

RESEARCH ARTICLE:

## An Existential Phenomenological Approach on Folklore as South Africa's Wealth in Context

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### Abstract

*South African folklore is engulfed with several challenges that persist as a result of post-colonial and post-apartheid effects. These challenges continue to undermine South Africa's folkloristic conventions such as indigenous healing and medicinal practices, among others. Over and above this reality, these challenges denote South Africa's folklore as a subordinated component of history, thereupon regarding it as a subordinate discipline and subject unworthy of expressing critical consciousness, intellectuality, and epistemology. In view of this fact, this article uses existential phenomenology as a qualitative research technique and applies a sociological perspective as a theoretical framework to underscore the wealth that is profoundly interwoven in South African folklore. It must be underlined that the employment of these research methodologies is not necessarily to compare or contrast their strengths and weaknesses, but to form a balanced and triangulated scholarly discourse. The aim is to underscore how and why South African folklore ought to be accepted as a quintessential discipline and subject while denouncing imperialist ideologies that seek to subjugate and discredit this discipline. Some of the notable findings are indicative of the historical consciousness and memory that is acutely interwoven in South African folklore while its contemporary relevance could be observed. It is anticipated that other scholars may potentially continue this discourse in an attempt to highlight the fertility that is embedded in South Africa's folklore.*

**Keywords:** apartheid; colonialism; modernity; South African folklore; existential phenomenology

### Introduction

It has fairly been argued by Bascom (1964: 17), Diko (2023a: 213), and Motinyane (2022: 7) that South African folklore has continually been sidelined, and the question of its significance is a bone of contention for post-colonial scholars like Masuku (2020) and Rani (2020). This is particularly evident in folklore components such as folktales, superstitions, and rituals that are continually regarded as outdated and impertinent (Diko, 2023a: 212). In the process, the challenge of relegating South African folklore involves assertions that it is ineffectual; denoting that it is irrelevant and insignificant for contemporary contexts, and has no customary discipline besides being a trivialised component of history, while others regard it as a bastard child of history. This problematic view, yet alarming, simply denotes that folklore is not an absolute discipline or subject area that could prevail on its own. Instead, the purposive idea is that it must be subsumed under the discipline of historical studies (Davidson, 1974: 75). This is a challenge given that South African folklore has been formally studied since the 19th century and with special reference to indigenous South African communities, it has been part of human and social existence from time immemorial. In view of this fact, it does not stand to reason to regard South African folklore as a child of history. This suggests that South African folklore is more than just a product of historical episodes and has a unique and dynamic identity that goes far beyond its historical context. In addition to this claim, the reality that South African folklore has existed from time immemorial is enough to indicate that the significance of folklore is extensively understood, celebrated and established in the South African context and beyond. This is on account that indigenous South African people lived through the practices of folklore such as folk dances, folk musical expressions, indigenous or traditional ceremonies, and many more. Nonetheless, when folklore's significance and role are questioned, and ultimately subverted, just as it has been indicated that South African folklore is viewed as

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the subordinate of history, this scholarly discourse is compelled to underscore the ways in which South African folklore is a fertile ground that could solitary function and operate while embodying wealth in context. In other words, what components prove the validity that South African folklore holds a fertile ground?

The ramifications of the decaying and lack of understanding of what is profoundly encapsulated in South African folklore may potentially lead to misconstrued narratives such as those that regard folklore as a subdiscipline unworthy of scholarly discourses and that it has no significant role in contemporary contexts and beyond. Among other important dialogues, there seems to be a lack of understanding of what folklore is and what it encases. This is rational owing to the reality that folklore tends to imbricate with other disciplines such as cultural anthropology, history, literature, and religious studies. The reason for this imbricating process is due to the fact that folklore comprises the scrutinisation of traditional ethnological practices, belief systems, and narratives passed down orally and in practice among a particular group of people (Zou and Priscilla, 2023: 7). These ethnological attributes could be utilised to comprehend the belief systems and values of a society, and thus, are of interest to scholars in a range of disciplines. Beyond this assertion, the evaluation of folklore provides perspectives into the historical, social, and economic conditions of a particular time and place, making it relevant to the investigation of history and cultural anthropology (Bascom, 1953: 284). In contrast to this view, folklore provides perspectives into the narratology and stylistics of a particular group of people and, thus, is of interest to scholars of language and literary studies (Diko, 2023a: 212). It is this juxtaposition and triangulation of this subject area that leads to confusion and deception as to what is it that it rigidly submerges. It stands in logic, therefore, that folklore is defined herein in a bid to advance the understanding of this concept and its disciplinary antecedents.

The term folklore is comprised of two conceptual fragments, that is, “folk” and “lore” (Makgopa *et al.*, 2012: 5). The fragment “folk” is an old word referring to the people; and “lore”, in its origin, denotes something that is taught or learned (Makgopa *et al.*, 2012: 7). In the current realm of scholarship, folklore refers to traditions and customs, folktales, sayings, dances, or art forms preserved among a cultural group of people (Bascom, 1964: 23). In the South African context, folklore is the examination of South African traditional and ethnological practices, belief systems, folktales, legends, proverbs and idioms, and narratives that are passed down orally among a group of people such as amaXhosa, VhaVhenda, amaZulu, and many others. South African folklore does not solitarily concern itself with the examination of folklore but also concerns itself with the practice of folklore in which traditional songs, for example, are used in traditional weddings and other related ceremonies (Mulaudzi, 2013: 43). This suggests that folklore in South Africa is not only investigated in terms of scholarship but is also practised by different indigenous South African people such as amaZulu, amaNdebele, Basotho, VhaVhenda, and many other ethnic groups in different contexts for different purposes. For instance, amaXhosa, which is one of the indigenous ethnic groups in South Africa, practices the legendary tradition and custom of *ulwaluko* (traditional male circumcision) which is part of their folklore history and heritage. This implies that folklore in South Africa appears in theoretical realms and in practice.

In the same vein, South African folklore encompasses a wide range of attributes, including folktales which are known as *iintsomi* in the isiXhosa language, *izinganekwane* in the isiZulu language, *dikanegelo tša setšo* in the Sepedi language; legends, mythologies, customs, belief systems, songs, proverbs, traditional poetry, and material culture. All these attributes are what makeup folklore in South Africa. Having said that, there is more to this as will be shown later—the wealth that is profoundly interweaved in folklore. In brief and by means of an example, folktales are appreciated for their role in providing significant insights into the cultural pedigree and value systems of society and mirror the social, economic, political, intellectual, and historical conditions of a particular time and place. With this view in mind, I contend that folklore is an intra-and-interdisciplinary field that draws upon cultural anthropology, history, literature, and other related fields to understand the denotations and significance of different communities. For instance, folklore has a profound influence on literature, and the investigation of folklore intersects with literary critique. Many classic works of literature draw inspiration from folk tales, mythologies, and legends. Owing to this fact, by exploring the literary dimensions of folklore, scholars could analyse storytelling techniques, narrative structures, and the evolution of themes across different ethnological contexts. Whereas this is the case, I must underline that folklore’s intra-and-interdisciplinarity does not subvert its significance as a solitary discipline or subject. In any event, the questions that remain a bone of contention are, what is special about South African folklore? In what way does it hold fertile ground so as to be regarded as South Africa’s wealth in context? These are the questions that this article attempts to address and answer. Nevertheless, it is important to observe the review of the literature in the next section.

## Literature Review

This section is dual. This means that the first subsection concentrates on the subjugation of South African folklore, while the second subsection deals with the existing scholarly discourses concerning folklore. I must indicate that the function of the second subsection is to locate and highlight any identified existing gaps or shortcomings concerning the problematised phenomenon hereunder. Over and above this, it is to acknowledge the strides that have been made by other scholars in a bid to advance the scholarly development of this subject.

South African folklore, a repository of variegated narratives, belief systems, and practices, has faced a multifaceted history marked by colonial imposition and systemic discrimination. This subsection endeavours to explore the multifaceted nature of the subjugation of South African folklore, tracing its roots to historical episodes and examining contemporary challenges that continue to shape its status. The imposition of European colonial rule in South Africa had profound implications for indigenous cultures, with a particular focus on their folklore (Diko, 2023b: 599). In the process, the suppression and marginalisation of indigenous South African languages, oral traditions, and spiritual practices were central to the colonial project (Obeng-Odoom, 2019: 211). As if colonial imposition and systemic intolerance were not enough to manipulate, distort, and erase enormously ingrained folklore components, the apartheid regime exacerbated the subjugation of South African folklore, as cultural multiplicity was systemically subverted in favour of a narrow and exclusionary narrative. This is the reason Suttner (2010: 515) suggests that Indigenous African Knowledge Systems (IAKS) and oral traditions were dismissed or distorted to fit the imperialist and ideological framework of apartheid. In fact, the commodification and appropriation of South African folklore by external entities advanced stereotypes and misconceptions, contributing to the subjugation of authentic ethnological expressions. For this reason, I argue that the commercialisation of folklore led to a loss of authenticity as external entities modify or oversimplify cultural elements to suit market trends or popular demands. This erosion of authenticity diminished the richness and depth of the original cultural expressions. As highlighted by Barnett (2004: 251), this had economic ramifications, as indigenous artists and storytellers faced exploitation and erasure. What is also significant to bear in mind is that despite historical subjugation, South African communities demonstrate determination by actively preserving and revitalising their folklore. Grassroots efforts to reclaim and honour indigenous traditions challenge the progressing effects of subjugation. On the grounds of this contention, it could be appreciated that folklore in South Africa may have far-reaching consequences, both for the preservation of ethnological legacy and for the social and economic development of communities, especially the underprivileged communities. The fact that there are challenges with the neglect of folklore in the South African context is adequate to underline that more dialogues, scholarly and non-scholarly, need to be carried out in order to deviate from the acts of fiddling while Rome is burning.

As previously outlined, this section also deals with notable scholarly discourses concerning folklore in South Africa and elsewhere in the global village. It must be appreciated that there are dialogues that have been put forward by different scholars. For instance, Hall (1984) underlines the impact of colonialism on the construction of tribal identities in Southern Africa. Hall (1984: 457) debates how European powers contributed to the shaping of ethnic categories, adversely affecting indigenous ethnological practices, including folklore. In explaining this view, Jeyifo (1990: 33) suggests the concept of decolonisation in African literary studies, and discusses its pertinence to understanding the impact of colonialism on indigenous cultures, including folklore. In consideration of this, Jeyifo (1990: 34) proposes that the concept of decolonisation seeks to dismantle the Eurocentric ideologies embedded in colonial discourses and reclaim indigenous voices, narratives, and cultural expressions. This makes it clear that when applied to the exploration of folklore, decolonisation entails questioning and challenging the colonial interpretations and representations of African traditions. This entails challenging the hegemonic colonial perspectives that misrepresented, or still do, or distorted South African folklore and traditions. In support of this view, Naidu (2001: 17) contends that colonialism propagated misconstrued perceptions about South African cultures, with special reference to their folklore. For this reason, Seroto (2011: 77) proclaims that decolonisation encompasses meticulously examining and contesting colonial perceptions, buttressing a more accurate and multifaceted understanding of the fertility and multiplicity of South African traditions. With this claim in mind, I argue that while other discourses are not exclusively concentrated on South African folklore, it would be perceptive to offer a broader context for understanding the interplay between colonialism, cultural defiance, and the preservation of IAKS. As a matter of reality, exploring the intra-and-interrelationship between folklore, political discourses, and the construction of national identity in post-apartheid South Africa would be a step in the right direction for the advancement of folklore. Among other concerns, as suggested by Naidu (2001), it would be prudent to address storytelling, mythologies, rituals, and the role of folklore in configuring ethnological identity. Bearing these

deliberations in mind, this particular discourse attempts to underline the ways in which South Africa's folklore embodies wealth in contemporary contexts.

To do this, this article hinges on existential phenomenology as a qualitative research technique, while the sociological perspective is applied as a theoretical framework. These are explained in the next section.

### **Existential Phenomenological Technique and Sociological Perspective**

As outlined previously, this article utilises an existential-phenomenological technique, which is one of the qualitative research methodologies. In the process, the sociological perspective, as a theoretical framework is applied to the discussions. Existential phenomenology is important in folklore owing to the reality that it permits a more in-depth and multifaceted exploration of the lived realities of individuals and communities as they relate to folklore (Länge and Klaassen, 2021: 745). This research technique is primarily a philosophical approach that concentrates on understanding the essence and lived experiences of individuals within a specific context. It seeks to explore the subjective meanings that individuals attribute to their experiences, underscoring the unique perspectives and interpretations of the individuals or groups in relation to a specific phenomenon such as folklore. When used as a research technique, existential phenomenology entails a meticulous examination of individuals' or groups' subjective direct and indirect experiences, perceptions, and consciousness (Owen, 1994: 347). Through this research technique, researchers uncover the essence of a phenomenon such as folklore's wealth in context, understanding it from the perspective of those who have lived it and relying on an existing body of knowledge that has been carried out by other intellectuals and non-intellectuals. Besides these details, this research technique considers open-ended observations and reflective critique. With special reference to this article, the existential-phenomenological technique considers the broader sociocultural, historical, and political context within which South African folklore is established. What is also significant to bear in mind is that existential phenomenology recognises that the researcher is not a detached observer but is actively engaged in the phenomenon of interest. Consequently, the researcher's direct and indirect experiences, emotions, and perceptions could influence the interpretation of the phenomenon herein. Williams (2021: 367) explains that this acknowledgement is in contrast to a more objective or detached stance that is associated with traditional positivist approaches. Over and above this, scholars employing existential phenomenology typically engage in reflexivity, which involves self-cognisance and critical reflection on their prejudices, assumptions, and perspectives (Reinach, 1969: 194). This denotes that through reflexivity, researchers may recognise and acknowledge how their own experiences, belief systems, and ethnological backgrounds shape their interpretations of the direct and indirect experiences concerning folklore.

In so far as the existential-phenomenological technique remains important, it is imperative to understand that to present a juxtaposed or triangulated dialogue, this article applies a sociological perspective as its theoretical framework. The sociological perspective is a way of understanding human behaviour and social communications that emphasises the role of social structures, institutions, and cultural ethical codes in shaping individuals' thoughts, feelings, and actions. Considering this explanation, sociologists and other interrelated scholars examine how social interactions and institutions eminence individuals and groups, and how people navigate complex social structures to create meaning and delineate their identities. This perspective, as a theoretical framework, acknowledges that individual behaviour is influenced by a wide range of attributes, including social class, race, gender, religion, and culture. This could be veritable against colonialism and apartheid in South Africa that sought to influence the social class, race, gender, religion, and culture in many indigenous communities. Beyond this fact, the sociological perspective recognises that social structures are not fixated, but rather are constantly evolving through the actions of individuals and groups (Chugh, 2011: 215). From a sociological perspective, it is prudent to understand the more encyclopaedic social context in which individuals and groups exist and to critique how social structures and institutions shape people's lives. On the grounds of this assertion, this theoretical framework helps to uncover the underlying causes of social challenges and disparities and inform policies and intervention strategies aimed at promoting greater social justice and inclusivity. Therefore, what does all this mean for folklore and the aim of this article?

The sociological perspective on folklore necessitates examining how folklore and traditional ethnological practices reflect and advance social norms, values, and beliefs, thereupon proving their wealth in context. This theoretical perspective concentrates on the social, human, and historical context in which folklore is created, transmitted, and interpreted, and how it mirrors the experiences and identities of different groups within the South African context. It also considers how folklore is used to establish and maintain social order, resist hegemonic power structures,



and create and buttress social identity and solidarity. Bearing the selected research technique and the theoretical framework in mind, it is important to now turn to the discussions of this scholarly dialogue.

### **Reflections Folklore as South Africa's Wealth**

Wealth is a common theme or subject in folklore across cultures. It naturally represents success, power, and humour. This is because folklore features characters (in the context of narratology such as folktales) and people (in the context of reality) who obtain wealth through hard work, intelligence, or paranormal means. This suggests that the concept of wealth in folklore goes far beyond material riches; it symbolises success, power, and prosperity, and it is interwoven in folk narratives that convey ethnological norms and values. For example, many South African folktales emphasise the significance of hard work, virtue, and perseverance as pathways to wealth. Characters who embody these qualities are continually rewarded with prosperity. In consideration of this assertion, I argue that these folk narratives serve as moral lessons, encouraging constructive virtues in the audience, especially children. Ordinarily, folklore features knowledgeable characters who outsmart challenges and amass wealth. Trickster figures, in particular, use wit and cunning to achieve success, hence these folk narratives celebrate intelligence and resourcefulness as valuable traits. Adding to this view, Liggins (1977: 91) argues that some African folktales involve paranormal or supernatural elements as a means of acquiring wealth. This means that magical objects, benevolent spirits, or encounters with supernatural beings contribute to the accumulation of riches. These folk narratives further blend the mundane with the mystical. This suggests that these folk narratives additionally intertwine the ordinary with the magical. By the same token, this combination adds depth, intrigue, and a sense of inquisitiveness to the narratives engaging readers or listeners on both familiar and fantastical levels. The sociological perspective underscores that folklore serves specific functions within a society. This suggests that folkloristic narratives featuring intelligent characters may potentially function to advance and transmit cultural value systems such as intelligence and the ability to reason. In fact, celebrating intelligence and resourcefulness in folklore serves to promote these traits as desirable within the community. In the same vein, the trickster figure, by outsmarting challenges, symbolises the adaptability needed to navigate the intricacies of society. In this sense, these folk narratives contribute to the cohesion and stability of the social structure. From a sociological perspective, as a theoretical framework, South African folklore mirrors and configures the concerted meanings within a society. This denotes that the re-production of intelligent characters in South African folklore serves as a symbol that transmits the significance of intelligence and resourcefulness in social interactions.

In contrast to this, trickster figures, through their wit and cunning, embody the negotiation of social boundaries and challenge established ethical codes. For this reason, these folk narratives could be interpreted as a reflection of the progressing negotiation of meanings within a society. Within the same context, intelligent characters in African folklore, particularly trickster figures, could be regarded as subversive figures contesting the status quo. Given this indication, by outsmarting challenges and accumulating wealth, they may represent a form of defiance against oppressive social structures. As a matter of reality, the sociological perspective, as a theoretical framework, underlines that these folk narratives and their voices could be explicated as a way for the hegemonic class to perpetuate the idea that success is attainable through intelligence and cunning, potentially justifying existing social hierarchies. Bearing this in mind, I argue that the celebration of intelligence and resourcefulness could potentially be tied to the economic systems in place, where individuals navigating complex challenges are more likely to achieve prosperity. Ultimately and in consideration of the sociological perspective, the examination of folklore in South Africa could focus on gender dynamic forces. In other words, are the intelligent characters predominantly male or female? How are intelligence and resourcefulness gendered in these folk narratives? These questions could uncover underlying gender principles, disparities, and stereotypes present in the folk narratives.

Over and above this, it is prudent to bear in mind that wealth in South African folklore is not always confined to material possessions; it can also symbolise spiritual or moral wealth. This suggests that characters may gain wisdom, compassion, or a profound understanding of life, which is re-produced as a form of legitimate richness. From a sociological perspective, as a theoretical framework, the evaluation of wealth in folklore as extending far beyond material possessions to encompass spiritual or moral wealth corroborates with various theoretical underpinnings within sociology and related disciplines such as African literary studies. One prominent lens through which one could evaluate this is through the sociological imagination (Fox, 1980: 244). The sociological imagination encourages individuals to connect personal experiences with broader social structures and historical processes. Thus, in the case of folklore depicting wealth, it becomes a reflection of societal values and ethical codes. By the same token, the concept of material wealth is enormously ingrained in many South African societies and continually

linked to status and power (Guyer, 1995: 83). In any event, folklore that reflects wealth as encompassing spiritual or moral attributes suggests a broader critique or commentary on societal values. This means that in the context of South African folklore, characters acquiring wisdom, compassion, or a profound understanding of life as a form of authentic richness challenges conventional ideologies of success and prosperity. It is for this reason I contend that folklore serves as an ethnological voice reinforcing the idea that legitimate wealth involves not just material abundance but also a moral and spiritual dimension.

It must also be added that wealth could be associated with destructive qualities, such as greed and corruption, and may potentially be a source of conflict or tragedy in folklore narratives. For example, an isiXhosa folktale called *uDyakalashé noMvolofu* (Jackel and Wolf) depicts greediness and corruption in which one character (Jackel) possesses self-serving interests and tends to manipulate other characters. Considering this fact, the association of wealth with destructive attributes, such as greed and corruption, adds another layer to the sociological critique of South African folklore narratives. This perspective aligns with conflict ideologies, which focus on the power struggles and disparities within a society. This amaXhosa folktale titled *uDyakalashé noMvolofu* serves as a vivid example of how wealth, when misused, could become a source of conflict and tragedy within a community. From a sociological standpoint, this folktale outlines the unequal distribution of resources and power. Characters like Jackel, who embody greed and falsification, exploit their wealth for personal gain, contributing to social strife. This mirrors real-world situations where individuals or groups, driven by self-interest, exacerbate social disparities, leading to tension and conflict. In a broader context, the characters' pursuit of wealth and subsequent conflicts depict class struggles seen in broader societal settings. This is based on the premise that Jackel's actions could be seen as representative of a ruling class exploiting others for their own benefit, maintaining and perpetuating social imbalance. Furthermore, the destructive qualities associated with wealth in this folktale resonate with symbolic interactionism. This suggests that the characters' behaviours and the consequences of their actions become symbols that bear meaning within the South African community, and elsewhere in the global village. This folktale, in this sense, contributes to the construction and reinforcement of cultural norms and values regarding the ethical use of wealth. With this in mind, I argue that this folktale underscores the potential consequences of unregulated greed and corruption, aligning with sociological perspectives on deviance. Keeping these views in mind and with special reference to the South African context, several politicians serve their personal interests while millions and millions of underprivileged South Africans remain at the line of poverty and hunger. This could be observed through high levels of poverty, youth unemployment, and high cost of living. This is denotative of the reality that South African folklore could be critiqued within the context of meaningful and significant folk narratives that embody wealth given that they have a fertile ground.

In addition to these scholarly claims, within South African folklore, there is heritage. Heritage is important since it provides a sense of identity, continuity, and nexus to the past. It encompasses ethnological, historical, and natural resources that have been passed down from previous generations and represents a concerted legacy that could be passed on to future generations. The importance of heritage, as a folkloristic component, is that it helps individuals and communities understand and appreciate their roots, ancestry, and genealogy; to learn from the past, and to create a sense of belonging and pride today, tomorrow, and yesterday (Diko, 2023a). The fact that traditional customs such as appraisal and worshipping ancestors are homogenised in folklore is sufficient to underline how heritage embraces ancestral dynamic forces. On the grounds of this, heritage could be an etymology of economic and social merits, such as tourism and community development. In consideration of this, protecting heritage is important to guarantee that it remains accessible and historic for current and future generations as well as external members of the global village. In fact, South Africa's heritage provides documentation and reportage of the social and human past and how contemporary society has evolved innovatively. In particular, heritage sites, whether natural or cultural, attract tourists, providing economic opportunities for local communities. Historical landmarks, traditional festivals, and cultural practices become attractions, drawing visitors who contribute to the local economy. Ultimately, tourism generates revenue through accommodations, dining, guided tours, and the sale of local crafts, thereupon promoting economic growth, development, and advancement.

As a result of these scholarly debates, the historical facet of heritage helps humans examine their history and traditions and enables the development of consciousness about themselves. That is the reason South African scholars such as Diko (2023c) and Whitelaw (2012) tend to employ heritage, which is subsumed under archaeology, to trace and track down some of the crucial components and episodes of history. This is not to necessarily suggest that folklore is submerged in history or archaeology. Instead, it denotes that heritage, as an important dimension of folklore in South Africa helps one comprehend and explain the ways in which people are

in different social contexts, and how. For example, some of today's folk music reflects certain elements from the music of the past or traditional music. The only difference is that today's folk music is produced and enhanced through technological advancements, while folk music was rigidly produced through traditional means such as the backhanding of a drum, which is a drum that was also made from indigenous materials such as wood and skin animals. It is crucial to further bear in mind that the evolution of folk music and its adaptation to contemporary technological advancements offers an intriguing perspective for sociological examination. This shift from traditional means of production to contemporary technological instruments explains changes in society, culture, and the ways in which individuals engage with their musical heritage. In view of this reality, the integration of technological instruments in folk music signifies the intersection of tradition and modernity, underscoring how cultural elements are not static but dynamic, evolving with the times. In any case, it is perceptive to observe that the advent of technology has implications for the democratisation of music production. This is because traditional folk music, often produced through rudimentary mechanisms such as handmade drums, might have been limited in terms of reach and accessibility. Having said that, the use of modern instruments and recording technologies allows for a broader dissemination of folk music, potentially reaching a global audience. This explains folklore concepts within globalisation studies, emphasising the interconnectedness and exchange of cultural elements on a global scale.

What is additionally important is that there are several ways in which cultural heritage and folklore such as heritage sites or museums could, directly and indirectly, contribute to society and the economy. In support of this view, Diko (2023a) claims that this may be through contributions to commercial activities and employment as well as regional and urban regeneration, skills development, and citizens' cultural participation. Cultural heritage, in particular, has the ability to promote access to and merriment of cultural multiplicity. In view of this reality, it could potentially be accepted that cultural heritage advances social capital and creates a sense of individual and collective belonging, which helps to maintain social and territorial cohesion. In the same wavelength, traditions, and customs, as significant components of folklore, are important owing to the fact that they provide a sense of identity, continuity, and connection to the past. This suggests that they represent the beliefs, values, and practices that have been passed down from previous generations and control the way that individuals and communities interact with each other and the world. By means of a scenario, traditions and customs help to create a sense of belonging and social cohesion, and could provide a framework for interpersonal relationships, rites of passage, and social norms. For this reason, they potentially serve as a means of expressing creativity and innovation and may be a source of pride and cultural diversity (MacDonald, 1891: 113). This implies that preserving and adapting traditions and customs is important to ensure that they remain meaningful and pertinent for current and future generations while allowing for the evolution and adaptation that is necessary to keep them alive and thriving. For instance, times have changed, but the way and how many traditions and customs are conducted have been altered to align with the current times. An example of this could be seen through the way *ulwaluko* (traditional male circumcision) is carried out. In this traditional custom, some people follow the very olden viral matrixes while others prefer to use hospitals to undertake this practice. On the one hand, certain people use traditional alcohol called *umqombothi* in the isiXhosa language while others prefer to use modern alcohol such as Hendricks Gin, Jagermeister, Sedgwicks Old Brown, beers, and ciders. By the same token, certain people prefer to follow old burial rites while others tend to downplay many historic burial rites.

Taking this into account, customs, and traditions have practical applications or implications in modern society in South Africa. They provide a framework for social interactions and relationships, such as etiquette, protocols, and codes of conduct. For instance, when a woman exhibits characteristics of misbehaviour, they are ordinarily reminded of what customs and traditions expect of her conduct. In today's language, one might hear utterances such as *o tšwa legaeng la mohuta mang?* (which home do you come from?), questioning how one was raised and disciplined. All these are entrenched in the traditions and customs of a family, home, and community. In this way, customs and traditions could be viewed as helping to promote social cohesion and cooperation by providing a shared set of values and norms. In light of this and bearing in mind the sociological perspective, I contend that customs and traditions are essential for the stability and functioning of society. They provide an integrated set of ethical codes and value systems that guide individuals in their daily interactions. For example, traditional ceremonies, rituals, and rites of passage contribute to social integration by buttressing a sense of belonging and identity within the community. In South Africa, customs related to ceremonies such as weddings, funerals, and initiation rites play a central role in maintaining social order and continuity. In view of this assertion, possessing an understanding of ethnological protocols and customs could be considered a form of cultural capital. This means that individuals who are well-versed in these traditions and customs may navigate complex social spaces more effectively and gain social recognition. Over and above this, I must underline that while customs and traditions in

South Africa contribute to social cohesion, they can also be an etymology of social contests. This is based on the premise that in some cases, traditional practices may be contested or challenged, leading to tensions between generations or different ethnological groups. This is particularly evident in the contestation of male-orientated perceptions, toxic masculinities, and sexism.

While this is the case, it must be brought to the fore that customs and traditions might perpetuate detrimental belief systems and practices or may be used to justify intolerance and inequality (Diko, 2023a). It is important, therefore, to strike a balance between preserving consequential and constructive dimensions of customs and traditions, while being open to change and adaptation to guarantee that they remain relevant and inclusive for all members of society. During the course, overlooking traditions and customs could have adversarial and destructive consequences for individuals and society. This is because without a sense of cultural pedigree and identity, individuals may feel disconnected from their community, and may lack a framework for understanding their place in the world. As a result of this concern, this could lead to a sense of disorientation and alienation and might contribute to social and psychological challenges such as anxiety, depression, and solitude. Ultimately, neglecting traditions and customs could lead to an erasure of cultural multiplicity and wealth. This is on account that customs and traditions provide a means of expressing creativity, innovation, and unique perspectives, and could help to advance a sense of pride and veneration for cultural differences. Without these cultural components, society could become more dominated by foreign influences, and individuals and communities may feel pressure to conform to hegemonic cultural norms. In addition to this, subjugating traditions and customs could potentially lead to a misplacement of historical knowledge and understanding that is deeply entrenched in these traditions and customs as part of folklore. One would recall that customs and traditions have origins in the past, and provide perspectives into the values, belief systems, and practices of previous generations. Inevitably, without an appreciation for these traditions, important aspects of history and culture may be lost or forgotten, and opportunities for learning and development may be missed. In a nutshell, neglecting traditions and customs leads to a loss of cultural legacy, a sense of disorientation and alienation, and a lack of historical knowledge and understanding. This disconnection could weaken communal bonds and erode a collective sense of identity and continuity.

Another important example of South African folklore that continues to possess wealth is poetry (both traditional and modern poetry). Poetry is a form of artistic expression that has significant personal and societal benefits. On a personal level, poetry is a powerful tool for emotional expression and self-reflection, allowing individuals to explore their thoughts, sensibilities, and experiences in a creative and meaningful way. Beyond this, poetry provides a sense of purification and helps individuals cope with challenging moments. Many South African poets express their challenging situations through their poetry, and thus, they use it as a coping mechanism. This is because poetry could be written and produced by anyone who knows and understands the language and intricacies of poetry. On a societal level, poetry plays a central role in shaping cultural values and promoting social change and transformation. It could potentially be used to raise awareness about social challenges, contest existing power structures and imbalances, and advocate for marginalised communities. For example, many state and public poets tend to comment on political discourses, leadership, and economic challenges. That is the reason I view poets and any literary writer as a leader given that they become a voice for the voiceless and become catalysts for social change and transformation. Unequivocally, poetry serves as a means of preserving cultural heritage and promoting cross-cultural understanding since it does not exist in isolation. In essence, poetry has the power to inspire, educate, and connect individuals and communities, and its importance lies in its ability to give voice to human experiences and emotions. With these deliberations in mind, I remain optimistic that South Africa's folklore holds immense importance and wealth, both culturally and societally, contributing to the rich tapestry of the nation's identity. Rooted in variegated ethnic groups, indigenous South African languages, and historical experiences, South African folklore serves as a repository of concerted narratives and voices, beliefs, and values that transcend generations. Given that this article approaches its final stages, it is perceptive to provide some concluding remarks, hence the next section.

## **Conclusion**

At its core, South African folklore is a vital medium for preserving and transmitting ethnological heritage. Through oral traditions, mythologies, legends, and storytelling, communities pass down their collective wisdom, historical consciousness, and memory as well as moral lessons. These folk narratives and voices provide a sense of continuity, connecting contemporary South Africans with their ancestral roots. In a country with a multifaceted history of diverse cultures and languages, folklore becomes a unifying force that buttresses a shared sense of



identity and belonging. In the process, South African folklore is an embodiment of cultural multiplicity. It re-produces the multiplicity of ethnicities and traditions within the nation, (re)defining the vibrancy of different belief systems and practices. This diversity is a form of cultural wealth, enriching the collective understanding of what it means to be a South African. Over and above this, folklore becomes an etymology of pride, celebrating the unique contributions of each ethnic group while promoting mutual honour and understanding among them. Similarly, the wealth of South African folklore extends far beyond its cultural significance; it plays a central role in shaping social ethical codes and value systems. Folktales, in particular, convey moral lessons, ethical principles, and societal expectations. They serve as a guide for individuals, imparting values that contribute to social cohesion, consciousness, intellectuality, and harmony. In this way, South African folklore becomes a dynamic force that not only preserves cultural wealth but also influences the ongoing development of societal ethos and moral frameworks. Beyond this view, I must underline that South Africa's folklore is a treasure trove of linguistic diversity, mirroring the multitude of languages spoken in the country. This is based on the premise that each linguistic community contributes its unique folklore, encompassing a variety of storytelling techniques, linguistic intricacies, and cultural expressions. This linguistic diversity not only preserves the affluence of South Africa's languages but also advances a profound appreciation for the intricate ways in which stories are told and shared.

In addition to this, South African folklore serves as a reservoir of indigenous knowledge and environmental wisdom. Many folk narratives are profoundly interwoven with the natural world, imparting ecological perspectives, sustainable practices, and a profound understanding of the relationship between humans and their environment. This ecological wisdom is particularly significant in the context of contemporary environmental challenges, making folklore a source of valuable insights for sustainable living and ecological stewardship. By the same token, the performative dimension of South African folklore, recurrently conveyed through music, dance, and visual arts, adds another layer of cultural wealth. This denotes that folk performances are not just about storytelling; they are vibrant expressions of cultural identity, rituals, and community bonding. These performances contribute to the intangible cultural heritage of South Africa, showcasing the nation's artistic prowess and the dynamic ways in which traditions are creatively expressed and preserved. In the realm of social cohesion, South African folklore plays a role in advancing intergenerational connections. The passing down of narratives and traditions from elders to younger generations amplifies family bonds and community ties. This intergenerational transmission guarantees the continuity of ethnological practices and values, creating a sense of shared history and legacy. In closing, the importance and wealth of South African folklore lie in its ability to unite, educate, and sustain the diverse cultural tapestry of the nation.

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