

## Chapter 11

# “Leina Lebe ke Seromo” (You are What Your Name Attracts): An African Calling Perspective on Research Epistemologies

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### **ABSTRACT**

*‘Leina lebe ke seromo’ is an African maxim that means that the meaning of a name tends to follow, or attract, the one who carries that name. If you are given a bad name, the description of the name attracts what the name means. ‘Seromo’ can be interpreted as a calling; therefore, the name calls one to go and do that which is inherent within the meaning of the name. This chapter examines the names, terms, and concepts ‘Black’ or ‘African’ which have been regarded as ‘bad’ and dismembering because the concepts have a history of marginalisation. The chapter positions the African maxim ‘leina lebe ke seromo’ as a lens of African consciousness that illuminates the concepts of an (1) African university and (2) the indigenisation of disciplines. It discusses methodological approaches that call for the recognition of indigenous perspectives because research in mixed methods enhances Western research paradigms.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Names should, in theory and praxis, reflect their meaning and relevance. The sibling concepts of coloniality of power, being, and knowledge (Dastile & Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013) are interchanged here with the term ‘constitution’. Dastile and Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013) regard these concepts as remnant forces that maintains colonial mannerisms of inferiorising the epistemologies of Africanisation, indigenisation and decolonisation. In contrast to ‘coloniality’ as a denigrating term, the chapter applies the term ‘constitution’ to the effect of the constitution of power, being and knowledge. Thus, constitution is the inherent constitution that characterises a name in its mental, emotional and physical make-up, look and feel, and reveals the suppressed knowledge, power and being embedded in the name.

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### **“Leina Lebe ke Seromo” (You are What Your Name Attracts)**

There is extensive literature on the African maxim, *leina lebe ke seromo*, which explains that if you are given a bad name the description of the bad name tends to follow you. That is, a bad name carries within it a calling to respond to that which is conveyed by the name. Possa-Mogoera (2020) and Leshota and Sefotho (2020) have demonstrated that names of people and concepts that negatively inflict pain and harm on others do have an influence and are a true reflection of such names. What distinguishes this chapter from other studies is the application of this African maxim through positioning the term *seromo* as being similar to an African calling, i.e., being called and sent out to perform the meaning of the name, or in this case, the terms or concepts ‘African university’, indigenisation of the discipline of homeopathy. This chapter points out that the existential constitution of power, being and knowledge of names is masked by colonial conditions of Eurocentrism and dismemberment in the sense that naming can be a vehicle of inferiorising and categorising (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013). This is reflected, for instance, in people’s response to being a student at a historically black institution (HBI) compared to a historically white institution (HWI). For example, when one studies at the University of Venda, a rural-based HBI, it is likely that four out of five African people will respond with dismay and disdain and ask why one is studying at such an institution of higher learning. On the other hand, if one is studying at a HWI (for example the University of the Witwatersrand or the University of Johannesburg) this is more likely to be superiorised and embraced. These modes are reinforced in various ways. Xaba (2017) asserts that

*Historically and currently White universities remain highly resourced, yet historically Black universities remain under resourced. Historically White universities maintain colonial and racist institutional cultures due to their histories, which exclude and marginalise Black students. Historically Black universities also remain under resourced and dysfunctional (Xaba, 2017, p. 97).*

According to Kessi (2017, p. 512) the inclusion of Black students and Black academics in the HWIs has been regarded as lowering the standards of an institution. Based on the maxim *leina lebe ke seromo*, this chapter examines the existential and ontological realities that follow the names, terms and labels ‘Black’ or ‘African’ and how this defines those who are called by this name. Xaba (2016) mentions Mpendukana’s (2016) comments on some of these and provides an example of this, that “violence is often Black and poor”. Kessi (2017) affirms that Blackness, Black or African can be understood from the existential and ontological realities of these terms, names and labels as referring to colour as well as the class category of systemic and structural oppression of African people. It is through the application of *leina lebe ke seromo* – “you are what your name attracts” – that new knowledge and philosophy can be drawn from an African indigenous knowledge perspective. Kehinde (2016, p. 2075) has addressed the name or term African and Blackness with subjections of positivity, concluding that “Blackness has been central to resistance to oppression for centuries globally and alludes that it calls for political mobilizations at grassroots level with the academy”. Names are not just names; more fundamentally, names carry reputational properties, for instance an institution of higher learning such as an African university, or a discipline of study such as homeopathy. The chapter reflects and describes the African maxim *leina lebe ke seromo*, that is, you are what your name attracts with the idea of following the calling to indigenise/Africanise fields of study/disciplines. These ideas are contested by those functioning within the Eurocentric status quo, revealing that the ideas are masked by being labelled *leina lebe* or a bad name because of the presence of the terms African or Black and when the name of a discipline is also not well-known, for example the discipline of homeopathy. The contestation is marked by questioning whether

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