A phenomenological study into African refugee men’s wellness seeking behaviours, inclusive of community, spirit and ancestral connections.

Andrew John Harris

orcid.org/0000-0003-2029-5216

A thesis submitted in total fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

(January 2017)

Melbourne School of Population and Global Health
Faculty of Medicine, Dentistry and Health Sciences
University of Melbourne
Abstract

AIM: To inform counselling with African male refugees in Tasmania, Australia, through the elaboration of African-derived approaches to problems. A secondary aim was to critique and re-inform Western counselling approaches and cultural assumptions.

DESIGN: Phenomenology was selected to facilitate close engagement with participants’ life-worlds, and African interpretive frameworks were investigated to assist with data analysis. Reliability was enhanced through triangulation techniques such as sequencing the literature review after the Tasmanian data collection phase, followed by field work in South Africa. The study spanned over ten years which provided opportunity for personal transformation and trust-building with participants.

METHOD: Phenomenological interviewing was the primary method, with the orienting question enquiring about “Approaches to Problems”. Participants (N=46) comprised 27 male and three female refugee entrants to Tasmania, Australia; and eight female and eight male residents of South Africa. Participants were selected through purposive sampling by place, augmented by trust-balling. Participant-observation in community activities emerged as a secondary method, and researcher experience was analysed heuristically. After publishing the results of interviews and two consensus groups in Tasmania, the researcher conducted three field trips to South Africa and recorded participant perceptions, behaviours, social exchange, and spirit resources.

RESULTS: Thematic analysis yielded family-focussed communities of interconnectedness with a vibrant, social universe, inclusive of animal, plant, physical and spirit entities. Complex, layered cultural norms centred around this theme of connectedness supported life-long development and education, and informed African approaches to problems.

CONCLUSIONS: Western research and therapeutic approaches informed by experimental science, and Western assumptions of individualised human existence, present multiple barriers to Africans seeking help. De-centred, fluid, and externally-oriented constructions of identity, inclusive of multiple centres of self, are required to enable full consideration of African experience. Such constructions of identity may assist in shaping counselling with western clients by their subversion of western counselling assumptions.
Declaration

This thesis comprises only the original work of the author towards the Doctor of Philosophy, except as referenced in the text.

Due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used.

The thesis is fewer than the maximum word limit, exclusive of tables, maps, bibliographies and appendices.

Signed

Andrew J. Harris    25th January 2017
Acknowledgements

This thesis was in large part an outcome of a fortuitous encounter. I met Dr Peg LeVine, an internationally recognised clinical psychologist and academic who was finalising her second doctorate in anthropology, at precisely the time that I was seeking help in shaping counselling service delivery to a predominantly African client population. Her encouragement of my first efforts at an intercultural phenomenological transcript, by suggesting that I apply for a placement in her graduate research program, was one of the most generous and influential interventions in my professional life.

That generosity, together with her gift for a precise amalgam of support and challenge, has been a key driver for this PhD thesis completion, which I understand will be her last as an academic supervisor. I hope it does her justice.

The study was supported by three Universities in turn. It commenced with the University of Tasmania Department of Rural Health, before a transfer to the Monash Asia Institute at Monash University. The study was completed through the University of Melbourne, School of Population and Global Health. The support of many staff at all three Universities was appreciated. My thanks go to Emeritus Professor Graeme Smith and Emeritus Professor Merika Vicziany at Monash University, and Professor Harry Minas at the University of Melbourne.

Many others contributed in profound ways. The willingness and openness of my participants, some of whom have become firm friends, was a recurrent theme. Also, thank-you to the many friends and family who provided feedback on my writing efforts, and offered dialogue and reassurance.

My two South African mentors deserve special mention. The collaborative support provided by Professor Tholene Sodi was vital in progressing the study to the PhD phase, and his lifelong commitment to African counselling and healing ideas and ideals has been inspirational. My encounters with Professor Nhlanhla Mkhize stand out for their multilayered and transformational impact.

Metaphysical themes were intrinsic to this study. My sensitivity to these dimensions of life has become accentuated and enriched through the past ten years. To all entities and influences that may be implicated in this, please accept my deepest gratitude.

Finally, to Brenda, my wife for the last five years: your eternal patience for the vicissitudes of life, and your steadfast faith in my intellectual ability and my capacity to persevere, left me no other option than to achieve.
# Table of Contents

Title Page ............................................................................................................. i
Abstract .................................................................................................................. ii
Declaration ............................................................................................................ iii
Acknowledgements ................................................................................................. iv
Contents .................................................................................................................... v

## Chapter 1. Introduction ...................................................................................... 1

- Accounting for the diversity of African refugee histories ........................................... 2
- Orientation to this Study: Context and Researcher Positioning ................................. 3
- How I came personally to this study ......................................................................... 4
- Advancing Ethnography .......................................................................................... 5
- Accounting for human agency and colonisation in psychological sciences and research .......................................................................................................................... 6
- Phenomenological design in this study ...................................................................... 8

## Study Context: Features of Research Landscape ..................................................... 9

- Shifts in Australian migration policy ....................................................................... 9
- Tasmania’s geo-political history ............................................................................... 11
- Mental health service provision ............................................................................. 12
- Supporting recovery from torture .......................................................................... 12
- Phoenix Centre client context ................................................................................ 13

## Note on Accessibility of Relevant Literature ......................................................... 17

## Development of the Research Questions .................................................................. 18

## Chapter 2. Literature Review .............................................................................. 21

- Structure of Literature Review .............................................................................. 21
- Critical Review of Research Methods ...................................................................... 21
- Phenomenology in this study ................................................................................. 22
- Emergence of Ethnographic and Heuristic Methods within the Study ..................... 26
- Heuristics, Qualitative Pluralism, and Reliability .................................................... 28
- Empirical Literature on Therapy with African and Refugee Populations ................... 30
- Process of Critical Literature Review .................................................................. 30
- Analysis of Psychological Literature ..................................................................... 34
Chapter 3. Methodology ............................................................................... 65

Methodological Structure and Development ................................................. 65
Methodological Decisions relating to Cultural Sensitivity .............................. 67
A Study on Men and Gender ......................................................................... 69
Research Protocol and Inclusive Practice ..................................................... 70
Culturally informed consent ......................................................................... 71
Reliability ...................................................................................................... 72
Diversity of Geo-cultural Sources .................................................................. 73
Timing of the Literature Review ................................................................... 73
Consensus Groups and Counter-Normative Participants .............................. 73
This Researcher’s Heuristic Experience ....................................................... 74
Phase I Methodological Process Developments .............................................. 74
Ethnography performed as Duty of Exchange – Duty of Care ......................... 76
Religious and Historical Orientations and Practices ..................................... 79
Place and “geo-ethnography” ....................................................................... 80
Taking Time ................................................................................................... 82
Phase I Data Analysis .................................................................................... 83
Phase II Methodology ................................................................................... 85
African Scholarship and Scholars .................................................................. 87
Study on “African Time” ............................................................................... 87
Gender and Geography – Unanticipated outcomes of “Trust-ballng” ............ 88
Counter-normative Participants ..................................................................... 89
Phase II Data Analysis .................................................................................. 89
Coding Tables for Participants ..................................................................... 90
Chapter 4. Findings - African Counselling and Traditional Educative Structures .......................... 95

The Reporting of Study Findings .................................................................................. 95
Experiential Statements ............................................................................................... 96
  4a: Family Responsibility within Community ......................................................... 96
  4b: Problems as a Community Matter ................................................................. 105
  4c: Tasmanian Settlement Problems and Recommendations ........................ 112
  4d: The “African Counsellor” .................................................................................. 116

“Education” as a principle in African Counselling ................................................. 125
Proverbs and Metaphors in African Counselling .................................................. 126
Skills of the African Counsellor ............................................................................. 128
African Time ............................................................................................................. 130
Elements of an African-Informed Counselling Model ........................................... 132

Chapter 5. Findings - Dimensions of Connectedness

........................................................................................................................................ 134

Dimensions of Connectedness .............................................................................. 134
Ordering of Dimensions of Connectedness .......................................................... 136
Dimension 4: Structuring Human Development .................................................... 137
  Dimension 4 (a) – Birth and Naming ................................................................. 137
  Dimension 4 (b) – Protection, Sheltering and Discipline .................................. 138
  Dimension 4 (c) and (d) – Education, Inculcation of Roles .............................. 139
  Dimension 4(e) – Marriage and Initiation ......................................................... 141
Preparation for the Female Role .......................................................................... 142
Preparation for the Male Role ............................................................................... 144
Dimension 4 (f) – Transitional Ritual ................................................................... 145
Dimension 4 (g) – Spirit Beliefs .............................................................................. 146
Dimension 4 (h) – Justice and Control .................................................................. 146
Dimension 5 – Negative Impacts of Traditional Systems ..................................... 147
  Dimension 5 (a) – Gender Disparity .................................................................. 147
  Dimension 5 (b) – Destructive CausalAttributions .......................................... 152
  Dimension 5 (c) – Power Struggles ................................................................... 154
Dimension 6 (b) – Agents of Connectedness: Traditional Practitioners .............. 157
Dimension 7 (f) – Death, Disruption and Reconnection ............................................. 165
Interconnectedness at a pragmatic level ................................................................. 166
Interconnectedness at a metaphysical level ........................................................... 167
Dimension 8 (c) – “Living in Two Worlds” ............................................................. 168
Living in the Two Worlds of Race-based Oppression ............................................ 169
Dimension 9 – Ubuntu and Moya: Ethics and Spirit Connectedness ..................... 171
Meanings attached to ubuntu .................................................................................. 172

Chapter 6. Summary and Implications of Study . 182

Summary of Findings ............................................................................................... 182
Literature Review ................................................................................................... 182
Findings .................................................................................................................. 183
Study Limitations .................................................................................................. 185
Being, Self and Consciousness ............................................................................. 187
African Conceptions of Self ................................................................................... 187
Dialogical Perspectives in African Counselling ................................................... 190
Consciousness and the “Filtering” model of the mind ........................................... 192
Interpersonal Neurobiology ................................................................................... 194
Shared Consciousness and Spirit Phenomena ....................................................... 195
Participatory Consciousness .................................................................................. 196
Implications for Broadening Models of Counselling ............................................ 198
Expanding the phenomenological stance of counselling ....................................... 198
Counselling as Education within Community ...................................................... 198
Hope and Faith ....................................................................................................... 199
Relational processes .............................................................................................. 200
Spirit connection in counselling ............................................................................ 201
Creativity and Imagination in Counselling Practice ............................................ 202
Trauma .................................................................................................................... 203
Relevance of African Counselling to First Nation Peoples ................................... 204
Further Work .......................................................................................................... 205

References ............................................................................................................. 207

Appendices ............................................................................................................. 226

Appendix 1 – Information Sheet (Tasmania) ......................................................... 227
Appendix 2 – Explanatory Statement (South Africa) .............................................. 231
Appendix 3 – Samples of Analysis (Tasmania) .................................................. 234
  Analysis of Initial Interviews: Conducting the Consensus Groups .............. 235
  Analysis of Initial Interviews: The role of elders ................................. 239
  Sample Coding of transcript (M3) .............................................................. 241
Appendix 4 – Sample of Analysis (South Africa) ........................................ 246
  Sample of annotated coded transcript (SA4) .................................. 247
Chapter 1. Introduction

This study was prompted by conversations with African-born, former refugee colleagues in 2005-06, within my role as coordinator of the Phoenix Centre\(^1\) for trauma counselling and support in Hobart, Tasmania. In the Phoenix Centre context, the counselling professional was a person who trained in “western” therapeutic practices in countries such as Australia, Europe and USA. The explicit model of service delivery in the Phoenix Centre positioned the professional as a “Counsellor-Advocate”, whereby the stress of settlement for refugees was understood as merging with or augmented by their traumatic histories. The practitioner’s role was designed to integrate the easing of anxiety and adjustments surrounding the settlement tasks faced by refugees, with a longer term therapeutic process which addressed more intrinsic disturbances in psychological and emotional functioning, and which were understood as historical trauma-induced.

Most of the refugees being resettled through the Australian humanitarian program at that time had been processed by the United Nations in camps in African countries, and it was clear that there was not always concordance between the expectations of Africans who sought assistance from the Phoenix Centre, and the content, assumptions and processes underlying service provision.

The explanation among service providers for this discrepancy was often that “Africans do not understand the concept of counselling” – as if they were ignorant and in need of education and reorientation in order to obtain this benefit. As coordinator of trauma services, this phrase seemed paternalistic and out of step with the ideas of respect and empowerment which were supposed to be central to our processes. It was also contradicted by the skill, wisdom and judgement displayed by employed African staff.

The Counsellor-Advocate model was criticized for the role blurring which was embedded within it, recognised as problematic for therapeutic work (e.g. Australian Psychological Society, 2007). The design of this study was prompted by a deeper concern regarding the potential perpetuation of the client’s chronic and cyclical disempowerment, through two observed processes. The first was that a client’s settlement options appeared to be inadvertently limited through the kinds of assumptions implied in the above statement about understanding counselling. The second was that the intertwined, binary construction of settlement and historical stressors allowed little room for expression of clients’ cultural or idiosyncratic understandings of the problems that they experienced.

Culturally-informed guidance was needed about what was missing in our responses to the traumatic distress of African clients, how it might manifest, and how to recognise it. In the incidental contact with employed African staff, I had been struck by their modesty about their level of expertise, and by their willingness to discuss their ideas and customary practices outside their home-country cohort. Gradually, over time,

\(^1\) The Phoenix Centre is the Tasmanian service that provides support for people who have endured torture and war prior to arrival in Australia. The majority of clients are resettled refugees registered with the Office of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), known within the Australian settlement sector as “humanitarian entrants”.
their small disclosures about personal experiences in settlement and their support of their communities sparked bursts of comprehension on my part, and I sought more detailed discussions with them, while placing them in the role of cultural mentors.

I avoided framing these discussions in terms of the prevailing models of trauma counselling. Instead, I invoked the idea of “consulting your consultants” from Narrative Therapy (Epston & White, 1992)\(^2\) to better understand the complexity underlying family, community, and power and gender relations and dominant modes of discourse. These discussions yielded anecdotal evidence of very different metaphysical and culturally specific influences on people’s wellbeing.

A Sudanese Elder introduced himself as an “African Counsellor” in one of these discussions: his use of that term was intended to convey that he offered support beyond the level of his immediate community, and that he practised an “African-centric” model of counselling. This utterly contradicted the received wisdom within the service sector, and provided a naturalistic pathway to his personal professional history: for the duration of our conversation I felt transported into an alternative cosmology of therapeutic ideas. In a profound reversal, I was offered un-asked for answers to many of the questions which had arisen for me from contact with my own African clients.

I sustained this alternative cosmology long enough to document the discussion, and after confirming the content with him and gaining his permission, I circulated it to colleagues in the sector. There was general agreement that the interview could be helpful in developing a culturally responsive service. The prospect was exciting, and indeed proved irresistible. A synchronistic encounter with my future supervisor Dr Peg LeVine, led to a Master’s program to formulate a phenomenological study, which was later upgraded to a PhD\(^3\).

Despite the success of these initial discussions, there was a reflexive recognition that phenomenological investigation as a western-derived process may limit full engagement with themes from a non-western context. As well as seeking to develop more effective approaches to working with African entrants to Tasmania, the “universality” of existential and phenomenological theory would likely be challenged in the themes emerging from participants’ data. This was expected to yield an additional dimension to the study: for the reported experiences of African participants to inform the questions and methodology of qualitative research and psychological theory and praxis.

**Accounting for the diversity of African refugee histories**

Africa is culturally and geographically diverse, comprised of many countries each populated by a range of communities with distinct and overlapping languages, geographical distribution, urban and rural emphases, and political and economic

---

\(^2\) I was not at that time aware that David Epston (1944-) had a qualification in anthropology, or that New Zealand (his main place of work) was a rich source of bi-cultural counselling knowledge creation (e.g. Durie & Hermanson, 1990).

\(^3\) Temporal multi-dimensionality emerged as a defining theme in this study. Its role in the study genesis was accentuated when, simultaneously with pressing the Enter key to send my email application for the Master’s program, my phone rang. It was the African Counsellor, from whom I had not heard for some weeks, wanting to know how I was progressing with my research project.
systems. This extended diversity means that any differentiation based on national or pan-African identity is a simplification, as well as perpetuating a colonial bias. Most nation-states in the African continent had their present form imposed by agreement between European countries in the late 19th Century (Boahen, 1987).

The African continent has been the site of a vast array of societal forms, from medieval cities comprising at least 30,000 people, comparable in size to those in Europe at the time, to trading empires extending over thousands of kilometres, to the more stereotypically rendered hunter-gatherer and nomadic herdsman cultures (Maquet, 1972). In the region of Sudan alone approximately 600 different ethnic groups have been identified with over 400 distinct languages spoken (Collopy, 2007), and Sudanese communities extend into Ethiopia, Uganda, Congo and other neighbouring “countries”. To generalise about African culture risks participating in and perpetuating a neo-colonising discourse; indeed Hountondji (1996) argued that such stereotyping is part of a more sinister oppressive strategy by western economic and cultural systems designed to perpetuate economic inequality. The term “African culture” is also criticised as an essentialist notion, linked to discredited race-based identity theory which is implicated in racist western notions of superiority (Dubow, 1994).

Nevertheless, there is a widely used construct known as the African or African-centric world view, which has been applied throughout the continent by African-identifying and western scholars, and which references black African experience (e.g. Boahen, 1987; Fanon, 1967; Holdstock, 2000; Lambo, 1963; Summerfield, 2005). A distinction is made between Sub-Saharan Africa and Northern Africa. Sub-Saharan Africa is characterised by traditions oriented toward the more tropical and temperate climate and the trade routes of the Indian Ocean, with variations in ethnicity traced in part to waves of migration. In particular, Bantu language groups introduced techniques of cultivation across Sub-Saharan Africa (Cockcroft, 1990) between 3000 to 1500 years ago, progressively displacing earlier hunter-gatherer communities. This interwove with “western” and “eastern” influences through the trade of goods and people, with Christianity being the dominant colonising religion: founded in the Biblically relevant historical connection between Ethiopia and Judea. Northern Africa, with a more arid climate, is characterised by strong Muslim traditions and a range of cultural influences via the Mediterranean Sea (See Map 2).

The present study focussed initially on refugees to Tasmania from Sub-Saharan Africa, and the term “African” referred to this population⁴. The limits to, and the expansions of the generalisability of this term were explored as the study progressed.

**Orientation to this Study: Context and Researcher Positioning**

The orientation to this study requires recognition that research is reflective of the context within which it is conducted, and of the positioning of the researcher within that context. In accordance with the precepts of qualitative research which seek to

---

⁴ There were few black Africans living in Tasmania at that time: “African” was a subset of “refugee”. One participant (M2) reported that when he arrived in Tasmania in the early 1990s, he knew of only three other black Africans in the capital city Hobart, whose total population was approximately 200,000 people.
make these factors transparent (e.g. Morse & Field, 1995), they are addressed in two sections in this chapter. Firstly, important aspects of how I came to the study are elaborated. Secondly, the historical and political circumstances which informed the development of the research are outlined. Given that observations and data collection informing this study spanned over ten years, methods needed to be fluid enough to track the evolution of socio-political circumstances that impacted refugee experiences and this researcher’s impressions.

**How I came personally to this study**

This section highlights this researcher’s progression from the field of engineering, to environmental studies, to psychology, to ethnography. The collective scope of these fields allowed for a span of investigation across the physical and metaphysical domains, enabling a more inclusive approach to wellness criteria.

Prior to qualifying as a psychologist, I was a Certified Professional Engineer (CPEng). The problem-solving orientation of such a role was influential in shaping my approach to psychology, and the privileging of the term “problem solving” in this study may reflect this orientation. My interest in the diversity of meaning systems, both across and within cultures, gained traction during construction work in the vicinity of recognised Aboriginal sites in remote areas of Australia at the time that the legitimacy of land claims of Aboriginal people was being pursued through the Mabo claims (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1995). Through this and subsequent indigenous community exchange, I considered alternative metaphysical perceptions of reality and causality, despite non-Aboriginal psychological science discourse. This orientation became critical to the research with African populations.\(^5\)

There were profound contradictions associated with temporal meaning. On the one hand, the projected life of a mine of several hundred years was the subject of awe and commanded respect for the way it would allow the generation of wealth. On the other hand, the ritual continuance at Aboriginal sites over tens of thousands of years was dismissed or, if acknowledged, signified through the inherently discriminatory rubric of “Environmental Impact”.

This was particularly poignant in relation to the community on whose land one mine was located: the Kokatha. I was insistently informed that despite a range of claims there were no living descendants of this group, although recognised sites were “protected” by fencing and other methods. I spent some time sitting with some of these sites because of the complex feelings and visions they evoked in me. I wondered what meanings were implied in such infusion at a ritual site after the associated human culture had reportedly vanished.\(^6\)

\(^5\) I have not engaged in any research work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island populations, and this commentary in Chapter One is intended to reflect my openness to alternative ways of being, rather than suggesting parallels with African systems. Some perceived parallels are explored in Chapter Six, in speculating about African contributions to therapy. Clearly the exposure to colonial influences has been one commonality, although the particular form that has taken has been widely variable.

\(^6\) During the present study, this lived experience primed me to reflect on the meaning attached to the arrival of the first African refugees in Tasmania, where the coloniser’s myth of the extinction of Aboriginal Tasmanians is reflected in contemporary sayings such as “that went out with the blacks”.

---

4
I expressed my unease in relation to these various contradictions in a sardonic poem that was published, ironically perhaps, in a collection featuring Aboriginal poets (Harris, 2002, p. 47):

Thankfully there was no trouble from the blacks
With all the Kokatha now good, and dead
their sites could be routinely praised as monuments
to off-white sensibility

When working as an engineer, the field of environmental science (which hosted these culturally contested determinations) was becoming more influential, especially in the context of uranium mining near the Great Artesian Basin. My interest in this mix of themes led me to complete a Graduate Diploma in Environmental Studies and to work as an environmental engineer and scientist in the 1990s. This demanded a rigorous appreciation of “hard” scientific investigation, as well as an interdisciplinary approach incorporating complexity theory, philosophy, politics, feminist and post-modernist studies. It included the self-project of deconstruction of identity (e.g. white, male, middle-class, western, Christian-by-context, heterosexual, professional, single/partnered/married, father etc.).

**Advancing Ethnography**

Embedded in my progression through these different domains of understanding was a relationship with the uncanny, through predictive dream experiences. Within the phenomenal worlds of Aboriginal Australians and African refugees, I found a normalising context for such experiences.

**1983:** My first predictive dream. “I find an empty drink container: where the use-by date should have been were the words *International Star – The Imp*. I think in the dream that it sounds like the name of a racehorse”. I discover that *The Imp*, a horse I have never heard of, is running in the steeplechase! A huge thrill runs through me, tantalising me for the next 24 hours. The race starts, and I leap each hurdle in my own chest, urging *The Imp* along. The last hurdle, *The Imp* is comfortably leading, then the impossible happens! The jockey is unseated, but swings around under *The Imp*’s neck, regains the saddle and wins the race! My Thursday-night dreams become a feature in the 4th Year Engineering common room. This utterly bizarre, inexplicable prescience has become a social expectation in a peer group purposefully trained to cultivate pragmatism and scepticism.

This incursion into my pragmatic engineering frame of reference forced an openness to the “other” which remained under-explained throughout my formal psychological

---

7 One of the world’s largest usable water aquifers, extending across a vast area of the Australian “outback”
training. Psychology as a social scientific field emphasised predictability and controllability (Wilkes, 1991).8

At the time of my qualification, cognitive and behavioural therapies emerged as the dominant models for practice. Evidence of their efficacy was generated through randomised controlled trials (RTCs) that depended on the categorisation of therapeutic presentations through clinical diagnosis, the definability and repeatability of interventions, and the measurement of specified desired outcomes.

This approach was based on a hybrid of medical science and psychological science in the cognitive and behavioural fields, and has been challenged as not reflecting the needs of psychotherapy (Goldfried & Wolfe, 1996). It was institutionalised when the American Psychological Association (APA) published recommendations for the adoption of empirically validated treatments (Task force on promotion and dissemination of psychological procedures, 1995), partly in order to compete with the accumulating evidence base for the effectiveness of pharmaceuticals.

The subsequent development of the field of Empirically Supported Therapies (ESTs) and its relevance to this study is further elaborated in Chapter Two. Of particular relevance was the emergent tension between the ideals of “cultural competence” and those of “evidence-based practise” (Gone, 2015).

However, evidence showed that there was far greater benefit from therapeutic processes which emphasised common factors, and from extraneous variables, than from the selection of particular models (Lambert, 1992). This elevated the question about the impact of features of human life which were not readily included in the science of psychology. Grounded in multidisciplinary expertise, scientific principles, and an exposure to the uncanny, I was thereby primed to design a robust study that could account for metaphysically relevant data within a scientific, culturally informed frame.

**Accounting for human agency and colonisation in psychological sciences and research**

Agents for therapeutic change are drawn from a wide range of sources, often discounted within counselling and psychological models: artistic expression, religion, sport, nature, work, and family, are described as therapeutic in everyday conversation. The question which faced this researcher throughout my psychology training was: How was the status of “change agent” conferred in any therapeutic encounter, and by whom? In considering this, I also kept in mind the evocative experiences I had had as an engineer, dwelling in the intangible aura at ancient Aboriginal sites: along with predictive dreams, this broadened the possibilities for change agent beyond the materially and temporally familiar.

Fortunately, there have been variations within psychological theorising that allowed a widening of criteria for the attribution of agency. For example, the persistence of psychodynamic approaches offered legitimacy to the therapeutic value of wisdom, “the uncanny”, creativity, imagination, the meaning and use of time and place, and the

8 References provided in this chapter represent ideas discussed at more length in the literature review in Chapter 2
importance of therapeutic space. It also provided structure for consideration of dreams, emotional “transference” and self-knowledge (Jung, 1958), albeit within an anthropocentric frame.

Yalom’s (1980) textbook *Existential Psychotherapy* challenged cognitive science, and drew from psychotherapy, philosophy, ethics, and ontology. It was informed by the European existential philosophers, whose grounding in the anxiety of the human condition prompted a more dynamic construction of selfhood: Heidegger (1962/1935) emerged as most influential to this researcher. He described the distinctively human mode of being: *Dasein*. This is an active mode, including awareness of differentiable features of one’s relationship with the world and the other objects and modes of being within that world, as well as an active appreciation of subjective time: particularly the horizon created by the recognition that the time available for our lives is limited.

Heidegger, along with other existentialist writers, argued that *dasein* is sharpened at times when humans are faced with death or a profound challenge to taken-for-granted beliefs about life. These were precisely the conditions under which humanitarian entrants arrived. Such was the epistemological stance from which the present study evolved.

The psychological theory and experimentation by the Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934), also highlighted the importance of the agency of the subject in selecting from the range of opportunities made available within society (Vygotsky, 1978/1935). This active formulation of self-hood allowed more sense to be made of spontaneous and creative interactions within counselling practice.

This was consistent with Narrative Therapy (White, 1992) wherein the role for the counsellor emerged as a skilled participant in a person’s decision-making, rather than the authority on a predetermined treatment for a defined disorder. White’s elevating of personal agency in therapy drew on the work of Bateson (1972) in ecological, systems, and complexity theory, and Foucault’s (1977, 1987) persistent questioning about the underlying play of power in historical developments, such as in the emergence of the modern prison system and of modern psychiatry.

Collectively, these authors presented radical challenges to the assumptions of psychology and mainstream therapy practice. They exposed how resistant established ideologies could be, to ideas which challenged those assumptions. The preference within psychology for experimental verification over practical utility which had so offended my engineering sensibility, became more comprehensible in this broader academic context.

During the literature review process for this study I learned of Africana existentialism. In particular, the writing of psychiatrist Frantz Fanon (1925-1961) examined the mythic status of “national consciousness” in the construction of post-colonial African identity (Fanon, 1965, p. 97). In so doing he attempted to include the role of colonisation and its impact on human suffering within wellness discourse. Fanon provided a counterpoint to other existentialist theses, offering ways to analyse how blackness and African-ness were shaping of existential possibilities, and importantly for this study, of the phenomenological encounter.
Informed by this literature, the present study sought to account for the impact of colonising forces within three distinct domains. Firstly, for African nations and populations; secondly within the field of psychological sciences across theory and practise; and thirdly for refugees in accessing a place of agency in a host country.

**Phenomenological design in this study**

Through long engagement with the above ideas, the task of suspending assumptions in therapy emerged as pivotal in assisting the therapeutic change process. As well as being explicit in post-modern analysis and models of counselling, this practise has a place in foundational humanistic therapies which emphasised client agency, such as Rogers’ (1951) client-centred therapy.

*July 2014:* It seems strange now to realise that, prior to this study I was unaware that this “suspending of assumptions” was a central feature of phenomenology. Phenomenology had informed existentialist and post-modern ideas, as well as humanistic psychology. It was to become a theme of this study that I would reach a startling insight or develop a new ability, only to have the study process then reveal its pre-existing form. This would be the first cycle: modern, scientifically endorsed therapeutic models that I had mastered were reliant on and apparently disconnected from that branch of science that is phenomenology.

The initial discussions with African staff were thereby founded on methods which had their roots in phenomenological practice: in particular, the purposeful suspension of *a-priori* assumptions. This also offered scope to assist in analysing the colonising forces noted in the previous section. Early in the literature review process, two key sources assisted in this researcher’s formal comprehension of the intersection between phenomenology, scientific psychology and psychological research.

Giorgi (1970) proposed the reformulation of psychology as a phenomenological activity, wherein the psychologist, complete with a personal/professional history, actively approaches the subject of interest. This is intended as a contrast to the traditional conceptualisation of the psychologist as a distant outsider and objective observer. Giorgi argued that the psychology session is created through the interaction between psychologist and client, who is also depicted as being active in the process, carrying his or her own history to the encounter.

Similarly, phenomenological research was represented by Rowan (1981) as a collaboration between researcher and participants, and the findings of the research are therefore co-constructed by these figures at the point of intersection of their lives and histories, and selectively represented by the researcher. The text used to distribute these findings invokes the agency of the reader in its evaluation, and the further construction of understanding or knowledge. Accordingly, this thesis seeks to make explicit the agency of the author, the participants and the reader in the production of such knowledge.

As one device to help achieve this purpose, I’ve chosen to use these indented paragraphs in first person narrative. These “moments” also allow the reader to be taken forward into the study, hopefully
invoking a sense of participation in dialogue. To this end, participants’ voices are also more directly represented than is commonly the case, even in many qualitative studies. The study began as a dialogue, and the potency of dialogue emerged as a key theme.

**Study Context: Features of Research Landscape**

When the study commenced in 2006, earlier discussions with African staff assisted in formalising the question to be answered and the methodology to be followed. The implicit question in these discussions had been “What can African staff teach western staff in Tasmania about working with Africans in a counselling setting?” This question sat in contrast to the implied service agenda: “How can we teach Africans about counselling so that they can receive our help?” This section examines features of the research context which most strongly influenced the reformulation of this question into a formal study.

**Shifts in Australian migration policy**

In the 1960s, debate intensified about the “White Australia Policy” (Yarwood, 1968), which was an inherently racist immigration assessment process designed to restrict non-European migration, introduced at Federation in 1901. It was repealed in 1973 (Stevens, 2012), and the fall of Saigon in 1975 led to the settlement of more than 60,000 Vietnamese refugees, followed by a Cambodian cohort. From the late 1980s, professionals working in the area identified a lack of appropriate support within the mental health system generally for entrants who had been tortured (I. H. Minas, Silove, & Kunst, 1993). After the Balkans conflict in the early 1990s (an event that seemed very “close to home” for the western world), the Australian Government implemented the PASTT program in 1995, designed to complement existing refugee settlement services (FASSTT, 2006).

Tasmania’s proportionate share of the refugee program was small: at the commencement of the study period it was approximately 400 people per year out of a total intake of approximately 13,000 (DIMA, 2006). The settlement of refugees in Tasmania was divided between the two major population centres of Hobart and Launceston (see Map 1 overleaf), with a ratio of approximately 60:40 over the five years leading up to the study (DIAC, 2007).

In 2001, the Australian Government made two decisions: one was to allocate refugee places on the basis of highest need (which at the time were mostly Africans); the other was to increase the settlement in regional areas, regardless of their capacity to provide quality health care to diverse groups (DIMA, 2003). This resulted in a new stream of refugees whose traditional beliefs were not in any way accounted for, either in the mainstream or the specialist agencies, placing pressure on services in regional areas, such as the Phoenix Centre in Tasmania. At the time the main source countries were Sudan, Ethiopia, and Sierra Leone.
Table 1 shows how entrant numbers to Tasmania varied leading into the study period (DIAC, 2007; DIMA, 2006). The entrant intake changed with global events: Australia was still taking significant numbers of entrants from the former Yugoslavia in 2001-02, and this dropped away completely at the beginning of the study period. Burundi, Liberia and the Democratic Republic of Congo became significant source

---

9 The two reports cited contained conflicting data, and data from the settlement program acquittals of the Phoenix Centre showed that the total entrant numbers in the period 2004-2006 were higher than the reported numbers by at least 20%. However, the relative proportions of countries of origin, as well as year to year trends, were consistent across data sources.
countries toward the end of the study period, and the emphasis shifted from Africa to Asia in 2006-07 with entrants arriving from Burma and Nepal.

Table 1: Numbers of Humanitarian Entrants to Tasmania 2001-07, by Country of Origin

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sudan</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>178</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>711</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sierra Leone</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>209</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethiopia</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burundi</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberia</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burma/Myanmar</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. R. Congo</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fmr Yugoslavia</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uganda</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(41)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afghanistan</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(38)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other countries</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>361</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>148</strong></td>
<td><strong>274</strong></td>
<td><strong>308</strong></td>
<td><strong>377</strong></td>
<td><strong>297</strong></td>
<td><strong>283</strong></td>
<td><strong>1687</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tasmania’s geo-political history

Tasmania has an inherent separateness as an island State with a small, more rurally dispersed, less culturally diverse population than mainland Australia. Its capital city, Hobart, is categorised as “Inner Regional” rather than “Urban” in Australian demographic terms, and unlike the mainland States, the majority of the Tasmanian population is outside the capital (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2007). In 2006, the Tasmanian population was just under 480,000, and approximately 11% were born overseas compared with 22% of Australians as a whole (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2008). Furthermore, Tasmanian migrants were disproportionately English-speaking or of European origin.

Tasmania’s early white history was distinctive, with two aspects having relevance to the present study.

Firstly, it was the Australian State with the highest proportion of convicts, having been established by England as a penal colony in 1806. In nearly 50 years of transportation of a total of 140,000 convicts to Australia, 70,000 came to Tasmania, and parts of the convict system endured to the 1880s (Hughes, 1987). Population growth was slower than the rest of Australia, partly because of the stigma and prejudice associated with the convict history, partly because by the end of the convict era most land in Tasmania had been allocated and opportunities for voluntary migrants were limited.

Secondly, notwithstanding the debate about the legitimacy of the term “genocide” (Manne, 2003; Windschuttle, 2002), the destruction of the Aboriginal communities in
Tasmania was so extensive that Tasmanian Aborigines were understood within the popular imagination as having become “extinct” from the late 1800s: in 1961, only 38 people were recorded as being Aboriginal in Tasmania (Rowley, 1970, p. 167). With increasing self-determination and recognition, the Aboriginal-identifying population at the time of the study approached 17,000 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2008).

Economically, Tasmania’s per capita income, health measures, and education levels languished behind the mainland Australian States, with over 40% of the population receiving some form of welfare payment at the time of the study (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006). This combination of historical saturation of imprisonment identity, wholesale colonisation, and chronic economic hardship suggests a high likelihood of intergenerational trauma as is hypothesised among other historically oppressed and disadvantaged populations (Danieli, 1998). In this context, the interaction between black African refugees and the host community was likely to evoke racist responses (Pedersen, Walker, & Wise, 2005), and indeed such a propensity was intermittently “rediscovered” by local news outlets (e.g., The Mercury, 2009).

**Mental health service provision**

One form of indirect racism was the differential negative impact that deficits in mental health services had on the migrant and refugee population: as documented in Australia through the National Inquiry into the Human Rights of People with Mental Illness (Burdekin, 1993). Migrant populations tended to access services later than the general population, in a more desperate condition, with a greater sense of stigma and less capacity to understand, often having exhausted the support available in their own communities. The lack of cross-cultural expertise among mental health professionals, and of quality research, have long been identified as major barriers to providing culturally responsive mental health services in Australia (I. H. Minas et al., 1993).

In Tasmania, the State mental health system struggled to meet the demand presented by the Australian-born client group, and systematically avoided acknowledgement of any role in service provision to refugees. At the beginning of the study period, no records were kept in Tasmania on the preferred language of mental health clients, and interpreter use in State Government Departments was rare (personal communication to the author by Associate Professor Des Graham, then Manager of the Mental Health Service, 2007). The first Mental Health Strategic Plan (2005-2010) (Tasmanian Government, 2006) excluded consideration of ethnic diversity, despite agreement in the Second National Mental Health Plan nearly a decade earlier that ethnically diverse populations be specifically addressed (Australian Health Ministers, 1998), and despite the ready availability of a framework for implementation (Commonwealth of Australia, 2004).

**Supporting recovery from torture**

The complex, demanding work of assisting people in recovering from torture requires some elaboration. The conventional understanding of torture in the form of psychological and physical abuse in interrogation is a narrow portrayal. The PASTT program endorsed a broader, internationally recognised definition (UNHCR, 2004). The key features of torture are that the violence to a person is degrading or inhuman, is for coercive purposes, and is explicitly or implicitly sanctioned by the State within
which it occurs. This might take place in confined interpersonal contexts such as police, intelligence, or prisoner-of-war settings. However, it extends to situations where identified individuals or groups are targeted with violence, such as in ethnic cleansing, the invoking of terror, or in reprisal for perceived betrayals.

The dehumanising and traumatising effect of torture has much in common with other forms of interpersonal abuse, but the fact that this degradation is being conducted with the sanction of the State, whose primary purpose is to ensure protection of its citizens, adds a potent dimension. Torture victims know through their lived experience that their personal safety is utterly contingent on arbitrary decisions of those in power (Gerrity, Keane, & Tuma, 2001). The torture survivor carries, recorded in his or her body, the evidence of this susceptibility.

All refugees had experienced the loss of family, friends and colleagues, and were removed from familiar place and culture. Many had endured years of deprivation, starvation, and other suffering in addition to persecution and torture. They might have physical injuries or chronic pain in addition to psychological disturbances. Their stress reactions could be impaired.

A full treatment program would include specialist medical treatment and rehabilitation, psychiatric medication, psycho-social supports such as access to meaningful work, reliable food and shelter, safety from persecution, contact with family, place and culture, and assistance with the psychological and emotional effects of torture through psychotherapy or psycho-education.

**Phoenix Centre client context**

The Phoenix Centre was the Tasmanian service for the federally funded Program of Assistance for Survivors of Torture and Trauma (PASTT). Massage and physical therapies were provided in most PASTT agencies, and in States with larger centres, medical staff including psychiatrists could be available for consultation. At the social level, community development and skills training (for example homework classes for children, advanced English classes, driver training, and cooking classes) were common strategies. However, specialist neurological and other medical expertise was generally available only through the public health system, meaning that services were necessarily disjointed and delayed. Over time, the broader range of needs of torture survivors could be better provided for: an explicit part of the “Counsellor-Advocate” role was to access and, at the organisational level, help establish appropriate services.

Perhaps the most profound level of disempowerment embedded in the approach was that, in being identified as the specialist service, more comprehensive service provision could only be established incrementally. Salaries were constrained by community service awards, with the implicit expectation that staff would be personally committed to the work: this created a gulf between the degree of specialisation required, and that which could be sourced. This was exacerbated in the context of the small population of Tasmania, where specialist medical services were often accessed from interstate.

The Phoenix Centre had experienced many crises during its short history, with high staff turnover. It was common for newly recruited staff to have little or no experience
in the field, requiring greater induction time and resources. The range and potency of needs with which Phoenix Centre clients routinely presented, could overwhelm the therapist’s capacity – with intercultural trust being an added dimension.

In the larger Australian States, such as Victoria and New South Wales, the PASST program funding was complemented with State Government funding in acknowledgement of the lack of expertise in the mainstream mental health services. In Tasmania, there was no such provision, and it was common for Tasmanian public sector staff to assert that, because the Federal Government had placed the refugees, it was their responsibility to provide that service. Quality service provision was difficult to sustain in this context.

November 2006: I am unable to afford conventional housing, and I am living in a self-contained flat in the backyard of a friend. There is conflict over processes and funding at work: I find myself in a hall of mirrors, with suspicion reflecting suspicion, and I am suffering from strong anxiety. The terms “vicarious trauma” and “parallel processing”, theorised to affect those working closely with traumatised populations, suddenly accumulate additional meaning. I have insufficient trust in the organisation to disclose this: I have struggled to obtain support for budget decisions, my attempts to restore line management processes have been unsuccessful, and my position description has generated confusion for many Board members. Distressing as this is, it does offer a temporary experiential window into the unquiet minds of clients.

Although the Phoenix Centre was limited due to its island-State status and small size, this did bring advantages. In mainland States with high numbers of entrants, more locations for settlement, and a higher proportion of migrants in the general population, the patterns of settlement were less visible. In Tasmania, with small numbers, Phoenix staff located in Hobart and Launceston could offer support to almost every entrant, and for at least a short period, monitor their settlement success. Even without a formal research component to the work, it was possible to form a reliable picture of the client responses to the service. This was augmented by ongoing dialogue with PASST centres in other States: despite its limitations, the network provided regular and effective support which maintained the viability of the Tasmanian service.

Clients challenged conventional approaches to therapy in three distinct ways. The first was the profundity of the inhumane events which they had endured through torture, dislocation and deprivation. Compounding this, many clients had experienced these events in geographic and cultural contexts which were far removed from western society and the associated rituals of daily life. This was particularly true of the cohort in 2004-2006, which was comprised mostly of entrants from the African countries of Sudan, Sierra Leone, and Ethiopia (see Map 2 overleaf). Typical backgrounds included village-based agricultural communities, with access to traditional regional practices to promote and protect health, and to protect against harm: especially through ancestral connection. Often lacking English language and familiarity with urban western settings, clients had spent protracted periods displaced from their homelands, including years or even decades in refugee camps.
Thirdly, entrants and entrant communities were in transition, and included many individuals characterised by two strong, contrasting features: firstly, they had been physically and culturally displaced from their homeland with no immediate prospect of access; secondly, they had succeeded in the protracted, competitive, and confusing challenge of obtaining resettlement. This presented a paradoxical combination of profound disempowerment, and extraordinary resourcefulness.

Internal evaluations showed that our work often had beneficial effects for our clients, but given this population’s capacity for endurance of deprivation, this was not a reliable indicator. Needs analyses had been conducted in Tasmania with generally consistent results. One was published shortly after the commencement of this study.
(Flanagan, 2007), with the consultation process including all refugee populations: at that time the majority of respondents (78%) were from African countries.

Although appreciative of the benefits of the security of Australian society, and hopeful of the new life it offered them, participants identified the following as high priorities: secure accommodation, driving licenses, work opportunities, family reunification, education and training, support for youth, and overcoming racism. In terms of mental health, the grief associated with separation from families, and the challenges of adapting to Tasmanian society, emerged most strongly. Contending with traumatic history did not emerge as a need, although some respondents referenced that history. This was consistent with studies on refugee settlement conducted interstate and internationally across a wide range of ethnic origins (e.g. Nsubaga-Kobi & Dimock, 2000; Summerfield, 2002).

The optimism which tended to permeate direct feedback and needs analyses was often contradicted in clinical work. Profoundly confusing and compromising impacts were common: disbelief, fear, guilt, shame, shock, rage, despair, and sometimes a deep questioning of the wisdom of the decision to apply for resettlement. It seemed plausible that the settlement experience in Tasmania contradicted culturally informed assumptions, which might help account for the intensity of reaction.

These settlement issues were compounded by a recursive element. All attempts to assist, whether effective or not, stemmed from the “host” service and represented the very cultural context that appeared to provoke such reactions in our clients. This required significant adaptation of ourselves, our clients, and our institutions. It also generated role reversals: clients routinely took the role of caretaker of our sensibilities, presumptions and theories, sometimes in extremely generous ways, motivated both by their reliance on the relationship and their concern for our feelings. In one extreme example, it was reported that a client felt the need to put aside the grief associated with a massacre, to provide support for a volunteer worker whose pet had died.

Participants in a later enquiry specific to African Australians (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2010) reported that access to torture trauma services was restricted by “communication difficulties, cultural differences and misunderstandings around mental health concepts and experiences, (and) a perception that some services lack sensitivity and cultural understanding” (p.22). Further, in relation to mental health, “services that were ‘family inclusive’ were the most effective in responding to mental health issues” (p. 22).

**July 2014:** Redrafting the thesis provides me with a retrospective look at the capacity within Tasmania to provide help to this population, and it shocks me. Although the Phoenix Centre has had unprecedented continuity of staffing, the State Mental Health Service has undergone some adaptive restructure, and pockets of cross-cultural and trauma expertise have emerged and endured, the overall prospect for a newly arrived entrant with moderate to serious trauma impact is still precarious. At least three entrants with whom I had some contact have completed suicide in the past five years, with the
hopelessness of their felt experience finding no sufficiently responsive support. Now with a better appreciation of the subtleties, intricacies and multiple levels of traumatic experience, I could envisage the kind of service that would be required to prevent such deaths, but I regret my opinion that it is unattainable in Tasmania.

Despite the range of nationalities and communities represented in the intake to Tasmania, many similarities existed within their experience of settlement and their refugee status. As a group, black Africans stood out among the white majority Tasmanian population, and racism was observed to interfere with settlement success, compounding entrants’ struggles with cultural difference. Unsurprisingly, racism emerged as an important settlement theme among study participants.

This study therefore sought to identify themes which, within refugee settlement transition, offered approaches to problems that may have relevance across and within African communities. Rather than being close representations of traditional systems, these themes were expected to reflect the cultural context of Tasmania as a settlement location for African populations, as well as resettlement issues more generally. The “African” construct determined the recruitment of participants, however the research process emphasised the life-worlds of participants rather than their political (and politicised) identity. This provided for differential responses across nationalities, communities or other categories of identity.

Note on Accessibility of Relevant Literature

A critical review of the literature is provided in Chapter Two, which will show how the present study occupied an under-researched academic space, shaped by dominant research conventions. At the onset of this study, no culturally reliable literature was identified which could account for the collective challenges facing the Phoenix Centre work with Africans. Very little material had been authored by members of the African communities, and the low profile of such material that did exist compounded the difficulties of access10.

The impact of torture was included within the diagnostic category of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) which was formally described in 1980 (American Psychiatric Association, 1980), but continues to be subject to critique as a western construct (e.g. Brewin, 2003).

Within the settlement and torture recovery sector, the emphasis was on the combined impact of the organised, purposeful dimension of torture, and the displacement associated with unsettlement-resettlement. This combination had been observed to evoke reactions which were not fully accounted for in PTSD-oriented work. They included a range of complex problems related to memory, time and place, and the construction of a person’s identity around their status as a refugee and torture survivor (Marotte, 1994).

10One detailed study that was later obtained was completed in Victoria by a Ugandan-born, Australian-trained social worker, but published only in the form of a two-page summary of a conference presentation. (Senggaga-Sali, 2001). Competing demands and the vicissitudes of academic processes appeared to contribute to the marginalisation of such work.
The training manual most widely used in PASTT agencies, *Rebuilding Shattered Lives* (Kaplan, 1998) had four goals: restoring safety and reducing fear and anxiety; restoring capacity for relationships and overcoming grief and loss; restoring a sense of meaning and purpose; and overcoming guilt and shame by restoring dignity. This model was based on the pooled clinical expertise available within torture-trauma specific services globally, and was influential in shaping the Australian guidelines for working with trauma in respect of refugee populations (Australian Centre for Posttraumatic Mental Health, 2007).

The focus on settlement support was intended to assist clients to achieve a stable living situation as one aspect of attending to traumatic material. This was in keeping with sequential approaches of dealing with complex trauma (Courtois & Ford, 2012), although it introduced other limitations, such as role confusion and the risk of inadvertent disempowerment. These could erode the clarity of intent and composure required of the trauma therapist (Chu, 1998).

Overall, the accessible literature drew on assumptions embedded in western constructions of trauma, settlement, torture, and cultural difference, with limited attempts to account for the implications either for cultural norms which might be radically different, or for the effects of the secondary levels of colonisation which might emerge in the dynamic of host-refugee. Given the evidence that such profound suffering appeared to affect fundamental dimensions of a person’s identity, there was a prospect of unknowingly compounding the problems that the services sought to address.

Qualitative methods are recommended for such complex research contexts (Morse & Field, 1995; Punch, 2005; Reason & Rowan, 1981). Qualitative methods are flexible and exploratory, able to complement theory-driven inquiry by enabling new phenomena to be identified, and allowing emerging data to inform the research process (Henwood & Pidgeon, 1994). Ponterotto (2002) argued that qualitative methods were ideal for exploring the complex interactions of cultural difference and therapy. Within the field of refugee studies, Ahearn (2000) stressed an increased need for research using qualitative methods in order to capture the complex, dynamic aspects of the refugee experience.

Within the qualitative paradigm, phenomenological methods were selected to place at the centre, African men’s personalised constructions of the meaning of the geo-cultural displacement, suffering, and resettlement.

**Development of the Research Questions**

The purposes of the present study were:

1. To identify and develop culturally responsive counselling approaches for African male humanitarian entrants into Tasmania.
2. To elicit the cosmological/metaphysical domains that informed participants’ daily lives, activities, sensibilities, and approaches to problems.
As detailed in Chapter Three, key informants were interviewed within a phenomenological framework, with findings ratified through consensus group discussions and literature review. The leading questions for the interviews were:

1. What can you tell me about how problems are approached and addressed within Africa?
2. What was your personal experience of approaches to problems within Africa?
3. What is your personal experience of approaches to problems in Tasmania?

This set of questions enabled a contrast to be made between culturally normative approaches to problems across participants’ experience of displacement-resettlement. The context, that I was a psychologist interested in generating culturally reliable support, ensured that participants’ understanding of the question emphasised personal problems or issues. However, many issues were set in the context of political conflict and social change, and participants were encouraged to respond in ways which were personally meaningful for them: accordingly, broader discussions were common.

Ethnographic methods were introduced to complement the primary interviews, and the range of countries and communities of origin sampling expanded through the “trust-balling” process, and through the inclusion of Muslim participants to account for religious bias. Map 2 shows the proportion of Muslims in different African countries, which illustrates how the recruitment of only Christian-identifying participants may have distorted findings.

An expansion of the study was enabled when the Master’s Degree pathway was upgraded to a PhD. The publication of the emergent results based on the Tasmanian data (Harris, 2011) provided a point of reference for further interviews and ethnographic work conducted in South Africa. This second phase of work was founded on relationships developed with African academics in the field of African Psychology, following a presentation on emergent findings of the study at a conference in Cape Town in 2009. The presentation was included in an emerging stream of work expanding beyond western-derived psychology for the majority black, rural, traditionally oriented population in South Africa, and Africa more generally.

The emergent findings of Phase I of the study were summed up as follows:

1. There were traditionally informed practices identified for counselling, mediating, problem-solving and traditional healing which appeared to apply generally across refugee African communities represented in the study, including Christian- and Muslim-identifying participants.
2. These practices were consistent with practices portrayed and addressed in a literature review regarding African counselling, mediating (including mediating across cosmological realms), problem-solving and traditional healing, within a wide range of communities.
3. Such traditionally informed practices were suggestive of a set of assumptions about life, selfhood, society, nature, and spirit phenomena which in some ways contrasted radically with those western assumptions on which modern psychology and counselling practices were based.
To ensure that the PhD conversion offered a strategic extension to the study, it was proposed to interview recognised African scholars who had contributed to theory and practice, and to undertake ethnographic observations and emerging interviews as deemed appropriate in their communities of origin, in South Africa. The objectives of Phase II were:

1. To contrast the responses and findings from investigations conducted among displaced refugee African communities, with those conducted among communities which had endured differently structured dislocation and displacement in the form of Apartheid in South Africa.
2. To thereby take account of place and displacement factors in furthering an understanding of African counselling, mediating, problem-solving and traditional healing.
3. To extend the literature review across psychology, anthropology and philosophy with an emphasis on the writing of African-identifying scholars and western sources endorsed by them.
4. To contrast African with western practice, exploring the assumptions associated with them, with a view to contributing to the development of more inclusive therapeutic approaches and notions of self-hood.

The following chapter (Chapter Two) presents the literature review, beginning with literature relevant to development of the study methodology. A critical analysis of the applicability and limitations of the relevant psychological literature shows the space this created for the emergence of the present study. A summary of the literature which related to the content of the study is then provided. This sequential literature review process was selected to enhance cultural reliability, and refinement of final analysis and conclusions.
Chapter 2. Literature Review

Structure of Literature Review
This study extended over a period of ten years, and engagement with different aspects of the relevant literature occurred progressively during that time. This ordering through time was a key influence in the research process, and in the development of the findings. In keeping with phenomenological research practice, the material pertaining to the content of this study was accessed subsequent to completing the initial data collection and analysis. Locating this material in this chapter may suggest to the reader that it pre-empted the study’s findings whereas in fact it served as a retrospective reliability check.

The literature review structure is outlined below, and reflects the emergent understanding over time, of the meaning of “counselling” for African populations.

1. A critical review of the methodological literature, grounded in the historical development of phenomenological and existential philosophy, inclusive of African authors.
2. A review of empirical literature relevant to African refugee populations.
3. A critique of the empirical literature focussed on the limitations of empiricism and diagnostic categories in addressing the complexity of the trauma therapy for the African population.
4. Consideration of literature on culturally competent practise, forced migration and ethno-psychology.
5. An exposition of literature contributing to an “African Psychology”, with an emphasis on material derived from or endorsed by African scholars.

The study emerged from a western position which was naïve in terms of African scholarship, yet sensitive to the limitations of western systems of meaning and psychological practise. The primary focus throughout was the elaboration of culturally reliable therapeutic responses to the issues facing African populations, particularly African men arriving to regional Australia as refugees. This was refined progressively, taking account of the parallel development of the rapidly developing field of “African Psychology” during the decade-long period of the study.

A key example was the release of the textbook *Counselling people of African ancestry* (Mpofu, 2011): had it been published six years earlier, this study may never have emerged, as the impetus to seek guidance on culturally responsive practise may have been neutralised. Alongside this development within African counselling and psychology, the strategically reflexive process embedded in the methodology provided scope for an informed critique of western psychological practise. This is introduced in the present chapter through a critical review of relevant psychological research, and is revisited in Chapter Six.

**Critical Review of Research Methods**

This section introduces the literature relating to the phenomenological process of investigation used in this study. As asserted by Giorgi (1970) in describing research in phenomenological psychology (p. 132):
...it is not wrong for a scientist to help in formulating and clarifying the very framework within which he will operate, even if these concerns bring him in touch with meta-psychological issues.

These “meta-psychological” issues were profound for a study which sought to generate knowledge in relation to meaning systems across multiple geo-cultural settings. Aspects of the meaning systems embedded within phenomenology are therefore explored through tracing its historical development: with emphasis on its grounding within an individualised, scientific attitude to the world. The inclusion of ethnographic and heuristic methods within the phenomenological framework is then addressed.

Phenomenology in this study
Phenomenology is a qualitative research methodology which attempts to generate an in-depth description and analysis of a feature of interest. In order to achieve this, assumptions about the feature of interest are suspended: in phenomenology, this practice is called *epoché*: “the process by which we attempt to abstain from our presuppositions, those preconceived ideas we might have about the things we are investigating….sometimes known as bracketing” (Langdridge, 2007, p. 17). As noted in the Introduction, this researcher had developed skill in bracketing in the counselling setting, prior to encountering it in this formal sense.

This allows assumptions or “theories” which are implicit in the observational stance taken, and which may be impeding understanding, to be exposed and challenged. The researcher adopts a reflective, contemplative stance in relation to the accessed material, seeking to derive an understanding that is more in accord with the “essence” of the feature of interest (Wertz, 2005).

Phenomenology therefore offers scope for inter-cultural knowledge creation: an open, exploratory stance allows for collaborative effort at understanding and idea development. The exposure of the researcher to contradictions and challenges to personal as well as cultural assumptions is an explicit part of this process.

In the present study, the feature of interest was “African Counselling”, however due to the likely intrusion of preconceptions of western counselling ideas in any such discussion, the broader term “approaches to problems” was used for discussion. The phenomenological process centred on purposive interviews in which the experiential meaning-making of participants’ approaches to problems was interrogated and elaborated with the explicit intent of generating an understanding of “African Counselling” or its equivalent.

The founding concept of phenomenology was that, prior to taking a position of examining the world as a scientist, a person is positioned in the “natural attitude” (Husserl, 2006/1911, p. 2). That is, he or she is aware of an experiencing “I” within an embodied existence, aware of his or her extension through the body into the physical world, of having a personal past, and of the world extending beyond perception both in time and space.
Importantly, this awareness is via mental representations which are experienced internally, and which are shared, compared, and contrasted with other humans who can be assumed to have an equivalent internalised experience. This necessarily entails a recursive process, whereby the investigation informs the investigator, demanding a modification of both the perceived object and the process of investigation.

When the object of investigation is held within the experience of other persons, this recursive process is duplicated, and language becomes a primary medium of investigation (not just of interpretation), bringing embedded within it, its own hermeneutic circle founded in both parties’ cultural and historical antecedents. Thus (Langdridge, 2007, p. 122):

*language reveals being within particular historical and cultural contexts.... understood through the fusion of horizons (here of participant and researcher – through the language of the interview) moving in a circular fashion between part and whole, with no beginning and no end.*

The researcher has an embodied specificity, grounded in the field of investigation, and constrained to make interpretive observations; there being no prospect of true objectivity. To account for the pre-determined positioning of the investigator, relevant aspects of that positioning require documentation. This renders transparent the process by which knowledge comes to be created, represented, and given meaning. Equally, to ensure appropriate limits are placed on the generalisability of data, the participant’s positioning requires some elaboration.

This contextual framing invokes an ethical requirement for the researcher in subsequent elaboration or interpretation of the data, to represent it as faithfully as possible to the shared understanding of meaning that prevailed at the time of the interview. This feature of phenomenological theory strongly informed the style of presentation of results in the present study: especially the attempt to portray African experience more directly through extensive quotations.

**The Historical Construction of Phenomenology**

A challenge to the construction of this thesis has been the individualism of the origins of phenomenology within European philosophy. Phenomenology developed contemporaneously with the scientific method, as a response to the epistemological crisis provoked by Kant (1724-1804): essentially, because consciousness cannot know its own limits, all “knowledge” is uncertain (Spiegelberg, 1960). This was in turn a response to Descartes (1596-1650), who had proposed the singular, paradoxical position that one’s capacity to doubt is the most reliable evidence of one’s own existence (Hospers, 1990).

Experimental science in its modern form was conceptualised in the 1920s by Popper (1972/1957) as a rational, reliable method to account for the inherent uncertainty pertaining to the know-ability of the natural world, as well as the susceptibility that human scientists have for shaping their own observations according to their thoughts and ideas. In western philosophical terms it drew on the two main competing traditional claims to truth: empiricism, that truth is observable from the senses; and rationalism, that truth is discernible through reason (Audi, 1995).
Husserl cited Dilthey (Husserl, 1977/1925, p. 3) that scientific psychology was “blind to the unique essential species of psychic life” through its reliance on the paradigm of natural science. In phenomenological terms, all psychological events are representations that are internally experienced by an inter-subjectively co-constituting, bodily being, informed by history and culture. From this perspective, the derivation of psychological models emphasising “objective” observations or measures of behaviour, misrepresents the essence of psychology.

As well as offering a response to the problem of human limits of knowledge, Husserl proposed a resolution of the problem of universal ethics. Kant (1996/1787) argued that, for a decision or act to be moral or ethical, it must be a choice that is an expression of free will, informed by reason. Importantly for this study, this placed the principles of a reasoning individual at the centre of ethical practise. The challenge in acting ethically was to sustain and act upon a “principle” which was held to be both universal and somehow also accessible to any individual; and which must be both enduring and open to modification.

In contrast, phenomenology incorporates the “other” in its formulation (Husserl, 2006/1911, p. 5):

...but not in the sense that it sees itself or experientially finds itself.
Rather it posits them in the manner of “empathy”: perception of the other and experience of the other.

If I accept that for an action to be ethical it must be universally applicable, then I am implying the existence of another ethically oriented human who has the capacity to agree or disagree with me. The term “universal” presupposes agreement among humans as to what the rule might be. Human ethical laws are founded on shared ideas of justice, right, wrong, good and bad, and are formulated and adapted through cultural processes. They are a negotiated response to events in the world. The position that ethics are developed, understood and applied through dialogue with the “other” allows for western norms to be put aside or challenged as part of any inquiry into non-western norms.

There is a warmth to Husserl’s philosophy. In contrast to positivist philosophy and scientific theories, it evokes a sense of being open to influence, interested, and curious about another person: how do I experience this person? For the present study, it offered a formulation for understanding meetings between human beings, which seemed more radical than the assumptions of modern scientific psychology. It provided a point of reference for research into psychological issues associated with counselling or help-giving, as well as an intellectual heritage to critique for assumptions which might be revealed in dialogue across cultures.

Inter-subjectivity in Phenomenology

The theoretical development of phenomenology contributed to a reconceptualization of the human subject: from a discrete, bounded individual with internal representations of the “other”, to the cultivation of a contextualised, relational way of being with the purpose of mutually shaped knowledge creation.
This evolution can be traced to the concept of *dasein* proposed by Heidegger (1962/1935) which implicitly incorporated a sense of the “other” through exposure to and adoption of cultural artefacts which were created by others for specific purposes. For example, a manufactured tool has a distinctly different mode of being for *dasein*, than does a ready-to-hand object, even if that object is used as a tool. Of particular relevance to phenomenological research, the cultural artefact of language draws *dasein* into relationship with others in the negotiation of perception, meaning, purpose, ethics, and other human activities.

Within research, Reason (1981) illustrated how phenomenological interviewing comprised a less alienated form of human research wherein the researcher is more fully engaged experientially with the material, and is confronted by the agency and human-ness of the data source. This dialectical framework emphasised the exchange and co-creation of knowledge and understanding, rather than the extraction of pre-configured data. Similarly, Van Manen (1990) emphasised the study of lived experience as both the context and object of investigation.

The boundary condition inherent in interpersonal experience was compared with that of death by Merleau-Ponty (1962; p. 325):

> And yet each other person does exist for me as an unchallengeable style of setting of co-existence: and my life has a social atmosphere just as it has a flavour of mortality.

Beyond the interpersonal, Merleau-Ponty (1962) argued that religious experience implied a transcendence of human experience. Research which extended awareness beyond the boundaries of the physical self was collated by Valle and Halling (1989): extra-sensory perception, altered states of consciousness, drug-induced and ritualised experiences of unity with the world or humankind. A developmental hierarchy of experience was constructed which moved from the personal to the universal, with an idea of universal shared consciousness as an aspirational goal. Frager (1989) argued that such a predetermined hierarchy was contrary to the precepts of phenomenology: any such ordering of experiences should be supported by the data. The exoticisation of these categories of experience in the west is at odds with the data from the present study. However, it shows the scope within phenomenology to consider transcendent experience.

Importantly for this study, Hufford (2008) argued for the extension of this scope to spirit encounters, stating that “The development of phenomenological interview techniques and the use of verbatim accounts are essential to investigation of the perceptual basis of spirit beliefs” (Hufford, 2008, p. 302). He showed how conventional academic demands for objective verification of such beliefs through scientific experimentation, and the rejection of the possible truth-value of such experiences through post-enlightenment rationalistic beliefs, were in themselves both unscientific and irrational, as well as demeaning of non-western systems of belief.

This argument was similar to that used by Kelly et al. (2007), who accumulated empirical evidence within psychology, of spirit and other “rogue” phenomena such as mystical experience, genius, and paranormal abilities. This material will be explored further in Chapter Six in considering the findings of the study.
Inter-subjectivity intersects the sociological concept of social structure, which assisted in more fully comprehending African experience. Defined as the “enduring, orderly and patterned relationships between elements of a society” (Abercrombie, Hill, & Turner, 2006, p.361), the term has been critiqued as referring to essentially abstract forms which yet have a capacity to influence human behaviour, suggesting a confounding of categories.

The early social theorist Emile Durkheim (1858-1917) used the term to distinguish between internal, psychological influences, and features of the social and therefore external environment. Acknowledging that a social structure, being a shared experience, would have an internal representation, he argued that its distinctive influence was exerted through a coercive external pressure by others: (Durkheim, 1985/1895p. 67):

“What is special about social constraint is that it comes...from the prestige with which certain representations are invested...Habits dominate us, and impose beliefs or practices upon us. But they dominate us from within; for they are wholly within each of us. On the other hand, social beliefs and practices act on us from outside..."

Durkheim was a contemporary of Husserl, and his theory was founded on concepts similar to those underlying phenomenology: however, the emphasis was on analysing observable features of the social environment, rather than subjective experience. The distinction assists in formulating an understanding of the intersubjective experience of phenomenological engagement: any such interaction will include both the capacity for emergent understanding, and susceptibility to social influence.

This emerged as crucial in seeking to approach for understanding “African Psychology” wherein the respective places of internalised beliefs and external influences emerged as more ambiguously rendered. In remaining loyal to the precepts of phenomenological investigation and analysis, the present study tussles with many of these hidden ambiguities and contradictions within western theory.

Ultimately, the philosophical as well as scientific basis for this study was intersubjective phenomenological encounter with key informants purposefully sampled from selected cultural groups identified through their nationality and place of residence. The analysis drew on psychological as well as philosophical and sociological theory. As the study progressed, the commitment to the discipline of phenomenological encounter prompted the use of ethnographic methods: particularly participant-observation.

**Emergence of Ethnographic and Heuristic Methods within the Study**

Given the cross-cultural dimension of the study, it might be argued that anthropological methods should have been central. However, the primary purpose of the study was to contribute to improving psychological practise with the African-identifying client group, and the flexibility of phenomenological methods enabled the inclusion of anthropological methods.

Ethnography is “an empirical and theoretical approach inherited from anthropology that seeks detailed holistic description and analysis of cultures based on intensive
fieldwork” (Barker, 2000). The cultural embedded-ness of the emergent data from this study demanded an appreciation of anthropological literature, and of the contested meanings attached to it. This reflected the argument by Gottleib (2006) that ethnography, in common with hermeneutic phenomenology, shares the hermeneutic tradition that the construction of information relates to cultural features of human existence, which is inextricably intersubjective and interpretive. This assisted in informing the development of dialogue, the interpretive responses, and the elaboration of findings.

Ethnography was identified in Wilson’s (2002) four-way typology of scientific observation as complementary to the indirect form of observation implied in interviews (this observation being mediated through language, with the interviewee as the direct observer reporting on their experience). Ethnographic observation emphasises description of observable features of what is occurring; whereas phenomenology emphasises the personal meaning of phenomena, requiring intensive intersubjective inquiry (Morse & Field, 1995). Considerable flexibility was offered by combining these methods in the present study: participant interviews included reflections on observed behaviours, and as the study evolved to include more ethnographic fieldwork, interviews became more embedded in daily activities. The adoption of a participant-observer stance was an early feature of the development of the methodology in this study.

The interplay between ethnographic methods and psychological theory development was shown by Lutz (1988), whose intensive field work on a Micronesian island produced compelling evidence that emotions and their expression are strongly informed by place and cultural purpose. This challenges the view that basic emotions are common across cultures, and supports the social constructionist perspective, that the experience and expression of emotions have a reciprocal relationship in both defining and perpetuating explicit and implicit social or cultural objectives (Harre, 1985).

In relation to male gender dynamics, Derne (1995) interviewed Indian men about their attitudes to women and marriage, allowing him to demonstrate their implicit patriarchal structure. Ethnographic fieldwork has been used to generate “experience-near” ethno-psychological models of self, psychology, and emotion by Eberhardt (2005) for a Shan Buddhist community in North-western Thailand, and by Hardman (2000), for the Lohorung Rai in Nepal. The use of ethnographic methods for communities in transition, dislocation or conflict was recommended by K. B. Warren (2002), with the recognition that such communities could best be studied across time and place, as their experience was embedded in discontinuity and change.

One academic distinction in anthropological research which informed the present study, was that between etic and emic perspectives. Etic refers to a view from outside, drawing on shared behaviour or psychology such as eating, sex and reproduction, language, and thought. Emic refers to a view from inside a system or culture showing the distinctive ways that a particular culture operates (Berry, 1989).

Berry outlined a five-stage research process which fitted the research experience of this study very closely:
A researcher begins with a question in one’s own culture (step 1 - emic A) moving to an attempt to use the same concept or instrument to study a behaviour in another culture (step 2 – imposed etic), then to the discovery strategy in another culture (step 3 – emic B), and finally to the act of comparison of emic A and emic B (step 4) (p.730).

In the present study, the derivation of an etic of “counselling” across African cultural groups enabled analysis across Euro-American counselling theories and practices.

**Heuristics, Qualitative Pluralism, and Reliability**

Through its explicitly open character, the phenomenological process, supported by ethnographic methods, allowed for any aspect of experience held to be important by a participant to come into view and be considered. Interview transcripts that accounted for the contexts which participants inhabited were the primary data record of the phenomenological component of the study, and descriptive field notes recorded the ethnographic component. Journal entries recorded details of the timing and context of interviews and observations.

However, this did not account for all relevant data from this study. African clients within my counselling practice generated case material, which were not included in the study, but did inform my appreciation of the issues. Emergent research findings were also applied in therapeutic work with non-Africans where these seemed reliably applicable (for example, for people whose relationships to family or place were particularly strong, and for those who reported spirit encounters, especially in relation to grief for close family).

The research involved periodic immersion in research material: visiting participants’ homes, sometimes for periods of days; participating in community events; and travelling in South Africa. Empathic engagement in the relational field associated with these activities provoked a sense of the lived experience of participants. Seeking to experience their world required engagement with their community and physical environment. This researcher’s lived experience of this process produced heuristic data: an analogue, perhaps, of this community oriented way of being. The experience could be described in terms of being aligned with, immersed or saturated in a radically different world, albeit one which was to some extent replicable in my broader life experience.

To formalise these aspects of the research process within this study, the six phases of heuristic research were considered as follows (Moustakas, 1990).

*Initial engagement*: The emotional and intellectual challenge of contending with the African refugee population that led to the study;

*Immersion*: Occupying a participant-observer role in African cultural events;

*Incubation*: Periods between intense research activity, during which there was frequently an aversion to engage in the work, or a frustration with slow administrative processes (in particular these periods provided insight to a version of “African Time”);

*Illumination*: Occasions when previously puzzling aspects of the research became clear, or when sudden insights transformed my understanding;
Explication: Prompted by such new understandings, the task of writing became more straightforward, and it became possible to incorporate ideas more seamlessly or rewrite sections of the thesis at a more comprehensive level; and Creative synthesis: On several occasions this process of explication generated structures of the work that had not been clear before.

To report on this heuristic element, indented paragraphs are used at strategic “moments” throughout the thesis. One example was the analytic process associated with the Tasmanian data:

**November 11th 2009**

I need a fully drafted analysis to bring to the first consensus group. Over the past few weeks I have been working and re-working the themes from the interviews, allowing for commonalities and differences across countries and religions, making sure the issues that the men stress are prioritised. Yet the intended reader will not be African, but someone seeking understanding from within the western framework. Arbitrarily, I imagine how a quintessential participant might express these themes, and begin. It feels like I am channelling: as I write, all the elements of analysis find a place. After less than an hour, I have 26 “experiential statements” in the first-person plural. I order the statements so that the first two represent the aspects most important to participants, and the second two represent those themes that will be most illuminating to non-Africans.

The group accepts my invitation to decide how to proceed. They read through the statements, animatedly elaborating some of the points, with only one significant point of contention. They decide on a second meeting to properly complete the task: surely a sign of the quality of the work. Relieved, and noting that some “edginess” remains among participants, I discover that a group of South Sudanese women have obtained funding for a community development project, and these men are unsure about their own role in that project. The density of the multi-layered cycling of engagement, recording, analysis, reporting, and ethnographic opportunity is palpable today.

The shaping of the methodology through the demands of emergent data was in keeping with phenomenological research precepts. However, diverse qualitative methods may be epistemologically incompatible; or they be used in ways that are invalid (Moran-Ellis et al., 2006). For example, claims of increased reliability through “triangulation” can be nullified if data are generated from sources or through use of methods which are not independent. In this study, the diversity of sources will be presented whenever triangulation is used as evidence for reliability. In addition to supporting reliability, the diversity of methods illuminated the phenomena more fully, and also rendered the process more transparent: these are recognised uses for plurality, increasingly encouraged within the qualitative literature (Frost & Nolas, 2011).
Empirical Literature on Therapy with African and Refugee Populations

The present study was partly prompted by the difficulty in accessing reliable psychological literature to inform culturally responsive counselling for the African refugee population in Tasmania. Six years later, Levers, May, and Vogel (2011) noted (p. 63):

*a dearth of research regarding traumatized refugees ……and even less is known about the efficacy of psychotherapeutic approaches in this population, especially in Africa.*

Process of Critical Literature Review

In keeping with phenomenological tradition, the literature review of content relevant to this study formally initiated in March 2009 by searching the Medline and PsycINFO databases for the terms “Africa*” and “counselling or therapy”. An inspection of the results showed that African-American populations and medically oriented studies concerning HIV/AIDS comprised approximately 95% of the search results. The African-American material was for the most part specific to the demographics of the USA. In the HIV/AIDS material, the term “therapy” referred to medical treatment, and “counselling” referred to assisting people to come to terms with the diagnosis and treatment options. These categories were therefore excluded.

Separate searches were undertaken using “Africa*”, “counselling or therapy”, and “Stress or trauma or refugee or PTSD”. These searches were repeated using the main source countries (Sudan, Sierra Leone, and Ethiopia) instead of the term “Africa*”. The terms “Africa*, and existential* or phenomenolog* were also searched, again excluding African-American references. The searches were repeated at the end of the study period to identify studies which had been published in the interim.

The searches yielded very few empirical studies; most studies reported practise wisdom from clinicians experienced in working with African populations.

**June 2009**: I identify few references through conventional means. While watching a TV program featuring an African commentator, I squint at the bookcase behind him. That’s how I trace “Existential Africana”, which due to its singular title had not shown up on internet search engines. This introduces me to Franz Fanon, who practised as a psychiatrist in Algeria in the 1950s, and provided perhaps the first modern account of the psychological sequelae of torture, as well as his analysis of the “Black” existential experience. I look in vain for references to his work in the American or Australian psychology, torture trauma, or cross-cultural counselling literature, and find only one reference in refugee studies. Yet the multiple copies of his books are so popular in political science that I need to place a hold in the University of Tasmania library.

The difficulty in accessing reliable literature on African-derived counselling practices for the refugee population was partly due to demarcations between disciplines, which were based more on historical trends than on content. For example, cross-cultural
counselling emerged principally in response to the need to provide more effective services to migrants and marginalised minorities in western settings (I.H. Minas, 1990; Ponterotto, Casas, Suzuki, & Alexander, 1995; Sue & Sue, 1990). However, substantive migration by Africans to Australia has occurred relatively recently; and with the exception of some consideration of African-American psychology (e.g. Vontress, Woodland, & Epp, 2007) culturally relevant material was mostly absent from mainstream journals.

Transcultural psychiatry had its origins in the writing of western anthropologists, physicians and psychiatrists in non-western settings prior to 1960, such as North American indigenous communities, Aboriginal Australia, Asia, and Africa (Prince, Okpaku, & Merkel, 1998)\(^\text{11}\). Anthropological sources also included thorough descriptions of the traditional practices of communities in Sierra Leone (Little, 1951) and Sudan (Evans-Pritchard, 1951) which proved relevant for this study.

As the study unfolded, literature from diverse interdisciplinary sources was identified as relevant, which periodically augmented this resource reliability check. The contours that western-derived literature and theory imposed on the comprehension of African experience became clearer, and community-oriented selfhood, relationship-based identity, and the place of spirit influence in African cosmologies became more familiar.

The task of summarising the empirical literature was simplified by the publication of two major reviews during the study period. The first was by Murray, Davidson, and Schweitzer (2008), who conducted a search of English language databases over the previous 25 years, and identified 13 empirical evaluations of non-pharmacological, psychological interventions for refugees in resettlement countries. Six of the studies were with children, and seven were with adults.

A Cochrane Review (Patel, Kellezi, & Williams, 2014) collated randomly controlled studies on torture survivors (as distinct from refugees). This identified only nine studies of sufficient quality for inclusion (out of a shortlist of 35 studies selected from over 2000 abstracts). Three of these had been conducted in Africa, and five of the others included African participants: all studies were with adults, with a combined \(n\) of 507: the majority of participants were men, but all studies included at least some women.

There was only one study included in both reviews. This discrepancy was partly due to the differing but overlapping target groups, and partly to the narrower constraints of the Cochrane Review, which concluded that there was limited evidence of immediate reduction of symptoms of any intervention (compared with control groups), and weak evidence of the benefit at a six-month follow up, of Narrative Exposure Therapy (NET) and Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT).

The interventions included in the review by Murray et al. (2008) were CBT, learning groups, music therapy, Eye Movement Desensitisation and Reprocessing (EMDR) with conversational therapy or play therapy, school-based counselling, NET, creative

\(^{11}\) Notably this book referred to the Nigerian psychiatrist Thomas Adeoye Lambo (1923 - 2004) as influential, but failed to provide references to any of his publications, which I was only able to access via antiquarian bookstores: this mirrored the omission of Fanon’s work from readily accessible sources.
expression, coping skills training, testimonial psychotherapy, and family intervention.

All the studies identified in that review showed gains in some target measures, suggesting that the modalities were plausible candidates for working with refugee clients in western contexts. However, the authors noted that for the most part, sample sizes were small and results needed to be interpreted with caution.

The dominance of the CBT model within the literature was evident in these reviews. The model directs attention toward the opportunities for change through changing behaviour directly (for example, introducing exercise), or changing thoughts (for example, interrupting and correcting negative self-talk). More commonly, a combination of thought and behaviour change is employed: for example, overcoming avoidance behaviour by interrupting and changing avoidant thinking, then initiating behaviour change. Empirical investigation of the benefits of CBT has supported its use with a wide range of psychological problems. Given that refugee and torture survivors do report common psychological problems such as anxiety and depression, the application of CBT for these groups would be expected to be effective. This was supported by the one small study included in both reviews, which was conducted in Sweden with refugee torture survivors (Paunovic & Ost, 2001). This study also showed that Exposure Therapy had equivalent benefit.

Narrative Exposure Therapy (NET) was the most widely investigated single treatment within the empirical literature (Patel et al., 2014). A development of CBT for trauma, NET involves facilitating the telling of the life story from beginning to end, with times of trauma being dealt with in detail. Props can be used to represent the traumatic periods (for example, knots on a rope, or piles of rocks on a path). The client is desensitised to the emotional content of their traumatising memories, enabling thinking and behaviour to be more adaptive to current circumstances. The two most relevant studies involved Sudanese refugees in Uganda (Neuner, Schauer, Klaschik, Karunakara, & Elbert, 2004), and African and other refugee torture survivors in Germany (Neuner et al., 2010). These studies reported favourable results for NET compared with control groups. A related technique which emphasised the telling of the story (Testimony Therapy) was found to be supported for torture survivors in Mozambique (Igreja, Kleijn, Schreuder, VanDijk, & Verschuur, 2004).

A small study with predominantly African refugees in Australia, investigated the effectiveness of a music therapy program for students at risk in a Queensland school (Baker & Jones, 2006). This crossover design provided evidence of the benefit of music therapy on externalising behaviours (particularly aggression).

**Scientist-Practitioner Model of Psychology**

The empirical robustness required for inclusion of studies in these reviews reflects the hierarchy of evidence within the “Scientist-Practitioner Model” which is the most common framework for psychology training (Horn et al., 2007). The model proposed that psychology would advance through a cyclical process whereby practitioners made use of scientific research evidence to inform their practise, and their observations and experience would then inform research endeavours. Outside of the formal reviews which demanded high empirical standards, studies were identified which drew on practise wisdom and such empirical evidence as was possible to acquire within the service context.
One study which, like the present study, sought to incorporate community priorities, was a multi-family group intervention study for Kosovar refugees in the USA (S. M. Weine et al., 2003). These authors drew on the key role of family support in contending with the legacy of political violence in the former Yugoslavia.

A variation of this program for Bosnian refugees (S. Weine et al., 2008), involved 197 subjects who had been exposed to war trauma but were not receiving mental health support, together with their families. Compared with a control group, involvement in the program increased access to mental health services, particularly for clients with depressive symptoms (the discussion suggested that trauma-specific symptoms were not so readily identified as treatable by families). Another study designed to enable the refugee population to contribute to the intervention process was an advocacy and mutual learning group for Hmong refugees in the USA (Goodkind, 2005).

Kira et al. (2012) offered a synthesis of ten years of practice developments in group psychotherapy for refugee torture survivors, based on practice evidence which suggested the importance of ethnic and gender homogeneity, the need for addressing the collective nature of the oppression (especially for survivors from collectivist societies) the value of traditional activities such as art, movement, cooking, textile making, and gardening to enhance cultural expression and reduce emotional intensity, and the option of transitioning groups toward an active community purpose. Through this process, a Somali women’s group met weekly in a format resembling a traditional afternoon sharing of problems with elders, named “Bashaal” (p. 79).

The rationale for group processes specific to torture survivors from collectivistic cultures was that (Kira et al., 2012, p.71):

*In collectivistic cultures, healing usually takes place within the group context. When people are persecuted because of their group memberships, a group therapy approach that targets group self-esteem and efficacy among its goals seems logical and has greater therapeutic potential. In collectivistic cultures, it is common for families and community elders or religious or political leaders to be the first source of support for personal problems and/or health concerns. Thus, group, multi-family therapy, and community work can be especially effective.*

This community approach was also adopted in the PEN-3 model (Airhihenbuwa, 1995; Airhihenbuwa, Ford, & Iwelunmoor, 2013), derived from community engagement and developed in response to the AIDS epidemic in Africa. It emphasised the power held within family and community systems in responding to health issues, encouraging their strengthening and development through specific strategies.

The purposeful gathering of participants is an explicit therapeutic intervention in African communities (e.g. Nwoye, 2002a). This has two implications for controlled empirical studies: the first is that programs emphasising individual therapy are likely to exclude the therapeutic benefit of culturally familiar group settings, and the second is that those studies which do investigate group programs require a group-setting control, to ensure that any measured benefits are attributable to the program content.
The use of group interpersonal psychotherapy for depression in rural Uganda was described by Bolton et al. (2003). They used a locally normed and validated questionnaire for functionality, and a modified and locally validated version of the depression scale of the Hopkins Symptom Checklist (HSCL) (Derogatis, Lipman, Rickels, Uhlenhuth, & Covi, 1974), which is a commonly used scale for refugee populations (notwithstanding limitations in its development to be discussed under the forthcoming section on PTSD and trauma). A significant improvement was found in the treatment group compared with matched controls who received no intervention: notably this also meant that the study did not control for group participation. It also did not account for relevant social factors such as poverty or migration status and experience. For women, there was improvement in depression scores and in functionality. For men, there was improvement in depression scores but not in functionality. The reason for this gender difference was not explained, although given that the functionality scales were sex-specific (measuring different tasks for men and women) it is likely that it partly reflected those differences.

Uniquely, a replication of this study was completed by Nakimuli-Mpungu et al. (2013), although the data were compromised by confounds associated with a controlled trial in resource-poor, high-need populations. For example, the sample included a diversity of cultural backgrounds, symptomatology and trauma history; many participants had concurrent access to alternative remedies as well as pharmacological treatment; and participants were itinerant (nearly half the participants in the treatment and control groups were unavailable for final data collection).

Peltzer (1989) reported that psychosocial counselling focussing on support in grief and loss, working through trauma, and stress management, had been successful in 11 out of a sample of 28 African refugees that he worked with. The article also described the development of a 35-item psychosocial assessment scale used as an orienting tool to provide counselling in Zambia to refugees from other African countries. In keeping with the scale developed by Ebigbo (1982) for trauma symptoms in Nigerian populations (referenced later in this chapter) it included a range of symptoms familiar to western clinicians such as sleep disturbance, headaches, and loss of memory, but also locally derived symptoms such as “Heat in the head”, and “Heart is flying out” (Peltzer, 1989, p.115).

Analysis of Psychological Literature

This overview of relevant empirical work, whilst offering limited support of western derived models, shows how little evidence has been accumulated. On the one hand, robust studies are generally conducted with the support of well-resourced institutions, using treatment protocols which are derived from western approaches: however these are rarely able to account for population-specific issues. On the other hand, attempts to evaluate approaches derived from the study population are often compromised by small sample sizes, limited resources and inadequate research protocols. Where the priority is to achieve scientific verification, the textured meanings embedded in the presenting issues can be obscured. These concerns reflect broader ways in which western-oriented therapeutic approaches may pre-emptively discount likely candidates for culturally reliable practise.
Accounting for culture: Counselling efficacy and outcome studies

The limitations inherent in the scientific investigation of the efficacy of counselling interventions, were a formative concern for this researcher. As part of the entrenchment of the Scientist-Practitioner Model within the field, the movement toward a scientific ideal of “Evidence-Based Practise” was institutionalised by the American Psychological Association (APA) in 1995 (Task force on promotion and dissemination of psychological procedures, 1995). This issue has attracted incisive and thoughtful interpretation by a wide range of commentators and the debate offers a window into the complexity attached to scientific study of counselling processes and outcomes. The following summary illustrates structural reasons for the lack of research attention to help-giving processes which are likely to be important in assessing and enhancing the psychosocial wellness of Africans.

The APA Presidential Task Force on Evidence-Based-Practice (2006) sought to accommodate the key issues within the debate by defining evidence-based practice in Psychology (EBPP) as:

…the integration of the best available research with clinical expertise in the context of patient characteristics, culture, and preferences (p. 273).

For the purposes of the present study, a welcome acknowledgement was made of the value of other disciplines in contributing to EBPP, including “ethnography…cross-cultural psychology…cultural psychology…psychological anthropology…and cultural psychotherapy” (p. 279).

The Task Force highlighted the need to address both efficacy and clinical utility in EBPP research, particularly in relation to limitations to the generalizability of findings to the clinical setting, and especially with culturally diverse populations. Randomly controlled trials demonstrated the efficacy of a range of therapeutic systems (now known as “Evidence-Supported Therapies” or ESTs) for specific disorders. Studies which aimed to inform clinical utility focussed primarily on understanding and quantifying which aspects of therapeutic processes contributed to therapeutic outcomes (with most research oriented toward “common factors”, or therapeutic processes that are common across systems).

These studies showed that the variance in therapy outcome attributable to specific therapy systems was small compared with the variance attributable to factors which were common across systems: Lambert and Barley (2001) estimated these variances at 15% and 30% respectively. These figures show that in general, “common factors” collectively have twice the influence on outcomes than do any therapy-specific processes.

From a meta-analysis of this body of literature, Laska, Gurman, and Wampold (2013) proposed four empirically supported practical steps to improve outcomes in clinical settings:

- providing client feedback to the therapist;
- assessment of the therapist-client alliance;
- investigating and highlighting the practises of therapists who consistently produced better results; and
- provision of quality training incorporating the full range of research findings.
Norcross and Wampold (2011) identified six elements within the common factors framework which were “demonstrably effective” (p. 99).

The first three elements related to the quality of the therapeutic alliance: in each of individual, youth, and family psychotherapy. The other elements were:

- cohesion in group therapy;
- empathy; and
- collecting client feedback.

In addition, goal consensus, collaboration, and positive regard were found to be “probably effective” elements; and congruence/genuineness, repairing alliance ruptures, and managing countertransference were found to be “promising”.

The pre-eminence of aspects of the therapeutic relationship such as alliance, empathy, and client feedback, fits with the observations of skilled therapists across modalities. Investigating this more intensively in a qualitative study with experienced therapists, Moltu and Binder (2014) found there was a need to attend to all aspects of the relational space and respond accordingly (even when this contradicted techniques which had been standardised within ESTs), in order to facilitate change in difficult cases.

In a study which interviewed experienced therapists in the refugee sector in Australia, Schweitzer, van Wyk, and Murray (2015) identified four primary themes:

- principles of therapeutic practice (with the subthemes of meaning-making, therapist role and characteristics, and use of an integrative approach);
- therapy as a relational experience;
- the role of the refugee context; and
- the impact of therapeutic work on the therapist.

These studies suggest that as the complexity of the work increases, attention to relationship and reflective clinical decision making become more important than program content. In the empirical rigour required to maximise certainty, much of the potential for effectiveness is minimised and marginalised.

There is a more pronounced dilemma of special relevance to the present study. “Expectancy effects” (including the placebo effect) and “extra-therapeutic factors” (including spontaneous remission, fortuitous events, and social support) have been assessed as accounting for 15 % and 40 % of outcome variance respectively (Lambert & Barley, 2001). This shows that positive client expectations are at least as important to the outcome as the most powerful specific features of any therapy system; and the greatest impact on outcomes comes from features of the client’s experience which are not routinely included in therapeutic systems at all.

The normative priorities in psychological research have narrowed the range of investigation to focus most sharply on those features which are nominally within the control of the therapist, whilst labelling as “extraneous” those which are most influential. Furthermore, as noted in the literature on cultural competence (e.g. Gone, 2015), the requirement to control extraneous variables has tended to exclude studies...
oriented toward cultural diversity, as well as limiting the influence of therapeutic systems from non-western contexts.

Seeking ways to build expectancy and social support within therapeutic models, and to further investigate reasons for spontaneous remission, would seem fruitful areas for development, although evidence is contradictory. Roehrle and Strouse (2008) found only a low effect for the influence of social support in therapy outcomes. In contrast, social support has consistently predicted better outcomes for culturally diverse survivors of torture and war trauma (Johnson & Thompson, 2008) including Sudanese (Schweitzer, Melville, Steel, & Lacherez, 2006). It is likely that this variability is related to the degree of social support that was available prior to the intervention, with war and torture survivors frequently socially isolated.\(^\text{12}\)

A study which used structured interviews with Sudanese refugees in Queensland, Australia, investigated difficulties and coping strategies identified at different stages of the refugee experience (Khawaja, White, Schweitzer, & Greenslade, 2008). These authors identified four main coping strategies, which will be seen to fit closely with the outcomes of the present study.

They were:
- religion;
- social support;
- cognitive reframing by highlighting the person’s strength and endurance, and by normalising the situation; and
- maintaining hope.

Factors considered as “extra-therapeutic” in western empirical research thereby have the status of explicit interventions for this population, showing how the scientific gaze has been averted from areas of importance in the present study. Additionally, the present study found that spirit influence has therapeutic importance for African populations which is not necessarily incorporated in the term “religion”.

One mixed-methods study was located which specifically sought to map the interventions which were associated with positive outcomes for children in South Sudan through a multiple case study design (Jordans, Komproe, Tol, Nsereko, & de Jong, 2013). The three features associated with successful outcomes appeared to be as follows. Firstly, the appropriateness of the choice of intervention by the counsellor to the client’s situation was identified as important; with graduated exposure, challenging negative thoughts, and problem formulation and solution being prominent. Secondly, the level of active engagement with appropriate recommendations between sessions was influential (for example activity scheduling, and mobilisation of social support). The third skill identified was instilling trust and hope.

Within the social work field, the active involvement of clients is more routinely taken into account than in psychology, both in terminology and practice. For example

\(^{12}\) The findings of the present study suggest that the importance of connection to community may partly explain the benefit found for Sudanese refugees.
rather than conceptualising “social support” as a feature of the therapeutic landscape that may provide benefit, the idea of clients being partners in their own recovery and being empowered to access support is emphasised (Tilsen & Nyland, 2008).

In summary, the literature on the empirical investigation of therapy was found to contain very little material that was directly relevant to the nature of the questions posed for this study. Limited support was found for the effectiveness of western-derived models of therapy such as CBT and NET in assisting displaced populations from Africa. Practice wisdom pointed toward group processes as being likely to be effective, and alternative approaches such as music, gardening and movement were recommended for further investigation. A brief analysis of the main themes of Evidence Based Psychological Practice showed that rigorous scientific investigation of therapy has tended to divert research attention from those areas which might be expected to contribute the most to working with African populations: building hope and expectancy, long-term engagement, social support, spirit influence, and drawing on non-western systems.

**Interdisciplinary Literature on Suffering**

The framing of questions and the selection of methods in this study sought to bring to the forefront as primary data, the descriptions of African male refugee experience. The range of influences on this experience demanded a breadth of interdisciplinary literature sources. This section considers the complexity of trauma, cultural competence, forced migration, and ethno-psychology.

**The Complexity of Trauma**

Given that the context of the study was a trauma service, assumptions about the meaning of “trauma” need to be acknowledged. The dominance of the Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) construct in shaping clinical trauma assessment demands specific attention.

There is considerable complexity attached to the meaning of “trauma” in supporting and researching the responses to adversity by the refugee population. As Kirmayer (1996) explained:

*The effort in the PTSD literature to isolate a simple cause-and-effect relation between trauma events and specific symptoms ignores the social and cultural embedding of distress that ensures that trauma, loss, and restitution are inextricably intertwined* (p. 150).

The diagnostic category of PTSD was based on clinical observations of US veterans returning from the Vietnam war in the 1970s (American Psychiatric Association, 1980). The variability of observed traumatic responses in the clinical population has subsequently contributed to the development of the term “complex trauma”, building on a distinction between “Type I” and “Type II” trauma in children described by Terr (1991). Terr observed that the effects of repeated or prolonged abuses could include “massive denial, repression, dissociation, self-anaesthesia, self-hypnosis, identification with the aggressor, and aggression turned against the self” (p. 16).
The diagnostic criteria for PTSD in the DSM-V (American Psychiatric Association, 2013) now covers four categories: intrusion symptoms, avoidance symptoms, negative alterations in cognitions and mood, and alterations in arousal and reactivity; with the addition of a subtype which includes dissociative symptoms. Outside the DSM framework, “complex trauma” has become a commonplace working definition for traumatic responses to multiple or prolonged stressors which include more extreme experiences, such as the overwhelming of a person’s “identity, relationships, and overall security” (Courtois & Ford, 2012, p. 21).

Young (1995) analysed PTSD as a construct which emerged from a specific North American context. That is, there was an attempt to generate reliable and valid classifications of psychiatric disorders (The DSM III), just as Vietnam veterans were returning home. Young argued that the transformation of veterans’ distress into a psychiatric disorder, which then founded an industry of traumatic studies, was a culturally specific response to human suffering. Importantly for the present study, given the alternative constructions of causality and time within African systems of meaning, the PTSD diagnosis has embedded within it a “temporal-causal relation” whereby (Young, 1995, p. 7):

*it permits the past (memory) to relive itself in the present, in the form of intrusive images and thoughts and in the patient’s compulsion to replay old events...without it, PTSD’s symptoms are indistinguishable from syndromes that belong to various other classifications.*

Young also examined how institutional interests and funding criteria shaped the content of scientific investigation of PTSD. This supported the decision to allow alternative constructions of suffering to emerge from the telling of African experiences in the present study.

Important developments in neuroscience have offered some clarity in understanding the neurological aspects of trauma responses, particularly the role of the amygdala, hippocampus, pre-frontal cortex, and the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) system in the establishment and perpetuation of heightened arousal and associated cognitive effects, such as re-experiencing symptoms and memory problems (Kolassa & Elbert, 2007). The possibilities associated with neuro-plastic change have been widely popularised (e.g. Doidge, 2007) whereby the brain’s remarkable capacity to “re-wire itself” has informed ways of working with a number of neurological problems, including complex trauma.

The expression of scientific endeavour which led to psychiatric classifications, particularly that of PTSD, contrasts markedly with the neurological understanding developed from specific, objectively measurable human stress responses. Indeed the publication of the DSM-V (American Psychiatric Association, 2013) was accompanied by a shift at the health research policy level because the diagnostic categorisations were not considered to be sufficiently supported by scientific evidence. The American National Institute of Mental Health announced that DSM categories would not be used as a basis of ongoing mental health research priorities: rather, the awarding of research grants would be based on a new framework comprised of “Research Domain Criteria” emphasising biological and genetic factors.
with the ultimate objective of developing an entirely new diagnostic system (Insel, 2013).

Contemporaneously with this study, trauma psychology has entered a new phase where established diagnostic systems are challenged by biological evidence, and may even be supplanted. The diagnostic category of psychological trauma is therefore likely to undergo further transformation within the western contexts from which it has been derived. In the next section, the scope for assessing “trauma” across cultures is examined, emphasising research findings which have emerged from non-western communities.

**Trauma and Post-Trauma Measures across Cultures**

This section reviews the clinical use of symptom-based post-trauma inventories for refugees whose adjustments are cumulative, ongoing, and likely informed by differential political and cultural history. For instance, the intercultural reliability of The Harvard Trauma Questionnaire (HTQ) (Mollica et al., 1992), has relied on its original pooled sample of South-East Asian patients in a North American trauma clinic. The countries of origin were Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam, and the lack of political and geographic distinction may have compromised the response set, given the varied cultural, political and genocidal histories of those countries. However, studies using the HTQ and related measures have consistently revealed a “dose-response relationship” between the number of exposures to incidents of trauma and the severity of PTSD symptoms across a range of cultural groups (Johnson & Thompson, 2008), although “both the determinants and prevalence of PTSD vary with context” (de Jong et al., 2001, p. 561).

Three quantitative studies suggested that this relationship applied for African populations: a French language version of the HTQ normed on African refugees in western countries (de Fouchier et al., 2012); a study comparing Sudanese and Ugandan nationals residing in Uganda (Karunakara et al., 2004); and a national survey in South Africa (Hirschowitz & Orkin, 1997). However, there was no attempt in these studies to investigate localised understandings of the experiences and symptoms characterised as trauma and PTSD.

Challenging the assumption that the PTSD construct can be reliably applied to different cultural groups, Renner, Salem, and Ottomeyer (2007) reported an Austrian mixed-methods study with refugees from Chechnya, Afghanistan, and West Africa. They found differences between the groups in the PTSD items they endorsed as part of the quantitative component, and in participant descriptions of the trauma effects, meanings and responses in qualitative discussions. These researchers called for more detailed culture-specific exposition of trauma effects.

Within West Africa, Fox (2003) reported a qualitative study which sought the responses of Mandinka traditional healers to vignettes of mental health disorders, including trauma. The results suggested that traumatic incidents as conceptualised in western systems were recognised as potentially producing mental health problems within the traditional healing system of classification. The system was graduated, with differently labelled problems coexisting and supplanting one another, organised according to increasing levels of social dysfunction.
A promising research area which may have culturally specific implications for African populations was suggested by Musisi (2004), in referring to the prevalence in Africa of “various forms of dissociative and somatoform disorders among massively traumatised individuals” (p. 80). Only one study was located which sought to formally describe such disorders. Ebigbo (1982) interviewed subjects about 65 previously documented somatic complaints in order to identify those which appeared to distinguish between a heterogeneous group of psychiatric patients and a University population, in Nigeria. The complaints ranged from those which might be expected to occur in any human population such as severe headaches, through reports of heat in various parts of the body; through to culture-specific terms such as “Sometimes my heart suddenly wants to fly out (obi-ilu-miri)” (p. 35). The study recommended further investigation to attempt to develop a culturally specific nosology based partly on discriminating somatic complaints, because they were likely to be more readily accepted by patients. However, with the exception of the scale reported earlier (Peltzer, 1989), no further studies have been published.

Indirect evidence of a tendency for Sudanese refugees to express distress through bodily symptoms was found in a descriptive survey of 304 unaccompanied refugee minors in the United States (Geltman, Grant-Knight, Ellis, & Landgraf, 2008). These authors found that participants presented to health services for unexplainable physical complaints (rather than presenting to mental health services); and that this was proportionately more the case for those participants who also satisfied the criteria for PTSD.

A meta-analysis raised questions about the prevalence of somatic expressions for trauma across a range of cultures (Hinton & Lewis-Fernandez, 2011). Other features which were found to vary were: avoidance; the relationship between some symptoms and culture-specific emotional norms; and the influence of spirit phenomena and meaning systems.

One mixed-methods study (Miller, Fernando, & Berger, 2009) reported the development and application of the Sri Lankan Children’s Daily Stressor Scale (CDSS), which measured domestic sources of stress. It was used to investigate the traumatic effects of civil war and the 2009 tsunami. PTSD symptoms were strongly correlated with exposure to the tsunami and war, which would appear to support the validity of the PTSD construct. However, regression analysis showed that this effect was not direct: rather, the identified traumatic events had impact on daily lives as measured by the CDSS. This shows how evidence supporting the PTSD diagnosis can mask more salient factors related to problematic personal experience, especially for communities which faced daily struggle. A similar degree of complexity could be expected to apply to the populations in the African studies cited above, as well as refugee populations in western countries such as Australia (Ingleby, 2005).

In a 6-year longitudinal study, Silove et al. (2014) investigated trauma and mental health measures in Timor-Leste, a population which had endured war and natural disaster and continued to experience chronic poverty and hardship. The study

---

13 Peltzer did not reference Ebigbo, and may not have been aware of that study. The scales were normed from different populations, which suggests that terms such as “my heart wants to fly out” and “heat in the head” which appeared in both scales, may have broad generalizability for African populations, providing scope for further detailed analysis of these symptoms.
included a natural experiment when armed conflict occurred during the study period, allowing comparison of pre- and post-measures with a previously affected population. Among a complex set of findings, they showed that:

...poverty was associated with severe distress including symptoms of depression, whereas cumulative human rights trauma and ongoing family and community tensions were linked to post-traumatic stress disorder (p. 298).

There was also a link between a preoccupation with injustice and a high risk of post-traumatic stress disorder, suggesting that PTSD is related to perceptions of injustice.

Similarly, Basoglu et al. (1997) reported less PTSD symptoms for torture survivors who were politically active, compared with those who were not. This may be evidence for the benefit of psychological preparedness for trauma, through the personal meaning of a potentially traumatizing event. Punamaki (2000) found that for women living under the conditions of war in Palestine, having an ideological commitment to overcoming the conflict appeared to be protective against trauma symptoms. By focussing on the personal experience of participants, the present study offers the scope for inclusion of such meaning systems in evaluating the impact of events in their lives.

The absence of references to post-trauma symptoms was a feature of an anthropological investigation with Nuer (a community located primarily in South Sudan) refugees in Minnesota, USA Holtzman (2000). The study referenced the foundational fieldwork in Nuer communities by Evans-Pritchard (1951). Among the rich analytic findings offered by Holtzman (2000) was the centrality of church life as the only structure which offered recognisable continuity between pre- and post-migration life, (albeit contextualised within the historicity of Nuer “conversion” to Christianity as a reaction to Islamic oppression in the 1960’s). In a finding that was consistent with the present study, participants were focussed on the transition to their new context, rather than the potential impact of their personal histories.

Working with a Cambodian population in Australia, Eisenbruch (1991) proposed the term “Cultural bereavement” as a diagnosis to be considered for populations who, in having been geographically displaced, were also disconnected from cultural norms and ritual. This was especially relevant for protective or restorative measures against spirit influence, and the bolstering of personal mastery by participation in ceremony. In one example, “PTSD” was resolved after a traditional healer intervened in a feared spirit attack.

Also founded on work with the Australian Cambodian community, Huot (2001) was the first to describe a culture-specific trauma syndrome labelled “Baksbat” (translated as “Broken Courage”). Chimm (2012), a psychiatrist working in torture recovery within Cambodia, developed a new inventory for trauma based on Baksbat. One subscale of this inventory, labelled Psychological Distress, closely matched western constructs of PTSD. Other subscales were Baksbat, which reflected a loss of ability to face or confront others; and Erosion of Self, which suggested a generalised withdrawal from social engagement. These subscales may have intuitive appeal for clinicians, and the study shows that although western-derived measures may have
relevance across populations, they also may occlude a fuller appreciation of traumatic experience.

Shoeb, Weinstein, and Mollica (2007) conducted ethnographic interviews of Iraqi refugees in the United States, and key informant discussions with psychiatrists in Baghdad, to adapt the HTQ for work with the Iraqi refugee population. The final version reflected a range of geographically, historically, and culturally specific features such as the different techniques of torture used in Iraq in two different time periods, the influence of the Muslim faith in interpreting torture events, and expressions of spirit-, religious- and culture-based ideas of mental health preferred by respondents.

In an approach which brought indigenous meaning systems to the fore, LeVine (2010) reported a qualitative ethnographic field study investigating Cambodian men and women’s recalled experiences of marriage and birth under the Khmer Rouge regime (often standing on the places where incidents occurred, in Cambodia). Instead of utilising trauma indices, respondents were enabled to recall their exposure to the terror of the regime through the prism of important aspects of their personal lives. This approach exposed a range of culture-specific influences on responses to the genocide, which could be both complementary and contradictory. For example, Buddhism offered ways to project the felt sense of injustice into a karmic realm, and this sometimes co-existed with perceptions of tampering by spirits and ancestors, which generated new fears during periods of transformative change for both victims and perpetrators of atrocity.

In a finding that has specific relevance to the present study, LeVine described a range of other spirit influences which offered protection or explanation or an added sense of threat. Foremost was a pervasive unease which had persisted through the decades since the genocide, that Angkar (the official name given to the regime “organisation”) had spirit sources: this carried the implication that the genocide may therefore recur at any time. The animist context, inclusive of such spirit sources of horror, promoted a level of culturally specific unease which would have eluded comprehension if PTSD constructs had been imposed on respondents’ experiences.

Thus, spirit-based anxiety may be a confounding factor in assessing trauma in non-western contexts, and this may have relevance for refugees residing in host countries. The study also mapped the changes in traumatic content of stories across time and context, which showed that the retelling process was shaped in subtle and complex ways. This appeared to reflect cultural norms of emotional and cognitive responses to trauma, such as the reportedly normative capacity to control thinking because of the risk of the thoughts being detected. Even without consideration of culturally specific influences, if trauma stories can be expected to change over time, the test-retest reliability of assessment is likely to be compromised, and the authenticity of refugee stories can be in question, having implications for resettlement (Herlihy, Scragg, & Turner, 2002). The richness of such findings was influential in choosing to follow a qualitative paradigm for the present study.

---

14 Many respondents perceived spirit forces amid the confusion in relation to Angkar, exacerbated by the absence of a headquarters.
Taken together, these studies offer a dialogue that distinguishes between different psychological health constructs within the complex context of post-war communities enduring a range of ongoing stressors. They also point to challenges and possibilities for qualitative methods in mapping psycho-cultural and spirit phenomena that contribute to wellness and un-wellness.

**Suffering and Trauma in the Context of Forced Migration Studies**

The orientation of refugee service delivery toward explicit torture or other traumatic events had the effect of sidelining interview methods which might elicit other systemic, personalised or culturally normative meanings associated with suffering. In this section, literature from forced migration studies will show how the emphasis on “trauma recovery” of refugees has restricted the understanding of the experience of the African refugee population.

For example, Kienzler (2008) highlighted the contributions that anthropology had made to the understanding of war trauma, including the documentation of relevant local healing systems. Citing Kleinman (1995), she drew attention to the fact that the term “social suffering” as applied to torture and trauma survivors was extensively investigated and analysed in the social sciences, but was absent from the discourse of medical science (Kienzler, 2008; p. 225):

*Suffering is, thus, considered a social experience in that it is first, an interpersonal engagement with pain and hardship in social relationships; second, a societal construction that serves as a cultural model and moral guide of and for experience; and third, a professional discourse that organises forms of suffering as bureaucratic categories and objects of technical intervention.*

The assumption that historical events were a dominant influence in current suffering through a complex derivative of “PTSD” became paired with the observation that the challenges of settlement also provoked intense distress for clients, in the structuring of designated services across Australia (PASSTT\(^{15}\)). Thus “trauma recovery” attained the status of a bureaucratic category which organised people’s experiences of suffering, among Phoenix Centre clients.

Silove (2005) identified a third strand of study within the literature on the mental health needs of refugees: the relationship between forced migration and specific acute mental health issues such as serious mental illnesses. He proposed a service model based on the five themes of Security/safety, Attachment, Justice, Role/Identity, and Existential/meaning-making.

This approach retained an outcome-oriented treatment focus, constructing the experience of suffering as something to be overcome as an individualised psychological project. Although research-based, that research was itself shaped by the assumptions inherent in the western mental health framework: as described earlier in the chapter, such assumptions can unhelpfully divert attention from important aspects of lived experience. Furthermore, the interpretation associated with “meaning” in mental health recovery obscured consideration of cultural norms which

---

\(^{15}\) Program of Australian Services for Survivors of Torture and Trauma
might suggest alternative pathways. Notably, spirit and ancestral influences were overlooked in favour of religious faith as foundational in systems of meaning.

The inclusion of the theme of *Justice*, which expanded the individual recovery project beyond the medicalised trauma model, was supported by Worthington and Aten (2010). They reviewed the role of societal and individual forgiveness and reconciliation in the trauma recovery process, emphasising the need to consider all levels of injustice and interpersonal transgression in assisting individuals and communities in adjusting to new relationships (although once again omitting spirit justice issues). The Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa became a model internationally as a society level process, and the proliferation of this model has been contrasted with the more conventional International Criminal Court judicial processes to evaluate their relative benefits and weaknesses in providing scope for individual and community recovery (Jappah & Smith, 2013). These authors noted that any political interventions may be subject to the same forms of abuses that they are instituted to address. The risk of presuming the universality of concepts such as forgiveness and institutionalised justice also requires further cultural analysis, especially for populations whose meaning systems emphasise the animist domain, wherein justice may be rendered by non-human agents.

**Displacement and Re-Attachment**

The theme of *Attachment* can also assist in reaching beyond confined ideas of trauma recovery, especially when considering attachments to place, ritual, and ancestral spirit. Writing about the suffering associated with displacement, Stein (1986) highlighted a number of features that refugee populations appeared to share, which revolved around relationship to place, with the theme of displacement and re-attachment emerging over that of trauma and the PTSD construct.

Stein described the process as follows. Forced migrants were distinguished from voluntary migrants by the fact that the move was not a considered choice but an attempt at survival. This varied with the timing of departure (some anticipate disaster, others react to it), individual capability, and other factors. The consequences included the loss of access to loved ones, rituals and daily routines (including food), the familiar natural world, and the place one has chosen to live.

Evidence for this distinction was provided in a study exploring the different categories of Sri Lankan migrants to Australia. Silove, Steel, McGorry, and Mohan (1998) found that voluntary migrants demonstrated less trauma and other mental health symptoms than either asylum seekers or refugees. Asylum seekers also suffered from more post-migration stress than either of the other groups.

Having escaped, refugees typically spent time in a refugee camp - or, in the contemporary Australian context, a detention centre (Fazel & Silove, 2006) - ending with one of four basic solutions. These were: lingering in the camps (or in detention), returning to the country of origin when it was perceived to be safe, acceptance in the country of asylum, or resettlement in a third country. This latter solution was the one typically leading to settlement in Tasmania, and generally required candidates to meet stringent criteria, including health checks, a good understanding of the system, and in many cases a strong capacity for optimism and persistence. Those family members who initiated the process tended to be highly functional and adaptive, whereas other
family members might be more representative of the broader refugee population; there were also those accepted in particular categories such as women at risk (DIMIA, 2005). The African cohort shared this history of layered displacement and reattachment experiences with previous refugee cohorts, along with the cyclical process of settlement.

Williams and Berry (1991) outlined a primary health approach to dealing with mental health issues for refugees, based on a model of acculturative stress – which was experienced alongside the re-attachment processes in settlement. They proposed that a range of variables needed to be considered in formulating and evaluating approaches, and that to be most effective these should be community based. A specific recommendation was the value to practitioners of formal and informal contact with the target communities. This helped shape the decision to undertake research with the African communities, and later to include an ethnographic component to the present study.

**Politics of empowerment in service provision**

Summerfield (1997) warned that psychologising traumatic experience narrowed the focus of concern on the individual, seen as impaired through traumatic experience and requiring treatment. He pointed out that war and human atrocity are also attacks on the social order, and that a focus on individual recovery distracts attention from this: the impetus to rebuild their social world can have important restorative power for individuals and groups. Testimonials, creative endeavours, implementation of justice-seeking processes, and the creation of textured histories to inform future decision making, may all contribute to wellness.

Focussing on family and community effects of the extended civil war in Sri Lanka, Somasundaram (2007) detailed a range of social disruptions and transformations: a trend toward single parent families, mistrust within families, changes in significant relationships and child rearing practises, collective antisocial behaviour by adolescents, and diminished community action and leadership for fear of persecution. A 20-stage process of community-based psychosocial work was implemented, with a referral system for severe psychological distress.

The struggle between the political purposes of western countries on the one hand, and the human needs of displaced persons (mostly from non-western countries) on the other, has shaped the field of study (Chimni, 2009). Through their ambiguous legal identity, the refugee or stateless migrant is conceptualised as a locus for the exercise of power in support of the hegemonic interests of the nation-state system. The psychological, political and social experience of the person is then an artefact of a power struggle whose precise form varies with historical and current circumstances. Through this power dynamic, the humanitarian aid work of NGOs becomes saturated with the political demands of the funding nations, and a progressive anthropology becomes a potential dissenting voice, providing a “voice” for refugees. However, through its own dependence on western interests, it may inadvertently set up another layer of disempowerment when political expediency dictates.

A contemporary example in Australia is the mental health impact of detention for asylum seekers (Fazel & Silove, 2006). Murray et al. (2008) noted that there was no established ethical framework to guide decision making in this potentially conflicted
role, and this theme was evident in the work in the Phoenix Centre and within the research process. The present study sought to account for this endemic risk of multilayered marginalisation and vulnerability through specific methodological choices.

**Institutionalised Racism**

Minas (1990) described how Australian mental health services were established in the context of a society which was deliberately shaped to be mono-cultural and monolingual. The increase in cultural diversity through the post-1970 migration program (by 1990 in some parts of Australia, over 30% of the population were born overseas) therefore appeared to the mental health system as a complicating feature, making service delivery more challenging. Generally, approaches to cultural difference in mental health in western countries are inextricably bound up with the racist assumptions upon which the societies were founded. In Chapter One it was argued that these issues were more intensified in the Tasmanian context, than on the Australian mainland.

This institutionalised racism, seen as characteristic of multi-ethnic societies such as UK, USA and Australia, was elaborated upon by Fernando (1995b), detailing its inherence within psychological and psychiatric models of health, as well as within mental health service structures. Pointing to the historical construction of western mental health systems as systems of control rather than healing, Sassoon and Lindow (1995) presented research suggesting that black people in the UK continued to suffer marginalisation within these systems. They argued that western mental health models were structured to remove or to disempower those perceived as too different, and this was disproportionately oppressive to ethnic minorities.

The continued emphasis away from research which examined culturally relevant features of displacement, trauma and settlement may also be an expression of this racism. Riggs (2004) analysed the distorting effect of the strategic political rubric of a “multicultural” society, as it perpetuated “White” psychology at the same time as making a claim to diversity. This theme will be revisited later in this chapter. Even within the cross-cultural literature, the great majority of research has been based on extant western theory rather than seeking to comprehend non-western psychological experience through qualitative methods (Niblo & Jackson, 2004).

Fernando (1995b) offered recommendations for overcoming such endemic racism: a move to a more pragmatic community based model of mental health care, where the notion of diagnosis and treatment of mental health conditions (seen as inherently racist) was largely supplanted by a community-based, problem-solving approach which incorporated explicit anti-racist processes and non-western systems of understanding wellbeing. Necessarily this would require engagement with non-western practitioners and communities. It will be seen that the present study followed this general process and reached corresponding conclusions.

Qualitative work with refugees from Africa and the former Yugoslavia in Western Australia (Colic-Peisker & Tilbury, 2003) focussed on the interaction between settlement services and refugee settlement styles. Noting the emphasis in the Australian settlement system on the traumatic effects of pre-migration trauma, these authors argued that such medicalisation of trauma may have contributed to a passive,
“victim” style of settlement, and that refugee settlement priorities of affordable, secure housing and employment might provide more “therapeutic” value than putatively therapeutic interventions.

A subsequent study (Torezani, Colic-Peisker, & Fozdar, 2008) showed that the Job Network employment programs were relatively ineffectual for assisting refugees in finding employment, and that instead participants made use of these services to help overcome the social marginalisation which was structurally instituted in Australian society.

Marlowe (2010) reported a qualitative study with Sudanese refugees in Australia, which employed the narrative therapy technique of “double listening” whereby a clinician listens both to the story of traumatic experience and to the story of the person’s responses to trauma (White, 2004). The “traumatised refugee” label was perceived as undermining of their prospects (Marlowe, 2010, p.187):

actually this assumption has become one of the factors that has led to some of us not getting work because employers think: “Why should I employ people who are traumatized?” (Participant 13).

A Canadian study with Sudanese refugees and migrants (Simich, Hamilton, & Baya, 2006) found that a high level of economic hardship was associated with low psychological functioning, after controlling for demographic variables and for a history of displacement within Sudan prior to migration. Interview responses suggested that a strong mediating factor between the economic hardship and psychological distress was the limited capacity of respondents to support family members back in Sudan.

These sociological studies reveal mismatches between the purposes and priorities of settlement services, and their refugee recipients. Where the (culturally informed) needs of refugees are misunderstood, services are rendered ineffectual and may contribute to an increasingly medicalised health burden; refugees will compensate by adapting the services to their real needs. The dominance within psychological service delivery of empirically supported systems, and the reliance on the PTSD diagnostic category, may work against the recovery process. To the extent that people are constructed and treated as “patients” requiring “treatment”, their capacity as social agents responding to social events, their need for restorative justice, their opportunities for reattachment processes, and their access to culturally supportive practices, may be undermined.

In summary, the apparent discordances observed between Phoenix Centre services and the needs of African clients which prompted the present study, could be expected to be multi-determined in ways which could not easily be accounted for. The layering of stressful and traumatising experiences including displacement, settlement, negative and discriminatory experiences with the services intended to support them, the distal effects of global politics, and the likelihood of material and non-material influences which might be place-, time-, or culture specific, could all be potentially at play. The contested validity of the PTSD construct, the western-centric and individualised understanding of trauma, the ambiguities revealed in studies on the effectiveness of
psychotherapy, along with the paucity of research on African populations, all supported the use of qualitative research methods.

**Literature Pertaining to an “African Psychology”**

The literature review to this point has analysed the scope and limitations of western ideas of trauma, culture, displacement and psychology, when applied to African refugee population in Tasmania. This section discusses material which offers insights into African-centric responses to these issues.

**African Models of Therapy for the Refugee Experience**

A number of authors offered models for service delivery which were ostensibly based on African systems, but which on closer examination could be seen to be derivatives of western models. Peltzer (1999) outlined a model for working with African trauma survivors based on clinical experience across ten years and three clinical settings: two in Africa and one in Europe. The model consisted of seven stages, however these were for the most part drawn from conventional western models (e.g. Egan, 1998) incorporating recognised trauma therapy techniques, rather than having been derived from the ethno-cultural material of African clients.

Some examples of culturally normative counselling techniques were noted, but not expanded upon in terms of their cultural relevance or systemic meaning. For example, Stage 6 “Principle of education and advice” included the observation that “Sudanese counsellors often conclude with what they call ‘the counselling words’” (Peltzer, 1999, p. 347), with examples of closing pieces of culturally informed advice, but there was no further exploration of this practice. This appears to have been a missed opportunity to highlight the culturally normative educative aspect to African counselling which emerged in the present study. The reference to ritualistic approaches referred to the use of symbolic therapeutic processes rather than the enactment of localised ritual, and the value of religious gathering was explained in terms of “social comparison” and the importance of Biblical readings rather than the shared benefit of togetherness and the felt immediacy of “God”.

Van Dyk and Nefale (2005) described “Ubuntu Therapy”: however this drew heavily on techniques and approaches readily recognisable from psychodynamic (particularly Jungian and Gestalt) models. These authors did endorse culturally normative ritual as part of the process, and sought to contextualise the work within the collectivist ethic known as ubuntu in South Africa; however much of the case study detail could equally have been situated within the conventional western therapeutic framework.

The textbook cited at the beginning of this review, *Counselling people of African Ancestry* (Mpofu, 2011), in its chapter on trauma (Edwards & Blokland, 2011) recommended a conventional western trauma framework and only incorporated traditional African systems of understanding as potential barriers to preferred outcomes:

...although some African clients may attribute their symptoms to being bewitched... this specific belief can usually be addressed through psycho-education (p. 235).
The chapter on African refugee experience (Abrokwaa, Ngoma, Shizha, & Mpofu, 2011) was written for the generalist practitioner rather than specialist refugee clinician, providing a comprehensive overview of the phenomenon of forced migration within the African context. It included little in the way of detailed, culturally informed therapeutic recommendations.

One article offered culturally derived strategies for working with Black South African clients who had experienced trauma (Eagle, 2005). This described a case study of a woman who, having survived a gang-rape in which her friend was murdered, was then subject to another rape attempt. The client interpreted the second rape attempt as spirit-related, as the family had instituted a curse.

The article outlined how those beliefs which appeared to be hampering recovery could be examined and reinterpreted. This enabled a culturally sound process to be initiated, in that the client re-engaged with her late friend’s family, and any misgivings or sense of blame were neutralised through a shared ritual at the burial site. Although displaying sensitivity to African cultural beliefs, the article maintained an explicitly western-centric position, restricting itself to strategies which might assist in cases where cultural beliefs presented barriers rather than potential benefits.

Holdstock (2000), drawing on a lifetime’s involvement in psychological research and practise in Africa, attempted a systematic critique of the culture-bound and historically determined assumptions attached to modern psychology. Positioning socially-oriented selfhood as normative for the majority of the world’s population, he suggested that “a person is best conceptualised as a vital force in participation with other vital forces” (p. 105). Despite a strongly written critique of western psychology which opened scope for African ideas, Holdstock uncritically endorsed romanticism and psychodynamic notions of archetypes and holism as the primary lens for an alternative view, and lapsed into individualised western concepts such as “values” when contrasting African and western concepts of self. However, allowing for the regrettable retention of explicit western frameworks for re-interpreting African psychology, the text provided numerous points of reference for the present study16.

The “African World View”

This section reviews writing (predominantly by African-identifying authors) which sought to elaborate on the African world view, in which the word “world” is inclusive of material as well as non-material features.

Lambo (1963) explicitly connected the world view of “the African” with existential ideas, offering a useful entry point for this researcher. He made penetrating and respectful speculations about the psychological advantages that African systems of belief and healing may have over western science and medicine. For example, he concluded that African societies purposefully pre-empt and address the questions which, in the west, have provoked the concept of existential angst:

16 Holdstock also held indirect historical importance to this study: he was identified as the sole source of support during the apartheid era, for the pioneering research work with Sangoma (traditional healers) by one of this study’s key informants.
The richness of his culture provides him with adequate answers thereby averting a breakdown of normal psychological processes (p. 9).

Lambo (1976) described the African worldview as one which transcended boundaries between nations and communities, and which had endured through migration, displacement, oppression and slavery. Importantly, he challenged the stereotypical interpretation of connection with the natural world as “mystical”, noting that:

The African...regards nature as an important part of society. This implies a social and not a mystical association (p. 114).

Included in the human experience are the spirits of all things, as well as spirits which inhabit other realms:

...there are no sharp distinctions between the animate and inanimate, the material and mental, the natural and supernatural. It is a world of transmutations, of inherence, affinity and inner experiencing, in which all things maintain a dynamic correspondence with one another, be they visible or invisible. In this mode of thinking man somehow mirrors and contains the universe. Subject and object are not opposed but absorbed in a world consciousness that transcends both (p. 114).

Crucially, this points to a differing conception of consciousness as something which is not contained within the human mind.

Ritual observances were identified as important in maintaining a harmonious correspondence between individuals, communities, natural and supernatural worlds, including ancestral influences. According to Nqweni (1999), the African worldview considers the following:

The system within which the person lives...has grown out of shared cultural and historical experiences of people of African descent, which are:

1. the centrality of community and cooperative living;
2. acknowledgement and respect for African traditions and cultures;
3. a high level of spirituality and ethical concern;
4. harmonious coexistence with nature;
5. the emphasis on education and learning to liberate oneself, to challenge social inequality, and to humanise the world;
6. and lastly, the deep respect of one’s ancestors.

In the Afro-centric worldview all elements of the universe, such as people, animals and inanimate objects, are viewed as interconnected (p. 187).

Ebigbo (1995) echoed and amplified this description:

The African...is group-minded and addresses the group with his mind and body. Example of speaking with his body is somatisation. He believes in his world being filled with spirits, every concretely existing object or force has a spirit which can become active. He also has a spirit and speaks to the group through the spirit for example in “Ogba Nje” or spirit possession. Very important is the spirit of the ancestors. Plants and animals are also media through which the spirit of man or the
spirit of the gods or ancestors could act in the concrete world. Every human being has a personal god who is part of the one Almighty God from whom all things come and to whom all things return. There is therefore a holistic view of health. Health or illness cannot be conceived of except in the context of inter-human and human-spirit relationship (p. 7).

Wooding (1981) studied the community in which he grew up, a former slave colony in Dutch Guinea which, due to geographical isolation, had had limited social and cultural exchange. He reported close correspondence between the traditions of the colony, the West African communities from which the slaves were taken, and other slave destinations in the Caribbean. He described their conceptual cosmological framework as follows (Wooding, 1995, p. 146):

The world and all things in it are dominated by a magico-religious force called srama or obeah that is conceived as omnipotent, omni-penetrable, and omni-animating. It is the essence of all supernatural beings and living things, all of which share in it to varying degrees.

Tangwa (2000) offered the term “eco-bio-communitarian”:

...implying that there are plastic walls between as well as interdependence among human beings, superhuman spirits, nonhuman animals, plants, and inanimate objects and forces...Since a human being can conceivably be transformed (with or without their knowledge or consent) into any of the other ontological entities, in this life or in the life after death, no human being can confidently claim to know that he or she is not the brother/sister of any other thing in existence. All this engenders an approach toward nature and all living things that is cautious, reverentially respectful, and almost ritualistic (p. 42).

A specialist in African bio-ethics, Tangwa noted that there had been considerable philosophical debate about the legitimacy of the idea of an African philosophical worldview, and its possible role in an ongoing project of diminishing African power globally (e.g. Hountondji, 1996). However, he argued that regardless of the terminology or the implications, the expressed experience of Africans included broad commonalities. The above description was based on his Nso’ ethnic origins in Cameroon, but he made the claim that, for the most part, all other African peoples in his experience shared this attitude.

Mkhize (2004a) provided an overview of a generalised African metaphysical system, with the recognition that it did not apply to the same extent across all African populations. Broadly speaking, it placed humans in a central position within an interconnected system of being. The system included all material objects, plants, animals and humans, as well as recently deceased human spirits, a community of integrated ancestors, and God.

This world view has widely been recognised as applying across Sub-Saharan Africa in particular (Mpofu, Peltzer, & Bojuwoye, 2011), although Crapanzo’s (1980) case study showed that many of the themes attached to the sub-Saharan African identity such as spirit and ancestor influence, are also evident in North Africa.
In recognition that this material tended to define African experience in contrast with western experience (for example, emphasising the community and spirit influences, while largely neglecting descriptions of the material domain and independent agency), Nwoye (2006) theorised the African self as having eight interrelated components. The structure provided for features of the African world view as referenced above, and asserted the pre-eminence of two components largely overlooked by western commentators, namely the “embodied self” and the “generative self”. This construction is considered in more detail in Chapter Six. There have been limited attempts to test such theories empirically: for example Mpofu (1994) found support for a communally oriented identity among Shona-identifying university students in Zimbabwe.

Influences in African healing systems

Central to the African experience which emerged from this study was the seeking and providing of traditional healing methods and spirit mediation. Within the African world view outlined above, any disorder, misfortune or inharmonious circumstance which is not easily remedied by natural means is likely to be believed to have been brought about by spirit influence, sometimes through the agency of a living or ancestral human (e.g. Ademuwagun, Ayoade, Harrison, & Warren, 1979; Fabrega, 1982; Lambo, 1963). A commonly reported negative effect of this, is the accusation of poisoning or intended harm by another person through an indirect means, typically a witchdoctor (e.g. Lambo, 1963; Mpofu et al., 2011). Such beliefs provided fertile ground for rumour, superstition, and serious distortions of fact (Crapanzano, 1980). Accordingly, a traditionally-oriented African who experienced suffering with no recognised cause would look to malign influences from the human community or the spirit world. This may include the search for explanation for perplexing effects of traumatic experience.

The development of counselling to assist in addressing the HIV/AIDS epidemic prompted attempted to account for traditional African beliefs (Seeley, Wagner, Mulemwa, Kenega-Kayondo, & Mulder, 1991). These authors reported that there was resistance to individuals being told their test results, based on fear of allegations of witchcraft, and the possibility of “acting out” by HIV-positive patients (which risked further transmission). The study illustrated the interplay between beliefs about the body, causes of disease, individual autonomy, leadership authority and responsibility, and the centrality of family in traditional African settings.

A number of studies described specific traditional healing systems and practices within African communities throughout the continent (e.g Crapanzano, 1980; Edgerton, 1979; Jahoda, 1979; Reid, 1982; Sodi, 1998; Vontress, 1999; Wooding, 1981). All involved a combination of spirit guidance and herbal remedies, with practitioners typically chosen within the family lineage, or through significations such as demonstrated skill, directive dreams or prolonged illnesses. A summary of such practises was outlined by Mpofu et al. (2011). Routine processes included explicit manipulation of hope and expectation; naming of the source of the problem; symbolic associations; dream interpretation; and cleansing.

The role of traditional healers in Uganda for both physical and non-physical ailments was systematically investigated by Tabuti, Dhillion, and Lye (2003). They conducted interviews with recognised healers and a representative sample of members of the
population across the Bulamogi county. The results largely conformed with the above summary, with findings including the recording of 97 physical illnesses and 26 magical, spiritual or ritual conditions (p. 121). Psychological conditions were categorised among physical conditions as “Nervous System and Mental Disorders”, and comprised epilepsy, madness, migraine, motion sickness, and vertigo. Non-physical conditions consisted of a range of charms, and protective rituals, for example to become popular, protect against evil, disease, and other harm, or to recover lost love. Notably, equivalent terms for trauma, anxiety or depression were absent.

The study contradicted the often cited (but under-researched) estimate of the World Health Organisation that 80% of health care needs in such under-served areas are met through traditional medicine (World Health Organisation, 2007). Whereas 65% of community members stated that they used both traditional and orthodox (western) medicine, when asked where they had last sought help, over 80% stated that they had sought western treatment, with effectiveness being foremost among a range of reasons.

A key development in the history of “African Psychology” was the inauguration of African psychotherapy in 1996 (Madu, 1998). A series of conferences was held to provide an opportunity to compare African indigenous healing and therapy with internationally recognised psychotherapeutic models. This literature was consistent with descriptions given by participants in the present study: for example, “African Grief Counselling” was described as follows (Nwoye, 1998, p. 67):

*By African Grief Therapy… is to be understood the patterned ways and rituals invented in traditional African communities for the successful healing of psychological wounds and pains of bereaved persons…. it uses the power of local wisdom and human/psychological resources composed of priests, elders, kinship bonding, honorary experts and instrumental support in effecting its interventions.*

African Grief Therapy was comprised of five stages (Nwoye, 1998, p. 72):

*Stage 1: Solidarity of protest*
*Stage 2: Declaration/redundancy enhancement promotion*
*Stage 3: Reframing/counter affect promotion*
*Stage 4: Healing/parting ritualization*
*Stage 5: Recovery/rehabilitation*

Such practices may involve large numbers of people and will include substantial practical support to ensure that the bereaved is relieved of onerous tasks or costs, at the same time providing solidarity in their grief, with the ritualised communal knowledge of spirit practices ensuring safe passage. After the initial acknowledgement of anguish, the bereaved is strategically offered new ways of conceptualising the tragedy, encouraged over time to regain a more constructive attitude to life and return to other responsibilities.

Pastoral counselling within the structure of organised religion has an enduring place in the African counselling field (Louw, 2011). The importance of instilling hope through communal worship was described by Nwoye (2002a), reporting on a participant-observation study in three communities in each of West Africa and East
Africa. This yielded an eight-stage process. Perhaps most challenging to western assumptions was the explanation for Stage 2: Promotion of Memory of Universality (Nwoye, 2002a, p. 66):

*Here the key effect intended is to historicise/challenge each member’s travail or distress and to demythologise the member’s usual tendency to believe in the uniqueness of their pain and wretchedness, a feeling that usually arises from the phenomenon of social distance and isolation among suffering people.*

In short, a person invites more suffering by asserting their individualised right to their pain, rather than acknowledging their shared experience: which includes ancestral knowledges in liminal space and time. Other stages were designed to promote and encourage hope: by recourse to religious passages, by testimonials, through song, dance, petitioning, and offering of the self to God. It is provocative to contrast this with the measured, scientifically informed approaches of western psychology. Remembering the demonstrated value of “expectancy effects” - quite apart from real spirit intervention - it would be intriguing to compare the psychological benefits of individualised western therapy with African hope-healing community practices. The invocation of religious power also figured in African approaches to marital therapy, as did the importance of gender roles (Nwoye, 2000) and elders (Nwoye, 2002b).

Larson, Milano & Lu (1998) showed how religious ideas had been considered to be antithetical to psychological health by many prominent therapists, and that this led to a lack of preparedness to consider their potential value in therapy. They argued that historically, this had further marginalised and pathologized non-white, non-western clients because their belief systems had been doubly discredited: firstly, through being different from the therapist’s own; and secondly through being labelled irrational. A corrective body of literature sought to identify robust evidence for the benefits derived from religious orientation (Levin & Koenig, 2005). A two-volume handbook (Pargament, 2013) summarised the field, with the second volume emphasising the cultural diversity of religious ideas: notably this included African-American spirituality, but omitted African.

Ebigbo et al. (1995) described Harmony Restoration Therapy, an Africa-centric therapeutic modality which was formulated to fit with the African world view. The principle tool of Harmony Restoration Therapy is a cosmogram drawn for the client which maps all the significant relationships in their life in accordance with their cultural background. This would include family members, friends, work relationships, animals, ancestors and other spirits, and God, as well as the physical environment such as their land and dwelling. Lines drawn with symbols indicate the degree of harmony in these relationships: therapy proceeds by strengthening and utilising harmonious relationships and by attempting to address the disharmony of other relationships. A disharmonious relationship with ancestors or spirits may require traditional healing techniques.

Aroyewun and Ariyo (2014) described Meseron Therapy as a cognitive approach based on traditional ideas from the Urhobo language group in Nigeria. Attributing power to the spoken word, and positing “that man is a striving creature with a potential to change” (p. 127), Meseron Therapy appears to rely on the therapist
motivating the client to render their thinking and associated behaviour more constructive through reference to the Meseron cultural norm.

Honwana (2006) conducted ethnographic work in Angola and Mozambique, exploring the community impact and responses to the involvement of child soldiers in the protracted conflict in those countries. She documented extensive use of spirit protection, cleansing, and reintegration rituals, led by traditional healers, which was reported by community members to be essential in the (now adult) child soldiers’ recoveries. The mwanza ritual in Angola (Honwana, 2006, p. 115), involved a three-day process of seclusion and medicinal care, followed by a ritual cleansing in a river. The patient had to face upstream, and was then washed by the healer, with the contaminating impact of the war washed away behind him. He then had to walk back to his hut without looking back, suggesting a complete break from the past. Ritual food was prepared for the malevolent spirits who may have wanted to reclaim him, and family members participated in providing and sharing food and drink. According to one patient (Honwana, 2006, 116):

*All young soldiers have to go through the mwanza treatment according to our tradition. In the mwanza he does not talk to anyone apart from the kimbanda who is treating him. The kimbanda prepares his food and talks to him about what happened during the war...This is our kind of therapy.*

The present study supported research cited in this section, with one emergent finding that a “break from the past” was implicit in African participants’ approaches to historical “trauma”. In this regard, might the empirically measured benefits of psychotherapeutic practices be attributed to the enactment of western cultural norms and rituals, rather than the effect of interventions? This very question has run through the methods that informed this thesis, in keeping with the recognition that any ideas or theories of psychology emerge from a specific cultural context (Gergen, Gulerce, Lock, & Misra, 1996).

**Sociological and Political Criticism**

In contemporary Africa, traditional practises have a pervasive but ambiguous influence. The “shattering forces of disintegration that characterise modernity” (Coleman, 1994, p. 21) stemming from the slave trade, colonisation and more recently nationalism, have diminished the power of traditional healing processes (Lofchie, 1982). Lambo (1960) coined the term “Malignant Anxiety” to describe a psychological condition implicated in an increase in the number of killings, disappearances, and other atrocities by members of secret societies who were attempting to appease the spirits for the negative effects of colonialism.

The overt political consequences of post-colonialism in Africa included the creation of tribal unions: political entities which drew on kinship and cultural identity in order to gain control over the new nation-states (Davidson, 1992). Slavery, which long pre-existed the western slave trade, is reported to be resurgent in Sudan under these influences (Jok, 2001). In all, the disruption of ritual and cultural norms, and the associated intrusion of western norms, generated complex confounds in the exploration of the benefits of African-derived practises.
Influences in “White” and “Black” psychology discourse

The analysis of the psychological effects of colonialism (Fanon, 1965, 1967) challenged western-centric conventions within psychiatry, psychology and philosophy in ways which have yet to be accounted for (Bulhan, 1985). Fanon argued that the erosion of selfhood for non-white, non-western populations was more profound than the effects of marginalisation. By presenting the western middle class male as the psychological norm, the practice of psychology is irretrievably distorted. It normalises an internalised sense of entitlement, self-referential thinking, and violation of others: quite apart from an individualised sense of self. For psychology to have any more than a thin pretension at universal applicability, the psychological norm should rather be defined in the terms of the global majority: those who have suffered centuries of oppression and colonisation by an explicitly expansionist and violent western culture.

Fanon argued further that the psychology of oppressed populations (such as in post-colonial Africa) was characterised by a split between an internalised sense of inferiority and an inherently self-defeating aspiration to the dominant western cultural identity. Applied to the American post-slavery population, this notion was invoked in reconceptualising chronic depression among African-Americans (Vontress et al., 2007). The psychology of “Nigrescence”, a process for the reclamation of an African-centric identity by African-Americans has been theorised and mapped in one constructive response to this perspective (Cross, 1995).

Fanon’s argument reflected the work of Simone De Beauvoir (1908-1986), according to which women were constructed and evaluated psychologically with reference to an exalted image of maleness (De Beauvoir, 1963). Historically, De Beauvoir and Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980) collaborated with Fanon (Bulhan, 1985) and Sartre wrote the preface to Fanon’s The Wretched of the Earth (Fanon, 1965).

Sue (1993) urged researchers and practitioners to take account of the impact of internalised white western culture on their engagement with marginalised populations. The field of Critical Psychology (Prilleltensky & Fox, 1997) sought to analyse how the practises of power such as processes of inclusion/exclusion perpetuated a psychology in support of western ideological and economic interests.

Mpofu (2002) argued that the dialogue between western and African psychology scholars was profoundly imbalanced toward the perpetuation of conventional western practises. He noted the small population of under-resourced psychologists in Africa, the overt marketing of western psychology, and a range of features associated with the contrast between individualised and socially-oriented assumptions of selfhood. He recommended a more interpretive, contextualised approach to the practise of psychology as being more likely to reflect the majority world experience, including African.

October 2009; South African Psychology Congress. I am increasingly disillusioned with the blindness of western psychology. Identifying Fanon’s writing had seemed a supreme achievement in detective work: here I discover that it is core curriculum material in undergraduate psychology courses in South Africa. Now a white South African psychologist discloses that she attended the
conference mainly as a show of solidarity with the black African organisers. She reports that many colleagues had so mistrusted the organisational capacity of blacks, that they did not attend. I remain pleased with my personal research effort, but at the same time increasingly aware of the deeply layered ignorance of the ultra-white psychological theory in which I feel inextricably embedded.

In 2012, at the International Congress of Psychology in Cape Town, further revelations of the influence of this “whiteness” were provided through the presentations by current (including founding) members of the Association of Black Psychologists (ABPsi) from USA. ABPsi had formed in 1968 in a definitive rejection of perceived intractable racism within the American Psychological Association (Nobles & Cooper, 2013). From the 1970s onward, although the dominant focus was on forging culturally appropriate models for working with Black Americans, ABPsi sought to be explicitly inclusive of African-derived ideas of living. Accordingly, articles examined the place of indigenous African ideas in re-asserting the centrality of African thought within a Black Psychology, deriving a definition for Black Psychology from African and American sources (Myers & Speight, 2010).

A second strand of literature within the USA, closely aligned with Fanon, was the philosophical thought of black intellectuals who sought to articulate the existential positioning of slaves and the post-slavery black American population (Gordon, 2000). One of the earliest exemplars of this tradition was Douglass (2001/1845), who wrote an autobiography of his experience as an escaped slave. At risk of recapture and re-enslavement if he remained in the USA, he toured England and Europe as a public speaker and advocate of abolition. The existential absurdity of slavery was highlighted by the fact that his book “made its way through the Library of Congress and was protected by the laws of the land, but he had no legal standing” (Gordon, 2000; p. 48).

More generally, the existential positioning of the post-slave black intellectuals was that of being required to assert and then justify their own existence: their writing emphasised autobiography, description of real conditions, and the trope of having a unique contribution to make to human understanding and existence. Having emerged from the non-being of slavery, their history and very existence was subjected to “whitewashing” in order that a semblance of ethical standing could be maintained among white Americans.

These sources suggest that the absence of Fanon’s work in the literature on torture, cross-cultural counselling and migration studies, along with the marginalisation of other black intellectual thought and the transparent imposition of western interpretations on African experience, were part of a systemic process of colonisation. This resulted in extensive discontinuities in the representation of black intellectual effort across disciplines and across time, and the heuristic theme of discovery/disillusionment was therefore likely an artefact of a purposeful fragmentation.

**Decolonisation influences**

Similar themes can be discerned in post-colonial African literature: wherein the reclamation of the story of African development includes the argument that the
sophistication of ancient Egyptian civilisation was a localised product of the development of agriculture throughout Africa (Chinweizu, 1987). This argument suggests that the spectacular preparations for the death of Egyptian kings were derived from African norms, challenging the separation within historical western thought between Egypt as a centre of civilisation, and the rest of the African continent as primitive.

Chinweizu argued that to counter the dominant international discourse that discounts African contributions, there was an imperative to “decolonise” the thinking of both blacks and whites. However, this also required the reformation of political and economic systems to ensure sufficient freedom and resourcing: hence post-Marxist critiques of colonisation became relevant. In post-apartheid South Africa, the majority black population, formerly denied the status of full humanity, were positioned through the democratic process to re-define race relations (Sparks, 1990). The political and economic dimensions of this socio-historical context will be considered further in reporting the South African data.

In a similar vein, Airhihenbuwa (1995) argued that the idea of development is “grounded in the promotion of Western hegemony in the name of universal progress” (p. ix). In health education/promotion in particular, a medicalised approach acts as oppressive to local ideas of wellbeing, which are grounded in ethical systems emphasising relatedness, in which a range of forms of spirit protection may have importance (See also Maynard, 2004; Mkhize, 2004b).

Such critiques can have counterintuitive features. Hountondji (1996) pointed out that to seek to unearth a distinctly African philosophy from among the range of orally transmitted traditional ideas, be they aspects of cosmologies, mythologies, normative cultural imperatives, folktales or other relevant sources, would be to conflate the cultural products of two distinct traditions. This would further legitimise the western tradition and associated ideology and economic power, rendering the African tradition “primitive”, at the same time providing excuses for African political abuses of power.

Hountondji argued that philosophy as a recorded history of contested ideas is a written tradition with particular purposes, and that oral traditions structure a different set of cultural purposes. Rather than seeking to “rediscover” a philosophy within the oral traditions, African philosophy, if it can be said to exist in a distinct category, would consist of the contributions that African intellectual effort has made and continues to make to the international philosophical canon. Any such contributions would be grounded in African lived experience, but the philosophical argument must stand on its merits in an internationalised contest of ideas.

The project of re-interpreting African-centred identity or psychology can also be critiqued in this way. That is, reifying a distinctively African psychology, constructed in contrast with the dominant western “objective” stance, serves to perpetuate the colonial mythology of Africans as primitive, mysterious, instinctive and intuitive, rather than open, thoughtful, and logical, and is thereby held captive to hegemonic western interests rather than African. Similar arguments are represented within the literature on indigenous psychologies, with Jahoda (2016) arguing that the project contained intractable contradictions and was doomed from its inception.
While touching on the literature on cultural competence, it is instructive to consider how this has taken shape in Africa (specifically South Africa) compared with Euro-American academic discourse. Usually constructed from the point of view of a health service within a western context which seeks to provide a service to those from minority cultures, cultural competence “aims to make health care services more accessible, acceptable and effective for people from diverse ethno-cultural communities” (Kirmayer, 2013, p. 151).

This objective is typically approached by strategically implementing changes at the levels of the health system, the service organisation, the provision of training, and the development of appropriate delivery models. This process can be at odds with the implementation of evidence-based practise, and as noted by Fernando (1995b), in a fiscally tight context, the requirements of servicing the majority culture will typically be prioritised over the implementation of system changes which might better serve minority cultures.

The relationship between culture and psychology in South Africa is radically different: “cultural competence” is rarely cited in the literature. Rather, for the past 40 years, a parallel “Relevance” debate, with roots in global protest movements in the 1960s (Sher & Long, 2012) has questioned the benefit of psychology to the majority black population, and has contested terms such as culture, ethnicity and race as tools of apartheid (Dubow, 1994). It is acknowledged that “mental health resources and training in South Africa remain substantially skewed, iniquitous, and minimally transformed” (Pillay, Ahmed, & Bawa, 2013), marginalising the majority black population. These authors argued that from the point of view of psychology services, the client population has changed from almost exclusively white, to one which was almost exclusively middle class. The majority black, poor, and especially rural population were unlikely to be offered or to accept psychological help.

The advent of community psychology as a core element of post-graduate psychology programs was seen as a partial solution to this inequity, including the embedding of post-colonial theory founded on Fanon’s thought in psychology programs (Hook, 2004). The place of indigenous psychologies, which seek to identify relevant indigenous restorative practices which might supplant or augment western psychology, emerged as a strong theme of the cultural relevance debate in South Africa: although it was not immune to uncritically perpetuating colonising ideas and assumptions (Sher & Long, 2015).

Accordingly, Airhihenbuwa (1995) argued that rather than holding to a strong position of cultural relativism, whereby a person’s health can and should only be interpreted through their own cultural traditions (which would render western psychology redundant in the African context), there was a need to recognise that western systems of understanding health had, in a range of ways, misrepresented the African norms that they were investigating, and that such flaws (including those in western psychology) needed to be problematized and investigated. This line of thought seeks to chart out a “middle ground” between relativism and universalism.

---

17 The Phoenix Centre engaged in such a process from 2006-2007, using a set of practice standards developed within the Australian torture trauma services network
18 For example, only four articles were found in the South African Journal of Psychology that used the term “cultural competence” in the text.
For the purposes of the present study, the question of “African Psychology” is addressed at three levels. The first level is sociological and anthropological, seeking to identify, record and elaborate on the methods of healing and problem solving, and other practises within contemporary African societies which contend with recognised imperatives of personalised human existence. This necessarily reflects the socio-historical circumstances and transmission of ideas within and across communities and across time, and includes contemporary interpretations of traditional ideas as part of the informing context.

The second level consists of critically derived contributions to an inclusive, international psychological practise which emerge from consideration of African lived experience. This is likely to involve radical challenges to the assumptions of western psychological theory and practice. The present study is located primarily within this level; but in the process, aspects of the former level are required to be articulated as part of the content of “African lived experience”.

The third level is an ongoing critique of the emerging theory and documented practise, seeking to protect against two contradictory risks: firstly, further discounting or diminishing practices and ideas that may be more relevant to the black African population, and secondly, the risk of uncritically accepting “indigenous” knowledges as inherently relevant.

**African Fiction, Dialogical Theory, and Ubuntu**

An important thread in the reclamation of African-centred-ness is found in works in colonising languages of poetry and fiction. Although attracting criticism for endorsing essentialist African norms of selfhood, the *Negritude* poets in the 1930s and 1940s were attributed significant influence in discourses of the liberation of African colonies from France. Leopold Senghor (1906 – 2001), later to become President of the independent Senegal, wrote compellingly of his allegiance to an ancestral and/or animal spirit, among other themes of protest (Kennedy, 1975; p. 133):

*The Totem*

*In my innermost vein I must hide him,*  
*My ancestor with the lightning scarred, the stormy skin.*  
*I must hide my guardian animal*  
*Or a scandal will break out.*  
*His is my faithful blood, requiring my fidelity*  
*To protect me from my naked pride,*  
*And the arrogance of lucky races...*

Given the centrality of the oral tradition in African culture (Maree & du Toit, 2011) the place of creative writing as part of the liberation and self-reclamation struggle is not surprising. However the extent to which the novel *Things Fall Apart* (Achebe, 1959) has been cited as an authentic portrayal of African psychology is striking (e.g. Nwoye, 1998; Sodi, 1998). Obiechina (1993), using *Things Fall Apart* as a case study, argued that the embedding of traditional oral forms such as proverbs and myths within African novels helped authenticate and structure the stories, as well as having
the political purpose of ensuring that such forms became incorporated within written history.

African fiction and poetry have thereby assisted in the task of developing and communicating a concept of self which provides a fit for African experience, and which also does justice to the socio-historical construction and marginalisation of African-ness within an international context. To this end, a range of African fiction and poetry was consulted (e.g. Emchata, 1979; Head, 1977; Laye, 1959; Maja-Pearce, 1990; Malan, 1994; Ngugi, 1977; Soyinka, 1983).

One framework which can account for this ready incorporation of fictional sources was proposed by Mkhize (2004b), who sought to integrate dialogical theory with African psychological thought. Dialogical theory was founded on the reconceptualization of the novel as a purposefully subversive dialogical project (Bakhtin, 1981) and is related to the socio-cultural view of psychology developed by Vygotsky (1978/1935).

Vygotsky’s conceptualisation of thought as internalised speech is extended through dialogical theory to the idea of the self as poly-phonic, or multi-vocal. In the novel, dialogical theory refers to the poly-phonic dialogue generated by the interplay of independent characters with contradictory or divergent positions. In the social world, dialogical relationships recognise the prospect of radical independence and differentness which may not be reconcilable. The state of “heteroglossia” then prevails: in contrast with the “monoglossia” of more highly constrained public discourse, wherein insistence on a dialogical relationship can be perceived as a challenge to authority or social norms.

According to dialogical theory, the self is conceptualised as poly-phonic: through normal development, a person internalises a range of “voices” which are identified with to a greater or lesser extent, and which enable fluidity and flexibility in adapting to different situations. This conceptualisation of thought processes therefore presupposes the existence of an “other” who may agree or disagree, may choose to respond honestly or otherwise, etc. The “other” is thereby represented within the dialogical imagination as an influence and participant in the thought process itself.

Mkhize (2004b) argued that dialogical theory corresponded with African views of the self, with the key African concept being the term ubuntu: an IsiNguni word which has equivalents in a wide range of languages of Southern Africa (Mnyaka & Motlhabi, 2005). Ubuntu references the inter-relatedness of human being as an existential given, as an ethic, as a necessity for development, as a dynamic process, and as a model for humanity. The term emerged among South African participants in the present study, and is explored in detail in Chapter Five.

To accentuate the parallel of dialogical theory with African thinking, Mkhize referenced Ogbonnaya (1994) who portrayed African being in terms of “person as community”, using diverse African ideas of personhood which emphasised multiple internal spirit or soul entities: features which were taken for granted as having independent influence within the healthy person. An example was provided of a healing conducted by an Igbo Diviner in the village of Ugbawka, in Nigeria. In that case, a young man whose experience of sickness had resisted a number of medical
interventions, was recommended rituals to heal his relationship with his ancestral self and his animal soul, with the Igbo Diviner concluding the treatment by saying (Ogbonnaya, 1994, p. 85):

“Call back your selves from where they have gone. Be at peace with the world. Be at peace with yourself.”

The role that African novelists had in reflecting and comprehending the African experience of self may be explained by dialogical theory. Perhaps African novelists, in adopting the western written tradition of the novel, recognised the suitability of the form to represent African dialogism. In this respect it should be noted that despite the difficulty in dating ideas within an oral tradition, the term ubuntu clearly pre-dated the development of dialogical theory (which emerged from post-revolutionary Russia).

The idea that dialogical theory may be consistent with African experience also offers support for the methodological choice of phenomenology for the present study. Mkhize (2004b) highlighted how meaning emerges from dialogical relationships which occur in an open system, rather than in a closed system where logically related ideas have limited scope for variations in meaning (for example in mathematical equations and binary systems where the logical construction is a “mono-phonic” dominant voice whose purpose is to identify the one correct solution). In an open dialogical system, the existence of two or more co-creating participants ensures that the meaning can only be accessed through the consideration of the context, and does not necessarily apply to other contexts.

This “story-ing” of African selfhood may also help explain why Narrative Therapy, which was influential in generating this study, has been proposed as a candidate for counselling for African populations (Mpofu et al., 2011; Randomsky, Hassane, Hoy-Watkins, & Bandawe, 2011). Narrative Therapy (White, 1992) proposes that the task of the counsellor is to assist the client to broaden the range of alternative stories which they tell about their lives, and select those stories which enable the development of the client’s hoped-for outcomes and views of themselves. A formative part of this process is to map the extent to which a person’s life has been defined by oppressive, discounting, diminishing, or pathologizing stories told by powerful others about them: in therapeutic conversations, the person reclaims their story. Preferred stories are thus set against external pressures in a spirit of revolution and transformation, and the client is invited to elaborate and develop those stories as a way of reclaiming agency in their own lives. The “multi-story-ed” view of personhood in Narrative Therapy is therefore closely aligned with the polyphonic view of dialogical theory.

These themes are further considered in discussing the theoretical implications of the study in Chapter Six.

Summary
This chapter has selected aspects of psychological, philosophical and other relevant literature to ground the study in a multi-disciplinary context. Firstly, the methodological literature was presented, emphasising the western origins of phenomenology and the scope and limitations that this might offer in seeking to understand African experience. The rationale for the use of ethnographic and heuristic research techniques in concert with phenomenology was outlined.
The scope and limitations of western psychological theory and research were illustrated, especially the shaping of knowledge creation about therapeutic processes and benefits. It was concluded that practices which could be expected to most benefit African populations were structurally excluded from consideration in the dominant research designs.

The diagnostic category of PTSD and its relationship with the traumatic experience of non-western populations was considered, which highlighted the racism embedded in the western-centrism of psychology, and showed that qualitative methods could be expected to yield valuable insights into African experience of suffering and loss. A range of cross-disciplinary material relevant to the study area was then introduced.

Finally, literature pertaining directly to “African Psychology” was covered, ensuring that the work of African-identifying authors was represented, and analysing some of the ways that western writing imposed interpretations on African experience.

Chapter Three details the methodological development of the study, and particularly how it sought to account for possible limitations and bias.
Chapter 3. Methodology

Methodological Structure and Development

This study was purposively grounded in phenomenological theory and associated qualitative methods of research, to explore deeper meanings associated with “African Counselling”.

At the onset of the study, there was no baseline for normed adjustments across participants. Rather, African refugees in Tasmania were continuing a cyclical adjustment of disruption-resettlement-reorientation-disruption, with jagged personal histories originating in cultural norms and geographic regions that were very different from the host culture, and in many cases from each other. Culturally-informed impacts of this process needed to be considered as a feature of reported experience.

Pragmatic considerations of timing, resourcing, participant priorities and availability were also challenging, leading to an iterative ten-year research process along with the need to account for ongoing adjustments across time and place. Also, since many participants had experienced cumulative torture and other traumatic experience, many interviews were conducted in open places or home settings to enhance physical and psychological safety.

The research methodology was designed to allow for pragmatic and reflexive decision making whereby changes in status and features of identity could be considered, policy changes, shifts in geo-cultural contexts, and the passage of time could be accounted for, implicit assumptions could be examined, and insights could be harvested across time and place. And yet, the research process needed to remain coherent and focussed.

Overall, participant-observational methods emerged as the most appropriate in providing for the flexibility and adaptability needed in conducting such a complex study. The researcher’s fieldwork and heuristic observations within Australia and Africa provided a context for iterative emergent knowledge creation, with initial preconceptions and assumptions challenged in ways that progressively informed the emphasis of the study.

Methodological process decisions resulted in fieldwork with two main categories of participants, across two geographic regions, in two distinct timeframes. Phase I studied African men arriving as humanitarian entrants to Australia within Tasmania, with the fieldwork taking place from 2007 to 2010 inclusive. Phase II studied Africans resident in South Africa, with fieldwork occurring during three visits in 2011, 2012, and 2013.

Providing a full account of the methodology required some pre-empting of the content and process findings of the study which were relevant to methodological decisions. The chapter is ordered under the following headings, reflecting the iterative process whilst portraying the methodological integrity of the study:
Methodological Structure and Development
• Phase I Methodological Process Developments
• Phase II Methodology

The figure overleaf illustrates the 2-phase research methodology process, using colour coding for clarity (mauve for Phase I, red for Phase II). The detailed Phase I methodology process was as follows:

1. Initial interviews were conducted with four male African staff recruited through purposive sampling via place (one each from Ethiopia and Sierra Leone, and two from South Sudan). The participants were asked about their knowledge and experience of problem solving in Africa, and to make comments on the best ways to approach group discussions. Handwritten notes were taken of these interviews, written up and their content confirmed with interviewees.

2. One interview was held with a female South Sudanese counsellor to help account for gender bias.

3. An opportunistic group discussion was held with four South Sudanese elders (two male, two female) at the prompting of one of the participants (C3). This discussion was video-taped and transcribed.

4. Thematic analysis of initial interviews was completed.

5. A second round of interviews was conducted with each of the four male participants from the initial interviews, enquiring about their personal experiences of dealing with problems both in Tasmania and in Africa. The sample was expanded to include Muslim-identifying participants, using a qualified Arabic interpreter where required, and through the recruitment process an additional four Christian-identifying participants were interviewed. These interviews were audio-taped and fully transcribed.

6. Additional interviews were held with two participants (C2 and C4) who maintained contact with the researcher throughout the study.

7. Ethnographic observation and informal discussions occurred at a range of community and household gatherings including formal meetings, conferences, funeral services, church services, celebrations, family events, casual family visits, and chance meetings. Written notes were taken either during or immediately after these events, depending on cultural appropriateness and situation.

8. Thematic analysis of the data was completed.

9. Literature review was conducted as reliability check on the preliminary analysis, informed by four conference presentations in Australia, and one in the African indigenous psychology stream in the 2009 South African Psychology Congress.

10. Two consensus groups were held, each comprised of 5 male community members from the South Sudanese and Sierra Leone communities respectively: none of them had paid work in the settlement sector. All group members had a different ethnic identity except for two Mende men from Sierra Leone, and all were literate in English. The groups were presented with a three-page summary of the thematic analysis in English, and engaged in a discussion designed to produce a consensus.

11. Final analyses were undertaken with the assistance of peer de-briefers.
Methodological Decisions relating to Cultural Sensitivity

The study was designed to ensure appropriate provision for a genuine “Duty of Care” to participants. African men described a range of cultural norms, including traditional healing and counselling processes, which featured within their communities of origin.
6th August 2007  Just finished the telephone interview with C2: again, I am reminded of the potency of the material. When asked if he had further to add, C2 sighed: “Ah, I think that is all. You have completely squeezed the orange!” Over two years now I have heard responses to the chronic hopelessness of refugee camps. I have witnessed awe for the wisdom of acknowledged elders in intact communities, and empathised with compassion for the fractured identities of child soldiers. I have sat with loss beyond words, and descriptions of experiences that challenge human limits. I notice how I admire the modesty and self-deprecation with which my informants acknowledge their own skill in assisting others with psychological responses which are at least as acute, protracted and complex as any presentation likely to be encountered in western psychological practise.

In this study, the displaced African identity was experienced as demanding enhanced cultural competence, as well as informed sensitivity to the collective experiences of suffering. The inter-relatedness of identity and culture, and the necessarily iterative process of cultural interpretation (Geertz, 1973), require a nominated starting point, notwithstanding the fact that any such starting point will likely reflect the process itself as much as the culture being interpreted. Accordingly, the early developmental steps in the methodological design sought to take account of the terminology and cultural norms that had been explored in the conversations which led to the formal study.

The meaning of the term “African” in this study as referring generally to Sub-Saharan black Africans did not provoke any controversy among participants, despite their ethnic, cultural, and geographic diversity. The term proved reliable in the analysis, based on two process findings: firstly, the term “African” was used as a self-description by all participants at times, regardless of their ethnic identification. Secondly there was a commonality among the responses to the open question of approaching problems in the African context. This was almost always interpreted as referring to problems within families, communities or relationships, suggesting that there was a generally accepted construct for “African”, and that it emphasised relationship.

In contrast, the culturally derived terms “counselling” and “therapy”, and “trauma” emerged as problematic in pre-study conversations and initial formal interviews. Even the idea of “problem solving” proved problematic, because it provoked among some participants the response that there were many problems that couldn’t be solved. Fernando (1995a) pointed out that problem solving assumed a degree of empowerment and expectation of control which were not as reliably present for non-western compared with western populations. For the initial interviews the terms of counselling, helping, working with the community, and problem solving were used; however, as the process was refined, the terms “dealing with problems” and “approaches to problems” were selected as more inclusive.
These early examples of the potential impact of distortions which were intrinsic to the research process (indeed to the language of the process) illustrate the role played by a sensitivity to interpretative assumptions, in refining the methodology.

**A Study on Men and Gender**

It was immediately evident among African clients of the Phoenix Centre that gender roles were strongly defined across community and family engagement. In anthropological studies this was widely recognised to be a characteristic feature of many traditional communities. For example, the *Nuer* of Southern Sudan had been the subject of a pivotal anthropological study including detailed accounts of these gender role differences (Evans-Pritchard, 1951). Although the subsequent development of ethnographic studies has emphasised the complexity and variability of role identification and enactment, and highlighted the tendency for early researchers to privilege male perspectives, traditional gender roles remain influential for most men and women (Cornwall, 2005). Among the Phoenix Centre client group, the men tended to be more directly engaged in public debates about issues of settlement, and most of those working in the field were men. Men were reported to be struggling more with issues faced by communities: marriage and family breakdown, unemployment, and financial issues. It was concluded that an investigation into the development of culturally appropriate counselling approaches for men would be of practical benefit, and there would be accessible sources of information.

As a male researcher, restricting the study to men also minimised the prospect of inadvertently contradicting unknown and important cultural norms for relationships between men and women. In particular, access might be limited in gender-specific areas such as birth, sexual health issues and sexual assault, which had a prevalence ranging up to 80% among female refugees (UNHCR, 1995).

It was considered that the risk of bias associated with the inclusion of only male participants, would be less than that associated with little-understood gender relations. On both pragmatic and culturally sensitive grounds then, Phase I of the study was restricted to exploring the responses of African men. This decision was made with the recognition that it opened the study up to criticism as contributing to the perpetuation of exclusion of women from consideration in the discipline of psychology (Wilkinson, 1997).

To assist in neutralising this potential weakness, one female African counsellor was interviewed: also, representations of gender roles were always considered critically. Two members of the “Elders Group” were female. As the study progressed into Phase II, female students and researchers took the lead in identifying further participants: ultimately this resulted in an equal mix of male and female participants in Phase II. This offered an unplanned opportunity to provide balance and texture to the gendered character of the findings.

*26th March 2008* Spending the Easter weekend with one of my Muslim contacts, I record just three interviews. At the time this visit is arranged, there are numerous offers of help from several Muslim community members. All they need to know is: what is this “Easter” I am talking about?!!
On arrival, I am amazed that they seem to make no connection between my presence and my previous request for help accessing participants. Given their expressed enthusiasm at the time, the lack of preparedness is disappointing. There is no action unless I make explicit requests: even then responses are non-committal, mostly comprising dialogue in Arabic. With Africans coming and going from the house throughout the day, we watch Egyptian movies and I become the audience for opinionated arguments about the American and Australian English dialects and whether it is more important to get a job or to study. No one seems intent on doing either, much less provide help to me! I become very irritable.

After 20 years of engagement with ideas of deconstructing the male gender role in western society, including working with offenders and survivors of family violence and sexual assault, the overt gender politics of many African men was both reassuring and disconcerting. On the one hand, there was an inspiring sense of confidence and wisdom that many men embodied in their analysis and management of problems. On the other hand, were taken-for-granted assumptions about the “nature” of women and their fitness only for traditional roles such as child-rearing, house-keeping, and domestic agriculture; the “un-nature” of homosexuality, and the apparent reliance on one-God’s will. As the study unfolded, more detail of the complexity of men and women’s roles and attitudes, and their culturally proscribed interdependence, emerged. The phenomenological method required an ongoing bracketing of my own enculturation as a man into feminist ideas and practices (Langridge, 2007) As this participant-observer positioning became more practised, I found myself envying the straightforward joy and pride that many men and women displayed in their respective roles.

**Research Protocol and Inclusive Practice**

The proposition of research with members of minority cultures through a University immediately asserts the dominant culture in ways which cannot be entirely accounted for: status and privilege meets struggle and survival. The study process perpetuated this divide. For example, the detailed pre-requisites for ethics clearance effectively excluded study participants from contributing their ideas on methodology or cultural protocol, while not necessarily protecting them from exploitation. Essentially, western-centric research ethics might not be the best way of identifying and overcoming the ethical issues inherent in investigating a western-centric bias in counselling practice! In the case of the refugee population, participants may be motivated for a range of reasons: a sense of obligation, a fear of the consequences of refusal, a hope of some yet-to-be understood reward, a wish to contribute to the community benefit. While being bound by University ethics and protocol, the very fact of this thesis provoked radical questions: for example, how can the study account for the difference between written and oral communication traditions, given that it is entirely situated within a written tradition? The conventional hierarchy of written over orally expressed knowledge is well recognised within indigenous knowledge theory (Hikuroa, Morgan, Durie, Henare, & Robust, 2011). The use of phenomenological theory and methods was identified as the best available way to address these limitations. A commitment was made to a full transcription of recordings in order to enable detailed appreciation of the style of expression, and to
ensuring that findings represented participants’ views, priorities and “voices” as closely as possible.

**Culturally informed consent**

The first interviews were envisaged as a navigational tool to develop confidence in the integrity of subsequent stages of research; particularly issues that might need attention in the conduct of group discussions with African men who did not have paid work roles in the sector (all initial participants were identified through such roles). Participants’ opinions were sought on the likely response by prospective group participants, to issues such as informed consent and video recording, as well as to the study generally. The main recommendations which emerged from this process were to ensure that the purpose of recordings was fully explained, and that there were clear opportunities for participants to decline to speak or to absent themselves (for example, by using stages of recruitment and providing breaks in discussions).

As part of a graduated approach, the first interviews were recorded only through hand-written notes. African staff were familiar with the documentation of meetings, case work and other records, making it a reasonable assumption that they would be accepting of written records in research interviews.

**July 2007**: Noting my caution in having such expectations on African staff, perhaps I should have chosen to study the range of forms of racism within the Tasmanian service sector and community generally. The turning point comes in the meeting with the elders, who I had constructed in my mind as traditionally rural and uneducated. My contact person (C3) leaves the house on family business just as we are about to begin: I am counting on him as an interpreter! I awkwardly make an introductory comment in slow “foreigner” English: there is a long silence, then the most senior man present (E1) states in a richly enunciated voice “please do not be concerned about our proclivity for the English language”.

The collegiate status of the relationship also meant that initial participants could be expected to actively assert their views through feedback on summaries of interviews based on these notes. These factors (shared appreciation of context and ability to assert their views) have been identified as critical components of the use of participant agreement as a form of validation (Ashworth, 1993). In the event, all participants were openly welcoming of audio or video recording, perhaps because the precautionary recommendations were fully adopted.

The iterative, reflective process of engagement provided opportunities for participants to decide whether to recommit at each stage, and one participant declined. There were no identified adverse outcomes of participation. These process outcomes supported the robustness of the engagement process in minimising the negative impact of any hidden coercion.

Subsequent to the first data collection phase, an article was published which explored the ethics of research practises with displaced populations in depth (MacKenzie, McDowell, & Pittaway, 2007). Herein, concerns about the cultural contrasts and
tensions were thoroughly addressed. The methodological adaptations explained above matched the recommendations from that article, providing powerful retrospective validation. An iterative process of consent based on a slow-paced engagement with the communities of interest was strongly recommended.

In an article accessed after all data had been collected, Lyons, Bike, Johnson, and Bethea (2012) concluded that the use of qualitative methods for psychological research with people of African descent was congruent with African cultural norms. They made the following recommendations which had been explicitly addressed in the present study:

- Accounting for the influence of context on research methods, processes and outcomes;
- An acknowledgement of how the practise of psychology, both historical and contemporary, was implicated in the oppression of African people;
- The overt examination of the researcher’s worldview to account for the inherent bias of western-derived systems of meaning;
- An emphasis on interpretive, collaborative research;
- Consideration of the “place” within which the research occurs, with the emphasis on site selection for the convenience and safety of participants (e.g. in their homes, communities, or places of comfort); and
- Enacting African cultural norms within the research, for example respect for elders, and appreciation of community.

The primary methodological weakness in the present study which was exposed by this article, was the absence of a research team incorporating African-identifying researchers to enable greater proximity to the data through language and cultural norms. As a PhD project this was not feasible; however, the ongoing collaboration with two participants (C2 and C4), and supervision from senior African academics in Phase II, compensated somewhat for this.

**Reliability**

Qualitative methods include techniques to enhance reliability, or what is known as “trustworthy”. In this study, five techniques were included in the process design. They were:

- The broad range of geo-cultural sources represented in interviews;
- The strategic timing of the literature review;
- The use of consensus groups;
- The opportunistic recruitment of counter-normative participants; and
- The documentation of the researcher’s heuristic experience.

Seeking comparisons from external, independent sources, a form of “triangulation”, is among the most powerful techniques available for enhancing reliability in qualitative studies (A. B. Warren & Karner, 2010). The benefit of triangulation is strongest when the sources of data are demonstrably independent, although this requirement can unwittingly be compromised.
For example, the independence of sources which are located within the same social matrix cannot necessarily be relied upon. Secondly, interpretation of social phenomena is highly dependent on context (Moran-Ellis et al., 2006): rather than providing objective reliability, triangulation is considered to assist in accounting for the research context.

Notwithstanding the limitations of triangulation as a source of validation of social data, it is argued that for this study, the diversity of geo-cultural data sources, and the strategic timing of the literature review together with the disparate sources of literature identified, did ensure a high level of independence, and therefore does offer a reliability check. This was further strengthened through use of consensus groups and counter-normative sources; and the documentation of the researcher’s heuristic process offered additional transparency about the research process.

**Diversity of Geo-cultural Sources**

As discussed in Chapter One, the construct of “African Psychology” assumes commonality among African peoples which, while critiqued for its alignment with essentialist thinking, has broad support in the literature (e.g. Mpofu, 2011). In this study, separate interviews with participants from different locations within Africa were analysed prior to exposure to documented commonalities, yet the data generated findings which fitted with this theme. The choice of South Africa as a location for the Phase II fieldwork was influenced by the fact that it was a focus for African Psychology. Having emerged from Apartheid with well-resourced academic infrastructure, there was scope for South African academics to shape research with the majority population.

**Timing of the Literature Review**

Conducting the literature review after the data collection was consistent with phenomenological theory and methodology. Effectively, this strategy structured the phenomenological method of epoché, or bracketing (Langdridge, 2007) into the study: wherein pre-existing assumptions are held to one side to enable more immediate engagement with the material. It minimised the extent to which the study would be informed by the assumptions or findings from other studies or perspectives. Studies which assumed pre-determined concepts such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or depression, or even “counselling”, or which constructed migration as a problem for host countries, might detract from or over-ride an appreciation of the experience of participants.

**Consensus Groups and Counter-Normative Participants**

Consensus Group discussions enabled similarities, contrasts or tensions within and between the literature and outcomes from interviews to be explored. Furthermore, the composition of the groups enhanced the generalisability of the findings: none of the participants had paid roles within the settlement sector, and they were purposively selected from differing community identifications.

The recruitment of a female African counsellor as a counter-normative participant was also a planned device to offer a counterpoint to the interviews with the men. This device was repeated as opportunity presented throughout the study and is discussed in more detail in the section on Phase II Methodology.
This Researcher’s Heuristic Experience

Phenomenological enquiry into the experience and systems of meaning of other people is intrinsically recursive: the capacity to perform the phenomenological reduction depended on the ability to account for preconceived ideas as well as spontaneous human responses to the material. Inevitably this study informed my own developmental process: an appreciation of the material demanded adaptations and attitude changes in my own life. My field notes included comments on my own process, events in my own life and the lives of those around me, and records of dreams that seemed to reflect the process. The documentation of this process was conducted in accordance with recognised heuristic methods discussed in Chapter Two (Moustakas, 1990). The following journal extract illustrates how at times my honest intent and expressed personal experience became interwoven with African community members in ways that offered influential reflections on life decisions, and visceral support of research findings.

October 2009 My own family dynamics alter markedly during the Tasmanian data collection phase, in ways which suggest an “Africanization” of my own life. I move town to be closer to my teenage daughters, and my ageing parents move house with the unified support of us, their children. My younger sister produces her first child at the age of 43, and announces her wedding plans. Upon disclosing this personal history to an African friend, I am told that these are the blessings due to my family for our contributions to the African communities. He assists me in preparing a speech for my sister’s wedding in the tradition of an African older brother. Many at the wedding disclose that the speech provokes them to thoughtfully review their own marriages and relationships. The only black person present, an African-American man, seeks me out and tearfully thanks me for reminding him of the stories of his grandmother, then expounds on these stories, to the delight of those present.

Further examples of this heuristic analysis and process are documented through the course of the thesis.

Phase I Methodological Process Developments

This section outlines how “process findings” continued to inform and refine the study methodology. Analysing descriptions of African styles of counselling described by participants in initial interviews produced the following themes:

- Counselling-in-community (rather than in one-on-one conversations);
- The role of elders; and
- The role of religion, ritual, and animist perception and practice.

These themes were linked: elders or counsellors were known for their commitment to and involvement in the maintenance of family and community, and might also be religious leaders with officiating roles at gatherings.
Some participants referred to the difference between western and African belief systems, particularly in village settings, and the range of spirit-based practices which existed in this context: e.g. traditional healers, rain-makers, and spirits of the ancestors and of the natural world. The influence of spirit harm was referenced; for example, the role of curses by witches or witchdoctors, ancestral and other spirit anger. Clandestine poisoning emerged as an explanation in cases of unexpected death.

Such accounts invited immersion into participants’ metaphysical sensitivities, to better comprehend these descriptions. I became cognisant of the contexts (place and time) that interacted with accounts of spirit visits. In addition, I had to “Bracket” my own assumptions, which was at times tested to the point where I struggled to conceptualise further useful questions.

29th June 2007: During the meeting with elders I find myself floundering in the gap between the questions I ask and the responses I receive. One of the group members (E1) says: “We have a saying in Africa…It is like you are trying to climb the tree from the top”. He shows great compassion to my evident confusion, and like many others before and since, he invites me to visit his country to see for myself, offering on behalf of his community all the support and hospitality I might need.

Reflecting on this in supervision, it became clear that the initial data was comprised mainly of descriptions of cultural norms, interspersed with some personal experiences. The lived experience of participants was not being captured, so much as their own cultural observations or interpretations. The phenomenological encounter is intended to open a mutual sharing between the life-worlds of the participant and researcher, rather than being a question and answer session on the expertise and knowledge of the participant. The onus of understanding is then on the researcher.

All initial participants identified as church-going Christians of varying denominations, and church gatherings, faith and prayer figured prominently in their descriptions of counselling and problem solving. This was in accordance with Holtzman (2000), who reported that for Nuer refugees in Minnesota, the Christian church represented the only identifiable source of continuity from the community structures of their pre-migration lives.

In the present study, this presented the risk that the findings may have reflected this Christian influence. Given that a large proportion of the Sub-Saharan African population identify as Muslim, and that these two religions co-exist in Africa along with other world religions and a range of traditional beliefs and practices, Muslim participants were recruited.

Each male participant was interviewed again. In this round, interviews were audio-recorded and participants were specifically asked for descriptions of ways that they had dealt with problems themselves, in Africa and in Australia. Interviews were fully transcribed and reviewed. Contacts were requested to identify Muslim-identifying Africans who would be willing to participate, and after a staged recruitment process, additional interviews were held.
These interviews drew out more personal experiences. They also exposed some idiosyncratic survival strategies: for example, one participant (C7) described in detail the benefit that his photography provided him both before and after his displacement and flight (especially the mundane but profitable business of photographs of school students for identification cards). Conversations weaved between observation and experience, offering explicit accounts of the interplay between perceived normative context and personal stories of coping or problem solving. It was at this point that the study focus broadened somewhat: some aspects of problem solving and indeed some problems could only be appreciated within the context of a broader cultural understanding. The interaction between human struggle and the shaping effect of culture invited consideration.

Ethnography performed as Duty of Exchange – Duty of Care

A potent methodological and ethical tension emerged from participants’ claims that the more active members of the population were tiring of being repeatedly consulted, with no identified substantive benefit accruing from it.

Yeah, we sit down with some people come from immigration, some people come from Migrant Resource Centre, some people come from police officer, we sit down have a tell these people, but the people no do it, no care…now I never sit down talk with these people, I never! - M1.

Typical issues identified in such consultations (e.g. Flanagan, 2007) were also represented in participants’ statements in the present study. Priorities included:

- access to employment and accommodation;
- issues with police;
- concern about the way families were splitting up, with welfare payments directed to women and children identified as a contributing factor;
- children challenging (dishonouring) their parents and grandparents; and
- applying for family members to settle in Australia, or finding some way of supporting them effectively.

Notwithstanding this perception of over-consultation and under-delivery, most participants asserted that the study was much needed. Partly this was because the study sought to look beyond these identified needs, to approaches which might better assist people. Partly, it was because of the participatory way that the study was conducted. Regardless, a decision was made to ensure that participants’ preferred responses to settlement issues should be explicitly included in the findings of the study.

MacKenzie et al (2007) recommended the inclusion of meaningful benefit for participation in the study, in order to compensate for the erosion of personal benefit that tended to accompany participation: a genuine duty of care implied a duty of exchange, while care was required not to inadvertently coerce compliance.

12th August 2007: I find myself joining in speculation at how some issues might be addressed. One participant (C4) openly states that I am the only Australian person he has encountered since his arrival who has taken sustained action to support him. At times this leaves
me with the uncomfortable feeling that I am perceived as offering something beyond my capacity to deliver, and which is outside the scope of the study. Further, I feel despair at the lack of basic support experienced even by the most adaptive individuals in the cohort I am studying.

Disclosing such dilemmas elicited additional material. Some participants knew this pressure only too well, having routinely experienced demands from their communities which were utterly outside their capacity to respond. One participant described how my presence at a memorial gathering had encouraged the community:

… you conducted yourself very well … because you spoke, and shared the pain that people were having at that time…..obviously you have lifted up their spirit “oh we have people who can support us, look at this person”……the people that you help, you will always get information or a telephone call when they are in dire need….or if they are in trouble, or whatever…you know they will definitely let you know that this is what happened - C6.

This highlighted a prominent theme in help-seeking and help-giving among many in the African communities studied; that people actively seek help and support through contact with those who have been present to their pain or problems. The act of visiting a participant family or gathering was experienced by them as intrinsically supportive, whereas the explicit purpose was to obtain information (about what might be supportive). The research practise was emerging as an answer to the research question, through the culturally normative process of enhancing hope.

2nd August 2008: I experience another dilemma. I had used my old car to teach a participant (C2) to drive, agreeing that he could keep it: however, it returns to me when he leaves the state. I struggle with the sense that the car no longer belongs to me, and I offer it to another Kakwa community member so he can drive his children to school. This provoke some controversy in the community until the role of taxi driver is allocated, rendering the gift sufficiently communal. It is thereafter referred to as the “Kakwa Car”. More disturbingly, such is the extent to which the Africans have been given unusable equipment by their Tasmanian “helpers”, it provokes mistrust until the African mechanic certifies the car as reliable.

A research stance which did not enable such engagement would have disrupted the natural flow of problem solving practices within gatherings or conversations. Instead, the shared commentary on my experience enabled better mutual understanding of the ways that approaches to problems could be analysed. Rather than an ethical dilemma, with the introduction of ethnographic methods this became a source of data. Williams and Berry (1991) recommended ethnographic methods to improve practitioners’ understanding of communities; now it seemed that ethnography in research provided therapeutic benefit for some communities. This also fed into the reflexive benefit available for practitioners in relation to their own cultural background, expressed well by Lutz (1988), p. 6:

....in which we see the emotional life of the ethnographer and his or her society reflected as an exotic phenomenon in the eyes of the people encountered...
Before I discovered this tradition in the literature, I coined the term “reverse ethnography”, whereby recording the observations of participants taught me as much about my own culture as theirs. Questions of language and meaning repeatedly emerged.

8th December 2007: Just finished transcribing my interview with C6: it was more than two hours long. I am struck by the calmness of his statement about his colleagues being killed, and I note how I just “move on” with him, following his telling. This is so different from the pausing in, or “teasing out” of grief and emotion characteristic of western counselling. C6 makes no reference to the idea that traumatic material can be engaged with and to some extent overcome. Rather, that it is helpful to know the background of a person in order to deal with them appropriately; it is not helpful to “bring back” past experiences that they have gone through, and that might have a debilitating impact. The metaphor of “going through” stands out; it is commonly used by participants, and I wonder what this form of language might reflect about an experience I might call “traumatic”. I contact C6 for some clarification, as well as another participant (C1); they both identify that the phrase is used when someone has passed through something that others have not: it implies survival of a situation, like a rite of passage. Also, that it is just an expected part of life, to have to go through such difficulties. Such difficulties as imprisonment, massacre, torture, and refugee camps: although I am told in an even voice (C1) that these more serious things do sometimes have their effects. My own emotions well up in the face of such comments, which seem to me to be profound understatements: despite their ubiquity.

This relationship between participants’ language and their construction of “problems” is explored further in Chapter Four. The common phrase “what I have gone through” with the emphasis on the survival of the event rather than the impact, suggested endurance as a culturally normative response to intractable problems. Participants’ normative construction of problems and identity through language may have been influential in ameliorating traumatic effects: one response to any problem is the language that is used to name it. A radical phenomenological reduction and reflexivity was needed to suspend assumptions about the meaning embedded in such normative comments.

Through a range of coincidences and through the influence of the study on my own life, I came to feel personally implicated in the sense of connectedness which emerged as the primary theme of the study.

15th July 2009: Can this just be a coincidence? I locate a 1950’s anthropological study about the community of one of my participants, and present it to him as a gift. He is very excited, and sits down to read it straight away. We are both astonished when he recognises a house plan included in the book as identical to a house he had
visited as a boy: he describes events that happened in some of the rooms. Finally, through personal references in the book, he identifies his own grandfather as the primary informant! Cultural practises which he had believed were kept completely secret, are described openly by his own ancestor. This challenges his attachment to cultural taboos: some years later he discloses personal experience of these secrets to me. It is so easy to believe that the spirits of the ancestors are supporting my study.

The passing of time and the associated building of trust were crucial factors in the findings of this study. Under the heading “A methodological word on secrecy” Maynard (2004; p. vii) described the delicate balance that he sought to maintain in conducting anthropological field work about Kedjom “medicine” in Cameroon. Maynard concluded that the secrecy that was maintained around these practises in pre-colonial times had been a key component in sustaining community harmony and health, which referred to ethical health rather than physical. The associated “medicine” would be more precisely translated as “restorative ritual”.

In his fieldwork over a total of 15 years, Maynard’s discrete avoidance of information to which he was not entitled, enabled him to understand how such information had been previously withheld from German and English colonial powers. He found that Kedjom elders had been disturbed at the freeeness with which the colonisers disseminated information; both western (such as reading and writing skills, and science-based understanding), and information that they obtained from the Kedjom. This practise of free disclosure was perceived to be unethical. The development of trust over time, based on conduct which was ethical to the Kedjom (which included the withholding of some findings from publication), offered a verification of the information that he did obtain.

A similar approach was enacted in the present study, whereby attempts to obtain interviews or information led at times to dead ends or distractions. Such obstacles may have been accidental, evasive, or coincidental; but contending with them respectfully was incorporated by this researcher into the process of trust-building. Repeatedly, such ambiguities were “held” as part of the research process, seeking a way forward whilst accepting the current limitations.

**Religious and Historical Orientations and Practices**

The identification with established Christian churches by initial participants and other community members, as well as their early emphasis on religious practices in approaching problems, provoked curiosity about the interplay between religious, community, and spirit influences. The methodological choices of including Muslim-identifying participants and seeking more personal experiences began to expose the complexities of this interplay.

In contrasting the interviews with Christian- and Muslim-identifying participants, the first clear finding was that the distinctions between religious groups did not emerge as salient for participants, even for nations where the conflict was partly religiously based, such as Sudan.
This was illustrated within the recruitment process by the fact that two “Muslim” participants identified as “Christian” at the time of the interview. In one case the manipulation of religious identity had been a way of solving problems (see below): in another case, religious identity had simply been mistaken.

24th March 2008: Perhaps the most disorienting interview I have had. My interpreter struggles to keep up with a veteran freedom fighter (C8) as he laughs and shouts in a mixture of English, Arabic and Amharic, while describing the way that he had used religious identity for survival. He had entered Australia in the 1990’s as a Muslim, but this identity was a pretence he had used to seek asylum in Northern Sudan. He states that he reverted to his Christian identity and name in response to telephone calls from Australian intelligence agencies after 9/11. The three of us have a vibrant, if disjointed discussion centred round the simplistic thinking that seems to prevail in African, Australian, and international regimes of control and which my participant had so readily exploited.

My interpreter, who had also recruited this participant for me, discovers the deception at the same time as myself (there are numerous pictures of Jesus Christ on the walls of the man’s flat when we arrive). He later confirms that he did not experience any personal or religious affront, nor does he show any sign of concern that my sought-after Muslim participant does not fit the requirement.

It may be that the same lack of concern for such labels was responsible for the fact that of the Muslims identified, one was Liberian, another Egyptian, and a third Eritrean, rather than belonging to the pre-selected countries of origin. This unplanned expansion of source countries perhaps reflected the geopolitical and cultural links between Liberia and Sierra Leone, Egypt and Sudan, and Eritrea and Ethiopia. In any case, the similarities in the interview responses of this broadened sample provided unanticipated evidence that themes could be expected to apply more generally across national boundaries, and this fluidity of labels recurred throughout the study.

Place and “geo-ethnography”

The ethnographic dimension of the study allowed more explicit consideration of the concept of “place”: especially important for a study population that was defined as “displaced”. Place also emerged in the degree of identification with place of origin, the danger faced by family members because of their location, the profound influence that refugee camp settings had on people, and the theme of flight as the solution to problems.

Meaning was infused in the locations where interviews “took place”: most interviews were conducted in participants’ houses, and the researcher’s presence was honoured through offers of food, and privileged seating. I attended large and small gatherings at churches, parks, halls, and private homes. I noted how men and women moved between segregated specific activities and inclusive, communal discussions. Family or community members collaborated before, after, and sometimes during recorded sessions. In one interview, recorded while walking in a park setting, features of the physical environment prompted numerous unexpected disclosures and insights.
During the study, conversations also occurred with Africans living in Australia and subsequently South Africa, who had come from the countries of Angola, Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Somalia, Swaziland, and Uganda, in addition to those countries represented among participants. This occurred at gatherings, home visits, conferences, airports, hotel dining rooms, and cafes. These conversations provided additional confidence in the generalisability of emergent findings, and provoked additional insights.

The theme of place was reflected in my own movements during the study. This included two different homes in each of three cities: Hobart and Launceston in Tasmania, and the Gold Coast in Queensland. I also worked in seven different settings over that time. There were four visits to South Africa: the first to the conference during Phase I, which powerfully influenced the further development of the study, and three data collection visits in Phase II.

To illustrate the complex interplay between interviews, aspects of place in ethno-psychology, shifts in my own identity and behaviour, and the layered emergence of insights, an excerpt from a Phase I interview is reproduced below. My participant (C2) explains the Kakwa norm which I had observed (also practiced by other African communities) whereby on entering a room, a person will shake hands with everyone present:

C2: (it is) a sign of peace, a sign of love, a sign of togetherness, a sign of closeness, I am close to you, you are close to me, we are people of the same category, the same feathers, we can fly together.
R: Yes.
C2: You see? It has got a meaning, it has got a big explanation behind that... You see like with Australians, the trust comes after explanation.
R: (Laughs).
C2: When you introduce me to somebody, after introducing me to him, and then he can extend his hand out, and say how are you, my name is so and so...in Africa it was not like that. You don't need even explanations, you don't need anything, just greeting first, and then explanation later.
R: Yes.
C2: But here we have come to a certain environment whereby greeting has become the last, explanation first.
R: Mm. yes.
C2: You see? There is a bit of strangeness that sometimes makes the trust (difficult), and the feeling of the Africans becomes very strong because they’ve lost so many things, they’ve lost so many things. And they’ve come to a new culture, that they have to learn; (they have to) withdraw, some of their culture.
R: Yes...so having lost so much they then have to lose more.
C2: Yes, and that’s like, now they’re losing everything...

The exchange illustrates in a compelling way how ethnographic observation led to an appreciation of the depth and range of loss experienced by participants, which complemented interview material. There was also an implicit challenge to western ideas: it was reflected that in Australia “greetings come last, explanations first”. The primary assumption implicit in the African tradition represented in this exchange was a “being with” or connectedness: this had to be regretfully withdrawn by Africans as part of their enculturation.
This insight provoked changes in my personal behaviour, as well as visceral exploration of ideas of closeness, immediacy, the oral tradition, and subjective experiential wisdom as characteristic of African culture and consequently of their counselling. This contrasted with western ideas of seeking objectivity through distance, explanatory models, the written tradition, and programs of treatment.

**Taking Time**

The first of the initial interviews was conducted in March 2007, and the last consensus group took place in March 2010. I moved from Hobart to Launceston (180 km away) in February 2007, and interviews with participants recruited whilst in Hobart involved travel and logistical delays.

**Table 2: Timeline of Phase I Methodology**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First-round Interviews</th>
<th>Second-round Interviews</th>
<th>Literature Review Commenced</th>
<th>Cape Town Conference</th>
<th>Consensus Groups</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mar 07 - July 07</td>
<td>Oct 07 - May 09</td>
<td></td>
<td>March 09</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>July 09</td>
<td>Nov 09 – Mar 10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The second round of interviews required time to recruit Muslim participants. The process was supported by an Arabic interpreter in Hobart, and an African social work student in Launceston. Four of the seven Muslim interviews were conducted with the Arabic interpreter present or on the telephone. To best ensure informed consent for these participants, the process involved three stages. Firstly, the recruiter would arrange a meeting for the researcher to explain the study in detail, including the consent process and forms, using an Arabic interpreter as required. The recruiter would then contact the prospective participant to confirm their interest. In one case, there was no confirmation and that person did not contribute to the study.

These intersecting methodological and outcome issues provided a fitting opportunity to formally conduct the literature review, detailed in Chapter Two. Substantial relevant literature had been sourced, and there was a wealth of data to compare from interviews and from ethnographic experiences within communities.

**Consensus Group Dynamics**

Arranging the consensus groups was another protracted process. Care was taken throughout the study period to provide information about the study at gatherings and events attended. Many community members had identified my involvement as having been supportive, and expressed enthusiasm about participating in the groups. By the time of group formation, local service providers had modified or introduced programs based on the early findings of the study, along with other sources of information. For example, there was more intensive engagement with neighbours in the settlement process, and a project was designed to provide a systematic pathway to work.
opportunities for work-ready migrants and refugees. The lapse of time therefore provided for some evidence of tangible benefit of the study process.

It had been planned to involve the Ethiopian community as a group in addition to the Sudanese and Sierra Leone communities. By the time the expanded interview stage was complete, the main contact with the Ethiopian community was no longer able to assist. Also, most of the Ethiopian community lived in Hobart. As an alternative, an invitation was extended to the Eritrean community in Launceston to participate as a group, however they nominated a trusted representative who was interviewed instead, and that interview was included in individual participant data.

The South Sudanese group was comprised of members who all had taken leadership roles within their community, although none of them had worked as settlement staff. Three of the five participants had had no direct contact with me prior to the first meeting; one of them (SS1) had hosted some gatherings I had attended, and through our long-standing relationship had affirmed his interest in participating in the group. The recruitment was done over a period of two months by participant C9, and the meetings took place at his house. He did not participate, but his family provided a meal prior to the formal meetings.

All participants identified as Christian, and were from different communities within South Sudan. Two meetings were held, one in November 2009, the second in February 2010. This was partly because some members did not arrive at the agreed time and others needed to leave early, so not all the issues were considered in the first meeting. Also, part of the first meeting was taken up with the formalities of informed consent and background information.

The Sierra Leone group took five months to arrange after introductions were made by a participant (C4) at a community meeting. Two subsequent community meetings were attended to further clarify the study purpose, and each prospective participant was then met with individually, the ethics requirements were further clarified, and informed consent and background information was obtained. The meeting was held after a barbeque at one participants’ house (SL5).

All three consensus group meetings were video recorded, which enabled the identity of each speaker to be clarified, and group interactions, gestures and physical expressions to be reviewed.

**Phase I Data Analysis**

Recordings were fully transcribed by the researcher, which functioned as an immersion process. As described earlier in this chapter, statements or phrases which had not seemed prominent during the interviews often stood out during the transcription process.

On completion of each stage (First-round Interviews, Christian, Muslim, Ethnographic Notes, Consensus Groups), transcripts were read as a group for similarities and contrasts. The interview structure generated three main categories of discussion, although these overlapped: African Problem Solving Practises; Expressions of African Cultural Norms, and Expressions of Settlement Experience.
The data were analysed using iterative thematic analysis, with the classification of strategies for dealing with problems being the primary focus.

Explicit problem solving practises were collated (for example, *family support, prayer, perseverance, or seeking advice*). Obvious implicit strategies were also noted: for example, fleeing violence or *flight* was a key strategy spontaneously reported by many participants, although it might not have been explicitly identified as a way of dealing with problems.

Thirdly, all material related to the context of identified problems was considered for its relevance. For example, racism or other exclusion practices within Tasmania were noted, and the responses considered: one participant (C6) initially sought to address workplace racism, then shifted to an acceptance strategy, finally choosing to leave the workplace. Within such a story were detailed descriptions of interactions with various parties: for example, the support offered by other community members or the family. The themes extracted would be *discussion, acceptance, flight, seeking advice, and family support*, and the detail would enable the character of these themes to be more fully comprehended.

The literature was consulted once the thematic analysis was well advanced, and considered in relation to identified themes. There were no major inconsistencies noted between the literature and the transcript themes, although material emerged which was yet to be found in existing literature. Typically, the literature provided a broader context within which to comprehend some of the details of the transcripts. For example, one participant (C4) described how measles and other illnesses were believed by most people in Sierra Leone to be spread through the air by witches. This was verified in a detailed article, based on beliefs within another West African country, Mali (Imperato & Traore, 1979):

> *Because measles is thought to come with the wind it is also referred to as Finyabana which means “wind illness” ... Bambara witches (nennenyi) are thought to be the chief cause of measles. Virtually all serious childhood illnesses are thought to come from their evil work.* (p. 19)

Such precise agreement between the reported experiences of participants and independent sources was common. Although it could not be concluded that such a belief was universal in Africa, its prevalence in two distinct locations, one identified by a participant, the other from a scholarly source, was good evidence that such beliefs were widespread.

To consolidate these themes for the Consensus Groups, they were presented in a first-person conversational style which replicated the interviews by including specific words and phrases.

For example, to characterise *acceptance*:

> *Generally, problems are simply accepted as part of life. If someone needs counselling it means that their problem is too big for them or is something new to them. Perhaps they have lost hope for the future, which is common in places like refugee camps, and*
A total of 26 “Experiential Statements” were derived and presented for consideration to the consensus groups. In the South Sudanese group, two contentious issues related to negative aspects of African cultural norms which had emerged in interviews. Firstly, the destructive effect of community reprisals was reworded to reflect that this was an exception, rather than a norm, and in a healthy community would only apply to those who sought to usurp or defy community norms.

There was an emphatic reaction to the inclusion of role of witchdoctors as way of solving problems (notwithstanding the fact that the need for defence against a witchdoctor implies that someone else has sought to make use of one). Witchdoctors were regarded as categorically negative. Both these issues, and the potency of the debate around them, highlighted the role of exclusion in maintaining norms. This also helped explain the confusion that was sometimes expressed in conversations where radically counter-normative features of life were referenced, such as homosexuality. It had been explained to me in a gathering (by C4) that the laughter that accompanied the mention of homosexuality was an expression of incredulity that there might be such a thing.

The Sierra Leone consensus group identified one theme which was not present in the statements. This was the idea that African men were trained to act strongly, and so to acknowledge having a problem would be perceived as a weakness and would not often occur. This was incorporated in the above statement as follows:

Generally, problems are simply accepted as part of life. *Men especially are trained to act strongly, and even if we have a problem we might not want anyone to know, for fear of being seen as weak.* If someone….

The consensus group process provided strong support for the reliability of the Experiential Statements: there was robust discussion which augmented the interview material, and apart from the above addition and minor corrections, both groups endorsed the findings as an accurate representation of their experience. The presentation of study findings in this thesis was structured to ensure that the integrity of these statements was retained. This was done by devoting Chapter Four to a presentation of Phase I findings, with the commentary augmented by some material and insights from Phase II. This device also emphasised the developmental process of the study.

**Phase II Methodology**

Phase I of the study was based on interviews with male African humanitarian entrants to Australia, living in Tasmania. Broadly speaking, the primary findings of this part of the study were:

1. There were traditionally informed practices identified for counselling, mediating, problem-solving and traditional healing which appeared to apply generally across African refugee communities represented in the study, including Christian- and Muslim-identifying participants.
2. These practices were consistent with practices identified in a literature review of this thesis regarding African counselling, mediating (including mediating across cosmological realms), problem-solving and traditional healing, within a wide range of communities.

3. Such traditionally informed practices were suggestive of a set of assumptions about life, selfhood, society, nature, and spirit phenomena which in some ways contrasted with those western assumptions on which modern psychology and counselling practices were based.

Questions which emerged from Phase I, and which formed the basis of Phase II were:

“How do counselling, mediating, problem-solving and traditional healing practices described by displaced male African community members in Tasmania compare with those described by members of communities in South Africa?"

“To what extent are the ideas of life, self, society, nature, and cosmology implied in these practices consistent across communities?”

“What additional or contrasting practices, or ideas of life, self, society, nature, and cosmology are described by African scholars and members of communities in South Africa?”

“How can these practices and ideas contribute to a more inclusive approach to counselling?”

Contemporary African academics were contacted during the literature review process, and these relationships were further developed at the inaugural meeting of the Forum of African Psychology at a conference in Cape Town in 2009. It became evident that a broad movement had emerged, with a strong centre in post-Apartheid South Africa, which sought both to critique western derived ideas of psychology, and to develop approaches which were more appropriate to the majority black African population.

It was proposed to formally interview African scholars and undertake ethnographic observation and other interviews as deemed appropriate in their communities of origin, in South Africa. The objectives were as follows.

1. To contrast the responses and findings from investigations conducted among displaced migrant African communities, with those conducted among communities which had endured differently structured dislocation and displacement in the form of Apartheid in South Africa.

2. To thereby take account of place and displacement factors in furthering an understanding of African counselling, mediating, problem-solving and traditional healing.

3. To extend the literature review across psychology, anthropology and philosophy with an emphasis on the writing of African-identifying scholars and western sources endorsed by them.

4. To contrast African with western practice, exploring the assumptions associated with them, with a view to contributing to the development of more inclusive counselling approaches and notions of self-hood.
The following methodology was devised to investigate these questions.

1. Interviews with Africans with recognised research or practise expertise.
2. Ethnographic observation in South African communities.
3. Further interviews as appropriate.
4. Expanded literature review.
5. Final analysis and write-up.

As for Phase I, process issues informed the specific methods used: particularly African scholarship, time, gender, place and staging.

**African Scholarship and Scholars**

The primary shaping influence for Phase II was the identification, through participation in conferences and literature searches, of a range of African scholars investigating similar themes within their own communities and institutions. This material enabled a critical examination of the findings of Phase I. It also exposed the way such authors were overlooked in seeking to develop appropriate psychological theory and practise for African communities.

Because of the timing of the study, and the explicit introduction of ethnographic methods, attendance at conferences included ethnographic observations of the emergent politics and processes of a new field of study, with a highlight being the Cape Town conference in 2012 wherein psychologists from the Association of Black Psychologists in the USA offered support and collaboration to the Forum of African Psychology in South Africa.

At play here too, was the tension between the western written tradition and the African oral tradition. The conduct of participants in the above events mirrored the conduct of Africans that I had witnessed at formalised family and community settings in Tasmania. Importance was placed on impromptu speech-making, informal, respectful debate, with a broadly shared goal being mutual support rather than the individualised contest and achievement so often on display in western academic gatherings.

**Study on “African Time”**

The time between commencement and completion of the study was ten years altogether. As with Phase I, recruitment of Phase II participants was time consuming. There were also administrative delays. Firstly, there was an 18-month period from October 2009 and May 2011 between initial application for transfer from the University of Tasmania to Monash University, and the final approval for the PhD program. This “in-between” status was oddly reflected in the first field trip to South Africa, during which unexpected events compromised the purposive data collection. In 2014 I transferred from Monash University to Melbourne University and the overlap in administrative processes delayed the write up.

I took an 8-month leave of absence from September 2012 to April 2013 when I married a black American woman with three children, and took on the responsibilities associated with their migration to Australia. In many ways, this personal process
increased my sensitivity to the unspoken adjustments toward and through “dependency” during migration.

Table 3: Timeline of Phase II Methodology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Approval</th>
<th>1st Data Visit – Durban and Polokwane</th>
<th>2nd Data Visit - Cape Town Conference</th>
<th>3rd Data Visit - Johannesburg, Pretoria and Durban</th>
<th>Completion Seminar</th>
<th>Final write-up and synthesis from seminar</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>May 2011</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 2011</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 2012</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 2013</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 2015</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2015-2016</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Gender and Geography – Unanticipated outcomes of “Trust-balling”

The Phase II data collection involved three visits to South Africa: in November 2011, July 2012, and July 2013.

The first field trip to South Africa in November 2011 was intended as an orientation visit, through the acceptance of Professorial invitations to the Universities at Durban and Polokwane. Unfortunately, opportunities were limited in Durban by the poor health of the Professor there, and in Polokwane by a power failure at the University. A tour of the surrounding areas provided a useful introduction to aspects of the physical landscape and living conditions of urban and rural communities.

One interview was conducted with a female Sangoma (traditional healer) who was also a qualified psychologist. This interview was recorded via handwritten notes, with a typed summary subsequently confirmed by the interviewee as accurate. In addition, a range of informal conversations were held with people “on the street” to assist in orienting to the kinds of issues which pertained to those areas of South Africa.

After this first field trip, a medical practitioner from Zimbabwe (ZIM1) working in Tasmania, expressed interest in the study. He had previously worked in many African countries, and a Phase II interview was conducted focussing primarily on his historical experience. This and all subsequent Phase II interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed.

Two of the Phase I participants (C2 and C4) provided additional interviews during this period, which were recorded and transcribed. These interviews provided a continuity from Phase I as well as a contemporary counterpoint to the Phase II interviews. These interviews were included in the Phase I dataset.
The second visit to South Africa, in July 2012, was planned around the International Congress of Psychology, held in Cape Town. There was a very strong African Psychology stream of presentations, (including a poster presentation of this study) and it was planned to take some time out from the conference to interview a range of the presenters. However, the demands of conference organisation or other academic responsibilities worked against interviews with many prospective participants. Through word of mouth contacts at the conference itself, interviews were held with three participants: two female psychology graduate students from Zimbabwe, and a male South African graduate student.

The third visit, in July 2013, entailed visits to Pretoria, Johannesburg, Durban and Polokwane at times that would suit prospective participants. This process resulted in ten interviews, and audio-recorded supervision sessions with two leading South African psychology academics who provided feedback on the study process and emergent findings.

**Counter-normative Participants**

Opportunities were welcomed to interview participants who might be expected to offer contrasting positions. The trust-balling process of Phase II provided many such opportunities: among the participants were a medical doctor and a social worker both of whom related predominantly negative experiences of the impact of traditional beliefs in working with AIDS victims; three Zimbabweans living in South Africa, two engineering students, one of whom was from Namibia, and a female white South African. Altogether, eight of the sixteen Phase II participants were female. This diversity offered points of contrast and comparison both within the Phase II cohort and for reference to the Phase I cohort.

**Phase II Data Analysis**

The primary purpose of Phase II was to offer a comparison and contrast with Phase I findings. All recordings were transcribed by the researcher, and transcripts were thematically analysed with the findings of Phase I purposefully “bracketed” in order that distinct or contrasting themes could be identified. No major thematic differences were found, with interviews instead offering additional texture to Phase I findings.

For example, the interviews with females did not contradict the Phase I interviews, so much as offer an alternative perspective: the sense of male privilege and entitlement referred to earlier in this chapter found a different expression in the impact this had on the lives of female Africans in South Africa. Equally, experiences of war were uncommon among South African participants (more common for Zimbabweans), but the oppressive impact of Apartheid was strongly represented.

The primary conceptual organising theme which emerged from Phase I had been *Connectedness*, and this was replicated in Phase II interviews. The analysis was structured to enable the further exploration of the theme of connectedness. The results of this process are provided in Chapters Five, with Chapter Six providing an overview of findings and a theoretical commentary.
Coding Tables for Participants

The coding for Phase I and Phase II participants is provided in the following tables. To allow the reader to readily distinguish between categories of participant without the constant need for reference to the tables, the coding for Phase I interview participants is based on their identified religion (C for Christian, M for Muslim), with the group participants (all of whom identified as Christian) being designated through their group membership (E for Elder, SS for South Sudan, and SL for Sierra Leone). The first five participants (C1 - C5) comprised the first round of interviews; of those, C1 - C4 were re-interviewed in the second round.

Phase II participants (all but one of whom identified as Christian) are designated through their nationality of origin: SA for South Africa, ZIM for Zimbabwe, and N for Namibia. The supervisory interviews with the named African Professors are designated at the end of this table by SUP1 and SUP2.
Table 4: Phase I Participants Coding and Demographics (N = 30)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Age* &amp; YOB</th>
<th>Interview Dates</th>
<th>Community Group/ Nationality*</th>
<th>Self-Identified Religion</th>
<th>Interview Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>C1</td>
<td>Settlement Worker</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>40 1967</td>
<td>12/3/2007</td>
<td>Tigrinya/ Ethiopia</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>Hobart (Park)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>28/10/2007</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Hobart (Home)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6/8/2007</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Phone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1/2/2008</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Phone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2/9/2008</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Phone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>18/9/2011</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C3</td>
<td>Settlement Worker</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>30 1977</td>
<td>21/6/2007</td>
<td>Madi/ South Sudan</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>Hobart (Office)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>26/1/2008</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Hobart (Home)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C4</td>
<td>Settlement Worker</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>50 1957</td>
<td>13/5/2007</td>
<td>Mende/ Sierra Leone</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>Launceston (Home)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>23/6/2007</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(Park)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>28/10/2007</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(Home)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>22/10/2008</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(Phone)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6/4/2014</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C5</td>
<td>Settlement Worker</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>37 1984</td>
<td>5/7/2007</td>
<td>Kakwa/ South Sudan</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>Launceston (Home)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C6</td>
<td>Settlement Worker</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>36 1983</td>
<td>19/10/2007</td>
<td>Sudanese/ South Sudan</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>Hobart (Home)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M1</td>
<td>Taxi Driver</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>29 1979</td>
<td>2/2/2008</td>
<td>Nubian/ North Sudan</td>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>Hobart (Home)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>22/3/2008</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Hobart (Café)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C7</td>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>62 1946</td>
<td>28/2/2008</td>
<td>Kisi/ Sierra Leone</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>Launceston (Home)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M2</td>
<td>Business</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>40+ 1965?</td>
<td>21/3/2008</td>
<td>Sudanese/ Egypt</td>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>Hobart (Café)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C8</td>
<td>Disability Support</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>56 1952</td>
<td>22/3/2008</td>
<td>Amharic/ Ethiopia</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>Hobart (Home)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M3</td>
<td>Truck Driver</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>51 1957</td>
<td>14/4/2008</td>
<td>Madingo/ Liberia</td>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>Launceston (Home)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C9</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>28 1980</td>
<td>30/9/2008</td>
<td>Kakwa/ South Sudan</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>Launceston (Home)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M4</td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>37 1972</td>
<td>1/3/2009</td>
<td>Dafuri/ North Sudan</td>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>Launceston (Home)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Age at date of first interview (approximate for some whose precise year of birth was not known); year of birth (YOB) and nationality provided to assist in comprehending the political histories endured by participants.
Table 4: Phase I Participants Coding and Demographics (Continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Age * &amp; YOB</th>
<th>Interview Dates</th>
<th>Community Group/ Nationality*</th>
<th>Self-identified Religion</th>
<th>Interview Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>M5</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>30 1979</td>
<td>25/4/2009</td>
<td>Dafuri/ North Sudan</td>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>Launceston (Home)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M6</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>40 1969</td>
<td>3/5/2009</td>
<td>Unstated/ North Sudan</td>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>Launceston (Office)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M7</td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>42 1967</td>
<td>29/10/2009</td>
<td>Tigrinya/ Eritrea</td>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>Launceston (Home)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SS1</td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>40 1969</td>
<td>14/11/2009</td>
<td>Kakwa/ South Sudan</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>Launceston (Home)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SS3</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>25 1984</td>
<td>14/11/2009</td>
<td>Madi/ South Sudan</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>Launceston (Home)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SS4</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>34 1975</td>
<td>14/11/2009</td>
<td>Bari/ South Sudan</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>Launceston (Home)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SS5</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>26 1983</td>
<td>14/11/2009</td>
<td>Lotuko/ South Sudan</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>Launceston (Home)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SL2</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>60 1950</td>
<td>15/3/2010</td>
<td>Creole/ Sierra Leone</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>Launceston (Home)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SL3</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>32 1978</td>
<td>15/3/2010</td>
<td>Kisi-Kono/ Sierra Leone</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>Launceston (Home)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SL4</td>
<td>Taxi Driver</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>36 1974</td>
<td>15/3/2010</td>
<td>Mende/ Sierra Leone</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>Launceston (Home)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SL5</td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>44 1966</td>
<td>15/3/2010</td>
<td>Mende/ Sierra Leone</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>Launceston (Home)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Code</td>
<td>Occupation</td>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>Marital Status</td>
<td>Age * &amp; YOB</td>
<td>Interview Date</td>
<td>Community Group/Nationality*</td>
<td>Self-identified Religion</td>
<td>Interview Location</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ZIM1</td>
<td>Medical Doctor</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>40+ 1970?</td>
<td>19/5/2012</td>
<td>Shona/ Zimbabwe</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>Launceston (Home)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA2</td>
<td>Graduate Student</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>25 1987</td>
<td>26/7/2012</td>
<td>Pedi/ South Africa</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>Cape Town (Conference)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ZIM2</td>
<td>Graduate Student</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>30 1982</td>
<td>27/7/2012</td>
<td>Shona/ Zimbabwe</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>Cape Town (Conference)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ZIM3</td>
<td>Graduate Student</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>26 1986</td>
<td>30/7/2012</td>
<td>Samanyika/ Zimbabwe</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>Cape Town (Conference)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N1</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>22 1991</td>
<td>31/7/2013</td>
<td>Oshiwambo/ Namibia</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>Pretoria (Office)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA3</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>23 1990</td>
<td>31/7/2013</td>
<td>Tswana/ South Africa</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>Pretoria (Office)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA4</td>
<td>Christian Minister</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>27 1986</td>
<td>2/8/2013</td>
<td>Sotho/ South Africa</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>Pretoria (Café)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA10</td>
<td>Social Worker</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>37 1978</td>
<td>13/8/2013</td>
<td>Zulu/ South Africa</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>Durban (Office)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUP1</td>
<td>Supervision Session Professor Mhkize</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>13/8/2013</td>
<td>Not Stated/ South Africa</td>
<td>Not Stated</td>
<td>Durban (Office)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUP2</td>
<td>Supervision Session Professor Sodi</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>14/8/2013</td>
<td>Not Stated/ South Africa</td>
<td>Not Stated</td>
<td>Durban (Office)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Age at date of first interview (approximate for some whose precise year of birth was not known); year of birth (YOB) and nationality provided to assist in comprehending the political histories endured by participants.*
Chapter 4. Findings - African Counselling and Traditional Educative Structures

The Reporting of Study Findings

This study drew upon scholarship and field experience over a ten-year period. Interviews and observations were generated from sources which were geographically and culturally diverse, and analysis was done progressively as new information emerged.

Given the complexity of the findings and their relevance for counselling practice, findings are structured across Chapters Four, Five and Six. This is intended to reflect the layered emergence and re-emergence of data across time and place. In this way, the richness of the validation process is illustrated, and the researcher’s analytic process is rendered more transparent.

This fourth chapter presents the key findings which emerged from Phase I interviews with African refugee men arriving in Tasmania, Australia. This demarcation has ethical importance, ensuring that the integrity of these men’s representations of their lived experience is preserved within the broader study context. Secondarily, it assists in tracing the contextualising and elaborating role of the fieldwork conducted in South Africa.

One substantive exception is made to this quarantining process. The intersecting and mutually informing character of the Phase I (Tasmanian fieldwork) and Phase II (South African fieldwork) data is demonstrated through the “bringing forward” of key data from one South African participant, enabling a consolidation of the theme of traditional educative structures as intrinsic to an understanding of “African Counselling”.

Chapter Five presents the findings from the data collected in South Africa, elaborating on the central, re-emerging theme of connectedness. This theme was significant throughout the study regardless of differences across gender, place, and ethnicity. The chapter begins with personalised, immediate dimensions of connectedness, in order to portray its relevance in everyday lives of participants and communities. In the second half of Chapter Five, the intrinsic place of connectedness within cosmological and meaning systems is emphasised.

Chapter Six provides a commentary on the limitations and implications of the findings for a conception of selfhood that would be inclusive of African experience. Together, this constellation of findings informs an inclusive model of counselling that is responsive to people and communities who have suffered displacement.
**Experiential Statements**

The thematic analysis of the first phase of fieldwork yielded 26 “Experiential Statements”\(^{19}\), presented as numbered paragraphs. The following clusters reflect the relative importance to participants, whilst ensuring a logical flow for the reader.

a. **Family Responsibility within Community.** Men’s formal and informal roles within their immediate and extended families were identified as the most important aspect of their lives, and this was contextualised within a broader, inclusive sense of community.

b. **Problems as a Community Matter.** Problems were almost invariably described as features of life contextualised within traditional community norms. The community context, as an extension of the family context that men identified as most important, appeared to pre-configure the men’s reported experience.

c. **Tasmanian Settlement Problems and Recommendations.** This cluster represents issues of settlement insofar as they were prioritised by participants in this study, along with proposed or requested responses.

d. **The African Counsellor.** The final cluster contextualises descriptions of counselling approaches provided by participants within the theme of traditional educative structures, informed by key data from Phase II of the study.

4a: Family Responsibility within Community

The following transcript excerpts show the commitment that men expressed when relating their role-place within family and ancestral systems, while representing themes within themes.

1. **Gender and Authority:** As African men, we have the main responsibility and authority to ensure that our families survive and thrive. We take this very seriously and our families are the most important thing to us.

If you know your responsibility for the children, you going to hold them good…me, I been suffering for a long time, for my children. So, I don’t want my children to suffer – M3.

When we were running from the rebels we were in a village and we were in one house and my sister and nieces were in the next house. I saw a rebel going to the next house and knew that if he found my sister and nieces he would abduct and rape them. He had a gun but I ran out and I stood in front of him and told him you are not going in there! He slapped me in the face! We argued but luckily the convoy came and I explained to the leader what I had done. – C4.

I tried to apply for migration in many countries since 8 years; they never had me a chance until …. in the year 2007 for migration to Australia.

*R: How did you keep your hope alive for all of that time?*

\(^{19}\) Much of this material was previously published in Harris (2011).
I got married in the camp and I had children, and that put more responsibility on me, even if it wasn’t for me I should…I felt…I should do something for the sake of my family, my children – M6.

Journal Entry 15/11/2006 - Kakwa gathering in Launceston:
Most of the food preparation was done by the women, but men contributed to child care, with children circulating in the gathering. I had a baby on my lap for some time, and such was the sense of shared parenting, I could not work out who among those present, were the baby’s biological parents.

2. Problem-solving within Family Systems: For men, it is helpful if we get acknowledgement and support for the strength of our commitment to family life. If there is a problem in the family, we usually will work hard and quickly to fix it. It doesn’t usually help with African families to leave the father out of the discussion. Also, it is usually helpful to involve other experienced community members in solving a problem.

It’s traditional that if there is any problem between husband and wife, you go to the oldest in the family, talking, trying to fix, these kinds of things. But when I talked to my (Australian) ex-mother in law, about I have a problem with my wife, she would say straight out to her, “oh your husband has been, he don’t trust you, your husband is this, your husband is that. Oh, leave him and come to me!” And that’s what happened – M2.

Journal Entry 15/11/2006 - Kakwa gathering in Launceston
Men spoke first, however women appeared to be accorded equal respect in listening to their speeches. The final speech was by the oldest woman who spoke in the mother tongue, acknowledging (as it was subsequently translated to me) my part in the gathering and confirming my welcome to the group.

I think the research should be based on this only. A full research should be based on this. Because to me it is the main, or biggest problem to face here… if we can find a solution to these (family conflict) problems here, I think people would live more peacefully – SS4.

Traditional norms demarcated status and roles within families, with men occupying the place of authority. Settlement in Tasmania brought a sudden loss of status for the men, which was not simply a personal affront; it disrupted community integrity.

If a husband has paid dowry for a wife, and the police take the husband away, the dowry has been dismissed without compensation. Should we send an invoice to the police for how many goats? – E1.

The impact of loss of such an intrinsic role could be devastating; comparable with all other previous losses:

Before, he lost his home and his livelihood and his safety and his connection with his ancestors, perhaps his family members. Now, he has succeeded in getting to Tasmania but this success has destroyed his life completely - C4.

As settlement progressed, men adapted to the requirements of the situation, yet tended to express a sense of unease with the emergent norms.
Journal Entry 9/10/2008 – Kakwa memorial gathering in Brisbane

My informant reflected on the gathering, noting that the men enjoyed themselves as the women worked; if men tried to involve themselves in the cooking they would be sent away. This time was for women to chat amongst themselves; men were the providers and were to be served. It seemed clear that the women were also enjoying their work, with lots of laughter, loud chatter, and singing. My informant said this was changing in Australia now, especially as women got work: he encouraged men who were unemployed to contribute to the cleaning and learn some simple cooking, as it was unreasonable for a man to expect a wife to come home from a hard day’s work and immediately provide for him.

In Africa…. women they grow up, they know the rules of the house, what they can do, what they have to do. But here, the women, what they will say: I work, you work. We equal – M2.

The rights of children in Tasmania were identified as a source of family conflict and confusion.

3. **Parental Roles in Transition**: Many African children will misuse the protection that Tasmania’s laws give them, and parents can be wrongfully under suspicion. In African communities, all adults are expected to provide guidance to children, who are required to show respect.

In Africa (the police) will charge that boy; if the boy is disturbed, drinking … but here, the boy will be in the police car, saying my mother is doing this, my father is doing that, my elder brother is doing so and so to me - C7.

You have to listen to them. Your kids! In Africa, I’m the boss, child is child… if you go out… they will ask what time you are back? And you must tell them! When children give up on the family, move out from the house, some parents will suicide because of this – C5.

We have a saying that here, when you talk 3 or 4 words, the child will talk more than 10 words. And this one is really burning your heart, that the kid your child can talk to you like this – SS4.

Australian young ones, they don’t want kids…. they want dogs! They don’t want kids at all because having kids are very stressful… your dog will never call police about you!! (laughter)… They don’t want kids, because …what they did to their parents… they don’t want no kids to do that to them. They don’t want that at all! - SL1.

Another problem commonly reported in Tasmania was the family conflict which resulted from women being identified as the recipients of welfare payments, and in some cases making decisions that did not support family life. Following the cultural norm that men had the responsibility as providers, and that women had control over the small amounts of money that they earned, women might buy clothes, makeup or hairstyles, or send money to their families in Africa. There would then be no money for rent or other essentials. The Tasmanian welfare sector, which tended to perceive African men as abusive within the family system rather than protective, then interpreted men’s angry complaints as expressions of power and control.
4. Parental Roles and the Welfare State: Centrelink (welfare payment) goes to mothers and children directly, who can be new to this responsibility. If either the mother or father misuse the family income this will create a problem. When Safe at Home (family violence service) or Child Protection become involved it is a big shock, and causes shame, anxiety, and anger, which can be hard to manage. Often, problems go straight to the police, and Australian laws can exclude the father and stop the community from becoming involved.

When we split, I (wasn’t permitted) to see my children for three months… because my ex, she thinks I’m going to run away (with them) … I don’t like my children (to be) without father and mother. We don’t have to be together, but I have to communicate, work together for the family, for the kids – M2.

In general, violence is condemned in Africa…. if your wife is someone who is being good, your relatives will not let you. And they will rescue the wife. Normally you tell your close relatives, your wife is doing this this this…they call one of her relatives… you see your daughter? She is doing like this like this like this…if she does it again, we will send her to you, to be disciplined…this is what happens in Africa. And it’s very embarrassing… it is the worst thing a lady can do, to be sent back home for discipline, because it is telling the whole people there that they don’t know how to raise a family… a woman …. Very, very embarrassing! - SS1.

This illustrates a traditional protocol for dealing with common problems such as disputes between husband and wife. This close involvement of family and community members in responding to emerging problems pointed to the finely textured interplay between community life, education, and approaches to problems.

In Tasmania, some women were encouraged by service providers to seek “safety” and “independence”, with the father’s influence restricted by restraint orders or even imprisonment. This contributed to family tension, conflict and separation. This pattern was confirmed by the female participant, although she noted that men often struggled to understand that their power was limited by society’s rules, and that where women did gain work, there was a need for men to contribute in the home:

They don’t take restraint orders seriously. They will say: no-one will see me I will go at night. Still the police come and see them. The men still have African beliefs: but women are now homemakers as well as breadwinners. If you have six kids, you can’t expect the wife to do cooking, also the homework, everything – C5.

The role of police in African communities in Tasmania was investigated by Campbell (2007). Initial fear of police needed to be overcome, and police reported being taken aback by some African norms (in one example, an African woman insisted on her husband’s right to beat her if dinner was not prepared). Campbell cited adaptations that police had made, such as holding group information sessions with African men about family violence, which attracted increasing numbers over time. It was noted that as the numbers of Africans within the communities increased, reports of family violence decreased, which was attributed to the more effective dissemination of information within the community as it became more established, suggesting a high degree of responsiveness on the part of the community.
Family-in-Community as Intrinsic to Cosmological Order

The men in this study displayed an intense agitation in relation to their sanctioned role being contradicted and undermined after arrival in Tasmania. The process by which such an intrinsic role is established and maintained is complex and detailed. Men’s traditional roles within families had a complex relationship with African cosmology. This was embedded in cultural practices such as the bride-price, which operated in a range of ways to ensure family stability (as discussed in Chapter Five). These practices were in turn incorporated with a complex system of countervailing loyalties (Cockcroft, 1990) which ameliorated the risk of conflict, and provided the flexibility needed to expand, migrate, and cohabit with other family groups.

The key theme identified in this study was an ethic of connectedness:

The point is … African way of life is … about being close to other people or connected … there’s that … there’s that … there’s no… nothing; we are still learning actually… to live as individuals – C6.

It is difficult to convey the emotional weight with which such things were spoken: the phrase “there’s that … there’s that … there’s no … nothing” suggested at the time that the participant was at a loss to capture the contrast with Tasmanian culture.

In the western context, these men’s distress in the face of family problems could be framed around their endorsement of the culturally sanctioned male gender role (Pleck, 1981), but this presumes a distinct individualised authority to endorse gender roles, and fails to do justice to the extent to which the African men’s roles were defining of a broader purpose and meaning. This family responsibility was experienced as an essential feature of life, supported and legitimised by all living and non-living things.

In Tanganyika (now Tanzania) in the 1960s, Nyerere (1964) referenced the Swahili term *Ujamaa* or “familyhood” to legitimise a specifically African socialism: 

*The foundation, and the objective, of African socialism is the extended family. The true African socialist… regards all men as his brethren – as members of an ever-extending family* (p.76).

There is close correlation between the most strongly emphasised theme in the lives of refugee African men from diverse countries arriving in Tasmania, and the political foundations of a different African country 50 years previously. Such triangulation is strong evidence that this sensibility is widespread and enduring.

5. **Radical Connectedness:** We are together with other people and all other things in the world. Whatever affects the community or world, affects us. Depending on the community, the African world might include God, ancestors, spirits, especially of the soil, forests, mountains, and rivers, animals, plants; and other things we can see or can’t see. This is especially true for those of us from villages or small towns, where we rely on agriculture to live and are very close to the natural world.
If I am sick, my family is sick also – C4.

And sometimes when I am alone, I will still say, oh I need to call Andrew, I need to talk to him… because already there is that connection, and there is that feeling, that oh, part of my body, is part of the food that I ate from Andrew’s house… and that is why that if we go to any African’s family, we always share meals together. That’s the culture that brings people together. And that’s very, very important in the African communities or society, if you come to my home, I offer you something and you don’t want to eat it, there is a big question mark, I have to question myself what is wrong between myself and Andrew – C2.

I am westernised but… big things, big and mighty things, like even those big rocks I saw, it reminded me of the work of somebody. And to be honest that has …it has some connection with my Christianity….it will say Oh those big rocks, big mighty rocks were put there by God…you know so there is still a connection between that, and me… – C4.

There was often a potent visceral aspect to the experience of connectedness, extended to animals, plants, soil and other features of the physical environment, as in the following dialogue from the South Sudanese Consensus Group:

SS1: …. the soil can be used as a power, to drive outsiders out…for example my kids, when they go back the first thing (my community will) do is take the soil (bends down as if picking up soil), and put here (presses finger to forehead) …. this shows that you are welcome, you belong…
SS2: Yeah, this land’s yours…
SS1: You belong to this soil…so they put here they mark it…
SS3: That is the sense of they say…
SS2: Coming from here
SS1: you are welcome, this is your place…
SS3: you are recognised by the ancestors…
SS1: when someone from somewhere (else) comes and do something not good, when it comes to cursing sometime they get the soil and say…
SS3: Go back!
SS1: it means you will not survive in this soil… (yeah, yeah) if your intention is not good…your crop he will not be happy, because the soil says, you don’t belong here…
SS3: you don’t go and hunt (if) it doesn’t belong to you…. because if this territory was mine, before you come to this bush, you have to come through me…and have to get some blessing… that all the animals which are here should be killed and nobody should be injured in this hunting process…and you see a lot of it in the spirit of the land…people…
SS2: Yeah, animals…
SS3: Even the rivers, you can’t go to catch, you know the fish, in an area that is someone else’s don’t belong to you… so everything is…
SS2: interconnected.

This interaction showed the degree of commonality across different communities, with each group member identifying with a different language group. The transcript also showed how agency was often conferred in language “your crop he will not be happy, because the soil says, you don’t belong here”.

It seemed clear that consensus group members spontaneously collaborated to convey their shared ideas. There were cultural variations, for example in death rituals: one discussion centred on the need to establish the nature of the death, and the commensurate compensation to be paid to the family of the wife by the husband (in a
case where the wife died). Without such payment, burial was not permitted, which could lead to spirit-related risk.

SS5: When you marry someone’s daughter, you take her away from her parents, she is going to work for your people …and if she dies, they say OK it is like we have lost everything…so pay us something…and if the woman has a child…they may say OK you have a child there, what about us? We have lost ours. You pay us something for us to mourn with.

SS3: One example I saw, when he took the body back to the relatives for burial, he had a big struggle, and he paid a lot of money. But with the Azande people, we have something different, if you read the anthropology we normally use the oracle, you know, find out exactly what happened, so it’s unlike in other tribes in Sudan… (but) there is still that kind of a link between the relatives, the parents and their children...

SS4: …especially when the families are divided, for instance we are relatives with X, and then X does disappear, he doesn’t visit me, and then on such occasions when the funeral happens, and then X happens to come, and then they will try to discuss all of this and ask X why he is not visiting friends or families, that sort of thing…so if it is solved then everyone goes in peace.

In this way, men were expected to enact authority within their family systems such that community, ancestral and spirit obligations were appropriately represented. This accounted for the intensity of agitation displayed by the men in this study: in a double bind, they felt obliged to maintain their role, but were powerless to do so.

Few participants volunteered spirit beliefs explicitly, but many made references to situations in which these beliefs were intrinsic (such as the Azande divination) and responded to further questioning. The process of divination appeared to have the same truth value for this participant, as the anthropological description of it: these features were described in just such matter-of-fact ways, implying that they were an integral part of life. The loss of access to such spirit-based and other protective practices can be a source of profound anxiety in traditionally identifying communities, which can be confounded with western trauma constructs (LeVine, 2010).

6. Spirit Connectedness: Many Africans have beliefs that are very different from those of most Australians, like belief in the influence of ancestors and other spirits. These are just other aspects of our community life, and most Africans have seen evidence of them, so they remain important to many of us.

It is a common belief that a bad stomach is caused by crossing a river and the spirit in the river has afflicted you. (As a child) I had been visiting my mother’s relatives and had crossed a river on the way back. In the morning I woke up very sick, and was unable to get up. My grandfather filled a half-gourd with water from the compound and placed it on my head. He tossed hot charcoal in the water so that it hissed. Straight after this treatment my illness went away and I was able to run about normally – C2.

The interplay between the community, the natural environment, and spirits was also referenced.
A place like here (a natural setting) if it was in Africa, will be seen as sacred, because in Africa these are the places where the spirits go and live, like the spirits of the sea, the spirits of the forest, and normally we would come here every year maybe after the harvest, and they would come with the elders, and there would be sacrifice, they will worship and leave some cooked food, thinking that when they go away the spirits will come and take them – C4.

Journal Entry 15/11/2006 - Kakwa gathering in Launceston
There is a heavy rain squall precisely at the time the gathering is called to order for the meeting. It had been overcast and misty all morning but with no rain. I am told that the squall is a “blessing” and would be confined to the area of the house as a sign that the gathering was acknowledged. This is explained in the same matter-of-fact tone as is the preparation of the food. I later establish that no-one I know in Launceston saw any rain that day, and there was no rainfall officially recorded.

My host (C2) had previously told me about the funeral service he had arranged for his mother and brother on his recent trip to Sudan. He stated that at the end of the service, his brother in the form of a deer, rare in that area, came to give his blessings. My host explains that there is a connection between such gatherings and subsequent fortuitous events, interpreted as blessings to those who attend the gathering.

The matter-of-fact attitude towards the squall “blessing” was evidence of its normative quality. These men routinely experienced their role as being affirmed and legitimised through this interplay of environmental, cultural, and spirit events, with such “blessings” remaining influential through time and across space. Other uncanny rain events are illustrated in the following three journal passages.

Journal Entry 7/2/2013 – My daughter’s farewell gathering
It is a warm, clear summer night. In my speech, I reference the compelling power of African traditions in such situations. “If this were in Africa, we might have her walk through a drizzle of water through the thatched roof, to offer protection on her journey. Regrettably, we don’t have a thatched roof. Also, I had not thought beforehand to arrange any water”. With that, there is a sudden downpour of rain lasting about 30 seconds, and amazed murmurings from those present mingle with the sound of the rain on the roof. As the rain stops, I thank the spirits for their offer of protection, predicting that my daughter’s journey might not be conventional, but that we can hope that the spirits would ensure success, and I invoke the spirits of all those present to help sustain her.

Journal Entry 10/12/2014 – Nelson Mandela’s Memorial Service
Watching the service on television, the commentary by western reporters on the drenching rain seems ill-informed: they remark on how the rain seems not to dampen spirits but instead the dancing becomes enlivened, as if to defy the rain. More likely, it is a jubilant response to the ancestral realm accepting Mandela.

Journal Entry 14/1/2016 – My father’s memorial service
My sister begins the eulogy and there is a simultaneous downpour which drowns out her words. When I speak I choke with emotion as I acknowledge the African tradition which interprets this as the ancestors’ acceptance of my father’s spirit. My PhD supervisor is at the service, which is affirming to me and offers credibility; she reports being powerfully moved.

Spirit influence repeatedly emerged as explanatory of behaviours by Africans which confused clinicians. One participant (C2, later confirmed by C4), explained why it might be difficult for western counsellors to engage successfully with Africans, especially at the beginning of the first session. The client is likely to have been prompted to come, either through human or spirit agency, and will arrive with the
open expectation that the practitioner will have been advised beforehand, through ancestral or spirit contact, what the required remedy is. To ask about the problem suggests incompetence, and there would follow a process of polite avoidance. An authoritative, culturally acceptable beginning to a consultation was required to promote confidence. This feature was affirmed by Wreford (2008):

*A major difference...rests in the fact that the patient rarely proffers information about a condition before receiving a diagnosis. Nosibele (my teacher) even referred to occasions at which the patient was not identified in a family group, and the first task for the healer was to discover “which one is ill”* (p. 80).

The three sources cited were from South Sudan, Sierra Leone, and South Africa respectively; suggesting widespread distribution through the African continent.

The notion of community thus emerged as more intimate, inclusive, immediate and active than is routinely understood in the western context. It conjured an idealised notion of a community in harmony. This sensibility was not universally endorsed.

---

7. **Tension and Conflict in Community**: Some Africans see negative aspects to this community approach. Rumours and superstition can be powerful, and education is not always encouraged if it conflicts with tradition. There may be long-standing disputes and conflict between groups, especially if it is believed that taboos were broken. Some Africans use the power of community thinking negatively, either diminishing others, or making unreasonable demands. But mostly it allows everyone to have a good life. If we can build a strong community here we can manage these disadvantages.

People, they didn’t want someone to progress...they just want people to be all the same ... like if I am poor, I don’t have anything ... I always go and beg; people want me to remain that way ... and if my children start to grow up and prosper, in a different way ... they will get rid of all these children who are trying to prosper.... they just want to make sure people are all the same – C9.

We have trouble tribe to tribe, with Dinka and Nuer...if somebody have a fight with somebody, somebody injured...that generation will never forget that trouble. That always a problem.... kill to kill... always trouble in Sudan like that. That will keep going, never stop - M1.

There were profound ambiguities and contradictions in the post-colonial African self-in-community way of being that was revealed by these men. Deep connection along with profound hostility and war; heroic family/community responsibility along with endemic fraud, corruption, and subversion; willing and joyful involvement of men with their families along with dismissive enactment of male privilege.

Participants of the South Sudanese Consensus Group argued that it was for the most part the corruption of the African system, rather than the system itself, which produced the negative effects. Over time, with these men’s repeated insistence on the
concern for their children, the impact of dislocation on children and young adults became more salient. Lacking immediate guidance on traditional norms, some young Africans seemed to enact disjointed aspects of them.

Journal Entry 03/02/2014
The showy displays associated with expensive cars, large TVs, and flamboyant dress, and the intensity with which many young African men pursue University qualifications for which they are not academically equipped, become re-contextualised for me as dispirited cultural enactments intended as messages to a (largely absent) community.

This theme was noted by Mboya (1964) who represented such post-colonial “tensions” as a necessary focus in African development.

Phase II participants tended to emphasise the negative aspects of such tensions more strongly than Phase I participants, suggesting that they were more present in day-to-day life in South Africa. This is expanded upon in Chapter Five, alongside the roles that women assumed in African communities and in the cosmic domain; the interface between traditional healing and rituals; medical responses to AIDS and other diseases; the influential doctrines of the Christian Church; and the legacy of Apartheid.

The less urbanised background of Phase I participants, together with their geographical dislocation through their refugee status, may have moderated their awareness of these tensions compared with those interviewed in Phase II.

4b: Problems as a Community Matter
During analysis, it emerged that the concept of “problem” was constructed in relation to community (including ancestral) expectations, rather than being personal to an individual: the term therefore may have quite different meaning for participants across cultural contexts.

8. African Conceptualisation of Problems: Generally, problems are simply accepted as part of life. Men especially are trained to act strongly, and even if we have a problem we might not want anyone to know for fear of being seen as weak. If someone needs counselling it means that the problem is too big for them or is something new to them. Perhaps they have lost hope for the future, which is common in places like refugee camps, and can happen in Tasmania if problems pile up. They might be frightened about what they have done wrong to cause the problem.

In Sudan, it’s very hard to fix a problem … (laughs) … like a sieve … when water go in a sieve, you can’t hold the water, you can’t stop the water … the water can always find some way out … it is like a problem every way … always another problem is coming happening … (laughs) – M1.
So, people are living without water, and may be afraid of the government coming to take their house away, and may be afraid of being robbed… You will be angry and you will be sad … but no-one can help you – M5.

Refugee experience is not really something everyone enjoys, it’s not really good, but at the same time it’s sort of tolerable…especially when you don’t have a choice…it’s something that you have to accept….I can’t actually remember any problem that I actually solved … now when I look back, and I try to remember what used to happen to me, or the problems I used to face, I can see how horrible it must have been … Yeah it’s unbelievable, it’s unbelievable … when you put things on a scale, and you can’t believe that you used to face these sort of problems - M7.

We left from Guinea, about 2 o’clock or 3 o’clock in the night (attacked by rebels) … no shoes no nothing, no food no nothing, walked for, walked for, I think 3 days…back to Liberia…then try to find a way to get back to Morovia… (because) they have some rebel leader with the same name as me they started looking for all that family in Liberia…Yeah. Ohhh, it were not easy. So I were there, they kept at me. They beat me, massacre me, they want to kill me! Do you see the marks? (shows scars on arms). See the marks? – M3.

I was persecuted since I was a child, I was accused wrongly of having weapons … I spent some time in prison, I was still a child … (shows scar on arm) … I was shot in this arm … stayed in gaol for some time … that I think was mainly the reason why I decided to leave the country … Talking about these things is not really upsetting, I’ve been through a lot, this is only a tiny bit of what I experienced, and talking about it, doesn’t cause me discomfort or anything - M6.

We have a good and bad spirit which is born in us and we have to learn about it. We only learn about our good spirit when our bad spirit takes us away from it. That is what has happened when an African asks for help; they have realized that their bad spirit has taken them, and that scares them - C2.

People believe that if they break a taboo, or if they don’t show respect to the ancestors properly, they will come into harm – C4.

A tendency to minimise problems emerged, especially when comparing problems in Tasmania with those encountered back home in Africa. Equally, the idea was expressed that having survived such extreme circumstances, entrants could handle the challenges of settlement.

If you compare the situation here, and in Africa, here people are getting paid from government, every fortnight … but in Africa, there are people who don’t have anything, completely … they think like today, what will I eat. The first thing when they wake up in the morning … what will I eat today. Now after completing that task today, tomorrow will be a different task. Now, if you compare, the situation like this one here, I don’t think there is a problem here … there is no problem – C9.

Although all participants had suffered from extreme events over protracted periods of time, few identified negative consequences to their functioning. Problems encountered in Tasmania were then sometimes seen as unnecessarily provoking memories of times of hopelessness and despair that they had already come to terms with.

9. The Pragmatics of Forgetting: We have all been through a lot of problems, but what has happened to us personally before we
came here is not something we like to focus on. Sometimes we notice that our abilities are not as great as they once were, and this is humiliating. We are trying to make a better life in our new place, and sometimes when we fall into a problem this brings back memories of what happened before. Our lives have so much loss there is no end to it, and we are reminded of it when things go badly here. But when today’s problem is dealt with, these memories usually fade enough for us to manage.

Yes, with time we get used to these things, because if you keep thinking about them you will never achieve anything or step forward … you feel hopeless, but we have to think ahead, think forward – M6.

I would be killed (if I went home), because my enemies would not allow me to even stay there for a second. My land has been taken away, everything been taken away, so I’m just…. this is why I want to hold it tight here, attend God, attend Australian people, what they done for me, I only pray God for the nation, (Australia) so that the nation will be a big superpower, and let the world see it, because they have done a great thing for me – C7.

We are in Australia to make a better life, not…to go backwards – M2.

There are many things, many things… (long pause) …. one of the core things I had prior to coming here, was to come and rebuild my life…that was what I had. And that remains the hope I have in Australia, to rebuild my life – C6.

In Chapter Two, the argument that PTSD was a culturally constructed and interpreted problem of memory was outlined (Young, 1995). The men in the present study resisted the idea that emotive responses to current issues were informed by their history, and could be assisted by “reprocessing” that history. They did report that the most difficult issues tended to “take them back to problems in Africa”, but inverted the relationship between trauma and memory. A current problem was more serious (and needed to be addressed) because it evoked disturbing memories of earlier problems. This finding suggests that much more needs to be done to properly comprehend the issue of trauma across populations.

Jordans et al. (2013) noted that key elements of successful counselling for children by South Sudanese counsellors included timely avoidance-focussed guidance, and encouragement to suppress and distract oneself from difficult feelings. Forbearance in the face of overwhelming difficulty would seem to be a culturally sanctioned norm for the African communities studied. As noted in Chapter Three, for non-western or under-resourced populations, problems are constructed as something to endure rather than to solve (Fernando, 1995a).

References to problems being addressed almost invariably called attention to such community expectations. Traditionally, problems would be addressed by others within the community, rather than requiring help-seeking by an individual.

10. **Role and Responsibility Allocation in Community:** Most activities are determined by age and gender roles. Important
decisions are made together with others, and this means that both positive and negative outcomes of decisions are shared. This provides support when things go badly, and the benefits are shared when things go well. It creates a powerful sense of closeness and trust. For personal decisions, support is mostly provided informally within the family, which is at the core of this community based approach.

We grew up in a situation where decisions from when you were a child, to any age, other people were involved in it. And because they are in it, if those decisions go wrong, you will know that you are not alone, you get a lot of support, because it is a collective decision, so a collective responsibility is taken….and also you owe allegiance….to your people - C4.

Normally people they solve their problems by uniting together…. for example, if the problem is employment, the people would come together and they start to solve their problem, that’s how I found it – M7.

11. Authority, Compliance and Coercion: In traditional communities, elders make many of the decisions which are then followed by everybody. People may be encouraged or persuaded to follow the community interest, and community support may be withdrawn if they don’t comply. This is a very powerful threat in a strong community. In Tasmania, this is not so easy but communities will try to gather together to work out community problems, and those who have more local experience will often provide guidance.

In the community, they have to live together…. nobody working for money. So how they used to solve problems, they meet, they form a club, sort of society group, so if they don’t have physical amount to, to contribute monthly, when they make farm, if you grow rice, everybody bring one peck of rice, and give to one person, for that year, and that person will do something, whether to build, whether to get married… When we live in a very small group, we don’t have bank, nothing, so this is our bank we have, we trust some elderly people, we give it to them to keep – C7.

I’m taking a risk …as an initiate, I have revealed the secret society to another person, (so I would) be fined very very very very heavily; and if I have a house I could lose it. Whosoever is an initiate discloses that…. you will be in biiiiig trouble. I’m telling you… I think I am more comfortable talking about it because I’m in the western world… if it were say in Sierra Leone, even in Freetown, I wouldn’t be so… comfortable. (But) I know that nothing supernatural will happen to me.…. I just think that if I disclose that and living thousands of miles away, even if there is a supernatural thing it won’t know that I am doing that here…the reach is not so far – C4.

Religion, God, and Prayer

For all participants, God, religion, or prayer were key components of approaches to problems, and pastoral support features prominently in African counselling (Nwoye,
In the interviews, God was portrayed as an active force, intrinsically part of the world and therefore present in community.

12. Sacred Practices in Connection: Religion, God, and prayer are important, but family and community are generally stronger influences than which religion we might have. Whether Muslim or Christian, our religion gives us an opportunity to gather together, and teaches us that we have to work together, to face things as a community. Where religious difference has been used to deliberately undermine community, such as Sudan, it has become more problematic.

How do I know (God helped)? … in Africa, I get up and pray, I ask God … I say Ay God! You give me the children … I don’t know how to make nobody, you give me, so God please help me, for me and my children, to survive … but before survive, he must give me place what is safe for me and my children. So if I do that from year to year to year to year, and then I see myself in Australia, I feel that God has answered my prayer. That is great! - M3.

And, in time of problem also, there are evidence that it helps, it comforts, to talk to God and to talk about, but it goes beyond that. There are situations that I know personally that changes, even people with ah, ah mental problems…without any counsellor, you pray for them, it might take time but they get healing, and they get completely restored – C1.

The other thing that I find useful…and it does seem to me that it works, is that people coming with Christian affiliation, they use the Bible, you know, open some chapters, and read them; and then start talking about...God you know. That’s common, that is really, really, common. I don’t know with someone who is maybe a Muslim, I don’t know. It puts you to thinking that yes, even though you are going through this, God is there, watching you, and definitely things are not going to be the same, things will change – C6.

Like if someone die, all of the people will come… to my house, and they will read… read the K’oran… yeah it will let you to be confident, to forget about dying, and you can’t be upset, if you read that… It gets you to be brave – M5.

And the thing that amazes me was, the SPLA (Sudanese People’s Liberation Army) was desperate, they wanted people, they wanted soldiers. But this man (a Dinka SPLA recruit whose weapons he carried) could…the…the thing he offered to me was to leave Sudan rather than to join the SPLA. And then I feel like, yes…And I think, because with my faith, Christian faith, God has spoken to this man – C6.

Religious gatherings were valued for the way they brought people together, as well as for engagement with God.

In the camps, you have perhaps 1 cup of palm oil a month, and 2 kg of cornflour. The rebels come at night, you had to hide, you never know if you or your family might be killed. People turned to God in the camps, gathering and praying. I had turned to God before then, and became closer to God … there was more activity of gathering and praying and singing, this brought me closer - C3.
Religion is viewed as the most important fundamental of things that unite us together…so it’s very important for us – SS4.

**Distinctions of meaning between Muslim- and Christian- identification**

The responses from Muslim-identifying participants mirrored those from Christian-identifying participants. All participants referenced the importance of family in providing support, and generating motivation and hope; the involvement of more experienced members of the family in addressing issues; and assistance that was founded on a collective sensibility. The embodiment of tradition through elders and culturally sanctioned practices (including prayer) was strong, although the recourse to God per se was not emphasised by all Muslim participants, as it had been for Christian participants. References to traditional spirit beliefs were also less common in Muslim interviews.

One theme emerged more strongly in the Muslim interviews: a greater emphasis on racial discrimination and inter-tribal conflict in Africa. This was most pervasive among Sudanese Muslims, all of whom identified personal persecution associated with the colour of their skin, identifying the Arab or “red” Sudanese as the persecuting authority, despite sharing their religious beliefs.

If they find you on the way you going to Khartoum…they will kill you or they will do something bad for you…because they don’t like Darfur people – M3.

They also referenced inter-tribal conflict among Africans after arrival in Tasmania. Christian participants tended to refer to the periods of war within their respective countries, with an emphasis on the way this destroyed communities, and appeared to want to downplay references to inter-group conflict. However, when this issue was more deeply explored with the South Sudanese group, the source of community disruption was clearly identified as deliberate discrimination by the Muslim Arab power elite in Khartoum, which pervaded community and family life.

(The Imam) with black skin…he was leading the prayers that day…and then before he finished the prayers, the (Arab) stood up and started praying … he say, because your skin is black, this will not be listened to by God – SS4.

Other features of Muslim interviews were that four of the seven participants spontaneously displayed scars (none of the Christian participants did this), and there was a greater emphasis on the need for stronger rules for behaviour in Tasmania to prevent problems emerging. This suggestion of a more intense machismo among some Muslim participants was supported by proverbs cited by one participant: the first emphasising the need for tough responses to wake a person up to his responsibilities in the world:

We pinch you to wake you up, not to make you bleed – M1.

He also contrasted the Muslim with the Christian approach to help-giving with the following saying:

If you go in the front door of the Church, people help you. You go to the front door of the Mosque, people help you to pray – M1.
The themes of acceptance of problems and endurance are clearly reflected in these sayings, with a dark-humoured edge. Generally speaking, participants identified commonalities rather than contradictions between traditional beliefs, Christianity and Islam.

Islam and Christianity… they emphasise on helping the needy or the troubled one – M7.

One Phase I participant (C4) described Muslim, Christian, and traditional African spirit practices he had observed and participated in. When asked about the variations he had observed in traditional practices across African countries, a Phase II participant stated that:

I didn’t think there was a big difference from my experience…. Some of the things were quite similar, particularly in the traditional communities, there are some areas where it’s really like mostly Muslims, as opposed to Christians… the way they used to do things was a little bit different, more secretive – ZIM1.

Even when the political use of religious difference was an aspect of the conflict (as in Sudan), strong efforts were made to re-establish a sense of community after settlement, which illustrated the “passing down” or inherited domain of connectedness. The following extract referred to a welcoming party that had been arranged by the Sudanese community for all new and recent arrivals, regardless of nationality or religion.

Here in Launceston, you don’t see any difference between Christians and Muslims, because we are all at the party … there are Muslims there … why is there not a problem? … because we don’t see any problem! … but if it was back in Sudan … they would be a bit aloof… like saying, “Oh God they (Christians) are not clean!” … and then we would not be associated together - SS3.

Notwithstanding this, many participants and particularly the South Sudanese consensus group, made references to the pain and enduring inter-group mistrust stemming from religious conflicts: and also the care that might be taken to forestall this.

In Sudan - I don’t talk about other African countries - we have been with the Arabs and we have known really how these people are, and that’s why it has become a very sensitive…and this is the problem that creates (war), people dying until today – SS4.

One married a Muslim…and then we had a big discussion about it… because the husband wanted the girl to turn to Muslim…but she can’t change to a Muslim, without talking to all of us….so we had a very long debate. We have to decide whether this girl should become Muslim or she has to remain a Christian now married…and it’s an ongoing debate… if this girl becomes a Muslim, and that marriage doesn’t work out…how is she going to start again…The marriage was not a bit stable, you know the husband is not stable so we say no, this girl is still young, she needs to take her time…you shouldn’t force her to become Muslim…and for example, if the husband comes back from the in-laws and says I am not eating there because they are not clean…how do you feel? – SS4.

The above quotes illustrate the calmness with which such problems were often appraised, and the importance placed on issues which may affect the community. The individual preference to have a Muslim husband was not challenged, but the context,
the need for protecting her future interests, and the possible repercussions were subject to prolonged discussion. In such a way, individual preferences and community impacts could be balanced.

4c: Tasmanian Settlement Problems and Recommendations

Apart from the pressure on families, which provoked intense distress among all the men, most problems encountered in Tasmania evoked a tone of acceptance. However, this was in the context of an overall strategy of minimising problems, especially in comparison with the survival issues faced in Africa.

The sense of historical loss and the disconnection from community in Africa was pervasive.

13. Fractured Place, Ritual and Role in the Experience of Loss: A big problem is thinking about those who we have lost. This is a problem that can’t be fixed so it is better to try and put it behind us. This is hard because we often miss out on traditional ways of dealing with their deaths, so it stays with us. Also, we can’t easily settle in Tasmania if our family or community are suffering in Africa.

We are seven (children), from the mama and father, and of the family I’m the first. Because the first two, they died…. I’m the third…and then the two die…I’m now number one…I’m (the one with) responsibility. But I’m here! I can’t help them back there – M3.

When westerners talk about grief, they are talking about the loss of one or maybe two things, their dog, a family member, something important. They feel the loss about this one thing, and that is what their counselling is based on. But for me, when I lost an entire family, a home, the status from being descendent of a chief and warrior; the large farm, there is no single thing to grieve for; just a big sense of something lacking – C4.

It’s really a very important thing, the family and we feel really, really sad; it’s a big decision when you decide to leave the family (to flee the persecution), and it’s got a big impact on your feelings and your psychology, and even though you are apart from them, you feel like keeping the connection and following up to make sure your decision wasn’t wrong or something – M4.

The emphasis for these men was not so much on their personal sense of loss, although that was expressed: rather it was on the inability to settle because of the harm and suffering being experienced by their families and communities back home. The men were in an acute dilemma because every choice about spending was a decision between maintaining the norms of their new culture (paying for power, phones, electronic devices, cars, etc.) and contributing to the survival needs of their communities. One such need could be addressed with small amounts of money, however there was no end to the needs that many men were asked to help with.

My mother still alive, my brother, two brother, two sisters, still living Ethiopia … lot money go away. I can’t buy a house, I can’t buy clothes … because a lot money go away - C7.
Many of their immediate family were in protracted situations similar to the ones they had endured, but they were not necessarily able to do much for them:

My father is in Khartoum, my mother wanted to see some relatives in Darfur, and when she went there the war started, and she got blocked there, she wasn’t able to go back to Khartoum. She stayed now she is in (a refugee camp in) Chad – M4.

On the other hand, some African men (for example C4) who had become well established and had responded to many requests for help, stated that their relatives and contacts in Africa would ask them for money as a first option, rather than trying to deal with the problem themselves by finding work.

14. Racism as Replication of Displacement: Racism is a big problem in Tasmania, and makes other problems worse: housing, work, driving license, rules, and learning English are problems we can manage, with some help. But racism works against us: we can be made to feel we don’t belong here and it is hard to fight against because there is often no evidence. Politicians, police and public servants don’t like to admit there is racism, and don’t seem to see it as a problem to deal with, which can make it worse.

They are calling me nigger. When I say what is nigger they say I don’t know. I say you should go to TAFE, so they can teach you better English! (laughter) - SL3.

Racism is the most sensitive one…there are some minor issues that happen that doesn’t bring back the memories, but when it comes to racism, racism plays a very big role here to bring back the memories…when somebody’s talking racist language, I would definitely say this is not my country - SS4.

He say eh you damn black eye…I say yes, thankyou…you are finished…I am black…if you call me black “eye”, it mean nothing! - M3.

I had three letters of racism that were written to my mailbox and I believe they…. came from where I was working… some of them were threatening… the only thing is to swallow those problems into myself….and in which case it creates distress… anger…and anxiety … That actually is one of the reasons that I have resigned by the way I have to tell you, I endured for three and a half years working there. And this is by the way a heartbreaking decision. Because this was something I loved doing – C6.

You know even when I tell somebody I have been driving for the past 18 years, they say what do you mean? You have been here for 5 years…I say yes I have been here for 5 years but I have been driving for 18 years… it is like, everything they see you doing they think, you learn it from Australia – SL2.

Most of the time they think nothing good comes from Africa…nothing can come from an African man…they just think an African man is down here…down the ladder – SL3.

These quotes exemplify the understated language and emotion used for describing deeply challenging and upsetting problems: “I would definitely say this is not my country”; “This is by the way a heartbreaking decision”. The former quote also
typified the relationship drawn between current and historical problems: rather than the western approach which might be dealing with the “triggers” of previous trauma, the triggering was the indication of the seriousness of the current problem, and the need for it to be addressed.

15. Unemployment as Thwarted Role Fulfillment: Finding work is hard, and for men it is upsetting not to be able to provide for the family. It is discouraging to do the training we are told to do and then still not be able to get work. It is especially hard for those who do not have good English, because everything needs a certificate. Also, in Tasmania people employ others who they know, and Africans are new here so we don’t get the job even though we can do it.

When you go and apply for a job, you give him the certificate, he asks you after that, which company did you work for before: you show him which company you did that job with before… You still don’t get the job – C8.

There is a lot of prejudice in Tasmania which means employers will not believe that Africans can do a higher-level job even if they have the qualification: even those Africans that get a University qualification – C5.

Two participants (C3 and SL4) were among those who achieved University qualifications and travelled interstate (in each case living away from family, on the opposite side of the country) to find work. In the case of SL4, the whole process took ten years, including four years working professionally away from the family, before he obtained a transfer back to Launceston within the organisation. He reported that many of his University graduate cohort were still unemployed at the time he returned.

The issues of work and racism were often related for the men in the present study. The Australian Human Rights Commission (2010) reported on a collaborative inquiry which acknowledged that racism against African Australians was indeed a serious barrier to their accessing employment, as well as housing, health services and the justice system.

The need to improve English speaking and writing – along with obtaining a driving license - were acknowledged as powerful barriers to employment, and for some the discouragement was overwhelming. At the time of the interview, the following participant (in his late 20’s) had stopped looking for work, having been diagnosed with diabetes and allocated the Disability Support Pension.

The big problem what I find in Tasmania, I didn’t want to do the taxi driver work… because I’m a very bad English, I try many job, but I didn’t get it… You know if you write letter, and you forget the dot… no you can’t have job, sorry… (I want) good job and good income, good life... we not living good life, we like a possum: work nights: night time is day time, is no good for me, I do that for five years – M1.
It seems likely that his taxi driver lifestyle contributed to his diabetes over that long period, culminating in a limbo-like state in terms of his capacity to achieve his hopes and aspirations.

Others noted that English classes did not provide well for differing levels of need, leading to frustration and a sense of being thwarted.

Everyone was in the same class regardless of ability, which meant that good English speakers such as myself could not learn much about the Tasmanian English, and poor English speakers were reluctant to participate. It was as in a village dance where everyone dances his own way and the dance does not work – E1.

Group-based problem solving was then illustrated in E1’s proposed solution: good English speakers could take the responsibility to help divide the class into groups of different levels of understanding with at least one common language, and they would have a question and answer system within each group to help them learn what was most relevant to them.

**Recommended Responses**

The following recommendations were endorsed by the consensus groups as practical, specific responses that could be expected to support the client group represented in this study.

**16. Restoring Connection:** We need help with our families and community members back in Africa. Keeping our hope alive that they will be safe and we will see them again helps keep us positive and active here. There needs to be much more help understanding the immigration processes and clear information about options to bring our families here or to support them in Africa.

I want you people to help us, our children that are back there, our families, those that are in the refugee camp, those that are in need... I miss them, and I worry, even if I eat good food here, they will not eat it, then I will just be thinking about them over there. Yeah - C7.

**17. Recreating Community:** One way of helping recreate the sense of community here in Tasmania is to ensure that neighbours are better informed and activities are held that support interaction at neighbourhood level to develop the sense of community.

In Africa, your neighbour is your mother ... your friend, your brother, and everything...... in times of need, your neighbour is the first person to respond … here is a different story – C6.

The neighbours are good for me. Sometimes when they plant crops in their yard, because I don’t have anywhere to plant, everywhere is cement concrete, so when
they plant something in their yard, they share it with me, yes… I need help from
them, even in the night, they can come to my help, yeah – C7.

There is one person that has really stood firm up to today, he rings us every week,
every Saturday, like tomorrow he is going to ring, he wants to see how we are
going, and that to me…because really he is an old... elderly person, but I think he is
well informed, that’s how I look at this person – C6.

18. **Leadership in Inclusion**: We would like to hear stronger
statements from Australian community leaders that racism is not
acceptable, and we need effective ways of dealing with it.

It was clear from the discussions that participants could see the perniciousness and
intractability of racism in various forms. Although it was not the primary focus of
their attention, any attempt at constructing a model that supported African people
would need to explicitly incorporate anti-racist measures, as suggested by Fernando
(1995b). There were some documented examples of such explicit measures: for
example, Campbell (2007) described police responses such as having senior officers
respond to racist complaints, and the compilation of all such complaints to enable
patterns to be identified.

19. **Mentoring Pathways to Work**: We need help meeting people
who have jobs available, and we need opportunities to show how
well we can do the job. We also need help developing small
businesses: many of us have done this in Africa but the systems
are different here.

The above recommendations contributed to program initiatives within the Migrant
Resource Centre of Northern Tasmania in Launceston (MRC (North))20, which
reflected other initiatives throughout Australia. During the course of the study they
have become recognised as necessary aspects of settlement, although the formalised
evaluation and public reporting of such interventions was still lacking.

4d: **The “African Counsellor”**

This section seeks to illustrate the contemporary role of “African Counsellor” as
represented by participants’ descriptions of work with African clients. Key aspects of
the role are used in shaping recommendations that would be accessible to western
trained practitioners, but oriented toward traditional African norms. Keeping in mind
the study limitations, such a role could be expected to have reliability for Sub-Saharan
African men arriving as refugees to regional Australia, may have relevance for other
African populations and other settings, and also enables an expansion of possibilities
in working with non-African populations. In Chapter Six, after the theoretical
implications of the findings are more thoroughly explored, the scope for the broader

20 The influence of these findings was enhanced through my role as an MRC (North) Board member
from 2009-2013, which also provided me with access to reports on the progress in these areas.
application of interventions founded on African norms is discussed. In accordance with numerous commentators (e.g. Bulhan, 1985; Holdstock, 2000; Muthukrishna & Sam, 2011) this challenges the skewed thinking that suggests that western-derived approaches could work with African populations without considering that the reverse may also be true.

The “African Counsellor” term was drawn from the initial encounter with C2, who introduced himself with that designation to distinguish himself from someone who might be known for their work within their own community. The role of counsellor would traditionally be performed by elders within the family, church or community: perhaps in conjunction with other traditional healing or leadership roles. However, it is argued that with the expansion of the African diaspora and the professionalization of community support, “African Counselling” has increasing meaning and application, especially to inform the counselling practice of those who do not identify as Africans. A prominent feature of such a role would be the facilitation of connection or re-connection with the African community and with traditional norms and practices.

The final six “Experiential Statements” offer a broader empirical grounding for the specific counselling examples described, showing how the practices are embedded in community norms.

**20. Counselling Embedded in Community Roles:** In Africa, if someone has a problem, an elder, a leader, or an older person with recognised experience might notice, and involve themselves: or the person with the problem may seek them out. They could be male or female depending on the problem, and will counsel by listening very carefully to someone’s problem, to understand it properly, and help find a way out of the problem. This might involve reassurance, suggestions, advice, stories of their own experiences, or explanations of what sort of problem it is.

If I have a problem with my father, my brother-in-law, we will sit down, OK what’s happened, dit dit dat dat dat dat … then the eldest in the family, try to fix it: oh you wrong for doing this, you wrong for doing this, you’re right, and then, getting back together … Support, always taking support – M2.

One of the reasons for the authority of the elders and for the respect paid to older people in traditional societies, is that they are the representatives of the ancestors. So in order to know whether they are respecting the ancestors, they ask the older people. – C4.

Our elders are the repository of knowledge in Africa… (gestures to oldest man in group) we go to him for past things, we go to him for knowledge, we go to him to solve problems… but (now) he has come here, it seems as if he is nothing! People don’t consider him! So sometimes our older people, will be suffering inside – SL2.

In Ethiopia and Sudan counselling is conducted in a group with a minimum of 3-4 elders. The elders are recognised within the culture as being able to help in this way, and they will sit time and time again, listening, redirecting negative energy or thoughts, and reminding the group of what is important (e.g. children) to change
their perspective on the issue...for a family conflict the elders will ask the woman to nominate members of the elder group, and also ask the man to do so. Nominated people will participate in the group discussion. The elder group will nominate a leader who will arrange a time for the meeting with the parties, and direct them to be at home. The elders will obtain evidence about the issue from all sources, not just the parties directly affected. Usually they will meet with the conflicting parties separately until they are satisfied that they can be brought together. In such a situation, emotional protests and lying will be exhausted and eventually challenged on the basis of the information obtained – C1.

21. Specialisation and Escalation in Community Counselling:

Sometimes a Pastor, Imam, herbalist, or traditional healer might be involved. Serious problems will affect more than one person, sometimes the whole community, and in that case the community or a group of elders may meet to discuss the problem, learn more about it, and involve whoever is needed.

A lot of people who are Christians...when they are faced with challenging things...they will go to their Pastor they will pray, but probably they are so worried and they want the results so quickly that they will say OK in addition to prayer, why can’t we go this other way, and go to the sorcerer, go to the spiritualist, go to the wizard – C4.

(Herbalists) are, they are better than doctor...if like you go to doctor (they say) I can’t do that I will cut you …you lose your hand (gestures hand amputation). But if you go with (herbalist) they will get you better.... when I cut my hand, on this one (shows scar on hand) ... they helped me for this. Ah, yeah...and they put something on it - M5.

You will find out that it is very important for people to get connected to some members of their community...I’m talking really about all Africans. And once they get connected to family, what it does is actually helps to share burden. Because when they have problems they would first go to someone in the community. People do not want to take a house (in Tasmania) which is far away from their community group, because when something happens, the first thing they do is they call a person they trust, an elderly person or something. And then once they do that, it’s only in the event that that person advises them also to go to a counsellor – C1.

As discussed in Chapter Two, outcome studies have shown that, of all the factors that are nominally within the control of the therapist, it is the quality of the relationship which is the most important predictive factor of positive outcomes in western therapy models. According to traditional African norms, strong connectedness to other humans, the natural environment, and the cosmological realm is the normative healthy state, and too much individualism is a violation of respect for one’s place in the community and the ancestral and cosmological order. The beneficial outcomes ascribed to relationship in western therapy could therefore be because the developing relationship overcomes or compensates for a state of relative disconnection. This is further discussed in Chapter Six, after a more thorough analysis of the relationship between ethical conduct, healing, and the meaning of connection in the African context.
The immediate, physical expression of care and concern, and the importance of sustained physical presence and involvement over time, were reported to be features of African counselling or support, especially in relation to traumatic events and personal loss. The following was one participant’s recollection of a road accident we both witnessed. It serves as another example of the value of ethnographic participatory fieldwork:

In Africa, people would have rushed to support that boy, and even they could have held him, and carried him on their chest, to give him that pure support…. that emotional support…. that feeling, that ah that boy could think that there is really someone in this world who cares… To my surprise, being in a different environment and different laws and different society, expression of that feeling was there… but the action is missing! Everybody was “Oh my God! Oh my God!” just putting his hands on his head, and that’s a sign of sorrow, that is a sign of pain, the sign of feeling something which is really very bad. But there was no action! - C2.

As noted earlier, the shared responsibility of a community approach means that an individual’s sense of self-importance is diminished in any achievement. Such achievement is, as it were, preconfigured as a community achievement:

Irrespective of a very good qualification I have, they will pray for me, and if I stand out, I won’t attribute it just to my intelligence, I will say oh, because I had the blessing of my people they prayed to my success, I got the job - C4.

This contrasts sharply with the orientation of Euro-American models of counselling, which emphasise interventions targeted at cognitive, intrapersonal change, bolstering self-reliance in preparation for an individually competitive world.

The following two statements were informed by ethnographic observation at gatherings.

22. Gathering as Purposefully, Radically Restorative: African gatherings, whether for a wedding, birth, death, or other important event, will involve eating, speeches, dancing, drumming, music, singing, and ritual. This reminds everyone that we are together and that there is community support for all parts of life. Before-hand there will be meetings to organise and allocate tasks and collect funds, and the women will prepare and cook the food. There will be lots of discussion about life, sometimes the men and women separately, and sometimes together, with the children playing together.

**Journal 9/10/2008 – Planning for Kakwa Memorial in Brisbane**

Males and females gather mostly on opposite sides of the room, with the bereaved and her husband on the sofa next to my armchair: I am the guest of honour. Before the main discussion begins there are many little groups talking animatedly in dialect and Arabic; occasionally it is translated for me. Strong themes are childcare for the women and work for the men. In the main discussion, the bereaved speaks first, welcoming everyone and welcoming me particularly, thanking everyone for their thoughts and contributions. Her husband speaks then, outlining the purpose and giving information to consider: the service content, the arrangements with the church, food preparation, cleaning up, welcoming guests to ensure no-one is
confused about what to do. Men and women participate equally in the discussions until the issue of food comes up; then the women dominate in calculating the amounts needed. The budget raised for food and other consumables for the event is $1900. The bereaved appears very moved by the mention of this amount but just allows discussions to surround her. Later, it is explained to me that in this gathering, the whole Sudanese community is acting as a family normally would in Africa; so that those grieving feel as supported as they would in their own family at home.

**Journal 11/10/2008 – The Eve of the Memorial**

The house has been busy all night. At least 40 people came, with the men playing cards, music and talking, and the women preparing the food. There is very lively conversation. I am shown how some of this was purposefully helping one member; like a kind of group counselling, guided by one of the older family members. As the cooking task becomes less labour intensive, women begin practising the hymns that had been chosen for the service next day. The musicians accompany them, on Adungu, 7-10 stringed instruments roughly the shape of a harp. More people gradually join this group, so that by about 2 am, men and women are chanting hymns in dialect with makeshift instruments like beer bottles, cardboard boxes, and upside down buckets. The card game and cooking chatter become louder to match the singing, and the house is full of noise and activity. I meet a Sudanese man who had been granted asylum in Australia over 20 years previously. Sighing, he says that the feel of the gathering takes him back to his village; and relieves his stress. It also however brings back memories of lost members of his family who would have been at such a gathering.

In the many African gatherings attended, this stylised structure was almost always evident. That is: an informal process of gathering and arrival, with a loose segregation of the sexes; a more formal program of events; food; then music and dance, which could continue throughout the night. The sequencing of these aspects of the events appeared to have an intrinsic purpose, and all features were identified at one time or another, as purposefully healing or restorative. The restoration of connection is here virtually synonymous with the restoration of self.

It is difficult to represent the saturation of intense reassurance, inspiration, excitement, and personal hope generated within these settings, even in dislocated refugee communities. At some gatherings, the sense of welcome offered this researcher as a participant-observer was renewed and reaffirmed in multiple interweaving ways, apparently as part of an intrinsic aspect of entitlement that was inherent in my authorised presence.

**23. Embedment of Problem Solving within Gatherings:** Many problems get discussed at these times, especially at gatherings involving the death of someone where the settlement of disputes and the redefinition of roles will be worked on: although some problems can continue for generations. In Tasmania, we often live far apart and it is hard to find the money and time to come together as a community. We are used to coming together easily and naturally, and the gathering itself can be healing.

If someone is entitled to something, like for example, my father in law was entitled for a bull that I should have brought to him…and I didn’t bring before he died…so they say oh he died before he had the bull, now it is a problem! (laughs)…So they
say OK for you to solve this problem instead of one bull we need two now (everyone laughs) – SS1.

If we can gather and dance, who needs counselling? We dance all night and then we feel relieved – C4.

This study did not extend to observing ritualistic sacrifices, although one Phase II participant pointed out a sacrificial cow as we drove past a gathering in Durban, and participants routinely reported participating in such events. Lambo (1976) attributed them with great psychological power (p.115):

*These rituals aim at the transformation of the individual’s psychological orientation and provide a critical threshold of group effectiveness. It forms the base from which spontaneous, human, imaginative processes emerge and this base has been narrowed, made superficial, and the boundary constricted by Western rationality.*

Such participation promotes an ongoing readiness for change; an inherent expectation of transformation: a hope. Mpofu et al. (2011) identified community participation as a primary aspect of the treatment methods of traditional healers (p. 9):

*Typical group healing ceremonies involve vigorous physical exercises, such as dancing, clapping of hands, and singing. These physical activities help energize the patient and significant others in their adherence to intervention for wellness.*

In such healing, the patient would generally be seen as the victim of an affliction, and deserving of support, but also may be subject to coercive practices to ensure their compliance.

---

24. **Informed, Repetitive Support and Education:** In settlement, there are many things to learn. We might need to be reminded of things again and again; this requires patience. African men are used to being seen as powerful and in charge of their families, and in Australia the rules are different. Support needs to take account of the gap between our expectations of a new life and the reality; this includes the loss of ability we may have suffered through our past experiences. African men are unlikely to show weakness, so we need help to come to terms with the humiliation of this and the fact that we lose power to our women and children. Discussion in groups, with experienced community members present, helps remind us about new rules, makes us feel supported, and gives more opportunities to talk about how to manage in our new home.

They need simple, straightforward explanations. And you need to say again and again. Again! You need to explain to them as a western man you will go to gaol if you break a restraint order. Same with drink drive: African/westerner same rule – C5.

So had it to be that there are some institutions that are teaching people what Kevin Andrews (then Minister for Immigration) said, that their word, ah, the word is what
The theme of experiential and formal education can be seen to emerge in these extracts, and is discussed in more detail below. The last quote also shows an ambiguity of language associated with perceptions of selfhood and community influence. The distinction between an idea of “values” as an internalised set of principles, and an idea of values as externally located information that can be learned, appears to have been creatively reconciled by this participant. For the idealised individual self, there is a heroic image of maintaining values in the face of external pressure: however, if values are believed to be authorised by the community, then ethically concerned persons would be likely to attend to their culture for explicit instruction and ongoing affirmation of their behaviour. Again, as with the term “problem” the meaning of and orientation to the term “value” depends on whether it is perceived as being external or internal to the person.

This reflects Durkheim’s (1985/1895) distinction between the influence of internalised beliefs and external social structures. In “African Psychology”, there is a greater permeability of self in relation to the influence of such “structures”, and an ethical imperative to act in a way that is reflective of them.

25. Primacy of Gathering in Resettlement Support: We need more support to gather together and discuss our new lives, our achievements and our problems in more traditional ways. It can be helpful if specialists join our discussions so that we get the right information. If activities are arranged which Africans are used to, like working on the land, this could bring us together in a more familiar way. Many Africans have not seen the natural landscape in Tasmania and having gatherings in such places could be useful because we are reminded of the rivers, rocks, animals, plants and trees that we grew up with, and it can make us feel a bit more relaxed. For some this can be a reminder of fleeing through the bush, so it can be a problem.

With the community, it’s really helping so much…I can give you an example for instance we had one Sudanese who died, and he didn’t have any relatives here…we as a community we stood up, and contributed to bury him, to finish his funeral; like we were doing it as if we were family, and as if we were in Africa – SS4.

Some part of this (natural setting) is similar to, to my country. And to the birds that are singing…you know. The songs of the birds and the river, so all these things just remind me and it makes me think, oh yeah, I had…I was a boy, I was …everything I did was like something I wanted to do and I was happy doing it (laughs)…compared to now, that I cannot find a lot of pleasure, the situation and circumstances and the responsibilities do not permit me – C4.

Within the Australian settlement sector and psychological service provision, the ongoing privileging of individualised counselling is totally at odds with the primary need that African populations have in order for them to experience full recovery.
Indeed, it likely reminds them of their aloneness and contributes to overwhelm by emphasising individual responsibility. The incorporation of purposeful, celebratory gathering which seeks to respond to or at least meaningfully share, the multiple immediate needs and successes of communities, is an urgently required. Rather than needs consultations, African communities should be offered the opportunity to shape and build such gatherings over time.

As discussed in Chapter Two, African scholars pointed to a strong community orientation as central to any conceptualisation of African healing, therapy, or counselling. Holdstock (2000) preferred the term “interdependent” to describe the African conception of selfhood, listing a range of variations from the literature: “embedded, embodied and dialogical, socio-centric-organic…. communal, ensemble, collective, contextual, connected, constitutive…relational…” (p. 91). To this should be added “eco-bio-communitarian” (Tangwa, 2000, p. 42). The term “participatory” on a continuum with “bounded” is suggested by the data in this study, intended to better capture the descriptions of participants.

The community theme was consistently identified by participants, both explicitly and implicitly: when asked how she worked differently now she had been in Tasmania for some years, one participant replied:

(It is like) helping a baby walking. If I can let go and it walks properly, then let it go its way. If there is trouble I hold the hand until they are walking. I used to work the African way; but it meant that they wouldn’t be independent by themselves; they come back tomorrow and tomorrow…… it is important not to work the African way: because of the way things work here. You will be in trouble if you keep advising them; they will say “(the counsellor) told me to act so” and the trouble will come back to you – C5.

Like many descriptions of counselling from participants, this quote shows the interplay between the individualistic and community orientations, displays a creative use of metaphor, and is infused with good-humoured acceptance. The recognition of the new community’s expectations is built into the counselling process: that persons are seen as autonomous and a counsellor is therefore required to reflect that. Indeed (somewhat paradoxically) the counsellor may be at risk of some sanction by the new community if they fail to do so21.

More radically, in prematurely “letting the baby go its way” there was a sense of regret at having been required to move away from the African style of support. Rather than a paternalistic view of the client, the data from this study showed that the African style included a conscientiousness in ensuring that all persons were given the guidance they required in order to become fully functioning members of the community. This is a life-long project, and the responsibility of the counsellor is to play their part in that broader project. This is contrasted with just helping them to get moving in whichever direction they choose, being more guided by the client’s judgement of their own functioning and purpose, and leaving them to be held accountable for errors. It also contrasts with the medical model of “treatment”,

21 Although not a feature of the study interviews, the experience within Australian culture of not being provided with sufficient information and then being accused of acting wrongly, was noted in work with African and other refugee clients.
wherein a recognised expert defines the problem then specifies and evaluates the solution.

The need for an authoritative, yet culturally relevant statement about the role of the trauma therapist generated the following:

26. **Culturally Responsive Trauma Support**: If you want to help us with trauma a good way to think about it is: “You have come to a new place, so we need to help you find your way into a new community, to recreate connection. You have lost so much. You may have lost some loved ones, and this can be hard to put out of your mind. Also, what you have gone through may have been outside the natural order of things. We can talk about how to put this experience behind you so that you can have a better chance at your new life.”

The phrase “to recreate connection” was added subsequent to consensus group discussion, and is the only substantive alteration to any of the experiential statements. It reflects the centrality of this idea in the thesis. The formulation explicitly incorporates settlement issues in the work on “trauma”: in order to regain a proper order of things, it is necessary that the host country educate and help a person access employment, safe accommodation, freedom from persecution, justice, and a sense of connection with the new community. It emphasises loss as the foremost issue of suffering for most participants, and that “what they have gone through” was both a distinction and a possible barrier to settlement. Being “outside the natural order of things” allows the inclusion of a range of possible effects including spirit influence, and the use of ritual to restore connection. The statement also reflects the normative expectation not to be focussed on historical problems.

**Dis-Connectedness and Trauma**

A number of examples have been provided of linguistic and meaning issues associated with the African sense of connectedness: for example problems being conceptualised within the context of community norms; contrasting concepts of “values” depending on an individualistic or collective orientation; the reliable coherence of a world view which is reflected by both living and non-living features of the environment (such as animals and rain); and the tendency to see “triggering” as an indication of the power of the present problem, rather than something to be overcome in itself.

PTSD as the dominant western formulation of trauma, references the impact of a “life-threatening” event. However, if personal security is incorporated within a broader sense of community security, then the threat of disintegration of community may be a more powerful traumatic trigger than that of an imminent risk of individual death. If the meaning associated with death is rooted in the reliance on the community capacity to overcome the rupture represented by one’s death, ensuring “safe passage”, then any indication of the disruption of such capacity is likely to be anxiety provoking. If a person’s sense of meaning is located largely in relation to
specific cultural norms, then a breach of community norms may also be correspondingly traumatic.

Consider the confusion and alienation that a person like the participants of this study might feel, arriving in Tasmania. Their life experience is saturated in extended sources of connectedness, and they then encounter a culture where ideas of connection sit primarily on three planes: the nuclear family, engagement in social activities which are perceived as being extrinsic to the self; and a model of religious connection that prioritises a “One-God” experience. The realisation of this isolation may exacerbate trauma, especially where access to related ritual is perceived as essential to ongoing survival. This phenomenon needs to be considered in counselling models and in research.

“Education” as a principle in African Counselling.

Up to this point, the reported findings had been, for the most part, explicitly endorsed in the consensus groups. The remainder of this chapter reports the result of subsequent review and analysis of the data and of the literature. Included are descriptions of African counselling from Phase I participants, associated extracts from the literature, and some material from Phase II data. The use of the term “education” which emerged within Phase II as a context for approaching problems, was found to retrospectively inform the analysis of Phase I data, and is brought forward for discussion here.

The term is intended to reflect the persistent instruction and purposeful inclusion by community members, in contrast with the idea of engaging with an individualised sense of personal meaning and developmental choices. It implies the existence of an enduring educative structure incorporating a range of authorised “teachers”, rather than an individual counsellor or therapist.

The emergence of education as an informing concept for African counselling was an example of the heuristic component of the research supporting insights into the material. As an inspection of the last seven Experiential Statements shows, the theme developed itself some years before it registered “heuristically” to the researcher. The heading of “Education” might have been better placed prior to Statement No. 20, and was explicit in Statement No. 24. It was however an authoritative, integrative statement by the final participant in Phase II, four years later, which provided the key:

You see, that…borders on the question of what is education…because the responsibility of certain members of the community… senior people regarded as the torch bearers…they hold the moral values of the society together…they are known to be doing good things, to be responsible, to be guiding…..and that is a form of education, that is passed from the older generation to the younger generation…. if there is a problem… you need education, you need certain learnings, from the elders… if you hunt, this is how you walk in the forest, this is how you manage to kill this, because if you do this these are the consequences…so it becomes… a day to day teaching….and you implement, you fail, you talk to, to the, people concerned…of course there are layers, as you can imagine…the layers of seniority….that there will be, very serious complex problems that will need those that have been there many many many times, and one example I can give you is when we went to the….you people call it, um, initiation school…we call it koma/bogwera … it was a requirement….you are not going to come back unless you have killed a python – SA11.
This quote further illuminates the idea of a school for Australian values referenced earlier, which suggested the felt absence of such an intricate, layered and purposefully educational context. This perspective was also emphasised in the following:

If you go to an average village, it is very complex. They have developed these things over a long time, and they have layers, and they are a complex society… a compact culture; you just see the surface, and think because they are simple people they live simply - C4.

Proverbs and Metaphors in African Counselling

The Phase II participant (SA11) continued with his personal experience of the detailed process of learning as a team to kill a python, which required the explicit teaching by an elder. The participant explained proverbs as validated expressions of accumulated knowledge whose primary purpose was to educate:

There is no idiom, or proverb, in African culture that is not based on experience…but that experience is based on studies …. they have observed over time, over time…and a proverb is extracted from this …. and its applicability was then tested, over time – SA11.

In a multi-layered example, he provided the following proverb (at my request in his own language and in English):

...go itse puo ya gaeno ke go ikitse (to know one’s language is to know one’s self)  
– SA11.

His intended meaning of the saying was that it promoted caution in action unless there is full knowledge of the relevant processes, rather than the philosophical meaning which the English translation seemed to indicate. In order to know what to do about something, one needs to understand it fully, to understand its language, just as to know one’s language is to know one’s self.

This illustrates the challenge that confronts any attempt at a comprehensive understanding of African systems. Without diminishing the value of the present study, such glimpses of the subtlety and complexity of African systems of meaning were useful reminders of the need to maintain humility. Given that for the most part, African cultural norms were historically perpetuated through oral, musical, and dramatic communication, it should not be surprising to find highly sophisticated, subtle examples of oratory.

The use of proverbs and of spontaneous metaphor was common among participants; frequently with a humorous or light-hearted touch.

The metaphor cited in Chapter Three “you are trying to climb the tree from the top” was powerfully educational in the context of this study, strongly informing the research process, including the decision to extend the study through fieldwork in Africa: this offered a multi-layered reflective loop for deeper comprehension.

On another occasion a participant referenced our driving lessons in his comment on my reactive response to a bureaucratic challenge, at a time when our service was already struggling:
The driver needs to learn that when travelling downhill, it is not advisable to accelerate. Brake! Brake! Brake! Clutch! Clutch! Clutch! – C2.

My experience of these interventions, in each case precisely applicable to my personal situation at the time, was that they created psychological space as well as energising my thought processes with humour: they were also memorable, and even without the transcripts, I could never imagine forgetting them.

The use of metaphors and proverbs, often derived from folktales or mythological stories, has an acknowledged role as a way of handling difficulties. Nwoga (1978) quoted the following proverb (p.72):

*Proverbs are the palm oil with which words are eaten.*

He further explained that elders would use folktales for educational purposes, otherwise refraining from frivolous commentary (Nwoga, 1978, p. 66):

*The story of the wrestler who insisted on going after great achievements till he has faced his chi (personal spirit) and (is then) smashed in a throw, is a proverbial warning where somebody is overstretching their ambition* (non-italics added).

As described in Chapter Three, a recurring heuristic theme for this researcher was of being taken aback, challenged, or humbled by aspects of participants’ descriptions and of the meaning embedded in observations. The multi-layered meaning of such proverbs and stories, and their implications for “overstretching” of this researcher’s ambition, generated tension between the sense of achievement and the sense of overwhelm; this led to recurrent self-doubt. Seeking feedback on this in the final interview, the response offered validation of the commitment to phenomenological principles in the study:

> It is and was, your interest, in difference. A lot of people come, they listen, they judge …. but you persistently wanted to know, how does this work? What does this mean? And that, for me…. …that became attractive … maybe that represents the openness. But the persistence in asking “Oh this is different…what does it mean? How is this done?”’ – SA11.

In Chapter Two, a mismatch was identified between counselling processes which were the focus of empirical investigation, and those processes which emerged in this study as important within African Counselling. The use of proverb and metaphor is clearly part of the African oral tradition, and although metaphor is recognised as a valuable aspect of therapy in the western context (particularly family therapy and psychodynamic therapy), its specific role is contested and under-researched (Tay, 2014). In addition, usage of proverbs and metaphors are typically short-term techniques embedded in humanistic counselling, rather than core elements of practice intended to have transformative impact. There is evidence that exploring clients’ use of metaphor is more therapeutically important than the formulation of an appropriate metaphor by the therapist (McMullen, 1989), although this does not account for the transformative power that an appropriate metaphor such as those cited in this section, can have. This effect might be attributable to the interaction between fields of understanding that the deliberate use of imaginative metaphor elicits (M. Black, 1962).
Foley (2015) studied the metaphors of war veterans, finding support that the metaphor of a “mission” provided a culturally supported way of constructing a therapeutic process; and that the use of metaphor in trauma work offered a low-intensity way of approaching traumatic pain. This feature might partly explain its prevalence in African counselling. In the present study, compelling metaphors of counselling processes suggested themselves as having broader application for other populations.

In the following example, “Falling into a problem” allowed a sympathetic approach which acknowledged the positive intentions of a client who has made a mistake, implicitly demonstrating the community-based assumptions of African counselling:

> What happens is that someone is going the right way and then they go the wrong way and “fall into a problem”. It might be that they have a disagreement with someone and they need a way to approach that person to admit that they have done something wrong… the person would say “oh, you went the wrong way” and the problem would not be there anymore - C2.

The following example shows an emergent relationship within the counselling context, between the bitterness of the “bad spirit”, the use of metaphor, and the intervention of God:

> When someone is taken by their bad spirit they can be very bitter and aggressive… as a counsellor you have to have a lot of room for this bitterness and aggression; it can feel that it is an attack on you, but it isn’t. It is just that the person is full of their bad spirit. (One example was) this man was very bitter. I said to him “it is like you are on fire, and your house is burning. I want to take out of your house the things that are precious so the fire does not destroy them”. The man went away and when he came back he said “it was not you that wanted to save what was precious, it was God”. The man was reasonable and easy to get on with after that – C2.

The image of the “bad spirit” – whether it was meant metaphorically or as a real entity - enabled the problem to be conceptualised as being separate from the person: once the influence of the bad spirit has been thrown off, the person returns to normal. This illustrates successfully invoking the possibility of rapid transformation through spirit influence.

**Skills of the African Counsellor**

The following description emphasises skilful listening and careful selection of helpful responses, which showed a striking alignment with the proverb about careful observation:

> …in Africa, counsellors learn two main skills: listening very carefully, and thinking hard to generate words that will help to rescue the future of the person. A counsellor needs to listen very carefully to all the words the person says, to form a proper understanding of the true nature of the person’s problem. This can be very tedious work but there are counsellors in Africa who can listen to a person so well that when the counsellor speaks, the person sometimes even forgets they have a problem! … what the counsellor has done is to find words that the person can straightaway see will give them a way out of their problem – C2.

This has its counterpart in western counselling and therapy: for example Smith (2014) referenced the skill of “abduction” in psychotherapeutic case formulation. Abduction
is the process of selecting the most useful out of a range of possible explanatory ideas for a problematic situation; in this case a person’s described experience. The capacity to reproduce or to generate a proverb (or hypothesis) which captures a person’s experience in a way that is recognisable or meaningful to them, and which incorporates or suggests a pathway out of the problem, would appear to be a key aspect of expert counselling in any cultural context. The shared culture or context is integral to such interactions.

The use of the term “rescuing the future” illuminates work with a traumatised, suicidal client in profound hopelessness:

In a deep deep trauma, the person’s words are only about the past and the present and are confused, they go back and forth, but mostly the feeling is that they go back. The counsellor will use words that talk about the present and what-happens-next; the person will accept these words and might not notice they are moving towards a future. They will allow the counsellor to help them to rescue their future… if she has moved away from believing that there is no hope, then there is a future – C2.

This emphasis on sustaining hope was evident in the African literature in Chapter Two, noting that hope is as much personal as transpersonal. Its emergence as a key theme in African refugee coping styles (Goodman, 2004; Khawaja et al., 2008; Poppitt & Frey, 2007) is indicative of its normative status. Given the abject desolation of many problematic African settings, such as refugee camps, extreme famine, urban poverty, and the HIV/AIDS epidemic, the restoration and maintenance of hope is unsurprisingly more central in African counselling, than in the western equivalent. African hope-instilling counselling techniques would be one likely contribution to an inclusive counselling model: particularly applicable to those western problems which appear most intractable.

Such descriptions of counselling by participants showed creative, fluid, engaged and powerful skill. Observations of similar conversations at gatherings, both in Tasmania and South Africa, suggested that these descriptions depict aspects of “the counselling words” referenced in Chapter Two as characteristic of Sudanese counsellors, (Peltzer, 1999, p. 347) which appear to be a more widespread feature of African counselling. Jordans et al. (2013) noted that, in contrast with counsellors in Burundi:

...the emphasis of South Sudanese counsellors on advice giving may tentatively point to the importance of joined problem solving and respect of advice from elders/healers as an effective strategy in more collectivistic oriented interpersonal settings (p. 364).

This affirms the notion of the “African Counsellor” as a role which is rooted in traditional community systems, and which will be more relevant to those Africans who identify with such traditions.

In Chapter Two, a similar style of intervention was identified as characteristic in both East and West Africa (Nwoye, 1998, 2002a) with thoughtful, informed exhortation to effectively meet the challenge of the situation. This is worthy of further specific investigation, but the data from the present study would suggest that the interventions often described as “advice giving” - which on further examination are complex, culturally embedded interventions - do play an important part in those communities studied.
The following example takes account of men’s sense of family, community and ancestral responsibility, and their corresponding behaviours of demonstrating strength and power, and hiding weakness.

You can explain that you understand that his children are the most important thing to him, but that by doing the things he is doing he is taking himself further away from them. He seems to be holding onto something very small very tightly. He needs to think about the way the community will see him, he needs to remember that the laws here are strong and it doesn’t matter how strong he is, the laws will still win.

If he feels that someone is taking his power away, explain that a law has been made, by the majority of people and written down by the leaders, and that person is getting support to uphold the law. Even though the woman next door can call the police to ask you to turn down your music, the police will not come if she complains that you do not sweep her compound! That is because one is a law and the other one isn’t.

Show him how the things he has done have led to the situation he is in. Explain that he is not the only one going through these things, it happens a lot and there is a lot of unhappiness: even though people have money in Australia many are not happy in their lives. He is not the only one. You have to decide “what is the most important thing to you?” If the most important thing is drinking and fighting and having trouble with police and missing out on jobs because of your criminal record, then you are going the right way. If the most important thing is peace, having your children happy with you, living a respectful life, being admired by the community, maybe finding love again, then you need to go a different way - C4.

This illustrates how an African style of counselling emphasises the circumstances a person finds themselves in, and their responses to it, rather than referring to an internal state, “anger problem”, or “personality trait”.

The reference to community as a motivator for change emphasises external factors rather than internal ones, and the reference to the client being “not the only one” is directed at overcoming the sense of aloneness. The client’s reactions are affirmed but challenged, using correct information about the world (education) with the implicit assumption that the person will adjust their response when they understand the situation better (hope). The simple, concise language, explaining Australian norms such as the strength of the legal system, offers an intriguing option for Australian men who might also “fall into this problem”. The metaphor of “holding onto something very small very tightly” has great appeal when compared with the western equivalent of being “obsessed” or “fixated”. The general idea of “going the right way or the wrong way” is also creatively referenced by this participant.

**African Time**

This thesis would be incomplete without a consideration of the relationship to time. This issue did not often emerge explicitly in interviews, but as noted in Chapter Three, the time-based organisation of conducting interviews and consensus groups sometimes conflicted with the orientation to time displayed by participants. Pejorative references to “African time” were widespread in the refugee service sector, and indeed it was quickly evident to anyone working in the field that, if African
clients were to meet the time-based demands of appointments, detailed and persistent explanation was often needed.

**Journal Entry 6/12/2006 – Berlin Conference on Torture Trauma**

The exigencies of long-distance plane scheduling bring me to Berlin at the same time as three delegates from different countries in Africa. The fact that I am uniquely welcomed to Berlin as an honorary African is hard to overlook, and I am from that moment associated with the African contingent: even after the arrival of my fellow Australians. We visit a local bar and there is a discussion about time differences. I am celebrated as having come furthest, from Tasmania, “a place beyond day and night”. They ask me if I am familiar with “African time”, and compete in telling stories of missed flights as part of the process of learning to conform to western time requirements. An Ethiopian man finishes the discussion by declaring: “I will win any such competition: our calendar is 400 years behind the rest of the world!”

A common explanation of the difference between African and western conceptions of time (Kalu, 1978) holds that to westerners, time is linear, abstractly divided into regular segments, and projects backward and forward from the present. In contrast, it is argued that Africans measure time more concretely and cyclically, referencing the seasons, rising and setting of the sun, and community activities such as meals, ceremonies, and rituals.

One participant (C4) explained that the western world dependence on scheduling, planning, and commitment to time also implied a reliance on advanced technology. Arriving on time for the train only makes sense if it hasn’t been delayed. In contrast, the immediate and relational world of African tradition required presence over long periods of time, and indicators in the cultural and physical environment determined the timing of events. A community authority may demand your presence, a friend may need help, the weather may at last be suitable for an agricultural activity. It was argued that westerners were thereby controlled by time; whereas Africans allocated time in response to situational requirements. The felt immediacy of ancestral and other spirit influence also demanded a more fluid construction of time, and in the counselling context, the time taken to listen in ways that allow proverbial and metaphorical interventions is regarded as time-enhancing rather than time-consuming.

Further, the theme of hope and aspiration which emerged in this and other studies suggested an imaginative representation of the future. For those who struggled successfully in extreme circumstances, the influences of the past were purposefully diminished, and the future was perceived in terms of the inherent possibilities for improvement: with a moderating acceptance that the time for improvement has not yet come. It is argued that this is more radical than was suggested by cognitive reframing (Khawaja et al., 2008) or stoicism (Tempany, 2009). From the data of the present study, such hope incorporated a strongly enculturated acceptance of one’s time and place in the world; with the concept of time extending beyond the material realm.

Orientation to time is thus embedded in experience, in a similar way that cultural norms and assumptions are embedded in language. The displacement of African refugees to Tasmania demanded reorientation to place, culture, language and time. The African orientation to time is further considered in Chapter Six.
Elements of an African-Informed Counselling Model

The main themes which the foregoing suggest for an African-informed counselling model are as follows:

- Engagement and collaboration with elders, traditional healers, religious and community leaders, including the recruitment of a diversity of cultural consultants would be required to support the necessary community processes and to assist in shaping service delivery over time. Care should be taken to avoid relegating such specialists to the status of “bicultural workers”.
- The explicit orientation of a service should be educational, in the sense that it should seek to assist with the informed, adaptive integration of clients as fully engaged and contributing members of the contemporary community: this connotes a systematic structure within which the service plays a part.
- Group and community processes which may include acknowledged community elders, healers, and officiators of relevant faiths, as well as recognised authorities and experts within the host culture, with a focus on information sharing, should be prioritised rather than family and one-to-one counselling. Such processes need to take account of English capacity and to be structured to maximise participation.
- As one focus of such processes, facilitation of community responses to community-wide problems (such as the pain of separation, housing, employment, family stress and conflict etc.) should be prioritised.
- Cultural forms such as dance, music, feasting, and oratory (especially the creative use of metaphors and proverbs) should be incorporated to mobilise, energise, and authenticate traditional norms.
- Family and community therapy should be prioritised over individual counselling, and expertise in contending with complex parenting and family relationship issues should be a key technical requirement for practitioners, including a broad range of responses to gender dynamics and traditional systems, and attention to the complex repositioning process required by both men and women in their new context.
- The projection of hope, and expectation of life getting better should be an explicit part of any intervention: with the reference point being the recognition of the survivorship of “what people have gone through”, rather than typical western expectations of life. The twin acknowledgement that obstacles to settlement may appear overwhelming, and that the person has successfully faced even more overwhelming circumstances previously, could be expected to be a generically useful stance.
- In further support of this evocation of hope, the option of interaction with faith-based approaches should be facilitated (for example, holding events after church services).
- Problems should be expressed in terms of conflicts with and between host or migrant community norms and expectations, rather than internally located symptoms or values.
- Western understandings and interventions can be presented as options which might offer additional hope for change; rather than being defining of people’s problems.
• The use of techniques which illustrate and illuminate should be preferred over diagnostic techniques.
• With particular reference to trauma, the phrasing in Statement 26 should inform the initial stance, with western ideas of trauma introduced and explained as relevant over time. The development of culturally informed understanding of such responses should be an aspect of facilitated community discussions.
• A relaxed and open stance is needed toward client involvement with spirit phenomena, as well as other culturally normative features, and invitations to recreate meaningful ritual should be offered.
• Required administrative processes such as client consent, confidentiality, record keeping, statistics etc. should be managed by devising a hierarchical system of requirements for relevant activities and roles: these are likely to require periodic community consultation to clarify issues.
• Services need to be flexible in terms of time, with (for example) same-day response clinics being provided so that appointment setting and timetabling can be negotiated.

This chapter has emphasised the data from Phase I of the study, informed by the analysis of Phase II data, to develop recommendations for a model of counselling in the settlement sector which would more reliability suit African norms. The central theme of connectedness has shaped this analysis and the associated recommendations, and the theme of education was found to assist in structuring an understanding of African counselling. The theme of supporting, eliciting and maintaining hope emerged in a range of ways within African counselling norms: for example in faith-based healing and reassurance, in the expectation that a person will change their behaviour once a lesson is learned, and in maintaining a focus on the possibility of change in protracted difficult situations.

In Chapter Five, the Phase II data are analysed to develop the connectedness theme in more detail, elaborating on the concept of lifelong human development. The complexity of the multi-faceted, inter-related responsibilities, obligations and benefits of a traditional African society structure is discussed.
Chapter 5. Findings - Dimensions of Connectedness

This chapter carries forward the development of themes that emerged from fieldwork with male African refugees in Tasmania, Australia, and which were represented in the literature as reflective of ideas and practises across Sub-Saharan Africa. The second phase of the study was designed to further test this thematic continuity by capturing aspects of the lived experience of a contrasting population. This fieldwork was conducted in South Africa rather than Tasmania, with South African, Zimbabwean and Namibian nationals, all of whom were university educated, and half of whom were female. Following the same principles of phenomenological encounter, the findings of Phase I were kept in mind but “bracketed” in approaching the interviews of Phase II.

The term connectedness reliably emerged and re-emerged throughout the study, becoming increasingly relevant as an organising concept in analysing data. It was found to be:

- a pragmatic imperative for the survival and flourishing of a subsistence culture;
- a tool for maintaining social functioning, individual development, community continuity and rhythm;
- an expression of family and community coherence;
- a support in contending with disruptions and transitions;
- an indicator of ethical sensibility; and
- a mode of knowledge, wisdom, and knowledge transfer.

Connectedness also emerged as a process finding: no aspect of the study could be reliably viewed in isolation. This applied between participants as well as within any one participant’s history. Time and again, one participant’s disclosure would be the “missing piece” which helped explain facets of other participants’ histories, suggesting a deep commonality between stories.

This pervasive multi-dimensionality suggested that Connectedness held the status of an intrinsic aspect of human being, foundational to the development of a person with ethical agency within a community culture. This chapter analyses the dimensions of connectedness identified by participants, progressively extracted from the Phase II interviews. Phase I interviews were then reviewed to ensure that all themes from the study were represented.

**Dimensions of Connectedness**

1. Connections within the family environment.
2. Connections with other humans
   a. among families (for example through marriage), neighbours, communal participation;
   b. personal sense of tradition, “mother tongue”, friendships, and the African diaspora;
   c. imaginative and metaphysical connection with personal ancestors and other human-spirits;
d. connections with non-Africans.

3 Connections between humans, place, and other entities: plants, animals, land, soil, rivers, mountains, forests, non-human spirits.

4 Structuring human development through connectedness in community via:
   a. birth and naming, contextualising new life within community;
   b. community provision of safety, protection, sheltering and discipline;
   c. provision of lifelong, responsive education and training in norms and role expectations as a shared responsibility, including structured use of peer education;
   d. role allocation and status based on gender, age, and community (including ancestral) need, as well as individual capacity and interest;
   e. facilitation of life transitions such as initiation, marriage, eldership, death, ancestral status and tertiary education;
   f. institutionalised ritual, ceremony and celebration;
   g. generalised beliefs and causal attributions;
   h. administration of justice, including specific protocols, tools of control and maintenance of tradition such as role restrictions and requirements, taboos, community exclusion and coercion.

5 Negative aspects of contemporary expressions of traditional systems:
   a. gender disparity: particularly the differential power for independent decision making, and the use of traditional status (e.g. male privilege) to impose demands or make claims on property;
   b. susceptibility to superstition and destructive causal attributions, including the evocation of spirit-induced anxiety which provides scope for exploitation, coercion, vengeance, confusion, rumour, superstition, gossip, and false beliefs;
   c. the physical dangers and inefficiencies attached to the wrestling for power between and within groups (including corruption);

6 Agents of connection and cultural transformation:
   a. knowledge bearers, knowledge transfer and creation through spirit agents, intercultural contact, migration, visitors;
   b. elders, negotiators (e.g. for marriage), traditional healers, problem-specific rituals;
   c. restoration of status and connection within community.

7 Breaches and disruptions:
   a. crime, taboo and overt or covert challenges to norms;
   b. disharmony, including personal ambition, jealousy, envy, shame, dissatisfaction, selfishness and greed; as well as affliction, bad luck, and illness;
   c. non-conforming “in-between” statuses;
   d. witchcraft;
   e. death.

8 Incursions, resistance and assimilation:
   a. war, invasion, colonialism, apartheid, racism and internalised racism, torture, racial violence, neo-colonialism;
   b. impact of western cultural norms and knowledge systems (specifically medicine and psychology), education, paid work, consumerism, distortion of traditional beliefs and inducement of shame about them;
   c. contending with the tensions of conflicting systems or “living in two worlds”.

**Ordering of Dimensions of Connectedness**

The integration of themes across two distinct categories of data, within each of which was a diversity of participants, included the following considerations.

Care was taken to avoid duplication whilst ensuring scope for inclusion of all relevant data. The dimensions overlap; for example, agents of connection and transformation (6b) may enact institutionalised ceremony, celebration and ritual (4f), which may draw upon their connection with spirits (2c, 3) as well as religious systems (9), in response to a breach of taboo (7a).

As discussed in Chapter Four, men arriving in Tasmania experienced profound challenge to their allocated role, which was to ensure the security and flourishing of their family. Integral with this was to ensure that their wives, children and other members of their household complied with tradition, including the inculcation of connectedness. For these men, asking questions about problems within the context of settlement almost invariably directed the conversation toward the challenge to that role. Dimension No. 1 was therefore the most strongly represented within Tasmanian data, and the reporting of Phase I data extensively addressed the broader sense of community represented by Dimensions 2 and 3.

In the South African fieldwork, the role of men within families was not subject to such threat, was referenced with less frequency and less intensity. Some female participants in South Africa highlighted negative aspects of this male role, and this is discussed in the section on gender disparity later in this chapter.

Rather, the fieldwork in South Africa was contextualised within ongoing rebuilding of the nation post-Apartheid, and within that rebuilding, reclaiming or contending with the coherence of community life. Participant descriptions of the detailed structuring of community life resulted in Dimension 4 being the most strongly represented in the South African cohort.

The South African data also included discussions with academics and traditional practitioners: their areas of specialisation tended to dominate those discussions. Dimensions 6 and 9 were therefore more strongly represented than would have been expected among non-specialists.

Accordingly, the relative importance of the different dimensions cannot be inferred from their proportionate representation among participants. Rather, the ordering follows a logic which emphasises the family centred-ness of African life, purposefully structured to ensure the development of connectedness across the lifespan and across realms. The ordering moves outward from personal life experience, through ideas of community and human development, to cosmological and meaning systems that inform community life. Importantly, metaphysical themes are associated with all aspects of community life, and are therefore implicated within all dimensions. This interweaving of realms is analysed extensively later in this chapter: particularly in considering the role of traditional healers and the conduct of death rituals.
This chapter begins with consideration of Dimension 4, showing how connectedness is structured into human development in community. The analysis proceeds to a more abstract level with Dimension 5, which addresses aspects of traditional systems identified as problematic by participants. As a counterpoint to Chapter Four, female experience is emphasised. Broader societal and cosmological dimensions of connectedness are then explored through Dimensions 6-9, opening the way for a discussion on the implications for therapeutic scope and theories of selfhood and consciousness in Chapter Six.

**Dimension 4: Structuring Human Development**

The themes of connectedness and education will be seen to be intertwined through the purposeful lifelong training described by participants. The reciprocal gender roles, and relationships of participants to those roles, will be depicted in some detail.

**Dimension 4 (a) – Birth and Naming**

Participants described how a new baby is purposefully incorporated within a network of relationships, dialogue, and community norms. The provision for tradition and flexibility within gender relationships is also referenced.

> I was named after my grandmother from my mother’s side... in my culture you name your children after your elders, so my eldest sister was named after my grandmother from my father’s side. So, that’s how they do the... always give preference to the husband – SA6.

> His new wife was an ex-freedom fighter. She brewed a good traditional beer apparently. She bore kids by the dozen and they were strategically named after some or other relative, each kid always – I mean without fail – attracted favour and clothes and school fee sponsorships from their namesake so if you were named after someone poor, tough! – ZIM2.

> Actually, my name has a negative connotation. (The root word means) problem; or bother. A lot of people interpret it as “have poverty” or “have problems”. But (the suffix) qualifies it to say: “do not worry about me”. So, my mother was probably telling my dad, do not worry about her! (Her mother, a spirit medium, had conceived her to another man) – ZIM4.

The following journal extract shows how naming can evoke an extended connectedness from the personal through the human community to the ancestral domain.

**Journal 16th November 2011 – Polokwane, South Africa**

I am told that for one community, children are not named at birth, but this must wait until the “older mother” (female elder) attends and holds the child: she names the child, often in relation to the circumstances of the birth; or after one of the ancestors. The routine practice of asking after the children becomes then also a way of acknowledging the ancestors and the circumstances of the family.

> One peculiarity is that, if the wrong name is chosen, the child will cry and cannot be settled: this is an indication that the ancestors do not endorse the name. I meet a man later the same day in the café
“Mom’s Kitchen” who provides confirmation: when I say that I have heard that there is a problem if the wrong name is chosen for a baby, he exclaims “you will not sleep for a week!” He explains that this could happen if the parents choose the name instead of waiting for the older mother, which is becoming more common. Sometimes there would need to be consultation among other elders in the family; and the correct name will lead to the child becoming settled.

This feature was not recognised by South Africans I spoke with from outside Polokwane, but the spontaneous acknowledgement provided by the second conversation suggested that it was widely known in that area. A Phase I Consensus Group participant (SS1) later confirmed that in his experience of Kakwa norms in South Sudan, a baby might be asked by an elder about a name, and if the baby started crying a different name would be chosen.

In both communities, the baby’s reaction was perceived as an expression of ancestral wishes. Through such practises, connectedness in communities extends not only into the ancestral past but is projected into the future, via the influence exercised by ancestors on naming. Thus, connectedness is preconfigured at birth in multiple intersecting ways. One participant summarised this interconnection in terms of shared being:

We talk of those that are alive, those that have left the physical world (the living dead) and those that are yet to be born … they still constitute part of our being, because once we are departed, they will take over and we will go to a different level – SA11.

A PhD study from Mali highlighted the intricacy with which the meanings of “counselling”, “problem solving” and community connectedness can be intertwined through the use of naming as a method to air grievances (Shoemaker, 2012). At a gathering dedicated to the naming, the story would be told through the baby’s name, of how another community member had caused problems, and this would offer opportunities for resolution.

**Dimension 4 (b) – Protection, Sheltering and Discipline**

The sense of community responsibility for all children is a key feature of traditional African life. Elders, and less proximally, ancestors, were perceived to use their wisdom, experience and influence to maintain balance and harmony and to ensure that community members continued to remain connected and protected. As noted above, this was ritualised from birth. The sense of protection from harm, and of reassurance within prescribed roles, emerged strongly, especially among female participants in South Africa.

My friend’s mother, she came and visited Zimbabwe, and met my parents for the first time…she knew I was applying to University of Johannesburg, and she was like “Oh you know I stay in Jo-Berg” so in any case, what I’m grateful for is, that sheltering, that even when I came here for the first day I was sheltered, because I went under the cover of someone – ZIM3.

If you are older than 10, you go to the fields; and that’s as early as 3 in the morning…before the sun starts to get hot…everybody else stays behind. (Then) the younger boys took the goats; the older boys took the cows; because the cows
were harder to control…..we (girls) remained behind, we have to sweep the yard, get the fires going, make tea for the people that are at the fields; bake the bread, and to fetch more water… everybody falls in line, and starts working their role, it’s very gender divided….my aunt’s kids they sort of knew, what next, what next, what next, so we had guides – ZIM2.

**Dimension 4 (c) and (d) – Education, Inculcation of Roles**

In Chapter Four, the role of the African Counsellor was shown to reflect norms of cultural education embedded in the day-to-day lives of participants. The following quotes depict recollections from childhood of the shaping effect of connection with cultural norms.

What olden ways did, was set up guidelines and principles of how to live, but those guidelines and principles were not written out, they were implanted sort of….in your behaviour and personality…when we were growing up, we just knew something was not going to be done, nobody had to say…you either pick it up when someone says it is not done, or you pick it up where people show it, where it’s not something that should not be done – SA2.

This quote is suggestive of the historical or ancestral source of current norms and expectations, with the sense that they were intrinsic to African experience: a kind of ancestral embossment.

The mother has to chew a certain root, and then spit it into its mouth, and the baby has to swallow…. and then your child sort of calms down…they have a calmer disposition about them…just how they handle things when there’s a crisis… and when they describe a person, if I’m too all over the place…they’ll say “your mother must have swallowed instead of you” (all laugh) – ZIM2.

“Your mother must have swallowed instead of you” served to remind the community of the importance of the ritual, as well as to seek to modify unwanted behaviour.

Coming from the village, what will happen is that when a child does something and another parent or another older person sees it, they will just discipline that child…it didn’t really matter if it was their child, because as a child, like the whole village would actually take responsibility as parents to that child …yah so that’s why like I didn’t really want to get into trouble, because I know that someone is watching somewhere… Yah that keeps me on the straight line - SA2.

(When she caught us stealing) my grandmother went to my neighbour and asked (for the) son… I think we were around 11 or 12 years old… and he would have been 21.  So… he locked us in the shed, and he started beating us!  (laughs)… my grandmother couldn’t do that….so the neighbour! … we never did it again! (both laugh) …because he became part of (my grandmother’s discipline) “Oh you want me to call him?” – SA4.

Yah…it’s mostly non-verbal … my mother has to look at me once and she will have told me what are you doing sitting down? (all laugh) … it’s time to be making supper right now… she gives you that one look and you know…you know! - ZIM2.

Super and Harkness (2008) noted that within South Africa, the implementation of programs based on western psychological theory, even if well targeted, could be perceived as neo-colonialism, and circumstances rarely enabled their effectiveness to be robustly assessed. Equally, rigorous localised research on child-rearing practices was lacking, with a tendency to relegate majority world practices as simplistic and limiting of human potential. The present study offers a small contribution to an
understanding of the complexity and sophistication associated with such practices throughout the lifespan.

...there’s a wealth in it...the small things that you learn, that become useful as you grow up. I know how to herd cattle, I know how to milk cows, I know how to kill chickens, lots of them, very fast! (both laugh). We used to go hunting, or go and get honey... so you would learn all of that. So...that’s treasured... - ZIM4.

There’s a pride that comes with that (skill of carrying water on my head) and the biggest thing that I learned, even up to now, being in the rural areas, respect respect respect. As a girl, you cannot go and embarrass us wherever you get married, and say “oh I can’t cook on a fire” or whatever, yah...You do not, you do not for the life of you ever sit on a chair if there is somebody older than you. You do not! And you do not, if you are a girl you do not sit on a chair if there is a boy present... – ZIM2.

The preceding quotes emphasise the compliance with age and gender roles, which participants recalled with pride and fondness. The deliberate use of group processes to inculcate a community orientation was also referenced. One Phase II participant described a Sotho children’s game, called masekitlana.

Masekitlana is where children sit in a circle with somebody with two stones in the middle, and as long as you’ve got the stones you can talk...it’s your story, and the children on the outside ask and question – SA7.

The children manipulate the stones to assist with the story, moving the stones around to represent people and things, and banging them together to highlight strong themes. This early orientation to storytelling and dramatization, and the involvement of community in shaping the story, suggests that group processes are likely to be familiar to such African-identifying participants. This inculcation into community was affirmed by Mangena (2016, p. 68):

... in almost every Southern African village; children are socialized to value the interests and needs of the group more than they would value their own individual interests. At a very early stage, boys are taught to head cattle as a group so as to foster the idea of group or community.

One Phase II participant nominated his music as key to his sense of connectedness, which appeared to be purposefully structured into community:

(We have) dinaka – everyone brings their instruments; for them it means....it brings a connection with the living dead, the ancestors. (I am Christian but) that’s where I first could say that I could find the music, the connectivity, to the music, the connectivity of the culture.... people gather round and they just play, dinaka, and then through them also, like I could identify with it....it just brings some excitement within me, some excitement, some, a feeling of belonging - SA2.

SA2 reported that his father had compared the musical Dinaka: where different parts would be played by different people as a way of sorting through difficulties; with the Legotla: the traditional gathering for addressing problems. He described how in school, Zulu, Xhosa and Sotho boys played the marimba and re-worked their relationships through the music; developing a kind of harmony between them, minimising conflict, and managing differences.
An echo of this description was provided by Jones, Baker, and Day (2004), reporting musical therapy interventions with adolescent Sudanese boys in a Brisbane school setting. They identified three features which appeared to support good outcomes: the use of syncopation and strong, clear rhythms, the importance of complementary “parts” for each person to play, and the use of body movement.

**Dimension 4(e) – Marriage and Initiation**

Transitional processes such as marriage and initiation emphasised the continuity of connection. In Chapter Four, the main gender dynamic identified was the loss of men’s status that occurred as an outcome of their migration: their descriptions of African marriage and family were often tinged with loss. A more comprehensive discussion of the meaning and implications of marriage was enabled by interviews with male and female participants in South Africa.

…so my family, they went to (her) family, they sat together and they agreed on the amount for Lobola… after that then we got married. Yah. And in African way, marriage is not, it’s not what happens in the church…OK. Marriage, is when family comes together…. that constitutes marriage…so you are considered married once the family agrees…that’s already a marriage – SA4.

Traditionally, the place of women was shaped, supported, and indeed recognised, primarily within the confines of roles as wife and mother. In addition, complex community protocols were required to support a viable marriage, most likely including negotiation of a bride price (denoted by the term lobola in South African literature). This is a ubiquitous and persistent feature of African traditional life: according to Tangwa (1996), it was common to all traditional African communities with the only exception known to him being his own, the Nso’. If analysed within a feminist framework, it can appear to have the purpose of diminishment and commodification of women; restricting them to the roles of childbirth, mothering, and servitude to the male master; structurally separating them from the support and protection of their birth family, and confining them to the domestic sphere. Accordingly, there is ample evidence that women suffer profound exploitation and harm in many contemporary African systems (e. g. Jackson & Abosi, 2007).

Qualitative research into the place of lobola in contemporary South Africa has presented a mixed picture. Men and women identified the payment of lobola as a burdensome but foundational requirement of mutual respect in a marriage, as well as consolidating the relationships with their respective families; in rural areas it remained a community requirement (Heeren, Jemmott, Tyler, Tshabe, & Ngwane, 2011). However, the legislative provision for multiple wives in South Africa was regarded as reinforcing the traditional gender inequity which was exploited by many men, particularly in their participation in multiple unsanctioned relationships. Conversely, women risked alienation from their communities if they sought legislative redress, and tensions around modern and traditional attitudes toward lobola tended to distance couples from their families (Kotze, 2013).

Notwithstanding the structural gender inequities in traditional systems, the wife was positioned at the point of connection between two families: her degree of accomplishment in nurture, care and hospitality brought honour to her birth family and strength to her new family. Given the emphasis on connectedness in African
systems, this positioning suggests a high status, rather than low status role. The bride price reflected the loss of her contribution to the birth family; and the process of negotiation provided a focus for each family to assess the other’s integrity, skill, humour, and persistence, further consolidating the relationship between the families.

The agreed price may exceed the capacity of a man and his family to pay, so a future component would help structure continued contact. The preparatory ceremonies were likely to invoke ancestral blessing and to include divination. As well as offering enhanced security, this opened both family histories up to scrutiny. Families would be motivated to support the marriage because of the need to pay back the bride price if the marriage failed. Thus, it was an integral part of ensuring a stable platform for the next generation, and the wife’s accomplishments became the primary focus for the community support needed to ensure their success. And although the bride price inherently demanded submission to community expectations on the part of bride, the following quote shows how such traditional norms included provision for protection.

After the marriage, when you have problems, you no longer go to your family, but you come to my family. (But) it has a flip side to it...the family always, most of the time they stand with the wife. Because they feel, we married her, now we have to protect her. And the man will feel but I'm not protected, nobody is protecting me here...I am standing alone! The last time we went home, it was when me and my wife were not seeing things the same way. We drove home to my aunt (the recognised elder of the family, approximately one day’s drive away). And when we got home... my aunt took side with my wife (both laugh). With my wife! I got angry for a few days, and it passed on, and we made a decision to follow her way.... but I am still not happy even today! But anyway, it was solved. – SA4.

**Preparation for the Female Role**

The lifelong training of girls for this role carried a security and predictability. One female participant took some care to sketch the traditional structure of Zulu development that she had experienced (see Figure 2).

**Figure 2: Progression of Female Development in a Zulu community**
It is not argued that this is representative of all communities, but the sense conveyed of being stepped through life was ubiquitous, both for females and males.

You see there were stages that were followed by a girl. There were the Intombazane…those were just before puberty. Then when somebody who is, on puberty who is ready to start dating…this is Itshitghi… and this one (Ifongosi) is already maybe, chosen…and then you get Iquikizai is somebody who is now engaged, but it is her duty to control these ones (below)… they cannot do anything that is towards choosing somebody without being… advised, they take advice from this one… Inkehli controls this Iquikizai. Because she is nearly getting to married now, and even the dress, the head-dress is different from what (Iquikizai) was wearing…then we have Ingoduso, Ingoduso is about to get married. This one, the bride price has been paid…and all the ceremonies that have got to do with it …and then the only thing that is left is the wedding date.

And then you’ve got Umakoti….Umakoti is the bride who has already got married, and (she) will talk to this one (Ingoduso), and this one will talk to this one (Inkehli)…and it is a structure, it’s an infrastructure that is made, so society knows exactly which stage this person is…even by the kind of beads that the woman is wearing…determines which stage is this. Because even the men, are going to respect somebody who is wearing a certain kind of bead, because it signifies a certain level in that person’s life. And then you get, you get Umana, this one has already, you know, (she is) the older woman in the house, maybe the mother-in-law.

With this one, (Ifangosi) …they will be taught by these ones (Iquikizai) …and they will be told if you do it this way… (sexual penetration) this is what’s going to happen, and then you are no longer…. a young lady, you are not yet a wife to somebody, you are (Zanale); just…a bat, that’s what they used to say, you are not a bird, you are not a mouse…you are just in-between.

When a girl (Intombazane), was getting to, starting the menstruation…you know what used to happen? You tell one of these (Ishitghi)… and they will tell you, walk you through….and you will be taken away from the cooking, doing anything … you are taken, sitting there for seven days, being told that you know what! You are getting to a stage whereby this is happening to your body, and when you do this, this is what will happen…you are taught for seven full days … and don’t do this, don’t do this, and don’t do this. That took care of the anxiety… that’s why we didn’t need any psychologists…. the infrastructure was fantastic …. when you had a problem, you knew exactly who to go to…and if that person doesn’t have the answer, they go to the next level….

The African structure has got, where it comes to men, that patriarchal thing is there. Because on top of this, ladder that I’ve just worked out…there is a man who is expecting these to be done accordingly. (But) even with the men, at the same time, these (men) are being taught how to take care of the woman, how to nurture, how to protect…you understand. In such a way that that is why, you would find, ladies walking around bare-breasted, and bare-backed, without rape… unlike today, rape is everywhere – SA8.

This extended extract gives a sense of the tightly embedded, interweaving roles which a person moved through as they developed, and the associated peer and elder support that was provided, in an intact traditional culture. Psychologically, this would ensure that everyone within the structure was confident in their role but also aware of the immediate developmental stages that faced them; reassured that those they had always known have successfully negotiated those stages and were there to support them. This helps explain the external orientation to development: all community members
were trained to remain alert to community cues to inform their lives, precluding the sense (for most) that they were isolated in the struggle.

The example also points to an important aspect of child development in African systems: sibling and peer caregiving. This has presented particular vulnerabilities in the contemporary context: one feature of the HIV/AIDs epidemic has been that the caregiving burden for families has fallen disproportionately to orphaned adolescent females, who may be further disenfranchised by claims on property by male extended family members who acted upon their traditional entitlement (Schatz, Madhavan, & Williams, 2011).

In the post-colonial context, the disempowerment associated with traditional expectations of compliance was noted by the white South African participant:

> African children are so disempowered. They just say well, we can’t cope with you in the family, you’re going into a children’s home. Some children are so happy, and some families are so delighted, their child will get three meals a day. But some children …like that little girl who was raped … her mother was a street worker, a sex worker, and she lived with her granny, so the granny couldn’t cope, and thought the girl would be raped again, so she was summarily put in a children’s home for protection – SA7.

A more nuanced critique was offered by Nsameng (2008), highlighting the social capital in traditional peer education or care. For the purposes of the present study, peer- and sibling- care remained features of a structured developmental pathway for children, with such caregiving delegated through an authoritarian leadership, and supported and encouraged in the broader community as part of the developmental process.

**Preparation for the Male Role**

In a striking example of the “flow” that occurred repeatedly in the study, shortly after the field trip that yielded the above material, a Phase I participant volunteered his experience of initiation into the *Poro* Secret Society in the *Mende* community in Sierra Leone, on the other side of the African continent from the *Zulu* system reported above. This participant (C4) contributed periodically throughout an eight-year period, and in 2013 the trust was established sufficiently for him to risk the consequences of betraying the Society code.

> … the *Poro* bush is there, maybe a little bit away from the village; but always when that season is drawing near, there are young men initiates sitting around, and they know all the un-initiates. And the law is, the uninitiated can’t step their foot… if this is the *Poro* bush, if you step your foot here, (takes one small step) then you should be initiated. And they believe that the *Poro* Devil is always in the bush, and the moment you step he is coming to carry you. But what actually happens, one or two of these strong men will be watching you….and the moment you go they just come and grab you, and start shouting, right into the bush. And then within a few minutes, ten or twenty or thirty men will be there shouting (the song of the *Poro* Devil). And maybe just after that another one, then another one….

I got up one morning at 6 o’clock, I didn’t want my parents to know, and started running (about 8 km) straight into the *Poro* bush. So, that year… I was the first person. I was so much filled with this desire, and when you are the first person to open the bush; you are like the leader, even if there are 200 people after you… and the moment you start coming there the *Poro* Devil will start to sing. And the belief
is that the Poro Devil is such a big spirit, that all of you that goes into that bush, are
not living physically on the ground, but you are in the belly of the Poro. When you
have been there for two or three months, there will be one night, before the
graduation ceremony, where the Poro Devil will vomit all of you. And they
believe that the (initiation) marks they make on your back, are the tooth...of the
Poro Devil.

(And) there are instructions, and sometimes they can even beat you, if you don’t
recite things; they teach you how to set traps, how to climb palm trees... and how
can you behave in the village, if you are an initiate, you don’t go naked, you don’t
use abusive words.... you will be taught how to take care of your woman, and how
to provide for your woman. – C4.

This extract illustrates the serious play associated with spirit beliefs. The idea of the
Poro spirit is deliberately invoked and sustained, with the community structured
around those men who are initiated into the real source of the spirit effects, whilst
women and non-initiates are encouraged to believe in the spirit phenomenon.

As with the account of the Zulu female structure, the educative component of the
initiation process was highlighted. In discussions of initiation processes, the focus of
globalised attention is often on ritual (particularly the harm caused by female
circumcision). However, the technical and emotional instruction as preparation for
adulthood clearly had prominence for both participants. This helped illuminate the
ways that community processes were structured to provide for the lifelong
development of community members, with transition rituals providing an energising
and imaginative context. Hence “African counselling” occurs within the life-long
educative context of African community life.

**Dimension 4 (f) – Transitional Ritual**

The importance of death ritual and ceremony emerged as a profound feature of
African traditional life, and is discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

An example of the structured, purposeful, lifelong developmental process associated
with acquiring the status of elder is described below.

And of course, you don’t just become an elder...in the same way that you don’t just
become a living-dead...an ancestor...you, you earn it... what I am going through
now.... (when) someone marries in the family... they started bringing me in as an
observer...just listening to what happens during negotiations...and then they
started saying, look you’ ll handle this area.... you are going to be, the second
negotiator...then after that they will give you feedback, you did well when you did
this and this, however, you must know this is a game.... the next time, they say,
you become the negotiator...we will support you...go tell them this...and you
come back and you say they say this and this and this, and they say, what did you
do? What did you say?  I said this and this and this... they say now go back and
do this - SA11.

The phrase “what I am going through”, noted in Chapter Three as having been
important in shaping the analysis and methodology of the study, resonates here as a
reference to a rite of passage acknowledged by the community.

Some participants highlighted the degree of personal choice or preference which
existed in pursuing formal education, for which families and communities made
significant sacrifices. Connectedness as an ethic is shown through such emphasis on resourcing the needs inherent in such transitional processes.

During that time, girls were not supposed to be going to school…it was… the job was to groom them to become wives…and my father said no, my children are going to school, and if they decide to leave the school, that will happen to be their own choice…as for me, I wanted to….I loved school…I used to love…going to school so much, maybe out of laziness because I didn’t want to go to the fields! – SA8.

…luckily, I passed very well, but at home there was nothing to take me to the university, in terms of money. But luckily my mother borrowed money from one of the relatives, so I managed to register ….eh, things were really tough at home, (but) they never put any pressure on me, that because of the situation at home you had to go and work. Yeah no, they kept me, you know - SA9.

… with a family of nine, your father is a messenger, your mother is a domestic worker, what does that tell you? You are building. You know basically you are building… and my dad also, and my mum was supporting us in our education…. all of us are (now) independent, (tertiary educated and working professionally), having our own families, own houses… and on that point I think they were successful - SA5.

**Dimension 4 (g) – Spirit Beliefs**

Compliance with spirit taboos and ancestral requirements was referenced:

The story goes that if you go to that mountain you will not come back, because God has eaten you…because you are testing the mind of God… if you listen carefully when you are close to that mountain, in the morning, you will hear people, you will hear cows, you will hear milking, and taking cows wherever in that mountain… that’s a sacred place… you don’t go there… a lot of people have gone there and they don’t come back! - SA11.

I still believe like if I buy a new car, the first night you have to take your mother and grandparents and go to the cemetery, and maybe like tell your ancestors that I bought a new car… and then like, doing that there is a belief that they will protect you in the roads in an accident - SA3.

This dimension is developed further in subsequent sections, however such beliefs were influential even for Africans who endorsed scientific understanding.

**Dimension 4 (h) – Justice and Control**

Non-compliance with community expectations could elicit punitive responses, with exclusion processes being prominent.

When I grew up in our village, there was this guy…. a very good guy…. who did not go to the initiation school…and what surprised me was that he would not be part of discussions when the men came together to resolve issues…. he was sort of the “other” again - SA11.

Family conflict was a frequently reported phenomenon, ranging from bickering to major rifts, with different family members drawing on different aspects of traditional systems to support their case, or escalating the issue to elders or leaders.

My grandfather, his brother, had two wives, ne? ... and the brother passed away. So now the two wives were fighting for his cattle. Because I think initially, or
according to the culture, the elder wife, you know she was to inherit everything, and then if she wants, she was to give the younger wife something. So the brother, when he died he was staying with the younger wife… so the cows were with the younger wife. And after he died, I think the younger wife also felt they were hers. (The matter was referred by my grandfather to the chief, but then) all of them… they were hit by lightning…. Yes, and there was now a belief that the elder wife bewitched the cows. So that they can die - SA6.

This situation was strongly gendered, stemming from the passing of property between wives from a polygamous marriage. The quote illustrates how interpersonal tension can be structured into role relations in African systems, and how it can be dissipated through spirit-beliefs and witchcraft. Traditional expectations served to guide decision making, but the close involvement between family and community members, who would all have different experiences of traditional requirements, could also be expected to arouse enmity, jealousy, and other negative emotions. Those with more structural power (particularly men) might endorse tradition, with women and children being required to absorb their relative disempowerment, whilst being ready to make a claim when it was likely to be sanctioned.

**Dimension 5 – Negative Impacts of Traditional Systems**

As noted in Chapter Four, some participants expressed misgivings about the claimed benefits of the traditional African ways of structuring life. The three features of traditional systems that were most strongly represented in interviews as problematic were:

a. Gender disparity: particularly the differential power for independent decision making, and the use of traditional status (e.g. male privilege) to impose demands or make claims on property;

b. Susceptibility to superstition and destructive causal attributions, including the evocation of spirit-induced anxiety which allowed scope for exploitation, coercion, vengeance, confusion, rumour, gossip, and false beliefs; and

c. Power struggles between and within groups.

**Dimension 5 (a) – Gender Disparity**

The study was not aimed at rigorously analysing the gender power relations, and indeed the experience of men was explicitly privileged. However, ethnographic observation and the interest shown in the study by female participants allowed reliable commentary on this dimension of African life. For the female participants in this study, male authority was an accepted part of life, within which personalised adaptations were made and power was negotiated. For example, at the top of the Zulu female development structure was a male-specific role for ensuring that it was sustained and enacted, clearly implying male authority in enforcing such social structures. However, as seen in the discussion on marriage, this authority was balanced by other features such as the focus on wellbeing of community children, and ancestral obligations.

---

22 The term used by participants from Zimbabwe.
The men in Tasmania, in a finding supported by the South African fieldwork, insisted that the expressions of power and strength demanded by the African male gender role were explicitly directed toward supporting and protecting the family. However, the idea of the inherent authority and entitlement of men was also explicitly upheld, and was reflected in most institutions. Gender roles were prescribed in the *Mende* initiation process in Sierra Leone, including the men’s entitlement to sex:

As an initiate, your wife is your wife, you have control of her, and if you marry a woman they will bring her to you, and most of the time, if that is the first time they are having sex, they will prepare the bed with a white sheet, that will show that they haven’t had sex, by blood on that white cloth…. and the family; or the parents, the mother, the sister, the aunty… will be very proud… those instructions will be given to you (in the *Poro* bush) – C4.

This participant argued that rape, as defined by the broader global consensus, was a socially sanctioned norm:

When I knew the (western) definition of rape, I can tell you that 99.9 % of women in Africa are raped. Because when you are given to a man, you have not had sex before, and he is ready to have sex with you, it is by force. They force you. Sometimes (the family) even hold you…. and so once force is there, it is rape… (nevertheless) rape is forbidden, if you are not (in a sanctioned relationship) – C4.

In addition to rape outside of marriage, a range of prohibitions were reported:

It is forbidden to have sex with a woman in the bush. When you do that, you defile the bush. Yeah if you are caught, you pay a lot of fines, those people who did that. And also, you should not have sexual relationships with your family members, and so on and so forth – C4.

The sanctity of “the bush” implied that the protection of women from sexual assault was not so important compared with respect for place, and the risk of spirit justice at the defilement of nature. Sanctions against infidelity in marriage were constructed around the idea of women as property, and this was explicitly taught as a norm:

…. if they have a boyfriend, or somebody is going to marry them… you can be in very serious trouble. And sometimes the man, if he suspects that the woman is having an affair, can actually either beat the woman, or do something to the woman, until the woman confesses, that she is with somebody…. and you come to the chief… and once the woman has confessed, it stands…. and then the man, there are certain amount of money that you have to pay, for having sex with somebody’s wife…. the man (is paid). Because they look at it as his woman. – C4.

The ambiguous value of such role allocation was further highlighted in a qualitative study of the *Mevungu* rite in Cameroon (Tsala Tsala, 1998). The rite supported human fertility and fertility of the soil, and was called for when there was evidence that either of these was compromised. In that study, participants (all female) described it as reconnecting them with the social collective, and to the power of their role in fertility. There was considerable status attached to the influence attributed to women in this respect; although it also provided scope for blaming women in the event that the rite was unsuccessful.

In the *Zulu* hierarchy of development for women, *Zanale* (the female who had sex before marriage), was located completely outside the hierarchy in a state of “in-
between”: and no equivalent category existed for men. Little (1973) reported that a motivating factor for increasing levels of female migration from rural to urban areas across Africa, was to escape the scrutiny and male-dominated constraints of traditional female roles in villages, along with economic advancement and (perhaps paradoxically) the desire to find a husband. Sexual politics and practises in towns were analysed to be radically different from traditional rural settings, with an instrumental and pragmatic approach taken by both men and women in the forming and ending of relationships of convenience. In that context, traditionally structured developmental processes, and especially statuses such as Zanale, would become redundant: until, perhaps, there was a return to the village.

Unilateral decision making by men was evaluated as problematic in the following:

(My father’s family said) why do you think we mustn’t take our brother’s house? … (as children) we couldn’t speak out of turn…and we had to be respectful… Culturally there is something called Musarapavana: that’s a person who if your wife dies, for example, your wife’s sister must come and live with you to be with the kids …but in this case it was both parents (who died) … and it was my dad who passed away first… and the guy that was supposed to take care of us, already had his own huge family… and was not very helpful. And then when my Mum passed away, a year later, she…she…we had no-one (to protect us) now - ZIM2.

This participant disclosed that it was only in the study interview that she fully comprehended that her parents had died of AIDS. Also, that she had narrowly escaped the contemporary trend of households in poverty headed by female AIDS orphans.

Women (and children) were very susceptible to risk when the protection of a man was not made available, or when the man whose role should have been to protect, chose not to offer that protection. This authority to exert power through traditional status, in concert with the incursion of western cultural norms emphasising the individual accumulation of wealth and power, renders the personal choices of men highly influential in contemporary African culture. This has been exacerbated by the trend away from agricultural living in rural areas, toward paid employment in cities.

Examples of the relationship between gender and power were evident in ethnographic observations in Tasmania. The sexual violence that was periodically attributed to younger males in the African community in Tasmania, although not sanctioned, was represented as a problem primarily because of the impact it had on the image of the African community, rather than the impact on the victims. This pointed to the tacit acceptance of male sexual privilege (noting that such attitudes are characteristic of non-African contexts as well). Offhand remarks about gender differences in relationships and sexual conduct by participants (in incidental conversations rather than recorded interviews) could be illuminating: the idea that it was the nature of African women to stay with their husband regardless of circumstances, and that a husband’s affairs were his own business. Such naturalising and entitlement-claiming statements obscured the shaping effects of culturally based gender norms.

Another participant described contested claims on being “truly African” which pivoted on gender:
(He) came to my house… I was very busy at the time and I said fix yourself whatever you want, I’ll finish this quickly and then we’ll talk and if you want a proper meal then I’ll be able to make one up. And then I see this look, of me? Make my own food?… you know….so he was like yah but I’m African…then I said are you saying I’m not African… (laughter) you know… you are saying there is one way of being African?... and some men, in that culture, West African men, North African men, are treated like princes, they don’t do anything, if there are sisters in the home, the sisters do everything… that’s just patriarchy overload and God knows what else… (laugh) – ZIM3.

The use of decontextualized traditional roles to position women in lower status in such interactions required persistent resistance on the part of individual women if they were to aspire to gender equity. A tension was thereby created between a woman’s respect for traditions that may have supported her development, and expectations imposed by men who did not comply with the traditional responsibilities of their own gender roles.

The open-ended form of interview processes provided opportunity for more textured examples to emerge. As an addendum to the account of the Poro initiation process, a corresponding process for women was referenced.

During the Bundu (women’s initiation) ceremony they (women) have authority and power which is not questioned by the men. For example, they will also come to the town during the day, and all the men will hide in the house, and (the women) will catch the goats and sheep, and everything. And during the initiation ceremony into the Bundu, 2 or 3 months, a woman can leave the house, and go to the bush, and come back. It’s an empowering institution socially – C4.

Gender roles were also subject to sanctioned variation:

We have women who are actually women, but for some reason they are not members (of the Bundu), they will never go there….so they are with the men (initiated in the Poro bush) – C4.

This extract exemplified the acceptance that participants displayed in relation to contradictions that they observed: despite being a senior initiate and having witnessed it, C4 offered no explanation for women being initiated along with the men into the Poro Society.

One female participant described a gendered dilemma which had the overlay of conflicting Christian and traditional rituals:

Among some elders… I am not traditional enough, hence I have not been made a wife yet. There seems to be a belief from my paternal family that there needs to be a traditional ceremony of sorts to correct this. I was initially offended almost to tears because being reproached in this manner by your family is heartbreaking. I feel they have no right at all because they have no idea of the woman I have become in the time they were un-involved, or of the impact of the loss of my parents! I acknowledge they are convinced in this matter but am resolved to not participate in any ceremonies as they contradict my Christian conviction. A sibling has pointed out to me that their acts come from a place of how best they know to show love. He says we are to make a monetary contribution. I obviously beg to differ because they pin my womanhood to a ceremony and marriage! I will obey my sibling on the contributions but you can imagine I’m not that driven to find the money – ZIM2.
This illustrated many of the themes of the study: the centrality of family in a person’s identity, the acceptance of the importance of prescribed roles, the attribution of problems to the spirit realm, the interaction between Christian and traditional beliefs, and the normative process of engagement of family members in attempting to overcome problems. The re-engagement with the paternal family system (which ZIM2 felt had abandoned her at the death of her parents) was at the same time accepted and questioned, and shows the individual’s struggle with the tension between compliance and protest. At the time of writing, this dispute had not been resolved, but it had apparently been diffused by the agreement to contribute to the cost of the ceremony: noting that this contribution may never occur. Such tensions between modern and traditional expectations are elaborated further in the section entitled “Living in Two Worlds”.

**Contemporary storytelling**

As noted in Chapter Two, fictional works have been widely referenced within African Psychology literature. The novel *The joys of motherhood* (Emechata, 1979) described the life-long process of redemptive suffering of the main character Nnu Ego. She was offered an opportunity to produce a male child through a “second chance” marriage, but this required her to leave her village to be wife to an unimpressive man she had never met, in the capital city Lagos. Saturated with examples of her diminishment in the face of male privilege and unyielding traditional community structures, a turning point came with the birth of a son: “…only now with this son am I going to start loving this man. He has made me into a real woman – all I want to be, a woman and a mother. So why should I hate him now?” (p. 53).

However, the child dies, and in a furious panic Nnu attempts suicide, only to be restrained by onlookers, including, somewhat miraculously, a man from her own village, who knows how she has been trained to fight and can overcome her. The narrator explains: “you are simply not allowed to commit suicide in peace, because everyone is responsible for the other person. Foreigners may call us a nation of busybodies, but to us, an individual’s life belongs to the community and not just to him or her” (p. 60).

In a later synchronicity with potent spirit overtones, Nnu returns to the village on news of her father’s illness, staying with her husband’s family. It is later revealed that her father had died five days before Nnu’s return, but came back to life in order to greet her on her arrival, so that he could bear news of her to her mother, who had died long before and was in the spirit world.

On the day that her father dies the second time, Nnu produces a fourth son. The baby’s resemblance to his grandfather leads to the proclamation: “It’s Agbadi! He is back!” (p. 155), and the villagers come to pay their respect to the returned chief. The medicine man reports: “I can see your father now in the land of the dead, busy boasting to his friends what a good daughter you are” (p. 155). This only partially redeems her, however: she is counselled by a senior female elder to return to Lagos to contend with the mischief created by her husband’s younger wife, whom he inherited from his brother.
The novel dramatized the complex and multi-tethered place that women occupied within the shifting norms of post-colonial Africa. It was reviewed partly to illustrate these complexities in a dense form, in order to contextualise the extracts and analyses of the present study, and partly as an example of the power of the African novel to draw the reader into the African world. Set in Nigeria, the novel further illustrated how traditional systems share commonalities across place: most of the cultural traditions were reflected in the communities of participants in this study.

The context and form of gender roles is very different in a culture which emphasises connectedness and a community-based sense of being, rather than individual achievement and success. The above examples show a range of ways that for African communities, this connectedness is orchestrated by layered community structures and expectations, evoking an active yet submissive positioning of women, but also of men.

**Dimension 5 (b) – Destructive Causal Attributions**

A range of phenomena which might be considered “metaphysical” have already been referenced in the study. Some such phenomena were judged to be superstition by some participants, and harmful or restricting of opportunities. Most prominently, the extension of the community structure to include protection by ancestral and other spirits introduced a susceptibility to remote breaches of such protection through human and/or spirit agency.

Overall… in the rural areas… the majority of people don’t believe that when you fall ill, you fell ill because there was a bug… it’s more you have fallen ill because someone has cast some, you know bad… spirits or whatever. Someone has done something to you, that’s why you are ill… even a professor (say) of education; he still goes back to this traditional thing, where over the weekend he gets into his car, he goes rural, he communicates with the dead people you know, through the spilling of traditional beer, and ah, it’s quite a strong thing, it’s quite a strong thing – ZIM1.

Some participants recalled the costs of such protection as draining of community finances:

And my Granny would call that Sangoma in… I have some marks... (showed little scratch scars on her wrist) … those were the things, those were the things they were doing to us when we were still growing as children, the Sangoma would come and say you need to take this… I don’t know what it is called… they used some razors, they cut us, and then they would put some medication, the traditional thing… eh, they will say, you will be strong, so that the evil spirits won’t attack you easily. So, if it didn’t happen… Oh! my Grandma would be very upset. And my Grandma, she used to call my parents, friends and uncles, and say… if this doesn’t happen, hey somebody might die in this family, because you know the witchdoctors are out there, and they might do something bad, in this family – SA10.

Although critical of many such traditional practises, this participant reported positively on the apparent power of the Christian spirit in an incident that had occurred ten years previously:

I was in my first year, at the University, I had some problems. I couldn’t concentrate in class, eh, I remember at one stage, I, I don’t know whether I fainted, or what happened. But something strange was happening to me. And then my Grandma said, no, you need to go and consult the Sangoma… Well, I, I went to the
Sangoma... and the Sangoma gave me, they used to give us something to put over here (a rope amulet around her wrist). And they say this will protect you, wherever you go. Well, (at a faith healing one night), at the University, I accepted Jesus. So, the following morning, this thing fell off, and it was cut into pieces. It was a, very thick rope... I didn’t go back to my Grandma and tell her what had happened, I just continued with the Gospel, up to today... I never looked back – SA10.

This tension between Christian doctrine and spirit influence was a feature for many participants.

The people in the congregation know my stand on this matter, so they are not open with me. And I have to be extra careful when do I address the issue. If somebody is having an ancestral worship service at home, I can’t preach about it immediately, because it will be like I am picking on them – SA4.

The pejorative term “ancestral worship” was often demarcated from Christian belief, showing the incursion of western derived ideologies in generating conflict or confusion among Africans seeking to understand their place in the world. The contrasting influence of different aspects of western culture, and the way the contested language served to obscure the meaning of many traditional practises, was well captured in the following:

There is this misconception that Zulus are primitive people, maybe they praise ancestors and all of that stuff, but as I read more books on the cultural side, I discovered that actually the Zulu speaking people they use the ancestors as mediators, so they can communicate with (indistinct); that is God... so that is when I actually understood it was something that needs to be integrated... it doesn’t necessarily mean that if they communicate with ancestors that person is anti-Christian: that person is communicating with God – SA9.

This Christian- and Zulu-identifying participant clearly valued the legitimising power of western traditions of psychology and anthropology for Zulu practises. The re-interpretation of ancestral communication as “mediation” with a “God” that was implied as being identical between the Zulu and Christian traditions had for the time being satisfied the tension between the traditions. Teasing out a reliable rendition of such practises could be confounding for the participant as well as this researcher.

Within the spirit beliefs, the primary differentiation was between ancestral spirits, which were related to as more remote family members, and other spirits which may have positive or negative influence but which were related to as “other”; typically, with apprehension for their capacity to cause harm. These categories could overlap: for example, the spirit of the soil invoked for protection in the Sudanese consensus group (reported in Chapter Four) appeared to be associated with an ancestral spirit of place, which infused the soil with the power to protect.

The compliance of many patients with the recommendations of such traditional healers was perceived to compromise medical treatments for conditions such as AIDS:

The person will say... I am due for HIV medication, but ... I need to consult with my ancestors first. The Sangoma has prophesised with me, and they said I have indi... they call it indi in Zulu... it means possessed by the ancestral spirits....so there is a ceremony that needs to be done, Amagobongo. So, it is very difficult to convince the person to move to the western (medicine)... they get very, very sick
because they delay the process of starting medication, or else they start medication and go through this process, so of course it will clash. Because a person will be taking medication (but) on the other hand inducing vomiting in the morning (as part of Amagobongo) – SA10.

The problem comes when they cannot differentiate… for example TB… if you have TB and you don’t get TB drugs you will die… that is straightforward… but people don’t recognise this… you know even the traditional healer they claim they can treat everything… HIV, TB, malaria… they can’t… we know that… and people die – ZIM1.

Participants varied widely in their degree of endorsement of traditional methods: two participants identified with such a role in addition to having postgraduate qualifications in psychology (their descriptions of the processes of recruitment into the role are outlined in the next section). Others identified a healer within their immediate family. As can be seen from the above extracts, some saw such roles primarily as a distraction, or as exploitative or harmful. A pragmatic approach, which accepted the ubiquity and popularity of the role but sought to integrate it within a broader health response, was reported as a feature of government policy:

One way was to try to work with them and say OK you guys we know you can do these things… but I think there are things that you can’t do…. why can’t you refer these patients when it’s still early….it was not a very successful program, because they tend to be… quite secretive, no-one knows how they do their things - ZIM1.

Hountondji (1996) pointed to a global subtext of deprivation of blacks by whites, in which the idealisation of “metaphysical” aspects of African being, distracts attention from the pervasive material limitations and serves to provide intellectual satisfaction for westerners and a false sense of contributing to the advancement of African people. The need to maintain a pragmatic, economic approach to problems in African development, including health, can be in tension with the idea of reclaiming an authentic pride in African identity (e.g. Chinweizu, 1987).

Such analyses need to be kept in mind as part of the complex interplay of influences that informed this thesis. However, the evidence from this study of the integration of the role of traditional healer into the fabric of community stands as an example of the finely textured structure of influence and control which shapes many people’s lives.

Dimension 5 (c) – Power Struggles

Although it was not the primary focus, this study had its origin in the phenomenon of African refugees escaping from chaotic political environments where armed conflict, often on ethnic lines, had destroyed normal life. The negative effects of post-colonial power struggles, as well as poverty, corruption, nepotism, militancy and escalated inter-group tensions, were referenced by many participants as influential in the shaping of their lives.

Government they have a slogan of “People First” … but the reality is totally different…. because now only those sections where big names come from, are the only places where services are available no question, there are services… but to many of the South Africans, many still don’t have electricity, many still don’t have running water, and sewers, so many still live in poverty, many are still sick and no infrastructure to support them – SA5.
The streetscapes of towns and villages provided a direct display of the inequities of life in South Africa.

Journal 13th November 2011 – Polokwane, South Africa (population 600,000)
Staying in a guest house in the back yard of one of these fortress residences. It feels like being in a prison. The thick brick walls are about seven feet high with two feet of barbed wire on the top, and the automatic sliding gate is constructed of vertical bars, so you can see who is outside before opening them. I feel nervous at the idea of going outside, but the street is quiet. Walking into town I am the only white on the street, but there is no sense of threat. I am amongst black people who seem to have been walking forever.

A car tour around the local area shows me the elaborate walled enclaves of “Tender towns” where the newly rich blacks live (the informal name refers to the corruption associated with winning Government construction tenders). Further out are the townships, built to house blacks in the 1950s when they were removed from the city. Later townships have been built post-apartheid to house the increasing number of people coming from the rural areas, and many people have extended or improved the buildings, which are small but substantial. These are not like the shanty towns of Johannesburg or Cape Town. The further from the city centre we go, the smaller the walls around the enclaves or houses are. Only 25 km from town we cross a river into a dusty rural village, where the houses are basic and fences, if they are present, are made of chain mail or chicken wire. Chickens and goats and children roam.

On the way home, we pass interminable lines of black people walking to and from work at shift-change: then we see dozens of buses transporting even more people home from working in the factories. I am told that most of these workers would be outside the formal economy (migrants or people from rural areas without identification) earning about R500-1000 (US $50 - $100) per month: about the cost of a private psychologist appointment here. This compares with R8000 that a bus-driver in Durban told me that he earned, and R2700 earned by the attendant at the museum here. The economic imperatives of life in South Africa come sharply into focus.

One participant worked as a psychological consultant after violent stand-offs in South African mines:

You go there, you talk to the people, you listen to the people, the things that they cry about its about basic things, like not having basic housing… sometimes even lack of water… they would stay in places, sometimes they would go for three days without water… and yah the money they were getting was little, you know – SA6.

Another described his childhood memories of violence in an informal township:
So, there is this thing that happens in the – we call it townships... so it’s not necessarily an urban area but it’s not exactly a rural area as well; it’s kind of in between those two places. So, there was this guy who allegedly having stolen something in the community. Yah it was early in the morning, and when we woke up as a family, we found that this guy was being beaten up in front of the house... and yah I still remember vividly the memory of that guy, even he was beaten up with bottles, and in the head and he had something coming out of his eye... these things happen in townships, that sometimes you will not wait for the police to handle the cases; sometimes you feel that, these people are really troublesome, and you gather together as a community and you take the law into your own hands... so as a child it is something that is very traumatic and disturbing... the community can sometimes be so brutal... they will beat up the person and the person is about to die, and then they would call the police and the people would then split... the police would just find a dead body there – SA9.

The father of one participant had been “disappeared” during the Rhodesian war of independence, and this dampened any interest he had in political participation:

We don’t know where he is even up to today... so they naturally they killed him... but we don’t know where they buried him... so we grew up with that thing to say, you know, politics is not for us... It happened in 1977, so that’s a long time ago... but still I think it is sort of shaping the way I look at things. I am an Australian now, I am a citizen, but you can never hear me saying “Oh, Gillard (then Prime Minister) is a whatever-whatever” no... I can’t do that... because that’s my background... I just think politics is for politicians... (both laugh) – ZIM1.

Such themes were prevalent in the media and within participants’ lives. The 2013 Zimbabwe election was being held at the time of the final field trip to South Africa, and one participant (ZIM2) reported that two of her friends had recently been “disappeared”. As with many participants discussing such events, it was stated matter-of-factly rather than with a sense of outrage, grief or despair.

Another participant described the momentum she experienced in continuing to seek to make a difference in communities:

I have met people from villages where I work, and you know... it has really humbled me, and it has made me realise that no matter how much I want to stop doing this, it is not going to, to happen, I can’t stop... you should see things that are happening out there... when you see them you know that you can’t just stop... especially when it involves children, especially when it involves old people... who are helpless – SA8.

These experiences of violence and deprivation were powerfully shaping of participants’ felt sense of agency in the world, and were interwoven with their experiences of community, and their ideas of oppression and opportunity. The cherishing of new life and the deeply felt ritual obligations in relation to death were counterpoised with mass killings and social chaos.

In Tasmania, South Sudanese participants moved from a sense of hope and excitement at the formation of the new nation in 2011, to discouragement and resignation at the impact on their communities and families, of the violence in the newly formed State. This breakdown was understood by South Sudanese in Tasmania, to be fuelled by longstanding rivalry between the Dinka and the Nuer, in the context of increased freedom from decades of oppression by the Arab regime in Khartoum.
Violence by groups against identified outsiders was reported and might be sanctioned for transgressions like stealing or homosexual conduct: three South Sudanese community members in different conversations (not recorded interviews) reported witnessing the practise of “necklacing”, where a road tyre would be forced over a person, they would be doused with petrol and set alight. These disclosures were made in the context of highlighting the inadequacy of Tasmanian laws in dealing with such transgressions: the examples were given as typical African consequences that were perceived as being more effective.

Those who attempted to fulfil leadership or work roles within their communities in Tasmania reported being targeted by community members who might accuse them of only seeking the status or material benefits of their positions, and not caring about the communities (e.g. C6). African community associations sometimes struggled to maintain coherence, with disaffected parties making ambit claims on resources such as funding grants or positions of status such as the Chairperson. This was a strongly gendered phenomenon, it being the case that most active members of such groups were men. There also appeared to be a destabilising impact when a women’s community group was awarded funding: when the program entered the second phase, it was being run by the men in the community.

These features of African experience do not readily fit with the idea of the safe, harmonious, ordered existence idealised as traditional African life. The overall effect in terms of the connectedness theme is to highlight the sense of contest, jostling, fear, personal disquiet and interpersonal pressure that many participants expressed: this adds jarring texture to the overall picture of a purposeful, tightly interwoven fabric of human experience within community.

Up to this point, this chapter has portrayed and analysed aspects of normative developmental experiences by participants in the study, emphasising the structuring of connectedness in community. The remainder of this chapter examines emergent findings which, above others, demarcated African perceptions and cosmological views from mainstream western cultural world views, and which appeared to inform and strengthen the structuring of connectedness.

Data on traditional practitioners is considered, emphasising their role as agents of connectedness. Community responses to death as processes intended to maintain or regain connection are then reported upon. The deceptively simple term “Living in Two Worlds” is investigated as a rubric for managing ongoing connection with tradition, within a complex context of post-colonial tensions. Finally, African-derived concepts are reported which emerged within the course of the study, and which appeared to offer an entry point to the historical intellectual construction of connectedness within African thought.

**Dimension 6 (b) – Agents of Connectedness: Traditional Practitioners**

Many study participants reported events which could not readily be explained within materialist logical systems. Some of these events were retrospectively understood to have been elaborate deceptions orchestrated by more senior members of the community, such as the Poro Devil in the Mende community in Sierra Leone.
One might therefore conclude that all such reported events were cultural enactments, and that the apparent distortions of material reality could be exposed as deceptions. However, study participants described events which could not be readily explained in this way.

Some events were understood as spirit communication, with ancestral dream experiences being most commonly reported: two participants reported experiences with features that were characteristic of the development of traditional healing abilities (e.g. Edgerton, 1979):

- An ancestral figure appears in the dream or vision;
- much of the training and indeed healing occurs through following instructions from such figures;
- instructions may be novel, counter-intuitive, and suggestive of a non-linear timeframe;
- living mentors are recruited by similar means to provide training and support;
- the abilities are not sought after and may be met with confusion and resistance; and
- one ability is an intuitive “knowing” of a patient, their ailment or its treatment.

One participant reported her development as a Sangoma (the Zulu term roughly translated as “spirit healer”), and the second as a herbalist. The ubiquity of these roles, and their uneasy relationship with western medical treatment, were noted in the previous section. Both participants had post-graduate degrees in psychology, and both identified as Christian. In the interviews, the ancestral sanction of the traditional roles emerged as contrasting with the scientific scepticism of psychology. There was less conflict expressed about Christianity: as with many participants, the spirit and vision experiences reported within Christianity, and the supremacy of an ordering God, were readily reconciled with traditional beliefs.

The first participant (SA1), whom I will call Almena, was recognised within the academic African psychology field as occupying a dual role of academic psychologist and Sangoma. The interview was arranged explicitly to offer me an understanding of the role. It was recorded through written notes, later confirmed by email with the participant.

Almena was prompted by a message from an ancestor in a vision, to write down all her dreams. These dreams would often later be found to have been predictive. An overseas trip which seemed implausible at the time of the dream, occurred three years later when she was invited to attend an international forum on traditional African psychology.

If there was a dream or vision instructing her to obtain something or to undertake a ritual, no matter how bizarre or unlikely it seemed, it would always be possible to fulfil the requirement. She would ask trusted friends for support if she received a message that she could not see how to fulfil. In this way, the role was supported by the community, although it was still very isolating.

The training process was primarily through visions and dreams provided by ancestors, often then clarified by a mentor. An example was dreaming of a tree, which the mentor would be able to show her in a visit to the bush; it might be the tree of a herb which she would then learn how to use in healing. The mentor would
also receive dream messages relevant to her training, particularly in terms of her readiness for developmental steps.

Once knowledge was obtained through this method it was never forgotten. Almena also confirmed that it was not necessarily a straightforward process accepting the role: that first one tended to go through a stage of denial. The role could entail a great deal of discomfort and a diversion from other hopes or activities. The ancestral messages would generally be insistent and sometimes troubling, and could occur at inconvenient times, reducing sleep and creating a degree of confusion that had to be worked through. It was necessary to learn to discern between good and bad messages and promptings. It was not a role that was necessarily welcomed. (My felt sense being present as Almena described this experience was of a weighty knowledge; it was not difficult to believe that the ancestors may have been present during the interview, contributing to the gravity of the discussion) – SA1.

The second participant (SA8), whom I’ll call Pata, had been recruited by a white academic psychologist (SA7) on the basis of her role as a psychologist in community work, apparently with no knowledge of her history as a herbalist. Pata reported that, soon after migrating to the USA as a young psychology graduate, she had a “weird” dream about her grandfather:

My grandfather died when I was very young… so he came to me and he said you know what? You are going to help people… help people how? He said you are going to become a doctor… and you are going to heal people. I said no, you are mistaken, I am only doing psychology, and it has nothing to do with healing people… he said no …take a pen. It was in a dream! But it was so real. “Take a pen, and write”. I started writing, my grandfather had never gone to school. But all the – what do you call it…the herbs that he was giving me, were in Latin. He was saying those words in Latin… I didn’t know even when I went to look for these herbs, I wasn’t sure that they existed. Because here is a man who has never gone to school! … he could not even write his name…but he said I must write. And I wrote all eight of them. And when I wrote those herbs, and then he said now, go catch bus no. 16, to Coconut Grove… and you are going to buy these. And I said: this guy has never travelled outside his province, let alone the country! - SA8.

Pata reported that she followed the instructions and obtained the herbs as directed, despite not having heard of the herbs or of the herbalist store before. Then followed a period of anxious waiting for her grandfather to reappear.

And you know a year passed, nothing. There was an English person – I was staying in her house…when I was unpacking, one of the packages fell …She said what are you doing with this? … I told her how I got these herbs, and everything, how scared I am, because the dream has never come back, and I don’t know, I’m stuck. Then she said have you ever heard of Herbology before, I said no, she said OK, come to one of my lectures tomorrow, and see if you are able to learn… it turned out that she was a Professor in Herbology. So… I graduated in an Associate Diploma in Herbology, and I can mix anything….in herbs, I can make supplements out of them and everything - SA8.

Some years later, after Pata had completed postgraduate training in psychology, her grandfather reappeared in a dream and directed her to return to South Africa. She was at that time pregnant, and resisted the idea of returning. The dreams became increasingly insistent, and in her eighth month of pregnancy she fell sick, requiring an appendectomy. She associated this affliction with her refusal to follow the dream instructions, and was then surprised at her husband’s enthusiasm to move to South
Africa. They made the decision to return as directed, where she practised as a herbologist and trained in traditional herbalism.

**Journal 10th August 2013 – Durban, South Africa**

Another tiny profundity. I provide Pata with a lift home: a small concrete block house in a township. On the way we pass a large gathering centred around a cow, which Pata explains is a common traditional ceremony in process: the cow is about to be sacrificed. She expresses regret that I am not here long enough to meet one of the local Sangoma and participate in such a ceremony.

She wants to show me photos of her project on AIDS prevention wherein she recreates the traditional norms of sexual development for young women, which includes chastity. Arriving at her house, she can’t get her key to turn in the lock on the steel-barred security door. She remarks that that hasn’t happened before, and oddly, it seems to me, she hands the key to me. I feel a bit perturbed about the symbolism. We have been talking about her grandfather, and there is a veiled sense of his presence for me. I struggle with the key just as she has, then mention that perhaps now it is my own grandfather who we need, as he had been a locksmith. The key turns easily, and we go inside.

These reports challenge the strength of cultural-bound assumptions in trauma psychology and psychological medicine on causality, time, and material existence. In the interviews, it was clear that participants also had to contend with these challenges. They are at the same time common and exceptional, and have profound implications.

One participant (ZIM4) whose mother was a spirit medium, expressed a nervous relief that it was not herself who had been so “chosen”; this was typical of responses encountered during the study. Resistance to the role can have very deleterious consequences, with the most common reported by Zulu participants (e.g. SA9, SA10) being a form of psychosis, the ceremonial treatment of which had the function of a selection process.

The old trained Sangoma will do this ceremony, (the patient) will have to take some herbal medication, and they do the induced vomiting every morning early in the morning before the sun rise, and they will do that for a certain period of time, and there is a certain clothing they have to wear…. they wear the white robes, and then they wear some white thing all over the body. So they do that for maybe over a month or two months, and then after that they will have to go to that person’s house, and do the celebration, as a closure of this. And then there must be a slaughtering of goats and chickens, and whatsoever thing. And then after that they will wait and see if the ancestors have accepted that. If they have accepted that, then the person will be OK. But if they haven’t accepted that then the person will have to go for training, (which) takes maybe about six months or a year. Then after that the person will become a qualified Sangoma – SA10.

For the Venda, in the Northern Province of South Africa, physical illness was reportedly more common (Mufamadi & Sodi, 1999). The hardship could be extreme:
I thought to be a traditional healer was a shame. It was something that will make me feel inferior. Because I was refusing to accept that gift, I had to suffer a lot. I had eight children and they passed away one by one until only one remained and I decided to accept that calling. That child was saved. From that time I left teaching and started working as a traditional doctor from 1973 until today as I am speaking (Lamola, 1999, p. 237).

ZIM4 described her childhood memories of her mother’s mediumship:

I was 5, 6, 7 years old… for some reason I would not want to be in the main hut… which was like a ceremonial hut… because, she would get into a trance, and speak…..as somebody else, as a medium…..and, I just, subconsciously I just didn’t want to be part of that particular…I – I - I would hear the voice….and it sounded very painful….I don’t know… I wasn’t scared….I would feel sorry for her. It’s like I would experience her pain. I don’t know….I knew what she was going through… I understood the physical pain she was going through, but I didn’t understand why it had to be done – ZIM4.

ZIM4 reported that our interview was the first time she had spoken with anyone about that childhood experience of witnessing the sounds of her mother’s pain. She described how the diminishment of the traditional meaning of the role contributed to her mother making the decision to discontinue, which provoked a crisis.

… my understanding now is that she had this crucial role, which was to be the medium of the family…. as the responsibility she was born with… these things come to you, you don’t ask for them…. from the way I see it now, it seems people just held these ceremonies, to make sure they get a good job, they get money… the spiritual side stopped… (they had) no real deep understanding of what it is. And with my mum now, eventually she stopped. And it was difficult for her, because her father was very angry with her… he probably understood why she had to do this. She didn’t really understand why she had to do it, when everybody else’s life is going on… she then became a teacher, so she had to mix her contemporary life, with this traditional life. So eventually she became schizophrenic. (Now) she’s got both bipolar and schizophrenia – ZIM4.

At face value, these accounts suggest that the devaluation of these traditional roles through the seeking of individual advantage was resisted by ancestral influence, and the father’s role in ensuring compliance with tradition is also referenced. The traditional healer, in providing the point of connection between the mundane and spirit worlds, has become a site of tension between traditional and western processes.

Five participants who had worked in rural areas (C1, C2, C4, SA8 and ZIM1) asserted that in their experience, traditional healing was the primary means of managing health, partly because medical clinics were often not accessible. This is in accordance with the commonly cited figure that 80% of the population of developing countries rely on such health care (World Health Organisation, 2007), although this figure is not empirically founded and has been challenged in rigorous research (Tabuti et al., 2003).

Participants confirmed that the stigma that may be attached to using traditional healing, and the fear of being refused medical treatment, resulted in a tendency to under-report usage. “Through intergenerational learning, patients or consumers of indigenous healing may be wary of the historical and negative connotations of those
terms and be less open to admitting to their using indigenous healing services” (Mpofu, 2006, p.377).

Pata noted the hypocrisy which could attend the issue for those whose status depended on being perceived to be westernised:

And the same people, they claim to be educated, and so on…guess what? Come evening, they go to traditional healers, behind other people’s back. During the day, they will talk badly about traditional healers…but come evening they are there …. there’s Kombis, there’s buses going to places where there are traditional healers – SA8.

Maynard (2004) argued that contemporary “traditional” healers were not “traditional” at all, at least in the case of the Kedjom in Cameroon. His research suggested that the precolonial equivalent of “medicine” was a ritualistic process conducted among authorised men in secret societies, with the purpose of re-ordering community life, with physical healing being a subsidiary function. There were at least five categories of practise:

- guardians of Kedjom gods and ancestral shrines, who presided over regular community rites;
- houses with specific purposes, such as protection in warfare;
- medicinal houses which produced medicines according to seasonal requirements;
- protective practices at the family or clan level, which were directed to lineages of ancestors to confer protection in relation to particular roles; and
- individuals within family systems who had gained experience and expertise in applying appropriate remedies within their family.

The broader applications of “medicine” in the first two categories, which provided the foundation for wellbeing and protection within the communities, were the more powerful and most strictly controlled.

Although this research was specific to the Kedjom community, it suggests that contemporary “traditional healers” have emerged partly because of the fragmentation of community, modelled on the family practitioner role. Such healers, who typically claimed either to have been trained in an apprenticeship model, or (as with the participants in the present study) to have had their gifts granted directly from ancestral spirits, have become the “face” of contemporary “traditional” healing. The more systemic processes, held to have power in sustaining communities, may remain under-examined for their psychological importance: especially if secrecy was implicated in their power.

Although the public focus may have become more individually oriented, the re-ordering function of the community is still implicated in the authentication of the role:

The professor, the Big Sangoma… takes you through the initiation…the bogwera/koma process… and then on the day of graduation, he sits back… the community comes, and the community is going to check if (the candidate) is competent. He is going to work with this community, they must check… you take the test in front of the community. And if it doesn’t work you’ve failed… go back!
(both laugh) and we say, your internship is going to be extended… my aunt is one of those who failed…she did not pass the exams - SA11.

Wreford (2008), a white English woman whose PhD in anthropology documented her own training as a Sangoma, described how her own “graduation” involved a range of ritual processes over some years, including a demonstration to an audience of established Izangoma. Her enactment of an ancestral spirit command (experienced by her as a voice in her head telling her to “dance on her knees”) was interpreted by the audience as evidence of her ancestral connection. Her teacher explained:

*It is because that is how the old people dance…. They can’t stand on their legs anymore so they dance on their knees* (p. 162).

One Tasmanian participant described a form of divination whose purpose was the testing of guilt and innocence in antisocial activity.

In a village situation, things will happen like they will steal a goat, or sheep. So, there are people who are believed to possess supernatural powers to catch the culprits. And one of the ones I witnessed, is…. (the medicine man) goes to the bush and gets some palm leaves to make a broom, and then they squash these leaves in a pan or pot of water, and then they find a very strong man among the people and give him the broom to hold with both hands, and they will be talking some incantations and then rubbing the water down the hands, until this (strong) man goes into a frantic….I don’t know how to call it, but he starts to tremble or shake, vigorously shake the broom like this (demonstrates violent shaking with his hands). Then the medicine man will say “seek out the person who stole the goat, and wherever the goat is, go and find it”. And sometimes this (strong) man will be shaking and running around in a trance, and I have seen them going among 200 or 300 people, and start hitting one, with the broom, until that person confesses, and I have seen them go wherever they hid the goat, or if they have already killed them, that there is some meat. So, I have witnessed that – C4.

The participant stated that these abilities were either inherited from the person’s father or conferred by an ancestral spirit. In one case he observed, the man in the trance ran several kilometres to another village where the culprit was found: showing that they did not need to be physically present to be identified. Wreford (2008, p. 114) described her training in a similar technique, labelled *Umhlalaho* in Zulu, translated as “hiding and finding”. The explanation she provided was that the technique involved listening to the spirits, who would provide the location of an item hidden by the teacher. The training was preparation for listening to spirit guidance in determining the illness of a patient. The use of divination within the Azande community to determine the cause of death (noted in Chapter Four) would appear to be a related practise.

These expressions of ancestor and spirit influence extend the range of connectedness beyond the living human community and the material world: this provides status for the traditional practitioner. However, in the following extract the ancestral decision making is the key feature, with the practitioner and patient at the mercy of ancestral direction.

In cases where the psychosis is a calling to be an Izangoma they would say that that person’s ancestors are communicating…. they are not actually trying to make that person sick, but to seek help. And they say it is very difficult to assist that person
because it is that person’s ancestors who is going to decide where that person is going to get help – SA9.

The multilayered healing process is shown in the following detailed report from the Zambian Ndembu community (Turner, 2008, p. 83):

_The ritual was a collective effort to draw out an afflicting spirit from a sick woman, with drumming to aid not only the healing but the discernment of the spirit. The support of the community with singing and clapping was essential to the success of the ritual. The medicine men attached cupping horns to the back of the woman to draw out the spirit, and continually addressed the entity, persuading it to come out. When the woman began to shake, and utter her pent-up grudges about her misfortune, the spirit was reckoned to be on its way out. But it took a long time. Finally, when most of the crowd had given up hope a major crisis occurred._

_The sky had grown dark and a wind came up. Just then the central figure swayed deeply; all leaned forward, this was indeed going to be it. I realised along with them that the barriers were breaking. Something that wanted to be born was now going to be born. Then a certain palpable social integument broke and something calved along with me. I felt the spiritual motion, a tangible feeling of breakthrough moving through the whole group. Then it was that the patient fell: the spirit event occurring first and the action happening afterward. I was clapping and singing with the others like one possessed, while the drums bellowed and the tribal doctor pressed the patient’s back, guiding and leading out the tooth. The patient’s face wore a grin of tranced passion and her back was quivering rapidly. Suddenly she raised her arm, stretched it in liberation, and I saw with my own eyes a large thing emerging from the flesh of her back. This thing was a big grey blob about six inches across, a dark grey opaque thing in the shape of a sphere._

The exhaustive participation of the community, directed and exhorted by acknowledged authorities, the drumming, clapping and chanting, the coerced compliance by the spirit inducing the illness, and the association with wind and light variations of the physical environment, show how multilayered the healing experience may be.

From the discussion in this section, it is concluded that the western tendency to conceptualise “healing” as an individualised, diagnosis/treatment process is too narrow. Rather, African healing is inclusive of sustaining and restorative ritual practices that may involve divination, spirit connection, and dynamic community participation, and relies on a profound sense of interconnectedness that transcends culture, time, and cosmological categories of being. The perceived barrier to western health care that traditional healing presents, might be better addressed by defining “health” in terms of social justice. Advocacy for equitable distribution of resources (for example) would then be a culturally relevant health-inducing practice.

As noted in Chapter One, this researcher had personal experience of precognitive dreams, which acted as a priming influence for investigating some of the experiences reported in this section. Further, some dreams during the study period provided data which was relevant to the themes of the study. The following dream was interpreted
as reflecting a deep engagement with the radical connectedness that characterises African experience.

Journal - 24th January 2010

I dream that there has been some serious mistake to do with “going into reverse” (this phrase being an enduring metaphor coined by “C2”, originating in our driving lessons). C2 makes a speech about me. He then dresses me in a special costume to leap from a tall tower; this means I will be a king.

When I phone C2 to tell him the dream there is a long pause, and he interprets it as follows, saying that the dream is in four parts: and that it referred to my spirit joining in the communal grief for a young Kakwa man who had died in hospital earlier in the month. I had met the man’s brother during my visit to Queensland in October 2008, which, C2 carefully notes, had been for a memorial gathering.

The “mistake” referred to a mistake made by the hospital that contributed to his death: “going into reverse” (part 1). C2 had given a speech for the late, then had to dress the body for return to Sudan (part 2). The leap from the tall tower symbolised the spirit trip across the ocean (part 3). When the body arrived in Sudan, it was received by the foreign minister as a measure of respect, because of the ambiguous circumstances of his death: this explained the phrase “I will be (received as) a king” (part 4).

I feel some resistance to this claim on my dream, aware by now that accepting it may generate more tensions for me. However, I am impressed by the promptness, plausibility and comprehensiveness of C2’s interpretation. It continues to evoke a sense of connection for me, with the African communities and the African continent.

These associations illustrate how connections with community may be made on multiple levels, and a person’s place within a community might be shaped through a range of influences. The incorporation of such features within the lived experience of urban and rural African people has implications for conceptualisation of human being and selfhood, and these are explored in Chapter Six.

Through reference to the death rituals that had been followed for the young man, the interpretation also illustrated the extent to which refugee communities sought to engage in traditional rituals and processes when there was a death, which are explored in the following section.

Dimension 7 (f) – Death, Disruption and Reconnection

From the very beginning of the study, there were striking contradictions across the theme of death. Participants reported in matter-of-fact ways the experience of living with a day-to-day threat of death, whether through starvation or illness in refugee camps, military attack, antisocial behaviour, intergroup conflict and persecution, through the arbitrary violence in townships, out of personal envy and enmity, or
through supernatural means. The prospect of death was therefore more immediate than is generally the case in western societies.

Among trauma clients at the Phoenix Centre, the violent deaths of family members, even the massacres of whole families were of course profoundly upsetting, but were rarely the identified problem leading to contact with the service sector. However, the response within communities to a more recent death was perhaps the strongest mobilising force that could be witnessed. Underfunded communities would produce thousands of dollars for such costs as repatriation of the body to Africa from Australia, or for family members to fly to or from Africa to attend funerals. The ritualistic observances around death were highly valued: the inability to perform these due to war or lack of identified remains appeared to be as strong an influence on survivors as the grief associated with the personal loss. There thus seemed to be both a heightened state of readiness for one’s own death, and a heightened sensitivity in response to the death of another.

This paradoxical feature of African societies was noted by Mbiti (1989): death is accepted as part of the natural rhythm of life: yet “every human death is thought to have external causes, making it both natural and unnatural… by far the commonest cause is believed to be magic, sorcery and witchcraft” (p. 151).

Participants with medical training (e.g. ZIM1 and SA10) seemed confounded by the way that so many people would appear to prioritise the perceived obligations to ancestral influence over the continuation of their own lives. These apparent contradictions were partly resolved when the place of death within the community and cosmological interconnectedness of being, was more fully investigated.

**Interconnectedness at a pragmatic level**

The intricate designation of roles and the interweaving of a person’s life with many others in the broader community, meant that at their death there was a need to reallocate the responsibilities among those that remained. Much of this reallocation is preconfigured through recognised traditions, such as *Musarapavana*: wherein the sister of the wife moves into the household to provide for the domestic functions; or where orphaned children move into the household of the uncle.

The gap left by the deceased would be most strongly experienced by their immediate family members, and Nwoye (1998) described African Grief Therapy as contextualised within a movement of the whole community in support of the bereaved: an example of this was reported in a journal extract in Chapter Four.

Writing from the perspective of an economist with 28 years’ experience in African countries, Cockcroft (1990) observed that African societies had a weakness in “the problem of succession” (p. 110). He highlighted a tendency in traditional systems toward authoritarian leadership sanctioned by ancestral powers or God, and observed that there had been few examples of smooth transfers of power in modern African nation states. Equally, the successful enactment of a coup (with success suggesting spirit sanction) might legitimise new leadership: and with it, the prosecution of immediate “justice” on supporters of the former regime. The associated cycles of crisis, war, retribution and revenge were thereby seen partly as culturally normative.
The community norm of intensive education and preparation for roles suggests that a functioning small scale community managed succession by gradual preparation of suitable candidates, with decisions negotiated upon the death of an incumbent. However, Cockcroft argued that such decision-making processes often involved conflict, deceit, and bravado, leading to destabilisation, especially at the scale of the nation-state.

In any event, such reallocations would not necessarily be convenient or practical, and there might need to be considerable negotiation to ensure sustainability. Conversely, taking on such an additional responsibility attracted special recognition and respect. One participant (C2) reported that he was disappointed at not being able to attend a memorial gathering in Africa, because he was expected to contribute to the decision making; but also, because he would be missing out on the acknowledgement and blessings that were due to him for his provision of care to non-biological children within the bereaved community. In Chapter Four, it was explained that such “blessings” associated with specific gatherings were expected to extend across time and space for those present, illustrating the interweaving of the metaphysical and mundane realms.

**Interconnectedness at a metaphysical level**

Distinguishing between different levels and dimensions of connectedness for the purposes of analysis may at time have obscured the extent to which they are inter-related: a “meta”-interconnectedness. The community response to the death of one of its members is one of the events which illuminates this feature most strongly. As well as contending with the pragmatic aspects of loss, there is an anxiety about the uncertainty of the cause of death, and of the transition process.

Transition through different life stages (e.g. for births, initiations, weddings, and education) is prioritised highly. Accordingly, these processes make strong demands on resources, energy and time. In within-life transitions, the anxiety in the face of possible disruption is alleviated by the recognition that there are opportunities for correction or recovery, and that such recovery processes would also be a shared responsibility. A marriage can be stabilised through intervention by an elder, illness can be healed, initiation can be delayed, and although less favoured, there are pathways other than marriage to a respectable adult status.

However, in the death transition, there are extensive requirements to be met, in the context of a community already contending with the practical impact of the loss. Furthermore, the outcome might depend on the receptivity of the ancestors, the preparedness of the spirit, the worthiness of the person or the family, or the nature of the death. An inadequately managed transition may create risk for generations to come (Sodi, 14/8/2013, personal communication):

If they have not been sent off properly, their spirit will come to haunt you; and their spirit may not only haunt you, or it may not even haunt you, but it may haunt your children or your children’s children; and that will also then indicate that the relations between us and our ancestors is a real one…. it’s an ethic, to continuously relate to that. Now if you can imagine, if somebody has not been sent off well, that spirit is aggrieved, and it comes back to haunt the living, they will always have misfortune, things will not go well – and you then have to have other costly rituals… to quieten the storm, so to speak…. and that will also have cost a lot of
emotional pain. So, it’s always best to prepare this person well, to get to the other side… so you have paid your dues, you are not left with lingering tensions… with people who have departed… yah that is a very important element.

The importance placed on the continued sense of connection through death rituals accentuated and expanded upon the pervasive sense of connectedness that permeated the findings of this study.

**Dimension 8 (c) – “Living in Two Worlds”**

Another feature which came to have more potency over time was the notion of modern African life having the form of “Living in Two Worlds” (Sodi, 1/4/2013, personal communication):

> Over the years, you come to live with it…and I suppose the tensions associated with this experience of living in two worlds…probably could be one of the factors that lead to many people to be very stressed…those, the tensions that are going to be there will always be there, and the need to traverse the two worlds…

At first encounter this term seemed simply to describe the practical problems that came with fitting academic and professional institutional life (in Professor Sodi’s example) with the ethic of ongoing connection with his shaping traditions. However, as with many apparently simple formulations, the term leant itself to a wider range of reported African experience, providing a glimpse of a distinctly different way of experiencing and envisioning the self.

Many of the previously reported themes are reflected in this term; within traditional life as well as in the tension between modern and traditional worlds. The role of spirit healer can be seen to be an example of the way traditional culture supported such a status. Researching the phrase “Living in Two Worlds” yielded the title of a book by a psychotherapist, reflecting her multi-layered experience of research with Xhosa healers in South Africa (Buhmann, 1984). A parallel role was demanded of the new wife, who was required to bring honour to her birth family through her mastery of the domestic sphere, and through her relationships with her husband’s family.

One participant reported the rejuvenating effect of submitting to the traditional structure at home:

> It’s difficult to juggle the two: I am a leader in what I am doing here. And when I get home I’m under the authority of the family leader. To tackle this, you come from a place where you say I’m the leader, now you go to whereas, here I am a child… you submit to the elder, there. And you feel like a child. And I think everybody needs that in him, I need to be a child again…I need to feel that – SA4.

Multilingualism clearly fits with this theme of living in two worlds: all study participants grew up knowing at least two languages, and many spoke more than five. The viability of the study demanded of most participants that they speak in their second or third language, and as described in Chapter Four, enough evocative proverbs were referenced to attest to the risk of impoverishment of meaning that speaking in English entailed. Two worlds are implicit in rituals for birth, adulthood, marriage or death, and this priming for transition may help explain the reported effectiveness of rituals which invoked a break from the past.
The idea emerged then, that built into the structure of traditional African society was a purposeful preparedness for providing the transition between worlds, or a moving to-and-fro between them. The challenge of accommodating the disparity that exists between western and African-derived systems can thereby be contextualised within an explicit African tradition.

**Living in the Two Worlds of Race-based Oppression**

The apartheid social structure in South Africa was perhaps the most enduring overt expression of racial oppression in modern African history, emerging from an increasingly restrictive post-industrial society to an overt political form in the 1940s (Sparks, 1990). Famous for its pass-laws, the assassination, exile, or extended imprisonment of emergent Black leaders such as Steve Biko and Nelson Mandela; the Sharpeville Massacre; burgeoning ghettos; and isolationist white superiority policies, the legacy of apartheid was referenced by many participants.

There was a point in time where an aeroplane went past, pouring a white substance down…and that led to the dying of our chicken, our poultry, and we couldn’t get anything from the trees. Only to find later that that was actually the strategy, to kill, so that somebody can be able to make money out of us now we started taking some buses, going to look for work – SA5.

One participant made reference to dual cultures as a formative experience growing up during apartheid:

I would say I was brought up in a dual culture kind of context…grew up practicing traditional customs, ceremonies, rituals….but of course there was an interface with the western way of doing things…. working for a white farmer, they had their own culture, and we had our own African culture… that was the culture within which, I learned a lot…. the concept of being…what does it mean to be - SA11.

The transition from an acceptance of inferiority implied in his positioning in society was reported as having come gradually, through questioning and then rebelling:

… so I would say in the context of the apartheid system, a lot of things that I later saw as abnormal I grew up thinking they were normal…for example it was normal for a white person to, to, stay in a nice place, to eat well, and to drive a car, and it was OK for a black person to work for a white man, and from a very early age it is in your face on the farms - SA11.

The white South African participant provided a mirroring from the “White world”:

…as a child, stopping at robots (traffic lights), I used to look at mothers holding their children; I’d look into the eyes of the young children and I thought Ohhhh! That child is so sad…of course they were, because we were in cars, the white people, and the blacks walked the streets…which of course they still do now, generally….And I, I read Cry, the beloved country by Allan Paton, and I gave a talk about this, the honest truth and opinion from a girl of about 12, it was a competition…. a pin would not have dropped, because I was saying what was not allowed to be said… I felt that I was in disgrace - SA7.

Structurally discriminated against even after the end of apartheid, in the absence of an academically recognised way of reflecting on their own lives, black psychology students took recourse to other ways of sustaining black identity:
We were few blacks (in the University), they would have English and Afrikaans classes, so all the blacks would go to the English classes, (even) at Honours level I remember. we had to attend after hours. Because the Afrikaans group would attend during the day, and English in the evening… I was selected for my Masters for research psychology; that’s when reality also hit that you know what, you are alone… I felt I do not fit in, this is not my world… that’s when I started with my dreadlocks… I wasn’t white, and I didn’t want to be white…and this was my way of saying you know this is who I am…this is me, and don’t mess with who I am – SA6.

A Zimbabwean participant living in South Africa reported a complex experience around blackness and African-ness; her relatively westernised style distinguished her in South Africa as more like whites. She thereby inadvertently acted as an agent of connection between black and white South Africa. Acknowledged by white society, not readily identifying with black South African culture, she questioned the fading of her Zimbabwean and African heritage:

What happened to my accent and how do I get it back? – ZIM3.

The resistance to the seduction of being identified with white culture is a recurring theme in black literature: the example of the Negritude movement was discussed in Chapter Two (Kennedy, 1975). Barack Obama provided a personal example in his autobiography: “I ceased to advertise my mother’s race at the age of twelve or thirteen, when I began to suspect that by doing so I was ingratiating myself to whites” (Obama, 2004, p. xv).

The potentially “splitting” effect of living in two worlds was referenced by other participants; for example, the putative Zimbabwean Minister of Education visiting the rural areas on weekends for divination, and the tension between expressed devotion to Christianity and engagement with traditional practises:

I am a Christian, but I cannot deny…. the experience that I felt, the connectedness that I felt… with people, with the community – SA1.

Living in two worlds evokes an acceptance of uncertainty as potentially both a limiting and creative space, and of dialogue. This capacity of the self was defined as the “liminal self” by Nwoye (2006, p. 137), with an explicit example being the “in-between” status of refugees. In retrospect, the reported experience of African refugees coming to Tasmania also clearly fitted with the metaphor of “Living in Two Worlds”, especially given their extensive attempts at maintaining connection with their family or community in Africa.

The term “alternating bi-culturalism” was coined in a qualitative study of African-American and Mexican-American adolescents in the USA (Phinney & Devich-Navarro, 1997, p. 16), as one response of adolescent migrants to the conflicting and non-overlapping cultures of their home life and school and peer life. This was also cited in describing the status of participants in a qualitative study of Sudanese adolescents in Brisbane, Queensland (Poppitt & Frey, 2007).

Concerns expressed by these authors about the sustainability of this status may be partly alleviated by recognising its ubiquity within the African diaspora: it may be that alternating biculturalism is more culturally normative than is routinely
appreciated within Australian culture. The less formal term “Living between two worlds” allows such solutions to be contextualised within African cultural norms rather than those of the host country, and may offer legitimising power.

This multifaceted theme is suggestive of a less fixed sense of individualised identity than is typically represented in western psychology. One can attend church in the morning and then a traditional sacrifice in the afternoon, or as reported by one participant (C4), a family can attend at the Mosque one week and a Christian Church the next. No problem is experienced because the identity is not expected to be “held together” by an internal continuity of “belief” or “value”. Rather, the expectation may be that people are adept in acting in accordance with the context that is salient at the time. This recalls the description of African counselling in Chapter Four, wherein the counsellor appealed to the difference between the African and Australian contexts as a way of influencing the client to alter his behaviour. Ultimately, the term may reflect the dialogism in the African expression of human being: in that an explicit orientation toward a relational construction of self will be more context-dependent than an individualistic construction of self.

**Dimension 9 – Ubuntu and Moya: Ethics and Spirit Connectedness**

It was not a specific objective at the commencement of the study to directly explore notions of selfhood or ethics in African communities. However, these features gradually unfolded with the pursuit of a fuller understanding of approaches to problems, as the focus broadened from techniques and practices to their context and development. The theme of connectedness increasingly represented itself, not just as a feature of African approaches to problems, but as an ethic.

The Sudanese and Sierra Leonean men in the consensus groups were universally insistent that the key theme they wanted represented was that of the importance to them as men, of family cohesion - and by extension their role in ensuring community connectedness. The distress they reported at having this foundational role minimised, overlooked or denied in interventions by Tasmanian services, was more prominent than the impact of historical difficulties or other current practical problems. It was concluded that for these men, Connectedness was problematized at a superordinate level.

The term ubuntu emerged in 2009, at the transition point between Phase I and II of the study, through the following inferential process.

1. The theme of connectedness was often explicit and always implicit in the interview descriptions of African ways of approaching problems.
2. The theme was often explicitly contrasted with “living as individuals”.
3. This provoked the question about the implied assumptions of human being that Africans brought to their experience.
4. Referencing “I think (or “I doubt”) therefore I am” as a formative expression in western thought on individualised selfhood, a contrasting assumption “We are together therefore I am” was inferred as a plausible alternative reference point for an intrinsically relational self.
5. Subsequent to this inferential process the term ubuntu was encountered in a newspaper article in South Africa (Ndungane, 2009), translated in that source as “I am because we belong together”. 

171
The implications for the experience of selfhood that emerged from this reasoning suggested a deep challenge to western theories of the self. Rather than one’s own capacity to doubt as a founding paradox for the looping experience of selfhood, the emphasis was on the experience of the existence of another, recognisably similar self. Developmentally, if the infant is to survive, the existence of the other is, as it were, always awaiting verification. This capacity, along with the capacity to distinguish between self and other, develops within the first two months of life (Rochat, 2006).

**Meanings attached to ubuntu**

The term *ubuntu* is a *Nguni* expression and is ubiquitous in South Africa. Similar terms have been identified in most South African languages as well as through much of Southern Africa, including Zimbabwe, Kenya, Tanzania, Mozambique, Democratic Republic of Congo, and Angola (Mnyaka & Motlhabi, 2005).

In a detailed historical account of the use of the term in academic writing, Gade (2011) showed that from the 1850s to the 1980s the most common translations were “human nature”, “humanity”, and humanness”. The first recorded political usage was in the 1980s in Zimbabwe, where it was explicitly argued that it was important that the positive human quality of *ubuntuism* be represented in the constitution and legislation of the newly independent country.

In South Africa, *ubuntu* was evoked as an organising principle in the transition to power of the African National Congress (ANC) at the end of apartheid, and informed the Truth and Reconciliation process (Gade, 2011). Between 1993-1995, *ubuntu* began to be explained more by reference to proverbs, most commonly the *Nguni* proverb ‘*umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*’ (translated as “a person is only a person through other people”). The term was used by Barack Obama in his speech at the memorial for Nelson Mandela in 2013 (A. Black, 2013), in recognition that Mandela himself had come to be seen as embodying *ubuntu*.

It may be that the more recent use of proverb-based explanations marked a reclamation by African authors of a more authentic system of definition, given the use of proverbs as a traditional oral education style. Gade (2011) noted the implication of a political agenda of “return” to African authority in the use of *ubuntu*, but left aside the question of whether earlier written definitions (mostly by western authors) may have overlooked the proverbial context and thereby inadvertently “westernised” the meaning.

In the supervision interview with Professor Mkhize, the developmental structuring offered to a person implied in the *Nguni* proverb *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* was affirmed (Mkhize, 12/8/2013, personal communication):

*umuntu* does not really become a human being by virtue of being physically born; OK…*umuntu* is a process of becoming…so as you engage with your surroundings; other human beings, the earth, the gods, the ancestors; it is through that process that you become an *umuntu*… a human being who possesses the full essential attributes that qualify himself or herself to call themselves human. So that is where in African thought the idea of dialogue comes in; the idea that you become a human being through dialogue; you become a human being through engagement; it is through your practises or social relationships that you become a human being.
This emphasised the community oriented, developmental and educational process inherent in the term, which contrasted with the notion of a human quality which tended to pervade earlier western descriptions.

The interactive aspect of African ethics was emphasised by Bujo (2001), highlighting dialogue as being central to ethical conduct. Such dialogue incorporates and also explicitly uses proverbs, fairy-tales and metaphors in day-to-day discussion as well as in formalised settings.

(Referring to Bujo) I recognise my being, through recognising your existence. So…as we sit, like this, I realise my person-hood, I realise my selfhood, that I am alive, because you legitimise my being, by listening to me…by connecting so deeply with me…so my existence is actually legitimised by other people’s…by other people around me. So even…it’s more…there’s a lot of people who say, that this ubuntu of yours takes away individualism…it is not true…it actually recognises that…the individual gets meaning in the context of and through the other - SA11.

This suggested a foundational equivalence between being human and *being in relationship*, as distinct from a term such as “humanity” which appears to apply to the individualised self.

One of the most commonly cited explanations does not refer to the word *ubuntu* at all: rather it is a general depiction of the African norm of personhood-within-community (Mbiti, 1989, p. 106):

In traditional life, the individual does not and can-not live alone except corporately. He owes his existence to other people, including those of past generations and his contemporaries. He is simply part of the whole. The community must therefore make, create or produce the individual; for the individual depends on the corporate group. Physical birth is not enough: the child must go through rites of incorporation so that it becomes fully integrated into the entire society. These rites continue throughout the physical life of the person, during which the individual passes from one stage of corporate existence to another. The final stage is reached when he dies and even then, he is ritually incorporated into the wider family of both the dead and the living.

Just as God made the first man, as God’s man, so now man himself makes the individual who becomes the corporate or social man. It is a deeply religious transaction. Only in terms of other people does the individual become conscious of his own being, his own duties, his privileges and responsibilities toward himself and towards other people. When he suffers, he does not suffer alone but with the corporate group; when he rejoices, he rejoices not alone but with his kinsmen, even if they bear only their father’s or mother’s name. Whatever happens to the individual happens to the whole group, and whatever happens to the whole group happens to the individual. The individual can only say: “I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am”. This is the cardinal point in the understanding of the African view of man.

Maquet (1972) described how the initiation processes as well as other forms of education such as the use of proverbs, emphasised the importance of relating to others. This provided a context for an explicit ethical system such as *ubuntu* (p.129):
In African education, stress is placed on interpersonal relations. It is of the highest importance that every person should know how to conduct himself towards other people. The ideal picture which is implied by this education and which more or less consciously inspires it, is that of a society of individual personalities well adapted to their various social roles, whose social relationships are therefore easy and harmonious.

One aspect of \textit{ubuntu} that was emphasised by Ngubane (1963), and reiterated by other authors to the point where it has been seen as an authoritative statement, is the idea that:

\textit{Supreme virtue lay in being humane, in accepting the (other) human being as a part of yourself, with a right to be denied nothing that you possessed. It was inhuman to drive the hungry stranger from your door, for your neighbour's sorrow was yours.}

A clear alignment between \textit{ubuntu} and the ideal of Christian love is suggested here, which provokes intriguing questions: for example, were such widely publicised ideas of \textit{ubuntu} purposefully aligned to Christianity, were they derived from the same source, or was the notion of converting Africans to Christianity superfluous even in early Christendom?

Revisionist African history includes the acknowledgement of a range of early historical connections between Christianity and the African continent, including the establishment of churches in Egypt in the 1st Century, Central North Africa in the 2nd Century, Ethiopia in the 4th Century, and Nubia in the 6th Century (Fatokun, 2005). Despite this acknowledged history, no scholarship could be identified that sought to analyse the interplay between traditional African ethics and Christian beliefs prior to missionary activity in the 16th Century. The historical interaction between Islam and West African societies is better documented, with Arabic sources describing the conversion of the aristocracy of Ghana in the 11th Century, and the city of Timbuktu becoming an important centre for Islamic scholarship (Maquet, 1972, p. 140). It can be assumed that there will also have been an interplay between the global development of Christianity and its early African expressions. It is even plausible that Christianity developed from traditional African ethics, given that cultural exchange between Arabic and African nations long pre-dated Christianity.

A range of references to \textit{ubuntu} were provided by other participants. One recalled that as a boy, the following proverb came to be understood through the exciting experience that the best food would always be brought out for visitors:

\textit{Visitor come to my house, so that I can be able to eat because of you} – SA1.

Another, who identified as Christian and eschewed the ancestor rituals, described how he engaged with the concept of \textit{ubuntu} in late adolescence. For him the Christian principles and \textit{ubuntu} were aligned, but \textit{ubuntu} was still distinct, and paradoxically extensive:

\textit{Yah ubuntu is a small, just a small concept with very big implications…in a sense that you say ubuntu, meaning humanity…that’s what basically it’s saying…you}
know *ubuntu* will tell you when somebody needs help, you recognise that, that is *ubuntu*, when somebody is sick, you need to recognise that, if somebody’s battling you need to recognise that… that is *ubuntu*, and you do things, you do things in order to, to support that person, to be a better person. So *ubuntu* will tell you that even if somebody who is in need is not necessarily your daughter, or your son, or your relative, if someone is in need, *ubuntu* will dictate that you need at some point to help that person meet that particular need. Whether you know the person, whether you don’t know, doesn’t matter, that is basically what happens – SA5.

The style of language suggests here not just a concept, but a living impulse: “…*ubuntu* will tell you”. This recalls the agency attributed to inanimate features of the environment in Chapter Four, such as crops, soil, and the sun; as well as non-material influences, such as spirit.

Another participant (SA4) told the story of how, when his grandfather had found a woman he wanted to marry, the parents had investigated the quality of the match by visiting on a pretext to observe how the family received them and how respectful the prospective daughter-in-law was toward them. The emphasis in *ubuntu* on welcoming strangers showed a practical utility in this story: one could never be sure who the visitor might be, or what was their purpose.

The existential formulation “I am because we are together” that was inferred from *interconnectedness* as a phenomenological theme in Phase I, is therefore only one aspect of the term *ubuntu*, which has broad explanatory power and relevance to African culture, at least in Southern Africa. None of the Tasmanian participants used the term, or indeed any indigenous equivalent. However, the meaning of the term was inferred from their descriptions. To emphasise this commonality, further examples are provided below. The country of origin of each participant is specified in order to provide a sense of the geographic extent of the general ideas that fit with the term *ubuntu*.

This is not to imply that the term *ubuntu* is representative of all African culture. Rather, in this study, a generalised concept was identified that appeared to be represented in interviews with Africans from a geographically broad range of communities, and which contrasted strongly with western individualism (although having strong alignment with Christian principles). Further, that through its representation in a number of African languages, it has been perpetuated across time and place as an explicit concept. It therefore can be considered to be reflective of an important aspect of African thought and cultural practise.

**Ethiopia**

If I am a guest with someone, then they will take care of me, until, as far as they can go, but if there are problems they are open: “we don’t have this what can we do?”, so it becomes a collective problem… so in a way you don’t have to panic because if it becomes a problem it becomes a collective one, rather than it is your problem you are in this situation. And that’s how people survived through the camps. They live in a group of 4, 2, 3, and they share everything… people are not going to say it is your problem, you have it, you need to get away…. no they will not do that, I mean I haven’t seen anything like that, so far. And it’s been 14 years … so it must have been the norm – C1.
Here is a clear reflection of an equivalent notion to *ubuntu* which was in this case perceived to be the norm that could be expected not just from fellow Ethiopians, but within many East African community groups.

**Eritrea**
If I am to talk about forefathers, I would say it’s also based on what we learned from them… (like) the two religions taught us: Islam and Christianity… they emphasise on helping the needy or the troubled one, and yeah I would also say that is part of what we learned from them, or part of what we inherited from them – M7.

This quote, also referenced in Chapter Four, highlights the commonality identified by this participant, between the ancestral African, Christian and Muslim traditions. Another Muslim participant aspired to a shared community ethic, with life in Australia as the unifying motivation:

**North Sudan**
(I am) against organising a representative or leader for the community of Islam… because that has been a problem… you going to have a problem if you do a Catholic or South Sudan, you do community by itself… we North do community by itself… we don’t need that… because we all one country, we all here in Australia – M1.

Western life was seen by some participants to be ethically deficient in important respects, which undermined the ideas suggested in *ubuntu*.

**Sierra Leone**
There are many practices in western society that are not civilized, like the way people treat strangers, and how the society makes it hard for families to be together without spending lots of money on transport, which means you have to concentrate on earning money instead of being together – C4.

Ironically, explicit western scientific and ethical principles were identified as contributing to the problem:

**Sierra Leone**
Western people… didn’t inherit that from their ancestors, they have lost it… probably science is part of it, and probably also human rights, and freedom, in the name of freedom and human rights, that’s part of it. I have the right to decide what I can do; I don’t have to bow to society – C4.

An *ubuntu*-like ethic is readily apparent from the following journal extract, referring to a South Sudanese community in Hobart:

**Journal - 9th September 2007**
He invited me back to where the gathering was being held (the memorial for his brother). There were perhaps 50 Africans in two small suburban rooms waiting for us, singing hymns in their language. I was quickly seated next to the refreshments table. As I walked in, there was a little flutter of pages and some quiet conversation lasting perhaps 10 seconds… and everyone, in perfect unison, began the next hymn in English so that I could participate.
At the time the warmth of welcome spontaneously and collectively offered by these visitors to my country had overwhelming impact, and the memory still evokes powerful emotion. In hindsight, the idea that this experience might be an intended outcome of an explicit, shared ethic, and that it might therefore be representative of a normative experience, still seems out of reach.

**Ethiopia**

Family is very important thing in Africa. So, when you go take the money from Centrelink, $100 is going Africa, to family… A tree, he go like this. A tree (and) down here, his family down in there around him, from flower or something (they grow, they) never go away from the tree. My family in Africa are like this tree. My mother still alive. I never far away – C8.

The act of sending money back to Africa was among the more widespread practises for Africans in Tasmania, regardless of country of origin or religion. Rather than being an expression of guilt, or even a sense of charity or propriety, or a logical proposition that my family members should not starve if I am not starving, it seemed that this practise was an expression of the felt experience of continued closeness despite the geographical distance. *My mother still alive. I never far away.* Although family was the central focus of this sensibility it extended outwards, perhaps indefinitely, spontaneously seeking to recruit everyone (including the researcher) into the project.

**Sierra Leone**

Nothing is safe there… people are still in the camps. So I want you to help those in the camp there, even some of us, we care about the relatives and children over there… you help us for the people there to join us. I miss them, and I worry, even if I eat good food here, they will not eat it, then I will just be thinking about them over there – C7.

These quotes exposed the culture of Tasmania as alienating and lacking in important dimensions of human care. Having escaped a situation where there was a catastrophic breakdown of all social norms, their task was to rebuild from a position of utter loss. This included a responsibility to rebuild or recreate the community ethic as best they could, in the absence of the societal structures that supported it. In contrast, most participants in South Africa, for whom the concept of *ubuntu* was explicit, expressed conflict or tension in relation to it, or at least in relation to the norms that it reflected.

This may have been because of contrasting personal histories between the groups, rather than differences in country or community of origin. Phase II participants were predominantly University graduates, typically having chosen to leave a rural setting to access education or opportunity. Phase I participants had for the most part been forcibly displaced from rural or small urban, more traditionally African settings, with limited access to western education.

Regrettably the “trust-balling” process, including four visits over four years to South Africa, had just reached the point where firm offers were made to provide the researcher with informed access to rural homelands, and there was no prospect of following up on these invitations within the research timeline. Arbitrarily visiting rural areas was considered, and some participants expressed confidence that at least some people would respond favourably to such an approach, and that it would be safe.
The danger will probably be from the informal settlements that surround towns. But if you go to deep rooted culture places, there won’t be any issues.

Researcher: So, if I travelled 20 km outside of Polokwane, and went to a village…
SA3: Ah they will help you.
N1: They will be more than welcoming.
Researcher: Well maybe I should have courage in that then.
SA3: Yeah go for it…they will gladly help you.

The lack of local knowledge on potential risks, and the felt sense that it may be disrespectful to visit uninvited, outweighed the perceived benefits of such a visit. Despite the lack of exposure to settings that could be expected to more closely reflect traditional norms, the concept of *ubuntu* was extended a little further. In the supervisory interview with Professor Mkhize, a further concept was offered that reified the sense of interconnectedness that had emerged from the study: that of *moya* (Mkhize, 12/8/2013, personal communication):

Going back then to this idea of *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*… the fundamental definition of being in African thought. So, by extension then, this being is in a way reducible to what we call the spirit, or in African languages the *moya*, which we share with everything. It is that *moya* that binds us together…which connects these threads of existence… the *moya* is that which we share… so if my *moya* or spirit is affected, or if I sense something in you… my *moya* will respond in a particular way, vindicating that connectedness, vindicating that we are always communicating. That is where the wisdom of the traditional healer comes in now… people don’t believe this, this is how dreams operate, through that connection, somebody can send you a message; because ultimately there is that thread which connects all of us.

One participant suggested *moya* as a point of reference which was more meaningful than the term “psychology” for describing African experience:

they talk about African psychology. African this this this… I’m not sure the word psychology captures who we are…we really have to find our own indigenous languages to represent what we really understand… it comes to the African *moya*… I call it moya… because moya is everything in our existence… the spíritus – SA11.

No references were located to expand upon the concept of *moya*, and the place it may have in orienting toward an indigenous understanding which could supplant “psychology”. Similar concepts were found in the anthropological literature; for example Wooding (1995) stated of the Surinamese traditional religion of *Winti*, that:

*The world and all things in it are dominated by a magico-religious force called srama or obeah that is conceived as omnipotent, omnipenetrable, and omnianimating. It is the essence of all supernatural beings and living things, all of which share in it to some degree* (p. 146).

Other African communities use related terms such as *emi* and *okra* within the *Yoruba* and *Akan* communities respectively (Wiredu, 1998), and *nyama* in Mali (Newton, 2006), suggesting that it has pan-African significance. It may have its equivalence in indigenous psychologies outside Africa, with a commonly cited example being the New Zealand Maori concept of *Mauri-Mauri*, described as the “binding force” by Durie (1998, p.24).
The references to moya suggest that ubuntu is more tangible than an ethic or human quality. Moya was represented as a spirit-based connectedness that had at least three real effects: in a felt sense in dialogue, in dream messages, and in the enactment of the traditional healing role. The process of identifying offenders, reported earlier in this chapter, may be another example.

Accordingly, moya is deeply implicated in ethical decision making. The failure of a person to act ethically is diagnostic of a break in moya; and the response to transgressions is focussed on restoring the transgressor to the state of humanity reflected in ubuntu. This demands a system of reconnection, perhaps through ritual, perhaps through patient dialogue (Mkhize, 12/8/2013, personal communication):

**Professor Mkhize:** The simplest way to illustrate this is to observe people engaging in traditional dancing… where for example sometimes they come in a circle, and they dance collectively… unison is very very evident, but also that space is given for one member to display his or her unique style of dance which complements the group…. But what really binds all of them together… is the common moya…or spirit…because you can see that at some point the moya is heightened… they may not even be aware of what they are doing or saying… so the moya is speaking through them, the moya is speaking in them. So, the idea of moya or spirit, is the most fundamental one in African knowledge systems…it is that which binds us together, connects us together… if there is disconnection in moya, then I fail to recognise you as a member of my community, or as part and parcel of me…. it gives me the license to kill you! So, it gives me the license not to feel your pain… the moya, that which connects us has been broken… so that is the fundamental thread that runs through all African ethical traditions, African dialogical systems… they go beyond the dialogue of human beings, to include dialogue which takes place by virtue of this connectivity… this connectivity that binds everything that is created.

(Researcher): You have anticipated my questions! In relation to how it occurs that one person kills another in this system… I was wondering what are the circumstances that must be pertaining in order for that to occur?

**Professor Mkhize:** OK – those are the circumstances. The breaking of the moya… the same thing applies to all forms of violence… rape…. in South Africa we have this problem at the moment of the rape of young children, sometimes infants….as well as the rape of elderly people… it’s when the moya has broken down completely and you have failed to realise that the other is part and parcel in you, and you are in the other… so you commit that crime, it’s a crime against that particular person, but it’s also a crime against the community, it’s also a crime against yourself. You may not realise it at that point in time, you will live with it, you will have to… whether you admit or you get imprisoned or not is irrelevant…but it is also a crime that you have also committed against yourself. So in other words it is also disconnection, outwardly, but also a disconnection within… when you lose that moya, the only remedy is to restore it… that is why prison systems don’t work… they are not geared toward that…

It’s… in all of us… I don’t want to lie to say I’ve got these abilities… but at some critical moments they can be revealed in any one of us… and those who have been trained carefully can access this intelligence… we can think about it as fundamental universal intelligence… it permeates everything… that means that the moya is an element of the supreme being… This universal intelligence can be thought about as a certain level of consciousness that we can access… but only at certain sporadic moments…. but there are certain people who can access it in a much more specialised way…. more purposeful… the moya is then part of that universal intelligence that… ultimately in Nguni thinking they would think about this as the more divine intelligence.

I found that the qualitative experience of interviewing Professor Mkhize reflected the content of what he was saying, which I attempted to capture in my journal:

**Journal - 12th August 2013**  
I experience a range of complex feelings through the conversation, in which Professor Mkhize seems to have anticipated my questions,
and even my supervisor’s question about the place of peripheral awareness in African therapy. The dominant feeling is a shifting, deep gratification, in which I am moved nearly to tears at some points, at others feeling a strong connection with him, at others suddenly cut off as his mind seems to reach for some other idea. On two occasions, I feel myself physically reeling, as if his words are physically shaping me. I am left with a refreshed sense of my own connectedness in this field, that despite some feelings of uncertainty about how I am regarded, at root there is an inextricable bond that carries a shared sensibility between us. Every time I am in his presence I feel comforted that he acknowledges me.

The multilayered experience of this interview seemed authenticating of the content of the discussion; as well as of the dialogic character of being, and my personal engagement in the issues being discussed.

The idea of restoration as a therapeutic intervention had been referenced by other participants:

Even when girls were raped, and they were despised by the villagers; but then there were people who took them through rituals, to cleanse them. And once they were cleansed, they go through the ceremony, the people accepted them again…they may become members, they get married, some of them say things are good for them now. It is not like doing one-to-one counselling; if they are going to forgive you and go through the ritual, there are representatives of people who are all going to do that; they wash you, they do this to you, they do this, and the majority of people believe that once that has been done, you can mingle with people now; you don’t have the bad luck anymore… it’s a powerful way, because psychologically, you’ve been accepted back – C4.

The pragmatic acceptance that such restorative processes are not fully within the control of the healer was shown by Wreford (2008), in her description of a failed attempt by a Zimbabwean n’anga to dispel a spirit. The process involved a consultation with the family, a ritual offering, a cleansing, and an instruction to the spirit to leave. In that case, the apparent stubbornness of the spirit was reflected both in the withdrawn sullenness of the patient, a young girl, as well as in the intransigence of the chicken which appeared to function as a proxy for the spirit, and refused to leave the spot on which it was placed by the n’anga:

The bird though was having nothing of this and stubbornly stood its ground. Ambuya repeated her instruction with the same result. With a shrug of her shoulders, and what I caught as a glance of irritation at her patient, she turned away from the bird and the water (p. 122).

The dialogic character of such healing processes is clear in this example. In order for the treatment to be effective, the healer relies on multiple responses: by the ancestral guiding spirit in shaping the intervention, by the possessing spirit in accepting the offerings, by the patient and their family in participating in the ritual, and possibly even by the chicken, in accepting its role.

I believe that system (corporal punishment) works much better than sending people to gaol…because I believe a form of punishment is only worthwhile if there is a
chance of rehabilitation…if you are sending someone to gaol, and he comes out worse, then nothing has been achieved - N1.

Ritual and physical punishment can be seen here to fit with close physical human contact and dialogue as ontologically ethical practices; they are all reminders, as it were, of the relatedness of being. This contrasts with the deprivation of liberty and enduring diminishment of status that characterises western responses to crime: when viewed from the African perspective, such practices are inherently inhumane. They separate and perpetually demarcate those who are thus relegated to that status: this fits with the embedded western assumptions of stability of personality, as opposed to prioritising a commitment to dialogue and change. These inferences are noted in order to highlight directions of thought that this study points to: if we reimagine the starting point of an ethical system, then it should not be surprising if we find ourselves reconsidering what may constitute justice.

This discussion suggests that a distinct set of feelings will be associated with the ubuntu construct as one aspect of the structure that perpetuates it. That set of feelings would signify the state of ubuntu and would in a sense be diagnostic of it. This researcher’s visceral experience of dialogue with Professor Mkhize may have been an example.

For the everyday person, it would be the feeling set characteristic of ubuntu as well as the conscious awareness of his or her compliance with any particular aspects of it relevant at the time, which would provide the moment-to-moment reassurance that he or she was acting properly.

Whatever was then personally experienced within that context would be taken to be part and parcel of ubuntu. This appears to include connectedness with animals and birds, plants, particular places, and inanimate objects such as stones and shells. The experience is extended to the awareness of spirit phenomena, particularly the felt experience of ancestor spirits, and a susceptibility to harm from spirits and from human ill-will. It is speculated that these experiences would be incorporated in the everyday felt experience of communities living according to ubuntu, with the key feature being a presumption of connectedness that is regularly affirmed by felt experience and observation, and may reflect “moya”, a subtle but real connectedness which has perceptible physiological properties.

This material challenges mainstream western scientific assumptions. Exploration of the implications of these challenges forms the core of the discussion in Chapter Six.
Chapter 6. Summary and Implications of Study

This thesis has presented the findings of a phenomenological study that was prompted by a desire to develop more culturally reliable counselling practices for African men arriving in Tasmania, Australia, as refugees. The flexibility of the phenomenological process enabled the inclusion of ethnographic and heuristic methods. In order to circumvent western-derived ideas of trauma, therapy, and ethical norms, the key question referenced African approaches to problems rather than counselling or therapy per se, and the literature review purposefully sourced material by African-identifying authors.

The data obtained in this way was unexpectedly rich, and the study was extended to include fieldwork in South Africa. The findings have been presented in a layered way, moving from a focus on supporting African male refugees in Tasmania, through a thematic analysis of African structuring of human development centred around the theme of Connectedness, to an expansion of selected themes which demarcated African perceptions and cosmological views from mainstream western cultural world views. In particular, metaphysical dimensions were found to thread through and inform all aspects of life, and were therefore strongly implicated in African approaches to problems. This central finding accentuates the restrictedness of western counselling theory and practices associated with empiricism and rationalism, and has profound implications for any inclusive model of counselling.

This chapter summarises the main process and content findings of the study, notes the study limitations, and analyses the implications for an inclusive conception of human Being and the broadening of counselling approaches.

Summary of Findings

Literature Review

The literature review outlined the scope and limitations of psychological research in trauma and in counselling outcome studies, in relation to African populations. This revealed an absence of African-identifying authors, and a systemic mismatch between the features of human experience which have been targeted in such research, and African norms for responding to traumatising events. In particular, the evocation of hope, purposeful gathering, religious practices and working with spirit influence emerged as key aspects of counselling in the African context. All these features are marginalised by the emphasis of western scientific psychological investigation on controlled experimentation, material and statistical evidence.

African-identifying scholarship was reviewed, which highlighted the diminishment and marginalisation of such scholarship within majority western psychological writing as one aspect of an inherently racist white psychology. The historical example of Franz Fanon stood out as representative, and the witnessing of the inauguration of the Forum of African Psychology (FAP) in 2009, and the interaction between FAP members and the Association of Black Psychologists (ABPsi) in 2013, were experienced as restorative.
Findings
Phase I data consisted of recorded interviews in Tasmania with Christian-identifying men from South Sudan, Sierra Leone, and Ethiopia, and Muslim-identifying men from North Sudan, Egypt, Liberia and Eritrea. Conversations with Africans from a wide range of other countries included in journal notes, augmented this analysis. Analysis of this data converged with the literature review toward an appreciation of African human being as being profoundly family-oriented within a complex interconnectedness with all being, supported, enlivened and threatened by spirit influence; particularly ancestral spirit.

The phenomenological, ethnographic and heuristic methods employed in the study enabled the documentation over time of associated metaphysical beliefs and social structures. This process intensified during Phase II of the data collection, conducted with South African, Zimbabwean and Namibian men and women living in South Africa. The African experience of being was found to be purposefully inculcated through a lifelong educative process supported by complex cultural structures, informed by an ethic of relatedness which extended beyond the living human and material worlds. Transition processes were a focus in ensuring successful human development, especially birth and naming, initiation into adulthood, marriage, training in valued community roles, and death rituals.

Rather than being inherently harmonious, the structure provided for conflict, protest, resistance, the occupation of “in-between” status by some persons, with personal annihilation as one possible outcome of community orientation. There was variation among participants in relation to specific aspects of the “African Worldview”, but all acknowledged the emphasis on family and community connection, and all expressed strong religious beliefs which were held in tension with or alongside traditional beliefs.

It was concluded that the provision of counselling for Africans, especially for African men in the Australian regional context, needed to account for this extended sense of self and educative orientation. The role of “African Counsellor” was identified as a contemporary feature of the African diaspora. Specific recommendations which should assist in legitimising and supporting such a role are summarised below.

- engagement and collaboration with elders, traditional healers, and religious and community leaders;
- group-based processes with a focus on family cohesion and community engagement, supported by strongly defined gender roles, life-education, and a welcome to the new society;
- community development around likely priorities such as support for family members remaining in Africa, access to employment, contending with racism, and devising structured responses to community deaths and other tragedies;
- explicit attention to the needs of children in the new culture, and development of strategies to support their development;
- acknowledgement of the importance of wide variations of spirit influence and religious faith;
• evocation of community norms and expectations rather than internalised values, and the use of illustrations and explanations rather than individual diagnosis and treatment;
• use of cultural forms such as dance, music, feasting, and oratory (especially the creative use of metaphors and proverbs) to mobilise, energise, and authenticate traditional beliefs;
• open-ness to a range of responses to gender dynamics and traditional systems, including the complex repositioning process required for both men and women in their new context.

These recommendations were informed by the multilayered integration of traditional ideas of health and wellbeing within all levels of African society, especially the protective importance of family, community and ancestral endorsement, centred around a person’s fulfilment of sanctioned community roles.

Enacting a supportive and guiding role toward all community children, and facilitating the restoration of community structures and the transition to the ancestral realm after a death, were found to be pre-eminent among community obligations. The management of tensions and contradictions in a person’s sense of responsibility were found to be well represented by the phrase “living in two worlds” in contrast to the idea of forced choices between internalised principles. Examples were found in the role of the wife in joining two families through marriage, and in the role of traditional healer in mediating restorative contact with the spirit world. The developed capacity to “live in two worlds” may have been a protective factor in sustaining an authentic sense of African selfhood in the context of racism and colonialism, and has contemporary value in contending with the complex, contradictory demands of post-colonial Africa.

The study process invited examination of ontological themes regarding human being. Firstly, reflective phenomenological methods exposed individualistic, anthropocentric assumptions inherent in western thinking, through the researcher’s experience of confoundment in engaging with expressions of African co-relational being.

Secondly, the primary purpose of the study was to generate culturally reliable counselling processes for the African male refugee population in regional Australia. In so doing, limitations of western counselling and psychology, and their associated ontological assumptions, were exposed. Specifically, the marginalisation of metaphysical theory development that was associated with organisation of western psychological understanding around a particular strand of scientific empiricism, truncated serious consideration by psychologists of the limits of human experience, thinking and practise. The outcome was an ideological fixedness to unexamined assumptions about foundational psychological concepts such as consciousness, whilst sidelining ideas which did not fit within the western scientific psychological canon, but which were nonetheless grounded in reliable scholarship.

The emergent recommendations cannot then be regarded as optional “modules” to be detached and re-attached to a metaphysically impoverished western psychological praxis: such co-optive practices perpetuate a western colonialism of intellectual effort and a diminishment of hard-won lived experience outside western conceptual boundaries. Instead, the contribution of the study to more inclusive ideas of human
being, consciousness, and selfhood is analysed. Most significantly, the time-bound conceptualisation of human being was revealed in this study as inadequate to account for normative African experience. From this position, more searching recommendations are made to broaden counselling praxis.

This thesis makes no pretence at a comprehensive review of relevant metaphysical theory. Rather, the literature which informed this researcher’s initial approach to the study is used as a point of reference and comparison for emergent metaphysical themes. Secondarily, literature which emerged during the study is considered for its relevance to an inclusive system from which culturally relevant and metaphysically rich counselling practices can be developed.

For example, there was evidence in the multilayered meaning of the African indigenous terminology ubuntu, that explicit ideas of ethical human behaviour were coherently founded on African notions of selfhood, which contrasted with individualised, majority western concepts of the self. Such ideas held that human selfhood was a process of becoming rather than a state of being, and this process was only feasible as part of community, through open dialogue with, and presence to, the “other”: umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu (“A person is only a person through other persons”). The honouring of relationship with other humans was paramount, but the sense of reciprocal connection and responsibility extended to all living and non-living things across all realms. The potential of this concept to counselling models has been noted previously, with Hanks (2008) suggesting it for the management of Residential Treatment Centres for children and adolescents in the USA.

This orientation to life was hypothesised to incorporate an emotional set which, in an intact traditional structure, had the function of shaping behaviour and thought toward conformity with a community-based identity as the most reliably sustainable life-option available to humans. There was evidence that in traditional African thought, the connectedness intrinsic in human being incorporated a distinct spirit-dimension (known as Moya in Nguni) which had real, if subtle, sensory effects such as dream visitations and felt responses. These indicators vindicated the sense of connection with others and with everything in the world, and such connectedness was diagnostic of health and ethical conduct. Conversely, disconnection was pathological and may require intervention, particularly through dialogue and ritual.

**Study Limitations**

The main limitation of the study applies to all western-derived methodologies which would seek to inquire into non-western cultural experience. That is, that in the construction and enactment of the investigation, western norms may have intruded, inadvertently marginalising African ideas and experiences. While complex sequential methods were designed to minimise cultural intrusions, all methods have limitations.

In this regard, phenomenological and ethnographic methods opened out possibilities to generate data in a collaborative and voluntary way, and to analyse and report it according to the shared understanding that emerged with participants.

The primary source of data in this study was the transcription of interviews and consensus groups with a total of 34 male and 11 female adult participants from ten African nationalities. Most participants in Phase I of the study were identified as
having a leadership or mentorship role within their communities, and all participants in Phase II had attended university. Clearly this sample was not representative of the black African population, and care needs to be taken in generalising the findings. It was noted in Chapter Five that the responses from the two sample sets appeared to reflect the specific geo-political contexts of participants: the loss of role for displaced male refugees in Tasmania, and the felt absence of the intricate, traditional structuring of life for the university-educated participants in South Africa. Further samples could be expected to draw out additional texture within the identified themes, shifting the emphasis of the study findings.

Accordingly, the findings are focussed on African male entrants to regional Australia in the first instance, with evidence provided where the study had potential for broader generalizability.

For example, most participants had extensive experience from working with their own and other African communities, so their observations reflected a broad appreciation of African life as a context for their personal histories. It was also notable that many participants freely distinguished between features of their descriptions which applied primarily to their own communities and history, and those which applied across African communities of their experience. This was also a feature of literature by African-identifying authors.

Additionally, ethnographic methods included extensive observations across a range of settings and incidental conversations with Africans from more than 15 countries, which supported the primary findings of the study. Counter-normative responses were sought, but were found to be restricted to declarations of lack of endorsement or belief in specific features of African life. The correspondences between the reported experiences of participants regardless of country of origin, ethnic identification, gender or religion, together with the parallels noted in anthropological studies, in contemporary African psychological texts and in African fiction, were powerful evidence that the findings were reliably reflective of widespread norms.

All interviews were conducted by one researcher, and researcher bias was therefore not controlled for within the primary data. A semi-structured interview format was used to assist with consistency, and the counselling expertise of the researcher enabled interviews to proceed in line with explicit and implicit priorities of the participants, in a collaborative endeavour, according to recognised phenomenological practise. As noted in Chapter Three, the absence of capacity in African languages restricted the scope of the study to that material which was expressible in English.

Conversely, this researcher’s personal and professional history included exposure to precognitive dreams, spirit influence, and post-modern ideas of identity. This resulted in a personal preparedness to investigate such areas and may have contributed to a stronger emphasis on such aspects of African experience, than may have been the case for other researchers. It is argued that this most likely resulted in a more accurate representation of the overall African experience (in enabling fuller discussion of material which ran counter to western psychological theory); however this cannot be reliably confirmed within the confines of the present study.
**Being, Self and Consciousness**

The overall impression provided by this study was an account of human experience that, although it overlapped with individualist norms of majority western psychology, nevertheless was oriented distinctly differently. “African Psychology” was found to address dimensions of human experience which demanded a radically different understanding of human *being*, selfhood and consciousness, centering around a community- and ancestrally-linked sense of self which was connected with the world. This section considers African-derived theory which has sought to conceptualise this distinction, and western-derived ideas of self which appear more accommodating of such distinctions.

The term “self”, for the most part uncritically used throughout the western psychological tradition, is a metaphorical rather than literal concept. When a person talks about their “self”, they are not referring to a physical entity that can be precisely measured, but a shifting, loosely defined interaction between his or her body, memories, aspirations, relationships, and numerous other features. Illustrating the power that such a mistakenly reified concept can have, Landau et al. (2011) made the paradoxical finding that subjects were strengthened in their resistance to influence by others, if the idea of an expanding selfhood was suggested to them.

Through the culturally normative metaphor of an individual self-concept, the project of western therapy (whose purpose is commonly expressed in terms of “expanding” or “developing” the “self”) has a metaphorical rather than an empirical – let alone a sound metaphysical - basis. The ambiguity inherent in the “self”, together with the evocation of personal meaning associated with it in western culture, enhances its motivational power: such processes are foundational to the use of metaphor. As explained by M. Black (1962, p. 44) “The metaphor selects, emphasizes, suppresses, and organizes features of the principal subject by implying statements about it that normally apply to the subsidiary subject”. In the case of the self as a metaphor, a person is encouraged to adopt culturally normative qualities of “self” (the subsidiary subject) to their own lives (the principal subject).

By contrast, if a person’s point of reference is located outside of their bodily self (for example, held within intersecting, developmental community roles and nature- and spirit- relationships), this renders them more open to influence and validation by others and therefore less susceptible to self-centred mystification.

**African Conceptions of Self**

The development of a model of human selfhood or consciousness within “African Psychology”, like the development of indigenous psychologies more generally, has been both hampered and provoked by the colonising influence of western psychology (Gergen et al., 1996). Accordingly, African conceptions reflect those of other indigenous cultures. One option depicts the self as contained within a series of circular “realms” which include community, physical environment, and spirit-world, in a development of ecological models (Naidoo, Sehoto, & De Villiers, 2006). In Harmony Restoration Therapy (Ebigbo et al., 1995) the self was configured as being contextualised within a set of relationships represented by linear linkages. Written descriptions, including those provided in this study, typically depict African selfhood as emphasising a subtle, tangible sense of connectedness to all things (particularly
other humans, including those in the spirit world), mediated with a kind of spirit substance or “thread”, such as moya. These models seek to capture the lived experience of Africans, particularly those with strong connections to tradition, but they remain at the level of a schematic representation of experience rather than a conceptualisation of human selfhood which might supplant or augment western psychological theories.

Returning to the pivotal work of Augustine Nwoye (2006), the findings of this thesis lend support to his model proposing eight aspects of the “fabric of the African self” (p. 119):

1. The embodied self, emphasising the impact of the physical body on a person’s life.
2. The generative self, emphasising the achievement of socially relevant distinctions of worth from one’s own actions.
3. The communal self, emphasising the community interrelatedness of African selfhood.
4. The melioristic self, emphasising the capacity to respond to misfortune and uncertainty through an appeal to greater meaning.
5. The narratological self, or “the sediments and influence of cultural memory of the people on the modern African imagination” (Nwoye, 2006, p. 133).
6. The structural self, roughly equivalent to the western psychological self, comprising features such as thinking, will, and emotion.
7. The liminal self, emphasising the transitional state of being in-between, such as not yet being born, adolescence, unemployment or displacement.
8. The transcendental/spiritual self, inclusive of the responses to religious ideas, god, as well as ancestral and other spirit influences.

Nwoye outlined how each of these aspects informed a person’s life in the African context, noting that they are inescapably interrelated. The theory allows a movement away from a distinctly separate individualised “self” which, as explained above, is more a metaphorical than a descriptive concept. In contrast, Nwoye identified inherent features of life such as bodily and emotional existence, the presence of community, and the limitations on power and influence, characterising these according to the African context.

Rather than a core “self” acting in and making sense of his or her own life over time, a person experiences these dimensions of life and orients themselves accordingly. Nwoye explained how each aspect incorporated the positioning of a person within the relevant context.

Although Nwoye did not specify this, it seems that the term “self” used in this way refers to how any particular person occupies or acts within each “aspect” of self: their “map” of self would then change across time and place as they achieved particular objectives and as different aspects of self were activated. A person may seek to modify their physical body to access culturally relevant benefits – especially a mate, but also particular work or social status. They may be influenced by their immediate community, the effects of their own decision making, the legacy of cultural norms, their own personal emotions, god’s will, or spirit involvement.
Sudden events such as an accident which caused bodily harm, the death of a community member, or the loss of a job would immediately alter the fabric of the self, and demand further changes over time. The theory’s decentred model of self may assist in coping with traumatic change: an ideological attachment to the metaphor of an individualised, continuous self might mean that such sudden events are represented as more catastrophic; whereas for the fabric of self, there may be more opportunity for a smoother adjustment.

This fluctuation of a fabric of self in a shifting relationship with the world is in accord with the dynamic representation of self, described in Chapter Five (Mkhize, 12/8/13, personal communication), where according to African thought, a person (umuntu) is in a process of becoming, through dialogue. It is also in keeping with the cosmological image of all existence as having an animated, purposeful vibrancy in relation to all other being.

Journal - 12th August 2013 - Durban. The last week of data collection, awaiting confirmation of supervision interviews with the two professors who supported my South African visits. An image of a gently curved cloth comes unexpectedly to mind. The idea that human being may be represented as threading through an interwoven fabric immediately has more intuitive appeal than (by way of contrast) a minute speck in a disconnected universe. A person’s life would then augment an evolving pattern: there would be scope for personal creativity but it would need to adapt to other lives as dynamic threads with which it was already interwoven. Only the immediate patterning would be visible, but a sensitivity to the nuance of this pattern might enable a reflection of ancestral weaves, and provision for newly introduced threads. Part of the impetus for the weave would be to compensate or make allowance for distortions, ruptures, tears, and punctures. The phenomena of interpersonal tension or oppression evoke a sense more of distortion and “bunching up” than of struggle and conflict; the image emphasises the “already connectedness” implicit in human life. The ideas of “drawing on” former experience, and being supported by those around us, become more tangible. In terms of my immediate experience of waiting, the image is calming: either my “cloth” will incorporate the highly-desired threads from the African professors, or it won’t.

This image suggested that the connectedness of human being is more visceral and “real” than an abstract idea conveys23: in this way, the idea of moya found both visual and textural expression for this researcher.

Two other emergent findings from the present study can be seen to fit well with Nwoye’s (2006) fabric theory of the self. Firstly, the idea of “living in two worlds” suggests a fluidity of identity, wherein a person adapts to the expectations of the external environment, including changing aspects of identity which might ordinarily be assumed to be more fixed in majority western experience. For example, religious practises might be enacted in contradiction to declared religious identity, contradictory ethical positions or statuses might be assumed in contrasting settings.

---

23 The image occurred four years subsequent to reading Nwoye (2006), and the possible role that the article played in priming the image occurred only after some reflection.
(such as the professional urban setting compared with the traditional village setting), and in the case of a spirit medium, identity might include or be supplanted by the identity of ancestral spirits.

In a related theme, the orientation toward external validation of ethical conduct emerged within this study in preference to an orientation to internalised principles or values, as shaping and informing of behaviour. This incorporated an emphasis away from independent, self-referential decision-making, toward external support and advice on how to enact prescribed roles. As with the idea of “living in two worlds” this was consistent with a more dynamic, interrelated experience of self.

**Dialogical Perspectives in African Counselling**

In addition to offering support to Nwoye’s model, the findings are consistent with dialogical theory, which was introduced in Chapter Two. Mkhize (2004b) analysed the commonality between the “poly-phonic” view of self in dialogical theory, with the dialogical experience inherent in African thinking: with particular reference to *ubuntu*.

Mkhize (2004b) provided the example of the call to become a traditional healer. Such a process could be understood within dialogical theory as a struggle between the voice of the healing spirit and the person’s everyday ambitions (the latter would be labelled the *generative self* in the conceptualisation by Nwoye (2006)). From the data generated in the present study, a dialogical model would hold that the voice of the ancestors, which may be experienced internally and/or externally, would thereby become authoritative in the person’s decision making. “Living in two worlds” may therefore be an allegory for occupying fluctuating aspects of the fabric of the self.

The African context of village life for developing children, wherein a wide range of caregivers or “voices” – including multilingualism - is normative, also fits with dialogical theory. Indeed Ogbonnaya (1994) supported his portrayal of the African “community of selves” model of identity, by arguing analogically from the external multiplicity of selves of a person’s community, to this being represented internally.

To expand upon these African dialogical ideas, the concept of *ubuntu* is contrasted with Heidegger’s concept of *dasein*.

**Ubuntu and Dasein: Contrasting African and Western phenomenological/existential concepts**

Heidegger (1962/1935) proposed an analysis of human *being* (*dasein*) which was introduced in Chapter One as one aspect of this researcher’s intellectual orientation to the study. An enquiry into particular aspects of *dasein* will show how that strand of phenomenological thinking parallels African thought in rejecting the radical subject/object split which pervades western majority views of the self.

It is argued that the terms *dasein* and *ubuntu* are equivalent terms within their respective phenomenological and African dialogical meaning systems, and that they differ in ways which reflect the differences between these two systems.

Heidegger concluded that to be authentic, *dasein* is oriented toward a future state of being in concernful relationship to others and the world (p. 237):
In Being-ahead-of-itself as Being toward one’s ownmost potentiality-for-Being, lies the existential-ontological condition for the possibility of Being-free for authentic existentiell possibilities.

*Dasein* is inextricably in relation to the world, and to other being in the world. The terminology reflects the idea of active *being* in a state of continual development as in the future-oriented verb “to be”, rather than a physical object:

*The ‘essence’ of this entity lies in its “to be”* (p. 67).

This is a foundational feature of existence, and therefore, of the capacity to know the world and to choose how to orient toward it. This idea of “being as becoming” appears to be a key feature of *dasein* and *ubuntu* within their respective intellectual traditions.

Heidegger continues:

*Such an insight will keep us from failing to see this structure or from previously cancelling it out – a procedure motivated not ontologically but rather “metaphysically” by the naïve assumption that man is, in the first instance, a spiritual Thing which subsequently gets misplaced “into” a space* (p. 83).

Heidegger concluded that the defining quality of *dasein* in its authentic being was *care*, as a necessary corollary of its purposeful orientation toward the world. (Heidegger, 1962/1935, p. 235).

Although Heidegger emphasised dialogue and interaction with other *being* as constitutive of selfhood and of development, his analysis departed from the idea expressed in *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*, or “A person is only a person through other persons” in that authentic *dasein* had the task of distinguishing itself from the “they”, a term used to describe the conventions of being human as reflected in public discourse:

*We take pleasure and enjoy ourselves as they take pleasure; we read, we see, and judge about literature and art as they see and judge; like-wise we shrink back from the great mass as they shrink back; we find shocking what they find shocking* (p. 164).

There was a requirement to see the blindness of “they” as obstructing access to an authentic life (rather than supporting it) and *dasein’s* guide to authenticity was then found through the “voice of conscience” (p. 313). In this we see the re-assertion of individualised wisdom and decision making that is characteristic of western thought.

Both the premise and the logical development of Heidegger’s analysis parallel those inherent in the African system of *ubuntu*, such that the existential given-ness of the relatedness of human *being* with all other *being* and with the physical environment, are used to construct an ethic for existence. For Heidegger, the ethic of *care* is

---

24 In an interesting parallel with the transmission of African thought through myths and proverbs, Heidegger (1962/1935) authenticated the historicity of this idea by reference to a Latin myth in which *Care* was given possession of man, having thoughtfully fashioned him from clay (p. 242).
inferred as an orientation to life that a person will be “called to” through their conscience, once they have learned to discern this from the false external reference of the “they”. For ubuntu, the necessary precondition of other human being demands conduct that is oriented toward others and conducive of the development of all human being. This incorporates something equivalent to “care” toward all other being.

In another discrepancy, Heidegger’s conception of human death was negativistic, in that the structure of dasein included the recognition that it would end, and at death dasein would be paradoxically complete and absent. It can be seen that by contrast, the African conception of the continuity of spirit after death, together with the importance of ancestral endorsement for the living, provides a point of reference that obverts the need to dismiss the “they”: and therefore also avoids the need for an internalised “conscience”. Through that connection, and through the recognition that all humans are so connected, the “they” is rendered as a point of reference for ethical conduct, oriented toward an active ancestral influence.

This construction also suggests a perception of time which is not limited to the living or material world: a crucial distinction given Heidegger’s title of “Being and Time”, and the truncated future associated with dasein. In African experience, different concepts of time appear to apply to different realms: for example, there is a slowed-down time implied in the gradual settlement of recently deceased persons into the ancestral realm, and ancestral influence appears to cut across time and space. On a more mundane level, the importance of connection and togetherness within ubuntu can shape the perception and allocation of time, which is experienced as more fluid. The overall effect is the loosening of the relationship between time and human being than is implied in dasein.

The African conception also adds a tangible element to the contextualised interrelatedness of self as exemplified in the concept of moya, inferred from the evidence of ancestral communication (implying the continuity of some real aspect of the self after death); correspondences between the human, natural and spirit world (such as divination, affirming animal and bird behaviour, and physical events such as rain); and the capacity of some people to interact with others who are not present (for example, in witchcraft or remote detection of guilt or innocence).

Consciousness and the “Filtering” model of the mind

The discussion in Chapter Five on spirit influence, ubuntu and moya addressed metaphysical dimensions of connectedness which emerged during this study. This aligned with the discussion in Chapter Two, relating to the emergence and development of phenomenology from western philosophical controversy over the term “consciousness”. Whatever consciousness is (as distinct from what it appears to be for any one of us), it is generally accepted that human consciousness cannot know its own limits, and also that, despite the assumption that all functioning human beings have consciousness, the consciousness of one person cannot be directly accessed by another. Any conceptualisation or investigation of consciousness has to be done “through itself”. However, this limitation may be just another feature of the uncritical acceptance of an individualised idea of self.

Although scientific psychology systemically marginalises experience which contradicts such fundamental assumptions, considerable evidence has been
accumulated about non-conforming findings. In a recent collation of such material, *Irreducible Mind: Toward a psychology for the 21st Century* (Kelly et al., 2007) presented a model of human psychology which could account for such evidence, formulated by Frederic W. H. Myers (1843-1901) in the 19th Century, and endorsed and augmented by William James (1842-1910).

The evidence presented included the inexplicable power of the placebo effect (suggestive of extraordinary self-healing capability) reliable observations and outcomes of experimental methods which supported precognition (particularly through dreams), remote influence on the body of one human by another, spirit visitations (particularly recently deceased family members), perceptual anomalies such as out-of-body experiences, and continuation of memory after death (mediated through living individuals). Also reported were accepted phenomena which were not well accounted for in psychological theory: such as the decentralisation of neurological activity in higher level brain processes, creative genius, hypnosis, trance states, mysticism, and other evidence of superior intelligence outside of conscious awareness.

According to Kelly (2007a):

...these seemingly anomalous phenomena occur not in contradiction to nature itself, but only in contradiction to what is presently known to us of nature. The phenomena we catalog here are important precisely because they challenge so strongly the current scientific consensus...they not only invite but should command the attention of anyone seriously interested in the mind. (p. xxxviii)

The “filtering” model, taking into account the evidence available at that time, proposed that the human mind or brain functions as a filtering device which has been shaped through evolutionary processes to operate at multiple levels which are:

... somehow interconnected, and coordinated in greater or lesser degree, by something like Myers' Subliminal Self, or by a consciousness that somehow underlies or pervades the whole structure. (Kelly, 2007b, p. 638).

Although this question is left open by Kelly et al., the model suggests that the psychological processes that are susceptible to objective observation, measurement and manipulation (in particular the five senses, conscious cognition, emotional responses, and features such as “will”, “love”, and indeed “care”) might be pre-filtered or “delegated” functions which can for the most part be relied upon to operate independently. This would enable the human organism to manage on a day-to-day basis, and indeed to experience itself as a continuous, self-directed functional entity. In such a model, awareness that “consciousness” as experienced by the entity was not the ultimate intelligence at work might interfere with its capacity to do its task well: such information might then need to be distributed according to some kind of organisational “need to know” principle. Such a construction would also be consistent with ideas of consciousness within Buddhist traditions, especially with the experience of awe which accompanied the sudden realisation of the less readily accessible realms of consciousness (Sorenson, 2008, p. 22).
Kelly et al. (2007) did not present evidence obtained from non-western cultural contexts, but such a model also has a clear advantage in accounting for African experience reported by participants in this study, and in the broader literature. Kelly et al. were criticized for presenting too narrow a view of the modern scientific “consensus” of psychology as a point of departure, for failing to fully contextualise the work of Myers, and failing to clarify their positions in relation to the diverse debates which have arisen around the philosophical and psychological anomalies in the mind-brain problem (Ash, Gundlach, & Sturm, 2010). However, their primary claim, that a vast literature exists of credible quality, of features of human experience which run counter to contemporary cognitive and neuro-scientific theory, was not refuted. It can therefore reasonably be argued that there is a need to consider alternative models of consciousness such as that proposed by Myers.

The limitation of such a model in accounting for African experience again revolves around the idea of the inherent relatedness of human being. The filtering model of the mind implies a static, receptive entity rather than a dynamic and purposefully relating being. Rather than passively filtering information from a distinctly external universe, an equivalent African conceptualisation would emphasise purposeful movement toward and visceral interaction with a range of “otherness” generating responses from within and without the self. Dynamic relatedness as an ontological feature of human being would thereby preconfigure any viable theory of the individual self.

Interpersonal Neurobiology

The Myers-James model reported by Kelly et al. (2007) has support from more recent neurobiological investigation, which has shown that individuals are closely inter-related in their existence. Further, that models for consciousness and selfhood are correspondingly inadequate. One example is found in Interpersonal Neurobiology (IPNB), a term coined by Siegel (2015, p. 160):

- **IPNB** addresses three fundamental aspects of life, relationships, brain and mind:
  - (a) Relationships are the sharing of energy and information flow.
  - (b) The ‘brain’ or the ‘embodied brain’ is the embodied mechanism of energy and information flow.
  - (c) The mind – though rarely defined beyond being called the same as the ‘activity of the brain’ – in addition to including consciousness and subjective experience, is seen as an emergent, self-organising, embodied and relational process that regulates the flow of energy and information.

The IPNB definitional structure was designed to account for the most recent scientific as well as interdisciplinary findings associated with human development, trauma and therapy, with a particular focus on devising appropriate support for child development: most recently the rapid relational and brain developments in adolescence (Siegel, 2014).

The IPNB definitions drew on the ideas of complexity theory, which suggested that human being may fit the category of an open, complex dynamical system, and that (for example) “consciousness” or “mind” may then be the experience of the order that emerges from the interactions of the associated physiological,
neurological and relational micro-systems (Lewin, 1992). Earlier, the distinction between open and closed systems was made in discussing dialogical theory: in that and other respects Bakhtin anticipated aspects of complexity theory. Intriguingly, it seems that African thought also conceptualised human *being* as an “open dynamical system”. The deceptive complexity of simple village life, with its multilayered influences and ancestral and non-human connections, may be a purposefully constructed complexity. It may therefore be that the emergence of the concept of complexity within western thought reflects a “catching up” with non-western models of human *being*.

In any case, the IPNB structure is general enough to begin to address the issues which have been raised in the present study. The use of the term “energy and information flow” which includes flow within and between people, things and their environment, allows scope to consider the specific neurological mechanisms which are held to have a role in this flow, but also for the intra- and interpersonal experiences which arise from it. There is an analogy between the idea of “energy and information flow” and the ambiguous status of such ideas as *moya* in African thought. A particular attraction of this set of definitions is that it neither excludes nor requires the idea of spirit influence: rather there is an openness incorporated in the idea of “energy and information flow” which provides for further augmentation and refinement.

The theme of interconnectedness which emerged from the present study has its direct correlate in IPNB. A number of cortical functions have been found to be triggered in one person through witnessing the effects of those functions in another: without the need for conscious awareness of those effects. Accordingly, “the neural activation and responses of each party become linked” (Baldini, Parker, Nelson, & Siegel, 2014, p. 219). These effects are enhanced when deliberate attention is paid to them, offering a neurological explanation for empathy and therapeutic transference, and perhaps the reported African experience of interconnectedness.

**Shared Consciousness and Spirit Phenomena**

Kelly (2007b) noted that during the late 19th Century a range of explanatory models of human consciousness were offered, but that during the 20th Century, western psychology became increasingly captive to experimental scientific methods, measuring putatively objective (external) observation. This was superseded by the dominance of the metaphor of “information processor” to inform understanding of conscious mental processes. The debate about human consciousness, at least within western psychology, became captive to the requirements of scientific advancement, rather than science being one tool used to elaborate on the complex phenomenon of human consciousness.

Other conceptualisations of consciousness were marginalised. Hufford (2008) provided a personal example of just such discounting and marginalisation in the face of his academic refutation of the idea that spirit experiences were essentially illusory manifestations of pre-existing cultural beliefs:

...a colleague asked me how I did explain these beliefs and accounts of experience if they do not depend on cultural sources. I replied that I did not know of any
explanations that accommodated the data except, of course, for the explanations found in folk traditions – explanations involving real spirits. Although I did not go on to argue that such explanations are correct, the ensuing discussion – and later the unexplained absence of my paper from the published conference proceedings – made it clear that I had already upset some colleagues rather badly (p. 289).

Hufford went on to point out the irrationality of a presumptive dismissal of spirits as real entities, especially given the failure of alternative hypotheses to satisfactorily explain the observed phenomena. He also expressed regret that at least in relation to spirit phenomena, this non-scientific attitude appeared to be the norm rather than the exception.

Assuming on the contrary that participant and anthropological descriptions reported in this study (e.g. Turner, 2008; Wreford, 2008), were indeed reliable first-hand accounts, requires that any model of consciousness must provide for interpenetration of consciousness as well as the effects of “group-consciousness”. These were reported as tangible, including shared perceptual experiences, with generally predictable and sometimes intentionally powerful effects on group members.

The models propounded by Kelly et al. (2007) and Siegel (2015) do provide such scope: perhaps humans can be recruited through culturally informed means to participate in processes which, although routinely outside their conscious awareness, enhance their collective purpose toward shared objectives, to the extent that it has real effects on the spirit and/or material world. Or, in terms more consistent with Siegel (2015), the regulation of energy and information flow may be powerfully shaped through prolonged proximity and activation in a group setting, toward a culturally informed perception and regulation of subtle energy, understood locally as spirit activity. Of course, as Hufford pointed out, on current evidence the possibility of real spirit influence (as distinct from spirit influence as a culturally informed interpretation) cannot be excluded as an explanation.

The construction of experimental settings which could generate empirical evidence for such a hypothesis would of course be challenging. A natural experiment could plan for independent observation of events that were culturally relied upon; however the process would be complicated by the expected variability of outcome, the requirement for a particular kind of participation, and for favourable decision making by other participants - even (or especially) spirits.

**Participatory Consciousness**

In considering the foregoing, a de-centred, participatory human consciousness is suggested. Rather than individual consciousness being occasionally extended into an individualised enhanced awareness, it may be that consciousness is a pre-existing feature of the world (perhaps a subtle aspect of the inexplicable process of life) into which each person is born. This would provide for the possibility that other beings such as spirits, which appear as non-material or at least more diffuse and transient, also participate in consciousness. This idea was prompted by the description of the African world view by Lambo (1976):
Subject and object are not opposed but absorbed in a world consciousness that transcends both (p. 114).

The “ordinary” experience of consciousness would then be the effect of a delimiting or directing of awareness, structured by a person’s interactions with expressions of culture pertaining to the community into which he or she is born. This conceptualisation retains the recognition that humans experience themselves as active decision-makers in our own thinking, sensing, emotion and behaviour. The self is theorised in functional terms, as both the locus and focus of the decision-making around which the human experience is centred.

As with Nwoye’s (2006) “fabric of self” there may be more than one such centre of self, which allows for the possibility that at any time, a person has awareness of other personal selves (or in a parallel with dialogical theory, other “voices”) which might be experienced as internal or external (and might indeed actually have an independent presence, either internal or external). Also provided for in this model, are the reported experiences of Dissociative Identity Disorder (previously known as Multiple Personality Disorder), as well as “spirit possession”, where the self is experienced as shifting between centres, or being supplanted by some other self, within the same body.

Our personal identity is then the moment-to-moment constellated experience of specific aspects of a participatory self, within a field of consciousness of which we have limited awareness. There remains capacity to relate to aspects of the body and the world which are not activated: either they are not acknowledged, insufficiently practised or learned, or avoided. The experience of individual selfhood may be an adaptive navigational tool, reified in western models of psychology.

According to this conceptualisation we would have the capacity to restrict our participatory self as well as to expand it. To the extent that we identify a particular constellation of self as our identity, we will tend to train ourselves to maintain it. The practised maintenance of a particular constellation of self leads to a more rigid and enduring sense of self, or “ego”, and requires intentional restriction of other aspects of participatory selfhood. Conversely, with effective cultural structuring of experience, the participatory capacity of the self can be enhanced, as in the reported experiences of shared consciousness.

It is then, a developmental task to attain an enduring but varying congruence between our existential being, our self-awareness, and our physical existence as a body within a world which contains a range of other being: despite the uncertainty of the limits of consciousness, some features such as our body, are primary aspects of our experience of ourselves. At times however, our bodily existence may be outside of awareness. The range of self-awareness is therefore different from, but overlapping in time and space with, the physical body.

Through dialogue in a culture comprised of other participatory selves, we delimit ourselves and allow ourselves to be delimited. A primary process by which this occurs is dialogue in spoken language; along with other reciprocally
determined performances of self. Stories about and by ourselves become an influential process by which selfhood is enacted. It is arguable that we incorporate multiple voices in this story telling processes.

**Implications for Broadening Models of Counselling**

In seeking to derive more culturally reliable methods of counselling for the African refugee population, this study has provided insights into ways that counselling with non-Africans might be augmented by recourse to African norms, thinking and methods. These insights are not claimed to be unique to this study: it has already been noted that models such as dialogical therapy and narrative therapy have commonalities with the emergent themes, and the pre-existing body of work on “African Psychology” and the field of critical psychology (Prilleltensky & Fox, 1997) offer related challenges to majority western practices. Accordingly, this section seeks to emphasise how the present study findings support a broadening of counselling scope.

**Expanding the phenomenological stance of counselling**

The foregoing development of ideas of self and consciousness prompt the question: if human being is an open dynamical system, perhaps participating in a shared consciousness, how open is it, and what might it include? A counselling encounter is a specialised version of human encounter, sharing its phenomenological preconditions. If a counsellor considers themselves to be joining with the client in a shared experience of dimensions of existence of varying subtlety (including spirit or subtle material influence), the scope for intervention immediately becomes very broad. Alongside a diagnostic assessment process, an attendance to the client’s sense of connection, a preparedness for unanticipated change, and an openness to intuitive and/or spirit promptings are likely to usefully shape the content and process.

Adopting this as a phenomenological frame, the needs of the client emerge through a dialogical process. This would likely provide a more accessible process for clients who report or desire strong connectedness to other people, to animals, to plants, to place, or to other features of life. Framing a problem in terms of “disconnection” with the objective being “reconnection” is likely to offer a novel therapeutic pathway in some western contexts. A sense of connection might be accessible through recognised cultural practises such as music, art, literature, or participation in activities such as sport.

**Counselling as Education within Community**

Returning to the counselling recommendations in Chapter Four, the key finding was the contextualisation of African counselling within a broader community education. This has a place in an inclusive counselling canon, especially for children and younger adults (for whom problems are likely to be associated with a lack of experience). Identifying the role of the counsellor as a specialist teacher within society, assisting clients in both shaping their culture and adapting to it, has generic application. This provides scope for well-crafted advice, encouragement, exhortation, and personal history telling. In western counselling contexts, these kinds of interventions have been sidelined in favour of responses which place the burden of responsibility on the individualised
person. Such a position, foundational to western constructions of self and ethics, is challenged within a system whereby the ethical responsibility is held more diffusely within the community.

Invoking the recognition that the client is positioned within a community, and that their problem may reflect a conflict between themselves and the expectations of society, allows the problem to be cast in terms of adapting to a conflict rather than struggling alone with an individualised sense of pathology, alienation, oppression, or exclusion. The techniques illustrated in Chapter Four, wherein both the counsellor and the client update their understanding of the requirements of life, or of their current situation, and the counsellor helps frame this in a way which enables decision making to be clarified, can then lead to the necessary education or skill development.

Of special note in this context was the skill of very attentive, careful, thoughtful, and sometimes tedious and time-engaging listening and observation, leading to a potent summation, often in proverbial or allegorical form: the “counselling words”. This skill was shown to be likely to translate across cultural boundaries, although this would be limited by the implicit need for shared context and meaning.

Hope and Faith
Another theme of African counselling which emerged from this study was the skill of evoking and sustaining hope. African hope-instilling counselling techniques can contribute to an inclusive counselling model: particularly applicable to those western problems which appear most intractable.

Building on the framework of education for young adults struggling to find a place in society, the idea can be invoked that there is a joint responsibility for preparing and inducting young people into a fulfilling society role. The question can be asked: to what extent has the young person fallen short of their responsibility, and to what extent is it a deficit in society? The idea that it is a process of adaptation that continues into the future may help overcome initial overwhelm. The ubiquitous African good humoured acceptance of a person’s own time and place in the world can be drawn upon to help overcome the urgency associated with unrealistic expectations. Metaphors such as “rescuing the future” may have application here.

The interplay between hope and faith allows for flexibility to draw on sources of hope that are relevant to any particular client. For those for whom religious faith is important, drawing on that faith to augment a more general theme of hope may neutralise differences in belief between counsellor and client.

The invocation of faith-based healing in African counselling would have varying application in other contexts, but the associated prospect of unexpected transformations and reversals can provide encouragement. This benefit may also accrue from the explicit use of storytelling, citing examples of how the maintenance of hope has allowed opportunities to open up for others.
Relational processes

The findings of this study support the position that assessing the health and strength of relationships should be done with as much care as assessing problematic thinking, emotion and behaviour. Drawing on the ethic of ubuntu (noting that it does have global currency) a client can be introduced to the recognition that they inhabit a field of relationships; that it is a necessary life-skill that they attend to this, and learn to draw on relational sources to achieve a more satisfying life.

Imaginative use of alternative social settings can assist in shaping more constructive responses to individualised problems. For people who experience a sense of personal failure or inadequacy, which can provoke profound despair and hopelessness, the question can be asked as to whether society has provided necessary support and encouragement. Speculating about how life may have taken a different trajectory in a setting where guidance, direction and encouragement was routinely offered or available, may offset the intensity of futile self-blame and recrimination.

Invoking collectivist constructions of ethics may assist in legitimising and introducing alternative ways of thinking and being. In families where one member may be dominating decision making through recourse to a definitive internalised “conscience”, the question might be asked how ethical ideas are distributed through the family and through the culture. Parents who are struggling to instil the “values” of society in their children can be asked about preferred points of reference within their community. This allows children and parents to look outwards together at the source of values, rather than remaining in entrenched conflict. Theories of emotion which emphasise their socialisation function (rather than their individualised meaning) can be represented to assist in understanding emotional problems and associated behaviour as having collective meaning and therefor evoking collective responsibility. This can help clients and their families overcome initial feelings of helplessness.

Similarly, the metaphor of “living in two worlds” – indeed, as it would seem, “living in many worlds” - can assist in helping people adjust their responses between different worlds of experience: work/home transitions, peer/family conflict for adolescents, and transitional development periods (e.g. unemployment, illness, and life changes) could be creatively captured with this metaphor. Any state of transition can be highlighted as a period of confusion and uncertainty, the management of which is a life skill which relies on having a sense of future development. In a traditional structure, this movement between two worlds will be informed by the experiences of others who have negotiated such a transition. In contemporary western culture, the emphasis on individual experience may discount the value of mentorship through such transitions, and the restoration of this can be an explicit part of the counselling process.

Perhaps most profoundly, the prospect of a transformation in a person’s conceptualisation of their own being can be kept in mind. In particular, holding the idea that for western contexts, it is likely that clients have uncritically endorsed an individualised sense of themselves and are seeking to resolve their issues within that frame. Most conventional western psychology practices
reinforce this self-concept. A shift toward a more relational construction of identity may represent the beginnings of a transformed approach.

A common way this can happen in practice is that clients become aware that they are very susceptible to influence by others, and that this leads them to consider themselves less resilient or self-reliant. Instead of supporting them in shoring up a robust independence, the idea that this may be a foundational choice in shaping identity can open possibilities of preferred development which incorporate a sense of “self-in-other”. The present study suggests that this is a more authentic and therefore more reliable positioning in the construction of identity.

Other aspects of relational being can be invoked. The emphasis in African systems on the immediacy and proximity of sources of help can be kept in mind to assist in normalising the help-giving and help-receiving process. The counsellor can be positioned as the culturally endorsed source of such support. This can be used for clients at both ends of the dependence/independence polarity. Over-dependent clients can be reassured that in many cultures, their desire for closeness may not be seen as a problem, and that their primary developmental task may be to adapt to a culture which does not endorse such closeness and support. For clients who struggle to accept or seek help, a discussion about the range of ways that all cultures incorporate such opportunities, perhaps reviewing the various examples in their own lives where support has been offered or sought, may provide a context wherein counselling becomes more accessible.

Narrative therapy and dialogical therapy are examples of intervention systems which more readily incorporate such African ideas of interactional being, as they assume multiple “voices” in their epistemological systems and privilege dialogue and social support. Within the framework of narrative practice, clients’ descriptions of experiences of connection can be selected for more intensive scrutiny as a way of challenging inherently alienating western cultural norms.

A close fit between African counselling and narrative therapy is the use of language which “externalises” the problem (White, 1988/89) by locating it outside the person’s being: this allows them to approach it with a stronger sense of personal integrity than if the problem is internalised as a symptom. An example was presented in Chapter Four, wherein the throwing off of a person’s “bad spirit” allowed them to return to normal.

**Spirit connection in counselling**

This study has traced the thorough interweaving of metaphysical dimensions within African daily life, with the participant-observer role of this researcher enabling illumination of subtle aspects of its influence: for example, the phone call from the elder cited in Chapter Five. Within the western tradition, following the reasoning by Kelly (2007b), the scientific preference for predictable, verifiable psychological practices does not warrant the ideological rejection of other possible sources of healing and comfort. Indeed, as discussed in Chapter Two, this trend, through its shaping of legitimate scientific enquiry which excludes investigation of practices which are not readily replicated or
even uniquely formulated, has likely contributed to the marginalisation of helpful responses for African populations. It is reasonable to extrapolate that such marginalisation has also had negative impact for non-African populations.

Where clients describe a restorative sense of connection to spirits of the dead, this can be legitimised by referencing the matter-of-fact attitude to such experiences in other (e.g. African) cultures, as well as its representation throughout cultures and history. This opens scope for considering such spirit experiences as informing of ethical action, or offering reassurance about decision making. In its most simple form, for example when a parent has died, their importance as an ongoing point of reference can be supported. Paradoxically, this can also dilute the intensity of the felt sense of obligation to such a figure: if there is a narrowing of the gap between the experienced realness of the living and dead, their influence can be included as one among many, rather than as a duty to be enacted individualistically (for example, “I promised my father/mother that…”).

Conversely, where an ancestral figure may have failed in their own duty, a person can feel empowered in their felt sense of responsibility to compensate for this, by the idea that there is a collective ethic that is shared across time and across realms. Stories of African ideas of intergenerational accountability may assist in contextualising this: equally, it is likely that such stories can be found in any family history. The attachment to the need for material certainty within scientific study (for example, demanding an answer to the question of whether spirits are “real” or not) may preclude the therapeutic benefit which could be gained from the imaginative engagement with a person’s reported spirit experience.

**Creativity and Imagination in Counselling Practice**

More generally, the trend toward increased codification and repeatability which has been driven by the desire for scientific verification, inevitably lessens the scope for imaginative and creative responses. The following quote, also provided in Chapter Four, epitomises this distinction:

“…in Africa, counsellors learn two main skills: listening very carefully, and thinking hard to generate words that will help to rescue the future of the person”. (C2)

The counsellor draws on wisdom and experience rather than refined techniques, in order to best meet the client’s immediate imaginative capacity. The creative use of metaphorical language relies on a tradition of proverbs and stories which have current salience: phrases such as “falling into a problem” can lighten the mood and shift perception.

Sparking the imagination of a client would seem to be a skill which needs reinvigoration in western psychology. The incorporation of spirit influence, visual arts, music, song and dance clearly have scope to broaden the range of energising imaginative power.
Trauma

The context within which this study evolved was a trauma counselling setting, and the study has offered insights which can inform this field. The conceptualisation of trauma within western psychological theory appeared to perpetuate ideas of human consciousness and selfhood which are open to challenge. A self-concept as a chronologically continuous and individually bounded and self-contained identity, which has pride in its mastery over its environment, is particularly vulnerable to perceptions of damage through “trauma”: indeed, the western psychological meaning of trauma may depend on this self-concept. A more fluid self-concept, which incorporates a sense of other-in-self and self-in-other, may be less susceptible to traumatic injury of this kind.

In contrast, this layered awareness of contiguity between self and multiple, varied others, inclusive of non-human being, as well as spirit, will have different vulnerabilities, as well as different expressions of “trauma”. The findings of the present study suggest that, as well as the quantifiable, observable aspects of such disruption (e.g. loss or felt absence of family, diminishment of physical, mental, or social functioning, and profound discouragement), there are other expressions which would for the most part remain invisible to counsellors trained in western techniques. Examples are the meaning associated with death transitions, the loss of access to “blessings” to which one may be entitled, and anxiety in the face of community disintegration, dishonouring or breaches of norms (especially by children, whose futures are a prime focus of concern). The sense of saturated connection that appears to be a desirable state for Africans may be, to expand the metaphor, made arid and brittle in individualised existence. Further exploration of the contrast between these putative states, perhaps operationalising them more precisely, may enable a more respectful dialogue between traditions.

An important aspect of the traumatic harm caused to one person by another, or by a group, is that an important status, believed to be inalienable, has been stripped from the person. In torture, that stripping is done either in the name of, or with the tacit approval of, the State. The insurmountable contradiction for many, is that the State simultaneously establishes and denies such status. Traumatic recovery includes regaining that status and/or attaining an alternative status, and renegotiating meaning in life given that change. In western cultures, the rights of the individual have been allocated inalienable status (although for many this is a transparent falsehood). The African men interviewed in Tasmania experienced their sanctioned role of protector and authority as suddenly being removed: this might explain the observation that settlement experiences were more disturbing than historical events: especially given that those events had been overcome by the protective project of resettlement.

Recovery from this traumatic loss then consists of renegotiating a role as fathers, husbands and contributors within the new community context, and/or adapting to the sanctioned roles for men within that new community. The use of the term “living in two worlds”, likely to resonate for African clients, would have applicability in assisting in this transition. This conceptual construction may be generalizable to other counselling contexts. The key distinction would
be to differentiate between a person’s experience of a trauma to their “self”, and their loss of status. Introducing a collective or participatory orientation to life may assist in establishing this distinction: thus easing the attachment to the idea of an individualised self.

Relevance of African Counselling to First Nation Peoples

The methods in the present study were informed by ethno-psychological studies (e.g. Eberhardt, 2005; Hardman, 2000; LeVine, 2010; Lutz, 1988). Accordingly, the study is aligned with aspects of the indigenous psychologies literature: especially in the twin goals of generating a more culturally reliable approach for identified communities, whilst critiquing the embedment of marginalising assumptions within western psychological theory and practice (Poortinga, 1999). This researcher also has significant clinical experience with First Nations Peoples of Australia: especially Pallawa (Tasmanian Aboriginal people), and Koori people associated with the Lake Tyers Aboriginal Trust in Victoria. There is therefore scope to explore possible contributions or parallels for First Nation Peoples of Australia.

A kinship and community orientation, spirit-centred sensibility, and the legacy of colonial oppression are recognised aspects of Aboriginal social and emotional wellbeing (Parker, 2010). In Australia, First Nations responses have focussed on grief and loss: dispossession, dislocation from country, stolen generations, and ongoing enculturated loss through alcohol and drug use, family violence, suicide, criminal sanctions, unemployment, poverty, rurality, and discrimination.

Despite this acknowledgement of an oppressive colonial context, there has been little evidence of a systematic attempt to apply the ideas of Franz Fanon to mental health service provision to First Nations Peoples in Australia. In a recent exception (Molloy & Grootjans, 2014) Fanon’s work was cited in arguing that the oppressive power relationships that characterised colonialism are often replicated in health systems and interactions, and that cultural safety demanded that practitioners engage strongly in critical reflection in order to minimise the risk of such replication.

This scarcity of references to Fanon replicates the piecemeal incorporation of Fanon’s ideas within academic literature generally (explored in Chapter Two), and suggests a reluctance within Australian psychology to fully account for the colonising and racist implications in its own practice and history. A stronger, sustained challenge to hegemonic white psychology in Australia would seem overdue. In notable contrast, New Zealand, within whose contemporaneous colonial history indigenous influences have been more directly acknowledged and contended with than in Australia, there is a more progressive indigenous health literature (inclusive of psychology) seeking to locate Maori culture more centrally within mainstream practice (Durie, Hoskins, & Jones, 2012).

Within Australian literature, the theme of connectedness is represented, with a particular emphasis on connectedness to place: “There is agreement that Aboriginal identity is predicated upon descent and country of origin, about knowing and being a part of an Indigenous community and perceiving oneself
as Indigenous” (Dudgeon, Wright, Paradies, Garvey, & Walker, 2010, p. 32). These authors also note that introductions with traditionally oriented Aboriginal people tend to specify “my country” and one’s family members: people are then recognised through those relationships.

Emergent models on healing and recovery have been promoted by First Nations-identifying practitioners, referencing their traditional beliefs. One such model draws upon the idea of *Ngarluy*, or “the place of the inner spirit” (Roe, 2010, p. 245). Located in the stomach area, *Ngarluy* provides for the spirit from the country (*Rai*) and the spirit from within (*Bilyurr*): on death the former returns to country to be born again, and the latter “goes on its journey to its special place” (Roe, 2010, p. 245). The sense of being-in-community-in-place is reported to be signified by a feeling in the stomach of shared sense of agreement or *Waraja Gnarlu*. Roe adds that Aboriginal people are also reported to experience the voices of their relatives or ancestors as guides to conduct, and to experience protection through identification with totemic animals or other entities.

These features do seem aligned with the ideas of *ubuntu*, *moya*, connectedness, and multiple centres of self as referenced earlier in this chapter, with greater emphasis on place. It seems likely then that aspects of the commentary on human *being* presented in this chapter, and of the associated recommendations for culturally reliable practise, may also have relevance to some First Nations communities. The metaphor of “living in two worlds” may have particular resonance, given the broad applicability of that term and the implications that it has for opening up space for alternative conceptions of *being* within the hegemonic Australian psychology structure.

**Further Work**

This study has sought to privilege African and African-centric “voices” in an investigation of approaches to the problems of African refugee entrants to Tasmania, Australia. A range of interventions emerged which could be expected to improve outcomes for this population, with an emphasis on family- and community-based approaches, and with consideration of the implications of a collective sense of self. A logical extension of this study would be to implement a system based on these recommendations, designed in such a way as to enable a rigorous evaluation of outcomes and the qualitative experience of participants.

The trajectory of the researcher within this study has been of a felt sense of increasingly detailed comprehension and awareness of African ways of being. A process of seeking to come closer, both intellectually and experientially, to the essence of these expressions. Clearly this process has not reached an end-point, and it is hoped that the charting of the dimensions of connectedness and the explorations of the meaning of contrasting ways of being can be further developed.

Although the study was prompted by the needs of African refugee entrants to Tasmania, emergent findings have encouraged a broadening of application of the findings and of the study methodology to other populations. In particular,
the extension of the study to include South African fieldwork offered strong evidence for the generalisability of the methods and findings across African populations and across place. Further, the perspective on western psychology provided by the African data enables consideration of deployment of a wide range of interventions for non-African populations.
References


Huot, L. (2001). *Qualitative investigation into the dynamic nature of suffering within a Cambodian community in Victoria Australia the emergence of Bak Sbat (demoralisation) and the Ivinh chu chot (bitter-sour-bitter) experience*. (Master of Psychological Medicine), Monash University.


Molloy, L., & Grootjans, J. (2014). The ideas of Frantz Fanon and culturally safe practices for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia. Issues in Mental Health Nursing, 35, 207-211.


Appendices
Appendix 1 – Information Sheet (Tasmania)
Re: Research project: Development of Culturally Appropriate Counselling Pathways for African Men in Tasmania

Information Sheet – Interviewees

You are invited to participate in an interview as part of the above research project. This Information Sheet is designed to give you a full understanding of the study and what you will be asked to do.

The study is designed to obtain a better understanding of the experiences, needs and expectations of African men in Tasmania, when they find that they need help with a problem. It is hoped that this will enable the Phoenix Centre and other counseling organizations to provide a better service to African men.

Mr Andrew Harris, the Coordinator of the Phoenix Centre, is undertaking the study for a Masters in Medical Science through the University of Tasmania, Department of Rural Health. My name is Dr Peg LeVine, and I am the academic supervisor for the project.

You have been invited to participate in the interview stage of this study because of the interest you have shown in assisting the settlement of African refugees in Tasmania in your capacity as (eg bi-cultural staff member of the Migrant Resource Centre).......

Study Procedures
The interview will be held at the Migrant Resource Centre, and will take between one and two hours. It will be based around your experiences and observations about the issues that African men face in their settlement in Tasmania. Andrew will make notes during this interview, and will use your comments and observations to guide discussions in groups. Your name will not be linked to the comments and observations that you make, and Andrew will show you the notes that he makes during the interview.

The interview will begin with a question asking you to make comments on the best ways to approach the discussion in the groups. Your responses will be explored to obtain sufficient details to develop firm recommendations. You will be free to provide advice or examples of approaches which you think will be helpful. You will not be required to provide information on your personal experience, however you may choose to do this.
The groups will be made up of African men, who will be selected from contacts made through the Phoenix Centre, Migrant Resource Centre or from Community Associations. It is planned to have three groups, one each with Sudanese, Ethiopian and Sierra Leone men.

It is proposed that group sessions will be taped with a digital video recorder to make sure all the information is properly recorded. Although all group members will be English speakers, the recording will enable any discussion which occurs in the participants’ preferred language to be translated by the group for the researcher to record. Your comments on this process will be welcomed.

Andrew will then design a questionnaire to be distributed through the communities to get a better idea of the different opinions and expectations. The responses to these questionnaires will be anonymous.

Andrew will then analyse the information to identify what is most helpful to African men, and will develop appropriate counseling approaches from this analysis.

**Risks**
Many African people have suffered a great deal through problems in settlement, and previous experiences in refugee camps and in war situations. It is possible that you may become upset from the interview, or worried about what will happen with the information you offer.

To help manage these risks, we have put in place the following:
- You will be asked to sign a Consent Form to ensure that you are fully aware of the study requirements
- You are invited to talk to Andrew or Dr LeVine about any concerns you may have
- You will be reminded that participation is entirely voluntary
- You may decline to discuss any topic
- You will be free to withdraw from the interview at any time, and withdraw any data you have provided

**Confidentiality**
Your identity as an interviewee will not be disclosed by the researchers, and your suggestions and comments will not be linked with you. It is possible that other people who are aware of the study and your interest in it, will associate some of the data with you. If you are concerned about this possibility please discuss with the researchers.

All data will be stored in locked cabinets or password-protected computers at the University. Storage is required for five years after the date of publication. The data will then be destroyed. Hard copies will be shredded, and digital records will be permanently deleted.

**Approvals**
The study has received approval from the Human Research Ethics Committee (Tas) Network and the Board of the Migrant Resource Centre (Southern Tasmania) Inc. If you have any concerns of an ethical nature, or complaints about the manner in which the project is conducted, please contact:
A summary of the results will be forwarded to you upon completion, and you will be invited to a presentation on the study.

You are welcome to keep this Information Sheet. Please contact Andrew if you are interested in participating in this study.

Yours Sincerely

Dr Peg LeVine
Appendix 2 – Explanatory Statement (South Africa)
Explanatory Statement – African Academic and Expert Participants

10th October 2011

Title: African Approaches to Problem Solving: A Phenomenological Investigation into Cultural Expressions of Being

This information sheet is for you to keep.

My name is Andrew Harris and I am conducting a research project with Dr Peg LeVine, an Associate Professor at the Monash Asia Institute. The purpose of the project is to complete a PhD, which means that I will be writing a thesis which is the equivalent of a 300 page book.

You are invited to take part in this study. Please read this Explanatory Statement in full before making a decision.

You have been invited to take part on the basis of your reputation as a person with expertise in the area of Indigenous African approaches to problem solving.

The aims of this study are to:
1. Obtain data from experts resident in Africa on Indigenous African approaches to problem solving, which can be contrasted and compared with data previously obtained from interviews, ethnographic observations and group discussions among African humanitarian entrants to Tasmania, Australia.
2. Explore and describe the relationship between Indigenous African and Western approaches to problem solving in order to contribute to a more inclusive practice of counselling and psychology.

Possible benefits
There is no likely immediate benefit to participants in this study. Expected benefits are better-informed psychological practise and training for people who identify with Indigenous African beliefs, and to render the field of psychology more inclusive of such beliefs.

Extent of commitment
The study involves audio or video recording of a semi-structured interview and the completion of a culture-context questionnaire. Total interview duration is between 1 and 2 hours, and the questionnaire requires 15 minutes to complete.

Inconvenience/discomfort
The interview may involve personal information relevant to problem solving. This may provoke some unease especially for practises which are particular to your cultural traditions and which may involve a degree of sensitivity around secrecy or embarrassment. There is a small risk that, despite the measures taken to ensure confidentiality in relation to the data obtained, readers of the research may associate some of the data with their personal knowledge of you.

Payment
No payment is offered for participation in this research.

You can withdraw from the research at any time
Being in this study is voluntary and you are under no obligation to consent to participation. However, if you do consent to participate, you may withdraw from further participation at any stage but you will only be able to withdraw data prior to your approval of the interview transcript.
Confidentiality
Your participation in this study will be kept confidential. Any data reported from your participation will not be associated with you and measures will be taken to disguise your identity to minimise the chance that readers of the material will associate it with their personal knowledge of you. For example, recognised academics will be described in general terms without their specific cultural background being disclosed.

Storage of data
Data collected will be stored in accordance with Monash University regulations, kept on University premises, in a locked filing cabinet for 5 years. A report of the study may be submitted for publication, but individual participants will not be identifiable in such a report.

Results
If you would like to be informed of the aggregate research findings, please contact Andrew Harris on ajhar27@student.monash.edu. The findings will be accessible in this way up to the end of 2014.

If you would like to contact the researchers about any aspect of this study, please contact the Chief Investigator:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dr Peg LeVine</th>
<th>Executive Officer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School of Social and Political Inquiry (Monash Asia Institute)</td>
<td>Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee (MUHREC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monash University VIC 3800</td>
<td>Building 3e Room 111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tel: 61 400978158</td>
<td>Research Office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email: <a href="mailto:peg.levine@monash.edu">peg.levine@monash.edu</a></td>
<td>Monash University VIC 3800</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If you have a complaint concerning the manner in which this research H9160 is being conducted, please contact:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Executive Officer</th>
<th>Tel: +61 3 9905 2052</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee (MUHREC)</td>
<td>Fax: +61 3 9905 3831</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building 3e Room 111</td>
<td>Email: <a href="mailto:muhrec@monash.edu">muhrec@monash.edu</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Office</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monash University VIC 3800</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Thank you.

Andrew Harris
Appendix 3 – Samples of Analysis (Tasmania)
### Analysis of Initial Interviews: Conducting the Consensus Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practical issues</th>
<th>Problems to consider</th>
<th>Approaches to use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>C1</td>
<td>Weekends are the best times</td>
<td>Such a group is likely to be extractive in nature rather than supportive – this often happens “when experts are at the learning stage” with a new community. The first candidates may be guinea pigs, and suffer as a result. There is a need to attempt to provide something which will be supportive of the group members.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Communities like to identify their own meeting places; for example the first Burundi group met in my garage at their request.</td>
<td>People who have been in a camp situation will be reserved about the truth and reluctant to speak up; they find it difficult to speak in a way that is different from the way they have been “trained” to speak in the UNHCR assessment process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>May need to meet with Ethiopian community in two groups as bringing them together may be difficult.</td>
<td>People from the Kenyan camps will have been familiar with western counselling by the NGOs; not so much people from the Sudanese camps (where most of the Ethiopians have come from)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Approach the Sierre Leone community in Launceston; in Hobart the Sudanese, Congolese, Burundi and the two Ethiopian communities could be approached.</td>
<td>Be alert for possible bias due to “gatekeepers”; key members of the community who will be needed to ensure the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Some people will be unhappy about the idea of video recording; however others will be OK.</td>
<td>In Ethiopia and Sudan (the groups C1 knows best) counselling is conducted in a group with a minimum of 3-4 elders who sit with affected people</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Problem solver: B</th>
<th>Problem solver: D</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C2</td>
<td>Recommended five other individuals to interview about the groups</td>
<td>The Sudanese are becoming tired of being asked for information without any evident benefit to themselves; lots of consultation, not much in response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C3</td>
<td>It is likely that you will need to arrange for transport, and contact the men prior to the group to remind them. Having food will be good. Acknowledge that everyone is busy, ask their advice on when would be a good time. C3 thinks Saturday or Sunday would be the best days.</td>
<td>Be aware that if any of the men are uncomfortable they are unlikely to acknowledge it. African men don’t want to accept that they are going through difficult times, and they will protect their manhood.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>It will be important that they understand that this is about bringing to light the problems that face the men and how is the best way of dealing with them, that the video recording will not be seen by the Government, by DIAC, by Centrelink or anyone. It is just to make sure that I can get a proper picture of what the men are saying and how strongly they feel about different</td>
<td>Every time there is a gathering or a meeting</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
If it is possible, provide some education groups after the research groups on subjects that people identify. If they know that their attendance will result in some useful information or education, they will most likely come. Anger management groups would be good, or a leadership program.

With stakeholders the issue of the plight of men comes up; people in the community are getting sick of the fact that it gets the cold shoulder; noone wants to take it seriously and do something about it. DIAC and the other funding bodies have had enough experience now to know that this issue will come up; it is not reasonable that there has been no effective response. Therefore it will be necessary to explain the purpose of the group well to the men to get their participation.

Anger management groups would be good, or a leadership program. If it is possible, provide some education groups after the research groups on subjects that people identify. If they know that their attendance will result in some useful information or education, they will most likely come. Anger management groups would be good, or a leadership program.

| C4 | In order to make sure they pay attention keep the session less than 2 hours. More than that and people will disappear during a break. Transport to meetings may be useful. They might be suspicious of what you will do with the video. They might agree to having a video but secretly don’t want to. People may then keep quiet rather than talk. | Sudanese are coming to many meetings; haven’t seen the product. Very many are extracting the information. eg Anglicare paid $20 each for people to come. Sudanese are in the transition, they are trying to settle, and very young; it is hard to get them to come. Might be easier to get older Sudanese to come. Give consideration to what are the topics, what is the motivation for people to come. People are interested in answering questions about how the organisation should work differently. You should ask the question and judge by the reaction; just as when you are counselling; you know if you have the right question if they respond or not. |
| C5 | People are leaving. Six families have left for the mainland this year; three more are planning to. | Issues to consider for African men in a group: work opportunities (families are moving to mainland for this reason). “Relationships with partners; the best ways of managing the house. Disciplining kids. Domestic violence, restraint orders. They don’t take restraint |
(Re video use) Need to explain purpose well. E.g. you have observed problems, men aren’t getting jobs, stressed, not confident, coming from different countries to a new country. You need the video because in Western society everyone needs evidence.

orders seriously. The men still have African beliefs, but women are now the breadwinners as well as the homemakers. If you have six kids, you can’t expect the wife to do cooking, also the homework, everything. They do not understand the homework, they expect the schools to do everything. They need simple, straightforward explanations. And you need to say again and again. With the teenagers: everyone stressed. They are a bit cut off from their kids.”
## Analysis of Initial Interviews: The role of elders

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Descriptions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>C1</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>C2</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>C3</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Ancestors properly, they will come into harm. So in order to know whether they are respecting the Ancestors, they ask the older people. Also, older people have gone through much more, and perhaps they have gone through a similar problem, in which case they can suggest a solution to a problem that they found has worked before.

It is important to remember also, that where there are no books or literacy, people learn from oral histories about the rules and traditions of the society. If there is no other way of getting the information about how to behave in a situation, then people must go to the elders, who will advise them. When people start to learn from other sources, like science, they might get nervous because they don’t know if what they have learned is going to be the same as what the ancestors would say.

C4 I am someone that people come to but I do not feel like an elder. I do not have a clear memory of the way the elders were. The older people who come will have a clearer memory of the elder traditions. We could get a group of older Sudanese together and ask them. I would be able to do that; I would like to hear what they say about the elder traditions.

I studied pastoral counselling for 2 years. They would bring in a scenario – something has happened to this family – in the absence of elders what do you do.

You have to ask the complete history of each man and woman separately.

Next thing, after getting the complete scenario, ask if they would now like to come together. Get them to tell their stories with each other present. If one is talking the other is to be quiet – don’t interrupt your turn will come.

Ask them if they would like to bring someone with them. Ask for each party to give advice – objective is to keep couple together. Always then visit the family as a blessing; your presence is a reminder of their decision or the healing; like the Minister who married them visits to remind of the vows.

Relate the problem to the Scriptures and the stages of faith.

C5 The elders watch the young people, warn them away from unsuitable families or people, encourage them toward someone who will be good. We (myself and my husband) were encouraged toward each other.
M3: OK You see the problem with our brother refugee or our brother African, when the war come, sometimes you go to the refugee camp, and you if, everyone is there from Liberia, you will join together as a brother. You don’t understand? Then when it came to go ahead to get resettlement, when they come to Australia or America, when the government going into Centrelink, that’s where the separate coming from. But, usually, in Australia they will not tell you! But they know. They are not family. They are only family.

R: they are only family because they came from the same refugee camp

M3: They came from the refugee camp. And they’re all Liberians. So when they came to Australia, or anywhere

R: They call themselves one family

M3: They call themselves one family. But time come when one has been in camp, is separate

R: Yeah, cos all of a sudden they can get different money

M3: Everybody get different money, and sometime if they don’t get different money, because of property. I want to stay for myself, and migrant will give me television, they will give me house, they will give me chair, they will give me fridge, they will give me this, because of property, they separate, at the end, they go into police station, or they go into migrant. That’s the problem. That’s the problem our African brother here. You don’t understand.

Now, we have other problems, serious problems, that that we getting here. The responsibility of our children, we the family who know, the daddy who know, the parent know, but the responsibility for the children, the Australian people can’t tell their children. You understand what I mean

R: Yeah, it is hard to have control of your children because the way it is done here is so different

M3: You know the culture is different

R: Yes. And you notice that with your children very much, and your older children especially

M3: That also brings separation in Australia here

R: Creates a tension for the family…

M3: Yeah, I have a brother right now (basta bana? indistinct) the children…they come from Africa, they stayed in Ghana for many year for over 20 year, before they come here, together, but when they come, they above 18, 21 22, they get their own car, they can get money for themselves, they separate! These are the problem. They’re not, forget to know, if you give too much chance to African children, here, is a problem. You, you are Australian, you born here. Your children know what you dream. But our children when they came, to Australia, they don’t know what we dream. What they know, everybody for his self, and Government gave them money

R: They come into Australia and they discover all this freedom, and this choice, and the money, and they don’t know what to do

M3: They don’t know what to do

R: and they’re not used to it, and it creates a problem

M3: At the end, they could not respect their parents

R: And the parent, they feel like, the parent is being too bossy, and they say I’ll ignore you, I can get my own money goodbye
M3: And then, you going to see all the people from Australia here, they take the children, they keep them, and they find house for them...look at our boys, there are two boys here right now, down here, take the children from the parents, and bring them to get house for them, they give all the things for them, tell me, how can they respect their parents?

R: Yeah and that must feel very bad for the parents. They have come all the way through the refugee camps...

M3: Taking the children, taking the parent to be an enemy for your own child to be enemy with you...that’s the problem now we facing here

R: And that’s number 1 problem

M3: That’s no. 1 problem we are facing

R: Because your children are part of you

M3: Me, it no happen to me...it will not happen to me...because I know what kind of culture I’m a giving my children...my children know what kind of man am I...they know.

R: So how is that you’ve been able to, make that happen. How have you been so...how have you been able to do it differently. What is it you’ve done that means that your children are staying with you

M3: You see, everybody, the oldest, the first son, he’s 21..., and the other second one, they call him Muhamed, he’s 20, they sleep here. (Indistinct) They all live here, we are ten, all 8 children, I get everybody.

R: Yeah. How have you done that, how have you kept them with you.

M3: I know how to talk to my children.

R: You know how to talk to them. How do you do that? What do you do?

M3: Because if you know your responsibility, if you know your responsibility for the children, you going to hold them good. And then secondly, they come through the camp, a different world we coming from. Because me, I been suffering for a long time, for my children. So I don’t want my children to suffer. So anything they say, we should do together. Because.

R: You’re very strong on making sure the family does things together? And you have suffered a lot through the time that you’ve, the 17 years...

M3: Yeah

R: and so you have a very strong idea of where the dangers are, and how to protect against? How do you protect against those dangers? What do you do? You talk to your children, and you make sure everyone does things together? And what else? How do you...what else do you do?

M3: The whole thing is that, my experience, is to how to take care of my children. That I know because children today, the time we get, they different today than the other children we have. So the environment we’re in now...so how the children come here onto high school, get the idea and get a sense (?)...so if you do that, sometimes, you can’t control your children. You see I don’t want to give them a hard time...they say do that I say no problem, we do that...because I suffer for a long time...my, my day and today is quite different. So if I say, what I do, they will do it, is selfish

R: OK So you’re going with the times a bit, you’re recognising that things are different from your day, so you’ve got a flexible approach, you can look at how things are different, and act reasonably, and your children respect that...they say Oh my dad will let me do this because he can see, this is part of our new life, you might have some little fights about this...
M3: And some parents can’t do that…sometime in a week, I call after prayer, I call them, we have lecture together, talk to them, and how should do, how should move, what you should do, what thing you shouldn’t do

R: And this is with other people in the community or with your children

M3: Our children, my children, not in the community

R: This is after prayer, on the week…how do you do the Muslim…arrangement here

M3: I do five times prayer

R: Five times during the day

M3: In the morning, about 6:45, I pray, then 2 o’clock, I pray, 4 o’clock, I pray, then 6, 10 after 6 in the evening, I pray, then 7 o’clock in the evening, the last prayer I pray before go to sleep

R: And so after prayer, you talk to them…which prayer, each one, or

M3: No, not each prayer, after the last prayer in the evening time, at 7, 7 o’clock, I call them

R: Ok, and they all come

M3: How is school, how did you spend the day, how you look, and then I will tell you, can you will be very careful, because you are not Australian, we coming to new home. If you want to be like Australian, you going to get problem on the street, because somebody tell you say 2 days, if you is not good for you, you move from there. Even if somebody curse you on the street, you move from there. Because before coming, during the orientation, they tell we, in the orientation, you have (indistinct take alcohol…?) you say you are going to new home, but you be forgetting to know, like other people who like you, like other people who not like you, so when you go, when you walking on the streets, sometimes you might see, you hear noise…sometime they tell you you black or you green or you this…you got to forget it, because you not going to know.

R: So you give your children a chance to talk about the things that have happened during the day, and you provide some advice, or some response to that…and that’s helping, your children are appreciating that?

M3: Yeah! They appreciate

R: They value the wisdom that you have

M3: Yeah! Even the other day the older one, he told me that one time when he walking, and some children attack him, and he run from there. I said that is good!! That is a good son…know he said you black monkey, I said they want to make you to be monkey…that if you run from there, it don’t mean that you are stupid…so is good. They told him he is black monkey, and you damn African, you damn black eye(?). I say yeah…this is good, they can’t make you black eye, they can’t make you monkey. So you were good, you run from there…you are a good boy

R: Yeah, don’t be like a monkey, don’t get in a fight

M3: So he can’t make you monkey! Government know that you are you are human, government know that you are not monkey…so government bring you here…so there no monkey on the street…if he call you monkey, that’s no problem!

R: (Laughs)…well done..

M3: So you good boy!

R: The government knows you are not a monkey! (laughs)

M3: Yeah…so if you have other person telling you are monkey, that is no problem.

R: when the government starts telling you you’re a monkey, that’s the time to worry

M3: That’s the time to worry! (both laugh)

R: It happens though…..but it hasn’t happened here..its good…
M3: It happens!...even me, I have a car, have my car, yeah. One time I was driving from Kmart I were turning in...there were two guys, who were in a car, so, before I push in on the light...he say eh you damn black eye...I say yes, thankyou...you are finished...I am black...if you call me black eye...it mean nothing...because...
R: Well done...you’ve got eyes to see...
M3: Yeah...so that’s the problem...that is thing I can tell my children...if you saw children here they are not even reached to Hobart...not seen Hobart...
R: That’s right...they’ve not seen even Westbury...
M3: OK...so if you call him black eye, it mean nothing...
R: They have never seen a person like this before
M3: Yeah...they have called you nothing...can take your brain from there, you can’t do nothing from there...so you do something about it...you come home...so these are the things I can tell my children at the end of the week...
R: And after prayer time, at the end of the day...
M3: Yeah...after prayer time
R: And tell me, are you able to give me an idea of how you pray? What it is that you do when you pray...because that’s a very important part of obviously, what you do...is that something you can tell me about, or ....do you speak in Mandingo, to God?...
M3: Yeah, in Mandingo, but you see, you see we read the K’oran, and imagine what, I don’t know Arabie, but when you read in Arabic, I can understand it...but I can’t speak Arabic
R: Oh, you can speak?
M3: I can’t speak, yeah, that’s the problem
R: You can’t speak
M3: I can’t speak.
R: OK, no..
M3: But we read the same thing
R: So you listen in Arabic,
M3: We read the language, the Koran, the same way the Arab can read it, we read it the same way, but then we can’t speak in Arabic.
R: no...how do you read it, then
M3: (quoted extended Arabic passage)...that’s all
R: So that’s how you pray, you pray in Arabic, and you’ve learnt some prayers, and you know what they mean, I suppose...what does that mean? What you’ve just said
M3: Hmm, to translate to English,...is too hard for me
R: Too hard.....but you understand in Mandingo, in your own mind...so you have enough Arabic to pray, and you understand it by the, Mandingo...
M3: Yeah Mandingo, yeah...But you see, our country, is a non-Christian country, a Muslim country, is a Christian country, but we had a good government, government, past government, decided to send the Muslim, or Muslim (indistinct), so the desire went, in this country, we don’t want no war, don’t want anything...Muslim Christian, we are all equal in our country, but is not Christian country, I mean Muslim country....
R: Everybody is...everyone is just...there is no Muslim law...there’s a government and it allows all the different religions...
M3: Yeah...that’s the problem...
R: Do you know...I know that there’s not much of a Muslim group in Launceston...have you made any...have you got any community here? To share that worship with?
M3: Even I…just about three days ago, somebody told me that they have Mosque in university…
R: Yeah…I think there is a prayer room there,
M3: Yeah but I don’t know how true it is because I want to go find it…If I find out, even on Friday prayer, we can go meet there.. never see any Muslim organisation here in Launceston.
R: No, there’s not…as far as I know
M3: It is a problem…I spend six, seven months, eight months. This is our eighth month, from July 27 to now…roughly eight months or seven months, I never see, I try to get only, I take out some times ago, since I got my car is three months.
R: Yeah, so you’ve been able to travel more widely…and you’ve still seen no Mosque
M3: No.
R: There is no Mosque, I can tell you
M3: One time, immigration came from Hobart, said there is a Mosque in Hobart…in Launceston no Mosque…say they trying to find me, get one now….nothing
R: It’s one thing, I just wonder how much…how is that for you, to not have a Mosque, is it a big problem for you? You obviously are looking for a place
M3: Yes!…Yeah you see it is a big problem, because how our prayer, according to how you can tell…I don’t learn the Koran, I don’t learn the Koran too much
R: Yeah…you need an Imam to be able to do the…
M3: For you to spend all six months, you can’t go to Mosque, is not easy…yeah…big difficult thing for us, is a problem for us…we tried to get it but here Launceston, I like Launceston, I don’t want to move from here
R: So, we have to make Mosque in Launceston somehow
M3: If you can do that I would be very happy…

Coding Key

*Family as the central concern*

Recreating family-in-community in refugee camps for survival

Impact of Centrelink payments and children’s freedom in Australia

Cultural difference leading to problems with parenting

Use of extensive dialogue with children to ensure they remain connected to family

*Role of religion in family connectedness*

Religion as a way of approaching problems: affirming connection in family

*Settlement Issues*

Settlement issues; driving license

Addressing racism with humour
Appendix 4 – Sample of Analysis (South Africa)
Sample of annotated coded transcript (SA4)

SA4: the father will say OK I will go and study that family…that’s where the whole thing…now my grandfather once told me, when he got married to my grandmother, he told his father, and then his father and the mother, they got into their horse…horse..cart? is it cart? (horse cart yes)…to town and then they went to that house, and we are looking for…and they just called a name which is non-existent…we are looking for Mr who who who…he used to stay here…and then the mother of the woman she was saying Oh I don’t know that family, come in, sit down…

4e, 6b Elders investigating marriage prospect

then they can see oh this family has a hospitality…they come in, make coffee, call the husband do you know this man? No, I have never heard…
R: Oh, so they made up the name, and as a test of hospitality

9: Ubuntu-like ethic

SA4: Yah, yah…and then the mother said to the young lady, remember, this young lady is the one they are interested in…the mother says ”make tea for your guests”
R: So she understands what’s happening?
SA4: No she didn’t understand, she didn’t even know these are the parents for the girl, and then they were looking at her…

4c, 4d: role allocation, training

so when they go back, they tell uncles, who come and negotiate, they are not there when they negotiate…so the uncles do it…This is very much Sotho…so in the olden days they were very much vetting the family…but nowadays…

6b

but it had another flaw…if the family didn’t like your family, then it will be a matter of why do you remain in that house? It can be very dangerous, because the family can pull back, and if the family pulls back, it means you will have a lot of troubles in the future…because you are going to need a family time and again…
R: The family pulls back from supporting the couple you mean
SA4: Yes…and if they pull back, then there is a problem…there you have got no source of support, you are alone…that’s why you will realise these days even the divorce rate becomes so high…why because families are no longer that much connected….now if me and you, I married you you could just say oh get off… and the families that could have solved that thing they don’t get involved anymore

2a, 4b, 4h Family support and coercion
SA4: Yes...so my family had to come back from Free State, they went to the family, they sat together and they agreed on the amount for Lobola...that’s how it happened, they agreed on the amount for the Lobola...after that then we got married. Yah.

And in African way, marriage is not, it’s not what happens in the church...OK. Marriage, is when family comes together... that constitutes marriage...so you are considered married once the family agrees...that’s already a marriage...but we love to do the western culture wedding, so all the people can recognise our marriage, and all that, especially the church as well...but marriage is where families; that’s why you will find black people who argues: She’s my wife, but you say, you’ve got no proof she’s your wife, where’s the marriage...no we don’t need the marriage certificate, because marriage is constituted by family...

So, it’s quite interesting, the African way of doing things as well...it has pros and cons as well...it means it my family is a controlling family, or your family is a controlling family, you can see there won’t be balance...in our marriage as well, because some family is going to dominate the other...that also tends to bring problems.

2a, 4e: Marriage as connection

SA4: I tell you after the marriage, the husband’s family now takes over...most of the time. No longer the lady’s family...because now you are married into my family. Now if, when you have problems, you no longer go to your family, but you come to my family. It has a flip side to it...the family always, most of the time they always stand with the wife.

R: Oh, the husband’s family will take the part of the wife

SA4: Most of the time, most of the time. Because they feel, we married her, now we have to protect her. And the man will feel but I’m not protected, nobody is protecting me here...I am standing alone, and when I go to my family...

R: So you’d better behave...

SA4: You better behave, or you are in trouble, yes...and people are coming away to protect women, and all that, even if you just give a woman a clap, it’s a problem...something like that...but nowadays it still happens, in places like Free State it still happens, in (?) Oh you are on your own, it’s a different, it’s happened (pause for a drink)

4b, 4d, 6b: protection of wife by husband’s family, gender roles

I grew up in a very rural environment, it’s a small town in the Free State Province, called (name)...and this place is a province where I can say apartheid was so much prevalent. Everybody could see it, you could smell it, you could taste it...even after a few years of the Republic of South Africa, apartheid was still there, even today there are still white people who believe black people are inferior, (yes) there are still some black people who still feel inferior because of what our white....

R: the internalisation of that power...

SA4: Yes, and its only when people go out, where you realise that actually we are better than we thought we were. I left that town let me say in 2003, for the first time
coming to Pretoria (wow, first time…) to Pretoria in 2003, so you can see that it shaped who I am today. That’s the background which…

8a *Apartheid*

R: So you lived in a small village, or town…

SA4: It’s a town, it’s a small town. According to Census 2001, its about 55,000 people. I don’t know the census now, I think it is more, because people are coming from farms into townships, but it’s a very small town. When I was still there, everybody knew everybody…we could, even if I don’t remember you somebody would remember you. We are always connected, always in a very small town we are coming from.

2a: *community connection*

R: Yes; and growing up, when do you, when can you remember first noticing how issues were solved or addressed in a family or community situation…often people have an early memory as a child, being around a gathering, or they know what was going on, or they wanted to find out or something…

SA4: Yes, let me say, my background is brought up by my grandmother, not by my mother, because my mother was in Johannesburg working, sending money home to my grandmother. My father disappeared when I was around 4 years, so he married another woman, not married legally, but married traditionally, so he stayed there. So my mother actually had to raise us, alone. So, she took me back to Free State, so I was brought up by my grandmother.

2a, 4b, 5a, *female headed household, gender issues*

And how problems were solved; I remember, most of the time we had problems, in the family, the first people my grandmother would call, are elders, in the church. So my grandmother was a very devoted Christian, so we would go into church elders, but even the elders who would come wouldn’t be the female elders, they would be male elders. Even family problems…and when my uncles were being naughty, and my grandmother was, my grandmother would go to, and a female elder would come, and they would make a prayer, and that was how it was resolved…they would try to give advice here and there, and yah…and that’s the environment I grew up in.

4d, 9: *gender identified elders, Christianity*

It respected males, males were seen as problem solvers, than, than problem maker. Actually quite contradicting what is happening today. The male is supposed to be the head, to take the lead, that is where I come from. And that actually has impact in me, because I still believe that…I still believe men should take their rightful place. And the rightful place not, not to oppress women and children, not to be violent, not to, take the role that we have to raise a family, to love your wife, to love your kids. And and, and be able to provide for your family if you can, emotionally, physically, be there. Yeah, that’s that’s the background I come from.

4c, 4d, 5a
R: And how did you learn that with your father away, and you mother in charge of the family, that must have…there’s a paradox there, in a way

SA4: Yah! You know what, I think that’s where my respect for women comes from…because I’ve been brought up by a single mother, with my grandmother, so two women actually shaped who I am, and I know their strong points, and their weaknesses as well. So that made me I strongly believe women can do it. Women have the ability, women can shape lives, and it comes from that. But the longing to have my father in my life also, makes me to be an attitude of saying, let men take their role. We are, as men, let’s take our role in society, in community.

4d

Let’s, let’s…because that’s a vow I made to myself, I will never leave my children, I am going to be there all the way until they are old enough to make their own decisions…and I pray that they will be Christians! (both laugh). But if they make a choice, that’s their choice, they have to live with it…when they are older. But now as a father I find that I am very strict…this is what you do, and that’s it.

R: And you have one child so far.

SA4: Yes, I have one child but I have a stepdaughter. My wife had a daughter, and she’s a teenager, that difficult stage. But she has never been much rebellious toward church. She’s a good kid, if I have to say. And I know at school she gets to be mischievous and horrid…but I know other kids too…so yeah

2a, 4b, 4d, 9

R: Ah, that’s been a wonderful beginning for me to get a sense of you growing up and witnessing, experiencing…what’s the first time you saw a specific problem, that you then saw solved…?

SA4: I actually because a feud comes to mind. The first time I ever saw, as I said elders were very much involved. And this family elder who was very much involved, actually he was my school principal. And he was very close to our family, because he was an elder, so he knew the in and outs of our family as well. And it was very difficult to face him at school! (Both laugh). With him knowing my background, and mother…but he loved me a lot, and he...

6c, 6d, 9: Church elder, also school principal

but the first time was when my uncle, my mother’s brother, who had a family, divorced the wife, and left…and at around when he was…he retired early because he had an accident and he came to stay with my grandmother. And now we had an uncle around, but he was a very violent man, very angry man. And I remember one day, I was still in primary school, when my grandmother actually called the police…because he wanted to claim my grandmother’s house….so I am the only son, so this is my house. And all that. But I realised that when my elders came, because they sat down together, and started talking to him….I wasn’t in that meeting, but I know that happened. And from there we started seeing a change, in what….he was still a violent man, but to an extent…and it wasn’t that serious after that.
The, the elders spoke to him…I think out of respect for the elders, as well, it made a difference. And if it was anybody else I think it would have turned out differently, somehow.

R: So it was something about their status, that…and the fact that they were talking to him, I guess…that it had been brought to this point…that he needed to recognise that if he wanted to proceed, then he needed to change things a bit…?

SA4: Yeah because after that he even came to the decision that he will move out. And go and rent a place somewhere…actually it was a blessing to us…because when he was around, we were never free…he will make us go and bath at 5 o’clock in the afternoon. Whereas when you are in primary school 5 o’clock is still early, you still want to play…and you know and so it wasn’t nice when he was around. And after that there were many problems.

Sometime I remember, even the neighbours, were part of problem solving in my home. Because my grandmother will rely a lot, to the both sides, this side and that other side…both neighbours. So, they would always share, and talk about what is happening in the families…and they would give one another advice, and…to the extent that you, when I grew up I thought these people were relatives!

R: Ah-hah…and that’s been my understanding, that neighbours are often part of the family…

SA4: I thought they were my relatives, and when I grew up and started to recognise that actually no, they are not even relatives but actually neighbours. Because when we didn’t have sugar, my grandmother would say go and get sugar…yes…from the neighbour…and the neighbour wouldn’t even question, she would just put in a cup and give…all the time…and they would come and say do you have cooking oil, and we would give…so there was that, working relationship.

R: And interesting how the children play that role of the movement between, the two families, or situations…and that is how things work…

SA4: You become also part of…part of the solution…because you run back and fro, being sent here and there,…

yay, yay, even us being children we were naughty…I remember one day, me and my brother, we used to eat my grandmother’s cake. My grandmother actually bought a cake, because she was going to have visitors…and then she went away. And then me and my brother, being the naughty ones, we went into the house, and saw this cake, and we cut off pieces and we ate…and we ate quite a lot! (laughs)…and then we went away and then we stayed away…and when we went away my grandmother came back with visitors and the cake wasn’t there! And so they had to share what they had there. And when they left my grandmother went to my neighbour and asked did they have a son…older brother…I think we were around 11,12…and that would be the son of my neighbour, he would have been 21. So, he went and caught us. And he locked us in the shed, they had a shed, and he started beating us! (laughs)…so then my grandmother couldn’t do that….so the neighbour?

R: You had become too big and too frisky for her…
SA4: Yeah... so now the neighbour’s son did it and after he beat us, we never did it again! (both laugh)... because he became part of... Oh you want me to call him?
R: That threat is still there... (yah)
SA4: So he played that role, let me say, to discipline
R: So the neighbour, the whole system works together that way... (yah works together that way)...

2a, 4h: Neighbour as disciplinarian

R: So we can fast forward a little bit, because obviously you have taken a particular role... (yes, yes) maybe I can ask a little bit... I am curious to hear how you do address issues in the community... because you are someone who would be called upon, I guess... (yes) so some of your expertise there and how you go about that would be helpful... but I'm also keen to hear a little bit about how you chose, or how you were chosen, to be a pastor...

SA4: A pastor, OK, let’s go back to that one. At home, we were living very close to the church. The church and my home were actually, ah opposite one another. So the keys, the church keys they stay at my house. So at the age of 12, my grandmother and I, she played a very big role in my life, actually, we were late for service, which is the normal way, in the black context!... (both laugh). And we were staying right in front of the church, but we were late. And I remember one day I moved into the church, with my grandmother, and the minister was already there; the minister was staying outside, in another village, town... and he was standing at the pulpit and he was singing in a loud voice... because in the black context you will see, when you come on Saturday, we don't have keyboards and all that, we sing without any instruments. So, and he was singing with that loud voice, and I said to my grandmother, one day I will be just like him... But it was in cheek, I was just a kid. But my grandmother, when we met with friends, would say, “come and tell my friend what you are going to do when you grow up” (OK), so I said “Oh I want to be a pastor”, and he nurtured that. Until when went to Matric, and then it became more personal, I knew the Lord Jesus Christ and I accepted him, and yah it grew bigger in me now... it wasn’t just the thing I saw... that I liked, something I wanted to do...
R: So your memory is quite clear that at 12, you just saw an act, if you like, that you wanted to be, but you didn’t have a feeling for it, you just thought I'd like to do that...
SA4: I'd like to do that... and I think my grandmother played a role because he actually reminded me that “can you tell everyone what you want to do” and she would bring that up time and again, time and again... so I think it became the reality in me.
R: So when the child identified something that was supported, your grandmother said yes that is a good direction, so she encouraged it and supported it...
SA4: Because it was supported by my grandmother, I think it became more... now I knew the Lord Jesus Christ and I became very active in the congregation as a youth, I became very active as well, and I was chosen at the age of 22 to be an elder... at which it was the first time even an elder at that age, in my town...

4c, 4d, 4e, 9: Identified early with sanctioned, supported role (Christian Pastor)

R: And what did that mean? What did that entail?
SA4: Actually I was sitting on the Church Council, making the decisions of the church...
R: OK, so that’s the structured elder role, within the church sitting, which is distinct from maybe being a recognised elder in a community, or a village.

SA4: No in the community really it was not recognised, only in the local church. And even there I didn’t play that much role… I used to go and sit, and be on the roll, to be marked….and then I would listen to all the people speak …I don’t think I was empowered, to speak my mind a lot…but I liked what I saw and it trained me, now I am a pastor, I knew I had been in sessions before, I know what sessions are like, but I believe it’s God’s way….he was preparing me, for the ministry as well….so yeah that also played a big role, seeing people how they fight in the session, and how they will try to reconcile, and fight again, and reconcile, in the communication…yeah so I played that role, at that time…

From my context, or background, I know the church to be the centre place, where problems are solved…that’s my belief and my mentality. But when I came into the ministry I realised, because here in Gauteng people are educated, the church is not the only, source of information, people tend to come to the minister when things are at their worst….I’ve realised…people tend to….the church becomes the last resort….because if people are going through a divorce, my belief was that people will go first, to the church, so the church can be involved, give them support…not to solve their problem, but given them support, give them guidance….but what I’ve realised now, its not the case….people will go see, legal, psychologist, try to deal with problems, see social workers, try to deal with problems…and when they come to the pastor, most of the time its when they are getting divorced…when things are deteriorated so much….so actually now this says to me, church is not the only place to solve problems…it has become one of the many organisations that can help…but unfortunately the church is not given enough time to sort things out.

6b, 9: Elder in Church context

R: If people came to you to be a witness to their struggle, then you are a witness, to influence it, but if they are then coming, a bit ashamed perhaps, or disturbed that they have reached this point, they’re already nine tenths of the way through the decision…

SA4: Yes, and there is nothing you can say, that will change that; to the point where in our congregation, we decided, to have a couple’s retreat….to say let’s sort problems, let’s talk in general terms, about what is marriage, how to handle one another….how to be sensitive to one another, so we get experts from that side, to come and address us, as couples. We go out to a weekend, once a year, every year…people register and they pay for them….for that year….then we go there for two or three days….then we have our retreat….that is a way to solve it. Because most of the time you know when things are at their last stage, of the divorce…so the church must do, something.

R: So, your response to noticing that you are too often involved at the end of the process, was to create a structure which allowed people to have an open forum earlier, in the context of what’s marriage about, rather than what is your problem…

SA4: Yes; what it is about…because some will come back from that and say phaw…that retreat really helped us, on this matter, on that matter, and that actual feedback, helps as well.

6b, 9: Church counselling structure
Author/s: 
Harris, Andrew John

Title: 
A phenomenological study into African refugee men’s wellness seeking behaviours, inclusive of community, spirit and ancestral connections.

Date: 
2017

Persistent Link: 
http://hdl.handle.net/11343/172308

File Description: 
A phenomenological study into African refugee men’s wellness seeking behaviours, inclusive of community, spirit and ancestral connections

Terms and Conditions: 
Terms and Conditions: Copyright in works deposited in Minerva Access is retained by the copyright owner. The work may not be altered without permission from the copyright owner. Readers may only download, print and save electronic copies of whole works for their own personal non-commercial use. Any use that exceeds these limits requires permission from the copyright owner. Attribution is essential when quoting or paraphrasing from these works.