

## Book Review

# MILITARY PSYCHOLOGY FOR AFRICA GAJ van Dyk

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The African life philosophy of *ubuntu* is about two aspects *ubu* and *ntu*, and constitutes a wholeness and oneness (Ramose, 2002).<sup>1</sup> Modern psychology has until very recently entailed oneness with its Western ideas and approaches (Sinha, 1986).<sup>2</sup> In South Africa, psychologists' interventions often lack "the necessary broader contextual focus needed to address social problems" (wholeness).<sup>3</sup> The challenge posed to African psychologists has been to work proactively towards combining theory building and practical knowledge application within the indigenous African context. Only through the exploration of contextually relevant research, can there be influence. This book fills a long-awaited void in South African and African military psychology in its contextual contribution, both in terms of theory and practice under the guidance of Professor Van Dyk. Prof. Van Dyk has, for many decades, dedicated his time and his research findings towards making a contribution to knowledge building within the South African Military Psychology community. Twenty-two years into democracy, this book *Military psychology for Africa* brings 'wholeness' for African soldiers, their families, psychological scientists, university scholars and practitioners.

The scope of this book is holistic and covers all the critical areas of military psychology, enabling a wide audience to gain insight into the key areas of involvement for military psychologists in Africa. In addition to delivering rich factual as well as contextual information, this book serves as a unique academic reference to contemporary and up-to-date military psychology issues on the African continent.

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The book consists of seven main

sections, divided into 20 chapters ranging from the context of modern warfare within the African continent to selection of soldiers, military personnel and associated civil servants, the work readiness and career management of the African soldier, psychological well-being, the effect of trauma on body and mind, and a fascinating description of a culturally relevant *ubuntu*-based approach in trauma treatments. There is a chapter devoted to military family support and work readiness, and finally a chapter on the personality profile of the African leader within the modern African operational context.

In Chapter One, Col. Piet Bester enables conceptual insight into “time, space, resources and purpose” (p. 38) of psychological support within the African military geometric battlespace environment as the reader is reminded of the centrality of the (often-overlooked) human dimension. Insight into the functional and strategic role of the psychological support in addition to a detailed explanation of the lines of support, enables a clear and concise understanding of the critical roles, responsibilities and contributions in ensuring psychological readiness, maintenance, enhancement, sustainment and general consultant support during conventional and peacekeeping operations.

Chapter Two offers valuable insight into the stressful nature of peacekeeping operations on the African continent, giving background on international peacekeeping but importantly, providing the reader with a section on “African experiences of peacekeeping stressors” (p. 56). The critical role that military psychologists could play in contributing to the success of peacekeeping missions is discussed in the context of the wide-ranging skills required by the soldiers to fulfil their role as peacekeepers, as they continue to experience stress at “physical, emotional, social, economic and occupational levels” (p. 47).

In Chapter 3, Van’t Wout and Van Dyk present an opportunity for reflection on the way African soldiers are prepared for combat as it presents, as a case study, the recent Battle of Bangui (p. 77) and the factors that influenced the outcome of this significant battle on the African continent. In this chapter, factors that influence morale during combat missions are presented (p. 71). The authors make a case for the development of tailor-made psychological plans to maintain the morale of soldiers on specific military missions (p. 78), thereby providing a contextualised plan for ensuring the combat readiness of members on the African battlefield.

In Chapter 4, Nicole Dodd provides a summative description of selection techniques within a military environment, which is increasingly dependent on effective selection methods. Reference is made to special operations forces and the importance of effective selection methods within this context.

In Chapter 5, Van Dyk skilfully provides the reader with a holistic picture of humanitarian and military component perspectives to peace support operations in Africa. The author points to the need for cooperation and coordination (p. 120) between the stakeholders within this context as she skilfully introduces the reader to the complexities of peacekeeping roles within the African military peace support environment. Exposure to complex situations, by both the military and the humanitarian support components is discussed, pointing to the importance of the CIMIC (civil–military cooperation) officer to coordinate and assist all stakeholders in this context. The dual contributions expected of the military component as performing both humanitarian and security roles are highlighted as the question is asked (p. 118) whether sufficient capacity exists for the fulfilment of these roles. The differences between the humanitarian and military perspectives are however shown to be complementary. The roles and functions of the CIMIC officer are discussed, highlighting the need for a cooperative framework within the peace support operations (PSO) context, where the CIMIC officer acts as coordinator and advisor. These roles require specialist skills, attitudes and knowledge to bridge the gap (p. 120) of the often-overlooked stressors associated with PSOs.

In Chapter 6, Van Dyk incorporates his many years of experience and knowledge of military trauma management on the African continent, to offer a holistic approach to effective trauma management in the military context, urging others to do the same. The concept of psychological debriefing (PD) is introduced, pointing to the definitions and goals of PD, but also objectively pointing to literature debating the efficiency of PD in the treatment of trauma (p. 138). Van Dyk also offers personal insight into factors that could influence the outcome of PD, interestingly pointing out that in the Special Forces context, emotions are not dealt with effectively within the context of PD (p. 138) The chapter contains valuable information, insight, advice and context pertaining to the dimensions of trauma, causes of trauma, prevention of trauma and ways of effectively dealing with trauma. Coping mechanisms like resilience and hardiness training are proposed in addition to an emphasis on effective selection and preparation of soldiers, psycho-training of commanders and peers to manage members exposed to trauma or still going into battle better. The important role of the debriefer is emphasised along with required skills and practical ways of assisting individuals and groups in debriefing of traumatic events.

In Chapter 7, Helen Loubsher offers the reader the opportunity to gain insight into recent research and scientific advances on the effects of trauma on the brain. In the context of the fight, the flight-freeze response and various physiological reactions associated with trauma are pointed out and the importance of including body reactions in trauma therapy is highlighted.

Chapter 8 follows on the previous chapter, as Loubsher emphasises the body in the context of trauma, providing the reader with insight into the importance of instinctual bodily responses to the process of healing after a traumatic event. The author discusses the shaking response, i.e. physically ‘shaking off’ trauma as a recovery mechanism in both animals and humans, by relaxing core muscles, pointing to therapies designed to trigger neurological tremors to release the high charge of tension in the muscles (p. 179).

In Chapter 9, Dhladhla and Van Dyk discuss post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) both within the international and the African context, pointing out the vulnerability of soldiers to PTSD – not only in combat situations, but also during peacekeeping operations, when soldiers are exposed to traumatic experiences that fall within a wide range of exposures, from death to suffering. This chapter enlightens the reader by providing concise definitions provided in various contexts and warns that the effects of this phenomenon can be all-encompassing due to the persistent and traumatic effect that this condition could have on individuals if not properly treated. It is pointed out that soldiers involved in peacekeeping operations within the African context are amongst the most vulnerable to PTSD (p. 199) as within this role as peacekeeper, soldiers are exposed to a wide range of traumatic experiences as they witness human tragedies and experience the threat of death on a daily basis. Several demographic and personal characteristics are shown to be related to a heightened risk of experiencing or avoiding PTSD. The symptoms of PTSD are discussed within the military context as well as the dilemma of soldiers who are unwilling to seek help as a result of the possible stigma attached to getting psychological help after traumatic events. PTSD at the individual level of analysis is discussed, and the lens is widened by providing insight into the effect PTSD has at societal level and as it affects military family members. A useful model consistent of pre-deployment screening, awareness training, post-incident counselling, post-deployment screening and assessment, debriefing and follow-up assessments complemented by continuous psycho-education is proposed for the management of PTSD within the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) and in the African context, emphasising that the contribution of this model would be to provide military leaders with information to manage soldiers who show signs of PTSD effectively. The importance of pre-deployment screening as the best prevention strategy in avoiding PTSD is discussed, particularly before deployment (p. 206), noting that most soldiers are unaware of the causes and symptoms of PTSD, and that awareness training at junior leadership levels could provide commanders with critical skills and insight to identify, manage, coordinate and facilitate such incidents before the situation gets critical.

In Chapter 10, Maotane appropriately approaches the critically important topic of HIV/AIDS and health in the African military, from the African *ubuntu*

perspective. The devastating effect of this disease is discussed in terms of its influence on the effectiveness of the military as well as the psychological consequences of the disease on factors like combat readiness. An explanation of African traditional approaches to healing provides valuable insight into how African individuals view the world as consisting of three inter-related cosmic levels that form an “indivisible whole” (p. 227). African traditional beliefs steer the individual towards finding harmony and consequently health by maintaining a balance between the three cosmic levels. This chapter underlines the importance of contextual understanding and appreciation of traditional healing methods within military psychology, in line with this book. *Ubuntu*-oriented therapy with its focus on psycho-theological, interpersonal and intra-psychic relationships as a healing method, could promote personal well-being, growth and development. This therapeutic approach contributes towards the health of the collective being ... the soldier facing the HIV/AIDS disease crisis.

Chapter 11 makes a further contribution towards an understanding and promotion of traditional African healing methods within the African military context. The roles and categories of African traditional healers and healing methods are discussed. The context of the origins and elements of traditional African healing practices and traditional African worldviews are presented in a clear and interesting way, pointing to the interrelated nature of the African culture. Reference is made to traditional African beliefs in the supernatural, the importance within the African culture to achieve a balanced life interlinked with the cosmos, society and ancestors. This chapter enables a thrilling cultural learning experience provided by an African. It contributes towards an appreciation for the way Africans think about and approach disease, by things “you see and don’t see” (p. 239).

Chapter 12 describes the realities of the unpredictable nature of conflicts in Africa and the factors involved in ensuring the combat readiness of soldiers. This chapter highlights the contribution made by military psychologists in Africa towards ensuring that soldiers are combat ready and prepared to engage in the wide-ranging requirements that fall within the peacekeeping domain. Shinga manages to create a clear understanding of the holistic elements involved in combat readiness, not only pertaining to the individual soldier, but also the context in which soldiers are required to function. Descriptions of combat readiness and the elements related to it, provide the reader with a clear indication of the factors involved as the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) continues to make a key contribution within complex peace operations across Africa (p. 261). Despite the objective of peace operations to ensure peaceful resolutions and settlements, many peace operations in Africa escalate to become conflict situations. In these circumstances, the peace operation mission becomes armed conflict where soldiers are required to engage in violent and brutal

interactions. At the individual level of analysis, adaptability of mind and body is required along with a wide range of other components that serve to support combat readiness in this context, including personnel readiness, support readiness, unit readiness, training – with the note that training should be as practical as possible to simulate the combat situations within which soldiers will engage. Cohesion between military members at individual and group level is discussed in the context of contributing toward the end state of combat readiness. The critical contribution of leadership (p. 263), personal relationships both within the military and personal life as well as the construct of hardiness are presented as factors that assist in ensuring combat readiness for soldiers in Africa.

Chapter 13 introduces the concept of family support and well-being during military deployments. The author provides a step-by-step model of factors in need of attention during the planning, management and closing phases of deployment, emphasising that preparation throughout these three phases is critical in enhancing the well-being and resilience of both family members and the deployed soldier during the periods of separation. The author manages to provide the reader with a clear context pertaining to the realities of military engagement within the SANDF context. In line with the rest of the book, this chapter contributes to the holistic nature of the activities to which military psychologists in Africa should attend. With the focus on the family unit, the collectivistic nature of African culture is recognised as the health and resilience of the individual are shown to be dependent on the welfare of the family unit. By providing insight into the various cycles of deployment, the author makes a contribution towards a better understanding of the subjective psychological well-being of deployed soldiers.

Chapter 14 focuses on the concept of personality, and particularly the individual ego within the context of war in Africa, where the author cautions that more attention should be given to the effect of toxic leadership and leadership pathology and that the leaders of the future should be equipped with skills and competencies related to improved emotional intelligence to ensure peace and stability on the continent. Van Dyk presents the reader with the opportunity to review the role and structure of personality from a Jungian framework where the individual personality is driven by ego and the personal and subconscious mind, providing as an example the case study of the personality disorder of General Douglas McArthur, described as a narcissist based on seven criteria listed in the DSM-IV (APA, 2014). The case study shows how personality development could be influenced by relationships and family background, in the case study, leading to an inflated ego and relationships. A fascinating case study of the personality of Saddam Hussein, is given, describing his personality in terms of a ‘wounded self-concept’, low ego-power and emotional and economic deprivation symbolised by the mud hut in which he was born and where he

was rejected by his mother, who chose not to breastfeed him. Using Jung's psychoanalytic framework, Van Dyk points to the clear contrasts between Hussein's earlier deprived life becoming the driving force for his personality disorders in later life. Hussein became what is described in the text as narcissistic, antisocial, paranoid and sadistic. In contrast to his lack of emotional and economic support structures as a child, Hussein made the nation his family and luxurious palaces became his home. The use of formal psychiatric criteria is suggested within the military and political landscapes "to predict, understand and control leadership behaviour for common good" (p. 321).

Chapter 15 presents a chapter by Alma Grundlingh, who proposes new military leadership for new wars in Africa, outlining the international security challenges of "globalisation, integration, fragmentation, homogenisation, diversification and localisation" (p. 324) on the African continent. The author describes new wars as being characterised by a "rapidly expanding, non-linear and multi-dimensional battlespace" (p. 323), discussing the characteristics of contemporary military environments comparing 'old wars' characterised by "uniformed armies in combat against each other" (p. 325) to "new wars", characterised by "claiming identity rather than territory". The modern soldier is described as requiring "not only physical fitness but also psychological fitness in the way soldiers think and process information" but also "how soldiers feel about themselves, others and the environment" (p. 326). The concepts of psychological fit and the importance of interpersonal skills are discussed complemented by a description of the stressors associated with the new types of wars in Africa. Research showing a statistically significant relationship between emotional intelligence and psychological capital as predictors of leader success is presented and the application of these instruments are proposed within the African context. The Battle of Bangui is discussed as an example of how "new" leaders are required to deal with the "rapidity of change" (p. 333), leaders "who will be able to deal with diverse peoples and cultures, tolerate ambiguity and demonstrate a high level of inventiveness" (p. 334).

Chapter 16 follows with a detailed and extremely valuable contribution to the concept of holistic military leadership development within the African military context. This is a valuable contribution to military psychology for Africa as this chapter takes mostly westernised leadership theories and applies them in a way that makes sense within the African cultural context and realities. Mphofu and Van Dyk present a holistic, idealistic (but possible) conceptualised model for leadership in Africa with the aim to "educate and empower" (p. 351), providing the reader with insight into the main theories of leadership, referenced to practical scenarios of African security and instability situations. The authors present the concept of super leadership, based on the development of self-leadership and self-development skills

in line with the requirements of new wars, where troops are increasingly expected to apply self-management principles (p. 352). Self-leadership is also contextualised in the sense that its main principles are based on traditional African approaches and “ancient ways, moulded into contemporary forms” (p. 352). The authors point to research confirming that super leadership is positively related to the positive psychology concepts of self-efficacy and intrinsic motivation, important coping mechanisms for new wars. Transformational leadership, operational leadership and strategic leadership are discussed, offering valuable practical examples to enable a clear understanding of the application of these models in African military scenarios. The model of ethical leadership is introduced and emphasised in the context of leadership development that enables African leaders to make moral decisions, which prevent corruption of military leaders in African contexts, susceptible to outsiders looking to prey on vulnerable leaders for personal gain.

Chapter 17 offers a case study of Uganda, as illustration of the need for military psychology applications in that country. Kasujja offers insight into Uganda’s military history involvement in peacekeeping missions. The challenges for military forces in Uganda are effectively illustrated within the text through a tragic case study where a 31-year-old lance corporal from Kampala, having returned shortly before from a peace keeping mission, shot and killed four people. The author illustrates the effect of deployment on families and combat-related mental health problems. The challenges faced within the Uganda military are further discussed within the recruitment context. With Uganda having over 50 dialects and the military preferring Swahili as the official language (p. 385), communication is difficult as many recruits have to learn the language. Furthermore, the image of the armed forces in Uganda is characterised by a negative public image of them being rebels and committing public atrocities against the people of Northern Uganda (p. 386). Emerging security threats are discussed in the aftermath of two bomb attacks on people in a sports bar in Kampala. Further challenges entail the challenge of work overload within the military on the one hand and boredom on the other, leading to frustration, the imminent threat of HIV/AIDS on the military population, insufficient military funding leading to insufficient weapons and facilities. The author discusses in some detail the factors that influence the mental health of military members and the psychological needs of Ugandan soldiers. The role and contribution of military psychology in Uganda are discussed and emphasised.

In Chapter 18, Mpofohu and Van Dyk offer a model based on lessons learnt during the Battle of Bangui in which South African soldiers performed heroically during a series of running battles outside Bangui in the Central African Republic (CAR) against 3 000 opponents. Lessons learnt from this interaction are discussed and a model of preventative measures, including the participation of a preventative



team (consisting of commanders, chaplains, social workers and psychologists), is focused on preventing harm, healing and restoring the mental health of soldiers.

Chapter 19 offers insight into the changing nature of war and its effect on military work readiness, and suggests specific competencies and factors that may contribute towards the performance of soldiers facing new types of challenges in the military environment. Masole and Van Dyk discuss the role and contribution of hardiness, emotional intelligence, psychological capital, well-being and personality that have shown potential in mitigating the challenges faced by modern-day soldiers as they engage in unconventional warfare activities. These new demands placed on work readiness in the military require agility and adaptability (p. 431), both physically and emotionally, and in this chapter, factors and competencies that could improve work readiness are discussed.

Chapter 20 fittingly concludes with a focus on the subjective military career success of soldiers in Africa and how personality factors could mediate how individuals experience their military career success and the military environment. The author emphasises the importance of organisational support, growth opportunities and job security in increasing the experience of subjective military career success.

## Conclusion

This book is enriching and valuable in the way it presents key military psychology issues. This book is testimony to the important contributions made and still to be made within the field of military psychology in Africa. Providing theoretical frameworks for the practice of military psychology in combination with suggested models for practice, this book presents the key issues of modern military psychology in an interesting and relevant manner. The importance of effective psychology practices within the military have only recently started to receive the recognition it deserves. The fact that this book is written from an African perspective, signifies an important paradigm shift towards the creation of indigenous psychological knowledge and perspectives in the practice of military psychology on the African content. Valuable contextual information is provided pertaining to the African culture and way of being.

This book comes highly recommended as a key source on military psychology in Africa, a rich reference to turn to time and time again. In line with the *ubuntu* vision of ‘wholeness’, this book provides the golden thread of military psychology theory and practice for Africa.

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<sup>1</sup> MB Ramose. *The philosophy of ubuntu and ubuntu as a philosophy*. In P. H. Coetzee & A. P. J. Roux (eds.), *Philosophy from Africa: A Text with Readings*.

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<sup>3</sup> AV Naidoo. *Community psychology: Constructing community, reconstructing psychology in South Africa*. Inaugural Lecture at Stellenbosch University. Stellenbosch: Stellenbosch University, 2000.