deeper understanding of human actors and their contexts. As Guba and Lincoln (1994:106) point out, “human behaviour, unlike that of physical objects, cannot be understood without reference to the meanings and purposes attached by human actors to their activities”. In the following sub-sections, I describe the three-pronged foci of this study’s research methodology, namely ‘philosophy as qualitative research methodology’; ‘review of literature as qualitative research methodology’, and ‘philosophical research methodology as a paradigm’.

### 3.3.1 *Philosophy as a ‘Qualitative Research Methodology’*

Against the backdrop of the above sketching of 'methodology-as-philosophy', my reference to 'methodology' in this study shall be one that eschews some of the paradigms and expectations of some social scientists, especially those that emphasise empirical data collection techniques and "the tripartite breakdown of method into data gathering, data analysis and data representation" (Ruitenberg, 2009: 316). Instead my reference to 'methodology' shall be premised on the view of philosophy as a 'qualitative research 'methodology' (Sheffield, 2004). Neuman (2007:89) neatly captures the role of qualitative researchers as follows:

*"Qualitative researchers emphasise the social context for understanding the social world. They hold that the meaning of a social action or statement depends in an important way, on the context in which it appears. When a researcher removes an event, social action, answer to a question, or conversation from the social context in which it appears or ignores the context, social meaning and significance are distorted."*

Heidegger (1996:14) argues that "only when philosophical research and inquiry themselves are grasped in an existential way - as a possibility of being of each existing *Dasein* - does it become possible at all to disclose the existentiality of existence and therewith to get hold of a sufficiently grounded set of ontological problems". For Heidegger (1996:155), "philosophical research must for once decide to ask what mode of being belongs to language in general". Thus against the backdrop of Heidegger's analysis above, it can be reasonably argued that the role of philosophers as qualitative researchers is to "analyse, clarify, and criticise" (Sheffield, 2004:763). In addition, Sheffield argues that "in analysis, one reduces complex ideas or explicates human situations into understandable, relational concepts... Essential concepts that drive practice are extracted from the 'boom and buzz' of experience so that they may be more easily understood and debated". 'Clarification' points to the "responsibility of philosophers...to challenge and ultimately clarify those constructs we use to make sense of the world; constructs often taken for granted rather than clarified and truly understood", while "criticism means making judgments as to value".

Thompson (2012:240) argues that "the 'philosophical method' is about openness that even transforms the grounds on which we start to engage with the known or with what we wish to know". She contends that "philosophical research is about a practice that changes our view of the world and of ourselves in it" (Thompson, 2012: 242). I use philosophy in this study to refer to "virtually all forms of intellectual inquiry" (Carr,

2006:425). As Carr (2006:422) points out, ‘methodology’ refers to the theoretical rationale or, ‘principles’ that justify the research methods appropriate to a field of study. So understood, Carr elaborates, “a methodology cannot be derived from research but instead has to be grounded in that form of *a priori* theoretical knowledge usually referred to as ‘philosophy’”.

### 3.3.2 *Review of Literature as Qualitative Research Methodology*

I shall use ‘review of literature’ as a form of ‘philosophical research methodology’. I shall do this by interrogating the above-mentioned claims and assumptions in the works of Enslin and Horsthemke (2004), Ntsebeza (2005) and Bentley (2005), and others that shall be mentioned as the study unfolds. The planned ‘review of literature’ as qualitative research method shall serve two purposes: firstly, to recast the above claims and assumptions with a view to centring indigenous African epistemologies in the dominant mainstream Western conceptions of philosophy and secondly, to make a case against research designs and research methods [paradigms] that view indigenous African epistemologies through ‘imperial eyes’. I shall argue that such paradigms should be critically interrogated and exposed for their continued perpetuation of Eurocentric notions of what Apple (2000) calls ‘official knowledge’, or “who has been and is now seen as a legitimate ‘author’” (Apple, 2000:xxviii). It is Apple’s (2000:10) contention that “the politics of official knowledge are the politics of *accords* or *compromises*. They are usually not impositions, but signify how dominant groups try to create situations where the compromises that are formed favour them”. The planned review of literature as ‘qualitative research methodology’ shall allow me to broach the question: Who controls our knowledge? The answer to this question should lead to advocacy and mobilisation to decolonise the politics and discourses of dominant groups (Smith, 2008, Mazrui, 2003; Wa Thiongo, 1994). In South Africa, discourses emerging from previously white [whether English-speaking or Afrikaans-speaking] privileged higher education institutions continue to entertain a perception that regardless of the historic political transition of 1994, the country is still under the influence of British liberal or conservative Afrikaner ideologies, both of which previously controlled conceptions of knowledge; what is knowable? And whose knowledge is of most worth? In the early 1980s, Kenyan novelist and playwright Ngugi Wa Thiongo (1994:1) made a compelling observation that “imperialism is still the root

cause of many problems in Africa". He argued that "imperialism is not a slogan. It is real; it is palpable in content and form and in its methods and effects". He noted that "imperialism is total. It has economic, political, military, cultural, and psychological consequences for the people of the world today" (Wa Thiongo, 1994:2). For Apple (2000:38), "the issue is what counts as official knowledge, making it subject to critical scrutiny by students, teachers, and others".

Coming back to literature review as qualitative research methodology, Boote and Beile (2005:3) contend that "a thorough, sophisticated literature review is the foundation and inspiration for substantial, useful research". Boote and Beile (2005:4) posit that as the foundation of any research project, the literature review should accomplish several important objectives:

- It should set the broad context of the study, clearly demarcating what is and what is not within the scope of the investigation, and justifying those decisions.
- It should situate existing literature in a broader scholarly and historical context.
- It should not only report the claims made in the existing literature. But it should also examine critically the research methods used to better understand whether the claims are warranted.

For Boote and Beile (2005:9), a good literature review should be the basis of both theoretical and methodological sophistication, thereby improving the quality and usefulness of subsequent research. They argue that "very sophisticated literature reviews might recognise the methodological weaknesses of a field of study and propose new methodologies to compensate for those weaknesses".

### 3.3.3 *Philosophical Research Methodology as a Paradigm*

In this study, I intend to interrogate the above-mentioned forms of 'official knowledge' by drawing on 'philosophy research methodology' as a paradigm. Guba and Lincoln (1994:105) define a paradigm as "the basic belief system or worldview that guides the investigator, not only in choices of method but in ontologically and epistemologically fundamental ways". It is their contention that "a paradigm may be viewed as a set of *basic beliefs* (or metaphysics) that deals with ultimate or first principles. It represents a *worldview* that defines, for its holder, the nature of the 'world', the individual's place in it, and the range of possible relationships in that world and its parts" (Guba & Lincoln, 1994:107).

When used with reference to research, a “paradigm is an all-encompassing system of interrelated practice and thinking that define the nature of enquiry” (Thomas, 2010:292). The notion of ‘paradigm’ gained prominence as a result of the publication of Thomas Kuhn’s seminal book, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Like Guba and Lincoln (1994) above, Kuhn (1996:23) defines a paradigm as “an accepted model or pattern”. He argues that the study of paradigms “prepares the student for membership in the particular scientific community with which he will later practice” (Kuhn, 1996:11). To that end “men whose research is based on shared paradigms are committed to the same rules and standards for scientific practice. That commitment and the apparent consensus it produces are prerequisites for normal science, that is, for the genesis and continuation of a particular research tradition”.

I was inducted into the philosophy of education research paradigm at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg in the 1980s under the guidance of Professors Penny Enslin and Wally Morrow. That induction was consolidated in the mid-1990s at the Institute of Education, University of London where I was a postgraduate research student in philosophy of education under the tutelage of Professor John White. The commitment of the above-mentioned philosophers to the discipline of philosophy of education, coupled with the provocative philosophical questions they raised and debated in education, provided solid building blocks that inspired my immersion in the philosophy of education’s scientific community. Kuhn (1996:11) argues that “acquisition of a paradigm and of the more esoteric type of research it permits is a sign of maturity in the development of any given scientific field”. Fundamentally though, paradigms are useful tools for explaining and understanding social reality. They “gain their status because they are more successful than their competitors in solving a few problems that the group of practitioners has come to recognise as acute” (Kuhn, 1996:23). To that end, “paradigms guide research by direct modelling as well as through abstracted rules” (Kuhn, 1996:47).

Guba (1990:18) notes that paradigms are marked by the way their proponents respond to three basic questions, which can be characterised by the *ontological*, the *epistemological*, and the *methodological* questions. These questions are:

- *Ontological*: What is the nature of the ‘knowable’? Or, what is the nature of reality?

- *Epistemological*: What is the nature of the relationship between the knower (the inquirer) and the known (or knowable)?
- *Methodological*: How should the inquirer go about finding out knowledge?

Guba contends that answers to these questions “are the starting points or given that determine what the inquiry is and how it is to be practised”. Crucially, Guba (1990:19) argues that all belief systems or paradigms are *human constructions* that are subject to all the errors and foibles that inevitably accompany human endeavours. They are not static or fixed. Instead they are porous, fluid, always shifting and taking new forms. A paradigm shift entails “a change in the beliefs, values and techniques that guide scientific inquiry” (Lather, 1992:89). Thus a “new paradigm ought to replace the old one”, and “enable us to view the old one in new light” (Alexander, 2006:209). For Kuhn (1996:109), “when paradigms change, there are usually significant shifts in the criteria determining the legitimacy both of problems and of proposed solutions”. But Guba (1990:27) cautions that a “new paradigm will not be a closer approximation of the truth; it will simply be more informed and sophisticated than those we are now entertaining”.

In summary, I have contrasted between ‘methodology-as-technique’ and ‘methodology-as-philosophy’. I have argued that ‘methodology-as-technique’ is based on a paradigm of research that is presumed to yield ‘objective knowledge’, while the assumptions of ‘methodology-as-philosophy’ recognise the centrality of values to research. I stated that given that my aim in this study is to *philosophise about education* and that my research method shall be philosophy as ‘qualitative research methodology’. The latter is predicated on ‘philosophic inquiry’. There is tacit understanding among philosophers of education that ‘philosophic inquiry’ counts as method in so far as it is systematic and based on critical self-examination.

### **3.4 Conclusion**

What I have tried to do in this chapter is to describe my preferred ‘research design’ and ‘research methodology’. I noted that the notions of ‘research design’ and ‘research methodology’ have generated wide interest among professional associations and their scholarly journals, which have devoted Special Issues towards attaining deeper understanding the two notions. I highlighted the fact that ‘research design’ and ‘research methodology’ are contested issues that warrant a critical philosophical

clarification. I acknowledged that 'research design' and 'research methodology' are necessary for clarifying one's research paradigm. However, given the philosophical nature of this study I indicated that a suitable 'research design' would be 'dialectical philosophy' or 'philosophical inquiry'. I contrasted 'methodology-as-technique', which pertains to the hard sciences and relies more on analysis of statistical data to make inferences; and 'methodology-as-philosophy, which recognises the centrality of values to understanding social phenomena. To that end, and given that this study shall be ineliminably philosophical, I stated that my preferred paradigm shall be philosophy as research methodology. In the next chapter, I turn to liberalism in South Africa. I shall flash out liberalism's complexities and contestations, as well as the challenges of liberalism's survival in South Africa whose ruling tripartite alliance has Marxist-Leninist leanings.

## CHAPTER 4

### LIBERAL DEMOCRACY IN SOUTH AFRICA

#### 4.1 Introduction

Some political commentators have expressed doubts on the viability of liberal democracy in Africa in general, and in South Africa in particular (Biko, 2005; 1972; Makgoba, 1998; Gilliomee, 1995; Ake, 1993). For instance, Ake (1993:243) argues that “the familiar assumptions and political arrangements of liberal democracy make little sense in Africa. Liberal democracy assumes individualism, but there is little individualism in Africa”. For Ake (1996:132), Africa needs “a social democracy that places emphasis on concrete political, social, and economic rights, as opposed to a liberal democracy that emphasises abstract political rights”. Similarly, Makgoba (1998:272) argues that “individualistic liberalism flies totally against most things that Africans have stood for and cherished - *Ubuntu*, humanism, tolerance, the elimination of racial and class divisions, and the emphasis on society”. Gilliomee (1995:97-98) takes issue with the view that “South Africa represents enough of a common society to provide a sufficiently stable base for a well-functioning liberal democracy”. His view is that “South Africa lacks the social requisites associated with the consolidation of liberal democracies: broad-based economic development and national homogeneity” (Gilliomee, 1995:84). However, Gilliomee’s view above is at odds with liberalism’s distinctive feature of ‘openness to pluralism’ despite a lack of homogeneity among members (Geuss, 2002). As Downing and Thigpen (1993:1050) point out, “liberals assume that because there will be a plurality of life plans in a free society, insistence on a common good would bring conflict; persons and groups would attempt to further their own ways of life through government”.

The above concerns about liberalism in South Africa are not necessarily unfounded. As Welsh (1998:1) observes, liberalism in South Africa has been “diffused and lacking in organisational focus”. Enslin (1999:180) notes that it continues to be “widely derided, or at best ignored as irrelevant to South African affairs”. Some have argued that liberalism “has never been a dominant force in South African politics” (Waghid,

2003:81). For Makgoba (1998:284), white liberals in particular remain “unpopular because in the eyes of the majority and the international community they are subtle racists”. Yet, and ironically “political organisations like the National Party and the ANC, neither of whom could be described as liberal, could agree on an essentially liberal form of state” (Welsh, 1998:28).

From time immemorial, liberalism has either been celebrated and defended (Gaus, 2000; Gutmann, 1985, Rawls, 1999), or contested (Abbey, 2005; Abbey, 2004; Cobbah, 1987; Gray, 1978), scoffed at and reviled (Biko, 2005; Makgoba, 1998; Ake, 1993). For instance, on the one hand, Gaus (2000:180) contends that “the twentieth century was a surprisingly liberal century ...Consensus on the pre-eminence of the liberal ideals of liberty and markets appears well-nigh universal”. He argues that by the close of the twentieth century “liberalism has apparently defeated, or has certainly got the upper hand on its traditional rivals” (Gaus, 2000:195). While Gutmann (1985:310) mounts a defence against claims that “liberal politics is philosophically indefensible”. On the other hand, Abbey (2004:11) informs us that “Taylor draws attention to the ways in which certain interpretations of liberalism shape and distort our thinking about what is normal, necessary, or possible in politics”, while Geuss (2002:320) finds “signs of a significant theoretical, moral, and political disaffection with some aspects of liberalism”. Geuss (2002:320-321) argues that “liberalism has for a long time seemed to lack much inspirational potential; it is good at dissolving traditional modes of life and their associated values, but less obviously good at replacing them with anything particularly distinctive or admirable”.

That there is such a wide diversity of views on liberalism is not unusual. Evans (1999:117) contends that “being aware of the great diversity within the liberal tradition, no sensible liberal would be prepared to offer a substantial and rigidly specified characterisation of that which makes a doctrine ‘liberal’”. Similarly, Holmes (1995:13) observes that “the political theorists who have most cogently articulated and defended liberal aspirations - Milton, Spinoza, Locke, Montesquieu, Hume, Voltaire, Beccaria, Blackstone, Smith, Kant, Bentham, Madison, Hamilton, Constant, Tocqueville, and J. S. Mill - were deeply immersed in contemporary controversies. Each spent his life responding to local challenges, defending specific reforms, struggling with circumscribed problems”. It is his contention that “their epistemologies and

metaphysical beliefs were sometimes diametrically opposed to each other's. They also deviated from one another on a wide range of policy questions". As a result, "none can be fully understood if plucked ahistorically from his political and intellectual context and forced to march in a canonical parade of liberal greats".

Like their predecessors above, contemporary liberal theorists are also grappling with contestations around various articulations of liberalism (Galston, 2005, 1991; Rawls, 1999, 1996; Waldron, 1987; Enslin, 1986; Berlin, 1969). It is clear that liberalism is an "essentially contested concept" (Abbey, 2005; Gray, 1978) that is also 'complex' (Simhony, 2003:283). Therefore, I argue that South Africa's appeal to liberalism should be viewed as a manifestation of the many proliferations of liberalism referred to above. To that end, there should not be any doubt as to whether South Africa should or should not be a liberal democratic state.

This chapter is divided into four sections. In the first section I explore the basic principles that liberals generally value. This exploration is necessary given that "South Africa's new democratic order and its education system presuppose some critical distinguishing features of liberalism" (Enslin, 1999:175). I should indicate from the outset that throughout this study I shall use the term 'liberalism' in its classical form to mean a political theory that is concerned with the principle of liberty and the rights of people to associate, assemble, move, and to freely express themselves. In the second section I sketch the contestations of liberalism in South Africa with a view to ascertaining whether the context-specific contestations necessarily negate the broader value of liberalism as a political theory. Unlike scholars such as Biko (2005), Makgoba (1998) and Gilliom (1995) who reject liberalism, in the third section I explore the plausibility of liberalism in South Africa against the backdrop of the country's constitution, which has been hailed worldwide as 'liberal' and 'egalitarian'. However, Geuss (2002:333) cautions that "in its origin, liberalism had no ambition to be universal either in claiming to be valid for everyone and every human society or in the sense of purporting to give an answer to all the important questions of human life". With this in mind, it seems reasonable to argue that South Africa has every right to appropriate elements of liberalism that pertain to its socio-political and cultural imperatives. Given that large sections of South Africa remain rural and communal, it can be argued that the country might consider appropriating elements of liberalism

that are generally associated with the politics of consensus. As Geuss (2002:326) points us, “what is distinctive about liberalism isn’t ... so much its openness to pluralism as its view that all societies should be seen as capable of attaining consensus, despite a lack of homogeneity in the manners, beliefs, and habits of their members”.

In the third section I grapple with the ideological challenges facing South Africa as an African liberal democracy whose ruling tripartite alliance is inclined to Marxism-Leninism. The Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) and the South African Communist Party (SACP) are self-declared converts of Marxism-Leninism and its political strategy of ‘national democratic revolution’. The two [COSATU and the SACP] are in a strategic political alliance with the African National Congress (ANC). In the larger scheme of things this marriage is unsustainable. However, I shall argue that the ANC, which is the lead partner in the tripartite alliance, is more community-oriented and less attuned to the aspirations of organised labour like COSATU and the SACP. Moreover, given its majority support base, the ANC has effectively hegemonised the alliance. Against the backdrop of these observations, it seems unlikely that South Africa’s liberal project will be nullified by the Marxist-Leninist stance of both COSATU and the SACP. In the final section I shall offer some concluding remarks. I now turn to the basic principles that liberals generally value.

## **4.2 Basic principles of liberalism**

### *4.2.1 Values and assumptions of liberalism*

Enslin (1984:3) posits that “the necessary and most fundamental formal characteristic of liberal ideas is that they defend the principle of liberty or freedom”. For Waldron (1987:130), “liberty is a concept which captures what is distinctive and important in human agency as such and in the untrammelled exercise of the powers of individual deliberation, choice, and the intentional initiation of action”. Historically, liberal political philosophy is closely linked with the Enlightenment. Waldron (1987:134) posits that “the relationship between liberal thought and the legacy of the Enlightenment cannot be stressed too strongly. The Enlightenment was characterised by a burgeoning confidence in the human ability to make sense of the world, to grasp its regularities

and fundamental principles, to predict its future, and to manipulate its powers for the benefit of mankind". It is Waldron's view that "after millennia of ignorance, terror, and superstition, cowering before forces it could not understand nor control, mankind faced the prospect of being able at last to build a human world in which it might feel safely and securely at home".

Gray (1995:17) concurs and argues that "throughout the latter half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the history of liberalism in continental Europe and the spread of the Enlightenment must be regarded as aspects of one and the same current of thought and practice". It is his contention that "the *sine qua non* of the liberal state in all its varieties is that governmental power and authority be limited by a system of constitutional rules and practices in which individual liberty and the equality of persons under the rule of law are respected" (Gray, 1995:71-72). This point is endorsed by Waldron (1987:130) who contends as follows: "in politics, liberals are committed to intellectual freedom, freedom of speech, association, and civil liberties generally. In the realm of personal life, they raise their banners for freedom of religious belief and practice, freedom of lifestyle, and freedom (provided again that it *is* genuine freedom for everyone involved) in regard to sexual practices, marital affairs, pornography, the use of drugs and all those familiar liberal concerns". Thus, "liberals insist on the importance of rights, including the right of people to practice their religion as they see fit, to speak for and assemble around causes in which they believe, and to possess a significant degree of control over their personal livelihood" (Wolfe, 2009:11). Wolfe (2009:11) posits that "liberals believe that individuals live within an ordered world that necessarily constraints the ability of people to do whatever they want whenever they want to do it". However, he is quick to point out that for liberals, "such constraints are not imposed by authorities over which people have no control or shaped by traditions they cannot influence; they are established instead by people themselves through some form of consent or social contract. Independence cannot exist without interdependence".

Cobbah (1987:312) contends that "the political philosophy of liberalism was largely a reaction to medieval thought. It was a philosophical opposition to traditional authority that was based on divine wisdom, religion, and the common law". For him, it was Thomas Hobbes who introduced the idea of human rights as a conception of human nature in which individuals possess natural rights to all the objects of their desire

(Cobbah, 1987:313). Cobbah (1987:312) notes that Hobbes conceived of a right as the “liberty each man has to use his own power as he will himself, for the preservation of his own nature - that is to say, his own life”. In the same vein, John Locke (1993) rejected medieval notions of authority and envisioned individuals stripped of all historical loyalties and beliefs, pursuing their security, within a community in which they could appoint a ruler, who would govern subject to remaining acceptable to the community. One of my aims in this study is to highlight the plausibility for crosspollination or cross-purposes<sup>3</sup> between some traditional African values and some liberal values.

Similarly, Susser (1995:59) posits that “liberalism represented a revolt of the rising urban middle class of merchants and entrepreneurs against the pre-modern alliance of throne, sword, and altar - the absolute monarchy, the feudal aristocratic order, and the vast powers of the church”. Liberalism is “a theory about what makes political action - and in particular the enforcement and maintenance of a social and political order - morally legitimate” (Waldron, 1987:140). Writing on the specific South African liberal tradition, Welsh (1998:1-2) identifies the following as “the core values of liberalism”:

- A commitment to fundamental human rights and those procedural safeguards known as the rule of law;
- A commitment to constitutionalism, meaning that the state and government are to operate under law and that certain fundamental principles must remain beyond the reach of any (temporary) government;<sup>4</sup>
- A belief in equality (whose exact parameters remain a matter of on-going debate, but implying at least equality before the law) and (for most liberals) the dismantling of entrenched political, economic, and social inequalities;
- An emphasis on the primacy of the individual as the possessor of inalienable rights, though by no means, as critics allege, unmindful of the need for, and claims of community;
- Tolerance of conflicting viewpoints (spelled out with force in John Stuart Mill’s essay *On Liberty*). Tolerance is perhaps the logical consequence of the right to

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<sup>3</sup> I borrow the notion of ‘cross-purposes’ from the work of Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor. See Charles Taylor. 1991. *Cross-purposes: the liberal-communitarian debate*. In Nancy Rosenblum (ed) *Liberalism and the Moral Life*, Harvard University Press: Massachusetts.

<sup>4</sup> Section 9 (3), chapter 2 of the Bill of Rights in the Constitution of South Africa resonates with Welsh’s second core value of liberalism above as well as the view expressed by David Gray (1995) above. It reads as follows: “The state may not unfairly discriminate directly or indirectly against anyone on one or more grounds, including race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language and birth”.

freedom of expression, but its centrality in liberal thinking requires that it be regarded as a separate principle;

- An optimistic belief in the possibilities of individual and social ‘improvement’ with the implication that no individual, community, or society is irretrievably damned as hopeless; and
- Compassion.

Welsh acknowledges South Africa’s communal imperatives with reference to the importance of community in bullets four and six. It is my view that community [however it might be conceived] is an essential component of the liberal tradition. Indeed there is consensus among some liberals that “liberalism is itself a form of community” (Galston, 1991:43), whose members “excel in liberal virtues and as a consequence, flourish in a distinctively liberal way” (Macedo, 1991:278). Some liberals have suggested that “liberalism supplies the best interpretation of a political community” (Dworkin, 1989:480), that “the lives of individual people and that of their community are integrated”, and that “the critical success of any one of their lives is an aspect of, and so is dependent on the goodness of the community as a whole” (Dworkin, 1989:491). On the contrary, others have argued that “the inseparability of rights and community is a consistent liberal position” (Simhony, 2003:271). As Abbey and Taylor (1996:3) point out, “it is possible for someone to have communitarian or holist ontology and to value liberalism’s individual rights”. However, in my view, Mulhall (1987: 275) is spot on in his endorsement of the place of the individual in a community. He argues that the liberal “need have no difficulty in accepting the constitutive role of community membership”. Mulhall further argues that “liberals must indeed affirm that the political community’s institutions embody a vision relating to *personhood*, that is, they must affirm that such institutions protect that capacity which makes an individual citizen a human agent and so refer to a capacity which every citizen is supposed to possess if he is to be seen as a person at all”.

The above-sketches liberal values presuppose development and consolidation of a range of virtues that are necessary for individual flourishing in a liberal society. But as Johnston (1994:18) cautions, “liberal values have to be interpreted, and the differences of interpretation that arise when these values are elaborated into a full theory distinguish different liberal theories from one another”. Downing and Thigpen (1993: 1046) contend that “the viability of a liberal society depends on its ability to

engender a virtuous citizenry". Thus, liberals tend "to emphasise *political* virtues". Some of the liberal philosophers who have contributed to the debate on the virtues include William Galston (1991), Steven Macedo (1991) and Amy Gutmann (1989, 1985). A communitarian philosopher who has contributed immensely to the debate on virtue and who warrants mention is Alasdair MacIntyre in his book entitled: *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*. The virtues can be briefly summed up as those key attributes and personal qualities that the citizenry needs "if democracies are to remain stable" (Sabl, 2005:212). The virtues are so important to most liberal nation states that they are deemed "most worth defending" (Sabl, 2005:208). Below I briefly sketch conceptions of virtue in a liberal context, and conceptions of virtue in a communitarian context.

#### 4.2.2 Liberal conceptions of virtue

Downing and Thigpen (1993: 1054) contend that "if liberals understand the common good not as a view of the good life for persons but rather as arrangements that enhance the lives of people generally, then the virtues may be viewed as predispositions that must be widely shared in order to attain the liberal common good". In this respect "the liberal state may promote virtue by creating institutions and programmes to foster and preserve certain virtues" (Downing & Thigpen, 1993: 1057). But what are virtues? And why are they so important to a political order? In 1988, Galston published an article entitled: "Liberal virtues" in *American Political Science Review*. He later republished it as a chapter in his book entitled: *Liberal Purposes: Goods, Virtues, and Diversity in the Liberal State*. For my purpose in this section, I shall draw on the latter version to try and answer some of the questions above.

Galston (1991) demarcates the virtues into *general virtues* - courage, law-abidingness, and loyalty; *virtues of the liberal society* - individualism and diversity; *virtues of the liberal economy* - work ethic, achievement, a mean between ascetic self-denial and untrammelled self-gratification, and adaptability, and *virtues of liberal politics* – citizenship, leadership, and general politics. In addition, Galston (1991:217) argues that "the liberal virtues are the traits of character liberalism needs, not necessarily the ones it has". Galston (1991:215) argues that John Locke "teaches a set of moral virtues that make men able to respect themselves and be useful to one another both

in private and in public life". For me this stands as the most important justification why we should all be committed not only to teaching about the virtues, but also to seeking ways of promoting them at all times.

Galston (1991:221) insists that "some of the virtues needed to sustain the liberal state are requisites of every political community". He posits that "individual virtue (or excellence - the Greek *arete* will bear both meanings) is knowable through everyday experience, definable through philosophic inquiry, and is always and everywhere the same" (Galston (1991:217). We should be cautious though with regard to *general virtues* such as, for example, courage and loyalty. As MacIntyre (2007:200) warns, "courage sometimes sustains injustice", while "loyalty has been known to strengthen a murderous aggressor".

While the bulk of the above analysis covers liberal virtues as means to an end, Galston also explores liberal virtues as ends in themselves. For instance, he argues that "If we look to human nature, we are led to focus on the virtues as intrinsic goods – that is, as the active dispositions that constitute our good, excellence, or perfection *qua* human beings. If we look to human circumstances, we emphasise the virtues as instrumental goods - that is, as dispositions that enable us to perform well the specific tasks presented by our situation" (Galston, 2005: 76).

Galston (1991:229) grapples with the question "whether there is a conception of the virtuous or excellent individual linked intrinsically to liberal theory and seen as valuable, not instrumentally, but for its own sake." He notes that the liberal tradition "suggests three conceptions of the intrinsic individual excellence, overlapping yet distinct". The first is "the Lockean conception of excellence as rational liberty of self-direction". 'Self-direction' is also known as 'autonomy' – "the capacity to form, pursue, and revise life plans in the light of our personal commitments and circumstances" (Enslin, 1993; Galston, 1991). The second is "the Kantian account of the capacity to act in accordance with the precept of duty - that is, to make duty the effective principle of personal conduct and to resist the promptings of passion and interest in so far as they are incompatible with this principle" (Galston, 1991:229). The third is "adapted in different ways from Romanticism by John Stuart Mill, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry

David Thoreau, and Walt Whitman; it is the understanding of excellence as the full flowering of individuality” (Galston, 1991:230).

Sabl (2005:208) is concerned that advocates of virtue in the US tend to speak across one another. For instance, Galston stresses the bourgeois and integrative virtues; Macedo stresses the Millian or anti-traditionalist liberalism that praises openness to eccentric lifestyle choices, and explicitly calls family and career duties into doubt, while Gutmann assumes a Deweyan, progressive ideal, whereby the worth of liberal democracy lies in a constant and collective rational examination of all social practices, so that those that can no longer be defended may be exposed and discarded. Sabl (2005: 213) argues that “it is easy to imagine that some citizen virtues could be necessary for the survival of liberal democracy, while others might be less necessary but conducive to its perfection or flourishing”. But as I mentioned above, this is not unusual, and in fact it should be expected given that liberalism does not flourish on homogeneity but allows for diversity and plurality of life plans in a free society.

Galston (2005:80) argues that the virtues “are guides to (or aspects of) living well”. He contends that “beyond the virtues needed to sustain all political communities are virtues specific to liberal communities - those required by the liberal spheres of society, economy, and polity” (Galston, 1991:222). He is convinced that “the viability of liberal society depends on its ability to engender a virtuous citizenry” (Galston, 1991: 217). He suggests that “the political community should structure its institutions and policies to promote virtue in its citizens, and its worth as a community depends on the extent to which it achieves that goal” (Galston, 1991: 217-218). This study is really about how South Africa’s education system can develop virtuous citizens.

#### *4.2.3 Communitarian conception of virtue*

I mentioned above that Scottish philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre is one of the most important moral philosophers who has contributed immensely to the debate on virtue. A brief consideration of MacIntyre’s views on virtue is necessary given that he debates

virtue from a communitarian point of view, which resonates with South Africa's communal and interdependent socio-cultural context. The Constitution of South Africa has been hailed as "a model liberal democratic constitution that has few peers in the world community" (Jordan, 1996); that bears "the hallmarks of liberal democracy" (Enslin & Horsthemke, 2004:552; Dugard, 1998:23). Moreover, it "is widely hailed as liberal and egalitarian" (Deveaux, 2003:162) because "it values human dignity and frames human rights at its heart" (Robinson, 2012:2). However, the same constitution recognises the institution of traditional leadership, whose claim to power is by birth right and not by democratic processes and procedures. However, I want to argue that notwithstanding this seeming contradiction, South Africa seeks to build a socio-political future based on the amalgamation of traditional African values and liberal democratic values. As a result, an understanding of how the notion of virtue is conceived and cultivated in the traditional African polity that embraces liberal democratic values is of critical importance to this study.

Briefly, MacIntyre (2007:191) defines a virtue as "an acquired human quality the possession and exercise of which tends to enable us to achieve those goods which are internal to practices and the lack of which effectively prevents us from achieving any such goods". For MacIntyre, this is an adequate definition that "illuminates the place of the virtues in human life". Without the virtues the goods internal to practices are "barred to us, but not just barred to us generally, barred in a very particular way". Furthermore, MacIntyre (2007:194-195) contends that "the exercise of the virtues is itself apt to require a highly determinate attitude to social and political issues; and it is always within some particular community with its own specific institutional forms that we learn or fail to learn to exercise the virtues". He posits that "one of the features of the concept of a virtue which has emerged with some clarity... is that it always requires for its application the acceptance for some prior account of certain features of social and moral life in terms of which it has to be defined and explained" (MacIntyre, 2007:186). To that end, "it is one of the tasks of parental authority to make children grow up so as to be virtuous adults" (MacIntyre, 2007:195). He elaborates: "for what education in the virtues teaches me is that my good as a man is one and the same as the good of those others with whom I am bound up in human community" (MacIntyre, 2007: 229).

To summarise, I have sketched the basic principles that the liberals value. I have highlighted the fact that liberals generally insist on the importance of the rights of individuals to assemble, to associate, and to express their views under the rule of law. Crucially though, I underscored the importance of community to liberalism given that liberalism is a form of community in which members flourish in a distinctively liberal way. I have expounded on the notion of virtue and suggested that polities can promote virtue by creating institutions and programmes that foster certain virtues. This is because virtues constitute our good, excellence, or perfection as human beings. Indeed the viability of most polities is dependent on their ability to engender virtuous citizens. It is therefore ironic that even against the backdrop of the above analysis of the underlying values and assumptions of liberalism there are still contestations in Africa generally, and in South Africa in particular, about the viability of liberalism. I noted that South Africa's liberal tradition is diffused and lacking in organisational focus; that it is widely derided and ignored as irrelevant to South African affairs, and that even the ruling African National Congress (ANC) does not regard itself as liberal. In the next section I sketch contestations around liberalism in South Africa with a view to ascertaining whether in the last instance, such contestations negate the broader value of liberalism as a political philosophy and theory.

### **4.3 Contestations around liberalism in South Africa**

In South Africa, the liberal tradition has always been regarded as in disarray. For instance, it has been described as "diffused and lacking in organisational focus" (Welsh, 1998:1), and as "widely derided, or at best ignored as irrelevant to South African affairs" (Enslin, 1999:180). As also Waghid (2003:81) points out, liberalism "has never been a dominant force in South African politics. Yet, the liberal tradition in South Africa has a long and distinguished history which acquired an organised and political voice in the Liberal and Progressive Federal Parties since the 1950s". How did it all start to fall apart for liberalism in South Africa? Liberalism was severely tested during apartheid, and it failed dismally. However, I should mention that this perceived failure should not detract from the good work of liberal leaders such as Alan Paton, Colin Elgin, Patrick Duncan, Zach de Beer as well as notable female leaders such as Margaret Ballinger and Helen Suzman, who opposed apartheid from within the

country's parliamentary structures, and received wide acclaim for their efforts. Waghid (2003:82) sheds light on the matter in his observation that even though the white liberals were "committed to the creation of a liberal democracy in South Africa", the Progressive Federal Party "was not the liberal or even a liberal party, although it inherited some aspects of South African political liberalism". In fact "its history has been far too diverse and complicated simply to depict it as a pure liberal party".

Without doubt the fiercest critic of the liberal tradition in South Africa was Steve Biko, leader of the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) who died in police custody in 1977 while detained under the Terrorism Act of 1967. Dugard (1978:136) observes that "although designed to combat terrorism, the Terrorism Act has itself become an instrument of terror". Biko (1972:5) argued that "the *thesis*, the *antithesis* and the *synthesis* have been mentioned by some great philosophers as the cardinal points around which any social revolution revolves. For the liberals, the *thesis* is apartheid, the *antithesis* is non-racialism and the *synthesis* very feebly defined". Biko argued that "Black Consciousness defines the situation differently. The *thesis* is in fact a strong white racism and therefore, the *antithesis* to this must, *ipso facto*, be a strong solidarity amongst the blacks on whom this racism seeks to prey. Out of these two situations we can therefore hope to reach some kind of balance - a true humanity where power politics will have no place". Biko (1972:5) argued that "the failure of the liberals is in fact that their *antithesis* is a watered-down version of the truth whose close proximity to the *thesis* will nullify the purported balance".

However, Biko's views should be considered in the context of the BCM, which he led during the volatile period of the 1970s. What then is Black Consciousness (BC)? Biko (1972:6) defined BC as follows:

*"In essence this is an attitude of mind and a way of life. It is the most positive call to emanate from the Black world for a long time. Its unadulterated quintessence is the realisation by the Black man of the need to rally together with his brothers around the cause of their oppression - the blackness of their skin - and to operate as a group in order to rid themselves of the shackles that bind them to perpetual servitude. It is based on a self-examination which has ultimately led them to believe that by seeking to run away from themselves and to emulate the White man they are insulting the intelligence of whoever created them Black".*

With regard to liberals, Biko (2005:20) observed that “these are the people who argue that they are not responsible for white racism and the country's ‘inhumanity to the black man’. These are the people who claim that they too feel the oppression just as acutely as the blacks and therefore should be jointly involved in the black man's struggle for a place under the sun. In short, these are the people who say that they have black souls wrapped up in white skins”. Biko (2005:20) was contemptuous towards white liberals’ “insistence that the problems of the country can only be solved by a bilateral approach involving both black and white”. He queried that “the integration they talk about is first of all artificial in that it is a response to conscious manoeuvre rather than to the dictates of the inner soul... the people forming the integrated complex have been extracted from various segregated societies with their inbuilt complexes of superiority and inferiority and these continue to manifest themselves even in the ‘non-racial’ set-up of the integrated complex”. Thus “the integration so achieved is a one-way course, with the whites doing all the talking and the blacks the listening”.

For Biko (2005:22), South Africa’s white liberals were only playing games. He argued that “they are claiming a ‘monopoly on intelligence and moral judgment’ and setting the pattern and pace for the realisation of the black man’s aspirations. They want to remain in good books with both the black and white worlds. They want to shy away from all forms of ‘extremisms’, condemning ‘white supremacy’ as being just as bad as ‘Black Power!’. They vacillate between the two worlds, verbalising all the complaints of the blacks beautifully while skilfully extracting what suits them from the exclusive pool of white privileges”. Biko did not find any honesty in white liberals’ anti-apartheid protests. He argued that “their protests are directed at and appeal to white conscience, everything they do is directed at finally convincing the white electorate that the black man is also a man and that at some future date he should be given a place at the white man's table”. Hook (2011) describes this attitude as “an attempted demonstration of non-complicity”.

Biko’s views above are consistent with Franz Fanon’s (1986) views on the ‘white man’, which he sketches in *Black Skin, White Masks*. Fanon (1986: 128) argues that “the white man wants the world; he wants it for himself alone. He finds himself predestined master of this world. He enslaves it. An acquisitive relation is established between the world and him”. It is Fanon’s (1986:133) contention that “the theoretical and practical

assertion of the supremacy of the white man is its *thesis*; the position of negritude as an antithetical value is the moment of negativity". To that end, Fanon (1986:11) was uncompromising that "the white man is sealed in his whiteness. The black man in his blackness".

Biko's anti-white liberal views have found expression in the writings of William Makgoba. Like Biko, Makgoba (1998:278) argues that during apartheid "there was a subtle but major distinction in objectives between the fight of the oppressed and that of the liberals, and it was this: the oppressed fought for the removal of all forms of racism, the crude and the molecular types (sometimes referred to as subliminal, subtle, or unintentional racism), while the white liberals fought to protect privilege and remove only the crude form of racism". Makgoba (1998:278) insists that white liberals "could not fight to remove the subtle version, which is part of their life, their socialisation, their culture, and history", for the simple reason that "this form is generally linked to privilege. Privilege, the sense of identity and culture offered by 340 years of colonisation and apartheid, could not simply be erased by ushering in a genuine democracy".

My view is that Makgoba's analysis misses the bigger picture. While white liberals were peripheral to the very architecture of apartheid's obnoxious policies and legislation they mounted the struggle against apartheid from within the system's parliamentary structures, where they had representation by virtue of being white. And while they might have failed dismally, their failure was not in vain. Let us take Makgoba's 'privilege' thesis for instance. It does not explain how the multi-party democracy that is now in full swing in South Africa was actually ushered from within the ranks of the Afrikaner Nationalist Party. History will testify that it was the Afrikaner Nationalist Party (NP) which began negotiations with the ANC in exile for the eventual handover of power. Gumede (2007:31) notes that "Anglo American, which had an office in Lusaka, Zambia, less than a stone's throw from the ANC's headquarters, made overtures in 1985 to exiled ANC leader Oliver Tambo". It is Gumede's view that "this was the beginning of a series of meetings between the ANC and white local business leaders, non-governmental figures and opposition party members". In 1988, PW Botha, who is FW de Klerk's predecessor in the leadership of the NP "instructed

his chief of intelligence, Niel Barnard, to meet Mandela in jail and find out what the ANC positions were on a negotiated settlement”.

As a consequence, in February 1990 when South Africa’s president de Klerk made the historical announcement in Parliament to unban all liberation struggle movements - the ANC, PAC, and SACP, and to free Nelson Mandela (Gumede, 2007; Webster, 2000), he was only completing the political process that was started in the 1980s by his predecessors. The logic behind these initiatives, Gumede (2007:32) argues, was that “if the National Party government made the first move, the ANC alliance would be placed on the defensive”? Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela (2013:33), senior research professor at the University of the Free State argues that “at a critical moment in South African politics, de Klerk listened to the voices that called for change. He was not blind to the unpalatable reality that it was time for apartheid to go – whatever pressures prevailed to ‘force’ him, as some might say, to release Nelson Mandela in February 1990, and to use his power to call a referendum in March 1992 to determine white voters’ support for political negotiations”. The point of this lengthy historical chronicle is to show that it was the Afrikaners, architects of apartheid, who made a conscious decision to relinquish their position of privilege that was acquired and institutionalised during years of apartheid rule.

Makgoba (1998:283) charges South Africa’s English-speaking liberals of failing “to engage with the system of identity, values, and culture that are central to and hold together the oppressed majority. They have failed to engage with African culture as part of their socialisation...Yet they live within a sea of Africans. Instead they have from a superior position tended to expect the African simply to imbibe their culture and language”. In an interesting twist of irony Enslin (1999), who is a staunch defender of liberalism,<sup>5</sup> and Makgoba’s fiercest critic in the areas of Africanism/Afrocentrism and *Ubuntu*,<sup>6</sup> agrees with Makgoba. Enslin (1999:180), argues that in South Africa the white “liberals were unable to provide the strategies and mobilisation that were needed to overthrow apartheid and were regarded by some as its accomplices”.

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<sup>5</sup> See Penny Enslin. 1986. In defence of liberal theory of education, unpublished PhD Thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg; Enslin, P. 1999. Education for liberal democracy: universalising a western construct? *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, 33 (2), 175-186.

<sup>6</sup> See Enslin, P. & Horsthemke, K. 2004. Can *Ubuntu* provide a model for citizenship education in African democracies? *Comparative Education*, 40 (4), 545-558.

It would be tempting at this stage to simply conclude, as Biko (2005; 1972), Makgoba (1998), Gilliomee (1995), Ake (1993), and Parekh (1993) do, that the political cultures and traditions of non-Western countries are not amenable to Western liberalism and liberal democracy, and that they are incompatible with Western liberalism and liberal democracy. But that would be tantamount to committing a serious error of judgement given that the views of these scholars are either context-specific (Biko, 2005, 1972; Makgoba, 1998; Gilliomee, 1995), or misjudge the trends in social theory and political practices in the rapidly changing global context (Parekh). There should be no doubt though that liberalism is an “essentially contested concept” (Abbey, 2005; Gray, 1978) and that it is also laden with complexities (Simhony, 2003). Some liberal commentators have even suggested that rather than talk about liberalism [*singular*] we should instead be talking about “a multitude of liberalisms” (McKay, 2000:627), “many liberalisms” (Friedman, 2003:182; Rawls, 1996:223), or “a family of liberalisms” (Simhony, 2003:283). As Friedman (2003:182) elaborates, “equality, rights, autonomy, justice, and liberty are all variously interpreted by liberals themselves. Liberalism is no more monolithic or homogeneous than are the minority cultures that sometimes challenge the authority of liberal governments”. It is Friedman’s contention that “what are called ‘liberal values and principles’ are simply values and principles that happen to figure prominently in many versions of liberal ideology today, but that could be defended from any number of philosophical points of view”.

Indeed Simhony (2003:283-284) warns that “to talk of ‘standard’ liberalism is not helpful to appreciating the variety of liberalism”. It is his view that “complexity is lost when we approach the liberal argument from a discourse of simple oppositions”. The pertinence of Simhony’s contention above to the discourse of opposition to liberalism adopted by Biko (2005; 1972), Makgoba (1998), Gilliomee (1995), Ake (1993), and Parekh (1993) cannot be overemphasised. The five scholars treat liberalism as a political tradition that is opposed to, and is therefore fundamentally incompatible with non-Western political traditions. My view is that this position does more harm than good to the debate in that it obfuscates the proliferation that is manifest in the liberal tradition today.

South Africa's appeal to liberalism should be viewed as part and parcel of this continuing proliferation of the liberal tradition. As Bell (2014:705) points out, "the history of liberalism is a history of constant reinvention". Indeed Lumumba-Kasongo (2005:7) is spot-on in his observation that "liberal democracy is not the monopoly of Western society as struggles outside the West have shaped its content and contributed to its redefinition". Abbey (2005:472) buttresses this point when she notes that "the liberal way of life features as one among other viable possibilities, and liberal politics is dedicated to finding a *modus vivendi* among the ways of life within society so that they can enjoy peaceful co-existence". However, Lumumba-Kasongo (2005:13) sums up this debate nicely with respect to Africa: "a critical knowledge of liberal democracy and its processes can be beneficial to the African people and their leaders as they search for the chance to invent the developmental democracy and new democratic state's paradigms needed for progressive social change". My own view is that there should not be any doubt about the viability of liberalism and liberal democracy in South Africa.

To summarise, I have sketched the contestations around South Africa's liberal tradition. The liberal tradition has not been taken seriously. In fact it is generally regarded as irrelevant to South Africa's social and political affairs. Unsurprisingly, liberalism has never been a dominant political force in South Africa. I argued that South Africa's liberalism was tested by the apartheid regime and failed dismally. One of the fiercest critics of South Africa's liberal tradition is BCM leader Steven Biko, who argued that the liberals simply verbalised all the complaints of the blacks while skilfully extracting what suited their exclusive pool of white privilege. Similarly, Makgoba argues that South Africa's white liberals could not fight for the removal of the subtle version of racism because it is part of their life, their socialisation, their culture and history. I showed that even Enslin, who is a staunch defender of liberalism, agrees with Makgoba that South Africa's white liberals failed to provide the necessary strategies for the overthrow of apartheid, and that they were in fact regarded as accomplices of the system.

The questions I am grappling with, and which I pursue in detail below are whether these context-specific contestations necessarily negate the broader value of liberalism? Do they nullify the viability of liberalism in contemporary South Africa?

Personally I do not think so. My view is that South Africa is at liberty to decide which elements of western liberalism pertain to its social, political and cultural imperatives, and are therefore worth importing. As Geuss (2002:326) points out, “what is distinctive about liberalism isn’t ... so much its openness to pluralism as its view that all societies should be seen as capable of attaining consensus, despite a lack of homogeneity in the manners, beliefs, and habits of their members”. Given South Africa’s communal feature, which is perceived to be amenable to the politics of consensus, it is only logical that it appropriates those elements of consensus in liberalism to which Geuss refers above. I now turn to the challenges of Marxism-Leninism to South Africa’s liberalism.

#### **4.4 The Marxist-Leninist challenge of liberalism in South Africa**

The questions I want to raise in this section are: how plausible is liberalism in a post-apartheid South Africa whose ruling tripartite alliance of the African National Congress (ANC), the South African Communist Party (SACP), and the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) has strong Marxist-Leninist leanings? Notwithstanding existence of a clearly liberal constitution, what prospects are there for liberalism to flourish? I should mention though that regardless of the above-sketched hard line BCM’s anti-white liberal views by Biko (2005, 1972) and Makgoba (1998), generally there is hope that the seeds of liberalism that have been planted thanks to the country’s constitution can germinate, grow and flourish provided there is a conducive social, cultural and political environment for such germination, growth and flourishing (Letseka, 2013, 2012; Waghid, 2003, Enslin, 1999; Welsh, 1998). Before delving into the plausibility of liberalism in South Africa, I want to start by acknowledging that liberalism is an ‘essentially contested concept’ (Abbey, 2005; Gray, 1978; Gallie, 1956), and that it is laden with ‘complexities’ (Simhony, 2003). I say more on these contestations and complexities below. I shall follow this with an exploration of the influence of Marxism-Leninism in South Africa. My contention is that unlike its alliance partners, COSATU and the SACP, the ANC has not only asserted its hegemony on the alliance, but it is also more community-oriented than its alliance partners, which effectively nullifies any potential threat of Marxism-Leninism to South Africa’s liberalism.

##### *4.4.1 Liberalism as ‘complex’ and ‘essentially contested concept’*

It is important to mention from the outset that liberalism does not feature in Gallie's (1956) list of 'essentially contested concepts'.<sup>7</sup> However, Abbey (2005) is of the view that like art, democracy, social justice, and the Christian life, liberalism is also an 'essentially contested concept'. As to why Gallie omitted it from his list of 'essentially contested concepts', Abbey (2005:468) argues that "with concerns about democracy on the ascendancy...the concept of liberty, or more accurately, of particular liberties deserving protection irrespective of their democratic spread or appeal, appears steadily to have lost ground". But this is highly debatable. As Ware (1992:130) points out, "since the 1950s, political scientists attempted to develop classifications of liberal democratic regimes...It was commonplace to distinguish between Anglo-American and Continental European political systems". Evidence from the literature points to vigorous debates on liberalism from the 1930s onwards through to the 1950s. Case in point, on 28<sup>th</sup> December 1934 a symposium was held during the meeting of the Eastern Division of the American Philosophical Association at New York University where John Dewey, William Ernest Hocking, W. M. Pepperell Montague, Morris Cohen, C. M. Bakewell, Sidney Hook, and John Herman Randall, Jr., debated 'The Future of Liberalism'. Some of the papers presented at this symposium were published in the *Journal of Philosophy* and the *International Journal of Ethics* in 1935 and in *Western Political Quarterly* in 1948. Books published on liberalism during this period include John Dewey's (2000) *Liberalism and Social Action*; Harold Laski's (2005) *The Rise of European Liberalism*; William Beveridge's (1945) *Why I am a Liberal*, and Morris Cohen's (1993) *The Faith of a Liberal*. In 1949, Gallie himself published the paper "Liberal morality and socialist morality" in the journal *Philosophy*, which elicited critical responses from T. B. Bottomore and Helen Wodehouse in the same journal in 1950.

I now want to briefly touch on Abbey's (2005:468) view that liberalism "qualifies as an 'essentially contested concept' because it approximates Gallie's criteria as closely as the examples he offers do". Abbey (2005:462) contends that "as more and more

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<sup>7</sup> In his formulation of "essentially contested concepts" Gallie (1956:180) lists art, democracy, social justice, and Christian life as 'essentially contested concepts'. Gallie (1956:169) argues that 'essentially contested concepts' are those "concepts the proper use of which inevitably involves endless disputes about their proper uses on the part of their users".

political theorists locate themselves within the liberal fold, the meaning of the term liberalism has widened and the construction of the liberal tradition has become increasingly contested". Thus "the question of what liberalism is has become more intensely debated by those who consider themselves liberals" (Abbey, 2005:463). As Philp (1996:391) elaborates, "some liberals take preferences in the form of a utility function, others start from the person as having 'reasonable' demands upon the political process, still others start from an antecedent conception of the self as a rights bearer or moral subject, and communitarian liberals start from a view of the subject as embodying the values and principles of his or her community". I want to argue that the route South Africa is taking is of the self as a rights bearer or moral subject, while embracing the values and principles of his or her community.

It is Abbey's (2005: 468-469) contention that liberalism approximates Gallie's criteria in at least four ways. Firstly, "in most contemporary English-language political theory, the term liberalism is used in the positively appraisive way required by Gallie". Secondly, "liberalism is an internally complex phenomenon". For instance, "liberty, equality, rationality, individual dignity, rights, justice, autonomy, consent and the priority of the right over the good" are among liberalism's constituent elements. Thirdly, the above elements are however, "susceptible to being ordered in different ways". Fourthly, "liberalism is a vague and open-ended concept". It offers "the possibility of an inherently dynamic approach to politics and society in that it provides society with the possibility of and justification for continuously remaking itself". For Abbey (2005:469), "this dynamic quality derives from the abstract and universal nature of ideals that lie at the heart of liberalism - liberty, equality, autonomy and toleration". It is Abbey's contention that "by promising equal freedom to all in the shaping of their own lives and pursuit of their own conception of the good (subject to caveats like the harm principle), liberalism offers the normative resources for constant challenges to the status quo".

Commenting on the liberal tradition in South Africa, and on liberalism's ability to accommodate multiple values, Welsh (1998:3) argues that "it is one of liberalism's most attractive features that it not only tolerates but welcomes internal debate...Liberalism's very flexibility and its open-endedness within the broad parameters of its core values have enabled it to be dynamic, adaptable, and

pragmatic". In concurrence, Galston (1991:227) contends that "a general liberal political virtue is the disposition – and the developed capacity – to engage in public discourse. This includes the willingness to listen seriously to a range of views that, given the diversity of liberal societies, will include ideas the listener is bound to find strange and even obnoxious".

Abbey (2005:471) argues that the critical potential of liberalism resides in the immanent normative resources it supplies those who seek to change some aspects of social or political life. For my purpose in this study, I am persuaded by the views Charles Taylor on the relationship between individualist and collectivist ontologies. Taylor (1991:163) argues that "the portmanteau terms 'liberal' and 'communitarian' will probably have to be scrapped because they carry the implication that there is only one issue here, or that someone's position on one determines what he holds on the other". His view is that "either stand on the atomism-holism debate can be combined with either stand on the individualist-collectivist question". This is consistent with the basic position I am advocating in this study, which is that South Africa's socio-political future is premised on the coexistence between traditional African values and liberal democratic values.

Abbey and Taylor (1996:3) contend that "to get the relationship and the differences between liberalism and communitarianism right, it is essential to distinguish ontological from advocacy issues. Ontological issues have to do with how we explain social life while advocacy issues encompass things that we value, hold to be good and worth promoting". They surmise that "at the ontological level, you could explain social life and personal identity in atomist terms, as liberalism traditionally has. Or you could explain it in terms of shared goods, of language and other factors that cannot be accounted for by nor reduced to individuals". As Lehman (2006: 363) reminds us, Taylor's "communitarian development of liberalism is not simply about the imposition of a particular ontology on communities, but involves a strong form of reconciliation that respects and repairs difference". Such reconciliation "involves a dialectical process of mutual engagement between the ontological and advocacy levels and therefore does not privilege any one particular source of the self". How then do the above contestations and complexities facilitate or hamper liberalism in South Africa? I showed above that the liberal way of life features as one among other viable

possibilities (Abbey, 2005), and that liberal democracy is not the monopoly of western society (Lumumba-Kasongo, 2005). By adopting the much-acclaimed 1996 Constitution, South Africa became “a liberal democracy” (Enslin, 1999:176). Suffice it to mention though that the Constitution of South Africa enshrines a wide range of individual rights and guarantees press freedom and free speech, as well as a non-descriptive approach towards economic policy.

The question: which liberalism should South Africa choose is as complex and contested as liberalism itself. There is such a wide range of views on liberalism that it would make little sense to envisage one single view of liberalism that defines what it means to be a liberal. It seems it would also not make sense to argue that liberalism is fundamentally incompatible with traditional African ideas and values of politics. Indeed Enslin (1999:175-76) does a pretty good job in her rebuttal of Parekh’s (1993) claim that liberal democracy is a western construct that should not be regarded as universalisable. She refers to the new democratic order in South Africa and its education system, which she argues, “presuppose some critical distinguishing features of liberalism”. Her rebuttal is against the backdrop of the constitution of South Africa, which is ‘liberal’ and ‘egalitarian’. I now turn to the influence of Marxism-Leninism on South Africa’s post-apartheid liberal democracy.

#### 4.4.2 *The influence of Marxism-Leninism in South Africa*<sup>8</sup>

There are deep ideological contestations between South Africa’s liberalism and the SACP and COSATU. The latter are key partners in the ruling tripartite alliance with the ANC. In its constitution, which was amended at the 13<sup>th</sup> National Congress in July 2012, the SACP (2012:3-4) argues that “in leading the working class towards national and social emancipation, the SACP is guided by those principles of ‘Marxism-Leninism’ whose universal validity has been proven by historical experience”. It declares that “in applying the general principles of ‘Marxism-Leninism’, the SACP is, in the first place, concerned with their indigenous elaboration and application to the

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<sup>8</sup>This section of the chapter has been adapted into an article that has been published in an international journal. See Letseka, M. 2013. Liberalism vs. Marxism-Leninism and the future of education in South Africa. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, 4 (3), 67-75.

concrete realities of our own developing situation” (SACP, 2012:4).

The SACP states that it seeks to end the system of capitalist exploitation in South Africa. In addition, it seeks to establish:

- a socialist society based on the common ownership of, participation in, and control by the producers of the key means of production.
- to organise, educate and lead the working class in the struggle for socialism and the more immediate objectives of defending and deepening the ‘national democratic revolution’ and of achieving national and social emancipation.
- to organise, educate and advance women within the working class, the poor and rural communities in pursuit of the aims of the SACP.
- to raise the consciousness of the working class and its allies around the integral and oppressive nature of gender relations within South African capitalism; to combat racism, tribalism, sex discrimination, regionalism, chauvinism, xenophobia and all forms of narrow nationalism, and to promote the ideas of proletarian internationalism and the unity of the workers of South Africa and the world.

However, some of the SACP’s pronouncements above warrant a critical response. For instance, the SACP claims it endeavours to “educate and lead the working class in the struggle for socialism and the more immediate objectives of defending and deepening the national democratic revolution and of achieving national and social emancipation”. However, there are concerns about its leadership’s lifestyles of opulence that is characterised by ownership of storeyed mansions in the former white suburbs, luxury German cars, and first class air travel. Such lives of opulence are a direct opposite of the lifestyles of the poorest of the poor and ordinary rank and for workers the party purports to represent. UCT’s political scientist Anthony Butler (2013) observes that “the SACP is now in government. It is seeking not to destroy the capitalist state but rather to use it as an instrument of economic development. The party has therefore abandoned Marx”. This has led the leadership of the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA), a former affiliate of COSATU to lament that senior members of the SACP pontificate that “the South African state is not a bourgeois-democratic dictatorship”, and yet the South African state remains "one of the most brutal and backward capitalist states" (Butler, 2013).

While the SACP states that it seeks to “advance women within the working class”, at its 13<sup>th</sup> National Congress where office bearers were elected for the 2012-2017 term of office, only one female candidate, Joyce Moloi-Moropa, was elected to the position of party National Treasurer. The rest of the office bearers, the General Secretary: Blade Nzimande, First Deputy General Secretary: Jeremy Cronin, Second Deputy General Secretary: Solly Afrika Mapaila, National Chairperson: Senzeni Zokwana, Deputy National Chairperson: Thulasi Nxesi, are all males. Even in the party’s Central Committee, which comprises thirty five (35) members, there are only ten (10) females (SACP Media Release, 14 July 2012). Everyone who joins the SACP is required to take the following pledge:

*“I accept the aims and objectives of the SACP and agree to abide by its Constitution and loyally to carry out the decisions of the Party; I shall strive to live up to the ideals of communism and shall selflessly serve the workers and the poor and the country, always placing the interests of the Party and the workers and the poor above personal interests” (SACP, 2012:10).*

While the pledge is intended for mature working adults who are presumed to have read and understood the SACP constitution and made informed choices and decisions to join the party, one cannot help but notice close resemblance in the wording of the SACP’s pledge with the wording of the oath taken by 10-year-old German boys in the 1930’s and 1940s upon joining Adolf Hitler’s *Jungvolk* (Young People’s) organisation. The *Jungvolk* oath read:

*“In the presence of this blood banner, which represents our Fuehrer, I swear to devote all my energies to the saviour of our country, Adolf Hitler. I am willing and ready to give up my life for him, so help me God”. (Great Events of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century: How They Changed our Lives, 1977, p.234).*

It seems odd that there is no mention of ‘Marxism-Leninism’ or ‘national democratic revolution’ in COSATU’s constitution (2006). However, this omission should not deviate from the fact that COSATU and the SACP have an ideologically symbiotic relationship. For instance, in public presentations at various regional forums the leadership of COSATU has publicly declared the labour federation’s commitment to Marxism-Leninism. In a speech delivered at the 4<sup>th</sup> International Police Symposium in Lusaka, Zambia, from 27<sup>th</sup> – 30<sup>th</sup> April 2013, the president of COSATU informed the delegates that “as COSATU we approach issues from a Marxist - Leninist perspective”. He prefaced his address “by summoning from the grave Louis Althusser on ‘Ideology and Ideological State Apparatus’” (Dlamini, 2013:2). He argued that

Althusser's article "captures what I consider to be the main content of our discussion today because we have come here to discuss *Advancing Sound Labour Relations in Policing and Correctional Services within the African Continent*. But comrades as you are all aware this theme is not innocent or neutral. It is about how the police also function by ideology both to ensure their own cohesion and reproduction, and in the 'values' they propound externally" (Dlamini, 2013:3).

In another address, to the National Union of Mineworkers' (NUM) national congress which was held on 25 May 2011 at Emperor's Palace, Johannesburg, the president of COSATU reiterated the federation's commitment to Marxism-Leninism. He stated that "As Marxist-Leninists we should shift away from a false belief that history is made by 'Great Men and Women', kings and queens, statesmen and politicians. As Marxist-Leninists we are opposed to this unscientific approach, but we do not deny the role of individuals in history, their initiative or audacity (or lack of it), in the social struggle" (Dlamini, 2012:5). He argued that "our revolution has reached a stage where we need to invest our resources into building the capacity and political resourcefulness of our shop stewards based on advancing our class interests". Part of this task, he announced, "includes building the SACP as our vanguard" (Dlamini, 2012:6). By declaring the SACP the vanguard of COSATU the labour federation's president was echoing Lenin's (1999:22) view on the Communist Party as the "vanguard of the proletariat, its class-conscious section", which he succinctly spells out in one of his political treatises, *Left-Wing Communism: Infantile Disorder*. Lenin (1999:26) argues that "the united-front tactic, like all the tactics employed by the Marxists, is aimed at facilitating the creation of a revolutionary vanguard party capable of educating, organising and mobilising the working - class masses to carry out a proletarian revolution and the building of the classless socialist society".

It is reasonable to argue that the above-mentioned ideological contestation poses a challenge to the revival and consolidation of the liberalism in South Africa. For instance, how can it be assured that the country's Constitution, which is widely recognised as 'liberal' and 'egalitarian' is sustained given that some of its custodians openly declare that they are "guided by the fundamental principles of Marxism-Leninism" (Southall & Webster, 2010:138), and are committed "to build[ing] Marxism-Leninism as a tool of scientific inquiry to search for answers in the contemporary world"

(Maree, 2012:64). However, COSATU and SACP's Soviet-style Marxism-Leninism can be said to have been neutralised by the ANC's community and township orientation.

By virtue of its majority in the alliance's National Executive Committee (NEC) the ANC has asserted "its hegemony over the alliance" (Southall & Webster, 2010:140). Southall and Webster (2010:132) recall that in 1979 the ANC triumphed and prevented "the attempted take-over by a group of Trotskyites of the ANC, a UK-based group of activists suspended from the ANC... and expelled in 1985", for attacking the ANC leadership as "a right-wing faction whose aims ran contrary to the interests of the working class in South Africa". The ANC has never espoused the hard-line Marxist-Leninist leanings of its two alliance partners. Southall and Webster (2010:140) argue the ANC's emphasis "on mass participation in urban warfare after 1979 made it increasingly community-oriented and thus by implication identified the movement with the townships. This community orientation gave it a social base quite different from that of the industrial unions, and it was ultimately township support - including elements of the African middle classes, most notably the civics - which would provide the ANC with its main source of strength". This made the ANC "less attuned to the aspirations of organised labour than at any time during the previous 30 years".

But what could be the genesis of COSATU and the SACP's Marxist-Leninist orientation? Buhlungu and Ellis (2012:274) argue that

*"For more than four decades after the Second World War, South African communists enjoyed the support of a superpower and espoused a political programme strongly influenced by the Soviet style of Marxism-Leninism. The immediate goal was the overthrow of apartheid through a national democratic revolution. As long as the Soviet Union existed, the SACP could be sure that it would, via its relationship with the ANC and the preponderance of its members in the ANC leadership, be in a position of considerable strength to embark on the next phase of the revolution, the transition to socialism".*

Against the backdrop of the SACP's constitution above, it is evident that the party "remains firmly wedded to an Orthodox Marxism-Leninism, while acknowledging some of the failings and excesses of the actual experience of the Soviet Union" (Buhlungu & Ellis, 2012:276).

Should any liberal be concerned about the prospects of liberalism in South Africa? Put differently, is the country's project of a political future based on the amalgamation of

traditional African values and liberal values potentially in vain? What are the implications for liberal education given that the General Secretary of the SACP also happens to be South Africa's Minister of Higher Education and Training (HET)? Does this imply there would be a radical policy shift towards a Marxist-Leninist conception of education in South Africa? Such questions would be dismissed as counter-revolutionary capitalist rhetoric in countries such as China or Russia where the General Secretary of the Communist Party is the all-powerful party leader who is well placed to influence educational policy to fit in with the party's Marxist-Leninist ideology. My view though is that the above scenario might not pertain to South Africa for two reasons. Firstly, while the SACP and COSATU are key partners in the ruling alliance, the ANC calls the shots. And as mentioned above, the ANC is more community-oriented and less attuned to the aspirations of organised labour like its alliance partners. Most importantly, the ANC has more or less "hegemonised the alliance".

Secondly, the Constitution of South Africa is the supreme law of the land by which everyone is bound, and with which the disparate political parties and their ideologies are obliged to comply. As Gray (1995:71-71) points out, the *sine qua non* of the liberal state is that governmental power and authority should be "limited by a system of constitutional rules and principles in which individual liberty and equality of persons under the rule of law are respected". The supremacy of South Africa's 1996 Constitution is clearly stated in the Preamble:

*"We therefore, through our freely elected representatives, adopt this Constitution as the supreme law of the Republic..."*

Three former judges of the Constitutional Court have come out in support of the Constitution's robust nature in guaranteeing democratic processes and procedures. For instance, Chaskalson (2003:599-600) contends that "the new South African Constitution is a moral document. Even a cursory reading of its provisions demonstrates this. It is the supreme law, and law or conduct inconsistent with its provisions is invalid". He notes that "the preamble to the Constitution identifies constitutional goals that include establishing a society based on democratic values, social justice and fundamental human rights. Key to this is the Bill of Rights, contained in chapter 2 of the Constitution, which is a cornerstone of democracy in South Africa.

It enshrines the rights of all people in our country and affirms the democratic values of human dignity, equality and freedom”.

Goldstone (1997: 454) argues that to say the Constitution is the supreme law of the land means that “the Court's power to interpret and enforce the Constitution, guarantee an independent, impartial, and appropriately qualified judiciary is protected; that universally accepted fundamental rights are entrenched; that the independence and impartiality of certain state institutions are ensured; that universal adult franchise and proportional representation are protected; and that existing provincial powers in relation to the state have some protection”. Mokgoro (1997:1280) contends that “the new Constitution is the supreme law of the land and contains a chapter which guarantees fundamental human rights. However, this chapter of the Constitution, described as ‘the cornerstone of democracy in South Africa’, is founded on the values of freedom, equality and human dignity”. Mokgoro argues that “in full realisation of the potentially competing demands that a drastically changing society of diverse values and equally diverse historical experiences may place on scarce resources, the new Constitution contains a fully-fledged limitations clause in the Bill of Rights, which provides courts with sets of criteria to be applied when competing rights and interests have to be balanced”.

South Africa’s political scene is no doubt ironic. While Marxism-Leninism might be a threat to liberalism, however such a threat might not result in a radical policy shift. This is because while Marxism-Leninism might be a commonly shared ideological view of some partners in the ruling tripartite alliance, it is a contested concept. For instance, the ANC, which holds all the aces, is not Marxist-Leninist. Commenting on David Welsh’s (1998) introductory remarks in the book *Ironic Victory: Liberalism in Post-apartheid South Africa*, Waghid (2003:14) argues that “many liberals who believe in the values of human dignity, the achievement of equality, the advancement of human rights and freedoms, non-racialism, non-sexism, supremacy of the rule of law, universal adult suffrage, a national common voters roll, regular elections and a multi-party system of democratic government with the aim to ensure accountability, responsiveness and openness, would certainly consider the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa of 1996 as an ‘ironic victory’”. It seems that Gaus (2000:179-180) is also right after all that despite fears that “the prospects for liberalism had

dimmed”; or that “liberalism could gradually sink”, or that “its days were numbered”, liberals at the turn of the century “may understandably feel entitled to celebrate”.

In summary, I have explored the complexities and contestations of liberalism. I showed that Gallie omitted liberalism from his list of ‘essentially contested concepts’. However, liberalism qualifies as an ‘essentially contested concept’ in that it approximates Gallie’s criteria and the examples he offers. I indicated that even among liberals there is no single dominant view on what liberalism means. Instead there is agreement that there are ‘many liberalism; ‘a multitude of liberalisms’, and ‘a family of liberalisms’. I explored the plausibility of liberalism in South Africa against the backdrop of COSATU and the SACP being staunch supporters of Marxism-Leninism. I debated the question whether this hard-line Marxist-Leninist stance is a sign of a looming radical policy shift that might frustrate the consolidation of liberalism in South Africa. I showed that the ANC, which is in the majority, is more community-oriented and less inclined to the aspirations of organised labour like COSATU and the SACP. I argued that this nullifies the threat of Marxism-Leninism to liberalism. Therefore, it stands to reason that South Africa’s endorsement of liberalism should be seen part of this bigger picture in the proliferation of liberal political theory.

## **4.5 Conclusion**

In this chapter I attempted to clarify what the liberals value. I briefly sketched basic principles that undergird liberalism. I acknowledged that liberalism is a complex and contested concept, and that even among the liberals themselves there is no single dominant view on what liberalism actually means. However, I showed that generally, liberals value human dignity, equality, freedom and tolerance of dissenting viewpoints. I highlighted the importance of virtue, understood as our good, excellence, or perfection as human beings, and argued that the viability of most liberal polities is dependent on their ability to engender virtuous citizens. With the South African context in mind, I highlighted the importance of community and interdependence to liberalism and argued that liberalism is also a form of community in which members flourish in a distinctively liberal way. However, I showed that in South Africa liberalism has been diffused, lacking organisational focus, and widely derided and ignored as irrelevant.

I explored the potential for coexistence between liberalism and Marxism-Leninism in South Africa and inquired whether the hard-line Marxist-Leninist stance of both COSATU and the SACP implies the possibility of a radical policy shift in South Africa's education. However, I showed that as the leading partner in the tripartite alliance the ANC is more community-oriented and less inclined to the aspirations of organised labour like COSATU and the SACP. I concluded that South Africa's endorsement of liberalism in a traditional African communal setting is evidence of liberalism's proliferation. I now turn to indigenous African traditions and cultures in South Africa.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **INDIGENOUS AFRICAN EPISTEMOLOGIES: A FOCUS ON *UBUNTU***

#### **5.1 Introduction: demarcation of ubuntu**

In the previous chapter I discussed the basic values and principles that characterise what it means to be a liberal, or what the liberals generally value. I argued that while on the surface it can be presumed that the liberals value human dignity, equality, individual rights, freedom, tolerance of dissenting viewpoints, and the promotion of the 'virtues' - understood as our good, excellence, or perfection as human beings. But that as a theory or as a philosophy liberalism is essentially 'a complex and contested concept'. Its complexity and contestation derive from the fact that even among the liberals themselves there is no consensus as to what liberalism in real terms means. I pointed out that values such as equality, rights, autonomy, justice, and liberty are variously interpreted by liberals themselves (Friedman, 2003:182).

On the basis of the 1996 Constitution, South Africa has been described as a 'liberal democratic state' (Deveaux, 2003; Dugard, 1998; Enslin, 1999; Jordan, 1996; Welsh, 1998). The Constitution enshrines a wide variety of rights and freedoms for the individual, and which created a politically conducive environment for the country's openly contested multi-party democracy based on free and regular elections. And yet, the same constitution, which is widely hailed as liberal and egalitarian, also recognises the institution of traditional leadership, and by extension, the practice of African customary law. While others have found this state of affairs to be fundamentally contradictory (Beall, 2006; Beall, *et al.*, 2005; Bentley, 2005; Ntsebeza, 2005), a more Afrocentric view would be that the Constitution's recognition of the institution of traditional leadership and the practice of African customary law should be regarded as *fait accompli* given that South Africa is an African country whose "black African population group are in the majority (42,28 million) and constitute almost 80% of the total South African population" (Statistics South Africa, 2013:6). Given that South Africa is now part of the international community, the logic of the above Afrocentric

view still remains pivotal despite the pressure to embrace the global political and multicultural influences. However, the importance of being rooted in and of identifying with the local cultures and traditions cannot be sacrificed at the altar of globalisation, internationalism, postmodernity and cosmopolitanism. However, the upshot of these considerations then becomes complex. It means that South Africa needs to strike a healthy balance between the local/indigenous cultures and traditions and external socio-political and cultural influences in order to build a socio-political future that is based on the amalgamation of desirable aspects of traditional African values as well as desirable aspects of liberal democratic values.

In this chapter I pick out *Ubuntu* as a central piece of this jigsaw puzzle. I argue that *Ubuntu* should not only be defended against assaults that seek to cast aspersions on it (Enslin & Horsthemke, 2004; Marx, 2002), but that it should also inform conceptions of education in South Africa. I conceptualise *Ubuntu* as a multifaceted notion - as humaneness, as a form of personhood, as a form of morality or a normative concept, as a pedagogical principle, and as a potential public policy (Letseka, 2013a, 2013b, 2012, 2000); as a notion of African communal justice (Letseka, 2014a), or African jurisprudence (Mahao, 2010). In the same vein, Waghid and Davids (2014) opine that the notion of *Botho* or *Ubuntu* is constitutive of African political, social and ethical thought, often illuminating the communal interdependence of persons geared towards the cultivation of human flourishing in indigenous African societies.

My own view is that *Ubuntu* can add value to the education of young people by immersing them in the values of humaneness and caring. I therefore recommend the inclusion of *Ubuntu* in the school curriculum as well as in the extra-curricular activities. It is worth mentioning that *Ubuntu* already features in some education policy documents of the Department of Education (DoE), although only superficially. These include, *Understand School Leadership & Governance in the South African Context* (2008); *Revised National Curriculum Statement Grades R-9 (Schools)* (2002), and *Manifesto on Values, Education and Democracy* (2001). However, there is no evidence that *Ubuntu* has gained traction as far as its implementation on the ground is concerned.

I centre *Ubuntu* as the conceptual heart of this chapter with a view to sketching specific ways in which Africanist scholars have written about *Ubuntu* as a philosophical basis

for framing the social, political, cultural and democratic direction of South Africa. *Ubuntu* is particularly important to South Africa's fledgling democracy given that its underlying values are also consistent with the values implicit in the country's Constitution, especially the Bill of Rights (Motha, 2009; Tshoose, 2009; Keevy, 2008; Mokgoro, 1988). Indeed *Ubuntu* has the potential to enable South Africans to attain a common understanding on how to live lives that are characterised by a deep yearning for reconciliation. This is necessary given that the country has only just emerged from, and is beginning to come to terms with its apartheid past (Gibson, 2006, 2002; Gibson & Gouws, 2003).

*Ubuntu* articulates a sense of communal interdependence and a rootedness in one's community (Chichane, 2008). It is consistent with the maxim on African communal interdependence articulated by Mbiti (1989, 1975) in, *I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am*. I shall explore the view that *Ubuntu* is a moral theory, or 'a theory of right action' (Metz & Gaie, 2010; Metz, 2007; Letseka, 2013b; 2012, 2000; Shutte, 1994; Teffo, 1994), and argue that *Ubuntu* implies an interactive ethic in which our humanity is shaped by our interaction with others as co-dependent beings (McCluskey & Lephalala, 2010; Cornell & van Marle, 2005). It is my considered view that *Ubuntu* has the potential to serve as public policy (Nkondo, 2007) and as a notion of communal justice in African communities (Letseka, 2014a; Keevy, 2008).

Throughout the chapter I shall use the terms *Ubuntu*, African, and democracy. I now briefly clarify how I understand each of these terms and elaborate on how I shall use them in the chapter. Generally, *Ubuntu* is conceived of as humaneness, personhood and morality. It has been described as the philosophical foundation of African practices among the Bantu speaking peoples of Africa (Keevy, 2008), and as a comprehensive ancient African worldview based on the values of humanness, caring, sharing, respect, compassion and associated values (Broodryk, 2002). In my earlier publication I argued that *Ubuntu* has normative implications in that it encapsulates moral norms and values such as altruism, kindness, generosity, compassion, benevolence, courtesy, and respect and concern for others (Letseka, 2000). Similarly, retired South African Constitutional judge, Justice Yvonne Mokgoro (1998) has argued that *Ubuntu* is a humanistic orientation towards fellow beings. It is Mokgoro's contention that *Ubuntu* envelops key values of group solidarity, compassion, respect and human dignity. She

opines that the spirit of *Ubuntu* emphasises respect for human dignity and marks a shift from confrontation to reconciliation. My own view is that *Ubuntu's* pertinence to the education of young people is such that it cannot, but be promoted by the country's public schooling system. This is necessary given that South Africa is currently grappling with its past, which was marred by civil strife, racial segregation, discrimination, relations of subordination and domination, and exclusion of the majority blacks from all conceivable opportunities.

I shall use the term Africa in its geographic sense to pick out the continent as different from Europe, Asia, Oceania, North America or South America. In this regard, the adjective African has geographic, political and cultural slants built into it. Given Africa's enormous diversity (Appiah, 1997), I shall use the term democracy in the context of Africa but with a deeper sense of contemplation. The reason for this is that democracy is one of the concepts listed by Gallie (1956) as 'essentially contested'. This is not unusual. Over the years, the concept of democracy has been variously described by political theorists and political philosophers (Collier & Levitsky, 1997; Dahl, 2000; Davis, 2005; Held, 1987; Laurence, 1997; Macpherson, 1966). As Collier and Levitsky (1997:430-31) neatly sum these various descriptions, there has been "a proliferation of alternative conceptual forms, including a surprising number of subtypes involving democracy 'with adjectives'. Examples from among the hundreds of subtypes of democracy that have appeared include 'authoritarian democracy', 'neo-patrimonial democracy', 'military-dominated democracy', and 'proto-democracy'". This suggests that the term democracy does not consist of a single unique set of institutions. Rather, there are many types of democracy, and their diverse practices produce a similarly varied set of effects (Schmitter & Karl, 1991).

Finally, I shall also use the term democracy to mean a socio-political order that is based on clearly defined political principles and procedures, and that supports the freedoms and rights of individuals to participate in decision-making processes, and to exercise choice. In his book, *Strong Democracy: Participatory Politics for a New Age*, Benjamin Barber (2003) calls this type of democracy a 'strong democracy'. Barber (2003:132) defines a 'strong democracy' as

*"Politics in the participatory mode where conflict is resolved in the absence of an independent ground through a participatory process of ongoing, proximate*

*self-legislation and the creation of a political community capable of transforming dependent, private individuals into free citizens and partial and private interests into public goods”.*

It is Barber’s (2003:118) view that a ‘strong democracy’ envisions politics “not as a way of life but as a way of living<sup>9</sup> – as, namely, the way that human beings with variable but malleable natures and with competing but overlapping interests can contrive to live together communally not only to their mutual advantage but also to the advantage of their mutuality”.

I shall argue that there is no democracy where there is no liberty for individual self-expression or for expression of choice. Concomitantly, there is no democracy where there is no equality because socio-economic and political inequalities reduce human relations to subordination and domination (Ake, 1987). And while regular elections might be welcomed as a preferable mode for the exercise of political rights, in and by themselves elections do not necessarily equate to democracy (Diamond, 2002; Leiva and Veltmeyer, 1994). In what Larry Diamond (2002:23) describes as ‘hybrid regimes’ or ‘political grey zone,’ some countries conduct regular elections but they are either full-fledged democracies or outright dictatorships. Diamond (2002:22) contends that a system is democratic when its most powerful collective decision makers are selected through fair, honest, and periodic elections in which candidates freely compete for votes. However, great care should be taken given that these are only the criteria for describing an ideal democracy. Dahl (1998:29) reminds us that the criteria only describe an ideal or perfect democratic system. They provide us with standards against which we can compare the achievements and the remaining imperfections of actual political systems and their institutions, and they can guide us towards solutions that would bring us closer to the ideal.

This chapter is divided into four sections. Firstly, I briefly sketch the criticisms of *Ubuntu* and Africanism/Afrocentrism with a view to offering responses where I deem it necessary. Secondly, I explore the potential for *Ubuntu* to serve as a moral theory or as ‘a theory of right action’ (Metz, 2007), and briefly comment on the possibility for

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<sup>9</sup> There is strong resonance between Barber’s (2003) characterisation of ‘a strong democracy’ as a way of living and John Dewey’s (1966) characterisation of education in chapter one of *Democracy and Education*, as ‘a necessity of life’.

*Ubuntu* to serve as public policy (Nkondo, 2007), as well as a conception of communal justice (Letseka, 2014a; Keevy, 2008). The point I make is that *Ubuntu* can be linked to the imperatives of democracy and social order. Thirdly, I expound on the value *Ubuntu* ought to add in conceptions of education in South Africa. This is a very important point given that some of the values that are implicit in *Ubuntu* can also be said to be implicit in the Constitution of South Africa, and that the country's public school system is required to promote them. Fourthly, in the final section I offer some concluding remarks. I now turn to some of the criticisms of *Ubuntu* and Africanism/Afrocentrism.

## 5.2 Criticisms of *Ubuntu*

In the article entitled "Can *Ubuntu* provide a model for citizenship education in African democracies?", which appears in the international journal, *Comparative Education*, Enslin and Horsthemke (2004:546) take issue with the view that education for democratic citizenship should be based on local or regional foundations. Their challenge is directed at an essay written by Malegapuru William Makgoba (1996) which appeared in the weekend newspaper, the *Sunday Times*. Enslin and Horsthemke (2004:545-546) object to Makgoba's characterisation of classical Western democracies and liberal philosophy, the account of *Ubuntu* he gives, and its purported usefulness as a principled action guide. Their challenge revolves around several related claims - the claim that democracy is essentially 'embedded', that is, it is a local, indigenous phenomenon whose manifestations differ according to social and cultural context; that African democracy is distinct and unique; that Afrocentrism is a valid perspective from which to view democracy and citizenship education; that in the context of (South) Africa, only *Ubuntu*, the African principle of human interdependence, provides a suitable democratic model; that African cultures and identity are ill-served by other democratic models; that the community has priority over the individual, and that African traditional education provides an adequate and fertile ground for democratic citizenship.

Enslin and Horsthemke (2004:546) do acknowledge that democracy and democratic citizenship education necessarily involve sensitivity to (local) contexts. They argue that

*without* such concern or awareness of local contexts democracy and democratic citizenship education are dry and colourless, if they have any practical value or application at all. However, they contend that the fundamental principles and tenets of democracy and democratic citizenship education are universal, and that failure to acknowledge this carries a substantial price. I have no qualms with the universal nature of democracy and democratic citizenship education. However, I have serious qualms when that ‘universal’ nature appears to presume that such notions are unproblematic, and therefore uncontested. We should not lose sight of the fact that democracy is one of the concepts that Gallie (1956) describes as ‘essentially contested concepts’. In the introduction above, I alluded to the fact that democracy has been variously described by political theorists and political philosophers. Case in point, democracy has been described as muddled (Macpherson, 1966), as paradoxical (Dahl, 2000), fuzzy (Davis, 2005), vexed (Laurence, 1997), confusing and unsettled (Held, 1987), and as marked by numerous adjectives (Collier & Levitsky, 1997).

It seems odd that Enslin and Horsthemke (2004) chose to critique a newspaper article that makes pronouncements on *Ubuntu* when there is a plethora of Africanist scholars who have published their views on the issue in various scholarly journals and books of repute (Ramose, 2002b; Broodryk, 2002; Tutu, 1999; Mokgoro, 1998; Sindane, 1994). I now turn to some of the criticisms of African democracy, *Ubuntu*, communality, and African traditional education, and offer responses where I deem it necessary.

### 5.2.1 *Democracy as essentially embedded in communities*

I start with the criticism of democracy as essentially embedded, as a local, indigenous phenomenon whose manifestations differ according to the social and cultural context. Like liberalism, whose ‘essential contestation’ I debated at length in section 4.4 above, democracy is also one of the concepts that Gallie (1956) described as ‘essentially contested’. I shall therefore not dwell on the nuts-and-bolts of what it means to say that a concept is ‘essentially contested’ in order to avoid unnecessary repetition. It is worthwhile mentioning though that other theorists have drawn on Gallie’s formulation to debate among others, whether the following are ‘essentially contested concepts’: democracy (Collier, Hidalgo, & Andra, 2006; Baker & Hughes, 2000), philosophy and politics (Newey, 2001), liberalism (Abbey, 2005; Gray, 1978), the rule of law (Waldron,

2002), education (Enslin, 1993), citizenship (Carr, 1991), freedom (Day, 1986), power (Lukes, 2005), rape (Reitan, 2001), abortion (Gibson, 2004), and medicine (McKnight, 2003).

If we accept Gallie's formulation above as unobjectionable, it then becomes clear that whether democracy is essentially embedded or not is itself a necessary feature of the essential contestation of social science concepts. I have highlighted above that democracy has been widely described. These disparate descriptions suggest that democracy means different things to different people (Bratton & Mattes, 2001:108). As Dieltiens and Enslin (2003:7) point out, various formulations of democracy exist with some theorists claiming to be true democrats according to the relative weight they give to particular indices. Appiah (1996:24) argues that even "the institutions of democracy - the election, the public debate, the protection of minority rights - have different meanings to different subcultures". This should not be surprising given that in their research on the concept of democracy Collier and Levitsky (1997:430-31) found a proliferation of alternative conceptual forms of democracy, including a surprising number of subtypes involving democracy 'with adjectives'.

It seems that in principle, Enslin and Horsthemke (2004:550) do not dispute the view that democracy is embedded. For instance, they acknowledge that communitarians and defenders of *Ubuntu* as an appropriate underpinning for both democracy and education have a point in their concern that institutions like schools, and the values they reflect, should cohere with the cultures of those they serve. The need for cultural coherence requires that citizens should feel at home in the institutions that serve their needs. This implies that the everyday practices of schools and politics should be welcoming and familiar rather than exclusionary and alienating (Enslin & Horsthemke, 2004:551). Enslin and Horsthemke (2004:550) endorse Levinson's (1999) view that individuals must be able to feel embedded within a culture or a set of cultures, and to mediate their choices via the norms constitutive of such cultures.

In her book entitled: *The Demands of Liberal Education*, Levinson (1999:31) contends that cultural coherence aids individuals' sense of identity and hence agency. In addition, cultural coherence helps to limit individuals' range of choices to a manageable level so as to prevent their development of anomie - paralysis as a result

of massive anxiety and indecision about the choices one should make in the absence of binding commitments. She makes the point that civic identity is ‘thick’ and encompasses or gives life to a complex combination of commitments, practices, beliefs, rituals, et cetera. This helps to shape the lives of individuals and communities with the state (Levinson, 1999:133). It is Levinson’s (2004:231) view that it is impossible to have a school grounded in the civic culture that is fully detached from local commitments. Interestingly, the view that individuals are embedded in a set of cultures is acknowledged by liberal theorists such as Dworkin (1988:12), who writes: “We know that all individuals have a history. They develop socially and psychologically in a given environment with a set of biological endowments. They mature slowly and are, therefore heavily influenced by parents, peers, and culture”. Similarly, British liberal philosopher Isaiah Berlin (1969:124) argued that “men are largely interdependent that no man is so completely private as never to obstruct the lives of others in any way”.

For Turner (1995:722), the individual “is born into a world where political and social ideas are already performed into patterns that have a structure which is independent of the individual. Our views and experiences about reality are part of a collective political culture which shapes and gives expression to our own unique life experiences”. Etzioni (1999:94) is of the view that individuals are embedded in the social fabric. Their ability to make rational choices, to be free, is presumed in their embeddedness in a social fabric. Our views and experiences about reality are part of the collective political culture which shapes and gives expression to our own unique life experiences (Turner, 1999: 722). Levinson (1999:98) opines that membership in a community and embeddedness within a cultural and normative framework is a primary need of individuals - and an essential prerequisite for autonomy. One cannot act autonomously if one has no firm structure of beliefs on which to act. “We are initiated into a given set of meanings, which is sustained by a community, and which we not only are compelled to use to express what is ‘our own’, but which relevantly constitutes what is most ‘our own” (Ramaekers, 2010:61). For me Michael Walzer (2004: x) offers a compelling summary of the views mentioned above. He writes that “most of us are born into, or find ourselves in what may well be the most important groups to which we belong – the cultural and religious, the national and linguistic communities within which we cultivate not only identity, but character and whose values we pass on to our

children". A few pages later, Walzer (2004:14) asks: "Can we really imagine individuals without any involuntary ties at all, unbound by class, ethnicity, religion, race, or gender, unidentified, utterly free?" These are potent arguments to finally put the final nail on Enslin and Horsthemke's (2004) objection to social embeddedness. Therefore, it is my submission that there is really no anomaly in the view that democracy can be a local and indigenous phenomenon that is embedded in a particular social fabric. However, I must caution that embeddedness in a particular social fabric that precludes openness to other views on democracy would be insular and parochial, and therefore not worth supporting.

### 5.2.2 *African democracy as distinct and unique*

Enslin and Horsthemke (2004:547) take issue with Makgoba's (1996) claim that *Ubuntu* seems logical in our [South African] situation because our democracy is unique in that it must evolve from the beginning within a multiracial and multicultural context and deliver freedom with opportunities while addressing values and cultural systems. They argue that the idea that the transcending philosophy of African *Ubuntu* could provide a distinctive underpinning for democracy in South Africa presents an immediate anomaly (Enslin & Horsthemke, 2004:552). But they do not explicitly state the nature of the anomaly with which they are concerned. Instead they go on to contrast the values implicit in *Ubuntu* with the values implicit in the South African Constitution - its strong emphasis on freedom and equality; its bearing all the hallmarks of a liberal democracy; its Lockean requirement that the powers of the legislature, executive and judiciary be separated; its protection of a range of rights, including privacy, freedom of religion, belief and opinion, expression, assembly and association, as well as freedom and security of the person, children's rights and the right to basic education; its conferment of a universal adult franchise on citizens who are protected by it against infringements of their rights by the state, and its provision for public consultation by the national and provincial legislatures to gather a range of opinions on proposed legislation. They then highlight the link between the Constitution and the deliberative mode of democracy, with reference to the work of Benhabib (1996).

Let me briefly comment on the view that *Ubuntu* has a constitutional value in the South African context (Motha, 2009; Mokgoro, 1998). *Ubuntu* is an Nguni word for *Botho* -

its Sesotho equivalent. *Ubuntu* is a worldview of African societies and a determining factor in the formation of perceptions which influence social conduct (Mokgoro, 1998). In addition, Mokgoro (1998:18) opines that *Ubuntu* should be incorporated into mainstream jurisprudence by harnessing it carefully, consciously, creatively, strategically, and with ingenuity so that age-old African social innovations and historical cultural experiences are aligned with present day legal notions and techniques in order to create a legitimate system of law for all South Africans. What I glean from Mokgoro's writings on *Ubuntu* is the need to revisit traditional African values, borrow those aspects that are deemed desirable for shaping human conduct in contemporary African communities, and fashion those borrowed aspects to be responsive to our contemporary lifestyle. It seems though that the greatest challenge will be how to get the current generations – the generation 'X', the generation 'Y', and 'Millennials', which are symbiotically attuned to modern electronic technologies - smart phones, tablets and laptops, and various social media – twitter, facebook, Mix It, or Google+, to recognise and embrace the imperatives of *Ubuntu* as they go about their daily hustle and bustle.

*Ubuntu* was invoked by the Constitutional Court of South Africa as one of the sources for authorising the unconstitutionality of capital punishment (Motha, 2009:318). Therefore, it can be reasonably argued that *Ubuntu* reveres life. And as Motha (2009:319) cogently points out, "a 'rigorous jurisprudence' would want to engage with specific norms inspired by *Ubuntu* and the profile of punishment in African cultures before reaching any conclusions on the meaning of *Ubuntu* for the question of the constitutionality of capital punishment". Against this backdrop, it seems reasonable to rule out any suggestion of an anomaly with respect to the view that the normative values of *Ubuntu* have the potential to provide a philosophical basis for democracy in South Africa.

Enslin and Horsthemke (2004:549) argue that there is no distinctly or uniquely African democracy. I beg to differ. And let me explain. For me, there should be no doubt about the uniqueness of African democracy. Ake (1993:243) makes a compelling case for the uniqueness of African democracy. He argues that democracy has to be recreated in the context of the given realities in political arrangements which fit the cultural context, without sacrificing its values and inherent principles. This latter point is of

critical importance in that it suggests that Ake (1993) would have no problem with a conception of democracy that draws on the imperatives of local cultures and traditions without necessarily compromising democracy's universally accepted fundamental principles and tenets. Ake (1993:244) cautions that an analysis of democracy in Africa must acknowledge the con-societal arrangement and the use of ethnic groups, nationalities and communities as the constituencies for representation. He posits that such a con-societal arrangement would be a highly decentralised system of government with equal emphasis on individual and communal rights. This last point is consistent with the thrust of my argument in this study, which is coexistence between liberal democratic values and traditional African values.

Ake (1993:241) argues that "in order for African democracy to be relevant and sustainable, it has to de-emphasise abstract political rights and stress concrete economic rights because the demand for democracy in Africa draws much of its impetus from the prevailing economic conditions". This is because generally, Africans do not separate political democracy from economic democracy, or for that matter, from economic well-being. Instead they regard political empowerment as an essential part of getting the economic agenda right and ensuring that development projects are managed better, and their rewards are evenly distributed. For Ake (1993:244), a unique African democracy is not something that would emerge from a rational blueprint. Rather it should emerge from practical experience and improvisation in the course of a hard struggle. It must be shaped by the singular reality that those whose democratic participation is at issue are ordinary peoples, many of whom are illiterate, poor, rural dwellers in essentially pre-industrial and communal society. Africa remains predominantly communal. It is this communality which defines the people's perceptions of self-interest, their freedom and their location in the social whole (Ake, 1993:244). South Africa is an upper middle income country. And yet millions of blacks are illiterate, poor, rural or informal settlement dwellers, which is why South Africa is one of the most unequal societies in the world. Its Gini coefficient - the best-known measure of inequality in which 0 is the most equal and 1 the least, stands at over 0.63 (*The Economist*, 2012).

Mbeki (1998:71-72) drew on Sir Benjamin Disraeli's 1845 novel *Sybil, or Two Nations*, to make a case for South Africa as 'Two Nations'. He wrote:

*“We therefore make bold to say that South Africa is a country of two nations. One of these nations is white, relatively prosperous, regardless of gender or geographic dispersal. It has ready access to a developed economy, physical, educational, communication and other infrastructure. This enables it to argue that, except for the persistence of gender discrimination against women; all members of this nation have the possibility to exercise their right to equal opportunity, the development opportunities to which the constitution of 1993 committed our country.*

*The second and larger nation of South Africa is black and poor, with the worst affected being women in the rural areas, the black rural population in general and the disabled. This nation lives under conditions of a grossly underdeveloped economic, physical, educational, communication and other infrastructure. It has virtually no possibility to exercise what in reality amount to a theoretical right to equal opportunity, with that right being equal within this black nation only to the extent that it is equally incapable of realisation”.*

For making such an important observation Mbeki was berated and vilified. Nattrass and Seekings (2001a, 2001b) accused him of ‘reducing inequality to race’. That is, of implying that black equals poor and white equals rich. Nattrass and Seekings (2001a:474) argued that South Africa was not simply a society comprising a rich, capitalist minority and a homogeneous, poor majority dependent on the sale of uniform labour. Instead the country’s social structure comprised three broad groupings: at the top was the upper class, comprising people with incomes well above the mean, and assets and skills that are internationally transferable. Below this was a large group comprising the urban industrial working class, a range of public sector employees, and some workers in the formal private service sector. This group had income ranging around the median up to above the mean. At the lowest rank were predominantly households that either had no working members, or were in the most marginal sectors of the working class, especially domestic and agricultural employment. Nattrass and Seekings (2001b:47) insisted that by emphasising interracial economic inequality, Mbeki misunderstood the changing nature of inequality in South Africa. For them, inequality was driven by two income gaps between an increasingly multiracial upper class and everyone else, and between a middle class of mostly urban, industrial, or white-collar workers and a marginalised class of black and rural poor.

My own view is that Nattrass and Seekings simply glossed over South Africa’s racially skewed labour market in which a minority of whites continue to hold most skilled occupations and senior and executive management positions, while the majority of

blacks continue to swell the ranks of junior and support staff (*Econometrix Ecobulletin*, 2007; Moleke, 2006, 2005; Pauw Oosthuizen., and van der Westhuizen, 2008; Bhorat, 2004). Moleke (2005:2) rightly observes that because of discrimination and acquired human capital, South Africa's labour market is characterised by racial job segregation both between sectors and between occupational categories. Drawing on labour market analyses she conducted for the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC), Moleke (2006:4) argues that whites are still overrepresented in skilled occupations and their representation at senior-management level is also relatively high. Her findings are confirmed by Econometrix, one of South Africa's independent macro-economic consultancies.

Here is a brief illustration of the enduring racial job segregation between sectors and between occupational categories. While the proportion of Africans in top management increased from 6.2% in 2000 to 11.3% in 2006, the proportion of whites was 87.5% and 74.4% respectively (*Econometrix Ecobulletin*, 2007). African senior management positions increased from 8.7% in 2000 to 13.4% in 2006, while for whites it was 81.6% and 70.9% respectively. The proportion of professionally qualified Africans declined from 32.8% in 2000 to 20.2% in 2006 while the proportion of professionally qualified whites increased from 56.1% in 2000 to 61.2% in 2006. Unemployment rates for whites during 2001-2007 ranged between 5% and 4.8%, which was way below the national average of 31.5%. Shockingly, unemployment rates for Africans ranged between 30% and 37%. As it can be noticed, these rates were well above the national average at some stage.

A critical question that should be raised at this stage is, has the situation changed since the 2006 data above were made public? The answer is, unequivocally, not much. The Commission for Employment Equity (CEE) released its 2010-2011 report which paints a gloomy picture. The CEE report notes that the proportion of Africans in top management remains unchanged at 11.3% while the proportion of whites in top management improved from 74.4% to 74.9%. The proportion of Africans in senior management positions remains unchanged at 13.4%. Similarly, the proportion of whites in the same category remains unchanged at 70.9%. The proportion of professionally qualified Africans increased from 20.2% to 31% while the proportion professionally qualified whites declined from 61.2% to 47.7%. Disparities between the upward mobility of whites and blacks in the value chain are astounding. Some labour

market analysts have projected that it would take over 100 years to transform the top management level and over 30 years to transform the senior management level in terms of African and Coloured representation (Matsha, 2011, Ray, 2008). It is a matter of concern to Africanist economists and policy makers that in a country where Africans constitute the majority some employers and their managers can still claim that they cannot find qualified blacks (Mabokela, 2000:102).

To reiterate Ake (1987) above, there is no democracy where there is no equality because inequality reduces human relations to subordination and domination. Political rights cannot be divorced from the economic well-being of the individual persons. A person may be free to express his/her political ideas and still not be free to pursue or realise his/her chosen purpose in life because they are denied the necessary conditions for realising such a purpose (Gyekye, 1997:142-3). In the same vein, economic well-being should not be relentlessly pursued to the total disregard of the political rights of the individual. It is my view that *Ubuntu* as humanness, caring, sharing, respect, compassion (Broodryk, 2002:13) and as kindness, generosity, benevolence, courtesy, and concern for others (Letseka, 2000:180), is a useful tool for understanding the deep and enduring socio-economic inequalities that continue to plague South Africa. A discussion of socio-economic inequalities that is premised on the above *Ubuntu* values and principles has the potential for a candid pursuit for dignified solutions.

### 5.2.3 *Whether community is prior to the individual*

The issue of whether community has priority over the individual or whether communalism is ethically superior to individualism dominated social science debates in the 1980s when the liberal-communitarian debate burst into the open. In this study I make a case for the amalgamation, or crosspollination between some traditional African socio-political and cultural practices and some liberal socio-political and cultural practices. I am drawn to the work of Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor (1991:161), who argues that often the choice is not simply between a close, family-like community and a modern, impersonal society. Rather it is possible to have communitarian or holist ontology and to value liberalism's individual rights. By this,

Taylor means that someone can subscribe to communitarianism at the analytical level and still advocate certain liberal goods, such as freedom of speech and religion at the ontological level. Taylor (1996:3) contends that to get the relationship and the differences between liberalism and communitarianism right, it is probably necessary to distinguish ontological from advocacy issues. Ontological issues have to do with how you explain social life while advocacy issues encompass things that are valued, held to be good and worth promoting. For Wiredu (1996:72), the distinction between communalism and individualism is one of degree only. A considerable value may be attached to communality in individualistic societies, just as individuality is not necessarily trivialised within communalism. In fact the two orientations can co-exist in different sectors of the same society.

#### *5.2.4 Ubuntu and African democratic education*

Enslin and Horsthemke (2004:553) question attempts to establish a suitable educational discourse or philosophy of education for South Africa. They are critical of the viability of African traditional education, especially the assumption that an indigenous African epistemology should constitute the basis for an African version of both democracy and conceptions of education. Moreover, Enslin and Horsthemke (2004:554) are particularly critical of Adeyemi and Adeyinka's (2003) notion of indigenous African education which is anchored on the principles of:

- 'Preparationism': learning and teaching that equip boys and girls with the skills appropriate to their gender in preparation for their distinctive roles in the society';
- 'Functionalism': learning through imitation, initiation ceremonies, work, play, oral literature;
- 'Communalism': an environment in which all members of the society own things in common and apply the communal spirit to life and work;
- 'Perennialism': a conception in most traditional African communities by which education is a vehicle for maintaining or preserving the cultural heritage and status quo; and
- 'Wholisticism': multiple learning in which young people are provided with the skills they would need for their future occupations.

Enslin and Horsthemke (2004: 554) contend that these principles are *either* not particularly or uniquely African *or* do not constitute obviously 'sound' foundations. They pick out preparationism, perennialism and wholisticism and argue that they are not obviously sound in that they endorse a strict gender-based division of labour and existing power structures while discouraging critical and independent thinking. Personally, I would be appalled by a socio-cultural arrangement that puts a gendered stigma to certain roles or privileges one gender over the other. Such a privilege would no doubt be inconsistent with my own upbringing. I was born into a family of eight (8) siblings – five (5) boys and three (3) girls. Given the size of my family, the siblings studied and completed their qualifications in turns. For instance, after completing my primary school-leaving examinations in 1970, I stayed out of school for two years - during 1971-72, so that my two elder sisters could complete their Cambridge Overseas School Certificate (COSC) at a boarding school in Maseru, the capital town of Lesotho. I returned to school in 1973 to begin my studies towards the Junior Certificate (JC), which I completed with a second class pass in 1975. In 1976, I had to miss out on schooling so that my younger brother and a sister could enrol at a secondary school for their JC. Out of frustration, in 1976 I got recruited to work as an underground winch driver at Western Areas gold mine, near the town of Westonaria, South of Johannesburg, South Africa. While the above-mentioned breaks in my formal education may seem unfair to champions of children's' rights, in hindsight I can understand the challenges my parents faced to ensure that each of their eight children obtained at least a school exit certificate, even if it meant others had to make huge sacrifices in the process. My view is that the maxim: *I am because we are. And since we are, therefore I am*, appropriately captures the sacrifices some of us had to make so that educational opportunities for all the siblings could be equitably distributed.

Masolo (2010:52-53) cautions that if our cultures teach us from childhood that males are more valuable than females, we are likely to grow up believing that such a statement of gender inequality is a true description of the social order, and if we are males, it may lead us to believe that we are justified in treating women as unequals in the family and in the workplace. Masolo (2010:251) is unequivocal that a person is morally good when he strictly observes the rules that separate gendered spaces in society and where such separation is made out of respect rather than to discriminate. To that end, I believe my parents were morally good in their observance of rules that

separate gendered spaces to which Masolo refers above. Reminiscing about his own experiences of gender relations in his hometown of Mombasa, Kenya, Masolo (2010:132) recalls that everyone knew that at the taxi stop, mothers, people of the female gender, children, and the elderly boarded and alighted first, and no one pushed anyone else. These mores were so well known that no one needed to be reminded of them. Masolo informs us that in Swahili this is known as *ustaarabu* - social civility.

In Chapter 2 above I noted that the central cultural fact of Africa's life is not the sameness of Africa's cultures, but their enormous diversity. It seems to me that Enslin and Horsthemke take Adeyemi and Adeyinka's views on indigenous African education to be a representative conception of indigenous education across the entire continent of Africa. I am afraid that such a position misses the focus of Appiah's (1997) argument with respect to Africa's enormous cultural diversity. Appiah (1997:47) argues that "Africa's forms of life are too diverse to capture in a single ideal type. The central cultural fact of Africa's life remains not the sameness of cultures, but their enormous diversity". Appiah picks out among others, the diversity in religion, politics, clothing and cuisine. Taking cue from Appiah's argument above, it seems that instead of referring to 'African culture' [as a homogeneous entity], we should be referring to 'African cultures' [as heterogeneous entities]. It follows therefore that while Adeyemi and Adeyinka (2003) may be Africans, they are writing about specific conceptions of indigenous education in Nigeria, which are not even representative of the diverse traditions and cultures found in Nigeria. Nigeria is Africa's most populous nation, with a population of over 150 million peoples, and "over 250 ethnic groups and languages, each having a number of distinguishing characteristics" (Falola, 2001:4). Adeyemi and Adeyinka's views on indigenous African education cannot therefore be regarded as broadly representative of conceptions of indigenous African education on the continent of Africa as a whole. To regard them as such would simply amount to 'reductionism'. Nagel (1998:3) argues that according to the 'reductionist idea', "all of the complex and varied and apparently disparate things and processes that we observe in the world can be explained in terms of universal principles that govern the common ultimate constituents out of which, in many different combinations, those diverse phenomena are really composed". Nagel explains that "the idea is that there exists, in principle, a theory of everything, in the form of a theory governing the one thing or few things of which everything else consists". An often used expression which passes as

reductionist is when someone tries to explain another person's misfortune in order to reach closure by declaring: "it is God's will". Often reducing sad human experiences to 'God's will' suggests there should be no further discussion on the matter given the omnipotence of God.

In this final part of the section I shall share some conceptions of the Basotho indigenous education, with qualification of course. Lesotho is one of Southern African countries in which there is one official language - Sesotho. Generally, all the Basotho people are Sesotho speakers. However, there are those Basotho who live along the border between Lesotho and the border towns of South Africa's Eastern Cape Province, who are Sesotho speakers first, but also speak Isi-Xhosa as a second language, and out of necessity for interacting with their Xhosa neighbours. I grew up in a traditional Sesotho homestead in a rural Lesotho village. I could, if I would, share understandings of Zulu indigenous education, Pedi indigenous education, Tsonga indigenous education, or for that matter Xhosa indigenous education. But I cannot do that, notwithstanding that these are all regarded as Bantu-speaking peoples. Realistically therefore I can only offer my readers an account of Basotho indigenous education because it is my own native knowledge with which I can claim familiarity, and about which I can write uninhibitedly. Having said that, it would be naive of me to presume that the notion of Basotho indigenous education I shall describe is representative of other Sotho indigenous education among the Basotho people found in Southern Africa. For to do so would imply that I am painting all Sotho-speaking peoples of Southern Africa with a single paint brush that presumes cultural homogeneity regardless of their vast cultural diversity.

Basotho indigenous education strove for some form of social civility. As Matšela (1979:159) points out, the education of a Mosotho child entailed cultural values, philosophy, personal and family responsibilities and duties to the clan and the people, or what in modern politics is known as civic responsibility. Basotho indigenous education aimed to create citizens that are immersed in the kind of personhood that was regarded as essential for 'good' human conduct among Basotho communities.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> I borrow the idea of 'creating citizens' from Eamonn Callan's (1997) book, *Creating Citizens: Political Education and Liberal Democracy*. Callan (1997:3) advocates a political culture in which there is an active commitment to the good of the polity, confidence and competence in judgements regarding how

Matšela (1990-53-56) argues that through *lebollo* or initiation school, Basotho indigenous education aimed to equip youngsters with competencies that were essential for adulthood. These included *bohloeki* (purity), which is advocacy for cleanliness both in its literal form as it relates to hygienic living and in its metaphorical form as it relates to the purity of mind and inner self. *Lebollo* sought to instil competencies such as *thuto-kelello* (cognitive engagement) - the ability to think strategically and at the highest level. For instance, the initiates were exposed to a problem-based education where they were presented with problems pertaining to real life situations in society and challenged to develop solutions. They were instructed on *makhabane* (virtues) such as industry or hard work, respect for persons, humility, perseverance, service to the nation, patriotism, *leruo* (wealth), *makunutu a sechaba* (national secrets or classified information), *bonatla* (warriorship), and *boqapi le bokheleke* (creativity and eloquence). It is therefore debatable to suggest, as Enslin and Horsthemke (2004) do, that indigenous African education discouraged critical and independent thinking.

My own initiation into responsibility began as a herd boy tasked to look after my father's cattle in the early 1970s. Herding then was a serious duty and responsibility which every herd boy was expected to carry out with distinction regardless of whether the weather outside was glorious sunshine, pouring rains, freezing winters, hail storms or snow. A herd boy who excelled in his duties and responsibilities was revered and honoured throughout the village. He was known as a *Motjodi* – or the *Euplectes progne* – the long-tailed widowbird, which implies one who leads with distinction. Mapesela (2004:322) contends that Basotho indigenous education inculcated good ethics, morals and values such as humaneness (*Ubuntu*), neighbourliness, responsibility, and respect for self and others. He posits that Basotho indigenous education “can still be used to encourage people to become better members of society, as well as to help curb certain social problems.... a lack of neighbourliness (leading to heartlessness, theft, killing and rape), a lack of *Ubuntu* (resulting in an uncaring and unpatriotic society); as well as a lack of good ethics (leading to an irresponsible, lazy and poor society)”.

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that good should be advanced, and a respect for fellow citizens as well as a sense of common fate with them that goes beyond the tribalisms of ethnicity and religion and is yet alive to the significance these will have in many people's lives.

Elsewhere I have commented on the important aspect of *letsema*, or cooperative community farming in Basotho indigenous education. I show that “four or more families would come together and agree on a duty roster that would allow them to cultivate each of their fields on agreed days to make them ready for the planting season” (Letseka, 2000:183). *Letsema* was not simply a cooperative community effort. On the contrary, through *letsema* members of the community recognised that it would be difficult and slow for individual families to complete the cultivation of their fields on time if each family was to go it alone (Letseka, 2000:184). Adeyinka and Ndwapi (2002:18) observe that part of the purpose of African traditional education was the development in children of a communal spirit, by which each individual saw himself/herself as part of a bigger unit, working and living together for the common good. In this regard, it can be argued that African traditional education inculcated in young people feelings of belonging to a community as well as the interdependence that existed between members of the community. Masolo (2010:240) calls this “a life of cohesion, or positive integration with others”.

To sum up, I have sketched the criticisms of *Ubuntu* vis-à-vis conceptions of education and democracy in South Africa. I underscored the fact that invoking *Ubuntu* calls for the embeddedness of African democracy in indigenous social and cultural contexts. I argued that African democracy needs to be recreated in the context of the realities in political arrangements of the African cultural context. I sketched the Basotho indigenous education and argued that it aimed to create citizens who are initiated in the kind of personhood that was regarded as essential for ‘good’ human conduct among the Basotho people. I acknowledged though that given Africa’s enormous diversity of cultures, a particular peoples’ indigenous education cannot be generalised as representative of all African cultures. In the next section I explore the potential for *Ubuntu* to serve as a moral theory, a public policy, and a notion of African communal justice. I shall make brief remarks on the coincidence between some of the values that are implicit in the Constitution of South Africa and some of the values that are implicit in *Ubuntu*, and close by highlighting the educational upshot of *Ubuntu*.

### **5.3 *Ubuntu* as a moral theory and a public policy**

Mudimbe (1988:194) raises important questions pertaining to current debates on *Ubuntu* in South Africa, and are also central to perceptions of the value of *Ubuntu* to African communities. He asks: "What is an African and how does one speak of him or her and for what purpose? Where and how can one gain the knowledge of his or her being? How does one define this very being, and to what authority does one turn for possible answers?" In section 3.2.1 above I referred to Mudimbe's (1988) view that Western interpreters as well as some African analysts have continued to use categories and conceptual systems which depend on a Western epistemological order. And that even in the most explicitly 'Afrocentric' descriptions, models of analysis explicitly or implicitly, knowingly or unknowingly, refer to the same order.

Oladipo (1995:26) picks out a European discourse on Africa that tends to underestimate and denigrate African cultures and identities and to deny that reason played a significant role in the development of society and cultures in Africa as it did in Europe. This discourse is an aspect of the myth that was designed as an ideology of legitimation of the colonial enterprise. Oladipo (1995:27) argues that Africans are, and always have been regarded as backward and barbaric people who have never been able to establish a civilised society of their own. To the colonisers Africans were an inferior race of people whose religions, where there were any, were without any abiding values. They [the Africans] were perceived as lacking the intellectual and moral resources of the Europeans, whose mission in Africa was a 'civilising mission'. Fatton (1990:458) reminds us that at the height of African nationalism and the drive for independence from colonial rule, the "Africans were treated as children who had yet to acquire the necessary maturity required for considered judgment and political decision making. They were socially dead and removed from history".

There are glaring similarities between the above-mentioned views on Africa and the African people and the assumptions of the Christian National Education (CNE) policy - the apartheid philosophy on which Bantu education during apartheid in South Africa was based. The CNE stated that 'on the grounds of cultural infancy' of the native, it was the right and task of the Afrikaner state, in collaboration with Afrikaner Christian churches, to give and control native education and training of the native teaching

forces (Rose & Tunmer, 1975). *Article 15: African (Bantu) Teaching and Education* of the CNE policy stated as follows:

*“We believe that the calling and task of white S.A. with regard to the native is to Christianise him and help him on culturally, and that this calling and task has already found its nearer focusing in the principles of trusteeship, no equality and segregation ...in accordance with these principles we believe that the teaching and education of the native must be grounded in the life and world view of the white, most especially those of the Boer nation as the senior trustee of the native, and that the natives must be led to a mutatis mutandis yet independent acceptance of the Christian and National principles in our teaching” (Rose & Tunmer, 1975: 128).*

As a consequence of the above ideological stance, the education of the Africans was taken over by the Afrikaner state bent on gaining ideological control over the black intelligentsia (Terreblanche, 2002: 335). In my view, central to the debate on *Ubuntu* should be the imperative for South Africans to clarify their conceptions of ‘an African’ identity. As Keevy (2008:319) puts it, *Ubuntu* represents a ‘recovery of the logic of brotherhood in ethno-philosophy’ because it [*Ubuntu*] is the collective personhood and collective morality of the African people. I use ‘conceptions of an African identity’ here to clarify that individuals do not have a singular identity, but a repertoire of identities (Ross, 2007: 287). Identities are composed of several, and sometimes contradictory or unresolved affinities. Hall (1992:292) argues that identity has two distinctive connotations: one of ‘being the same as others’ and having continuity with them, and the other as identity that brings with it a sense of being different from the other. Thus for Jamieson (2002: 34), identity is an elastic and inference-rich concept that bundles together complex social processes. The term identities can also be used to encompass facets of the self that are only at play in some social contexts, and not others. *Ubuntu* is therefore a ‘counter discourse’ which aims to reclaim African humanity (Oladipo, 1995: 27).

As an educationist I find Wa Thiongo’s questions regarding the inherited colonial education systems and the consciousness they inculcated in the African mind, most compelling for thinking about education and its aims in South Africa. Wa Thiongo (1994:101-102) asks: What directions should an education system take in an Africa wishing to break with neo-colonialism? What should be the philosophy guiding it? How does it want the ‘New Africans’ to view themselves and their universe? From what base: Afrocentric or Eurocentric? What are the materials they should be exposed to:

and in what order and perspective? Who should be interpreting that material to them: an African or non-African? If African, what kind of African? One who has internalised the colonial world outlook or one who is attempting to break free from the inherited slave consciousness?

When Thabo Mbeki (1998a:32) described himself as ‘an African’: as the grandchild of the warrior men and women that Hintsa and Sekhukhune led; the patriots that Cetshwayo and Mphephu took to battle; the soldiers Moshoeshe and Ngungunyane taught never to dishonour the cause of freedom, he was not merely appealing to nationalistic populism that comes with the overvaluing of the golden past (Odora Hoppers, 2002). Instead he was expressing a perception of his African identity. Mbeki’s fascination with the concept of African identity should be viewed within the context of his African renaissance project (Mbeki, 1998b). The African renaissance project was an attempt to interrogate the manner in which Africa has been represented, cast, or stereotyped as the *Other* by Western colonial and imperial literature. Since the colonial and imperial eras, the West has been “a locality of power and a centre distinctly demarcated from the *Other* as the subject of knowledge and inevitably subordination” (Ahluwalia, 2002:267). In order to turn the situation in favour of Africans defining their destinies, Mbeki (1998b) makes a case for ‘Africa’s renewal’. He argues that Africa's renewal demands that her intelligentsia must immerse itself in the all-round struggle to end poverty, ignorance, disease and backwardness, inspired by the fact that the Africans of Egypt were, in some instances, two thousand years ahead of the Europeans of Greece in the mastery of such subjects as geometry, trigonometry, algebra and chemistry.<sup>11</sup>

I was brought up in a rural African homestead in Lesotho which identifies itself with the totem group of the *Bafokeng*. The *Bafokeng* totem group is associated with the wily rabbit, which in Sesotho cultures and traditions is known for its trickery to get out of difficult situations. I was socialised to proudly assert my *Bofokeng* through recitation

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<sup>11</sup>See Obenga, T. 2004. Egypt: Ancient History of African Philosophy. In Kwasi Wiredu (ed) *A Companion to African Philosophy*, Blackwell Publishing: Malden, California, pp.31-49; Karenga, M. 1998. Black Studies and the Problematic of Paradigm: The Philosophical Dimension. *Journal of Black Studies*, 18 (4), 395-414; Critchley, S. 1995. Black Socrates? Questioning the philosophical tradition. *Theoria: A Journal of Social and Political Theory*, 86:79-98; Assante, M. K. 1992. *Kemet, Afrocentricity and Knowledge*, African World Press: Trenton, New Jersey.

of specific *Bafokeng* praise poetry. It is the norm among the Basotho people of Lesotho to dare one another to praise one's totem group when they meet up. Totem group praises take the form of oral historical and poetic recitation of one's family lineage. The poems are carefully preserved and passed from generation to generation by word of mouth by lineage elders. Their knowledge is highly regarded and is perceived to signify one's cultural identity.

Having said that, and while I am proud of, and hold my cultural identity in high esteem, I am not shackled to it. This is because I have other identities that I have adopted as I evolved from a Mosotho village herd boy to a university academic, educational researcher, scholar and cosmopolitan citizen. The latter identities are as equally valuable to me as my *Bofokeng* identity. For instance, as a university academic, education researcher, scholar and cosmopolitan citizen, I travel widely on the African continent, across Europe and North America where I interact with fellow academics, education researchers, scholars and cosmopolitan citizens at international conferences or other scholarly forums. The defining feature of cosmopolitan citizenship is that it embraces the cosmos (Gitlin, 2006:130). Cosmopolitanism is not just a belief. It is also an experience. It rests on sociological realities such as inexpensive travel, comfort with multiple languages and a thick mesh of contact with people of other nations who affiliate by professional and political interest (Gitlin, 2006:130). The world that cosmopolitans inhabit is not confined to fixed national boundaries. This is because cosmopolitanism is premised on a fluid set of relationships which are often lived out as network extensions. Cosmopolitanism invites connections with people who happen to live in other countries. Hence for cosmopolitans, nations are not natural, organic, objective, or anything of that sort but are the inventions - 'constructions' - of intellectuals and the stories that they tell about history and culture (Gitlin, 2006:131).

While a cosmopolitan allegiance is to the global community of human beings to be a citizen of the world, but it does not necessarily mean one should give up one's local identifications, which can frequently be a source of great richness in life (Nussbaum, 2002:9). One should not think of oneself as devoid of local affiliations, but as surrounded by a series of concentric circles. The first one is drawn around the self; the next takes in one's immediate family; then follows the extended family; then one's

neighbours or local group, one's fellow city-dwellers, one's fellow countrymen – and we can easily add to this list groupings based on ethnic, linguistic, historical, professional, gender and sexual identities. Outside all these circles is the largest of them all, that of humanity as a whole (Nussbaum, 2002:9). Nussbaum (2002:8) makes a compelling case for education for world citizenship on three grounds. Firstly, the study of humanity as it is realised in the whole world is valuable for self-knowledge: we see ourselves more dearly when we see our ways in relation to those of other reasonable people. Secondly, only by making our fundamental allegiance to the world community of justice and reason can we avoid the dangers of local allegiances and partisan loyalties. Thirdly, cosmopolitan politics recognises in people what is especially fundamental about them, most worthy of respect and acknowledgment: their aspirations to justice and goodness and their capacities for reasoning in this connection.

Against this backdrop, my view is that central to the debate on *Ubuntu* should be how the African peoples perceive *Ubuntu* as a worldview that embodies their notions of morality, their views on personhood, and their notions of the good life. The reason for this is that *Ubuntu* encapsulates the value systems that acknowledge people as social and co-dependent beings (McCluskey & Lephala, 2010:23). In this regard, *Ubuntu* has been described as a form of African communitarianism (Keevy, 2008; Biko, 1987), or Afro-communitarianism (Metz & Gaie, 2010). I should mention that the adjectives 'African' and 'Afro' should not be misconstrued to imply that *Ubuntu* is merely a locally insulated worldview that has no international relevance. This is because some of the values that *Ubuntu* encapsulates can be traced to various Eurasian philosophies. As Louw (2001: 28) rightly points out, it would be ethnocentric and, indeed silly to suggest that the *Ubuntu* ethic of caring and sharing is uniquely African. I shall come back to the above-mentioned Eurasian philosophies with more details below. I now turn to the view of *Ubuntu* as a moral theory.

### 5.3.1 *Ubuntu as a moral theory*

A common thread running through the work of Africanist scholars of *Ubuntu* is the view that *Ubuntu* is a normative concept or a moral theory that has a cohesive value (Metz & Gaie, 2010; Metz, 2007; Bessler, 2008; Broodryk, 2002; Ramose, 2002b; Letseka,

2000; Sindane, 1994; Tutu, 1999; Shutte, 1994; Teffo, 1994). The above-mentioned scholars agree that the defining features of *Ubuntu* include among others, caring, compassion, respect for others, and concern for the well-being of others. British philosopher Joseph Raz (1994, 1988) has written extensively on the philosophical aspects of the concept of 'personal well-being'. His view is that the definition of 'well-being' sees life as active. He argues that the concept of 'personal well-being captures one crucial evaluation of a person's life: how good or successful is it from his point of view (Raz, 1988:289). In a later publication, Raz (1994:3) contends that the promotion and protection of 'well-being' ought to be the central task of political action. He surmises that 'personal well-being' and personality or character, are the two most basic (and deeply inter-connected) dimensions by which people understand and judge themselves and others.

I want to argue a case for resonance between Raz's (1994, 1988) position on 'personal well-being' and Ramose's (2002a) philosophical insights on *Ubuntu*. For instance, Ramose (2002a:230) argues that *Ubuntu* is the wellspring flowing with African ontology and epistemology. He posits that a persuasive philosophical argument can be made that there is a 'family atmosphere' - a kind of philosophical affinity and kinship among and between the indigenous people of Africa, which is captured in the maxim: *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*, whose English translation approximates something like: "a person is a person through other persons". My view is that *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* articulates a deeper communal interdependence and a concern with the 'well-being' of others in the traditional African worldview.

It can therefore be reasonably argued that as a moral theory that is concerned with the well-being of others, *Ubuntu* is the capacity to express compassion, justice, reciprocity, dignity, harmony and humanity in the interests of building, maintaining and strengthening the community (Bessler, 2008:43). *Ubuntu* articulates our inter-connectedness, our common humanity and the responsibility we owe to each other. It commands us to care for each other and to embrace the principle of reciprocity and mutual support (Elechi, Morris & Schauer, and 2010:75). The maxim: *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* has a much deeper meaning. It articulates social interdependence or a deep rootedness in one's community (Chichane, 2008; Adonis 2008). Thus to utter the phrase *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* inspires us to expose

ourselves to others, to encounter the difference of their humanness so as to enrich our own (Sindane, 1994:8-9). As Louw (2006:161) puts it, *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* articulates a basic respect for compassion. It is both a factual description and a rule of conduct or social ethic that not only describes human beings as *being-with-others*, but also prescribes how human beings should relate to others: that is, what *being-with-others* should be all about.

While French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre is known for his views on existentialism, he has attempted to establish the link between existentialism and humanism.<sup>12</sup> As Flynn (2006:91) points out, central to Sartre's humanism is the view that if we are to pursue freedom in the concrete rather than merely dream of it in the abstract, we must address the alienated situation of others because we cannot be free until they too have been liberated. Sartre (2007:51-52) notes that the word 'humanism' has two different meanings. On the one hand, it might mean a theory that takes man as an end and as the supreme value. But Sartre rejects this meaning of humanism, for, as he points out, existentialism will never consider man as an end, because man is constantly in the making. He argues that we have no right to believe that humanity is something we could worship, in the manner of Auguste Comte, for the cult of humanity leads ultimately to an insular Comteian humanism, or to Fascism. It is Sartre's contention that this type of humanism is undesirable. On the other hand, the other meaning of humanism is one that sees the existence of the universe as human. As Sartre (1966:55) writes:

*"Man is all the time outside himself: it is in projecting and losing himself beyond himself that he makes man to exist: and, on the other hand, it is by pursuing transcendence aims that he himself is able to exist. Since man is thus self-surpassing, and can grasp objects only in relation to his self-surpassing, he is himself the heart and centre of his transcendence. There is no other universe except the human universe, the universe of human subjectivity".*

Sartre (2007:53) calls this 'existentialist humanism'. He argues that this type of humanism reminds man that there is no legislator other than man himself. And that man must therefore make his own choices, and seek goals outside of himself in the form of liberation in order to realise himself as truly human. For Sartre (1966:60), in

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<sup>12</sup> See Sartre, J. 2007. *Existentialism is a Humanism*, Yale University Press: New Haven; Sartre, J. 1966. *Existentialism and Humanism*, translated and introduction by Phillip Mairet, Methuen & Co. Ltd: London.

the final analysis, humanism is a philosophy that is concerned with human dignity and the eminent value of personality.

In *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*, Sartre (2003:413) argues that we discover ourselves not in conflict with the other but in community with him. He opines that the 'we' includes a plurality of subjectives which recognise one another as subjectivities. Moreover, the 'we' is a certain particular experience which is produced in special cases on the foundation of *being-for-others* in general. The *being-for-others* precedes and founds the *being-with-others* (Sartre, 2003:414). Thus "the nature of my body refers me to the existence of others and to my being-for-others" (Sartre, 2003:218). Sartre (2003:238) observes that finally in my essential being I depend on the essential being of the *Other*, and instead of holding that my *being-for-myself* is opposed to my *being-for-others*, I find that *being-for-others* appears as a necessary condition for my *being-for-myself*. Sartre's views above resonate with the fundamental principles of *Ubuntu* which dictate that if we are to be human, we need to recognise the genuine otherness of our fellow citizens; to acknowledge the diversity of languages, histories, values, and customs, all of which constitute the South African society (Louw, 2006:167).

It should be getting clearer by now that central to *Ubuntu* is the notion of human dignity. Metz (2007:340) argues that *Ubuntu* is "a theory of right action". He contends that the most justified normative theory of right action that has an African pedigree is the requirement to produce harmony and to reduce discord. In this regard, *Ubuntu* is fundamentally a matter of reverence of human life. Thus valuing human life or thinking of others as worthy of human flourishing is part of loving others or promoting harmony. Metz (2007:329) cites a Constitutional Court of South Africa judgement by Justice Yvonne Mokgoro in which she states that life and dignity are like two side of the same coin. But the concept of *Ubuntu* embodies both.

The notion of human dignity is at the heart of the 1996 Constitution of South Africa, especially Chapter 2 - Bill of Rights. Section 9 (1) states that "everyone is equal before the law and has the right to equal protection and benefit of the law". Section 9 (2) conceptualises equality as "the full enjoyment of all rights and freedoms", while section 9 (3) protects these rights and freedoms. Even the state may not breach these rights.

For instance, “the state may not unfairly discriminate directly or indirectly against anyone on one or more grounds, including race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language and birth”. Sections 10 and 11 affirm the right to respect and protection of everyone’s dignity, and the right to life. By the same token, *Ubuntu* accords all human beings a moral status. It considers everyone in principle to be potential members of an ideal family based on loving or friendly relationships (Metz & Gaie, 2010:281). I want to submit that *Ubuntu* has the potential to foster a shared moral discourse which is a characteristic feature of a cohesive society (Morrow, 2007:6). In this regard, the struggle for *Ubuntu* is a philosophical struggle for people trying to heal the brutality and desperateness of a deeply ruptured society. In heartfelt terms, the struggle for *Ubuntu* is the struggle for the dignity and soul of South Africa (Swanson, 2005:4).

To come to the point I made earlier regarding resonance between *Ubuntu* and some Eurasian philosophies, it is my view that *Ubuntu* can be compared with Eurasian concepts such as *Bildung*, which is prevalent among Germanic philosophies, and the concept of *Jen*, which is prominent in Confucian philosophy. Siljander and Sutinen (2012:2) are certain that “the term *Bildung* is typically a German term and is often regarded in the German language area as a fundamental concept of educational science”. Drawing on the work of Immanuel Kant, Siljander and Sutinen (2012:4) argue that “*Bildung* is the realisation of the idea of a humanity, of a human becoming a human”. German scholar and intellectual Wilhelm von Humboldt outlined the notion of *Bildung* in his book, *Theory of Bildung*. Von Humboldt argued that *Bildung* is about linking the self to the world in the most general, most animated and most unrestrained interplay. He conceived of *Bildung* as mimetic. That is, as non-teleological, undetermined and uncertain, and aimed at the reconciliation between outer historico-social and inner individual conditions (Wulf, 2003:247-48). For Humboldt, *Bildung* requires interchange between individuals. It is a political and social harmony which must be achieved in the modern state (Sorkin, 1983:60). Sorkin (1983:68) notes that for Humboldt, there is always an internal moral imperative which makes *Bildung* the basis of politics. And as Luèth (1998:57) sums it up, *Bildung* is an ‘ideal of humanity’ that is only possible as a communal effort. There is a sense in which Luèth’s summary

here can be regarded as consistent with *Ubuntu's* inclination for communal interdependence.

Løvlie and Standish (2002:319) note that in the world of *Bildung* the self is never a lonely wanderer, but always already involved, such that the opposition between the self and the world is not a contingent one but expresses a necessary relation. In other words, *Bildung* starts with the individual as embedded in a world that is at the same time that of the differentiated other. For Gert Biesta (2002:380), the modern conception of *Bildung* articulates an educational ideal that, through the Enlightenment, has gained a political significance in that it has become intimately connected with an emerging civil society and with a specific conception of the ideal citizen in such a society. It is Biesta's (2002:383) contention that the aim of critical education should be acquisition of the capacity to decipher the operations of power behind the status quo, that is, behind what presents itself as necessary, natural, general and universal. Thus, the aim of a critical approach to *Bildung* becomes specified in terms of demystification.

Considering that among the Bantu-speaking peoples of Southern Africa *Ubuntu* translates to humanness, in Confucian philosophy the concept of *Jen* "has been variously translated as 'love', 'benevolence', 'human-heartedness', 'man-to-manness', 'sympathy', and 'perfect virtue'" (Ma:1988:202). Walker and Dimmock (2000:168) point out that "the concept of *Jen* verifies that individuals should not be considered as separate entities but as inextricably bound to social context, the family, and the organisation". In the same vein, Shun (1993:457) posits that *Jen* (humanness, goodness) is used "to refer to an all-encompassing ethical ideal which includes all the desirable qualities" such as "love for fellow human beings". In Chinese philosophy Confucius is regarded as a thinker of merit about moral ideals such as humanness, tolerance and impartiality (Dong, 1992:33). Dong (1992:41) argues that historically human-heartedness referred to filial piety, or clan fidelity. "The intimate feeling among close members of the family – to attend to one's parents and fellow older brothers, et cetera – was what the 'human-heartedness' aimed to apply to all social relationships". Thus 'human-heartedness' was regarded as universal human nature. "Human beings are inherently good; everyone has feelings of human-heartedness, righteousness, propriety and wisdom" (Dong, 1992:42). Justice amounts to practicing human-heartedness and is under the claw of human-heartedness" (Dong, 2002:44).

Given that *Bildung* is taken to imply an unrestrained interplay linking the self to the world (Wulf, 2003) and requires interchange between individuals (Sorkin, 1983); and that the “Confucian’s notion of *Jen* can be best described as love based on humanity” (NG, 2000:48), and an ideal that encompasses ‘love’, ‘benevolence’, ‘human-heartedness’, ‘man-to-manness’, ‘sympathy’, and ‘perfect virtue’” (Ma:1988:202), a case can therefore be made for parallels between *Bildung*, *Jen* and *Ubuntu* given that *Ubuntu* also implies a humanistic orientation towards fellow beings (Mokgoro, 1988); a theory of right action (Metz, 2007); a philosophical affinity and kinship among and between the indigenous people of Africa (Ramose, 2002), and a conception of communal justice (Keevy, 2008). I now broach the idea of *Ubuntu*’s potential to serve as public policy and a conception of communal justice in traditional African societies.

### 5.3.2 *Ubuntu as public policy and communal justice*

Nkondo (2007:88) makes a case for building *Ubuntu* into South Africa’s national policy. He argues that *Ubuntu* can be connected with the imperatives of political power and democracy. As public policy, *Ubuntu* has the potential to contribute significantly to the development of an ethical disposition that can enable South Africans to reach out beyond narrow racial and ethnic identities (Nkondo, 2007: 94). Given some of the values that are implicit in *Ubuntu*, for example altruism, kindness, generosity, benevolence, courtesy, and respect for others, Nkondo argues that *Ubuntu* has the potential to deepen our disposition for compassion and caring. The political ideal of *Ubuntu*, associated with communalism seeks to reconcile two ideas: First, the idea that society possesses a morally privileged status that should be enshrined and protected by certain inviolable rights and freedoms against exploitation and domination (Nkondo, 2007:95). And second, the idea that the rights and freedoms of the individual should not be in conflict with the common good.

The *Ubuntu*-based political ideal is founded on the idea that we live in a moral space mapped by strong values, that one’s social world provides a framework which defines

the shape of a life worth living (Nkondo, 2007:95). Thus under *Ubuntu* conditions political thinking would involve interpretation of shared understandings and meanings bearing on the political life of one's community. Persons would realise themselves in the process of acting with others, in social practice (Nkondo, 2007:96). Elsewhere I have argued that persons living in communities that embrace *Ubuntu* would be marked by a commitment to treating others with a sense of *Botho* or *Ubuntu*, which entails treating them with justice and fairness (Letseka, 2000:188).

Given its resonance with the country's Constitution the concept of *Ubuntu* can also be said to pertain to notions of justice in South Africa. I mentioned above that *Ubuntu* reveres human life. Within the context of social order, *Ubuntu* regulates traditional African societies through customs, laws, traditions and taboos that ought to be observed. For Keevy (2008:288-89), justice can only be done if *Ubuntu* laws are based upon *Ubuntu* values. In this regard, the primary function of *Ubuntu* is to create a social order in which a person can realise the promise of becoming human. *Ubuntu* law is community-oriented, based on traditions and customs to resolve disputes through mediation. Keevy (2008:401) opines that the ultimate goal of *Ubuntu* justice is to restore win-win situations of peace between individuals in the community. As a result, justice in *Ubuntu* legal philosophy involves perpetual exchange and sharing of the forces of life to restore peace, harmony and balance within the community. The Constitutional Court of South Africa acknowledges that *Ubuntu* recognises a person's status as a human being and demands unconditional respect, value, dignity and acceptance of the person towards other members of the community (Keevy, 2008:278). An important point emerging from this brief analysis is that beyond its potential to serve as social policy, *Ubuntu* can also potentially provide a framework for a communally based conception of justice in traditional African societies.

To sum up, I have underscored that respect for human life and dignity is not only at the heart of the Constitution of South Africa, but also that *Ubuntu* accords all human beings a moral status. This implies that *Ubuntu* has the potential to foster a shared moral discourse. I argued that the struggle for *Ubuntu* is therefore the struggle for people trying to heal the brutality and desperateness of a society that is deeply ruptured by its past history of segregation and racial discrimination. I made a case for *Ubuntu's* connections with the imperatives of political power and democracy, and

showed that *Ubuntu* has the potential to contribute to the development of an ethical disposition that can enable all South Africans to reach out beyond narrow racial and ethnic identities. Furthermore, I argued that *Ubuntu* has the potential to frame a communally based conception of justice in traditional African societies. Finally, I highlighted parallels between *Ubuntu* and some Eurasian philosophical concepts such as *Bildung* among the Germans, and *Jen* in Confucian philosophy. In the final section below, I briefly touch on the educational implications of *Ubuntu* in South Africa.

#### **5.4 *Ubuntu* as an educational value in South Africa**

Nkondo (2007:98) contends that South Africa's public education system needs to play a more effective role in the political, social and economic reordering of the state and society. What is needed is for the public education system to articulate a methodology for developing an *Ubuntu* social disposition. It is Nkondo's (2007) view that an *Ubuntu*-oriented framework could be the engine and elixir for transformation, particularly if a clear methodology existed for the integration of its principles into a national system of education and training. I shall explore the South African education in more detail in Chapter Seven below. Here I shall only make cursory remarks on the place of *Ubuntu* in South Africa's education policy framework.

The Department of Education's (DoE) (2001:7) report, *Manifesto on Values, Education and Democracy* identifies 10 fundamental values in the constitution of South African that pertain to education. These are democracy, social justice and equity, equality, non-racism and non-sexism, *Ubuntu* (human dignity), an open society, accountability, the rule of law, respect, and reconciliation. The report states that *Ubuntu* embodies the concept of mutual understanding and the active appreciation of the value of human difference (DoE, 2001:14). It posits that out of the values of *Ubuntu* and human dignity flow the practices of compassion, kindness, altruism and respect, which are at the very core of making schools places where the culture of teaching and the culture of learning thrive (DoE, 2001:14).

Another DoE (2000:10) report, *Values, Education and Democracy*, which precedes the *Manifesto on Values, Education and Democracy* above, proposes that education

should equip young people with values such as honesty, integrity, tolerance, diligence, responsibility, compassion, altruism, justice and respect, which are deemed essential for a democratic livelihood. These are the values that the literature broadly associates with *Ubuntu* (Metz & Gaie, 2010; Nkondo, 2007; Swanson, 2005; Broodryk, 2002; Letseka, 2000). The report states that the public schooling system should actively promote these values. It posits that an educational philosophy of a democracy should develop intellectual abilities and critical faculties among children and young adults in schools. Firstly, this is necessary because a democratic society flourishes when its citizens are informed by a grasp of their history and of current affairs, where nothing is beyond question, and where ideas are explored to their fullest extent (DoE, 2000:14). Emphasis on the grasp of one's history cannot be overemphasised especially in the wake of attacks on foreign nationals in South Africa, some of whom come from countries that supported South Africa's liberation struggle unconditionally, often at the risk of invasion by the apartheid military. Secondly, such an educational philosophy should be inclusive of all learners irrespective of their backgrounds. Inclusion is critical for the promotion of cultural and political tolerance, as well as appreciation of difference. Thirdly, such an educational philosophy should equip learners with the tools to resolve the many problems that come with being human.

One example of the tools that are necessary to equip learners to resolve problems that come with being human is the mind-set to regard problems as challenges that need to be resolved through knowledge and understanding rather than to be regarded as unbearable burdens that are to be endured without solution (DoE, 2000:12). I want to argue that this state of mind can be attained when people, especially young people, are taught to embrace the value of deliberation and when they are equipped with critical thinking dispositions. Nussbaum (2002:7) invites us to regard our deliberations as, first and foremost, deliberations about human problems of people in particular concrete situations, not problems growing out of a national identity that is altogether unlike those of others. She argues that in educational terms, students must learn to recognise humanity whenever they encounter it, undeterred by traits that are strange to them, and be eager to understand humanity in its 'strange' guises.

Development of critical thinking dispositions in learners is one of the central aims of South Africa's national education policy. For instance, section 17 of the *White Paper*

*on Education and Training* (1995) requires the curriculum, teaching methods and textbooks at all levels and in all programmes of education and training to encourage independent and critical thought, the capacity to question, enquire, reason, weigh evidence and form judgments, achieve understanding, recognise the provisional and incomplete nature of most human knowledge, and communicate clearly. Kuhn (1991:2) conceives of critical thinking as a type of reasoned argument. For her, the 'skills of argument' presuppose the ability to propose opinions alternative to one's own and to know what evidence would support these, to provide evidence that simultaneously supports one's own opinions while rebutting the alternatives and to weigh the goodness of one's own evidence and that of others.

In this regard, critical thinking can be regarded as reasonable, reflective thinking that is focused on deciding what to believe and what to do (Ennis, 1996). However, on or by itself critical thinking is not sufficient. Instead, it requires critical thinking dispositions. Ennis (1996:166) defines a disposition as the tendency to do something, given certain conditions. When the notion of disposition is applied to conceptions of critical thinking, it implies an inclination to reasonable, reflective thinking. Ideally critical thinkers are inclined to (1) caring that their beliefs are true, and that their decisions are justified, (2) presenting a position honestly and clearly, and (3) caring about the dignity and worth of every person (Ennis, 1996:171). Evidence from the literature suggests that in its current form South Africa's public schooling system does not have the requisite capacity to deliver on this very important policy mandate (Howie, van Staden, Tshele, Dowse & Zimmerman, 2012; DBE, 2011; Spaul, 2011). As Spaul (2011: 23-24) observes, "in a league table of student performance, South Africa ranks 10th out of the 15 Southern and Eastern African Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ) countries for student reading performance and 8th out of 15 for student maths performance". The SACMEQ country report on South Africa also confirms that "the proportion of students who are classified at the 'acceptable' level of reading is strikingly low at 30.8%. The vast majority (69.2%) of South African Grade 6 students have not acquired 'acceptable' reading skills" (DBE, 2011a).

The reason for the above systemic failure is that South Africa's public schooling system is dysfunctional (Bloch, 2009; van der Berg, 2008, 2007' South African Human Rights Commission, 2006; Taylor, 2006), and continues to be serviced by large

proportions either of unqualified and/or under-qualified teachers (Chisholm, 2009; Arends & Makola, 2009; Paterson & Arends, 2009). South Africa's education system faces the challenge of supply and demand for teachers, as well as the challenge of attrition and retention of teachers (Diko & Letseka, 2009; DoE, 2008). The system loses an estimated 20000 teachers annually through resignation, retirement and death, and yet only 6000 to 8000 new teachers graduate from the higher education sector each year (DoE, 2008:16). The Centre for Development and Enterprise (CDE) (2011:21) has fervently argued that South Africa needs to produce about three times more teachers a year than it currently produces. The country's higher education system responsible for initial professional teacher needs to inject around 15000 or more new teachers a year into schools.

The consequence of the failure of the supply side to produce the requisite number of newly qualified teachers annually is that the public schooling system is forced to content with employing unqualified and/or under-qualified teachers (Chisholm, 2009; Arends & Makola, 2009; Paterson & Arends, 2009). Chisholm (2009:5) argues that among supply-led approaches there are short-term quick fix solutions and longer-term, more sustainable solutions. Short-term quick fix solutions may - and in practice often do - involve the employment of unqualified teachers or substitute teachers. Conversely, longer-term policies include improving teacher preparation programmes; providing incentives that improve the attractiveness of teaching, such as scholarships and loans for students who otherwise would not afford to go into teacher education; and improving teacher salaries, benefits and working conditions.

Chisholm (2009:23) points out that the main priorities of the DoE during 2004-2008 were short-term supply-side interventions – upgrading unqualified teachers and improving the quality of existing, employed teachers rather than planning for future cohorts. She cites the DoE's (2005) report which laments that the country faces a dilemma in which the employment of unqualified teachers would become the norm. Employing unqualified teachers has the unintended consequence of compromising the quality of teaching and learning. Notwithstanding these major challenges I want to argue that development of critical thinking dispositions among learners at school level is crucial for the promotion of *Ubuntu*-oriented attributes and dispositions. Concomitantly, a public schooling system that is expected to drive the above policy

imperatives will have to be one that is serviced by cohorts of highly qualified, knowledgeable and dedicated teachers.

To sum up, I showed that the notion of *Ubuntu* is already built into South Africa's education policy frameworks. For instance, the DoE (2001) report, *Manifesto on Values, Education and Democracy* identifies *Ubuntu* (human dignity) as one of the fundamental values that ought to be promoted by the country's public schooling system. In the same vein, the *White Paper on Education and Training* makes it mandatory for the public education system to promote the development of independent and critical thought, the capacity to question, reason, weigh evidence and form judgements. The DoE (2002) recognises *Ubuntu* as an important educational value that that schools should promote. I highlighted the challenges facing South Africa's education system – the challenges of supply and demand for teachers, and the failure of the initial professional teacher development sector to produce the requisite number of teachers annually in order for the public schooling system to function optimally.

## 5.5 Conclusion

What I have attempted to do in this chapter is to defend the notions of *Ubuntu* and Africanism/Afrocentrism against criticisms. I argued that *Ubuntu* articulates communal interdependence and a deep rootedness in one's community. I highlighted the consonance between values implicit in the Constitution of South Africa and values implicit in *Ubuntu*. I argued that *Ubuntu* has the potential to serve as a moral theory, a public policy, and a notion of communal justice. On the one hand, the Constitution of South Africa enshrines a wide range of rights and freedoms for the individual and affirms the democratic values of equality and human dignity. On the other hand, *Ubuntu* reveres human life, dignity, respect, caring and compassion. Thus, understood as human dignity, *Ubuntu* is critical to South Africa's education in general, and to the public schooling system in particular, and the schooling system should therefore promote *Ubuntu* values.

The type of learner envisaged by the South African government is one who will act in the interests of a society based on respect for democracy, equality, human dignity, life and social justice. To that end, the public schooling system is under pressure to develop lifelong learners who are confident, independent, literate, numerate, multi-skilled, and compassionate, with the ability to participate in society as critical and active citizens (DoE, 2002:8). I pointed out though, that South Africa's initial professional teacher development institutions produce between 6000 and 8000 new teachers a year while an estimated 20000 teachers leave the profession annually through resignations, retirement and death. The number that graduates annually is short of the required number of newly qualified teachers that should be injected into the public schooling system annually in order for the system to function optimally.

Some scholars have expressed doubts on the viability of liberal democracy in Africa in general, and in South Africa in particular (Biko, 2004; Makgoba, 1998; Gilliomée, 1995; Ake, 1993). For instance, Ake (1993:243) has argued that the familiar assumptions and political arrangements of liberal democracy make little sense in Africa. While Gilliomée (1995:97-98) has expressed doubts that South Africa represents enough of a common society to provide a sufficiently stable base for a well-functioning liberal democracy. Regardless of these doubts South Africa is a liberal democracy courtesy of its 1996 Constitution, which has been widely hailed as liberal and egalitarian (Enslin & Horsthemke, 2004; Deveaux, 2003; Vilakazi, 2003; Gibson, 2001; Jordan, 1996; Robinson, 2012). I explored the notion of liberal democracy in Chapter Four above where I argued a case for coexistence between some liberal democratic values and some traditional African values. My considered view is that such coexistence is necessary given that post-apartheid South Africa seeks to build a socio-political future that is based on the amalgamation of both liberal democratic values and traditional African values. In the next chapter I flesh out the political and philosophical implications of attempting to amalgamate traditional African values and liberal democratic values in an aspirant African liberal democracy.

## CHAPTER 6

# AMALGAMATION OF TRADITIONAL AFRICAN VALUES AND LIBERAL DEMOCRATIC VALUES IN SOUTH AFRICA

### 6.1 Introduction

In this chapter I explore the potential for the amalgamation of traditional African values and liberal democratic values in South Africa. Such an exploration is necessary as South Africa has a Constitution that enshrines a wide range of rights and freedoms for the individual, and casts the new democratic order as the antithesis of its predecessor, the apartheid regime, which was declared ‘crime against humanity’ by the international community.<sup>13</sup> Conversely, the same Constitution recognises the institution of traditional leadership.<sup>14</sup> Some commentators have taken issue with the above position (Beall, 2006; Beall, *et al.* 2005; Bentley, 2005; Biko, 2005, 1972; Ntsebeza, 2005; Makgoba, 1998; Ake, 1993). Their argument is that liberal democratic values and traditional African values are not only incompatible, but they are also fundamentally contradictory in that the institution of traditional leadership’s claim to power is by birth right and not through open democratic processes. In this chapter I challenge the above position. I shall argue (a) that such a position does not necessarily preclude the potential for the amalgamation of liberal democratic values and traditional African values, and (b) that existence of chieftaincy in a liberal democracy is not peculiar to South Africa. Therefore, there is no compelling ground to suggest incompatibility and/or contradiction in coexistence between liberal democracy and the monarchy.

This chapter is structured around six sections. Firstly, I attempt to conceptualise the relationship between tradition, as in the institution of traditional leadership in South

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<sup>13</sup> See the United Nations Security Council Resolution 134 (1960) of April 1960 [S/4300], Resolution 181 (1963) of 7 August 1963 [S/5386], Resolution 182 (1963) of 4 December 1963 [S/5471], Resolution 190 (1964) of 9 June 1964 [S/5761], and Resolution 392 (1976) of 19 June 1976 titled “The situation in South Africa: killings and violence by the apartheid regime in South Africa in Soweto and other areas”.

<sup>14</sup> See sections 211 and 212 of *The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996*, annotated version.

Africa, and modernity, as in the notion of liberal democracy (Mungwini, 2011; Hallen, 2006, 2002, 1995; Ciaffa, 2008; Gyekye, 1997, 1992; Wallerstein, 1995; Bodunrin, 1981). I shall argue that the two are contested in so far as they tend to invoke contrasting, and even conflicting versions of the African *Weltanschauungen*. Secondly, I respond to claims that traditional African societies were authoritarian and were, as a result, incompatible with liberal democratic values. Thirdly, I theorise the notion of authoritarianism. My view is that those who claim that traditional African societies were authoritarian seem to presume that the notion of authoritarianism is uncontested, and that its meaning is self-explanatory. This, I argue, is debatable. Fourthly, I tease out the socio-political fabric of some Southern African traditional societies with a view to arguing that they were characterised by communality and the preponderance of norms of moral ethnicity. I shall argue that their political practices were informed by some elements of the deliberative model of democracy given that their members deliberated on matters of socio-political importance and moral disagreement and were required to ‘talk until they agreed’ (Gyekye, 1997; Mandela, 1995; Busia, 1967). Fifthly, I draw on the works of Hanna Pitkin (1967), Jane Mansbridge (2003) and David Runciman (2007) to unpack the notion of representation as it pertains to traditional African societies. I shall argue that in the traditional African polity women were consulted on internal political matters and on most governmental affairs. In the final section I offer some concluding remarks. I now turn to a conceptualisation of the notions of tradition and modernity.

## **6.2 Conceptualising tradition and modernity**

In post-colonial African philosophy, “the subject of ‘tradition-modernity’ divide is a very sensitive one” (Hallen, 2006:16). This is because both concepts invoke contrasting, and often conflicting versions of the African *Weltanschauungen*. The term “tradition” is often perceived as pejorative especially when it is used in association with the well-established stereotype of Africa as a continent stuck in its dark past (Conrad, 1999), or a continent with no history (Hegel, 2001). Hallen (2006:175) reminds us that when used with reference to Africa the term “tradition” tends to imply a place where people do not “assign a high priority to reason, to critical thinking, in formulating their views of the world”. He argues that “African systems of thought are portrayed as placing

minimal emphasis upon rigorous argumentation and criticism in a search for truth that provides for discarding the old and creating the new. Tradition somehow gets portrayed as antithetical to innovation” (Hallen, 1995:383). Mudimbe (1985:150) wonders whether “the African *Weltanschauungen* and African traditional systems of thought are unthinkable and cannot be made explicit within the framework of their own rationality”. He opines that thus far the ways in which the African *Weltanschauungen* and traditional African epistemologies have been evaluated and the means used to explain them relate to theories and methods whose constraints, rules, and systems of operation suppose a non-African epistemological locus.

When “used to cut a strict cultural or metaphysical divide between evolutionary stages of social advancement, the purported binary or polarity between tradition and modernity misrepresents the African life and experience” (Mungwini, 2011:3). For instance, in his book *The Philosophy of History*, German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (2001:109) described Africa as “the land of childhood that is enveloped in the dark mantle of night”. He lamented that “the peculiarly African character is difficult to comprehend for the simple reason that in reference to it, one must quite give up the principle which naturally accompanies one’s ideas of universality”. Hegel (2001:110-111) argued that in ‘Negro’ life the characteristic point is the fact that consciousness had not yet attained the realisation of any substantial objective existence. He then proposed that for a better understanding, *Africa* should be divided into three parts: one which lies south of the Sahara desert, which he labelled ‘Africa proper’, ‘the Upland’, almost entirely unknown to Europeans, with narrow coast-tracts along the sea; the second, which is found north of the desert, and which he regarded as ‘European Africa’, with its immaculate coastland; and the third, which was the river region of the Nile, the only valley-land of Africa which was connected to Asia. Hegel (2001:109) was unrepentant that Africa, and by this he meant ‘Africa proper’, “need not be mentioned again because it was not a historical part of the world. It had no movement or development to exhibit. Historical movements in its northern part belonged to the Asiatic or European World”.

In the 1970s Joseph Conrad’s celebrated novel *Heart of Darkness* was heavily criticised by among others, Nigerian novelist Chinua Achebe (1978) for projecting the image of Africa as ‘the other world’; the antithesis of Europe and therefore of

civilisation; the place where man's vaunted intelligence and refinement are mocked by triumphant bestiality. While Conrad's book is a work of fiction, Achebe's (1978:7) main concern was that Conrad is "a narrator behind a narrator" – Marlow, the protagonist. Achebe argued that through *Heart of Darkness* white racism against Africa is such a normal way of thinking that its manifestations go completely undetected. He posited that Conrad portrays Africa as setting and backdrop which eliminates the African as a human factor. He argued that Conrad's novel calls into question the very humanity of black people. Africa becomes a metaphysical battlefield devoid of all recognisable humanity, and into which the wandering European enters at his peril. Achebe (1978:9) wondered why a "novel which celebrates this dehumanisation, which depersonalises a portion of the human race, can be called a great work of art". His position was that it should not be celebrated at all. He worried "why it is today perhaps the most commonly prescribed novel in 20th literature courses in our own English Department", and suggested that time was "long overdue for a hard look at things" (Achebe, 1978:11). Through *Heart of Darkness*, Africa is a continent to be avoided. It is a continent trapped in primordial barbarity. The message conveyed by the novel to European travellers is simple: 'Keep away from Africa, or go there at your own peril'.

Taiwo (2004: 244) argues that "one of the pylons of colonial rule was denial by colonisers of the humanity of Africans". This view is confirmed by Rorty (2004:70) who observes that history is written by victors. He writes, "victors get to choose their ancestors in the sense that they decide which among their all too various ancestors to mention, write biographies of, and commend to their descendants". In the same vein, Wolf (2010:229) argues that a history written by slavers and their beneficiaries has long obliterated the African past, portraying Africans as savages whom only the Europeans brought into the light of civilisation. Such history denied both the existence of a complex political economy before the advent of the Europeans and the organisational ability exhibited by Africans in pursuit of the trade once begun. Wolf's (2010:230) view is that "the task of writing a realistic account of African populations is not to justify one group as against another, but to uncover the forces that brought Europeans and Africans (and others) into connection with one another in the construction of the world". This is an important observation vis-à-vis attempts by previously colonised communities such as those on the African continent to reclaim their humanity and reassert their own senses of identity.

Coming back to modernity, Hallen (2002:44) is of the opinion that modernity is ambiguous in that “it must combine, at least in the African context, European (economic and cultural) imperialism, colonialism, and the varieties of neo-colonialism that are local manifestations of the global competition between capitalism and socialism”. While for Mungwini (2011:12), “modernity is a complex phenomenon in that the experiences of modernisation across the world have been varied and multifarious, yielding a host of modernities such as first world modernities, third world modernities, Indian modernities and African modernities, among others”. Traditionally, to be modern implied being anti-medieval, in an antinomy in which the concept ‘medieval’ incarnated narrow-mindedness and dogmatism. To that extent, Wallerstein (1995:472) opines that modernity was “the presumptive triumph of human freedom against the forces of evil and ignorance”. It was the modernity of liberation, of substantive democracy, of the rule of the people as opposed to the rule of the aristocracy, the rule of the best, of human fulfilment. The “modernity of liberation was not a fleeting modernity, but an eternal modernity. Once achieved, it was never to be yielded”.

Wallerstein (1995:474) suggests that “one way of resuming Enlightenment thought might be to say that it constituted a belief in the identity of the modernity of technology and the modernity of liberation”. For him, the French Revolution, the decolonisation of the Americans, and the struggles for liberation throughout Europe and around its edges - from Ireland to Russia, and from Spain to Egypt, these were all indications of aspirations for the modernity of liberation. He argues that “the key to the operation was the elaboration of the ideology of liberalism, and its acceptance as the emblematic ideology of the capitalist world-economy” (Wallerstein, 1995:475). It is Wallerstein’s (1995:476) contention that liberalism became the central justification for the strengthening of the efficacy of the state machinery because liberals saw the state as essential to achieving the furthering of the modernity of technology. Technology was viewed as panacea for all the socio-economic hardships that gripped Europe at the time. For instance, when Benjamin Disraeli published his novel *Sybil, or the Two Nations* in 1845, he marketed it as the book about the ‘the Condition of the People’, the ‘Two Nations of England’, ‘the Rich and the Poor’. For Wallerstein (1995:478), “the great programme of liberalism was not to make states out of nations, but to create nations out of states ... the strategy was to take those who were located within the

boundaries of the state – formerly, the ‘subjects’ of the king - sovereign, now the sovereign ‘people’ - and turn them into ‘citizens’, all identifying with their state”.

Important questions that I grapple with in this study are: How plausible is the perceived polarity between tradition and modernity? How sustainable is the view that tradition is necessarily antithetical to innovation? In a way, if we were to focus the argument on traditional African values and liberal democratic values how fundamentally incompatible and contradictory are they? My task is to mount a rebuttal of this perceived incompatibility and contradiction. I agree with Hallen’s (2006:302) observation that “tradition and modernity are not ‘opposed’ (except semiotically), nor are they in ‘conflict’”. This is an important observation that resonates with the case I am to make in this study, which is that South Africa seeks to build a socio-political future that is based on the amalgamation of traditional African values and liberal-democratic values. A traditional culture may possess values that are congruent with values inherent in a perceived modern state while another culture may cling more tenaciously to its old ways.

Gyekye (1997:218) argues that “societies that are called ‘modern’ also recognise traditions as relevant, and not as obstacles, to their development”. He contends that “modernity inevitably contains elements that are clearly traditional, inherited, and appropriated from previous generations of the European civilisational trajectory” (Gyekye, 1997:269). Similarly, Volet (1999:190) points out that “traditional wisdom inherited from the past is reconstructed day after day, year after year, generation after generation, in order to fit the requirements of new circumstances”. Thus, “tradition and modernity do not coexist side by side but overlap to the extent that it is often difficult to decide what is ‘traditional’ and what is ‘modern’ except by way of very crude and idiosyncratic means” (Volet, 1999:190).

Gusfield (1967:355) reminds us that “Japan is unlike the Western societies in the ways in which ‘feudalism’ and industrial development have been fused to promote economic growth”. For the Japanese, “tradition is not something waiting out there, always over one's shoulder. It is rather plucked, created and shaped to present needs and aspirations in a given historical situation” (Gusfield, 1967: 358). What lessons can be learned from Japan’s appropriation of tradition with respect to South Africa? In Chapter

1 I showed that while the Constitution of South Africa has been widely hailed as liberal and egalitarian, it also recognises the institution of traditional leadership. This is an indication that South Africa is an African liberal democracy that is also heavily steeped in local traditions and cultures.

In the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region, South Africa is an economic power house that accounts for over 70% of the entire SADC's gross domestic product (GDP). South Africa is also one of Africa's wealthiest states in total GDP, having recently conceded its African leadership spot to Nigeria. But more, South Africa is a member of the Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa block, or the BRICS countries, and Africa's representative in the G-20 – the premier global economic policy forum (European Commission for Africa and African Union, 2011:71). How South Africa succeeds in mediating these multifaceted global identities without losing its identity as an African state will be instrumental to managing the amalgamation between traditional African values and liberal democratic values.

To summarise, what I have attempted to do in this section is to unpack the contested cleavages between the notions of tradition and modernity. I have argued that the perceived polarity between the two is in fact a fallacy. One traditional culture may possess values that are congruent with modernisation in the same way as a modern culture may contain elements that are clearly traditional and inherited from previous generations. The point here is that “no human culture is absolutely unchanging, totally refusing to take advantage of possible benefits that often accompany encounters with other cultures” (Gyekye, 1997). I suggested that South Africa should harness tradition and modernity to fashion a new socio-political culture that is responsive to the challenges of the current era. In the next section I tease out claims that traditional African societies were authoritarian, and by implication, did not cohere with liberal democratic values. I shall argue that the political fabric of some traditional African communities can be said to have been informed by some elements of the deliberative model of democracy given that important national decisions were arrived at through lengthy deliberations that were anchored by the principle of consensus.

### **6.3 Traditional African societies and authoritarianism**

Wiredu (1980) laments that traditional African society was deeply authoritarian; its social arrangements were shot through and through with the principle of unquestioning obedience to superiors. Commenting on the political fall-out between Nelson Mandela, the former President of South Africa, and Pello Jordan, then Minister of Communication, and the disappearance of the talented Cyril Ramaphosa into political wilderness, Beresford (1996) expresses concern with the iron of an authoritarian streak which he argues, may be a tradition founded on tribal authoritarianism. Other political commentators have argued that most African countries possess political cultures that are embedded under authoritarian regimes in the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial periods (Bratton, 1994). For instance, Ramphole (2008) is concerned that the legacy of authoritarianism, from both pre-colonial and colonial African culture lies deep within African governance systems. She worries that people have no time for caring and practise an authoritarian system in their homes. There is tyranny in schools, homes and in the streets (Ramphole, 1995). Similarly, Nguru (1995) argues that the classroom in African nations is characterised by unilateral teacher authority, the use of fear, sarcasm, repression and intimidation.

To avoid being misconstrued as fomenting “a reactionary ploy to resurrect traditions” (Ayana, 2002: 26), I should state from the outset that I share Goduka’s (2005:60) view that indigenous ways of knowing are by no means a romanticism and, a nostalgic yearning for the long gone past, nor a movement to go back to the ‘caves’ and ‘bushes’. Neither are they a rigid understanding of culture as static, archaic, exclusionary, and frozen in space and time. Cultures are dynamic and adaptive, and have evolved over time to integrate other ways of knowing. For Mudimbe (1988:189), the view of cultures as static and archaic stems from “the episteme of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that invented the concept of a static and prehistoric tradition. Travellers’ reports localise African cultures as ‘beings-in-themselves’ inherently incapable of living as ‘beings-for-themselves’”. In this study I support Gyekye’s (1992:501) view that “the ideas and values in the traditional African system of politics must be thoroughly and critically examined and sorted out in a sophisticated manner so that those that appear unclear and woolly must be explored, refined, trimmed and given a modern translation”. Gyekye argues that “what needs to be done, in pursuit of democracy and stability, is to find ingenious ways and means of

hammering these autochthonous democratic elements in the anvil of prudence, common sense, imagination, creative spirit, and a sense of history into an acceptable and enviable democratic form in the setting of the modern world”.

Secondly, I am persuaded that societal cultures are highly complex and contested (Sewell, 2005; Limerick, 1997; Said, 1994; Bhabha, 1994). In his attempt to clarify the concept of culture in contemporary academic discourse, Sewell (2005:77) argues that “trying to clarify what we mean by culture seems both imperative and impossible”. He sketches two concepts of culture, namely; culture as a system of symbols and meanings, and culture as practice, and argues that “most analysts insist on culture as a sphere of practical activity shot through by wilful action, power relations, struggle, contradiction, and change” (Sewell, 2005:83). It is his view that systems and practices tend to be complementary concepts, each presupposing the other. In this regard, to engage in cultural practice implies utilising existing cultural symbols to accomplish some end. For instance, the employment of a symbol can be expected to accomplish a particular goal only because symbols have more or less determinate meanings - meanings that are specified by their systematically structured relations to other symbols (Sewell, 2005:85).

Sewell (2005:85) makes a case for the autonomy of culture. He argues that the cultural dimension of practice is autonomous from other dimensions in two senses. Firstly, culture has a semiotic structuring principle that is different from the political, economic, or geographical structuring principles that also inform practice. Secondly, the cultural dimension is autonomous in that the meanings that make it up are shaped and reshaped by a multitude of contexts. Sewell (2005:86) argues that “the meaning of symbols always transcends any particular context, because symbols are freighted with their usage in a multitude of other instances of social practice”. For him, culture may be thought of as a network of semiotic relations cast across society, a network with a different shape and different spatiality than institutional, or economic, or political networks. To that extent, cultures are contradictory, loosely integrated, contested, subject to constant change, and weakly bounded.

Edward Said (1994: xii), known for his ground-breaking book, entitled: *Orientalism*, advances a view on culture (s) that resonates with the argument I am making in this

study, and that is: societal cultures are a contested terrain about which simplistic assumptions and judgements should be eschewed. Said argues that “peoples’ cultures are too complex to simply pass generalised judgement about them”. It is his contention that culture means all those practices, like the arts of description, communication, and representation, that have relative autonomy from economic, social, and political realms, and that often exist in aesthetic forms, one of whose principal aims is pleasure. For him, culture includes a refining and elevating element, each society’s reservoir of the best that has been known and thought. It is a source of identity, a sort of theatre where various political and ideological causes engage one another. By the same token, Oyěwùmi (1998:1050) argues that “culture captures the idea that people have their own historically sedimented frames of reference, and come at events [the social world] with their own ways of thinking and feeling, which means that people of different cultures organise their world in distinct ways”.

However, Said (1994: xiv) warns that culture can be a battleground on which causes expose themselves to the light of day and contend with one another. Similarly, Suny (2002:1485) argues that culture can be “a field of play with borders far less clear than in earlier imaginations, its internal harmonies less apparent, in which actors and groups contend for positions and power, sometimes in institutions, sometimes over control of meaning”. In his celebrated book, entitled, *The Location of Culture*, Homi Bhabha (1994:218) notes that cultures abhor simplification. He argues that “how culture signifies, or what is signified by culture is a complex issue” (Bhabha, 1994:247). For Limerick (1997: A76), “while culture can be a powerful lens for scrutinising society and a tool for understanding, equally it can hinder our understanding of human thought and action”. There is always a chance that culture can be reified.<sup>15</sup> Once it is reified, “its surface becomes opaque, more effective at absorbing light than at directing it. Instead of being usefully employed as an explanation or causal factor, culture can develop a startling ability to bring critical inquiry to a halt”.

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<sup>15</sup> See Lukács, G. 1971. *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, Merlin Press: London; Pitkin, H. 1987. Rethinking reification. *Theory and Society*, 16 (2), 263-293; Colignon, R. 1989. Reification: the ‘holistic’ and ‘individualistic’ views of organisations. *Theory and Society*, 18 (1), 83-123; Litowitz, D. 1999. Reification in law and legal theory. *South California Interdisciplinary Law Journal*, 9: 401-427.

Against the backdrop of the above analysis of culture (s), I should mention that African cultures are also characterised by diversity and complexity. Appiah (1997:47) notes that “the central cultural fact of Africa’s life remains not the sameness of Africa’s cultures, but their enormous diversity”. In another publication, Appiah (1992:26) argues that whatever Africans share, “they do not have a common traditional culture, a common language, a common religious or conceptual vocabulary. They do not even belong to a common race”. And yet despite this range of differences, an underlying unity and continuity ties the diversity of the African peoples. Within the variations between the African peoples is the understanding that co-operation and social harmony are valued over competition and individualism; that the community comes before the individual. Verhoef and Michel (1997:395) argue that “in all African societies an orientation exists towards a communal way of life, an understanding grounded in the belief that an individual is naturally connected to, as opposed to separate from, others and the universe”. As Sewell (2005:52) neatly sums it up, “culture should be understood as a dialectic of systems and practices, as a dimension of social life autonomous from other such dimensions both in its logic and in its spatial configuration, and a system of symbols possessing a real but thin coherence that is continuously put at risk in practice and therefore subject to transformation”.

A question that might arise at this stage is: how can the above-mentioned claims of authoritarianism be reconciled with the literature which attests that traditional African cultures were inclusive (Ayana, 2002); characterised by consensual politics (Makumbe, 1998), and open public debate (Gyekye, 1997; Mandela 1995; Guy, 1994; Sparks, 1991)? My view is that a major flaw running through the above claims of authoritarianism is that they are highly generalised and not supported by the literature. For instance, the notions of culture (s) and authoritarianism are not theorised. Instead they are presented as unproblematic, and therefore uncontested. None of the proponents of the claims of authoritarianism attempts to mount a compelling theorisation of cultures, tradition or authoritarianism. As a result, they all tend to portray traditional African societies and their cultures as forms of socio-political order that are devoid of an autonomous internal morality, which is highly debatable.

In summary then, I have debated the claims that traditional African societies and their cultures were authoritarian. I have attempted to theorise the notion of culture (s) and underscored that cultures are contradictory, loosely integrated, contested, subject to constant change, and therefore weakly bounded. I have argued that without a compelling analysis of cultures, tradition or authoritarianism the proponents of the claims of authoritarianism simply present these notions as uncontested and unproblematic, as if their meanings are self-explanatory. In the next section I broach the notion of authoritarianism, focusing on authoritarian regimes. I shall argue that governance in authoritarian regimes is centralised, and that there is forcible prevention of political expression by certain sections of society. However, I shall argue that the political fabric of some traditional African societies was characterised by deliberation and collective decision-making, which begs the question whether they were authoritarian.

#### **6.4 Conceptualising the notion of authoritarianism**

The notion of authoritarianism has been widely delineated (Linz, 2010; Purcell, 1975, 1973). Here I focus on authoritarian regimes with a view to getting clearer on how authoritarianism plays itself out in politics. I draw on Purcell's work on Mexico in the 1970s, which she describes as a patently authoritarian regime. Generally, authoritarian regimes are characterised by limited, and not responsible pluralism. They neither have elaborate guiding ideologies nor intensive or extensive political mobilisation in which leaders exercise power. Linz (2010:146) defines authoritarian regimes as those that lack the capacity "to satisfy the expectations of society, to solve pressing problems, whether internal or external". He opines that authoritarian regimes cannot translate efficacy into political legitimacy in the way that democracies are able to. Critically though, founders of authoritarian regimes tend to personalise their positions of power to the extent that they "consider themselves indispensable, are unwilling to relinquish power while still alive, and are fearful of naming their heir apparent".<sup>16</sup> Purcell and Purcell (1980:204) argue that "an authoritarian system

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<sup>16</sup> North Korean leader Kim Jung-un, known in his country to as the 'Supreme Leader' is a classic case of an authoritarian leader. While on thirty-two years of age, in 2014 he ordered the execution of his uncle Jang Song-Thaek on suspicion that his uncle was planning a coup. In May 2015 Kim Jung-un is reported to have ordered the execution of Jang Song-Thaek's children, brothers and grandchildren, to prevent 'mutiny' (Parry, 2015).

emphasises the centralisation of power, the flow of decisions from top down rather than of demands from bottom up, deference to authority, limited pluralism, and the use of violent repression when other methods of co-optation and control fail”.

Purcell (1975, 1973) writes that in Mexican decision-making processes “all important decisions were formally initiated by the president, and the president both claimed and received full credit for the decision, whether or not the idea for the decision was originally his” (Purcell, 1975:136). In the first stage, the president committed himself to a particular idea that he may or may not have originated. The actual origin of the idea was immaterial. What mattered was the president’s commitment to it. For Purcell (1973:30), “limited political pluralism is defined as a situation in which interest groups are partially tied to, and dependent upon the regime. The leaders of groups owe their primary allegiance to the regime’s elite and are only secondarily dependent on the support of their followers”. This contrasts sharply with the responsible political pluralism in democratic regimes where interest groups are independent, and the continued survival of the leaders or the groups is not contingent upon their acceptance or sustenance by the government. Low subject mobilisation implies politicised individuals possess a ‘subject’ rather than a ‘participant’ (or independent) attitude. Citizens are mobilised on temporary basis to ratify the decisions of the authoritarian elite and to demonstrate support for the regime. And yet much of the time the regime does not encourage participation.

Purcell (1975:4) argues that “the predominant style of rulership in an authoritarian regime is patrimonial or clientelist. The population is organised into interwoven vertical chains of patron-client relationships”. The patrons and clients are of unequal status, with the result that vertical chains are multiclass. The multiclass chains are held together through the higher status member’s distribution of particularistic rewards such as political patronage, money, privileged information, and the likes to the lower status member. In return, the individual recipients (clients or subjects) acknowledge the authority of the ruler and defer to him. As a result of receipt of benefits, the recipients are put in a position analogous to that of the ruler. They are able to bestow a portion of their grant upon others below them who, in return, are deferential and obligated to their ‘patron’ (Purcell, 1973:30-31). Furthermore, Purcell (1975:3-4) argues that “the

executive in an authoritarian regime shapes and manipulates demands emanating from below while enjoying substantial leeway in the determination of the goals that the regime will pursue". Authority flow "is the reverse of what supposedly characterises democratic polities", where officers are subject to the rules governing the exercise of those offices' authority and might not "appropriate the offices in the sense of private property that can be sold and inherited" (Purcell, 1973:31). Invariably, "authoritarian regimes have found themselves severely constrained by their absence of legitimacy, in terms of their ability to activate commitments in support of the regime" (Linz, 2010:147).

In summary, I have attempted to conceptualise the notion of authoritarianism, with a focus on authoritarian regimes. I have argued that authoritarian regimes penetrate the life of society by forcibly preventing the political expression of certain group interests or shaping them by interventionist policies; emphasising the top down flow of decisions rather than of demands from the bottom, and using repressive means when other methods of co-optation and control fail. In the next section I explore the socio-political fabric of some traditional African societies with a view to rebutting their characterisation as authoritarian.

## **6.5 The social and political fabric of traditional African societies**

### *6.5.1 The social fabric*

One of the most enduring features of traditional African societies and their cultures is the notion of communality. As Ake (1993:243) rightly puts it, "communality defines the African people's perceptions of self-interest, their freedom and their location in the social whole". Verhoef and Michel (1997:394) posit that "morality within Africa is that which evolves from the process of living and is grounded in the context of communal life". Mbiti (1989:106) argues that in African communal life "the individual cannot exist alone except corporately. She owes her existence to other people, including those of past generations and her contemporaries". The opening lines of English poet John

Donne's famous poem 'No Man is an Island' neatly capture the notions of communality and interdependence in traditional African societies:

*"No man is an island,  
Entire of itself.  
Each is a piece of the continent,  
A part of the main".*

Commenting on traditional life among the Kikuyu of Kenya, Kenyatta (1965:296) notes that "according to Kikuyu ways of thinking, nobody is an isolated individual. Rather, their uniqueness is a secondary fact about them; first and foremost they are several people's relatives and several people's contemporaries. People are closely interconnected with one another in a lifestyle oriented to the other". This resonates with Mbiti's (1989:106) view that the cardinal point in the understanding of the African view of man is captured by the belief that whatever happens to the individual happens to the whole group, and whatever happens to the whole group happens to the individual. "The individual can only say: I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am". In section 2.4 above, I alluded to the fact that in the African ethos the 'we' "is a shared experience, a body of collective experience, an understanding that one's experiences are never entirely one's own" (Verhoef & Michel, 1997:396). Kenyatta (1965) and Mbiti's (1989) views above are echoed by Scottish philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre whose stance on human relations in a communitarian social setting is that

*"I am someone's son or daughter, someone else's cousin or uncle; I am a citizen of this or that city, a member of this or that guild or profession; I belong to this clan, that tribe, this nation. Hence what is good for me has to be the good for one who inhabits these roles. As such, I inherit from the past my family, my city, my tribe, my nation, a variety of debts, inheritances, rightful expectations and obligations. This constitute the given of my life, my moral starting point. This is in part what gives my life its own moral particularity" (MacIntyre, 2007:204-05).*

According to this logic, "one's ties to family, friends, and lovers are among those carrying the most weight in social life. Each such relationship generates a set of imperatives with legitimate claims to oblige" (Boyd, 2001:296). As Holder and Corntassel (2002:145) point out, "one's relations with others are primarily defined by social or kinship networks. As a corollary to this, members are not forced to comply, but rather a consensus is sought". Interestingly, American philosopher of education

John Dewey (1966:143) was also persuaded that “what one is as a person is what one is as associated with others, in a free give and take intercourse”.

Communal interdependence in traditional African societies found expression in the extended family. Lauras-Lecoh (1990:480) argues that “worldwide Africa is seen as one of the sanctuaries of the extended family. It is the continent where the nuclear family, reduced to a couple and their offspring, is still a rarity”. For Ayisi (1992:16), the extended family forms the *raison d’être* of all social co-operation and responsibility. Mbiti (1975:176) contends that the extended family is a microcosm of the wider society. It embodies a broad spectrum of personal associations between great-grand parents, grandparents, fathers, mothers, uncles, aunts, children (sisters, brothers, cousins, nephews, and nieces), a host of maternal and paternal relatives, as well as the departed members. For Gyekye (1997:292-293), “one outstanding cultural value of the traditional African society that is a feature of ever-present consciousness of ties of kinship is the emphasis on the importance of the family - the extended family”. Thus, the extended family is the medium for the concrete and spontaneous expression of communal values such as love, caring, cohesion, solidarity, interdependence, mutual sympathy, responsibility and helpfulness.

In traditional African societies, the extended family is the forum for infusing norms of moral ethnicity. Norms of moral ethnicity encourage collective activity in the public sphere. That is, a form of political participation and a vision of good citizenship (Orvis, 2001:25). Mbiti (1975:178) picks out the following moral vices that the individual in traditional African societies ought to eschew - robbery, murder, rape, lying, stealing, cruelty, swearing, disrespect, practising sorcery or witchcraft, interfering with public rights, backbiting, laziness, greediness, selfishness, and breaking promises. Contrary to the above vices, the following are desirable virtues that the family and the community are expected to promote - kindness, politeness, respect, truthfulness, honesty, reliability, keeping promises, hospitality, altruism, hard work, looking after one’s homestead, practising justice in public life, and keeping to the good traditions and customs of one’s society.

It might be argued that the above-mentioned virtues are simply Mbiti’s wish list that can only be pursued, but never attained. I would counter such an argument by

indicating that some of the above-mentioned virtues are subsumed in the normative values of *Ubuntu*. I defend *Ubuntu* in Chapter 5 above and therefore here I shall only make cursory remarks. Ramose (2002a:231) argues that “a persuasive philosophical argument can be advanced that there is a family atmosphere, a kind of philosophical affinity and kinship among and between the indigenous people of Southern Africa, which is captured in the expression: *motho ke motho ka batho* (Sotho), or its Nguni variation: *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*”. Thus, according to *Ubuntu*, to be fully a human being is to affirm one’s humanity by recognising the humanity of others, and by so doing, establishing humane relations with them. *Ubuntu* inspires us to expose ourselves to others to encounter the difference of their humanness in order to inform and enrich our own (Sindane, 1994:8-9). It illuminates our communal embeddedness and interconnectedness to other persons (Letseka, 2000:183), and contrasts sharply with the view advocated by French philosopher Rene Descartes in: *I think, therefore I am*.

This is because *Ubuntu* is the African worldview based on the values of humanness, caring, sharing, respect, compassion and associated values. Let me briefly break each of these values down. Caring is associated with a loving attitude. It manifests in the respectful and humble way people treat one another (Broodryk, 2002:13). Sharing resonates with traditional African societies’ guiding maxim of *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*. Respect - *inhlonipho* (in Nguni languages), or *hlompho* (in Sotho languages) resonates with customary rules that govern relationships at different levels of society in that it entails conventions regulating and controlling posture, gesture, dress code and other behavioural patterns (Rudwick, 2008:155).

For Carton and Morrell (2012:33), respect or *hlompho* “includes the injunction that personal ego be subordinate to homestead hierarchy, which quarantines toxic conduct in tightly regulated peer activities and gender obligations. It stipulates the authority of elders over younger people, parents over children and leaders over followers”. It resonates with humility, understood as “respectfulness and considerateness of others” (Hare, 1996:241), or as “taking oneself no more seriously than one should” (Richards, 1988:258). In this regard, “humility promotes the stability of a progressive and civilised society. It is indirectly an aid to individual and communal self-realisation” (Newman, 1982:282). It requires “an appraisal of oneself combined with a reasonably generous

appraisal of others” (Newman, 1982:283). In effect, “humility coexists with appropriate feelings about oneself, feelings founded not in error, but in self-knowledge” (Richards, 1988:285).

It is my considered view in this study that young people ought to be brought up in communities that embrace the norms and values implicit in *Ubuntu* and humility. I have argued that “persons living in communities that embrace *Ubuntu* would be marked by a commitment to treating others with fairness at all times” (Letseka, 2000:188). In closing this subsection I want to submit that the social fabric sketched above should have the capacity to engender a political culture in which reasonable persons can live lives that are marked by civil political engagements undergirded by *Ubuntu* values and principles. In the next subsection I tease out the political fabric of some traditional African societies with a view to continuing with my rebuttal of the claims that they were authoritarian.

#### 6.5.2 *The political fabric*

Political practices of some traditional African societies can be said to have been informed by elements of the deliberative model of democracy. Makumbe (1998:306) notes that “some African societies can be argued to have had consensual political systems which required that major decisions be made only after widespread consultation among the people”. I shall show below that some Southern African communities had indigenous public representation institutions known as the *imbizo* and the *khotla*, where matters of socio-political importance and moral disagreement were openly debated and resolved. I shall further show that chiefs and kings in those communities would not make any decisions of national importance without the advice of the *izikhulu* or community elders.

I am mindful that democracy is an ‘essentially contested concept’ (Gallie, 1956). Westheimer and Kahne (2004: 238) caution that “conceptions of democracy and citizenship have been and will likely always be debated – no single formulation will triumph”. They argue that “there exists a vast and valuable array of perspectives on the kind of citizens that democracies require and the kinds of curricula that can help to achieve democratic aims (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004: 239). I comment on the

essential contestation of concepts in section 4.4 above and shall therefore not belabour the issue here. Suffice to mention though that “the contested status of any given concept opens up the possibilities for understanding each meaning within its own framework” (Collier & Levitsky, 1997:433). For instance, in the specific context of South Africa, contestations around democracy revolve around the majoritarian framework and fears that given its unassailable majority in Parliament, the ruling party has effectively reduced South Africa to a one-party democratic state (Southall, 2004; Lodge, 2002; Giliomee, 1998; Mattes, 2002). I shall say more on this later.

In his book, entitled: *Democracy in America*, French political thinker and historian Alexis de Tocqueville (2010:410) highlighted the threat of the ‘tyranny of the majority’ or the “unlimited power of majority, and its consequences”, whereby the majority is the all-powerful section of society against which individuals in the minority are rendered helpless in instances where the majority abuses its strength. De Toqueville (2010:402) argued that “in our time, the right of association has become a guarantee against the tyranny of the majority”. He cautioned that “arbitrariness must be carefully distinguished from tyranny. Tyranny can be exercised by means of the law itself, and then it is not arbitrary; arbitrariness can be exercised in the interests of the governed, and then it is not tyrannical. Tyranny usually makes use of arbitrariness, but if necessary it knows how to do without it” (de Tocqueville, 2010: 415-416). When tyranny becomes arbitrary it has the potential to cause ‘harm’. Echoing John Stuart Mill’s (1991) notion of the ‘harm principle’, Schmitter and Karl (1991: 79) caution about occasions when “*numbers meet intensities*”, that is, when a properly assembled majority (especially a stable, self-perpetuating one) regularly makes decisions that harm some minority (especially a threatened cultural or ethnic group).

Concerns about the ‘tyranny of the majority’ have arisen in South Africa as a result of the ruling tripartite alliance of the African National Congress (ANC), the South African Communist Party (SACP) and the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU)’s command of almost two-thirds majority in the country’s Parliament. There are concerns that the tripartite alliance might use its unassailable majority to change the constitution, design policies and pass laws that might harm the interests of minority Afrikaners while privileging the interests of the majority blacks who were historically

marginalised during apartheid.<sup>17</sup> Lodge (2002:154) argues that in South Africa, representative politics is overwhelmed by one large party to the extent that “the prospect of any alternation of parties in government is rather remote”. Indeed in 2008 the ANC and its alliance partners flexed their political muscles to pass the National Prosecuting Authority Amendment Bill and the South African Police Service Amendment Bill. The two bills paved the way for the disbanding of the Scorpions, a then investigative unit that had a credible crime and fraud busting success record (Asmal, 2008; Gumede, 2008). Again in 2011 the alliance partners resorted to their majority to canvas for the passing of the Protection of State Information Bill, otherwise known as the ‘Secrecy Bill’. Upon becoming law, the ‘Secrecy Bill’ would ensure that some members of the ruling party avoid prosecution by classifying information that might incriminate them. Breach of the ‘Secrecy Bill’ by whistle-blowers or members of the media may result in conviction and imprisonment for up to five years<sup>18</sup>.

To ensure that the above *status quo* prevails, in September 2011 the South African President announced the appointment of the country’s new Chief Justice. Njabulo Ndebele, renowned author, critic and former UCT Vice Chancellor noted that “a process of judicial succession that required wise and sensitive management divided the country and rendered the Judicial Service Commission (JSC) vulnerable”. Despite the seemingly impressive interrogative performance of many interviewers, “it did not take much of an imagination to sense the direction in which things would go in the total scheme of things given that there was only one candidate” (Ndebele, 2011). Ndebele lamented the erosion of the values of justice and fairness, which he argued, are distributive values<sup>19</sup>. He argued that justice and fairness follow a simple ethical law: do unto others as you would have them do unto you. He counselled that “if we put the country above party politics, we will appreciate the fullest import of this ethical law,

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<sup>17</sup> See Southall, R. 2004. Party dominance: Is ANC’s gain democracy’s loss? *Business Day*, 1 June; Lodge, T. 2002. *Politics in South Africa: From Mandela to Mbeki*, David Philip: Cape Town; Giliomee, H. 1998. South Africa’s emerging dominant-party regime. *Journal of Democracy* 9 (4), 128-142; Mattes, R. 2002. South Africa: Democracy without the people. *Journal of Democracy*, 13 (1), 22-36.

<sup>18</sup> See sections 38 and 39 of Protection of State Information Bill, Government Gazette No. 32999 of 5 March 2010.

<sup>19</sup> See Letseka, M. 2014. Ubuntu and justice as fairness. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, 5 (9), 544-551; Kelly, E. (ed) 2001. *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement/John Rawls*, Harvard University Press: Cambridge, Massachusetts; Rawls, J. 1999. *A Theory of Justice*, Revised Edition, Harvard University Press: Cambridge, Massachusetts; Rawls, J. 1958. Justice as fairness. *The Philosophical Papers*, 67 (2), 164-194.

which gives us the basis on which to build a shared public life". He noted that "this law is the source of public solidarity. It makes every political party, every business, and every institution a subset of the national community. It inspires public confidence. It widens loyalty to public office, particularly the office of the president, beyond sectarian loyalties that exclude". In the same vein, Schmitter and Karl (1991:80-81) caution that "for democracy to thrive certain procedural norms must be followed and civic rights must be respected. Any polity that fails to impose restrictions upon itself, that fails to follow the 'rule of law' with regard to its own procedures, should not be considered democratic".

Against the backdrop of the above analysis, my stance on democracy is neither 'anti-electoral' nor 'anti-majoritarian'. As I alluded to in Chapter 5 above, I support the notion of a 'strong democracy' as sketched by Barber (2003). To reiterate, a 'strong democracy' is premised on the participatory mode where conflict is resolved through a participatory process of ongoing, proximate self-legislation and the creation of a political community capable of transforming dependent, private individuals into free citizens and partial and private interests into public good. Barber (2003) contends that in a 'strong democracy' politics is something done by, not to, citizens. In this regard, the theory of 'strong democracy' envisions politics "not as a way of life but as a way of living – as, namely; the way that human beings with variable but malleable natures and with competing but overlapping interests can contrive to live together communally not only to their mutual advantage but also to the advantage of their mutuality" (Barber, 2003:118).

By the same token, Held (1992:17) advocates "a cluster of rules and institutions that permit the broadest participation of the majority of citizens in the selection of representatives, and that also recognises the political equality of all mature individuals". Such political equality helps not only in securing an environment in which people would be free to pursue their private activities and interests, but also in engendering a state in which, under the watchful eye of the electorate, would do what is best in the general or public interest (Held, 1992: 15). My own view is that the above

envisaged environment is realisable in societies that value, and are committed to the promotion of the deliberative model of democracy.<sup>20</sup>

In the deliberative model of democracy, “deliberation is a procedure of being informed. The deliberative model proceeds not only from a conflict of values, but also from a conflict of interests in social life” (Benhabib, 1996:71). Deliberative democracy “privileges a plurality of modes of association in which all the affected parties can have the right to articulate their points of view” (Benhabib, 1996:73). Gutmann and Thompson (1997:4) argue that “deliberation is the most appropriate way for citizens collectively to resolve their moral disagreements not only about policies but also about the processes by which policies should be adopted”. For Cohen (1996:99-100), “the outcomes are democratic and legitimate only if they are the object of a free and reasoned agreement among equals”. In another publication, Cohen (1998:221) contends that “what makes the deliberative conception of democracy compelling is the idea that decisions about the exercise of state power are *collective*, which gives added impetus to legitimacy”.

Coming back to Barber (1994:46), he notes that a strictly political construction of democracy focuses on active citizenship and on-going practical deliberation. This assumes a regime in which citizens “make common decisions, choose common conduct and create or express common values in the ever-changing practical context of conflicting interests and competition for power”. In this kind of environment, Barber further argues, “there is no necessary agreement on prior goods or certain knowledge about justice or rights”, and citizens “must proceed on the premise of base equality both of interests and of the interested”. He contends that “democratic rules, the definition of citizenship, and the character of rights, become legitimate only when

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<sup>20</sup> See Thompson, D. F. 2008. Deliberative democratic theory and empirical political science. *American Review of Political Science*, 11: 497-520; Ryfe, D. M. 2005. Does deliberative democracy work? *Annual Review of Political Science*, 8:49-71.; Cohen, J. 1996. Procedure and substance in deliberative democracy. In Seyla Benhabib (ed) *Democracy and Difference: Contesting the boundaries of the political*, Princeton University Press: Princeton, New Jersey; Gutmann, A., & Thompson, D. 1997. *Democracy and Disagreement*, Harvard University Press: Massachusetts; Benhabib, S. 1996. Toward a deliberative model of democratic legitimacy. In Seyla Benhabib (ed) *Democracy and Difference: Contesting the boundaries of the political*, Princeton University Press: Princeton, New Jersey.

subjected to democratic deliberation and decision” (Barber, 1994:48). In concurrence, Enslin and Horsthemke (2009:218) argue that “in deliberative theory it is widely accepted that all affected by decisions must be allowed to participate freely and equally in making them, in making calls for justice, in debating the terms and the agenda of the discussion”.

Questions that might arise at this point are: Does deliberative democracy work in practice? Who should participate in the deliberative processes? How should such participants be contacted? How are they required to talk to one another? Is there a deliberative talk tool that should guide discussions? What would it look like? And finally, what should be done with the product of deliberative encounters? Ryfe (2005:51) argues that “civic participation is strongly correlated with belonging to the social networks that privilege civic identities and make access to the political process relatively easy and frequent”. In some cases, civic participation is linked to educational levels.<sup>21</sup> As a result, those who participate in political processes are likely to be white, college-educated, or of middle-class background. Conover and Searing (2005:269) observe that “average citizens have fewer opportunities to deliberate rigorously in formal institutional settings”. As a result, most of their political discussions are quite unstructured. They tend to be hesitant deliberators, preferring to ‘pass the buck’ when they can. This might explain why participation in deliberation may produce greater anxiety and frustration than other choice-making processes. Ryfe (2005:56) argues that “it is unsettling to have one’s cognitive script disrupted, and it is even more frustrating to recognise that no new script is forthcoming since decisions about public issues are necessarily complex and admit to no easy answers”.

Enslin and Horsthemke (2009:218) are concerned about the likelihood of dominance by others in deliberative contexts. They cite Iris Marion Young, who emphasises the importance of including the marginalised by broadening deliberations to be more communicative, accommodating speaking styles of marginalised groups through

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<sup>21</sup> See Milligan, K., Moretti, R., & Oreopoulos, P. 2004. Does education improve citizenship? Evidence from the United States and the United Kingdom. *Journal of Public Economics*, 88: 1667-1695; Putnam, R. D. 1995a. Bowling alone: America’s declining social capital. *Journal of Democracy*, 6 (1), 65-78; Putnam, R. D. 1995b. Turning in, turning out: the strange disappearance of social capital in America. *Political Science and Politics*, 28 (4), 664-683.

greeting, rhetoric and narrative, and in the making of policy. Ryfe (2005:62) contends that individuals succeed and are motivated to overcome historical, structural, and psychological impediments to intentional reflection. He acknowledges that while deliberation is difficult and fragile, it is attainable. It requires a mixture of knowledge, skills, motivation, and civic identity. How does the above analysis pertain to the political fabric of some traditional African societies?

The literature suggests that some traditional African societies and their cultures were characterised by elements of the deliberative model of democracy and consensual decision-making (Williams, 2003; Dong'Aroga, 1999; Gyekye, 1997; Guy, 1994; Mandela, 1994). For instance, Gyekye (1997: 118) points out that when faced with matters of political and moral disagreement elders in Nyasaland (present day Malawi) would "sit under a big tree and talk until they agreed. This talking until you agree is essential to the traditional African concept of democracy", or what is known as "the African custom of debate and *palaver*" (Dong'Aroga, 1999:150). Commenting on governance among the Akan communities of Ghana, Gyekye (1997:126) notes that "in the assembly, whether in the council of the chief, or in the palace of the chief – where general assemblies of all the people usually take place - or in the house of a councillor. (that is, head of a clan), there is free expression of opinion". Gyekye argues that "no one was hindered from fully participating in the deliberations of the councils or general assemblies and thus from contributing to the decisions of these representative bodies". The chief would never act without the advice and concurrence of his councillors, who acted as representatives of the people. My view is that in the context of traditional African societies and their cultures, the notion of representation was probably understood in paternalistic terms and not as it is conceived in modern day electoral politics. I shall come back to this issue in more detail below where I explore the notion of representation.

Remarking on the *imbizo* in his native Thembuland in the former Transkei, Mandela (1995:24) notes, like Gyekye (1997) above, that "everyone who wanted to speak did so... There may have been a hierarchy of importance among speakers, but everyone was heard: chief and subject, warrior and medicine man, shopkeeper and farmer, landowner and labourer. People spoke without interruption and the meetings lasted for many hours". This is consistent with Schmitter and Karl's (1991:79) view that

“democracy’s freedoms should encourage citizens to deliberate among themselves, to discover their common needs, and to resolve their differences without relying on some supreme central authority”. Schmitter and Karl argue that “in contemporary political discourse, this phenomenon of cooperation and deliberation via autonomous group activity goes under the rubric of ‘civil society’”.

In a useful account of Zulu history, David Omer-Cooper (1966:36), historian and author of *The Zulu Aftermath* attempts to debunk the myth that Shaka, who was Zulu king in the 1820s was an absolute despot. He argues that Shaka’s position as king “depended on the loyalty of his troops and their commanders, the *indunas*, who held positions traditionally occupied by the territorial chiefs and were treated as counsellors”. Indeed Shaka’s portrayal as an ‘execrable monster’, an ‘inhumane mutilator’, or a cruel tyrant who frequently attacked smaller tribes for no reason except for some sadistic purposes (Biko, 1972:7) has been dismissed as a patently absurd exaggeration that only “suited colonial superiorist notions of black self-destructive violence”, and revelled at “the captivating image of a landscape littered with human bones” (Wylie, 1994:9).

Jeff Guy, author of *The Destruction of the Zulu Empire*, argues that Cetshwayo [who was Zulu king in the 1870s] ruled with the elders of the kingdom, or the *izikhulu*, who comprised the *ibandla* - the highest council of the state. Guy (1994:29) notes that “without the *izikhulu*, the king would not make any decisions of national importance”. Omer-Cooper (1966) and Guy’s (1995) views above are consistent with John Locke’s (1993) observation in the *Two Treatises of Government* that the authority of the king originates in the consent of the people (paragraph 105), and that the king only rules “for the public good and safety” (paragraph 110). In the same vein, in his book entitled: *Liberalism*, Leonard Hobhouse (1911:25) argues that “the people are sovereign and government is merely their delegate.<sup>22</sup> Government functions to maintain the natural rights of man as accurately as the conditions of society allow, and to do naught beside”.

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<sup>22</sup> See Raz, J. 1994. *Ethics in the Public Domain: Essays in the Morality of Law and Politics*, Clarendon Press: Oxford, especially chapter 15, “Government by Consent”. However, I am inclined to disagree with Raz that “the idea that the legitimacy of government rests on consent is deeply embedded in Western thought” (Raz, 1994:339). The idea of government by consent of the people has been a key feature of some traditional African societies and their cultures. See Dong’Aroga, 1999; Makumbe, 1998; Gyekye, 1997; Mandela, 1995; Guy, 1994; Ayisi, 1992.

In his account of the history of the Basotho nation, historian Leonard Thompson (1975:204) observes that until his death in 1870 Moshoeshe, king of the Basotho “attracted and retained the services of able advisers. His councillors (*matona*) resided at Thaba-Bosiu and were his most intimate associates. Representing different interest and points of views, they kept him informed on the various currents of opinion and they were sufficiently talented to exert considerable influence over the territorial chiefs”. Thompson (1975:209) argues that Moshoeshe “used the *pitso* to sound out public opinion. A *letona* [a councillor] would introduce the subject and then there would be a general debate, in which any man had the right to speak and to make forthright criticism of the authorities, even of the king himself”. Indeed in 1841 Moshoeshe was strongly criticised by his people for paying too much attention to European missionaries and neglecting the views and resolutions of his people. Thompson (1975:210) argues that among the Basotho, the *pitso* “was a socialising and nation-building institution. In the absence of a literary culture, it was a vital forum for political communication and education”, and “it promoted concerted action, which was particularly important since Moshoeshe and his *matona* had scarcely any means of exerting physical coercion over the territorial chiefs”.

Curtin, Feierman, Thompson, and Vansina (1980:325) note that Moshoeshe and his councillors “heard appeals from the decisions of their local courts and from time to time he (Moshoeshe) summoned all the initiated men to Thaba-Bosiu, where he discussed public affairs with them and announced his decisions”. It is Curtin, *et al.*'s (1980: 328) contention that the case of Moshoeshe and the Southern Sotho illustrates the importance of the style of African political leadership, the condition of the African society in the moment of the first substantial contact with Europeans, and the class of Europeans who provided contact.

Consultation of elders by chiefs and kings was common practice in most traditional African societies and their cultures. This suggests that most of these societies can be said to have been ‘gerontocratic’. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines gerontocracy as ‘government by a council of elders’/ ‘a governing body consisting of old people’/ ‘a state or government in which old people rule’. As Ayisi (1992:69) observes, “The elders are usually the oldest men in the society and constitute a gerontocratic core of the

political structure". For Mandela (1995:24), the elders [or the *izikhulu*] "were wise men who retained the knowledge of tribal history and custom in their heads and whose opinions carried great weight". Canadian philosopher of education Kieran Egan (1992:641) argues that "oral cultures place significant emphasis on memory to preserve knowledge, lore, and customs". This probably explains why in oral cultures the elders and memory are of such considerable socio-political and cultural importance. The elders tell stories that articulate conceptions of identity, morality, and social order. The ultimate force of storytelling is both moral and constitutional. Moral in the sense that storytelling tells not only what happened but also what ought to have happened. And constitutional in the sense that storytelling produces the conditions for self-identification. As a result, the elders are deemed "qualified to speak authoritatively on public matters and to mediate on socio-political and cultural issues because they articulate the meaning of life" (Egan, 2001:294).

Dahl (1998: 10) posits that tribal elders "see themselves as about equal in being well qualified to have a say in governing the group". For Ryfe (2005:63), the elders "anchor reality by organising experience and instilling a normative commitment to civic identities and values". But herein lies the problem. Invariably, gerontocracy presumes male elders. This presumption is a major bone of contention contested by feminist critics who charge that gerontocracy perpetuates patriarchy by excluding women from key decision-making structures (Reddy, 2008; MacPherson, 1995). Let me explore this issue further. Traditional African societies and cultures referred to in this study were dominated by male elders. The term elders as used by Mandela (1995) and Ayisi (1992); *izikhulu* as used by Guy (1994); *indunas* as used by Ommer-Cooper (1966), or *matona* as used by Thompson (1957), all presume male elders. As a consequence, the *imbizo* and the *khotla* have come under fire for being patriarchal (Good, 1996; van Binsbergen, 1995; McGregor, 1994). For instance, in Swaziland the *ibandla*, which is equivalent to the *khotla*, is only "open to all male members of the chieftaincy" (McGregor, 1994:559). Commenting on the *kgotla* in Botswana, Kenneth Good (1996:47) notes that

*"While the kgotla was a unique indigenous political forum, participation within it, in the decades proceeding and just after independence, was limited to influential Tswana men, with women and such as the San either excluded or silent. Its powers were advisory only, and it essentially functioned to facilitate social control by the leadership."*

Van Binsbergen (1995:24) argues that in Botswana the *kgotla* is perceived to be “manipulated by the elite to produce populist authoritarianism through symbolic engineering”.

Boafo-Arthur (2003:135) notes that in Ghanaian chieftaincy “none of the members of the National House of Chiefs is female”. Therefore, there is a compelling case to be made for a feminist critique of traditional African societies and their cultures. In fact, Okin (1999:14) is unequivocal that “many of the world’s traditions and cultures, including those practised within formerly conquered or colonised nation-states – which certainly encompass most of the peoples of Africa, the Middle East, Latin America and Asia – are quite distinctly patriarchal”. She argues that they have “elaborate patterns of socialisation, rituals, matrimonial customs, and other cultural practices (including systems of property ownership and control of resources) aimed at bringing women’s sexuality and reproductive capabilities under men’s control”. Similarly, Enslin and Horsthemke (2004:55) argue that “in all cultures, ‘western’, ‘eastern’ or ‘African’, there have been oppressive practices, such as racism and gender oppression, that require alteration as part of the evolution of democracy”.

In her book entitled: *Justice, Gender, and the Family*, Okin (1987:47) argues that even in the liberal tradition, despite its supposed foundation of individual rights and human equality, “liberals have assumed that the ‘individual’ who is the basic subject of their theories is the male head of a patriarchal household”. In another publication Okin (2004:1543) cites Linda McClain (1992), who argues that

*“Liberalism has been viewed as inextricably masculine in its model of separate, atomistic, competing individuals establishing a legal system to pursue their own interests and to protect them from others’ interference with their rights to do so. Hence, it is said that liberal, masculine jurisprudence has exalted rights over responsibilities, separateness over connection, and the individual over the community.”*

Okin (1989:14) makes a case for ‘gender as an issue of justice’ on three counts. Firstly, it is the obvious point that women must be fully included in any satisfactory theory of justice. Second, equality of opportunity, not just for women but for children of both sexes, is seriously undermined by the current gender injustices of societies. Thirdly, the family – currently the linchpin of the gender structure – must be just if we are to

have a just society, since it is within the family that we first come to have that sense of ourselves and our relations with others that is at the root of moral development.

For Shvedova (2005:35), “men largely dominate the political arena; largely formulate the rules of the political game; and often define the standards for evaluation”. She argues that in theory, the right to stand for election, to become a candidate and to get elected is based on the right to vote. However, in reality, women’s right to vote remains restricted, principally because the candidates are mostly male. “This is true not only for partial and developing democracies, but for established democracies as well” (Shvedova, 2005:34). She argues that the low level of women’s representation in some European parliaments should be considered a violation of women’s fundamental democratic right and, as such, a violation of their basic human rights. Echoing Okin’s view above that many of the world’s traditions and cultures are quite distinctly patriarchal, Shvedova (2005:34) posits that the unequal rate of representation in legislative bodies signifies that women’s representation, rather than being a consequence of democratisation, is more a reflection of the *status quo*. It is evident from the above analysis that patriarchy and the exclusion of women are a global phenomenon. As Amartya Sen (2001:35) points out, “they exist in most parts of the world, from Japan to Morocco, from Uzbekistan to the United States”. Norris and Inglehart (2001:127) go further to argue that “women have not achieved equal representation with men in any country”.

Historically, Greece is regarded as “neither a model, nor just one historical specimen among others, but the seedbed of western democracy” (Hartog, 1994:41). The Greeks, most conspicuously the Athenians, are generally taken to have been the architects and early practitioners of democracy (Barber, 1994; Kyrtatas, 1994; Ober, 1994; Harrison, 1993; Dhal, 1989). And yet Athenian political culture was a patently adult male culture. Held (1987:19) argues that “only Athenian males over the age of 20 were eligible for full citizenship. Ancient democracy was a democracy of the patriarchs; women had no political rights and their civic rights were strictly limited (although married women fared rather better in this latter respect than single women)”. Kyrtatas (1994:44) notes that Athenian decision-making by majority rule was strictly located within the limits of a citizen body. It was “full citizens [men] who were entitled to participate ‘in judgement and authority... Slaves and foreigners, including those with

permanent residence, were ineligible - and so were of course, women and children". Kyrtatas (1994:44) notes that "this simple fact, acknowledged theoretically by most scholars, though forgotten thereafter in their investigations, is deeply problematic". If Athens was interested in securing the unity of its total population, not just of its privileged elite, then "the citizens of Athens had no reason to question the loyalty of their women and children, and the same held true for resident foreigners, called metics".

It follows therefore that Athenian society was far from being completely egalitarian. Raaflaub (1996:154) attributes the exclusion of women, foreigners and slaves in Greek political culture to restrictive enfranchisement policies. He argues that Sophistic theories about the essential equality of humankind had no impact on human life, let alone politics. Comic fantasies about the women's political takeover were so funny precisely because they dealt with the impossible. Thus, on the one hand, Athenian political culture was punted as the form of social order that did not discriminate among citizens of diverse backgrounds, birth or wealth. And yet on the other hand, "its citizens rigidly excluded women, immigrants, resident aliens, allies of the polis, and slaves" (Manville, 1996:382).

Fast forward centuries later and the exclusion of women around the world remains a major bone of contention. Markoff (2003:90) observes that when Alexis de Tocqueville described the extension of men's rights in the United States in 1835 as 'universal suffrage', the irony of this description was that "no women were part of that universe". Field (2001:113) argues that in the United States in the 1840s, white male citizens aged 21 years were enfranchised, but there was no stage of life equivalent to manhood for women.<sup>23</sup> Oyzerman (2003:96) reminds us that "even the first programme of the Social Democratic Party of Germany adopted in 1869 and fully approved by the founders of Marxism called for universal suffrage only for *men* to the exclusion of women". Most western nation states only recognised women's right to vote after New Zealand became the first nation state to enact women's suffrage in national elections in 1893. Subsequently, Australian women gained voting rights in national elections in 1902. Finland granted suffrage for both sexes to vote for parliamentary deputies in

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<sup>23</sup> Notice the similarity here between Field's (2001) observation regarding the enfranchisement of male citizens of a particular age in American and the point David Held (1987) makes on the eligibility of Athenian males over the age of 20 for full citizenship.

1906. British women were only able to vote for the House of Commons in 1918, the same year that “Canada enfranchised women at the national level” (Markoff, 2003:92). These historical accounts beg the questions: why were women’s right to political participation not treated as integral to these so-called Western liberal democracies all along? And, why did not these Western nation states provide for women’s participation in political decision making processes in their constitutions?

Markoff (2003:103) clarifies that “the exclusion of women seemed eminently reasonable and natural to those who first constructed the institutions that were to make democracy real, so reasonable and natural that in many places constitutions and electoral codes did not even have to specify that only men were to vote”. It seems to me that one way of making sense of this phenomenon is to acknowledge the validity of Okin’s (1999) view above that most of the world’s traditions and cultures “are quite distinctly patriarchal”. Most patriarchal societies tend to adopt a politically paternalistic attitude towards women. There is a taken-for-granted assumption in such societies that men would represent women in public decision-making processes. But as indicated above, such an assumption is contested by feminist political theorists (Okin, 1999, 1989, 1987; Harding, 2006).

The above criticisms of the *imbizo* and the *khotla* (Good, 1996; van Binsbergen, 1995; McGregor, 1994) underlie contestations around issues of power, power relations and how power ought to be exercised. Foucault (1998; 1980, 1977) studied and analysed institutions like the prisons, mental institutions, military barracks, factories, and schools to try and understand who has power? How power is exercised? And what are the effects of such an exercise? For Foucault, “power is diffuse; it is exercised by everyone; it forms a complex mosaic in which each local piece plays its relatively autonomous role” (Shiner, 1982: 390). Thus “power relations are rooted deep in the social nexus” (Faubion, 2002: 343). That is, they are “rooted in the whole network of the social” (Faubion, 2002: 345). To live “in society is to live in such a way that some can act on the actions of others. A society without power relations can only be an abstraction” (Faubion, 2002:343). Shiner (1982: 390) argues that power relations are “a matter of ‘governance’: a way of attempting to give structure to the terrain of action of others”. In this regard, “power relations form a kind of ‘game’ or ‘war’ in which each participant and group of participants develops strategies to gain an advantage”. For

Shiner (1992:391) “clearly, the effects of power are not simply negative and restrictive but above all productive”. Their productivity creates a fine web of power relations in which “power simply produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth”. It is Foucault’s (1980:39) contention that “power reaches into the very grain of individuals, touches their bodies and inserts itself into their actions and attitudes, their discourses, learning processes in everyday lives”.

In his book entitled: *Power: A Radical View*, Steven Lukes (2005:12) offers an alternative and fresher formulation of power, power relations, and the way power is exercised. He writes: “A exercises power over B when A affects B in a manner contrary to B’s interests”. Lukes’s formulation is consistent with Bachrach and Baratz’s (1962:948) view that “power is exercised when A participates in the making of decisions that affect B”. Bachrach and Baratz (1962: 949) argue that “to the extent that a person or group-consciously or unconsciously - creates or reinforces barriers to the public airing of policy conflicts, that person or group has power”. At the heart of this view of power is concern about how the powerful secure the compliance of the subordinate, and why power is an unavoidably value-dependent concept.

Lukes (2005:12) argues that: “power is a capacity not the exercise of that capacity (it may never be, and never need to be, exercised)”. He contends that “power as domination, is only one species of power”. One “can be powerful by satisfying and advancing others’ interests”. In the latter respect, the definition of power and any use of it “are inextricably tied to a given set of (probably unacknowledged) value-assumptions which predetermine the range of its empirical application” (Lukes, 2005:30). Lukes (2005:30) argues that “the concept of power is, in consequence, what has been called an ‘essentially contested concept’ - one of those concepts which inevitably involve endless disputes about their proper uses on the part of their users”. Therefore, For Lukes (2005:30) “to engage in such disputes is itself to engage in politics”.

For Nicholas Burbules’ (1986), the ‘relational conception of power’ brings into the analysis another face of power, what Bachrach and Baratz (1962: 947) call the ‘diffused face power’. Burbules (1986:96) argues that “in general, traditional theories

of power have assumed that power is a property of individual persons [centralised], wielded instrumentally as a means to particular intended outcomes". Burbules (1986:103) suggests that contrary to thinking of power only as an *individual* possession, power can also be regarded "as a *relation* among persons [diffused]: that *A* has power over *B*, but that in most cases *B* empowers *A*". On this understanding, "a relation of power binds and constrains the activities of both parties, and each party defines its purposes and range of alternatives partly in terms of the other". As Eldredge (2007:4) points out, "definitions of power that equate power with domination and assume implicitly that power flows downward from those who hold political authority ignore the play of power outside the realm of officially recognized channels of authority".

Indeed Burbules (1986:104) argues that the 'relational conception of power' [diffused] is a "conception of power as a *web*, as a system of relations: discursive, practical, material, intellectual, and psychological". This conception reveals four characteristic features of power relations:

- relations of power as to some extent reciprocal, both because of the dynamic of compliance and resistance and because a person in power over another in one respect may be relatively powerless in other respects;
- power as transitive in its nature and its effects (the father beats the boy, and the boy kicks the dog);
- the traditional distinction between actual power and potential power is too simple, since power can be as effective in its latent form as in its overt expression and use; and
- typologies of 'forms' of power treat as distinct what are always and necessarily interrelated *aspects* of a given power relation (Burbules, 1986: 104)

But the exercise of power can also be unconscious. As Lorenzi (2006:93) points out, "this may be the case where *A* exercises its power over *B* yet remains unaware of its consequences". Lorenzi (2006:94) contends that "how much power we see in the social world, and where we locate it, depends on how we conceive of it". Against this backdrop, I want to argue that it is questionable whether in traditional African society men wielded more power than women. It is also questionable whether men intentionally excluded women from public decision-making processes or whether this is merely a perception whose validity needs to be tested by logical and evidential procedures.

In his book entitled: *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses*, Oyèrónké Oyěwùmi (1997) interrogates the ways in which Western assumptions about sex differences are used to interpret Yoruba society, and in the process, create local gender systems. Her analysis challenges common ideas in Western feminist writings, for instance, (a) that “gender categories are universal and timeless and have been present in every society at all times”. Oyěwùmi (1997: xi) argues that “this idea is often expressed in biblical tone, as if to suggest that ‘in the beginning’ there was gender”; (b) that “gender is a fundamental organising principle in all societies and therefore always salient. In any given society, gender is everywhere”; (c) that “there is an essential, universal category ‘woman’ that is characterised by the social uniformity of its members”; (d) that “the subordination of women is universal”; and (e) that “the category ‘woman’ is pre-cultural, fixed in historical time and cultural space in antithesis to another, fixed category – ‘man’” (Oyěwùmi, 1997: xii). Oyěwùmi argues that while “Sex (with a capital ‘S’) is a gender system of the West... Sex is not the only way to sort out human bodies, not the only way to make sense of sex. One can only imagine different cultural classifications and rationales for gender categories, different scenarios that take into account the evidence our bodies provide”. Adesina (2006:140) contends that Oyěwùmi’s work demonstrates that the inscription of gender ordering in the anatomical body or the coincidence of anatomical maleness and anatomical femaleness does not reflect the experience – historical or even contemporary in the context in which she worked.

Another issue that warrants a critical response is whether traditional African societies and their cultures had procedures for citizens to recall rulers who abused their positions of power or who did not represent their offices as they were expected to. The literature on traditional African societies and their cultures suggests that rulers who abused their positions of power were ‘destooled’ or dethroned (Williams, 2003; Gyekye, 1992; Ayisi, 1992; Sparks, 1991). Williams (2003:61) argues that “some traditional African leadership and authority systems had specific formal practices which positioned citizens to authorise, critique and sanction the ascension of their ruler, his or her continued reign, and the selection and ascension of his or her successor”. Similarly, Gyekye (1992: 243) posits that among the Akan people of Ghana, “The chief was bound by law to rule with the consent of the people. If a chief

abused his power, his subordinate chiefs, who were members of his council, could depose him". Commenting on the Southern African traditional communities, Sparks (1991:16) writes that "a chief would not make decisions that were binding to his juniors unless he discussed the matter with them. The chief might have appeared to be an absolute sovereign, but there were measures to regulate his exercise of power. The chief governed only as long as the people chose to obey him. If he behaved tyrannically he would lose support". In the same vein, Williams (2003:62) argues that "the reign of a particular king, however loved or despised, was never more significant than the endurance of the kingdom itself".

To summarise, I have sketched the socio-political fabric of some traditional African societies and argued that they had indigenous institutions of differing degree of representation in decision-making and governance. I acknowledged though that these institutions have been criticised for being patriarchal and for excluding women in their deliberations. However, I argued that patriarchy and the exclusion of women are not peculiar to Africa or the African people, but are a global phenomenon that can be traced as far back as the time of Athenian democracy. Exclusion of women is also prevalent in modern liberal democracies. My view is that central to the above-sketched contestations is how power is conceived and exercised, and how its effects are understood. Building on the above analysis, in the next section I broach the notion of representation. I recognise that the notion of representation is a puzzling, paradoxical, and contested concept.<sup>24</sup>

## 6.6. The notion of representation

There has been increasing interest among sociologists, political scientists and political philosophers in the notion of representation in general (Urbinati & Warren, 2008; Mansbridge, 2003; Lublin, 1997; Mill, 1991; Pitkin, 1967), in democratic representation (Cotta & Best, 2007; Krouse, 1982), political representation (Runciman, 2007; Rehfeld,

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<sup>24</sup> See Pitkin, H. 1967. *The Concept of Representation*, University of California Press: Berkeley; Pitkin, H. 1968. Commentary: The paradox of representation. *Nomos X, Representation*, edited by Roland Pennock & John Chapman, Atherton: New York, pp.38-42; Runciman, D. 2007. The paradox of political representation. *Journal of Political Philosophy*, 15 (1), 93-114; Eulau, H., & Karps, P. 1977. The puzzle of representation: specifying components of responsiveness. *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, 2 (3), 233-254.

2006; Brennan & Hamlin, 1999), and citizens' representation (Warren, 2006) in particular. Most of these commentators continue to draw on the work of Hanna Pitkin, especially her seminal book, *The Concept of Representation*, as well as journal articles she published prior to completion of her doctorate (Pitkin, 1964, 1964b). Pitkin (1967:222) conceives of 'representation' as "substantive acting for others". She argues that "a representative is defined as a person who has been given authority to act, and this in turn means a deployment of rights and responsibilities" (Pitkin, 1964:329). Others have argued that "the idea of representation holds that someone stands for, speaks for, or acts for another" (Saward, 2009:3). Indeed in *The Concept of Representation*, Pitkin (1967) grapples with the idea of 'standing for' by exploring 'descriptive representation' [Chapter 4], and 'symbolic representation' [Chapter 5]. Pitkin's (1967:8) 'first' working assumption is that "representation does have an identifiable meaning applied in different but controlled and discoverable ways in different contexts. It is not vague and shifting, but a single, highly complex concept that has not changed much in its basic meaning since the seventeenth century". Pitkin (1967:8-9) contends that "representation means, as the word's etymological origins indicate, *re-presentation*, a making present again". Generally, representation means "the making present *in some sense* of something which is nevertheless *not* present literally or in fact". But "to say something is simultaneously both present and not present is to utter a paradox, and thus a fundamental dualism is built into the meaning of representation". For Pitkin (1967:222), what makes a relationship one of representation is "not any single action by any one participant, but the overall structure and functioning of the system, the patterns emerging from multiple activities of many people". Thus, representation is primarily a public, institutionalised arrangement involving many people and groups, and operating in the complex ways of large-scale social arrangements.

Runciman (2007: 93) broaches the paradox to which Pitkin refers above. He argues that "this is not a formal or logical paradox, but a linguistic one, and it has its roots in the etymology of the term: 're-presentation' implies that something must be present in order to be '*re-presented*' but also absent in order to be '*re-presented*'". It allows for the idea of representation to be identified both so that representatives should take decisions on behalf of their constituents, who must be absent so that voters should issue instructions to their representatives. Runciman (2007:108) contends that the

language of representation “can accommodate a broadly coherent conception of politics that is still a recognisably democratic one”. Although representative politics reduces the focus of political activity to competing claims of representatives to act in the name of the represented, this does not necessarily mean that the represented are reduced to a passive role. Instead the represented remain the arbiters of political representation. Runciman (2007:108) argues that this way, “political representation offers a uniquely flexible form of collective activity in which actions are undertaken in the name of the abstract group, but assessed by a collection of separate individuals”. Thus “the paradox of presence suggests that some variety in our understanding of representation is unavoidable” (Runciman (2007:113)

In the same vein, Mansbridge (2003:215) argues that “constituents choose representatives not only to think more carefully than they about ends and means but also to negotiate more perceptively and fight more skilfully than constituents have either the time or the inclination to do”. However, in reality “none of us is ever *fully* represented - representation of our interests or identities in politics is always incomplete and partial” (Saward, 2009:3). My view is that to conceive of representation solely in terms of modern-day electoral processes, of constituents electing or choosing their representatives, limits the potential for deriving alternative conceptions of representation that are also viable even though they might not necessarily be based on the idea of the represented choosing representatives. For instance, non-elective representation (Saward, 2009; Rehfeld, 2006) and surrogate representation (Mansbridge, 2003) have emerged as alternative forms of representation that have the desired impact in enabling the public to mediate issues of socio-political importance and moral disagreement. What non-elected representation and surrogate representation highlight is that at times the “definition of representation – as ‘substantive acting for others’ - does not in principle require election” (Saward, 2009:4).

In what then do surrogate representation and non-elective representation consist? Firstly, “surrogate representation is representation by a representative with whom one has no electoral relationship” (Mansbridge, 2003:522). Mansbridge (2003:526) argues that “in pure surrogate representation, there need be no relation at all between the representative and the individual constituent”. This is because surrogate representation provides at national level the elements required for systemic democratic legitimacy that other forms of representation do not provide. As Urbinati

and Warren (2008:392) note, “representation is at best a surrogate form of participation for citizens who are physically absent”. Secondly, non-elective representation is based on the assumption that someone or some organisation carries the desired force to represent the common interests and common sentiments of sections of society that are excluded or marginalised by forces beyond their control.

Saward (2009:1) refers to U2 lead singer and celebrity political activist Bono who has declared himself a representative of many people in Africa, whom he argues have no voice at all. Bono acknowledges that the peoples of Africa have not asked him to represent them. But he believes, cheekily, that they would be glad he did. There is absolutely no basis for Bono’s belief. My own view is that he is just a condescending Western European celebrity who has an unfounded sense of self-importance that drives him to believe he can represent ‘the voiceless Africans’, as if the African peoples are a homogeneous group that happens to be desperate for Bono’s representation. Dryzek and Niemeyer (2008: 481) rightly point out “nobody elected Bono; he is not formally accountable to anybody, and most of the people he claims to represent have no idea who he is or what he proposes”.

In what ways does the above analysis of representation pertain to the role of women in traditional African societies? What form could this role take? How best can it be understood? From which vantage point? Can it be understood on its own or when juxtaposed with women’s relations with men in their specific contexts? These are vexing questions about which there might not be simple answers. Suffice to mention though that “any society’s masculinity and femininity are relational constructs” (Hussein, 2004:134). A deeper understanding of the social construction of masculinity and femininity is critical to our overall understanding of how traditional African societies were ordered, and how the notion of gender might have been conceived. Sudarkasa (1986:96) attributes perceptions of the ‘status of women’ in traditional African societies to the obsession of Western scholars with analyses of the nuclear family and the operations of the principle of conjugality in determining kin relations. She argues that this emphasis derives from an attempt to analyse kinship in other societies from the viewpoint of and with paradigms appropriate to Western kin groups. Ditto Mudimbe’s (1985) concern that the ways in which the African *Weltanschauung* has been evaluated were based on a non-African epistemological locus.

Nzegwu (1998:602) calls for the use of 'historicity' in analysing socio-cultural issues. She argues that historicising interpretations should involve "using appropriate yardsticks so that the time frames are not illicitly collapsed and conceptual frames of cultures are not illicitly switched". She contends that in Judeo-Christian tradition, and in European and American cultures, definitions of gender entail a binary oppositional epistemology, which "aligns women in opposition to men" (Nzegwu, 2001:112) . And given that the study of gender in African Studies was pioneered by white Africanist women scholars, the underlying pivotal gender assumptions of European women were carried over to Africa. If we accept the view that the politics of gender is mired in the specific social histories, ideological commitments, and cultural strategies of the activism of dominant white Africanist theorists, critical questions to ask are: "How relevant is the concept of gender to Africa? What is the basis for universalising it? What if there is no social category of woman in a given traditional African society? And what if such a society has a non-gendered principle of organisation" (Nzegwu, 2001:113)?

Some have suggested that in traditional African societies, a meaningful basis of identity should be the lineage, where power is diffuse (Claesson, 2011; McIntosh, 2005; Nzegwu, 2004; Ayisi, 1992). The lineage is a corporate unilineal descent group whose members trace their genealogical relationship to a founding ancestor. In my Letseka family lineage, the praise songs for our ancestors start by noting that

*"We are the people of Mohaila, of Tsepa, Khomo, Nkhate, Sebothoana, and Mochaoana"*

The six are names of the founding fathers (*baholo*) of the Letseka lineage. Therefore, the lineage is larger than the nuclear family in that it embraces several generations of kin-groups. The principle of organisation in the lineage is age-based seniority. For instance, in a lineage-ordered social structure, marriage is not reducible to a relationship between a man and a woman, as is the case in a nuclear family. Instead it is a union of two or more lineages [the Sesotho term for lineage is *leloko*].

Nzegwu (1998:611) is unequivocal that family-as-lineage is the appropriate unit of analysis in traditional African societies. In the lineal-cultural framework, the marriage

partners and their respective families are held together by an intricate structured web of interrelationships between their respective families-as-lineage. In this intricate structured web, a traditional African household is not a household of masculinity as the gendered analysis suggests, but a socially defined site for tending to the well-being of the members of the lineage. For instance, Sudarkasa (1986: 100) argues that “women were consulted on most governmental affairs. Their participation through their spokespersons paralleled the participation of males through theirs”. While there was sex differentiation, it does not necessarily follow that it equalled sex discrimination (Nzegwu, 1998:6021).

To summarise, I started by acknowledging that the notion of representation is paradoxical in that it implies that something must be absent in order to be ‘re-presented’. I argued that while there is a perception that in traditional African societies women were represented by men, a case can be argued that women either participated through their spokespersons or were consulted on internal political issues and on most governmental affairs. It is my considered view that regardless of the foregoing analysis, it is now an opportune moment for the institutions like the *imbizo* and the *kgotla* to be revisited, candidly investigated, thoroughly debated and meticulously refined so that their processes and procedures are refashioned and made responsive to modern-day political imperatives and priorities.

## 6.7 Conclusion

What I have attempted to do in this chapter is to explore the potential for the amalgamation of traditional African values and liberal democratic values in South Africa with a view to understanding the implications of such an amalgamation. The exploration was necessary given that South Africa’s constitution is hailed worldwide as liberal in that it enshrines a wide range of rights and freedoms for the individual. And yet the same constitution also recognises the institution of traditional leadership, which is hereditary and therefore not necessarily bound by democratic procedures. Some scholars have suggested that the Constitution’s recognition of the institution of traditional leadership is not only incompatible with liberal democratic values, but is also contradictory. I challenged that suggestion and argued that existence of traditional and

cultural institutions in a liberal democracy is not peculiar to South Africa. In fact, as is the case in the UK, the Queen is a constitutional monarch who presides over the country's democratic processes. For instance, at the conclusion of an election the Queen has a constitutional duty to meet with the winner and incumbent prime minister and instruct him/her to form a government.

I argued that South Africa seeks to build a socio-political future based on the amalgamation of desirable aspects of traditional African values and desirable aspects of liberal democratic values. I suggested that it is a fallacy to think that there is a disjuncture between what is perceived to be traditional and what is perceived to be modern given that no society is entirely traditional or entirely modern. A traditional culture might possess values that are congruent with modernisation, while a modern culture might have long held traditions that it might want to preserve for posterity. In this regard, tradition and modernity overlap and it might not be easy to decide what is traditional or what is modern except by way of very crude and idiosyncratic means.

I attempted a conceptualisation of the notion of authoritarianism, with a focus on authoritarian regimes. I argued that governance in authoritarian regimes governance is centralised and there is often forcible prevention of political expression by certain sections of society. I challenged the view that authoritarianism is peculiar to traditional African societies. The basis for this challenge is that the literature shows that socio-cultural fabric of traditional African societies was marked by communality and interdependence, while their political fabric was marked by deliberation and the inclination for consensus in decision-making. I argued that some traditional African societies were informed by the deliberative model of democracy given that political leaders were required to 'talk until they agreed' on matters of socio-political importance and moral disagreement.

I teased out the notion of representation in relation to the *imbizo* and the *khotla*. I acknowledged that the notion of representation is paradoxical in so far as it implies the making present in some sense of something which is nevertheless not present literally or in fact. I recognised that the *imbizo* and the *khotla* have been criticised for excluding women from their processes. However, I argued that exclusion of women is not peculiar to Africa or the African peoples. Most of the world's traditions and cultures are

quite distinctly patriarchal. Worldwide men dominate the political arena and formulate the rules of the political game. I showed that in some traditional African societies women either participated in decision-making through their spokespersons or were consulted on internal political affairs and governmental affairs. I suggested though that perhaps it is now an opportune moment for the underlying assumptions and guiding principles of the *imbizo* and the *kgotla* to be revisited, thoroughly investigated, vigorously debated and meticulously refined so that they are responsive to modern-day political imperatives and priorities.

In the next chapter I explore conceptions of education in South Africa with a view to suggesting a conception of education, or philosophy of education that will be responsive to both traditional African values and liberal democratic values. Such a conception of education or philosophy of education would need to start with Africa. It would have to locate African cultures, norms and values at the heart of its curricula offerings, while at the same time embracing the values that are implicit in the country's constitution, values such as non-racialism, non-sexism, respect for human dignity, human rights, and freedoms for the individual. Such a conception of education or philosophy of education would seek a common space for traditional African values and liberal democratic values to coexist and flourish in the teaching and learning processes. I now turn to the conception of education for an African liberal democracy.

## CHAPTER 7

### CONCEPTIONS OF EDUCATION IN A LIBERAL DEMOCRATIC SOUTH AFRICA

#### 7.1 Introduction

In the foregoing chapters I have mounted three critical arguments: (a) given that its Constitution is liberal in that it “affirms the democratic values of human dignity, equality and freedom” (Republic of South Africa, 1996), South Africa is therefore a liberal democracy<sup>25</sup> (Deveaux, 2003; Dugard, 1998; Enslin, 1999; Jordan, 1996; Welsh, 1998). I submitted that generally liberalism attaches a high premium to the rights and freedoms of individuals to move, to assemble, to associate, and to openly and autonomously express their views, under the rule of law of course (Chapter 4). I underscored the importance of the virtues to liberal societies given that the virtues are taken to constitute human goodness, excellence, or perfection of the very essence of *being*. I argued that against this backdrop, the viability of most liberal democratic societies is predicated on creation and existence of a critical mass of virtuous citizens. However, I acknowledged that liberalism is a contested concept. The contestation arises from the fact that liberal values such as liberty [freedom], rights, justice, equality, and autonomy are variously interpreted by liberals themselves. This has prompted some liberals to suggest that perhaps we should recognise that there is no single view on liberalism. Instead there is “a multitude of liberalisms” (McKay, 2000); there are “many liberalisms” (Friedman, 2003; Rawls, 1996), and that there is “a family of liberalisms” (Simhony, 2003).

However, I argued (b) in Chapter 5 that the same Constitution that is widely regarded as liberal and egalitarian also recognises the institution of traditional leadership, and

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<sup>25</sup>However, in his book *Creating Citizens: Political Education and Liberal Democracy*, Eamonn Callan (1997:11) warns that “the marriage of liberalism and democracy is a turbulent one, and its turbulence is inevitably manifest in our educational thought and practice”. In South Africa this turbulence is as a result of the relationship between liberalism, democracy and the institution of traditional leadership. One of my tasks in this chapter is to demarcate a philosophy of education that is able to mediate this turbulence with a view to ascertaining coexistence between the three.

by extension, the practice of African customary law. This makes South Africa a liberal democratic state that is also heavily steeped in African traditions and cultures. I argued though that it is not unusual for liberal democracy and local traditions and cultures to coexist in different sectors of the same society. Firstly, South Africa is an African country in which the African peoples constitute the majority. Therefore, there is nothing unusual in the country's intentions to frame its socio-political and cultural trajectory in, among others, the local cultures and traditions. Secondly, and contrary to concerns that the Constitution's recognition of the institution of traditional leadership is both incompatible with, and contradictory to liberal democratic values (Beall, 2006; Beall, *et al.*, 2005; Bentley, 2005; Ntsebeza, 2005), existence of chieftaincy and/or traditional institutions of politics and governance in a liberal democracy is not peculiar to South Africa. The literature shows that enduring liberal democracies such as Japan (Ruoff, 2001; Fujitani, 1996), the UK (Harvey, 2004), Belgium (van Goethem, 2011), the Netherlands (Andeweg & Urwin, 2002) and Spain (Bogdanor, 1996), to mention a few, have had monarchies from time immemorial. But their monarchies have neither been a hindrance to democracy in general, nor to liberal democratic governance in particular.

Finally (c), and flowing from (a) and (b) above, I argued a case for the amalgamation of traditional African values and liberal democratic values in South Africa (Chapter 6). The thrust of my argument was that co-existence and/or crosspollination between traditional African values and liberal democratic values seems to be *fait accompli* in South Africa given that the country manifests a diversity of African traditions and cultures as well as liberal democratic aspirations on account of its 1996 Constitution, which is widely regarded as liberal and egalitarian. I posited that South Africa seeks to build a socio-political and cultural future based on the co-existence and/or crosspollination of traditional African values and liberal democratic values. In section 1.2 above I made reference to Ware (1992), who observes that the 'exporting' of liberal democracy to ex-colonies or to regimes which were conquered militarily, but which had no previous history of liberal democracy has transformed liberal democracy exponentially. Ware's (1992:137) view is that "there are today quite distinct types of liberal democracy". This is consistent with the views expressed by Friedman (2003), Simhony (2003), McKay (2000), and Rawls (1996) on the existence of a multiplicity of liberalisms.

In this chapter, which focuses on the educational implications of the foregoing analysis, I shall propose a philosophy of education for South Africa, which seeks to dovetail both liberal democratic values and traditional African values. I shall argue that because South Africa is an African country in which the African peoples constitute that majority, it follows that the country's philosophy of education should be rooted in Africa. This means that when framing such a philosophy of education, the cultures and traditions of the country's African peoples must take centre stage. Thus, such a philosophy of education would need to unpack critical questions such as what ought the 'African child' to be educated for? In other words, what set of principles ought to frame a philosophy of education for an 'African child'? Should such principles centrally consider the African child's habitat, or *habitus*,<sup>26</sup> before attempting to embrace other, external cultures and ways of knowing? I shall argue that such a philosophy of education would need to get learners to clarify for themselves what it means to be an African.

Concomitantly, such a philosophy of education would need to be responsive to the democratic values implicit in the Constitution of South Africa, such as the values of human dignity, equality rights, and freedom. The key question philosophy of education would grapple with are how ought a child in an African liberal democracy be socialised in order to live a flourishing life in such a political order? In section 1.6 above, I hinted at these questions when I asked: What would be the aims of a philosophy of education in a liberal democracy that is also heavily steeped in indigenous African cultures and traditions? I referred to Knight and Collins (2010) who observed that such questions arise for all humans, mainly because humans are self-conscious; they are able to reflect on the content of their consciousness, and on the relationship between their experiences and the rest of the world. Worldwide, liberal philosophers of education have tended to emphasise a multiplicity of liberal values. For instance, some emphasise the promotion of individual autonomy (Schmenk, 2005; Enslin, 1997; White, 1997; Raz, 1988, 1994), while others emphasise the promotion of democratic

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<sup>26</sup>In his book, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* French sociologist, anthropologist, and philosopher, Pierre Bourdieu (1995) argues that the *habitus* is the universalizing mediation which causes an individual agent's practices, without either explicit reason or signifying intent, to be none the less 'sensible' and 'reasonable'. For Bourdieu, the *habitus* produces individual and collective practices, and hence history, in accordance with the schemes engendered by history.

citizenship (Nussbaum, 2007, 2006, 2004; Callan, 1997). Still others emphasise democratic education (Gutmann, 1999; Dewey, 1966). For instance, Gutmann (1999:3) argues that democratic education is a political as well as an educational ideal. She contends that “because being a democratic citizen entails ruling, the ideal of democratic education is being ruled, then ruling. Education does not only set the stage for democratic politics, it plays a central role in it”. For Callan (1997:2), “to believe in liberal democracy is to believe in free and equal citizenship”.

This chapter is structured around four sections. I begin with an exploration of the notion of liberal education. For my purpose in this study, I prefer Martha Nussbaum’s notion of liberal education. Her emphasis on the ‘cultivation of humanity’ and development of ‘narrative imagination’ can be said to be consistent with the values and principles that are implicit in *Ubuntu*, understood as “human interdependence and humanness” (Waghid, 2014; Letseka, 2013a, 2013b, 2012, 2000). Indeed as Beets (2011:80) argues, *Ubuntu* implies that “each individual’s humanity is ideally expressed in relationships with others”. Nussbaum (1998:45) seeks “to cultivate the humanity of students so that they are capable of relating to other human beings not through economic connections alone, but through a deeper and wider set of human understandings”. In the second section, I broach the idea of an African traditional education (Maharaso, and Maharaso, 2004; Mapesela, 2004; Adeyemi, & Adeyinka, 2003; Adeyemi., & Adeyinka, 2002; Matšela, 1990, 1979). I shall argue that African traditional education is rooted in Africa and seeks to develop a strong African communal spirit in children, and to acknowledge and establish an African identity in education (Higgs & Smith, 2015). One of the grounding principles of the African traditional thought is the idea of ‘living with, and for others’, as lucidly captured in the saying: *umuntu-ngumuntu-ngabantu*.

Some elements of ‘living with, and for others’, as in *umuntu-ngumuntu-ngabantu* can be found in the writings of French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre. For instance, the relationship between the notions of *being-for-others* and *being-for-myself*, which he sketches in his book entitled: *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*. Sartre (2003:218) writes that, “Finally in my essential being I depend on the essential being of the *Other*. Instead of holding that my *being-for-myself* is opposed to my *being-for-others*, I find that *being-for-others* appears as a necessary condition for

my *being-for-myself*'. Therefore, it follows that an African conception of education that is shaped by the values and principles of *Ubuntu* would be marked by a commitment to the well-being of others and the general well-being of the community. For instance, as a general courtesy, when Africans meet at the *khotla* or the market place they often inquire about the health and well-being of the family, especially the children and grandchildren. This is quite the opposite with Europeans who often comment about the weather. In the third section I propose a philosophy of education for an African liberal democracy. As mentioned above, in South Africa, co-existence between traditional African values and liberal democratic values seems to be *fait accompli* given that South Africa is a liberal democracy that is also heavily steeped in African cultures and traditions. In the fourth section I offer some concluding remarks. I now turn to the exploration of the notion of liberal education.

## 7.2 Liberal education

Various philosophers of education have articulated varying conceptions of liberal education (Bailey, 2010; Levinson, 1999; Peters, 1966; Enslin, 1999, 1986, 1985; White, 1982). For my purpose in this study I shall draw on Nussbaum's conception of liberal education, which she sketches in her book entitled; *Cultivating Humanity: A Classical Defence in Liberal Education* (1997), and other related publications (Nussbaum, 2011, 2007, 2004, 2002, 1998). Nussbaum (2004:42) worries about the role of traditional American liberal education in "forming imaginative compassionate world citizens". She is concerned that since 9/11 Americans have generally been living in fear. It is Nussbaum's (2004:42) contention that fear narrows moral imagination and makes it "difficult to view with sympathy the situation of people who live at a distance or who look different from us". She opines that fear leads to 'conflict of civilisations'. Nussbaum's concerns about America's fear of terrorism and the potential for 'conflict of civilisation' resonate with Waghid's (2014) similar concerns about the prevalence of crimes against humanity in Africa and the imperative for educational institutions to play a significant role in the cultivation of *Ubuntu* values and moral dispositions. Waghid (2014:55) laments the ethnic cleansing in Uganda during the dictatorship of Idi Amin; the genocide against the Tutsis in Rwanda; the incessant ethnic conflicts in Kenya and Nigeria; the rapes perpetrated against women and children in the Democratic Republic of the Congo; political instability and increasing militarisation in the Darfur region of

Sudan, and the continuing socio-political instability in Lybia, Tunisia, and Egypt despite the overthrow of authoritarian rulers.

The debate on ‘conflict of civilisations’ was made prominent by American political scientist Samuel Huntington in his epoch-making book, *The Clash of Civilisations and the Remaking of World Order*. Huntington (1993:29) argues that the clash of civilizations occurs often violently, over the control of territory and each other. States from different civilizations compete for relative military and economic power. They struggle over the control of international institutions and third parties, and competitively promote their particular political and religious values. He concludes that “at the macro or global level of world politics the primary clash of civilizations is between the West and the rest; at the micro or local level it is between Islam and the others” (Huntington, 1996:255). These clashes induce global fear. Nussbaum (2004:42) surmises that “fear leads to polarisation”. Concomitantly, polarisation harms “relationships with other nations and with groups inside our own society”. The issues Nussbaum grapples with are no doubt vexing issues that pose major challenges for those who are charged with the responsibility to educate young children and to prepare them for responsible citizenship. Nussbaum is in no doubt that the solution to the issues she raises is in education. She argues that “education (in schools, in the family, in programmes for both child and adult development run by non-governmental organisations) forms people’s existing capacities into developed *internal capabilities* of many kinds” (Nussbaum, 2011:152). Thus, education is necessary “to prepare citizens to participate effectively and intelligently in our open political system if we are to preserve freedom and independence” (Nussbaum, 2011: 154). Ditto Callan’s (1997) book, *Creating Citizens*.

Nussbaum (2007, 2004, 1998, 1997) draws on the teachings of Greek philosophers Socrates and Seneca. She refers to Socrates’ principle of ‘critical self-examination’ and Seneca’s notion of ‘cultivating humanity’. Both Socrates and Seneca premised their conceptions of liberal education on the etymological origins of the word *libertas*, which is Latin for liberty. According to ancient wisdom, *Libertas* was the Roman goddess and an embodiment of liberty or freedom. Arena (2013:6) defines *libertas* as “the status of non-subjection to the arbitrary will of another person or group of persons”. She argues that “in the late republic, all Romans shared a basic

understanding of the value of liberty: they agreed that fundamentally *libertas* referred to the state of non-slavery” (Arena, 2013:14). In Chapter 3 above, I briefly touched on Socrates’ idea of ‘critical self-examination’. I argued that his commitment to critical and dialogical questioning led to a relentless critique of authority, motivated by a quest for intellectual integrity and moral consistency, and that it was manifest in fearless speech, or *parrhesia* (Letseka, 2008; West, 2004). Socratic wrestled with profound questions such as: What is justice? What is courage? What is piety? What is love? It follows that Socratic questioning yields intellectual integrity, philosophical humility, and personal sincerity. Nussbaum (1998:48) notes that for Seneca, “only liberal education will develop each person’s capacity to be *fully human*, by which he means self-aware, self-governing, and capable of recognising and respecting the humanity of our fellow human beings, no matter where they are born, no matter what social class they inhabit, no matter what gender or ethnic origin”.

Thus, Nussbaum’s (2004:44) view is that liberal education is attractive because “it places the accent on the creation of a critical public culture, through an emphasis on analytical thinking, argumentation, and active participation in debates”. Her notion of liberal education is based on three critical skills that are associated with the humanities and the arts – (a) critical thinking, the ability to imagine; (b) understanding another person’s situation from within – the capacity for empathy, and (c) a grasp of world history and the current global economic order or cosmopolitanism. Nussbaum (2011:155) argues that these skills are “essential for responsible democratic citizenship” because they engender important capacities that pertain to liberal democracies, and which liberal education has a moral obligation to cultivate. The capacities in question are as follows:

- Cultivating humanity: the capacity for Socratic self-criticism and critical thought about one’s own traditions;
- World citizenship: the ability to see oneself as a member of a heterogeneous nation and world; and
- Narrative imagination: the ability to sympathetically imagine the lives of people different from oneself (Nussbaum, 2001, 1998, 1997).

Below I briefly elaborate on each of these capacities. Later in the chapter I shall show that some of these capacities were also manifest in some aspects of African traditional education.

### 7.2.1 *Cultivating humanity*

By linking the phrase ‘cultivating humanity’ to liberal education, Nussbaum (1997:17) recognises that “philosophical questioning arises wherever people are”. It is her contention that “philosophy breaks out whenever people are encouraged to think for themselves, questioning in a Socratic way”. This is because “Socrates’ inquiry opens up the questions that are, and already were, of urgent importance for a culture committed to justice” (Nussbaum, 1997:24). Moreover, Nussbaum (2007:28) associates ‘cultivating humanity’ with democracy and argues that “democracy needs citizens who can think for themselves rather than deferring to authority and who can reason together about their choices rather than simply trading claims and counterclaims”. In this regard, ‘cultivating humanity’ is predicated on “the capacity of critical examination of oneself and one’s own traditions”, or what Socrates calls ‘critical self-examination’. This is “a life that accepts no belief that is authoritative simply because it has been handed down by tradition or becomes familiar through habit; a life that questions all beliefs and accepts only those that survive reason’s demand for consistency and for justification” (Nussbaum, 1998:42). Attainment of the capacity for ‘critical self-examination’ is based on the ability to reason logically; to test what one reads or says for consistency of reasoning, accuracy of fact and, finally, of judgement.

In *The Apology*, Plato (1993:63) writes that after Socrates was found guilty and sentenced to death he accepted the judgement and expressed no regrets at the choices and decisions he had made. He went on to declare that a life spent “without discussing goodness” or examining oneself and others “is not worth living”. I should mention that South Africa’s education and training policy requires the development of capacities in young people similar to Nussbaum’s idea of ‘cultivating humanity’ and development of ‘narrative imagination’, as well as Socrates’ idea of ‘critical self-examination’. For instance, section 17 of Chapter Four of the *White Paper on Education and Training*, number 195 of 1995, entitled: “Values and Principles of Education and Training Policy”, requires that “the curriculum, teaching methods and textbooks at all levels and in all programmes of education and training, should encourage independent and critical thought, the capacity to question, enquire, reason, weigh evidence and form judgments, achieve understanding, recognise the

provisional and incomplete nature of most human knowledge, and communicate clearly". This is a desirable policy imperative whose attainment still needs to gain traction.

There is a link between Nussbaum's views above on 'cultivating humanity' and Patricia White's (1996) views on 'educating citizens for a democratic society, which she sketches in her book, *Civic Virtues and Public Schooling: Educating Citizens for a Democratic Society*. White (1996) ventures into a wide array of civic virtues that pertain to education for citizenship and which philosophers of education should promote through their teaching and research. For instance, she dedicates specific chapters to notions such as 'hope and confidence', 'courage', 'self-respect and self-esteem', 'friendship', 'trust', 'honesty', and 'decency'. But it is her central assumption that I find quiet invaluable to the issues I am grappling with in this study, and that is, "things will go better in the polity if citizens acquire the appropriate democratic dispositions" (White, 1996:3). It is her contention that "teachers have to encourage understanding of, and trust in, the political institutions of the wider society and at the same time teach the importance of distrust. She elaborates: "the aim is to give students some picture of the nature of different dispositions, their place in the ethical life, the tensions between them, how they might be changed over time, and why some people or groups of people might be particularly disposed to think and act in some ways rather than others" (White, 1996:6).

### 7.2.2 *World citizenship*

Historically, Nussbaum (1997:56) observes, "it was neither Plato nor Aristotle who coined the term 'citizen of the world'. It was Diogenes the cynic". Diogenes chose a life of exile from his own native city. He defiantly refused protection from the rich and powerful for fear of losing his freedom, and instead he chose to live in poverty. He "connected poverty with independence of mind and speech, calling freedom the finest thing in human life". Diogenes "refused to be defined by his local origins and group memberships, so central to the self-image of the conventional Greek male; instead, he defined himself in terms of more universal aspirations and concerns" (Nussbaum, 2002:6-7). Indeed for Diogenes, freedom from subservience "was essential to a philosophical life" (Nussbaum, 1997:56). Nussbaum (1997:53) recounts the story of

another Greek philosopher, Herodotus, who “examined the customs of distant countries, both in order to understand their ways of life and in order to attain a critical perspective of their own society”. She notes that Herodotus “took seriously the possibility that Egypt and Persia might have something to teach Athens about social values”. Herodotus acknowledged that “a cross-cultural inquiry may reveal that what we take to be natural and normal is merely parochial and habitual”. It is Nussbaum’s (1997:57-58) contention that citizenship of the world is an invitation to become “philosophical exiles from our own ways of life, seeing them from a vantage point of the outsider and asking the question an outsider is likely to ask about their meaning and function”.

These chronicles of Diogenes and Herodotus offer invaluable lessons for those wishing to design a philosophy of education that is outward looking instead of inward-looking or insular. As Nussbaum (1998:43) points out, “citizens who cultivate their humanity need a further ability to see themselves as citizens of some local, regional group - but also, and above all, as human beings, bound to other human beings by ties of recognition and concern”. She recalls that the Stoics’ view of a ‘citizen of the world’ was based on the assumption that “thinking about humanity as it is realised in the whole world is valuable for self-knowledge: for we see ourselves and our customs more clearly when we see our ways in relation to those of other reasonable people” (Nussbaum, 1997:59). In another publication, Nussbaum (2002) calls this type of citizenship, ‘cosmopolitanism’. I briefly touch on ‘cosmopolitanism’ in section 2.5 above. Here I only make cursory remarks with reference to education, or what Nussbaum terms ‘cosmopolitan education’. It is Nussbaum’s (2002:9) contention that in educational terms children must “learn enough about the difference to recognise common aims, aspirations, and values, and enough about these common ends to see how variously they are instantiated in the many cultures and their histories”. She offers four arguments for making cosmopolitan education the focus of world citizenship.

*(a) Through cosmopolitan education, we learn more about ourselves.*

Nussbaum (2002:11) is wary of education that takes national boundaries as morally salient. She argues that such an education too often reinforces the “unexamined feeling that one's own preferences and ways are neutral and natural”. A vivid example

of this sort of feeling can be seen in the socialisation to defend white privilege in South Africa, which was, ironically won by conquest. Ndebele (2007:5) observes that “such a culture engenders inward looking behaviour. Where it is as powerful as South Africa’s white society, it turns other cultures outside of it into instruments of its self-defined goals. It limits the capacity of its defenders to empathise with and to even imagine a common interest with outsiders”.

*(b) We make headway solving problems that require international cooperation.*

Nussbaum (2002:12) uses the metaphor of ‘air’ to make the point that “the air does not obey national boundaries”. She contends that this simple fact can be, for children, “the beginning of the recognition that like it or not, we live in a world in which the destinies of nations are closely intertwined with respect to basic goods and survival itself”. During my travels around the world I collect miniatures of historical landmarks in different cities that I visit – Big Ben Clock tower in London, and Kings College chapel in Cambridge, in the United Kingdom; the Colosseum Amphitheatre in Rome, Italy; the Parthenon Temple on top of the Acropolis in Athens, Greece; the Eiffel Tower in Paris, France; the Statue of Liberty in New York, the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco, California, in the Unites States, just to mention a few. These are invaluable teaching aids that I use to engage my grandchildren in educative global and multicultural discussions. It is Nussbaum’s view that in order to conduct global dialogue “we need knowledge not only of the geography and ecology of other nations.... but also a great deal about their people, so that in talking with them we may be capable of respecting their traditions and commitments”. Nussbaum is a strong advocate of the need to gradually initiate children into embracing “global planning, global knowledge, and the recognition of a shared future”.

*(c) We recognise moral obligations to the rest of the world that are real and that otherwise would go unrecognised.*

Nussbaum (2002:13) highlights the importance of values such as “respect for human dignity and the opportunity for each person to pursue happiness”. These values are consistent with German philosopher Immanuel Kant’s philosophical concept of the

*categorical imperative*, by which one should act in such a way that one will always treat humanity, whether in one's own person or in the person of any other, never simply as a means, but always at the same time as ends in themselves (Paton, 2005; Kant, 1991). If we agree with the central assumptions of the *categorical imperative*, it follows that as educators we need to recognise our moral obligation to design curricula that places the requirements of the *categorical imperative* at the heart of our pedagogical conceptions and practices.

*(d) We make a consistent and coherent argument based on distinctions we are really prepared to defend.*

Nussbaum (2002:14) worries about the high premium that is often placed on blind 'patriotism'. This is because blind patriotism can be very close to jingoism – 'extreme patriotism, or belief that one's own country is always the best.'<sup>27</sup> Nussbaum notes a tendency to undercut the very case for multicultural respect within a nation by failing to make central to education a broader world respect. To that end, she appeals for the kind of education that enables children "to cross those boundaries in their minds and imaginations", so that they can accord respect to all humanity, and avoid thinking of themselves as worthy of special attention and respect than others. In Chapter 6 above, I touched on 'humility', which I described as "respectfulness and considerateness of others" (Hare, 1996:241), or "taking oneself no more seriously than one should" (Richards, 1988:258).

Cosmopolitanism should not be misconstrued as a peculiarly Western tradition. Nussbaum (1997:53) touches on the work of influential Indian philosopher, poet and educational leader Rabindranath Tagore, who developed his own cosmopolitan views from older Bengali traditions. In the same vein, she refers to Ghanaian philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah, who remarks as follows about an African identity: "we will only solve our problems if we see them as human problems arising out of a special situation, and we shall not solve them if we see them as African problems generated by our being somehow unlike others". Lesotho historian Leonard Thompson (1975:24) chronicles the travels of Mosotho sage and Moshoeshoe's mentor, Mohlomi in the

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<sup>27</sup> See Lal. V. 2005. The tragi-comedy of the New Indian Enlightenment: an essay on the jingoism of science and the pathology of rationality. *Social Epistemology*, 19 (1), 77-91.

early 1800s. Consistent with Nussbaum's (2002) metaphor of 'air' above, Mohlomi also did not obey national boundaries. Thompson describes Mohlomi as "an indefatigable traveller. He went on foot to visit peoples as far away as the Tswana on the verge of the Kalahari Desert, the Venda near Limpopo River, the Nguni near the Indian Ocean, and the Phuthi near the confluence between the Caledon and the Orange Rivers". He notes that Mohlomi "advised his chiefly hosts to rule their subjects wisely, to care for the poor, to abstain from warfare, and not to punish people who had been accused of witchcraft". These accounts illustrate that like Diogenes and Herodotus, Mohlomi was also a 'citizen of the world'. His advice with respect to attitudes towards those accused of witchcraft pertains to contemporary South Africa where there have been reports of incidents in which the elderly people were set alight and killed because they were suspected of witchcraft (Mkamba, 2012). It is my contention that one way of avoiding recurrence of such unfortunate incidents of moral indiscretion is by conceiving a liberal education that not only emphasises critical thought and respectful argument, but one that is also pluralistic and premised on 'cultivating humanity'. It should be the sort of liberal education that enables one "to think what it might be like to be in the shoes of someone different from oneself" (Nussbaum, 1998), and moves one to behave and act with a deep sense of *empathy* and consideration towards others. Ratcliff (2012: 475) writes that 'empathy' "essentially involves presenting someone else's experience as *theirs*, and thus incorporates a distinction between self and other".

### 7.2.3 *Narrative imagination*

By 'narrative imagination' Nussbaum (1998:44) means "the ability to think what it might be like to be in the shoes of someone different from oneself; to be an intelligent reader of that person's story; and to understand the emotions and wishes and desires that someone so placed might have, including the many ways in which social circumstances shape emotions and wishes and desires". Thus, 'narrative imagination' is the ability to decipher, through imagination, the meaning of speech as it expresses something of importance in the context of a person's history or social context (Nussbaum, 1998:44). For Nussbaum (2004:46), 'narrative imagination' has the potential to cultivate in students 'inner eyes' or the ability to come into contact with "issues of gender, race, ethnicity, and cross-cultural experience and understanding". This is because "narrative imagination is an essential preparation for moral interaction"

(Nussbaum, 2006:148). Indeed 'narrative imagination' can also be viewed as "the cultivation of imaginative sympathy", which Nussbaum (2007:39) regards as "a key prop of good citizenship". Thus for her, educating for citizenship requires "learning how to be a human being capable of love and imagination" (Nussbaum, 1998:45).

A question that might be asked is: How is 'narrative imagination' to be developed in young people? Nussbaum (2004:46) identifies literature and the arts, that is, music, fine arts, and dance as the principal sources for the development of 'narrative imagination'. She argues that "the arts cultivate capacities for judgement and sensitivity that can and should be expressed in the choices a citizen makes... Music, dance, painting and sculpture, architecture - all have a role in shaping our understanding of the people around us" (Nussbaum, 1997:86). Furthermore, Nussbaum (1997:88) posits that "narrative art has the power to make us see the lives of the different with more than a casual tourist's interest – with involvement and sympathetic understanding, with anger at our society's refusal of visibility". Storytelling, she argues, enables children to acquire "essential moral capacities". Through listening to stories being read to them, children "learn to attribute life, emotion, and thought to a form whose insides are hidden" (Nussbaum, 1997:89). Commenting on the issue that pertains to South Africa - 'racism', Nussbaum opines that "understanding how a history of racial stereotype can affect self-esteem, achievement, and love enables us to make informed judgement on issues relating to affirmative action and education".

For Nussbaum (1997:99), literary imagination develops compassion. And compassion is essential for civic responsibility. She notes that as children grow older, they gradually learn to ascribe to others, and to recognise in themselves, not only hope and fear, happiness and distress, but also more complex traits such as courage, self-restraint, dignity, perseverance, and fairness (Nussbaum, 1997:90-91). That is, they acquire the necessary attributes for compassion. For Nussbaum, compassion "involves the recognition that another person, in some ways similar to oneself, has suffered some significant pain or misfortune". It is her contention that the analysis of compassion "requires estimating the significance of the misfortune as accurately as one can – usually in agreement with the sufferer, but sometimes in ways that depart from that person's own judgement". Thus, compassion requires "a sense of one's own vulnerability to misfortune. To respond with compassion, I must be willing to ascertain

the thought that this suffering person might be me” (Nussbaum, 1997:91). So understood, Nussbaum argues, compassion “promotes an accurate awareness of our common vulnerability”. Compassionate dispositions are *sine qua non* for a country like South Africa given its past history of racism, discrimination and segregation. As Nussbaum (1997:92) rightly counsels, “A society that wants to foster a just treatment of all its members has strong reasons to foster an exercise of the compassionate imagination that crosses social boundaries, or tries to”.

Nussbaum (1998:44) cautions though that “narrative imagination is not uncritical, for we always bring ourselves and our judgements to our encounter with the other, and we inevitably will not merely identify; we will also judge that story in the light of our own goals and aspirations”. In this regard, ‘narrative imagination’ is an essential preparation for moral interaction. Habits of empathy and conjecture conduce to a certain type of citizenship and a certain form of community: one that cultivates a sympathetic responsiveness to another’s needs, and understands the way circumstances shape those needs, while respecting separateness and privacy (Nussbaum, 1997:90). Threading together the three capacities, Nussbaum (1998: 45) emphasises the importance of producing “Socratic citizens, capable of thinking for themselves, arguing with their traditions, and understanding with sympathy the conditions of life different from their own”.

Nussbaum’s conception of liberal education is consistent with Debra Humphrey’s (2006:3) broad definition of liberal education, understood as “a philosophy of education that empowers individuals with broad knowledge and transferable skills, and that cultivates social responsibility and a strong sense of ethics and values”. From a pedagogical standpoint, Humphreys (2006:3) posits that today’s liberal education should advance an essential set of learning outcomes that are necessary for success in today’s world. These include: (a) Knowledge of human cultures and the natural and physical world. The latter should be grounded in the study of the sciences and mathematics, social sciences, humanities, histories, languages, and the arts - focused through engagement with big questions, both contemporary and enduring; (b) Intellectual and practical skills such as inquiry, critical and creative thinking; written and oral communication; quantitative literacy; information literacy; teamwork and problem solving; (c) Individual and social responsibilities such as civic knowledge and

engagement; intercultural knowledge and competence; ethical reasoning and action; foundations and skills for lifelong learning. Finally (d) Integrative learning - synthesis and advanced accomplishment across general and specialised studies; the demonstrated capacity to adapt knowledge, skills and responsibilities to new settings and questions. For Humphreys (2006:3), “a liberal education of this sort is more important than ever in today’s volatile global economy and interconnected world”. It is her view that liberal education “prepares students to understand the implications of our current global interdependence and to grasp complex problems and find innovative solutions” (Humphreys, 2003:6).

Amy Gutmann (1999:350) endorses these views on liberal education in her book entitled: *Democratic Education*. She argues that “a system of liberal education provides children with a sense of the very different lives that could be theirs”. Also weighing in on these views of a liberal education in the knowledge world, Scott (2014:25) posits that “the skills and abilities needed in the world today are not only knowledge of balance sheets and how to analyse them, but also understanding the dynamics of cultures and how people interact”. He argues that “a liberal education fosters the ability to distinguish between what is true and what is false...It helps students to appreciate that which is the best that has been thought and said, to recognise the true, the beautiful and the good, no matter the culture or time”.

To summarise, I have explored Nussbaum’s notion of liberal education. I argued that her emphasis on ‘cultivating humanity’, developing ‘narrative imagination’ and ‘world citizenship’ are most preferable for my purposes in this study. The reason for this is that ‘cultivating humanity’ resonates with *Ubuntu*, understood as ‘human interdependence and humanness’. Furthermore, ‘cultivating humanity’ is consistent with the values that are implicit in the constitution of South Africa, such as individual rights, freedom, human dignity, respect for persons, and non-discrimination. Developing ‘narrative imagination’ or ‘imaginative sympathy’ implies developing empathetic dispositions that require one to be an intelligent reader of another person’s wishes, desires, fears and aspirations. The need for development of ‘narrative imagination’ is in line with the provisions of the DoE’s (1995) *White Paper on Education and Training*, which require that the curriculum, teaching methods and textbooks should develop critical thinking faculties in school children. Finally, Nussbaum’s

emphasis on ‘world citizenship’ pertains to South Africa given that with the advent of democracy in 1994 South Africa was readmitted into the global community. South Africa’s affiliation to the various United Nations agencies and to numerous regional, continental and trans-continental bodies such as the African Union (AU), the Southern African Development Community (SADC), and the Brazil, Russia, India, and South Africa (BRICS) countries gives added impetus to ‘world citizenship’. Thus, the need to conceive a broad notion of liberal education such as Nussbaum’s, which blends the cultivation of humanity, narrative imagination as well as world citizenship, is critical to a country such as South Africa, which is an aspiring African liberal democracy. I now turn to African traditional education with a view to ascertaining its potential for co-existence with liberal education.

### 7.3 African traditional education

The notion of African traditional education has been widely demarcated by African scholars (Kingsley, 2010; Marah, 2006; Maharasoa., & Maharasoa, 2004; Mapesela, 2004; Adeyemi., & Adeyinka, 2003; Adeyemi., & Adeyinka, 2002; Matšela, 1990, 1979). Invariably, these scholars have tended to emphasise the following key characteristics of African traditional education:

- Its intimate integration with the social, cultural, artistic, religious, and recreational life of the ethnic group (Marah, 2006);
- Its communal and agrarian orientation (Adeyemi & Adeyinka, 2003; Adeyinka & Ndwapi, 2002);
- Its inclination to equip young people with the competencies that are necessary for adulthood (Matšela, 1990, 1979); and
- Its emphasis on preparation for overall moral goodness (Masolo, 2010).

Perhaps I should preface this section with excerpts from my own research on *Ubuntu* with a view to highlighting its pertinence to African traditional education. This prefacing is necessary given that one of my aims in this study is to mount an *Ubuntu*-oriented African philosophy of education that also dovetails elements of liberal education such as ‘cultivating humanity’, ‘narrative imagination’, and ‘world citizenship’. In the article entitled; “In Defence of Ubuntu”, which appears in the international journal *Studies in Philosophy and Education*, I make a case for resonance between the values that are implicit in the Constitution of South Africa and some of the values that are implicit in *Ubuntu*. I argue that *Ubuntu* is fundamentally a matter of reverence of human life

(Letseka, 2012:54). In another article entitled: “Educating for *Ubuntu/Botho*: lessons from Basotho indigenous education”, which appears in *Open Journal of Philosophy*, I advance an *Ubuntu*-oriented pedagogy and make a case for *Ubuntu*’s potential to cultivate personhood, humaneness and normative inclinations in young people (Letseka, 2013a). Finally, in the article entitled: “Anchoring *Ubuntu* morality”, which appears in *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, I explore ways in which *Ubuntu* morality can be anchored in the community, in the family, and in personhood. What can be gleaned from the above publications can be summarised as follows: (a) that “educating the young people for *Ubuntu/Botho* through Basotho indigenous education has the potential to contribute towards the ideal of creating citizens that are inclined to treating others with fairness, dignity and justice at all times” (Letseka, 2013a: 343). And (b) that “the family plays a critical role as the primary institution of formative moral development, the school of justice, and the medium for the concrete expression of communal values” (Letseka, 2013b:358). I suggest (c) that given that *Ubuntu*, understood as human dignity, is central to South Africa’s educational policy framework, the country’s schooling system is therefore obligated to promote its values and principles (Letseka, 2012:56).

Some of the views I advance above on the link between *Ubuntu* and education have been explored by other African scholars. For instance, in his book entitled: *African Philosophy of Education Reconsidered: On Being Human*, Yusef Waghid (2014a:1) makes a strong case for “an African philosophy of education that is guided by communitarian, reasonable and culture-dependent action in order to bridge the conceptual and practical divide between ‘ethnophilosophy’ and ‘scientific’ African philosophy”. He proposes an African philosophy of education that aims at contributing “towards imagination, deliberation and responsibility – *Ubuntu* (human interdependence and humaneness) actions that can help towards enhancing justice in educative relations, specifically in relation to African education”<sup>28</sup> (Waghid, 2014b: 270). Waghid (2014b:271) contends that “by provoking students towards imaginative action and a renewed consciousness of possibility they will learn to acknowledge humanity in themselves and others; by encouraging students to work cooperatively

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<sup>28</sup> Notice conceptual resonance here between Waghid’s (2014b) advocacy of a philosophy of education that contributes towards ‘imagination’, ‘deliberation’, and ‘responsibility’, and Nussbaum’s (1997) emphasis on liberal education’s capacity for the ‘cultivation of humanity’ and ‘narrative imagination’.

through sharing, engagement and remaining open to the new and unexpected, they will contribute towards cultivating learning communities”.

In my own research on *Ubuntu* I advocate a traditional African education that seeks to create citizens that are immersed in *Ubuntu/Botho* moral dispositions, consistent with Waghid's idea of an *Ubuntu*-oriented education above. However, I express concerns about incidents of moral indiscretion such as violent crime, domestic violence, rape, police brutality, murder of the elderly people on suspicion that they practise witchcraft, and homophobia, which have become commonplace in South Africa (Letseka, 2013a:337). I speculate on how *Ubuntu* as a pedagogical principle might respond to such incidents of moral indiscretion. It is my contention that *Ubuntu/Botho* morality eschews such acts of moral indiscretion. This is because “*Ubuntu* is a form of moral consciousness in terms of which communal Africans embark on caring, compassionate, hospitable and forgiving engagements to ensure that human interdependency and humanity become actualised” (Waghid, 2014b:271). It follows from the above analysis that an *Ubuntu*-oriented African philosophy of education would be the right antidote for the above-mentioned incidents of moral indiscretion given that it would be intimately integrated with the social, cultural, artistic, religious, and recreational life of communities.

Masolo (2010:251) describes this type of education as ‘social education’. He argues that in most traditional African societies, individuals were taught about the structure of their social environment and their place in that structure. This sort of knowledge unveiled to learners “not only how they related to the whole but also how they were expected to behave toward everyone within it, social expectations that were determined by how the initiate was related to each member”. For Masolo (2010:242), “moral education and the acquisition of the values that sustain the social order are part of initiation rituals in most African societies”. With regard to encouraging students to work cooperatively and through sharing, I have commented on the notion of *letsema* or cooperative community farming among the Basotho people of Lesotho (Letseka, 2000:183-184), and argued that central to *letsema* is the development in children of a communal spirit by which each child sees themselves as part of the bigger unit, working and living together for the common good (Letseka, 2013a: 342). Masolo (2010:240) calls this “a life of cohesion, or positive integration with others”.

I have made the point that *Ubuntu* is based on, among others, the values of caring, sharing, respect and compassion, and that caring is associated with a loving attitude (Letseka, 2013a, 2013b, 2012). Waghid and Smeyers (2012:20) draw on the literature on the 'ethics of care' (Mendus, 2008; Slote, 2007; Noddings, 1992) to argue that "*Ubuntu* as a particular ethic of care, through its reliance on empathy and relational autonomy, is a very persuasive approach". Consistent with Nussbaum's idea of 'narrative imagination' above, they posit that it is possible to inculcate a moral thought in children that would enable them to adopt a point of view of other people and to develop empathetic dispositions that induce inclinations to want to be moral (Waghid & Smeyers, 2012:9). Waghid and Smeyers (2012:19) suggest that through the expression *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*, or 'a person is a person through other persons', *Ubuntu* brings to the fore the idea "why one would want (even need) to be moral". They draw on my own views on *Ubuntu* as pervasive and fundamental to African socio-ethical thought, as illuminating the communal rootedness and interdependence of persons; as highlighting the importance of human relationships, and as an important measure of human wellbeing or human flourishing in traditional African life (Letseka, 2000: 179).

I want to argue that appeal to indigenous African epistemologies such as *Ubuntu* and African traditional education can be regarded as advocacy for the Africanisation of knowledge. Wa Thiongo (1994) regards the Africanisation of knowledge as 'decolonising the mind', while Ali Mazrui (2003) calls it 'cultural decolonisation'. Wa Thiongo (1994:100) starts from the premise that

*"Africa as a continent has been a victim of forces of colonial exploitation, oppression and human degradation. In the field of culture she was taught to look on Europe as her teacher and the centre of man's civilisation, and herself as the pupil. In this event Western culture became the centre of Africa's process of learning, and Africa was relegated to the background".*

Commenting on the specific case of South Africa, Swana (2015:1) writes that "the bulk of South Africa's black majority has been advised and indoctrinated to believe all valid knowledge and wisdom comes from white people, and more particularly that the base of all sound knowledge is Western philosophy and the European-style University". Echoing Biko's (2005, 22) sentiments in Chapter 4 above that South Africa's white liberals claim a monopoly on intelligence and moral judgment' and try to set the pattern

for the realisation of the black man's aspirations, Swana (2015) charges that "white people want us to believe that they are the parents of scholarship and that Western epistemology entered African minds that were blank". He dismisses this as a misconception: "Western scholarship and Western philosophy are not the only systems of knowledge creation. There is robust Asian philosophy in its multifaceted variety, which has decolonised itself and produced top-performing economies and sophisticated societies, at a time when Europe in is total crisis" (Swana, 2015).

Letseka (2014a:1304) confirms this view in her observation that "by the time Confucius (551-479 BC) died Socrates (469-399 BC) was only ten years old". She argues that "it is evident from this piece of history that Confucius was already an established philosopher long before the Greeks Socrates, Plato or Aristotle came to prominence as philosophers". For Wa Thiongo (1994:101), the debate around the Africanisation of knowledge should be "about the inherited colonial education system and the consciousness it necessarily inculcated in the African mind". He argues that the call for Africanisation of knowledge is the "call for a regenerative reconnection with the millions of revolutionary tongues in Africa and the world over demanding liberation. It is a call for the rediscovery of the real language of humankind: the language of the struggle. It is the universal language underlying all speech and words of our history" (Wa Thiongo, 1994:108).

With regard to 'decolonising modernity', Mazrui (2003:149) posits that it "is to seek cultural nearness to African society and to enable the influence of the local society to balance that of the Western reference group". In South Africa, Jansen (2014) invokes the notion of 'nearness' to unpack "a particular history of madness in terms of race segregation" at a previously privileged white Afrikaans university, and to challenge "mind-sets and culture". Jansen uses the notion of 'nearness' with reference to, among other things, 'emotional closeness'; 'communion'; 'courage or risk-taking'; 'truth-telling', and 'mediated action'. Coming back to Mazrui (2003:147), he argues that "African perspectives, models of communication, structures of stratification, rules of interaction, standards of evaluation, motives of behaviour and patterns of production and consumption have all been undergoing the agonies of change partly under the disturbing impact of western culture". He suggests that if modernity is to be decolonised, it must first be 'domesticated' in order to relate it more firmly to local

cultural and economic needs (Mazrui, 2003:148). By way of illustration, in Chapter 3 above, I show that Japan is a useful example of a non-Western liberal democracy that has successfully imported external Western cultures and indigenised them to suit the needs and aspirations of the Japanese people (Huntington, 1993; Fukuyama, 1992).

My view is that advocacy for the Africanisation of knowledge should be underpinned by important questions regarding the nature, origin and ownership of knowledge. University of Wisconsin-Madison's educational theorist, Michael Apple (2013, 2000) raises critical questions with regard to the nature and ownership of knowledge. He argues that such "questions are intimately related to the issue of the politics of knowledge and the politics of who can legitimately count as knowers" (Apple, 2013:23). Apple (2000:57) opines that quite often, the ideologies that dominate 'official knowledge' tend to represent a considerably more elitist orientation. His view is that we need more sophisticated models of textual analysis, and that our readings of what knowledge is 'in' texts cannot be done by the application of a simple formula. The sophisticated models of textual analysis to which he refers would prompt us to ask important questions such as: What counts as 'official knowledge'? Whose knowledge is it anyway? What ought to be included and/or excluded in children's textbooks? Who should have the moral and intellectual authority over such inclusion and/or exclusion? That is, who stands at the 'centre' of decision-making over what ought to count as 'official knowledge'? And who stands at the periphery? Jansen (2004:112) has been in the forefront of exploring the 'insider-periphery' discourse in South Africa, with particular reference to the notion of 'institutional culture', or "the way we do things around here". He argues that institutional culture has to do:

*"with what collections dominate the library; it has to do with who gets honorary degrees (and who does not)...it has to do with whose language dominates a public meeting or event, and whose is excluded... it has to do with the ways in which women are constructed in social relations on the school grounds or campus...it has to do with who gets called 'Mr' and who, irrespective of age, is simply called 'Klaas'; it has to do with the content of what appears on the emblem of the institution; it has to do with the metaphors for talking about others; and it has to do with the ways in which schools or universities talk about the future".*

Thus, in South Africa and the rest of the African continent where experiences of colonial and imperial domination are well documented (Laumann, 2012; Rodney, 2012; Davidson, 1995, 1994; Pakenham, 1991), advocacy for the Africanisation of

knowledge should be about “privileging of the deliberate and critical engagement with Africa, African histories, African cultures, African countries, African peoples, African promises and African challenges, past and present” (Maluleke, 2011:14). Maluleke (2011:14) defines Africanisation as “a deliberate and conscious attempt to understand and situate one’s epistemology, academic and research agenda and endeavours within an African milieu. It means the deliberate privileging of previously subjugated Africa knowledges, texts, contexts and experiences”. In a fitting tribute to Maluleke’s argument, the cover page of the 2011 winter Issue of *UNISAWISE* in which his article appears carries an artist side impression of the head of an African youth with the map of Africa located inside the youth’s head, with the running title: “Rooted in Africa”. The aim of this particular Issue of *UNISAWISE* is to challenge the taken-for-granted assumptions about ‘worthwhile knowledge’ or ‘official knowledge’ as it pertains to Africa. It articulates the view that “Africanisation is a process of inclusion that stresses the importance of affirming African cultures and identities in a world community” (Makgoba, 1997: 199). Ramoupi (2011:9) proposes an education system with a curriculum and content that has its roots in African knowledge production, and whose foundation of continental knowledge is accepted and embraced before other global knowledge production systems.

In South Africa, the ideological background of scholars who have consistently sought to cast aspersion on African philosophy of education and indigenous African ways of knowing [epistemologies] such as *Ubuntu* and their capacity for cultural, moral, and pedagogical re-imagination have tended to be white, English speaking and of liberal orientation (Horsthemke & Enslin, 2009; Enslin & Horsthemke, 2004; Horsthemke, 2004). Therefore, it is encouraging that amidst these Afro-pessimistic perceptions Waghid (2014a:2) boldly declares his faith and confidence in *Ubuntu*:

*“As a humanistic concept, Ubuntu can engender cooperative and harmonious human relations; as a philosophical concept, Ubuntu can contribute towards cultivating the respect and care that are required to produce a morally worthwhile African society; and as a politico–ideological concept, Ubuntu can engender human interdependence for transformed socio-political action.”*

In my own research I have argued that *Ubuntu* is a normative concept, or a moral theory, and a humane notion (Letseka, 2013a, 2013b, 2000). I have made a case for *Ubuntu*’s educational importance and showed that the DoE (2001) recognises

*Ubuntu's* value in its report, *Manifesto on Values, Education and Democracy*. The report identifies *Ubuntu* (human dignity) as one of the 10 fundamental values in the South African Constitution that pertain to education (Letseka, 2012:56). I have highlighted the fact that “South Africa’s basic educational policy framework not only places a high premium on *Ubuntu*... but that it also requires the schooling system to promote *Ubuntu*-oriented attributes and dispositions among the learners” (Letseka, 2012:47).

In another article I draw on Harvard University’s political philosopher John Rawls’ books, entitled: *A Theory of Justice* (1999) and *Political Liberalism* (1996) respectively, to argue that *Ubuntu* not only embodies the normative principles - values and morals, but that it also implies justice. In traditional African societies, justice is conceived as *Ubuntu* fairness, or “doing what is right and moral” (Letseka, 2014a:549). I emphasise the importance of locating *Ubuntu* justice and fairness at the heart of initiatives to conceive an *Ubuntu*-oriented philosophy of education given that *Ubuntu* is an African worldview that embraces specific communal and normative principles and reveres human life. Mahao (2010: 321) argues that “democratic accountability in African jurisprudence was embedded in the constitutional principle ‘*morena ke morena ka batho*’, translated to mean that the chief is the chief by the grace of the people”. He opines that this principle “speaks to the participatory nature of governance which renders it inherently democratic and accountable to the governed”. Mahao (2010:321) recalls the convictions of Moshoeshe, king of the Basotho, who always emphasised that

*‘Kobo ena ha kea ikapesa, ke e apesitsoe. Ke e apesitsoe ke banna khotla!’* (I did not bestow the crown upon myself. It was bestowed on me by the freewill of men at the *khotla*.)

It is Mahao’s (2010: 322) contention that the principle of ‘*morena ke morena ka batho*’ “implied a different philosophy of leadership, constitutionally formulated by cooperative and shared authority - a leader governed through clusters of institutions tasked with participatory management of public affairs”. He argues that in the context of ‘*morena ke morena ka batho*,’ “leadership was not characterised by a disconnect essentialism; an ‘Ivory tower-ness of the ‘I-know-it-all’ or ‘I-hold-all-the-answers’ variety”. Instead “the legitimacy of all decisions arose from their being firmly based within the

community which co-owned them through active and direct participation in governance” (Mahao, 2010:324-325). It is my considered view that this is the basis for *Ubuntu* as justice and fairness.

To sum up then, in this section I have made a case for an *Ubuntu*-oriented African philosophy of education. I have argued that given that *Ubuntu* morality eschews acts of moral indiscretions, *Ubuntu* can therefore be regarded as a form of moral consciousness in terms of which communal Africans embark on caring, compassionate, hospitable and forgiving engagements to ensure that human interdependency and humane treatment of others prevail. Thus, *Ubuntu* necessarily encourages one to want (even need) to be moral. I argued that invoking an *Ubuntu*-oriented African philosophy of education can be regarded as advocacy for the Africanisation of knowledge, also known as ‘decolonising the mind’ or ‘cultural decolonisation’. Advocacy for Africanisation of knowledge requires the privileging of the deliberate and critical engagement with Africa, African histories, African cultures, African countries, African peoples, African promises and African challenges. It is about challenging the taken-for-granted assumptions and perception of ‘official knowledge’ as it pertains to Africa. I showed that South Africa’s education policies recognise the importance of an *Ubuntu*-oriented African philosophy of education and argued that schools are therefore obligated to promote *Ubuntu* moral values. In the penultimate section below, I explore ways in which a philosophy of education for an African liberal democracy might be conceived. As I alluded to above, given that co-existence between traditional African values and liberal democratic values in South Africa is *fait accompli*, it seems logical that the amalgamation of African traditional education and a liberal education should be prioritised and promoted as the basis for conceiving a philosophy of education for a liberal democratic South Africa.

#### **7.4 A philosophy of education for an African liberal democracy**

In my opening remarks to Chapter 1 above, I argued that post-apartheid South Africa straddles two seemingly conflicting and incompatible ideological positions. On the one hand, South Africa is an African liberal democracy courtesy of its 1996 Constitution which enshrines a wide range of rights and freedoms for the individual and is therefore widely regarded as liberal and egalitarian. On the other hand, the same constitution

recognises the traditional African institutions of politics and governance such as the institution of traditional leadership. In Chapter 6 above, I showed that this recognition of traditional African institutions has been criticised as fundamentally contradictory to the liberal ethos (Beall, 2006; Beall. *et al.*, 2005; Bentley, 2005; Ntsebeza, 2005). I argued though that these criticisms are unfounded given that existence of traditional institutions of governance in a liberal democracy is not peculiar to South Africa. This duality in the socio-political and cultural complexion implies that South Africa is an aspiring liberal democracy that is also heavily steeped in African cultures and traditions. However, I indicated that it is not unusual for South Africa to manifest inclinations to African cultures and traditions given that it is an African country whose population is predominantly black and African. I argued though that notwithstanding South Africa's integration into the global community, the imperative for the country's discourses to be rooted in Africa cannot be sacrificed at the altar of globalisation, internationalisation and/or cosmopolitanism. I showed that historically Japan is a good example of a non-Western liberal democracy that has gone through cycles of 'importation' and 'indigenisation' of external cultures through replication and refinement. As a result, Japan can be said to be in the West in some respects, but clearly not of the West in important dimensions (Huntington, 1993). I indicated that in Japan tradition is not something that is waiting out there, always breathing over one's shoulder and demanding to be conserved. Instead tradition is plucked, recreated and refashioned in order to make it responsive to the needs and aspirations of the Japanese people. Against the backdrop of South Africa's cultural, traditional, and liberal democratic aspirations, in this section I explore ways in which a philosophy of education that amalgamates some assumptions of African traditional education and some assumptions of liberal education might be conceived.

I start by observing that South Africa is first and foremost an African country. As such, any attempts to conceive a philosophy of education should be rooted in the cultures and traditions of the majority of the African peoples. As Okrah (2003:93) rightly counsels, "education in Africa needs examination of African needs in order to fashion the curriculum to meet those needs". While I support Okrah's advice on this critical point my view is that in the current state of the globally networked communities, any conception of a philosophy of education should recognise that South Africa's education should not be regarded as insulated from the imperatives of global networks

and cultural crosspollinations. Failure to recognise this stark reality would only amount to cultural naïveté and parochialism.

There have been numerous attempts by African scholars to articulate an African philosophy of education (Hapanyengwi-Chemhuru & Makuvaza, 2014; Waghid, 2014b, 2014c, 2004; Okrah, 2003; Letseka, 2013a, 2013b, 2000; Mkhabela & Luthuli, 1997). The reasons for this are not hard to find. As Okrah (2003:12) points out, Africa has been colonised by alien forces which have claimed superiority over Africa's cultures, languages and forms of politics at the expense and to the detriment of indigenous cultures, languages and forms of politics. Ditto Wa Thiongo's (1994:100) observation above that due to colonial exploitation and oppression Western cultures have become the centre of Africa's processes of learning, and African cultures have, as a result been relegated to the background. Okrah (2003:12) argues that identification of the demise of African oral literature is imperative because if Africa is to know its own mind and channel its own course, it can only do so through the promotion of its indigenous oral literature and works in African languages.

Other African scholars have explored the notion of African traditional education (Masolo, 2010; Maharasoa., & Maharasoa, 2004; Mapesela, 2004; Adeyemi & Adeyinka, 2003, 2002; Adeyinka & Ndwapi, 2002; Matšela, 1990, 1979). A common thread running through these explorations is recognition of the imperative to ground the learning and development of the African child in the social, cultural, artistic, religious, and recreational life of the child's community; and to equip the child with the competencies that prepare him/her for adult life in his/her specific socio-cultural milieu. In Chapter 5 above, I draw on the work of Matšela (1990, 1979) who argues that Basotho traditional education prepared a Mosotho child for civic responsibility. I show that this was done by initiating the child in Sesotho cultural values, philosophy, personal and family responsibilities, as well as duties to the clan and the people. Similarly, Maharasoa and Maharasoa (2004:108) argue that among the Basotho "preparation for adulthood encompassed marriage counselling, sexuality education, herbology, as well as law and democracy". In the same vein, Mapesela (2004:322) posits that Basotho traditional education sought to "inculcate good ethics, morals and values, such as humaneness (*Ubuntu*), neighbourliness, responsibility and respect for self and others". What can be gleaned from these views is the fact that Basotho

traditional education sought to create citizens that were initiated in the attributes that were deemed necessary for industry, self-reliance and 'good' human conduct. Most initiation processes were grounded in the principles of communal interdependence as captured in the Sesotho expression: *motho ke motho ka batho*, whose Nguni equivalent is *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*.

Western scholars have also written on conceptions of liberal education (Bailey, 2010; Humphreys, 2006; Løvlie. & Standish, 2002; Gutmann, 1999; Levinson, 1999; Callan, 1997; Nussbaum, 1997; White, 1982; Peters, 1966). As Callan (1997:8) points out, "in order to construct an intelligent conception of liberal education...it is necessary to ground philosophical claims about education's ideal aims, distributions of control, and institutional structures within a practical framework of political and educational research". It is Callan's (1997:98) view that a liberal education should focus on "developing children's capacities for choice". By the same token, Levinson (1999:161) argues that an important requirement of liberal education's ideal "is to embed children's rights in an autonomy-promoting education in the constitution". This is because "liberal education is about creating future citizens and individuals" (Levinson, 1999:153).

However, and notwithstanding these useful contributions to liberal education, I have stated my preference for Nussbaum's conception of liberal education for the simple reason that it resonates with the implicit assumptions of *Ubuntu*, understood as 'human interdependence and humanness'. How then, might African traditional education and liberal education be weaved together a view to conceiving a philosophy of education that prepares the kind of citizen that is needed to support a country like South Africa, which is heavily steeped in local cultures and traditions, while also aspiring to be a liberal democracy?

It can be reasonably deduced from the above analysis that there is resonance between liberal education as sketched in section 7.2, and African traditional education as sketched in section 7.3. It would therefore seem prudent to argue that a philosophy of education for an African liberal democracy such as South Africa would need to be based on the amalgamation of some assumptions of liberal education and some assumptions of the African traditional education. Let me briefly elaborate. In section

7.2 above, I demarcated the following as proposed outcomes of a liberal education. It seeks to:

- equip the young people with the competencies necessary for adult life;
- empower the individual with broad knowledge and transferable skills;
- create a critical public culture;
- cultivate social responsibility; and
- essential for responsible democratic citizenship

In the same vein, in section 7.3 I identified the following as characteristic features of an African traditional education. It also seeks to:

- equip the young people with competencies that are necessary for adulthood;
- inculcate good ethics, morals and values, such as humaneness;
- emphasise preparation for overall moral goodness;
- it is communal and agrarian in orientation, and
- it is integrated with the social, cultural, artistic, religious, and recreational life of the ethnic group

Weaving together, on the one hand the above proposed outcomes of liberal education, and on the other hand the above characteristic features of African traditional education are necessary for the purpose of conceiving a philosophy of education that is suitable for a liberal democratic South Africa. The proposed philosophy of education would endeavour to equip the young people with the requisite skills and competencies to live flourishing lives in an African liberal democracy. Such a philosophy of education would seek to cultivate social responsibility and inclinations to desirable ethics, morals and values such as *Ubuntu* or humaneness.

Westheimer and Kahne (2004) offer useful suggestions to the question: What kind of citizen is needed to support a liberal democracy such as South Africa? They identify the following three visions of citizenship, the *personally responsible citizen*; the *participatory citizen*, and the *justice-oriented citizen*. In what ways would each of the three visions of citizenship pertain to an African liberal democracy like South Africa? Firstly, the *personally responsible citizen* acts responsibly in his or her community by, for example, obeying the laws of the country and engaging in volunteer activities to help those less fortunate (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004:241). Westheimer and Kahne (2004:243) argue that “obeying laws that flow from democratic structures such as legislatures is essential”. It is their view that efforts by educators to foster ‘personal responsibility’ in young people can be justified on the grounds that such educators

have the potential “to produce trustworthy, helpful, hard-working, and pleasant students” (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004:244). The ability of a country’s education system to produce ‘trustworthy, helpful, hardworking and pleasant students’ goes a long way towards ensuring that the sort of moral indiscretions about which I have expressed concerns above might not become commonplace. This is because ‘personally responsible citizens’ would not be inclined to engage in such incidents of moral indiscretion.

Secondly, *participatory citizens* are inclined to engage in collective, community-based efforts. Westheimer and Kahne (2004:240) show that *participatory citizens* are active member of community organisations and/or improvement efforts. They organise “community efforts to care for those in need, promote economic development, or clean up environment”. They know how government agencies work and know strategies for accomplishing collective tasks. Westheimer and Kahne’s (2004:240) plea is that “citizens must actively participate and take leadership positions within established systems and community structures”. In my own research, I have identified *letsema* or cooperative community farming among the Basotho people of Lesotho as a typical example of both *participatory citizenship* and *responsible citizenship*.<sup>29</sup> Finally, the *justice-oriented citizens* are responsive to social problems and to structural critique in order to make a difference. Westheimer and Kahne (2004:242) argue that “educational programmes that emphasise social change seek to prepare students to improve society by critically analysing and addressing social issues and injustices”. The purpose of such educational programmes is “to engage students in informed analysis and discussion regarding social, political, and economic structures” with a view to considering “collective strategies for change that challenge injustice and ... address root causes of problems” (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004:243).

To summarise, in this section I have explored ways in which a philosophy of education that weaves some assumptions of African traditional education and some assumptions of liberal education might be conceived. I found potential overlaps between conceptions of liberal education and conceptions of African traditional education. I

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<sup>29</sup> See Letseka, M. 2000. African Philosophy and Educational Discourse. In Philip Higgs., Ntombizolile Vakalisa., Tyobeka Mda., & N’dri Thérèse Assié-Lumumba (eds) *African Voices in Education*, Juta: Cape Town, pp.183-184.

argued that these overlaps constitute plausible grounds for weaving together the two conceptions with a view to mounting a philosophy of education that pertains to a country like South Africa, which is an aspiring liberal democracy that is at the same time heavily steeped in local cultures and traditions. I found synergies between the proposed philosophy of education for an African liberal democracy and Westheimer and Kahne's (2004) proposed three visions of citizenship, namely; the *personally responsible citizen*, the *participatory citizen*, and the *justice-oriented citizen*.

## 7.5 Conclusion

The starting point of this chapter was the need for a philosophy of education for a liberal democracy like South Africa. And second, that such a philosophy of education would need to recognise that South Africa is first and foremost an African country whose population is predominantly black and African. The latter condition requires that such a philosophy of education be rooted in the cultures and traditions of the majority of the African peoples. The reason for this is that as is the case with most African countries except Ethiopia, South Africa has suffered from multiple experiences of colonial and imperial domination, exploitation, oppression and human degradation, first, from the Dutch, then the British, and finally apartheid. Colonialism, imperialism and apartheid each claimed superiority over African cultures, African languages, and African forms of politics and governance, at the expense and to the detriment of indigenous cultures, languages and forms of politics. Therefore, there are compelling reasons for the reclamation of Africa's cultures, African languages, and African forms of politics and governance. I argued that appeal to these indigenous African epistemologies or ways of knowing should be regarded as advocacy for the Africanisation of knowledge, what Wa Thiong'o (1994) calls 'decolonising the mind', while Mazrui (2003) calls it 'cultural decolonisation'.

Given that post-apartheid South Africa has strong liberal aspirations courtesy of the Constitution of 1996, the proposed philosophy of education would need to embrace liberal democratic values. For my purpose in this study I expressed preference for Martha Nussbaum's conception of liberal education. This is because her emphasis on 'cultivating humanity' resonates with the implicit assumptions of *Ubuntu*, understood as 'human interdependence and humanness'. Furthermore, her emphasis on

developing 'narrative imagination' implies developing empathetic dispositions, which require one to be able to blend with the other person's wishes and desires, fears and aspirations. Finally, Nussbaum's emphasis on promotion of 'world citizenship' pertains to South Africa given that since the advent of democracy in 1994, South Africa has been integrated in the global community.

Against the backdrop of post-apartheid South Africa being a liberal democracy that is also heavily steeped in African cultures and traditions, I argued that the need to amalgamate liberal democratic values and traditional African values seems to be *fait accompli*. Concomitantly, this chapter proposed a philosophy of education that amalgamates some assumptions of liberal education and some assumptions of African traditional education. The reason for this is that there seems to be areas of overlap between some outcomes of liberal education and some characteristic features of African traditional education. For instance, both aim to equip the young people with the requisite competencies that are necessary for adult life. Both aim to develop humane attitudes among the young people so that they can live flourishing lives. And both are committed to developing in young people attributes of industry and self-reliance, as well as inculcating responsible citizenship. Thus, the proposed philosophy of education for an African liberal democracy would need to be one that seeks to equip young people with the requisite skills and competencies to live flourishing lives in an African liberal democracy. I posited that in the last instance, the proposed philosophy of education for an African liberal democracy would be one that endeavours to create the *personally responsible citizen*; the *participatory citizen*, and the *justice-oriented citizen*.

## CHAPTER 8

### CONCLUSION

#### 8.1 Introduction

In this final chapter I offer some concluding remarks. What I have attempted to do in this study is to explore conceptions of education for a post-apartheid South Africa that has liberal democratic aspirations whilst it is also heavily steeped in African traditions and cultures. The constitution of South Africa and its associated laws and policies are widely recognised as liberal and egalitarian. And yet sections 211 and 2012 of the same constitution recognise the traditional institutions of politics and governance such as the institution of traditional leadership. By extension, the constitution of South Africa also recognises the practice of customary law. However, I argued that there is nothing unusual in South Africa's inclination towards African traditions and cultures. But that it seems to be *fait accompli* given that the country is first and foremost an African country predominantly populated by the African peoples. In fact it would be unusual were South Africa to be seen to turn its back on the African traditions and cultures while fully embracing and privileging the Western liberal democratic values and forms of governance.

I argued that given that South Africa is an African liberal democracy it is reasonable to expect education policy makers to recognise some elements of liberal education when framing education policies. And yet it is ironic that while South Africa's liberal democratic inclination is widely recognised and spoken about by the elite, there is no commensurate recognition by the ruling tripartite alliance comprising of the ANC, COSATU and the SACP, of the logical connection of the country's socio-political landscape with liberal philosophy or liberal political theory. Similarly, while there is general awareness of the importance of indigenous African epistemologies and other indigenous ways of knowing such as *Ubuntu* to South Africa's socio-political and cultural fabric, these have not been sufficiently built into the school curriculum. Instead *Ubuntu* has been reduced to a hobby word that is widely exploited for commercial and ideological purposes. For instance, "*Ubuntu* School of Philosophy (Pretoria), *Ubuntu*

Security Company (Pietermaritzburg), *Ubuntu* Security alarm systems in Gauteng, *Ubuntu* Education Fund and *Ubuntu* Centre (Port Elizabeth) to computer software, namely the *Ubuntu* Linux computer operating system” (Matolino and Kwindigwi, 2013:200).

And while the official DoE (2001:3) report, *Manifesto on Values, Education and Democracy* recognises *Ubuntu*, which it equates with ‘human dignity’, later DoE reports such as the *Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement* (2011b) for grade R-3, and grades 4-6 life skills, and *Values and Human Rights in the Curriculum* (2005) make no mention of *Ubuntu*. For instance, the *Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement* only refers to “skills and values worth learning in South African schools” (DBE, 2011:4), and “positive attitudes and values” (p.8). One of my cardinal aims in this study was to locate indigenous African epistemologies and other indigenous ways of knowing such as *Ubuntu* at the heart of conceptions of education in South Africa, and therefore at the heart of curriculum as well as of teaching and learning. Otherwise how are educators expected to induct children into *Ubuntu* morality if this expectation is not institutionalised in education policies where it can be monitored and evaluated? This chapter is structured around three sections. In the first section I highlight the main arguments and emergent trends with a view to ascertaining the extent to which the study’s research aims can be said to have been attained. While this study is mainly philosophical and exploratory, in the second section I briefly map out possible ways in which some of the main arguments and emergent trends from the study might be realised in classroom practice through the creative efforts of teachers. In the final section I shall sketch further areas for research arising from the study. I now turn to a brief demarcation of the study’s main arguments and emergent trends.

## **8.2 Key arguments and emergent trends**

In chapter 1 I opened with a sketching of two conflicting and seemingly incompatible ideological positions that I believe shape the South African socio-political landscape. The purpose of this sketching was to highlight the challenges that the ideological positions in question might potentially pose for the direction that the country’s post-apartheid conceptions of education might take. I indicated that on the one hand South

Africa is an aspiring liberal democracy thanks to its constitution of 1996 which enshrines and affirms a wide range of rights and freedoms for the individual (Robinson, 2012; Enslin & Horsthemke, 2004; Deveaux, 2003; Waghid, 2003; Enslin, 1999; Dugard, 1998; Jordan, 1996). On the other hand, I indicated that the same constitution recognises the traditional African institutions of politics and governance in the form of the institution of traditional leadership, and by extension the practice of African customary law (Republic of South Africa, 1996). I suggested that this seeming duality in the country's socio-political landscape suggests that South Africa is an aspiring liberal democracy that is also heavily steeped in African traditions and cultures. I argued though that this is not unusual given that South Africa is an African country whose total population is almost 80% African. It can then be expected that when framing a philosophy of education geared at serving this majority of the African peoples their cultures and traditions will have to take centre stage. By this I mean when conceptualising a philosophy of education that aims at preparing the African children to live flourishing lives in an African context the underlying assumptions, principles and values of such a philosophy of education would have to be 'rooted in Africa'. That is, it must call for "an awareness of the location of the production of knowledge in Africa" (Lenka-Bula, 2011:12).

With the above-mentioned socio-political landscape in mind I stated the study's main research question, which is: "Is the perception that indigenous African values and ideas of politics are incompatible with, and contradictory to liberal democratic values and ideas of politics necessarily valid?" The three sub-research question sought to expand the scope of the main research question in the form of further probes. For instance, (a) what is the basis of the claim that a liberal democratic state that attempts to shape its future political trajectory by amalgamating indigenous African values and liberal democratic values is doomed to fail? (b) Is the amalgamation of indigenous African institutions such as chieftaincy and the monarchy peculiar to South Africa? And (c) what should the philosophy of education or a conception of education that amalgamates indigenous African values and liberal democratic values consist of? In answering these questions my aim was to mount a rebuttal of perceptions that indigenous African values and ideas of politics are incompatible with, or even contradictory to liberal democratic values and ideas of politics. Arising from this rebuttal, my purpose was to propose a conception of education or a philosophy of

education that locates indigenous African epistemologies such as *Ubuntu* at the heart of conceptions of education in general, and education for citizenship in South Africa in particular.

A question that might arise would be why is this necessary? The simple answer to this question is that South Africa, like the rest of the African continent, except Ethiopia, has suffered from multiple experiences of colonial and imperial domination, exploitation, oppression and human degradation. First, South Africa was occupied by the Dutch under Jan van Riebeeck in 1652. Following the defeat of the Boers during the Anglo-Boer war in 1902 South Africa was then occupied by the British under Lord Alfred Milner. Finally, South Africa fell under apartheid in 1948 when the Nationalist Party under DF Malan won the whites' only election. I argued that colonialism, imperialism and apartheid all claimed superiority over African cultures, African languages, and African forms of politics and governance. I cited Wa Thiongo (1992:100) who argues that Africa was taught to look on Europe as her teacher and the centre of man's civilisation, and to see herself as the pupil. As a result Western culture became the centre of Africa's process of learning, and African cultures and epistemologies were relegated to the periphery. Western culture, especially Western forms of knowing became what Apple (2000:57) calls 'official knowledge'.

In chapter 2 I provided a review of the literature from which I drew to advance and support my central arguments in the study. I opened up by making a case for a detailed, rigorous and critical review of literature, showing why this sort of review of literature is important for a doctoral research. The review spanned the fields of philosophy of education, political philosophy, and African philosophy, with an emphasis on *Ubuntu*. In chapter 3 I sketched the research methodology by which this study was conducted. I stated that this was a philosophic study that was conducted through a philosophic inquiry, understood as a paradigm that has its origins in philosophical pragmatism. Against this backdrop of the above statement I differentiated between 'methodology-as-philosophy' and 'methodology-as-technique'. I argued that while 'methodology-as-technique' tends to portray research as the deployment of particular methods or procedures that are presumed to be scientific, and therefore capable of yielding verifiable, and therefore objective knowledge, 'methodology-as-philosophy' recognises that educational research will always be framed

in terms of certain values. It raises fundamental questions about the very pursuit of social and educational research, and challenges the process, the goal of knowledge, the ideal of truth, and the possibility of objectivity (Hammersley, 2006:274).

In chapter 4 I explored the contestations around the place and value of liberal democracy to Africa in general (Ake, 1993), and to South Africa in particular (Biko, 2005; 1972; Makgoba, 1998; Gilliomee, 1995). For instance, I teased out Ake's (1993:243) argument that the familiar assumptions and political arrangements of liberal democracy make little sense in Africa because liberal democracy assumes individualism, and there is little individualism in Africa. Numerous African scholars have written extensively on communality and communal interdependence in traditional African communities (Chichane, 2008; Letseka, 2000; Gyekye, 1997, 1992; Michel, 1997; Shutte, 1994; Teffo, 1994; Mbiti, 1989). It is often wrongly assumed, as Ake (1993) does, that traditional African communality and interdependence preclude individuality. But this is a mistaken assumption. As Wiredu (1996:72) points out, the distinction between communalism and individualism is simply a matter of degree. A considerable value may be attached to communality in individualistic societies, just as individuality is not necessarily trivialised within communalism. Similarly Gyekye (1997:45) posits that "the common good, properly understood, is not reducible to an artificial combination of individual interests or preferences. The common good literally and seriously means a good that is common to individual human beings – at least those embraced within a community, a good that can be said to be commonly, universally, shared by all human individuals". From a deeper philosophical lens Taylor (1991:161) reminds us that it is possible to have communitarian or holist ontology and to still value liberalism's individual rights. By this he means that one can subscribe to communitarianism at the analytical level and still advocate liberal goods such as rights and freedom at the ontological level.

One of the points I made is that liberal democracy can no longer be regarded as a monopoly of the West. As Ware (1992:140) notes, the exporting of liberal democracy to ex-colonies or to regimes that were conquered militarily, but that had no previous history of liberal democracy has exponentially transformed liberal democracy. I showed that historically, as a non-western liberal democracy Japan has gone through 'cycles of importation of external cultures' and 'indigenisation' of those cultures through

replication and refinement (Huntington, 1996:94). As a result, while Japan is known for its strong traditional inclinations, tradition in Japan is not something waiting out there over one's shoulder. Instead it is plucked, recreated and reshaped in order to be responsive to the needs and aspirations of the people at any given historical moment (Gusfield, 1967: 358).

For Lumumba-Kasongo (2005:7), the struggles outside the West have shaped liberal democracy's content and contributed to its redefinition. As a result there are now quite distinct types of liberal democracy (Ware, 1992:137). Lumumba-Kasongo (2005:13) is convinced that liberal democracy pertains to Africa. He argues that a critical knowledge of liberal democracy and its processes can benefit the African peoples in their quest to invent a developmental democracy and new democratic state's paradigms that are essential for progressive social change. South Africa's constitution of 1996 is a good example of a non-Western country that attempts to appropriate liberal philosophy and liberal political theory with a view to refashioning their underlying assumptions and values and to make them responsive to local socio-political and cultural imperatives.

Against the backdrop of the above analysis I argued that there was probably nothing fundamentally untoward in Biko's (2005:22) scathing attack on South Africa's white liberals. Biko's attack should be viewed within the context of the historical moment and political struggles of the BCM, which he led during the era of apartheid's oppressive laws and policies in the 1970s, and which eventually claimed his life at a tender age of 30 in police custody. Biko (2005:22) argued that South Africa's white liberals claimed a monopoly on intelligence and moral judgment. They wanted to set the pattern and pace for the realisation of the black man's aspirations. They sought to remain in good books in both the black and white worlds while they skilfully extracted what suits them from the exclusive pool of white privilege. Similarly Makgoba's (1998:278) charge that South Africa's white liberals did not fight to remove the subtle version of apartheid, which was part of their life, their socialisation, their culture, and history given that racism was linked to white privilege, seems valid and safe to say that it pertains to the specific historical moment and political era. The point I sought to make is that the contestations around liberalism in South Africa should be seen as part

and parcel of attempts to pluck, create and shape the liberal ideas, and to reframe them to suite the liberation struggle imperatives.

I debated Gilliomée's (1995:84) view that South Africa does not represent enough of a common society to provide a sufficiently stable base for a well-functioning liberal democracy because it lacks the social requisites associated with the consolidation of liberal democracies. I argued that this sort of argument is inconsistent with current trends in social theory and political practice, trends which are marked by a history of liberalism that is in a constant state of reinvention (Bell, 2014:705). I offered a rebuttal of the view that coexistence between liberal democracy and the traditional African institutions of politics and governance is both incompatible and contradictory (Beall, 2006; Beall., Mkhize., & Vawda, 2005; Bentley, 2005; Ntsebeza, 2005). I premised my rebuttal on the assumption that coexistence between liberal democracy and traditional institutions of politics and governance is not peculiar to South Africa. I showed that liberal democracies such as Japan, the UK, Belgium, The Netherlands and Spain have had monarchies from time immemorial. However, their monarchies have never been incompatible with, or contradictory to liberal democracy. Instead, as in the case of the UK, the Queen is a constitutional monarch with vested powers and authority to invite the potential prime minister to Buckingham Palace to ask him/her to form government. I posited that historically the exportation of liberal democracy to regimes that had no previous history of liberal democracy has so transformed liberal democracy (Ware, 1992) that liberal democracy can no longer be said to be the monopoly of Western society. The struggles outside the West have shaped liberalism's content and contributed to its redefinition (Lumumba-Kasongo, 2005).

One of my major aims in this study was to argue for the reclamation of indigenous African epistemologies or ways of knowing such as *Ubuntu* not only in mainstream philosophical parlance, but also in the way we educate the young people. This reclamation, also known as the 'Africanisation of knowledge' is necessary given that historically the African continent in general, with the exception of Ethiopia, has suffered from prolonged colonial and imperial domination, exploitation, degradation, oppression and dehumanisation. Colonial and imperial domination and oppression claimed superiority by colonisers over the African peoples, African cultures, African languages, and African forms of politics and governance, at the expense and to the

detriment of indigenous African cultures, languages and forms of politics. I cited Ngugi Wa Thiongo (1994) who argues for 'decolonisation of the mind' as a form of Africanising knowledge; Ali Mazrui (2003) who calls for 'cultural decolonisation', and Smith (2008) who advocates the debunking of 'imperial cultural worldviews. For instance, Wa Thiongo (1994) reminds us that Africa was taught to look on Europe as her teacher and the centre of man's civilisation, and herself as the pupil. As a consequence Western cultures became the centre of Africa's process of learning, and African cultures were relegated to periphery. Writing about the colonial experiences of the Maori people of New Zealand, Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2008: 56) warns against research that is conducted through 'imperial eyes'. She argues a case for research that has the potential to "deliver social change for people who were oppressed" (Smith, 2008:165). Writing with reference to South Africa, Swana (2015) argues that white people want blacks to believe that they [whites] are the parents of scholarship, and that Western epistemology entered African minds that were *tabula rasa*, or blank slates.

Of course the view that Western epistemology entered African minds that were blank slates is a myth that needs to be debunked once and for all for its complete lack of substance. For instance, in a useful paper on whether philosophy originated from Greece Letseka (2014:1305) offers a powerful rebuttal. She contends that philosophy flourished in Egypt from about 3400BC to 343BC and in Kush (also known as Nubia or Ethiopia by the Greeks) from about 1000BC to 625BC. She argues that ideas about world views (metaphysics), knowledge views (epistemology), and value views (axiology), were fully developed by African ancestors long before Greek civilisation became prominent. Letseka (2014:1305) notes that Greek philosopher Plato visited the ancient Kemetic civilization of Egypt around 390BC as part of the collegial tradition which required scholars to visit places of particular reputation to learn from the experts, and forge collaborative partnerships in areas of mutual research interest. Kenyan philosopher Odera Oruka's (1990:44) research on Sage-Philosophy in his country showed among others that the old sages, who had no prior experience of formal Western education were surprisingly rigorous, dialectical and deeply philosophical in their engagements with local socio-political and cultural matters. Thus central to appeals for the 'Africanisation of knowledge' is the imperative to 'decolonise' the

African minds from the inherited colonial education systems and the consciousness such education systems inculcated in the minds of the African peoples.

In chapter 5 I explored the indigenous African epistemologies with a focus of *Ubuntu*. I sketched the criticisms of *Ubuntu* by Enslin & Horsthemke (2004), English liberal scholars who doubt the viability of *Ubuntu* as a model for conceptions of education and democracy in South Africa. I argued that at the heart of *Ubuntu* is respect for human life and dignity. By this I meant that *Ubuntu* accords all human beings a moral status. This suggests that *Ubuntu* has the potential to foster a shared moral discourse, which Morrow (2007:142) lamented was missing in South Africa as a result of the ravages of apartheid. I argued that the struggle for *Ubuntu* can therefore be regarded as the struggle for people trying to come to terms with the brutality and desperateness of a society that has been deeply ruptured by its legacy of segregation and racial discrimination. I made a case for *Ubuntu's* centrality to South Africa's imperatives for political power and democracy. I argued that *Ubuntu* has the potential to contribute to the development of an ethical disposition that might enable South Africans to reach out beyond narrow racial and ethnic identities. As such *Ubuntu* has the potential to frame a communally based conception of justice in traditional African societies.

I drew on the work of Nigerian political economist Claude Ake (1993) to argue that African democracy needs to be recreated in the context of the realities in political arrangements of the African cultural context. It is Ake's (1993:244) considered view that a unique African democracy must be shaped by the singular reality that the constituency whose democratic participation is crucial comprises ordinary peoples, the majority of whom are illiterate, poor, rural dwellers in an essentially pre-industrial and communal society. For Ake, this communality defines the people's perceptions of self-interest, their freedom and their place in the social whole. Drawing on the work of Kwame Anthony Appiah (1997) I acknowledged that Africa is an enormous continent with enormous diversity of cultures. Appiah (1997:47) argues that the central cultural fact of Africa's life remains not the sameness of cultures, but their enormous diversity. In his seminal book, *In my Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture*, Appiah (1992:26) argues that Africans do not have a common traditional culture, a common language, a common religious or conceptual vocabulary. They do not even belong to a common race. But despite this range of differences, an underlying unity and

continuity ties the diversity of the African peoples. I sketched the Basotho indigenous education, which I argued aimed to create citizens who are initiated in the sort of personhood that was deemed to be essential for 'good' human conduct among the Basotho people. However, and given the above-mentioned diversity I caution that a particular peoples' indigenous education, for instance, the Basotho's, cannot be generalised and presumed to be representative of all the African peoples and their cultures. I contended though that invoking *Ubuntu*, especially in debates on education and democracy in South Africa points to *Ubuntu's* embeddedness in conceptions of education and democracy in Africa's indigenous social and cultural contexts.

I showed that *Ubuntu* is already built into South Africa's education policy reports such as the DoE's (2001) *Manifesto on Values, Education and Democracy*, which describes it as 'human dignity' and one of the fundamental values that ought to be promoted by the country's public schooling system. In the same vein, the *White Paper on Education and Training* makes it mandatory for the public education system to promote the development of independent and critical thought, the capacity to question, reason, weigh evidence and form judgements. But as mention in the introduction above later DoE reports such as the *Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement* (2011b), and grades 4-6 life skills, and *Values and Human Rights in the Curriculum* (2005) hardly mention *Ubuntu*, which begs the question whether the DoE no longer recognises *Ubuntu* as an important normative value that needs to be developed among the young people in these critical stages of their growth and development? This study sought to address that lacuna. Its stance is that because *Ubuntu* morality eschews any acts of moral indiscretion, *Ubuntu* is therefore a form of moral consciousness that has the potential to ensure that caring, compassionate, hospitable, forgiving engagements, human interdependency and humane treatment of others can prevail in African communities.

In chapter 6 I ventured into the thrust of the study, namely, the potential for amalgamation of traditional African values and liberal democratic values in South Africa. This exploration was premised on the assumption that the proposed amalgamation can be said to be *fait accompli* given that while the constitution of South Africa is liberal in that it enshrines a wide range of rights and freedoms for the individual, the same constitution also recognises the institution of traditional

leadership. I argued that this implies that South Africa is an aspiring liberal democracy that is also heavily steeped in local traditions and cultures. I unpacked these cleavages arising from South Africa's inclination to both traditional and perceived modern political and cultural institutions. Other scholars argue that this seeming duality between traditional institutions of politics and governance and liberal democratic values is incompatible with, and contradictory to liberal democratic values and principles (Bentley, 2005; Beall, 2006; Beall, *et al*, 2005; Ntsebeza, 2005). I countered and argued that this claim of incompatibility and contradiction is in fact a philosophical fallacy. The basis for my counter argument is that no human culture is absolutely unchanging, totally refusing to take advantage of possible benefits that often accompany encounters with other cultures (Gyekye, 1997). I pointed out that a traditional culture might possess values that are congruent with the central features of liberalism the same way that liberalism might also contain elements that are clearly traditional and inherited from past generations. I argued that post-apartheid South Africa has the opportunity to harness both traditional institutions of politics and governance and liberal democratic values in order to fashion a new socio-political order that is responsive to the country's contemporary socio-political and cultural challenges and imperatives.

I challenged the claims that traditional African societies and their cultures were authoritarian. I argued that those who make such claims neither substantiate them nor mount compelling theorisation of the notions of 'cultures' and 'authoritarianism'. I offered a theorisation of the notion of culture (s) and underscored that often cultures are contradictory, loosely integrated, contested, subject to constant change, and therefore weakly bounded. With respect to the notion of 'authoritarianism' I focused on authoritarian regimes for a clearer illustration. I argued that governance in authoritarian regimes is centralised, and that authoritarian regimes forcibly prevent political expression through interventionist policies. They use repressive means when other methods of co-optation and control fail. I disputed the presumption that the above described form of social ordering can be said to pertain to traditional African societies and their cultures given that the literature shows that there was differing degree of representation in decision-making and governance in some traditional African societies, and that some of these societies were characterised by deliberation and collective decision-making. I unpacked the notion of representation and argued that it

is paradoxical in that it implies that something must be absent in order to be 're-presented'.

Chapter 7 proposes a philosophy of education for South Africa, which amalgamates liberal democratic values and traditional African values. While there are various conceptions of liberal education that have been articulated by liberal philosophers of education, for my purpose in this study I opted for Martha Nussbaum's notion of liberal education. Nussbaum's emphasis on 'cultivating humanity' and developing 'narrative imagination' resonates with *Ubuntu*, understood as 'human interdependence and humanness'. I argued that 'cultivating humanity' resonates with the values that are implicit in the constitution of South Africa, values such as individual rights, freedom, human dignity, respect for persons, and non-discrimination. For instance, Nussbaum associates the cultivation of humanity with the ability to think what it might be like to be in the shoes of someone different from oneself, and to behave and act with a deep sense of *empathy* and consideration towards others. Another quality that stands out from Nussbaum's conception of liberal education is 'narrative imagination'. Nussbaum (1998:44) argues that development of 'narrative imagination' aims at instilling in young people the ability to think what it would be like to be in the shoes of someone different from oneself. This way development of 'narrative imagination' can be regarded as the pursuit of 'imaginative sympathy'. It follows therefore that 'narrative imagination' is essential preparation for moral interaction in that it has the potential to cultivate a sympathetic responsiveness to others' needs.

Waghid and Smeyers (2012:20) point out that *Ubuntu* is a persuasive approach in that it is a particular ethic of care that relies on *empathy* and relational autonomy. In a separate paper Waghid (2014a:2) describes *Ubuntu* as a humanistic concept; a philosophical concept, and a politico-ideological concept. He argues that as a humanistic concept *Ubuntu* can engender cooperative and harmonious human relations; as a philosophical concept, *Ubuntu* can contribute towards cultivating the respect and care that are required to produce a morally worthwhile African society, and as a politico-ideological concept, *Ubuntu* can engender human interdependence for transformed socio-political action. I argued a case for resonance and convergence between Nussbaum's emphasis on 'cultivating humanity' and developing 'narrative imagination' above, and the notion of *Ubuntu*, understood as a humanistic concept

(Waghid, 2014a); as a moral theory (Teffo, 1994); as a theory of right action' (Metz & Gaie, 2010; Metz, 2007), as a notion of African jurisprudence (Mahao, 2010), and as a conception of African communal justice (Letseka, 2014a; Keevy, 2008).

Against the backdrop of the above sketching of resonance and convergence between liberal education and some aspects of *Ubuntu* what I attempted to do in this study was to propose a philosophy of education that amalgamates some assumptions of liberal education and some assumptions of African traditional education, especially the latter's emphasis on *Ubuntu* moral dispositions. While African traditional education can potentially inculcate in young people good ethics, morals and values such as humaneness (*Ubuntu*), neighbourliness, responsibility and respect for self and others, a thoroughly thought through liberal education has the potential to create the kind of citizenship needed to support a fledgling liberal democracy such as South Africa. Amalgamating the two would be a useful strategy for creating citizens that are immersed in *Ubuntu*-oriented liberal democratic values and principles. In the final section below I propose possible practical approaches by which the above values and principle might be taught in class.

### 8.3 Proposals for classroom practice

Notwithstanding that this study is mainly philosophical and exploratory a question that might be asked would be, how might the proposed philosophy of education that amalgamates some underlying assumptions of liberal education and some underlying assumptions of indigenous African epistemologies be realised in South African schools? I am mindful of the fact that the mere mention of generalised 'South African schools' might raise eyebrows given that South African schools are so vastly differentiated along the diverse quintiles in which they might be located.<sup>30</sup> However, and having said that, it is my considered view that such differentiation should not preclude proposals being made on how the proposed philosophy of education might be attained through pedagogical practices. To that end any proposals for pedagogical practices I make in this section should not be taken to presume that all schools are the

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<sup>30</sup> See DoE. 2004. *National Norms and Standards for School Funding*. Pretoria: Government Printer.

same. However, there is an expectation that in general teachers can adapt some of the proposals in line with their respective contexts and still deliver desired outcomes relative to their respective contexts.

The pedagogical practices I shall propose (a) storytelling, (b) philosophy for children (P4) and (c) the teaching of history. It is my contention that the three have the potential to attain the sort of capabilities associated with Nussbaum's focus on 'cultivating humanity' and developing 'narrative imagination'. It is Nussbaum's (1997:88) contention that storytelling enables children to acquire the essential moral capacities. With respect to the teaching of history, Amy Gutmann (1999:63) proposes that it should not be just a series of elections, laws, treaties, and battles, but lessons in the practice...of political virtue, lessons that require students to develop and to exercise intellectually disciplined judgment. It is Gutmann's (1999:310) considered view that mutual respect can be cultivated by teaching history and politics "to introduce students to paradigmatic examples of citizens reaching beyond national boundaries in recognition of the equal rights of all people". What I attempt to do here is merely to flag some of the pedagogical approaches school teachers across the spectrum might want to adopt from time to time and in their day to day mediation of classroom teaching. Nussbaum is convinced that narrative arts have the power to make us see the lives of others with more involvement and sympathetic understanding. However, and given the concern that many South African teachers have poor basic levels of content knowledge and that a high proportion of them is unable to answer questions aimed at their pupils (Spaul, 2013:5), realistically therefore, school teachers can only do what is feasible given their specific circumstance.

### **8. 3.1 Story telling**

Cavarero (2000:3) describes storytelling as narration. She argues that "narration ...is a delicate art – narration reveals the meaning without committing the error of defining it". Cavarero goes further to state that "narration reveals the finite in its fragile uniqueness, and sings its glory". In the same vein Scheub (1996: xv) posits that storytellers "fuse idea and emotion into story, and in that interchange audience

members are wedded to the past, as a significant exchange occurs: the past influences and shapes the experience of the present, at the same time that the experience of the present determines what of the past is useful and meaningful today". Among the Basotho storytelling or narration is known as *ditšomo* or *dipale* - folktales. Storytelling is a craft that is generally presumed to be mastered by the elders, especially the great-grand mothers. Letseka (2014b:353) surmises that this is because "grandparents were guardians of language and the keepers of culture". Traditionally therefore the *ditšomo* or *dipale* were part of the oral tradition in which stories are orally passed from one generation to the other by the elders, and became part of the community's tradition. Kock (1997:355) notes that in Sesotho culture the *ditšomo* or *dipale* were a pre-Christian philosophy of life that articulated *righteousness* and *empathy*. Coplan (1993:92) argues that the *ditšomo* serve as a form of schools for the teaching of literature and history. Their aim is to expose a Mosotho child to "the principles and contradictions of social philosophy and social behaviour". Coplan points out that like auriterary metaphors, most traditional Sesotho *ditšomo* or *dipale* are full of surprises and attacks ranging from the uncanny to the fantastical, with mythical creatures, wild animals, and even wilder humans pursuing improbable stratagems. And yet at the heart of Sesotho *ditšomo* or *dipale* are home truths about the nature of humanity and society. It is no wonder that the *ditšomo* or *dipale* are so crucial to Basotho social philosophy.

*The story of moshanyana' Sankatana and Khodumodumo among the Basotho*

One of the most popular Sesotho folktales is the story of *moshanyana'* [boy] *Sankatana* and *Khodumodumo*. *Sankatana* represents the liberator, while *Khodumodumo* symbolises a monster that takes the black peoples into captivity and bondage. *Khodumodumo* appears and in its wake consumes the entire Basotho nation except one pregnant woman who escapes by smearing her body with ashes and cow dung as a form of camouflage instead of ochre, which *Khodumodumo* associates with humans. *Khodumodumo* mistakes her for a soil-encrusted stone and spares her. As *Khodumodumo* departs in its search for more humans it gets stuck at the mountain pass and cannot cross to the other side. Meanwhile the woman who survived gives birth to a boy who miraculously grows into a young man, fully dressed in a blanket, and armed with a spear and shield, and identifies himself as *Sankatana* (the ragged-

one) (Coplan, 1993). *Sankatana* battles *Khodumodumo* with his spear, kills it and frees the people. Coplan (1993:93) contends that the story of *Khodumodumo* (culture villain) and *Sankatana* (culture hero) plays around with a series of culturally sentient metaphoric tropes, bringing them into a metonymic relationship and creating a dialogue between social ideology and practice. Centrally, as a *tšomo* the story of *Sankatana* conveys the message of a hero figure who defeats the villain – *Khodumodumo*, and frees the people from political captivity and cultural bondage. Coplan (1993:92) suggests that “*Kholumolumo* embodies the white South African state, enveloping the black multitudes in bondage, while *Senkatana* represents their young liberator”. Another interpretation of is that “In this future southern Africa, *Khodumodumo* could be the symbol of the 'apartheid' dispensation, while *Sankatana*, as redeemer, could be the symbol representing a President Mandela figure” (Kock, 1997:355). And so while in Sesotho myths and legendaries the story of *Sankatana* is told as *ditšomo* or folk tale, pedagogically it also serves a critical historical purpose by getting children to link it to, and reflect on our contemporary historical setting.

### **8.3.2 Philosophy for children (P4C)**

Philosophy for children, otherwise simply referred to by the acronym P4C has become the subject of interest for philosophers of education in Southern Africa (Letseka, 2014, 2013, 2012; Ndofirepi, & Shumba, 2012; Ndofirepi, 2012, 2011), in the United Kingdom (White, 2011; Trickey and Topping, 2004; Murriss, 2000); in Australia (Bleazby, 2011); in Canada (Daniel and Auriac, 2011; Daniel, 1999), and in the US (Lipman and Sharp, 1978). P4C was developed by Matthew Lipman in the 1960s, and developed further collaboration with Anne Sharp in the 1970s. Lipman grappled with very important question whether children can be taught reasoning. Lipman (1976:17) was intrigued by the idea of storytelling of how children’s thought processes work. His put across his idea in a fascinating metaphor as “to instruct the child in the hygiene of thinking (Lipman, 1976:18), implying that ‘good thinking is hygienic; and bad thinking is unhygienic’. Lipman and Sharp (1978:85) opined that the idea of teaching philosophy to children was handicapped by a number of presuppositions including the view that the difficulties in presenting philosophy to young people lay in the inherent complexity of the subject, and the abstractness which made it dreary and forbidding for children. This led to the assumption that teaching philosophy should only centrate on providing

enrichment to brighter students in secondary school years. Lipman & Sharp (1978:85) contend that “traditional reluctance to discuss matters philosophical with children is the product of ...reliance upon an archaic theory of education”.

Lipman (1976:28) was convinced that there is a way to get children to think philosophically. He argued that teachers must do more than merely titillate children’s interest. He suggested that they need to construct instructional materials and instruments that contain intellectual shock and surprise, and ignite their curiosity. Lipman (1976:28) argued that “a curious child is like a coiled spring in that he contains his own energy, his own dynamism, his own way of opening or unfolding. But one must find the proper trigger mechanism to release that energy”. Linking P4C with storytelling above Lipman (1976:27) argues that “using the techniques of children’s storytelling, it should be possible to relate idealised instances of cooperative, participatory discovery, not only of the principles of logic, but of ideas in a wide variety of philosophical domains”. Lipman suggests that the stories “should serve as springboards for intellectual discussions, and that these discussions should serve to promote heightened awareness of the understanding of the world these children inhabit, as well as their own identities in that world”.

Letseka (2014b: 353) expounds on how the use of stories from Southern Africa can potentially enhance prospects for P4C. She draws on the work of South Africa’s Award-winning storyteller Gcina Mhlophe whose stories appropriate the local South African context in multiple personifications of animals such as the Leopard, the Giraffe, and the Zebra. A good example is *Fudukazi’s Magic* (Mhlophe, 2009). This is a children’s storybook for primary school children in Grades 2, 3, and 4. It tells the story of the wise old Tortoise called Fudukazi “who uses her imagination and magic to decorate the world colourfully” to bring happiness among some of the depressed and unhappy animals. The story is that in the beginning, today’s most colourful animals - the Leopard, the Giraffe, and the Zebra wore coats that were dull and uninspiring. As they each agonised about how dull and uninspiring they were, Fudukazi arrived, asked each of the animals in turn to close their, wove her magic, and when they each opened their eyes they wore the beautiful and colourful coats with which they are today associated. Letseka (2014b: 354) points out that the *ditšomo* or *dipale* – folktales, “touch on acts of kindness, which revolve around the area of moral literacy”.

*Fudukazi's Magic* is about how old Tortoise Fudukazi takes away the misery of the Leopard, the Giraffe, and the Zebra's feeling of dullness and replaces it with a sense of goodwill and wellness.

### **8.3.3 The teaching of history**

The teaching of history has become synonymous with memorisation of perceived historical 'facts' such as events [e.g. the Second World War, the Battle of Isandlwana, the Battle of Berea], names of prominent people in history [e.g. Adolf Hitler, Cetshwayo, Moshoeshe], dates and places of historical significance [e.g. Isandlwana, Thaba Bosiu]. To add to this unsophisticated approach most prescribed history textbook, for instance, Blake and Haliburton's *From Stone Age to Space Age* treats the history of the black peoples as a peripheral issue under the umbrella of a Eurocentric interpretation. This approach not only treats the teaching of history as "preordained or as following an uncomplicated path that is inevitable" (Waring, 2010:283), but it also presumes "there are simple, monocausal explanations for why and how history happens" (Waring, 2010:287). In *What is History?* Edward Hallett Carr (2008) eloquently counsels that history consists essentially in seeing the past through the eyes of the present, in the light of its problem, and that the main work of the historian is not to record, but to evaluate; for, if he does not evaluate, how can he know what is worth recording? In this subsection I want to propose the teaching of history through 'chronology' and 'causation'.

Waring (2010:284) argues that "chronology and causation are integral and intertwined elements in enabling students to organize their historical thinking and construct plausible historical narratives". The teaching of history should therefore offer students "multiple opportunities to construct historical narratives to gain a better understanding of historical causality and how the narratives that they consume have been constructed" (Waring, 2010:286). Considering, and making chronology and causation integral to the teaching of history can, to invoke the title of Waring's paper, help students 'escape historical myopia'.

Using chronology and causation can potentially enable the students to understand, for instance, the battles between the Basotho and the British, or between the Basotho

and the Boers. A detailed chronology of the arrival of the British settlers in South Africa or the Boer Trekkers from the Cape becomes a useful history exercise in that it can show the students that the arrival of the white settler communities posed a threat to Basotho's arable and pasture lands. Land was important to the Basotho as a means of production or a means of livelihood. The Basotho were subsistence farmers who also practised animal husbandry. Their need of the land was therefore manifold. They depended on the land to farm agricultural produce and staple foods such as maize, sorghum and wheat. At the same time, and given that the Basotho herded animals such as cattle, horses, donkeys, goats and sheep they needed the land for pastures. Rosenberg and Weisfelder (2013:27) remind us that "during the pre-colonial period the Basotho maintained a mixed economy that was based on the cultivation of sorghum and the herding of cattle". In their account of the *Boer wars* Knight and Embleton (1996:13) note that as a result of the Boer Trek the area north of the Orange River "gradually filled up with Boer farmers looking for land". Similarly Rosenberg & Weisfelder (2013:5) observe that the Basotho "encounters with the British and Boer intruders meant that the greater portion of the fertile land of Moshoeshoe's domain was lost to white farmers, leaving the Basotho to eke out a living in the rugged remnants".

## **8.4 Areas for further research**

While this study has established the potential for the amalgamation of liberal democratic values and traditional African values, with particular emphasis on *Ubuntu*, and implications of this amalgamation to conceptions of education in South Africa, some important and related areas of research were not touched on or covered. In this section I demarcate and highlight these areas.

### *8.4.1 The integration of Ubuntu in the school curriculum*

This study established that while *Ubuntu* was prominent in the official Department of Education's (2001:3) report, *Manifesto on Values, Education and Democracy* recognises *Ubuntu*, which it equates with 'human dignity', the most recent education policy documents have abandoned any mention of *Ubuntu*. The extent to which

*Ubuntu* can be turned into a policy and implementation imperative is an area that shall be pursued post this study.

#### *8.4.2 Liberal philosophy as integral to the country's constitution*

The study recognised that the constitution of South Africa enshrines a wide variety of rights and freedoms for the individual, which makes South Africa an aspiring African liberal democracy. However, the ruling tripartite alliance still holds on to the ideology of Marxism-Leninism and the ideal of 'national democratic revolution'. This seeming ideological contradiction was only barely touched upon in section 4.4 of the thesis, and shall be explored in more detail as a further spin-off from the thesis.

#### *8.4.3 The place of traditional African institutions in a liberal democracy*

Are traditional African institutions of governance and politics incompatible with liberalism, and by extension, liberal democratic values? An argument that this study considered, but rebutted was that a seeming marriage between the two is both incompatible and contradictory. Drawing on the literature I showed that worldwide there are liberal democracies that have had monarchies from time immemorial and continue to have close working relations with their monarchies. A question that warrants further research is, why do contradictions and incompatibilities only seem to apply to South Africa?

#### *8.4.4 The nexus between Ubuntu and Open Distance Learning*

As a scholar and researcher of *Ubuntu* and open and distance learning (ODL) it is evident that there is a disjuncture between talking and writing about *Ubuntu* values and principles, and actualising the same values and principles. The extent to which *Ubuntu* can be broadly integrated in the development of teaching material and in the institution's pedagogical principles and practices is matter for further research.

## 8.5 Conclusion

What I have attempted to do in this chapter is thread together the study's main arguments and emergent trends. I briefly sketched the main arguments in each of the foregoing chapters and illustrated how each of the chapters is an integral part of the case that the study as a whole attempted to make. That case is as follows: South Africa is an aspiring 'liberal democratic state' that is also heavily steeped in African traditions and cultures. And while other scholars have tried to portray the relationship between liberal democratic values and traditional African values as incompatible and fundamentally contradictory, this study offered a rebuttal of that portrayal. Drawing on the literature the study showed that having traditional institutions of culture, politics and governance in a liberal democracy is not peculiar to Africa or the African peoples. Instead it is a global phenomenon that can be found in liberal democracies such as Japan, the UK, Belgium, The Netherlands, and Spain, which have monarchies. I showed that existence of traditional institutions such the monarchy, does not inhibit the practice and flourishing of 'democracy' or 'liberal democratic values and principles. I argued that due to the evolution, importation and indigenisation of liberal democracy by non-western democratic nation states, it can no longer be the case that liberal democracy is the monopoly of the west.

Against the backdrop of the above new and different take on liberal democracy, I proposed that a country like South Africa has the opportunity to conceive a new philosophy of education that amalgamates liberal democratic values and traditional African values. I argued that such a conception of education would encompass aspects of liberalism such as 'cultivating humanity' and a traditional African worldview such as *Ubuntu*, which is normative and *humane*. I proposed that such a philosophy of education might be attained through storytelling and the teaching of history. Storytelling engenders a better understanding of the past better, and prepares the students to comprehend how the past influences and shapes the experience of the present. The teaching of history through chronology and causation can potentially enable the students to organise their historical thought processes and construct narratives that position them to gain a better understanding of historical events.

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**THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF  
HUMANITIES & SOCIAL STUDIES**

***Ubuntu, Jen, Bildung: A South, East, Continental nexus***

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**ABSTRACT**

This paper makes a case for potential connections or nexus between *Ubuntu* in Southern Africa, *Jen* in Confucian philosophy and *Bildung* in German languages and philosophies. The paper argues that while the origins of the three moral concepts are in disparate continents, they are all concerned about *humanness* and attainment of the 'ideal of humanity'. Among the Bantu-speaking peoples of Southern Africa *Ubuntu* translates into African *humanness*. In the Confucian philosophy *Jen* is a human relation that encapsulates 'benevolence', 'love', 'altruism', 'tenderness', 'charity', 'care', 'compassion', 'human-heartedness', 'humanness'. While in German languages and philosophies *Bildung* refers to the 'ideal of humanity'. Thus the nexus between *Bildung*, *Jen* and *Ubuntu* implies that the three moral concepts are not mere local social constructs, but can be related to other parts of the world with a view to framing morality as a world concept and to generating more debate on morality across different continents.

**Keywords:** *Ubuntu, Jen, Bildung, humanness, morality, nexus,*

EPAT Workflow

Educational Philosophy  
and Theory Routledge  
Taylor & Francis Group**Jean-Paul Sartre and Ubuntu**

Journal:	<i>Educational Philosophy and Theory</i>
Manuscript ID	Draft
Manuscript Type:	Original Manuscript
Keywords:	Jean-Paul Sartre, Ubuntu, existentialism, humanness, Southern Africa

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Manuscripts

EPAT Workflow

 Open Rubric

Open Journal of Philosophy, 2015, \*, \*\*  
 Published Online \*\*\*\*\* 2015 in SciRes. <http://www.scirp.org/journal/ojpp>  
[http://dx.doi.org/10.4236/ojpp.2015.\\*\\*\\*\\*\\*](http://dx.doi.org/10.4236/ojpp.2015.*****)



## Do the notions such as 'research design' and 'research methodology' pertain to philosophy of educational research?†

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Received \*\*\*\*\* 2015

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### Abstract

The paper explores the language of 'research design' and 'research methodology' in educational research at an open distance learning (ODL) institution in South Africa. It challenges the taken-for-granted necessity of the two notions to educational research in general, and to philosophy of education in particular. It argues, on the one hand that the two notions pertain to a paradigm known as 'methodology-as-technique', which treats educational research as a science driven by laboratory experiments and statistical quantification. On the other hand 'methodology-as-philosophy' eschews the assumptions of 'research design' and 'research methodology' and challenges the goals of knowledge and the claims of objectivity. The paper highlights the importance of *philosophizing about education*, and challenges the perception that the notions of 'research design' and 'research methodology' pertain to all educational research. Its premise is that the very act of *philosophizing about education* is a method that philosophers of education use to clarify ideas.

### Keywords

**Philosophy of education; University of South Africa; research design; research methodology; methodology-as-technique; methodology-as-philosophy.**

† This paper was read at 7<sup>th</sup> World Conference on Educational Sciences, which was held in Athens, Greece, 5-7 February, 2015.

How to cite this paper: Author 1, Author 2 and Author 3 (2015) Paper Title. \*\*\*\*\* \*, \*\*, \*\*\*,  
[http://dx.doi.org/10.4236/ojpp.2015.\\*\\*\\*\\*\\*](http://dx.doi.org/10.4236/ojpp.2015.*****)

Available online at [www.sciencedirect.com](http://www.sciencedirect.com)

ScienceDirect

Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences 116 (2014) 4864 – 4869

**Procedia**  
 Social and Behavioral Sciences
5<sup>th</sup> World Conference on Educational Sciences - WCES 2013

## The Illusion of Education in South Africa

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### Abstract

South Africa's constitution is hailed as 'liberal and egalitarian' because 'it values human dignity and frames human rights at its heart'. But the country's public education is 'a national disaster' that is 'essentially dysfunctional'. In this paper I sketch this 'essential dysfunctionality'. I appeal to the notions of 'redesigning' and 'reengineering'. Employed sensibly 'redesigning' and 'reengineering' can generate dramatic improvements in critical performance measures such as cost, quality, service and speed. I argue that 'redesigning' and 'reengineering' can enable South Africa's public education to efficiently deliver 'education for all' to the majority blacks who were previously disadvantaged by apartheid policies.

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Selection and/or peer-review under responsibility of Academic World Education and Research Center.

**Keywords:** South Africa, Education, Crisis, Re-engineering

### 1. Introduction

South Africa is a liberal democratic state that boasts of a constitution that enshrines a variety of rights and freedoms for the individual. Indeed South Africa's constitution has been described as 'a model liberal democratic constitution' (Jordan, 1996), 'a constitution of classic liberalism' (Vilakazi, 2003), and a 'state of the art document' (Mattes, 2002), that is 'widely hailed as liberal and egalitarian' (Deveaux, 2003) because 'it values human dignity and frames human rights at its heart' (Robinson, 2012). Yet the country's education system is so dysfunctional that the above constitutional ideals seem more like a mere pipedream. In this article I briefly sketch the dysfunctionality of education system and propose ways in which it can be resolved. I find solace in John O'Looney's (1993) corporate concept of 'redesigning' the work of education and Michael Hammer's (1990, 2003) notion of 'reengineering' work. Both 'redesigning' and 'reengineering' require sectors like public education to break away from outdated rules and fundamental assumptions that underlie the way work is done and embrace radically new approaches to doing work. South Africa's Department of Basic Education (DBE) needs to rethink its provision of public education to the African peoples, who were excluded from educational opportunities by the apartheid system.

### 2. South Africa's education crisis

South Africa's education system has been described as 'a crisis' (Fleisch, 2008), 'a national disaster' (Bloch, 2009) that is 'in tatters' (Monare, 2010), is 'inefficient and makes ineffective use of resources' (Simkins, Rule,

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## How convincing is the claim that coexistence between traditional African values and liberal democratic values in South Africa is a contradiction?

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### Abstract

The paper offers a rebuttal of the claim that amalgamation of traditional African values and liberal democratic values in South Africa is a contradiction. South Africa is a liberal democracy whose constitution recognizes the institution of traditional leadership, or 'chieftaincy'. Japan is a good example of a non-Western liberal democracy that has successfully imported and indigenized aspects of Western liberalism to suit its local imperatives. South Africa has the opportunity to amalgamate traditional African values and liberal democratic values to fashion a philosophy of education that is liberal while rooted in African cultures and also responsive to globalization and cosmopolitanism.

**Keywords:** traditional African values; liberalism; African philosophy of education; liberal education; amalgamate.

### 1. Introduction

Post-apartheid South Africa straddles two seemingly incompatible ideological positions. On the one hand South Africa is a liberal democracy courtesy to the 1996 constitution which enshrines a wide variety of rights and freedoms for the individual. Chapter 2 of the constitution, Bill of Rights, enshrines among others, the right to equality, the right to dignity, to life, freedom and security, privacy; the right to freedom of religion, belief, opinion, conscience, and thought; the right to freedom of expression, of movement, and of association (Goldstone, 1997: 456-457). These rights and freedoms are protected by the 'Limitation of Rights Clause', which is standard procedure in global constitutional parlance and whose main purpose is to ensure that "in no case may the core element of a basic right be encroached upon" (Sarkin, 1998-1999:186). The 'Limitation of Rights Clause' is premised on the assumption that "the *sine qua non* of the liberal state in all its varieties is that governmental power and authority be limited by a system of constitutional rules and practices in which individual liberty and the equality of persons under the rule of law are respected" (Gray, 1995:71-72).

On the other hand, the same constitution recognises the institution of traditional leadership. There is a perception among some sociologists and public law scholars in South Africa that indigenous African values and ideas of politics are incompatible with, and might even be contradictory to liberal democratic values and ideas of politics. According to this perception a socio-political order that seeks to amalgamate indigenous African values and liberal democratic values as South Africa does through its widely acclaimed liberal constitution is doomed to fail. The basis of such a perception is that traditional African institutions, especially the institution of traditional leadership is not democratically elected. Its claim to power is based on heredity and not on recognised democratic principles and procedures (Beall, 2006; Ntsebeza, 2005; Bentley, 2005). These scholars further argue that recognizing the institution of traditional leadership may potentially be in conflict with the equal rights of women. Such perceptions

## Ubuntu and Justice as Fairness

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## Abstract

This paper juxtaposes John Rawls's 'justice as fairness' as articulated in *A Theory of Justice and Political Liberalism*, with an African worldview known as Ubuntu with a view to ascertaining whether Ubuntu can deliver 'justice as fairness' in South Africa, which is liberal and egalitarian, while also deeply influenced by indigenous African values and epistemologies, or ways of knowing. 'Justice as fairness' points to 'the moral powers' that people have, related to their 'capacity for a sense of justice' and 'for a conception of the good'. Ubuntu is not only a moral theory concerned with infusing humane dispositions. It also embodies values, morals, and notions of traditional African communal justice. Indeed in Southern Africa justice is perceived as Ubuntu fairness. That is, doing what is right and moral in the indigenous African society. Traditional African community represents Ubuntu. There is no Ubuntu without community. And while 'justice as fairness' is anchored on 'the social contract', African traditional democracy operates in a form of discussion, or an indaba, (open discussion by a group of people with a common interest), a lekgotla (a scheduled discussion at a secluded venue), or a pitso (a public assembly for discussing issues of national concern). The indaba, lekgotla and the pitso constitute elements of 'social contract theory' as articulated by Rousseau. They are vital fora for political communication and education. The paper concludes that given Ubuntu's capacity to constitute order, it can therefore be reasonably argued that it has the potential to deliver 'justice as fairness'.

**Keywords:** Ubuntu, 'justice as fairness', traditional African community, social contract theory, humane ethic.

## 1. Introduction and Background to the Debate

In the 1970s Harvard University political scientist John Rawls (1999, p.4) argued that a society is well-ordered when it is effectively regulated by a public conception of justice in which '(1) everyone accepts and knows that the others accept the same principles of justice, and (2) the basic social institutions generally satisfy and are generally known to satisfy these principles'. Rawls (1999:5) argued that "among individuals with disparate aims and purposes a shared conception of justice establishes the bonds of civic friendship". Rawls noted that men disagree about which principles should define the basic terms of their association. Yet despite this disagreement "they understand the need for, and they are prepared to affirm, a characteristic set of principles for assigning basic rights and duties and for determining what they take to be the proper distribution of the benefits and burdens of social cooperation". A question might be raised as to why is justice such an important concern for political scientists and political philosophers? Or as Scottish philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre (1988) cogently ponders in his book: *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* For Rawls (1999:9), "a complete conception defining principles for all the virtues of the basic structure, together with their respective weights when they conflict, is more than a conception of justice; it is a social ideal". Rawls (1999) propounded the notion of 'justice as fairness', which he argued, is "theories of justice that generalise and carry to a higher level of abstraction the traditional conception of the social contract" (Rawls, 1999:3). Rawls (1999:11) argued that the notion of 'justice as fairness' "conveys the idea that the principles of justice are agreed to in an initial situation that is fair". He argued that a society that satisfies the principles of justice as fairness "meets the principles which free and equal persons would assent to under circumstances that are fair" (Rawls, 1999:12).

Sen (2009:15) argues that Rawls's notion of 'justice as fairness' is "precisely about perfectly just institutions in a world where all alternatives are available". It is Sen's (2009:53) contention that "Rawls's foundational idea was that 'justice has to be seen in terms of the demands of fairness". Sen (2009:62) posits that there are some contributions of great importance in Rawls's approach to justice as fairness. First, the idea that fairness is central to justice "is a major avowal that takes us well beyond the understanding generated by the previous literature on the subject of justice". Second, 'justice as fairness' points "to 'the moral powers' that people have, related to their 'capacity for a sense of justice' and 'for a conception of the good'". And third, Rawls's prioritization of liberty draws attention to "the strong case for seeing liberty as a separate and, in many ways, overriding concern in the assessment of the justice of social arrangements"



*Of-published Urisa academic Moeketsi Lesaka  
(College of Education) asks whether lofty ideals have  
translated into practical successes.*

As a country South Africa has come far in efforts to transform the education landscape to suit the multi-party democratic political dispensation. The country has taken giant steps towards addressing the challenges that impeded its progress in the international education fraternity, isolated from the world and insulated within its borders due to embargoes and disinvestment in the pre-1994 era; the post-1994 period marked the era of pulling together policies and legislation, firstly to create a new education system and secondly to replace them with policies and legislation that were deemed to be pro-democratic in their emphasis on dealing with issues of access to education and eradication of past inequities.

#### Constitutionally enshrined

These new directions laid the foundation for providing quality education for all South African children. The cornerstone of this noble objective was the 1996 Constitution which enshrined a wide variety of rights and freedoms for the individual. For purposes of education, the most important part in the Constitution is section 29, on education, which reads as follows:

- (1) Everyone has the right –
- (a) To a basic education, including adult basic education; and
  - (b) To further education, which the state, through reasonable measures, must make progressively available and accessible.<sup>1</sup>

This was a landmark clause that legislated on access to education for everyone irrespective of race, gender, disability, creed, location, etc. The Constitution's emphasis on equality is further stated in section 9 (3), which reads:

"The state may not unfairly discriminate directly or indirectly against anyone on one or more grounds, including race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language and birth".

The White Paper on Education and Training (WPET), number 16 of 1995 had set the tone with its vision and principles that ought to frame an education for a democratic South Africa. First the WPET underscored that "education and training are a basic human right," and that "the state has an obligation to protect and advance these rights, so that all citizens irrespective of race, class, gender, creed or age, have the opportunity to develop their capacities and potential, and make their full contribution to the society". At a practical level the WPET challenged educators to produce learners with particular attributes and expertise in order to function in a democracy:

"The curriculum, teaching methods and textbooks at all levels and in all programmes of education and training, should encourage independent and critical thought, the capacity to question, enquire, reason, weigh evidence and form judgments; achieve understanding; recognise the provisional and incomplete nature of most human knowledge; and communicate clearly".

## Liberalism vs. Marxism-Leninism and the Future of Education in South Africa

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Doi:10.5901/mjss.2013.v4n3p67

### Abstract

*This paper debates the ideological tension in South Africa between, on the one hand, liberalism, and, on the other hand both the radical Africanist Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) of the 1970s, and the hard-line Marxism-Leninism inclined South African Communist Party (SACP) and the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU). The paper's central argument is, on the one hand, that the BCM's criticisms of liberalism were specific to South Africa's white liberals and to specific historical moments on the 1970s. On the other hand the SACP and COSATU's hard-line Marxism-Leninism is pitted against the African National Congress's (ANC), which is more community oriented and less attuned to the aspirations of organised labour like its partners. And given that the ANC is in the majority and has more or less hegemonised the alliance the threat to liberalism posed by both the radical Africanist BCM and the hard-line Marxism-Leninism of both the SACP and COSATU has been nullified. It can therefore be reasonably argued that South Africa's project of a liberal conception of education will be sustained in compliance with the country's liberal and egalitarian Constitution.*

**Keywords:** South Africa, liberalism, Liberal education, Marxism-Leninism, South African Communist Party, Congress of South African Trade Unions, Black Consciousness Movement.

### 1. Introduction

From time immemorial liberalism has either been celebrated and defended (Gaus, 2000; Gutmann, 1985; Rawls, 1999), or contested (Abbey, 2005; Abbey, 2004; Cobbah, 1987; Gray, 1978), scoffed at and reviled (Biko, 2005; Makgoba, 1998; Ake, 1993). For instance, on the one hand Gaus (2000:180) posits that "the twentieth century was a surprisingly liberal century ... Consensus on the pre-eminence of the liberal ideals of liberty and markets appears well-nigh universal". He argues that by the close of the twentieth century "liberalism has apparently defeated, or has certainly got the upper hand on, its traditional rivals" (Gaus, 2000:195). While Gutmann (1985:310) mounts a defence against claims that "liberal politics is philosophically indefensible". That there is such a wide diversity of views on liberalism is not unusual. Evans (1999:117) contends that "being aware of the great diversity within the liberal tradition, no sensible liberal would be prepared to offer a substantial and rigidly specified characterisation of that which makes a doctrine 'liberal'. In the same vein Holmes (1995:13) observes that "the political theorists who have most cogently articulated and defended liberal aspirations - Millon, Spinoza, Locke, Montesquieu, Hume, Voltaire, Beccaria, Blackstone, Smith, Kant, Bentham, Madison, Hamilton, Constant, Tocqueville, and J. S. Mill - were deeply immersed in contemporary controversies. Each spent his life responding to local challenges, defending specific reforms, struggling with circumscribed problems". Holmes argues that "their epistemologies and metaphysical beliefs were sometimes diametrically opposed to each other's. They also deviated from one another on a wide range of policy questions". As a result "none can be fully understood if plucked ahistorically from his political and intellectual context and forced to march in a canonical parade of liberal greats".

Like their predecessors above, contemporary political theorists are also grappling with controversies and contestations around various conceptions and articulations of liberalism (Galston, 2005, 1991; Rawls, 1999, 1996; Waldron, 1987; Enslin, 1986; Berlin, 1969). It is now clear that even though liberalism does not feature in William B. Gallie's (1956) list of "essentially contested concept" the bottom line is that liberalism is not only a contested concept (Abbey, 2005; Gray, 1978), but it is also a "complex" concept (Simhony, 2003). Some commentators have even made reference to "a family of liberalisms" (Simhony, 2003:283), "a multitude of liberalisms" (McKay, 2000:627), as well as to "many liberalisms" (Rawls, 1996:223) as evidence of the proliferation of the term. These varieties only go on to underscore the complex and contested nature of liberalism as a social science concept.

In 1996 South Africa adopted a Constitution that has been described as "a model liberal democratic constitution that has few peers in the world community" (Jordan, 1996); that bears "the hallmarks of liberal democracy" (Enslin and

## Anchoring Ubuntu Morality

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Doi:10.5901/mjss.2013.v4n3p351

## Abstract

This article explores ways in which ubuntu morality might be anchored in the community, the family, and in personhood. It draws on the main tenets of tribal critical race theory (TribalCrit), whose aim is to unmask, expose, and confront continued colonisation within educational contexts and societal structures. The article recognises that Africa is still largely a communal society, and that it is this communalism which defines the peoples' perception of self-interest, their freedom and their location in the social whole. The family is critical as the primary institution of formative moral development, the school of justice, and the medium for the concrete expression of communal values. The central argument of the article is that ubuntu - inclined communities and families are pivotal to the development of personhood given that persons are products of community. In most of Africa personhood is constituted by the interplay between the culturally objectified conception of persons, and the subjectively apprehended aspects of social life through which individuals express their subjectivity in opposition to or in conformity to the conventionally defined roles, rules, and regulations of the habitus. In the last instance the article seeks to insert ubuntu as an indigenous African epistemology in contemporary socio-political and cultural discourses.

**Keywords:** Ubuntu, morality, community, family, personhood, tribal critical race theory (TribalCrit).

## 1. Introduction

In my previous contributions to the debate on *ubuntu* in the areas of African philosophy and philosophy of education in South Africa I mounted a defence of *ubuntu* against Penny Enslin & Kai Horsthemke's (2004) doubts about its viability as a model for citizenship education in African democracies. I argued that *ubuntu* is a normative concept (a moral theory), a humane notion, and a potential public policy.<sup>1</sup> Having mounted that defence [successfully, I hope], I subsequently published the sequel in which I lamented the shocking and horrifying incidents of moral indiscretion that appear to have become commonplace in South Africa.<sup>2</sup> These range from violent crime, premeditated murder, rape, assault, to homophobic attacks and police brutality. These incidents almost made me doubt my own faith in the worth of *ubuntu* that I had so strongly advocated in my publications. I thought hard and deep about how *ubuntu* might respond to these incidents of moral indiscretion. Eventually I offered my readers African traditional education and Basotho indigenous education as programmes we might draw on to address the development of the sort of personhood that is necessary for *ubuntu* moral dispositions. I justified my choice of Basotho indigenous education on the grounds that it is my own native education about which I can write uninhibitedly. I surmised that young people who are initiated into *ubuntu* morality have the potential to become citizens that are inclined to treating others with justice and fairness at all times.

In this article I grapple with *ubuntu* morality and how it can be anchored in the community, the family, and in personhood. I shall ground *ubuntu* morality in the tenets of 'tribal critical race theory' (TribalCrit). Brayboy (2005, p.427) contends that TribalCrit "is rooted in the multiple, nuanced, and historically - and geographically-located epistemologies and ontologies found in Indigenous communities". In my work on *ubuntu* to which I briefly referred above I sought to rebut attempts mythologise *ubuntu* and to denigrate its value (Letseka, 2012). Brayboy (2005, p.430) suggests that "much of what TribalCrit offers as an analytical lens is a new and more culturally nuanced way of examining the lives and experiences of tribal peoples since contact with Europeans over 500 years ago". As I will later argue, taking a step back,

<sup>1</sup>See Letseka, M. (2012) "In defence of ubuntu", *Studies in Philosophy and Education*, 31 (1), 47-60.

<sup>2</sup>See Letseka, M. (2013) "Educating for ubuntu/botho: lessons from Basotho indigenous education", *Open Journal of Philosophy*, 3 (2), 337-344.

## Educating for *Ubuntu/Botho*: Lessons from Basotho Indigenous Education

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Received December 6<sup>th</sup>, 2012; revised January 10<sup>th</sup>, 2013; accepted January 24<sup>th</sup>, 2013

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This article reflects on shocking and horrifying incidents of moral indiscretion that have become commonplace in South Africa. The aim is to understand why human beings would carry out such shocking and horrific acts on fellow human beings. The article draws on Dismas Masolo's book *Self and Community in a Changing World* to unpack the notion of personhood. It draws lessons on Basotho indigenous education. The choice of Basotho indigenous education is premised on the assumption that it is the author's own native knowledge with which he is most familiar, and about which he can write uninhibitedly.

**Keywords:** *Ubuntu/Botho*; Personhood; Humanness; Basotho Indigenous Education; Morality; Moral Indiscretion

### Introduction

On a daily basis homes, schools, work places and public spaces are bombarded by reports from the public media—the radio, television and print media on violent crime, murder, rape, assault, police brutality and similar moral indiscretions. A morally discerning person [however we define such a person] will be distressed upon listening to accounts of such moral indiscretion on the radio, watching their images on television or reading newspaper reports on them. This is because such reports raise serious questions about what it means to be moral, and how ought we to treat others. The title of ethicist Neil Levy's book *What Makes us Moral?* is most pertinent to the issues I am grappling with in this article. Levy (2004: p. 41) acknowledges that defining morality is no easy task. However, it is his contention that a moral system must be devoted, largely if not wholly, to a concern for the welfare of other people. Thus for Levy (2004: p. 44), a morality must systematize norms of justice and fairness and prescribe equal treatment for everyone. In this article I explore ways in which *ubuntu/botho*, understood as morality (Metz, 2007), humaneness (Mokgoro, 1998), and personhood (Letseka, 2000) can be taught with a view to "creating citizens"<sup>1</sup> that are initiated in *ubuntu/botho* dispositions. I imagine such citizens to be inclined to treating others with justice and fairness at all times. In a recent article in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* Barry Schwartz and Kenneth Sharpe (2012)

<sup>1</sup>I borrow the idea of "creating citizens" from Eamonn Callan's (1997) book, *Creating Citizens: Political Education and Liberal Democracy*. Callan (1997: p. 3) advocates a political culture in which there is an active commitment to the good of the polity, confidence and competence in judgements regarding how that good should be advanced, and a respect for fellow citizens as well as a sense of common fate with them that goes beyond the tribalisms of ethnicity and religion and is yet alive to the significance these will have in many people's lives

argue that as important as it is to teach students how to think critically and analytically, another fundamental that is largely neglected is the development of the intellectual virtues that students need to be good citizens. For Schwartz and Sharpe (2012), such virtues would entail the love of truth, honesty, courage, fairness, and wisdom. I shall argue that Basotho indigenous education sought to instruct the young people on *makhabane* (virtues) such as hard work, respect for persons, humility, perseverance, service to the nation, and patriotism. What is missing from the above-mentioned accounts of moral indiscretion is the notion of respect for persons and acknowledgement of the principles of the "golden rule".

The notion of *ubuntu/botho* has been widely theorized (Letseka, 2012, 2000; Metz, 2011, 2007; Bessler, 2008; Ramose, 2006, 2002, 1999; Broodryk, 2002; Sindane, 1994; Mokgoro, 1998; Shutte, 1994). On the one hand Ramose (2006) contends that *ubuntu/botho* represents the epistemological paradigm that informs the cultural practices, including the law, of Bantu-speaking peoples. While Broodryk (2002) conceives of *ubuntu/botho* as a comprehensive ancient African worldview based on the values of humanness, caring, sharing, respect, compassion and associated values, ensuring a happy and qualitative human community life in a spirit of family. On the other hand Enslin and Horsthemke (2004) express doubts about the viability of *ubuntu/botho* as a model for citizenship education in African democracies, while Marx (2002) casts *ubuntu/botho* as an invented tradition whose task is to minimize historical chasms and fractures. Others have either offered a defense of *ubuntu/botho* (Letseka, 2012), or argued a case for *ubuntu/botho* as a moral theory (Metz & Gaie, 2010; Metz, 2007; Teffo, 1994), and as a public policy (Nkondo, 2007).

What I attempt to do in this article, which is a contribution to the debate in philosophy of education and African philosophy

## South African education has promises to keep and miles to go

The fall of apartheid brought promises for education progress in South Africa, but much of it remains unrealized, especially in small and rural towns.



The South African constitution enshrines the right to education for everyone, but the reality is that, almost 20 years after the transition from apartheid to democracy, the country's education system remains highly differentiated. Schools that serve the majority of poor and previously disadvantaged blacks suffer from systemic inefficiency and dysfunction, while the schools that serve the rich and affluent classes — black and white — are stable and efficient in their delivery of solid education.

About 20% of private and semi-private schools in former white, suburban areas account for over 80% of the students who pass the Grade 12 exit exams. These schools serve privileged black and white children from upper middle-income to rich families who can afford private school fees. These parents recognize that schools need money to keep class sizes low, recruit highly qualified teachers, and give each child the necessary individual attention. The parents in this socioeconomic bracket participate in school committees to drive the agenda for improved teaching and learning.

South Africa is a regional economic powerhouse, having re-

cently become a member of the BRICS economic block — Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa. It is classified as an upper-middle-income economy with countries such as Brazil, Thailand, Argentina, Portugal, Malaysia, and the Russian Federation.

**In South Africa, most grade 6 students have grade 3 literacy and numeracy abilities.**

But that doesn't include all its citizens. Almost 80% of schools in the black townships, in rural and farm areas have neither basic infrastructure, such as decent classrooms and libraries, nor basic services including clean running water and electricity. They don't have the required number of qualified teachers or functioning school governing bodies. They report pass rates of less than 30% on required school exit exams. Media reports have highlighted the plight of primary school children who were learning under trees in rural areas of Limpopo province. In a rural village in the KwaZulu-Natal province, school children must cross the crocodile-infested Tugela River every day to get to school because the local municipality hasn't built a bridge so they can safely cross the river. This is ironic given that South Africa accounts for over 70% of the entire Southern African Development Community GDP. Angola,

the second largest economy in the region, contributes just over 6%.

Given the mammoth challenges facing township, rural, and farm schools, South Africa's education has been described as a crisis and a national disaster. Sevaars van der Berg (2008), education economist at Stellenbosch University, said South Africa's education performs poorly and lags behind much poorer countries that spend less on education. During 2011 and 2012, South Africa's Department of Basic Education tested 6 million learners in grades 1 to 6 in reading and math. The tests — the Annual National Assessment — revealed severe underperformance among South Africa's primary school learners. For example, out of a total score of 100, most grade 3 children in disadvantaged primary schools achieved 35% in literacy and 28% in numeracy. Grade 6 students achieved 28% in literacy and 30% in numeracy. A number of studies have shown that most children in disadvantaged community schools don't acquire basic mastery in reading and mathematics. In fact, most grade 6 students have grade 3 literacy and numeracy abilities. (Department of Basic Education, 2011, 2012).

In 2012, the National School Monitoring Survey, which surveys 2,000 schools nationwide, showed that coverage of the curriculum across the country is uneven. The finding confirms research by the

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Stud Philos Educ (2012) 31:47–60  
DOI 10.1007/s11217-011-9267-2

## In Defence of Ubuntu

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Published online: 6 October 2011  
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**Abstract** The article defends ubuntu against the assault by Enslin and Horsthemke (Comp Educ 40(4):545–558, 2004). It challenges claims that the Africanist/Afrocentrist project, in which the philosophy of ubuntu is central, faces numerous problems, involves substantial political, moral, epistemological and educational errors, and should therefore not be the basis for education for democratic citizenship in the South African context. The article finds coincidence between some of the values implicit in ubuntu and some of the values that are enshrined in the constitution of South Africa and that on that basis argues that ubuntu has the potential to serve as a moral theory and a public policy. The educational upshot of this article's argument is that South Africa's educational policy framework not only places a high premium on ubuntu, which it conceives as human dignity, but it also requires the schooling system to promote ubuntu-oriented attributes and dispositions among the learners. The article finds similarities between ubuntu and bildung, whose key advocates, among others was German scholar and intellectual Wilhelm von Humboldt. It argues that it would be ethnocentric, and indeed silly to suggest that the ubuntu ethic of caring and sharing is uniquely African when some of the values which it seeks to promote can also be traced in various Eurasian philosophies.

**Keywords** Democratic citizenship · Ubuntu · Bildung · Education · South Africa

### Introduction

In this article I defend the notion of ubuntu against the assault by Enslin and Horsthemke (2004). I centre ubuntu as the conceptual heart of the article with a view to providing readers with specific ways in which African scholars have spoken of it as the philosophical basis for a unique African socio-political and economic democratic order. Ubuntu is particularly important to South Africa's young democracy. On the one hand South Africa is

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