

Botho/Ubuntu paradigm as cognitive justice in psychology

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Abstract

The concept of *Botho/Ubuntu* emerges as a balancing paradigm poised to drive cognitive justice in psychological discourses. A paradigm is a universally recognized scientific model that represents a worldview of the nature of the world. There are enduring concerns about the privileging of Western European paradigms, ontologies, epistemologies, and axiologies over their African counterparts. In this article, we present the *Botho/Ubuntu* paradigm as a strong contender for the promotion, and humanization of epistemologies in psychology. The 59th annual conference of the Comparative and International Education Society (CIES) in Washington, DC in 2015, whose theme was “*Ubuntu!* Imagining a Humanist Education Globally,” as well as the World Council of Comparative Education Societies’ (WCCES) recent book, *Comparative Education for Global Citizenship, Peace and Shared Living through Ubuntu*, are examples through which *Ubuntu* began to emerge as a paradigm poised to deliver cognitive and epistemic justice in the area such as psychology. We use Critical African Psychology as a lens through which we interrogate cognitive injustice. We conclude by demonstrating that *Botho/Ubuntu* paradigm might

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Correction (September 2024): City name from the author affiliations has been removed since its original publication.

serve as a driver of cognitive justice in psychology and makes inroads into major discourses driven by African scholars.

Keywords

Botho/Ubuntu, cognitive justice, paradigm, psychology

Introduction

Paradigm continues to be an elusive and contested concept from interdisciplinary perspectives. The re-emergence of decolonial discourse fuels a dichotomous debate between Euro-Western and African indigenous paradigms. In order to balance the debate, in this article we propose the *Botho/Ubuntu* paradigm as a form of cognitive justice, especially in the field of psychology. Euro-Western paradigms notoriously practice cultural narrowness through missing audiences, unvalued knowledge, unrecognized practices (Finlay et al., 2021, p. 1). In this article we use the notion of Euro-Western to denote an anticolonial framework or worldviews that represent European and Western countries (McDonnell, 2014). Paul Feyerabend, the anarchist (Gomes et al., 2013), for example, questioned the assumption that only Western science holds the criteria to determine the universal truth. He argued that “a philosopher who wanted to study the adequacy of science as a picture of the world, or who wants to build up a realistic scientific methodology, must look at modern science with special care” (Feyerabend, 1993, p. 49). He further observed that

“Scientists are not content with running their own playpens in accordance with what they regard as the rules of scientific method, they want to universalize these rules, they want them to become part of society at large and they use every means at their disposal - argument, propaganda, pressure tactics, intimidation, lobbying - to achieve their aims.” (Feyerabend, 1993, p. 163)

Feyerabend rejected universal standards on method and encouraged methodological plurality, which he termed “Epistemological (Scientific) Anarchism” (Anowai & Okafor, 2018). Niaz (2020, p. ix) notes that 30 years ago, “the empirical nature of science was considered an unquestioned axiom of both science and science education.” Such an approach aligned with a longstanding “Clarion Call” from non-Euro-Western epistemologies for legitimate acceptance and inclusion in global discourses. Our view in this article therefore is that the *Botho/Ubuntu* paradigm is a balancing act for cognitive justice, especially in the field of psychology and other disciplines.

This article is divided into six sections. First, it briefly explores the issue of the hegemony of Euro-Western paradigms. It argues that historically, the latter tended to assume a compulsion of “other forms of knowing” (epistemologies) to subscribe to patterns of reasoning, failing which non-Euro-Western epistemologies would be branded unscientific. The article calls for a courageous recognition and acknowledgement of the need for the institution of psychology to undergo deconstruction and decolonization. Second, the article presents cognitive and epistemic justice as instruments that might

counterbalance hegemonic positions and epistemic injustice. It argues that cognitive justice is the right of different ontologies and epistemologies to co-exist in the bigger space of knowledge production and practices, because such co-existence of knowledge production and practices constitutes cognitive justice. Third, it makes a case for the humanization of human sciences epistemologies through the lens of a critical African psychology. It draws on Brazilian philosopher, Paulo Freire's (1970) views on humanizing pedagogy, neatly expressed in his seminal work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Fourth, it teases out the notion of critical African Psychology. It argues that the goal of critical African psychology is to use psychological knowledge in, by, for, and with Africa and the rest of the world with a view to de-hegemonize, and to humanize the field of psychology. Fifth, it presents the *Botho/Ubuntu* paradigm as an important driver of cognitive justice in psychology. It argues that given its inclusive and communally rooted characteristic features, the *Botho/Ubuntu's* paradigm's moral values, virtues and principles would eschew the hegemonic and marginalizing characteristic features of Euro-Western paradigms. Finally, the article offers some concluding remarks.

The colonial experience

Our entry point in this debate is framed by our identity as indigenous Africans, of Lesotho origin. Lesotho, as well as Botswana and Swaziland (which has since been renamed Eswatini) are former British colonies, that were euphemistically referred to as British High Commission Territories. The history of colonization, to quote British reggae poet, Linton Kwesi Johnson (album, Bass Culture, 1980) "is a moving, is a hurting Black story." In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Franz Fanon (2004) writes that "the colonist turns the colonized into a kind of quintessence of evil. The colonized society is not merely portrayed as a society without values. The colonist is not content with stating that the colonized world has lost its values or worse, never possessed any. The 'native' is declared impervious to ethics, representing not only the absence of values but also the negation of values. He is, dare we say it, the enemy of values. In other words, absolute evil" (p. 6). In *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, Walter Rodney (1981) is more scathing, "Colonialism was a negation of freedom from the viewpoint of the colonized" (p. 223). He goes on to state that "to be colonized is to be removed from history" (Rodney, 1981, p. 225). "A formerly colonized nation has no hope of developing until it breaks effectively with the vicious circle of dependence and exploitation which characterizes imperialism" (Rodney, 1981, p. 26). A typical colonial scholar, German philosopher Friedrich Hegel (2001) wrote in his book, *The Philosophy of History*, that Africa was "the land of childhood that is enveloped in the dark mantle of night" (p. 109). He surmized 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, pp. 110–111). Concomitantly, Hegel (2001) was unrepentant that Africa "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" (p. 109).

In this regard Ngũgĩ Wa Thiongo (1994) is more eloquent, “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*” (p. 100). Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2008) reminds us that, “The world’s indigenous populations belong to a network of peoples. They share experiences as peoples who have been subjected to the colonization of their lands and cultures, and the denial of their sovereignty, by a colonizing society that has come to dominate and determine the shape and quality of their lives, even after it has formally pulled out” (p. 7). It is therefore no coincidence that the “Indigenous peoples represent the unfinished business of decolonization” (Smith, 2008, p. 7).

Euro-Western paradigms and their hegemony

Although the seminal work on paradigm theory emerged from Thomas Kuhn (1962), classical positivism founded by Auguste Comte (1798–1857) drove knowledge production and re-organization of society (Breen & Darlaston-Jones, 2010). It is believed that the objective observation and classification of social phenomena should be the only focus of scientific study of society. We believe that the objectification and classification propelled paradigmatic thinking. Nelson (2014) describes positivism as a philosophical position that remains highly influential in contemporary psychology (p. 1437). The Euro-Western paradigms largely emerged in philosophy and science, but later made in-roads in other disciplines such as psychology. Euro-Western paradigms are characterized by “assumptions on (ontology, epistemology, axiology, methodology, and rigor)” (Park et al., 2020, p. 690). Academic disciplines are compelled to follow this pattern, failing which, they become branded as unscientific, or simply “metaphysical.” Research studies must declare their paradigmatic assumptions in order to be considered scientific and bearing scholarly rigor. The permeation of this strictness is global. Anything outside this taken-for-granted norm is excluded from the scientific circles. This includes knowledge systems emanating from indigenous contexts, which have been disparaged for perceived lack of the scientific rigor acceptable to Euro-Western paradigms. Euro-Western forms of knowledge production have been considered an imposition on non-Euro-Western knowledge systems (Kerr, 2014). They therefore assumed a hegemonic stance, overshadowing and excluding different knowledge systems.

Euro-Western paradigms dominate the field of psychology around the world. The positivist paradigm dominated by objectivist approaches to the practice of psychology has been prevalent in the field. Paramount to the approaches has been testing and the use of psychometrics to make decisions about people’s lives as pioneered by Malherbe in the 1930s (Lionel, 2014). The aloofness of the psychologist, through the so-called keeping a professional distance has been the hallmark of the therapeutic spaces. These are generally inconsistent with the African Botho/Ubuntu paradigm which allows for alternative and varying ways of looking at life. The Botho/Ubuntu paradigm allows even the voices of those considered weak to be heard. A Sesotho proverb; *mo oa khotla ha a tsekitsoe*—(crudely translated) “one who errs in court is not punished” bears testimony to a paradigm that embraces a diversity of views.

The positivist paradigm played a critical role in promoting epistemic injustice. In South Africa it formed a crucial part of the colonial project to marginalize and subjugate the Black majority. The psychoanalytic perspective was a pioneering positivist approach in South Africa, where Malherbe applied psychometric testing of poor White people in the 1930s (Lionel, 2014). Focus on the poor Whites was very deliberate. It was meant to find why they were poor so that they could be assisted, and that was to the exclusion of the Blacks. According to Lionel (2014):

The first professional psychology association, the South African Psychological Association (SAPA) was established in 1948 with 34 members. In 1957, a Black psychologist, Josephine Naidoo, applied for membership and was refused. Simon Biesheuvel, regarded as the doyen of SA psychologists (International Journal of Psychology, 1991) led the discussions regarding Black psychologists's membership of SAPA from 1957 to 1962, without the participation of Black psychologists. When Blacks were eventually admitted to SAPA in 1962 a number of psychologists resigned to establish the Psychological Institute of the Republic of South Africa (PIRSA) on 23 June 1962 restricting the membership to Whites. (p. 1988)

On the contrary, psychology had very debilitating effects on the Black people. For example, Black professionals were systematically excluded, the general population's psyche was paralyzed. Dommissie (1986) noted that:

To the psyche of the African, Apartheid says: 'You are not a fellow human-being, worthy of respect or of any of the government services provided to all citizens in similarly wealthy countries. Husbands, wives and children can be separated for 11 out of every 12 months. You are like animals, cattle that can be herded here or there according to the wishes and dictates of the whites. If you are too young or too old or too sick to work for us you are sent to the barren homelands to die or survive as best you can on your own personal resources.' (p. 53)

The third International Critical Psychology conference equally noted that "Psychology is seemingly a discipline that was dominated by White people and, although critical psychology is about creating new spaces, it appears that it is still dominated by white academics" (Sonn, 2005, p. 594). These experiences speak to the role psychology in South Africa played towards epistemic injustice and formed part of the colonial project.

This article is not about pitting Western science against African folk traditions. On the contrary, it seeks harmonization and inclusion (Makhubela, 2016, p. 3). The hegemony of Euro-Western paradigms can, and should be challenged through efforts such as "Unsettling the Hegemony of 'Western' Thinking" (Kerr, 2022, p. 1). The dominance of Euro-Western thinking faces challenges and needs to recognize alternative voices in the global discourses. Although Makhubela (2016) claims that "Western knowledge is neither monolithic, nor the sole property and prerogative of the West. Africa has significantly contributed to its creation and should admissibly make foundational claims on it" (p. 1), he does not provide evidence to support this claim. However, he acknowledges that there is "the farce of knowing about the 'Other' that denies the 'Other' as thinking and

knowledge-producing subjects” (p. 3). It is this very denial that hegemonizes Euro-Western thinking as *othering* African knowledge systems and labeling alternative voices as “narrow particularism, narrow localism and ethno-theorizing” (Makhubela, 2016, p. 1). A courageous take is the acknowledgement that the institution of psychology must undergo decolonization (Makhubela, 2016, p. 1), which, according to Maldonado-Torres (2016), “refers to efforts at rehumanizing the world, to breaking hierarchies of difference that dehumanize subjects and communities and that destroy nature, and to the production of counter-discourses, counter-knowledges, counter-creative acts, and counter-practices that seek to dismantle coloniality and to open up multiple other forms of being in the world” (p. 10).

Often, alternatives are not suggested. This leaves a gap that we intend to fill through the *Botho/Ubuntu* paradigm for the promotion, and humanization of epistemologies. We propagate for cognitive and epistemic justice.

Cognitive justice and epistemic in/justice

In this article cognitive justice is read from the perspective of what Gollwitzer and Prooijen (2016) characterized as a “psychology of justice”—that is, it is “concerned with *subjective* aspects (what people *perceive as* just vs. unjust)” (p. 61). Shiv Visvanathan (1997) coined the term cognitive justice in 1997 to promote accommodation of a wider repertoire of ideas as an active recognition of the need for diversity. Specifically, cognitive justice identifies the right of differing forms of knowledge to co-exist as counter-hegemonic toward Euro-Western paradigms (Coolsaet, 2016). The co-existence of knowledge production constitutes cognitive justice, whose essence is a critique on the dominance of Euro-Western paradigms of knowledge production and modern science (Visvanathan, 2009). The goal of cognitive justice is to promote the recognition of alternative paradigms and sciences, especially those that are non-Western (Visvanathan, 2009). Knowledge is to be seen as pertaining to the “ecology of knowledges where each knowledge has its place, its claim to a cosmology, its sense as a form of life” (Visvanathan, 2009, n.p). Where knowledges each have their place, a cosmology, and sense as a form of life transcends hegemony to epistemic justice. Epistemic in/justice occurs when Euro-Western paradigms of knowledge production determine “who (knowers) and what (knowledge) is perceived as more or less epistemically valuable” (Hutton & Cappellini, 2022, p. 155). This epistemic exclusion often silences, excludes, ignores, and neglects knowledges considered epistemically less credible by Euro-Western dominant structures (Hutton & Cappellini, 2022). Epistemic injustice is disrespect of alternative knowledge and knowers. Knowers as individuals or collectively can be disrespected and their agency as custodians of their knowledge undermined.

Fricker (2007, p. 5) argues that “any epistemic injustice wrongs someone in their capacity as a subject of knowledge, and thus in a capacity essential to human value.” One type of epistemic injustice is *testimonial injustice*, which refers to situations in which a person is ignored in their capacity as someone who gives knowledge (Wanderer, 2012, p. 148). Another type is *hermeneutical injustice*, which speaks to situations in which people do not have equal participation in the generation of social meanings. Being

wronged as a knower, Fricker (2007, p. 44) argues, is being “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.” Moreover, Fricker (2007, p. 6) notes that such “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.” She further argues 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, p. 177). Additionally, Fricker (2007, p. 176) proposes that “combating epistemic injustice clearly calls for virtues of epistemic justice to be possessed by institutions as well as by individuals.”

In epistemic injustice, hermeneutically marginalized group members’ social experiences are poorly conceptualized and comprehended, maybe even by the subjects themselves (Hänel, 2020). Thus, for Fricker (2007, p. 176), “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, p. 177). Fricker (2008) designates this phenomenon as “hermeneutical injustice” characterized by a hermeneutical lacuna, described as rendering the custodians on knowledge powerless due to prejudice and disbelief of the legitimacy of their knowledge. For example, a drastic example to explain hermeneutical injustice could be of a child who at early stages of being aware of their sexuality, they declare themselves as either gay or lesbian. The tendency from parents and significant others generally would be how does this child know? Unfortunately, the essence of one’s experience cannot be adequately explained for those alien to it, thus creating a hermeneutical lacuna (Fricker, 2008). Harmonizing epistemologies could therefore be a bridge that unites the knowers and those alien to what is known, thus promoting epistemic participation (Schmidt, 2019).

The agenda for decolonization

Our aim in this article is to advance the agenda of decolonization of the *Eurocentric* slant that continues to dominate the taken for granted conceptions and practices of the discipline of psychology. Smith (2008, p. 23) reminds us that “The reach of imperialism into ‘our heads’ challenges those who belong to colonized communities to understand how this occurred, partly because we perceive a need to decolonize our minds, to recover ourselves, to claim a space in which to develop a sense of authentic humanity.” She argues that “decolonization is a process which engages with imperialism and colonialism at multiple levels. For researchers, one of those levels is concerned with having a more critical understanding of the underlying assumptions, motivations and values which inform research practices” (Smith, 2008, p. 20). The research methodology and methods, the theories that inspire them, the questions they create, and the styles of writing they use all become crucial acts that should be thoroughly and critically thought through before being put into practice (Smith, 2021, p. 34). In other words, Smith (2008, p. 39) argues that, they need to be “decolonized.” Smith (2021) conceives

of decolonization as “centring our concerns and world views and then coming to know and understand theory and research from our own perspectives and for our own purposes” (p. 34).

It worthwhile mentioning that Ngũgĩ Wa Thiongo (1993) flagged the notion of “centring” as far back as the early 1990s, arguing a case for “the need to move the centre from its assumed location in the West to a multiplicity of spheres in all the cultures of the world. The assumed location of the centre of the universe in the West is what goes by the term Eurocentrism, an assumption which developed with the domination of the world by a handful of Western nations” (Wa Thiongo, 1993, p. xvi). Amin (2009, p. 179) suggested that manifestations of Eurocentrism “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” manifestations. Thus, Eurocentrism represents not only a theory of world history but also a “global political project” (Amin, 2009, p. 154).

For Fanon (2004, p. 2), “Decolonization... is an historical process. In other words, it can only be understood, it can only find its significance and become self-coherent insofar as we can discern the history-making movement which gives it form and substance. Decolonization is the encounter between two congenitally antagonistic forces that in fact owe their singularity to the kind of reification secreted and nurtured by the colonial situation.” He argues that decolonization “focuses on and fundamentally alters being, and transforms the spectator crushed to a nonessential state into a privileged actor, captured in a virtually grandiose fashion by the spotlight of History. It infuses a new rhythm, specific to a new generation of men, with a new language and a new humanity. Decolonization is truly the creation of new men... the ‘thing’ colonized becomes a man through the very process of liberation” (Fanon, 2004, p. 2). “Decolonization, therefore, implies the urgent need to thoroughly challenge the colonial situation” (Fanon, 2004, p. 2).

Humanization of epistemologies of the human sciences

Our conception of the notion of “humanization” draws from Brazilian philosopher, Paulo Freire’s (1970, p. 51) seminal work, *Pedagogy of the oppressed*, in which he argues that “humanizing pedagogy is a teaching method that ceases to be an instrument by which teachers can manipulate students, but rather expresses the consciousness of the students themselves”. Freire (1970, p. 56) reminds us that “teachers who are able to promote a humanizing pedagogy are more apt to develop mutual humanization in a dialogic approach with their students, in which everyone ultimately develops a critical consciousness.” The notion of humanizing epistemologies is not alien to scientific and philosophical discourses. Epistemology is generally considered a branch of philosophy (Potter, 2017). It is therefore logical to first consider humanizing philosophy, particularly moral philosophy (Roberts, 1998). The following four Freirean moral principles are fundamental:

1. People ought to pursue their ontological vocation of becoming more fully human (through engaging in critical, dialogical praxis).

2. No person or group of people ought to knowingly constrain or prevent another person or group of people from pursuing the ontological vocation; that is to say, no person ought to oppress another.
3. We ought (collectively and dialogically) to consider what kind of world—what social structures, processes, relationships, and so on—would be necessary to enable (all) people in a given social setting to pursue their humanization.
4. All people ought to act to transform existing structures where critical reflection reveals that these structures serve as an impediment to the pursuit of humanization (by any groups within a society): this is the task of liberty (Roberts, 1998, p. 113).

The Freirean pedagogy appears instrumental in promoting the praxis of humanizing pedagogy in disrupting the scientific and philosophical discourses into realizing how they oppress alternative knowledge systems (Lee, 2003). Allowing spaces for dialogical praxis could be perceived as fertile ground for humanization of epistemologies of the human sciences. Enabling (all) people in a particular social context to pursue their humanization could be promoted through embracing who they are and not wanting to change them into what dominant systems want them to be. Knowledge production structures need to change to accommodate oppressed epistemologies. Epistemicide must be prevented in all its forms, covert or overt. The human sciences such as psychology, social and cultural anthropology, economics, political science and others, have a common object of study which is human existence and behavior. Psychology is particularly interested in explaining human agency (Bandura, 2006) and behavior (Freedheim & Weiner, 2021). In line with the spirit of this article we use critical African psychology as a lens to understand Botho/Ubuntu paradigm as cognitive justice in psychology.

Critical African psychology

Mainstream psychology is a discipline with a plethora of subfields. Reference to psychology in this article does not aim at one particular branch but intends to align with any branch of psychology as it addresses contextual issues. Critical psychology has emerged as a subfield of psychology that “emphasize either a ‘critical’ approach to psychology as such or a ‘psychological’ approach that is critical in its ethos” (Parker, 2015, p. 2). Critical traditions and critical scholars acknowledge that critical psychology is an emerging field (Mather, 2000). Painter and Blanche (2004) note that critical psychology in South Africa is indeed not different from anywhere in the world. Ratele (2017) bemoans the fact that critical psychology seems content to ignore conducting some introspection on its African heritage, or its absence.

Critical psychology emerged as “deconstruction” (Clark & Hepburn, 2015, p. 299) and transformation of mainstream psychology for the inclusion of the “...voices of change” (Sloan, 2001, p. xix). Critical psychology, in unison with other disciplines and movements such as radical psychoanalysis, neo-Marxism, liberation theology and others, promoted a clarion call for the reformation of mental health systems around the world (Sloan, 2001, p. xxi). Sampson (2001, p. 1), identified two aspects of what is critical about critical psychology: First, being critical of the field of psychology in general.

Second, a concern with human betterment through societal transformation. Clark and Hepburn (2015, p. 297) credited the French post-structuralist critical thinking that it also prompted the development of new ways of doing psychology. Maldonado-Torres (2017), credits Frantz Fanon for a decolonial turn in psychology with the field becoming a decolonial transdisciplinary practice (p. 432). The third International Critical Psychology conference [that] was held at the Howard College Campus of the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) in South Africa according to Sonn (2005), revealed that critical psychology continued the hegemony of the mainstream psychology on Northern counties (p. 592). The conference indicated White dominance of the discipline of psychology in general and critical psychology specifically (Sonn, 2005, p. 594). In line with Sloan's (2001) inclusion of the voices of change, the conference provided space for reflecting on critical theory and Indigenous psychology. Mkhize (2004, p. 25) called for a critical emancipatory psychology poised to "take into account indigenous people's languages, philosophies and worldviews". Mkhize (2021, p. 424), later boldly re-brands psychology in Africa as African/Afrikan-centered Psychology.

To that end, therefore the goal of critical African psychology is to "use psychological knowledge in, by, for, and with Africa" and the rest of the globe (Ratele et al., 2021, p. 430). This is the approach through which to de-hegemonize and humanize the field of psychology. In a similar vein, "...critical African psychology is willed towards a fundamentally humanizing, political, and ethical set of practices that bring notions of psychosocial liberation into social, economic, political, cultural, epistemic, and interpersonal justice" (Ratele et al., 2021, p. 432). We use *Botho/Ubuntu* driven critical African psychology in this article as a conduit to promote epistemic equity in knowledge production and use in the field of psychology, especially in conducting and disseminating research outputs.

Critical African psychology is emerging at the time in the history of Africa, when the people of Africa need their mental health issues to be addressed by professionals who understand their context. African mental healing must be from African perspectives. Researching and constructing African knowledge from African worldviews by Africans, should make inroads into Euro-Western, nondominating, and de-hegemonised dialogical spaces (Freire, 1970). Africa is an exponentially heterogenous continent in which no one system of psychology can sufficiently deal with avalanches of social issues plaguing the continent. However, we perceive critical African psychology as better placed to develop home-grown knowledge and practice to address African problems. The continent of Africa is generally thought of as comprising five subregions: North or Northern Africa, West Africa, Central or Middle Africa, East Africa, and Southern Africa. The oxymoron of Africa is that it is similar and different simultaneously. Critical African psychology is therefore faced with addressing this complexity of Africa.

A cursory look into the *Handbook of Critical Psychology* by Parker (2015) reflects only scanty representation of Africa, the second largest continent with the largest population. Part II of the handbook deals with varieties of critical psychology, but there is no mention of critical African psychology. An African psychologist, Desmond Painter in Part IIIa, approximates our desire to mainstream *botho/ubuntu* paradigm for cognitive justice in psychology but only deals with postcolonial theory (Painter, 2015). This is because Painter (2015, p. 366) observes that "mainstream academic psychology and

currently existing critical psychologies alike arguably remain Western-centric.” We embrace the “worlding” of critical psychology, and hope that this creates epistemic legitimacy and space for critical African psychology (p. 366).

We challenge the succumbing argument by Makhubela (2016, p. 1) that, “...some African psychologists’ indefatigable insistence on narrow localism and ethno-theorising, is a cowardly defeatism and an accessory to domination.” How is localism narrow? Why is ethnotheorising cowardly and defeatist? How is embracing local, contextually relevant knowledge contributing to domination, and is the contrary not true? We consider heroic and nonconformist, the work of critical African psychologists who strive to place Africa and her rich epistemic heritage at the center of knowledge creation and dissemination.

It is in our view, counter *botho/ubuntu* to embrace that which is foreign while scorning the local, while not appreciating one’s own house. Africa is our home, our motherland and our only hope. In Sesotho, which is the language of both authors: *Ntlo ea motho e mong, ha e na boroko*. Translated crudely; “One cannot sleep peacefully in someone else’s house.” Our approach is based on *botho/ubuntu* paradigm and aligns with Painter’s (2015, p. 366) “worlding” of epistemic relevance of local knowledge systems without epistemic neocolonialism. We are encouraged by Ebede-Ndi’s (2016) approach that: “... African-centered psychology and mode of transcendence should: (a) move beyond discussions on ideologies and identities, (b) concentrate on developing practical applications of its guiding principles, and (c) reclaim the relevance of an African history, memory, and past” (p. 65). We perceive *botho/ubuntu* as containing a rich heritage that can provide practical applications and guiding principles. Malherbe and Ratele (2022) suggest critical, emancipatory knowledge. Critical African psychology spearheads traversing the ecologies of knowledge construction, and we propose benchmarking on the *botho/ubuntu* paradigm for cognitive justice in psychology.

Botho/Ubuntu paradigm as a driver of cognitive justice in psychology

Letseka (2022, p. 12) contends that the term *uBuntu* is widely used among diverse Bantu-speaking peoples and cultures of Southern Africa. The Basotho people of Lesotho call it *Botho*, whereas the Tswana-speaking people in Botswana and South Africa call it *Setho*. Tambulasi and Kayuni (2005, p. 148) highlighted that for the Chewa speaking peoples of Zambia, *uBuntu* is known as *Umunthu*. For the Venda speakers of South Africa, it is referred to as *Vhutu*, and the Nguni-speaking peoples of Southern Africa (i.e., the Xhosa, the Zulu, the Ndebele, and the Nguni peoples) know it as *uBuntu*. For Yao speakers of Malawi it is referred to as *Umundu*. For the Tsongas of South Africa, Mozambique, parts of Zimbabwe and Swaziland, it is known as *Bunhu*. Finally, for the Shona-speaking people of Zimbabwe, it is called *Unhu*. Phillipson’s (1977, p. 108) argues that “Bantu languages, spoken by more than 130 million Black Africans, are distributed across Africa” and that “speakers of Bantu languages are also found in the equatorial forest as far north as where forest gives way to Savanna.”

Letseka (2000) argues that the notion of *Botho/Uubuntu* “encapsulates moral norms and virtues such as kindness, generosity, compassion, benevolence, courtesy, and respect and concern for others” (pp.179–180). Letseka (2022, p. 13) further argues that the notion of *Botho/Uubuntu* is an indigenous African worldview or philosophy; it represents a moral theory as well as the normative foundation upon which concepts of personhood are built. Put differently, it refers to “theory of right action,” a pedagogical principle, and a constitutional value (Letseka, 2022; Metz, 2007). In the same vein, Waghid and Smeyers (2012, p. 20) argue that because uBuntu is a specific ethic of care based on relational autonomy and empathy, it is found to be a persuasive approach.

Observing that Ubuntu is a traditional African worldview, Mokgoro (1998, p. 16) contends that *Ubuntu* is therefore, “a philosophy of life, which in its most fundamental sense represents personhood, humanity, humaneness and morality; a metaphor that describes group solidarity where such group solidarity is central to the survival of communities with a scarcity of resources, and the fundamental belief is that ‘[u]buntu ngumuntu ngabantu, modio ke modia ba batho ba bangwe,’ which, literally translated, means ‘a human being is a human being because of other human beings.’” She argues *Ubuntu* “is a humanistic orientation towards fellow beings” (Mokgoro, 1998, p. 16). She further contends that “group solidarity, conformity, compassion, respect, human dignity, humanistic orientation and collective unity have, among others, been defined as key social values of *Ubuntu*” (Mokgoro, 1998, p. 15). For Mokgoro (1998, p. 16), “a society based on *Ubuntu* places strong emphasis on family obligations.” Such a society is also characterized by a culture of communal interdependence. In other words, people do not exist alone or independently of one another but are instead interdependent in regard to their livelihoods. For Ramose (2002, p. 270), understood as humanness or a humane and respectful attitude toward others, “*Ubuntu* is the root of African philosophy. The being of an African in the universe is inseparably anchored upon *Ubuntu*.” Ramose (2002, p. 230) states that “*Ubuntu* is the wellspring flowing with African ontology and epistemology”. Ramose (2002, p. 231) further asserts 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*.”

Others have associated Ubuntu with the notion of “care.” For instance, Waghid and Smeyers (2012, p. 20) argue that *Ubuntu* is a particular ethic of care that depends on both relational autonomy and *empathy*. Waghid (2014a, p. 2) describes Ubuntu as *a humanistic, intellectual, and political-ideological notion* that can engender cooperation and harmony in human relations. As a political and ideological idea, Ubuntu can help foster the esteem and consideration necessary to create an African society that is morally admirable; it can also promote human interdependence that facilitates sociopolitical action. Waghid (2014b, p. 271) contends that “*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.” Furthermore, Letseka (2000, pp. 179–180) summarizes this perspective in stating 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.”

Our view on *Botho/Ubuntu* is that as a philosophical concept it transcends Africa and acquires the nature of universality. However, it is important to note that *Botho/Ubuntu* tenets make it particularly contextual while allowing universal relevance. Kenyan philosopher and theologian Mbiti (1989) coined the maxim: “*I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am*” (p. 106). Verhoef and Michel (1997, p. 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.” Mbiti (1989, p. 106) argued 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.” At the same time, “whatever happens to the individual happens to the whole group, and whatever happens to the whole group happens to the individual.” Similarly, former Kenyan President Jomo Kenyatta (1965) observed 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” (p. 29).

Cultural values of *Botho/Ubuntu* that could easily make in-roads into African/Afrikan-centered Psychology, specifically, critical African psychology are key to cognitive justice in psychology. In “Educating for Ubuntu/Botho,” Letseka (2013) draws lessons from Basotho Indigenous Education. The main lesson and a point of departure entails understanding the notion of Ubuntu/Botho. Letseka (2013, p. 338), poignantly points out that:

“Articulation of the notion of personhood to argue that educating for Ubuntu/Botho should entail equipping young people with the kinds of attributes and dispositions that enable them to live lives that are anchored in communal understandings of personhood and humanness... is sine qua non to addressing the social and cultural challenges of contemporary South Africa.”

The communal conceptualization of personhood and humaneness could be didactic to critical psychology which is critiqued for its “Westernised, individualistic worldview that is isolating and self-focused” (Fox et al., 2009, p. 6). The complexity of today’s world where respect for human life is nonexistent, could be debunked through African/Afrikan-centered Psychology bringing epistemic balance in the teaching of the value of respect in the human encounter. People must be respected because they are human. Children must not be neglected, abandoned or harassed, differently abled persons must be respected in communities, vulnerable and old women must not be raped or killed (Letseka, 2013). In their old age, human beings need more care and support. African families take care of their elderly, and do not send them to old-age homes (Michel et al., 2019). This is the ultimate respect for human life which could serve as a counter a worldview that sees an elderly person as deserving of care from strangers. *Botho/Ubuntu* advocates for care of human beings from the cradle to the grave.

There is a plethora of literature that attest to the view that African families take care of the elderly (Adamek et al., 2020; Makiwane, 2011; Kodwo-Nyameazea & Nguyen, 2008;

Schatz, 2007). For example, Schatz (2007) recognizes that “elders in developing countries face concerns about healthcare, social security, and old-age care” (p. 2). He further argues that “in South Africa, adult children’s migration, unemployment, and a high rate of non-marital births (often leading to children left with maternal grandparents when the mother marries another man) also contribute to the burdens faced by the elderly” (p. 2). However, there is consensus that caring for older relatives is often seen as an honor and as fulfilling one’s duty in order to maintain elders’ dignity and quality of life (Adamek et al., 2020). Makiwane (2011) comments that elders often live with their children in some developing countries, which may be due in part to both “filial piety [and by] economic realities” (p. 21). Writing about the elders in Ghana, Kodwo-Nyameazea and Nguyen (2008) note that “provision of elder care is viewed as a way to show family solidarity, and a means to demonstrate respect and appreciation to one’s older adult relatives and others who had provided support in the past” (p. 279).

Lessons of Botho/Ubuntu from the Sankofa mythical bird encourage going back into the indigenous ways to doing things and carrying forwards things that work effectively for human advancement (Slater, 2019). Recognition of indigenous knowledge systems promotes epistemic equity, and therefore by default cognitive justice. Critical African psychology could study the wisdom of the sages from across Africa and identify best practices that could form a critical part of therapy, research and practice. For instance, Africans raised children communally, no child belonged to a single family but to the community (Kiambi, 2022). It was therefore feasible to inculcate values in the youth as they were aware that every elderly person was interested in their moral upbringing. Reupert et al. (2022, p. 1) acknowledge the idea of a village raising a child, but propose understanding and expanding the notion of the village.

Reupert et al. (2022, p. 2) clarify that “the phrase ‘it takes a village to raise a child’ originates from an African proverb and conveys the message that it takes many people (‘the village’) to provide a safe, healthy environment for children, where children are given the security they need to develop and flourish, and to be able to realize their hopes and dreams.” They go on to argue that “this requires an environment where children’s voices are taken seriously, and where multiple people (the ‘villagers’) including parents, siblings, extended family members, neighbours, teachers, professionals, community members and policy makers, care for a child.” To that end, all members of the village may provide direct care to children or support parents in caring for them. Mbiti (1970, p. 141) writes that in Africa, “the child must go through rites of incorporation so that it becomes fully integrated into the entire society.” In this respect, Mbiti (1970, p. 141) further argues, “the children belong to the corporate body of kinsmen, even if they bear only their father’s name.” He concludes by stating that “whatever happens to the individual happens to the whole group, and whatever happens to the group happens to the individual. The individual can only say: ‘I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am’” (p. 141). Masolo (2010) writes about Kiswahili terms *ujirani*, *utubora*, or *ujamaa*, which “connote relational states that go beyond friendship or warm relations with a neighbor or kin. They describe the socio-moral states that every child is taught and that every right-thinking person is called upon to consider implementing as the objective of his or her everyday conduct” (p. 240).

Our take in this paper therefore is that the *Botho/Ubuntu* is a compelling antidote against epistemic injustice, hermeneutical injustice, and/or cognitive injustice that have been attributed to the historical and hegemonizing impact of Euro-Western paradigms. The abovementioned inclusive and communally rooted in *Botho/Ubuntu*'s moral values, virtues, and principles would eschew the hegemonic and marginalizing characteristic features of Euro-Western paradigms.

Discussion

This study reinforces what is already known about the colonial experience in relation to the government, the economy, and religion. Globally the colonial experience is being criticized for inequitable ways in which it treated the colonized. As observed by Wendt et al. (2022), thorny questions must be asked and cultural adaptation implemented. One of the fundamental colonial experiences not to be overlooked is education. Undeniably, colonialism brought its type of education to the colonies, which may have been fundamentally different from the indigenous, traditional education systems (Blume, 2022). Thus, colonialism introduced Euro-Western paradigms and their hegemony. For extended periods, indigenous education had been relegated to the margins. While the clarion calls for decolonization are not new, their renewed strength emerge to counter cognitive and epistemic injustice by weaving together indigenous and western knowledge in science education (Higheagle et al., 2023). Thus fueling the agenda for decolonization. Decolonization has become a serious issue in recent times. While it may not only be African countries that drive the decolonial agenda, most countries in Africa are now taking drastic measures. For example, the de-dollarization driven by the global south, especially the BRICS countries has sparked evictions of diplomats from some countries in Africa. Some countries which have used colonial languages as official languages are now scrapping those and replacing them with local languages. Education systems have also begun to transform curricula, and there is elevation of indigenous knowledge systems. Euro-Western epistemologies are also becoming increasingly inclusive of and receptive toward indigenous knowledge systems. An indication of this is the "American Psychiatric Association's Apology to Black, Indigenous, and People of Color for Its Support of Structural Racism in Psychiatry" (American Psychiatric Association, 2021; Canady, 2021). This apology must be followed by tangible humanizing changes and not only remain at an ideological level by "increasing culturally responsive care and mental health equity with indigenous community mental health workers," as proposed by O'Keefe et al. (2021, p. 1).

Consequently, the humanization of epistemologies of the human sciences is imperative through epistemic leverage via Critical African Psychology. Critical African Psychology counterbalances the Euro-Western epistemic hegemony by allowing African epistemologies to be included and catapulted to the global knowledge dissemination. It was Frantz Fanon's work in psychology that disrupted the status quo from modern and colonial methods to decolonial ones (Maldonado-Torres, 2017). It is important that the decolonial attitude is not a hostile one, but one that seeks amicable reparations. If the premises of our article is *Botho/Ubuntu*, our mission should be to build, not to perpetuate divisions. Our aim

should be to work toward inclusive humanity which eventually, unconditionally respects every human being without any form of discrimination.

We therefore propose the Botho/Ubuntu paradigm as a driver of cognitive justice in psychology. We are acutely aware that Botho/Ubuntu cannot be a panacea to all human woes. However, the Botho/Ubuntu paradigm represents a worldview that can be interwoven into Euro-Western epistemologies. Thus, the Botho/Ubuntu paradigm promotes global justice characterised by human interconnectedness and interrelatedness (Chimakonam, 2017). The Botho/Ubuntu paradigm transcends cosmopolitanism and particularism (Etieyibo, 2017). As acknowledged by Fricker (2007), if epistemology ignores the perspective of otherness, it will be unbalanced. Our argument therefore is that epistemology must be all inclusive. The Botho/Ubuntu paradigm positions itself beyond Euro-Western dominance and becomes an African-centred decolonial paradigm, driven by Kwasi Wiredu's call for "Africa, know thyself" (Dastile, 2013).

Limitations

This article is conceptual in nature. It draws on our individual and collective bodies of literature. Moreover, it draws on a wide range of secondary sources which we analyze and critique. While the article neither draws from qualitative, quantitative, nor mixed methods and/or research designs and methodologies, it is anchored on strong psychophilosophical foundations that derive from our individual research in Botho/Ubuntu and psychology. The views and ideas advanced in this article are therefore not presumed to be generalizable to other, contending paradigms, such as for example, Euro-Western paradigms. Rather, they are here presented as counterepistemological and counterhegemonic initiatives that seek to create presence and visibility for the Botho/Ubuntu paradigm as an alternative African indigenous epistemology or a way of knowing.

Conclusion

This article explored the hegemonic impact of Euro-Western paradigms, which have, historically tended to assume dominance over other "forms of knowing" (epistemologies). The *modus operandi* of Euro-Western paradigms has been premised on the assumption that non-Western epistemologies are unscientific because they might not subscribe to Euro-Western notions of logic and rationality. The paper made a cursory suggestion for the deconstruction and decolonization of the institution of psychology. The article explored issues around cognitive and epistemic injustice. It presented cognitive justice as the right of different epistemologies and ontologies to co-exist in the bigger scheme of things in the world of knowledge production and practices. The article argued a case for the humanization of human sciences epistemologies through the lens of *Botho/Ubuntu* as an indigenous African epistemic approach, or way of knowing. By drawing on *Botho/Ubuntu*, the paper proposed humanization of psychology and other human sciences given that central to *Botho/Ubuntu* is the pursuit of humaneness. With its inclusive and communally rooted characteristic features, *Botho/Ubuntu* becomes poised as a platform for the practice of critical African Psychology.

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