

The *Nama Stap* as Indigenous Identity and Cultural Knowledge

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ABSTRACT The Afrocentric method is derived from the Afrocentric paradigm which deals with the question of African identity from the perspective of African people as centred, located, oriented, and grounded. The Afrocentric philosophy is based on the principles of inclusivity, cultural specificity, critical awareness, committedness and political awareness. The *Nama Stap* is the Namas' entertainment form used as a social, cultural and educational tool by the Nama-Khoisan people. The purpose of this paper is to [re]claim the *Nama Stap* as a dance of identity, culture and indigenous knowledge by showing ways in which an Afrocentric-ubuntu-based research approach can be used to research indigenous culture. Data were collected through oral history, field notes and stories. A case is argued for using the *Nama Stap* as Khoisan cultural heritage tool to promote nation building.

INTRODUCTION

Khoisan indigenous culture has weathered rapid change over the last century because of Western cultures. Many researchers made real attempts to get inside the African culture but, even so, there was a tendency to see culture in terms of the coloniser's precepts and to assess educational needs in terms of the coloniser's agenda. When establishing formal education, there was no adequate reference to the indigenous education that Africans already had or to the depth of the ancestral opinions that influenced African thinking (Bishop 1998). Even at present, in assessing change, researchers who are interested in indigenous culture and education have made small reference to the extent to which African values have survived, or to the extent to which these values have continued to influence African researchers' actions at different junctures. It is important for researchers to remind themselves that much of the literature on African culture and education can be ideologically traced back to the emergence of 'knowledge' about indigenous peoples in the context of European imperialism and expansion (Van Wyk 2013). In brief, Khoisan culture must free themselves of judgments from a European context and not in terms of their own (Gillian 2002; Van Wyk 2012).

It is in the light of this, the researcher explored the Nama-Khoisan indigenous knowledge as an alternative method of studying Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKSs), especial-

ly "the *Nama Stap* as Nama cultural and indigenous knowledge".

Arising from the above, an Indigenous lens as theoretical framework for this paper is discussed. Secondly, the Afrocentric principles underpinning this study are explained by applying the different Afrocentric-indigenous learning principles. Furthermore, "cultural heritage" is conceptualised and recommendations formulated to advance the phenomenon in a South African context.

Conceptualised Indigenous Knowledge

The indigenous knowledge is derived from the Afrocentric paradigm which explores African identity from the indigenous view of people as centred, located, oriented, and grounded, togetherness. From a research point of view, Van Wyk (2013) argues that Afrocentricity in particular indigenous knowledge can have a significant impact on the way African researchers view their identity, specifically considering the African people as centred, located, oriented, and grounded. The argument is that, for a millennium, Africans, the Khoisan people have been moved off social, political, philosophical, and economic agendas. Consequently it becomes necessary to examine all data from the standpoint of the Khoisans as subjects and human agents rather than as objects in a European frame of reference. Of course, this means that one cultural entity, the *Nama Stap* as symbolic identity of the Nama people knowledge has implications

for indigenous African culture and identity. The *Nama Stap*, as Khoisan dance suggests cultural and social immersion, as opposed to scientific distance, as the best approach to understanding indigenous knowledge phenomena. This means that the researcher must have some familiarity with the history, language, philosophy, and myths of the people under study. This point takes on a normative and cultural dimension since research cannot be reduced to the mere collection and production of value-free scientific knowledge. The concept becomes a way of linking the purpose of research to the very discourse that emerges and is legitimised from within the indigenous knowledge framework. Such a position is critical in Africa because researchers may misrepresent indigenous cultural practices and thus perpetuate myths about the indigenous African culture.

It focuses on Khoisan knowledge as African as the cultural centre for the study of African experiences and interprets research data from an African perspective. According to Van Wyk (2012), this perspective should be understood in the context of the diverse cultural realities of South Africa, since the African paradigm serves as a liberating intellectual movement against the Eurocentric perspective in research.

The *Nama Stap* as Afrocentric-indigenous Identity and Culture

Emanating from the latter, this paper uses the Afrocentric-Indigenous principles of inclusivity, cultural specificity, critical awareness, committedness, and political awareness (Asante 1995). Hence, by definition, the Afrocentric-Indigenous place describes an *inclusive* philosophy. Van Wyk (2012) is of the view that despite the “Afro” in the name, the intention is to focus on any individual or group being served, in order to make them the subject, and not the object, of whatever activity is being undertaken. My contention is that the *Nama Stap*, as cultural heritage and identity, must take be appropriated by its legitimate and rightful owners, the Nama people, to be preserved for the next generation. The principles underlying this paradigm are in line with the qualitative research, which researchers should actively be involved in to produce knowledge suited to the cultural and social context in which they operate. In essence, this implies that the researcher does not attempt

to appear as an invisible anonymous voice of authority, but as a real historical individual with concrete specific desires and interests (Van Wyk 2013; Dei 2000). In this case, the researcher is more concerned with an understanding of the social phenomena such as the *Nama Stap* as Nama dance, by participating in the lives of the Nama people from the Richtersveld in the Northern Cape Province. In this paper, the researcher empathises and identifies with the Nama people being studied in order to understand how they see and experience cultural activity and centeredness as local knowledge. Any acceptable approach to studying the Khoisan cultural dance called the *Nama Stap* requires an approach sufficiently comprehensive to address questions of how knowledge is being structured and used.

This paper applies the Afrocentric principles of commitment, inclusivity, togetherness and awareness, therefore, mandates the researcher to consider the political, ideological, social and cultural beliefs, and motivations of participants such as the Nama-Khoisan people. This view necessitates a more comprehensive approach that goes beyond questions of what is learnt, by whom, and how quickly, to consider questions of how the knowledge being disseminated is structured and used. The five Afrocentric-Indigenous learning principles (Asante 1995; Dei 2000; Reviere 2001; Van Wyk 2014) are discussed in the context of this paper. The principle, *ukweli*, refers to the groundedness of educational processes and practices in the experiences of the Nama-Khoisan community being served. The experiences of community members, therefore, should become the ultimate authority in determining what should be taught and how it should be taught. In other words, the standards for establishing the educational needs of the community, and the individuals in that community, must be determined by the real-life experiences of the community members. In the context of research, the researcher have established that one cannot ignore the real-life and historical experiences of this community without running the risk of making decisions that do not fit their experiences and needs. The second principle of *utulivu*, requires the researcher to actively avoid creating, exaggerating, or sustaining divisions between or within Nama communities, but to strive to create harmonious relationships between and within the participating groups instead. The third principle, *uhaki*, requires a learn-

ing process that is fair to all participants, especially to those being served, and a process in which its applications are mindful of, and empathetic to, the welfare of all the participants. This principle mandates the researcher to be mindful of the interests and wellbeing of the Nama community being served. The interests of the Nama-Khoisan community should be paramount – this is simply a matter of justice towards their cultural heritage of the *Nama Stap* as cultural dance. The fourth principle, *ujamaa*, requires the researcher to reject the Nama people separation and not to presume to be the well from which all knowledge springs. The application of *ujamaa* should reveal the community affiliations of the Khoisan participants, in addition to their own assumptions about the knowledge of the *Nama Stap* as a social, cultural and educational tool to advance the ideals of the Nama-Khoisan. The last principle, *kujitoo*, requires the researcher to emphasise considerations of how knowledge is [con] structured and used over the need for dispassion and objectivity. This empowers the participant as well the Nama-Khoisan community to analyse and interpret the structure and use of Nama text and other discourses, and to reveal the hidden assumptions embedded in such, especially in reclaiming the *Nama Stap* as cultural-indigenous knowledge.

Acknowledgement of *Nama Stap* as Indigenous Knowledge

To start with, however, a reference to the concept of “culture”, which has been studied by anthropologists. Culture is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society. For the purpose of study, the focus is to enhance the *Nama Stap* as symbolic identity of the Nama people. Despite overt colonial influences within these dances today, the Nama have declared these performance artefacts to be symbols of Nama identity. As a constituent part of the affirmation and enrichment of cultural identities, as a legacy belonging to all humankind, the cultural heritage gives each particular place its recognisable features and is the storehouse of human experience. The preservation and the presentation of the cultural heritage therefore constitute a corner-stone of any cultural policy. The preservation of the cultural heritage now

covers the nonphysical cultural heritage, which includes the signs and symbols passed on by oral transmission, artistic and literary forms of expression, languages, ways of life, myths, beliefs and rituals, value systems and traditional knowledge and know-how (Dei 2001). Culture consists of the “lifeways” of a group, in this case the Nama people, including its distinctive commitment to certain values and subsistence patterns (Eisenhart and Borko 1993). Eisenhart and Borko are of the view that cultures are coherent, profound and systemic to the extent that “discrepancy in school achievement” could be the manifestation of discontinuity between culture at home and the expectations at school. The current South African national coat of arms was a step initiated by national government to give acknowledgement of indigenous knowledge, such as the *riel* and *Nama Stap* as Khoisan cultural heritage to nation building, reconciliation and social transformation (Van Wyk 2012). Through these actions, the democratic government demonstrated real commitment to the Afrocentric-Ubuntu spirit. Ubuntu is a communal way of life which deems that society must be run for the sake of all, requiring cooperation as well as sharing and charity (Broodryk 2006). Therefore, Ubuntu is the quality of being human (Murithi 2006). Additionally, Ubuntu involves caring, sharing, respect, and compassion and ensures a happy and qualitative human community life in the spirit of family. Moreover, Mkabela (2005) describes the fundamentals of Ubuntu as the kind of existence, one person’s personhood and identity is fulfilled and complemented by the other person’s personhood, as in the case of Namas.

USING THE AFROCENTRIC-INDIGENOUS METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this paper is to revive the *Nama Stap* as indigenous knowledge by showing ways in which the Afrocentric approach can be used for researching indigenous culture. The researcher employed an Afrocentric-Ubuntu-based research approach for this particular study. Tutu’s (2004) view of the Ubuntu-based research is that with participative research paradigms “we are bound with others”. Moreover, Broodryk (2006) supports Tutu’s view that the emphasis is on togetherness as a cooperative and community, heading for the same end re-

sult. Essentially, as a research philosophy, Afrocentric-indigenous principles gives the research process a human face, as opposed to some top-down imposed research processes, and advocates humane collaboration with the participants and community, in respect of their spirituality, values, needs, norms, and mores [morals?]. In short, become a Khoisan for full cooperation of Afrocentric-Ubuntu in research. This type of research undertakes an African analysis and produces indigenous African knowledge that recognises the African voice; that tells another story. Since validity has the power of truth and identifies acceptable research as well as accurate construction of knowledge (Gay et al. 2006; Reviere 2001), these and other authors such as Mkabela and Luthuli (1997) and Merriam (1998) recommend research paradigms that are compatible with contexts, and that include participants' perspectives and interpretations, instead of satisfying universal or global "truths". Afrocentric-Ubuntu-based research reaffirms the centrality of cultural experience as the place to begin creating a dynamic multicultural approach to research. This research is unique to the social structure and cultural values of African indigenous communities, such as the *Nama-Khoisan* people. It promotes the notion that the relevance of such an Ubuntu research paradigm can be said to have been achieved when it could satisfy not only the material needs of the people, but also their intellectual, spiritual and cultural needs. *Afrocentric-Ubuntu research design* has shown a growing interest in using the community-inquiry-based method. Through Afrocentric-Ubuntu, the researcher communicated, and agreed through dialogue with the Nama participants. This study employed oral histories and photographic images. These were undertaken in order to gain a richer and deeper understanding of views on becoming "Namadancers" through oral stories (Bathmaker and Harnett 2010). Linde (1993) coined these stories, culturally defined landmarks of the Nama people – even of peoples' lives, which are repeated over time and across occasions. Moreover, Mishler (1999) states that the cultural stories people tell about their lives are identity performances. Over time, *Nama Stap* stories have become landmark events related to life experiences of the Nama people. *Participants and data-collection procedure*: Nama participants responded through oral history (story telling), field notes and anecdotal.

The participants' narratives were then organised thematically before they were analysed in a five-phase process. Analyses of the participants' narratives are both *inductive* and *deductive* in nature. These interviews were inductive in that the researcher sought recurring themes in participants' ways of talking about the *Nama Stap* as a Nama dance and art form. *Ethical considerations* constitute a requirement in that participants demanded assurance that the researcher had obtained permission from the Nama Elders to conduct research (Mkabela and Luthuli 1997), but also an obligation to acknowledge the Elderly and spiritual leaders, chiefs, and other forms of leadership around the community. Additionally, in view of oneness in Ubuntu, seeking approval from elders and royalty increased the participants' participation because their local leadership blessed the evaluation, and therefore reduced tensions and improved power relations between participants and the researcher (Mkabela 2005). Decolonising research considers the dissemination of research outcomes as a collaboration that acknowledges the contribution of indigenous peoples and, most importantly, informs them of the methods of dissemination (Prior 2006; Reviere 2001). Thus, Afrocentric-Ubuntu research ethics included clearly identifying participants' contributions to outcomes, sharing, analysing and discussing the findings with the community elders, declaring fully the researcher's intentions in conducting the research, clarifying the participants' and benefits. According to Afrocentric-Ubuntu ethical requirements, the researcher explained the purpose and confidentiality to the Elders and community participants.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The collected data were analysed and themes emerged from the narratives.

Historical Context of the Nama Stap

The *Nama Stap* as Nama-Khoisan tradition and cultural heritage is an entire corpus of material signs – either artistic or symbolic – handed on by the past to each culture and, therefore, to the whole of Nama-Khoisan. The Nama may be identified with a sequence of movements that is widely recognised throughout South Africa and Namibia as the *Nama Stap*; the *Nama Stap* in

turn is the major movement motif of the Nama Stap Dance, and the foundation of the Nama Stap Dance-Female Puberty Version. Namaqualand in the Northern Cape Province, the largest reserve, includes Concordia, Komagga, Leliefontein, Richtersveld, and Steinkopf. The village of !Khubus is part of the Richtersveld reserve, where it lies in close proximity to the Richtersveld National Park. The democratic South Africa, as Archbishop Desmond Tutu coined the term 'Rainbow Nation' as cosmopolitan society with different identities, culture and languages, has adopted eleven official languages: Afrikaans, English, IsiXhosa, IsiZulu, Ndebele, Siswati, Sepedi, Sesotho, Setswana, Tshivenda, Xitsonga.

When asking what dominant language is spoken by the Nama people in the Richtersveld and surroundings, Dawid as community leader said: *Afrikaans is the language used by Nama in the Richtersveld; this is due largely to the dictum of the apartheid government that ruled South Africa for nearly fifty years. It is used in the home, at school, in business, and socially. Nama people who are fifty years of age or older may, however, have retained the traditional Nama click language, and, in many cases, are able to speak a second 'African' language. English is not a language freely spoken among the Nama of !Khubus or its surrounding area.*

It can be deduced that the acceptance of Afrikaans as the dominant speech in South Africa remains widespread but language use underpins the cultural survival of the *Nama Stap Dance*. In the post-apartheid era the Khoisan Heritage Programme was established as part of South Africa's nation-wide cultural revitalisation campaign. In the case of !Khubus, one of the major cultural revival programmes involves the re-establishment of the Nama language.

The Nama Stap Dance as a Symbolic Social Interaction

Giurchescu (2001) mentions that dance is a social function. Considering the social level of interaction, movement patterns and style, these function as symbols of social relationships between individuals and groups, and between groups. The *Nama Stap Dance* is a powerful symbol of a social function. It not only alludes to the changing world, but also becomes an instrument of change. According to Linde (1993),

the power of dance, considered in its artistic features, lies in the ecstatic function, which takes the dancers out of themselves, removes them from everyday life, and transports them into a virtual world of time and space. Moreover, Blacking (1984) mentions that the power of dance rests in acts of performance by dancers and spectators alike, in the process of making sense of dance in the cultural products of those processes, and in linking dance to other sets of ideas and social experiences. Elders, Gert and Janne-man expanded on this by saying that the *Nama Stap Dance* is a form of social event. In essence, this dance is an outdoor dance, a veld dance, and a modern form of some of the oldest indigenous dances of the Nama, Khoi and the San people." These two Elders said:

Our Nama Stap is our tradition and part of the movement vocabulary of all residents of !Khubus in the Richtersveld from the very young pre-school child to the eldest grandparent. It, along with our culture, is part of the primary education programme of the local school that all school-aged children of !Khubus attend. Within the school setting, young dancers are encouraged to not only develop as good Nama Stap dancers but also to be inventive within the form. Through the dance, a competitive spirit is encouraged and nurtured among us.

Elder Gert alluded... *Over the three decades noticed that the Nama Stap Dance has changed in relation to its social and (symbolic) purpose for the community. In the performance that I observed in !Khubus, it would appear that this purpose of the Nama Stap Dance has changed dramatically.*

These indigenous voices echoed the sentiments of the *Nama Stap* as experienced of daily life of cultural activities of the Nama people. They represented the essence of a social interaction as a way of life.

The Nama Stap Dance as Cultural Text of Expression

It is of the opinion of the researcher that the *Nama Stap Dance* is a cultural text characteristic of the Nama people. This implies that dance could integrate all the dimensions as coherent and dynamic factors of culture. According to the theory of culture text, it is the socio-communicative relevance of the dance performance that

endows this process with the quality of text (Mutema 2003). Moreover, Eisenhart and Borko (1993) argue that culture consists of the life ways of a group, including its distinctive commitment to certain values and subsistence patterns. This way of life is demonstrated by the Nama people. In their way of life, Reviere (2001) suggests, Ubuntu defines the individual in terms of rules of conduct or social ethics in relation to others. For example, the *Nama Stap Dance* consists of cultural movements which are welcoming, hospitable, warm and generous, and makes the Namas willing to share. These are attributes that one could argue, contributed to the advancement of the culture of the Nama-Khoisan people. Janneman reaffirmed the *Nama Stap Dance* as a cultural enjoyment endeavour:

I believed from the outset that this dance of our people must get a rightful place on the South African as well in Namibian cultural calendars. For as long as I can remember, the Nama people have been dancing the Nama Stap (NS) for ages. No one has been able to provide evidence of why or how it came into being. Very few Nama, if any, have no embodied knowledge of the Nama Stap. Most learn this dynamic cultural artefact in childhood along with other Nama signifiers such as round huts, Nama mud ovens and Nama baked bread. It is our way of life.

This statement expressed by an Elder embraces why they believed that the *Nama Stap Dance* must be recognized as their cultural text of expression as important characteristic of the Nama people identity.

The Nama Stap as an expression of Nama identity

Wolfram (2006) investigates the indigenous peoples' cultural activities in the Lak region of Southern New Ireland, Papua New Guinea and found that through the different dance performances by the Lak indigenous island people, they demonstrate through their performances who they are, what they consists of and how powerful they can be as a community. Through these dances, the Lak indigenous island people demonstrate as way their identity and culture. Moreover, Elder Gert Moos believes that the *Nama Stap* is a centuries-old rhythm and steps from the Khoisan and Nama dance traditions which over time, merged with contemporary in-

fluences. Additionally, Elder Gert emphasised that this dance is performed as *'n sosiale geleentheid soos vertel deur my grootouers en my ouers hulle lewe lank die dans beoefen* [a social event as told by their grandparents and my parents how they have danced it their whole life]. Gert mentioned that no-one really knows what the Nama dance looked like in its purest form, or when and where the transition took place because there has been no research on it. He went on to say, *"What I know today ... This Nama Stap was danced by the descendants of the Nama-Khoisan and that it became the dance of the working classes. This is our identity performed in the open air, under trees or on dusty plains by rural folk in isolated areas, particularly in the Namaqua land in the Northern Cape and Southwest Africa (now Namibia)."*

Giving their point of view, Mietjie and Gert said this dance style encapsulates the Khoisan identity:

It was the only socialised and entertainment form of our people. We did it with only a single "ramkie" (tin guitar made out of an empty oil can and a piece of wood with strings). Sometimes we do it with the odd handmade violin or, sometimes, a banjo, accordion or mouth organ. Our people come from places such as !Khubus in the Richtersveld, Garies and Rehoboth in Namibia, Kweekkraal, Kliprand, Molsvlei, Spoegrivier and Soebatsfontein to enjoy them. These towns may be hard to find on a map, but for the people living there, the ancient art of dance is alive and well. To this day ... this is Nama-Khoisan identity.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The purpose of this paper is achieved whereby participants echoed to [re]vitalize the *Nama Stap* as dance of the Nama people as indigenous knowledge. Elders in this paper echoed their voices as a proud Nama people about a dance they have enjoyed for past years. They believed that their dance culture had been increased among the youth in the rural villages in Namakwaland region of the Northern Cape and surrounding neighbour country, Namibia. They argue for the advancement of the *Nama Stap* as a dance of the Nama people. This Nama-Khoisan cultural identity could be strengthened in future partnerships and collaborative efforts of local government, corporate business and the community at large.

Arising from the literature review, the Afrocentric approach is based on the principles of inclusivity, cultural specificity, critical awareness, committedness and political awareness. My view is to “support and safeguard” the Nama Stap as an indigenous artistic form which aimed at ensuring the viability of the intangible cultural heritage, including the identification, documentation, research, preservation, protection, promotion, enhancement, transmission, as well as the revitalisation of the various aspects of such heritage. The Bill of Rights of the Constitution states that “everyone has the right to freedom of expression, which includes ... freedom of artistic creativity ... and everyone, has the right to use the language and to participate in the cultural life of their choice”. The Nama Stap is one of the oldest, the original entertainment form of dance used as a social, cultural and educational tool by the Nama people. The Nama Stap as a dance is part of the Namas’ cultural heritage in the process of nation building.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper recommends that the *Nama Stapas* indigenous knowledge being promoted as cultural heritage in the following manner:

- ♦ To extend further research on this phenomenon as cultural heritage;
- ♦ To write up this dance form through documentation in South African school curricula;
- ♦ To preserve and promote this dance form among the youth through drama and art classes at school and tertiary levels;
- ♦ To advocate the dance by using community radio talkshows and cultural heritage days to inform other cultures and communities about the *Nama Stap*,
- ♦ To develop and integrate the *Nama Stap* as part of the school curricula and
- ♦ To establish partnerships with businesses, local government, non-governmental organizations (NGO) and schools to advance the dance.

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