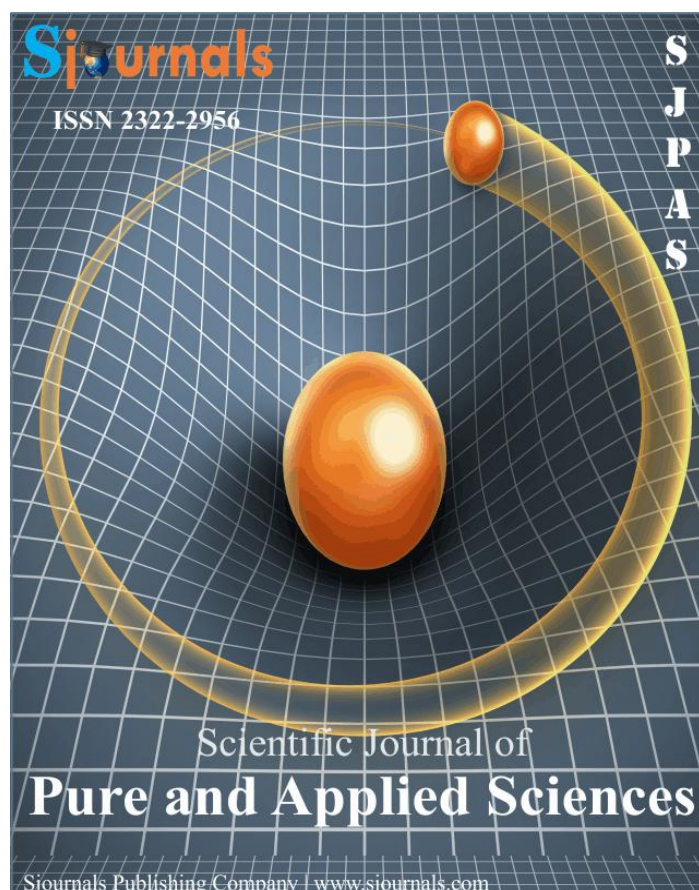


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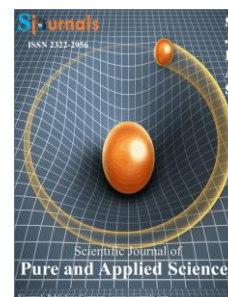
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Review article

The degradation of the Afrocentric counselling perspective as a function of the perpetuations of engendered Eurocentric hegemonic practices in Zimbabwe

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ABSTRACT

Africa as a whole, Zimbabwe included, has not remained static since colonisation by the west who pretended to be on a civilizing mission in terms of culture, norms and lifestyle yet they had an agenda punctuated by supremacy ideologies. The perpetuation of Eurocentric ideologies has left a trail of extreme distortion of most, if not all, the cultural values of the African people to the advantage of the west. This has left Africa confused and uncertain culturally, philosophically and religiously as to which counselling perspective to follow between the Afrocentric and Eurocentric perspective. Thus the invasion and colonisation of Africa has polarised even the counselling systems employed by its people leaving them distorted and in a state of confusion. The effects of this colonisation and invasion have permeated the Afrocentric perspectives and approaches to counselling to the extent of undermining the cultural and spiritual significances in these regards. This paper interrogates the degradation of the Afrocentric counselling perspective as a function of the hegemonic perpetuations of Eurocentric counselling systems with a special focus on Zimbabwe. The paper traces how the supremacy agenda of the west has permeated the counselling domain and, like in the case of missionary religion, used as an excuse to exterminate the traditional forms of counselling in the name of formality and professionalism. The value of Afrocentric counselling is overwhelmingly exposed in the paper and as a way

forward the paper admits to the fact of globalisation and plurality of culture and therefore concludes in favour of the multicultural perspective to counselling which is hitherto not biased toward Eurocentrism.

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1. Introduction

Naidoo (1996) states that the Eurocentric perspective entails the perpetuation of the dominance of power and control over the cultural patterns, behaviours and attendant values of one particular group by a western worldview. This is the kind of approach where the tendency is to perceive, construct, and understand phenomena such as reality, behaviour, and theory for instance from a predominantly Euro-American or white cultural perspective (Coker, 2004). In our view, Eurocentric counselling is the social science of helping clients that is based on the western view since it encompasses the application of western crafted theories to solving clients' challenges. The Eurocentric approach brought formal ways of counselling where a chair and a table are employed. In the main, it is in the milieu of western oriented practices of a table and chair or the Famous Freudian relaxing couch (Coker, 2002) applied to the science of helping. Eurocentric counselling is entrenched in white culture in the synthesis of ideas, values, norms, beliefs and behaviours coalesced from descendants of White European ethnic groups (Wright, 2013). It focuses on the problem and the now without regard for the African value systems and context of the African client. It is therefore individualistic in its approach, but has continued to dominate counselling practices in modern African societies in Zimbabwe and the continent as a whole save for a few highly conservative minority traditional groups. The western world has continued with its supremacy ideologies in these regards and has used tactics that demean indigenous African practices of counselling as means of exterminating them so as to maintain Eurocentric dominance.

As opposed to Eurocentric counselling, Afrocentric counselling describes the Afrocentric idea as a model for an African view of the universe and thus the methodological approach to solving human emotional problems using African traditions, value systems and cultures (Manteiro-Ferreira, 2014). Asante (1998) defines the Afrocentric idea as conveying African peoples' sense of the world and of their existence and provides an epistemological tool to dealing with social and cultural manifestations either from a cultural/aesthetic, social/behavioural, or even a political/functional perspective. Afrocentric counselling is thus the help that is centred on African culture and traditions. It upholds the African principles which inform the African perspective of the universe. It is about the collective good which values the support from the family system and community (Rupande and Tapfumaneji, 2013).

2. The practice and significance of the Afrocentric perspective of counselling

The principles of Afrocentric counselling reflect on the view that all events and indeed all people are tied together with one another (Mikaye, 2012). In that manner the highest value of life lies in interpersonal relationships between humans and therefore cooperation, collective responsibility and interdependence are the key values to which all should strive to achieve (Wright, 2013). Ndlovu and Hove (2015) further explain that in the context of Afrocentric counselling ones' self is complementary to others, 'I am, because we are and since we are, therefore I am', is of utmost importance to the survival of the group (Wright, 2013). On its own the social security that manifests from this collectivism is therapeutic. Thus, Afro-centric approaches in counselling are approaches in counselling that centre or focus on Africa or African peoples, especially in relation to historical, political, socioeconomic and cultural influences (Mkize, 2008) that are rooted in the philosophy of collectivism.

The collectivistic approach to counselling emanates from the traditional African society's practices whereby character formation was achieved through an intense formal and informal programme of counselling (Mikaye, 2012; Rupande and Tapfumaneji, 2013; Ndlovu and Hove, 2015). Witmer (1990) in Mikaye (2012) says that African traditions and cultures guided individuals in social roles, values, belief systems, sex, regimental roles and skills they would need to enhance their culture. Afrocentric counselling had and still has an essential part of conveying collective wisdom which controlled and regulated social interactions and intra-personal behaviour. Witmer further

states that in African societies, counselling was effected through identified people to whom members could turn to when necessary. Rupande and Tapfumaneyi (2013) also concur that counselling services have traditionally been provided albeit by non-professionals who included the elderly or mature people, close relations such as uncles, aunts and close family friends. Although the social standing of the preferred traditional counsellors varied from country to country, the underlying criteria remained that of a trusted confidant who was capable of assisting individuals with their personal problems. In our view, those qualified to provide traditional professional Afrocentric counselling, by their own standards and from their growing experiences became professional in their discharge of duty. This is evidenced by the persistent survival of this African traditional social practice albeit its degenerating significance due to modernity and therefore Euro centrism. The Afrocentric system of counselling is of course still cherished today. This is reflected in the overwhelming, although undocumented calls for the return of the extended family system in the wake of an increased need for counselling due to a breakdown in the social fabric of the contemporary African societies.

The traditional counselling set up was in effect sufficient and suitable for the past closely knit rural communities of Africa (Rupande and Tapfumaneyi, 2013; Ndlovu and Hove, 2015). Counselling and advisement were not taken as a paid service, but a contribution towards the development of upright citizens of society and the onus was upon the person who received the wise counsel to offer a token of appreciation, especially when he/she had overcome the problem, anxiety or task. Counselling was done within the family and at times was done by community leaders for a little or no cost at all. Counselling was given to equip people with survival skills even before getting into crises. Thus, most of it was more of preventative counselling than correctional counselling. Meanwhile, the involvement of traditional leaders and family elders in counselling corroborates Charema and Shizha's (2008) assertion that the indigenous approach to counselling tactfully captures the importance of the family and the community as a mode of communication for therapy and moral values. An African cannot be understood fully outside the context of family as family exerts a lot of influence in modes of behaviour hence the importance of family and community in counselling. Mkize (2008) points out that the traditional Afrocentric counselling methods emphasized the importance of helping the individual and that communication and experience were what a counsellor needed to counsel someone.

Counselling in the Afrocentric context would take place in situ. Afrocentric counselling was often informal but effective. For example, Sommer and Sandtrock (2005) asserted that in the African cultures, rights of passage were the avenue by which youth gained access to sacred adult practices, responsibilities, knowledge and sexuality. This practice captured the communal way of counselling and it was done in a non-formal way. In Zimbabwe African cultures there remain remnants of Afrocentric counselling practices whereby individuals are offered counselling, including career counselling by family members, peers and elders (Ndlovu and Hove, 2015). Such counselling aligns the problem with one's culture and traditions and seeks to find an Afrocentric solution to the problem at hand. It has been observed that, due to the dominance of Euro centrism today, the Afrocentric approach to counselling is at times attempted as a face server at many weddings and funeral gatherings of black Zimbabweans. This has proved ineffective because it is either not properly done is haphazard or is rarely practiced outside such events. The distance between relatives and the degeneration of the extended family attachment have crippled the potential benefit of the practice even where it is preferred or desirable.

In a study, Charema and Shizha (2008) discovered that the vast majority of traditional Zimbabwean people use traditional informal counselling to deal with their challenges in addition to modern western counselling services. Charema and Shizha (2008) point out that Afrocentric counselling could also take the form of group counselling which was done by a group of elders in many tribes in southern and eastern Africa especially during the performance of rites of passage to facilitate the children's transition from childhood to adulthood. Mkize (2008) argued that children and youths ready for this practice would be taken out of the village to a temporary shelter where they were given adequate knowledge including growing up and sex knowledge. This type of counselling was often undertaken as a ritual with certain acts such as circumcision for males to mark the transition into adulthood. Group counselling and discussions in a less formal environment seemed quite appealing for the Afrocentric system of counselling (Ndlovu and Hove, 2015) until the domineering of Eurocentric counselling perspective perpetrated via engendered and artificial white supremacy ideologies.

In the olden days, Afrocentric counselling was a process and a way of life. It was incorporated into the culture and African spirituality and hence celebrated together by the traditional African societies of Zimbabwe. African spirituality is embedded in their culture and even in the counselling approaches (Ndlovu and Hove, 2015). For instance, it is believed that respecting adults and admitting to the elders' counselling and advisement goes with

the blessings from the ancestors. According to Machingura (2011) the African people of Zimbabwe for instance are always in touch with the spiritual world and it becomes very sensible and secure to continue with this link even in counselling circles, in case of an attack by evil spirits they would have encountered. The aspect of being in touch with the spiritual world is something linear and centrally important in the Shona/Ndebele world view before one's birth, during one's life, at death and after death (Charema and Shizha, 2008). The African interpretation of life is guided by their understanding of the spiritual world and one cannot imagine a situation where one can claim not to be spiritual or atheistic as proudly done by some people in the Western world (Machingura, 2011). Charema and Shizha (2008) advocate the use of indigenous approaches to counselling which they claim tactfully capture the importance of spirituality, family and community as a means of communication for therapy and moral values. Of importance is the realisation that appropriate counselling takes cognisance of the client's cultural environment and religion and utilises structures in the family and community to enhance assistance offered to clients. In its domineering and hegemonic efforts, Eurocentric counselling practices have loosely claimed to take care of these issues but there is little evidence to this effect.

3. The engendered hegemony of Eurocentric counselling practices

Due to the dynamic nature of today's societies, there has been rapid social and economic changes that have impacted on counselling practice. Thus, today's enlarged socio-economic environment and globalisation has necessitated the need for multi-sectorial counselling services, hence the emergence of Eurocentric counselling practices in Africa (Rupande and Tapfumaneyi, 2013) which have taken advantage of dynamic changes and socio-cultural mobility to overrun all the other counselling systems used in the continent. It therefore means that the type of counselling used in Africa and in particular Zimbabwe today, is pro-western and runs contrary to the African counselling traditions, practices and or expectations (Rupande and Tapfumaneyi, 2013). Eurocentric counselling as a modern philosophy in Africa and which is largely individualistic has permeated Afrocentric practices rendering them defunct in some settings. However, the agenda behind this engendered dominance of formal Eurocentric counselling systems in Africa has neither been wholly succinct nor fully accepted hence many Afrocentric counselling scholars have questioned its sincerity. Ndlovu and Hove (2015) note that modernity has resulted in the disintegration of the close family unit resulting in the degeneration of the value system inherent in the extended family. With the emergence of Eurocentric counselling, therefore the traditional systems of counselling have fallen apart and those in need could hardly refer to the traditional counsellors in the family or community system. Consequently, institutionalised Eurocentric counselling has become the dominant option. Unfortunately, the western definition of counselling side-lines African traditional efforts of assisting people with life challenges (Munikwa et al., 2012).

According to Matowanyika (1997) in Mutswanga et al. (2014) indigenous systems have long been considered backward and primitive by westerners and colonisers, and western knowledge systems have tended to subdue indigenous knowledge systems by flavouring it with foreign attributes. Afrocentric systems of counselling have been labelled inferior to western counselling approaches which are sometimes termed modern. Lalonde (2006), and Maree et al. (2006) however, argue that the narrow view of the Afrocentric counselling perspective and hence the indigenous knowledge systems as old fashioned, backward, static or unchanging is totally misconceived. In these contexts, Naidoo (1996) complains that dominant psychology is derived, founded, and imbued with the outlook that the Euro-American world view is the only or best world view, which is wrong and again narrow-minded. The perpetuation of this supremacy theory is predicated on one world view, one set of assumptions concerning human behaviour, and one set of values concerning mental health and therefore linear techniques of solving human problems. The hegemonic and supremacy ideology thus restricts our knowledge and understanding of the dynamics of counselling and limits our ability to be effective cross-culturally thereby reducing the counselling process to a technically orientated procedure as it also deprecates the value and usefulness of indigenous modes of intervening (Naidoo, 1996).

The advocates of Eurocentric counselling approaches actually took advantage of the lack of written documents and scripts about Afrocentric counselling systems and procedures to impose their approaches on the Africans. This lack of written documents or scripts has further widened the breakdown of Afrocentric systems of counselling under the disguise that it cannot be easily or explicitly followed except by those who emanate from the African culture and whose belief systems are inextricably rooted in African traditions. It has also perpetuated a narrow view and understanding of Afrocentric counselling even among young African generations in order to

perpetuate the Eurocentric hegemony. The narrow understanding of Afrocentric ways of counselling in general has significantly allowed western ways of counselling to overpower indigenous counselling orientations resulting in Eurocentric practitioners rating themselves as superior to Afrocentric-oriented counsellors (Mutswanga et al., 2014). The Eurocentric approach came with the understanding that all that which is African is uncivilised yet it had value to the Africans. As a result, the penetration of western religion into the African culture left the Afrocentric approach to counselling further confused as to which approach to take. It should be noted however, that, indeed Eurocentric counselling has done well in coming up with theories that are documented so as to be used for systematic reference in the practice of counselling. While this has gone a long way in equipping the counsellors living in the era of diverse cultures, we argue that such a revelation should not however be used as an excuse for undermining Afrocentric counselling practices without due regard for their significance. After all, Eurocentric counselling interventions have exhibited critical shortcomings when used in Afrocentric settings (Machingura, 2011; Charema and Shizha, 2008; Chamberlain and Hall, 2000).

4. Limitations of the Eurocentric counselling perspective within Afrocentric contexts

Eurocentric counsellors fall short when understanding and interpretation of the personal problems of a client require a spiritual or traditional cultural explanation. Chamberlain and Hall (2000) allude to the fact that counsellors who are not sensitive to cultural differences have lower success rates when dealing with clients of other cultures, and as a result, they fail to empower their clients. In addition, Coker (2004) observes that the issue of formal Eurocentric counselling is actually a problem among Africans as they associate this with a western endeavour that intrudes into people's private lives. They feel more comfortable in traditional sources of support such as family, friends and spiritual outlets (Sue and Sue, 2003). In critiquing western approaches to counselling, Charema and Shizha (2008) observed that western approaches to counselling demonise and oppress individuals' and groups' whole cultures when applied to non-western cultures. The Eurocentric counselling focuses on the problem and the here and now thereby neglecting the system and the context of the problem. It is there to promote individualism as reflected by the humanistic approaches that have been propounded (Chamberlain and Hall, 2000) to guide practice.

The Eurocentric approach has perpetrated the decline of collectivism which identifies with the Afrocentric approach. Additionally, while Eurocentric practice has not totally disregarded group counselling, it is not doing it in the context and practice of Africans since it is ultimately concerned with individuals' abilities to solve their own personal problems instead of resorting to the collective social capital inherent in indigenous African systems. This individualism is premised on the principle of autonomy, where an individual has self-concern as opposed to collectivistic theory enshrined in the Afrocentric counselling philosophy. Due to its weak regard for collective traditions entrenched in African philosophies, Lalonde (2006) and Maree et al. (2006) in Mutswanga et al. (2014) condemn Eurocentric approaches for failing to address counselling issues of the marginalised African groups in a relevant manner. Thus, Eurocentric counselling approaches become inferior to solving most 'Africanised' issues in these regards. It is at this juncture that even the medical doctor or professional counsellor in Zimbabwe comes to a point where they would say this needs *chivanhu/isibantu* (African spiritual intervention). The revelation in a study by Bodemer (1984) of the involvement of relatives, elders and traditional leaders in counselling even without formal training exposes the shortcomings of western approaches to counselling when used in African contexts as they do not take into account the cultural considerations of the African people.

5. Discussion and conclusion

The purpose of this review was to interrogate the degradation of the Afrocentric counselling perspective as a function of the perpetuations of Eurocentric counselling systems with a special focus on Zimbabwe. Counselling in the African context is interpreted as being embedded in the indigenous knowledge systems which according to Dondolo (2005) consist of traditional culture, traditional systems of healing, medicine and other forms of knowledge, oral traditions, storytelling and values. Baiden et al. (2007) actually advocate for the promotion of community-based lay counsellors to enable people in rural communities to access counselling in their community and from people who understand them better irrespective of the perspective. Counselling services would then be made much more accessible when compared to current situations where people have to visit institutional-based

facilities at which counsellors are only western trained. The situation may be made worse in rural areas where even such facilities could be inaccessible or unavailable altogether.

In view of the Afrocentric perspective, traditional leaders and elders had different ways in which they approached the counselling process and the main way was in talking to counselees and allowing them to talk of their problems. This practice is also inherent and is highly valued in Eurocentric methods. This is consistent with Gillis (1996) cited in Vogel (2009) who defines counselling as a facilitative process between a counsellor and a client. The only difference is that the traditional counsellors were not formally trained in the manner conceived by Eurocentric systems. This suggests the need to vary techniques by employing both Eurocentric and Afrocentric approaches in order to fully assist African people who for that matter have been entangled in global dynamic cultural changes and cultural explosion to the demise of their own traditions. It should be accepted in this context though that these dynamic cultural changes have affected traditional counselling practices in fundamental ways.

It is also noted that the traditional leaders in their counselling appeared to understand their clients in their cultural context. This tends to corroborate claims by Jones and Hodges (2001) that counselling should honour the contextual development of multiple individual realities and societal circumstances that challenge black Africans. This argument reveals that, it will be worthwhile for all counsellors, including the western trained ones, to employ the multicultural approach in order to cater for cultural diversity and cultural pluralism in modern societies. In rural communities, effective counselling can only be offered by those who understand the culture, knowledge systems and the role of family in supporting individuals (Sue and Sue, 2003). Western approaches to counselling may have serious deficiencies in assisting African people cope with the problems if they fail to appreciate the cultural contexts of the peoples of Africa. This view is shared by Bodemer (1984) who argues that, a good knowledge of the culture, customs and language as well as of the literature will help with the diagnosis of depression on black south Africans, for example and therefore guarantees effective counselling. For instance, the collectivistic theory and communal theory which is a dominant feature in Afrocentric counselling reminds us that clients do not come from a cultural or social vacuum but from a family unit that in turn has a cultural background which has moulded each member to what they are. The only problem is that such African philosophies are rarely documented.

It is speculated that there being no written Africanised documents and theories on indigenous counselling, indigenous knowledge systems are therefore unimportant because according to the western thought important things are in print (Mutswanga et al., 2014). However, the Africans considered their knowledge memory capacity as good enough to respond to counselling issues plus the day-to-day stories and proverbs were taken as enough reminders. In line with the collectivistic and communal theories, Mutswana et al. (2014) study acknowledges that every client has his/her own culture which counsellors should always take note of before sessions start. This has led to the questioning of the perceived solo contribution of western approaches to counselling of African clients. Due to the hidden or paradoxical nature of Africanism, in most instances modern approaches fail to provide relevant answers to the problems that call for an African traditional or spiritual explanation (Lalonde, 2006).

Another need to understand both the indigenous Afrocentric and the Eurocentric counselling approaches is that there is likely to be a reasonable match between the counselling phenomena to be understood and the description and interpretation of the phenomena since some of the issues may be spiritual (Mutswanga et al., 2014). There are times where even the medical doctors tell the people that some things are not conceivable and hence they need spiritual interventions. Cross-cultural competence should not be seen as ancillary or merely a specialisation in counselling but as an integral part of competent counselling and psychotherapy (Sumari, 2008). Training objectives also need to address more directly the manifest psycho-social problems and needs in the community (Naidoo, 1996). Cross-cultural training will help to guide more relevant and meaningful emic (within culture) and etic (cross culture) phenomena.

Knowing when and how to integrate the family and community into counselling practice will empower culturally different clients and help them seek a collective solution rather than an individual one (Mkize, 2008). This clearly shows that taking western approaches to counselling and therapy may not be helpful if such approaches do not embrace the cultural views of the Africans. Drennan (2001) actually states that, it would be inappropriate for counsellors trained in the western model to make diagnoses of traditional African problems, because not only are they not qualified to do so, but there is also no evidence that Eurocentric categories offer better or superior diagnosis in non-western contexts (Munikwa et al., 2012). Zimbabwean counsellors therefore need the appreciation of both Afrocentric and Eurocentric counselling so that they may be effective in their work. This will also empower them in the area of referrals. In other words, multi-cultural counselling is the best option.

It is undeniable that the need to attend multicultural diversity of clients is more obvious when counsellors and clients have different cultural backgrounds. According to Pedersen et al. (2002) and Sumari (2008) multicultural awareness is no longer considered as a special emphasis, but instead as a generic competence in counselling across cultures. From the foregoing, this paper concludes that, since the Afrocentric system of counselling is no longer stable, there is need to integrate Eurocentric techniques and where there is need, design a functional cross-cultural referral system in order to ensure maximum help for the client. In other words, we recommend a multi-cultural perspective which is hitherto not biased toward Eurocentric practices. There is also need for the Zimbabwean counsellor to succinctly understand the context of the diverse cultures during training since they will be exposed to diverse cultures during practice.

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