

CHAPTER FIVE

KNOWLEDGE BASE AS CULTURAL CONSTRUCT

What will follow in this chapter is a look at some themes from literature, relevant to this study, expounding on *African* and *black* psychology and philosophy. These are themes that have emerged from the culture, - and culture as a social construct, is seen to be inextricably intertwined with knowledge. Thus the themes could be viewed as forming part of local knowledge of the context.

The purpose of presenting these ideas here is to sketch the one end of the knowledge continuum western – African, from whence rise some arguments for indigenous knowledge in an African context. The notion of a knowledge continuum in itself serves to reify the dialectic approach to knowledge. However, it is not the intention to further this dialectic, but rather to present some dissenting voices from the other side coming from the modernist frame, as a background to further dialogue of an alternative approach. Much of this study has to do with voice and voicelessness, sound and silence, and so it seems only proper and congruent to give space to these ideas that contribute to the call for more inclusivity in a western dominated psychology.

It needs to be noted that this consideration of African cultures is made from a western perspective, which is where the author stands. Sometimes the concepts will be discussed comparatively.

Several writers and thinkers of African and black origin have attempted to draw parallels between African/black knowledge and psychology and philosophy. For this reason and also because of their common roots, both psychology and philosophy are considered as sources although they are both western notions in themselves.

Writing and the Oral Tradition

Considering the voicelessness of the marginalized African peoples (Fanon, 1967; Fanon, in Bulhan, 1985; Seedat, 1993) it is ironic to begin with a discussion of the oral tradition. However, it appears as if the western academic community was reading and so did not hear the words of the African peoples speaking about themselves. What was then first written by African authors was largely criticised both by westerners and other Africans for various reasons. Probably one of the most compelling reasons for the criticism has to do with the fact that the voices from both sides took the form of dialectic rather than a search for a dialogue.

According to Asante and Asante (1985), African culture was until fairly recently mainly described in literature by western scholars and, they claim, that it was the publication of Cheikh Anta Diop's book "African origin of civilisation", in 1971, which made way for a *true* African transformation in historiography. The varying arguments for the "true", claim Africa has preserved its stories in an oral tradition (Boadu, 1985; Nöthling, 1989; Serequeberhan, 1991; Wiredu, 1991) and those searching for some measure of purism often criticise scholars and writers of African texts as being either non-African themselves (Hountondji, 1983), or having lost their African-ness to a western education (Oyéwùmi, 2002).

Some disparaged the oral tradition itself. Early ethnophilosophers such as Placide Tempels (Hountondji, 1991; Masolo, 1994, Oruka, 2002), Alexis Kagame and Tannen (Biakolo, 2002), took the oral tradition to be a sign of primitiveness, an indication of the savagery of the early African people, referring to them as *pre-literate* and *inferior*. This attitude was also embraced by early anthropologists such as Lévy-Bruhl, Frazer, Tylor and Morgan who, additionally, placed the white man (sic) at the pinnacle of rational and abstract thought:

With the primitives, thought and language are of a character almost exclusively concrete.... In a word, our mentality is above all 'conceptual', the other barely so. (Lévy-Bruhl in Irele, 1983, p. 13)

Irele (1983) and Hountondji (1983) were among later African writers who rejected this denigrated view of African peoples. Hountondji (1983) believes that African thought should, can and does connect to the scientific world through the development of its own philosophy. He rejects contemplations on African ways by non-Africans as ethnophilosophical texts which serve to interpret and explain African thinking to other non-Africans. He maintains that it is the African self alone who can reflect on African ways and systems. Hountondji (1983) calls for a liberation of African discourse by Africans.

Among others, Wiredu (1991), counters voices such as Hountondji's and Irele's. These others are of the opinion that certain elements of African traditional thought may serve to hold back development and impede modernisation.

Through these deliberations and countering the ignominy of being referred to as primitive, runs an assertion of pride in being African and allegations of supremacy, flouting the western claims to this position. This assertion views Africa and Africans as the origins of civilisation with a direct line descending from the Ancient Egyptian culture. D. K. Koka (1996) and Cheikh Anta Diop (in Koka, 1996) suggest that western Europeans have wrongfully claimed this descendancy and that the Ancient Greeks acquired what knowledge they had from the Egyptians but failed to improve on it (Koka, 1996). The words of Diop express both pride and the anguish of the marginalised (in Koka, 1996, p. 49):

Greece, Mother of the best in European civilization, was a child suckled at the breast of Ethiopia, which itself had evolved from the complex womb of the Afrikan Motherland.

The history of Black Africa will remain suspended in air and cannot be written correctly until African historians dare to connect it with the history of Egypt.

Dialectics of African Traditional and Western Scientific Thought

Continuing in the dialectical of African versus western thought, comparisons have been drawn between traditional African thought and western scientific thought. Some of these will be discussed below.

Masolo refers to African traditional thought process as a "world of magical beliefs" (1994, p. 129). He presents the work of Robin Horton who claims that for the traditional African, words and reality are inextricably linked such that they become identical. This is in contrast to the modernist western scientific notion of words being tools to represent, explain and predict reality. Even social constructionism draws a line before it reaches the notion of *reality*. For the traditional African the identification of words with *reality* opens a window to the magical, the spirit world and personal spiritual explanations. This is typical of the dynamic at play in some African traditional ceremonies such as the *naming ceremony*¹ and in the significance of the role of spirituality in the African traditional way of life. Ephirim-Donker (1997) suggests that it is believed that the very existence of a person depends on the successful completion of the naming ritual.

The social power and authority held by the churches of Africa testify to the important place spiritual life plays in traditional and modern African

¹ Naming ceremony: Traditional ritual whereby a newborn child is given his/her names. The names carry significance for the person throughout life.

culture beyond the narrow delineation of *religion* (Bakker, 1989; Nöthling, 1989; Nsamenang, 1999; Peltzer, 1995; Setiloane, 1989). The present day African Independent Churches (Goba, 1988) are mostly Christian in origin but the confluence of African spiritual traditions with Christian dogma, have mutated these churches to social structures of a unique form and flavour (Goba, 1988). They have moved beyond places of worship alone, to places of physical and mental healing, ancestral connection, social support and, in Masolo's words, places of "magical beliefs".

Very often the religious services and the healing services integrate inextricably and are conducted by persons known as *prophets*². These same prophets lead church congregations in spiritual matters and ceremonious ritual but also hold special powers of healing, bestowed on them by the *ancestors*³. These spiritual healers are called to the healing profession through a process of *thwasa*⁴. This process usually takes the form of an illness that resolves during the training process of the healer (Campbell, 1998). The induction to becoming a healer involves becoming attuned to the voices of the ancestors whose powers the healer draws on in the healing craft.

The link between spirituality and healing is also found in African Islam practices (Bakker, 1996). With more than 40% of Africans south of the Sahara following an Islamic tradition, Islam shows itself to be a significant influence on present day African thinking and in turn has been influenced by traditional African practices.

Horton, (in Masolo, 1994), proposes that traditional African thought remains undisturbed by new explanations such as scientific explanations of the twentieth century, for example medical diagnoses and treatment. According to him the traditional African thought typically does not reject its own

² Prophet: Refer to chapter two

³ Ancestors: Deceased relatives who continue to play a role in the lives of the living

⁴ Thwasa: Process whereby a traditional spiritual healer is called by the ancestors to the healing profession. This is often accompanied by a sickness which resolves during the training.

explanations nor, necessarily, the new ones, but accommodates the new ones. This, too, is in contrast to the western scientific way of viewing theories of reality as adversarial. Once again, it is not being suggested here that either western or traditional African thought systems are in any way unitary, but that the notion of an “accommodative” (Masolo, 1994, p.130) thought process is useful in further considerations of African adaptation to the pressures of modernisation and westernisation. The reader is reminded of the description of Mamelodi in *The Story*, chapter one, where the Day Hospital lies across the road from the *sangoma*⁵. The one accommodating the other’s presence and the patients making easy use of both simultaneously for the same afflictions.

Modernity and Hegemony in Philosophy

Entering the fray of modernistic dialectics has left some Africans with a sense of voicelessness. The African philosopher, Tsenay Serequeberhan (1997), comments on and laments the apparent surrender of an African sense of reality to European modernisation. He accuses the western, European world of denying African reality, perceiving it as an “*unreality*” when compared with their own dominant and “superior” reality (p. 142). He further equates modernity with empire and colonialism. Serequeberhan quotes the French philosopher, Jean-François Lyotard who expressed this idea so succinctly:

Modernity...whenever it appears, does not occur without a shattering of belief, without a discovery of the lack of reality in reality - a discovery linked to the invention of other realities. (In Serequeberhan, 1997, p. 143)

Edward Said (1980, p. 78) likened the European initiative to bring modernisation and western development to Africa as an attempt to create “little Europes” all over Africa (and elsewhere). The result is an impression of

⁵ Sangoma: Refer to chapter two

alienation for African peoples, extensively discussed by Frantz Fanon (1986) in his text “Black skin, white masks”.

Alienation Through Social Change

Masolo (1994, p. 195) describes the recent African condition as

one of the most basic facts of our current existence:
double alienation - alienation from history, alienation into
cultural staticism and anachronism, alienation into under-
development.

The resentment that emanates from Hountondji's writings, resentment chiefly targeted at the non-African scholar who presumes to interpret African ways and systems of thought to other non-Africans, also criticises the African who toes the line for the non-African coloniser. Frantz Fanon (1963) refers to these two positions as that of the “substantialist” and the “turncoat” respectively.

The first chapter of Hountondji's book “African Philosophy: Myth and reality” is entitled “An alienated literature”. Perhaps it would be more appropriately named “An alienat-*ing* literature”. Hountondji calls for a renewal of pride in African identity as opposed to a toeing of the line as he sees it:

We thus remain unwittingly, prisoners of Europe, trying, as ever, to force her to respect us and deriving naïve pleasure from declaring for her benefit what we are naïve enough to regard as our philosophical identity. In a completely sterile withdrawal we go on vindicating our cultures, or rather, apologising for them to the white man,

instead of living fully their actual splendour and poverty,
instead of *transforming* them. (Hountondji, 1983, p. 50)

The angst of the non-western indigenous peoples subjugated by colonialism is further reflected in the words of Chief Kabongo of the Kikuyu:

We elders looked at each other. Was this the end of everything that we had known and worked for? (In Serequeberhan, 1997, p. 144)

Making Sense of the World: A Question of Knowledge Base

Any knowledge base has its roots in an epistemological ground, which forms the base for further knowledge production. The proposal that the African epistemological sense of the world is different from the western one is one of the chief motivations referred to in the call for a critical examination of psychological practice, as it currently exists in developing societies in Africa. This notion of an African knowledge base as distinct from and different from a western knowledge base in a broad sense has been purported by many writers in this field and has become a battle ground for power at a formal knowledge level at least. A discussion of this notion and its ensuing issues is considered useful for the purposes of this study and is presented here. The further section of this chapter will examine some psychological concepts from this perspective.

Truth, Power and Knowledge

Foucault (1972, 1980) explored and commented extensively on the relationship between truth, power and knowledge. It is beyond the parameters of this thesis to discuss these issues in any great depth but it is considered important here to mention that Foucault referred to socially recognised

institutions (e.g. university, military, writing or media) as political and economic apparatuses. He recognised that issues of truth, power and knowledge form the matter of ideological struggles.

Sociologist Edward Shils, during his more than fifty years as an academic, took a particular interest in, and expressed himself extensively on, matters of higher education, the learning process and academic ethics. Edward Said (1994) cites him in his 1993 Reith Lectures, where he takes a meta-view of the process of knowledge validation in societies:

In every society... there are some persons with an unusual sensitivity to the Sacred, an uncommon reflectiveness about the nature of the universe, and the rules which govern their society. There is in society a minority of persons who more than the ordinary run of their fellow-men, are inquiring, and desirous of being in frequent communion with symbols which are more general than the immediate concrete situations of everyday life, and remote in their reference in both time and space. In this minority, there is a need to externalize the quest in oral and written discourse, in poetic or plastic expression, in historical reminiscence or writing, in ritual performance and acts of worship. This interior need to penetrate beyond the screen of immediate concrete experience marks the existence of the intellectuals in every society. (Shils as cited in Said, 1994, pp. 35-36)

An interesting aspect of Shils' expression above, is that it moves beyond the idea of knowledge production being the realm of formally educated intellectuals (in the western world this would be mainly university educated persons) to a more inclusive acceptance of what constitutes valid knowledge. Ndaba (1999), an African philosopher and academic, concurs with this view by

stating that ways of knowing include imagination, intuition, mythology, and feelings, and as such are not restricted to reason. The concept of knowledge itself is stretched beyond the commonly understood parameters of western institutions - usually the written word in specific format, having been validated through prescribed processes. In the quote above, Shils refers to the "sacred", to "symbols", and shares the opinion with some African philosophers that these may be expressed in a variety of forms which include the oral, the poetic, performance, ritual, music and other forms of a more artistic, aesthetic and intangible (Ndaba, 1999; Ntuli & Smit, 1999) or even ephemeral nature than the empirical documents of the western institutions.

Ntuli and Smit (1999, p. 3), in a critique of what is considered to constitute valid knowledge and in a challenge to South African intellectuals, imply that "traditional" societies such as the healers, the *izinyanga*⁶, *izanus*⁷, *abaloz*⁸, as well as writers, poets, artists, government policy makers, the media and students, and others, should be included among the recognised intelligentsia of Africa. This would be congruent with identified traditional African thought systems which, in pre-colonial times, looked to "healers, divine queens and kings, priests, healers in initiation schools and secret societies" (Ntuli & Smit, 1999, p. 5).

Asante (in Oyebade, 1990) refers to the oral tradition of the African-Americans as *nommo* and describes it as such:

The power of the spoken word is well articulated among African-Americans. But this rhetorical power in speech, song, and myth is a carryover of the ancestral practice. When enslaved Africans arrived in America, they carried with them the African power of oral expression which

⁶ *izinyanga*, ⁷*izanus* and ⁸*abaloz*: Traditional African healers

they expressed in drumming, story telling, and praise singing. (p. 236)

Oyebade includes "sermons, lectures, raps, gospel songs, and poetry" (p. 236) in this repertoire of oratory through which history, culture and protest messages were communicated and transposed.

Western Dualism in Knowledge

Polkinghorne (2000) discusses a particular characteristic of western knowledge which is that it has generally accommodated a split between the secular and the spiritual since the early centuries AD: for example, Aristotle conceived of the world divided into the sublunar and the supralunar. The sublunar world consisted of the material, while the supralunar world consisted of the divine. Concomitant with this more recently has been a conception of a dualism between the human body and the mind, especially exploited by modernist philosophers (Polkinghorne, 2000). This dualism originated in Europe during the eighteenth century in what has come to be known as the Age of the Enlightenment (Christians, 2000). This age saw the rise of science and reason which came to dominate knowledge production in the west and during which time science challenged the authority of the church.

This duality has plagued Western thought ever since. As observed by the French philosopher Jean Wahl, the history of Western philosophy is, on the whole, an unhappy one, characterized by perpetual oscillations between the world as an automaton and a theology in which God governs the universe. Both are forms of determinism. (Prigogine, 1997, p. 2)

Approach to Knowledge

Traditional African approaches to knowledge have been described as being characterised by an holistic perspective which allows the religious, spiritual and lived experience to be an integral part of recognised knowledge (Sinha & Sinha, 1997). Ndaba (1999) suggests that certain later western philosophers - such as Heidegger (1889-1976) with his phenomenological, existential philosophies; Gadamer (1900-2002) and Ricoeur (1913-), with their phenomenological hermeneutic theories examining ontological experience in the face of written text as sources of knowledge - possibly resonate to some extent, to what he refers to as an *African* understanding of knowledge as lived experience. Senghor expanded on the concept of *négritude*, whereby he conceived of a “negro soul” such that all peoples of African origins shared a spirituality distinct from that of westerners (Irele, 2002; Deacon, 2002; Soyinka, 2002).

Thus, there does seem to be a merging point for what is often designated as an *African* perspective, with some western thought trends. The existential-phenomenologists, in varying ways, questioned the rational foundation of dominant modernist western thought and emphasised the significance of individual lived experience. Here we can also include Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961) the existential phenomenologist, who stressed the role of the active, involved body, the lived experience, in all of human knowledge. Ndaba (1999) suggests that this may be a starting point for a collaborative philosophy or at least a dialogue across the epistemologies. In a similar vein, Polkinghorne (2000) points out recent shifts from western dualism in psychology and advocates a more holistic approach from practitioners to the mind-body-environmental aspects of the human condition:

The exchange between a practitioner and client is an interaction between embodied existences. Descriptions of practice as simply “talk therapy” in which the words

clients use to think about themselves and the world are changed, understate the importance of bodily presence in human relationships. The idea of practice as simply talk is a reflection of what has been the dominant view of Western thinking; namely, that human existence is primarily a mental affair. The notion that thought is separate from body is being challenged by contemporary philosophers and cognitive scientists.... Although this challenge is not a consequence of Dewey's view that human existence should be understood as an organism/environment exchange, it is complementary to it. (para. 1)

Considered to be essential to the holistic or non-dualistic approach of traditional African thought is the non-distinction between the knower and the object of knowledge, which has pervaded formal western knowledge systems for the large part at least in modernist times. In contrast, Ndaba (1999, p. 2) refers to the African philosopher Senghor's explication of the "African" notion of lived experience and mystical experience as knowledge:

In dark Africa, people always dance because they feel, and they always dance someone or something. Now to dance is to discover and to re-create, to identify oneself with the forces of life, to lead a fuller life, and in short, to be. It is, at any rate, the highest form of knowledge.... The reason of classical Europe is analytic through utilization, the reason of the African Negro, intuitive through participation. (Senghor, in Ndaba, 1999)

Afrocentrism

The dialectic of African vs. western knowledge bases is often named Afrocentrism vs. Eurocentrism. Out of this dialectic there has emerged, among certain students of black and African scholarship, the opinion that in order for African knowledge to be best understood and interpreted, Africans themselves must disclose this to the rest of the world, from an *Afrocentric* perspective (Asante, 1980, 1987, 1988; Keto, 1989, Okafor, 1991; Oyebade, 1990).

While Afrocentrism promotes the idea that it is distinct and “*other*” from general Eurocentric approaches, it is noted that it is not necessarily unitary or unique: its claims may diverge from region to region and may be common to other cultures, not African. On the other hand, Eurocentrism frequently seems to refer to those western theories that developed from within a modernist epistemology.

Oyebade (1999) names Asante and Keto as two leading exponents of Afrocentric research, and he describes how Afrocentricity, in contradistinction to Eurocentricity, emerged as a theoretical concept in the 1980's in America. Asante quotes Keto on the need for Africa to assert itself intellectually:

In the history of intellectual thought, the Eurocentric paradigm has often assumed a hegemonic universal character, and European culture has placed itself at the center of the social structure, becoming the reference point, or the yardstick, by which every other culture is defined. For instance, the Western definition of civilization has become the standard of what constitutes a civilization. The Eurocentric worldview has become so dominant in the contemporary world that it has overshadowed other worldviews. The Afrocentric perspective seeks to liberate African studies from this

Eurocentric monopoly on scholarship and thus assert a valid worldview through which Africa can be studied objectively. (Keto, 1987, in Asante, 1990, p. 234)

Ncgobo (1999) believes that this virtual obscuring, to date, of African intellectual views threatens the social fabric of the African people. In a paper in which he blames the high levels of crime and violence in South Africa on “mass psychological depression, personal worthlessness and social despair” (p. 139), he refers to the nihilism of the black South African’s frame of morality and sense of social values:

Nihilism here refers to the ‘monumental eclipse of hope, the unprecedented collapse of meaning, the incredible disregard for human and especially black life and property’ in much of Black South Africa. (p. 139)

Ncgobo (1999) proceeds to describe how the Radical Black Psychology movement that arose out of the Afrocentric school of thought, conceived of, and articulated, an African personality core profile. According to him, this consists of

African Self-Extension Orientation (ASEO) and African Self-Consciousness (ASC) which derives from the former and engages in mutually interactive process. These psychological components are rooted in and reflective of African culture or an Africa-centred worldview which is characterised by three basic concepts: 1) holistic spiritual unity; 2) communalism; and 3) proper consciousness or self-knowledge. (p. 140)

The following section of this text attempts to present some previously identified *Afrocentric* psychological concepts and perspectives, although to do

so may already be assuming a Eurocentric paradigm. The task in itself is probably paradoxical and highlights the dilemma of the researcher in the social sciences attempting to uncover an ‘African discourse’, if this should indeed be possible. Where appropriate references will be made to other non-western cultural paradigms, other than African. Some of the arguments and viewpoints of Afrocentrism are presented in the following section, in juxtaposition with the dominant western modernist perspective on psychological concepts.

Considering Psychology in the Socio-cultural Context

The concept *psychopathology* is fundamentally a product of the paradigm of western medicine and originates in the notion of illness and disease residing within the individual (Lopez & Guarnaccia, 2000; Parker, 1999d; Seedat, 1997). Illnesses are categorised and treatments, in the form of psychotherapy (and/or medication) to rid the individual of the illness or disease, are formulated. In such a framework, it is the role of the psychologist to assume expertise to the patienthood of the one seeking help (Seedat, 1997).

As has previously been discussed above, it is impossible to separate notions of psychopathology and notions of well-being from their socio-cultural contexts. Even within their own systems, categorisations, disorders, symptoms and desirable/undesirable traits are subject also to historical contexts. For example, homosexuality was dropped from the DSM (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual) when it became more socially acceptable; other, new categories have been added over time to the same system - post traumatic stress disorder; attention deficit disorder; while others have changed names as the categories have been redefined - e.g. psychopathy became firstly, sociopathy and later, anti-social personality disorder.

Non-medical paradigms view the same problems in human living from a variety of different conceptual perspectives. As examples, interpretive,

narrative, and systemic approaches to psychological issues reject, to different extents, the notion of an inherent psychopathology. Accordingly, each framework, even within paradigms, advocates different ways of working with individuals in order to help them. Some even come quite close to the Africa-centred worldview as referred to by Ncgobo (1999), above. Schools of thought in applied psychology dance to the historico-socio-cultural demands of the contexts in which they evolve. An example of this is the Family Therapy movement that developed post World War II after families had been left shattered by the devastation of war. This was a time when society in Europe and America strove to re-attain the Euro-American ideal of the primary family unit (Miller & Janosik, 1980).

Liberatory psychologists call for an examination of local socio-cultural conceptualisations and practices in dealing with problems in human living (Enriquez, 1989; Nsamenang, 1997, 1999; Seedat, 1997). Seedat suggests that one way to attend to this matter is to increase dialogue between indigenous healers and western trained health professionals:

Since human subjectivity and trauma cannot be separated from the sociolinguistic context in which people are located, liberatory psychologists will enhance their discourse if they remain sensitive to ordinary, other-than-western discourses of illness, psychosomatic symptomology, trauma and disease (Levett, 1989; Lock, 1990). A growing body of literature (Buch & De Beer, 1990; Chavanduka, 1978; Farrand, 1984) that supports this view, indicates that health consumers utilise indigenous and western biomedical concepts in their beliefs about disease and health related problems. In an exploratory study of health consumers' perceptions of health care resources in Alexandra, an African township north of Johannesburg, Letlaka-Rennert, Butchart and

Brown (1991) reveal that although patients initially favoured health care groups from within the biomedical systems, such as doctors, nurses and pharmacists, they consistently, consulted indigenous faith healers in their subsequent choice of treatment options. (Seedat, 1997, p. 269)

Use of Metaphors in Culture

Metaphors are sometimes used as cultural expressions of wellness or not-wellness (Egwu, 1996). Seedat (1997) and Enriquez (1989), both non-western psychologists, emphasise the importance and usefulness of acknowledging the language metaphors which people bring to the health care settings. These metaphors can give clues as to how the persons can best be helped to recover their well-being or to continue to maintain it, as the case may be.

Enriquez (1989) presents an example of a culture specific language metaphor of the Philippine people: A cultural metaphor states that (undesirable) animal instincts are transferred to babies through cow's milk. Enriquez explains that this is a metaphor to promote the merits of breastfeeding. The western trained psychologist uses different, scientific, explanations to advocate the same practice.

Ephirim-Donker (1997) discusses a West African interpretation of what Europeans and North Americans term psychopathology. Such a state of being, according to the Akan, is a result of a grieving soul due to "bad acts" performed during the maturational process of the child. The successful resolution may occur when the family performs certain prescribed rites:

Expected by loved ones to be well and happy, the individual responds. The ceremony focuses a family's attention on the subject and helps him or her to regain behaviour. (p. 72)

Healing and Ritual

The strong connection between ritual and religion would appear to be a universal phenomenon. In the western mind, according to Jacob Needleman (1983), religion yielded to modern psychiatry/psychology when Freud's works first impressed their influence on western society. It is possible, but still debatable, that religious goals and aspirations in the form of enlightenment, grace and eternal spiritual happiness, were replaced for some, by goals of self-actualisation and a sense of psychological wholeness.

However, the universal importance of ritual in the lives of human beings has always been noted and continues to pervade social interactions, from the rituals of greeting, communal eating, romantic courtship; to the holding of judicial courts, parliaments and other forms of national leadership gatherings. In religion, ritual is overt and performed sometimes seemingly for its own sake. In other aspects of life rituals can take a more subtle form but bring a sense of community and order, necessary for a sense of well-being in the people participating in the performance.

Even western psychologists have pondered the role of expectation and ritual in the healing of the psyche in western traditional therapy (Kvale, 1992a; Smail, 1993; Welwood, 1983). Indeed, the ritual of a one hour appointment with a socially recognised healer of the psyche (psychologist), during which personal lives are probed, intimate thoughts shared, family secrets divulged, childhood memories revealed and so forth, in the space of a semi-formal office, creates strong expectations to be healed. Rituals of psychotherapy may extend beyond activities held within the consulting room, to assignments to be

performed between sessions. Sometimes medications are prescribed to be taken in addition, just as the traditional African healer may prescribe *muti* (herbal and other medications) to his/her patients. It is suggested that for ritual to be effective, it must have meaning in the lives of those joined in the practice of the ritual (Turner, 1969). Ritual would need to reflect, in some way, the ecology of the performers.

The rituals of psychotherapy could be viewed as those of a secular modern technological environment (Kvale, 1992a) and as such echo the ecology of the majority of the clients who present for psychotherapy. This may not mean that the majority of the clientele is non-religious, but that the present day environment compartmentalises aspects of peoples' lives, for example, the secular from the spiritual. Thus, the professional woman, comfortable in a scientific environment, may not relate to the possibly seemingly whimsical probings and treatment provided by a psychodynamic therapist who focuses on early childhood experiences and delves into the unconscious. Rituals of psychotherapy for this woman may more appropriately involve cognitively rational conversations and affirmation of her own reasonings of the situation, or a correction of this where it could help her - as she sees it.

According to writers on the traditional African *worldview*, life is approached with the intertwining of the spiritual with daily life (Durojaiye, 1976; Ephirim-Donker, 1997; Fadipe, 1970). Fadipe (1970) writes of the Akan people, describing their holistic approach to physical life and spirituality. He suggests that this holistic approach is apparent in the African notion that links the physical body to the soul e.g.: for the Akan people, *ahom* or *honhom* (the continuous process of inhaling and exhaling breath) is evidence of the soul (Fadipe, 1970). Similarly, the heartbeat and the blood in the veins are viewed as being linked to the soul so that to cut the throat of an animal or a person will allow the soul to escape together with the blood flow.

Generally, rituals in all cultures, universally, are rich with tradition and heavy with spiritual elements. In traditional African cultures, ancestors play an important role and so rituals often include ancestors. Healing in traditional African cultures is abundant with prescriptions of overtly spiritual ritual, while western cultures have generally replaced this with a different kind of ritual prescribed by science and modernist theories.

Seeking an Afrocentric ‘Sense of Self’

The social cognitive theorist, Walter Mischel (1986), in his text “Introduction to Personality”, discusses the perspective of self as a cultural construction, implying that the concept *self* varies across cultures. In addition, as such, the concept *self* must be dynamic as not only shifting cultural issues, but socio-historical and political influences mould the sense of self for individuals, and indeed, collectives. As a situationalist, Mischel recognised the role of the other in interpersonal situations and the consequent influence on perception of self. From this perspective, a sense of the self occurs in relation to others and to the socio-cultural situations in which interactions take place (Carver & Scheier, 1996; Hergenhahn, 1994; Mischel, 1986).

According to scholars writing from an Afrocentric perspective, values of traditional African cultures influencing the concept of self within those cultures, are characterised by communalism (Mwamwenda, 1999; Ndaba, 1999; Nsamenang, 1997, 1999; Olowu in Akotia & Olowu, 2000; Wiredu, 1991) or collectivism (Mwamwenda, 1999; Nsamenang, 1999), dependency (Mwamwenda, 1999;) or interdependency (Nsamenang, 1999), non-competitiveness (Evans, 1997) and successful assimilation into the community (Akotia & Olowu, 2000; Evans, 1997; Mwamwenda, 1999; Nsamenang, 1999). This is contrary to the Euro-American values permeating psychology and psychotherapeutic theories. Goals of such therapies typically include self-realisation, the building of ego strength and boundaries, personal achievement and individualism, independence and successful leaving of the parental home.

According to the Afrocentric view, the notion of interdependency has been said to manifest in a tendency to act in accordance with the needs and wishes of the community (Mwamwenda, 1999) to an extent that Durojaiye (1976, in Mwamwenda, 1999) refers to as "symbiotic" (p.5).

Markus and Kitayama (in Mwamwenda, 1999) describe what they see as a lesser need for boundaries between Africans:

Africans ... view the world and others as extension of one another. The self is viewed not as a hedged closure but as an open field. (p. 5)

And expressed similarly by Ephirim-Donker (1997):

The [African] ... sees himself/herself modestly as part of the great stream of life that transcends his/her own self. (p. 27)

Olowu (1997, in Akotia et al., 2000, p. 8) borrowed this description of interpersonal relatedness from Mbiti:

I am because we are, and because we are, therefore I am.
(Mbiti, 1971, p. 109)

Aspects and Stages of Selfhood

Scholars of psychology from the Afrocentric view, find themselves alienated and neglected by mainstream psychological texts. Nsamenang (1999), for example, criticises the discipline of psychology for largely ignoring aspects of developmental psychology such as ancestral and spiritual selfhood: - aspects he identifies as important to certain traditional African cultures. Major texts refer almost exclusively to social development and indeed, to social

development within a western setting and holding western values (Nsamenang, 2000).

Nsamenang (1999) mentions three phases of selfhood: ancestral, spiritual and social. According to Nsamenang human social development is identified among West African people as moving through between seven (1999) or nine (2000) stages or cycles, namely: period of the new-born, social priming, social apprenticing, social entrée, social internment, adulthood, old age, and death. This is a process for social self only and does not include ancestry and spiritual selfhood that would take their own processes.

Psychological Development and Intelligence

According to Nsamenang (1999, 2000), these stages are of importance to the African whose emphasis of value is on social intelligence rather than technological or cognitive intelligence as in the West. He mentions concepts such as communitarian ethic, multiple social enmeshments, encompassing social relationship, rhythms of collective life, and the subordination of individual identity. Akotia et al. (2000) refer to the concepts of practice and harmony as having been identified and recognised as important elements of an African intelligence. These are all advanced as being important cultural threads holding together traditional African social life.

The Naming Ceremony and Sense of Self

Several African scholars state naming the newborn as a particularly significant ritual marking an important early stage of socialisation in the life of the child:

Children are not thought to belong to this world until they have been incorporated into the community of the living through naming. (Nsamenang, 1999, p.27)

Nsamenang (1999) further describes how it is believed that children enter this world with special links with the spirit world. Children who die before the naming ritual are sometimes not mourned in West African societies:

Naming is an ontogenic event of primal importance because it marks the dawn of human...social development. Naming initiates the socio-ontogenetic destiny of the individual. (p. 28)

Likewise, Ephirim-Donker (1997) describes how the naming ritual is considered sacred among the Akan people in Ghana (p. 63):

The name is the final seal of a complete person, without which the individual cannot exist.... Upon receiving his or her name, the individual is counted among the human family.

According to this process, expectation is put on the child to achieve a good name for posterity as the name is passed down through generations. The child is expected to emulate the character of the one whose name he or she takes. However, several names are given the child, names after the day on which he or she was born (soul names), praise names as well as the family names usually on the paternal side of the family.

The names and their inherent strengths and attributes ensure unity of the person with his/ her soul. (Ephirim-Donker, 1997, p.65)

It is described how careful and elaborate rituals involving the whole community are held within the first eight days of the child's life. Should the infant die before being named he or she is not mourned in the same manner as

a named child would be. The significance of the naming ritual would seem to play an important role in the formation of a sense of self for those incorporating this ritual into their lives.

The child first hears and responds to a specific sound that permeates its inner being. As the child grows it associates and identifies with its name.... Every person lives his or her name, that is, their destiny. (Ephirim-Donker, 1997, p. 65)

An Afrocentric 'Sense of Community'

As has been stated above, communalism and collectivity are considered two significant aspects of a traditional African *sense of self*. The "symbiotic" nature of the relationship of the individual within his or her social context (Durojaiye, 1976, in Mwamwenda, 1999, p. 5), the de-emphasis placed on boundaries, as discussed above, all render the *sense of community* an important aspect of traditional African life. The strong sense of community is perceived to influence decision-making, effectively binding individuals together in an interdependent network. N. A. Fadipe (1970) in his study of the sociology of the Yoruba people of Nigeria, noted some effects of a community oriented way of life among these people:

The average Yoruba...maintains contacts of a more or less intimate character with a much larger circle of blood and affinal relations, neighbours and friends than does the average Englishman [*sic*] or North American. These various relationships have a way of bringing together a very large group of people whose opinion the individual must take into account in his behaviour. (p. 309)

Sindima (1995) suggests that the bonds between persons go beyond a social networking and it is inferred that the sense of community is intricately linked to the sense of self:

This sense of being connected, bonded in one common life informs human relationships and defines behavioural patterns. The African concept of community also arises from...the feeling of being in the network of life... People belong to each other...consciousness is not consciousness of the self but always consciousness of the flow of life in the community and the world. (p. 127)

And also:

African traditional society deals with the totality of persons...in African thought the concept of person is related to the meaning of life. (p. 125)

This intricate linking of *self* with a sense of community is noted by other African scholars including Akotia et al. (2000), Asante (1985), Baldwin (1976), Mwamwenda (1999), Nsamenang (1997,1999), and Senghor (1965).

The characteristic diffusion of boundaries within traditional African societies presents implications for the focus of analysis of psychopathology and wellbeing in African communities as opposed to those in western individuals. In western psychology signs of concern include a lack of boundaries, the diffusion, enmeshment or weakness of boundaries; while ego strength, independency and the ability of the individual to function autonomously in the world, drawing on his/her own inner resources, are promoted. In traditional African societies, the sense of self, intricately linked to the sense of community, moves in the opposite direction to the western ideal, largely of individualism.

From Tradition to Multiculturalism

In his paper “A Key to Multiculturalism, Citizenship, and the Knowledge Society”, Peter Merry (2000), discusses the global shift towards multiculturalism with the explosion of technology leading to knowledge-based societies. As a multiplicity of religions, political systems, cultures, healing cults and social transformations exert their influences; diversity within nations and communities becomes the new order.

Merry writes that the "patterns in our minds reflect the patterns of power in our culture" (p. 6). Culture is dynamic and perhaps it can be stated that it is the collective mind (as in culture) which determines the individual *sense of self*, rather than the sum of individual selves that determine culture. As such traditions are not impervious to change and the above discussions on philosophy, culture and traditions are not intended to be reified but rather to serve as a background and platform to further discussions on psychology in South African local conditions.

It is also important to reflect here that while particular cultural characteristics for specific socio-cultural contexts have been identified and continue to be so, it does not necessarily mean that these characteristics are present in any ‘real’ sense. These characteristics may be universally present in all human societies, but the difference and significance lies in the value attached to these characteristics by the different cultures. So, as individuals ‘buy’ into the collective mind, so they adopt the values and the characteristics of that culture. This idea will be expanded on in chapter seven as a discussion around an *ecology of mind*.

The following chapter will explore an ecological map of the western mainstream academic world of research approaches and attempts to situate this study in that map.