



Inviting movements in physiotherapy: An anthology of critical scholarship

Edited by Patricia Thille, Clair Hebron, Roshan Galvaan,
and Karen Synne Groven

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Chapter 2

Ukuyankaza kuyi-Nkululeko, Movement is freedom: Journeying towards autoethnography as a transformative qualitative research methodology

Mahitsonge Nomusa Ntinga, Harsha Kathard, Filip Maric, Kristen Abrahams, and Seyi Ladele Amosun

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ABSTRACT:

Ukuyankaza kuyi-Nkululeko is isiZulu, meaning 'movement is freedom'. This chapter describes how the transformative nature of autoethnography as a qualitative research methodology contributed to my reclamation of my African Indigenous identity. I draw on my experiences, using personal letters to an inquisitive blackgirl, Himore. The purpose of this chapter is to draw on the lessons learnt, original thoughts evoked, and my experiences marked by a critical event in my professional identity formation and my PhD journey. Using my Indigenous language within the title of this chapter is a disruptive act of reclaiming my cultural identity and voice. It also signals my efforts to move towards decolonizing research and speaking out as a previously silenced people. The freedom is described as I moved out of the chains of societal conditioning that denies my authentic self as a critical Indigenous womanist, physiotherapist, and decolonial academic in South Africa. Ukuyankaza kuyi-Nkululeko emerges using autoethnography as I account for and expose power, hegemonic issues, prejudice, dominance, politics, and privilege so that subjugated voices and epistemologies can be heard. Movement that requires the deliberate shift from the singular representation of an Indigenous person's identity towards acknowledging that our very existence as a complex collective is legitimate.



CHAPTER 2

Ukuyankaza kuyi-Nkululeko, Movement is freedom

JOURNEYING TOWARDS AUTOETHNOGRAPHY AS
A TRANSFORMATIVE QUALITATIVE RESEARCH
METHODOLOGY

MAHITSONGE NOMUSA NTINGA, HARSHA KATHARD, FILIP MARIC,
KRISTEN ABRAHAMS, AND SEYI LADELE AMOSUN

Indlela eya ekhaya idlulah engozini, The way home passes a dangerous terrain

(Isihlabelelo sama-Nazaretha no. 40: iNkosi iLanga YasekuPhakameni, J. G. Shembe)

Ngokukhulu ukuzithoba, Ngiyanibingelela bathandwa. Thokozani.
Izithakazelo zabantu abadala abahlambulukile abaka-Ma-nabaka-Baba
zibafanele, Makwande eMakhosini!

In the language of the colonizer, as a Shangaan/Zulu woman of African Indigenous heritage from the native land of Azania (colonial name: South Africa), I introduce myself as a seeker of truth, a womanist, decolonial, critical theory-based PhD candidate in Health Sciences Education at the University of Cape Town. In Azania we recognize a person (uMuntu) as the sum representative of their ancestral heritage, spirituality, cultural traditions, and community. In the waters and land of Nuwbia/Alkebulan (colonial name: Africa), our identity is deeply rooted in our relational connection to mother nature, each other (past, and continuous-present selves), embedded within

our rich Indigenous languages.¹ I would like to humbly acknowledge my ancestors first with the honour, respect, and dignity that they so deserve, Realeboha boDlakama! As I push forward with this emancipatory work, I do so with a localized critical awareness of the economic, physical, and psychological condition of the disenfranchised Black and Coloured Indigenous woman of my land.² The colonial powers use of English language to frame the identity of Black and Coloured as a separate people was intended to harm by othering or further dividing Indigenous communities. This framing of the Indigenous community identity is according to the Language Policy of Statistics South Africa regulatory framework which is still based on the terms set by the racially segregated apartheid government of 1950 (www.statssa.gov.za). The Black and Coloured Indigenous people are related brothers and sisters of one mother—Azania—these are all the descendants of Black ancestry (Adhikari & Adhikari, 2009).

Historical deprivation stands in contrast with my current position of privilege as an academic scholar that allows me the audacity to question reality and to be writing the words that you are reading. In preparation for my PhD research study, which focuses on Black and Coloured Indigenous people's physiotherapy professional identity formation (PIF), I came across autoethnography as a methodology of keen interest to me.

I came to appreciate that autoethnography is more than scholarly engagement; it is a revolutionary form of criticism of the relationship between dominance and power in social and cultural inquiry when combined with localized critical Indigenous theory.³ Autoethnography chose me as its medium to move the physiotherapy profession around the planet into a newfound freedom. To move in Western spaces of society requires the shifting of personal values to conscientiously define, own, and understand the reality whilst representing my authentic Indigenous self. This means not just the ability to move but using self-knowledge in grasping how to move and grappling with what and when to move. I envisioned myself writing personal letters to a younger self, named Himore, who is in the second year of her physiotherapy undergraduate degree. Each section will begin with a series of personal letters to a blackgirl, Himore, that serve to enlighten her on possible challenges and offer her an enormous paradigm shift to becoming a co-creator of knowledge.⁴ These are followed by critical literature and theoretical

discussions directed towards readers and persons who identify with the plight of Indigenous peoples' identity globally.

Where are we stuck and hypomobile in physiotherapy?

Sawubona (We see you) Himore,

The African identity is grounded in the interconnectedness of the spiritual with the natural, physical, and encompassing realm of our ancestors. Ancestral intelligence stems from your bloodline, your inherently natural gifts that are bestowed upon you by your lineage. The African identity is intimately relational to nature—African metaphysical cosmology—and is based on collective kinship of the spiritual and physical community with nature. This means that your physical features were deliberate, intentionally designed and nothing to be ashamed of. Consider positively that the darkness of your skin, the spiraling coil of your hair and the broad base of your nose are universally acceptable qualities that are inherently beautiful and are an expression of the intelligence of the Umdali/Umfihlakalo (Creator). Your Indigenous language is a key part of that ancestral intelligence—a medium of expressing your authentic self and connection to the vibrational frequency of nature and the cosmos.

Biomedicine research is what informs the knowledge that is taught in the health sciences and physiotherapy curriculum. The representation of western knowledge systems as superior, modern, and intelligent versus the portrayal of Indigenous knowledge systems as inferior, demonic, and barbaric is due to the Western, scientific, reductionist, abstract world of biomedicine research (Mubangizi, 2015). Positivism is based on rationalism that emphasizes that knowledge needs to be quantifiable, observable, measurable and is based on presumption of neutrality in its reasoning because it reduces information into numbers. But positivism fails to realise that human subjectivity/bias is continuously present in all observable phenomena thus failing in its deception of being neutral or void of bias. Interpretivism is a research paradigm that analyses findings is based on the reality that there are multiple contributors to knowledge such as the culture, norms, language and belief system that informs the subjective truth of that society. Positivist research that informs the health science education knowledge is what contributes to a physiotherapy profession that is exclusionary, stuck, and hypomobile. This comparison between Western knowledge and my Indigenous knowledge left

me cycling between constant mode of assimilation of Western attributes or disconnected from my authentic self or with a debilitating state of imposter syndrome. This disconnection was not easy, and I often interpreted it as a silent violence steaming inside me. My intuition and cultural identity were very much a great part of who I am and my gift from my ancestors, but a Western framed professional identity made this “separation” from myself mandatory. Alternative research methodologies allow for richness in differences and play a key role in diversifying knowledge production. My concerns that keeping my Indigenous identity, my emotions, talents and vulnerabilities separate from my physiotherapy professional identity were validated by how damaging, counterintuitive, counterproductive, disconnection from self was a working act against my self-esteem. The most dangerous African person today is a colonized African who is not-self-aware of his mentacidal state.⁵ That colonized African brother/sister would chop off their own arm and sew on white man’s arm instead because of the inert belief the new arm is superior to their original arm (Fanon, 1952). I write to you Himore to appeal to you to begin to view your original African Indigenous self as adequate and enough. There is no longer a need to play a role in this play called life—that the colonizer wrote and taught you to enslave you. Due to my well-taught perception of being presumed incompetent, I have spent most of my physiotherapy career trying to keep my Indigenous identity, culture, and vulnerabilities separate and external from this physiotherapy professional identity. I urge you to walk on this career path as though you have every right to be here, in an openly subjective way. By being open to and using alternative research methodologies such as autoethnography, to reclaim your authentic African Indigenous identity, and courageously standing up to this giant called Western professional identity. Qina, Sterkte!⁶

Research is what informs the continued practices of each profession. Western knowledge is what informs what is taught in the physiotherapy curriculum and has been legitimized by colonial and capitalistic governors of professions which is higher education institutions (Nicholls & Cheek, 2003).

A profession is a field of labour that requires specific knowledge, skills, and training and which is a qualification that allows the person to be employed.

Higher education institutions are the producers, holders, amplifiers, and gate keepers of this specific knowledge.

Professional identity is the roles, values, practices, and ethical standards accepted by a profession. The collective professional identity in physiotherapy values objectivity, coherence, clinical skills, and Western ethics, similar to the knowledge system in which the origins of the professions emanate (Hammond et al., 2019). There are unique negotiations that African physiotherapists experience to develop their individual professional identity. The portrayal of Indigenous persons, within medicine/physiotherapy research is problematic because it is informed by colonial and Western value systems. As outsiders from these Indigenous communities, colonialists tasked themselves with framing Indigenous peoples' identities, often through a deficit lens, as a problem to be solved, where a solution comes from the outsider. This is the epitome of the perpetuation of the Western colonial agenda (Sheperd et al., 1993; Lurch et al., 2023).

Indigenous knowledge systems are an alternative form of knowledge because they subscribe to completely different sets of value systems compared to the West. That is, African Indigenous people value community kinship, nature, spirituality, traditions, rituals, and rhythm. We attach meaning to all life events—symbolised with often artistic expression through folklore, idioms, poetry, parables, song, dance, beadwork, and art motifs. Ubuntu is what govern our values of relationality, reciprocity, a communal purpose, and meaning to work (Mubangizi & Kaya, 2015).

A constant negotiation with the dominant discourse of physiotherapy education is required for an African Indigenous person to thrive in the higher education environment. The historically predatory nature of collecting research data from Indigenous communities without being part of the communities is rooted in the extractionist ways of coloniality and isolating ways of positivism. Euro-American research practices paraded positivist knowledge as privileged, as the epitome of intelligence and today's superior knowledge (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013; Nicholls, 2017). Interpretivist research does not stand as the singular representation of truth because interpretivism is based on the differences that exist in human perception and subjectivity, allowing for realistically diverse interpretation, critical reflection, and acknowledgement of human bias (Gemma, 2018). Womanism is a branch of feminism that considers how power influences race, gender, class, and

sexuality, and how these factors impact relationships where feminine roles in the family and community are at the centre (DeLoach & Young, 2014). However, feminism only considers the patriarchal power relations between white women and men mostly without the acknowledgement of how racism, privilege, and coloniality assigned the subhuman status to Black women, dispossessing them of their femineity. As an African Indigenous woman, the current physiotherapy professional identity has omitted me or failed to represent me in our profession.

The perfect physiotherapy professional identity crisis storm: Grasping how to move

Sawubona (We see you) Himore,

I have often reminisced about youth, the wide-eyed naivety, so eager to learn and clammy, soft, hands so eager to prove that they can do the work. During my formalised schooling and especially during my physiotherapy undergraduate years, I found myself learning to silence my inner South African Indigenous voice and embody the new Western voice of being an educated diagnostician. Monolingual and Westernized schooling problematizes the use of our Indigenous language by only prioritising English modes of teaching, assessments whilst dismissing the richness of my African Indigenous language which is endowed with the African value system of my people. After years of being torn away from my true cultural identity, by the social conditioning done by Western education, it is typical of vulnerable women such as us, to have an inner identity crisis, a debilitating imposter syndrome, in the process of trying to discover where we fit in society. Western scientists, as agents of colonial power, extracted, appropriated, commodified, and distributed knowledge from experiments conducted on Indigenous populations in the name of science (Bishop, 2005). We either become these Western scientists ourselves or we use this education to liberate Indigenous people out of their current dispossessed status back into harmonious, non-materialistic ways of being.

If we see ourselves through the colonizer's eyes, we will always be lacking, but if we see ourselves through our ancestral eyes, of unconditional acceptance, we will view ourselves as enough. Himore, you need to know that you are enough. The colonizer assigns value to that which he can exploit, use as cheap labour, and use as a ploy to further deceive the masses that the

capitalistic system is not in fact a system that is actively against nature-life. The toxic individualism imposed on you as an innocent blackgirl forever striving to embody an acceptable English twang, a capitalistic identity, and white women-based standards of beauty. Carrying the heavy burden of English is no measure of intelligence. Himore, the fact that we still have a monolingual education system that problematizes our Indigenous languages is absurd. Your ability to be your true African Indigenous self as your birth-right was taken from you before you knew its worth. Azania, with all its rich lingual and cultural diversity, has nothing to show for it; we should be leaders in language innovation that eases communication across our eleven official languages. Ancient Indigenous South African languages that have been deemed unofficial must be researched, reconstructed, and re-taught to the Africans first peoples. !Khwattu, my Coloured brothers and sisters, our Indigenous languages are the communicative umbilical cord to our ancestral intelligence.⁷

Professional identity formation is the process of how the primary self evolves into the secondary self to embody professional values, attributes, and behaviours (Lammers, 2015; Batac, 2022). Health sciences professions are endowed with Western, positivist research that leave many Indigenous persons feeling compelled to embody the Euro-American, Western, professional identity norms and expectations to succeed in these professions. Alternative research methodologies such as autoethnography allow for freedom of expression by demanding emotional depth and positioning of the self, while accounting for biases and providing alternative ways to showcase knowledge. Black and Coloured Indigenous physiotherapists negotiate socialization by thinking, acting, speaking, and conducting themselves within a Westernised physiotherapist's professional identity.

In my experience, the first and second years of physiotherapy undergraduate training in South Africa (SA) are when African students learn to leave their ideals of being an African and a healer behind when forced to embody becoming a technician acting over the human body. Students delve deep into the Latin language discourse of anatomy, pathology, theory, and practical content of musculoskeletal, cardio-pulmonary, paediatrics, and women's health physiotherapy (Allum, 2013). This is when students learn the limitations of their range of movement in physiotherapy—who they can be and who they cannot be because the language of physiotherapy is indoctrination,

isolating, and an educational tool of domination. The first two years of most undergraduate physiotherapy's training globally are when students are given their first exposure to theoretical knowledge and practical foundations of physiotherapy, and to clinical sites, where students get to interact with the assessment protocols and have dialogues with real patients. The first two years have all the ingredients for what I would like to call "the perfect professional identity crisis storm". It's in these years that students take authority over the human body as the instrument through which they are learning to exert themselves onto their patients. According to my African Indigenous knowledge system, there needs to be harmony between the spirit, soul, mind, and body. This holistic approach of Indigenous ways towards healing is based on instinctual reverence of the spiritual origins of the Creator of human beings; it stands in conflict with the material body-based, machine-like approach of biomedicine, thus giving rise to the perfect identity storm (Knop, 2015).

Grappling with what and when to move using autoethnography

Thinking blackgirl, Himore!

Written word is the conquest engine and commanding mechanism of the colonization of human thought (Modiri, 2018). The silence, focus, and self-casting required for reading uses my own inner voice against me. Studying through reading is how I was forced to take in Western knowledge so that I can become a professional. I believe this is what makes Western education such powerful tools to relay a dominant message to society. Becoming a professional means agreeing to the colonizer's value system and their lies told about Indigenous peoples—which are a mental prison, an invisible wall of chains that keep the mind shackled, keeping me from being true and authentic to myself.

Alternative ways to conduct research and to answer complex questions is what informs other forms of knowledge. We need to use alternative research methodologies to move the profession forward. After years of getting the emotion out of my professional identity, autoethnography has made it possible for me to read, study, and write with emotion. There is no way that the cold, rigid scientific biomedicine version of me could assert itself on me any longer. A softer, kinder, more vulnerable, sentient, decolonized version of me must be conjured from the depths of my African spirituality informed

identity. I am using alternative forms of knowledge production to reclaim my freedom, my humanity. I am writing about what it is to discover my African identity, what it's like to be living among dominant Western identity, by learning when to insert myself into their literature, their books, in their media. We, Black and Coloured Indigenous people of Azania (SA), will open their eyes, together, by returning the title of humanity to all peoples. Because the truth is that they might be one of us, in some way battling with their own "othering", stuck in anguish in a system they can no longer sustain. We will take back our place in humanity, awaken humanity (A-bantu), assist humanity to track the root causes of their mental, spiritual, and physical dysfunction. When we move? The answer, Himore is now. Phambili!⁸

Autoethnography is a qualitative research methodology that uses life experience as a rich data source by embracing the subjective nature of being human. This research methodology is non-conventional when used in health sciences education because it aligns with idea that there can be varying answers to a single research question (Adams et al., 2015). The recognition of how dominance, emotions, perceptions, and culture inform the "self" in auto-ethnographic participation are some of the key ingredients to how autoethnography may inform a critical, decolonial, and interpretivist worldview. Autoethnographic researchers write about themselves, their communities, their cultures and therefore cannot be neutral or objective in research, nor can they avoid being vulnerable (Poulos, 2021). We move forward by placing the "uMuntu" - into research., When "aBantu" - are participants in the research then we can have first-hand accounts that fully describe, understand, and give real-life applications of our authenticity and vulnerability. Our vulnerability is often caused by our perception of inadequacy meaning we need to embrace our personhood-informed humanness, our emotional, subjectivity, bias, and sentient nature of "abantu". Currently, there is little research honouring vulnerability in Indigenous physiotherapists, or our patients—research directed towards Indigenous people in academic spaces lack deliberate intention to delve deep into the pertinent issues of the lack of belonging, self-expression, confidence, and autonomy that Indigenous people experience in the current health-care system (Ramugondo et al., 2017).

Moving to autoethnography requires that we expose how subservience plays out in the face of dominance of multiple intersecting identities, specifically in terms of ethnicity, race, gender, age, ethnicity, class, and ableism

which inform the human perception of the experiences in this world (Keskin, 2021). The “auto” speaks to how the self, perceives in describing personal experiences using autobiography and personal narrative in story, memoir-like style. In so doing, even autoethnography perpetuates Western views of the individual as singular, clearly defined person in contrast to Indigenous methodologies that view a person as the sum representation of his ancestral heritage, bloodline, language, land, and connection with community and nature. The self for Indigenous people is not individualistic in primordial form but relational, communal and is connected with ancestral spirituality, an immaterial harmony with the land in which they rest, and “enoughness” in the use and sustaining of natural resources (Babbitt & Lachney, 2021).⁹ Community begins in the individual’s ancestral spirits as the initial self-expression of Ubuntu that the each native individual inherits in the family unit. This relationship permeates through into the immediate, extended family, clan, and community in collaboration with the physical realm.

The “ethno” in autoethnography stands for “culture”. Without the acknowledgement of the researcher’s cultural identity, the researcher cannot be reflexively involved in the critique of hegemony within knowledge production. It is the recognition that culture plays a pivotal role in human identity and how this frames our perception of the world. In *The art of autoethnography*, Adams, Holman, and Jones (2015) describe cultural experiences, communal expectations, social beliefs, values, and practices as constructs of human identity. The autoethnographic researcher is required to be a member to the unique cultural group, should embody the member perspectives to call attention to the group’s plight, and should shed light on complexities and phenomena that are specific to it by using evocative, thick descriptions of the cultural experiences. The “ethno” part of autoethnography is one that speaks to the core of my African Indigenous values because our culture is pivotal to our identity, and the ongoing intellectual separation from our culture has been on the colonial monotheistic agenda since inception. Our African culture is maximalist and polytheistic in nature. The maximalism is grounded in the regenerative capabilities of the sun, soil, and water in nature and multiplicity of spiritual gifts that are assigned to each person before birth guided by diverse divinities, Deities, Orishas/iZithunwa.

The “graphy” in autoethnography speaks to the practical collecting of memories which may be done by using art artifacts, poetry, written

transcription of oral conversations, and personal reflective letters. The work of autoethnographers is the descriptive writing and rewriting of the past, to articulate past harms, microaggressions, and epiphanies by creating stories of a truthful, subjective written record for others geared towards a particular audience (Bochner and Ellis 2016, p91). Apprenticeship and storytelling are major parts of educating the young African, a means of community building activity among adults and means of relaying important principals to live by during rites of passage or marriage.

“Narrative privilege” means that the power naturally belongs to the person narrating a story. This power has long belonged to the Western societies while Indigenous people have not had the necessary courage, authority and exposure to higher education systems to tell or document their lived experiences by standing up and choosing how to be represented in the telling of their own story (Bochner, 2012). Autoethnography together with critical Indigenous methodologies allows Indigenous communities to own their “narrative privilege”, choose how we define success and how to tell the stories of our ancestors, or define our current lives and how we want to be represented in the future (Poulos, 2013). There is a crisis in representation and a singular narrative privilege crises in the Western dominated health sciences knowledge bases. Autoethnography may be used to counter this underrepresentation or the limitation in current research of specific populations or to highlight the unique day-to-day human experiences. Autoethnography has been used to magnify and describe in detail the knowledge that the researcher, who is the participant, possess as members of the specific population group.

The researcher being a participant removes the epistemic, extractionist nature of positivist research methodologies. Bias is the way human beings view the world either with prejudice or distortion due to their preconceived ideas and social conditioning. When the researcher is the participant in the study, her bias is reflexively accounted for, as in all autoethnographic work—reality is subjective, bias is welcome, and is already happening in all research methodologies (Anderson et al., 2019). Subjectivity is the individual lens through which we each view ourselves in relation to the world around us. Autoethnography values the self-awareness and accountability that the researcher assigns to their bias rather than the denial or refuting of this bias. Having bias is a human trait and the lack of accounting for one’s biases is the biggest blind spot of positivist research today. Using my Indigenous language

is a means to attempt to position myself and to encourage the reader to see life and societal issues from my perspective just as the continued use of English has a medium of education has influenced the world population to see the issues keenly from the Western, colonizers perspective. My Indigenous language is the one part of my identity that the colonizer has no authority, where his standards have no jurisdiction, and his gaze is obsolete. Woe to those who have embodied the oppressor's language as their own. Awake, my Africa!

How can we improve our mobility in physiotherapy? Decoloniality, critical theory and Indigenous research methodologies

Curious blackgirl, Himore

I have had to learn to become my true self again and unlearn toxic individuality, unlearn entrenched competition with others. We need to form partnerships with Indigenous communities and reconnection with our culture and traditions. The separation from my true self, my community, and from my culture is no longer tolerable.

I resist the trivialization and marginalization of African Indigenous identity, knowledge, and scholars that is perpetuated by the Western ideologies underlining health sciences education. The internal validation that comes from possessing pride in our cultural identity, rituals, traditions, and community values should form an internal shield that protects you from life's storms. This is the first time that I could embrace my culture's love for other people without any of the shame. We, as African people, need to identify with our culture of Ubuntu, in a way that edifies, affirms, educates, and potentially liberates our people. We must take pride and ownership in speaking, writing, and preserving our Indigenous languages in all spaces whilst leaving a rich narrative inheritance for future generations of our people. Alternative research methodologies such as autoethnography is how we create other forms of knowledge, such as our rich ancestral intelligence, African cultural heritage, connection to our Indigenous communities, and the soil in which they rest. We can expose the elitist Western ideologies that are working against society's well-being, and in which the mental health decline is an omen of decivilization. I beseech you blackgirl to school yourself in African ontology, cosmology, Pan-Africanism, Black consciousness, African philosophy,

intersectionality, Black radical feminism, womanism and Wu-Sabat because in these you will find the hidden intelligence of your elders.

Decolonization of the physiotherapy curriculum is our way out of the professional identity storm. Decolonial theory informed methodologies are defiant to those research practices that perpetuate Western power by adding to the understanding of the underlying assumptions, motivations and values that inform colonial research practices (Peters et.al,2024; Fishman & McLaren, 2005, p.33). Indigenous theory informed alternative research methodologies are better positioned to be relational in that they require that the researcher locates themselves within the context of the communities from which the Indigenous knowledge is centered. This stood out for me as a major gap in health sciences education research in the African context. "Movement" is self-autonomous drive to progressively maneuver out of the deficit based Western gaze, by telling our stories ourselves and by contributing to the rebuilding of Indigenous societies into mental liberation and restoration. Collaboratively writing our stories is a validating act of reclaiming our African identity (Pelias, 2022). The requirements of success in the media are defined within Western standards of individual success obtained via an insatiable appetite for wealth colliding head-on with over-working, and over-consumption, isolating people into physical and mental health degradation. We run the risk that our Black and Coloured children will think that the only way to achieve success is to model Western values and abandon their own Indigenous value systems to be "successful". Critical theory claims that information always contains an ideological dimension, whether it is quantitative or qualitative research methodologies that are being used. Critical theory alone failed to address how Indigenous civilizations and their epistemologies were positions of resistance and empowerment unless contextualised to the local level (Norman et al., 2014). The disconnect from our ancestral heritage, our communities, Indigenous culture, traditional healing, and Indigenous languages are how colonial hegemony was achieved. This is how we found ourselves isolated, subjugated, disconnected from our authentic selves. This ongoing disconnection from each other, disconnected from our cultural values, is made evident by the current mental, physical, and planetary health crises of the Indigenous peoples of our generation (Berry, 2022; Obioha & Nyaphis, 2018).

Movement to build strength: Knowing who we are, being co-creators of knowledge using African renaissance theory

Truth seeking blackgirl, Himore

I will be speaking using “we” and “us” in reference to all those who identify with the plight of Indigenous people globally. History and research told from a colonial perspective was a deliberate means to ensure that we lowly esteemed our own African value systems. Our ancestors were portrayed as barbaric, demonic, which made us orphans without a positive self-identity. Undermining of African intelligence was a colonial tool used for the mentacide of the Black African descendants, so we could comply to be forever colonial slaves. The perceived shadow of self-incompetence is that which follows you into the competency-based physiotherapy curriculum (Shumba & Tekian, 2024). Ubuntu demands the relational inclusion of other human beings into our worlds. As physiotherapists, this means being advocates of this harmonizing movement into Indigenous peoples’ freedom into movement into collective consciousness. Building strength can be achieved through building mutually beneficial relationships, partnerships, and collaborations with like-minded peers. Movement done together, Ngo Buntu, Himore, is how we build strength. Therefore, do not isolate yourself. Form and nurture relationships such that you become co-constructors, co-creators, co-restorers of African knowledge. This will require courage to foster unity, community and harmony wherever you go because Western spaces favour silos, isolation, competition, and toxic individualism. Surround yourself with like-minded people. There is a resilient power of living life surrounded by your peers rather than at going through life alone. Sankofa! Masibabaneni!

Collaborative autoethnography is when a group of participants co-construct a narrative by sharing their life experiences together. Collaborative autoethnography is a type of autoethnography that most resembles my African Indigenous values of reciprocity, relational kinship, and participation. Individuality is a Western construct that is in contradiction to African Indigenous perspectives that are steeped in connectivity and community as their foundation (Mencher, 1947). Individuality is a western and colonial value system which esteems the self; my Indigenous identity values Ubuntu, which stands for “we are made human by the combined humanity of those beings around us” (Mokhachane, 2023). In collaborative autoethnography, multiple participants embark on a

storytelling journey of their combined lived experiences to draw attention to the complexities to their experience. The reason why collaborative autoethnography is preferred is because of my Indigenous values of kinship between community members, reciprocal spoken word. Stigmatized people find ways to cope and adapt to the stigmatization. This is traceable through the collective recounting of daily experiences, daily reactions to prejudice, and ways to overcome difficulties and learn resilience and coping strategies (Goffman, 1963). As an example of collaborative autoethnography, Boylorn traces microaggressions and celebrates the ways of life and resilience of rural Black women in southern small towns in the United States of America by retelling their experiences through triumphant stories (Boylorn, 2016).

According to Cabral's radical theory, Africans returning to African Indigenous knowledge systems, cultures, traditions as their "original form of knowledge" would ensure the deliberate promotion and embodiment of African values and languages. This would symbolise for African Indigenous people the ultimate "returning back to their true authentic identity of unity", which is the undoing the colonial, racist ideals that Africans should be divided and isolated at all costs. (Cabral, 1972a). African Renaissance theory is a restorative theory that aims to rehumanize, unite, and reimagine African Indigenous communities' pride and undo decades of inferiorization (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2019). African Renaissance theory questions the origins of "poverty" as quantified by the west and the redefining of capitalistic-influenced atrocities that are claimed to plague the African continent. African Renaissance theory advocates for the decolonization, re-Africanization, unification, and liberation of Black and Coloured African Indigenous people and to replace Western norms and health systems with a more just, sustainable, and equitable health-care systems (Rabaka, 2020; Rabaka, 2022).

How do we influence flexibility of movement in physiotherapy such that all peoples can move to their optimum capacity as active participants of society and not merely subjects whose level of competence is queried in order to be controlled?

Critical and courageous blackgirl, Himore.

The reasons there is a shortage of Indigenous academics who are in active creation of alternate knowledge in the Global South is we have a low regard for the things we should hold most dear (Myser, 2015). Our horrid

colonial/apartheid past has given us an inferiority complex that is reinforced by self-abasement that we bestow on our cultural identity.

Being orphaned from our ancestors resulted in the deliberate replication of the colonizer's ways and the decolonized curriculum cannot materialise without radical self-love of the African identity (Cobbing, 2021). In intellectual combat the need to acquire knowledge of self becomes an emergency because if you don't know who your true African identity is, you will run the risk of being taught what others prefer you to be. A self-aware, self-knowledgeable, and spiritually conscious person cannot be controlled. In a compelling quote that explains the disfunction that comes from our history and culture being taught to us by our oppressor, Dr. John Henrik Clark states that "To control a people you must first control what they think about themselves". He further iterates that once a person is made to be ashamed of themselves, their history, and their culture, you no longer need chains to hold them. The freedom to move will come from finding out who you truly are (Person-Lynn & Snipes, 2014).

The Black critical feminist theorist autoethnographer Dr. R. Boylorn has stated that "being at home within yourself as an impressionable blackgirl" requires the fully realized acknowledgment of the intersecting cultural identities that make up who we are (Boylorn, 2017). If we are at peace within and at home within ourselves, we can begin to influence greater freedom movement in physiotherapy. We need to do the inner work of self-re-construction, unite collaboratively with others, and speaking for ourselves. Autoethnography is how we influence freedom of movement in physiotherapy. Autoethnography gives us the agency to write our own research firmly grounded in Ubuntu value system of relation-based community. African Indigenous persons past and present, need to unite to influence future, self-determinate perspectives. Collaboration is how we claim back the narrative privilege that has been occupied by the colonizer, to be included in physiotherapy, society, and the world according to our terms. This the movement into freedom where the cultural, personal, and professional combine into symphony of "enoughness" and oneness of Black and Coloured Indigenous people of Azania. Ukuyankaza kuyi-Nkululeko.

Before white universities make us the "natives of nowhere", I quote from the great Zulu Sanusi or Imboni (high priest) Baba Vusamazulu Credo Mutwa:

In me flows the blood of two of the most ancient races of Africa-
and also of mankind-the Bantu and the Bushmen. . . .¹⁰ OH! My

indolent and gullible Africa—the superior aliens glibly talk of bringing the ‘light of civilization’ to your shores. And yet the only civilization they can bring is one infected with physical, moral, and spiritual decay. The ‘light’ they hold forth is the violent flare of the hydrogen bomb. There is much talk of raising your living standards. But the end of this is to turn Africa into a vast ndali market for the mass rubbish that is manufactured. You are given more so that they can take more from you. (Credo Mutwa, 1998, p. 691)

Imboni Mutwa further explains: The sons and daughters of Africa must let the world know that we can well do without their wayward, life-constricting concept of civilization if it means that we have to throw our own culture, beliefs, and way of life overboard. Why must we be turned into soulless zombie or emotionless robots (p. 692).

The great Sanusi concludes by declaring:

Rather use your newly won uhuru to lift your subjects from the gutter of starvation. Appoint scientists to do research into your nations past. Rather than playing soldiers, concentrate your energies on trying to buy back the thousands of antiques the foreigners have stolen from your countries and which are now housed in museums all over the world. Nourish and save for posterity, the store of knowledge your forefathers have left for you. The challenge to every Bantu is to bring about a glittering Renaissance of the cultures and the arts of Africa. Put your histories down on paper. There is much that you can do that will be of supreme value to your own people and the future generations.” (Kumalo, 2018; Credo Mutwa, 1998, p. 693)

Knowledge-able blackgirl, Himore

We are those researchers; we are those co-creators of knowledge! We are no longer the subjects but melanated participants in research. We are the healers and awakeners of our people. We are restoring dignity to our ancestral intelligence and cultural heritage. Our people are finding the meaning and purpose to life. Let toxic individuality that is the brainchild of capitalism devour the original looters of the planet’s resources so that we may go back

to our art of living, as the original civilizers and intercessors of this planet. Where work and money are adjuncts to human identity, mere playthings in the shadow of a far greater, purposeful African Indigenous identity. That, at the core of who we are, is within the rich inheritance in our collective memory. We are reclaiming our power so that we can address unhealthy education practices, poisoning our thoughts against us. We are taking back our narrative privilege, inner pride in our Indigenous, cultural identity in order to give us the mental space to be sober-minded and introspective, and heal Indigenous peoples, their family patterns, and address the traumas. We are healing from a toxic colonial psychology. We will re-form healthy relationships within ourselves and rebuild healthy community relationships externally. We will be courageous to reinstate our African tribal councils, African traditional leadership pathways, dignify our African traditional healers and well-being practices so that we may live in harmony within, with each other, mother nature, and the greater ancestral family. We will finally possess the knowledge of self, stripped away by decades of lies. We may re-discover our gifts given to us by our ancestors so that we may live holistic and balanced lives, as 'enoughness' Black and Coloured people of Azania.

Grand rising-children of the Sun! Phakamani Sizwe esiTsundu!
NginiThanda nonke emakhaya-Ngiyabonga— Makwande!

Notes

- 1 Nuwbia/Alkebulan meaning mother of mankind/humanity or the origin of all life or garden of Eden or cradle of humankind.
- 2 Coloured Person is a person of mixed race comprising of African or European or Asian ancestry officially defined into law by the apartheid South African government of 1950 and still persist today.
- 3 Critical Indigenous theory focuses on how coloniality, dominance, racism impact the sovereignty of the Indigenous people to assert themselves in their own complex identities, coupled with the self-determination to identify, solve their life issues and prevention of neo-colonial subjugation.
- 4 Black girl. The words are joined as single word “blackgirl” due to the multiple identities when joined form intersecting systems of oppression that collectively shape Black women’s health and well-being. Singular representation is the coupled brutality of living experiences of Black women in a white male/patriarchal dominant/favouring world.
- 5 Menticide is the systematic prolonged efforts taken to undermine and destroy a person thinking capacity, values and beliefs such as miseducation, restricting access to education by using language, interrogation and intimidation tactics to murder the mind of an individual into submission/compliance. The systematic wrecking, intentional sabotage of a person’s conscience mind, brainwashing/conditioning a person’s psyche against themselves.
- 6 Qina is Isizulu means literally to harden or strengthen. Sterkte is Afrikaans term means to strengthen or to be strong.
- 7 !Khwattu meaning ‘waterhole’ in the /Xam Bushmen language. The language and cultural embassy of San Khoi of Southern Africa.
- 8 Phambili is isiZulu is meaning forward, meant to express moving forward despite the resistance.
- 9 Materialism is Agonists to materialism i.e. that physical matter is not the fundamental substance in nature. Immaterialism includes the unseen world, mental thoughts and consciousness. Enoughness is the condition or state of Indigenous world view in which all are related as kin, including non-human in with non-being superior or inferior to nature. It is associated with being in a calm state of adequacy, sufficiency and balance.
- 10 Mutwa is the Zulu word meaning Bushman which is the name that San-Khoi Indigenous people self-identified. Imboni Mutwas’ great grandfather was a Bushman medicine man, and his surname Mutwa, is the Zulu word for Bushman.

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