

AN EXPLORATION OF 'CALLING' AS A CAREER AMONG BASOTHO TRADITIONAL HEALERS

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ABSTRACT

Traditional healing predates mainstream clinical healing in Lesotho and the world over. Chief Mohlomi was one of the well-known traditional healers of the Basotho nation at its inception. Since then, traditional healers have been the mainstay of healing and wellbeing in Lesotho. However, traditional healing has not been well documented or perceived as a meaningful career in Lesotho. This article explores 'calling' as a career among Basotho traditional healers. The article links ancestral naming to the career identity and calling of traditional healers. An interpretative phenomenological analysis of 16 audio recordings representing a convenience sample of traditional healers was conducted over a period of two months.

Keywords: Basotho, 'calling', ethnomusicology, career identity, traditional healing, transformative paradigm.

INTRODUCTION

Traditional healing has existed since time immemorial in indigenous contexts around the world (Moteetee and Van Wyk, 2011), and Africa is home to various types of indigenous healing. Healing presupposes "the balance or wholeness of the body, mind, and spirit... where the person, family, community, environment, and universe are interconnected, whole, and greater than the sum of their parts" (McElligott, 2010, p. 2). Once the balance or wholeness is lost, illness sets in, and conditions of life require restoration. Traditional healing and Western types of healing are generally considered mutually exclusive systems.

The central tenet of traditional healing is the possession of 'gifts' (Sandlana and Mtetwa, 2008), which can be equated with the vocational or career competencies of traditional healers – people designated to provide the service of healing in traditional communities. There is, however, a dearth of information on the career identity of Basotho traditional healers from an ethnomusicological perspective. This article endeavors to fill this hiatus by reviewing existential phenomenological career construction in terms of the ancestral naming of Basotho traditional healers. The binary approach to healing is rejected in favor of a holistic approach that caters for traditional as well as Western perspectives of healing. Ethnomusicology is used as a conduit for transformation based on collaboration between traditional healing and biomedical healthcare (Keikelame and Swartz, 2015).

BASOTHO TRADITIONAL HEALERS

"Tradition can also refer to that which is handed down, but the emphasis is more on the process of transmission than on the content transmitted" (Booth, 1978:

82). Basotho traditional healers fall into two main categories under the generic name *lingaka* – meaning doctors. The first group of healers' presence in communities is quiet and exemplified by their command of respect and sometimes fear. These are 'Diviners', 'medicinemen' who throw bones and concoct herbs for healing (Sanders, 1989: 523). The second group is loud, and their origin can be traced back to the Tugela River where the first healers (called *mathuela*) were trained (Rakotsoane, 2001: 186). Traditional healers are 'called' to belong to a network that links with and constantly consults the world of the ancestors. Basotho traditional healers can be men or women who enter the healing profession at different ages. Traditionally, most healers were men, but this has changed significantly in recent times (Moteetee and Van Wyk, 2011). Traditional healers in Basotho society diagnose and treat various diseases as well as prevent the casting of evil spells on those who consult them.

Traditional healing has an oral tradition that is common among indigenous people. Herbal traditional healing depends on the oral passing on of 'ethnobotanical knowledge' and by no other means (Kose, Moteetee, and Van Vuuren, 2015: 184). In recent times, traditional healing has played a key role in the treatment of HIV/AIDS as well as tuberculosis. The Sesotho generic word *ngaka*, meaning healer or doctor, is a term applied to any kind of traditional healer (Moteetee and Van Wyk, 2011). For the purposes of this article, two types of healers will be referred to, namely the herbalist (*ngaka-chitja*) and the diviner (*ngaka, selaoli*). Herbalists are generally very knowledgeable about the ethnobotanical healing properties of indigenous plants. "The diviner uses bones (*litaola*) to help him make a diagnosis and discern the appropriate treatment. The diagnosis is based on the way in which the various bones land or fall on the ground, having been thrown by the person consulting" (Moteetee and Van Wyk, 2011: 210).

'CALLING'

'Calling' can be traced back as far as the 16th century (Duffy, Dik, and Steger, 2011). In religious contexts, calling was referred to as "a sense of purpose or direction that leads an individual toward some kind of personally fulfilling and/or socially significant engagement within the work role, sometimes with reference to God or the divine" (Dik and Duffy 2009: 427). Later, calling was considered a vocation in the fields of psychology and work, industrial psychology, and career psychology. Dik and Duffy's (2009: 427) definition of calling accords with the view of calling expressed in this article: "A calling is a transcendent summons, experienced as originating beyond the self, to approach a particular life role in a manner oriented toward demonstrating or deriving a sense of purpose or meaningfulness and that holds other-oriented values and goals as primary sources of motivation."

ANCESTRAL NAMING FOR CAREER IDENTITY

Traditional Sesotho names play an important role in the day-to-day life of the Basotho. Names play an even bigger role when ascribed to a person in order to

prompt him or her to fulfill a certain mission in life. "Bound up with name, there is history, legend, and fact" (Makhubedu, 2009: 4). The ancestors have always been revered in Lesotho. They play a crucial role in the life of the Basotho and serve as guides when important life decisions have to be made. "Among Basotho in Southern Africa, 'names' and the naming process is a socio-cultural interpretation of historical events. They embody individual or group social experiences, social norms and values, status roles and authority, as well as personality and individual attributes" (Guma, 2001: 265).

Reverence for the ancestors is demonstrated through obedience to their call, and the first task is to accept a calling and undergo initiation. This is a period of training and cleansing where the healer initiate is prepared for the work ahead. The initiate is then given a name to live by, a name indicating a possible career change and a new career construction in traditional healing. According to Bogopa (2010: 1), "Ancestors have mystical powers and authority, and they retain an important role in the world of the living". It is therefore important that someone who is called heeds the ancestral call as not heeding the call can have negative repercussions. The conventional idea of career choice is therefore not applicable in this context – the 'old calling' in the sense of vocational calling is more apposite, leaving the person who is called with no option but to heed the call (Fejes and Nicoll, 2010). Ancestral naming seems to provide a platform for career identity whereby a given ancestral name indicates the career path a traditional healer must follow. This is affirmed by the observation that "[t]he meaning attached to names by Basotho, plays a significant role in the definition of 'personhood', because it is believed that a given name does not only serve as an identity but also determines the type of person the individual will be" (Guma, 2001: 267).

THE INDIGENOUS CAREER OF HEALING

Healing is inseparable from the ancestors in terms of the Sesotho cultural worldview. Central to the notion of ancestors is the wellbeing of those who are still alive. According to McElligott (2010: 1), Healing is a positive, subjective, unpredictable process involving transformation to a new sense of wholeness, spiritual transcendence, and reinterpretation of life". Healing thus brings to one's life a sense of wholeness and often spiritual transcendence as well as a reinterpretation of life. The first two aspects of healing generally find expression in cases where life is reinterpreted through a career. How then can indigenous healing be seen as a career?

From the transformative perspective espoused in this article, indigenous healing can be seen as a career that transcends the self with the ancestors as the main external influences (Duffy and Dik, 2009). The contemporary understanding of a career is a pattern of work experiences permeating the entire life span of a person (Weinert, 2001). The ancestral call to the indigenous career of healing may mark a moment of spiritual transcendence in the life of the person who is called (McElligott, 2010). It may mean a career adaptation stage that requires learning new skills and competencies for a healing career (Savickas, 1997).

ETHNOMUSICOLOGY AS A TRANSFORMATIVE PARADIGM

It is important for healers in indigenous contexts to accept ethnomusicology as a legitimate and vital transformative paradigm (Mertens, 2012). Ethnomusicology emerged as a result of cross-cultural psychology's attempt to understand the person and wellness in non-Western contexts (Levine, 2005). Ethnomusicology is therefore not the prerogative of one specific context. Various examples of ethnomusicology can be found around the world including "sub-Saharan African societies, through South American jungle cultures, to highly developed but very foreign civilizations such as the Japanese" (Turner, 2012: 40). Other examples can be found in the Philippines, New Zealand and Australia.

Ethnomusicology in indigenous contexts is built on multidimensional views of what constitutes a person, which is diametrically opposed to the mind-body Cartesian dualist perspective (Keys, Kaiser, Kohrt, Khoury and Brewster, 2012). Such ethnomusicology can be seen as a transformative paradigm that embraces multiple approaches to understanding the person. Ethnomusicology is a meta-physical (Mertens, 2012) understanding of the composition of person and self (Loving, 2005).

The indigenous career of healing relates to transforming unplanned events (happenstance) into opportunities such as the calling to indigenous healing (Mitchell, Levin, and Krumboltz, 1999). As little is known about traditional healing as a career (Sandlana and Mtetwa, 2008), I sought in this study to mainstream indigenous healing as one of the most important careers available to marginalized populations in many societies. From a transformation point of view, the non-recognition and exclusion of indigenous healers constitutes a violation of the human right of self-determination (Alarcon, 2001), articulated by Magnarella (2001: 433) as "those processes and structures through which a people gain and maintain control over their own destinies".

Bojuwoye and Sodi (2010) maintain that integrating traditional healing into counseling can fill an important gap in Western psychological practice. There is an even greater gap in relation to career psychology and the recognition of healing as a career. This may be because traditional healing is not regarded as a career on the grounds that it is too primitive and conducted by untrained people in highly informal ways. One could challenge these views by asking what yardstick is used to make these judgments. Integration between traditional healing and counseling could be seen as a transformative paradigm shift, and Sodi and Bojuwoye (2011) suggest practical ways of effecting such integration.

METHODOLOGY

The study followed a qualitative research methodology as "a way of thinking about and studying social phenomena" (Corbin and Strauss, 2008: 1), driven by an existential phenomenological philosophy (Corrie and Milton, 2000) and underpinned by a transformative research paradigm (Mertens, 2012). I adopted an empirically radical approach in the study that acknowledges indigenous

understandings of the phenomenon under consideration while maintaining necessary academic rigor (Jankowsky, 2007). The study set out to answer the following research questions.

- How can Basotho traditional healers' lived experiences impact on the evolving nature of career identity?
- How can ancestral naming contribute to the emerging nature of career identity among Basotho traditional healers?

RESEARCH DESIGN

The study had a phenomenological research design with a close relationship between its philosophical stance, paradigm, methodology and design (Sefotho, 2015). Its philosophical stance was existential and phenomenological (Corrie and Milton, 2000) and its research paradigm transformative in nature (Mertens, 2012). Its research design was phenomenological involving the exploration of the lived experiences of the traditional healers' ancestral names and how they impacted on their career identities (Zubane, 2001). The study thus endeavored to address the present gap in the research on the career identity of traditional healers.

METHODS

Study area

The study conveniently selected Radio Lesotho from the radio stations in Lesotho and employed a documentary research method to collect the data (Mogalakwe, 2009) based on the station's recordings of traditional healers' music for a period longer than ten years. These recordings cover different areas of Lesotho as mentioned by the participants in their introductions. The staff of Radio Lesotho travel to different parts of the country where recordings need to be done.

Data collection

The data were extracted from 16 oral self-report audio recordings presented in song in the form of "ritual healing music" (Jankowsky, 2007: 185) obtained from a convenience sample of traditional healers compiled over a period of four months. The data were contained in public documents not collected for the purposes of research yet available for purposes of inquiry. The recordings were compiled into tracks from 1 to 16. I listened to the songs for many hours to become acquainted with them and to identify recurring themes. A transcriber with the same cultural background as the traditional healers was engaged and asked to transcribe the recordings verbatim. A period of three months was devoted to listening to the recordings before the actual transcription took place. The data were not confined to the interviews – other sources were also used, followed by document analysis of the recorded material (Biggerstaff and Thompson, 2008).

Interpretative phenomenological analysis

The interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) in the study involved a detailed examination of the participants' life-world model, as suggested by Smith, Flowers, and Osborn (1997). IPA was used as an emergent strategy (Mintzberg, 1979) to uncover the experiential meanings of the songs (Finlay, 2009). The transcribed data were analyzed using IPA, which is used extensively in healthcare-related studies (Fudge, 2004). IPA was considered to be consonant with the phenomenological research design of the study and also with the study's overall philosophical paradigm (Groenewald, 2004). A major advantage of IPA is that it can reveal healer perspectives on healing in relation to general healthcare (Biggerstaff and Thompson, 2008).

IPA procedures

Learning about the participants' psychological world

An important aspect of traditional healing is how the composition of 'a person' is perceived and understood in indigenous contexts. In Lesotho, a person is perceived to consist of three elements: *mele, pelo le moea* – body, heart and spirit where the heart represents the mental/emotional aspects of the person and was used to explore the psychological world of the healers on the basis of the recordings. Because phenomenology is highly inferential, the meanings of the healers' psychological world were largely inferred. The data were analyzed to identify those constructs believed to be indicative of this world (Krippner, 2007). The researcher's experiences resonated with the healers' life world and were bracketed while analyzing the data.

Bracketing my own experiences and prior knowledge

Bracketing is a concept that emerged from phenomenology as a technique for improving rigor and reducing bias (Tufford and Newman, 2012). "Bracketing is a methodological device of phenomenological inquiry that requires deliberately putting aside one's own belief about the phenomenon under investigation or what one already knows... holding in abeyance those elements that define the limits of an experience" (Chan, Fung and Chien, 2013: 1). According to Fischer (2009: 583), "[b]racketing typically refers to an investigator's identification of vested interests, personal experience, cultural factors, assumptions and hunches that could influence how he or she views the study's data". Bracketing can therefore be a challenging exercise for qualitative researchers (Tufford and Newman, 2012).

I bracketed my own experiences relating to traditional healing through a strategy known as 'mental preparation' (Chan, Fung and Chien, 2013: 3), which involves interpreting meanings against one's own past knowledge. Throughout the study, I was constantly reflexive but even more so during the data analysis stage both "with data and with evolving findings" (Fischer, 2009: 583). My own experiences relate to growing up under an uncle who was a traditional healer and who used to send us out to gather herbs for healing as young boys. Thus, I used mental

preparation to obviate using my past knowledge as a lens to interpret meaning so that I could concentrate on the participants' life-world.

The participants' life-world expressed through songs

The concept of 'life-world' is central to the work of Jurgen Habermas (Fairtlough, 1991: 547) within the phenomenological tradition (Tufford and Newman, 2012). Life-world was used in this study as another conceptual unit of analysis. Its components are culture, society, and personality, as identified by Brown (2011). "When we speak words, we are consciously and often unconsciously selecting dynamic, rhythmic and timbric elements to express our wishes, thoughts and responses to others in a way that is uniquely indicative of who we are" (Loewy, 2004). The IPA of the healers' life-world as expressed through songs gave an indication of who the healers in the song said they were (Loewy, 2004).

A double hermeneutic interpretation

According to Rennie (2012), qualitative research is hermeneutical, especially when it involves phenomenological inquiry. The last aspect of IPA as used in this study was hermeneutic interpretation as "hermeneutic phenomenology is concerned with the life world or human experience as it is lived" (Kafle, 2011: 191). Hermeneutics emerged as a methodology for biblical interpretation long before it became part of research methodology. According to Walshaw and Duncan (2015), hermeneutics is both a philosophical tradition and a methodological resource. I used hermeneutics in this study as an interpretation tool to help me better understand the world of the traditional healer. "Unlike the objects of the natural science, the objects of knowledge of the human sciences are characterized by a native point of view that cannot be ignored in the research process" (Ginev, 1998: 260). "In the double hermeneutic, hermeneutics enters into the social sciences on two levels of the world of the social scientist and the world studied by the social scientist... the double hermeneutic enables the social scientist to make sense of the relationship between ordinary language and social activity" (Maggs-Rapport, 2001: 279). As a researcher using a double hermeneutic interpretation, I paid particular attention to the language used (Maggs-Rapport, 2001) in the traditional healers' songs, cognizant of traditional healing as a career. The more I listened to these songs, the more I asked myself: what is the double hermeneutic of building connections as the essence of Basotho healers' career identity? (Cooper, Fleisher and Cotton, 2012).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study identified two main themes as abstracted from the recordings through in-depth, line-by-line scrutiny (Ryan and Bernard, 2003), namely ancestral calling and ancestral naming. Traditional healers were sidelined for many years due to comparisons with Western-trained healers, and traditional medicine was marginalized. However, today, the world realizes the value of traditional healing and the role traditional healers can play in curbing the spread of HIV/AIDS in particular. This may begin with the circumcision of boys and the repudiation of the belief

that they have been bewitched when people show symptoms of HIV/AIDS. In this phenomenological study, the main aim was to deepen understanding of the phenomenon of career identity among Basotho traditional healers.

THEME 1: CALLING AS SUBJECTIVE AND OBJECTIVE EXPERIENCE

Ancestral calling is synonymous with religious calling and can be compared also to a vocation (Steger, Pickering, Shin and Dik, 2010). Once traditional healers have accepted the calling, they invoke or consult the ancestors. The following sub-themes support Theme 1: Dwelling place of the ancestors; Ancestral calling is a painful experience; Training of traditional healers.

Dwelling place of the ancestors

In acknowledging and seeking guidance, one participant chanted as follows:

“You are an ancestor in the dwelling place of the grandmothers and grandfathers.”

“We call towards the graves; new and old. Ancestors, what do you want me to do?”

Dik and Duffy (2009) argue that incorporating the constructs of calling and vocation into the career counseling process can be very useful.

Ancestral calling is a painful experience

This is certainly true of the ancestral calling of Basotho traditional healers. According to the participants in the present study:

“A calling by the ancestors is a painful experience.”

A calling is not a personal choice – people follow a calling not because they like it but out of a sense of obligation. The pain of a calling may be psychological because when one has not made a choice, job dissatisfaction can easily ensue (Hughes and Bozionelos, 2007). The pain may also be physical as initiates sometimes have to wear animal skins and walk barefoot regardless of the weather conditions. There may also be financial disadvantages as initiates may have to forgo their salaries or lose their jobs altogether as training may last six months to a year. This will clearly require career adaptability (Savickas, 1997; Härtung, Porfeli and Vondracek, 2008) as career change has occurred (Carrillo-Tudela, Hobijn, She and Visschers, 2016).

Training of traditional healers

The study participants mentioned where they were trained as a sign of authentication and belonging:

“I was trained at Fobane. I was trained in the Free State. I was trained here at Sekhutlong. I was trained at Ha Majara.”

It is important to indicate the place where and the person under whom (an experienced healer) training was received in order to validate that one is indeed

a trained healer and not an imposter. This is necessary both for one's own protection and that of the community members one serves. Training involves detailed instruction in ethnomedicine (Richter, 2003) through apprenticeship under an experienced healer (Truter, 2007).

According to one of the participants:

"I am not only a traditional healer, I am also a pastor. I am just here to bless the family, so that all the ancestors will be pleased."

This is typical of some African religions where traditional healing and religion are combined as a career. Given the transformatory nature of the present study, career versatility in terms of protean and boundaryless careers (Briscoe, Hall and DeMuth, 2006) is encouraged to promote traditional healers' career identity (McArdle, Waters, Briscoe and Hall, 2007). According to some of the participants:

"We are asking for light and blessings from all corners of the world. O Diviner, throw your bones, the ancestors are in hiding."

"The ancestors sent me."

This could be extrapolated to mean searching for a career under guidance and counseling as twin pillars of career development. The skills people have before they become healers are transferable (Bennett, 2002). However, many traditional healers may not be well educated (Richter, 2003) and, therefore, the calling to healing may actually be their only career opportunity.

THEME 2: ANCESTRAL NAMES AS DEFINING THE ROLES AND CAREER IDENTITY OF TRADITIONAL HEALERS

Naming can be equated with a calling in traditional Basotho settings. Names convey "a status role, personality and individual attributes" among the Basotho (Guma, 2001: 265). Names given by the ancestors are significant as they provide guidance on what one is called to do. Healers have to live up to the names given by the ancestors. Failure to do so may be considered negation of the calling and result in ancestral reproach (Bogopa, 2010).

Theme 2 was supported by the sub-theme:

Ancestral naming

Names given by the ancestors are indicative of a calling. A person is named in a particular way that signifies and is consonant with his or her calling. In the present study, the participants provided names they had been given by the ancestors.

Some of the participants reported as follows:

"My ancestral name is: The medicine."

All traditional healers use herbs in healing, yet this name indicates that the bearer has to be particularly adept in the use of medicinal herbs in order to improve the health of community members. 'The medicine' can also control any

perceived social phenomena that may harm community members (Moteetee and Van Wyk, 2011).

“My ancestral name is: Water snake.”

Traditional healers are considered to belong to or to emerge from water. In Basotho culture, a water snake is a mystical creature endowed with powers to communicate with humans and sometimes to act in the place of the ancestors to convey messages to healers (Rakotsoane, 2001). Healers with such a name have a certain mysticism and reverence. Their careers are likely to thrive if they display the ability to foretell the future and point patients in the right direction for healing.

“My ancestral name is: Seabird.”

This is a rare and peculiar name, especially among the Basotho who live far from the sea. Nonetheless, it is a name that depicts versatility, a guiding and providing spirit, and the resilience to beat the odds and live a long life. Seabirds are also considered to be sentinels (Mallory, Robinson, Hebert and Forbes, 2010), a characteristic that could be amenable to the career discourse. The name also indicates the relationship of traditional healers with water. Although not clear whether the reference is to a pelican or hammer-head, the name has mystical qualities that can be traced to the mythology surrounding pelicans.

“My ancestral name is: The defender.”

In keeping with the concept of healing, the name ‘The defender’ resonates with the idea of defending community members against disease and calamity. It can also signify ‘The defender’ of ancestral wishes and commands. Sometimes individuals or communities may act against the wishes of the ancestors, and it may then be the duty of ‘The defender’ to steer them back to the right way of doing things.

In summary, these names provide information that can be linked to the career identity of traditional healers. The calling reveals the nature of the career that traditional healers are meant to follow as “a calling and career development are assumed to be closely related” (Hirschi and Herrmann, 2013: 51).

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The results and conclusions of the study have a number of limitations. The primary limitation was restricting the sources of data to an analysis of recorded material. Since this was a phenomenological approach, the study could have benefitted from richer data gleaned through in-depth interviews with people living with a calling and linking the calling to the career identity of traditional healers. Finally, this was an exploratory study in a field where little research has been done on the linking of career to traditional healing.

CONCLUSION

The study challenges the status quo on how traditional healing as a calling can be perceived as a career (Duffy, Bott, Allan, Torrey and Dik, 2012). Although

limited, the results suggest a link between traditional healing and careers, especially boundaryless and protean careers (Briscoe, Hall and DeMuth, 2006). Regarding career identity, there appears to be no evidence that traditional healers link their calling and ancestral names to their career identity. The implications of the study are that there is urgent need for research on the possibilities of traditional healing as a career in what Sefotho (2014) calls hephapreneurship, such research could contribute to the livelihood of marginalized members of society.

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