

African Psychology: The Psychological Adjustment of African Women Living in New Zealand

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ABSTRACT

Social representation theory is a social psychological framework of concepts and ideas relevant to studying psychosocial phenomena in modern societies. It suggests that social psychological phenomenon and processes can only be properly understood when they are anchored in history, culture and macro social conditions. Therefore, social representations are carriers of collective memories of social groups which are adequate for shaping the present through the past; while using the past to meet the demands of the present, which enables social groups to continue through time. Social groups are distinct in terms of their understanding of social phenomenon and other forms of action which in turn constitute their identity. In this article, I present an African psychological framework which represents African people's worldview. Further to this, is my experience as a doctoral student, exploring the psychological adjustment of African women living in New Zealand. I reflect on why the framework that I had used in my research were deemed inadequate to be used as psychological principles, because they did not correspond with a Western lens of understanding behaviour, actions and social reality. I conclude that the outcome of my study shows the reification and legitimization of Western psychology over African psychology. This article provides a possibility for a critical account of unequal social relations between Western psychology and Indigenous psychology, and exposes the issue of power and resistance embedded in the heart of social representation theories as it relates to psychology.

Keywords Social representation, African immigrants, African psychology, Decolonised psychology

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MY STORY

A man who calls his kinsmen to a feast does not do so to save them from starving. They all have food in their homes. When we gather together in the moonlit village ground, it is not because of the moon. Every man can see it in his own compound. We come together because it is good for kinsmen to do so (Achebe, 1959, p. 55).

I chose to open with an African proverb for two reasons. Firstly, proverbs embody African beliefs, societal views and spirituality. Secondly, it concerns matters of power and politics. The proverb is relevant to understanding power and politics as it relates to the concept of psychology and African people. My experiences in a mainstream Health Science doctoral programme are the central motivation behind this article. It was my intention to use the knowledge, principles, theory and methodology embedded in African worldview to understand and explore the psychological adjustment of African women living in New Zealand, however my inability to achieve this purpose, was a key factor in my decision to write this paper.

My doctoral journey was interesting but equally challenging. I found the experience interesting because my research was the first of its kind in New Zealand. On the other hand, I found it challenging because I was exploring the psychological adjustment of African women living in New Zealand and I intended to do this using African frameworks, principles and theories, but had access to limited resources and support. I had three supervisors to work with me; though they were not Africans, they were open to my ideas, respected my knowledge and supportive of my work throughout the journey. I need to state that the journey was not that smooth as my supervisors were not familiar with concepts of African psychology, worldviews or philosophy as it relates to my research; however, they believed in me and they allowed me to own the journey.

At the tail end of my journey, I submitted my thesis to the examiners; and the feedback was that they were pleased with my work, while also commending its contribution and relevance to a cultural group that little is known about in New Zealand. However, they were not convinced that I had explored the ‘psychological’ adjustment of African women because the African frameworks were not considered adequate enough to explore the topic. I accepted the feedback

with mixed feelings; on the one hand, I had joy because I was nearing the end of the journey, on the other hand, I felt sad because I could not achieve the full purpose of the thesis. In as much as I was convinced that the African frameworks that I used were adequate and appropriate to explore the research at hand, I chose to modify my thesis because I did not have the energy and time to convince my thesis examiners on this matter. I also struggled with shortage of resources and realized that I lacked the capacity to prove the 'scientific' nature of African psychology at that time. I must confess that I did not have the energy to continue with the battle, being the lone voice; hence, to gain my doctoral qualification, I had to drop the word 'psychology' out of the title of my thesis to please the examiners.

Reflecting on my experience, I could see why the frameworks that I had used in my research were not acceptable as adequate to be psychological principles, because they did not represent a Western lens of understanding behaviour, actions and social reality. This confirms what Robinson (2013) noted about Western psychology being the norm and 'others' for example, Indigenous psychology been abnormal. Hence, normality is established on a model that takes whiteness as the norm. The more approximate the model is to a Western framework, in appearance, values and behaviour, the more 'normal' one is considered to be. However, the major problem with such normative assumptions is the inevitable conclusion of deviance on the part of anyone who differs from this model. I could see my experience in light of Robinson's argument that the African frameworks that I used were considered abnormal because in comparison, they were not close to the thoughts, worldviews and paradigm of white people. My questions then would be, why is a Western psychology framework given prominence over African indigenous psychological framework? Is it possible to have conflicting representations of psychology? Does an African psychology framework constitute African people's reality? What then is psychology and how well does it serve the interest of African people in diaspora? I hope this paper will answer all of these questions.

WHAT IS PSYCHOLOGY?

Psychology is defined as the science of human behaviour (Robinson, 2013). This implies that human behaviour in all parts of the world must be studied (Triandis & Brislin, 1984). To study human behaviour, Western psychology has established a normative standard for human cognition,

emotion and behaviour. It is significant to state that these elements correspond with that of the White, middle-class personality. This is the standard against which all other psychological development is assessed and measured (Sinha, 1983). Included in this category of people who are assessed and measured using this standard are African people. However, many African scholars working with African families have noted the inadequacies of Western psychology in understanding the behaviour, actions and social realities of Africans (Holdstock, 2000). Holdstock (2000) also argued that accepted discoveries, worldviews and paradigms of Western psychology do not provide an understanding of black people; what they do is 'pathologise' African people.

It is important for professionals working with African migrants in the diaspora to know the relevance of understanding African peoples' behaviour, actions, social reality and lifestyles based on their worldviews and philosophies. Using this model would ensure the provision of practical and politically potent benefits to African communities.

TOWARDS AN AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE IN PSYCHOLOGY

Though poets and writers of Africa have been able to raise their voices, and are heard worldwide, "the voice of the African psychological community on the ideological assumptions underlying their discipline has been relatively muted" (Holdstock, 2000 p. 144). Also, presently in Australasia, knowledge about African psychology is almost non-existent. This supports the need for the development and explanation of the behaviour of African people which are based on African ideological assumptions. This perspective is essential for the development of an approach to social psychology that is consistent with the experience of African people; ensuring well-being and challenging stereotypic weaknesses (of being dominated and inferior), while also focusing on conclusions about African people in theory, models and research (Robinson, 2013). So what does an African perspective of psychology look like? Baldwin (1976) defines African/Black psychology as a system of knowledge relating to the nature of the social universe from the perspectives of African cosmology. Baldwin noted that "Black psychology is nothing more or less than the uncovering, articulation, operationalization, and application of the principles of the African reality structure relative to psychological phenomena" (p. 242). It is important to note that people have distinct realities in understanding phenomena; the difference between an African

reality structure and a Western reality structure suggests that social representations are embedded in the concrete reality of the social life of people.

An African psychology perspective will build conceptual models that organize, explain, and facilitate understanding of the psychosocial behaviour of Africans based on the primary dimensions of an African worldview. This will enable psychologists and other professionals to come up with interventions which capitalize on the strengths of African people. Recognition of African roots and philosophy is essential to generating a uniquely different understanding of lifestyles and realities of African migrants in the diaspora. According to Nobles (1980) African psychology is based on a culture and assumption of indigenous African philosophy. He states that one's cultural worldviews influences one's reality.

The concrete reality of African social life is embedded in their culture which is an array of beliefs, values, attitudes, customs and tradition. They are represented in images that condense manifold meanings, classify circumstances, phenomena and individuals with whom we deal with (Jodelet, 1991). This reality is rooted in practices that guide and influence a people's cognitive, affective, and behavioural response to life circumstances (Jodelet, 1991). Therefore, the values, customs, tradition and practices of Africans are reflected in their behaviour, attitudes, feelings and values; it provides them with a way of interpreting reality, relating to others, as well as their general lifestyles.

The foundation for the African worldview is centred on the fact that there are individual differences indeed; however there are more commonalities than differences (Kambon, 1998). The African worldview in psychology, and in general, entails living holism; a holism that is based on lived experience in contrast to privacy-oriented Westerners. According to Azibo, "All human life processes including the spiritual, mental, biological, genetic and behavioural, constitute African psychology" (Azibo, 1996, p. 6). The emphasis of African psychology is linked to the essential goal of human behaviour; which is survival. This study emphasises African people's cultural assets and strength, such as the ability to cope with stress, implement survival skills, and the use of extended family and community support, all as an alternative to focussing on stereotype or pathological characteristics of Africans (Robinson, 2013). To further understand the significance of culture and psychology, it is critical to understand the concept of personhood in the African culture.

Personhood from an African Perspective

Having a good understanding of who an African person is from a cultural perspective, reveals the foundation for actions, character and identity; these have a major impact on an African's well-being. There are two philosophical concepts of personhood in the African culture; these have been identified as the 'descriptive metaphysical' and the 'normative' (Ikunobe, 2006). The purpose of the descriptive metaphysical is to examine and evaluate the essential ontological make up of an individual. However, the normative concept seeks to understand a person based on the interdependent normative relationship between the individual and their family, the elements in the community and their ancestors. Such normative relationships provide the foundation for African "people's actions, characters and identity" (Ikunobe, 2006, p. 117).

Ikunobe's (2006) concept of a 'communal person' is contradictory to the individual person, which is the main focus of Western psychology (Holdstock, 2000). While this concept has been recently criticised in the field of psychology, Jahoda (1986) posits that most indigenous psychologies often have a very different and more socially oriented concept of what constitutes a person. It is the independent and self-sufficient person who is conceptualised as the unit of the social system within Western psychology; on the other hand, among Africans, it is the interdependent person that has volition, purpose and is thus capable of taking on responsibilities within a community and attain personhood status (Holdstock, 2000). The concept of an 'individual person' would be strange and unrealistic to African people because their concept of a person, is that of an interdependent self who fits in with others and lives harmoniously in his or her community; because a recognised self is one in relation to others (Markus & Kitayama, 1991).

A community is a collection of persons, principles, processes, and structures that defines social norms, moral expectations, responsibilities, ways of life, and modes of reasoning (Ikunobe, 2006). The 'self', in relation, implies the acceptance of the responsibilities for the welfare of others within the community; because a "being-in relation" individual emerges and expresses itself communally (Ogbonnaya, 1994, p. 74). Holdstock (2000) noted that the interdependence and normative relationships place great responsibilities on the individual to discover and maintain the good relationship with the multiple strands of the network of relationships. This is in

agreement with Richards (1981) who described how a person becomes relevant among African people thus:

“The person alone in his or her ‘isolated being’ lacks power. It is only as a part of the whole; that is, by being understood as representative in his or her being of the whole, that he or she gains force, takes on meaning, or becomes relevant” (p. 223).

In other words, it is only in being part of the whole, that is the community, that an individual finds fulfilment.

Consequently, morality is an important aspect of the normative concept and it is determined when a person is considered to be an emotionally autonomous person who has been sufficiently shaped and equipped by the norms, attitudes, structures and realities of his/her community. A moral person is the person who appreciates communal interest and reality, and internalises the requisite attitudes and values of the community (Ikunobe, 2006; Ogbonanya, 1994).

Deviance from these normative attributes makes one a dangling person. A ‘dangling person’ is someone who is a direct opposite of the interdependent normative person; someone who is abstracted from his/her community and not shaped by community norms and interests (Menkiti, 1984). A dangling person has no place within African cultures because the community’s interest involves the interests and responsibilities of individuals. In other words, a ‘dangling person’ is not able to apply communal norms to guide his conduct for personal interests and communal needs; he/she is not truly a person from an African point of view (Menkiti, 1984). The idea of a mutual relationship between an individual and the community could best be understood by the saying, “I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am” (Mbiti, 1969, p. 109).

Menkiti (1984) concluded that there is a crucial distinction “between Africans’ understanding of man and the understanding of man found in Western thought; From an African’s viewpoint, it is the community which defines the person as a person, not some isolated static quality of rationality, will or memory” (p. 176). The whole existence, from birth to death of an African person is sustained by a series of associations, and life can only have full value when

these close ties are nurtured and sustained. Communal living is one of the most vital features of the African heritage (Mbiti, 1969).

It is to be noted that the idea of community living, prevalent in Africa, has an intrinsic value with regards to African people's wellbeing. It is a product of African humanism which is concerned with the preservation of life, because life is of ultimate concern, and life can only grow in relationships.

I discussed the importance of developing an African model based on the worldviews and paradigms of African people. This would exhume survival skills and the strength of the African people. In the next section, I will present my doctoral research and African framework that I had used to explore the psychological adjustment of African women living in New Zealand. However, I will first of all define 'psychological adjustment' and the methodology used for the research, after which I will present the findings of the research.

Psychological Adjustment

The psychological adjustment of individuals could be understood in terms of optimal function, well-being and capacity to adapt. A sense of control over one's behaviour, environment, thoughts and feelings is essential for good psychological adjustment (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995; Maddux, 1995). Based on these definitions, I explored the psychological adjustment of African women living in New Zealand, how they have adapted to the changing environmental conditions of New Zealand, and whether they were able to cope effectively with the demands and stress of the environmental context. Exploring the process of adjusting to immigration stressors could also reveal the level of the women's self-esteem, the absence of distress, anxiety or depression as indicators of adjustment. To achieve this purpose, I had three research questions, which are as follows:

- What factors motivate African women to migrate to New Zealand?
- What major stressors do African women encounter upon arriving in New Zealand and what is the impact of these stressors on their person?
- What coping strategies do African women employ to handle the particular demands of adjusting to a new environment?

METHODOLOGY

This research draws on individual interviews conducted with fifteen women who are recent migrants from Africa. The main purpose of the interviews was to explore factors that motivate African women to migrate to New Zealand. The women who participated in this research originated from four different African countries previously colonized by Britain (Nigeria, Ghana, Zimbabwe and Zambia.). The length of residence in New Zealand varies from 2-5 years. Although the participants are from diverse cultural traditions and political histories, they are members of a single, though clearly not homogenous, African community in Auckland New Zealand. Most have advanced post-secondary degrees undertaken in English language institutions. The notion of researcher and the bicultural nation of New Zealand supports research that is culturally appropriate, in other words, it is appropriate to use a methodology that places the experience of the women at the centre of the analysis (Nobles, 1998; Schiele, 2000).

My first and primary goal is to articulate an African model of psychology using the African-centred framework. Central to this undertaking, is the necessary consultation with the oral traditions of African people. Any cultural enquiry about African people must seek the knowledge stored in their oral traditions. To that end, I have selected a tradition unique to Africans, that stores knowledge in different ways. Thus, I will be exploring African knowledge as embodied in the spoken word. Human beings are storytellers by nature, and stories are suitable means of organising different kinds of information; they are fundamental to how we express ourselves and our worlds to others (McAdams, 1993). Further to this concept is the knowledge of storytelling from an African perspective.

African Oral Tradition

In African societies, the oral tradition is the method by which history, stories, folk tales and religious beliefs are passed on from generation to generation (Olupona, 1990). The history of a people is (re)constructed through oral testimonies and cultural data supplied by individuals or groups, which is the basis for future construction, using oral transmission (Gbadegesin, 1984). These cultural data and testimonies represent the collective phenomenon pertaining to African communities which is co-constructed by individuals in their daily talk and action; they are also cultural tools that serve as collective memories. Hence, African oral tradition is the collective wisdom of the African community useful in upholding the connection between the cultural or

historical past and the present (Canon, 1988; Mead, 1962). In most African cultures the main function of stories is to educate about the cultural standards, worldviews, morals, and values of African people (Dasylva, 2007).

Shaw (1995) an Afrocentricity scholar proposed that the spoken word 'Nommo' is a fundamental tenet of Afrocentricity. The spoken word is considered the greatest power on earth to be able to speak harmony where there is chaos and disorder (Knowles-borishade, 1991; Robinson & Hawpe, 1986). It is expected that as African women traverse the physical, psychological and economic spaces through immigration they will experience chaos and disorder in some aspects of their lives; but through having a voice to tell their stories, it is expected that they will be able to experience harmony. Africans have different forms of stories; I had used the African epic which is a form of storytelling to collect stories about the psychological adjustment of African women living in New Zealand.

The Journey Motif of African Epic

The African epic which is situated between history and the myth, attributes the entire cultural experience of a society to one character who has made a mark on his/her time; concentrating maximum cultural data that serves as a symbol of community identity (Seydou, 1983). Moscovici (1992) argued that social representations can be seen as a contemporary equivalent of myths and belief systems. This gave rise to my usage of the 'journey motif of African epic' framework as a representation of African women to understand stories around their historical facts, and the cultural data of their communities, as it relates to the process of adjusting to living in New Zealand. I had used Kunene's (1991) journey motif, to understand African women's story of adjustment based on African feminism consciousness; one that reflects African women's roles, positioning, strength and resiliency in striving for the survival of their families and communities (Adelowo, 2012).

Many features of the African epic have been used in the analysis of stories, but I will be using some aspects of the "journey motif" (Kunene, 1991) which I consider relevant, to collect and analyse African women's experiences of immigration. The features of the "journey" that are considered essential are the reasons why a journey has to be made; the sufferings and trials experienced during the journey, and the interpretation of the signs that signifies the end of trials. I

will also explore the actions and events that occurred in each of these stages of the women's journeys, and the impact of these on the process of adjusting to life in New Zealand.

Kunene (1991) concluded that the question, "*who am I?*" becomes a powerful stimulus for a personal journey for which the physical journey is often only a metaphorical disguise. Kunene (1991) also posited that it is relevant to understand the features of the journey from four levels, namely: the spatial (traversing space), the temporal (travelling through time), the intellectual (receiving new knowledge-experience), and the psychological (emotion reaction to new knowledge or experience gained). Using this framework is essential to my study because it relates to the women's travel through space, time, intellect and how they react to the new knowledge and experience of the foreign environment/culture of New Zealand.

The second research question I explored was what major stressors African women encountered upon arriving in New Zealand and the impact these stressors had on their person. The themes that emerged as major stressors were: home sweet home, with sub-themes such as loss of family support, familiar environment, ethnic food, festivals, and the values of visiting families. Other themes included the difficulties of maintaining cultural identity, supporting teenage children, and racism. These themes all fit in with the stage of the African epic journey motif-rites of passage (Kunene, 1991). The stories shared by the women in this chapter represent the trials that they experienced in the process of acquiring the needed skills to resolve the conflict that led to their migration after their arrival in New Zealand. The women spoke about the psychological difficulties they had to come to terms with as a result of leaving behind their familiar environments, homes, social networks and collection of family and friends.

The third research question explored the coping strategies African women employed to handle the particular demands of adjusting to a new environment. The themes that emerged as coping strategies were identified as communalism, affect and spirituality (Thompson, 2003). These elements of coping in a place of foreign sojourn are also consistent with Afro-cultural ethos of coping.

These elements of African philosophy are crucial in understanding how African women have defined themselves, others and their relationships with the environment; and how these had helped them sustain healthy and adaptive functioning in New Zealand (Adelowo, 2012; 2015).

IMPLICATION FOR AFRICAN PSYCHOLOGY

The aim of this article is to establish the frameworks that I used in this research for studying the normative standard, human cognition, emotion and behaviour of African people. Added to this, is the need to explore the model, ensuring it fits the definition of psychology as the science of human behaviour; and the importance to determine if African cultural beliefs, values, attitudes, customs, tradition, and practices had an influence on African women's cognitive, affective, and behavioural response to life's circumstances, such as adjusting to the process of immigration in New Zealand. Other features which are important to the adaptation of African women are the four levels of journey features, namely: the spatial (traversing space), the temporal (travelling through time), the intellectual (receiving new knowledge-experience), and the psychological (emotional reaction to new knowledge or experience gained). This is because a person is considered a moral person when he is emotionally autonomous and has been sufficiently shaped and equipped by the norms, attitudes, structures and realities of his community. This person appreciates communal interest and reality; and also internalises the requisite attitudes and values of the community. The psychological adjustment of African women could then be understood in terms of optimal function, well-being and capacity to adapt to life in New Zealand based on their worldviews, science and culture.

The place of foreign sojourn, an element of the journey motif, is relevant to understanding the African model of psychology. It is a village where the 'hero/heroine' has the opportunity to identify and interpret the signs of victories that would enable him/her to overcome challenges. It is also a place where the 'hero/heroine' has been given the opportunity to sharpen or acquire the skills needed to overcome the challenges of the 'journey'. Other elements considered significant in the victory of the hero/heroine are: the village and its people, their reaction and attitude – either friendly or hostile, helpful or threatening, accepting, showing kindness, giving the hero the opportunity to sharpen 'his' weapons to develop war strategies, or make use of values and ethics from their cultures. These elements are considered crucial in helping the hero/heroine discover his/her identity and integrate in the place of foreign sojourn (Kunene, 1991; Seydou, 1983). Using these features of the African epic is appropriate because "the true objective of the epic lies in consciousness of its distinct identity, unity, and cohesion through interiorized communion"

(Seydou, 1983, p. 16). It is important to know whether African women were able to use these elements of African epic in the process of adjusting to life in New Zealand.

The place of foreign sojourn is the point where the sign (of victory) manifests itself. The women told stories of how they identified and interpreted the sign which signified the end of the “sufferings” or trials – loss of home, unemployment and racism; this assured them that they had survived the challenges that they had experienced. Not only did they recognise the signs of victory, they were able to utilise the skills that they acquired during the rites-of passage at this place.

The most significant coping strategy the women used would be communalism. As identified by Kunene (1991), an important element of the African epic is the village people and their attitude to the heroine. The women told stories that demonstrated that they were able to form both formal and informal relationships with their community in New Zealand. By forming such relationships with the village people, they had the opportunity to sharpen or acquire professional and social skills as well as the knowledge needed to overcome the challenges of migration.

They also told stories about the support of the village people in the various social spaces they had traversed. Not only have these villagers accommodated them, the reaction and attitude of the village people have been more friendly than hostile; although in some instances, the women reported experiencing cruelty or hostility but there was more of a positive and balanced attitude towards them. The women’s experience could be likened to going to the war front, they have set their goals for coming to New Zealand and despite the challenges that they have faced, they were able to develop war strategies and have made use of values and ethics from their cultures to achieve their goals and gain victory.

The women demonstrated the basic tenets of communalism which involves a commitment to inter-dependence, the ability to be socially involved, willingness to assume social duties, cooperativeness, mutual support, collective sharing, respect for others, and not neglecting the importance of their extended families. In as much as they were able to build and nurture relationships by making use of the resources available to them within the community, they also continued to be part of the villages of their various countries. They demonstrated that building human relations was their primary concern. Perhaps, this confirms Mphahlele’s (1962) assertion that Africans gravitate towards people, because people give them real pleasure.

Another important aspect of African ethics that has helped the women cope with the challenges of migration, was coming to terms with their collective consciousness. This has helped them rediscover their identity in a new political context such as New Zealand (Adelowo, 2015). To have a fuller understanding of the women's stories, I explored the supernatural characteristics of the African epic and its significance among the African societies' spiritual and religious practices (Deme, 2010; Kunene, 1991). Okpewho (1979) noted that "the essential mark of the heroic personality in many African folk epics is in its reliance on supernatural resources" (p. 119). Relying on the supernatural to "cope with man's original weakness" is a belief held in many African societies and it is a symbol of humans' consciousness of their weaknesses and limitations, as well as the desire to overcome such weaknesses and limitations. Deme (2010) concluded that it is the "reliance of the hero on supernatural aid that defines and determines true heroism in African oral epics" (p. 10). To demonstrate that the three African oral tradition principles are interrelated, African spirituality has served as a potential buffer from insufficient affection for the women. And because they were able to be part of their religious communities, they were able to build and sustain their interpersonal relationships with other live forces in the community. The benefit of this for the women is receiving comfort, strength and bonding through the emotional/spiritual village they have built.

The three principles of communalism, affect and spirituality asserts for African women in New Zealand that they exist because their spirit is connected to a community that understands them (Thompson, 2003). It is crucial to understand the psychological adjustments of African women in New Zealand from these three elements/perspectives, because "all human life processes including the spiritual, mental, biological, genetic and behavioural all constitute African psychology" (Azibo, 1996, p. 6). The experience of the women could be understood in the light of Kunene's (1991) statement that the question "*who am I?*" becomes a powerful stimulus for a personal journey, for which the physical journey is often only a metaphorical disguise

CONCLUSION

Pertinent to the issues surrounding African psychology is the differentiation between Western and African science. Indigenous African people do have a science of their own; traditional science was replaced with a belief system based on Western thoughts and science which is assumed to be the universal truth. However, all things believed to be true are culturally/socially constructed; science is only one world view and the incontrovertibility of science proves it's a fallacy (Colorado & Collins 1987). Native science is based on knowledge that is spiritual and sacred (Erniene, 1995). It exists in our visions, dreams, ceremonies, songs, dance and prayers. It is knowledge lived and experiential. It is cyclical and circular, and occupies itself with the past, present and future; the past guides our present, our future and that of the next generation (Absolon, 2011). It then means that if traditional science is the worldview of Western people, then African science represents African people's worldviews.

In this article, I have demonstrated that different representations compete in their claims to reality, and therefore limit and exclude other realities (Howarth, 2006). The competition among social representations of different social/community groups in the claims for reality and the resulting tensions, presents the possibilities for communication, negotiation, resistance, innovation and transformation (Howarth, 2006). Hence the relevance and necessity for engaging alternate domains of knowledge such as Indigenous African approaches to psychology that are marginalized, precisely because of their rootedness in non-Western spheres of influence and discourse. I have critiqued the over-reliance on Western approaches and frameworks via intersecting the implications of Western imposition of psychological well-being on African bodies in diaspora. In other words, it is important to understand the social representations employed by African communities in order to understand their forms of thoughts and actions. This is also of interest to proponents of a new non-experimental paradigms in social psychology, that of understanding something of the various 'indigenous psy-chologies' which exist within a society (c.f., Heelas and Lock, 1981).

The personalised introduction is an example of my subjectivity in the knowledge production process. This background provides a useful understanding of the deep-seated problems with managing the dual consciousness in many individuals living the diaspora experience; to more epistemological concerns of the discipline generally, and the challenge of

engaging in practices of denaturalization and decolonialisation within the discipline of psychology. Advocating an African psychological framework reveals my affiliation, loyalty and identity as an African; thus highlighting our ongoing contested identities, interest and hope (Godelier, 1986). There are socio-political implications of rearticulating postcolonial subjectivity via an African Psychology. This is politically useful in depathologizing African behaviours and actions; and benefits the decolonization of social psychology projects by continually engaging the question: “Where do we speak from? To what end? And how is our knowledge positioned as a political tool? In traditional African society, all knowledge is collective, for practical purposes, for safety and prosperity; it is believed that this cannot be achieved by any person in isolation (Van Vlaenderen, 2001).

Employing an African framework depicts power and resistance on the part of the women because through this process, many assumptions and stereotypes about Africans and African women have been challenged. African migrant women in this study have demonstrated that they have used their knowledge of their environment for the good and social welfare of themselves and families. The stories shared reflect their identity and self-consciousness; this, as well as their spirit of courage and tenacity have contributed to their well-being in New Zealand. They have faced a journey of many hardships and reached their quest in a manner to be celebrated. They are indeed heroines. They have much to be proud of; they found strength, toiled, overcame, and moved into new professional careers, and they see their children being well educated. The journey has been worth the cost. And, in the end, their psychological health is robust. It is important to use this framework to resist and transform existing and pathological description of African people based on a social representation different to their values and cultural influence; resisting existing knowledge and practice helps to form a just and more equitable society.

This paper has provided an empirical analysis of the experiences of a group of African women living in New Zealand. By utilizing an African-centred framework, the analysis highlights the importance of oral tradition and epic in illustrating how many Africans engage with their socio-political worlds. The role of stories in cultivating a sense of self, relative to a structural world is important and is beginning to unravel further in social psychology. While more common narrative approaches have initiated and highlighted the relevance of this form of exploration and critique, this paper contributes to the discussion via the role of an Afrocentric

ontology that brings to the fore the social meanings imbued in practice such as music and dance – the psychological implication of ‘story-in-practice’. The paper is grounded in a theoretical critique that simultaneously critiques traditional Western approaches to psychology as well as introducing alternate and different ways of engaging the psyche via African Psychological ontology.

Viewing African psychology through a social representations framework can serve to challenge the hegemonic social representations that invade our realities; highlight the reification and legitimisation of knowledge systems and consequent exclusion of African people from psychological theorising. It is important to promote an African psychology framework that will enable us to re-act, reject or re-form a re-presentation of the world that is in conflict with our stake, position, and self-identity. In conclusion, I affirm that employing an African psychology framework to understand the psychological wellbeing of Indigenous Africans at ‘home’ and in the diaspora will serve the purpose of defending and sustaining the construction of our reality and as a tool of resisting another version of reality, that of the dominant Western psychology framework.

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