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A PAN - AFRICAN QUARTERLY FOR THOUGHT LEADERS

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AN ISSUE ON

**New Terrains in African
Sociopolitical Imaginaries**

The Thinker

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20 YEARS
— 2005-2025 —

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The University of Johannesburg acquired *The Thinker* in April 2019 from Dr Essop Pahad. Over the last decade, *The Thinker* has gained a reputation as a journal that explores Pan-African issues across fields and times. Ronit Frenkel, as the incoming editor, plans on maintaining the pan-African scope of the journal while increasing its coverage into fields such as books, art, literature and popular cultures. *The Thinker* is a 'hybrid' journal, publishing both journalistic pieces with more academic articles and contributors can now opt to have their submissions peer reviewed. We welcome Africa-centred articles from diverse perspectives, in order to enrich both knowledge of the continent and of issues impacting the continent.



Prof Ronit Frenkel

Nedine Moonsamy is an associate professor in the English department at the University of Johannesburg. She is currently writing a monograph on contemporary South African Fiction and otherwise conducts research on science fiction in Africa. Her debut novel, *The Unfamous Five* (Modjaji Books, 2019) was shortlisted for the HSS Fiction Award (2021), and her poetry was shortlisted for the inaugural New Contrast National Poetry Award (2021).



Nedine Moonsamy

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Tamia Phiri

All contributing analysts write in their personal capacity

The Cheeky Natives is a literary podcast primarily focused on the review, curatorship, and archiving of Black literature. It is hosted by Dr. Alma-Nalisha Cele and Letlhogonolo Mokgoroane.

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Mondli Hlatshwayo is an Associate Professor at the Centre for Education Rights and Transformation of the University of Johannesburg. He has published numerous peer-reviewed journal articles and book chapters on the following topics: xenophobia and trade unions, football world cup and stadia, education and immigrant learners, and trade unions and technology. He is co-editor (with Aziz Choudry) of the Pluto Press book, *Just Work? Migrant Workers, Globalization and Resistance*.

Perfect Hlongwane is a writer and editor who lives and works in Johannesburg. His first novel, *Jozi*, was published by UKZN Press in 2013, and was shortlisted for the UJ Prize for South African Writing in English in the debut category. *Sanity Prevail*, his second novel, was published by Blackbird Books in 2021. He is currently working on his third novel, *A Tighrope Hope*.

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Xolile Mabuza is a teacher at Emshekantambo Secondary School. She holds a Bachelor of Education (BEd), an Honours degree in African Languages, a master's degree in African Languages, and a Doctoral degree in African Languages. She was awarded a merit bursary for Masters and Doctorate students by the University of Johannesburg for her Doctorate degree, which assisted her in completing the qualification. For the past 10 years, Mabuza has been teaching IsiZulu home language, fostering a deep appreciation for the language at the above-mentioned school. Her research focuses on the analysis of IsiZulu literature, and she remains dedicated to preserving

and promoting the language and its culture. Her research work particularly emphasises family dynamics and challenges faced by young girls.

Lerato Moletsane, born and raised in Dobsonville, Soweto, is an aunt, a daughter, a sister, a wife, and everything in between. She is the mother of Katlego and Tshidiso Moletsane (winner of the 2022 Sunday Times Literary Fiction Award), a title she feels inadequate to bear but declares with pride and joy. A solo traveller. A self-confessed adrenaline junkie with a fear of heights, has summited Kilimanjaro, skydived in Cape Town, and bungee jumped in Victoria Falls. She is an aspiring writer whose short story, "Pink Balloon Trousers," is part of the anthology *Fluid: The Freedom to Be* (2023). Lerato is an avid fan of Thandiswa Mazwai, Johnny Clegg, and Eminem... in that order.

Rofhiwa Maneta is a freelance arts and culture journalist. He has written for *City Press*, the *Mail & Guardian*, the *Sunday Times*, *Vice*, *New Frame* and *The Fader*. He was also a contributor to *Our Ghosts Were Once People*, and has published a memoir, *A Man, A Fire, A Corpse* (2022).

Marzia Milazzo is a writer, critic, and associate professor of English at the University of Johannesburg. Her book, *Colorblind Tools: Global Technologies of Racial Power* (2022), which shows how white people disavow racism across national boundaries to maintain power and how anti-Black and colonial logics can be reproduced even in some decolonial literatures, won the 2023 Association for Ethnic Studies Outstanding Book Award. A globetrotter and polyglot, Milazzo lives between Johannesburg and perpetual fernweh.

Kennedy Monari is a dedicated EiE specialist, researcher, peacebuilder, and teacher with extensive experience in refugee education, conflict resolution, and policy advocacy. With over 8 years' experience in the education sector, particularly in refugee settings and in arid and semi-arid land (ASAL) regions, he has gained a deep understanding of the intersection between education, conflict, and crisis, using a critical political economy of education lens.

As a Rotary Peace Fellow Alumni and an Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP) Peace Ambassador, Kennedy has actively contributed to peace building initiatives, training over 200 young leaders

in conflict resolution and youth engagement. He has also contributed to academic research and policy development, with publications in reputable journals. His research focuses on refugee education, peace, and political economy of education in conflict-affected regions.

Additionally, Kennedy serves as an educator and mentor at Patterson Memorial Secondary School in Kenya and is a member of ECW's Youth/Student-led constituency sub-group. He has a Masters in EiE from the University of Nairobi and a Postgraduate Diploma in Peace Building and Conflict Transformation from Makerere University.

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Lofane Peter Nicholas is a Ugandan political scientist with over two decades of experience in development, peacebuilding, conflict management, and mediation across East Africa. He has served in leadership and technical roles with more than six international and national NGOs, including over 15 years as the Executive Director of Manna Development Agency (MADA).

Currently, he serves as a Research Associate at the University of Johannesburg's SARCHI Chair in African Diplomacy and Foreign Policy. He is also the Chairperson of Uganda for Resilience (U4R) and a

Caretaker Board Member of Africa for Resilience (A4R), contributing to regional strategies for conflict transformation, climate resilience, and inclusive development.

He holds a PhD in Political Science, with a specialization in terrorism studies. His doctoral research focused on the effectiveness of the African Union in addressing the root causes of terrorism, with Somalia as a case study. His academic credentials also include multiple master's degrees in Local Governance and Human Rights, International Relations, and Development Studies, as well as a strong foundation in Philosophy and Religious Studies, which informs my critical thinking and ethical perspective.

His expertise spans diplomacy, legal and institutional analysis, program design and management, and policy-oriented research in the fields of governance, security, and development. He has made notable contributions to promoting democratic values, human rights, and community resilience especially in Eastern Equatoria, South Sudan, and Northern Karamoja, Uganda amplifying the voices of marginalized and conflict-affected communities.

Quincy Pule is a multilingual South African, raised in East London (Eastern Cape Province) and Pietersburg (Polokwane, Limpopo Province). He was inspired by his former University of the Western Cape (UWC) lecturer, Prof Kwesi Prah, to pursue Sociology at an advanced level. He obtained my BA degree (Sociology & Anthropology 3, English 3, and Psychology 3) through UWC, BSocSc (Hons) degree in Industrial Relations under the auspices of Sociology and Industrial Sociology from Rhodes University, a M.Phil degree (Conflict Transformation & Management) through Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, and a PhD in Sociology from the University of Johannesburg.

Sociology has inculcated in him with a sense that a human being is actually a social being inextricably intertwined with the rest of humanity. Through Sociology he has been able to acquire epistemological understanding of how society operates insofar as they relate as individuals and political beings. In this regard, he wants to contribute by advancing the frontiers of scholarly knowledge through research, impart the knowledge he has acquired and engage my community and society at large.

Shameema Sarang is a master's student in English at the University of Johannesburg. The cornerstone of her thesis is the representation of Black women in South African novels that deal with mental health problems and the role of racism in the production of these texts.

Unathi Slasha is a South African literary scholar and novelist. He is the author of the novella *Jah Hills* (Black Ghost Books, 2017; CLASH Books, 2019), which was nominated for both the 2019 Nommo novel award and 2020 Nommo novella award. His forthcoming novel, *The Hollow Sound of Lightweight Bodies*, is the winner of the 2025 Iskanchi Book Prize. Slasha's creative and critical work has appeared in *New Coin*, *New Contrast*, *Mail & Guardian*, *Herri*, *New Orleans Review*, and other venues.

Lindokuhle Ubisi (PhD) is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Psychology at the University of South Africa. His research interests are mainly within the psychology of sexual minorities, including the sexuality of children, LGBT+ individuals, as well as persons with various disabilities.

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TRIBUTE



Some Burn Too Bright: Remembering Tshidiso Moletsane

Compiled and edited by Marzia Milazzo, University of Johannesburg.

“I am balance. I am opalescent. All around me, instead of mere people, I see celestial bodies. I feel like we are the centre of the universe. I exist and then I don’t and then I do again. I think I died. I want to die again. I want to die a thousand times.”

—Tshidiso Moletsane, *Junx*

The winner of the 2022 Sunday Times Award and finalist of the UJ Prize for South African Writing, Tshidiso Moletsane’s novel *Junx* (2021) made an indelible mark on the South African literary scene with its powerful portrayal of a young Black man frantically attempting to escape his mental anguish while roaming the nightly streets of Johannesburg, sinking deeper and deeper into his own depression, yet never losing his self-deprecating humour. Far from being a city of gold, the Joburg of *Junx* is “a city in enormous discomfort, a city in mourning” (94)—a city symbolic of larger struggles that continue to shape Black life in South Africa. As it offers an unflinching lens onto post-apartheid society, *Junx* ultimately suggests that the consequences of white supremacy, anti-Blackness, and racial inequality are nothing less than devastating for poor Black South African youth.

On 26 May 2024, Moletsane died tragically by suicide at the young age of thirty-one, leaving an indelible void among family members, friends, and fellow writers. Here, Lerato Moletsane, Rofhiwa Maneta, Perfect Hlongwane, The Cheeky Natives, Marzia Milazzo, Shameema Sarang, Sewela Langeni and Unathi Slasha pay tribute to Tshidiso Moletsane, his work, and his undeniable legacy.

My Baby Boy!

by Lerato Moletsane

A vivid memory I have of Tshidiso was on a Saturday, in March 1994, just after he turned one. He was wearing red shorts and a red and white striped t-shirt, singing along to a song by All-4-One titled "I Swear." As I write this, I can almost hear his voice singing to the lyrics "*I swear, by the moon and the stars in the sky, I'll be there.*" On his last birthday, I shared this memory with him and thanked him for allowing me to try to mother him for thirty-one years. He then went on to share it on his social media, declaring that he has always been "dope." Tshidiso was such a happy child who was surrounded by cousins, aunts, uncles, and grandparents. It is difficult for me to speak about him in the past tense. I had it easy with him being the first grandchild. Raising him was a collaborative effort that echoed the saying "it takes a village to raise a child." It was my mother who named him Tshidiso, which means to comfort – "Condolences."

He had his first tooth at three months, at six months he could say "lato," and at nine months he could walk. My mom said it was unusual for boys to be this fast and that Tshidiso was going to be smart – and smart he was. It was as if he was in a hurry to complete his mission, whatever it was. He was independent, faced challenges head on, and was never one to complain. Tshidiso and I are so much alike, what with the love of the arts, writing and reading. Our language was Silence. We could be in a room together for hours and not say a word to each other; we understood the silence spoken by one another. It is our silent encounters, his warm and loving hugs, and his kisses on my forehead that I miss the most.

I knew his love for reading – because during my travels, he'd always ask me to buy him books. I did not know that Tshidiso was a writer. He never shared his plans until they were executed – he was more of an Action man than a Talker. So, it took

me by surprise when one Sunday morning he came to my bedroom to show me an email from the publishers announcing that they were going to publish his book. I was a bit jealous because I fancied myself a writer in the family. But jealousy was short-lived as it quickly turned to pride. I was always behind him during his book engagements and commanding my friends to buy his book and get it signed. When he sent me a message on the night of the awards ceremony to let me know that he'd won, I burst out crying tears of joy. My son, the author! I had never cried that much in my entire life until the day my life collapsed on me – 26 May 2024. Now I cry the tears of sorrow. I love Tshidiso gravely and miss him so much it pains me.

A Life in Two Tenses

by Rofhiwa Maneta

Present tense: the tense of a verb that expresses action or state in the present time. Example: Tshidiso Moletsane lives in Gauteng, splitting his time between Soweto and Weltevreden Park. Junx is his first novel.

Towards the middle of Tshidiso Moletsane's debut novel *Junx*, the nameless narrator speaks about the artistic utility of pain: "But I suppose pain does have some redeeming qualities. I see it like this: the best thing about any sort of pain is that it can be alchemised into the most moving art imaginable". It's a well-worn trope that the worst circumstances produce the greatest art, but in Tshidiso's case, this was thoroughly true. "I can say writing [*Junx*] was certainly cathartic for me. I was very angry, and I was going through a deep depression at the time I was writing this and it shows," he told *NOWinSA* in a 2022 interview.

Tshidiso and I grew up together and went to the same primary school but only became friends in adulthood. We had a mutual appreciation for the same transgressive authors (Hubert Selby Jr, William Burroughs, and the like) and I found his writing more direct and lucid than mine could ever hope to be.

Death is always around the corner in both his novel and the neighbourhood we grew up in. But the type of death discussed in *Junx* is the long, drawn-out self-destruction that comes with repeated overdosing, dangerous sex, and bodily neglect. "Everyday my body reminds me that it is falling apart," the unnamed narrator laments. "Everyday it

reminds me that it's dying. Life is stupid, man ... You check in naked and check out in a suit. Everything that happens in between is madness."

In some respects, *Junx* is an attempt to make sense of this madness. "Depression really sucks the life out of you," the narrator bemoans. "Your friends stop inviting you out because when you're out with them, you just sit silently in a corner drinking as much as you can as fast as you can until you go into a stupor." Over the course of 147 pages, the novel sprints to cover the distance it travels. The distance between Dobsonville and Braamfontein (where the novel concludes) is about a thirty-minute drive. But the existential interspace between life and death, living and surviving, is far greater. For the most part, *Junx's* narrator uses sex and drugs to try and make sense of the great 'in-between.'

In early 2024, Tshidiso and I made arrangements to meet. I have an idea for a book about religion and the trauma it exacts on its adherents. The day before we're scheduled to meet, I ask if we could move our get together to another time. "No flop bro. We'll do it some other time."

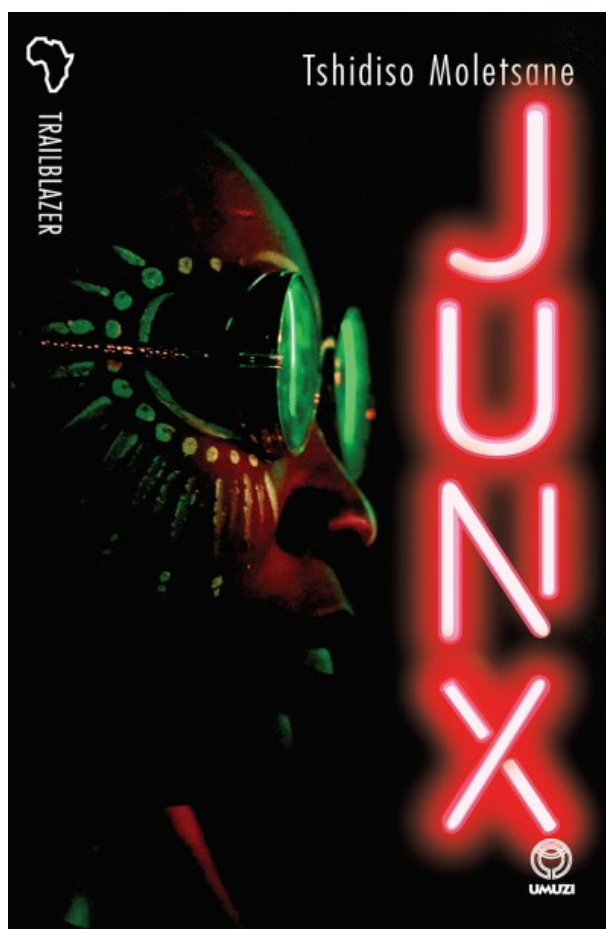
It is the last time I ever have a conversation with him.

*

Past tense: a verb or tense expressing action in or as if in the past. Example: Tshidiso Moletsane, winner of the 2022 Sunday Times Literary Awards fiction prize has died.

My brother sent me the message just after dawn breaks. "Tshidiso is no longer with us." I am driving at the time and have to pull over to steady both myself and the car. Out of a sheer combination of panic, confusion, and blind grief, I try to message him. A pink band of sunshine, fog, and industrial smog looms on the horizon and, for a moment, I look into the distance and try to make out the outline of Dobsonville, Soweto. I message a first, second, and third time. No response.

Something about this occasion whispers back the memory of a passage from *Junx*. At the very beginning of the novel, the unnamed narrator has a conversation with his friend Thabo about death: "The government doesn't want you to kill yourself because dead people don't pay taxes," he ruminates in his shack.



I remember sending Tshidiso that line and the subsequent discussion we had about death and the schemes we invent to keep the reaper at a remove. *Junx* is full of such schemes. The self-destructive excess that populates the novel is always an attempt to kick the can down the road, as it were. To tell death: not today, we have more immediate concerns than dying.

"I think your novel is about more than surviving," I told Tshidiso during our discussion. "It's about the mechanisms we employ – healthy and unhealthy – to make a life out of the different prisons we've been conscripted to." He neither agreed nor disagreed with my assessment but told me he was glad I found so much resonance with the book and that "a lot of anger went into its making."

On the weekend of his funeral, I attend another funeral (not his) and think of how death looms large in Tshidiso's novel and life itself. On that weekend, I remember thinking that life is a terminal disease whose inevitable end is death. I remember thinking about Dobsonville, where Tshidiso and I grew up,

and how it wasn't so much a place we grew up in, but a place we survived.

But mostly, I think about Tshidiso's death and remember a line from "Ghetto", a song from the band The Muffinz: "No fair, no fair, it's not fair. No fair, no fair, it's not fair. No fair, no fair..."

A Man Who Made His Mark

by Perfect Hlongwane

My first encounter with Tshidiso Moletsane happened when I got a copy of his debut novel, recommended by a writer and reader whose judgement I hold in high esteem. I read through *Junx* in two captivated days, and again at the tail-end of that week. Tshidiso's novel was, in many senses, the kind of book one had been waiting for, having grown hesitant about some of the formulaic, moralising executions of storytelling by local authors. *Junx* was an unexpected breath of fresh air, and a solid punch in the gut. I was excited reading it, and could not shake off the feeling that an important new voice was making itself known to us. Given Tshidiso's sudden and untimely passing, I have been wavering between being sad that *Junx* is all we will know of his singular and fearless pen... and gratitude that *Junx* is what life chose for us to remember him by.

Socially, I first met Tshidiso not long after he had been awarded the 2022 Sunday Times Fiction prize. He reached out to me asking if I had a copy of Ayi Kwei Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons*. That searing historical polemic seemed to me a fascinating choice for a promising young writer, and it gave me an encouraging sign of the breadth of his curiosity. In person, he was thoughtful and affable, and honest to a fault (he was very frank about what a difficult reading challenge *Two Thousand Seasons* turned out to be). When he met my dad, the old geezer gave him one look and said, "Ya, this one looks like a writer," while Tshidiso fidgeted in embarrassment. Over drinks, during a number of subsequent meetings, it became clear to me that Tshidiso preferred listening to talking and was determined to expand the range of his reading. He also wanted to meet and interact with other artists, and we made many fruitless plans to hook up with several writers based in Jozi.

Today, I think of *Junx* again; of the startling figure of Ari, of the sheer originality with which the writer wove the unnamed narrator's rollercoaster hell-ride from Dobsie to the inner city. I remind myself that none among us can know beforehand what length of days has been reserved for us. For this reason, I am grateful all over again that Tshidiso, having lost the first manuscript for *Junx*, pressed on and rewrote that disturbing, revelatory tale. It gives me some comfort to think that, beyond our instinctive urge to mourn the young when they die, the bare bones of the matter are that Tshidiso made his mark. He left his mark, and no amount of grief can erase the intervention that *Junx* made on the local literary scene. Seen in that light, "what ifs" seem a poor substitute for the terrible beauty that is *Junx*. Beyond the pain of Tshidiso Moletsane's sudden departure, he left us a novel of such timeous significance that we cannot fail to grasp what we have gained through the writer's life and gift, the pain of our loss notwithstanding.

An Ode to Brilliance

by The Cheeky Natives

Mental health has gained prominence in the public domain, and several books have been published in South Africa exploring mental health and one such book is Tshidiso Moletsane's *Junx*. Moletsane's brave story begins at a party in Dobsonville. A guy shares a joint with Ari — an imaginary friend, angel and demon — and the roller-coaster jol of a night begins. There are stolen cars with joyriding, brothels, sex, drugs, and anxiety. It's a trip of a book that is not only exciting but pokes cheekily and bluntly at the South Africa we live in.

The Cheeky Natives had the wonderful honour of being in conversation with Moletsane about his genre-bending debut in October 2021. The [conversation](#) covered a lot of ground. We spoke about emotional neglect, life on the fringes, Black life as a juxtaposition, the process of writing the book, mental health awareness and the stigma around mental health. In this talk, he openly spoke about struggling with depression and revealed that the book had autobiographical elements. Moletsane wrote the novel as a way of processing his feelings and emotions.

The gems of the conversation were the softer

moments in the book, such as the theme of friendship that pervades the novel. We spoke about Black men and masculinities, and how often toxic displays of masculinity inhibit the growth in friendships. For Molestane, his friendships were his solace. He said, "I'm very fortunate my friends are a very affectionate bunch, so I never got to struggle with being inhibited around my friends, so like we're very, very open about our feelings. We're very open about just basically everything. We tell each other that we love and miss each other."

Molestane was a talented writer who wrote about contemporary life with razor-sharp commentary. We are saddened by his passing. We hope that his work will continue to live on and shine a light on mental health and its often-deadly effects.

A Humble Genius

by Marzia Milazzo

When I first read Tshidiso Moletsane's *Junx*, as a jury member tasked with assessing hundreds of book submissions for the 2022 UJ Prize for South African Writing, it became immediately evident to me that the South African literary scene had never seen anything like it. The following year, entrusted with organising a UJ event with a creative writer or scholar of my choice, I knew Moletsane was the one artist I wanted to interview. Looking back at our [conversation](#), which is available on YouTube and excerpted in the sixth issue of *Imbiza*, Moletsane struck me as displaying the same honesty, sensibility, and sharp-wittedness as the narrator of his award-winning debut novel, which Moletsane started writing when he was only nineteen years old, and which has been compared to J. D. Salinger's classic *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951).

Not someone in love with the spotlight, Moletsane during the interview conceded: "I struggle with compliments about my work, so when I am compared with Salinger, I think that's a lot." His humbleness might have prevented Moletsane from seeing his own genius, but the sombre reality is that we have lost one of the most original, brave, and relentlessly introspective young voices in the country. As Moletsane's untimely death has left an unfillable void, we hold onto the brilliance that is *Junx*, attempting to uncover its profound depths and peeling off its countless layers with each new read.

Visceral and elegiac, *Junx* catapults the reader into one single night in the life of a young Black man from Soweto who struggles with mental illness. Moving from Dobsonville to Johannesburg CBD, and from Melville to Braamfontein, the narrator shifts in an out of consciousness under the effect of multiple drugs, including cocaine and profuse amounts of alcohol, as he tries to cope with depression. The narrator, who has "been suicidal for years" (18), traces his mental anguish back to childhood neglect and an alcoholic father in the obsessive attempt to find a cause for his suffering.

The reader, however, soon realises that the narrator's agony has wider social implications and is inevitably tied to the "squalor and filth" (38) of his environment, a squalor that is symbolic of the precarity of Black life that defines post-1994 South Africa. The novel, in fact, provides a devastating critique of neoapartheid society, in which, the narrator laments: "The Oppenheims and the like are all sitting pretty with money that was taken from us, while we live among rats and strays".

Neither drugs nor sex or the escapist youth culture of Braamfontein and Melville can provide respite for the narrator's pain. They "only give you temporary relief," the narrator argues, as his body falls apart under the pressure of self-neglect (40). Only in death, the ending intimates, can the narrator find freedom and hope for the future. I hope that Tshidiso, too, has found his happy place.

An Unassuming Creative

by Sewela Langeni

I had the pleasure of first meeting Tshidiso Moletsane at the Kingsmead Book Fair in 2023. As a bookseller, I am always excited to meet authors with the possibility of hosting them at Book Circle Capital. I approached him in the green room where he was waiting for his session to discuss writing about Johannesburg with Tanya Zack, the author of *Wake Up, This Is Joburg*.

He first struck me as shy and even a little bit uncomfortable to be among the hubbub of the room. But as I introduced myself to request his number he warmed up and flashed his winning smile. We reconnected in June the same year to film an [Episode](#) of The Morning Show SA Book Club

where he spoke to Tshwanelo Serumola about his award-winning book *Junx*.

Tshidiso came across as an unassuming, intelligent, witty, and respectful young man who found all the fuss around him and *Junx*, especially after winning the Sunday Times Literary Awards fiction prize, quite unexpected. He said it was a story borrowed from his life and the lives of his friends which he had been writing since he was in high school. He wrote the story to show the anger young South Africans feel in the face of a range of societal issues that can negatively affect their mental health. He spoke fondly of his mother and grandmother, laughing nervously about how they would receive *Junx*.

My second encounter with Tshidiso was at UJ where he spoke about *Junx* in the English Department with Marzia Milazzo and Shameema Sarang. At **the session**, Tshidiso inspired a room full of aspiring writers, sharing how his manuscript faced some rejections from publishers until he landed his publishing deal with Penguin Random House. During the discussion, he shared difficult topics using humour, like getting shot and losing the manuscript of the novel, and having to rewrite it.

Hearing about his passing in May 2024 was a deep shock for me. When we last spoke, he shared that he had an idea about his next book even though he had not yet started writing. He spoke candidly about the subtle pressure he felt about his next book as he wondered if it would live up to the success of *Junx*, which he wrote to prove to himself that he could write. "I wanted to write a good story, but even more than that, I wanted it to be fun to read," said Tshidiso. The South African literary space has lost a naturally talented writer that still had so much to offer.

A Contemplative and Philosophical Writer

by Shameema Sarang

In May 2023, I had the honour of **interviewing** Tshidiso Moletsane at the University of Johannesburg together with Marzia Milazzo. When Tshidiso walked down the passage, I was nervous at the thought of meeting the mind that brought *Junx* into the world. But Tshidiso's easy smile and the way we hugged after being introduced was disarming

and made him feel familiar, like someone I'd known. I saw later, during our interview, that his quiet confidence masked a nimble mind as was evident from his responses to our questions and from how he engaged the novel itself.

Tshidiso's willingness to thoughtfully reflect on serious and difficult issues raised in *Junx* revealed an intimately visceral yet contemplative and philosophical view of the world, allowing us to glimpse into the mind of a young Black man's fumbling high-speed chase through life. The novel deals with truths about mental health not easily communicated. For instance, *Junx* reflects upon how sometimes depression has no clearly traceable source and how the battle to keep oneself together can be ultimately lost. In the end, the narrator finds no solace even when he is surrounded by people who love him. The narrative leaves the reader feeling dirty and enthralled at the same time and, when I think about it, I believe he might be pleased with this outcome.

After the interview, we talked briefly about a next book project and the hope that he would filter himself less. On the first page of my copy of *Junx*, Tshidiso left me a note about this conversation, but the last line of this note transforms into something ominous and weighty now: "I am so glad you liked this book. I will be thinking of you when I get the urge to filter myself in the next thing I write, if I ever do." I am saddened knowing that there will not be another thing. The world seems less bright without Tshidiso in it.

All that Remains is the Word

by Unathi Slasha

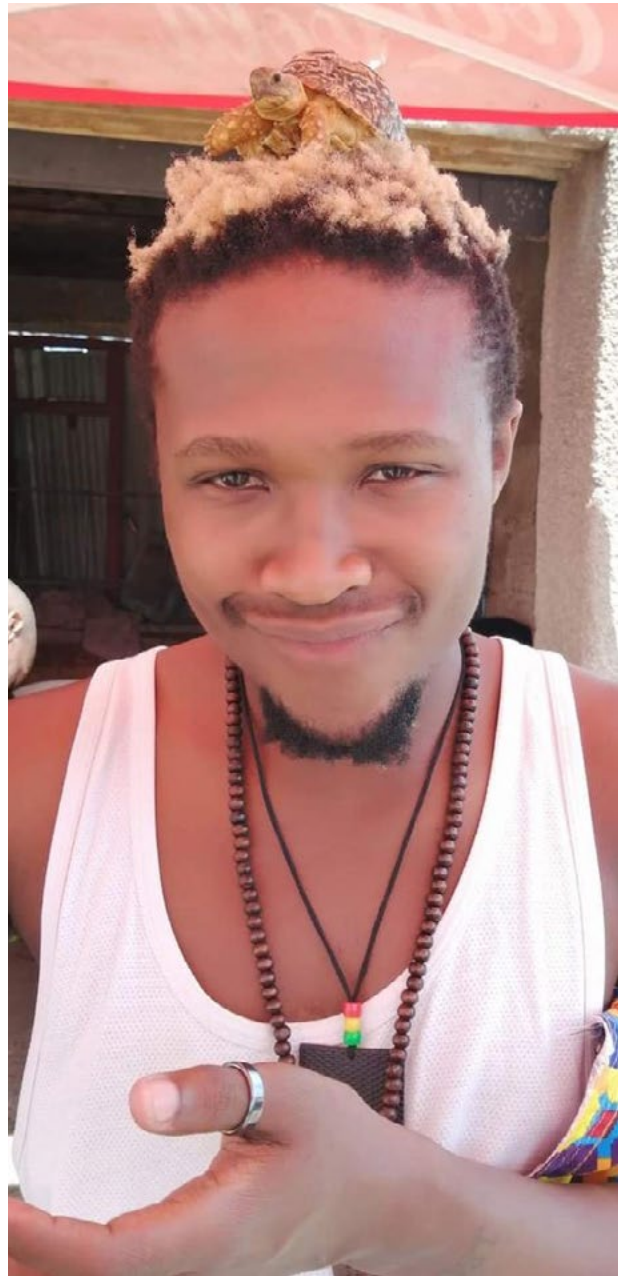
Steve Biko declares that it's a miracle for any Black person in the township to reach adulthood. We can extend this beyond simply the township. It's true for the suburbs where Blacks assume to have escaped the death-blows and woes of Black Life. It's true for the chaotic and crowded streets of the Central Building District. It's true for the uncared-for lives in the villages. South Africa as a site of endless violence refuses to allow Black people to breathe: wherever we are, there's always something that seems to suffocate us. This is true for the ordinary wayward youths. True for the unemployed and unemployables. It's also true for those with

extraordinary talents like Tshidiso Moletsane, the author of *Junx*.

Junx is as racy a novel as the township and city life it narrates. It openly refuses to be sentimental, romantic, apologetic: it even succeeds at avoiding being preachy about the party night-life that features the usual suspects: sex, danger, drugs, and alcohol. Readers find themselves immersed in the psychic world of the narrator. A ride through the precarious environment, the daring reader tails the narrator's nocturnal meanderings to the end. And the party the protagonist is rushing to get at is not without a bout of witty commentary on the daily politics of the country, with its jabs at politicians and priests who happen to be sexpredators.

Lewis Nkosi's biting obituary of his contemporary and friend Can Themba is well-known. In it, Nkosi complains by quoting a statement of someone who supposedly said, at a funeral, that their friend had no business dying. Nkosi maintains that, due to Themba's erudition, he was supposed to have produced literary material prodigiously, but unfortunately his life was cut short by alcoholism. Nkosi speaks of Themba's talent-misuse and talent-neglect—traits I cannot attribute to Moletsane, for his achievement is not underwhelming, and in his interviews he spoke about his future writing plans before being struck down by death. This is important because it shows that Moletsane was excited to continue producing more literary work even as the country neglects and rarely celebrates the talented young, like Moletsane himself, unless their works are misused for state propaganda projects.

Here, in my short homage to Moletsane, I refuse to partake in Nkosi's polemical *should've could've would've* if only to accept and engage the literary work that Moletsane has left behind. The might-have-beens are neither helpful nor insightful in the evaluation of a talent gone too soon. Quantity, after all, has never been a barometer for a good writer. Evidently, South Africa does not have a lack of good writers, including plenty of authors who produced less than three works only to disappear or die while aficionados of literature were anticipating much more from them: Can Themba, Dugmore Boetie, Joel Matlou, Wopko Jensma, Bheki Maseko, Phaswane Mpe, Phumlani Pikoli, etc.



As readers, we are compelled into a serious conversation with what Moletsane tried to communicate in his work and not what he could have achieved in work he did not produce. Any serious reader knows that an author's ability can only be judged when they are dead for the sole reason that they can no longer produce new work. No new work to which we can respond, to which we can look at the literary trajectory, and conclude, whether the author has, over the years, improved, or regressed. With *Junx*, Moletsane's original voice will ring eternal in the world of South African literature, that's for sure.



Teaching for social justice: Importance of including Adolescent Literature with an Afrocentric context in the South African English Language Curriculum

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to review literature to understand the importance of including Adolescent Literature with an Afrocentric context in the English Language Curriculum. Its focus is on how crucial it is that the prescribed literary network for English Language learners, particularly grade 12 learners, mirror the geographical and social realities of learners, and promote local knowledge and heritage in local contexts while being sensitive to global imperatives. The theoretical frameworks of Decolonization, Afrocentricity, and Identity form the foundation of this argument as they are linked with the National Curriculum Statement's principle of social transformation which motivated this writing, teaching literature for social transformation. The findings of this review revealed that teaching literature that is age appropriate and reflects learners' life experiences and history, in terms of geographical and social realities, can help learners understand literature and encourage reading. This review recommends further empirical research on Afrocentrism in education and the teaching of Adolescent Literature in South African contexts in the hopes that it would encourage South African network selectors to consider selecting Adolescent Literature with an Afrocentric context for South African English Language learners.

Keywords: Afrocentricity; Adolescent literature, Identity, Cultural Backgrounds, Prescribed Literature

Introduction

The South African National Curriculum Statement (NCS) Grades R to 12 aims to ensure that children acquire and apply knowledge and skills in ways that are meaningful to their own lives, through an emphasis on the importance of promoting knowledge in local contexts and recognising or acknowledging the rich history and heritage of South Africa, while being sensitive to global imperatives. Our national curriculum is also based on principles such as, social transformation, which means redressing the educational imbalances of the past and providing equal educational opportunities for all learners (CAPS 2010). The foreword in the National Curriculum Statement states that the current national curriculum is the culmination of efforts to transform the curriculum bequeathed to South Africans by apartheid (CAPS 2010).

The first interest of this paper is to highlight that the aims and principles of the NCS, and the foreword of the minister of Basic Education are not wholly reflected in South Africa's English Curriculum. The second one is to explore why teaching Adolescent literature with an Afrocentric context would be an indication of steps toward social transformation through the curriculum as well as encouraging active learner participation during literature lessons.

Adolescence is a reality of the learners in schools across South Africa, they are at a stage of trying to find themselves and their place in their families, school, and society, and establish their identities, but this is not mirrored by the prescribed literary texts in the curriculum.

The current list of prescribed literature has not moved away from what was prescribed in 2009-2011 which Silverthorne (2011) described as a Eurocentric core curriculum. The literature taught in South African English classrooms continues to promote European literature over African literature and does not acknowledge the age and realities of the learners by introducing Adolescent literature, that is imbued in with themes that are unique to a South African context and depicts contemporary realities about South Africans.

Theoretical Framework

According to Trepte and Loy (2017); Asante (2003), the theory of Afrocentricity is one that seeks to re-

locate the African person as an agent of human history to eliminate any ideas that he or she is not agent of human history. Afrocentricity seeks to bring Africans back to themselves, individuals with a rich culture, heritage, and firm identity. African literature is distinct from European literature because the Western orientated themes found in European literature deviate from African values, given that they relate to their socio-cultural behaviour characteristic or typical to western world (Umar and Gar 2021). In contrast, African norms and values are aimed at teaching learners' African culture which is often embedded in the spirit of communalism (Umar and Gar 2021).

Considering this, I believe that teaching literature with an Afrocentric context means teaching literature that acknowledges the heritage, culture and circumstances or experiences of the learners who are taught this literature. Literature with a South African context should be imbued with themes that are typical of South Africa, its people, and its socio-cultural problems. For example, corruption, gender-based violence, diversity, and the geographical locations that South Africans live in (Umar and Gar 2021). When selecting literature, relevance should not be mistaken for representation; learners can easily relate to themes like self-reliance but that is where it ends when the setting, the characters' cultures or circumstances do not mirror the learners' personal experiences or the experiences of those close to them.

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Literature with a South African context should be imbued with themes that are typical of South Africa, its people, and its socio-cultural problems.

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Methodology

According to Draper (2004), any new research study should be built upon an existing body of knowledge. A researcher must examine what evidence already exists with respect to their enquiry. This paper is based on existing literature and studies on Adolescent Literature, and teaching literature with an Afrocentric context and the cultural background of the country or place that that literature is taught in.

A decolonised approach to teaching literature in South Africa and Africa

According to Johansson (2018), Decolonisation is delinking from an imposed narrative, and not merely a critique of the social construct of race or capitalism. The legacy of colonialism or imperialism on African people is them knowing little about their heritage and contributions to the knowledges of the world, and disorientation in terms of their culture and identity (Asante 2003). Colonization destructed and undervalued people's cultures, history, geography, and education, amongst other things, and elevated those of the coloniser (Thiongó 1986). Therefore, to Africans, decolonisation means critically investigating the implications of colonialism and how colonialism disenfranchised Africans by disrupting the systems that continue to disenfranchise African people like the education system.

Debates about what literature should be taught in schools, colleges, and universities of African countries go as far back as the late 1950s, since the independence of countries like Ghana (Leshoai 1990). African countries agreed that the literature to be studied in their countries had to be relevant to the needs and requirements of Africa. Ngugi wa Thiongó expresses this in his comment "On the Abolition of The English Department" (Ashcroft et al. 1995) by saying that Africans want the establishment of a Department of African Literature and Languages that will enable Africa to be at the centre and not as an appendix or satellite of other countries, so things can be seen from the African perspective (Ashcroft et al. 1995). This stance was taken because colonisation burdened African learners and students with the study of foreign literature (English literature) which they did not understand and were therefore forced to study by rote – memorising to pass exams (Leshoai 1990).

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Teaching literature in schools matters because learners can reflect on the world and think about how to reshape it into the world they deserve...

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European literature could be challenging for many African learners, particularly because of the cultural distance between the texts and the readers' lived experiences. Therefore, it became boring, uninteresting, and meaningless to learners and students in Africa. The resolution made after some of the African countries won their independence was that schools had to teach literature which learners could relate to and enjoy but, most importantly, Afrocentric literature. Yet they were not promoting throwing out literary texts with European, American, or other contexts (Leshoai 1990), because the aim was not to dismantle what already existed but to recognise and highlight African cultures and heritage and to introduce texts that learners would understand and relate to (Lillis 1986). Johansson (2018), argues that by decolonising literature we ask not only what literature is, but also whose literature? Whose literature do we conceive as significant or more valuable and why? Then we possibly can move away from Eurocentrism to a different narrative where no knowledge is superior to another.

The study of literature in South African schools

The study of literature in South African schools has always been a significant component of the language curriculum especially at the Further Education and Training (FET) phase, as a component that enhances reading skills. 'Literature Study' is repeated throughout the CAPS

teaching plan and warrants a two-and-a-half-hour examination (Kromhout and Scheckle 2021). However, beyond enhancing reading skills and preparing learners to write and pass their Literature exam; it is acknowledged that teaching literature in schools is important because it helps learners understand people, societies, historical events, and cultures (Beach 2020). The literary texts read by learners have the potential to change their sense of self and their perception of the world and the people around them (Schrijvers et al 2016). It is also important to note that literature can portray the status quo or argue for a reorganisation of society (Beach 2020).

Teaching literature in schools matters because learners can reflect on the world and think about how to reshape it into the world they deserve (Beach, Appleman and Simon 2016) but how much more impactful would learning literature be for South African learners if they were taught literature that represented them, in terms of heritage, culture, circumstances and age, and provided them with opportunities to reflect and grow? It is for these reasons that it is important to acknowledge that text selection is a crucial component in making literature a distinct tool for language acquisition, self-enrichment, and cultural appreciation (Samat et al. 2021).

Identity formation through literature

An African philosopher, Alexis Kagame views identity as static, suggesting that one's identity is derived from predetermined metaphysical structures. Just as Aristotle views identity as static, each person has one authentic "inner self", and therefore identity formation is about finding one's true inner identity and working to align that identity with one's life path (Haertling et al. 2017). As individuals go through life, they adopt various identities through interactions with other people or facing pressures from society and culture. The theory of Social Identity proposes that individuals categorise themselves as belonging to various groups that are determined by factors such as age, gender, or even nationality (Trepte and Loy 2017). Notably, identity development is associated with adolescence, a key developmental period in which people experience identity crises and work to resolve identity confusion (Haertling et al. 2017). Learners in high school are at the stage of their lives where they

are faced with many identity challenges and are consistently searching for where they belong and who they are, therefore, the teaching of literature in school should be deeply entrenched in the view of adolescents as people amid autonomous identity development, a development that can be nurtured through literature instruction (Haertling et al. 2017).

Teaching Adolescent literature

According to Cart (2008), Adolescent literature refers to literary texts set in the real contemporary world and addressing problems, issues, and life circumstances of interest to children in adolescence. These literary texts often illustrate and reflect changes that take place in society as the characters negotiate a sense of identity, and position of power within the various institutions they live in. Through the texts, authors have been found to often encourage the reader to question and even reject the status quo and to tackle issues that would normally be seen as contradictory or complex (Inggs 2015). Adolescent literature presents itself as an invaluable source of texts for learners to deepen their understanding of the intricate relationships between Self, Other and the world with enhanced sociocultural knowledge as well as affective and cognitive development (Sun 2022).

Discussion of Relevant Studies

While the theoretical argument strongly supports the integration of Afrocentric adolescent literature for social transformation, the existing scholarly review upon which this argument is built highlights a crucial limitation in the available empirical evidence. There are not sufficient studies on adolescent literature in South Africa and Africa. The studies currently cited to support the connection between cultural relevance, textual engagement, and identity are predominately drawn from research conducted in Malaysia. The first relevant study is Samat et al. (2021)'s study on the voice of learners on English literary texts in Malaysian schools. The focus of this study was assessing the appropriateness of literary texts used by high school learners in terms of their ages, linguistic needs, and cultural backgrounds. It is important to note, before we get into the discussion of this study, its findings or relevance to this study, that the Malaysian Education Ministry only mandated the

inclusion of literature in the curriculum in Malaysia in March 2000. According to Samat et al. (2021), the selected texts for literature could be ones written by local authors or translated foreign literary works. However, the absence of literary texts that deal with issues beyond the conventional norm, such as wars and a sense of nationalism for one's country or homeland was evident in the text selection (Samat et al. 2021). Literary texts that were selected were not within local and cultural boundaries regardless of their importance. For instance, a text about war would have been appropriate in the English curriculum of a Southeast Asian country that was last involved in a war six years ago in 2016. This study found that although the texts addressed relevant themes of family relationships, cross-cultural interactions, and the formulation of ethnic and cultural identity hierarchies, they did not bring the Malaysian perspective into the classroom, nor did they promote inter-ethnic engagement. A contributing factor might be the fact that the selected texts are all either modified or taken directly from books and written material from other countries.

Literature that is unable to bring in a country's own perspective into the classroom is not uncommon in South Africa, especially in the setwork selection for English language learners because Western texts are privileged over local texts and learners are taught texts that do not include their culture to engage them in the process of teaching and learning, and to serve as a medium for learners to maintain their local and national identities.

In a study by Mohamed et al. (2021) on Malaysian university students' attitudes and perceptions towards cultural elements in literary texts, students were given different questionnaires based on three objectives of the study and one of the objectives was to analyse the significant relationship between attitudes and perceptions of the students towards culturally loaded literary texts in assisting English language learning. Most participants selected "strongly agree" when asked if they could learn language better when they are able to relate to topics and themes of the literary texts to their cultural backgrounds. The findings of this study revealed that students had positive attitudes towards culturally loaded texts as they enabled them to understand other people and their cultures or backgrounds better and be more accepting and appreciative of them but, most

importantly (Mohamed et al. 2021), it proved that when learners understand what they are reading, they enjoy it and do not feel excluded when their cultural backgrounds are considered by selectors of literary texts. According to Mohamed et al. (2021), literature and culture share properties such as values, behaviours, and language patterns and this enables learners to make relations in literary texts from their cultural backgrounds.

The findings of Mohamed's study, mentioned in the above paragraph revealed that based on a focus on the short stories' characterisation, setting, plot and theme, African values were constantly present in the stories and were presented on different components of the stories and thus selectors selected texts that centralised African values. However, the study recommended that teachers and learners need to be actively conscious of the existence of these Afrocentric values and their purposes in literature analyses and the South African classroom (Dlamini 2018). This recommendation made by Dlamini (2018) could be seen as an indication that African values could be present in prescribed literature and missed by both teachers and learners if they are not aware of them or actively searching for them.

The South African curriculum since 1994 has been criticised for different reasons and the selection of setwork is one of the reasons for its critique. This last study is a research report which is a critique of the 2009-2011 English setwork selection by Silverthorne (2011) and it is aimed at exploring whether the selection shows transformation in line with the aims of the National School Curriculum or it has stuck to the traditional literature that was selected in previous years. To do this, Silverthorne (2011) analyses the National Curriculum Statement in terms of the principles and outcomes which it intends to be actualised in the study of English and selects those that seem applicable to literature studies. In this study there is also a comparison between the 2009-2011 prescribed literature selection and setworks set from 1942 to 2008. This comparison establishes whether the new syllabus has departed from old syllabus designs, whether it acknowledges the new target group of pupils in multiracial, English Home Language classrooms by offering a revised, wider, and more inclusive selection of novels, dramas, poems, and other genres such as short stories, or whether it remains traditionally Anglocentric in conception (Silverthorne 2011).

The conclusions reached are that although the networks conform to the letter of the requirements set down in the NCS, the underlying spirit of transformation is not realised (Silverthorne 2011). The syllabus is not reoriented, and the curriculum remains Eurocentric core curriculum that does not reflect the interests and identities of the wide range of learners studying English Language in a South African context (Silverthorne 2011).

Silverthorne (2011) recommends that the choice of novels should be wide and should include writers from other parts of the world. She also recommends that text selectors be tasked with the responsibility of including South African writers so that the selected networks accommodate contextually and content-wise the life-worlds of so many of South African pupils (Silverthorne 2011). Other recommendations were that a modern novel from the later 20th century had to be on the list, as should books by writers of both sexes and different racial groups.

It has been years since these recommendations and there has been not much change in the selected network for English Language learners, especially in terms of selecting books by writers from different race groups and including South African writers. The current selected network does not accommodate, contextually and content-wise, the life-worlds so most South African learners.

To sum up this review, South African network selectors have a lot of work to do to ensure that the prescribed literature recognises learners, their age, personal experiences, cultural backgrounds. South Africa's English Language curriculum cannot and will not move towards transformation and learners and teachers will continue to have difficulties teaching and learning literature until it not only promotes local knowledge, but local knowledge is at the core of our curriculum.

The field of scholarly research in African adolescent literature is not extensive; there is a gap for more research on the teaching of adolescent literature and how it would benefit learners even though learners are already reading adolescent literature that has been suggested by friends or family members to them outside school (Piotrowski et al. 2013). This paper recommends further research on Afrocentrism in education and the teaching of Adolescent Literature in South African contexts.

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Transport justice for students: Transport crisis and some suggestions

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Abstract

Unsafe, costly, and unreliable travel is a significant issue for students from working-class and poor communities. Among the consequences are missed classes, late arrivals, and dropouts from university. This article examines the challenges faced by female students in Johannesburg and Bellville (near Cape Town), where local universities predominantly serve students from working-class communities. Public transport articles rarely address the experiences of young women who are students of the university education system in South Africa. The article suggests ways to improve the transportation conditions for these students based on in-depth interviews conducted in 2021 and 2022 and secondary sources. The findings reveal that women not only feel unsafe in their communities and homes but also when using different modes of transport to travel to and from the universities. The article concludes with suggestions and proposals to enhance the transportation conditions for women from working class communities in higher education.

Keywords: transport justice, public transport, universities, students

Introduction

In 2018, the former Western Cape Provincial Secretary of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) – the biggest trade union federation in

South Africa, Tony Ehrenreich, published an article in the *New Agenda*, a magazine focusing on economics and politics in South Africa, providing an overview of the state of transport in South Africa,

particularly public transport. He noted that apartheid geography moved black people to segregated areas that were far away from economic activities and livelihoods, forcing them to spend extra money to commute to their places of work, universities, schools, factories, and so on (Ehrenreich 2018). In taking forward the conversation on the crisis of public transport in South Africa, my paper zooms in on university student transport – an issue that requires debate and discussion – because it has a direct negative impact on university students, especially those who come from working-class and poor households. Like workers represented by COSATU, many students need transport to move from the townships to cities and towns. Students must move from townships far away from the universities and university campuses. Apartheid geography, which relegated Black people to far-flung areas, created a huge transport challenge for students who resided in Black, working-class regions (Czeglédy 2004). Like transport for workers, student transport is time-bound because students have to be in class, examination rooms, and laboratory on time (Msuya 2024).

A student who arrives late due to delayed transport may miss the examination and even fail that subject because of persistent transport challenges. Workers who arrive late may have a portion of their wage deducted as a punitive measure, which is less disastrous than students' situation. Still, a student may have to repeat a course in the following year, which has time and cost implications for a student—traveling long distances and the unsafe and costly transport force students to leave their places of residence and stay on campuses even though they may not have to attend class for eight hours. For instance, if transport systems were reliable and accessible, they would attend a class for one hour and go back home and come back to participate in another class after lunch (Munir and Saleem 2025). In other countries, like Germany, students move easily and enjoy freedom of movement and learning due to subsidised and reliable transport networks (Ortega and Link 2025). In cases where the universities cannot accommodate universities, ensuring they can move easily to and from campuses is supposed to be the norm. Student transport and accommodation crises are even present in the best universities, such as the University of Cape (UCT), where some students

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sleep in the SRC offices because of accommodation and transport problems at the beginning of the year. The fact that accommodation near campuses is expensive for many students compounds the transport issue, particularly for those from middle and working-class communities. A lack of reliable and accessible transport for precarious students makes the students' academic lives even more difficult (Dimmer 2025).

Based on the higher education sector figures, the number of financially needy students is just above 50% (542 653 students) of the total student population at public universities in South Africa (Mashilo 2025). No figures reveal the number of students who owned cars in 2025; this sector of students come from affluent families and, therefore, do not have to deal with the problems of public transport like taxis, which I discuss later in this article. Students from working-class communities are most likely to use taxis and buses to travel to and from campuses. However, a transport policy governing student transport is needed to ensure students can enjoy higher education. In a journal article that focuses on transport for university students, Ofentse Mokwena and Mark Zuidgeest (2020) argue that the National and Regional Transport Policy of the South Africa state, which is supposed to regulate transport in South Africa, tends to exclude students who need to move from their places of residence to universities for lectures, examinations, tests, and other academic activities.

Ofentse Mokwena and Mark Zuidgeest (2020, p.13) state, "There is a lack of specific legislation that enables effective administration and management of post-school education mobility and access exacerbates the problem." For instance, the White Paper on post-school education published in 2013, which is the main policy framework for the state's approaches to higher education (HE) and further education in general, states that technical and vocational education and training (TVET) students will be able to access transport allowances to help them participate in the TVET education system; however, the white paper did not mention the public transport crisis and how to solve this problem to ensure that HE students, particularly university students, are not sabotaged by poor public transport when pursuing their studies (Republic of South Africa 2014).

This article analyses data collected from news sources on the internet and in-depth interviews mainly conducted with young female students studying with some students at the University of the Western Cape in Bellville and the University of Johannesburg in Johannesburg. Both universities have a significant number of students from marginalized communities from poor urban and rural areas of South Africa. These universities are in metropolitan areas dominated by taxis and have some presence of buses and trains (Clowes et al. 2017; Thandi 2021; UWC 2019). Research has shown that improving student transport improves their mental health and performance (Schoeman et al. 2015). Millions of people use minibus taxis to get around South Africa every day. According to Martin (2024), taxis account for almost 70% of transport usage in South Africa by working-class people, lower-middle-class groups, and students coming from poor communities. Taxis are generally not safe for women and female students. Young women who are students often face sexual harassment and violence as they commute to and from campuses daily. Yet, there are not many studies that focus on transport problems and violence faced by a student who is supposed to be pursuing their studies with less anxiety and stress.

Research design

The qualitative study sought to collect data on the experiences and views of students in Bellville and Johannesburg. I chose the two universities

because one is located near a coastal town, Bellville, and the other is inland, in Johannesburg. I asked the interviewees to narrate their stories as they navigated a complex terrain of transport to and from the universities. Six in-depth interviews ranging from 30 to 60 minutes were conducted in 2021 with female students at these universities. Using an interview guide, the students were asked to reflect on modes of transport used when traveling to campuses, problems and challenges faced when commuting to and from the universities, and some reflections on the violence they face as women in different modes of transport. The sample was purposive because the women were selected because they are regular commuters and, therefore, have experiences to share as students and young women. To supplement the interviews, internet sources from reliable news agencies reporting on transport and students were another data source. The advantage of these internet sources was that they could capture facts and were also triangulated with the narratives of the students interviewed (Cloutier 2024).

Transcribed interviews and internet sources were analyzed using a thematic analysis, which entails reading both sources to determine patterns regarding students' experiences when commuting to campuses. The concerns about the lack of reliability of different modes of transport and the lack of safety for young women as they commute became some of the central themes of the research. Given the uniqueness of each province, the findings are reported in the form of a provincial report (Liu 2024).

I obtained ethical clearance to conduct a bigger study on transportation from the University of Johannesburg in 2020. Participants knew about the purpose of the study and were assured that their research would ensure that their identities and names were not revealed to avoid harm in the research process. The researcher observed all protocols pertaining to the Protection of Personal Information Act (POPIA). For example, I clarified to the interviewees that the information collected from the interviewees will only be used for this research, and only the researcher will have access to the data (Menziwa et al. 2024).

Findings:

UWC students find alternatives

Mase, a UWC student who lives in Nyanga, a working-class residential area in Cape Town, uses the Golden Arrow Bus Service because it is cheaper than taxis. The difference between a return trip is R6. Mase is fortunate because many buses go past her area. She does not use the taxis because they are infested with violence, and there are no trains in her area. Mase then reflected on how taxi violence affects the bus service she uses daily:

One day, I was supposed to write a Life Science test in the morning, and I saw people coming back from the bus terminus saying that they [unknown people] had burnt a Golden Arrow Bus. So I had to call my uncle to come and help me travel" (Mase, interview, 28 April 2022, Bellville).

Mase then said:

I spend about R700 [on transport], and it's fine because I am using NSFAS money. So, it's fine. Because I do not stay on campus, I get an allowance of R2200. ... It could be better if they could give us school buses to come and assist students, and I am sure the taxi driver won't affect them" (Mase, interview, 28 April 2022, Bellville).

The financial support from the government assisted Mase in further studies at UWC/ Despite some issues about violence associated with the taxis in her area, she seems to be happy with the bus system as a mode of transport to UWC.

The Use of shuttles as an alternative

Shuttle services are some of the responses adopted by students. Ntombi, a young female student who lives in Grassy Park in Cape Town, did not view trains as an option for transport because they had become dysfunctional and were generally not safe, especially for women. She wakes up at 5:30am and comes back at 7:30am. Ntombi argued that trains were not an option, and she elaborated on this:

I have not been on the train before. ...It is very dangerous and no longer as safe as it used to be. ... It is because there will usually be those people looking very suspicious, and it is unsafe for a young lady like me to travel

like that (Ntombi, interview, 28 April 2022, Bellville).

Alternatively, she is part of a transport shuttle that ferries students from her area to and from UWC. Passengers must complete a schedule so that shuttle drivers can pick them up. A 20-day package would cost R1 600. The reliable shuttle takes two hours to travel to and from UWC. However, the downside of the trip is that it takes two hours to travel to and from UWC, and she would have to wake up very early in the morning, and on her way back home, she sleeps on the bus (Ntombi, interview, 28 April 2022, Bellville).

Taxis as a dominant mode of transport

In one case, a UJ student indicated spending about 30% (R5 000 per month) of their monthly income on taxis. In many instances, a student would be transported by a taxi from Orange Farm in the south of Johannesburg to the city centre and then to Kingsway Campus of UJ (Ntu, interview, June 2022). In this regard, Ntu mentioned: "I wake [up] at 4:30 am when I have a class at 8 am" (Ntu, interview, 28 June 2022). The distance between the student's residence and the university's main campus is approximately 50km. Sadly, sometimes this student spends 4 hours traveling to and from the main campus. "As you can imagine, this is a lot of time wasted for a student who has to use her time focusing on reading and writing," Ntu said (Ntu, interview, June 2022).

Similarly, one of the UJ students who lives in Ivory Park – a working-class area in the northeast of Johannesburg – commented:

I would take a taxi from Campus Square near UJ and get to Johannesburg only to find a long queue at the taxi rank. Even though he left UJ at 4 pm, I would only get home at 8 pm. What causes these delays is that all taxis return to the townships in the late afternoon and early evening, causing very long queues at the taxi ranks (Zinhle, interview, 31 May 2021).

One of the problems cited by students who use taxis is that the taxis do not leave a taxi rank until they are full. According to Thuli who is another UJ student:

This delay causes many students to miss their classes, examinations, and tests. In

many cases, we [students] wake up early. Still, traffic congestion and the specific delays caused by the taxis fail them, causing us to arrive late for their academic activities (Thuli, interview, 31 May 2021).

Another UJ student complained that taxis called “Siyaya” (we are going there) taxis are highly uncomfortable. She elaborated on this: “So it gives you that real uncomfortable feeling, you know, and you can’t wait to get off because it is very uncomfortable...” (Xolo, interview, 31 May 2021).

Moreover, sometimes taxi drivers can be a law unto themselves. Xolo explains:

This is evident in the following scenario when one taxi driver was driving too fast, and when passengers expressed their unhappiness, he slowed the vehicle to the point that the speed was close to 0km per hour. This is a clear sign that a taxi driver is spiteful and shows the passengers he is in charge of driving the vehicle (Xolo, interview, 31 May 2021).

Alarming, criminals also prey on students, as can be seen in the theft of their cell phones, laptops, and clothing on their way to and from the university. Matters are reported to the police, but there is generally no arrest or prosecution (Xolo, interview, 31 May 2021). Another serious concern is that female students are often sexually harassed at the taxi ranks, such as the Bree and Noord Taxi Rank in Johannesburg. In this regard, a UJ student commented: “It’s tough to be a girl in South Africa. So, they would touch me like on my hands, or they will touch my shoulders and all that” (Thuli, interview, 31 May 2021).

All the problem narrated by the students are not new and the university system in South Africa is yet to resolve such problems. However, there have been some attempts by the student leadership that sought to address the transport challenges for students.

Transport as a structural problem for students

In the early 2000s, the Student Representative Council (SRC) at the University of the Western Cape (UWC), supported by the Division for Lifelong and the office of the Vice-rector of Students Development and Support, conducted this survey to get a picture of the transport needs

of full-time and part-time students. With close to 500 student participants, the survey showed a hunger for safe, reliable, and affordable student public transport. Moreover, the study called for all stakeholders to play a role in ensuring that UWC students enjoy public transport to facilitate learning and the intellectual development of students, especially those from working-class communities (Koetsier 2004).

Even after the research report was published in 2004, students at UWC continued to face problems. For example, those who stayed at the Hector Petersen Residence, which is near UWC’s Unibell Train Station and in the working-class part of the area called Belhar, were victims of violence. In this instance, they were robbed of their possessions, such as laptops, cell phones, earrings, and other possessions, while on their way to and from the UWC campus (Sass 2005).

On the eastern side of the Hector Petersen Residence, students also had their goods stolen by thugs when they used Belhar taxis to ferry them to and from Bellville, which is the nearest city. Incidents of rape and attempted rape were common among young women as they utilised trains and other modes of transport. Students also experienced violence when they travelled by taxi. One student was on her way to Delft from the Hector Petersen Residence when a criminal who was carrying a gun demanded money from the taxi conductor. What makes matters worse for students is that violence is associated with the taxi industry, and sometimes, it takes extreme forms, such as gun shootouts. When the trains were still running, they, too, were a site of violence and murder. Criminals frequently robbed UWC students of their possessions on the

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trains; some were stabbed, or they witnessed other passengers being stabbed, having their goods stolen, or thrown out of a moving train (Sass 2005).

All of the aforementioned incidents affect students negatively; unsafe and unreliable transport undermines their access to education and their intellectual environment. According to Venicia McGhie, access to safe, quality transport plays a significant role in students' academic success at the universities. Good transport enables students to attend classes, write examinations and tests, and use university facilities like laboratories and libraries. In McGhie's study, a UWC student living in Paarl had to travel to and from the university for at least three hours to and from the university (McGhie 2012).

The driving distance between Bellville and Paarl is 38.6km and it should take one 29 minutes to complete the journey if the average speed is 80 km/h (Distance Calculator 2022). The fact that transport was unreliable caused the student to miss some of her morning classes, and the traveling consumed her time for studying and preparing for her examinations and tests, for instance. Students who pass matriculation well and live off campus fail some of their modules because they spend so much time traveling and sometimes miss their tests and examinations (McGhie 2012).

The Metrorail train service is cheaper than taxis but extremely unreliable. When the train system works, waiting for a train can take up to three hours, and trains can be stuck on the tracks for two hours without explanation to passengers (Ledwaba 2019). In February 2021, after approximately 471 days of closure of the central line to Cape Town, trains could only travel from Cape Town station up to Langa station. The poor and unsafe railway system ground to a halt in Gauteng and the Western Cape when criminals took advantage of the "hard" lockdown of 2020 by stealing cables and steel and vandalizing the already poor railway infrastructure (Geldenhuys 2021). A stone's throw away from the Langa station in the direction of Khayelitsha, the railway tracks were occupied by people who built shacks. Then, a few kilometres away, the same thing occurred near the Philippi station. One of the reasons for the erection of shacks on the railway tracks is that the trains were not running for almost two years, paving the way for backyard dwellers to

find space for accommodation that had no monthly rental obligations (Mlamla 2020). This means that the railway infrastructure that was supposed to be used to transport workers, students, and people with low incomes generally was the proverbial adding insult to injury by exacerbating the existing transport catastrophe.

Like many students of UWC, students in Gauteng, especially those studying at the University of Johannesburg (UJ), have structural transport problems. The transport crisis in Gauteng was highlighted to the South African public when President Cyril Ramaphosa was directly affected. During his campaign for the national elections 2019, the president was stuck on the train with other workers and students in Tshwane for four hours on a trip that should have taken 45 minutes (BBC Reporter, 2019). The Metrorail service in Tshwane, Johannesburg, Vereeniging, Randfontein, and Springs operated under conditions of significantly reduced capacity due to cable theft and vandalism that took place on the railway infrastructure during the hard lockdown of 2020 (Masuabi 2022). Like in the case of the Western Cape, given the crisis of students who relied on Metrorail from working-class and poor areas in Gauteng, they no longer use the train because they are, quite frankly, unavailable (Laby et al., 2021).

The collapse of the Metrorail system in Gauteng and the fact that the Bus Rapid Transit System (BRT) does not reach all the areas and is also unreliable, means that some students end up using local taxis to get to the Chris Hani Baragwanath Hospital Taxi Rank and then walk a kilometre to the university's Soweto Campus to take a bus to the university's main campus in Auckland Park (Kingsway Campus). Before COVID-19 and the lockdown, the trains were the cheapest mode of transport, but the problem was that they were crime-ridden and overcrowded, and thus very unsafe for young women who faced sexual harassment during train rides (Hlatshwayo 2022).

Suggestions and Conclusion

The availability of transportation is crucial for students, especially young women, to succeed academically and access education, research, and teaching at universities. As data used in this paper shows, students who live off-campus often struggle

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to find affordable, safe, and reliable transportation (Van Zyl and De Villiers 2021). Commuting from distant locations, such as rural areas and urban residences, to campuses can be tiring and stressful, negatively impacting students’ academic performance (Ndagurwa 2017).

Students in urban areas from working-class communities spend a significant portion of their income on transportation to and from universities. As a result, they have less money to spend on necessities such as food, textbooks, and laptops. The situation is exacerbated by the fact that the modes of transport are not safe, particularly for young women, who are often victims of muggings and sexual harassment by men (Mentz and Webb 2019). The transportation crisis for South African students reflects the social and economic inequality faced by South African society, where students from working-class and poor communities continue to be affected by transportation injustices (Van der Berg et al. 2020). Students from poor and working-class communities struggle to access transportation due to its high cost, causing some to leave universities and miss classes (Govender 2017).

South Africa is experiencing a deep transport crisis, as shown in this article. Students, particularly young women from working-class families, have not realized transport justice or the rights to ensure that working-class and marginalized communities have access to safe, affordable, reliable, and clean public transport (Jennings 2015; Martens and Golub 2021). The apartheid geography that located working-class and marginalised communities far away from economic hubs and centres, including universities, and the fact that the post-apartheid South African state has not been able to transcend the apartheid geography, has placed a transport burden on workers and students, especially young female students (Cronin 2006). What is disturbing from the findings of this article is that the latter are the primary victims of the public transport system. This is evident in the various forms of sexual harassment and violence they experience as they leave their households to go and acquire knowledge at universities. Any society’s development is judged by how it treats women and girls.

The South African Constitution states that everyone has the right to freedom of movement (Section 21); the constitution also grants people socio-economic rights (Sections 26 and 27) and public services which could include access to transport (Section 9) (Republic of South Africa 1996). In other words, transport justice for students, including young female students, is a matter that requires the urgent attention of all stakeholders involved in university education. Local municipalities that host the universities, such as Johannesburg, Cape Town, and eThekweni, provincial governments, national and provincial arms of the National Department of Transport, various transport agencies, public and private bus companies, taxi associations, university managements, SRCs, community-based structures, community police forums, local councillors, and other local stakeholders, have to jointly find local-specific solutions to the transport problems faced by students, especially female students. Such a forum will have to be permanent so that it can ensure that all stakeholders are held accountable regarding the provision of safe and reliable public transport to students.

Students are compelled to leave their universities in the early afternoon to go to their working-class residential areas because transport at night is highly unsafe, especially for female students. This

means they cannot use the university's facilities in the evening, such as libraries and photocopiers. What makes it worse is that their homes do not always have the space for studying, as was shown by research conducted on online learning during the Covid-19-induced lockdown of 2020 (Naidoo and Israel 2021).

A researcher, based on his findings and experience, can express his or her opinions to advance a research agenda and come up with solutions to problems, such as transport challenges. (see Taherdoost 2022). One of the issues that need to be looked at by the proposed forum is providing a subsidized bus service for students living in working-class areas. A safe, affordable, and reliable bus service that specialises in ferrying students to and from the universities from morning to evening, using the existing special bus lanes, will contribute immensely to solving students' transport problems. Once they have arrived in the townships, taxis can help drop off students in their residential areas. Authorities will have to vet all drivers transporting students to minimize sexual harassment and other sexual offenses. Members of the police forums, as well as the police operating in working-class areas, will have a big role to play in protecting the students. To drive the process forward, students must consider area-based transport committees that are democratically elected to report to students using public transport. Already, students at residences have house committees that are supposed to be looking after the affairs of students at residences. Transport committees of areas like Soweto will have to be led by young women whose dignity is undermined by the current transport crisis.

Students can learn lessons for struggles for transport justice from campaigns waged by The Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) in the Western Cape. Unlike COSATU in other provinces, COSATU in the Western Cape has, over many years, led transport justice campaigns to aid the working class, students, and all the marginalized people in the Western Cape. Protests, the laying of charges against the Metrorail, and media statements have been used to highlight the transport crisis in the Western Cape and the need to create a safe, reliable, and affordable public transport system for workers, students, women, and working-class communities (Washinyira 2017).

Another organization that has played a role in transport justice is #Unitebehind, which has been calling for an end to corruption in state agencies responsible for public transport, the rehabilitation of the railway system, and an end to the apartheid geography that placed black people in remote areas distant from economic and work opportunities. #Unitebehind and COSATU, as organizations leading transport justice struggles, can act as collaborators with the SRCs and other student organizations in the struggle for transport justice (Human 2020).

On the other hand, Durban students tend to live near their campuses to reduce their traveling time. Based on a student population of 20 764, and a sample of 377 students from the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), the findings from research conducted by Ponnann, which was published in 2015, indicated that student transport in the Durban area is not bad because most of the students reside near various campuses of the university. The study discovered that about 65% of the students spent between 15 to 30 minutes traveling to campus. Unlike in Gauteng and the Western Cape, trains in the eThekweni area were cheaper for some students and tended to be reliable. However, the problem was that the rail routes were not always near all campuses.

Furthermore, the study revealed that taxis reached many destinations, but the challenge was that students had to wait for a taxi to fill up before embarking on a journey to the campus (Ponnann 2015). The positive results of Ponnann's research mirror the state of public transport in Durban, which is better than in other cities. The city has municipal buses, Metrorail trains, private buses, and decorated taxis. One of the innovations of the eThekweni municipality was the introduction of the Imuvo (One) card, which allows students and passengers to use the same card on different public bus services in the city (Alyssa 2020; Dlamini 2022).

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Empowering African women with the skills required in the workplace in the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR)

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Abstract

Africa has been characterised by gender and social inequalities that have affected different dimensions of women's lives. Even in the modern era of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR), most women do not have the right skills to secure and keep profitable employment. Grounded in human capital, postmodern feminism, and empowerment theories, this study unpacks how to empower African women with skills relevant in the 4IR. An integrative review approach is used. Out of 917 articles screened, 24 peer-reviewed articles (2018–2023) on 4IR, women, and Africa were retained and analysed using a manual content analysis method. Results reveal the need for a robust regulatory framework backed by government funding and support to address past inequalities and tackle the underdevelopment of 4IR and STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) skills in women. Firms, on their part, need to comply with regulatory frameworks and design programmes to empower women with 4IR skills while

offering them customised support. In this digital era, African women must actively cultivate a positive attitude toward technology and the development of 4IR skills. The unique contribution of this study is the proposed multi-stakeholder framework involving government, firms, and women to empower African women through targeted 4IR skills development.

Keywords: regulatory framework, fund skills development, support women, personal initiatives, STEM.

Introduction

Gender inequality has been persistent in Africa and globally and is being prioritized by the world's most influential organisations (International Labour Organization 2018; Lawson et al. 2022; World Economic Forum 2020). African nations are often fragmented based on race, class, and gender. Hence, the battle for equality and diversity has been a challenge, particularly for African women as they are regularly marginalized (Jeche 2023; Micheni et al. 2021). Poverty, underdevelopment, and other forms of inequalities characterize the unequal African society with devastating effects on women (Matotoka and Odeku 2021; Mahlatsi 2020). The unequal treatment and discrimination against women have excluded them from work and workplace opportunities for centuries (Mahlatsi 2020; World Economic Forum 2023a). Women are more vulnerable to job losses than men (United Nations 2022), occupy lower positions, and linger at the bottom of the organisational ladder (Basotia and Kothari 2020; Fitong Ketchiwou and Dzansi 2023; Micheni et al. 2021; Moalusi and Jones 2019). Although women constitute over half of the world's population, around two-thirds of the 175 million illiterates are youths and females (Potokri 2022). Youths and women are in the majority in developing countries, face abject poverty, high unemployment, and have limited professional skills that hinder their economic empowerment (Micheni et al. 2021). With Africa's history of persistent and significant inequalities, the continent is at risk of greater inequalities in the 4IR (Jeche 2023; Kayembe and Nel 2019).

Scholars argue that the continent is not yet ready for disruptive transformations of the 4IR (Chinyamunjiko, Simon, and Bhibhi 2022; Oke and Fernandes 2020; Masinde and Soux 2020), and several developing countries continue to struggle with previous revolutions (Moyo 2022; Saidi 2022; Uleanya and Ke 2019). Yet, the impact of the 4IR on Africa is significant with both positive and negative spins (Chinyamunjiko et al. 2022; Fitong

Ketchiwou and Ngulube 2024; Moyo 2022). There is also a technological divide between women and men (Adams 2018; Mahlatsi 2020; World Economic Forum 2023b), and between rural and urban inhabitants (Jeche 2023; Moyo 2022). Even though the 4IR technologies can promote equality and inclusiveness (Chinyamunjiko, Simon, and Bhibhi 2022; Omonzejele and Agu 2023), access to technology and technological tools remains a challenge for many on the continent (Moyo 2022; Yingi, Hlungwani and Nyagadza 2022). Women are more prone to perform unskilled tasks that are now being automated and will likely be the most impacted by job losses (Barclay 2018; Christiaense and Demery 2018; Jeche 2023; Madgavkar et al. 2019). The use of technology and the development of technological skills continue to be a challenge (Fitong Ketchiwou and Ngulube 2023), particularly for women (Adams 2018; Kayembe and Nel 2019; Mahlatsi 2020). There is a gender gap in skills anticipated to grow in demand and importance in the future, such as technology skills, technological literacy, artificial intelligence, and big data (World Economic Forum 2023a; World Economic Forum 2023b). Many women lack the skills and competence to operate in the 4IR (Jeche 2023; Matotoka and Odeku 2021; Micheni et al. 2021; Naidoo and Potokri 2021). There is already a paucity of women in certain roles and in technology (Matotoka and Odeku 2021; World Economic Forum 2023b), and women are not prepared to keep up with the trends and developments of the 4IR era (Adams 2019; Mahlatsi 2020; Potokri 2022). Thus, there is a need for them to be empowered.

“ There is still limited research on the 4IR in Africa (*Ebekozien and Aigbavboa 2021*) ”

There is still limited research on the 4IR in Africa (Ebekozi and Aigbavboa 2021; Fitong Ketchiwu and Ngulube 2024; Oke and Fernandes 2020; Ying et al. 2022). Surely the 4IR offers opportunities for skills development (Adeosun, Shittu, and Owolabi 2022; Oke and Fernandes 2020; Saidi 2022), can increase chances of employment in certain fields or professions (Ndagi and Salihu 2018; Omonzejele and Agu 2023), or create employment for women (Butler-Adams 2018; Fomunyan 2019; Potokri 2022). Yet, African research gives very little attention to women and the 4IR (Jeche 2023; Potokri 2022). Hence, this research seeks to unpack how to empower women with skills relevant in the 4IR.

The preceding section introduced the matter under investigation and identified the research problems, and research objective. The next section provides the theoretical anchor for this research and the methodology utilised in this research. Then, the researchers present a review of literature on the topic. The paper ends with research findings, implications, concluding remarks, as well as limitations and recommendations for further studies.

Theoretical background

This paper is grounded in the theory of human capital, postmodern feminist theory, and empowerment theory. The theory of human capital purports that investments in human development command returns in the labour market (Alnachef and Alhajar 2017; Becker 1993; Hideg et al. 2018; Sweetland 1996). This implies that women with developed skills have a better chance of gaining and retaining employment at all levels, especially if these skills are related to the current industrial dispensation.

The postmodern feminism theory challenges gender boundaries that restrict women's growth and confine them to gender-based stereotypes, dichotomies, and essentialism (Basotia and Kothari 2020). It destabilizes the societal patriarchal norms entrenched in gender inequality (Mishra 2021). Women's experiences are deeply rooted in inequality and discrimination that limit their access to economic opportunities. This theory is used in this paper to show that addressing gender inequality and removing boundaries can give women better chances in the workplace.

The empowerment theory describes a psychological concept in which people, groups, and institutions

feel in control, independent, and equipped with the power to change their status quo (Kalso 2019; Potokri 2022). Equipping women with vital 4IR skills can dismantle the gendered dichotomies and give women the power to make meaningful contributions to their careers, workplaces, and lives.

Literature review

In this section, we start by discussing gender inequalities, then the 4IR and skills of the 4IR, after which we review the role of 4IR in redressing past inequalities.

Gender inequalities

The World Economic Forum (2023b) defines the gender gap as the unfair difference between men and women and reveals that the gender gap is currently 68.6% closed and that it will take 131 years to arrive at full gender parity globally, 102 years for the Sub-Saharan Africa region, and 152 years for the Middle East and North Africa region to close the gender gap. This estimated time to parity is even higher than the one hundred years projected by the forum in 2020, thus indicating a worsening state for gender parity globally. Although women are re-entering the labour force at a higher rate than men, the overall gender gap remains wide in leadership, STEM occupations (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics), and artificial intelligence. As it stands, no country has full gender parity, and only one African country (Namibia) takes the eighth position in the top 9 countries with the best gender gap indexes, having at least 80% of its gender gap closed. The Sub-Saharan Africa region is the sixth out of eight regions with a 68.2% overall gender index. The region records a 67.2% gender gap for economic participation and opportunity, 97.2% for health and survival, a 22.6% gender gap for political empowerment, and an 86.0% for educational attainment. This ranking is followed by Southern Asia and the Middle East and North Africa region (World Economic Forum 2023b). Africa is deficient in skills relevant to the 4IR (Moyo 2022; Ying et al. 2022). Skills gaps are most problematic in Sub-Saharan Africa and limit the transformation of 70% of companies (11 % points higher than the global mean) (World Economic Forum 2023a).

The 4IR

Moll (2021) critiques that we are not in the 4IR but only experiencing an extension of the third industrial

revolution (3IR), the reason being that it does not meet his criteria for revolution, being widespread technological innovation, transformation of the labour process, changing work relations with the competing interests of employers and workers, changing community and social relations, and international/global transformation. He contends that a revolution consists of fundamental societal transformations that go beyond technological innovation, to include socio-economic, cultural, and geopolitical changes. He also argues that the current era lacks a comprehensive societal overhaul, with deep transformation of the labour relations, labour process, social life, and the international socio-economic relations to qualify as a 4IR. The author further adds that the technologies often cited as evidence of a “4IR” (e.g., AI and the Internet of Things) are only accelerated developments of the Third Industrial Revolution (3IR). Moll (2022) insinuates that the 4IR rose because the information-driven, digitalised, international order is in trouble and not because another revolution has happened.

However, according to Schwab (2016), the 4IR has emerged as we witness the emergence of technological breakthroughs in a wide range of fields such as artificial intelligence, the internet of things, robotics, 3D printing, autonomous vehicles, nanotechnology, biotechnology, energy storage, materials science, and quantum computing. This exponential change occurs at a much greater scale, scope, and complexity (Mahlatsi 2020; Oke and Fernandes 2020; World Economic Forum 2023), affecting humanity, societies, businesses, as well as the environment and universe (Fitong Ketchiwou and Ngulube 2023; Omonzejele and Agu 2023; Schwab 2016). Also, Marwala (2020) attests that the interconnectivity of technologies through AI, automation, nanotechnology, communication technologies, and biotechnology blur the lines between the physical and digital, and biological spheres, which marks a clear difference from the previous revolutions. Anwar and Graham (2022) argue that less than two decades ago, there were more internet users in countries like France or Germany than in all of Africa, yet from 2018, a majority of the world is now connected to the internet. Workers can now apply for and work anywhere remotely. With a rise in digital outsourcing in the labour force, a new world of

digital work emerged with several implications for the lives and livelihoods of African workers.

Masikane and Webster (2025) highlight the changes current digital technologies have brought to the labour market and hybrid worker organisations, resulting in collective unionised action and organisation. This has impacted workers' incomes, demands for better working conditions, work benefits, access to social security, social power, and job security. The rise of the gig economy led to a new social force that replaces the old one, evidence being the recent upsurge in labour struggles in the platform economy globally and in the global South. Again, Webster and Masikane (2021) argue that the disruption caused by the digital age and platform presents challenges and opportunities for workers in terms of fairness in pay, work conditions, contracts, management, and representation. On one end, there could be job creation, with most workers being stuck in low-wage drudgery without the protections or benefits of formal employment. On the other end, there could be a digital social compact created by workers and their organisations to create coherent national and global policies, unionisation, and legislation to protect workers. Hence, new technologies create platforms, work, and opportunities which are 'entry points' that facilitate access to social protection and support compliance with laws (Webster and Masikane 2021).

Anwar and Graham (2022) argue that the growth of digital technologies, increasing internet, and digital capitalism is bringing new jobs to Africa. Yet Africa has emerged as a major supplier of labour for digital and remote labour (with South Africa, Egypt, and Kenya leading) to meet the bulk of the demand for digital work in other countries. The business process outsourcing and remote gig economy create a global market for digital work and present an economic opportunity for African workers. However, African workers are challenged with structural constraints (cultural, social, political, and economic) that technology alone cannot transcend. The authors also argue that digital jobs are enabling 'digital Taylorism' that breaks down work into simple tasks to quantify worker performance and link wages to performance, thus using algorithms to control processes, workers, and the quality of jobs remotely. In low- and middle-income economies, the impact of digital Taylorism

on the quality of the job in digital work is greatly amplified due to poor socioeconomic backgrounds (e.g., lack of education) and political environment (e.g., high unemployment rates), inadequate social protection measures, legal protection, and workplace harassment. While new digital work activities bring employment opportunities for Africa, their job quality outcomes are varied (Anwar and Graham 2022). Despite ongoing debates on 4IR, recent literature cited above confirm widespread technological innovation, transformation of labour and its processes, changing work and social relations, at a global scale, which has been termed the 4IR. Thus, women need the relevant skills to leverage the opportunities that come with the 4IR.

Skills of the 4IR

The human capital theory emphasises the value of skills against commensurate results. Skills attributed to the 4IR include adaptability and flexibility, critical thinking, analytical thinking, problem-solving, judgment and decision-making, creativity and innovation, cognitive skills, automation, coding and programming, information and technology literacy, computer-based competencies, system thinking, data analysis, social media skills, resource management skills, active learning, communication, emotional intelligence, and teamwork (Adeosun, Shittu, and Owolabi 2022; Ayo-Ayinde 2022; Chaka 2020; Chopra and Purohit 2022; Naidoo and Potokri 2021; Potokri 2022; Reaves 2019; Schwab 2016; World Economic Forum 2023a). These skills are imperative to equip people for success in the 4IR era (Butler-Adam 2018; Chaka 2020; Fitong Ketchiwou and Ngulube 2024). Digital skills are required to use and implement new technologies such as artificial intelligence, cloud computing, quantum computing, robotics, machine learning, 3D printing, genetic engineering, big data, blockchains, process automation, biotechnology, nanotechnology, space technology, neuro-technology, autonomous vehicles, additive manufacturing, augmented reality, and digitization (Adeosun, Shittu and Owolabi 2022; Ayo-Ayinde 2022; Chinyamunjiko et al. 2022; Chopra and Purohit 2022; Kayembe and Nel 2019; Micheni et al. 2021; Omonzejele and Agu 2022; Saidi 2022; Schwab 2016; Venter et al. 2019; Yingyi et al. 2022). Skills considered as skills of the 4IR train the mind to be flexible, agile, and innovative (Fitong Ketchiwou and Ngulube 2023). Increasing

“ Digital skills are required to use and implement new technologies such as artificial intelligence, cloud computing, quantum computing, robotics, machine learning, 3D printing, genetic engineering, big data, blockchains, process automation, biotechnology, nanotechnology, space technology, neuro-technology, autonomous vehicles, additive manufacturing, augmented reality, and digitization. ”

women's access to skill development opportunities prepares them to respond to the rapid changes in the skills demand in the labour market (Chopra and Purohit 2022; World Economic Forum 2023b).

The role of the 4IR in redressing past inequalities

Africa has a history of gender-biased culture and religious norms that hinder women's employment, working conditions, and educational opportunities while men enjoy preferential employment, remuneration, and upward mobility (Mahlatsi 2020; Matotoka and Odeku 2021). The association of women with illiteracy and unskilled jobs reflects the gender and social injustice perpetuated against women (Chiweshe 2019). Also, the revealed gendered patterns in skilling have substantial

ramifications on economic progress, as they affect talent allocation, utilization, and innovation in a world with high demand for fast-evolving skills (World Economic Forum 2023b). Existing inequalities led to further occupational segregation, limited job opportunities for women, and talent scarcity in the 4IR. However, the 4IR has enormous opportunities for women (Chiweshe 2019; Fernandez-Stark et al. 2019; Owasanoye 2020). For example, increasing their employment chances (Jeche 2023; Ndagi and Salihu 2018; Omonzejele and Agu 2023) and their ability to create employment (Ajah and Chigozie-Okwu 2019; Butler-Adams 2018; Potokri 2022). This is in line with the empowerment theory as a tool to regress past gender inequalities.

The 4IR uses digital and smart technologies, automated systems, robots, and computerised heavy machinery that are easy to use by any gender. Thus, women can now access jobs that previously required physical strength and traditional male-dominated jobs (i.e., manufacturing, mining, and construction) (Fernandez-Stark et al. 2019; Jeche 2023). Agriculture is one of the sectors in which women excel, and technological advancement offers women opportunities to use automated machinery and smart farming methods to alleviate strenuous, rigorous, and hard labour. Advanced technologies also increase productivity, increase yields, lower costs, secure better financial gains, improve efficiency, and reduce environmental impact (Tanjea and Suraiya 2019; Jeche 2023), thereby breaking technical barriers and gender bias in the employment of women in male-dominated fields.

Likewise, women often do the bulk of unpaid female domestic work in patriarchal and dichotomised and stereotyped underdeveloped societies; hence, equipping them with 4IR skills can replace physical labour for financially rewarding employment (Jeche 2023). Employment can secure the financial empowerment of women (Kamberidou and Pascall 2020; Matotoka and Odeku 2021), and if the 4IR does not contribute towards this agenda, it may fail African women and perpetuate records of social exclusion (Jeche 2023; Micheni et al. 2021). As skills and employment levels augment in the continent, inequality gaps will reduce (Chinyamunjiko, Simon, and Bhibhi 2022; Yingyi, Hlungwani, and Nyagadza 2022), resulting in lower poverty levels (Ebekozien and Aigbavboa 2021; Manda and Dhaou 2019).

Technologies, digital apps, digital platforms, digital trade, e-commerce, and artificial intelligence (AI) will result in substantial labour market disruptions and job displacements (World Economic Forum 2023a). Automation and robotics in an unskilled workforce will result in significant job losses (Butler-Adam 2018; Oke and Fernandes 2020). This will cause the gradual disappearance of jobs in traditional trades, professions, industries, and sectors (Akparobore, Omosekejimi, and Nweke 2020; Yingyi, Hlungwani, and Nyagadza 2022). Research shows that women are more likely to perform unskilled jobs that will be automated (Christiaense and Demery 2018; Madgavkar et al. 2019). The fastest-growing roles are driven by technology, digitalization, and sustainability, while the fastest-declining roles are clerical or secretarial, postal service clerks, bank tellers and associated clerks, cashiers, data entry clerks, and ticket clerks (World Economic Forum 2023a). Unfortunately, these declining roles also fall under unskilled jobs often held by women. Skill gaps will disrupt labour markets across economies (Chamola et al. 2020; Schwab 2016; Soh and Connolly 2020) and broaden the gap between the rich and the poor (Chinyamunjiko, Simon, and Bhibhi 2022; Moyo 2022; Ndagi and Salihu 2018; Omonzejele and Agu 2023). Therefore, given the multifaceted inequalities on the continent, the 4IR could perpetuate and further marginalize the poor majority (Kayembe and Nel 2019; Fomunyam 2019; Mahlatsi 2020), thereby increasing women's vulnerability to accentuate unemployment and poverty (Barclay 2018; Micheni et al. 2021; Potokri 2022). Without social inclusiveness, the 4IR will not benefit women, thereby perpetuating male dominance in many ways, especially in Africa. Equipping women with the skills necessary to operate efficiently in the digital world can enhance their chances of achieving meaningful and executive employment (Matotoka and Odeku 2021; Micheni et al. 2021). Developing women's skills can also eradicate gender inequality, reduce poverty, and fast-track development (Jeche 2023; Oke and Fernandes 2020). Thus, empowering women with relevant skills for the 4IR is vital to redressing existing inequalities and securing their employability.

Methodology

This research used a qualitative approach because it allowed the researchers to source rich content

that enabled them to explore how women in Africa can be empowered with skills for the 4IR, within a limited timeframe (Creswell and Creswell 2018; Marshal, Rossman, and Blanco 2022). The researchers used an integrative review approach (Snyder 2019; Kutcher and LeBaron 2022).

Researchers used Google Scholar to source literature on the 4IR and women. Google Scholar was chosen because it is a reliable and free open-access academic search engine that gives access to interdisciplinary publications, indexing both peer-reviewed articles and grey literature, which might not be fully captured by other databases. The careful search strategy and cross-checks were added to ensure comprehensive coverage of relevant literature for this research and the replicability of the study. We used the review process proposed by Kutcher and LeBaron (2022), which includes: select a topic, determine the aim of the study (refer to the introduction), conduct the literature search (refer to methodology section), organise and evaluate literature, analyse and synthesise results (refer to section on findings) summarise findings and conclude, disseminate findings (refer to the conclusion).

Key search string used to search articles included *Women* OR *female* and “fourth industrial revolution* or *industry 4.0* or *4IR* and *Africa* or *developing country*, and *skills* or *competencies* or *ability*. Only peer-reviewed journals written in English between 2018 and 2023 were considered in this study. Articles that did not meet these criteria were excluded. The initial search resulted in 917 articles. The titles, abstracts, and content of these articles were examined to decide if they were relevant in helping us meet the research objectives. In a few cases, relevant articles cited in the consulted literature were used to support the literature. This resulted in 24 articles, which were evaluated in full using the reviewer approach suggested by Kutcher and LeBaron (2022), where the 2 authors reviewed the evaluation independently, based on predetermined criteria stipulated in the inclusion and exclusion criteria and in line with the research objective.

A manual content analysis approach was used to analyse data (Neuman 2014). The first step consisted of scanning through articles to ensure they met the selection criteria and to ascertain the relevance

of each article for the study. The researchers then read the selected articles thoroughly and analysed them in-depth as guided by the research objective and research question independently. Common themes were identified, organised as discussed in the next section, and later presented in Figure 1.

Findings: Empowering women with skills for the 4IR

Empowering African women to be skilled for 4IR will require the state, employers, and women assuming their share of responsibility.

Responsibilities of governments

Despite the male dominance in sciences and digitization, having the right measures can propel women to be on par with men and take the lead (Kayembe and Nel 2019; Potokri 2022). Matotoka and Odeku (2021) and Micheni et al. (2021) confirm that confronting the low level of digital skills that sideline women will require drafting, recalibrating, or revising targeted policies, legal framework, guidelines, and practices around social justice, equity, and diversity. Women should be part of the process involved in designing these frameworks. This regulatory framework should aim at skilling women, facilitating their employment and promotion in critical economic sectors in the 4IR. Some countries have made remarkable progress in promoting gender equality. Iceland, Norway, Finland, New Zealand, Sweden, and Germany are the top 6 countries that have nearly closed their gender gap (World Economic Forum 2023b) through their legislation, policy incentives, and resource allocation.

African governments need to implement industrialisation programmes to promote women’s advancement using affirmative action initiatives across the different sectors (Jeche 2023). Such programmes need to be adequately customised to address the challenges women face in each sector and promote social inclusion in the development of STEM skills and the 4IR skills. Sectoral targets could be added to fast-track gender equity in the different sectors. Governments should also break down the myths about gendered skills in some fields and promote the ideology of equal intellectual capabilities for all at an early age. They also need to break stereotypes, promote parental influence, create

employment and entrepreneurial opportunities, and develop role models for girls and women (Abe and Chikoko 2020; Kibirige and Modjadji 2022; Makola and Tabane 2023). For example, having pictures of female professionals exercising in male-dominated fields like engineering and medicine in primary and secondary schools. This can create a mental stimulus for girls and the desire to pursue their education and career in those fields. Giving motivational talks to pupils and encouraging them to choose STEM-related subjects can also help. Above all, governments can create platforms to support girls who are willing to do STEM subjects, girls who struggle to pass STEM subjects, and not only focus on girls who are doing well in those subjects. Funded community or school tutors could also assist in improving performance in STEM subjects. Education funding should prioritize funding and supporting the education of females (Mahlatsi 2020).

To meet the rapidly evolving demand for skills, governments need focused financial investments in adult education, training, and lifelong learning, in line with sustainable development goals (World Economic Forum 2023b). For example, waiving age limits and excellent previous academic performance in scholarships for women who assume multiple family responsibilities and who come from underprivileged backgrounds. Such scholarships could be granted for a year, renewable subject to a certain level of performance. This can give women a chance to further their education and pursue their careers in the STEM field despite previous limitations.

With the gender digital divide being a challenge in Africa, governments should have initiatives to resolve the digital inequality paradox to ensure that women are not sidelined by the inevitable technological developments (Jeche 2023; Mahlatsi 2020). The overall purpose of such initiatives should be to protect women, strengthen their economic status, promote social autonomy, offer them security, and support resilience (Mahlatsi 2020; World Economic Forum 2022). Education for women should be used as a powerful tool to proactively tackle the root causes of gender inequity and barriers that keep women out of educational systems (Micheni et al. 2021; Walker et al. 2019).

The government is responsible for providing a relevant talent pool for companies by funding skills development that connects talent to employment (World Economic Forum 2023a). States should eliminate barriers and increase access to innovative technologies for women (Kamberidou and Pascall 2020; Micheni et al. 2021). The government can also increase the pool of skills for the 4IR by harnessing the unemployed and those already in the workforce to create resilient innovation opportunities (Alexander 2021).

Responsibilities of corporates

Corporations are responsible for identifying employees' training needs and supporting their development. A report of a global survey conducted by the World Economic Forum (2023a) states that six in every ten workers will need training before 2027, yet only half of workers seem to have access to adequate training opportunities. More so, two-thirds of companies anticipate a return on their investment in skills training within a year (World Economic Forum 2023a), which provides a business case for companies' investments in developing women. Targeted development that equips women for the technological world has become essential (Chopra and Purohit 2022; Jeche 2023; Mahlatsi 2020).

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Maintaining women in jobs has been costly due to the current fragmented work arrangements and high competition for employment, which has made women lose some work-related advantages like paid maternity leave (Micheni et al. 2021). Although it is more financially profitable and less challenging to employ men, laws require organisations to employ and include women. It is therefore vital for companies to comply with existing gender laws and ensure that training and associated promotion opportunities do not exclude women (Fitong Ketchiwou et al. 2022; Matotoka and Odeku 2021). Hence, companies need adequate structures and initiatives to empower women with skills of the 4IR that will enable them to participate in the workplace equally and profitably. Gender-friendly policies and practices, enhanced work experience, mentorship, work involvement, training, and bursary programmes would be beneficial (Barclay 2018; Fitong Ketchiwou and Dzansi 2023; Wright 2018). Organisations should design personalised initiatives to mitigate the effects of gender experiences that limit women's careers. Such initiatives could consider the stage of the woman, in both the family life cycle and career life cycle. This approach will help to unlock her potential through self-awareness, goal setting, and 4IR skills building. For example, a mid-career woman who is in her childbearing years may want to balance her family and career to take care of her young children. Thus, she may need flexible development programmes that equip her with relevant skills for the contemporary era.

Globally, most employers ranked women as the most prioritised group for diversity, equity, and

inclusion programmes in all industries worldwide, with 78% indicating that they will prioritize women, 68% will prioritize youth under 25 years, and 51% will prioritize people with disabilities (World Economic Forum 2023a). Hence, the current technological emergence presents opportunities for the corporate sector to reflect on the training and development needs of women and empower them with skills to achieve equity and diversity in this current dispensation.

Personal responsibility

Workforce development is usually the responsibility of companies and employees (Ayo-Ayinde 2022; World Economic Forum 2023a). For African women to harness opportunities associated with the 4IR, personal investment in developing relevant skills is required of them (Oke and Fernandes 2020; Walker et al. 2019). Women also need to develop mental bravery, self-motivation, optimism, self-confidence (Fitong and van der Walt 2023; Mahlatsi 2020; Potokri 2022), self-determination, and anticipated value (Abe and Chikoko 2020; Kibirige and Modjadji 2022). This is vital for women to enter the workplace and succeed in the 4IR, especially in male-dominated fields. Women need to develop a flair and positive attitude toward technology and innovation to be able to effectively use, develop, and empower themselves with skills for the 4IR and to strategically position themselves in line with the demands of the 4IR (Adeosun, Shittu, and Owolabi 2022; Akparobore, Omosekejimi, and Nweke 2020). Government interventions and company initiatives may not yield expected results unless there is personal commitment from women.

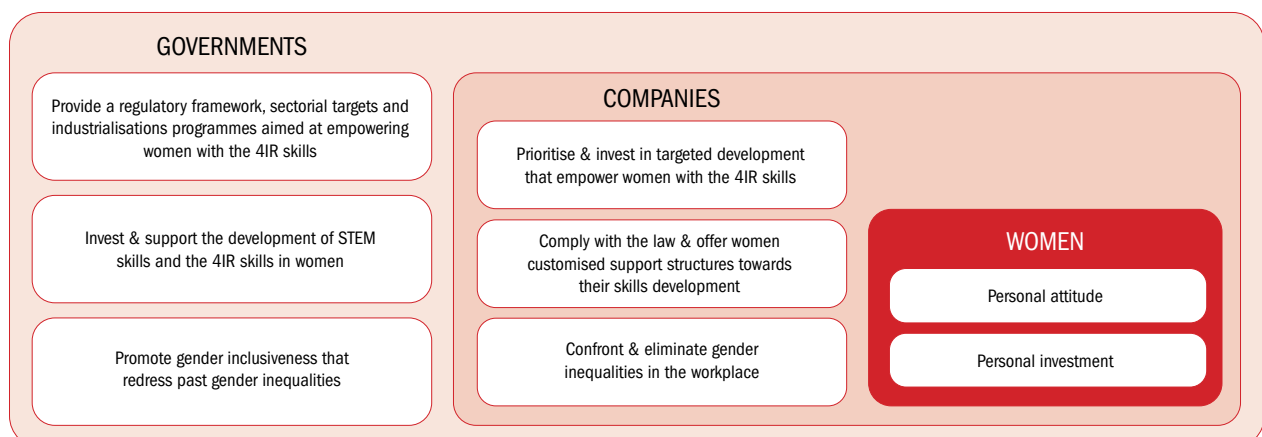


Figure 1. A model for empowering African women with skills required in the era of the 4IR.

Findings reveal that empowering African women with skills relevant in the 4IR era will require an appropriate state regulatory framework with legislation, policies, guidelines, funding schemes, and support mechanisms that promote the development of 4IR skills for women and redress past gender inequalities across different sectors and industries. Companies need to prioritize investing in empowering women with 4IR skills, comply with the law, institutionalize personalized support structures for women, and strive towards gender friendly workplaces. Lastly, women need to invest in themselves and have the right attitude towards their development for empowerment initiatives to be successful.

Practical and policy implications of the study

This research proposes a multi-stakeholder framework involving government, firms, and women, with each having a key role to play in empowering African women with 4IR skills. Policy makers can use findings from this study to promote the development of 4IR skills in women. Some lessons should be learnt from Luxembourg and Iceland with the highest percentages of women working in tech and tech-related jobs in Europe (AIPRM 2025). In Africa, Nigeria, South Africa, and Kenya fund and support the development of technological skills and tech startups formation for women, thus giving them access to tech-related employment (Veriv Africa 2025). A few practical examples provided in the next paragraphs can be replicated in African countries.

In Luxembourg, the Girls in Digital (GID) is an initiative designed in 2004 by WIDE (Women in Digital Empowerment) and the Luxembourgish Ministry of Equality. This online database aims to support youths, especially girls, to leverage digital opportunities through numerous resources in key disciplines for the future (such as STEM, AI, coding, and programming). GID offers a variety of online courses, fun workshops, games, and other content to educate on technology and improve skills in courses such as data science, programming, and cybersecurity. Some of the resources on the platform include STEM-focused quizzes to access digital knowledge and teach learners about STEM. Another resource includes Math and Science Tutor, where girls and women can acquire knowledge on problem-solving techniques, access instructional

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videos on STEM fields, and receive step-by-step guidance. They also have a program called Brilliant, where there is an immersive and highly engaged learning experience for participants to learn how to solve problems in a very interactive way (Petit 2024).

In Nigeria, the Gina Mata, Gina Al-Umma' program, translated from Hausa as “Building Women, Empowering Communities,” was launched in 2023 by the World Bank (Lawal and Robinson 2025). It aims to train girls and young women in Northern Nigeria in market-driven digital skills to help them access employment and economic opportunities. The program focuses on females from under-represented communities and vulnerable groups, such as those in internally displaced camps, young women facing economic hardship, and survivors of gender-based violence. The curriculum covers social media marketing, content marketing, online safety, financial literacy, STEM subjects, and remote work for the virtual economy supported by socio-

emotional skills, mentorship, financing earnings, and a practical career pathway. The success of this program informed the World Bank's Adolescent Girls Initiative for Learning and Empowerment (AGILE) project, aimed at improving secondary education for girls aged between 10 and 20. This is done by integrating training in digital skills in school curricula, providing computer labs, and equipping teachers.

In South Africa, the TechnoGirl Trust is a successful program designed by UWESO Consulting in collaboration with UNICEF and the Department of Basic Education, for girls and young women interested in STEM. The strategic purpose is to promote STEM careers among females through job shadowing and alumni empowerment for girls in school, as well as digital and 4IR training for unemployed females. The institution collaborates with corporates to expose and motivate girls to take up STEM careers where women are under-represented, to address the gender discrepancy in opportunities and the cycle of poverty for girls that impede social and economic transformation (TechnoGirl Trust 2025).

Again, in South Africa, the Department of Science, Technology, and Innovation (2025) launched the Women in Technology and Innovation Program in 2025. This pioneering initiative aims to address the systemic challenges women innovators and entrepreneurs face in the country and foster inclusive national innovation. It focuses on empowering women entrepreneurs through access to funding, mentorship, and creating an enabling environment for innovation to accelerate women's contributions in shaping South Africa's technological advancements and economic growth.

There are also company initiatives, such as the one in which the ABSA group collaborates with Women in Tech, an international non-profit organisation with the mission of closing the gender gap and supporting women pursuing careers in technology (ABSA 2023). The organisation drives women's empowerment through education, business, digital inclusion, self-confidence development, mentorship, and advocacy. Thanks to this program, women in the information and communications technology (ICT) sector across Africa and the globe can connect. Thus, allowing them to converse on the gender gap and related issues, access critical skills and mentorship, create jobs, increase female representation, provide opportunities for

women to advance, champion women at work, and empower women and girls for leading roles in technology. This is achieved through initiatives such as workshops, summits and the Women in Tech Africa Awards. The Women in Tech Africa Awards celebrate innovation, highlight women's achievements and their contribution to the technology sector, and increase the visibility of women making the mark in the industry. Hence, other women can learn, connect, collaborate, and grow. In addition to this program, ABSA is involved in other initiatives focusing on the development of skills of the future and the upliftment of women.

Conclusion

This study has explored how to empower women with the 4IR skills using the theory of human capital, the postmodern feminism theory, and the empowerment theory. We conclude that the responsibility to empower women in the 4IR relies on the government, corporates, and women. African governments need to provide a robust regulatory framework, funding, and support structures that will address past gender inequalities and facilitate the empowerment of women with skills relevant to the 4IR. Firms also need to invest resources in the development of women, specifically targeting the development of skills relevant to the 4IR workplace. However, for government and company initiatives to be successful, the commitment and investment of women in their personal development is imperative.

The new working arrangements and frontier technologies of the 4IR dispensation require a different type of education and skills development. Women have been disadvantaged in the past, and gender inequality persists even in this technological era. Hence, women need to be empowered for equal employment, productivity, and wage parity. Accelerating progress towards gender parity, igniting renewed growth, and increasing resilience in this dispensation of disruptive technologies requires collective and coordinated actions by the government, private sector, and women. The successful examples provided in the preceding section could be replicated within the African countries. The dissemination of this research, through publication, provides an input for policymakers, governments, companies, and women to strategize on how to empower women with relevant skills for the 4IR.

Limitations and recommendations for future studies

The search was done on Google Scholar using selected keywords. Future research could consider other databases and keywords. This paper broadly discusses Africa without taking into consideration the different contexts, such as urban and rural, North and Sub-Saharan Africa, which may weaken its applicability to specific regions or countries. Future studies should consider diversity and conduct quantitative or qualitative studies on the topic. Also, more country-specific research is recommended in the future.

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Neglectful Parenting Style and its Impact on the Upbringing of the Girl child as Depicted in M.E. Wanda's *Kunjalo-ke*

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Abstract

The upbringing of a child plays a critical role in shaping their personality, behavior, and overall development. This process entails the act of nurturing and guiding a child to maturity. It encompasses emotional, social, and intellectual support parents or caregivers provide for children. Neglectful parenting, however, a style characterised by a lack of responsiveness, attention, and emotional involvement by parents, poses significant challenges, particularly to the girl child. This paper explores the impact of this type of parenting style on the upbringing of the girl child through the lenses of social learning theory. It highlights the evident challenges and long-term consequences as depicted in M.E. Wanda's novel, *Kunjalo-ke*. The article examines the immediate and lasting effects of neglectful parenting. This includes lack of trust, impaired social development and poor academic performance, lack of emotional security and identity formation, sense of deceptiveness, and intergenerational trauma.

Keywords: Neglectful parenting, child upbringing, literary critique, novel

Introduction

In the words of Baumrind (1999), neglectful parenting style is typically represented by rejecting-neglecting and non-directive parents. Non-directive parents are characterized by low levels of demand and moderate responsiveness. In contrast, rejecting-neglecting parents exhibit low levels of both demand and responsiveness and are generally disengaged from their children's activities. Healthline (2022) concurs with Baumrind by asserting that neglectful parenting typically manifests in multiple forms, including physical neglect (e.g., lack of adequate food, shelter, or medical care), emotional neglect (e.g., absence of affection, attention, or validation), and general disengagement from the child's life. Uninvolved parents often do not know their children's friends, are unaware of their performance in school, and do not set clear expectations or rules. This neglect can stem from various causes, such as substance abuse, mental health issues, or overwhelming life stressors (Verywell Family 2021).

One cannot separate the upbringing of a child from parenting styles. It should be the first thing that crosses somebody's mind when they think about the upbringing of a child. According to Boldyrev (1979), in simpler societies, upbringing was not defined by specific structured activities. Instead, it involved the younger generation gaining practical knowledge through the direct experience of older individuals. This learning occurred during work, ceremonies, and recreational activities, where younger people developed essential skills and habits for their future roles. Upbringing was largely seen as a transmission of life rules, passed down orally across generations. In such societies, where there were no distinct socio-economic classes, all children received a similar form of upbringing. However, Boldyrev notes that the division of labor between men and women led to some differences in the upbringing of boys and girls. This is evident in the novel *Kunjalo-ke* (2008) by M.E. Wanda, where a girl from such a background experiences a similar upbringing.

Marx and Engels (1848) align with Boldyrev's perspective above, asserting that upbringing is shaped by the society and social interactions in which a child is immersed. They emphasize the role of society's direct or indirect involvement

“ One cannot separate the upbringing of a child from parenting styles. ”

through institutions such as schools and other forms of community engagement in shaping a child's development. The environment in which children grow up plays a crucial role in determining who they will become in the future. It is often said that children learn by observation, meaning they are likely to imitate the behaviors and actions they see around them. Children do not only learn from their parents; their upbringing is also influenced by peers, teachers, and society as a whole. In traditional African communities, for example, children were taught that every elder was a parent, regardless of biological relation. The concept of “parent” extended beyond just biological parents to include any adult in the community who played a role in the child's upbringing.

Today, it is evident that many children lack a strong sense of morality. They often act without consideration for others, especially elders, and fail to show respect. For some, this behavior is learned by observing their parents. Research indicates that children tend to mimic the actions they see, and parents who express anger frequently are more likely to pass on these emotional patterns to their children. As a result, there is now a generation of angry children, who are often resistant to learning and reluctant to improve their lives. Many of these children grow up witnessing the abuse of their parents, which makes them overly defensive. This article will explore this issue in greater depth through an analysis of M.E. Wanda's *Kunjalo-ke* (2008).

Mabuza (2021, p. 34) asserts that children from upper-class families, who had access to better resources, were often sent to private secondary schools, granting them opportunities for higher education. However, entry into higher education was more challenging for children from less privileged backgrounds. One of the issues arising from this disparity is that girls raised in such environments sometimes exhibit moral decline, though this is not true for all of them. Some,

especially those who are resilient, strive to improve their circumstances and become better individuals. This will be explored through the character known as Dumazile Kheswa in the novel.

While Wanda, in the highlighted novel above, depicts the neglectful parenting style and its effects on the development of the girl child, so far, there seems to be no academic study that has been conducted focusing on this aspect of his work. Mabuza (2021), on whose masters' study this article is based on, is probably the only scholar who has done so. Previous studies by Mihret et al (2019), Odame – Mensah et al (2018), Edet & Nkereuwen (2024), Seth & Ghormode (2013), Kapoor & Kapoor (2021), Tripathi & Pandey (2024), Sarwar (2016), Avdibegovic & Brkic (2020), Janius et al (2024), Wambua & K'okul (2024), Bedu – addo et al (2023), Mwanzia (2022), McWhiter (2023), Kuppens & Ceulemans (2019) and Mensah & Kuranchie (2023), highlight the negative impact of poor parenting styles from an educational and psychological perspective. In general, there is limited scholarship that uncovers parenting styles from a literary criticism point of view. Most studies on parenting styles are also empirical in nature, and they are not done within the context of the South African black community. In addition, in the context to the isiZulu language, for instance, the only notable study that is literary in nature and similar to this one is by Thwala & Tshabalala (2023) who analyze the significance of parental involvement in the child's schooling process as depicted in N.G Dlamini's drama volume titled *Impicabadala*. While the study at hand focuses on neglectful parenting styles and its effect on children in a novel, Thwala's & Shabalala's (Op cit.) study focuses on the negative impact of divorce on children as depicted in a drama book.

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Theoretical framework

This article is underpinned by social learning theory. The social learning theory focuses on how a child's behavior is shaped by interactions with others. It suggests that children learn by observing the actions of adults and then replicating those behaviors when faced with similar situations. Pajares (2002) notes that social learning theory, or “observational learning,” is based on the premise that learning occurs through observing others and later imitating their behavior. In other words, people learn by witnessing the actions of others and the consequences that follow. This enables individuals to either reproduce the observed behavior and gain rewards or avoid certain actions to prevent undesirable outcomes.

Bowers (1973) emphasises that behavior arises from the interaction between individuals and their environments, rather than from either factor in isolation. This implies that a child's learning depends not only on interpersonal interactions but also on the specific situations in which those interactions take place. Bandura (1977) introduces the concept of “reinforcement” within this framework, suggesting that behaviors can be modeled through rewards for positive actions or punishments for negative ones. He also differentiates between unidirectional and reciprocal interactions, explaining that in a unidirectional model, individuals and situations are treated as independent factors that combine to influence behavior. However, Bandura's theory accounts for the more complex and reciprocal nature of these influences in shaping behavior.

Methodology

The novel *Kunjalo-ke* (2008), which this article analyses, serves as the primary source. This suggests that data is collected, organised and interpreted from this novel. Since this novel is the primary source, this implies that this study is done qualitatively through textual analysis as a research technique. According to Bowen (2009, p. 28), primary data can be collected through a variety of techniques and this includes interviews, surveys, focus groups, and texts/documents. As the selected research technique, textual analysis involves a systematic analysis of a text. It focuses on the underlying themes, content, meaning, and ideological or cultural assumptions of a text

(Fursich 2009, p. 240). The scope and aim of textual analysis is in line with the interests of this paper, which is to conduct a systematic analysis of the selected novel to understand neglectful parenting styles and its impact on the upbringing of a girl child. The novel was purposively selected because of its clear and extensive depiction of a neglectful parenting style. However, since the study analyses one novel, this could also be acknowledged as a limitation. To cover for this, data from other studies is also considered to guide the analysis and findings of this study.

The synopsis of the novel *Kunjalo-ke*

The novel is about a young girl named Dumazile Kheswa. Dumazile is neglected by her parents, who send her to study far from home. When she arrives at her rented room, they provide nothing for her, not even basic necessities like food. One could say they have forgotten about her existence. This neglect makes Dumazile vulnerable and easily lured by her male teacher, Moloji, who sends her on errands and then gives her R50. Dumazile is an only child, raised in a family of three: her mother (MaNdovela), her father (Kheswa), and herself. This means her only behavioral influences are her parents. She has no contact with extended family members, so she is not used to interacting with others and finds it difficult to relate to people. This becomes evident when she is left in the care of the landlord, an elderly woman. Although the woman notices that something might be wrong and tries to reach out, hoping Dumazile will open up about what is troubling her, Dumazile chooses instead to lie.

Despite growing up in a nuclear family, Dumazile does not have a good relationship with her father. There is never a moment when she is able to sit down and talk or discuss anything with him. One of the reasons for this disconnect is that her father drinks alcohol and becomes easily angered. Additionally, the disrespect MaNdovela shows toward her husband, Kheswa, influences Dumazile's perception of him. As a result, she never takes her father seriously. When Dumazile eventually enters an intimate relationship with Moloji, she struggles to determine whether he truly loves her or simply lusts after her. This confusion stems from the fact that she has never experienced genuine love, particularly not from her father, so she does not know what being truly loved feels like.

The R50 that Dumazile receives from Moloji leads her to believe that she is experiencing true love, simply because she has never received such attention or care from her father, Kheswa. Growing up in a household where her mother consistently disrespected her father, Dumazile internalizes this behavior and later reproduces it in her own marriage to Mtalaselwa.

In her marriage, Dumazile mirrors the toxic patterns she witnessed in her parents' relationship, despite being aware of how harmful they were, particularly when her father was misled by a traditional healer about her health. Nevertheless, Dumazile repeats the same mistake by consulting a traditional healer for advice about her own marital problems. She also shows disrespect toward her husband and acts behind his back, ultimately creating dysfunction within her own family, just as she experienced in her childhood home.

Discussion

As indicated earlier, this article aims to shed light on what neglectful parenting style is and its effects on a girl child's overall development. It delves deeper into the consequences or effects of this parenting style. Neglectful parents are low in responsiveness or control. The consequences of this type of parenting, with reference to Dumazile as a character in the novel, are analysed according to the following sub-headings: lack of trust, impaired social development and poor academic performance, lack of emotional security and identity formation, sense of deceptiveness and intergenerational trauma.

Lack of trust

In the novel, the author introduces readers to Dumazile's parents: Kheswa, the father, and MaNdovela, the mother. They can be seen as neglectful parents, as they are portrayed as having allowed their daughter to live alone while attending school. This situation leads to Dumazile developing trust issues. Dumazile is essentially neglected, as there is a complete lack of communication between her and her parents. They simply leave her in someone else's home, renting a room for her without even attempting to build a relationship with the landlord. As a result, Dumazile never feels comfortable speaking to the old woman when she has problems. Instead,

she continually lies to the elderly woman. This is proven in the following words:

“Awu mntanomtani! Kanti akufundwa yini lapha eZenzeleni?” “Usho ngani gogo?” “Ngisho ngoba nayizolo ubuye ngaso lesi sikhathi.” “Ngicelile kuthisha ukuba ngizo-ayina izingubo zami lezi ebengizwasha izolo.”

(“Oh my grandchild! Are you not learning at Zenzeleni?” “Why do you say so granny?” “Because even yesterday you came back at this time,” “I asked permission from the teacher to come and iron my clothes that I washed yesterday.”) [authors’ translation].

(Wanda 2004, p. 8)

The excerpt reveals that Dumazile is not comfortable sharing her problems with the landlord because she is not accustomed to confiding in an elder. Her discomfort stems from the fact that her parents abandoned her at the landlord’s home without establishing any form of connection or support. As a result, Dumazile likely does not trust that the landlord can help her, given that her own parents have shown no interest in her life since she left them. She assumes that others will treat her the same way. Children in such situations often miss valuable opportunities because they struggle to trust others easily.

Impaired social development and poor academic performance

Darling (1999, p. 4) asserts that children with neglectful parents perform the worst in terms of social competence and academic achievement, and they tend to exhibit more behavioral problems than children raised under other parenting styles. One would agree with Darling, as Dumazile displays these characteristics. Her behavior suggests that Wanda, the author, fully concurs with Darling’s perspective, as reflected in the following words:

Zahamba izinsuku, baqala ukukhononda othisha ngomsebenzi kaDumazile. Izinga kanye nomfutho wakhe wokusebenza wawusqala ukwehla impela. Uma kunguMsombuluko nje wayefika esikoleni engawenzile umsebenzi ayekade ewunikezwe ngoLwesihlanu. Babevama ukungcebeleka ngezimpelasonto nothisha balale emahhotela agudle umtata

kumbe ulwandle. Izinga lokuhlonipha othisha bakhe laya ngokuya lancipha. Omisi nawomemu bona wayebabukisa okozakwabo. Kwakuthi uma bethi bayamthuma phela njengengane, avela achize ukotshi.

(Days went by, and teachers began complaining about Dumazile’s performance. Her academic level and work ethic started to decline significantly. On Mondays, she would come to school without having completed the work assigned on Fridays. She and Moloi would spend weekends relaxing and sleeping in hotels near the sea. Her respect for teachers diminished; she began looking at female teachers as if they were her equals. When they tried to instruct her or send her on errands like a child, she would become angry.) [authors’ translation].

(Wanda 2004, p. 14)

Wanda is trying to highlight some of the challenges faced by the girl child as a result of being raised by neglectful parents. Dumazile shows no respect for her teachers because she lacks proper guidance. Left to fend for herself, she struggles to distinguish right from wrong. With no one to correct or reprimand her when she makes mistakes, she becomes resistant to authority. When her teachers try to guide her, she reacts with anger, as she is not accustomed to being told what to do or how to behave.

Every child needs their parents by their side, they need to be loved and cared for. If a girl child is deprived of these two essentials, she may end up behaving like Dumazile. Dumazile lacks a father figure in her life. Although her father is present, her mother teaches her to view him as useless. Whatever Kheswa says in the home is not taken seriously, as it is believed that he cannot speak sense due to his alcohol consumption. This is reflected in his words below:

“MaNdovela ngangivele ngiyibonile mina le nto ukuthi ingane idweba umhlaba nje, ishiya izikole lapha endaweni, iyozifaka obishini. Awubheke manje akusafundwa koMbumbulu. Ukube nangilalela MaNdovela, ngabe ayikho yonke le nto. Wukuthi nina bantu besifazane nibuswa yingqondo yokuthi thina bantubotshwala asazi lutho.”

("MaNdovela, I saw that this thing of allowing the child to go and learn far, leaving schools in our area, was going to put her in trouble. Look now, they are not learning at Mbumbulu. If you had listened to me, MaNdovela, this problem would not be here. It is just that you women are controlled by the mentality that we people who drink alcohol know nothing.") [authors' translation].

(Wanda 2004, p. 27)

Lack of emotional security and identity formation

The lack of emotional security and identity formation often results from the absence of a father figure in the life of a girl child, which can significantly affect her relationships. Schmitz (2016: 19) suggests that if men are portrayed as incompetent parents through widespread cultural messages, they may internalize these beliefs and disengage from parenting. This is evident in Kheswa's behavior, as he allows MaNdovela to make all decisions regarding Dumazile. He even states that he is not taken seriously because society sends messages that people who drink alcohol know nothing.

Maccoby and Martin (1983) concur with Schmitz by describing such parents as uninvolved. They show little commitment to caregiving beyond the minimum effort required to feed and clothe their children. These parents are often overwhelmed by the many pressures and stresses in their lives, leaving them little time or energy for their children. As a result, they cope with parenting demands by doing only what is necessary to avoid inconvenience. While they may respond to a child's immediate demands for easily accessible objects, their efforts toward long-term goals, such as establishing and enforcing rules about homework or acceptable social behavior, are weak and inconsistent. This is evident in the novel *Kunjalo-ke* by M. E. Wanda. Kheswa and MaNdovela are seen only a few times showing minimal commitment to Dumazile. They send her to school but never make any effort to visit her where she stays. Not once in the novel do they express concern about what she is eating or how she is managing her schoolwork. This neglect is one reason Dumazile ends up dating her teacher, as reflected in the following words:

"Uthisha yena uyangithanda bandla. Washo futhi ukuthi ngingaqhutshwa nguyena ezifundweni zami esikoleni, angikhokhele zonke izidingo zesikole. Yena angakwenza ngempela lokho, unayo imali. Buka nje, kuyinto elula kabi kuyena ukungishiya nephepha elibomvu uma kade ngimenzela itiy."

("The teacher loves me, though. He even said he can pay for me to continue my studies and take care of all my school needs. He really can do that, he has money. Imagine, it is a simple thing for him to leave me with R50 after I make tea for him.") [authors' translation].

(Wanda 2004, p. 12)

Dumazile believes her teacher loves her because she does not truly understand what love is, having never experienced it from her own parents. She equates love with the material things her parents cannot provide, which Molozi promises her. Girls in situations like Dumazile's often struggle to relate to men, as they have not learned how to navigate relationships with them. This difficulty can continue into their marriages and workplaces. This parenting style presents significant challenges for the girl child. Mhlongo (2018, p. 90) notes that girls must manage peer pressure related to sexual activity. Many girls coerced into sexual relationships with older men, especially teachers, fail to report these encounters to their parents or others because the men promise support or even marriage if pregnancy occurs.

Dumazile has no one to share her problems with, as she is alone in her rented room, without family or friends. The pain of isolation leads her to turn to Molozi, her teacher, for comfort. Mzulwini (1996, p. 31) states that the caring presence of a mother creates a space where a child feels at home. In the mother's presence, the child is protected and can safely explore the world under her watchful eye, an experience Dumazile is denied.

The issue with Dumazile is not only that she lives far from home, but also that even when she is at home, she never has a serious conversation with her father. Kheswa is difficult to talk to and easily irritated. This situation can be attributed to MaNdovela, who never acknowledges him as the man of the house in front of their daughter. As a

result, Dumazile likely experiences a void where a father figure should be. This is reflected in the following words:

Kuthi xhifi kumnumzane Kheswa ezwakale esethi: ngangivele ngishilo kodwa MaNdovela! Asukume, aphume esacikekile eya endlini yabo yokulala.

(Mr. Kheswa got irritated and was heard saying: "I did say, MaNdovela!" She stood up and went to their bedroom, angry.) [authors' translation].

(Wanda 2004, p. 25-26)

This is another challenge faced by the girl child. Because they are not used to having a male figure who is approachable and loving, they often turn to anyone who will take advantage of their vulnerability, as Moloï does with Dumazile. He makes empty promises to her but ultimately ruins her life and abandons her. This highlights why fathers must consistently show love, care, and support to their daughters, making it easier for them to confide in their fathers when they face problems like Dumazile's. If Dumazile had a strong relationship with her father, she might have taken a bus the same day to report to him. Unfortunately, she does not, and instead turns to Moloï for support.

Sense of deceptiveness

Maccoby and Martin (1983) highlight that neglectful parents are parents who are uninvolved, and they show little commitment to their children. This is evident in the novel when Dumazile returns home and tells her parents about a "war" at school, neither MaNdovela nor Kheswa make any effort to visit the school and verify her claims. This is despite the fact that they notice other children from the neighborhood, who attend the same school, are not returning home. This situation presents yet another challenge for the girl child. Children raised by such parents often behave rebelliously, knowing their parents lack curiosity and concern. As a result, Dumazile is able to get away with lying.

MaNdovela is seen again repeating the same neglectful behavior when she takes Dumazile to the hospital. She leaves Dumazile alone with the doctor, who then gives the report directly to Dumazile. MaNdovela acts irresponsibly, as she does not follow up with the doctor to find out for

herself what is wrong with her daughter. Instead, she chooses to believe the lies Dumazile tells her. Her lack of involvement leads Kheswa to believe that Dumazile has been bewitched. This is reflected in the following words:

Izinyawo zikaDumazile zabe sezivuvukile sekungamagqikolo nje. Wayesehamba ebathazela njengekewu. Uyise wathi nhla, wayesephedukela ngakuMaNdovela, wathatha wathi: umeqo phela lo! Awubuzwa nakubuzwa, "umeqo ngempela lona! Igazi sizolibona seliza ngamakhala khona manje nje."

(Dumazile's feet were swollen to shreds. She was now walking like a duck. Her father looked once, turned to MaNdovela, and said: "This is witchcraft. You do not even have to ask, it is witchcraft. Soon we will see her bleeding through her nose.") [authors' translation].

(Wanda 2004, p. 30)

Healthline (2022) asserts that neglect often teaches children to rely on dishonesty or manipulation as coping mechanisms, tactics developed to meet unmet needs or avoid punishment. According to Bandura (1977), behaviors that are reinforced, either positively or through avoidance of negative outcomes, are more likely to be repeated. Thus, if lying allows a neglected child to avoid conflict or gain attention, that behavior becomes reinforced and normalized.

Intergenerational trauma

According to QuickBytes Education (2023) the consequences of neglectful parenting can be particularly damaging for girls. Girls raised in emotionally neglectful environments often struggle with trust, making it difficult for them to form healthy relationships in adulthood. Because they do not witness respectful or loving relationships modeled in their home environments, they are unlikely to replicate those behaviors later in life. In many cases, they may unconsciously imitate the same emotional unavailability or neglect they observed in their caregivers, perpetuating the cycle into the next generation.

Additionally, Bandura (1977) states that children learn through observation and collaboration. Neglectful parenting tends to perpetuate itself

across generations. Verywell Family (2021) concurs with Bandura by stating that social learning theory explains that behaviors observed in childhood are often replicated in adulthood unless there is a conscious effort to unlearn them. A girl who grows up in a household where emotional detachment is the norm may struggle to express affection, set boundaries, or meet her own child's emotional needs, because she never saw these behaviors modeled. Dumazile learns from her father that problems are solved by going to traditional healers, even when it may not be necessary. She is later seen doing the same when she faces problems with her in-laws. This demonstrates how narrow-minded she has become. Although she witnessed that the traditional healer her father consulted could not even recognize that she was pregnant, she still believes that traditional healers can solve her marital problems. This is reflected in the following words:

“Ngesonto eledlule ngahamba ngaya kumuntu obonayo. Ngangifuna ake angihlolele nje ukuthi umshado wethu umi kanjani. Hhayi wabhula waqeqebula, washiya angalaziyo. Wabona ngisho nezinto ebengingazinakile.”

(“Last Sunday, I went to a traditional doctor. I wanted him to assess the state of my marriage. He told me everything he knew and left out what he did not. He even saw things I had not paid attention to”) [authors' translation].

(Wanda 2004, p. 145)

Dumazile's problem has nothing to do with her in-laws bewitching her; it is a matter of character. She learnt disrespectful behavior from her mother. MaNdovela would speak to Dumazile carelessly about Kheswa. As a result, when Dumazile gets married, she also displays disrespectful behavior toward her husband. Wanda (2004, p.26) supports this with the words: *“Oyihlo laba baye bathathe wonke amawongowongo abawezwa ematshwaleni.”* (Your father takes in all the nonsense he hears in drinking places.) This influences Dumazile to speak carelessly to her husband, as she learned this behavior from her mother at a young age. MaNdovela exhibits an immature personality, which Dumazile mirrors in her marriage. She is heard exchanging words with her husband as if she were speaking to a child, as reflected in the following words:

“Wawuhamba nobani ukuya lapho?” “Ngangingahamba nobani? Ngangizohamba nobani ngokwakho? Ngangihamba ngedwa.” Esho kubonakale nje ukuthi igazi seliyafudumala.

(“Whowere you going with there?”

“Who was I going with? Who was I supposed to go with? I was alone.”

You could tell she was getting angry as she said this.) [authors' translation].

(Wanda 2004, p. 145)

This supports Bandura's (Op cit.) view that children learn through observation and collaboration. The way MaNdovela behaves in front of Dumazile becomes a challenge in Dumazile's marriage, as she imitates the same behavior. This reflects a broader issue: many modern marriages do not last because children, especially girls, grow up witnessing dysfunctional relationship dynamics and later repeat them in their own marriages. Many girls, like Dumazile, grow up believing that their mothers' behavior is acceptable, and they carry those same patterns into adulthood, often leading to conflict and divorce.

In the past, divorces were less common, partly because gender-based violence was not as widespread as it is today. In modern relationships, trust is often lacking, and when trust breaks down, couples may resort to extreme measures, eventually choosing separation or divorce. It is important to teach women that they have a responsibility to respect and honor their husbands, not to promote submission, but to foster stable homes and reduce the number of children growing up in broken families, who may later struggle in society. Parents must conduct themselves responsibly in front of their children, as children absorb and imitate what they observe. Those raised in loving, stable homes are more likely to recreate that environment for their own families, whereas those raised in abusive or neglectful households are at higher risk of repeating those patterns. This is in line with Thwala & Tshabalala's (2023) findings in their study, where they highlight how the divorce led to one of the analyzed children becoming promiscuous and immoral in their behaviour.

Conclusion

This article has revealed that a neglectful parenting style can have a detrimental impact on the

upbringing of a girl child. Children raised by neglectful parents often struggle to trust others, which leads to challenges in forming healthy and meaningful relationships. It has also been found that this parenting style can foster dishonesty, as children may resort to deceit as a means of survival, to meet their needs or avoid punishment. Furthermore, the patterns of neglect and their negative effects are often passed down through generations, perpetuating cycles of emotional and social dysfunction. Finally, neglectful parenting deprives girl children of emotional stability, which can result in low self-esteem and difficulties in developing a strong and secure sense of identity.

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Crisis of Trust and Military Takeovers in West Africa: Analyzing Factors and Citizen Reactions in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger

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Abstract

The recurrent military coups in West Africa, with the most recent cases in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger, point to an increasing crisis of trust between citizens and their governments. According to the Colpus 2023 report, military coups have increased significantly across the African continent since 2020, indicating the deterioration of democratic systems due to diverse political, social, and economic causes. Although each country has a distinct context, a variety of interacting factors encouraged military takeover resulting in a worrying pattern spanning history, politics, and geopolitics. Drawing from secondary data including media reports, peer reviewed research, reports from international organizations, and grey literature, this paper offers conceptual, and comparative account of this development. The paper highlights how governance failures, rampant corruption, insecurity from violent extremist groups, and socioeconomic inequalities contribute to eroding public trust. The significance of this study lies in its contribution to both scholarship and policy by providing insights into interplay between governance, security, and societal trust and advances theoretical debates on democratic resilience and coup prevention for the future of the region.

Keywords: Crisis of trusty, military takeovers, citizen reactions, Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger

Introduction

Since early 2020, West Africa has witnessed several military coups, both successful and failed attempted coups. This has further been fueled in part by the political and economic climates present in the various African nations as well as by external factors. According to the Colpus 2023 report, military coups have increased significantly across the African continent since 2020, pointing to the deterioration of democratic systems due to diverse reasons ranging from political, social, and economic causes. Six successful military takeovers and three unsuccessful, including two instances of 'coups inside coups,' were documented between 2020 to 2023. Further, these statistics show a 229% increase in military takeovers in the last 20 years (Chin, Wright and Carter 2022). The most recent military coups in Burkina Faso (January and September 2022), Mali (2020 and 2021), and Niger (2023) have marked significant political changes in regional governance systems (Africa News 2023). Many countries in Africa face difficult economic conditions, the abrupt military coups often serve as a precursor to further military coups (Mwai 2022). These have sparked regional concerns, drawing scholars, journalists, and international communities to examine the fundamental causes of the abrupt shifts in governance structure.

Although each country has a distinct context, a variety of interacting factors encouraged military takeover resulting in a worrying pattern spanning history, politics, and geopolitics. By contrast these domestic drivers of coups, the African Union's position against unconstitutional changes of government (UCGs) is primarily guided by three continental instruments: the African Charter on Democracy, Elections, and Governance, the Constitutive Act, and the Lomé Declaration of July 2000 (Souare 2009). While both the Lomé Declaration and the Addis Charter condemn military coups, their response to other critical issues, such as election rigging, human rights violations, manipulation of presidential term limits, corruption within political circles, and the capture of state institutions, has been relatively muted (Kipo-Sunyehzi and Lambon 2025).

One illustrative example was Niger in 2009. President Mamadou Tandja dissolved the Constitutional Court and the National Assembly,

followed by a referendum to change the constitution that extended his presidential mandate – a constitutional coup – and where the African Union's Peace and Security Council (PSC) opted not to take decisive action back then, in a failure to enforce constitutional principles, did not react until there was a military coup in 2010 (Wings 2023). Frontier analysis indicates that the AU's inaction during constitutional manipulation period demonstrates failure to address broader governance challenges raises concerns about the effectiveness and consistency of AU oversight mechanisms exacerbating erosion of trust in continental instruments and democratic institutions (Mavedzenge, 2025; Taruvinga 2023).

The persistent jihadist insurgencies and failures to provide security in Mali led to a deep erosion of trust in civilian leaders which helped pave the way for military action (Thurston 2024). In Burkina Faso, mounting frustration with ineffective governance, elite corruption, and increasing insecurity in rural areas resulted in two coups, first in January 2022, and then in September 2022, both claiming to act against these failures (Mahmoud and Taifouri 2023). In Niger, a coup in July 2023 occurred even though President Bazoum had demonstrated substantial progress towards democracy, resulting in a much more ambivalent reaction: on the one hand some citizens viewed the military takeover as a necessary correction to political capture, while others feared that it would lead to a reversal of the democratic gains (Sowale 2024).

Within this context, understanding the factors that underlie the crisis of trust and catalyze military coups is of paramount importance. The study centers on Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger, three countries that have experienced military coups during the period of heightened volatility from 2020 to 2023. This study aimed to explore the context in which these military coups occurred and the factors that have undermined trust in present political democracy. Moreover, the study aimed to discern the nuanced reactions of citizens in these countries exploring their support for or opposition to military coups, as well as their trust in the military institutions at the heart of these upheavals.

Current history of coups in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, 2020-2023

The concept of a military coup and the designation of an event as a coup may differ based on the context, legal framework, and perspectives of different countries, each bearing a distinct set of de facto and de jure implications (Thompson 1973). Coups, according to Powell and Thyme, are overt attempts by the armed forces or other powerful members of the government to unseat the current head of state using unlawful means.

Mali experienced a political crisis that led to a coup within a coup. In August 2020, Mali's military took power in response to peaceful mass demonstrations demanding the resignation of then-President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita. For many Malians, Keita epitomized multiple failures of the Mali government, from insecurity to corruption (USIP 2021). Following Keita's deposition, Colonel Assimi Goita was instantly appointed vice president and Bah N'daw was appointed president pro tempore by a group of 17 electors. Moreover, Goita and Colonel Major Ismael Wagué formed the National Committee for the Salvation of the People (CNSP) and promised to hold elections soon. On September 12, 2020, the CNSP pledged an 18-month political transition to civilian governance (Adetuyi 2021). However, tensions emerged between the civilian transitional administration and the military after N'daw reshuffled the cabinet without consulting Goita and his allies. As a result, N'daw and Ouane were dismissed in May 2021 for attempting to "sabotage" the administration, according to a statement released by Goita for public television (Al Jazeera 2021). In response, Goita seized power once again, ousted the president and prime minister, and dissolved what appeared to be a civilian-led government.

The military takeover in Burkina Faso in 2022 deepened months of deteriorating relations between former president Roch Marc Christian Kaboré and his army, in a nation where the populace and the military ineffectiveness of the state responses to deadly jihadist attacks. In January 2022, President Kabore of Burkina Faso was deposed by the military, who accused him of failing to stop the bloodshed of Islamist terrorists (Eizenga 2021). Lieutenant Colonel Paul-Henri Damiba, the leader of the coup, promised to

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reestablish security, but as attacks increased and military morale deteriorated, a second coup—led by the current junta's head Captain Ibrahim Traore—took place eight months later, in September after mutiny (African News 2022). Captain Traore suspended the constitution, toppled Damiba's transitional government, and vested authority in the military junta he had organized and headed. A national conference was held by the Traoré junta less than two weeks later, in October, and it was at this forum that Traoré officially took office as president (Wiking 2024).

Niger has become more unstable in the last three years because of a series of coups and attempted coups. In March 2021, a segment of the military conducted a coup attempt, which was attributed to an Air Force unit stationed near Niamey Airport. Captain Sani Saley Gourouza, who oversaw security at the unit's base, is said to have orchestrated the plot. Following the failure of the coup attempt, the perpetrators were apprehended (Oduoye et.al 2024). Early on July 26, 2023, the presidential guard barricaded the presidential palace in Niamey and captured Niger's President Mohamed Bazoum who had been legitimately elected. After several hours of tense discussions behind closed doors, the situation became clear when a group of army commanders announced the military coup on national television (Sowale 2024). They proclaimed the suspension of all institutions, the imposition of a curfew, and the closure of the nation's land and air borders, in addition to the overthrow of Bazoum's government. The new regime promised to safeguard Niger's global obligations but asked

international powers not to interfere (Zambakari 2023). On July 28, General Tiani appeared on national television to announce that he had taken control of the CNSP and had carried out the coup, making him the de facto new leader of the state. According to experts, President Bazoum's plan to remove the head of the presidential guard, General Omar Tiani, from his position, which he claims is prompted by "the continuing deterioration of the security situation" and "poor economic and social governance," is what triggered the coup (Demuyck and Böhm 2023).

Citizen Reactions and Broader Implications

Military coups in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger elicited varied public reactions. In all three cases, public dissatisfactions with their governments stemmed from deteriorating security, humanitarian crisis, and a limited economic opportunity (Eko 2025). Many citizens were skeptical that waiting for the next elections would bring change to their situations, as they felt the electoral processes perceived compromised and opposition parties as weak or ineffective (Kelly 2025). Against this backdrop, military takeovers were often interpreted not as a rejection of democracy in principle, but rather a pragmatic response to failing institutions (Mahmoud and Taifouri 2023). Many civilians publicly expressed support for military leaders who toppled what they considered corrupt or incompetent leaders, or who had simply failed to address critical challenges with post-coup governance and security (Taruvinga 2023).

Evidence indicates that citizens in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger see the military as a legitimate means of ridding themselves of corrupt or incapable leaders. For example, polls conducted by Afrobarometer (2024) revealed that approximately two-thirds of Burkinabè citizens believe that coups are justified in instances where leaders abuse power, while approximately seventy percent of participants in Niger said the same regarding leadership corruption (Silas, Ayeni and Shuaibu 2025). Similarly, parallel polls of ORB International found approximately two-thirds of Malians, Burkinabè, and Nigeriens supported military rule over civilian government before the recent coups (ORB International 2025). While military rule seems a popular form of state governance among citizens in all three countries, there were variations

in responses. For example, while Nigeriens had optimistic prospects for the future of their country in the lead up to the 2023 coup, citizens of Mali and Burkina Faso exhibited mixed reactions with some welcoming the military as a corrective to weak civilian rule, while others voiced concern about democratic backsliding (The Star 2023).

Underlying Factors

The military coup d'états in West Africa have been catalyzed by a combination of internal vulnerabilities and external pressures. Although Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger all had nominal democratic structures (i.e. elections, multiparty politics, constitutions), they were usually shallow democracies, had weak independence of the judiciary, inconsistent application of the rule of law, and unreliable civil liberties (Obinna and Semudara 2024). There was state legitimacy undermined for several reasons, including the lack of security from jihadist insurgencies, rampant corruption, socio-economic poverty, and declining public support for civilian governments. The conditions were conducive to military interventions (Levine 2025).

However, the underlying drivers varied across the three cases. In Mali, jihadist violence and the

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continuous failure of successive governments to stabilize Mali reduced support for civilian rule and enabled the military to position itself as a legitimate alternative and thus effect a military coup (Thurston 2024). The situation in Burkina Faso was different in that it arose in part from public intolerance of the elite corruption and associated poor governance, which led to more public support for the coups in 2022 (Fain, Issaev and Korotayev 2024), in the 2023 coup in Niger, while certainly perplexing, occurred despite some democratization under President Bazoum (although the timing of that democratization, if it indeed exists, is ambiguous, not to mention the military infighting after the coup and continued governance problems generally made it difficult to assess a public response to the coup (Mavedzenge 2025).

Security issues

The failure of the governments of these three countries to sufficiently protect their citizens from extremist groups operating within their borders has led to the public believing that the military is the only salvation. The coup in Burkina Faso was prompted by the Burkinabe government's failure to put an end to the Islamist insurgency (UNDP 2023). The growing threat of extremist organizations such as Ansarul Islam and the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS), particularly in rural areas with little government support and a lack of security and basic services fueled discontent. The military was unsatisfied with how the civilian government addressed the security issues, citing insufficient funding and a lack of a coherent strategy. Some military factions and civilians believed that a coup would be a good solution to solve these problems and restore stability (Lefdal 2024).

Despite this framing of insecurity as central, it must also be viewed with greater skepticism, both as an original grievance, and a legitimating narrative. Empirical work suggests popular support for coups is built on frustrations over governance failures, such as corruption, and weak institutions (Ziso and Hamandishe 2024). Leaders of coups in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger persistently portrayed their actions as a quick reaction to terrorism, thereby tapping into citizens' immediate anxiety. However, analysts assert that the accounts tend to oversell militaries' abilities

to provide stability. Armed takeovers often only signify failure to tackle the causes of insurgency and can also undermine democratic control of security (Mavedzenge 2025; Thurston 2024).

In Mali, intercommunal conflicts, ethnic violence, and Islamist insurgency have all played a key role in the country's ongoing security problems. The failure of the Malian government to respond adequately to these threats, coupled with complaints of human rights abuses by government security forces, created dissatisfaction among civilians and parts of the military (Wing 2023). The main armed actors include Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM)—a coalition formed in 2017 that incorporates Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM)—and the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS), both of which remain active across Mali's northern and central regions (International Crisis Group 2025; Thurston 2024). In addition, Boko Haram factions operating in the wider Lake Chad Basin are linked to global jihadist networks, most notably through the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) (Zenn 2020).

While frustration with insecurity has been a recurring theme in popular and military discourse surrounding Mali's coups, empirical evidence shows a more complex picture. Afrobarometer surveys indicate that although certain segments of the population have indicated qualified support for military intervention where there is catastrophic government failure, their support is not uniform and non-judgmental (Yusuf 2025). The coup leaders have, however, rationalized their actions as necessitating the re-establishment of security by highlighting the distinction between popular hope and the actual capacity of the military to deliver stability (Thurston 2024).

The Niger coup was an expression of a long history of social and political dissatisfaction with security challenges. Elections—especially regarding the credibility of free and fair elections—have historically generated volatility in Niger's political system. Although the elections in December 2020–February 2021 marked Niger's first democratic transfer of power, it was contested. International observers, including the EU, described the elections as broadly credible, but opposition parties alleged widespread irregularities. These claims caused February 2021 protests that were met with a 10-day

internet blackout, mass arrests, and clashes with security forces (ICCT 2023). Evidence suggests that this trend of contested elections with the coercive repression of the state undermined democratic legitimacy and solidified mistrust among citizens and ruling elites. The military, in this regard, legitimized its 2023 coup as a corrective process to restore order and address elite failures, although studies suggest that such rhetoric is more politically constructed than pragmatic responses to governance problems (Mavedzenge 2025).

Contested elections

In Burkina Faso, contested elections have repeatedly been an issue in their political landscape. One notable example is the presidential election held in November 2020. Incumbent President Roch Marc Christian Kaboré won re-election in the first round with around 57% of the vote (Widhalm 2024). However, the opposition contested the results, alleging irregularities and fraud. The 2015 presidential election in Burkina Faso also witnessed contested results and a turbulent political environment. This election marked a significant moment in Burkina Faso's history, following the ousting of long-time President Compaoré in 2014 after mass protests (Ajala 2023). Election results and allegations of electoral fraud in the nation have weakened the public's trust in the administration and widened political rifts. Many people have opposed attempts by leaders to extend their tenure or change the constitution to cement their authority, as was the case with former President Blaise Compaoré in 2014. Different sections of both the civilian population and soldiers in Burkina Faso are beginning to see military coups as a mechanism of political change in conditions of ongoing political instability, economic despair, and endemic corruption. Officer and elite perceptions of coups as a tool of authoritarian state-building were reinforced by the deepening state failures to curb rising insecurity associated with jihadist insurgencies, and the public's waning confidence in civilian institutions (Levine 2025). Afrobarometer survey data, show that whereas 75 percent of Burkinabé citizens believed in democracy in principle, only 42 percent were satisfied with it in practice, and a sizeable minority expressed a willingness to tolerate military intervention in conditions of insecurity and

state failure (Afrobarometer 2023). Furthermore, qualitative fieldwork by Wolfel et.al (2024) showed that frustration with ruling parties and opposition parties produced pragmatic, albeit contested, civilian support for the 2022 coups. This increasing agency in conceding to military coups would place Burkina Faso in a particularly vulnerable position for armed forces that instigated successive military coups in 2022 in which deepening security crises interacted with political tensions to undermine the prospects of democratic resilience.

Mali has gone through a series of violent political shifts marked by contested elections, corruption scandals, and allegations of electoral fraud. The 2018 presidential election in Mali was hotly contested, resulting in simmering political tensions when President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita was re-elected in a ballot that opposition parties claimed was plagued by irregularities. Earlier in 2018, tens of thousands took to the streets to demand Keita's resignation due to a disagreement over the results of a legislative election (Reuters 2023). In light of these issues, public trust in political leaders and democratic institutions has dwindled, resulting in large demonstrations and calls for political reform. Furthermore, the military has been actively involved in Malian politics through a history of coups and coups since the country's independence in 1960. Coup attempts are becoming more likely as the political and military sectors become increasingly entwined. Given this, certain members of the armed services have considered coups to effect change, address governance difficulties, and restore democratic order (Al Jazeera News 2023).

In Niger, the recent military takeover has been influenced by a long-ignored variety of political and security factors. Conflict over electoral processes related to the staging of free and fair elections has long been a feature of Niger's political scene. Election results, allegations of fraud, and questions about the legitimacy of elected individuals have all contributed significantly to political upheaval (The Star 2023). Niger held a general election in December 2020, resulting in the country's first-ever democratic transfer of power. Although numerous international observers praised the conduct of these elections, allegations of irregularities sparked massive protests and heavy government repression, including a 10-day internet shutdown. Hundreds of people were arrested in addition

to battles between police and demonstrators in other locations. The military considered coups as a method to influence the political class and solve political problems (USIP 2021).

Failure by the governments to provide public goods

Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger are among the richest countries in natural resources the world, having abundant energy and natural resources such as oil, gold, and uranium yet their citizens live in abject poverty. Burkina Faso ranks 184th among 191 nations Mali 186th and Niger 189th out of 191 nations in the 2022 UN Human Development Index (UNDP 2023). The government's failure to address economic issues in these countries due to bad governance and resource exploitation by former colonial powers resulted in widespread poverty among their citizens. France has been accused of exploiting natural resources in its former West African colonies at extremely low prices with benefits accruing largely to French interests and allied local elites. This dynamic often described as neocolonial is seen as contributing to widespread poverty despite the countries' wealth (Isilow & Basaran 2023). The failure to provide adequate infrastructure, healthcare, education, and economic opportunities has left many citizens living in dire conditions. Moreover, reports of corruption and exploitation by leaders have further eroded trust in democratic institutions. Citizens, disillusioned by the unfulfilled promises of elected leaders, have increasingly turned to the military as a perceived solution to their grievances (Reuters 2023).

Growing Resistance to Neo-colonial Influence

France's continued ties with Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger have had a profound impact on its sociopolitical and economic dynamics. These long-term relationships take various shapes, including financial alliances, military cooperation, and cultural influence (Kaledzi 2023). While such ties may give certain benefits, such as development assistance and security cooperation, they can also perpetuate a dependency relationship and limit the region's decision-making autonomy (France24 2023). Moreover, the legacy of French colonization in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger, is marked by brutal military operations, forced labor, pervasive

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repression, cultural erasure, racial segregation, and forced relocation, which continues to have a profound impact on these countries. The close ties that exist between France, Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger have not resulted in notable improvements in security, governance, or economic growth (Espelund, 2022). Most notably, through the operation Serval (2013-2014) in Mali and Barkhane (2014-2022) in the Sahel. The peak of Barkhane, France had over 5,000 troops deployed to the Sahel and was spending an estimated €1 billion annually. Yet violence from jihadist groups has extended from northern Mali to central Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger (Charbonneau 2021). Between 2016 and 2021, non-combatant deaths attributed to militant violence in the central Sahel increased more than fivefold, with Burkina Faso recording the most growth (ACLED 2022). This has helped fuel growing doubts over the French presence attributed to views of political meddling and unequal economic deals. Consequently, the citizens of most of these countries now view France no longer as an ally of stability but as one of the challenges to their stability and enablers of dependency (Ajala 2023; Wing 2023).

Loss of trust in regional organizations

With a succession of military coups across the larger Sahel region, the Economic Community

of West African States (ECOWAS) in partnership with the United Nations stepped up to prevent the increasing militarization of the region (AP 2024). However, Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger's junta voiced their dissatisfaction, alleging that the ECOWAS organization had strayed from the ideals of Pan-Africanism and its founding fathers. ECOWAS was originally intended to be an intergovernmental economic union. Nonetheless, as the Sahel region grappled with destabilizing civil wars and military coups that jeopardized democratic progress in the 1990s, its member nations transformed their community into a protection of democratic principles. The approval of a forward-looking democracy protocol in 2001 was a watershed moment in this process, inspiring the pan-African governance charter and paving the way for the organization to have a role in regional governance affairs (Ronceray 2023). Following the coups in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger, ECOWAS not only reacted quickly but also established the precedent for further regional responses, such as the imposition of sanctions (Crisis Group 2024).

Despite ECOWAS sanctions and diplomatic pressure, the junta governments in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger drew closer to one another, resulting in the creation of the Alliance of Sahel States (AES) in September 2023. The alliance was sealed by a Bamako charter that establishes a mutual defense pact that binds each state to assist other states militarily in the event of foreign aggression (EKO 2025). Apart from security, AES is also a political exercise of resisting foreign pressure, notably from ECOWAS and France, and asserting greater sovereignty in regional affairs (Bagayoko 2024). The partnership also reflects shared grievances: indiscriminate jihadist attacks, bad relations with Western allies, and growing popular hostility towards alleged neocolonial interference. By joining forces, the juntas seek to stabilize their regimes domestically and counterbalance foreign influence.

Moreover, the juntas of the three nations accused ECOWAS of selectively upholding democratic norms, focusing particularly on attempting to safeguard elected heads of state from coups. They contend that important problems like corruption, terrorism, and insecurity within each member nation have not received enough attention from ECOWAS (Ronceray 2023). In addition, ECOWAS

has come under fire for failing to address issues with tainted elections, claims of corruption, and presidential term limits. The prospect of ECOWAS-led coup seems possible considering these perceived deficiencies, which are seen as a reflection of double standards and an inability to effectively prevent coups (AP 2024).

Recommendations

To reverse the coups in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger requires a multi-dimensional approach to the specific political and security conditions in each country, to include progress on restoring electoral legitimacy, security sector reform, governance and corruption issues, and redefining engagement regionally and internationally, all at the same time.

While a military coup is, and ought to be, viewed as illegitimate and dictatorially incompatible with democracy, citizens do not perceive it as necessarily more corrupt than the governments they revolted against. As an example, research done in Burkina Faso, and more recently in Mali, alleges that some segments of the population in both encountered juntas as less self-interested governance than the civilian politicians they displaced. However, tangible reforms are needed to re-establish faith in democratic governance through meaningful measures to combat corruption and elite capture (Wing 2023).

The international support should also be channeled differently. Since the juntas have themselves made efforts to distance themselves from classic Western allies and get closer to Russia and other non-Western nations, an exclusive focus on Western conditional aid will also not be likely to work. Instead, aid can come from regional mediation, African multilateral bodies, and neutral actors such as the UN, aimed at humanitarian relief, technical electoral assistance, and incentives for gradual democratic opening (Bagayoko 2024).

The position of the AU and ECOWAS must be reviewed, with the three nations withdrawing from ECOWAS in 2024 and the formation of the Alliance of Sahel States (AES). Regional organizations, including the AU and ECOWAS, may have to begin to find flexible engagement approaches that stress a balance between pressure and engagement, rather than sanctions that have largely failed, such as restoring access to regional platforms, when there are observable reforms underway.

Lastly, facilitation of national dialogues remains necessary but impossible to expect from governing juntas voluntarily while democratic elections remain a threat to their tenure. With respect to this, civil society groups, religious authorities, and community-based organizations can exert bottom-up pressure on elites to open political space. Regional and international actors can add these by linking aid and recognition to inclusive dialogue frameworks.

Conclusion

Looking ahead, meaning progress will require political courage from leaders at all levels. Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger may distinct historical experiences and journeys towards sustainable governance and durable peace. Military takeovers in these countries highlight even deeper structural vulnerabilities and people's distrust in democratic institutions. Reversing these trends will require context-specific reforms to enhance election processes, security governance, anti-corruption efforts, and the inclusion of civil society.

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Abstract

This study examines the impact of the COVID-19 lockdown on teaching and learning in the Foundation Phase (FP) at Moonlight Primary School, a rural Quintile 1 school in Capricorn South District, Limpopo Province, South Africa. Employing a qualitative case study design, data were gathered through in-depth interviews with three FP educators, document analysis, and field notes. Findings reveal that limited technological infrastructure, inadequate access to learning materials, and insufficient digital literacy training posed major barriers to effective teaching and learning. Educators adopted low-tech coping strategies such as distributing printed materials, using phone calls and SMS to engage parents, and utilising community radio programmes to sustain learning continuity. However, persistent challenges, including the digital divide, inconsistent parental involvement, and limited institutional support, deepened educational inequalities. The study underscores the need for targeted investment in digital infrastructure, comprehensive educator training in blended learning, and decentralised support mechanisms to enhance educational equity and resilience in under-resourced rural contexts.

Keywords: COVID-19, Teaching and Learning, Foundation Phase, Capricorn South District, Limpopo Province, South Africa

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has profoundly disrupted education systems worldwide, exposing deep-rooted inequalities and challenging conventional modes of teaching and learning. In South Africa, the nationwide lockdown implemented in March 2020 forced schools to close abruptly, compelling educators to adopt alternative strategies to sustain learner engagement. These disruptions were particularly severe in rural areas, where limited access to digital infrastructure, low levels of parental support, and systemic resource constraints hindered effective teaching. FP educators who are responsible for the early development of literacy, numeracy, and life skills, faced unique challenges during this period. Their pedagogical approaches, typically reliant on direct and face-to-face interaction, were difficult to replicate online. The absence of structured classroom environments and the reliance on caregivers to facilitate learning at home further complicated the situation.

The Department of Basic Education [DBE] introduced several interventions, including radio and television lessons, online platforms, and printed learning materials, to mitigate learning loss. However, these measures often failed to reach rural and under-resourced communities where connectivity, devices, and educator preparedness were limited. Grounded in the digital divide framework, which emphasises disparities in access, skills, and utilisation of technology, this study investigates how FP educators at Moonlight Primary School navigated the lockdown period. It examines their coping strategies, the barriers encountered, and the implications for equity and resilience in rural education. By situating the experiences of these educators within the broader context of digital exclusion and educational inequality, the study contributes to ongoing debates about technology integration and educational justice in South Africa's post-pandemic recovery.

Literature Review

The COVID-19 pandemic prompted a surge of global scholars examining how education systems adapt during crises. Literature reveals that disruptions to traditional schooling have exacerbated pre-existing inequalities, particularly in access to digital tools and pedagogical support (Bozkurt et al.

2020; Daniel 2020; UNESCO 2021). In South Africa, studies by Spaul and Van der Berg (2020) and Mhlanga and Moloi (2020) highlight how school closures disproportionately affected learners in rural and low-income communities due to limited infrastructure and digital readiness.

The literature on education during times of crisis emphasized the dynamic intersection of digital inequality, pedagogical innovation, and systemic resilience as foundational to sustaining learning continuity. Scholars such as Hodges et al. (2020) and Trust and Whalen (2020) emphasise the need for context-sensitive strategies that enable educators to navigate sudden transitions to online learning environments. Within the South African context, the focus has shifted toward understanding how educators develop coping strategies in resource-constrained settings where digital exclusion persists. By contextualizing the experiences of educators at Moonlight Primary School within broader scholarly discourse, this review reveals how global and local responses to educational disruption shape the coping strategies employed in under-resourced rural schools.

Global Responses to School Closures

The COVID-19 pandemic prompted diverse educational responses worldwide, shaped by each country's infrastructure, policy agility, and socio-economic conditions. In high-income contexts, governments rapidly deployed digital platforms, television broadcasts, and mobile applications to sustain learning (UNESCO 2020). Countries like China, South Korea and Finland leveraged pre-existing e-learning systems and educator training programs to facilitate online instruction (Chung and Yi 2021; Reimers and Schleicher 2020).

In contrast, low- and middle-income countries faced significant constraints. Limited access to devices, unreliable internet connectivity, and uneven digital literacy among educators and learners hindered the effectiveness of online learning (World Bank 2020; Owusu-Fordjour et al. 2020; Belay 2020). Many relied on radio, printed materials, and community-based interventions to reach marginalized learners.

Rather than framing these responses as binary opposites, scholars emphasize the importance of context-sensitive strategies. Reimers and

Schleicher (2020) argue that successful adaptation depended not only on technology, but also on inclusive planning, stakeholder collaboration, and pedagogical flexibility. These global patterns provide a backdrop for understanding the localized coping strategies employed by FP educators in rural South Africa.

South African Educational Landscape During COVID-19

South Africa's response to the COVID-19 school closures reflected both systemic inequalities and adaptive resilience. The DBE introduced various online learning initiatives, including television and radio broadcasts, online platforms, and printed learning materials (DBE 2020). However, the effectiveness of these interventions varied significantly across provinces and socio-economic contexts. In urban and well-resourced schools, digital platforms such as MS Teams and Google Classroom were adopted with relative ease. In contrast, rural schools, particularly those in Limpopo Province, faced severe challenges due to limited internet access, lack of devices, and low levels of digital literacy among educators and learners (Spaull and Van der Berg 2020). These disparities were compounded by infrastructural deficits and socio-economic constraints, which hindered equitable access to learning.

Scholars such as Jansen (2020) and Soudien et al., (2022) argue that the pandemic exposed the fragility of South Africa's education system, particularly its reliance on face-to-face instruction and uneven resource distribution. While some schools demonstrated remarkable innovation and community-driven support, others struggled to maintain basic educational continuity.

Rather than viewing rural and urban responses as oppositional, it is important to recognize the diverse coping strategies shaped by local conditions, institutional support, and educator agency. This study contributes to that understanding by examining how FP educators in Capricorn South District navigated these challenges during the lockdown.

Foundation Phase Teaching and Learning

FP education in South Africa emphasizes holistic development, focusing on literacy, numeracy, and life skills for learners in Grades R to 3. Teaching in

this phase relies heavily on face-to-face interaction, tactile learning materials, and structured routines that support early cognitive and social development (DBE 2011). The COVID-19 lockdown disrupted these pedagogical foundations, forcing educators to adapt to online modalities that were often misaligned with the developmental needs of young learners.

Research by Spaull and Van der Berg (2020) highlights that FP learners are particularly vulnerable to learning loss during extended school closures. Their limited ability to self-regulate, coupled with the absence of structured classroom environments, made online learning especially challenging. Moreover, the lack of parental support, often due to low literacy levels or work-related constraints, further hindered continuity of learning at home (Mphahlele and Mosehlane 2023). Educators in rural contexts faced compounded difficulties. Without access to digital tools or printed materials, many relied on informal strategies such as WhatsApp messaging, community drop-offs, and oral instruction to maintain engagement. While these efforts reflect commendable resilience, they also underscore systemic gaps in early childhood education policy and infrastructure.

This study builds on existing literature by foregrounding the voices of FP educators in Capricorn South District, offering insight into how pedagogical adaptation unfolded in under-resourced settings during the pandemic.

Coping Strategies in Education

The COVID-19 pandemic compelled educators worldwide to adopt a range of coping strategies to sustain teaching and learning under restrictive conditions. In South Africa, these strategies varied across contexts, shaped by resource availability, institutional support, and educator agency. FP educators, in particular, had to navigate the dual challenge of maintaining learner engagement and adapting pedagogical practices to online formats.

Studies by Mphahlele and jikpamu (2021) and Spaull and Van der Berg (2020) highlight that educators employed both formal and informal methods to reach learners. These included the use of *WhatsApp* groups, printed learning packs, community drop-offs, and radio lessons. In some cases, educators

“ Research underscores that effective parental involvement in early education requires more than intent, it demands capacity, including access to learning resources, familiarity with curriculum expectations, and supportive relationships between schools and families. ”

collaborated with local stakeholders, such as school governing bodies and NGOs, to distribute materials and monitor learner progress. Such strategies reflect a form of grassroots resilience, where educators leveraged available networks to mitigate the impact of school closures.

However, these coping strategies were not equally effective across contexts. Many educators struggled against the absence of reliable digital infrastructure, inconsistent parental support, and growing emotional fatigue (Motala and Menon 2020; Spaul and Van der Berg 2020). As Jansen (2024) cautions, it is important not to romanticise educators' resilience without acknowledging the systemic inequalities that make such endurance necessary. Although creativity and adaptability were evident among educators (Bozkurt et al. 2020; Trust and Whalen 2021), these efforts often emerged out of sheer necessity rather than sustained policy or institutional support. This study contributes to the discourse by documenting the lived experiences of Foundation Phase educators in Capricorn South District, offering insight into how coping strategies were shaped by local realities and professional commitment.

Parental Involvement in Foundation Phase Learning

Parental involvement is widely acknowledged as essential to early childhood education, influencing learner motivation, academic achievement, and emotional development. During the COVID-19 lockdown, this role became even more critical as educators depended on families to support home-based learning. Research shows that in South Africa, school closures intensified educational inequalities and placed greater pressure on parents, particularly in low-income communities, to fill instructional gaps (Haffejee et al. 2024). A systematic review also found that effective parental engagement during online learning was shaped by access to resources, school communication, and parental capacity to adapt (Van der Linde 2023). However, the level and nature of parental involvement varied significantly across socio-economic contexts. In rural areas such as Capricorn South District, many parents faced barriers including low literacy levels, limited access to learning materials, and competing livelihood demands (Mphahlele and Jikpamu 2021). These constraints often resulted in minimal engagement with learners' academic activities, placing additional pressure on educators to bridge the gap through alternative strategies.

Research underscores that effective parental involvement in early education requires more than intent, it demands capacity, including access to learning resources, familiarity with curriculum expectations, and supportive relationships between schools and families. Haffejee, Simelane, and Mwanda (2024) found that during COVID-19 school closures in South Africa, many parents struggled to support learning due to limited digital access and unclear instructional guidance. Similarly, van der Linde (2023) highlights that meaningful engagement was often hindered by socioeconomic constraints and the absence of structured communication channels between educators and caregivers. This study contributes to the discourse by documenting how FP educators navigated these challenges, often assuming dual roles as teachers and community liaisons. Their experiences highlight the need for more inclusive and sustainable models of parental engagement, especially in times of crisis.

Digital Divide

To frame this study analytically, the concept of the digital divide offers a critical lens for understanding the disparities in educational access and participation during the COVID-19 lockdown. The digital divide refers to the unequal distribution of technological resources, digital literacy, and connectivity across socio-economic and geographic contexts (Van Dijk 2006). In South Africa, these inequalities are deeply rooted in historical and structural factors, disproportionately affecting rural communities such as those in Capricorn South District (Du Preez and Le Grange 2020). Warschauer (2004) and Selwyn (2010) argue that the digital divide extends beyond access to devices, it encompasses the capacity to use technology meaningfully for learning. During the lockdown, FP educators in under-resourced schools faced compounded challenges: limited infrastructure, low parental digital literacy, and minimal institutional support. This framework enables a nuanced analysis of how educators navigated these constraints, revealing both systemic gaps and adaptive strategies.

The literature reviewed in this section underscores the multifaceted impact of COVID-19 on teaching and learning, particularly in early childhood education. Global and national responses reveal stark contrasts in digital readiness and policy support, while local experiences highlight the resilience and ingenuity of educators working in constrained environments. By grounding the study in the digital divide framework, this research foregrounds the lived realities of FP educators in Capricorn South District, offering insights into the urgent need for inclusive, context-sensitive educational reform.

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative case study design to explore the coping strategies of FP educators during the COVID-19 lockdown in Capricorn South District, Limpopo Province. A case study approach was chosen for its strength in capturing context-specific experiences and generating rich, descriptive insights into complex social phenomena (Yin 2014). This design aligns with the study's aim to foreground educator voices and examine how systemic constraints shaped

their pedagogical responses. The qualitative design was appropriate given the exploratory nature of the research and the need to understand lived experiences in depth. By focusing on a bounded group of educators within a specific district, the study was able to uncover nuanced coping mechanisms that may be overlooked in broader quantitative surveys. The design also allowed for flexibility in data collection and interpretation, which was essential given the unpredictable and evolving nature of the pandemic context.

Sampling and Participants

Purposive sampling was employed to select three FP educators from Moonlight Primary School, a public, no-fee school located in Capricorn South District, Limpopo Province. This sampling method was appropriate for capturing context-specific experiences of teaching and learning during the COVID-19 lockdown. Moonlight Primary School was selected as a representative case of the systemic challenges confronting under-resourced rural schools during the COVID-19 pandemic. Serving learners from households predominantly dependent on government social grants, the school lacked the technological infrastructure necessary to support online learning. Unlike urban counterparts equipped with smartboards, stable internet connectivity, and digital literacy initiatives, Moonlight Primary had limited access to educational devices and faced ongoing connectivity issues, further hindering its ability to maintain instructional continuity.

Participants were chosen based on their direct involvement in FP teaching during the period of school closures, ensuring alignment with the study's objectives. All three participants were full-time educators at Moonlight Primary School, representing different grades in the FP and years of teaching experience. Their diverse professional backgrounds provided rich, contextually grounded insights into the coping strategies adopted under resource-constrained conditions. Ethical clearance was obtained prior to data collection, and all participants provided informed consent. Confidentiality, anonymity, and voluntary participation were strictly maintained throughout the study. This sampling strategy enabled the study to foreground the lived experiences of educators in an under-resourced rural school,

offering a nuanced understanding of how systemic inequalities shaped pedagogical responses during the pandemic.

Data Collection Methods

To explore the lockdown's impact on teaching and learning, the study employed multiple qualitative methods for triangulated analysis. In-depth interviews were central, capturing educators' experiences, challenges, coping strategies, and emotional strain (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree 2006). Each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes and was scheduled after school hours to accommodate the educators' availability. Document analysis of official circulars from the Limpopo Department of Education and DBE provided policy context, revealing gaps between formal guidance and rural realities (Bowen 2009). Field notes were maintained throughout the data collection process, capturing my observations, reflections, and contextual details of the interviews and school environments. These notes were particularly useful for documenting 62 non-verbal cues, situational nuances, and logistical considerations during data collection, ensuring a holistic understanding of the research setting (Emerson et al. 2011).

Data Analysis Approach

A thematic analysis framework guided the interpretation of qualitative data, enabling systematic identification of patterns across interview transcripts and documentary sources (Braun and Clarke 2006). Transcripts were reviewed and coded to extract themes related to teaching challenges, institutional support, parental involvement, and coping strategies, offering a context-sensitive lens on crisis adaptation in FP education. Credibility was enhanced through triangulation, aligning insights from interviews, policy documents, and field observations to ensure consistency and depth (Lincoln and Guba 1985). Member checking further supported trustworthiness, allowing participants to verify transcript accuracy and validate thematic interpretations.

Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to established ethical protocols, with approval granted by the University of Johannesburg Ethics Committee and the Limpopo

Provincial Research Ethics Committee. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, who were briefed on the study's aims, their voluntary involvement, and their right to withdraw. Anonymity was ensured by using pseudonyms for both individuals and the school. Data were securely stored on password-protected devices, maintaining confidentiality throughout the research process.

Limitations of the Study

This case study provides context-specific insights into FP education during the COVID-19 lockdown, limiting generalisability beyond Moonlight Primary. Researcher bias was addressed through reflexivity, triangulation, and peer debriefing, though subjectivity remains inherent to qualitative research. The design revealed educational inequalities, educators' adaptations, and systemic constraints. Tackling digital exclusion, improving institutional support, and enhancing community engagement are vital for future educational resilience.

Findings from Moonlight Primary School

Moonlight Primary School, a Quintile 1 rural school in the Capricorn South District of Limpopo Province, faced substantial challenges during the COVID-19 lockdown. Unlike well-resourced schools, Moonlight lacked access to technological infrastructure, stable internet connectivity, and structured institutional guidance. Educators at the school demonstrated resilience and creativity, employing low-tech strategies to sustain learning. This section presents the findings on the barriers educators encountered, the coping strategies implemented, and the effectiveness of support structures, offering insights into the broader systemic challenges faced by FP educators in underprivileged schools.

Challenges of Online Learning Transition

Moonlight Primary lacked essential digital tools, limiting educators' ability to facilitate online learning. The school had only five laptops shared among all educators. Most students did not own smartphones or tablets, preventing them from engaging in online learning activities.

One educator shared her frustration with the absence of technological resources:

Many children come from families that struggled to afford basic things, so they had

no computers, smartphones, or internet that they can use for learning (Mrs Phuti).

Moonlight Primary's challenges reflect broader issues in the digital divide. Only 11.7% of South African schools offered online learning due to limited access (Stats SA 2021). In Ethiopia, printed materials were used to offset digital gaps (Belay 2020), which was similar to Moonlight's approach. Yet, Ford et al. (2021) stress that FP learners need interactive, hands-on methods, making digital exclusion a major barrier. This highlights the need for equitable investment in infrastructure such as preloaded tablets, broadband expansion, and low-tech options like community radio to prevent learning disruptions in rural schools.

Lack of Alternative Learning Resources

In addition to digital barriers, Moonlight Primary struggled with access to radio lessons and television-based learning, further limiting educational continuity. The Limpopo Department of Education encouraged broadcasting curriculum-aligned content on radio and TV, but many students could not access these materials due to the lack of devices in their homes.

One educator expressed concern about the limited availability of alternative resources:

I also found out that some learners were not able to listen to the radio or watch TV programmes because their families were busy or did not have a radio or TV (Mrs Phuti).

Research shows that low-income families struggled with radio and TV-based learning during COVID-19, deepening educational inequalities (UNESCO 2020). In Rwanda, radio lessons helped some learners, but inconsistent access limited impact (Uwizeyimana 2022). In Brazil, lack of printed materials led to reduced engagement (Lichand et al. 2022). These findings highlight the need for multi-modal crisis planning governments should invest in printed learning kits, expand radio instruction, and create community hubs to support learners beyond digital platforms.

Parental Challenges and Limited Engagement

Parental involvement was crucial in maintaining learning, yet many parents lacked the skills, time, or resources to support their children effectively. Some parents were digitally illiterate, unable to

assist with learning platforms, while others had work commitments that prevented them from dedicating time to structured lessons.

One educator shared her experience with parental constraints:

Some parents couldn't help their children because they didn't know how to use the technology or didn't have data bundles to access online learning (Mrs Nape).

Parental involvement strongly influences learning outcomes (Treviño et al. 2021), yet low-income families face barriers like financial strain and limited education, hindering engagement (Sayed & Singh, 2020). In Indonesia, low-tech strategies were used to address low parental digital literacy (Fitria and Pangesti 2023). These findings highlight the need for structured parental training, schools should offer community workshops, share learner support guidelines, and ensure regular teacher-parent check-ins to strengthen engagement during crises.

Coping Strategies Employed by Educators

Use of Phone Calls for Parental Guidance

To compensate for the lack of online platforms, educators relied on phone calls and SMS messages to communicate with parents and guide them through lesson plans.

One educator explained how she encouraged parental involvement through direct communication:

I made many phone calls to parents to assist their children. I also encouraged them to use radios and TVs, which helped with educational programmes (Mrs Tobi).

This strategy aligns with findings by Paudel (2021), who noted that low-tech methods such as phone calls were effective in maintaining engagement during school closures. However, limited mobile network coverage in rural areas hindered the reach of such methods (Rehman and Fatima 2021). This finding highlights the need for government-sponsored mobile learning initiatives, where pre-recorded phone lessons and interactive SMS tutoring can supplement traditional classroom instruction in low-resource schools.

Distribution of Physical Learning Materials

Educators at Moonlight Primary also distributed printed learning materials to maintain instructional

continuity during the COVID-19 lockdown. With the absence of digital tools and internet access, educators prepared printed material that parents collected from the school, ensuring students had some structured activities to engage with at home. Despite logistical challenges, educators found this method useful in reinforcing lessons and providing students with tangible resources to continue learning outside the classroom.

One educator described the approach used to distribute learning materials:

I tried to provide learning materials by having parents come to collect them from school (Mrs Nape).

Printed learning materials are vital in low-resource settings. UNESCO (2020) notes they help maintain engagement without internet access, as seen in Ethiopia's take-home material initiative (Belay 2020). However, Spaul and Van der Berg (2020) caution that without teacher interaction, their impact is limited, especially for FP learners needing structured guidance. Moonlight Primary's reliance on printed resources underscores the need for multi-modal strategies that pair physical materials with teacher feedback, small-group tutoring, and community-led sessions. Future policies must blend low-tech and traditional methods to ensure inclusive, effective learning.

Sharing Strategies among Educators

Peer collaboration was a critical coping mechanism for educators at Moonlight Primary, allowing them to exchange ideas, teaching strategies, and emotional support. Without formal guidance from the Department of Education, educators formed WhatsApp-based peer networks where they shared lesson plans, discussed challenges, and helped each other navigate the complexities of online learning. This informal support system proved invaluable in bridging the knowledge gap and adapting teaching practices under restrictive conditions.

One educator elaborated on the significance of peer support:

Teachers talked to each other to share ideas on how to help children learn at home ... we had phone calls and WhatsApp groups to discuss what worked and what didn't work (Mrs Phuti).

Peer collaboration is crucial in crisis adaptation. Ferreira et al. (2023) show that learning communities boost educator resilience and creativity. Vale and Graven (2023) found that educators relied on informal networks like *WhatsApp* for problem-solving. Yet, Mhlanga and Molo (2020) caution that such networks can't replace structured guidance needed for long-term strategies. At Moonlight Primary, peer support was vital, but must be formalized into professional development. Schools should establish educator communities, led by curriculum advisors, to turn informal collaboration into sustainable learning platforms.

Lack of Formal Support from Authorities

Educators at Moonlight Primary expressed frustration over the lack of substantial support from the Department of Education during the lockdown. Unlike urban schools that had access to digital resources, rural educators were left to navigate online learning with minimal training or formal guidance. The absence of structured support left many educators feeling isolated and underprepared to manage the transition.

One educator described the difficulties caused by the lack of assistance:

I felt like I was on my own, trying to manage learners remotely with no real support from the department (Mrs Tobi).

Institutional support is vital for successful online learning transitions. Mhlanga and Molo (2020) found that lack of teacher training and digital literacy programs worsened disruptions, especially in rural schools. Spaul and Van der Berg (2020) noted that government efforts focused on urban areas, neglecting resource-poor institutions. Jung et al. (2024) observed that schools with prior training adapted more effectively. To ensure future readiness, policymakers must provide inclusive support, blended learning training, decentralised resources, and school-level interventions alongside regional task forces to guide and equip educators.

Lessons Learned and Future Recommendations

The importance of digital literacy training emerged as a key lesson from the COVID-19 lockdown. Educators recognised the need for early digital exposure to prepare both educators and students for future crises.

One educator reflected on this lesson:

Everyone needs to be familiar with technology and how to use social media for online learning. Learners also need to be educated about technology from a young age (Mrs Nape).

Research supports integrating digital literacy into teacher training to improve online learning management (Jung et al. 2024). Becirovic (2023) warns that such initiatives must match infrastructure and socioeconomic contexts. Moonlight Primary's experience highlights the need for ongoing digital literacy development. Schools should embed tech courses in teacher training, and policymakers must promote early digital education for FP learners.

Summary of Key Findings from Moonlight Primary School

The COVID-19 lockdown significantly impacted teaching and learning at Moonlight Primary School, a Quintile 1 rural school in Capricorn South District, Limpopo Province. The findings reveal systemic barriers, coping strategies, and lessons learned, highlighting the urgent need for equitable resource distribution, structured educator training, and strengthened institutional support.

Challenges of Online Learning Transition

Moonlight Primary faced severe technological limitations, as students lacked computers, smartphones, and stable internet access, making online learning nearly impossible. Educators struggled with limited alternative learning resources, such as printed materials or accessible radio programmes, which further hindered learning continuity. The sudden transition exposed educators' lack of preparedness for online teaching, as their training had primarily focused on face-to-face instruction. Additionally, parents lacked digital literacy, preventing them from effectively supporting their children's learning, which contributed to low student engagement and widened educational disparities.

Coping Strategies Employed by Educators

Despite these barriers, educators at Moonlight Primary demonstrated resilience and adaptability by employing low-tech strategies. Phone calls and SMS messaging became the primary means of communicating with parents and guiding home

learning. Educators distributed printed material, ensuring that students had structured learning activities despite the lack of digital tools. Peer collaboration through *WhatsApp* groups allowed educators to exchange teaching strategies and emotional support, compensating for the absence of formal institutional guidance.

Ineffectiveness of Support Structures

Educators reported minimal governmental support, stating that they received no formal training, resources, or digital literacy guidance to facilitate online learning. While curriculum advisors developed radio-based lessons, these efforts had limited effectiveness, as many families did not own radios. The digital divide at Moonlight Primary exacerbated learning inequalities, leaving educators feeling isolated and overwhelmed due to the lack of direct institutional intervention.

Conclusion

Moonlight Primary School faced significant barriers during the COVID-19 lockdown, including limited technological infrastructure, lack of alternative learning resources, inadequate institutional support, and low parental engagement. Educators adopted low-tech strategies such as phone calls, SMS, printed material, and radio lessons to sustain learning. However, these efforts were constrained by systemic inequalities, highlighting the urgent need for equitable access to education resources.

The findings highlight the urgent need for digital literacy training among both educators and

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The findings highlight the urgent need for digital literacy training among both educators and students, as technological proficiency is key to effective online learning.

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students, as technological proficiency is key to effective online learning. Equitable distribution of resources, including tablets and internet access, is essential to bridge learning disparities in underprivileged schools. Strengthening parent-teacher communication and providing parental training workshops can enhance home learning support during future disruptions. Additionally, decentralised educational support frameworks must be implemented to ensure real-time assistance for rural schools, addressing infrastructural gaps and teacher preparedness.

Implications of the Study

The study reinforces the Digital Divide Theory, demonstrating that technology-dependent learning strategies disproportionately exclude students in rural and underprivileged schools. Findings highlight the importance of structured educator training, community-driven learning support, and diverse instructional methods to ensure educational equity. Schools with pre-existing digital literacy training adapted more effectively, revealing the need for institutional preparedness in crisis management.

Recommendations

- **Investment in Digital Infrastructure** – Provide learners from low-income backgrounds with tablets, internet access, and offline digital resources to bridge the divide.
- **Structured educator Training** – Integrate digital pedagogy and crisis adaptation strategies into professional development programs.
- **Parental Engagement Initiatives** – Offer training workshops and accessible resources to empower parents in supporting home learning.
- **Decentralized Educational Support** – Establish regional task forces to provide direct guidance and resources to rural schools.
- **Multi-Modal Learning Approaches** – Expand radio, printed materials, and interactive low-tech solutions to ensure learning continuity beyond digital reliance.

Moonlight Primary's experience highlights deep systemic inequalities in education access. Addressing these disparities requires integrated policy reforms that prioritize inclusive learning models, enhanced educator preparedness, and strengthened institutional support structures to ensure education systems are resilient in future crises.

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African Union Strategic Response Against Terrorism in Africa: The Case of Somalia

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Abstract

Terrorism remains a critical global security challenge, with African nations facing some of its most severe consequences. The African Union (AU) has played a central role in counterterrorism efforts, particularly in addressing the threats posed by extremist groups such as Al-Shabaab, Boko Haram, and Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). This paper critically examines the AU's counterterrorism strategies, focusing on Somalia, where Al-Shabaab continues to threaten regional stability. The study assesses the effectiveness of AU-led initiatives, including intelligence-sharing mechanisms, joint military operations, and diplomatic interventions.

Drawing from contemporary scholarly literature and policy developments, the paper explores how financial constraints, donor-driven policies, regional political dynamics, and governance challenges affect counterterrorism efforts. Special attention is given to the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS) and its evolution into the African Union Support and Stabilization Mission in Somalia (AUSSOM), analyzing their strategic objectives, operational challenges, and potential for long-term stabilization. Despite significant military and diplomatic engagements, terrorist organizations continue to demonstrate resilience and adaptability, raising concerns about the sustainability and impact of AU-led interventions.

This study contributes to the broader discourse on counterterrorism by providing a nuanced evaluation of the AU's successes and limitations. It argues that while military operations are crucial,

a more comprehensive approach-including political stabilization, economic development, and local governance strengthening-is essential for lasting peace and security. By assessing the AU's evolving role in counterterrorism, this paper aims to inform policy recommendations for a more effective and sustainable response to terrorism in Africa.

Keywords: Counterterrorism, African Union, Al-Shabaab, Regional Security, Stabilization

Introduction

Terrorism remains one of Africa's most pressing security threats, with Somalia serving as a key battleground. The extremist group Al-Shabaab, an Al-Qaeda affiliate, continues to orchestrate deadly attacks despite sustained military interventions led by the African Union (AU). Over the years, the AU has deployed several missions, including the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) and its successor, the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS), in an effort to stabilize the region (Williams 2022). However, these interventions have faced numerous challenges, including inadequate funding, regional power struggles, and governance deficits, necessitating the recent establishment of the African Union Support and Stabilization Mission in Somalia (AUSSOM).

This article critically examines the AU's strategic response to terrorism, particularly in Somalia, evaluating its successes and limitations. The core question guiding this analysis is whether the AU's counterterrorism strategies are effectively mitigating the threat posed by Al-Shabaab and enhancing regional stability. By scrutinizing the AU's military interventions, diplomatic engagements, and regional collaborations, this study aims to assess whether the organization is fulfilling its mandate in combating terrorism.

A key area of focus is the role of donor-driven policies in shaping the AU's interventions. Research suggests that international donors significantly influence the AU's counterterrorism approach, often dictating priorities and operational frameworks (Cocodia 2019). Additionally, regional security dynamics, particularly the involvement of neighboring states such as Kenya and Ethiopia, play a crucial role in the AU's effectiveness in Somalia (De Coning 2021).

This study integrates insights from contemporary literature and policy analysis to provide a nuanced understanding of the AU's role in counterterrorism. By acknowledging both successes and short-

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comings, this article contributes to broader discussions on the effectiveness of regional organizations in addressing transnational security threats in Africa.

Evolution of Terrorism in Somalia

The evolution of terrorism in Somalia, particularly through the rise and expansion of Al-Shabaab, is a complex process shaped by historical, political, ideological, and environmental factors. The roots of the Somali insurgency can be traced back to the 1990s, when the collapse of the central government left the country in a state of anarchy, facilitating the emergence of various militant groups. Al-Shabaab, which emerged in the mid-2000s, was originally a radical youth wing of the Islamic Courts Union (ICU), a coalition of Islamist forces that briefly controlled much of Somalia in 2006. Al-Shabaab's ideological foundation was influenced by the global jihadist movements, particularly al-Qaeda, and its primary goal was to establish an Islamic state in Somalia, governed by strict Sharia law.

Al-Shabaab's emergence was not a random event but rather a consequence of a combination of local grievances, historical context, and international dynamics. Somalia's political instability, economic hardship, and lack of state infrastructure created

a fertile ground for radical ideologies. The collapse of the Somali government in 1991, following the overthrow of President Siad Barre, resulted in the fragmentation of the country along clan lines, which were later exploited by Al-Shabaab to rally support and recruit fighters from marginalized communities. In addition to internal drivers, external influences also played a critical role in the evolution of terrorism in Somalia. For instance, the 2006 Ethiopian military intervention in Somalia, aimed at quelling the growing Islamist insurgency, pushed many radicalized fighters, including Al-Shabaab, to align more closely with global jihadist networks, particularly Al-Qaeda. This strategic alliance was cemented in 2012 when Al-Shabaab formally pledged allegiance to Al-Qaeda, signaling its shift from a local insurgency to an international jihadist group with global ambitions (Abboud 2017).

Al-Shabaab's ideological shifts are also crucial in understanding the dynamics of terrorism in Somalia. Initially, the group's rhetoric was focused on Somali nationalism and the establishment of a Somali-based Islamic state. Over time, however, as the group grew more aligned with Al-Qaeda, its objectives expanded to include broader regional and global jihadist goals. This shift is evident in the group's attacks beyond Somalia's borders, including the 2010 Kampala bombings in Uganda, which were a direct response to the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) forces' involvement in the country (Aydinli and Cramer 2019). Al-Shabaab's strategic objectives, therefore, evolved from a focus on local power consolidation to a broader regional and global jihadist agenda, as the group sought to export its ideology and establish a pan-Islamic caliphate.

Environmental stressors have also played a critical role in sustaining Al-Shabaab's insurgency. Somalia's ongoing environmental crises, including desertification, drought, and famine, have exacerbated economic hardship and led to increased displacement and poverty. These stressors have created a pool of disenfranchised and vulnerable individuals, many of whom have been susceptible to recruitment by Al-Shabaab. The group has leveraged this humanitarian crisis by providing food, security, and services in areas under its control, thus gaining local support. In some instances, the group has positioned itself as a protector of Somali interests, particularly in the

context of the Somali government's inability to provide basic services or address environmental challenges (Marchal 2011).

Clan dynamics have also been pivotal in shaping Al-Shabaab's strategy and operations. Somalia's clan-based system of governance has historically been a source of both division and cohesion, and Al-Shabaab has adeptly manipulated these divisions for its benefit. By framing its narrative in terms of clan solidarity and representing itself as a defender of Somali identity, Al-Shabaab has gained support from various clans, particularly those in the southern and central regions of Somalia. Additionally, the group's ability to align itself with certain clans while alienating others has been a double-edged sword, as it has allowed Al-Shabaab to control significant parts of the country while also fostering deep-seated enmities that have fueled further conflict (Menkhaus 2014).

External influences, especially from neighboring countries, have been another key factor in the evolution of terrorism in Somalia. The involvement of Ethiopia and Kenya in Somalia's internal affairs has been a source of both support and antagonism for Al-Shabaab. The Ethiopian intervention in 2006, aimed at countering the Islamic Courts Union, created a power vacuum that Al-Shabaab filled. Ethiopia's continued military presence in Somalia has remained a focal point for Al-Shabaab's recruitment propaganda, with the group framing its insurgency as a struggle against foreign occupation (Hess 2012). Similarly, Kenya's military intervention in Somalia in 2011, ostensibly to counter Al-Shabaab's growing influence in Kenya, has been used by the group to justify its operations and attacks, particularly those targeting Kenyan soil.

The international community, particularly the United States and the African Union, has responded to the rise of Al-Shabaab with a combination of military and diplomatic efforts. AMISOM, the African Union-led peacekeeping force in Somalia, has been instrumental in pushing Al-Shabaab out of major urban centers, including Mogadishu. However, the effectiveness of AMISOM has been limited by several factors, including insufficient funding, inadequate troop numbers, and operational challenges. Despite these obstacles, AMISOM's presence has been crucial in preventing Al-Shabaab from gaining full control over Somalia

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and has provided the Somali government with the breathing space needed to consolidate power (Benton 2016).

In conclusion, the evolution of terrorism in Somalia cannot be understood without considering the interplay of historical, political, environmental, and external factors. Al-Shabaab’s rise from a local insurgency to a global jihadist organization was driven by both internal dynamics, such as clan-based grievances and environmental stressors, and external influences, including regional interventions and global jihadist networks. The group’s shift from Somali nationalism to global jihadism exemplifies the changing nature of terrorism in the 21st century, where local conflicts are increasingly intertwined with broader international security concerns. Effective counterterrorism strategies must, therefore, take into account not only the military capabilities of groups like Al-Shabaab but also the underlying political, social, and environmental conditions that sustain such insurgencies.

Methodology

The excerpt originates from my doctoral thesis, which investigated the effectiveness of the African Union (AU) in addressing the root causes of terrorism in Africa, with a specific focus on the case of Al-Shabaab in Somalia. The research

adopted a constructivist-interpretivist research paradigm, employing qualitative methods for data collection and analysis. The primary objective of this article is to scrutinize the AU’s counterterrorism strategies in addressing the terrorism prevalent in Somalia, while also extracting broader insights from the experiences of other terrorist groups across the continent.

The study engaged in in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with a diverse range of respondents, including religious and cultural leaders, media practitioners, representatives from Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), scholars from academia and think tanks, business community leaders, youth group leaders, and officials from regional bodies. This varied selection aimed to capture a comprehensive perspective on the multifaceted aspects of terrorism and its root causes.

To analyze the gathered data, a combination of content analysis, thematic analysis, and narrative analysis methods were employed. These methodologies facilitated a nuanced examination of the intricate factors influencing terrorism in Africa, with a specific lens on the strategies employed by the AU in the context of Somalia. The utilization of diverse data sources and analytical methods enhances the study’s depth and breadth, providing a robust foundation for assessing the AU’s effectiveness in addressing the complex and dynamic phenomenon of terrorism on the continent.

The African Union’s Counter-Terrorism Strategy

The African Union (AU) has played a central role in shaping Africa’s response to terrorism, particularly in Somalia, where Al-Shabaab remains a persistent threat. The AU’s counter-terrorism framework is anchored in the 2004 Protocol to the OAU Convention on the Prevention and Combating of Terrorism, which emphasizes regional cooperation, intelligence sharing, and military interventions (AU, 2004). However, the implementation of these policies has been constrained by financial limitations, political fragmentation, and governance challenges (Williams 2022).

The African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) was established in 2007 with a mandate to stabilize

Somalia, support the transitional government, and combat Al-Shabaab (Menkhaus, 2018). Over the years, AMISOM has played a pivotal role in retaking key urban centers from Al-Shabaab, particularly Mogadishu, Kismayo, and Baidoa (Williams 2022). However, the mission faced several challenges:

Reliance on Donor Funding: AMISOM's operations were heavily dependent on external funding, particularly from the European Union (EU) and the United Nations (UN). The financial instability often led to delays in salary payments for troops, affecting morale and operational efficiency (Williams and Hashi 2020).

Coordination with Regional Economic Communities (RECs):

While AMISOM collaborated with the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and the East African Community (EAC), coordination was often hampered by differing national interests, particularly among troop-contributing countries like Kenya, Ethiopia, and Uganda (Tadesse 2021).

Operational Challenges:

AMISOM struggled with logistical constraints, asymmetric warfare tactics employed by Al-Shabaab, and accusations of human rights violations, which affected its legitimacy among local communities (De Coning 2021). To address these limitations, AMISOM was replaced by the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS) in April 2022, with a mandate to gradually transfer security responsibilities to the Somali National Army (SNA) by December 2024 (AU Peace and Security Council, 2022). However, ATMIS faces similar challenges, including funding shortfalls, political uncertainty, and an increasingly resilient Al-Shabaab insurgency (Bryden 2022).

The African Union Support and Stabilization Mission in Somalia (AUSSOM) was recently established as a successor to ATMIS, following a UN Security Council resolution aimed at consolidating AU-led stabilization efforts (United Nations 2023). This transition marks a shift in the AU's approach to counterterrorism, emphasizing a more localized and politically driven strategy. However, key concerns remain:

Troop Composition and Regional Rivalries:

The AU has faced difficulties in mobilizing new troop commitments, as traditional contributors

like Ethiopia and Kenya reassess their involvement due to domestic political and security pressures (Felbab-Brown 2023). Ethiopia's increasing engagement with Somaliland has further complicated regional dynamics (International Crisis Group 2023).

Viability Amid Political and Environmental Challenges:

Somalia's fragile governance structures, inter-clan conflicts, and environmental stressors such as prolonged droughts and resource scarcity continue to fuel instability, limiting the effectiveness of military-centric interventions (Hassan and Weiss 2022).

The Shift Toward a Somali-Led Security Framework:

While AUSSOM aims to empower Somalia's security forces, the lack of institutional capacity and internal divisions within the Somali government pose significant risks to long-term stability (Barnes and Hassan 2023).

Regional and Geopolitical Dynamics

The effectiveness of AU counterterrorism efforts is influenced by regional rivalries and geopolitical interests. The security landscape in the Horn of Africa is shaped by competing influences from Ethiopia, Kenya, and external actors such as the United States, Turkey, and the Gulf States (Soliman 2022).

Ethiopia's Recognition of Somaliland and Its Impact on AU Strategy:

Ethiopia's recent decision to formalize ties with Somaliland has escalated tensions with Somalia, potentially weakening AU-led stabilization efforts (International Crisis Group 2023). Ethiopia's engagement with Somaliland could embolden secessionist movements, complicating the AU's commitment to Somalia's territorial integrity (Abbink 2023).

Kenya and Burundi's Role:

Kenya has played a critical role in counterterrorism efforts, particularly through cross-border operations and intelligence-sharing mechanisms (Botha 2022). However, Kenya's presence in Somalia has also been controversial, with accusations of economic exploitation and extrajudicial actions by the Kenya Defence Forces (KDF) (Hansen 2021).

Meanwhile, Burundi remains one of the largest troop contributors to AU missions, but domestic political instability has raised concerns about the sustainability of its involvement (Vorrath 2021).

External Actors and Counterterrorism

Operations:

The United States has maintained a strong military presence in Somalia, conducting drone strikes and supporting elite Somali counterterrorism units (Fisher and Anderson 2022). Turkey has also expanded its influence through military training programs and infrastructure investments (Soliman 2022). However, the divergence in counterterrorism priorities between the AU, the UN, and external actors has led to strategic misalignments (De Coning 2021).

Governance and Structural Challenges

A critical gap in AU counterterrorism strategies is the failure to address Somalia's deep-rooted governance deficits, which contribute to the resilience of Al-Shabaab. While military interventions have weakened the group in some areas, structural factors continue to fuel radicalization and instability (Menkhaus 2018). Key Governance Challenges include:

Weak Legitimacy of the Somali Government:

The Somali government struggles with internal divisions, corruption, and limited control beyond major urban centers (Barnes and Hassan 2023). Many local communities perceive the government as disconnected from their needs, which Al-Shabaab exploits by offering parallel governance structures (Hassan and Weiss 2022).

Clan-Based Marginalization and Al-Shabaab

Recruitment:

Somalia's clan-based politics often results in the exclusion of certain groups from governance structures. Al-Shabaab has successfully capitalized on these grievances, portraying itself as an alternative to a corrupt and ineffective government (Fisher and Anderson 2022).

Environmental Stressors as Drivers of Conflict:

Somalia faces severe environmental challenges, including desertification, water scarcity, and food insecurity. These stressors have exacerbated local conflicts and provided Al-Shabaab with recruitment opportunities by positioning itself as a

provider of social services (Hansen 2021).

Limitations of AU Interventions as Short-Term Solutions:

AU-led military operations have focused on eliminating immediate security threats rather than addressing the root causes of instability. Without long-term governance reforms, Somalia risks reverting to a security vacuum once AU forces withdraw (Bryden 2022).

The AU's counterterrorism strategy in Somalia has achieved tactical successes but continues to face structural, financial, and political challenges. The transition from AMISOM to ATMIS and now AUSSOM reflects a strategic shift, yet deep-seated governance and regional tensions remain significant obstacles. Moving forward, the AU must adopt a holistic approach that integrates security interventions with governance reforms, economic development, and climate resilience to achieve sustainable peace in Somalia.

Findings and Discussion

The evolution of terrorism in Somalia, particularly the rise of Al-Shabaab and the persistent challenge of dismantling this group, highlights the complexities and limitations of counter-insurgency efforts in the Horn of Africa. Drawing from the experiences of the African Union (AU) missions, AMISOM (African Union Mission in Somalia) and ATMIS (African Transition Mission in Somalia) as well as broader regional and international interventions, the following findings emerge, each of which points to critical insights regarding the effectiveness, limitations, and potential strategies for combating terrorism in the region.

The first major finding concerns the effectiveness of the AU missions in Somalia. AMISOM and ATMIS have made significant military gains in their years of operation, particularly in recapturing key urban centers, such as Mogadishu, and reducing the territorial control of Al-Shabaab. These missions have provided essential security for the Somali government, facilitated humanitarian aid, and allowed for some degree of political stabilization (Benton 2016). However, despite these successes, their inability to dismantle Al-Shabaab completely underscores a critical challenge. Military victories alone cannot defeat a group like Al-Shabaab, which operates as both an insurgent movement and a

social network. Al-Shabaab has been able to adapt its strategies over time, shifting from controlling territories to waging asymmetric warfare, conducting high-profile attacks, and utilizing local clan structures to maintain support (Marchal 2011).

This insight is not unique to Somalia but is evident in other counter-terrorism contexts, where military intervention is often limited by the complexities of local dynamics and the resilience of insurgent groups. As I have observed in my research and analysis, purely military strategies tend to overlook the social, political, and economic conditions that sustain insurgencies. Al-Shabaab's ability to exploit the lack of governance in rural areas, its use of terror to enforce control, and its integration into the local economy through taxation and trade have enabled the group to survive, even in the face of military defeat (Aydinli and Cramer 2019). The inability of AMISOM and ATMIS to dismantle Al-Shabaab points to the need for counter-insurgency strategies that go beyond military engagement.

A second major finding is the heavy reliance of AU missions on external funding, which shapes the strategic direction of operations and limits their autonomy. As I've noted in previous discussions, AMISOM and ATMIS, despite their significant operational presence, depend heavily on donor contributions, particularly from the European Union and the United States (Hess 2012). This financial dependency has had profound implications for the effectiveness of AU-led missions. It has led to a situation where the priorities and strategies of these missions are often dictated by external actors rather than reflecting the priorities of the African Union or the Somali state itself. This undermines the long-term sustainability of counter-terrorism efforts, as donor-driven initiatives tend to have short-term focus and may not be responsive to the changing realities on the ground.

In addition, reliance on donor funding can result in fragmented approaches that prioritize short-term military goals over comprehensive, sustainable peacebuilding strategies. It is crucial to acknowledge that counter-terrorism efforts, especially in fragile states like Somalia, require a long-term commitment that is not contingent on external funding cycles. As I have pointed out, the lack of financial independence for AU missions restricts their operational flexibility and inhibits the

development of a coherent, locally driven strategy that addresses the root causes of insurgency, such as poverty, governance failure, and environmental stressors (Menkhaus 2014).

Another key finding is the fragmentation within the regional security frameworks and the inability of regional economic communities (RECs) to effectively coordinate counter-terrorism efforts. The African Union, despite its role as the leading continental body in peace and security, faces significant challenges in fostering coordination between RECs such as the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and the East African Community (EAC). The lack of a unified regional approach weakens AU interventions, as it becomes difficult to coordinate military, political, and humanitarian efforts effectively across national borders (Benton 2016).

Somalia's neighbors, such as Kenya and Ethiopia, have often acted in isolation, pursuing their own security interests, which has led to inconsistent policies and at times, counterproductive interventions. For example, Ethiopia's military interventions in Somalia have been seen by Al-Shabaab as foreign occupation, which has been used to galvanize support among local Somali populations (Hess 2012). Similarly, Kenya's involvement in Somalia, while aimed at combating Al-Shabaab's growing presence along the border, has often resulted in retaliatory attacks within Kenya, demonstrating the difficulty of achieving security through unilateral action.

In my analysis, I have seen how the lack of a coordinated regional approach hinders the effectiveness of the AU missions. A unified regional strategy would enable more cohesive counter-terrorism policies and a stronger collective defense mechanism, but this is often hampered by the competing interests and priorities of individual countries. The need for stronger political will and a more integrated approach to security cooperation is evident, as regional fragmentation weakens the ability to address the complex and cross-border nature of the Al-Shabaab insurgency (Menkhaus 2014).

Finally, one of the most critical findings from the ongoing counter-insurgency efforts in Somalia is the pressing need for a holistic approach to counter-terrorism. Military interventions, as demonstrated

by AMISOM and ATMIS, are essential for addressing immediate security threats but are not sufficient on their own to bring about long-term peace and stability. A truly effective counter-insurgency strategy must integrate political stabilization, economic development, and environmental sustainability. As I have argued, counter-terrorism efforts that focus solely on military tactics fail to address the underlying socio-economic issues that fuel extremism. For example, the lack of economic opportunity, poor governance, and environmental degradation in Somalia have created a volatile environment in which groups like Al-Shabaab thrive.

A holistic approach would include strengthening the Somali state's ability to govern effectively, reducing corruption, promoting inclusive economic development, and addressing environmental challenges, such as the effects of drought and desertification. Moreover, peacebuilding efforts must incorporate local communities, fostering their resilience against extremist ideologies. Community-based initiatives, which focus on building social cohesion, promoting education, and providing alternative livelihoods, are critical in diminishing the appeal of Al-Shabaab's narrative. This approach would not only weaken the group's support base but also offer sustainable solutions to the root causes of terrorism.

In conclusion, while AMISOM and ATMIS have made significant strides in countering Al-Shabaab, their inability to completely dismantle the group reflects the limitations of a purely military approach. The heavy reliance on donor funding, regional fragmentation, and the lack of a holistic strategy further hinder progress. Moving forward, it is imperative that counter-terrorism strategies in Somalia and the Horn of Africa more broadly be based on integrated, long-term approaches that prioritize political, economic, and social stability over purely military victories. Only by addressing the multi-faceted nature of the insurgency can meaningful and lasting peace be achieved in Somalia.

The Way Forward

The enduring challenge of terrorism in Somalia, exemplified by the resilience of Al-Shabaab, requires a rethinking of current strategies, moving beyond short-term military victories

and externally driven interventions. The way forward, therefore, must be rooted in the themes identified throughout this study: strengthening local governance, fostering regional coordination, ensuring long-term stability through sustainable development, and reimagining the African Union's (AU) role in counter-terrorism efforts. I argue that a comprehensive, locally driven, and regionally coordinated approach is necessary for achieving lasting peace and stability in Somalia. In this section, I propose a way forward that aligns with these themes, emphasizing the need for a shift in strategy, focusing on inclusivity, long-term investments, and sustainable peacebuilding practices.

Enhancing Local Governance: Strengthening Legitimacy through Inclusive Political Structures

The foundation of any sustainable counter-terrorism strategy in Somalia must begin with the strengthening of local governance. As I have discussed throughout this study, one of the critical drivers of extremism in Somalia is the pervasive lack of trust in government institutions. The Somali government, despite its international support, has often struggled to extend its authority beyond Mogadishu, failing to provide basic services or maintain security in rural areas. This governance vacuum has allowed groups like Al-Shabaab to fill the void, offering their own brand of governance, which, although repressive, provides a semblance of order in areas where the state is absent (Menkhaus 2014).

In my view, enhancing local governance is not simply about reinforcing the power of the central government but about creating inclusive political structures at the local level. This requires empowering local communities, ensuring that their voices are heard in decision-making processes, and fostering a political culture that promotes transparency, accountability, and justice. As I have argued, local governance structures should not only be reflective of Somali clan dynamics but also address issues of political representation for marginalized groups, including women and youth (Benton 2016).

In practice, this means bolstering community-based governance initiatives, such as local

councils, that can work in tandem with the federal government to create a more decentralized and participatory governance system. Strengthening these local structures would not only improve the legitimacy of the state in the eyes of the Somali people but would also undermine Al-Shabaab's appeal, as it thrives by portraying itself as an alternative to the corrupt, ineffective state. Effective local governance can significantly reduce the likelihood of extremist ideologies taking root, particularly when communities feel empowered and supported by responsive and accountable political systems.

Regional Coordination: Addressing Fragmentation within RECs and Fostering Cooperation

Another critical element of the way forward lies in addressing the fragmentation within regional security frameworks and fostering greater cooperation between Regional Economic Communities (RECs). The lack of coordination between RECs such as the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and the East African Community (EAC) has been a significant obstacle to effective counter-terrorism efforts in the Horn of Africa. In my view, this fragmentation reflects broader political and economic interests that often hinder a unified approach to the region's security challenges.

To overcome these challenges, it is imperative that Somalia's neighboring states, along with regional organizations, adopt a more integrated and coordinated strategy. Regional coordination should include the sharing of intelligence, joint military operations, and political dialogue among neighboring states to ensure that counter-terrorism efforts are aligned and mutually reinforcing. As I have highlighted in my earlier analysis, the involvement of neighboring states such as Ethiopia and Kenya in unilateral interventions has often complicated the security situation, turning regional rivalries into obstacles to peace. The way forward must involve diplomatic engagement that fosters regional cooperation, recognizes shared security interests, and minimizes the risk of escalating conflict between states (Hess 2012).

Moreover, a regional approach should not be limited to military and security concerns alone.

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A holistic approach would include strengthening the Somali state's ability to govern effectively, reducing corruption, promoting inclusive economic development, and addressing environmental challenges, such as the effects of drought and desertification.

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Economic cooperation, such as cross-border trade and infrastructural development, should be part of a broader strategy aimed at building regional stability and reducing the appeal of insurgent groups that thrive in isolated, underdeveloped regions. In my opinion, regional cooperation must be based on mutual respect for national sovereignty but also recognize the interdependence of states in addressing transnational threats like Al-Shabaab.

Long-Term Stability Strategies: Investing in Climate Resilience and Sustainable Development

The challenge of terrorism in Somalia is deeply intertwined with the country's environmental vulnerabilities and economic challenges. Climate change, particularly the increasing frequency of droughts and desertification, exacerbates Somalia's poverty and displacement, creating fertile ground for extremist groups like Al-Shabaab to recruit and radicalize disaffected youth (Menkhaus 2014). Therefore, long-term stability in Somalia requires a comprehensive approach that goes beyond military interventions and addresses the root

causes of extremism, including climate change and economic underdevelopment.

In my research, I have consistently found that integrating climate resilience and sustainable development into counter-terrorism strategies is not only beneficial but essential. Investing in climate-resilient agriculture, improving water management systems, and promoting renewable energy sources can reduce the socio-economic vulnerabilities that drive individuals to join extremist groups. As part of a broader development strategy, initiatives aimed at improving food security, creating jobs, and strengthening local economies will undermine the appeal of Al-Shabaab's ideology, which is often framed around the provision of basic needs in the absence of the state.

Furthermore, a sustainable development strategy should prioritize education and youth empowerment. Providing young people with alternatives to joining extremist groups, through skills training, educational opportunities, and entrepreneurship, can have a transformative effect on the country's long-term peace and security. In my opinion, addressing the climate-security nexus through integrated approaches that focus on economic, social, and environmental stability is the key to reducing the conditions that fuel insurgencies like Al-Shabaab (Aydinli and Cramer 2019).

Rethinking AU Engagement: Moving Beyond Donor-Driven Approaches Towards Sustainable, Africa-Led Counter-Terrorism Initiatives

The final element of the way forward is a radical rethinking of the AU's role in counter-terrorism efforts. As I have argued throughout this study, the African Union's peace and security interventions, while important, have often been constrained by a heavy reliance on external donor funding. This has resulted in AU missions being shaped more by the priorities of international actors than by Africa's own security and development needs (Hess 2012). The way forward requires the AU to move beyond donor-driven approaches and embrace a more sustainable, Africa-led model for counter-terrorism.

To achieve this, the AU must focus on strengthening its institutional capacity, improving its funding mechanisms, and ensuring that its missions are driven by African priorities. The establishment of an African peace and security fund, for example,

would allow the AU to reduce its reliance on external donors and develop more coherent, context-sensitive interventions. Moreover, the AU should focus on fostering partnerships with African states, regional organizations, and civil society actors to create a truly continent-wide strategy for addressing terrorism and violent extremism.

In my opinion, Africa's response to terrorism must be rooted in the continent's own experiences, values, and realities. By adopting a more self-sufficient, locally driven approach to counter-terrorism, the AU can not only strengthen its legitimacy but also ensure that counter-insurgency efforts are better aligned with the long-term interests of African states and societies.

The way forward for Somalia and the broader Horn of Africa in combating terrorism must be marked by a shift in strategy, a move away from reliance on military interventions alone and toward a more holistic, sustainable approach that addresses the root causes of extremism. Strengthening local governance, fostering regional coordination, addressing climate change and economic vulnerabilities, and rethinking AU engagement are all integral components of a comprehensive strategy for long-term stability. It is only through this integrated, locally driven, and Africa-led approach that Somalia can hope to overcome the challenges posed by Al-Shabaab and achieve lasting peace and security.

Conclusion

This study has critically examined the limitations of the African Union's (AU) counter-terrorism strategies in Somalia, highlighting a series of systemic challenges that hinder the effectiveness of current interventions. Throughout the research, it has become evident that the AU's approach, while making some gains, has largely fallen short of dismantling the persistent threat posed by Al-Shabaab. The reasons for this are multifaceted and extend beyond the purely military domain to encompass deep-rooted governance failures, environmental vulnerabilities, and complex socio-political dynamics that continue to fuel the insurgency. As I have discussed in the preceding chapters, addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive, multifaceted strategy that not only targets the insurgency militarily but also

strengthens the foundations of Somali society—its political structures, economic resilience, and environmental sustainability.

The findings of this study underscore a critical truth: counter-terrorism efforts that focus exclusively on military interventions, without addressing underlying issues such as governance and socio-economic development, are destined to fail. While AU missions like the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) and the African Transition Mission in Somalia (ATIMS) have made some progress in reclaiming territory from Al-Shabaab, they have struggled to provide the long-term stability that Somalia requires. The failure to dismantle Al-Shabaab entirely is symptomatic of a broader problem—namely, the AU's reliance on external funding, lack of political coherence, and the absence of a holistic approach to counter-terrorism (Menkhaus 2014).

The need for integrated approaches that address governance, environmental, and socio-political challenges is more urgent than ever. To move beyond the constraints of current AU strategies, there must be a radical shift toward holistic, locally driven solutions. This study argues that such strategies must prioritize strengthening Somali political institutions, fostering economic development, and enhancing environmental resilience, as these are the root causes of the instability that terrorism thrives on. Only through a combination of good governance, economic development, and climate adaptation can Somalia begin to undermine the structural conditions that fuel extremism and terrorism.

One of the key lessons drawn from global strategies against terrorism is the importance of aligning military action with comprehensive peacebuilding initiatives. Looking beyond the African context, successful counter-terrorism models from countries like Colombia and Afghanistan offer valuable insights into how military successes must be complemented by political and social reintegration processes. As I have argued, Somalia requires a similar multi-dimensional approach—one that integrates counter-terrorism operations with long-term strategies for state-building and socio-economic development. By focusing on inclusivity and local ownership, Somalia can create an environment in which communities no longer

turn to violent extremism as a means of addressing their grievances.

Moreover, this study emphasizes the necessity for regional cooperation in the Horn of Africa. The fragmentation and lack of coordination between regional economic communities (RECs) like the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and the East African Community (EAC) have weakened collective efforts to address terrorism. To achieve sustainable counter-terrorism outcomes, regional cooperation must be fostered to ensure a coherent and unified response to the Al-Shabaab threat. In particular, shared intelligence, coordinated military operations, and cross-border economic initiatives are essential for a long-term solution to the security challenges facing Somalia. Without these coordinated efforts, the regional fragmentation observed in the Horn of Africa will continue to exacerbate the situation and undermine the success of AU interventions.

An equally important consideration is the AU's role in leading counter-terrorism efforts on the continent. The dependence on external donors for funding has shaped AU missions, limiting their autonomy and effectiveness. The study argues for a shift towards Africa-led solutions, one where the AU can rely on its own mechanisms for funding, coordination, and decision-making. This would allow for a more contextually relevant, flexible, and sustainable approach to counter-terrorism, as the AU would be better positioned to respond to the unique challenges faced by Somalia and the broader region. Strengthening the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) and fostering deeper institutional capacity within the AU are vital for ensuring that counter-terrorism efforts are not merely reactive but proactive and long-lasting (Hess 2012).

Furthermore, addressing the environmental drivers of extremism is crucial. The impact of climate change, particularly the increasing frequency of droughts and the degradation of agricultural land, exacerbates Somalia's instability. As I have argued, the combination of environmental stressors and resource scarcity creates fertile ground for recruitment into extremist organizations. Integrating climate resilience and sustainable development into counter-terrorism strategies will reduce Somalia's vulnerability

to both environmental shocks and insurgent groups. By investing in climate-smart agriculture, water management, and renewable energy, the international community and the AU can create a more resilient and self-sufficient Somalia that is less prone to the socio-economic grievances that Al-Shabaab exploits.

Looking forward, the way to achieve lasting stability in Somalia lies not just in recalibrating AU counter-terrorism strategies, but in transforming the approach to peacebuilding as a whole. This means embracing inclusive governance, regional cooperation, and the long-term promotion of sustainable development. A paradigm shift is required, one that recognizes the interconnectedness of security, governance, development, and the environment. Somalia's path to peace and stability depends on a comprehensive approach that treats the underlying causes of terrorism as part of a broader development agenda rather than isolated security challenges. As the study has shown, by drawing on successful global strategies, the AU can recalibrate its interventions to achieve lasting stability in Somalia, offering a blueprint for similar interventions across Africa.

In conclusion, the lessons from this study emphasize that combating terrorism in Somalia requires more than just military solutions. It calls for a deep, long-term commitment to governance reform, economic resilience, environmental sustainability, and regional cooperation. By recalibrating its interventions and drawing from successful global models, the AU has the potential to lead Somalia and the broader Horn of Africa towards lasting peace and stability.

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Connections between post-1994 Health Care and Street-level Bureaucracy



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Abstract

Performance metrics continue to be a useful tool for modifying bureaucratic procedures in the workplace, although the majority of bureaucracy research and intervention has been centred on increasing efficiency. Lipsky (1980) contends that street-level bureaucracy is compelled to consider the public objectives of efficiency and cost effectiveness, except for unique circumstances like a new service plan for locating clients. This conceptual article, which is based on secondary sources like journals, explains how the provision of health services changed during the apartheid era and how it was notably progressive considering the passage of laws protecting patients' constitutional rights. The article further argues that improvements in people's access to health care were brought about by the democratic dispensation, departing from a time when segregation of South African health services was regulated by law.

Keywords: Street-level bureaucracy, health sector, bureaucracy, apartheid, performance management, policy, authority, discretion

Introduction

Health personnel have attempted to give equal care in the face of inadequate financial allocations in the post-1994 civil service bureaucracy. Worth

mentioning is that health care professionals are tasked with enforcing regulations based on the requirements of the Constitution to minimise the impact of uneven access to care.

Brauns (2014) contends, however, that although the health sector is regarded as competent in ideation, policy formulation, resource allocation, and recommendation making, it is not in policy execution. This is highly likely to occur in situations where there is a severe lack of personnel and resources, which is unique to developing nations like South Africa (Meyer and Cloete 2006).

Whilst Lipsky (1980) did not have a democratic South Africa in mind, he overlooks the significance of community health workers in mitigating the influx of patients in public hospitals. Sudhipongpracha and Poocharoen (2021, p. 235) claim that, despite not being formally employed by local governments, community health workers (CHWs) carry out public service responsibilities in their communities by providing basic medical care and health education in compliance with orders from public health authorities. Because they allow private actors to actively participate in supervising and performing public functions, CHWs are an essential component of contemporary government.

Since health care workers cannot control negative social determinants of health like poverty, unhealthy housing, high transportation costs, unemployment, etc., these factors have hampered efforts to implement health reforms since 1994. Nevertheless, given the eventual containment of the Covid-19 pandemic, these obstacles are not insurmountable. Except for Sweden, the Scandinavian nations, Germany, France, Portugal, Israel, New Zealand, and other nations were sure to fortify their health systems and keep their borders closed (Goffen and Lotta 2021). It is noteworthy that even though Covid-19 was unprecedented and that governmental decisions were made to adopt these initiatives, health care personnel were ultimately responsible for putting the policy into action, which successfully contained the pandemic and prevented additional deaths.

Negativity Surrounding Post-apartheid Health Care

Given the restricted access that existed during apartheid, health care professionals are in a good position to provide services in restorative and participative ways thanks to their discretionary powers. However, Harris (2015) contends that authoritarian practices persist in post-apartheid

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health services that could impede access to care. These practices include abusive street-level bureaucracy and the top-down imposition of new policies that force health care providers to put the demands of managers ahead of the needs of patients. In times of personnel shortage, this could manifest as worn-out nurses being forced to work the required overtime.

Using a veiled allusion to discretion, Lipsky (1980) contends that employee compliance is influenced by how legitimate managers' instructions are viewed. According to Verloo (2019), street-level bureaucrats make two decisions about citizens' participation in policymaking and planning: first, they determine whether a citizen is eligible for government benefits; second, they use their discretionary powers to decide how to implement strategies and regulations. I would argue that street-level officials have the discretionary power

to handle circumstances as they see fit. However, noting that street-level bureaucrats contend with policies that are sometimes at odds with the realities of frontline work, Fox, Bayat, and Ferreira (2006), raise the prospect that policies are sometimes predicated on false information, irrationality, or impossibilities. This justification calls into question the belief that the nation has excellent policies, some of which may be beyond our capacity to carry out.

Noteworthy is that the improvements in South Africa's public health care delivery continue to be punctuated by elements of inadequacy insofar as equipment, infrastructure, shortage of medicine, staff shortage, influx of patients are concerned, and this results in worker alienation. Lipsky (1980, p. 75) asserts that worker alienation encapsulates several issues, including the degree to which the worker decides what gets done, has authority over what is created and how it is fashioned, and affects how the result is disposed of. Confronted with the challenges, health care workers express or repress their human and creative impulses through their professional activities. Leonardi, Paraciani and Raspanti (2024, p. 294) argue that a useful method for considering the heterogeneity of service realities is to use context as a guide. In this regard, through the conceptual lens of street-level bureaucracy theory, it is also feasible to observe how the South African public health care in which frontline workers operate affects their margins of discretion and responsibility. This has an impact on the bureaucratic relations and the standard of public services offered.

Impediments to Performance Efficiency

Hanning (2018) asserts that bureaucratic management has disadvantages of its own, one of which is that it restricts employees' freedom to be creative because they must fit into predetermined job profiles. This is a result of bureaucracy's rigidity and inability to accept workplace "order" aberrations. A counter-argument, on the other hand, is that since the work programme has become usual, health care professionals may find strategies to reduce stress at work without sacrificing the quality of care they provide to patients. The widely held perspective of street-level bureaucracy is that employees work in an environment with little oversight. According to Lipsky (1980), control

and supervision serve as a guidance for workers in making sure that bureaucratic objectives are met. Performance management, which allows management to identify unjustified departures from the standard, is one method of guaranteeing the accomplishment of these objectives.

Lipsky (1980), underlining the challenge of performance evaluation, notes that bureaucracies typically make it difficult to gauge employee performance. Similar in their viewpoint, Govender and Bussin (2020, p. 2) assert that research indicates that when there is a discrepancy between the organisation's goals and the metrics being used, performance management may have a negative effect on performance. The fact that quality is typically measured qualitatively and is hence descriptive in character is crucial to both points. It should be underlined that the discretionary acts of street-level bureaucrats can be evaluated by determining if, for instance, police operations were legal or went beyond the line of self-defence. For instance, in a hospital context, health care providers may be evaluated based on recommendations, grievances, and compliments. Assessing employees' performance in relation to precise roles and goals is the most effective way to do so.

According to Lipsky (1980), street-level bureaucrats are subject to agency goals, and public managers are drawn to holding them more accountable by restricting their discretion and choices—even though this may lessen their efficacy. In this context, the McDonald (2002) discovery is a relevant example. According to a British study on general practitioners' (GPs') working patterns, restricting their ability to allocate resources whenever they see fit will make the system less effective at managing supply and demand imbalances overall. This suggests that only street-level bureaucrats' discretionary powers can enhance system performance.

Bureaucracy Under Scrutiny

Discretionary powers can be a good break from the usual, but to produce the kinds of outcomes the organisation wants, they still need to elicit efficiency. According to Lipsky (1980), it is challenging to consistently ascertain what would have happened to a client in the absence of intervention.

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Although research indicates that different academics have different opinions on the best ways to implement bureaucratic management, bureaucracy remains an essential mechanism in formal labour.

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This is since individuals are complicated and the appropriate indications are insufficient. Bureaucratic principles would demand that the interventions be documented to serve as points of reference when executing policies to maximise efficiency. Zimmermann (2019) elaborates on the importance of documentation, stating that once information is codified, it becomes norms and regulations regarding how tasks should be completed. However, Zimmerman (2019) contends that because of its ostensibly rigid management style, companies frequently reject this structure. In reference to Zimmermann's (2019) claim, it may be deduced that efficiency can only be achieved if staff members are given the freedom to use their judgement.

Although research indicates that different academics have different opinions on the best ways to implement bureaucratic management, bureaucracy remains an essential mechanism in formal labour. According to Yuksel (2014), bureaucracy has been unable to solve issues related to teamwork, flexibility, adaptation, knowledge management, and employee contributions, among

other organisational and administrative issues. According to Yuksel (2014), a substantial amount of literature has been written about the drawbacks of bureaucracy. According to Bohm (2006), bureaucracy is frequently seen as ineffective, slow, typified by choices made from the top down and the misappropriation or waste of resources. One could argue that the advent of Lipsky's (1980) street-level bureaucracy theory in the late 1960s made employees more aware of opportunities for flexibility in the workplace.

Even though Zimmerman (2019) has reservations about bureaucracy, impersonal norms are one of the concepts that boost productivity. According to Weber (1986), the bureaucratic organisation's growth has always been primarily due to its complete technological supremacy over all prior organisations. Stated differently, bureaucracy is not restricted or deferential to the values or customs of any one institution. The management can enforce rules uniformly and impartially throughout the workforce by implementing impersonal regulations. Traditional leadership and charismatic authority both have the drawback of certain subordinates being immune from punishment should they break the rules due to their allegiance. This type of relationship could undermine the organisation's objectives and reduce its effectiveness.

In certain instances, a street-level bureaucrat's effectiveness may not always be obvious—rather, it may only be demonstrated by the client's actions following their recommendations. According to Lipsky (1980), street-level bureaucrats have different interests from managers since they must do their work quickly. Street-level bureaucrats like health care workers learn to take short cuts and simplify tasks to handle the pressure of their jobs since they must use judgement when handling a lot of work with little resources. The supervisors of the agencies in which street-level bureaucrats work frequently do not approve of the coping techniques they adopt. Occasionally, the public and their clients scrutinise the attitudes exhibited by street-level bureaucrats. According to Lipsky (1980), important public affairs include the decisions made by clients and the deeds of local administrators. His point of view may suggest that public “oversight” is influenced by worries about client respect and work ethics.

Socialisation Impacting Workplace Environment?

Using the example of street-level bureaucrats, Lipsky (1980) argues that while socialisation explains some important aspects of professional performance, the immediate work environment does. In other words, Lipsky (1980) argues that the structured nature of the conduct demanded by the work environment limits the effects of socialisation. However, it should be noted that not all forms of socialisation are inherently *laissez-faire*; rather, those that are more restrictive may instil qualities like honesty and a sense of deference to authority. Thus, my contention is that the rapport that occasionally characterises the dyadic relationships between health care providers and patients is impacted by socialisation to a lesser degree as well as the rules of the workplace. I therefore find that socialisation is resilient to the formalities of the workplace.

It might be argued that health care workers' institutional expertise gives them the ability to diffuse conflicts between patients and management in the connection between street-level bureaucrats and their clients. Lipsky (1980), who seems to be concerned about this possibility, explains that when people are unable to receive services, street-level officials act as a mediator between the people and the government. They sometimes can mediate disputes between customers and the organisation that is offering a service. Street-level bureaucrats implement policies as frontline staff members do, and they are the first to address clients when the state does not influence service delivery.

For instance, a hospital staffing shortage could not be immediately apparent to all patients, which could lead to unjustified criticism of medical professionals. Frontline staff members may be held accountable for patient service delays due to their perceived sluggishness in response to complaints. In this situation, clients might not be aware of the systemic choices that cause the delivery of health services to deteriorate. According to Lipsky (1980), street-level bureaucrats take charge of their work in reaction to such situations to save their current arrangements and themselves. To put it plainly, they must demonstrate the importance of their presence, the rationale of their behaviour, and the

status quo as a coping strategy. By considering these possibilities, health care professionals can use their discretionary abilities to enhance their relationships with patients.

Conclusion

The discretionary powers enjoyed by street-level have proven to be a mitigating factor against the rigidity of government policies that remain at odds with the realities of frontline work. Whilst the needs of patients, regardless of political dispensation remain the same, South Africa's health care workers continue to provide health services despite resource shortages. The post-apartheid era health care is in part influenced by the innovative element inherent in street-level bureaucracy, resulting in progressive health care policies.

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Psychology in South Africa's responses to marginalised identities and the decolonial project: A systematic narrative review

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Abstract

Marginalized identities have become a focal point in Psychology. Higher education institutions for example have attempted to promote diversity and inclusion through curriculum and policy changes. However, complex issues affecting marginalized identities persist, requiring transformative socio-economic and epistemic justice. This paper explores how Psychology in South Africa has responded to these challenges in the context of advancing the decolonial project. A systematic narrative review of publications (N=16) from the South African Journal of Psychology over five years (2020-2024) was conducted. The analysis examined how Psychology in South Africa has taken up the decolonial project by addressing the oppressions of three marginalized groups: (1) 'Foreigners' facing xenophobia; (2) the LGBT+ community experiencing homo-, bi-, and transphobia; and (3) disabled individuals confronting ableism. The review indicates that Psychology in South Africa is actively involved in problematizing the legacy of coloniality, however there is a need for more meaningful collaborations within the discipline.

Keywords: decolonial project; disabled individuals; diversity and inclusion; foreigners; marginalized identities; the LGBT+ community

Introduction

South Africa has a racialised, socioeconomic, and political history of segregation, hate, and violence against marginalised groups, such as foreigners (Gordon 2023; Marais, Nel, and Govender 2022; Mpofu 2020), LGBT+¹ individuals (Epprecht 2021; Ibrahim 2015; Msibi 2011), as well as disabled² identities (Lorenzo 2024; Swartz 2012; Watermeyer et al. 2019). Despite the South African Constitution affording equal protections to all individuals despite their nationality, gender, and disability, these 'disadvantaged' identities continue to face victimisation, hate speech, as well as unfair discrimination (Gordon 2020, 2022 and 2023; Kiguwa 2020; Swartz 2012). A more recent incident is the controversy around Miss South Africa finalist, Chidimma Adetshina, a South African black female with Nigerian heritage. Namely how her competing to represent South Africa created conversation around the public's participation in hate crimes and xenophobic abuse (Yasmin 2024). Many black South Africans questioned her nationality based on her Nigerian surname. This was followed by a circulating petition for her to be taken off from the contest. The dispute intensified with many white and black South Africans making an outcry that a Nigerian cannot be the face of South Africa despite Adetshina being born in South Africa. Adetshina reported facing racism, colourism, and xenophobia during the pageant as reflected in the following comments (Seemela 2024, para 13-14):

"To be honest, I just feel that all of this is Black-on-Black hate as I'm not the only one in this competition who has a surname that's not South African."

"I just feel like the attention is on me because of my skin colour which I think is a disadvantage... it's also been something I had to overcome growing up."

As the country weighed in Adetshina's identity, the country's Minister of Sports, Art, and Culture Gayton McKenzie, also made some splitting remarks around Adetshina's suitability for the Miss SA competition stating that: "We truly cannot have Nigerians compete in our Miss SA competition. I wanna get all facts before I comment but it gives funny vibes already." (Nkadimeng 2024, para 5).

Some followers, though, pointed out that there

have been previous Miss South African contestants with foreign parents, who have not been exposed to the same retaliation as Adetshina (Yasmin 2024). For instance, Vanessa Carreira Coutroulis, a 2001 winner of Miss South Africa, with Portuguese-Angolan parents (Yasmin 2024). Like other marginalised groups in South Africa, subgroups such as LGBT+ individuals continue to also report discrimination and the violation of their basic rights, as is evidenced in one of Pillay's comments (2023, p. 76) on LGBT+-identifying participants:

Being a South African, I do not see how the Constitution has given us equal rights as my partner and I faced a lot of discrimination from the Department of Home Affairs when enquiring whether they perform same sex marriages. We had to hire a private marriage official to officiate our registration (P027).

From a psychological standpoint, the experiences of and responses to xenophobia, homophobia, or ableism are not only negative but long-standing for the individual (e.g., trauma, isolation, and suicidal ideation). Psychology in South Africa has committed itself to the decolonial project (i.e., unmasking the effects of coloniality while reimaging possibilities of hope and healing) (Duncan and Bowman 2009; Pillay 2020; Suffla and Seedat 2020). As such, the paper conducts a systematic literature review of Psychology in South Africa's responses to three marginalized groups based on papers appearing in the last 5 years (2020-2024) in the South African Journal of Psychology (SAJP). These groups include: (1) 'Foreigners' or 'non-nationals' dealing with racism, colourism, and xenophobia; (2) the LGBT+ community facing heterosexism, cisnormativity, and various forms of phobia; and (3) individuals with disabilities encountering ableism and corponormativity.

The Decolonial Project

The decolonial project is an evolving, subversive, and interdisciplinary movement that intends to disrupt the unbalanced relationship of dominance and subordination and/or resistance between the Euro-American World and the Third World (Maldonado-Torres 2007; Mignolo 2007; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2015). The movement calls for an emancipation and re-interrogation of imposed ideologies by the West to the Third World given

“

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multiple of these categories,

generally by another

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(Ibrahim 2015; Gordon

2020; Suffla and

Seedat 2020).

”

that the Third World did not only become exploited in the political and economic spheres of life, but also witnessed a colonial domination in the spheres of history culture, identity, languages, power, education, intelligence, race, gender and sexuality,

self-image, knowledge production, amongst others (Maldonado-Torres 2007; Mignolo 2007; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2015). In terms of knowledge production, Ndlovu (2013) argues that revisiting the processes of knowledge production is important to address the aspirations and needs of previously colonised people of the Third World as a vehicle for political, economic, and social reclamation, self-determination, as well as other “concrete manifestations of freedom” (Gordon 2011, p. 101). For Psychology in South Africa, the decolonial project presents an opportunity for psychology professionals, researchers, students, and bodies to grapple with the enduring effects of colonialism by challenging systemic inequalities and cultural dominance particularly both in knowledge as well as the potential for a national common identity (Duncan and Bowman 2009; Pillay 2020; Suffla and Seedat 2020). As Ndlovu (2013) maintains, the decolonial project strives towards nation-building and belonging by uniting diverse languages, cultures, ethnicities, and identities that might seemingly present as competing to develop a cohesive identity. As such, continued investment in the decolonial project presents many possibilities for Psychology in South Africa for promoting social justice, equity, as well as cultural revitalization to provide redress and empowerment to marginalized and indigenous communities to equally represent them within multiple spheres (Ndlovu 2013).

Marginalised Identities

Marginalised identities refer to people who have been historically disempowered and discriminated against due to characteristics such as their race, sex, gender, class, culture, ethnicity, nationality, heritage, disability, or a multiple of these categories, generally by another influential group (Ibrahim 2015; Gordon 2020; Suffla and Seedat 2020). These people include Indigenous peoples, black and brown people, trans women, intersexed bodies, migrants, or individuals with disabilities (Duncan and Bowman 2009; Msibi 2012; Watermeyer et al. 2019). Being marginalised carries a disadvantaging condition of being outside of them centre, and in the periphery (Maldonado-Torres 2007; Mignolo 2007; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2015). In this study, the paper focuses on three prominent marginalised identities and how they have been discrimination based on race, nationality, and colorism (i.e., ‘foreigners’ or

'non-nationals'), gender and sexuality (i.e., LGBT+ individuals), as well as disability (i.e., people with disabilities).

'Foreigners' or 'Non-nationals'

From 2015 to 2024, albeit other studies trace it back to 1994 (Ityonzughul and Gbamwuan 2024), there has been a resurfacing of xenophobic sentiments across the country (Gordon 2020, 2022 and 2023; Marais et al. 2022; Mujinga 2024). The public, political, and media's promotion of xenophobia, Afrophobia, and xenophilia has resulted in the horrific killing, torture, lynching, looting, rape, aggravated assault, continuous harassment of 'foreigners' or 'non-nationals' (Chiumbu and Moyo 2018; Mujinga 2024; Ogunnoiki and Adeyemi 2019). Chiumbu and Moyo (2018), Gordon (2023), and Mamabolo (2015) implicate politicians and media representations of immigrants depicted as a nuisance, criminals, and competition for nations for jobs, food, shelter, basic healthcare, sexual partners, higher education, and business opportunities as some of the origins of xenophobic attacks. However, other scholars, such as Mujinga (2024), Ityonzughul and Gbamwuan (2024), and Mpofo (2020) propose more complicated explanations for xenophobia, ascribing to internalised racism, self-hatred, and displaced black rage as a product of South Africa's colonial and apartheid history. As for the consequences of xenophobia, Marais et al. (2022) further suggest that xenophobic attacks can have far reaching economical, emotional, and psychological consequences following the incident (e.g., repeated flashback episodes of post-traumatic stress disorder). Literature suggests that the local populace may not necessarily feel the effect caused by their xenophobic actions but individuals such as businessmen and women, artists, humanitarian organisations who want to have foreign relations may be adversely affected by xenophobic actions (Chiumbu and Moyo 2018; Mujinga 2024; Ogunnoiki and Adeyemi 2019). Further foreign companies who may want to invest in South Africa may be put off by xenophobia, creating a snowball effect on the economy (Mamabolo 2015).

Gender and Sexuality Diverse Identities

Despite the dawn of a democracy, the LGBT+ community continues to face constant oppression in realising fair and equal treatment from their

heterosexual counterparts (Epprecht 2021; Ibrahim 2015; Msibi 2011). This includes both overt (the police brutality on the iconic Stonewall riots in 1969) and covert forms of discrimination such as microaggressions and stereotypes (gay bashing on the internet) (Braun 2018; Kiguwa 2020; Moagi and Mavhandu-Mudzusi 2021), to unfavourable treatment in the form of structural oppressions like heterosexism, cisnormativity, homo-, bi-, and transphobia (Nel and Judge 2008; Pillay 2023; Wilks et al. 2022). Religious morality, compulsory heterosexuality, and cisheteronormativity contribute to the over-preference of male and female heterosexual by demonising, marginalising, and making LGBT+ identities un-African (Francis 2023, 2024a and 2024b; Ibrahim 2015; Kaighobadi et al. 2020). Then again, key texts such as Msibi's (2011) paper entitled, "*The lies we have been told: On (homo) sexuality in Africa*" as well as Epprecht's (2021) book, "*Boy-wives and female husbands: Studies in African homosexuality*" have unearthed evidence that homosexuality has been present and practiced in the African continent. These include documented accounts before White colonial settlers used sodomy laws to entrench patriarchy and heteronormativity in pre-colonial African societies (Murray and Roscoe 1998). This evidence acknowledges how pre-colonial and earlier African communities coexisted with "institutionalised marriages between women, same-sex relations between men and boys in colonial work settings, [as well as] mixed gender roles in East and West Africa" (Murray and Roscoe 1998, commentary section).

Disabled Identities

Much like the LGBT+ community, people with disabilities collectively have been fighting for equal representation and access to the rights and privileges enjoyed by abled-bodied individuals (Lorenzo 2024; Swartz 2012; Watermeyer et al. 2019). Through movements such as the Disability Rights of the 1960s (Stikler 2019), people with disabilities have been active in protesting against barriers imposed by such as ableism (i.e., prejudice based on disability), compulsory able-bodiedness (the over-representation of able-bodied individuals), as well as corponormativity (ableist construction of the able body as the idealized body type) (Davis 2006; Kumar 2014; McRuer 2006). Through

this disability-related discriminations, people with disabilities have been excluded in many areas of life, including employment, education, leadership, beauty, sexuality material, as well as the entertainment industry (Author-Anonymous 2021; Nguse 2023; Venter 2024). However, the definitions and experiences of disability have undergone several shifts from the religious and charity approaches in the pre-colonial, to the welfare and social models in major post-colonial both in the Global North and South contexts (Kumar 2014). This includes the adaptation of the “Nothing about us, without us” slogan within disability advocacy spaces. A more transformational, inclusive, and responsive definition of disability amongst healthcare providers is that disability should be seen as ‘an evolving concept that results from the interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinder their full participation in society on an equal basis with others’ (United Nations 2009, p. 5).

Methodology

Ethical clearance for the work was provided by the University of South Africa’s Research Ethics Committee (reference number: 22/04/13/90352025/02/AM). A combined systematic and narrative review strategy was carried out to strengthen the research methodology with the assistance of a librarian. According to Grant and Booth (2009), a systematic review endeavours to “systematically search for, appraise and synthesis research evidence, often adhering to guidelines on the conduct of a review” (95). This paper follows the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines for a systematic review (Grant and Booth 2009). This framework offers a standardized set of criteria for reporting systematic reviews and meta-analyses, helping authors to improve the transparency and rigor of their analyses and reviews. The review aimed to inform the situational analysis of the collected publications. Rother’s (2007) describes the aim of narrative reviews as intending to “... describe and discuss the state of the science of a specific topic or theme from a theoretical and contextual point of view” (vii). In this study, the selected and theoretical and contextual orientation is decoloniality within the South African context. Narrative reviews remain crucial

in the social sciences as they provide readers with an overview without going in-depth but instead give a rapid, up-to-date survey about a topic or theme. This approach remains useful especially when the reader wants to synthesis the situation around a broad topic. It narrates the situation such as in this case, Psychology in South Africa’s responses to marginalised identities rather than going into critical engagements of discourses, interpretations, or the combined efforts of the two approaches (Rother 2007).

Data Extraction and Quality Assessment

The search began with visiting the SAJP and scrolling for all volumes and issues published within the last 5 years (2020 to 2024, Issue 3) as shown in Figure 1. A Boolean search with keywords like ‘marginalised identities’, ‘othered identities’, ‘decoloniality’, ‘foreigners’, ‘non-nationals’, ‘xenophobia’, ‘hate’, ‘hate crimes’, ‘hate speech’, ‘racism’, ‘colorism’, ‘LGBT+’, ‘gender and sexuality diverse identities’, ‘homophobia’, ‘transphobia’, ‘disabled identities’, ‘people/individuals with disabilities’, ‘disabled genders and sexualities’, ‘ableism’, and ‘corponormativity’ was used to find both qualitative and quantitative studies. This approach aimed to address the research question on how Psychology in South Africa has responded to these challenges of three marginalised identities in the context of advancing the decolonial project. Reference lists from reviewed publications were also used to locate additional relevant works, including ‘grey literature’ not captured by the SAJP’s search engine.

Information Sources, Search, and Selection

The review excluded publications limited to abstracts, published before 2020, not in English, or conducted outside South Africa. This search strategy, illustrated in Figure 1, was carefully documented, and stored online. Data were synthesized using the Joanna Briggs Institute’s Quality Assessment Research Instrument (QARI) and the Population, Concept, and Context (PCC) framework, as detailed in Table 1. The search included English-language sources from 2020 to 2024, covering journal issues, articles, editorials, and book reviewers related to the three marginalized identities and the decolonial project. Of 23 retrieved publications, 16 were selected for review based on relevance to the study’s key terms and research aim.

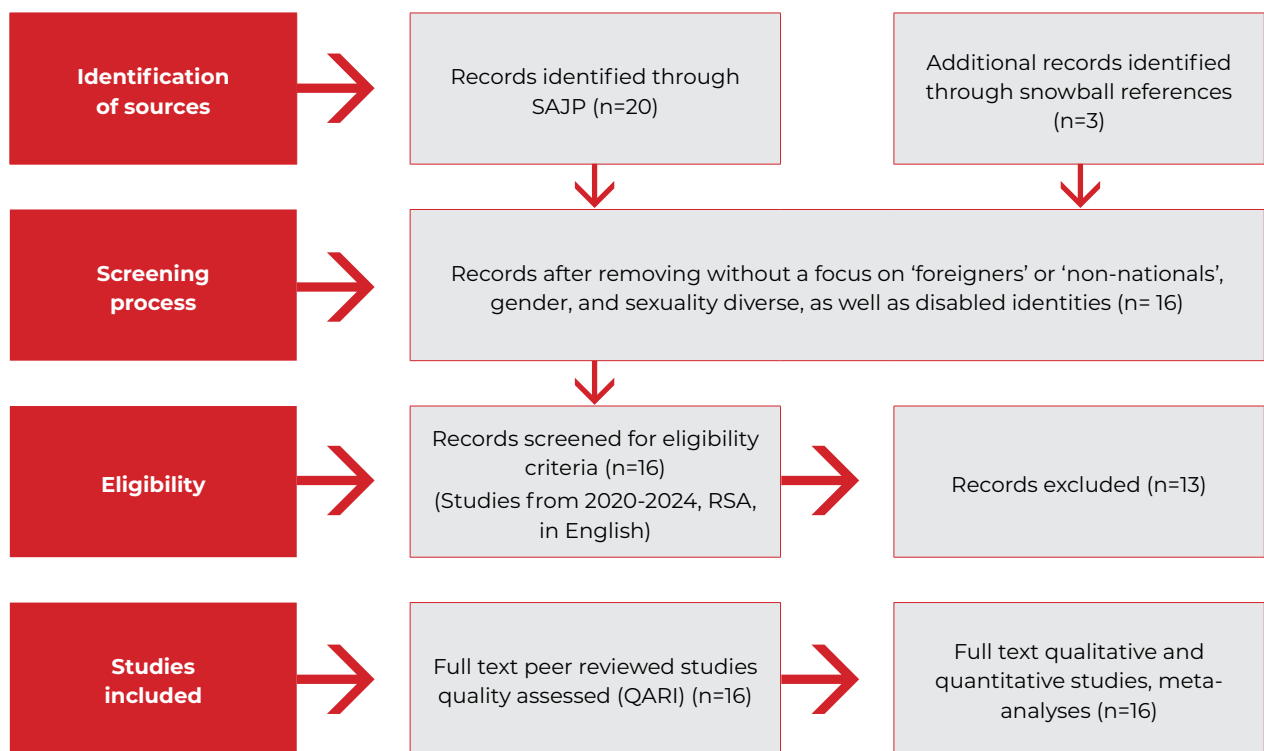


Figure 1: Systematic narrative review flow chart adapted from preferred reporting items for systematic review-PRISMA (author’s own work)

Table 1: How the population, concept, and context framework was applied during the data analysis process

PCC element	Definition (per JBI Reviewer’s Manual Ch.11)	Example
Population	<p>“Important characteristics of participants, including age, and other qualifying criteria”. (11.2.4)</p> <p>You may not need to include this element unless your question focuses on a specific condition or cohort).</p>	The responses of Psychology in South Africa to challenges faced by marginalised identities and the advancement of the decolonial project.
Concept	<p>“The core concept examined by the review should be clearly articulated to guide the scope and breadth of the inquiry. This may include details that pertain to elements that would be detailed in a standard systematic review, such as the ‘interventions’ and/or ‘phenomena of interest’ and/or ‘outcomes’”. (11.2.4)</p>	Marginalised identities, namely ‘foreigners’ or ‘non-nationals’, gender and sexuality diverse individuals, as well as disabled identities.
Context	<p>“May include cultural factors such as geographic location and/or specific racial or gender-based interests. In some cases, context may also encompass details about the specific settings.” (11.2.4)</p>	South Africa.

Data synthesis and analysis

From the search, a total of 16 relevant articles were analysed based on the selection criteria: n = 8 describing the challenges faced by ‘foreigners’ or non-nationals, n = 6 for LGBT+ individuals, as well as n = 2 for disabled persons. All 16 studies

were analysed using Braun and Clarke’s (2006) six-step inductive thematic analysis framework, as shown in Table 2. The process involved: (1) repeated reading of the retrieved publications, (2) coding and identifying initial categories, (3) organizing these into themes, (4) examining and defining the themes, (5) consulting with three Psychology

in South Africa experts (including two mixed methods specialists) to achieve consensus, and (6) documenting the findings. This approach was supplemented by relevant literature in the field.

Findings and Discussion

The aim of this study was to find out how Psychology in South Africa has responded to the oppressions of three marginalized groups (i.e., 'foreigners', LGBT+, and disabled individuals), and by so doing contributed to the decolonial project. Findings from the retrieved publications (n = 16) in the SAJP revealed a complicated history of oppressions experienced by the above marginalised identities, including racism, xenophobia, homophobia, transphobia, as well as ableism. The following is a discussion of the findings under the following headings: (1) Responses to 'foreigners' or 'non-nationals'; (2) Responses to gender and sexuality diverse identities; as well as (3) Responses to disabled identities.

Responses to 'foreigners' or 'non-nationals'

In the SAJP, Gordon's (2022) study tracked the incidents of xenophobia through public data indicating that there have been a recorded 602 violent xenophobic incidents from 1994 to 2019. Gordon (2022) however maintains that most incidents are not reported based on fear of retribution and apathy towards the criminal justice system. More recently, though, in the SAJP, there has been growing literature exploring the nuances of how people of colour experience of anti-immigrant violence (Gordon 2020, 2022 and 2023; Marais et al. 2022; Pillay 2020). Pillay (2020) for example reported an incident in Singh (2020) of a physiotherapist from Sudan who could not speak isiZulu and was harassed, assaulted, and even throttled to the point of unconsciousness by several black Tshwane Metro Police Department officers. This included one of the officers emphatically stating after harassing the Sudanese physiotherapist that, 'I am going to kill you like George Floyd' (Singh 2020). Pillay (2020) contends that South African police, citing another study (Katsere 2019), in metropolitan cities use vernacular dialect like isiZulu as a way to detect 'foreigners'. Gordon's (2023) sociological and psychological data around xenophobia further suggests that hostility towards 'foreigners' usually intensifies

as per location (e.g., more incidents occurring in township areas), political climate (e.g., during national elections), as well as perceived difference causing competing goals (i.e., perpetrator attacks the individual based on a characteristic that is unchangeable in the 'foreigner' or 'non-national' but seen as a threat). Gordon (2023) and Pillay (2020) have further reported on the consequences of these hate incidents and victimisation for both the victims (e.g., feeling dehumanised) and country's international relations (loss of favourable relations). For instance, South African higher institutions pride themselves on the attraction of international student bodies. But with the constant looming of xenophobia across the country, these discriminating attitudes could deter international students from finding interest in studying in South Africa or failing to create a safe and welcoming environment. Gordon's (2020) decolonial critique has been in emphasising the effect of the country's colonial history with nationalism, anti-Blackness, and the resulting township politics which have ignited group entitlements.

Responses to gender and sexuality diverse identities

The right to love and the freedom to convey one's gender expression through dress, embodiment, and expression has been at the hallmark of LGBT+ advocacy (Wilks et al. 2022). However, ridicule, rejection, and active discouragement from immediate family members, workplaces, and other surrounding social contexts are part of everyday experiences of LGBT+ individuals (Kaighobadi et al. 2020; Pillay 2023; Pitcher and Boonzaier 2023). Pillay's (2023) exploration for example of the 'hidden' experiences of lesbian, gay, and bisexual South Africans of Indian descent revealed how there is still an under-representation of literature of LGBT+ sub-groups. According to Pillay (2023), groups with intersectional identities such as bisexuals of Indian descent reported being further excluded within the LGBT+ community, creating an experience of being the 'double othered'. Kiguwa (2020), Pillay (2023), and Wilks et al. (2022) draw from an intersectionality theory to explore the intersectional oppressions of homo-, bi-, and transphobia from several social institutions further complicated by the multiple social categories one may espouse (race, religion, ethnicity, education level, socioeconomic status).

They highlight how subjectivity and social relations form subjects and create consequences such as the differences in treatment for example of whiteness versus blackness within the LGBT+ community. They problematise positions of privilege and disadvantage created by LGBT+ identities which have been represented versus those which have been made invisible through this intersectional lens (Kiguwa 2020; Pillay 2023; Wilks et al. 2022). At the same time, scholars such as Pitcher and Boonzaier (2023) and have attempted to re-imagine LGBT+ advocacy through feminist and decolonial approaches such as photo-narrative research with transgender youth. Pitcher and Boonzaier (2023) point out the importance of methods such as photo-narrative for marginalised communities such as young transgender individuals to own and represent their own stories, thereby disrupting issues of hierarchy, legitimacy, and epistemological justice during knowledge production.

Responses to disabled identities

In terms of its responses to disabled identities, the SAJP has published less ($n=2$) articles addressing disability-related discrimination since 2000. Nguse (2023), for example, maintained that the burden and experience of disability in South Africa is exacerbated by race, gender, socio-economic circumstances, as well as access to basic services. It was further pointed out that disabled Black females located in rural and township areas face the most disability-related discrimination. These disadvantaging characteristics contributed to the under-utilisation or the inability to access basic services not because of the individual disability. But because of the built environment (e.g., lack of ramps or interpreters in hospitals and police stations), ableist attitudes (healthcare providers talking down at disabled individuals), as well as the lack of full inclusion in most spheres of society (negotiation of their sexual reproductive health rights). Nguse (2023) further asserted that the COVID-19 pandemic further negatively affected the already subpar living conditions, quality of life, and access to basic care of most disabled individuals in poverty-stricken areas. My article (Author-Anonymous 2021) in the SAJP addressed how society tends to strip individuals with disabilities off any gender or sexual characteristics. We tend to not see them as sexual beings. But instead, as sexless,

genderless, and as individuals disinterested in sex. As a result of compulsory able-bodiedness (e.g., lack of disabled individuals in sexuality material) and compulsory heterosexuality (lack of disabled queer individuals), people with disabilities are falsely thought of not engaging in sexual relationships, that they cannot have children, or that they all identify as heterosexual. I (Ubisi 2021) encouraged scholars to move towards a social, decolonial model of disability that is critical of earlier constructions of disability, including African epistemologies of disability which promoted corponormativity by using condescending terms to describe the disabled body.

Conclusion

The study was conducted to find out how Psychology in South Africa has responded to the oppressions faced by marginalized identities, particularly migrants, gender-diverse individuals, and people with disabilities, as part of contributing to the decolonial project. Given the history of discrimination and oppression with these groups, the findings of this study show that Psychology in South Africa has shown increasing commitment to responses of inclusivity, critical analysis, and social relevance to these marginalised identities. However, what the study further showed is the missing collaborations or linkages between psychology professionals and researchers in engaging in entangled or compounded dimensions of oppressions such as those faced by migrant or LGBT+ disabled identities. The implication of this study presents a call for Psychology in higher education, research, and practice in South Africa to continue to promote equity, inclusivity, and cultural revitalization towards marginalized identities. The study recommends therapy, teaching, research, evaluation, and community interventions which are sensitive to trauma and multi-systems approaches to race, migrant, gender, sexuality, resilience, self-advocacy, healing, and national building to bring about restorative justice, psychosocial care, legislative frameworks for affected victims and communities of marginalisation. A limitation of this study is the number of articles analysed as drawn from the SAJP. It should also be pointed out that that not all authors who publish in the SAJP are psychologists or have an affiliation to the psychology profession,

albeit the SAJP welcomes manuscript with an aim and scope of addressing psychology related issues in therapy, assessment, research, community engagement, and training amongst others. Future studies are encouraged to take this opportunity to explore comparison of findings through other psychology related journals in South Africa.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ LGBT+ refers to lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transgender, queer/questioning, intersexed, asexual, and other gender non-conforming individuals (Francis, 2024).
- ² There are many debates about appropriate terminology for disability and disabled people. In keeping with social model conventions, South Africans have tended to use the term “disabled people” because according to the social model, people are disabled by society. Hence the term “Office on the Status of Disabled Persons”. Other legislation such as the Employment Equity Act uses the term “persons with disabilities”. By the time the Ministry was established, the term used was “persons with disabilities” (Ministry for Women, Children and Persons with Disabilities), in contrast to OSDP usage. ... The argument is that people are more than their disabilities, and that the term “disabled people” totalises their experiences and reduces them to nothing more than products of disablement. There is no consensus on use of the terms “disabled people” or “people with disabilities”; both usages reflect concern with the rights of disabled people. In South Africa, in activist circles the term “disabled people” continues to be used extensively despite the official terminology in the Ministry moving to “persons with disabilities” (Swartz, 2012, p. 35).

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‘Ersatz Europeans and Their Minions’: Performing Whiteness in Non-white Postcolonial African Ghettos

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Abstract

White lust and Black shame among blacks across all classes is a phenomenon that has not been fully explored and accounted for particularly as part of a residual inter-generational colonial psychosis expressed in everyday talk among black folk in postcolonial Africa. This leads to the questions: What aspects of whiteness or coloniser/colonised transactional relationships do the former colonised blacks manifest in conversations? How does whiteness refracted by class, gender, and ethnicity, remap itself onto new psycho-social relationships among blacks in former British settler colonies like Zimbabwe and South Africa? How are contemporary class differences expressed in terms of distance from or closeness to imagined whiteness in everyday ghetto language and communication? This research analyses meanings that attach to terms *murungu* (white person), and its plural form *varungu* (white persons) as used by Shona speaking black Zimbabweans in address or with reference to phenotypical non-white individuals as people engage in naturally occurring and undirected conversational talk in three

different locations. In *Black Skin White Masks*, Fanon broached the idea of the psychotic split personality as a condition suffered by the colonised subject resulting from the colonial situation itself. The situation taught the blacks to place in a pedestal and pursue all that was white, to self-hate and to seek escape from their black skin that kept their soul prisoner. The article seeks to show cases through which everyday talk by black Zimbabweans online and in Zimbabwean based taxis reveals deeper undertones of black shame and an exaltation of whiteness. It concludes that we can still trace colour schizophrenia through everyday talk among ordinary black people of Southern Africa.

Keywords: Ersatz Europeans; whiteness; race; class; white lust; black shame; race and ethnicity communication

Introduction

The meaning of the term black shame has been a subject of debate in available literature (Wigger 2010; Dahn 2014; Du Bois 1933; Osborne 2023). One school of thought such as that of Wigger (2009) and Dahn (2014) uses it to refer to the situation that arose when France deployed African troops to guard the Rhine as part of punishment for Germany's part in the First World War. In terms of widely shared notions of white racial supremacy it was unthinkable, indeed shameful that an African soldier, a member of an inferior race, could be placed guard over his white overlords. The deployment of black troops by France should be understood in the context of post-war Europe wanting to mete out punishment on Germany and least likely as recognition and acknowledgement of blacks as equals of their white counterparts. White moral panic over possible miscegenation, racial dilution and degeneration, and the threat to the preservation of racial purity and white supremacy found expression through the Black Shame on the Rhine campaign which started in Germany and quickly gained popularity in continental Europe in the inter-war period. In this sense Black shame thus actually referred to how interracial sexual mixing between black male soldiers and white women was a source of shame for Europeans. So it was from the European position that blackness was viewed as marring white racial purity. Black shame in this school of thought was thus what Europeans faced and were concerned with, rather than the other way around.

Another school of thought proffered by authors such as Du Bois (1933) and Osborne (2023) deploys the term black shame to denote a complex sense of racial inadequacy that supposedly assails every black African in the presence of white people whom they regard as superior and whom they therefore

envy. It results in psychological contemptuousness and denial of one's "blackness" and a longing for the white Other. Black lust for whiteness would manifest in the lengths to which some black men and women were prepared to go in order to acquire phenotypical proximity to whiteness in their looks, language and deportment in pursuit of a phenomenon Fanon (1967) refers to as the psychological goal of every black man – to become white. It is in this latter sense that the terms white lust and black shame are being used in this paper; to refer to the phenomenon of internalised racial inferiority complex or what Herr (2005) refers to as colour schizophrenia and its manifestation in everyday talk among ordinary black people.

The (in)transience of racial identities as a basis of self-definition and self-knowledge can be both a source of hope and despair about possibilities of forging new, more equitable and just post-racial societies in Africa. For example, the post-racial Africa that anti-colonial and anti-apartheid struggles had envisioned as encapsulated in the preamble to the South African Freedom Charter (1955), a society where values of human equality, liberty and fraternity beyond the colour line could be celebrated has largely remained a receding dream. Jean Paul Sartre's warning in a preface to Franz Fanon's book; *The Wretched of the Earth*, went unheeded as the seeds of new forms of inequality were being sown in the crucible of the Pan-African struggle against colonial racism on the continent then. Sartre alluded to "the European elite *undertaking* to manufacture a native elite" (Sartre 1963, p. 7) [emphasis added] who would be entrusted with the onerous task of ensuring the colonial *status quo* survived the end of colonialism in Africa. This was by no means the first time a policy of reproducing social inequality was invoked in dealing with subject

populations. The education system introduced for Indian subjects of British colonial rule in the early nineteenth century presents a forerunner of similar colonial policies. Advocating that system, Lord Macaulay had argued in 1835: “We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern, a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect” (Macaulay 2015, p. 247). Products of this process of (mis)education were always bound to occupy the liminal space between their racial identity of origin as Indian and the unattainable racial identity of destiny as English.

Sartre (1963, p. 7) calls the grotesquery who came out of colonial social engineering branded as with a red hot iron “white lies” to emphasise their status as poor imitations of their former white masters. Many scholars of race after Fanon have further elaborated on how in different geographical spaces and historical moments the artefact of white supremacy and the inferiority of phenotypically black people with or without the direct involvement of whites themselves was circumstantially developed, refashioned and reimagined in the service of power (Mamdani 2020; Mboti 2019; Memmi 2013; Said 1978). A motif that continues to run through the literature on the psychosis of racial identity in the colonial and postcolonial situation

since Fanon, is the tension between identifying as white surrogates and retaining racial identity as autochthonous black Africans (Magubane 2001).

According to Fanon (1976), skin colour masked unstable, complex and in certain instances pathological personality complexes across the colour line. Social identities are always plural, in a state of flux and contingent upon relations of power, particularly so, in the colonial situation and its aftermath. In the contexts of colonialism's aftermaths, centuries long colonial conditioning had left behind a psychic self-hate and an insatiable longing for escape into whiteness in the African's collective unconscious which needed to be unmasked, exorcised and expunged (Fanon 1967a). The Zimbabwean musician Oliver Mtukudzi well captures the subliminal and tension-fraught struggle with self-hate as black Africans and an ambiguous attraction to and identification with the white Other in the lyrics of one of his songs titled “*Tsika Dzedu*” (Our cultural etiquettes):

Kusvika rinhi tichitiza mimvuri yedu?

Kusvika rinhi (Till when must we continue to run away from our shadows)

Kusvika rinhi uchitiza mumvuri wako?

Kusvika rinhi (Till when must you continue to run away from your shadow?)

Kusvika rinhi tichinyara mimvuri yedu?

Kusvika rinhi (Till when must we continue to be ashamed of our shadows?)

Dada nerudzi rwakoo, nedzinza rako, dembedza rurimi pwere dzigoyemura. (Be proud of your identity, your race and your language to set a good example for the young)

It took many years of alienation, acculturation, and inculcation to impress on the black African mind-set, a sense of self recognition as racially inferior, self-doubt and an abiding longing for seeking validation with the superior white Other. That pathological sense of doubt in one's claim to being human remains the most pernicious aspect of the legacies of centuries of European enslavement and colonial domination of the black African at home (those located in Africa) and in the diaspora. To extend Achebe's argument; “At the center of all the problems Europe has had in its perception of Africa (*and by extension Africans' own perceptions*

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the colour line.

”

of themselves) lies the simple question of African humanity: are they or are they not like us?" (Achebe 2009, p. 88) [emphasis added].

The legacy of white doubt of African humanity was so poignantly articulated by Joseph Conrad's prototype European explorer Marlowe. The fictional Skipper of the Nelli documents his "discovery" (as a first arrivant on that epic journey in search of Mr. Kurtz in *The Heart of Darkness*), of specimens of a race whose humanity he had an extreme difficulty acknowledging as such, in the following terms:

The earth seemed unearthly. We are accustomed to look upon a shackled form of a conquered monster, but there—there you could look at a thing monstrous and free. It was unearthly, and the men were—No, they were not inhuman. Well, you know, that was the worst of it—this suspicion of their not being inhuman. It would come slowly to one. They howled and leaped, and spun, and made horrid faces; but what thrilled you was just the thought of their humanity like yours—the thought of your remote kinship with this wild and passionate uproar. Ugly (Conrad 1950, p. 98)

European racist ideology according to which the African was placed at the lowest rung of being had been well set by the time of Conrad's penning it down in *The Heart of Darkness* and provided the logical and moral grounds for European conquest and subsequent colonisation of the continent of Africa by the end of the nineteenth century. The real tragedy of black exposure to racist white treatment as subhuman, over time, lies in the black Africans beginning to believe as fact the white suspicion of their not being human. The primary focus of this discussion is on how the psychological effects of racial subjugation on the subject populations themselves continue to manifest through common talk in predominantly black ghettos many years after the most vicious of the brands of colonialism, apartheid, ended in former Rhodesia and South Africa.

Theoretical entry point

The article employs a whiteness heuristic. In addition to referring to racial experiences, the term "black" now also connotes poverty, oppression, and marginalization (see Vanyoro, 2020). A Black

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In Zimbabwe, the Shona

term *murungu* [white person]

is used to describe anyone

who is financially capable,

regardless of race

(*Tagwirei and De Kock*

2015, p. 193).

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person's experiences are initially primarily compared to those of a superior "white" Other. But according to Frye (1992) and Tagwirei and de Kock (2015), who use "whiteness" as a more critical theoretical conceptualization of what it means to be "white," "whiteness" is a term used to identify characteristics of white behavior, whether it be by Black or white people. In Zimbabwe, the Shona term *murungu* [white person] is used to describe anyone who is financially capable, regardless of race (Tagwirei and De Kock 2015, p. 193). They demonstrate how being white has come to be seen as having political and economic advantages, while being black has grown to be seen as having disadvantages. Therefore, they draw the conclusion that whiteness and blackness cease to function as fixed and self-contained categories when considered in this light. They are instead unstable and in a state of flux (Tagwirei and de Kock 2015, p. 194). Given this, the article employs this entire heuristic associated with whiteness to interpret the underlying discourses in the everyday talk under study.

Methodology

This research analyses meanings that attach to terms "*murungu*" (white person), and its plural form "*varungu*" (white persons) as used in

address or with reference to phenotypically black individuals as people engage in naturally occurring and undirected conversational talk in different contexts. We draw data from selected postings between January 2023 and December 2023 on a social media gossip *Facebook* platform titled @domesticworkerDiaries where domestic workers meet and share their workplace experiences as they gossip about the conduct of their bosses and employers. The creator administrator of the page professes that she created the page specifically to serve as a space where those engaged in domestic work as house helpers can freely share their experiences and give each other advice on how to handle particularly stressful situations that often arise as they deal with and relate to difficult-to-handle employers. The platform also serves as a free employment agency where prospective employers and prospective employees can advertise and meet up. This page was identified as a relevant corpus of data on black domestic workers' conceptualisation of their black employers who after independence emigrated and now live in former white suburbs. As bell hooks (1992) recommends, in order to glean some insights details, facts, observations, psychoanalytic readings of those blacks whom circumstance has thrust into privilege as the new employer class we rely on these domestic workers diaries of black domestic servants working in black homes just as in the past, "black domestic servants, working in white homes, acted as informants who brought knowledge back to segregated communities about the white 'Other'" (hooks 1992, p. 338). Domestic workplaces can serve as productive sites from which one can gaze at the phenomenon of blacks playing at being white through the vantage point of their domestic employees.

Rhetorical talk in the marketplace in Gweru, a city in Midlands in Zimbabwe, as ordinary people transact petty business deals as vendors and clients, and as commuter omnibus operators and commuters at public transport termini also provided an alternative source of insights about ordinary people's intergenerational co-constructed diction and understandings on racial difference between whites and blacks. Common catch phrases invoking taken-for-granted shared understandings of whiteness juxtaposed with blackness such as; "*varungu or maboy*" (European

people or African people), "*zvechirungu or zvaanaMseyamwa*" (highbrow or lowbrow), were thus collected ethnographically as researchers plied their routes between home and workplace via the city centre and through the hustle and bustle of the 'black' market between January 2023 and December 2023.

Ethical considerations

Ethical clearance was sought and the research was approved through the Midlands State University Ethics Board for Human Study in Zimbabwe. With respect to data sourced from online platforms such as a *Facebook* page where content is public, Gupta (2017, p. 15) cautions the researcher to determine whether the use of content reveals the identity of the author or the owner of the content and take steps to remove these identifying markers to achieve anonymity before they proceed with online data mining. In cases where identifying markers cannot be excluded without undermining the integrity of the data, it becomes imperative for the researcher to proceed by way of seeking informed consent to use the data from owners of the data if these can be identified and authenticated. Despite the fact that information published on the @domesticworkerDiaries *Facebook* page may justifiably be regarded as information that is in the public domain and publicly accessible by anyone online, due care was taken in accordance with best practice in measures to protect the identity of unwitting participants (Townsend and Wallace 2016) and to ensure, as much as possible, that identifying details were excluded and that all data used was anonymized and could not be easily traced to the authors of such posts.

Data collection done through physical field observations in the marketplace as ordinary people transacted petty business deals as vendors and clients, and as commuter omnibus operators and commuters at public transport termini had to be done through covert ethnographic research methods for two main reasons. First, seeking consent from research participants would inevitably interfere with their naturalist behavior as doing so would make them aware that they were under observation (Spicker 2011). Second, it was also difficult to tell beforehand who among the commuters or among those going about their own business in the hustle and bustle of a busy

marketplace was going to be the source of research relevant utterances as the behaviour of the research subjects was undirected by the researchers. Since the identity of the sources of research relevant information was of no special significance to the study beyond the fact that they were black, their privacy and anonymity were maintained.

Results

The results of this study are presented and discussed below under three thematic areas according to the three spaces from which data were drawn; namely the *Madhumbe Domestic Worker Diaries Facebook* page; at the marketplace and bus termini and on commuter minibuses in Gweru.

Varungu in *Madhumbe Domestic Worker Diaries Facebook* page

On the *Facebook* page titled *Madhumbe Domestic Worker Diaries* (@domesticworkerDiaries) the term *varungu* (white people) is the generic term used to refer to employers whether black or white. The word *Madumbe* is slang for domestic worker in Zimbabwe. It was derived from a popular television drama series *Gringo* a character played by the late Lazarus Boora and premiered in 1998 on the Zimbabwean public broadcaster Zimbabwe Television (ZTV). *Gringo* is a comedy starring a black male “garden boy” who starts working in the household of a black middle-class family where he meets his nemesis Madumbe the “house girl” a house help. From the time *Gringo* begins working at the Gweshe-Gweshe homestead tending the garden, and throughout the drama series, *Gringo* calls the Gweshe-Gweshes *varungu vangu* (my white people) when he is talking to either his friend John Banda or his mother. At some point John Banda, comes to claim his debt of one Zimbabwean dollar from *Gringo* and *Gringo* incessantly chases him out, threatening to beat him up every time he comes asking for his money back. *Gringo* argues that John Banda’s behaviour will undermine his good reputation *kana varungu vangu vakazviziva* (should my white people know about this). The Gweshe-Gweshe yard and house is therefore a carnival for the playout of many tensions where the unskilled are at loggerheads over the protection of the black middle-class family’s interests who have become ersatz Europeans – substitutes for ‘real’ white people.

Against this backdrop, the *Madhumbe Domestic Worker Diaries Facebook* page adopted the slang *Madumbe* to signify domestic workers. Most posts on the page loosely refer to potential or current domestic workers’ employers as *varungu* (white people). In one of the posts on the page, the contributor says: “*Musatitukirawo nekutyisa varungu vedu vanounza mabasa please. Regai vanoda mabasa vabatsirike*” (Please do not insult our white people who bring us employment on this page. Let those who require employment find value on this page). This shows how all potential and current employees are framed as white regardless of their race. Another post read “*Vaya vaichemera testimony, murungu ati awana munhu*” (Those who were asking for a testimony, the white person (employer) said they have found an employee through our page), accompanied by a screenshot of a *WhatsApp* conversation between the page administrator and a domestic worker confirming that they had found a job. Part of this page’s focus is the facilitation of conversations on experiences of black domestic workers. In one of the video posts on the *Facebook* page, the female domestic worker shares the experiences of a Zimbabwean migrant domestic worker based in South Africa and how she was prohibited by her employer (a middle-class black employer) from accessing health care when she fell ill. She says something in her native Shona language which when translated would loosely read: “This business of a sick domestic worker being refused access to health care by her white man (employer) because they are working is not good. The white persons (employers) are refusing her the freedom to visit the clinic threatening to report her to the police for not having a passport. The things that we as domestic workers go through are tough. Why do our white people (employers) do this?”

The above text has many intersecting themes such as race and migration. Apart from being exploited as workers, the woman whose story is being narrated above is also oppressed as a migrant. This shows the complexities of identity that exist in postcolonial spaces. Let us take a step back to another text where in a video on the page, one of the respondents is asked by the host the following question during their conversation:

“*Zvamurikutura izvi makazvitwa ne murungu akadii? Mukureva murungu-rungu chaiye here nekuti varungu chaivo*”

havadaro” (In this account what sort of white person did this to you? Are you referring to real white people or black employers? Because real white people do not do that)

to which she responds:

“*Ndirikureva varungu vedu ava maboy*”
(I am referring to our white people, the black employers).

This example shows the dichotomy of whiteness that is upheld in these workers’ framing of their employees. In this dichotomy, the “real white people” continue to be seen as more professionally superior and more humane in comparison to the “black whites”—Ersatz Europeans. This confirms the Fanonian “negro myth” which is a social and political system of representations or archetypes of blackness as evil (Hook 2004). Such myths tend to stick, as generalizations about black people based on a few “case studies” that are not naturally inherent acts of blackness. Hence, Steyn and Foster (2008) found that in South Africa, through white talk the imminent switch to tyranny and corruption among black people who achieve social or economic status is a firm expectation in the white imagination and it is always kept active in their hostile collective imagination. Therefore, while they can possibly be read as black people in proximity to whiteness, when the Ersatz Europeans “disappoint” by acting “black” there is not much to be surprised with.

In this instance, Ersatz Europeans are portrayed as white, but they fall short of the expectations associated with being white. They are deemed to “fail” due to an insufficient alignment with whiteness, lacking that elusive ‘Even if’ which, even in metaphor, serves to elevate the status of “real whites” to a more privileged echelon. As a result, we can see how selected black people in postcolonial Southern African settings, like Zimbabwe and South Africa, evaluate concepts like race and professionalism differently. The African postcolonial space is one where governments placed legal limitations on explicit white anti-black attitudes. In the postcolonial space, black middle-class people are not directly oppressed but are also considered in some instances by other black people they employ as cruel and exploitative. Because of this, accusations that they marginalize

their black employees carry weight. The implication is that privileged blacks, like certain whites, can maintain the devaluation of Black life. Here, Ersatz Europeans succeed in some respects and fail miserably in others when it comes to acting “white” as expected. These racialized encounters are therefore not simple occurrences, but multi-layered and contradictory. These experiences echo Fanon’s (1952) description of the black physician who is discursively constructed as a failure even before they have conducted surgery. Likewise, in the eyes of the domestic workers, the Ersatz European will never live up to the same standards of phenotypical whites.

Despite how it plays out in the *Madumbe* discourses, the devaluation of black working-class lives is not a new phenomenon in South Africa. Goebel (2015) shows how in post-apartheid South Africa, policy, elites, and the state all act in ways that deny the working class Black poor full city citizenship and dignity. Poor quality, poorly located, or otherwise underserved infrastructure (housing, services) is common (Goebel 2015). This exemplifies the denigration of Black life among the working class. Just like the phenotypical apartheid whites, “black whites” or Ersatz Europeans are at times seen to be exploitative of migrant domestic workers as witnessed in the account of the ill domestic worker who was refused health care. Such relationships may be viewed as learned and internalized violence, founded on apartheid’s labour policies that placed black migrant labour as essential yet vulnerable to exploitation. In these relationships there are layers of nationality and ethnicity, interpreted and enacted through the lenses of race. In migration spaces, the abuse of migrant domestic workers is also well documented in precarity literature (see Dodson 2018; Jinnah 2020). According to Griffin (2011) African migrant domestic workers in South Africa are often in vulnerable positions and taken advantage of. Most have no legal documentation and are often seen as desirable domestic workers who can be taken advantage of and a more submissive lot in contrast to their “troublesome” South African black counterparts (Griffin 2011).

These relationships and the racialization that exist across all black labour relationships can also be used to explain what has been referred to as xenophobia in South Africa. Apart from that, more generally, South Africa’s internal disputes, disaffection and

violence have continued to derail the country's credibility as a leader on the continent (Andreasson 2011). South Africa's hegemonic potential is therefore derailed by intersecting factors that suggest that it houses western ideologies through citizen wielded superiority complex over other nations. Because it is making itself felt through racialized relationships of hate towards black people, it could be apt to consider framing forms of mistreatment towards black migrants by other blacks as Afrophobia not xenophobia. Some critics have questioned the suitability of the term xenophobia to describe the largely black on black violent conflicts that have flared up in South Africa recently (Tagwirei 2019). They find the use of the term Afrophobia to be more consistent with facts on the ground. Fanon had called it Negrophobia. In these migration-based relationships of black-on-black exploitation "South Africans are accused of regarding themselves as exceptionally not of Africa. Apartheid history is evoked to account for this pride, ignorance and attendant hatred for other Africans" (Tagwirei 2019). Overall, the Ersatz trope prevails in postcolonial landscapes where skin complexion and colour interact with class, resulting in discriminatory and in some cases violent outcomes.

Ndlovu (2014) takes note of what he regards as South African exceptionalism in his understanding of how some South African leaders like Jacob Zuma viewed other Africans. The paper contends that the concept of South African exceptionalism is rooted in a Eurocentric perspective of existence and development, which ultimately fosters anti-black racism and Afrophobia. Perhaps there is some truth in these accusations, and they go on to show not only the supremacist nature of some South Africans but also the white supremacist ideologies inherent in some black employer-migrant employee relations in the country. President Mbeki's confession that South Africa is a "country of 'two nations', one rich and white the other black and poor" (Andreasson 2011, p. 1176) would be rather simplistic in light of the complex social stratification in the post-apartheid situation where a new class of beneficiaries of the Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) policy, though small by comparison, is increasingly acquiring white ways and attaining whiteness. This is indicative of South Africa's internal neo-colonial structures that

are framed along neo-liberal market ideas where the rich get richer while the poor get poorer. In relationships between *Madumbe* as representing the majority black worker and *Varungu* (whites) the employing class, one sees exploitation and discrimination along intersecting axes of race, class and ethnicity. This can best be summed up using Magubane's position that "although racism cannot be simply correlated with the process of material exploitation, the discourse produces forms of knowledge which are of great utility in justifying the degradation of the exploited. It serves to define the superior whilst at the same time serving to regulate the inferior and putting them in their proverbial place" (Magubane 2001, p. 4). The discourses of race, ethnicity and class were mutually reinforcing and constitute of the ideologies of whiteness that would endure well beyond the end of formal colonialism. Goebel (2015) contends that even after the conclusion of apartheid, numerous spatial, social, and service-delivery disparities persist. The marginalized, particularly women in informal settlements or those leading households, persist in facing challenges related to access to water, electricity, housing, and other essential services, indicating a lasting structural legacy of the apartheid system (Goebel 2015).

Whiteness at the marketplace and bus termini

When transacting business particularly in the informal market, in black ghettos popularly known as the black market in Zimbabwe, the term "*murungu*" (white person) is used interchangeably with such terms as "boss", "*ngezha*" or "shef", in situations when someone is addressing someone from whom a favourable return is anticipated especially in the form of money payment. In such cases the addressee is being equated to a white person. Those so addressed are expected to feel respected and honoured as the ones with the means of payment. The metaphorical significance of addressing someone as *murungu* stems from the myth that white people own inexhaustible wealth and are able to be able to pay for anything they like (Mashiri 2001). Such discourses were responsible for the perverse misconstrual of possession of wealth with skin colour according to which one is white because they are rich, and they are rich because they are white (Gibson 2008). In

urban ghetto spaces even where one can hardly expect to meet a white man, the term *murungu* is widely used to connote a higher social status for those from whom money is expected. For example, rank marshals and commuter omnibus drivers or any employee for that matter, would ordinarily use the term *murungu wangu* (my white person) to refer to their employer. In a context where a transactional relationship between buyer and seller at the marketplace or between bus conductor and commuter; the one who anticipates receiving money addresses the other as *murungu* (white person) or *varungu* (white people) if many. This address is expected and would make the prospective client feel special and more inclined to pay for the service.

At a busy *kombi* (Taxi) terminus in Gweru where University students' pick-up lifts to or drop-off from the Midlands State University campus in Senga, it is common to hear omnibus conductors, rank marshals or touts (*mahwindi*) hollering potential clients to board along the following lines:

"Senga, Senga, vanoenda, varikuda kumhanya. Murikuenda here sistren. One chete asara! Garisanaika varungu vangu tikwane tese. pindai tiende."(are you going to Senga my white people, quickly get in we are at your service) or:

Mati tidiiko vabereki, toenda here, pasina imi hatirame varungu (What are you saying elders? Should we transport you? You are our source for survival our white people)

As commuters board the *kombi*, the conductor would say *"ngatibatandzei mari dzedu varungu tinoda mari dzakachinjika pakufamba"* (Let's pay off our bus fare white people. We want the exact fare from you; we do not have change). On drop off points for passengers the conductors normally say:

"tokuburutsirai papi varungu vedu kana mave kusvika pamadrop-off points mutaure vabereki, ndimi varungu vacho ,tinokusvitsai pamunonyatsoda chaipo"(where do you want us to drop you off our white people, tell us when we approach your drop-off points our parents. You are the white people; we drop you off at the exact place you want).

"Ko urikuenda here ngezha? Kwiraka tibaye!", beating the door as a signal for the driver to start the engine in readiness for take-off, *"Hwani asara ariega. Handei vabereki."* (Are you going white boss? Board and let's go. We are left with space for only one more. Let's go my parents).

Reference to the paying black passengers as 'parents' takes one back to the paternalism that whiteness was associated with under colonialism. Cooper (1996) defines colonial paternalism as a governing approach in which European powers rationalized their control by depicting themselves as the "guardians" or "fathers" of African communities, asserting that Africans were "not yet ready" for self-governance and required direction toward "civilization" and "modernity." However, the paternalism we witness in the case above, takes a more communitarian form. Ogunbanjo and van Bogaert (2009) describe communitarianism as a framework for political organization that emphasizes bonds of affection, kinship, and a shared sense of purpose and tradition. For them, the idea of community, both in theory and practice, within the African context is deeply grounded in philosophical concepts like ubuntu and communalism. The term 'parents' is being used to suggest a reciprocal relationship is in existence. In their capacity as paying customers, the "parents" carry a certain form of privilege that is tied to its uniquely African origins. This is a privilege experienced by a financially liable passenger that enables them to remain connected to the community that "serves them." The passengers regarded as privileged in their ability to pay, possessing the funds that the other individual will benefit from- albeit, still being reminded that they remain connect to the individual as "my parents." This reveals the importance of a whiteness heuristic because it captures the temporality of relationships and their fluid nature. Among those referred to as parents in this case are people of different ages, yet their position as paying passengers affords them temporary parenthood status.

Noteworthy was the fact that in all cases where such talk and conversational exchanges occurred, there was no serious objection on the part of those so addressed. Instead, it appeared that there was tacit acknowledgement of such addresses as a form of compliment as opposed to an insult. A debtor

explaining why they have failed to settle their debt in time says: “*Sha, murungu wangu haasati andigadzirira mapeni angu kana zvangoita chete ndinokuitirabho*” (My white person has not paid me my monthly earnings yet, I will pay you once that has been resolved). Here a strong association of whiteness and capacity not only to employ, but also to pay is implied as a given. The image of whiteness being invoked in the taxi was one of purity and beneficence rather than maleficence.

Further, the same taxi conductors who refer to clients as *varungu* (white people) also refer to the owner of the taxi as *murungu* (white person). For instance, when asked why they had not been on the road in the past month, the conductor mentioned that “*murungu wedu anga arikuramba kugadzirisa motokari*” (Our white person – the taxi owner – was refusing to get the taxi repaired). In all the examples above the use of the term *murungu* (white person) is used to connote a high social status for the addressee and it relies for its meaning on a shared archive of residual colonial stereotypes about phenotypical white people as set apart from and as belonging to a superior benefactor race as opposed to their supposedly poor and mean black subordinates.

What is paradoxical though is the fact that whiteness in these portrayals is viewed from a rich more nuanced perspective that accommodates the complexity consistent with real life possibilities of human nature. The Ersatz Europeans are true imitations not only of what is worst or what is best in their imagined whiteness, capable of both virtue and vice, meanness and generosity. The evidence considered here in a way confirms what earlier scholarship on the subject (Mashiri 2001; Mawadza 2000) also established, which seems to go against the grain of images of whites as harbingers of a brutal system of colonial domination and racial segregation found in much of orthodox literature critical of white settler colonial systems in former Rhodesia and apartheid South Africa. This is made most evident in the tacit acceptance and absence of active rejection of such addresses by those to whom they are directed.

Another level of complexity is revealed in the results. One finds that communalism remains etched in existing relationships that are mediated through racialised understandings. This communalism confirms existing arguments made by scholar

of hybridity, who found that postcolonial spaces consist of complex subjectivities. Ersatz Europeans are not simple beings but are shaped through complex neoliberal and neocolonial relationships that are premised on class, labor, culture, ethnicity and citizenship. Initially coined by Bhabha (2012, 2015), hybridity questions the notion that culture is untainted, distinct, or unchanging. Rather, cultural interaction creates “in-between” spaces where meanings are shaped and negotiated. According to Mambrol (2016), colonialization produces new transcultural forms in the contact zone, which are referred to as hybridity. This horticulture term describes the cross-breeding of two species by grafting or cross-pollination to form a third, ‘hybrid’ species (Mambrol 2016. p. 2). Hybridization can be linguistic, cultural, political or racial among other forms (Mambrol 2016). The results of this article suggest that Ersatz Europeans are a product of hybridity which is invoked through how they are understood by fellow black working-class individuals who rely on their goodwill, professionalism and finances to secure a living. Ersatz Europeans are however a paradox in that their identity is based on the yardstick of phenotypical whiteness, a standard of which they are fated to unsuccessfully aspire to.

Conclusion

The way whiteness tends to be equated with possession of wealth in the above scenarios should not be dismissed as a figment of poor black people’s fertile imaginations, rather it should be viewed as inspired by real economic conditions where whiteness, phenotypical or discursive signals ownership of the economic means of production and wealth. The study of utterances people makes undirected and unaware that they are being watched and as they go about their daily life routines opens a window to the psychosocial world they inhabit with a view to suggesting ways in which that world could be changed. The problem cannot be dismissed as a problem of a residual colonial mentality in poor black people’s imagination. The class of black inheritors of white privilege whom Sartre satirises as “ex-‘natives’” in his preface to Fanon’s (1963) book, *The Wretched of the Earth* exhibit a pathological inferiority complex in the lengths they are prepared to go to in imitating white ways of life. It is however not all about imitation but about how the “ex-‘natives’”

are read by the selected black working class. In both the scenarios, we have observed that in the postcolonial situation, the problem of a persistent black inferiority complex continues to make Fanon's proposal for "nothing short of the liberation of the man of color from himself" (Fanon 2008, p.10) relevant. Indeed, as Fanon had argued back then, the liberation of the man of colour remains incomplete until the decolonization of the mind (Wa Thiong'o 1998) has been accomplished and his fallen self-image reversed. To undo the black hate and to inspire pride and self-confidence in a people recently coming out of centuries of racial colonial domination a Marxist (Marx 1904) economic determinism view of the problem would argue that it is the material conditions of existence that determine consciousness. So instead of aiming at changing people's consciousness and the language and words they use to name the world, it is advised to aim at changing that world. A contrarian view from the thesis of linguistic determination of race (Sartre and MacCombie 1964, p. 18) would posit that the words people speak act as a constraining habitus that circumscribes and marks the outer locus points of possible behaviour it would be reasonable to argue as Mararike does that since, 'the slavery of the mind precedes the looting of material resources and creates willing partners who cooperate in self-enslavement and participate in their own exploitation' (Mararike 1998, p. 94-95), rolling out programmes aimed at decolonizing the mind through paying attention to the content of public education and socialization programmes may be all that needs to be done to create a new mindset and language that is commensurate with a free society.

This study however, suggests that post-colonial governments in Africa have little choice but to embrace first what Sartre refers to as 'this anti-racist racism' as the only road that will lead to the abolition of racial differences as they set in motion a dually pronged decolonial agenda at both the ontological and epistemological level of intervention because the concrete material conditions of life and the ideology that feeds off them are dialectically linked. The seemingly innocuous use of such a term as *murungu* discussed above signal the existence of a much deeper psychosocial problem that calls for attention among Zimbabweans. Further inquiries into other parts of the African continent are also needed.

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