


Elsie Bokaba 

E Bokaba, School of
Philosophy, Faculty of
Humanities, North-West
University 
Potchefstroom,
South Africa.


E-mail:

Elsie.Bokaba@nwu.ac.za

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The loss of environmental knowledge: digital platforms and indigenous games in southern Africa

Abstract

Environmental knowledge is an area of epistemology in which the elderly population, particularly in rural areas, are recognised as integral transmitters. One of the traditional ways in which this knowledge is imparted to the younger generations is through the use of entertainment such as indigenous games (Bogopa 2012: 246). Indigenous games are not merely a socialisation tool; instead, they are often used to facilitate the transmission of values and norms directed towards the preservation and conservation of nature. Despite their significance, there continues to be a lack of recognition of these alternative mediums and indigenous knowledge holders. Using critical theory rooted in a decolonial position, I aim to critically analyse indigenous games in the growing digital landscape by considering the intersectional consequences of dismissing the ecological episteme gained from indigenous games as well as considering how this affects epistemic hubs such as the elderly population – particularly *ooMakhulu* (elderly women). I will argue that the failure to

integrate indigenous games on to digital platforms poses further risks on multiple axes, which include the extinction of the elderly's roles in the younger generation's lives, the loss of important cultural and heritage values, and the obliteration of indigenous environmental teachings.

Keywords: critical decolonial theory, decolonisation, elderly, environment, indigenous games, digital platform

Introduction

Advocates for the inclusion of indigenous communities are increasing in the global discourse surrounding digital landscapes. An example of this includes a recent conference held in Taiwan in February 2025, where concern was raised regarding the exclusion of indigenous voices in the rapid advancements of technology (Sunuwar 2025). Similar concerns have been voiced on the African continent with many institutions hosting conferences and workshops to tackle these concerns about indigenous voices (see International Telecommunication Union 2025). In this article, the group of indigenous voices absent from digital spaces are that of *ooMakhulu*.¹ The epistemologies of elderly African people have been marginalised and excluded for centuries for several reasons, a principal one being the consequences of colonisation on African epistemes (Bertolt 2018; Oyekunle 2024).

Colonisation on the African continent has disrupted the moral, psychological and physical situatedness of African people; its lingering effects are also evident with how coloniality of knowing continues to torment African individuals today. As argued by Anibal Quijano (as cited by de Lissovay and Bailon 2019: 87), coloniality – which is the evidence of colonialism – continues to persist in previously colonised countries; an example of this is the coloniality of knowing. In this article, the coloniality of knowing is located in the dismissing of alternative ways of knowing (i.e. indigenous knowledge) that characterises the Eurocentric models of knowing which persist in formal schooling. The effects of coloniality of knowing can be noted in the growing concerns currently about the digital space and how this so-called “neutral” space continues to subjugate voices that have been previously marginalised and silenced (Crandall and Fisher 2009).

¹ *ooMakhulu* is plural, while *uMakhulu* is singular.

On the one hand, I focus on legacy media, including broadcasting channels which often hold a public mandate (see Zimbabwe Media 2025, South African Broadcasting Corporation 2025)². These mandates are often adjusted to align with the public interest, but this is not always possible, because legacy media hubs also depend on generating revenue to remain functional. On the other hand, online digital spaces (e.g. YouTube) are of interest – and these platforms also have public mandates. The difference with here is private ownership (i.e. founders of the platforms), so their objectives, guided by their particular corporate mandates, do not have to align with the public interest.

I contribute to the discourse on digital platforms³, and the integration (or lack thereof) of indigenous knowledge systems therein, and use indigenous games as one type of indigenous knowledge emanating from the elderly, who also teach ecological wisdom through these games. Indigenous knowledge systems of the elderly in the 21st century are on the brink of extinction and are in danger of completely dying out (Chiba 2024). However, scholars such as Babalwa Magoqwana (2018, 2020), Jimi Adesina (2020), and Nomathamsanqa Tisani (2000), highlight the need to rehabilitate the status of elderly people such as *ooMakhulu* (elderly women) by acknowledging them as fundamental knowledge contributors in our society. They bear the responsibility of being the central hub of indigenous knowledge, especially in the African rural areas – yet their epistemological contributions are close to non-existent not only in the literature but also in the digital landscape (a mirror of societies' biased ways of *being* and knowing).

The focus here is on the inadequate measures taken to document this invaluable knowledge, particularly with regards to environmental wisdom. This article considers the intersectional oppressive relationship that exists regarding the marginalisation of indigenous knowledge, the absence of indigenous games in digital landscapes and the neglect of indigenous knowledge hubs such as *ooMakhulu*. The main argument is that the failure to digitise indigenous games contributes to the erosion of invaluable ecological indigenous knowledge, as well as indigenous knowledge hubs such as *ooMakhulu*.

2 As per the citations, I focus on southern African people mainly located in South Africa and Zimbabwe as a result of the indigenous games which I outline in the later sections.

3 While several types of digital platforms exist, I focus on two categories of platforms as they are the most consumed forms of media.

To support this argument, I employ a decolonial critical theory framework where I firstly consider how *ooMakhulu* over the years have used indigenous games as a way to impart ecological indigenous wisdom to the younger generations, by focusing on three specific games played in the southern African rural areas today. With this, I will show which eco-values can be learnt from these indigenous games and highlight the value in maintaining *ooMakhulu* as epistemic contributors. Thirdly, I show how the sidelining of significant indigenous intellectual contributors (e.g. *ooMakhulu*) has an impact on the growth of society and is a form of epistemic injustice. Lastly, using a comparative analysis, I critique the marketisation of Anglo-European digital games on southern African platforms and offer ways in which digital platforms can incorporate indigenous games. I also show what indigenous environmental games could look like when *ooMakhulu* are included in the process.

Conceptual framework: decolonial critical theory

Colonisation changed ways of being and knowing in various parts of the globe by deploying forms of economic, political, religious and social control. The displacement of colonised people, especially indigenous communities worldwide, has contributed to decades of epistemic erasure and today legacies of colonialism are evident in digital spaces too (Nothias 2025: 3). On the African continent, the lack of recognition of certain epistemes which are dismissed as “indigenous knowledge” is a reflection of the continuing effects of colonisation. Coloniality today has been interwoven into the lives of African people, as decolonial scholars such as Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013) critique. Decolonial critical perspectives allow not only the critique of power structures, as Frankfurt scholars have done, but further consider the critiques against the entanglements of coloniality of power and knowing. Synthesising critical theory and decolonial thinking is essential for this paper, as it provides a clear conceptualisation of the lingering effects of unjust power dynamics entangled with capitalism, particularly in previously colonised contexts, such as Sub-Saharan African countries.

Despite criticism of critical theory and its uncritical nature in relation to decolonial approaches, I support the argument that synthesising the two positions offers valuable insights, as Zembylas argues (2025: 1): “Critical theory provides analytical tools for examining ideology, power and capitalist structures, while decolonial thoughts foreground epistemic, affective, and

material dimensions of colonialism.” In this article, the primary argument is about how colonial power structures have perpetuated historical inequalities through cultural dominance, presently notable on digital platforms. I further argue that a decolonial critical lens shows how digital algorithms and biased programming situate indigenous knowledge gained from indigenous games (i.e. which are learnt from people like *ooMakhulu*) as insignificant and unfit to compete in mainstream content. This is a consequence of certain bodies of knowledges being venerated and noted as the “preference” (de Lissovay and Bailon 2019).

While we remain aware of the strands of coloniality, decoloniality seeks to move away from privileging Eurocentric epistemologies, advocating for the privileging of ‘epistemologies of the South’ (Santos 2014). Decolonial critical theory advocates for the “democratisation of knowledge” while also ensuring there is a rehabilitation of “distorted, bastardised, ignored” epistemes (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013: 15; Sithole 2014:vi). I argue that the lack of integration of African voices and indigenous games in digital landscapes is a form of coloniality of knowing, as African people’s voices continuously remain subjugated and ‘ignored’. An example of the latter is streaming services in sub-Saharan Africa that have historically excluded indigenous traditional games in their broadcasting, while Western games are consistently privileged on local networks such as the SABC (South African Broadcasting Commission), and also international platforms such as Netflix.

Furthermore, a decolonial critical theoretical lens assists one to see how the changing nature of society as a result of colonisation decentralised the role of *ooMakhulu* in society. While these women were venerated and acknowledged as important epistemological hubs in the pre-colonial era, they are merely a shadow of what they used to be as they are venerated at home but less so on a larger scale (Magoqwana 2018: 75). Feminist scholars such as Abosede Ipadeola (2023), Oyeronke Oyewumi (1997), Ifi Amadiume (1987, 1997), etc., all have argued that it is this Eurocentric patriarchal structuring from the colonial period that led to the marginalisation of not only indigenous knowledges, but particularly that of African women – like *uMakhulu*. Those structures that have essentially silenced African women and treated their epistemes as “subjugated knowledge” are arguably the same as those that dismiss the importance of acknowledging indigenous learning methods via indigenous games.

The lack of indigenous voices and games in the broader digital landscape is a symptom of the coloniality of knowing which attended colonialisation on the African continent. Through a decolonial critical lens, one which re-centres African people and privileges indigenous epistememes, a model of critical thinking is facilitated that encourages decolonial praxis towards “[epistemic redress] that commences a healing process for our communities from the destructive impact of centuries of colonial thought systems...” (Magoqwana 2018: 76). I recommend a praxis that involves identifying ways in which indigenous environmental knowledge should be authenticated and transferred to digital repositories. I also suggest how indigenous games may be integrated on gaming application platforms and how their presence (i.e. indigenous games and the environmental knowledge from these games) should be negotiated on online platforms – including legacy media.

Indigenous games and impartation of environmental wisdom

In this section, I have selected three games which I argue show how environmental wisdom can be directly and indirectly learnt from these games. Scholars conducting research on the significance of indigenous games and the younger generations often focus on the physical and cognitive aspects of these games, in fields such as Education and Psychology (Mosimege 2020: 4). However, discourse surrounding these games and their significance to environmental epistemologies and biased digital landscapes has not been given sufficient attention. I have chosen these three games, as they are commonly played in various locations particularly in rural areas (somewhat in the urban areas as well) and the names of these games differ according to geographical location (Burnett and Hollander 2004). This section will also highlight how *uMakhulu* as the primary caretaker is left with the social responsibility of imparting ecological knowledge using these games.

Skomborik

Skomborik is commonly played by children in South Africa. In the game children gather in two opposing teams and one team has to build a tower before the opposing team knocks it over. The tower is often built using recyclables such as tin cans (or anything else that is useful). The other team uses bits of plastic, old pantyhose, etc. to create the wrecking ball to knock down the structures before they are towers (CMI 2020). Before the game begins, the children collect litter

from their surroundings to build their equipment for the game; it is worth noting that this amounts to a collaborative effort in cleaning the local environment.

Legusha

In southern Africa another game which involves physical stamina is *legusha* (i.e. lekusha). Before the game commences, the children (most often girls) will gather materials in order to make a circle with a rope. This is done with old pantyhose, usually found in bins before being burnt or from the women in the communities (CMI 2020). These pantyhose are cut up and tied together to make a rope circle three metres in circumference. Two participants step into the circle facing each other, the aim being to jump over the rope, which starts off ankle high and moves higher up their bodies to make jumping it more difficult (CMI 2020). The aim of the game is to have a winner who jumps the highest level of the rope. While this game might not illustrate any immediate pro-environmental conscious behaviour, the eco-awareness comes from the children using up old pantyhose which otherwise would have been burnt (i.e. contributing to air pollution) (Matsekoleng et al. 2024: 75). So there is an element of land management in the act of playing *legusha*.

Dede Zangara Uyo Mutii

The song *Dede Zangara Uyo Muti* is part of a popular game played by children in Zimbabwe. Unlike the games described above, this one does not entail any physical activity, but is more cognitive and allows for creativity. *Dede Zangara Uyo Muti* is commonly played while the boys are herding the goats and cows or when the girls are fetching water from the wells or rivers – depending on what duties and chores the younger children have (Michel et al. 2020). The purpose of this game is to test the ecological knowledge of their peers by guessing what the various trees are and their telos in the ecosystem. According to Shumirai Nyota and Jacob Mapara (2008: 199) the song goes as follows:

Mubvunzi: Dede zangara uyo mutii?

Mudaviri: Mutondo tsvengurudze paya tsve.

Mubvunzi: Dede zangara uyo mutii?

Mudaviri: Muzhanje tsvengurudze paya tsve.

(Vanoramba vachidaro kusvika mubvunzi aneta kunongedza miti kana kuti mudaviri adzva).

To translate: one respondent points to a tree and asks what kind of tree it is; her opponent responds by naming “that tree”. The game continues until one person is unable to identify a tree or its purpose. In playing *Dede Zangara Uyo Muti*, the children make an effort to learn about the trees in order to win the next game and prove to their peers that they are intelligent as well. If *Ambuya*⁴ is the primary caregiver, the children will seek her knowledge.

Environmental values and wisdom

Accountability and eco-awareness

These games have been identified as instilling moral and ethical values such as *ubuntu* (Hadebe-Ndlovu 2022: 2); however, I argue that they can also instil ecological values – a potentially invaluable feature in the 21st century context, where the domination of nature has led to its destruction. I suggest that the first identifiable epistemes from the games are attitudes towards accountability and eco-awareness. For example, in a game such as *Dede Zangara Uyo Mutii*, when there are participants who know the various trees very well, the game inculcates notions about holding one another accountable with regards to our knowledge about essential resources such as trees, and promotes understanding of some aspects of the ‘biophysical environment’ (Nyota and Mapara 2008: 200). To become even more successful in the game, the children pro-actively learn about different trees and plants from their elders such as *ooMakhulu* while they do their daily chores, as some of these plants are used in the immediate *household* for medicine, herbs, firewood, etc. (Michel et al. 2021). I also argue that wanting to learn about nature (although driven by the competitive spirit) inevitably leads to children who become more conscious and aware of the value of nature.

4 The term *uMakhulu* in this article is aligned with the decolonial image Magoqwana proposes society ought to recognise with elderly African women – and so while this term has been used in this article, here I make use of the Shona equivalent term *Ambuya* (elderly women) to add to the decolonial discourse that Magoqwana has started in her writings of *uMakhulu*. The game explained here comes from people in Zimbabwe and for this reason I offer epistemic recognition to keepers of this knowledge (i.e. custodians of this knowledge largely include people such as *Ambuya*).

Cleaning up of land and recycling – positive attitudes towards nature (land management)

These games can only be played when all the materials are in place. Aware of this, the children are compelled to clean up their surroundings, and in the process they learn to recycle certain waste materials and are indirectly introduced to land management. This is reiterated by Matsekoleng et al. (2024: 73) who state:

Indigenous games have an important role to play in land management, environmental conservation, and environmental clean-ups. Most resources that children use to play are found in their immediate surroundings, for example, small stones of various sizes, empty boxes, and discarded/unused stuff such as bottle caps, electrical cords, pantyhose, bricks, polish tins, and shoe boxes. Children intentionally or unintentionally clean the environment when they collect such materials.

The act of cleaning up the environment, whether intentionally or not, promotes positive attitudes towards nature especially if this is regularly self-instigated. Environmental psychological studies led by Tessa-Marie Baierl et al. (2024: 2) endorse this by arguing that positive attitudes towards the environment, which lead to e.g. protection of nature, are often held by those who have spent a great deal of time outdoors and have an emotional affiliation to nature, often those engaged in outdoor sports.

Closeness to nature – value of appreciation of nature

The contemporary ecofeminist Mary Phillips (2016) highlights that one of the underlying symptoms contributing to reductionist views of nature is essentially our disconnection from the environment. Indigenous games foster a sense of social cohesion and I suggest that this sense of social cohesion can be extended towards nature. In the rural areas, indigenous games are all played out in nature, especially physical activities (Matafwali and Mofu 2023). This creates a connection between the individuals and the land, a connection often missing in the present. Connection with nature means being in tune with it and understanding when it is not well, which is an environmental lesson that can be learnt from games such as *Dede Zangara Uyo Mutii*. I contend that as the world becomes more digitalised, it is important that the younger generations understand the intrinsic significance of nature and one way to do this is through experiential knowledge of it. Indigenous games can contribute

towards finding ways to reinforce rewilding in humans. Simon Hailwood (2015) says the alienation and disconnection humans presently have with nature is understandable when one considers what contributes to this disconnection. In this context *ooMakhulu* as an ecological knowledge holder, as well as having knowledge about these games, is a significant resource for their communities, though their epistemic contributions to society often goes unacknowledged and unrecognised.

The significance of *uMakhulu* as an epistemic contributor

In this section, I consider how *uMakhulu* has historically had relevance as a knowledge holder and disseminator – the gaps in this section illuminate the significant harm in relation to the epistemic erasure of *ooMakhulu*. I will show the changes in society which led to *ooMakhulu*'s decentralised status in society and discredited her as a relevant epistemic body now.

Venerated positions of elderly African women in pre-colonial Africa

uMakhulu as a knowledge expert was evident back in the precolonial era. As argued by Oyewumi (1997: 31), during the precolonial era there was an immense appreciation for older women because of their eldership status (seniority is not only a chronological factor here). Unlike Western societies, African societies were structured and coordinated to venerate eldership. It was the elders who took up many of the leadership roles, mainly those of educating the younger generations and society at large (Asmiire and Twinamatsiko 2021: 5). The status of *uMakhulu* in precolonial African societies, mainly as educators, has been argued for by scholars such as Elizabeth Ezenweke (2015). Ezenweke supports Aidoo's perspective on elderly African women in the precolonial era by arguing that "our grandmothers played some roles – knowing the tradition and passing them to their daughters and future generations. They were actually in the forefront of rites and rituals. They were great teachers of traditions and values" (Ezenweke 2015: 145).

However, colonisation brought in the politics of epistemologies (i.e. whose knowledge is credible), influencing the displacement of African women (Ezenweke 2015: 145). Western ideologies enforced then contributed to shifts in the nature of society, including the choice of only specific intellectual hubs as credible epistemic contributors. African women became merely bodies that were largely dismissed because of the extreme nature of Western European

patriarchal ideologies that were introduced – ideologies that served to undermine the importance of women in a society (Mtombeni 2021; Moagi and Mtombeni 2020; Agbaje 2019). This is not to say that patriarchy did not exist in the precolonial era, as this would idealise precolonial societies; what I argue is that African patriarchal societies existed without diminishing and devaluing the importance of women – especially elderly women. African societies from the precolonial era until present have always been divisive in nature, however, arguably during the precolonial era women’s ways of knowing and being were appreciated (Babere and Mbeya 2022). This is evident in cases where African tribes governed by patriarchal ideologies could manage the co-existence of patrilineal and matrilineal structures (Asmiire and Twinamatsiko 2021).

The status of the colonial African women

The penetration of Western ontological ideologies during the colonial period (i.e. mainly around the 1800s onwards during the scramble for Africa), introduced colonial policies and laws favouring white individuals and to a large extent African men (Agbaje 2019: 8). For example, while African people were not allowed to hold any economic power, there was some leniency given to African men with regards to laws surrounding land ownership. Despite African women working on these lands to contribute towards the household income and survival, they were not allowed to possess anything that could give them any power – a sense of power that would challenge the images of these women as “unproductive bodies” in society (Magoqwana 2018: 80). This highlights an important issue that persists in contexts where maternal knowledge has only been appreciated in the shadows – evidence of what Tisani identifies as “patriarchal bias” (Tisani 2000: 99). *uMakhulu* as a knowledge holder is hyper-visible with regard to responsibilities (i.e. working on lands, being responsible for food sustenance, social responsibility in respect of the immediate environment) but is simultaneously invisible with her lack of authority in land ownership.

These ontological realities of devaluing African women and decentering them in society is evident even in the literature, for example, in African philosophy, with Kenyan philosopher Henry Orika’s (1991) sagacity approach. Orika introduces the sage philosopher, one who acknowledges the significance of oral traditions specifically those of older wise men and women in the communities. He distinguishes between folk thought [popular wisdom] and rational thought [popular wisdom and didactic wisdom] – while highlighting the desirable

as the ability to produce rational thought (Oruka 1991: 36). The widely held critique with Oruka's work is how he acknowledges sage men as having this capacity to reason, while older women simply portray folk thought so this is why older African women are inferior (Mosima 2018: 26). This reductionist way to comprehend and view elderly African women is a direct reflection of how society depicts the status of older women. Magoqwana and Maseko (2023: 393) support this, arguing that part of the colonial project was to exclude female ways of knowing because by making these women invisible in their societies meant the "exclusion of African ways of knowing in institutions of power and knowledge production".

Contemporary contestations of *uMakhulu* as a passive body

Scholars (Magoqwana 2018; Magoqwana and Maseko 2023; Tisani 2000) have contested this perspective of older African women, through the concept of *uMakhulu*. A recent study conducted by Janet Michel et al. (2019) highlights the multifaceted roles *uMakhulu* plays in society, including economist, family permanent advisor, family nurse, orphan advocate, educator, herbalist, psychologist, faith champion, agriculturalist, traditional midwife, family chef, baby sitter (Michel et al. 2020). I suggest that many of these (if not all) highlight *uMakhulu* as an epistemic contributor in her immediate and external environment. *uMakhulu*'s role as an educator ought to be acknowledged given that these women have held on to centuries of knowledge, especially that concerning the environment. As Lilian Cheelo Siwila (2014) says in her article 'Tracing the Ecological Footprints of our Foremothers', it is because of these women's dedication in passing down knowledge and generating epistemes to suit it to various contexts that African people in the rural outskirts have been able to remain resilient in the face of constantly threatening ecological climates.

From the precolonial era onwards, these women have found ways to pass down epistemes. I argue that when *uMakhulu* imparts knowledge about the games, during this process she intentionally and unintentionally shares valuable ecological knowledge and lessons to the younger generations. *ooMakhulu*'s interconnectedness with and closeness to nature as herbalist, educator, and agriculturalist in their households and larger communities makes them the knowledge hub for games such as *dede zangara uyo muti*, where children seek out information about plants and trees. With *legusha*, where perhaps materials cannot be found in the immediate environment, the children will ask *uMakhulu* for materials like pantyhose before these are thrown out and burnt.

uMakhulu will be sought as the knowledge hub and there is constant evidence of these women engaging in sustainable acts; as Magoqwana and Maseko (2023: 398) point out, “African quilt is normally knitted by the elderly women in the village, with lots of old clothes and throwaway pieces” – a regenerative approach. *ooMakhulu* have a large epistemic responsibility towards their communities; however, because of racist, colonial legacies, these women still remain “voiceless” and “nameless” since large bodies of knowledge still fail to record their roles as not only our foremothers but as custodians of knowledge (Ezenweke 2015: 144). As a result, the following section will make recommendations on how to redress this historical injustice while also looking at their contribution to digital advancement.

The intersections of *uMakhulu*, indigenous games, and digital landscapes

I have shown above the significance of *uMakhulu* as an epistemic contributor, as well as how indigenous games can assist in gaining environmental knowledge. In this section, I look at possible ways in which the games could be incorporated onto digital platforms. I will show how *ooMakhulu* and indigenous games ought to be integrated on digital landscapes such as streaming outlets, gaming apps, and digital libraries (including legacy media outlets such as television and newspapers). As Tlou Masenya says, “indigenous epistemologies of the elders are disappearing, especially those that have been solely reliant on oral traditions”; there is both a moral and ethical responsibility from scholars to protect and manage these epistemologies before they disappear (Masenya 2022: 318). Incorporating elderly indigenous voices onto digital media platforms is still in its infancy stages, but indigenous communities such as Native Americans have made progress since the late 1900s to ensure their epistemologies and cultures are well represented. Native Americans also suffered the adverse consequences of colonialism, and as such their communities have been either under-represented or represented in a distorted way, for example, the use of harmful stereotypes in gaming apps (Valdez 2024).

In a similar effort to maintain indigenous knowledge, in southern Africa there has been an increase in the promotion of indigenous games, for example with an “Indigenous Games Festival” (Department of Sports, Arts and Culture 2023). These activities have also been shared widely on both legacy media outlets (television) and online digital platforms, particularly YouTube and various channels on the SABC (Cola 2025). This effort is noticeable especially

because since at least 2010, particularly on the SABC, Anglo-European games like 'Total Wipeout' were regularly televised. These kinds of games find their way onto South African television because the media production companies are often owned by individuals outside Africa, and because viewers' ratings earn revenue – demonstrating the intertwined nature of capitalist enterprise and public service in relation to digital spaces.⁵ While these games are meant to “entertain”, the primary objective is to make profit, which is pursued at the price of the continuing erasure of indigenous knowledge and communities.

Digital gaming in Africa has attempted to include indigenous realities and voices with games like *Waste Masters Africa*⁶ shared widely (sadly only accessible to those with digital gadgets). *Waste Masters Africa* is a game integrated into the digital landscape, one example of how environmental epistemologies currently look in 21st-century digital platforms (Averda 2019).

An example of how games could become incorporated in digital gaming, apart from being put on the appropriate platforms, could be by including the interactions between indigenous knowledge holders and the gamers. An online game could have instructions such as “scan a tree or plant to get some suggestions of what it could be, and then ask an elder for verification”. That latter statement would help to validate individuals such as *ooMakhulu* as epistemic holders in their communities, a practical step towards decolonising indigenous knowledge systems and their holders rather than privileging Eurocentric voices. It would also contribute to worldwide environmental justice movements that are creating repositories of land epistemologies (see Dei et al. 2022). I also argue that the threatened epistemes of *ooMakhulu* would be given further life in such digital repositories – rehabilitating their image as credible ecological knowledge holders.

For a game such as *legusha*, the instructions could easily be incorporated online, as could the scores between teams or ways to increase difficulty levels. There could be instructions encouraging players to ask (a digitalised) *uMakhulu* for material, and to engage with her about the significance of using recyclable materials, and teams with novel answers could gain extra points in the game.

5 Physical endurance games such as Total Wipeout have been on South African television since July 2010 (TV-SA 2025). I also refer to Total Wipeout because it resembles the games I have described.

6 In a collaborative effort from web designers, students and cartoonists, the interactive game *Waste Masters Africa* has been developed. The game is aimed at promoting environmental awareness regarding waste management on the African continent (Averda 2019).

I argue that creating digital spaces that recognise indigenous knowledge hubs such as *uMakhulu* is a decolonial praxis that attends to the issues of epistemic injustice and recognition experienced by knowledge holders who have been dismissed and marginalised for centuries.

It could be argued that taking these teachings on eco-values online could cause a further rift between the younger generations and the environment and might even isolate the elderly. While this might happen, this is a dangerous perspective as it suggests that elderly people are static individuals who lack the ability to change in tune with the larger society. Dei et al. (2022: 129) record the importance of the elderly in the African and Canadian contexts, who have been able to survive “colonial erasure policies” and in various contexts are able to adjust with time because they remain the keepers of knowledge in relation to “the past, present and the future”. Additionally, digitalising games such as *Dede Zanagara Uyo Mutii* would involve constantly updating knowledge about trees and plants, inevitably encouraging the younger generation to be out in nature more.

Other ways to incorporate such games and knowledge systems should be sought, especially since indigenous knowledge is “mainly shrouded in secrecy and the hope it is being disseminated to everyone and utilised for the public good is almost impossible” in the African context (Mdluli et al. 2021: 1). Tseselelane Mdhuli et al. (2021), in ‘Knowledge management: preserving, managing and sharing indigenous knowledge through digital library’ argue that indigenous knowledge ought to be held in digital libraries. Legacy media is a form of digital library, I argue, and allows recognition of the alternative ways of learning using indigenous games, while also having images of *uMakhulu* as epistemic contributors to the knowledge (in the instructions for the games). These alternative ways of knowing and the use of various institutions of knowledge digitally is another step towards dismantling what Quijano (as cited by de Lissovay and Bailon 2019) identifies as coloniality of *knowing*.

Conclusion

To conclude, this article focused on the oppressive capitalistic nature of existing digital platforms that have been party to the failure to digitise indigenous games, while also not acknowledging the significance of *uMakhulu* as an epistemic contributor of ecological knowledge. I focused on three indigenous games commonly found in southern Africa, specifically selecting these games

given their knowledge of eco-values, including valuing nature as an intrinsic body, and having a heightened eco-awareness. The main source of knowledge for these games is *uMakhulu*, though they may not be the only such source in the rural areas of southern Africa. This article heeded the calls of Magoqwana (2018) and Siwila (2014) to trace the ecological footprints of *ooMakhulu*, as well as identifying these women as institutions of knowledge in their communities.

I have consistently shown that *uMakhulu* plays many roles in the community, and should not just be thought of as a passive member of society. These women, as Michel et al. (2020) say, have multiple roles but should be recognised mainly as teachers and keepers of ecological knowledge, including using alternative approaches such as indigenous games to impart knowledge. As globalisation and digitalisation expand, it is essential that these knowledge approaches and knowledge holders are both integrated into the changing landscapes. The digital landscapes that ought to be decolonised to include indigenous voices are firstly legacy media, and the call here is especially for television broadcasting of indigenous games. Secondly, I propose the expansion of coverage online, which includes media platforms such as YouTube and gaming spaces. Here I argue that we must think about how these spaces can serve as digital libraries – digital libraries to preserve the indigenous knowledges of *ooMakhulu*. In these online platforms Eurocentric voices have been historically privileged, even on the African continent. This has halted the recognition of indigenous games while also dismissing the voices of indigenous women like *uMakhulu* who are imparters of indigenous knowledge surrounding these games.

Glossary

Elderly woman, senior mother, grandmother	<i>uMakhulu</i>
Elderly woman	Ambuya

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