AFRICAN MARRIAGE COUNSELLING AND THE RELEVANCE OF WESTERN MODELS OF COUNSELLING

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the relevance of Western models of marriage counselling in the African context and specifically with Zulu couples. It argues that because of different worldviews, there are elements of western therapeutic approaches with couples that do not fit with the beliefs and values of many African people. The article examines some of the philosophies that underlie marriage in contemporary Zulu society, as well as the worldview, values and practices of Zulu people with regard to marriage. It then examines a selection of Western marriage counselling approaches in order to establish whether the Western based marriage counselling theories that are taught and practiced by social workers in South Africa today are relevant when used with Zulu couples.

INTRODUCTION

Marriage counselling in the South African context has been criticised as being too Eurocentric and individualised in nature, and thus not relevant for African society. Focussing specifically on Zulu society, this article highlights some of these criticisms and suggests ways in which they may be addressed.

The article commences by locating the discussion on culture in relation to marriage in its historical context. We then examine the worldview, values, and present day practices of Zulu people with regard to marriage, as well as a number of Western models of marriage counselling, in order to establish whether the Western based marriage counselling theories that are taught and practiced by social workers in South Africa today are relevant when used with Zulu couples.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

In order to understand people of a particular culture, it is necessary to understand their history, as well as the context in which they live (Burr, 2003). We tend to internalise the dominant norms and values of our culture, easily believing that they reflect the truth in respect of our identities. These dominant constructs can blind us to the possibilities that others might offer us. Whatever culture we belong to has influenced us to ascribe certain meanings to particular life events, and to treat others as relatively meaningless (Freedman and Combs, 2002). Some cultures have colonised and oppressed others, and the concepts of the dominant culture are then imposed on people of the marginalised cultures (Ugwuanyi, 2004). However, because society is interactive and reflexive, the marginalised culture will also influence the dominant culture.

South Africa has come from a history of imperialism from Holland, Portugal, France and Britain in the 17th century. During this time, as well as exchanging goods, European and English missionaries attempted to convert the African people to Christianity; and in doing so, challenged their traditional customs and beliefs. In the late 19th century with the advent of the Industrial Revolution in Europe, economic imperialism was transformed into political colonisation, which was the precursor to apartheid (Ugwuanyi, 2004). During this period of time, particularly since the start of the slave trade, traditional African cultural beliefs and practices have been marginalised and devalued by people of European origin (and perhaps African people too) and during colonialism and apartheid, social injustice and oppression appeared to be the

norm (Matolino and Kwindingwi, 2013; Ugwuanyi, 2004). Consequently, although South Africa has great wealth derived from its natural resources, many of its people have suffered extreme poverty, socio-economic inequality (Ojong and Sithole, 2007) and continue to live on the margin of society. In recent times, in addition to already dominant Western cultural practices, influences such as globalisation, women's empowerment and the ideology of human rights have impacted traditional African beliefs and practices about relationships (Sodi, Esere, Gichinga and Hove, 2010), further eroding the bedrock African culture as a source of power and health.

Since the democratic elections of 1994, South Africa has become a rapidly changing society that has elements of both the developed and developing world's thinking and values. South Africa has one of the most liberal consti-tutions in the world that enshrines gender equality and individual rights, while simultaneously catering for tribal cultures (Williams, 2011; Rudwick and Shange, 2009). In South Africa, there is an elected government that is voted for by the citizens at national, provincial and community levels. However, although not part of government, there are also traditional bodies of tribal chiefs and elders. KwaZulu-Natal not only has an elected provincial premier, but also has a king, King Goodwill Zwelithini kaBhekuzulu, commensurate with the power accorded to traditional African beliefs and values.

Land ownership also reflects the duality of Western and traditional systems, although both have been historically manipulated. Throughout Africa in the nineteenth century, the British Colonial Office organised certain land to be reserved as tribal trust land to prevent European settlers from buying it. In South Africa, the Land Act of 1913 was promulgated, but in addition to limiting European people from buying tribal land, it also prevented African people from buying land in other areas. Thirteen percent of the land was set aside for the African people who made up 80% of the population (Pepeteka, 2013). These laws were a pre-cursor to apartheid where access to land, free-dom of speech, and freedom of association were controlled by the National Government from 1948 until 1994, through laws such as the Group Areas Act of 1950, the Pass Laws Act of 1952 and many others. As a result, the Zulu people, amongst others, were discriminated against, their customs and beliefs were marginalised, and Western beliefs and values dominated, except in areas designated as tribal trust areas. This dichotomy was particularly evident in rural as opposed to urban areas. The Ingonyama Trust was established in terms of the KwaZulu-Natal Ingonyama Trust Act (Act 3 of 1994). This Act was amended by National Act 9 of 1997. King Goodwill Zwelithini kaBhekuzulu is the sole trustee but he is assisted by the Board of

the Ingonyama Trust. The Trust is the largest land owner in KwaZulu-Natal as it owns nearly 3 million hectares throughout KwaZulu Natal, and its main purpose is to manage the land for the benefit of individual members of each tribe, in conjunction with the various local traditional authorities (Ingonyama Trust Board, undated). Thus, even today, 20 years after the democratic elections of 1994 that enabled everyone to access and buy property else-where, the King and the chiefs through the Trust still control who may have access to and how they may use tribal trust land.

This background serves to illustrate that as a result of all these historical and political influences, there may be marked differences in the values, beliefs and behaviour between generations within one family, between the youth and the elders, and between those living in urban and rural areas. Many Zulu people living in urban areas have a dual lifestyle where they have family living on tribal trust land in rural areas, and will speak of "going to the farm" for family occasions, weddings, funerals, and holidays. The context, there-fore, is that South Africa is a land of contrasts at many levels where, ideally, many different ways of living and of being are respected, valued and celebrated; yet practically, many indigenous beliefs, values and practices are still being marginalised (Ross, 2010). Current African life remains "dominated by European ethics and values that shape social policy, spiritual life, and political and economic processes" (Akinyela, 2002:33). This impacts and influences the access to and relevance of help available for indigenous people with their marriages.

When examining recent statistics of marriages, the need for this assistance is evident. The number of registered customary marriages has decreased from 10.4% since 2011 with only 4555 customary marriages registered at the Department of Home Affairs in 2012 (Statistics South Africa, 2012). There may be several reasons for this – firstly, as Downie (2014) and Himonga (2014) mentioned, it is often difficult for people to get to the Department of Home Affairs to register the marriage, and there is insufficient follow up, so these statistics may not be accurate. Secondly, there is a decrease in the number of traditional Zulu marriages. This may be ascribed to the expense of *ilobola,* which young men can no longer afford (Posel, Rudwick and Casale, 2011). Another concern is that although the total number of divorces in South Africa has dropped from 34045 in 2001 to 22936 in 2010, the ratio of Black African divorces has increased from 23,1 % in 2001 to 35,6 % in 2010 (Statistics South Africa, 2010). This decrease in Black African marriages and increase in the divorce rate is a concern that may be addressed via strengthening marriage and perhaps marriage counselling, the subject of this article.

Let us now understand how social constructionism and worldview contribute to understanding Black African marriage so as to better offer relevant African counselling.

SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONISM AND WORLDVIEW

The philosophy and ideas of social constructionism provide a lens of great value to this country through which to understand its people. These ideas stress that people are born into a socio-cultural context and that through language and socialisation, they learn to understand the norms and values of their particular family, community and culture. We tend to internalise the dominant norms and values of our culture, believing that they reflect our truth. However, because society is interactive and reflexive, the marginalised culture will also influence the dominant culture, a notion that is important to consider when examining opportunities for changing the status quo, especially regarding marriage counselling.

Social constructionism informs people's view of reality and "shared meanings that could be said to reflect social constructions" (Williamson, 2006:85) and thus is considered sound in theoretically grounding this review of literature. With people in South Africa being born into such different cultures and contexts, everyone has a different experience of reality. As our under-standing, descriptions and constructions of the world change and adapt, so some patterns of behaviour and social action are sustained whilst others are excluded. As a result, certain actions, attitudes and behaviours are permissible whilst others are forbidden, based on influences that we consider important "our constructions of the world are therefore bound up with power relations" (Burr, 2003:5). Maluleke (2012:1) concurs with this view when he describes how traditional cultural practices reflect the values and beliefs held by members of a community for periods often spanning generations. He stresses, however, that although "some of these are beneficial to all members, others have become harmful to a specific group", so it is important to view cultural practices critically. A cultural group's understanding of the universe (cosmology), nature of being (ontology), values (axiology), and knowledge (epistemology) all contribute to the ways in which a people make sense of reality, i.e. their worldview (Carroll, 2008 and 2012).

However, the concept of worldview is contentious for the following reasons. It emphasises the homogeneity of billions of people in whole continents who come from different cultural backgrounds. The concept of a worldview cannot be detailed and comprehensive enough to capture the complexities of the different African/European/Asian cultures for the afore-mentioned reasons.

It also implies that culture and the view of the world that people have is static, whereas reality demonstrates its flexibility and fluidity. In spite of these reservations, the authors believe that there are sufficient similarities for a description of the African worldview to be useful and necessary when adopting a social constructionist theoretical framework in exploring Zulu marriage, and when critically examining Western marriage counselling theories.

THE AFRICAN WORLDVIEW

When comparing the Western and the African worldviews, there seem to be some aspects that appear diametrically opposed and Carroll (2008 and 2012) points out some of these differences. An African ontology views reality as made up of the spirit with some material manifestations; whereas in the Western view, reality is mainly materialistic, based on what can be understood using the five senses. In the African cosmology, the universe is interconnected, integrated and interdependent; as Nwoye (2015:14) indicates it is "a universe of multiple realities (natural, abstract and spiritual) in close proximity and complicated transactions with one another" in comparison to the Western worldview of the universe as independent and separate. The African worldview values communality and interpersonal relationships in the group, whereas the Western view is based on the individual within the group. In general therefore, the African view of the world is more holistic and interrelated – as Nwoye (2015:15) stresses, it is "holistic (and) in depth"; whereas the Western view of the world sees a separation of parts with clear boundaries. It is, therefore, extremely important to understand that as a result of these differences in worldviews "social reality is not only lived differently, but also understood differently" (Carroll, 2012:259). However, because one's worldview evolves through socialisation within a particular culture and community, the philosophies are often so taken for granted that an individual may be unaware that he/she subscribes to them, and that in fact they are socially constructed. A person may feel that this is the only way, or the "right" way of being.

In order to illustrate how a social construct can be influential, the authors have elected to focus on one important and influential aspect underscoring the African worldview: Communality or *Ubuntu*, also described by the proverb *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*, which means a person is a person through persons. This construct was selected as it is primary to the African concept of the human being which sees people individually and communally as complex; with physical, social, emotional, metaphysical and spiritual elements, both in life and after life. "There is a dialectical interpenetration

of the individual and the community in which neither has full primacy" (Nwoye, 2006:15).

There is no clear definition of *ubuntu* as it is a concept that, though experienced in many African cultures for many generations, has only recently been labeled as such. Gade (2011) in his examination of written information about *ubuntu* indicates that although there were occasional mention of *ubuntu* since 1846, it has only been since various African nations such as Tanzania became independent in the 1960's that concepts similar to *ubuntu* are mentioned in the political "narrative of return" back to pre-colonial society. Since then the literature on *ubuntu* has increased, particularly since the first democratic elections in South Africa. However, Gade (2011) points out that it was only in 1995 that the word "*Ubuntu*" was first been linked to the proverb '*umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*'. Reciprocity is also discussed by Nyaumwe and Mkabele (2007:152) who indicate that *ubuntu* "is premised on the reciprocal belief that an individual's humanity is expressed through the personal relationships with others in a community and in turn other people in that community recognise the individual's humanity".

The South African Governmental White Paper on Welfare officially recognises *Ubuntu* as: "The principle of caring for each other's well-being...and a spirit of mutual support...Each individual's humanity is ideally expressed through his or her relationship with others and theirs in turn through a recognition of the individual's humanity. Ubuntu means that people are people through other people. It also acknowledges both the rights and the responsibilities of every citizen in promoting individual and societal well-being" (Department of Welfare, 1996:18).

Poovan, du Toit and Engelbrecht (2006) use Mbigi's (1997) description of five social values of *ubuntu*. The first is that of survival whereby African people helped one another, pooled their resources and "through a shared will and collaborative spirit" have been able to survive extreme hardship (Poovan et al., 2006:18). The second value, which is linked to the first, is that of a spirit of solidarity within the family, and between the community members. Thus a person is defined through his/her community rather than through individual personality; the interpersonal and biological bonds of solidarity are expressed constantly in everyday life both practically as well as spiritually. Compassion is the third social value of *ubuntu*, where from early in life the African person is taught that as every person is connected, everyone needs to take care of, help and be responsible for others, without expecting anything in return. As Poovan et al. (2006) indicate, this value is entrenched in the African psyche. The fourth value is that of respect – *ukuhlonipha* – which is

one of the building blocks of the community as it delegates the position of the person within the hierarchical society. Dignity is the fifth value, and arises from and reinforces respect. Through offering respect to the elders and people in authority, these members become dignified. Wilson and Williams (2013) offer a similar point of view in their description of how different worldviews impact mental health by noting that African-Americans have maintained core values similar *to ubuntu*: humanness, caring, sharing, respect and compassion. They stress that Americans of African descent experience positive mental health through feelings of connectedness, social competence and group consciousness; as opposed to Americans of European descent who experience positive mental health through individuation, self competence and personal consciousness.

In the African worldview, "as human beings whose identity is defined through interactions with other human beings, it follows that what we do to others eventually feeds through the interwoven fabric of social, economic, and political relationships to impact upon us as well" (Murithi, 2009:226).

Let us examine how these concepts feature in various traditional Zulu practices such as *umemelu* (the coming of age ceremony particularly for women (Magwaza, 2008*), ilobolo* (bride price) and *ukuhlonipha* (practices of respect) stress the communal, reciprocal nature of relationships. Western feminists may challenge these practices by suggesting that although technically there is reciprocity, it is unbalanced due to the difference in power between men and women, and between the youth and the elders in such a structured patriarchy. In this regard, Roberts (2010) has described how feminist writers have criticised *ubuntu* as upholding patriarchal practices, and suggests that such writers in South Africa and Africa should be invited to contribute papers on *ubuntu* to stimulate further dialogue and debate, particularly in the areas of patriarchy; gender and race; the various gender roles in an *ubuntu* religious and cultural practice; *ubuntu* and gender violence; and *ubuntu* and the status of women in socio-economic and socio-political activities (Roberts, 2010) .

One example of *ubuntu* in practice, that is very relevant to this discussion of marriage, occurs with conflict resolution. When there is conflict, the family and relevant community members, such as elders or experts in the topic, gather together to discuss the issues until there is consensus (Murithi, 2009). There is no possibility to agree to disagree – there needs to be agreement in order for the community to move forward. Even when there has been violence and trauma, the community uses the skills of the traditional war healers from both sides to mediate, not only for those present, but also for the

ancestors of both groups; to do a cleansing ceremony so the community can move forward in peace, rather than take revenge (Nussbaum, 2003). However, Eze (2008:386) challenges the view of consensus as being constructive. He feels that sayings indicative of consensus such as *Simunye* – we are one – are used politically, and "absorbs multiple viewpoints through a totalitarian uniformity".

In the writers' opinion this argument carries weight as viewpoints that are contrary and that criticise authority, both within the family and within the community, are often seen as disloyal and disrespectful. This, therefore, may impact the concept of freedom of speech, and the resulting variety of expressed opinions. In addition, warring parties may continue to feel antagonistic towards each other as this stance suggests domination and acceptance of one worldview only.

Sulamoyo (2010) warns that the collectivism used in *ubuntu* is very complex, bearing in mind that though an individual's identity is based on the identity of the collective group, African societies have complex divisions based on tribal, religious, ethnic and clan lines. "Tensions … are also due to the urban-rural and modernist-traditionalist dichotomy and intra-ethnic difference and division" (Rudwick and Shange, 2009:67).

Hence it appears that the concept of *ubuntu* has many facets that may be very subtle and even invisible to a Western therapist, 'hence it is important to be aware of these facets in order to appreciate what to extract therefrom during counselling.

AFRICAN TRADITIONAL HELPING

When dealing with problems in traditional African communities, specific methods are employed by traditional helpers such as direct advice, the use of metaphor, and the use of ritual and spirituality. Ross (2010) explains that traditional healing attempts to restore harmony and balance; focusing on the physical symptoms whilst simultaneously attempting to re-integrate the person with their community, the earth, and the spiritual world. Thabede (2008) stresses that there are common underlying themes that characterise African culture, which are belief in ancestors, belief in a Supreme Being, belief in witchcraft, belief in traditional healing and the various rites of passage. The ancestors are extremely important in the lives of the Zulu people; they form part of the family, with whom there needs to be regular contact, and they have powers for good or ill (Thabede, 2008). Ancestors who were positive role models during their lives are believed to dictate the

events of one's life, and therefore in order to have a happy, successful family and a strong marriage it is important to consult with them regularly and to show them respect. These beliefs will obviously influence how the Zulu marriage is negotiated, yet they appear to be ignored in Western methods of relationship counselling.

INDIGENISATION

Is it, therefore, necessary to indigenise social work theory and practice? Most Western therapeutic methods are very individualistic, even when dealing with families and couples, and so their relevancy for African clients is questionable. Gray, Kreitzer and Mupedziswa (2014:109) stress that indigenisation allows African social workers to fulfil the underlying universal social work values of respect for human dignity and worth, and the quest for social justice through "focusing on local issues and problems and seeking culturally relevant solutions".

There are, however, several arguments against only teaching local indigenous therapeutic methods. Ebijuwa (2007:46) for example challenges the idea that Africans must only adopt their own traditional cultural practices as he feels that to do so is self-limiting, particularly in a world that is "connected in a network of interlocking relationship". He emphasises that culture is dynamic and unfolding, and using philosophical logic, it is, therefore, important to choose the aspects of culture that empower and grow development in Africa.

Another argument against indigenisation is the concern that universal standards need to be upheld, such as international human rights and issues of feminism, and indigenisation may exclude these. Some suggest that because social problems, and their alleviation, are different around the world, social workers are already using indigenous methods. Another important argument is that social work is a world-wide profession and therefore, needs to draw on a global body of knowledge. This allows social work students, social work lecturers, and qualified social workers to be internationally competitive with a "decreased risk of academic 'in-breeding'" (Habib, Price and Mabelebele, 2014). When examining Western therapeutic practices according to the African worldview, it is evident that they do not always fit African couples in distress. Western therapeutic methods tend to avoid the use of spirituality, and are based on physical, material reality. Although now there is greater acknowledgement of the inter-dependence between the physical and the psychosocial in Western counselling, there is still strong differentiation between the two.

Roles and stances of traditional helpers in the Zulu community such as family elders, traditional healers or community leaders tend to be structured and directive, yet there remains strong elements of respect and reciprocity, integrating the individual with the extended family and the community, and working with and through spiritual beliefs of God and the ancestors. Murithi (2009) describes the process of peace making and *ubuntu* in societies as acknowledging guilt, showing remorse and repenting, asking for and giving forgiveness, and paying compensation or reparation in order to commit to reconciliation. Both the victim and the perpetrator are involved in this process. Nwoye (2000:348) similarly uses role theory to look at the normative "obligations/expectations and privileges are taken as being linked to the occupancy of social positions". He uses a courtroom trial method to do so, where he makes an objective assessment of the quality of the roles each partner is fulfilling (Nwoye, 2006). He sees each of them separately several times, hearing each of their versions regarding the issue; he uses traditional techniques such as metaphors, proverbs and stories and where necessary teaches life skills, in order to harmonise their values, encouraging mutual validation and affirmation in order to introduce an alternative view and to grow their marriage. He sees the role of the counsellor as "building bridges between the dissenting spouses and helping to inject fresh perceptions in the way they conceptualise their conflict" (Nwoye, 2006:439). He then determines who was at fault, how to improve the situation, determines some form of reparation to encourage forgiveness, and once this is acknowledged, the couple meet with him for a ritualistic ceremony of reconciliation.

These traditional helping methods used in communalistic societies are quite different to Western based approaches. Some Western therapeutic theories that include reciprocal, interpersonal elements are the person-centred approach, the eco-systemic approach, community family therapy, Narrative Therapy and Imago Relationship Therapy.

Certain aspects of these are certainly useful when counselling Zulu couples. We are all human, and therefore humanistic theories apply to everyone. An example of this is Spangenberg's article written in 2003 where she argues that the Person-Centred Approach to social work is very relevant in Africa. She stresses that the counsellor firstly needs to have cultural self-awareness, which she describes as similar to Roger's concept of congruence. The counsellor also needs to know and understand the client's worldview, including the historical and socio-political aspects. Importance is accorded to the client's frame of reference, and in the African context this translates to focus not only on the client, but also on his/her relationships with the family

and community, as well as acknowledging and accepting the African's belief in the role of the ancestors (Spangenberg 2003). Spangenberg (2003) does not mention working directly with the community using the person-centred approach, thus *ubuntu* is not fully embraced in this approach.

The eco-systemic approach describes how different systems and sub-systems within a family and a community influence each other in a dynamic way, and so problems may ripple throughout a family or community but therapeutic change in one sub-system will also extend to other systems in the family. This theory, therefore, ensures that the couple is not viewed in isolation, but is viewed as part of the whole with focus on cybernetics (Krause, 2007).

Previously the therapist was seen as outside the family, giving input to disrupt the linear cause and effect of the problem. As a result of the introduction of the cybernetic concept however, the therapist and family became part of the therapeutic system as evident in Milan Family Therapy developed by psychiatrists Palazzoli, Boscolo, Cecchin and Prata (Freedman and Combs, 1996). Milan Family Therapy also used circular questions, as it was based on second order cybernetics, or holistic recursive feedback resulting in adaptation and change and the idea that the family's problem was maintained through underlying patterns of meaning. This aspect may cohere with traditional use of spirituality and ancestors in making sense of patterns that underlie (dys)functioning.

What may be useful with African clients, is the finding that the circular questions on their own resulted in change as the family members listened to each other's answers. However, although Milan family therapy examined the dynamic patterns of the family in depth, it did not specifically explore the context of the family within the community and the society, and this, therefore, would be an obstacle in working with African couples needing assistance.

In comparison, Narrative Therapy examines the person, couple, group or community within their socio-political context. It deconstructs and challenges the narrative of the problem and if necessary externalises it, often using metaphors. It then reconstructs an alternative, preferred narrative that is built using scaffolding questions (White, 2007). A reflecting team may be used to listen for unique outcomes when the problem is not an issue, and to thicken these to develop the description of the alternative story. Although the socio-political context is examined, the focus of attention is either – the individual, the couple, the family or the community, and not necessarily all at the same time.

A constraint of using both the Milan approach and the narrative approach to relationship counselling with Zulu people relates to the issue of *ukuhlonipha* – a rule of respectful, deferential behaviours that is very hierarchical and dictates who may speak to whom, how they may speak, and what they may discuss.

Community family therapy as described by Rojano (2004) is different in this regard. It was developed from work with low income, multi-problem families. The therapist and the clients do an audit of negative and positive energy and resources available to the client/s. Then a three pronged approach is used involving both the therapist and the client/s. This firstly includes remedial therapy, then the use of extensive networking, and finally, it includes both the client/s and the therapist working with the community using social activism. This approach, therefore, serves as a bridge between "the microsystemic limiting role of the family therapist" and the macro inter-ventions that include social development within the larger socio-political context (Kasiram and Thaver, 2013:155). This approach, therefore, has elements of re-integrating the couple within the community, not only as passive recipients of services, but as active participants to improve both the family's socio-economic status, and also to develop a strong web or network of community resources that build individuals, families and communities alongside each other. This may be effective but is probably idealistic given the shortage of social workers in South Africa.

Imago Relationship Therapy is based on the relational paradigm and works with couples, organisations and communities by assisting them to be aware of the relational space between them, and through the Imago dialogue or the Imago communologue, explore and understand the issues that trigger negative reactions. Jordon quoted by Luquet (2005:3) states that "we begin to see reality defined by relationship, continuities, and probabilities rather than by discrete objects and dualities". The role of the therapist is to facilitate and coach the couple through these dialogues, which also teaches them the tools to use at home in the family and at work and in their community. This approach, therefore, has some aspects that could fit with an African worldview, but the dialogue would need to be structured with *ukuhlonipha* in mind.

Reflecting on these Western based counselling practices, we see some glaring spaces for African tradition to fill, using the aforementioned concepts emanating from *ubuntu*.

CONCLUSION

The authors agree with Osei-Hwedie (2007) who stresses that as Western values and ideas have dominated development around the world, it is important to get to know the indigenous cultures and their core values. In Africa, social networks are important, hence knowledge, the concept of society, and the meaning of life would be based on roles and concomitant duties and obligations. Therefore, as Western based therapeutic techniques are geared more towards the individual and differentiation, they are not always relevant for use with African couples.

However, because Western theories, policies and practices are so entrenched, it is first necessary for all social workers to challenge their own ethnocentric beliefs and values and to become aware of different communication patterns, beliefs and values, as well as the specific cultural protocols from other cultures (Collins, Jordan and Coleman, 2010).

Nwoye (2010:39) suggests what he calls the principle of double socialisation which includes a "training curriculum to incorporate not only the relevant knowledge and skills of our indigenous heritage, but also building on such a foundation the important concepts and skills in the Euro-American practice."

However, in order to develop indigenous theory, policy and therapeutic methods it is also necessary, as Bar-On (2003:35) suggests, "to engage in reflective learning with the persons who are most knowledgeable about what Africans require and how they best can be served". Clients themselves, as well as members of the extended family, could provide valuable insights. This article has interrogated what needs to be considered before taking the next fieldwork step of research involving such participants.

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