



# How to Africanize Psychology in Zimbabwean Universities: An Introductory Note

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The revolution of Africanizing and liberating the Black African mind can never start and be expected to bear fruit unless there is a concerted effort to Africanize psychology taught at Zimbabwean and African universities. This resonates with earlier observations that we are “Black first and psychologists second” (Williams, 2008). The first port of call should be the undergraduate level. The course could focus on how Black African psychology is the study of African human motivation, how Black Africans as human beings perceive themselves and others, how Black Africans as human beings behave, and how Black Africans as human beings change. This calls for a class that will focus on psychological issues in the context of the African community. Since the African culture is not monolithic, the course will cover diverse perspectives on how psychology relates to the Black experience. Psychological issues such as African world views, social constructivism, Afrocentric and Africentric psychology, stages of Black identity development, the impact of racism on Black psychology, research, and African Americans in the psychology profession will be examined. While Black African American psychologists teaching at American universities have not only embraced but also championed and continued to spearhead this cause, it remains vague how this project may be conceptualized at African universities on the African

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continent. The initial step might be a feasibility study on the notion of mounting a course in Black psychology or African psychology. Endeavors should also be made to write Black psychology and African psychology textbooks. The current psychology taught at most universities in Africa has a Western orientation. Very few if any steps have been made to Africanize psychology at the textbook writing level. It may be prudent for the Association of Black Psychologists to consider such a project that may involve scholars from mainland Africa and the diaspora African who wish to champion the Black psychology and African psychology. This resonates well with Negash's (2005) observation that Africa appears to be bedeviled by

*Intellectual and political weakness of the African elite:* The second reason is the lack of political will and intellectual creativity and initiative of African authorities, and members of the middle class (intellectuals, academics, political leaders) generally to think hard about how to turn the potential advantages offered by the "new order" to Africa's advantage where it seems useful, or resist its interventions with African solutions where they seem clearly viable. (p. 3)

The idea of African or Black psychology curricula is a critical building block with which to unlock Black African human potential. These sentiments were earlier on portrayed by Myers and Speight (2010) who succinctly cautioned that Hilliard noted that there is something wrong with a psychology and psychological analysis that leaves people with African descent strangers to themselves, aliens to their culture, oblivious to their condition, and less than human to their oppressor. However, this is exactly the psychology that people acknowledging African descent people have inherited and the psychological analysis that has been provided over the past four centuries in the West. Over the past 40 years, African-centered psychological knowledge has been produced that places people acknowledging African descent and their cultural worldviews and teachings at the center of human process as agents with sacred authority. This inherited psychology is toxic to people of African descent in that it pits their own needs and way of life inferior to Western vices and virtues. This is a psychology that generates a Eurocentric mind in an African and must be eradicated at all cost in Zimbabwean universities. This is supported by earlier observations that as critical thinkers we should be open to new ideas without being gullible, discerning without being cynical (Meyers, 2001).

Currently, the psychology curriculum at most if not all universities in Zimbabwe is Westernized because psychology has not become independent to this date despite the country having been said to have attained independence more than 30 years ago. The type of psychology taught at most universities in Zimbabwe is British in nature owing to our colonial history. Sadly,

in Zimbabwean psychological circles in and out of the lecture room and even in private practice, with every passing day we seem to be drifting away from more Black Africans and the Black African psychological problems that they present with. Surprisingly and recently, I was talking to a friend who confided in me that he had met a White doctor at one of the popular private hospitals in Zimbabwe who told his patient to go and seek help from traditional healers and faith healers. How many of our own Black African doctors would dare say so? Let alone our junior doctors and even Black African psychologists and psychology students. Very few if any I guess. This for me is an area of Indigenous Psychological Knowledge Systems research where Zimbabwean universities may need to put resources. A good starting point would be finding out how many patients have been referred to seek traditional counsel and then make follow ups to see their well-being. I have a list of people who have tried the Western medicine and found it ineffective and only sought African psychological therapy and are well, up and going to this day. Most of them testify that had it not been that they had taken the Black African psychological therapy they could have died. Therefore, theorizing about Black African psychology is not just a philosophical debate but rather a major step in African identity mapping. A think tank of Black African psychologists and related professionals could be put in place to help in this endeavor. The theorization, study, and practice of Black African psychology, therefore, offer Black Africans, first their identity, and second, it maps the place of Black Africans in the world's civilization and also puts African minds at the center of liberation of humanity. This is on tandem with Sofonnou, Ngaié, and Morchid's (2012) observation that the major theme and challenge facing the whole world is how to un-Europeanize and un-Westernize the world. This is against a background where the whole world was Europeanized from the 15th century to the 20th century. Much as the theme might not be useful to other stakeholders, it at most inclines Black Africans to focus on the role of higher education institutions in this liberatory process. To that end, Black African psychology remains the bedrock for the total emancipation and liberation of the Black African mind in Zimbabwe, a country surrounded by a lot of controversies about its stance in challenging Western hegemony. The idea of mapping our identity as Black African psychologists in Zimbabwe ushers a new way of thinking about higher education, particularly the role of universities and departments of psychology at Zimbabwean and Black African universities in the design, teaching, and evaluation of psychology curricular.

As Black African psychologists we need to look at our past, link it with what we think about our future and the future of our grandchildren. Black

African psychology should focus on the Black African heritage. As Sofonnou et al. (2012, p. 5) aptly put it, "The reinvention of African would not be easy because new and more complex challenges have been added to the old ones." In as much these are wise words from Black Africans, it remains our mandate to circumvent and be more vigilant in our approach. I strongly consider this special issue a vehicle for reaching out to many Black African psychologists and should be made easily accessible to Black African scholars. Zimbabwean university libraries should also consider it prudent to subscribe to the *Journal of Black Psychology*. The psychology departments in Zimbabwean universities should also consider teaching Black African psychology as a course. In fact, I strongly believe that in the Department of Psychology at the University of Zimbabwe we should dedicate a day for celebrating and showcasing Black African psychology and the works of many Black African psychologists. As part of efforts to commemorate Africa Day, Day of the African Child, and other important dates, we could popularize Black African psychology. It would be good to also seriously consider Black African psychologists meeting the leadership of the Zimbabwean Government, African Union (AU), and to make presentations at annual meetings or similar gathering of the AU leadership about how we envisage the scope and direction of the liberation of the Black African mind. In addition, Black African psychology remains for me a political ideology from which Black Africans should draw inspiration and direction. This endeavor could also be made simpler if the AU were to incorporate the Black African psychologists in their structures and proceedings. This would simulate what happens at the United Nations where the International Association of Applied Psychology has gained reputation and has representatives to the UN body and makes presentations at the United Nations. In that way, Black African psychology will remain relevant to its people and their problems and will go a long way in alleviating the suffering that we witness among Black Africans at the hands of many man-made disasters such as hunger, poverty, crime, stress, unemployment, and homelessness. It is my submission in this special issue that at the global level Black African psychology should also make similar links with the United Nations and claim our space at international fora. We also need vibrant Chapters of the Association of Black African Psychologists. This is because we need people of African descent to save Africa. Black African psychology should not be seen as a reactionary platform but should remain a lifelong learning platform for Black Africans. One way of doing it is by reviving Black African traditions and practices by bringing adult instructors cum learners into formal institutions. It is surprising to note that most Black African universities are scrapping or have scrapped mature entry, yet there are hoards of Black

Africans who have been disadvantaged by the Westernization of the education system and could benefit from such a university entry option as long as they have their "O" levels and can demonstrate their candidature through the entrance tests. Black African leaders at the helm of Black African universities in Africa should seriously consider how they can avoid this "killing of their own wounded" by removing mature entry. The next step could be networking Black African psychologists within Africa and the diaspora. It should be prudent for most learned and esteemed Black African scholars to seriously consider a pilot project in which they come to teach Black African psychology in Zimbabwean universities and on the African continent specifically during their sabbatical or put in place a Black African Psychology Summer School. Such a Summer School could be championed from Zimbabwe or South Africa for now and then move, East, West, North, and Central on rotating basis. Part of such a mandate could stimulate the revival of traditional African institutions like the traditional *dare*. Black African psychology in Zimbabwe should seriously focus on the revival of the *Traditional dare*. The traditional *dare* was also a school system as has already been shown above. More to that, the African traditional *dare* was a socializing agent. In traditional African systems, it was at the *dare* that socially desirable and acceptable behavior was taught and displayed. If an individual displayed socially unacceptable or undesirable behavior, it was corrected at the *dare* in the presence of everybody. This was an open education system. The socially undesirable behavior took the form of hegemonic masculinities that have been alluded to above. *Tsika* and *Unhu* (customs) were taught at the *dare* and in the family home. *Tsika* and *unhu* entailed good behavior, like greeting the elders, respecting parents, peers, neighbors among others. At these traditional family and community forums, those accused of wrongdoing were required to give a verbal account of their involvement in an incident, whether or not they admit to the accusations. Alternatively, Black African psychology should be tagged to the Cape Town Declaration on a Pan African Psychological Union and may require constant dialogue with the continental leadership in liaison with the Association of Black African Psychologists, so that we do not lose the momentum and keep ourselves united. United we stand, divided we fall. We shall remain united as Black African psychologists. In that fashion, I foresee a formidable awakening of Black African minds and the emergence of a forceful army of Black African psychologists equipped with enough Black African psychological ammunition to fight Westernized conceptualizations about human nature and behavior and take Black African psychology to dizzy heights.

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