



Commemorating Women, Honouring Culture and Embodying Decolonial Ethics of Care Through Women's Dialogical Spaces

iGwijo or songs, such as *Wathint'abafazi wathint'imbokodo* (isiXhosa for “You strike the women, you strike a rock”) commemorate the mass of women who marched to the Union Buildings to protest against pass laws, through the leadership of Lillian Ngoyi, Helen Joseph, Rahima Moosa and Sophia Williams in 1956. This song has since remained an anthem in Black South African women's spaces as it carries the sentiment of advocacy for freedom, inclusion and equality not only for the benefit of women, but ultimately for all.

Today, community outreach units like Imbumbé YaBafazi draw from the tradition of *igwijo*, alongside communal storytelling, affective exchange, praise and dancing, during their regular grassroots dialogues aimed at addressing contemporary societal issues that affect women. Reflecting on journeying with women over the past ten years, we highlight the value of history, culture, integrity, affirmations, and togetherness in these spaces – values which are essential to a decolonised psychology.

Citing the principle that “in the communities where we operate, we map issues affecting families, with a special focus on women” and guided by the belief that women are the cornerstone in sustaining peace, stability and kindness in communities, we aim to ensure that the lived realities and of women remain central to its work. This commitment underscores the importance of recognising both the structural violence and cultural nuances that shape women's experiences, as well as adopting a participatory approach to problem-solving.

A recurring element in these spaces is the singing of *igwijo* – songs such as *Wathint'abafazi wathint'imbokodo* referred to prior, carry sentiment and memory into the spaces where women gather. Commonly sung at Black South African gatherings, including Imbumbé's dialogue spaces, *igwijo* such as *Eli lizwe nge lamakhosikazi* (“This is the land of women / where women reign”) invite all present to reclaim their place in the world, to remember their worth, and to reaffirm their identity. Imbumbé's founder notes that Africans sing - whether in celebration or in sorrow. *iGwijo* thus become oral

testaments to struggle, triumph, and hope and serve not only as affective expressions, but also as living archives of indigenous modes of knowing, healing, and relating.

At the heart of Imbumbe's commitment to creating and facilitating these spaces of reconnection lies the belief that well-supported women and youth are the foundation of strong communities. Drawing from the African proverb, *ugotshwa usemanzi* (isiZulu for "You have to bend the branch while it is still wet"), we prioritise intergenerational dialogue to ensure that futures are shaped before the challenges of life harden potential. This approach ensures communal participation in reshaping narratives which restore dignity, learning and unlearning perspectives, and the transfer of practical tools for both individual and community capacity-building. Ultimately, it encourages young women to take up space in a patriarchal society marked by hegemonic masculinity – one that works to minimise and marginalise them.

Beyond offering a safe space where women can authentically be, grassroots dialogue spaces cultivate shared humanity, transmit local and intergenerational knowledges, and provide cultural grounding. They become spaces of collective consciousness, solidarity-building and community well-being, nurtured through practices of remembrance, resistance, relational accountability, introspection, action, and collective healing in the pursuit of justice. These practices reveal what mainstream psychology, in its Euro-American form, so often misses: that healing is cultural, relational, and more impactful when approached collectively.

Offering a model of embodied collective healing, Imbumbe Yabafazi's work examples a living praxis of decolonial mental health care and serves as an exemplar for decolonial ethics of care, which are critical to an African-centred decolonised psychology. The honouring of story, song, and ritual in women's dialogue spaces should thus not be seen as merely performative; rather, these are methodologies of healing – psychosocial, political, cultural, and spiritual interventions – forms of praxis that psychology should engage with seriously in its own transformation, particularly in the African context.

A culturally rooted, community-based approach that values the recognition of historical trauma and the structural conditions shaping mental health, indigenous knowledge systems, and oral traditions, thus positions communal healing as a valid and vital form of psychological practice. Embracing *Ubuntu* (a Nguni philosophy underpinned by the sentiment that "I am, because we are" or shared humanity) in this way shifts the therapeutic process from an individualised, expert-driven model to one that is collective, participatory, and culturally grounded. Such an approach would also enable local psychology



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professionals to forge deeper connection and critically engage with the situated experiences, knowledges, and practices that offer healing in communities – often without formal recognition.

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