DECOLONISING THEORISING ON CHILDREN: MOVING TOWARDS AFRICAN-CENTRED CHILDHOOD STUDIES PEDAGOGY OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND TRAUMA

N. Titi
Children's Institute, Paediatrics and Child Health
University of Cape Town
Cape Town, South Africa
https://orcid.org/000-0003-0576-5865

ABSTRACT

Background: In Africa, remnants of colonisation and the effects of coloniality have influenced childhood in ways dissimilar to those in other parts of the world.

Objectives: This article contests against universalised theorising of children, advocates for Afrocentric approaches to childhood studies on African children, and makes a case for Afrocentric pedagogy in the psychology of child sexual violence and childhood trauma.

Methodology: The arguments in this article are informed by a rapid review of doctoral research on the history of violence in South Africa and developmental theory to understand how children make meaning of the experience of sexual violence-related trauma.

Results: South Africa's history of colonisation and Apartheid significantly contributes to child outcomes. Decolonial thought and African-centered theorising must be applied to childhood studies in Africa for a contextual understanding of African childhoods. They must centre on the needs and worldviews of Africans.

Conclusion: Education is an instrument of enculturation; therefore, pedagogy should reflect the people it studies. The methods and practice in teaching childhood studies in psychology in Africa must humanise both children and professionals.

Contribution: The article addresses the questions of relevance in childhood studies in Africa and advances recommendations for how academics and practitioners in childhood sexual violence and psychology should work with complex knowledge in childhood studies pedagogy.

Keywords: Afrocentricity, childhood studies, culture, history, identity, pedagogy, sexual violence, psychological interventions

INTRODUCTION

It is critical for academics who study African children to shift their perspectives and challenge Western ideals of what is considered normal childhood. Western attitudes towards African childhoods can often be dismissive and closed-minded towards diverse ways of understanding knowledge and reality with notions that Black children are problematic and deviant. These positionalities must be questioned. Researchers and practitioners working with children must

acknowledge Western biases in human and social sciences and consider how Black children's childhoods are shaped by their cultural contexts. Focusing on Western worldviews tends to ignore the complex social and cultural factors that influence child development in children of African descent living on the continent and in the Diaspora.

This paper promotes decolonial thinking in childhood studies based on a doctoral study that focused on how children comprehend sexual violence-related trauma within poly-victimisation, using African-centered and child-centric perspectives in South Africa (Titi 2021). This article contributes to the ongoing conversations on decolonisation and discusses identity politics, representation, knowledge production, citation, and curriculum development (Idahosa 2019). It recognises the significance of African-centred childhood studies, particularly in response to the call to decolonise higher education and transform South African universities. It furthermore presents pragmatic suggestions for academics, practitioners, and students to navigate the intricacies of childhood studies pedagogy in Africa given the violent histories of African children living in and outside Africa.

WHY CONTEXTUAL CHILDHOOD STUDIES

Childhoods in Africa have been negatively impacted by colonialism, which was initiated and implemented by colonial authorities. Because of numerous negative socio-economic factors stemming from the continent's colonial history, the majority of African children are on an unequal footing compared with children from the global North (Ali and Ailincai 2015; Gqola 2015). These inequalities are rooted in colonialism and cause adverse effects on childhood in Africa (Ngugi wa Thiong'o 1986). Childhood in African countries was consequently severely redesigned because of childhood slavery which limited children from experiencing actual childhood due to the restrictions and control slavery brought (Shanguhyia and Falola 2018).

During colonialism African children were robbed of their childhoods and forced into premature adulthood by making them central to the capitalist monopoly (Alanamu, Carton, and Lawrence 2018). The slave trade undeniably contributed significantly to the capitalist monopoly. Generations later, in African communities, children often assume co-parenting responsibilities for their siblings due to mothers and other caregivers working long hours far from home. Hence, it is a common experience for Black and African children to take on adult household responsibilities, including caring for themselves and others, due to prolonged absences of their parents and caregivers for work. Thus, African children are burdened with early responsibilities that deprive them of their childhood and force them to grow up faster than their peers (King 2011). They are taught to prioritise caring for and managing the households over engaging in play to survive (Titi 2021).

VIOLENCE, SLAVE TRADE, APARTHEID AND AFRICAN CHILDHOODS

The slave trade and Apartheid policies have shaped modern-day African childhoods. Children were made the first slaves of the Cape of Good Hope colony by the Dutch in the mid-17th century (Shell 1994). The slave trade determined the course of African children's development, prescribing what would be the focus of African childhoods. The system enculturated them for domestication and as the source for the economic development of a capitalist system that, in turn, continues disregarding Black children (Diptee and Klein 2010). Due to systemic neglect, Black children in townships and rural areas face poor education and limited health care access. Despite 29 years of democracy in South Africa, the education system has failed to overcome the negative impact of the Bantu Education Act of 1953. The implementation of 1997 Language in Education Policy (LIEP) which was established for equitable access to education by promoting the use of learner home languages has also been disappointing. Black children still do not have equitable opportunities and chances positive childhood outcomes. To understand African children's childhoods, we must recognise how colonialism disrupted traditional African childhood experiences. This is an essential focus for childhood studies, as articulated by Diptee and Klein (2010, 3):

> "Children were actors in major themes of African history – children were often targeted by slavery in Africa; made victims of the domestic, trans-Saharan, and trans-Atlantic slave trade in significant numbers; crucial to the familial, communal, and social fabrics of African societies; a highly valued labour source; and, during the colonial era, in particular, real efforts were made to control, remake, and manipulate African childhoods."

In essence, similarly to Apartheid in South Africa, the slave trade was instrumental in the dissolution of families that manifests today in generational trauma Therefore, to fully understand the needs and socialisation of African children, it is crucial to examine their historical context. The effects of colonialism on African childhoods can still be observed today through political, economic, social, and cultural divisions (Fanon 2004). African childhood studies should prioritise teaching African history in its curricula, beginning with the colonial project between the 17th and 19th centuries. This period contained significant stark violence by the colonisers for the colony establishment by declaring wars compared to the 20th and 21st centuries' systemic violence through the migrant labour system, pointing to post-coloniality (Mbembe 2003). During the 17th to 19th centuries, much violence carried over into the 20th century, leading to a divide between urban and rural areas. In South Africa, due to Apartheid, this divide is seen in how townships and villages are governed and controlled (Mamdani 1996).

Additionally, it is vital to understand the history of violence in South Africa to understand better children's behaviour, including social issues such as bullying and sexual assault. The country, like much of the African Diaspora, has a traumatic history of slavery and sexual subjugation that contribute to the current crisis of violence. To have a significant impact on childhood studies, South African curricula must acknowledge and include this historical context.

TOWNSHIPS, POLY-VICTIMISATION, COMMUNITY AND FAMILY LIFE

In South Africa, townships were created through colonial spatial planning and are home to most Black families in all provinces (Wood 2019). Living in a township has adverse effects on children, including community segregation, father absence, and reportedly the cause of the breakdown of the values of Ubuntu that traditionally held African families together, regardless of blood ties (Lephakga 2017; Makiwane et al. 2016). Furthermore, the poor living conditions in townships led to a decline in the sense of community, and the violence perpetrated by colonisers against the colonised contributed to incidents of intra-community violence among Black people (Biko 1996). Ubuntu is commonly translated as "I am because we are". However, according to Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela (2015, 1087), this expression cannot be translated accurately into any African language, including ten of the twelve official languages in South Africa. Instead, Ubuntu is better explained as an African ethical concept that emphasises the importance of one's subjectivity in comparison to others in their community. In the context of Ubuntu, all individuals are valued as integral members of a community and deserve respect. Inclusion does not mean that people's actions are mindlessly accepted and not questioned. Ubuntu is about an orientation of openness to others and reciprocal caring that fosters a sense of solidarity founded on a collective sense of being. This is in contrast to the Cartesian individualistic sense of personhood because it values solidarity over individualism (Gobodo-Madikizela 2015).

An illustration of how communities were disconnected is the forced removal of Black families from their homes, which was imposed by the Apartheid regime, and had a devastating impact on these communities. It disrupted the communal structure of families by separating them because they had to travel farther away from home to find work, which leads to significant negative consequences (Lephakga 2017). Overcrowding in neighbourhoods also leads to crime and violence which are prevalent in South African townships. These social ills lead to childhoods that are characterised by multiple and complex traumas across various settings, which are unlike children's experiences in developed countries and formal settlements (Abrahams et al. 2017; Kaminer and Eagle 2010; Mathews et al. 2013). Biko (1996, 75)

observed that "Township life alone makes it a miracle for anyone to live up to adulthood. There we see a situation of absolute want, in which black will kill black to survive. This is the basis of vandalism, murder, rape, and plunder that goes on while the real sources of evil – white society – are sun-tanning on exclusive beaches or relaxing in their bourgeois homes".

Conversely, African children are subjected to various forms of oppression based on factors such as their race, gender, social status, and age. In South Africa, Black children residing in townships may encounter additional difficulties, such as inadequate health-care services for their intellectual, psychological, and physical impairments. Although Fanon (2004) does not specify children in his description of the *zone of the damned*, he accurately depicts the cruel and hostile conditions Black children experience, a phenomenon that experts studying childhood violence have labelled as poly-victimisation.

It is deplorable that the Black majority residing in South African townships experience a violent way of life, that leads to generational traumas and persistent violence. As a result, children living in these areas are hypervigilant about crime and violence, even within the safety of their homes (Titi 2021). Childline Gauteng (2020) reported a surge in violence against children during the COVID-19 lockdown in South Africa. This spike was not limited to any social class and was linked to the government-imposed mobility restrictions to curb the spread of the virus. These restrictions led to decreased household income and an increase in violence within homes involving children, despite the expectation that children would be safer as they were at home (Mathews et al 2022). This meant that African children were disproportionately impacted due to existing social oppressions. Focusing on interventions designed explicitly for African childhood studies is therefore crucial to address challenges affecting Black children living in townships. These interventions should consider all children's experiences and further respond to children's traumas in their wholeness (Linklater 2014).

CULTURE EMERGES FROM SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITIONS

The economy significantly impacts children's lives, influencing their education and life chances (Gumede 2021). Poverty, inequality, and violence can all harm academic performance, resulting in a lower quality of life and reduced life expectancy (Ross 2010). Wahbie Long (2017) asserts that addressing these problems is vital to develop authentic African psychology, and cultural initiatives alone are insufficient. Given the history of Africa and the impact of Apartheid laws on the socio-economy of Black lives, the first part of Long's argument about the intersection of inequality and violence is sensible. However, to his second point, while much controversy surrounds the centrality of culture in African-centred Psychology, it remains pertinent to note that culture is a resource for identity irrespective of nationality or ethnicity

(Keesing 1974; Mkhize 2018; wa Thiong'o 1986). It is vital to comprehend the cultural environments of children as it contributes significantly to their perception of the world (Cole, Hakkarainen, and Bredikyte 2010). As highlighted by Titi (2021), the use of cultural explanations by children should be considered when studying African childhood and carrying out research on children.

Scholars of anthropology and psychology scholars describe culture as a collection of socially transmitted behaviors that connect people within shared and interconnected environments (Keesing 1974; Nobles 1986). These behaviours are integral to community life and shape various aspects such as spiritual practices, religious beliefs, settlement patterns, social groupings, technologies, and political organisations, as highlighted in studies by Mkhize (2018), Keesing (1974), Nobles (1986), and Bhana (2005). Culture is thus a product of socio-economic conditions, where available resources determine the community's technologies and traditions for interacting with each other and carrying out activities. As an illustration, i*inkomo* (cows) is a token used for *ilobola*, a form of currency among indigenous Black people based on livestock. Even today, cows are still used as currency to calculate ilobola before being converted into monetary value. The significance of culture is evident in African psychologies and consequently plays a central role in the lives of children.

CULTURAL FLUIDITY, NON-HOMOGENEITY BUT COMMON AFRICAN ONTOLOGIES AND ACCESS TO MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Mental health scholars and practitioners continue to be concerned about the effects of trauma on children and families and their ability to access services (American Psychology Task Force 2008; Titi, Jamieson, and Vutu 2022). Although there has been increased knowledge about the psychological and social effects of trauma in South Africa, there is still a lack of local data regarding the developmental aspects, risks, and protective factors associated with it. Practitioners are therefore concerned about the lack of knowledge on effective intervention strategies for children who experience prolonged and recurring trauma. More research on the efficacy of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition (DSM-5) diagnostic criteria, is necessary, because the tool was tested on children over the age of 15 years (Blom and Oberink 2012; Kaminer and Eagle 2012; Scheeringa et al. 2011; 2012; Gregorowski and Seedat 2013; Van der Kolk et al. 2009). Considering the diversity of cultures in Africa, it is crucial to consider each culture's various developmental milestones when designing psychological interventions for childhood studies. This approach ensures that interventions are developmentally appropriate and effective for the intended audience.

Modern African families face cultural ambiguity and is clarified by decolonial feminism

which centers on the voices and lived experiences of Global South women (Manning, 2021). This ambiguity arises as Global South women and their children navigate urban-rural life and traditional-contemporary in-between worlds (Lugones 2010; 2016). The impact of colonisation, urbanity, and capitalism affect their belief systems, worldviews, and social and cultural lives. As cultures blend and evolve, more African families in the Black middle-class community are incorporating Western child-rearing practices. To truly understand African childhoods, therefore, it is crucial to appreciate the diverse cultural influences that shape children instead of seeking to generalise childhoods.

Furthermore, Black children in modern African and Black communities often experience fluidity in childhood, despite their cultural differences. To effectively help children from these communities, it is imperative to consider their diverse cultures when determining the most appropriate trauma interventions and understanding their experiences. It is imperative to acknowledge an individual's cultural identity to provide practical support, regardless of how challenging it may be, to determine the best approach. The American Psychology Task Force (2008), Linklater (2014), and Ungar (2018) have all emphasised that psychological interventions must consider an individual's social identification, including cultural background, age, gender, race, class, and spiritual beliefs. It is imperative to take a firm position on these matters, and neutrality must be avoided in any form of intervention.

CONTESTING UNIVERSALITY AND ADVANCING AFRICAN-CENTRED DEVELOPMENTAL PRINCIPLES

There is an ongoing debate regarding universal child development, as some theorists consider it unscientific (Araujo 2016; Nsamenang and Lamb 1995; Oswell 2013). In psychology, the Western middle-class family is the standard for a typical family structure and what constitutes healthy child development. This Western-centric positionality often influences policies regarding child rights, child protection, and parenting practices. Although specific policies may be in the best interest of children, it is critical to consider the different cultural expectations and familial norms present in marginalised and African communities (Van Ijzendoorn et al. 2006; Nsamenang 2013). Relying solely on Western-centric principles of family and human development to determine what is best for African children is problematic (Oswell 2013). Such a universalising approach fails to account for the diverse cultural contexts of children living in the Global South and African regions (Woodhead 1999).

Similarly, it is crucial to acknowledge that attachment theory may not apply to African children due to socio-cultural differences. The Western concept of a nuclear family, which is the foundation of attachment theory, does not match the shared responsibility of child-rearing

in African communities. In African culture, the care of a child is a shared responsibility among family members and friends, and emphasising the bond between a mother and child is not relevant to the African context (Mkhize 2006; Bowlby 1969; Van Ijzendoorn et al. 2006).

Studying childhood development involves examining how identity is formed and what childhood entails. This is particularly important for advancing African childhood and developmental studies (Biddle 2017). To understand the development of children, it is important to consider their environment rather than making comparisons to other cultures and using their values and norms as a standard., particularly those rooted in Western culture. Centring on the African perspective in childhood studies recognises the differences in parenting practices across cultures, including communication patterns. Learning communication practices in African cultures is a critical aspect of moral development in childhood, which informs a child's conscious understanding of morals and values. This understanding is essential for practitioners in therapeutic sessions, researchers, and teachers as children bring themselves into these spaces. It is also essential for theorists to learn, respect, and include this consciousness in their scholarship and practice.

RESPECT CULTURAL DIFFERENCES, UPHOLD CULTURAL VALIDITY

Violence against children is central to childhood studies as it undermines their growth and development (WHO 2022). It is therefore imperative to grasp the impact of cultural differences on how children perceive and cope with different forms of violence such as sexual violence. This knowledge is crucial in identifying effective interventions to mitigate the effects of such – and related – trauma. However, the lack of evidence on the dependability of child trauma therapeutic interventions raises concerns and warning signs about their effectiveness. The success of sexual trauma interventions hinges on their ability to respond effectively to the survivor's environment and culture. Because of this, it is imperative to consider contextual and cultural relevance as cultural validity in interventions fosters positive development for trauma recovery (Ungar 2018). Children's healing pathways from sexual violence-related trauma in contexts where children are exposed to heightened forms of violence require cultural validity due to culture and language being essential components for effective psychological interventions for African children (Titi 2021). The lack of respect for diversity in attachment theory is characteristic of Western-centric interventions (Keller, 2018). The theory has been criticised for its Western cultural bias and disconnection from African cultures. It contains significantly more cross-cultural differences than similarities with cross-cultural invalidity in around 1200 different cultures in 186 different cultural areas (Van Ijzendoorn, Bakermans-Kranenburg, and Sagi-Schwartz 2006). Addressing and examining questions about the

effectiveness and cultural validity of childhood violence and trauma interventions is therefore crucial, especially among marginalised and African communities.

CULTURAL RELEVANCE, THERAPEUTIC RELATIONSHIPS, AND AFRICAN ONTOLOGIES

Among the *abantu* cultures (*abantu* is the Nguni word for people) of South Africa, some particularities are culture-specific such as the ethic of *Ubuntu*. Ubuntu gave birth to *Isintu (*the ways of African people*)*, making *Isintu* a culture borne out of *Ubuntu* and spreads principles associated with Ubuntu across similar communities and languages. Culture motivates behaviour by influencing choices, goals, and levels of commitment (Jiang and Pretorius 2010; Rowan et al. 2014). Therapeutic adherence depends on clients' beliefs, particularly those of their religions and spirituality and requires knowledge from the therapist (Cakata 2020). As with adults, children's values, shared histories, experiences, and languages form part of the culture and influence how they perceive and experience life experiences. Therefore, effective psychological interventions with children should begin from the point that culture is highly relevant in behaviour, sense-making, and decision-making (Jiang and Pretorius 2010; Tawanda 2006; Titi 2021).

In psychological practice, as with other clinical work involving children, the quality of the therapeutic relationship between the therapist, child, and primary caregivers is the foundation for trauma treatment. Safe, secure, and trusting therapeutic relationships support the recovery process and encourage children and caregivers to address the impact of trauma exposure and the experience thereof (Foster and Hagedorn 2014). Developing trusting therapeutic relationships with African children and parents is particularly challenging yet critical (American Psychology Task Force 2008). This distrust of therapy has been ascribed to racial differences, poverty, and the therapist's lack of familiarity with the child's cultural context which may affect their attitudes (Choudhary, Satapathy, and Sagar 2019). However, culturally responsive interventions prioritise inclusivity by engaging both the child and their family in the therapeutic process. By doing so, this approach values and respects the traditions and values of the family.

The cultural appropriateness of interventions and psychosocial treatment for children, such as attachment-based therapies, intensive family support, and cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), have reportedly been paid little attention to. This issue raises concerns about the differential impact on children with differential trauma exposure (Ungar 2018), such as those who live in South African townships and are perpetually exposed to poly-victimisation. Focusing on cultural relevance is not to say that interventions developed in the West are

ineffective for African children. There is sufficient evidence that demonstrates that CBT treatment reduces severe trauma reactions, such as PTSD, additional anxiety, and depressive symptoms that underlie behavioural problems (Bandura 1997a; Cloitre 2015). However, in their application, such treatments must regard African ontologies. For instance, animal-assisted therapy (AAT) is a popular technique used by organisations working with children dealing with trauma and abuse, such as Jelly Beanz. AAT is provided through the support of Emotional-Support or Service/Assistance Animals with the belief that animals provide healing (Fine 2006). For example, in indigenous cultures animals are associated with different spiritual meanings and messages that may affect how African children experience and their receptivity to trauma therapy (Linklater 2014). Therefore, cultural awareness and sensitivity are crucial in psychological interventions for African children. Interventions must pay attention to contextual relevance and communal cultural meanings rather than relying on Western conceptualisations of healing and human behaviour (Bottrell 2009).

DETACH FROM EURO-AMERICAN THEORISATION

Mainstream developmental psychology has been built on European and American viewpoints, which may result in prejudiced theories that bias Euro-American Western-centric culture and contain racial connotations (Palmary and Mahati 2015). Thus, African people have been impacted by problematic theories about childhood development, which have led to long-lasting negative perceptions of Black children. These theories have affected the perceptions of black children's intelligence and social skills. It is therefore crucial to revise childhood studies in Africa to ensure a more accurate portrayal of African children, whether they live in or outside the African continent. It is further imperative to examine the relevance of developmental theories from other parts of the world, particularly the Global North, to humanise African childhoods, which necessitates a focus on African scholars' epistemic perspectives.

At its inaugural convention in 1959, the Pan Africanist Congress of Azania proclaimed the right to African self-determination (Black Agenda Report 2022). During this event, in IsiXhosa language, Robert Sobukwe declared, "Asazi ukuthi iyozala nkomoni," conveying that the outcome of that movement was yet unknown. Today, this sentiment is reflected in the effort to decolonise the curriculum of African universities, which includes childhood studies. For the proper education of African students, the curriculum must be grounded in African knowledge and applicable to their specific circumstances. Moreover, it must encompass Africa's contribution to the global knowledge economy. While African-centered childhood studies are still in their developmental stages, the dignity of Black children must be given the utmost priority in texts, lecture halls, research, and all forms of practice involving them.

Ultimately, understanding childhood and the context it occurs is crucial for practical interventions taught in higher education institutions and applauded in research organisations such as those aiming to reduce violence against children, develop interventions and promote social justice. During the era of colonisation, the education system was utilised as a tool to enforce Western culture on Africans to erase African ontologies and identities which resulted in self-criticism and self-hate (Fanon 2004). It has been extensively argued by scholars that endorsing Western ideologies and colonial beliefs regarding Africans leads to the perpetuation of symbolic violence against them (Chukwuokolo 2013; Gqola 2007; Lugones 2016; Oyewumi 2016).

Decolonised education about childhoods in Africa will further humanise and affirm Black students, who may be leaving their villages for the first time to study at a university. For transformed universities, it is crucial to acknowledge and respect students' diverse cultural backgrounds in the classroom. African students' values, shared histories, experiences, and languages are all integral factors that shape their understanding and attitudes toward academic courses. Culture must be upheld in the classroom because in addition to influencing epistemology, it motivates learning commitments (Asante 2007). As observed in African Cultural Psychology and postulated by historic cultural scholars such as LeVine (2007), Bruner (2008), and Wundt (1896), culture is highly relevant to people's everyday behaviour.

In the study of Black children, all fields of science must take into account the various stages of human development in African cultures. When researching children from Africa, researchers must adopt the worldviews and philosophical assumptions of African ontologies. However, it must be emphasised that Afrocentricity does not mean disregarding Euro-American theories that could also be relevant to African childhoods. Adherence to African-centred guidelines to pedagogy positions scholarships for complete, informed and accurate findings. Notably, according to Nhlanhla Mkhize (2018), it is essential to avoid relying only on psychological theories from Western cultures to understand the needs of people in different cultures and over time. Therefore, although Euro-American theories can be helpful, there are alternative ways to understand African societies.

While psychology is defined as the methodical examination of behaviour and experiences (Bandura 1997b) as established in this article, the discipline tends to generalise childhood experiences despite evidence showing diversity in the contexts in which children live. In South Africa for example, the living conditions of children in townships are vastly different for children in formal establishments, and so are their developmental needs. Homogenising children is, therefore, a fundamental error in understanding and practicing with children (Ratele et al. 2018). To comprehend how psychological interventions, affect Black children in their

surroundings, it is essential to apply African-centered research to African-centered teaching and learning. This method is in line with the objective of Afrocentricity, which is to examine Africans based on their own beliefs and aspirations (Asante 1992).

CONSIDERATIONS FOR DECOLONISED CHILDHOOD STUDIES PEDAGOGY

When pedagogy is viewed through a lens that ignores the African context of children and childhood, it can lead to a negative perception of their cultures and an inaccurate understanding of their spiritual beliefs (Asante 2007; Nwoye 2012). Pedagogy lacking culturally appropriate and competent approaches births mistrust in services to African children as they lack culturally inclusive modalities and apparent representation (Linklater 2014; Sones et al. 2010). Cultural differences manifest in various ways, such as the contrasting Eurocentric perspective prioritising individualism over African philosophical values such as Ubuntu which emphasises communal values. Black children's upbringing is rooted in the belief that their actions affect others and that shared experiences hold significant meaning. It is therefore crucial for institutions to recognise and accept this knowledge rather than suppress African students' motivation, creativity, and culture when engaging with them.

Furthermore, in understanding childhood contextually, the analysis of children's participation in household chores from a Western perspective may result in unjust criticism of the domestic responsibilities of Black children. Considering cultural context can yield a more comprehensive comprehension of the communal obligation for survival within the household. It is therefore imperative to gain a comprehensive understanding of the realities, expressions, and perceptions of children in African families to make effective recommendations to policy-makers. This entails incorporating an African perspective into the curriculum and recognising children as complete and autonomous individuals rather than incomplete entities that require moulding to meet foreign developmental standards. By prioritising this approach, we can develop policies and interventions that cater to the needs of African children and their families and communities.

Additionally, indigenous languages must be incorporated into childhood studies as language and culture are intertwined. Acknowledging that the education system was created to assimilate Africans during colonialism is crucial. Institutions must recognise that language and culture play a vital role in shaping the identities of African children and curricula should reflect this understanding without fail. Nsamenang and Lamb (1995), similarly to Vygotsky in their examination of verbal thinking, strongly emphasise that social beliefs become internalised social norms. Through language, children receive messages from their surroundings, shaping their perception and understanding of their lives. Thus it is vital to understand that language is

a conduit of culture that conveys connotations about social hierarchies and cultural norms. It communicates a child's place in society and the realities of the child in how they speak (wa Thiong'o 1986).

Professionals in childhood studies and paediatrics who work with African children should therefore have proficiency in African languages as a basic requirement. They should at the least be registered to speak the primary indigenous language in the area where they practice or conduct research. Professionals must be able to understand the language and cultural nuances of the children they work with to help them effectively. Language is a carrier of culture, and this understanding is essential for providing adequate are and support.

CONCLUSION

In education and practice it is critical to be culturally inclusive as this demonstrates that professionals are ethically committed to humanising all people and communities. Pedagogies on childhood studies in Africa must be based on an Africa-centered perspective. Such a lens resists a colonial gaze and integrates contextual and African epistemologies, ontologies, and knowledge exchange practices in higher education. Through the lens of developmental, social, and human studies, a decolonised approach to childhood studies in Africa is imperative. By doing so, childhood studies in Africa can effectively transmit knowledge that supports situated theorising and transformed teaching and learning. Recognising and comprehending the enduring influence of history on the present is crucial for those in the field of childhood studies to establish a stronger connection with their African students and clients. Humanising this process fosters greater empathy and understanding, ultimately leading to more meaningful and effective engagements.

REFERENCES

Abrahams, N., S. Mathews, C. Lombard, L. J. Martin, and R. Jewkes. 2017. "Sexual homicides in South Africa: A national cross-sectional epidemiological study of adult women and children." *PLOS ONE* 12(10): e0186432. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0186432.

Alanamu, T., B. Carton, and B. N. Lawrance. 2018. "Colonialism and African childhood." In *The Palgrave handbook of African colonial and post-colonial history*, ed. M. Shanguhyia and T. Falola, 389–412. Palgrave Macmillan.

Ali, M. and R. Ailincai. 2015. "Child development in post-colonial contexts: Educational change and ethnic transfiguration in a French Guiana Wayana-apalaï indigenous community." *Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences* 174: 3625–3632. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2015.01.1081.

American Psychology Task Force. 2008. *Children and trauma: Update for mental health professionals*. Presidential task force on posttraumatic stress disorder and trauma in children and adolescents, American Psychological Association.

Araujo, S. d. F. 2016. "Wundt and the Philosophical Foundations of Psychology: A Reappraisal." https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-26636-7.

Asante, M. K. 1992. "The Afrocentric metatheory and disciplinary implications." *The Afrocentric Scholar* 1(1): 98–117.

Asante, M. K. 2007. *Revolutionary Pedagogy: Primer for teachers of black children*. Universal Write Publications.

Bandura, A. 1977b. *Social learning theory*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Bandura, A. 1997a. *Self-efficacy: The exercise of control*. Freeman.

Bantu Education Act 1953. Anonymous. weebly.com. (Accessed 22 June 2023).

Bhana, D. 2005. "Violence and the gendered negotiation of masculinity among young black schoolboys in South Africa." In *African masculinities*, ed. L. Ouzgane and R. Morrell, 205–220. Palgrave Macmillan.

Biddle, S. K. 2017. "Social constructions of childhood: From not-yet-adults to people in their own right." *Anthós* 8(1): 9–33.

Biko, S. 1996. *I write what I like: A selection of his writings*. Ravan Press.

Black Agenda Report. 2022. "Manifesto: The 1959 Pan Africanist manifesto." *MANIFESTO: The 1959 Pan Africanist Manifesto | Black Agenda Report*. (Accessed 12 June 2023).

Blom, M. and R. Oberink. 2012. "The validity of the DSM-IV PTSD criteria in children and adolescents: A review." *Clinical Child Psychology and Psychiatry* 17(4): 571–601.

Bottrell, D. 2009. "Understanding 'marginal' perspectives: Towards a social theory of resilience." *Qualitative Social Work* 8(3): 321–339.

Bruner, J. 2008. "Culture and Mind: Their Fruitful Incommensurability." *Ethos* 36(1): 29–45.

Cakata, Z. 2020. "Safely Nestled in isiXhosa is a Psychology of a People." *Alternation - Interdisciplinary Journal for the Study of the Arts and Humanities in Southern Africa* 27(1): 113–129.

Childline Gauteng. 2020. "COVID-19 – Report on Help Line data lockdown period 27 March 2020 – 30 April 2020." https://childlinegauteng.co.za/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/2.-Lockdown-Level-5_CLGP_-Stats-Report_Final.pdf. (Accessed 22 June 2023).

Choudhary, V., S. Satapathy, and R. Sagar. 2019. "Qualitative study on the impact of child sexual abuse: perspectives of children, caregivers, and professionals in Indian context." *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse* 28(4): 489–510.

Chukwuokolo, J. 2013. "Afrocentrism or Eurocentrism: The dilemma Of African development." *OGIRISI: A New Journal of African Studies* 6(1): 24 – 39. https://doi.org/10.4314/og.v6i1.52333.

Cloitre, M. 2015. "The 'one size fits all' approach to trauma treatment: Should we be satisfied?" *European Journal of Psychotraumatology* 6(s4): 1–8.

Cole, M., P. Hakkarainen, and M. Bredikyte. 2010. "Culture and early childhood learning." In *Encyclopedia on Early Childhood Development*, 1–6. http://www.child-encyclopedia.com/culture/according-experts/culture-and-early- childhood-learning.

Diptee, A. A. and M. A. Klein. 2010. "African childhoods and the colonial project." *Journal of Family History* 35(1): 3–6. https://doi.org/10.1177/0363199009350880.

Fanon, F. 2004. *The wretched of the earth*. Translated by R. Philcox. Grove Press. (Original work published 1963).

Fine, A. H. 2006. "Incorporating animal-assisted therapy into psychotherapy: Guidelines and suggestions for therapists." In *Handbook on animal-assisted therapy*, ed. A. H. Fine. 3rd Edition. Elsevier Academic Press.

Foster, J. M. and W. B. Hagedorn. 2014. "Through the eyes of the wounded: A narrative analysis of children's sexual abuse experiences and recovery process." *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse* 23(5): 538–557.

Gobodo-Madikizela, P. 2015. "Psychological repair: The intersubjective dialogue of remorse and forgiveness in the aftermath of gross human rights violations." *Journal of the American*

Psychoanalytic Association 63(6): 1085–1123. https://doi.org/10.1177/0003065115615578.

Gqola, P. D. 2007. "How the 'cult of femininity' and violent masculinities support endemic gender based violence in contemporary South Africa." *African Identities* 5(1): 111–124.

Gqola, P. D. 2015. *Rape: A South African nightmare*. MGBooks.

Gregorowski, C. and S. Seedat. 2013. "Addressing childhood trauma in a developmental context." *Journal of Child & Adolescent Mental Health* 25(2): 105–118. doi:10.2989/17280583.2013.795154.

Gumede, V. 2021. "Revisiting Poverty, Human Development and Inequality in Democratic South Africa." *Indian Journal of Human Development* 15(2): 183–199.

Idahosa, G. E-o. 2019. "Decolonizing the Curriculum on African Women and Gender Studies." In *The Palgrave Handbook of African Women's Studies,* ed. O. Yacob-Haliso and T. Falola. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-77030-7_66-1.

Jiang, D. and L. Pretorius. 2010. "Communication behaviour in international engineering projects: An empirical and comparative study between South Africa and China." *PICMET 2010 Technology Management for Global Economic Growth*, 1–8. IEEE.

Kaminer, D. and G. Eagle. 2010. *Traumatic stress in South Africa*. Wits University Press, South Africa.

Keesing, R. M. 1974. "Theories of culture." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 3(1): 73–97.

Keller, H. 2018. "Universality claim of attachment theory: Children's socioemotional development across cultures." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 115(45): 11414–11419. https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1720325115.

King, W. 2011. *Stolen childhood: Slave youth in nineteenth-century America*. 2nd Edition. Indiana University Press, Bloomington. http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt16gzk3n.

Language in Education Policy. 1997. Microsoft Word – 2.doc. www.gov.za. (Accessed on 22 June 2023).

Lephakga, T. 2017. "Colonial institutionalisation of poverty among blacks in South Africa." *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 43(2): 1–15.

LeVine, R. A. 2007. "Ethnographic Studies of Childhood: A Historical Overview." *American Anthropologist* 109(2): 247–260.

Linklater, R. 2014. *Decolonizing trauma work: Indigenous stories and strategies.* Fernwood Publishing, Canada.

Long, W. 2017. "Essence or experience? A new direction for African psychology." *Theory and Psychology* 27(3): 293–312. https://doi.org/10.1177/0959354316686428.

Lugones, M. 2010. "The coloniality of gender". In *Globalization and Decolonial Option*, ed. W. Magnolo and A. Escobar, 369–390. New York: Routledge.

Lugones, M. 2016. "The coloniality of gender." In *The Palgrave handbook of gender and development*, ed. W. Harcourt, 13–33. Palgrave Macmillan.

Makiwane, M., M. Nduna, and N. E. Khalema. 2016. *Children in South African families: Lives and times*. Cambridge.

Mamdani, M. 1996. *Citizen and subject: Contemporary Africa and the legacy of late colonialism*. Princeton University Press. doi:10.2307/j.ctvc77c7w.

Manning, J. 2021. "Decolonial feminist theory: Embracing the gendered colonial difference in management and organisation studies." *Gender, Work & Organization* 28(4): 1203–1219.

Mathews, S., A. Delany, L. Makola, L. October, N. Titi, N. Hendricks, and K. Rehse. 2022. *Understanding the intersections of violence against women and violence against children in two communities in the Western Cape, South Africa*. Cape Town: Children's Institute, University of Cape Town, South Africa.

Mathews, S., N. Abrahams, R. Jewkes, L. J. Martin, and C. Lombard. 2013. "The epidemiology of child homicides in South Africa." *Bulletin of the World Health Organization* 91(8): 562–568.

https://doi.org/10.2471/BLT.12.117036.

Mbembe, A. 2003. "Necropolitics." *Public Culture* 15(1): 11–40. https://doi.org/10.1215/08992363-15-1-11.

Mkhize, N. 2006. "African traditions and the social, economic and moral dimensions of fatherhood." In *Baba: Men and Fatherhood in South Africa*, ed. L. Richter and R. Morrell, 183–200. HSRC Press.

Mkhize, N. 2018. "Ubuntu-Botho approach to ethics: An invitation to dialogue." In *African perspectives on ethics for health-care professionals. Advancing global bioethics*, ed. N. Nortjé, J. C. De Jongh, and W. Hoffmann, Vol. 13: 25–48. Springer.

Nobles, W. 1986. *African psychology: Toward its reclamation, re-ascension and revitalisation.* Black Family Institute Publication.

Nsamenang, A. B. 2013. "Dilemmas of Rights-Based Approaches to Child Well-Being in an African Cultural Context." In *Vulnerable Children*, ed. D. Johnson, D. Agbényiga, and R. Hitchcock. Springer, New York, NY. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4614-6780-9_2.

Nsamenang, A. B. and M. E. Lamb. 1995. "The force of beliefs: How the parental values of the Nso of Northwest Cameroon shape children's progress toward adult models." *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology* 16(4): 613–627.

Oswell, D. 2013. *The agency of children: From family to global human rights*. Cambridge University Press.

Oyewumi, O. (Ed.). 2016. *African gender studies: A reade*r. Springer.

Palmary, I. and S. Mahati. 2015. "Using deconstructing Developmental Psychology to read child migrants to South Africa." *Feminism and Psychology* 25(3): 347–362.

Ratele, K., J. Cornell, S. Dlamini, R. Helman, N. Malherbe, and N. Titi. 2018. "Some basic questions about (a) decolonising Africa(n)-centered psychology considered." *South African Journal of Psychology* 48(3): 331–342. https://doi.org/10.1177/0081246318790444.

Ross, F. C. 2010. *Raw life, new hope: Decency, housing and everyday life in a post-apartheid community*. Claremont, South Africa: UCT Press.

Rowan, M., N. Poole, B. Shea, J. P. Gone, D. B. Mykota, M. Farag, C. Hopkins, L. Hall, C. J. Mushquash, and C. Dell. 2014. "Cultural interventions to treat addictions in indigenous populations: Findings from a scoping study." *Substance Abuse Treatment, Prevention, and Policy* 9: 34.

Scheeringa, M. S., C. H. Zeanah, and J. A. Cohen. 2011. "PTSD in children and adolescents: Toward an empirically based algorithm." *Depression and Anxiety* 28(9): 770–782.

Scheeringa, M. S., L. Myers, F. W. Putnam, and C. H. Zeanah. 2012. "Diagnosing PTSD in early childhood: An empirical assessment of four approaches." *Journal of Traumatic Stress* 25(4): 359–367.

Shanguhyia, M. S. and T. Falola. (Ed.). 2018. *The Palgrave handbook of African colonial and post-colonial history*. Palgrave Macmillan, New York.

Shell, R. C. H. 1994. *Children of bondage: Social history of the slave society at the Cape of Good Hope, 1652–1838.* Wesleyan/University Press of New England, London.

Sones, R., C. Hopkins, S. Manson, R. Watson, M. Durie, and V. Naquin. 2010. "The Wharerata Declaration – the development of indigenous leaders in mental health." *The International Journal of Leadership in Public Services* 6(1): 53–63.

Titi, N. 2021. "How children make meaning of sexual trauma: Toward decolonising African centred child-centric interventions." Doctoral dissertation. UNISA.

Titi, N., L. Jamieson, and S. Vutu. 2022. *Closing the gaps in services that respond to violence against women and children.* Cape Town: Children's Institute, University of Cape Town.

Ungar, M. 2018. Systemic resilience: Principles and processes for a science of change in contexts of adversity. *Ecology and Society* 23(4): 34.

Van der Kolk, B. A., R. S. Pynoos, D. Cicchetti, M. Cloitre, W. D'Andrea, J. D. Ford, and M. Teicher. 2009. "Proposal to include a developmental trauma disorder diagnosis for children and adolescents in DSM-V." Unpublished manuscript. Verfügbar unter: http://www.cathymalchiodi. com/dtd_nctsn.pdf. (Zugriff: 20.5. 2011).

Van Ijzendoorn, M. H., M. J. Bakermans-Kranenburg, and A. Sagi-Schwartz. 2006. "Attachment cross diverse socio-cultural contexts: The limits of universality." In *Parenting beliefs, behaviors, and parent-child relations: A cross-cultural perspective*, 107–142. Psychology Press.

wa Thiong'o, N. 1986. *Decolonising the mind: The politics of language in African literature*. James Currey, London.

Wood, A. 2019. Circulating planning ideas from the metropole to the colonies: Understanding South Africa's segregated cities through policy mobilities. *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography* 40(2): 257–271.

Woodhead, M. 1999. "Combatting child labour: Listen to what the children say." *Childhood* 6(1): 27–49.

Wundt, W. 1897. *Outlines of Psychology*. Translated by C. H. Judd. Leipzig: W. Engelmann.