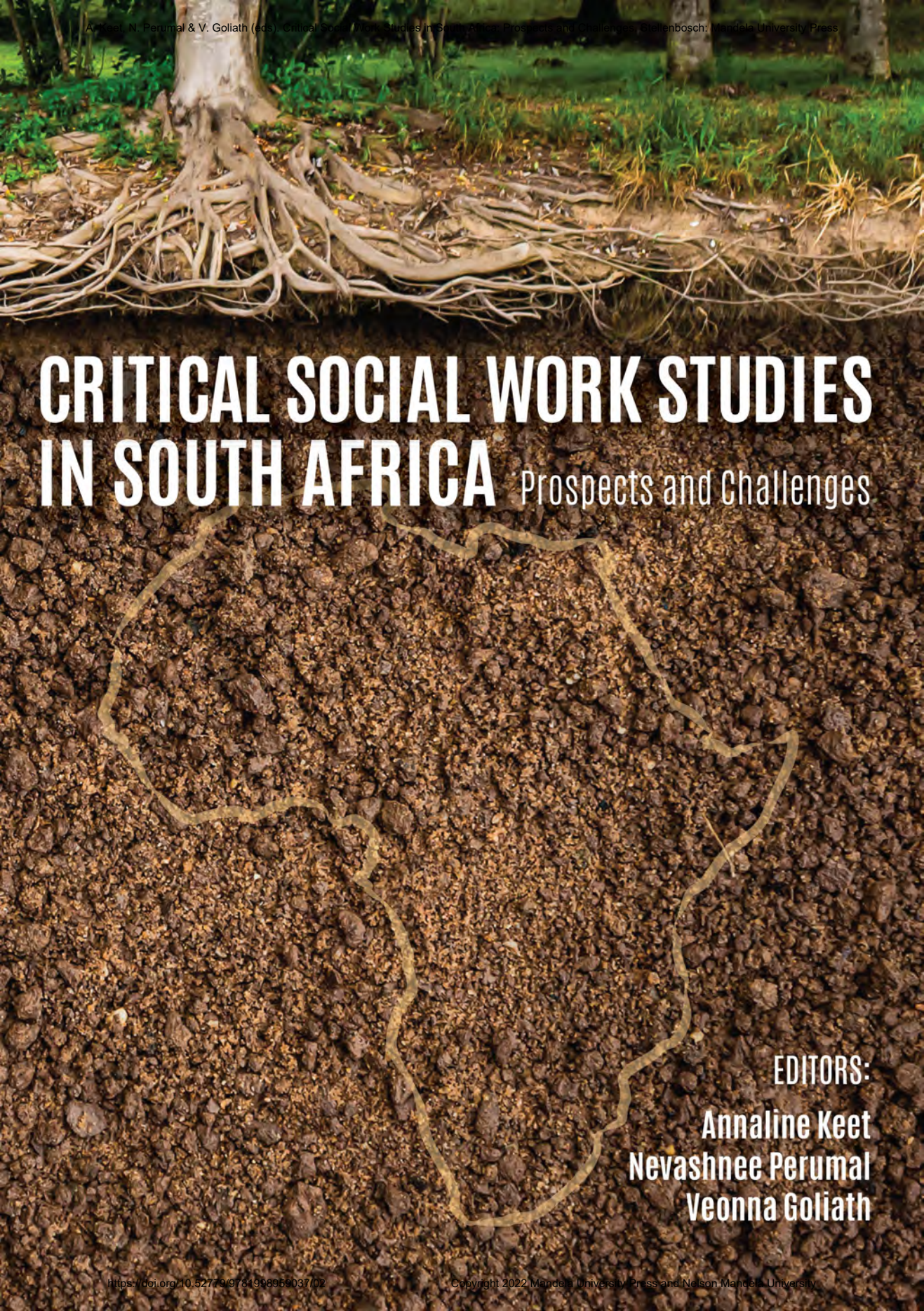


The background of the cover is a photograph of a forest floor. In the upper half, the thick, gnarled roots of a large tree spread out across the ground. Below the roots, the soil is dark and textured, with a yellowish-brown outline of the map of South Africa superimposed on it. The title text is overlaid on the upper part of the image.

CRITICAL SOCIAL WORK STUDIES IN SOUTH AFRICA

Prospects and Challenges

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DISPELLING THE UTOPIAN NOTION OF 'FAMILY' IN SOUTH AFRICA

Illuminating the lived reality of the African clan system
raising children with Down syndrome

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ABSTRACT

The notion of 'family' as a Western construct describing the basic social system does not resonate with the African conceptualisation of the foundational social system found among African communities. The indiscriminate use of the word 'family' within the African context breeds conceptual confusion. This chapter utilises the lived experiences of African clans raising children with Down syndrome to illuminate the silenced but traceable contours of an indigenous social institution referred to as an African clan. A qualitative research approach was adopted and complemented by a phenomenological research design. Data were sourced through semi-structured clan interviews and focus group discussions with clan members raising children with Down syndrome and analysed using a thematic approach. The findings uncovered a clan system characterised by a clan name, totem, rendition of clan praises and an inherent clan-based approach to raising a child with Down syndrome. The main thrust of the arguments advanced by this chapter is that the African clan as a foundational social institution should form the cornerstone and vital unit of intervention for Afrocentric or decolonial social work. Thus, theories and techniques may be constructed in South Africa based on empirical research findings such as the one on which this chapter is based.

KEYWORDS

African clan, decoloniality, 'family', kinship, spirituality, world view

INTRODUCTION

The 'canonisation' of the term 'family' through colonial imposition and its widespread acceptance and usage in non-European contexts such as Africa breeds conceptual confusion between the social reality as lived by Africans and the literal meaning of the term as conceptualised in the Euro-North contexts. The absence of an equivalent term in African languages that translates literally to the term 'family' bears testimony to the existence of a conceptual confusion and reduces the continued usage of the

term 'family' in African contexts to nothing less than utopia. Early sociological and anthropological studies of African social institutions, structures and systems seem to have relied largely on the Western world view to analyse and describe some aspects of the African social reality. Consequently, such studies failed to tap into the lived realities of Africans to allow for the development of unique and authentic theoretical constructs grounded on African worldviews and social realities (Russell, 2003; Siqwana-Ndulo, 1998). The verifiable scarcity of genuinely African social theory points to a lack of will among scholars to conceptualise the lived realities of Africans to a level of valid theory (Russell, 2003). This could be partly attributed to the general tendency of yielding to colonial measures of professional and academic advancement of the self at the expense of the collective, leading to a state of 'colonial capture' of the profession of social work. Often the lack of scientific rigour has been tossed around as a reason for dismissing any African concept of being and knowing. The superimposed Western concepts remain intact despite their lack of cultural relevance, sustained by the enduring influence of coloniality. Sociologists and anthropologists have not adequately documented indigenous African social institutions (Siqwana-Ndulo, 1998). Yet, generalisations and assumptions about such institutions as those dubbed 'families' continue to be made to date.

The question of the relevance and appropriateness of Western theories and methods of social work remains a bone of contention in decolonial and indigenous social work scholarship. Consequently, social work in Africa has witnessed the rise of indigenous and Afrocentric approaches for social work education and practice in Africa from empirical research initiatives (Butterfield & Abye, 2013; Coates, Gray & Hetherington, 2006; Kreitzer, 2012; Twikirize & Spitzer, 2019). African world views have stood the test of time long enough to justify an argument that Africans possess a distinct philosophy and ethos (Ani, 1994; Mbiti, 1969; Mungai, 2015; Osei-Hwedie & Rankopo, 2008; Ross, 2008; Schiele, 2000; Thabede, 2008). Echoing these sentiments, Mupedziswa, Rankopo and Mwansa (2019) propound that African world views provide philosophical lenses through which Africans view phenomena.

However, despite this thesis, the epistemological and ontological grounding of social work remains largely unchanged and connected to the Eurocentric world view like two sides of the same coin (Ornellas, Spolander & Engelbrecht, 2018; Quijano, 2000; Twikirize & Spitzer, 2019). One of the key drivers of the continued legacy of European epistemic hegemony is both the direct and indirect use of colonial languages when conceptualising theories and approaches, such as our continued direct and indirect use of English in South Africa and other colonial languages around Africa despite the exciting developments in newer indigenous approaches (Maathai, 2009; Mawere, 2015; Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 1987; Tembo, 2019). By using English, I refer to both

the direct use of English as a medium of instruction and communication, as well as the indirect usage of English when conceptualising theoretical constructs followed by their translation to indigenous languages at application level.

Therefore, the translation from English to various African vernaculars may not adequately 'sanitise' such social work theory of the cultural orientation embedded in the original language of conceptualisation. Several decolonial African scholars have cautioned against the colonising nature of language (Maathai, 2009; Mawere, 2015; Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 1987). Most notably, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, renowned African novelist and decolonial scholar, publicly denounced and dissociated himself from the use of English in his decolonial texts titled *Decolonizing the Mind* as an attempt to address the colonising nature of English as a language (Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 1987). For Mawere (2015), language is one of the key means to understanding social values in a given geographic context.

Notably, the danger of the colonising nature of hegemonic languages does not lie only in the use of languages as mediums of instruction and communication, but also in the cultural semantics embedded in words originally conceptualised from a Eurocentric world view. It is common knowledge that language frames thinking, making it less effective for African scholars to conceptualise Afrocentric social work using a colonial language. This is because Eurocentric concepts may not find resonance when transposed and superimposed to describe social phenomena based on African world views. As intimated by Nelson Mandela:

If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his own language, that goes to his heart. (Mandela, 1995:630)

As per the above quotation, language goes deeper than a mere cognitive function to invoke the heart and soul. Thus, the newly developed indigenous African approaches in social work may not deliver a meaningful epistemic revolution unless they succeed in effectively disposing Europe and focusing on Africa as the epistemic centre of Afrocentric social work. As argued by Quijano (2000), meaningful decolonial interventions require as a prerequisite the effective challenging of the epistemic hegemony of Europe in knowledge production. Therefore, the current state of social work in Africa wherein the profession continues to rely on key Western concepts to describe social phenomena including social institutions, systems and structures calls for critical scholarly engagement and redress.

One such social institution is the so-called 'family' in Western cultures. The 'family' as a foundational institution in society is a very important system and a unit of intervention within the social work scope of practice. Casework, also known as social work micro practice, focuses on individuals and 'families' (Cummins, Sevel & Pedrick, 2006). Therefore, it is important that this unit of intervention is properly understood

and contextualised. The concept 'family' is a parochial Western cultural construct without universal applicability despite it being paraded as such. The evidence of its parochial relevance is found in its absence in the language register of non-Western contexts such as South African vernaculars. The term 'family' will be used to refer to Western descriptions of the foundational institutions in society which are called differently in African contexts. The term will be used interchangeably in instances where the author refers to the Western conceptualisation or as used in literature by other authors. However, when used by the author to refer to the foundational social institution (*lapa/ndyangulumndeni/usapho*) for the South African context, the term will be deliberately substituted in favour of *African clan*. In this chapter, the description 'African' refers to the Bantu people (historically described as Black) of South Africa and in some instances to the continent of Africa in general. A similar description is reflected by the White Paper on Families in its official classification of South African racial categories (Department of Social Development, 2013). The South African government classifies South Africans into four racial categories, namely: Africans, Coloureds, Indians and Whites (RSA, 2012). Thus, this chapter foregrounds native Black African clans excluding Coloureds and Indians as they did not form part of the study.

As correctly argued by Ornellas, Spolander and Engelbrecht (2018), social work in Africa should draw from a collectivist-communalist ontological perspective congruent with African world views. Similarly, Twikirize and Spitzer (2019) argued strongly for the repositioning of social work to draw deeply from African indigenous knowledges, including the need to centre the profession on critically important African philosophical principles. It is against this backdrop that the author questions whether it is prudent for indigenous Africans to continue using borrowed Eurocentric concepts such as 'family' to describe indigenous African social institutions conceptualised from the unique lenses of African world views and their unique knowledge systems. Are we not wittingly or unwittingly landing ourselves into a quagmire captured in the adage 'lost in translation'? This the author argues emanates from the fact that what the Western world refers to as 'family' is starkly different from what indigenous Africans refer to as *ndangu* or *umndeni* or *usapho* or *lapa*. These indigenous African terms are semantically related to what is called 'family' in English, but are completely different in their essence (form, structure and content). Therefore, using this English concept of 'family' indiscriminately and interchangeably with vernaculars to refer to the same thing is both misleading and a distortion of our understanding of the lived experiences of indigenous Africans and, by extension, its silencing. Thus, the conventional use of the term 'family' within Africa is likely to create a utopia that can only be dispelled using the lived realities of Africans. Despite its canonisation and wide use in formal and legal communication in this decolonial age, there is a need for critical questioning and verification to establish if a term such as 'family' resonates with indigenous concepts perceived to have a similar meaning.

The purpose of this chapter is to dispel the myth embedded in the adoption and use of the term 'family' in South Africa by illuminating the lived realities of an African clan raising a child with Down syndrome (DS). The chapter is based on the findings of an empirical study conducted with African clans raising children with DS. It is hoped that the chapter will help address a knowledge gap relating to what constitutes the foundational social institution for Africans in reality and that it will invoke appreciation of the existing misalignment and incongruences relating to epistemic influences of languages and naming practices between English (conventional) and African vernacular with regard to conceptualisation of social phenomena. Thus, this chapter represents a scholarly attempt to move towards closing this gap through the development and adoption of culturally and contextually appropriate terms when describing key African foundational social institutions.

The author begins with a general discussion of the concept of 'family' as conceptualised from the Eurocentric world view and conventionally used in social work practice and education. The author then presents a discussion of the African clan (*ndyangu*) as a foundational social institution foregrounded on an African world view. This is followed by a discussion of the theoretical framework underpinning the study. The author then discusses the research methods, as well as findings presented according to a theme that emerged from the data. The emergent sub-themes related to the nature of the African clan including its characteristics, structure, functions, and regulation are discussed in relation to the experiences of African clans raising children with DS. Finally, the author concludes and presents recommendations for further studies.

CONCEPTUAL CONFUSION SURROUNDING 'FAMILY' AS EUROCENTRIC CULTURAL CONSTRUCT

Like any other society, Africa has always had its ways of being, doing and knowing. The colonial era heralded a long period of genocides (killing of people) and "epistemicides" (killing of their knowledge systems) (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015; Santos, 2014). However, there is ample evidence showing that despite such a prolonged onslaught, African heritage (cultural characteristics and traits) demonstrated resilience as seen through its survival to this age (Biko [1978], 2004). Much attention in current decolonial social work scholarship illuminates a variety of prevailing African ways of solving problems through kinship networks, mutual aid groups, solidarity and alliance (Twikirize & Spitzer, 2019).

These African ways of being, doing and knowing are underpinned by some form of instruction medium and communication patterns. Thus, before delving into a discussion about the utopian nature of the use of the concept 'family' in South Africa, it would be helpful to clarify the conventional conceptualisation of the term.

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The Western meaning of ‘family’ refers to a married couple with their biological or adopted children who share a household (Belsey, 2005; Russell, 2003; Siqwana-Ndulo, 1998; Tembo, 2019; Waite, 2000). Based on the above conceptualisation, the nuclear family structure predominately found among people of European and North American descent represents normality. Conversely, the so-called ‘extended family’ structure found predominantly in the Global South, including Africa and South Africa in particular, represent a pathological deviation from the norm (Degbey, 2012; Russell, 2003; Tembo, 2019). As correctly argued by Tembo (2019), these concepts as social constructs have their origin in Western cultural thought and are non-existent in African languages.

The South African government, through the White Paper on Families, affirms the same concept of ‘family’ (Department of Social Development, 2013). According to the White Paper, the concept ‘family’ refers to a group of people who either share or do not share a household/residence but are connected through any kind of marriage including cohabitations and are related by blood (kinship), including children who are adopted or fostered (Department of Social Development, 2013). Although the concept ‘family’ is broadened to accommodate some of the virtues of the actual nature of social arrangements and relations found among African clans, the definition remains mainly Eurocentric. A comparative analysis of family structures among different racial groups in South Africa conducted as part of a study by the Department of Social Development during the development of the White Paper on Families revealed an anomaly among Black family formations: Black African families had the highest proportion of three-generation, absent-spouse, single parent, child-headed and siblings’ families. This finding affirms in no uncertain terms the existence of a unique structure and nature of social organisation characterising social institutions among Black Africans. This social structure is incongruent with what the Western world considers normal family structure by its standards.

Furthermore, the concept of ‘family’ as used in the legal context carries similar confusion. For instance, Section (21) of the Children’s Act 38 of 2005 (as amended) accords rights and responsibilities exclusively to the biological mother and father or adoptive parents to the exclusion of significant others in the context of the African clan system (RSA, 2006). However, the welfare system in its search for clarity has sought to adopt a more fluid sense of the concept of ‘family’ that is accommodative of different types and forms, with a fusion of both the Western and customary systems as shown in the White Paper on Families (Department of Social Development, 2013). Indeed, African families can be best understood from an Afrocentric prism as described in this section. It was on similar grounds that Siqwana-Ndulo (1998), following her exploration of household arrangements in the Transkei sub-region of the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa, concluded that there is no evidence that

African 'families' are going to evolve to nuclear families. The author consequently called for more nuanced and grounded approaches to studying African 'family' and household arrangements based on African world views, rather than some imagined universal household structure. This chapter makes some contribution to the call made by Siqwana-Ndulo.

THE ENDURING UNIQUE NATURE OF AFRICAN FOUNDATIONAL SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS

The typical social institution making up local African society as confirmed by Siqwana-Ndulo (1998) is generally constituted by a much wider circle of people and is therefore inconsistent with the conceptual framework of 'family' as used in Western societies. The idea of an 'extended family' is alien and does not form part of the linguistic register of African societies (Adinlofu, 2009; Degbey, 2012; Gyekye, 1996; Tembo, 2019). The paradoxical nature of the above interpretations of 'family' as a concept emanates from the fact that the African and Western ways of being and knowing are undergirded by distinct world views and cultural orientations. Furthermore, the term 'family' as a social construct emanates from the Western world based on its lived experiences that does not find expression in African world views (Tembo, 2019). Most importantly, the Eurocentric descriptions of 'family' used conventionally and perceived to be universal, effectively eliminates and over-shadows the essence of the distinct social reality as lived by African clans (Degbey, 2012). The common descriptions of 'family' in the literature is biased and Eurocentric despite its general acceptance and elevation to an unquestionable status (Tembo, 2019). Most importantly, it prematurely arrested its development and evolution by labelling the African clan as a traditional and primitive African 'family', implying its gravitation towards a normal 'family' as construed in the Western world.

However, evidence in the literature suggests otherwise. The typical foundational social institution making up local African society, as confirmed by Siqwana-Ndulo (1998), demonstrated great resilience in surviving the colonial onslaught with its continued existence. This is shown by the continued distinct structures, practices and unique patterns of relationships as affirmed by the analysis leading to the development of the White Paper on Families (Department of Social Development, 2013). A study conducted by Tembo (2019) confirms the strengths, durability and resilience of the African social institutions in Uganda and Zambia as did an earlier study by Siqwana-Ndulo (1998) in South Africa. The African American 'family' has been subjected to similar biases and hostility in the hands of Westernised analysts as it was accused of failing to develop properly into the ideal of a 'normal' 'family'. Despite the general negative labelling of the African American 'extended family' as pathological, it remains a fundamental character of Black American society (Siqwana-Ndulo, 1998).

There is a glaring lack of acknowledgement in the literature about the existence of a unique arrangement of social institutions in Africa. The foundational social institution of ‘family’ as conceptualised in the Western world seems to denote an institution not traceable among typical indigenous African social institutions. While some elements of similarity exist between African and Western foundational social institutions, there are stark differences. For instance, similarities include that they are both constituted through marriage. However, marriage among African clans is undergirded by the principle of collectivity and interdependence in stark contrast to individualism and independence in the Eurocentric world view (Tembo, 2019). Notably, despite the fundamental differences discussed above, there has not been any acknowledgement in the literature and/or in research that we are dealing with two distinctive social institutions that cannot be described using similar terms or concepts. Thus, a critical interrogation of the fundamental differences is necessary.

The early literature on African social institutions documented changes observed in what was referred to as the ‘traditional African family’. Such early scholars argued these changes represented a progression of the ‘traditional African family’ towards the more advanced and modernised ‘family’ forms because of their exposure to Western civilisation (Siqwana-Ndulo, 1998). Conversely, Siqwana-Ndulo (1998:409) characterised changes observed as signalling normal evolution of the African clan and cautioned “... because of the Eurocentric assumption about the ‘family’, ... household forms evolving among Africans are seen only as corruptions of the ideal ‘family’ type ...” It is therefore important that any analysis of the African foundational social institution considers that the institution and its household organisation is underlined by distinct world views. The findings of a study by Russell (2003) confirm this, revealing that Black Africans had a distinctive system of household formation whether in urban or rural areas, which contrasted with the lack of strong kinship relations uncovered by Census 2002 regarding White South African households. Consequently, and with the benefit of hindsight, Russell (2003:155) contended that earlier anthropological analysis of the African ‘family’ failed to interpret the data correctly because of “the imposition of preconceived models imported from Western sociology on to the data”.

Tembo (2019) highlighted several prevalent biases and hostilities towards African ways of being and knowing that must be dispelled. Firstly, the continued and persistent use of the term “bride price” referring to the monetary gift or gift in kind awarded to the bride’s parents to seal a marriage. There is no rational justification for labelling such a noble traditional practice as ‘purchasing’ or ‘buying’ of a wife. This, together with many others in my view, forms part of a list of Eurocentric naming practices against African values and practices that are founded on stereotypical and/or negative grounds, requiring redress. “There is no bride price in our society. Traditionally no parent fixes

a price for his daughter (a bride). We do not sell brides in our society. However, as a prospective husband, you are told to pay for the marriage and not the bride. Marriage involves much more than just the bride.” (Tembo, 2019:37). He further argues that the words ‘buy or purchase a wife’ are non-existent and do not feature in any discussions among key participants in African marriages. For instance, Tembo (2019) shares an example of the Tumbuka of Eastern Zambia. In this context, the verb *kugula* (to buy) refers to purchasing or buying of any commodity in trading terms, while the verb *kulobola* is a special concept referring to a sacred practice of handing over valuables partially, by arrangement, or in full as part of an agreement by one clan to another as a way of concretising an African marriage (Tembo, 2019). So *lobola* is a way of legitimising marriage. The sacred practice of *lobola* is widely observed among the Bantu peoples of Central and Southern Africa. Another example of Eurocentric bias and negativity is the prevalent use of the terms ‘avoidance’, ‘segregated relationships’, lack of ‘love’ and ‘tenderness’ in traditional African marriages. Tembo (2019) laments some of the examples of customs and interaction patterns among African clans that White people described as ‘institutionalised restrictions’, ‘segregated patterns’, and ‘avoidance patterns’. The patterns of relationships described above form part of rituals of respect observed between a son-in-law and his mother-in-law, a daughter-in-law and her father-in-law. Similar customs or ‘rules of restrictions’ in interaction apply between many other kin among African clans.

THEORETICAL FRAMING

The analysis used in the chapter is guided by the theory of existential phenomenology (Fanon [1952] 2008:166; Sithole, 2016). Using ‘existential phenomenology’ (the life world as experienced), the actual lived experiences of the African clans raising children with DS are subjectively accounted for and articulated. As articulated by Sithole (2016), existential phenomenology represents a counter measure to colonial subjection that relegated and reduced Black people to subjects who are ontologically void, meaning subjects without ontological density. As a result, a philosophical intervention is necessary for redress in this situation (Sithole, 2016). The value of such a philosophical intervention is twofold, namely: to help us make sense of the condition of Black people and to liberate Black people and their subjectivities for them to emerge with the full ontological density that was previously blocked.

Research methods

The study utilised a qualitative research approach. A phenomenological research design was adopted (Creswell, 2013). The study was conducted in four of the nine South African provinces: Gauteng, Limpopo, Mpumalanga and North-West. The research population consisted of African clans raising a child with DS, older than a year and

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younger than 15 years, residing in one of the four provinces. The participants were further divided into two groups: one consisting of members of the clans interviewed together at their homes and the other consisting of biological parents and/or guardians of the children with DS, engaged through focus group discussions. Purposive sampling was used to select participants because the researcher looked for specific attributes in participants such as that the African clan must have had a child with DS for a year or more (Neuman, 2006). Using a semi-structured interview schedule for clan interviews and focus group prompts for the focus group discussions, participants were engaged in conversations about the nature of their clan including identity and influence (initially phrased as family), the clan's handling of the experience of raising a child with DS, the roles and reactions of different members of the clan in line with established cultural practices and protocols, community reactions, how they made sense of the experience, ways of managing and interfacing with the world of Western scientific medicine and social work and finally their suggestion for the improvement of social work services to them as African clans.

Table 2.1 Demographic characteristics of clans

	Description	Number of participants
Ethnic group	Ndebele	6
	Pedi	6
	Tswana	8
	Shangaan	1
	Venda	2
	Xhosa	2
	Zulu	2
Clan name	Known	25
	Unknown	2
Location of family	Rural	9
	Urban	18
Religion	Christian	14
	Traditional	8
	Unspecified/no affiliation	5

Table 2.2 Demographic information of focus groups participants

Category	Description	Number of participants
Primary caregiver of the child	Biological parent/s	35
	Grandparents or aunts	9
Gender	Male	3
	Female	41
Occupation	Clerical	4
	Domestic/Farmworker	9
	Unemployed/Pensioner	25
	Professional	6
Marital status	Divorced	4
	Married	17
	Never married	14
	Separated	6
	Widowed	3

A total of five focus group discussions were facilitated and 27 clan interviews conducted. There were 44 participants in the five focus group discussions, while the 27 clan interviews involved 143 participants with an average of seven members per clan. Semi-structured interviews were conducted, guided by an interview guide and focus group prompts. Qualitative data were thematically analysed following the methods by Terre Blanche, Durrheim and Painter (2006).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Most participants in the support group and clan interviews were female, as they generally serve as primary caregivers for children, whether their own children or the offspring of their significant others. Although most of the participants were biological parents, a significant number of participants served as guardians for the children with DS, and were members of the clan, usually a grandmother or aunt. It is common practice among African clans to share the responsibility of raising a child, particularly with the elder members of the clan, be they grandparents or aunts.

Table 2.3 Summary of theme and sub-themes

Theme	Sub-themes
1. The nature and functioning of the African clan raising children with DS	1.1. The clan lineage and identity (name, totem and praise titles) 1.2. Clan functioning (structure, culture and tradition)

The study that formed the basis of this chapter yielded results beyond the one theme outlined above. Given space limitations, it will not be possible to report on all themes in a single chapter. Therefore, the author, in line with the purpose of the chapter, selected the above themes and sub-themes as most appropriate for substantiating arguments advanced around the utopian nature of the concept ‘family’ in the context of Africans raising children with DS.

The nature and functioning of the African clan raising children with DS

The findings confirmed the existence of a clan system among Africans raising children with DS across urban and rural settings. The traditional African clan raising a child with DS was found to be characterised by a unique form of social organisation, different from the conventional Eurocentric concept of ‘family’. Therefore, an authentic analysis of patterns of social relations and interactions in the Black African context should start from the premise of a clan system. The following section will describe the nature of the clan system and its functioning, as sub-themes emerging from the empirical research data.

The nature of the clan system

All conversations were facilitated using African languages as shown in Table 2.1 under ethnic group. Surprisingly, all participants often code-switched from their African language to occasionally throw in the word ‘family’ interchangeably with the perceived equivalent in their mother-tongue. However, when probed further as to what exactly constituted what they referred to as ‘family’, they would explain it as a clan system encompassing multi-generations of kinship networks. Thus, the word ‘family’ automatically fell off as conceptually inappropriate and irrelevant in capturing the essence of the foundational social institution that participants were describing. The closest concept that resonated well with the descriptions was ‘clan’ system, hence it was adopted as a preferred description. A common thread emerging from the research data was the importance of clan identity, particularly regarding clan consciousness and loyalty as primary determinants of thought, attitude, and behaviour. A deeper analysis of the data revealed an organising logic that breaks down clan identity into at

least three elements, namely clan name, totem, and a practice of 'clan' praise singing or the reciting of 'clan' praises or poems that celebrate shared personal characteristics and traits among clan members.

Interestingly, the data also showed how clan identity is intertwined with spirituality. The participants reported that clan identity is instrumental in prayer and communication with ancestors. This was common across all ethnic groups interviewed. Furthermore, they reported that their clan identity, which comprises kinship networks, praise songs and totems, was from the paternal side of the kinship system (patrilineal). There was no evidence of any 'clan' tracing their kinship identity through the maternal line (matrilineal), although, the matrilineal line of kinship retained strong influence and power in the regulation of social relationships and decision-making.

However, in cases where the biological parents were not married, families were compelled to stick to the maternal kinship identity (matrilineal). This confirms an assertion of Meiser, Irle, Lobb and Barlow-Stewart (2008) and Penn, Watermeyer, MacDonald and Moabelo (2010) that a patrilineal kinship system is found in African families, while Tembo's (2019) research confirmed the existence of both patrilineality and matrilineality among African clan systems, particularly in the Zambian and Ugandan regions. However, this South African study among African clans showed consistently that identity was always derived from the paternal side of the clan, and only in the case of unmarried mothers did their child with DS derive their clan identity from the maternal side. This is said to be common practice and the generally accepted way of managing identity prior to finalisation of African marriages.

The practice of *lobola* was key in concretising marriage and allowing for the transfer of clan identity from the maternal to the paternal side of the kinship system. The findings also demonstrated in no uncertain terms that the *lobola* ritual and ceremonies not only served as formal recognition of the marriage and transfer of identity from one clan to another, but also as a spiritual ritual uniting ancestors of both clans. The significance of the *lobola* rituals and ceremonies was so great that it was observed across different religious denominations whether the clan belonged to the mainstream Christian faith, traditional African religion or was non-religious. The excerpt below demonstrates this significance of *lobola*:

Without lobola ... the biological father cannot be recognised ... the ancestors of both clans are not united and therefore the father or his clan have no say in the affairs of the child or the child's mother.

Despite the legal framework reflected in Section (21) of the Children's Act 38 of 2005 (as amended) decreeing a different regime that recognises and awards parental rights and responsibilities to both confirmed biological parents of a child regardless of whether married or unmarried, the African clan system regulated such relationships

differently. The participants affirmed their commitment to observing cultural protocols that prohibited recognition of parental rights and responsibilities to the biological father of the child who has not fully completed the *lobola* rituals and ceremonies as required by custom. There was consensus among participants to respect and comply with cultural protocols even though the legal framework dictated otherwise.

Despite the evidence of a patrilineal system among the African clans participating in the study, neither individual men nor married couples or households wielded the most influence or dominant social status. It is the clan that was reported to have the most power and influence in the regulation of relationships and decision-making. This was the case despite the legal powers granted to various members of the clan system either through their civil marriages or as biological parents to their progeny as per the Children's Act.

Hlogo keya rena re le lelapa, le ge a ka gola ge eba ke garebe a ba mosadi aya bogadi, hlogo keya rena.

(The child belongs to the clan. No matter what happens, they may grow older and as a girl matures into a woman and gets married, bottom line is they continue to belong to the clan, they are owned by the clan. Not even the clan that marries them or their husband, but their clan back home).

These findings confirm similar results from Tembo (2019) in his Zambian and Ugandan study. This implies that whenever there are challenges, or a critical decision is needed, the clan must be consulted through its elders and those within the clan who are bestowed with decision-making powers such as aunts, uncles and grandparents.

Clan functioning, structure, culture and tradition

Firstly, the findings revealed that the African clan system provides for the emotional needs of clan members. The clan system, through allocating powers, status and responsibilities to various designated members such as elders, aunts and uncles, becomes a coordinating and regulatory system for the provision of economic, social and psychological security to all its members. Whenever problems arose, concerned or affected clan members knew to seek counselling from the clan elders. The same members would also be entrusted with the responsibility of informing the ancestors of the clan through performing rituals and ceremonies. The clan system also regulated procreation of children and their socialisation, which involved transmission of social and moral norms and maintenance of spiritual customs and traditions. This is done in line with African world views or philosophy which emphasise harmony with nature and the environment (Ani, 1994). Consequently, the use of modern family planning is frowned upon in favour of a more spontaneous and natural cycle of childbearing.

which often results in bigger families among Africans (Tembo, 2019). Clan cohesion is therefore retained and maintained in the same manner. The above findings concur with earlier results of studies by Tembo (2019), Degbey (2012) and Adinlofu (2009).

Secondly, the findings showed an unwritten hierarchy and structure of social relationships, with the elders at the top. These findings confirm earlier findings by Degbey (2012) that the dominance of the elders/aged has a relatively high degree of social control on the individual, especially the youth within the clan. The elders are followed by uncles and aunts who enforce rules and regulations or police the clan. Here, uncles and aunts are not seen as 'extended family' and these titles only refer to the brother of the mother as uncle and the sister of the father as aunt. This pattern of relationships and structuring affirms patrilineality and matrilineality among African clan systems. Thus, these uncles and aunts are also key figures vested with powers to make major decisions within the clan and to preside over rituals and ceremonies including naming ceremonies, marriages and rites of passage. For example, when a child with DS is born and a ritual or ceremony has to be conducted, the paternal family is consulted and represented by the aunt (sister to the father) and the maternal family consulted through the uncle (brother to the mother). This is critically important and is a spiritual imperative. Uncles and aunts are also seen as ancestral representatives for the two key lineages. Again, where *lobola* rituals and ceremonies have not yet been conducted or concluded to seal a marriage when the child was born or in the cases of children born outside marriage, the maternal side (uncles) preside alone with the support of their elders since they are perceived to not yet be united with the paternal side at a spiritual level. The uncles and aunts are followed by the biological parents who are then followed by their children.

In this system, all brothers of the father are called 'father', not 'uncle' as in the Western world, all sisters of the mother are called 'mother', all their children 'brother' and 'sister'. The aunt's (father's sister) children and the uncle's (mother's brother) children are called cousins. So, the term 'cousins' refer exclusively to the children of one's uncle (mother's brother) or aunt (father's sister) and not to the children of your father's brother or mother's sister as those become brothers and sisters. The same structure also dictates protocol for problem-solving and escalating matters within the clan system. For example, when parents discover that they have given birth to a child with DS, their first point of call becomes the uncles and aunts who in turn escalate to elders. These are very important aspects of the clan system. Therefore, any form of social work intervention with members of these clans would have to appreciate all of these crucial factors if meaningful and sustainable helping interventions were to be made.

CONCLUSIONS

The findings confirmed earlier contributions by African scholars (Ani, 1994; Asante, 2006; Graham, 2002; Mbiti, 1969; Mungai, 2015; Osei-Hwedie & Rankopo, 2008; Ross, 2008; Schiele, 2000; Thabede, 2008) who asserted the existence of specific African world views among people of African descent. The subjective and lived experiences of African clans raising children with DS seem to suggest that a unique system of being, doing and knowing exists. This system of being, doing and knowing has a way of reproducing and developing itself in a unique way, which includes its transmission from one generation to another. There is no evidence in social work literature in South Africa that acknowledges the symbolism embedded in various facets of the African clan system, such as the clan name, totem and praises, and particularly how these facets influence how people deal with life experiences. The findings of this study show how crucial these facets are in defining and setting a tone for everything done or not done within the clan. However, the author also acknowledges the lack of uniformity across Africans given some level of variation, as shown in the findings presented on this chapter. Additionally, there are also some overlapping and commonalities with some of the elements found in the Eurocentric or Western world view. Thus, the affirmation of literature and theory based on the lived realities of African clans and on African world views do not necessarily imply obliteration of the Western world view but represent alternative options that may even be complimentary to it.

The chapter thus contributes towards closing the knowledge gap by uncovering the symbolism and underlying meanings that are crucial when considering how the African clan deals with psychosocial challenges. African clan members' attachment and awareness of the clan identity form the basis for their sense of collective being (identity), knowledge and power – hence, the common adage among Africans that 'I am because you are' (own clan). The focus on a collective identity ('I am where I belong', 'I am where I am') in this study is supported by a traditional African belief in *ubuntu* (Mangaliso, 2001). It appears that the reliance on spirituality and affect, as additional sources of knowledge over and above objective truth, is one feature that sets African world views apart from the dominant Western world view where everything revolves exclusively around objective truth (Schiele, 2000). It is therefore imperative that social workers in South Africa take these matters into consideration when dealing with African clans. The recommendation is therefore made for the development of practical guidelines in this regard. Furthermore, the use of 'African clans' is in itself a foreign concept that is used in this chapter only for purposes of readability. The recommendation is for the normalisation of the use of selected African concepts in their original language. For instance, *ndyangu* for Xitsonga, *umnden* for Zulu or *usapho* for Xhosa.

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