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Narrative research across cultures: Epistemological concerns in Africa

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Abstract
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Keywords
Narrative research, Ubuntu, Afrocentricity

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Introduction

This paper describes the challenges in bridging narratives in cross-cultural research, drawing from the author's past research experiences in Africa, using the introduction of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) in Bantu communities as a case. Research in Africa must consider local cultures if the African narratives are to be understood and authentic and valid. As an example, the paper fronts a proposal for Afrocentric research paradigms, which among Bantu should take Ubuntu into account. Ubuntu as an Afrocentric research paradigm can be used together with some Western paradigms to improve authenticity as well as validity of data, and usefulness of narrative research in Bantu communities.

The paper starts by outlining the source of tensions when ICT is introduced into African communities and then discusses narrative research in African contexts. Ubuntu is given as an example of African philosophy upon which research methodology could be based among Bantu in Africa. The paper proposes a hybrid of Western narrative and Ubuntu as ways of improving methodology, authenticity and the validity of research about ICT among Bantu communities.

The issues

The application of ICT in the field of education among formerly colonised Indigenous communities in Africa provides an interesting case for narrative inquiry because ICT is basically Western knowledge but now has become part of many aspects of the lives of Indigenous Africans. No research, much less in ICT, is value-neutral. Rather it is

impacted by inbuilt pedagogical assumptions focused on the nature of reality as well as interactivity, drawn from established Western philosophies (Jefferies, Carsten-Stahl and McRobb 2007). A Western philosophical example given by Jefferies et al (2007: 113) is the positivist stance when educators view learning as conditioned response and use behaviourist strategies (e.g. Skinner 1938). This position is based upon realist ontology, which assumes that the world exists independent of the observer and that reality is measurable. By way of comparison, Indigenous Africans value human social interaction as paramount, believe in the super-natural (the metaphysical) and take knowing as socially constructed. Hence, there is likely to be tension when a Western construct based upon positivism, such as ICT, is introduced to African communities. Additionally, ICT is instrumental and held as responsible for inserting many Western ways of constructing and disseminating knowledge into African Indigenous Knowledge Systems (African IKS). For example, in Africa, ICT is communicated predominantly in English, and the Internet is amassed with Western lifestyles. Furthermore, there are no direct translations into the languages of Indigenous Africans for most of the ICT tools.

Other agents, blamed for inserting Western value systems into African IKS, include formal education, commercial interests, and research. It has been suggested by Forster (2006: 1) that the thinking behind these is grounded in the idea that scholarly pursuit, insight, and wisdom has its origins in Europe and America. These agents use 'strategies of disinformation' according to Emeagwali (2003: online). Emeagwali has identified these to include 'selective omission of non-European achievements, inventions and of technologies; the distortion or rejection of data obtained from methodologies used by African IKS; and surreptitious naming' (Emeagwali 2003: online) of African artefacts. At the same time, contemporary research that is internationally recognised is perfecting Western knowledge systems. Most research in Africa, as a consequence, is referenced against Western-recognised literature and research methodology.

Narrative research as an agent of authenticity and validity in ICT research and dissemination

In this paper narrative research is considered to be the spoken or written account of connected experiences. In support of this position Clandinin, Pushor and Orr state 'narratives inquiry is much more than the telling of stories' (2007: 21) and they provide 'a framework of elements for designing, living out and representing narrative inquiries' (2007: 24). Traditionally most Indigenous African narratives have been expressed in an oral form. Emeagwali (2003: online) alerts researchers to be 'fully sensitive to the status of the provider of information, his or her stake in the system and the various versions of the traditional information given'. There are many approaches, according to Pinnegar and Daynes (2007: 7), that can be used to analyse how people communicate, but research does not become narrative inquiry until

> we recognize and embrace the interactive quality of the researcher-researched relationship, primarily use stories as data and analysis, and understand the way in which what we know is embedded in a particular context, and finally that narrative knowing is essential to our inquiry.

Researchers who have an understanding of narrative inquiry act as agents exploring knowledge in this way. Narrative inquiry tends to be most popular in the social sciences. Although narrative inquiry seems to be new to research involving ICT, it is embedded in the social communication tools used, such as blogs, wikis, and emails. It is

indeed a contradiction that ICT is about communications and collaboration, though more fully examined by scientific and quantitative research than qualitative forms.

The number of Indigenous Africans who use ICT, such as mobile phones, to communicate their stories is increasing. Their narratives about experiences of ICT would appropriately be disseminated in the form of stories. The explanation of qualitative methods provided by the Department of English, Colorado State University (2009: online) clarifies this point:

> Qualitative research describes and classifies various cultural, racial and/or sociological groups by employing interpretive and naturalistic approaches. It is both observational and narrative in nature and relies less on the experimental elements normally associated with scientific research (reliability, validity and generalizability).

A need for an epistemological agenda for Indigenous Africans

If narratives are to be treated as authentic there needs to be an epistemological agenda including Indigenous knowledge systems (Martin 2008; Smith 1999), both in Africa and across the globe. Ditton (2007) recognises different epistemologies in different contexts and cultures, and alludes to the predominance of Western knowledge systems in epistemology. There are complaints that Western understandings and research falsify, frame and submerge most African IKS (Leach and Fairhead 2002), to the extent that some notable African philosophers such as Hountondji (1996) suggest that African epistemology is a myth. Hountonji advises Africans to adopt Western knowledge systems, arguing that philosophy is universal. In contrast, Ogunniyi (1996: 274) advises Indigenous Africans to curb imported ideas to encourage local initiative and create academic independence.

This is because distinctively different interpretive communities use unique standards or versions of proofs of truth and validity (Fish in Lincoln and Denzin 1994). Instead of the tendency to satisfy universal or global 'truths', the introduction of ICT innovations into communities therefore requires the adoption of paradigms that are compatible with local contexts and social fabric (Evans and Powell 2007; Ogunniyi 1996; Pinkus 1996; Wells and Wells 2007). The introduction of ICT into any community should be preceded by research; the research is valid if the local contexts, including participants' IKS, priorities, and culture, as well as the local environment, are considered (Denzin, Lincoln and Smith 2008; Gay, Mills and Airasian 2006). The research paradigms must be acceptable to participants because acceptable paradigms are likely to lead to the evolution and growth of IKS that is specifically adapted to the requirements of local people and conditions (Langill 1999). Hence, Langill (1999) and Prior (2006) recommend that researchers should examine what aspects of culture might play a role in shaping knowledge. In light of this UNESCO (2001) resolved that locally evolved solutions lead to more sustainable development. It appears that the failure of research findings, and of some ICT innovations to contribute positively to development in Africa, as well as to the growth of African IKS, could be an indication that some research paradigms imported into Africa are not valid.

In consideration of the arguments in favour of local participation in the above, Mkabela (2005) notes the absurdity of research in Africa, which uses methodologies that are external to African IKS. Additionally, Prior (2006) notes that African IKS have had

little influence in shaping research agendas or methods of inquiry and advises for change. This would benefit from adoption of Foucault's advice (e.g. in Mpahlele 1996) against subversive genealogies, which, according to Denzin (1994: 579), refuse to accept local systems of discourse. Breton and Largent (2000) also advise researchers to change their view of reality and their thinking and valuing. For example, African IKS should be a central consideration and valued in research carried out in Africa. However, the change requires representation of IKS in the scholarly products to be facilitated (Raseroka 2005), most likely by use of 'intellectual tools for expressing and exploring the insights of traditional African thinking in a systematic way' (Du Plessis and Raza 2004: 3).

African IKS must have their own valid research paradigms that have grown from the African IKS and which ensure the growth of African IKS, for example by the incorporation of Western methodology and ICT. Stories about Africa should be Afrocentric by the use of valid African paradigms in authentic environments, which should replace Western distortions, restrictions and rigid norms and values. Thus, the researcher should involve the Indigenous people in all validations, and Mkabela (2005: 179) presents 'Afrocentricity', described by Asante (1995), as an essential intellectual core in African paradigms. Afrocentricity locates and validates research in authentic African IKS. Focus upon the particular validities outlined below should lead to improved interpretation and the understanding participants (in this case, Indigenous Africans) will have of research processes and findings (Gay, Mills and Airasian 2006).

Technical validity examines the fit between research questions, data collection procedures, and analysis techniques and the effective application of specific data collection and analysis techniques (Eisenhart and Howe 1992; Heron 1996; Hitchcock and Hughes 1995). Technical validity appears to be closely related with Construct validity, which is the meaningfulness of research constructs or ideas (Banks 1997). Therefore, the African indigenous participants should understand clearly the research questions and constructs, and the researcher should seek methodologies that amicably integrate with African IKS. For example, questions and interpretations of data should be translated into vernacular. Both require ascertaining Treatment validity, in that Indigenous participants in the research should primarily be the ones to judge and to accept the objectives, instruments, and procedures of research (Banks 1997). An important consideration in validating Treatment is the perception Indigenous people hold about the usefulness of the research process and outcomes.

Perception is largely a matter of the interpretation by the African participants in the research, of the process and outcomes of the research. Positive perceptions require improving Psychosocial validation by which the practice, both in the way research is done and in its outcomes, are interpreted (Heron 1996). Additionally, perception would improve by Ecological validation, which ensures that the research looks beyond the individual to social-historical contexts (Banks 1997). Social and historical considerations are important especially in formerly colonised African communities. Le Compte et al (1993) refer to this consideration as Fairness. Fairness requires the researcher to obtain balanced representations of the multiple African realities. For example, the realities of culture in Africa are sometimes in contrast to formal education as an introduced colonial practice. The descriptions of realities should be accurate in terms of African IKS to improve Descriptive validity (Maxwell 1992). A further improvement of perception could be achieved if the research grows African IKS. The

growth could be identified in form of personal and social transformations, which are elements of Value validity (Heron 1996; Le Compte, Preissle with Tesch 1993).

Any form of validity is achieved in authentic circumstances. Authenticity in Africa implies Afrocentricity by organising the research around African IKS — that is, around African value systems and methodologies, in environments that are characteristic of a genuine African culture. For example, interviews held in an office might yield different data from those in a village setting where the interviewees can seek approval of their responses from their communities. Authenticity also requires sincerity about the intentions of the researcher, to the extent that the research is integral to African IKS. The Africans should be made aware of underlying intentions of the research. Often, however, the intentions are hidden. For example, a researcher fails to mention that he or she is pursuing a PhD qualification in ICT or researching for a market for ICT products. The author has observed that failure to reveal underlying intentions have sometimes created animosity against new research projects in instances where, for example, Africans find the data they provided in publications or theses.

Narrative research and identity

A narrative essentially belongs to some person or persons and therefore has some identity and belongs to a context, as well as a knowledge system. Therefore, an important benefit from Afrocentric narrative research in Africa is the potential to improve self-worth among the local Indigenous peoples.

Raseroka (2005) believes that Indigenous Knowledge contributes towards self-confidence and dignity, because it provides the foundation for engagement and equality with other worldviews. Therefore, IKS is important in narrative research because it ought to 'embrace the interactive quality of the researcher–researched relationship, [and] primarily use stories as data and analysis' (Pinnegar and Daynes 2007: 7). The question 'Who am I?' is fundamental, especially regarding participants' contributions to research in terms of permanence, physicality and spirituality (Forster 2006: 10). Furthermore, Foster believes that, ontologically, identity structures relationships with others, space and the objects in space, as well as with spirituality. The advantage with narrative research then is in allowing authentic communication of IKS in the research process and outcomes. The narrative reveals who we are, thus augmenting the ownership of research. The feeling of ownership improves the self-worth, and can lead to self-actualisation, through the possibilities of ultimate development of participants and their circumstances. The ownership is often communal and culturally embedded in Africa.

Narratives in Western contexts might not equally provide that kind of communal pride because of individualistic tendencies. Forster (2006: online) seems to infer that the Western individualism has a lot to do with Rene Descartes's statement 'I think therefore I am'. Descartes introduces the 'I' or 'my' factor, which has defined democracy and capitalism. Ontologically, Forster (2006: online) argues that Descartes's approach is one of those philosophical positions that have shaped reductionism: to reducing the nature of complex things to the interactions of their parts, or to simpler or more fundamental things, with the wrong assumption that the sum of parts (constituents) equals the whole.

Nonetheless, reductionism has yielded important equations in science (e.g. on the basis of causality), supported research (especially quantitative) and has clarified some

statistics (e.g. correlations). Quantitative and scientific research has yielded benefits to Africa and should not be dismissed (Emeagwali 2003: online). African IKS-scientific hybridisation, in a postmodernistic sense — that is, the use of scientific methods and knowledge in African contexts — has improved lives for example in medicine, where traditional herbs have been researched to produce better medicines, and some traditional African musicians use electric instruments. The Internet and mobile phones are disseminating important traditional narratives and support African trade across the globe.

On the other hand, reductionism can be catastrophic when applied to the complexity of nature, especially human social nature. The recent economic downturn is a good example of reducing human behaviour to numerical predictions. With regard to narrative research, the assumption might lead to isolating an individual's emotional, psychological, biological processes, and social interactions, from complex factors of nature and humanity. Reductionism isolates the researcher from the narrative and translates individual stories or parts of stories into numbers and averages. Consequently, the averages tend to distance findings from individual experiences and ownership, and to reduce self-worth.

Scientific approaches are sometimes inappropriately applied in African IKS. For example, although scientists hesitate to apply scientific processes to some Western knowledge systems, such as Christianity, they continue to discount traditional African beliefs as scientifically nonsensical. It is indeed a double standard to accept the Christian doctrine without subjection to the rigours of science, while relegating traditional African beliefs as witchcraft. The Biblical miracles such as the walking on water by Jesus (Gospel of John, Chapter 6) would not pass the rigours of scientific proofs.

Even then, sequencing of processes in science is in some instances not agreeable to African IKS epistemology (e.g. as shown by Wolfe *et al*. cited in Lalonde 1993). Although there might be cases where there is overlap with science, Emeagwali (2003: online) believes that it hardly caters for discovery that is 'intuitive, accidental, conjectural, or inspirational (spiritual) … some scholars argue that the general thrust of mainstream is to explain regularity and to deliberately exclude the unique and intractable' (Emeagwali 2003: online) characteristics of African IKS.

Ubuntu

Ubuntu is an authentic representation of Afrocentricity because Bantu (those who practice Ubuntu) inhabit over three quarters of Africa, from West to South Africa. An individual is a Muntu. The term Ubuntu as used in this paper is a reference to the social conduct of a Muntu by the Xhosa and Zulu in South Africa. Other Bantu languages have different terms for Ubuntu. For example, Ubuntu is Buntubulamu in Luganda language of Baganda in Uganda.

The term Ubuntu originates from '-ntu', which is a suffix referring to the ancestor who spawned human society and gave human beings their way of life (Foster 2006: 4). Ubuntu is in its execution a form of narrative because it includes humanity and is considered to be collectivist. Humane and collective actions define Ubuntu as Broodryk (2006: 132) explains:

> Ubuntu is a Bantu characteristic of relationships and … deems that society must be run for the sake of all, requiring cooperation as well as sharing and charity…. Ubuntu consequently, is the quality of being human … involving caring, sharing, respect, compassion … ensuring a happy and qualitative human community life in the spirit of family.

Ubuntu is based on 'the belief in a universal bond of sharing that connects all humanity' (Wikipedia, b). Mtuze (1999: 84) explains: Ubuntu is a kind of existence, where one person's personhood and identity is fulfilled and complemented by the other person's personhood, where 'each person exists because the other person exists'. Therefore, Bantu are welcoming, hospitable, warm and generous, and are willing to share.

Ubuntu accentuates the importance of agreement, because Bantu democracy relies on extensive discussions that provide a platform to every person until some solidarity is reached (Louw 2004; Mkabela 2005). The discussions engender the exposure of a Muntu to others, answering the question 'Who am I?'. It enhances the chances of identifying and ironing out differences between individuals, towards an agreement that is cognisant of norms and values of that community. The agreement binds a Muntu within community values and discourages her/him to take precedence over the community because, in a philosophical sense, a Muntu *is* because of others. Her/his progress is intertwined with the progress of a community. Hence, a Muntu signifies a plurality of personalities because the community is responsible for forming her/his character, to the extent that an individual's behaviour can be used to identify that individual's community or tribe.

Ubuntu and Western narrative

Ubuntu contrasts Western knowledge systems where discussions confront plurality for truths or credibility because the particularity or individuality of the other is not modernistic and Cartesian (Louw 2004). Each individual exists prior to, or separately and independently from, the rest of the community or society such that the rest of society is an added extra to a pre-existent and self-sufficient being, according to Louw (2004). Cartesian individualism is constitutional, solitary, and sometimes against communal interests in Western systems. Collective Cartesian individuals often translate into competitiveness in Western democracy and capitalism. Perhaps the most important difference between Ubuntu and Western narratives is that Ubuntu confers humanity upon a research process, in contrast to some of the Western distanced top-down imposed research.

The contrast between Ubuntu and Western knowledge systems illustrates the tensions that can arise when a Western research methodology is applied among Bantu communities. From the point of view of Bantu, the methodology by a Cartesian researcher fits Dreyfus and Rainbow's (as cited in Lather 1991: 10) description of power relations: the researcher has privileged access to meaning, is also the adjudicator in explaining what data really means, but at the same time claims externality and political neutrality in relation to the interpretation. Dreyfus and Rainbow (as cited in Lather 1991: 10) note that this covert positivism tends to objectify the research, albeit without the benefit of the researched to interpret data. A case in point was a PhD student at the University of New England during a symposium for postgraduate students in 2007 who concluded that Africans believed having sex with a virgin cures AIDS! Robbotom and Hart (1993: 598) observe that, contrary to the desire to inculcate freedom of thought and thesis among participants, certain and often imposed

approaches are instrumentalist in explaining and predicting phenomena for the participants.

African approaches (such as Ubuntu) have been seriously altered and disrupted during the colonial period and the disruption is still perpetuated by the north–south political and economic system (Lalonde 1993). A fundamental difference between Ubuntu and Western research paradigms is that Ubuntu, as an Afrocentric paradigm, is much more holistic; not only the individual ('Who are you?': psychology), and third person ('Who do others say you are?': sociology) are considered, the interrelatedness ('Who are we and how does that inform who you are and who we perceive you to be?') are examined (Forster 2006: online). Therefore, practices based in Afrocentricity do not separate the 'knower' from the 'known' (Du Plessis and Raza 2004: 2-3) because the practices are collective (Emeagwali 2003). It has been explained by Mkabela (2005: 79) that the 'Afrocentric' approach such as Ubuntu rejects labelling participants as subjects, simply 'data' or informants in the Eurocentric frame of reference, and adopts Ubuntu, where participants are human (Bantu).

Forster (2006: 1) argues 'that … ethics of Ubuntu, as it relates to the concepts of ontological being, can add to Western knowledge systems the richness of human consciousness, identity and what it truly means to be a human person (a Muntu)'. Tutu's (2004) statements also identify Ubuntu-based research with Western participative research paradigms and methodologies in stating that we are bound in this life and as a cooperative community. Ubuntu is about sharing what we have (Broodryk 2006: 6), including thoughts.

However, Ubuntu becomes difficult to place in Eurocentric research discourse because it would appear at two levels: as a philosophy in the way it defines humanity; and as a methodology in the way it executes human relationships.

Ubuntu methodology and narratives

In relation to introducing innovations such as Information and Communications Technology (ICT), Ubuntu *interrogates truths or credibility* (Louw 2004) as communal narratives. Broodryk (2006: 7) points to the need for inclusivity of everyone in a group using open collective forums in Ubuntu. This is why Bantu often wish to confer with community members before committing themselves to an answer. Thus, research questionnaires given to individuals might be returned with somewhat similar answers. For example, Bantu tend to use 'we' instead of 'I'. Therefore, interviews are likely to produce more information than responses to questionnaires, which are typically detached and lose on important details of discourse. Interviews can also better accommodate traditional aspects of narratives, such as gestures. If non-structured questions were used in the interviews it would facilitate dialogue (Denscombe 1998: 109-12; Merriam 1998: 71), encouraging participants' interactivity. A Muntu who is interviewed in isolation could be interpreted as a benevolent 'informant' who reveals sacred IKS without community permission, and subsequently might be rejected by the community. Hence, focus groups would be more appreciated than individual interactions among Bantu. Furthermore, vernacular, not normally a recognised scholarly communication standard (Raseroka 2005), might convey more accurately the understanding that Bantu participants have of the research process and its outcomes. In any case, most people appreciate and communicate more effectively in their own first or home languages.

Additionally, valid narratives require one to become a Muntu. This implies basically submitting oneself to Ubuntu for which Mkabela (2005: 179) advises cultural and social immersion as opposed to scientific distance. Becoming a Muntu in cyberspace or while using ICT might not be easy because, firstly, it comes to Africa with underlying Western cultural values (Jefferies et al 2007). Secondly, ICT such as MS Windows is presented to Africans in foreign languages, mostly English or French. While the quality and depth of respondents' information depends on the perception Bantu have of 'who' the researcher is (Muwanga-Zake 2007, 2009), the identity of a Muntu in the labyrinth of cyberspace competes against already established identities and cultures in cyberspace (Jefferies et al 2007). However, for example, by the researcher sharing family history, Bantu respondents are more at ease to share information because then they 'know' the researcher (Muwanga-Zake 2009). It has been observed by Muwanga-Zake (2009) that increasing the ease of Bantu might require the presentation of a clan, and family history. Some of the family trees of Indigenous Africans can now be researched from the Internet.

Ubuntu collaborates and relates with participants as equals with respect to their values, needs, norms, and mores; this approach ameliorates power in the discourse of the research (Muwanga-Zake 2009). Greet, introduce yourself, understand their needs, and if possible sit and eat with Bantu to gain cooperation and validation of your research (Muwanga-Zake 2007, 2009). This is in concert with Social Constructivism, which, according to Gergen (1985: 266), views discourse about the world as an artefact of communal interchange. Social Constructivism in Ubuntu articulates common understanding regarding mutual respect for others, an agreement on research and interpretative criteria, and dialogue or 'mutual exposure' of beliefs (Mkabela 2005: 179). This has the potential to move from a Cartesian solitary individual researcher to solidarity and from independence to interdependence (Louw 2004). In the context of ICT, equality with participants is unlikely, since the researcher often owns the equipment, has more advanced skills and knowledge of it, and interprets the meaning around the associated jargon. So the researcher has power over the participants.

A difficulty is to access sacred knowledge. The author's experience is that most of Bantu IKS is yet to become public — again in a somewhat similar way some scientific knowledge remains confidential for economic, security or economic strategic reasons. African IKS could be sacred because it empowers sections of a community. For example, an herbalist obtains status and possibly income from his/her IKS of herbs for ailments. Therefore, such IKS might not be easily or only partially revealed and in fact might never be revealed because it is a source of income and status. However, Bantu might cooperate where the research clearly contributes towards the development of their IKS or where the research positively transforms their community, albeit without contravening their culture (Muwanga-Zake 2009).

Fortunately, Indigenous Africans have demonstrated enthusiasm for ICT (Muwanga-Zake 2007). Ubuntu ethics include permissions from the authorities to conduct research (Merriam 1998: 214), which among Bantu require observing and respecting participants' Ubuntu protocols regarding the discretion and reticence of elders to provide access to IKS (Mkabela 2005: 187). There could be spiritual (including traditional healers), administrative (e.g. chiefs) and many other forms of leadership among the Bantu. Seniority in chronological age is another important consideration. Asking for willing volunteers (Cates and Goodling 1997: 30) or how much exposure

Bantu wish to give (Mkabela 2005: 183) could reduce tensions and improve power relations.

Therefore, the Bantu narratives are likely to be idiosyncratic, constructivist and interpretive in relation to Ubuntu culture, and reveal the researcher's presence and actions (Neuman 1997: 331). The culture and IKS of that community, and how these relate with the researcher, research process and aims, should therefore be clearly described. The researcher should be visible with concrete desires and interests instead of being an anonymous voice of authority (Harding cited in Mkabela 2005: 180), which is characteristic of the distanced 'scientific' passive reporting devoid of the human element.

Furthermore, the narratives among Bantu would require the analysis of Ubuntu discourse, including culture (e.g. attitudes such as how he/she greets you), environment (and its relation with IKS), gestures and glances, thoughts, understanding, values, and emotions (Foucault in Cohen and Manion 1987: 253; Mphahlele 1996). For example, the discourse might indicate a level of acceptance. Furthermore, the hierarchy (in age or administration), royalty, and unity of the participants not only indicate the authenticity of the narrative, but give an idea of the roles of each of such categories of people in a community. Unfortunately, impoverished Bantu communities are likely to produce false discourses in an attempt to obtain ICT, especially if the research or project includes a promise of equipment such as computers. In this regard, the narrative relating to the introduction of ICT might be an act, which does not reveal the truth. Another challenge is how to record Ubuntu discourses in cyberspace since some of the discourse includes actions, such as greeting and facial expressions (Muwanga-Zake 2007).

Challenges of Ubuntu in narrative research

Much of African IKS remains tacit, sacred and embedded in practices, relationships and rituals (Bhola 2002; Cosijn, Pirkola, Bothma and Jävelin 2002), and is often transferred orally between generations (Kawooya 2006; Mbow 2003). Bantu IKS is therefore not readily available in the public domain. In addition, oral transmission of knowledge is often rejected as worthless in mainly Westernised formal education (Kawooya 2006: 1; Mbow 2003: viii; Raseroka 2005). Moreover, the oral transmission of African indigenous knowledge (Kawooya 2006: 1; Mbow 2003: viii) has made deliberate alteration or misinterpretation easier (Emeagwali 2003).

Fanon (1970) has asserted that typically Europeans view Indigenous African knowledges as inferior. In line with this position Bhabha (1994: 70) argued that the colonialists' discourses portray the colonised as degenerate races. Fanon (1970) observed that education can impose inferiority complexes among Indigenous Africans because they strive to feel equal to the Europeans, who assume superiority of knowledge and truth, and who define their lifestyles. This assumption is exacerbated by the insult that Europeans discovered Africa. The assumed racial inferiority illustrated by the 'specimens and remains of Indigenous colonised people as objects of scientific interest in European museums and laboratories, with little regard for their cultural significance' (Prior 2006: 163) serves to affirm this position.

Ultimately, unfortunately, Western paradigm survival equals personal survival (Breton and Largent 2000) and in Africa because the Western paradigm now provides employment and sometimes aid it defines modern lifestyles for Indigenous peoples.

Thus, Indigenous Africans are addicted to Western paradigms (Kawooya 2006: 2). While these have helped Indigenous Africans, the Western paradigms also immobilised and discontinued the development of their local knowledge systems. Therefore, some Indigenous academia in Africa ignores or suppresses knowledge of anomalies in the paradigms that operate in their institutions. They tend to fail those students or job applicants who align themselves with localised methodologies (Breton and Largent 2000). Indeed some Bantu feel ashamed of their traditional names. Consequently, Bantu have rarely, if at all, initiated qualifications on foundations of Bantu IKS. Research among Bantu has often yielded naught contribution to their development. Indeed, the 'educated' Bantu are often accomplices in perpetuating foreign paradigms and in the genocide of Bantu IKS.

The educated Muntu also suffers complexes emanating from the dual personalities — one a Westernised lifestyle and the other an indigenous approach to life. Many educated Africans see Bantu IKS as shameful because it does not fit into Western knowledge, and its imperial education or its scientific and religious or spiritual notions (Kawooya 2005; Raseroka 2005). For example, it used to be shameful to have no Christian name (personal experience) and job applications had spaces for such names. The multiple personalities in a Christian and educated African implies that the African has to behave as a Christian, as a well Western-educated person, and as an Indigenous person. In my experience, these multiple personalities — for example, I the author am a Christian, hold a PhD, and am a Muganda — complicate narratives since, if I do research or I am researched, I have to switch between these personalities. Similarly, naming my children calls for a Christian as well as an Indigenous name; this is probably not the case for Europeans. Other examples of complex narratives among Africans are marriages, which start with traditional payments of dowry to the bride's family and then a church service to bless the marriage.

Indigenous Africans misuse some ICT because it is an introduced resource without grounding in African IKS. Examples of unnecessary high bills, due to mobile telephoning, have been recorded in impoverished Africa. Some others spend unnecessary time and resources on computers and the Internet. While some of these instances are rich with many varieties of narratives, and benefit Indigenous Africans with understanding more narratives, the narrative of Indigenous Africans becomes difficult to record and interpret as he/shes juggles between different personalities as well as with rather foreign ICT.

According to Emeagwali (2003: online), close reliance and over-dependence on demographic stability and morality are thus weaknesses. Additional challenges include the Bantu preference of expressing their feelings openly within their communities, which to some extent could cause introverts to hide true feelings. Hence, Ubuntu can easily derail into an oppressive collectivism where conformist behaviour becomes the norm for solidarity.

Furthermore, resolving theoretical and conceptual issues about the identity of African IKS is a challenge (Emeagwali 2003: online) mainly because of its secretive, sacred and undocumented nature. Emeagwali (2003) argues that further complications arise from the fact that intellectual property rights and ownership make it difficult to decide how and for what to use African IKS. Thus, there is a lack of support to research, develop,

and define authentic research paradigms for African IKS, independent of Western influence.

The factors outlined above undermine the inclusion of African IKS into major research paradigms and formal education and increase the resistance by academia and academic journals, including those in Africa. Additionally, academic journals are costly and written in jargon, foreign to most Indigenous Africans. Hence, African stories have had limited international interest and space and so are often wrongly interpreted.

Conclusion

Indigenous Africans are increasingly benefitting from ICT. For example, cyberspace allows the communication of African narratives, as well as communal online interactions, and is playing a role in developing local epistemologies. However the cyberspace excludes important Ubuntu discourses. False narratives could also be told in an attempt to access ICT in a community. Fundamentally, Ubuntu should form the basis for research on ICT among Bantu, not as a competing paradigm, but as the main one, to enable production of knowledge that is valid as well as authentic and relevant to Bantu communities. The challenge in introducing Western knowledge, such as ICT into Bantu communities is to develop research hybrids that recognise Bantu IKS as at least equal to Western knowledge, with sensitivity to cultural biases embedded in ICT. The other challenge is for Indigenous Africans to get involved in research as leaders who develop their own ICT.

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