



## **The Strength of a Crocodile is Water: Thought in Tsonga Proverbs**

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*Language carries culture and culture carries, particularly through orature and literature, the entire body of values by which we come to perceive ourselves and our place in the world*

—Ngugi wa Thiong’o

This article discusses how Tsonga proverbs have engaged coloniality of knowledge—or the legacies and practices of the logic of colonialism in social sciences in Africa, particularly in Mozambique—to reassert African thought. Established after the Scramble for the continent as part and parcel of colonialism, the late eighteenth-to-mid-twentieth century anthropological discourse on the Tsonga ethnic group of Southern Mozambique has reproduced Tsonga thought and subjectivity as other, establishing new forms of knowledge and systems of knowing. However, a rereading of Tsonga proverbs through the lens of critical theory shows that these proverbs—literary records that distill Tsonga thought—have rationalized the environment on their own right and created ethical and metaphysical insights with which to order their society—before, during, and after colonialism. Such sayings as *Matimba ya ngwenya i mati* [The strength of a crocodile is water.], *U nga nwe mati u setela hlowo; mudjuku u ta nwa kwini* [Do not close the well after drinking from it. Where would you drink tomorrow?], *Mumiti wa nhengele a dumba nkolo wa kwe* [He who swallows a large stone has confidence in the size of his throat.], and *Mbuti ya shihaha a yi beleki ntlhambini* [A good goat does not bring forth in the midst of the flock.] address universal questions of integration versus alienation, mastering nature, and living an ethical life by avoiding harm within a social community. Tsonga proverbs have continued to critique coloniality of knowledge—even long after being translated into Portuguese and intertextualized in other Mozambican languages—providing an alternative way of viewing and talking about the world and being human. Through critical theory, this argument rereads the Tsonga proverbs towards social transformation, particularly the eradication of African dehumanization.

**Keywords:** proverbs, knowledge, anthropology, critical theory, tradition, modernity, Tsonga, Mozambique, Africa

## Introduction

African civilizations have long developed proverbs that provide metaphysical propositions about God, nature, and ethics, even if European colonialism has reported the contrary. In Southern Mozambique, the proverbs of the Tsonga society exemplify how Africans have always made sense of reality—before, throughout, and after colonialism. Since European colonization of Africa, African systems of knowing have engaged “coloniality of power” or the logic of colonialism, its legacies and practices, including the control of knowledge and subjectivity, using race as the organizing principle (Quijano & Ennis, 2000, pp. 533-535; Mignolo & Escobar, 2013, pp. 22-32; Mignolo, 2011, pp. 8-9). The coloniality of power in Africa (Ndlovu-Gatseni, 2013), particularly the colonial production of Mozambique’s knowledge and subjectivity as other, is reflected in the anthropological study of the Tsonga “social” and “psychic” lives in *The Life of a South African Tribe I and II* (1912) by Swiss missionary and anthropologist Henri-Alexandre Junod, who lived with them from the late nineteenth to early twentieth century. It is Junod who compiled such proverbs as *Matimba ya ngwenya i mati* [The strength of a crocodile is water.], *U nga nwe mati u setela hlwo; mudjuku u ta nwa kwini* [Do not close the well after drinking from it. Where would you drink tomorrow?], *Mumiti wa nhengele a dumba nkolo wa kwe* [He who swallows a large stone has confidence in the size of his throat.], and *Mbuti ya shihaha a yi beleki ntlhambini* [A good goat does not bring forth in the midst of the flock.] (Junod, 1912, Vol II, pp. 157-158). Undertaking an extensive study of Tsonga aesthetics, Junod’s work, nevertheless, diminishes them as folkloric, obscure, and enigmatic (Junod, 1912, Vol II, pp. 157-158). His consistent Eurocentric perspective throughout his work leads him to conclude that the Tsonga must be submitted to the hammer and anvil of the civilizing mission, and, in fact, he uses his work with the Tsonga to advocate for just that—the Tsonga’s total submission to European colonization. This article critiques Junod’s coloniality of knowledge and subjectivity towards Tsonga, their aesthetics, unveiling their ethical and metaphysical insights reflecting the human “spirit” or the desire for God and “character” or the will for good as to avoid evil (Bell, 1997, p. 202) to make sense of the environment in which one lives. While Junod can only—indeed, conveniently for the colonizers—envision the Tsonga’s engagement with religion, which permeates every sphere of social life, as mystification (i.e., African thought and practices as mysterious without reason, logic, and/or rationale); a critical reading of Tsonga knowledge production reveals quite the contrary. This rereading finds Tsonga proverbs to engage in human spirit and character to master the environment, addressing humanistic issues related to integration as opposed to alienation, knowing nature, and practicing an ethical life. Placed against the history of the Scramble for Africa (and Portuguese colonialism), which corresponds with the time of Junod’s work in Mozambique, Tsonga proverbs critique coloniality of knowledge, providing an alternative way of viewing this world and being human.

## On Coloniality of Knowledge in Africa

The coloniality of knowledge in Africa can be traced as far back as the fifteenth century with the Doctrine of Discovery, a Euro-Christendom socio-political paradigm that granted Euro-Christian kingdoms the right to conquer Indigenous lands and people presumed “pagans. . . and . . . reduce their persons to perpetual slavery” (Davenport,

1917, p. 23; Mudimbe, 1988, p. 58). In fact, late fifteenth-century Euro-Christian theology deployed the production of new types of knowledge and subjectivity about Africa and Africans founded on Euro-Christian cosmology. As Achille Mbembé (2002) puts it, the Euro-“Christian narrative of Africa is dominated by the motif of darkness. . . Africa is the metaphor par excellence of the human fall into a state of sin. . . seen to live at a distance from the divine. Indeed, this is the essence of paganism” (p. 633). The endarkening and paganistic logic of the Doctrine of Discovery codifies African humanism and knowledge as the most corrupt, negative, and undesirable versions of the European; a theology that has sanctioned one of the most violent history against humanity: the enslavement of the African from late fifteenth through late nineteenth century.

This “epistemic violence” or constitution of colonial subject and knowledge as other (Nelson & Grossberg, 1988, p. 24) was in fact consolidated by the European Scramble for Africa from the late nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century. Propelled by a colonialist ideology and global capitalism, the partition of Africa was unquestionably informed by the Doctrine of Discovery and post-enlightenment reason, particularly the Hegelian historicism, which had declared Africa a place with no God, law, history, and morality (Hegel, 2007, p. 91). This othering compels Europeans to engage in the myth of the civilizing mission to supposedly bring Africa and Africans from objecthood, an enterprise that still raises unresolved ethical questions. As V. Y. Mudimbe’s *The Invention of Africa* (1988) puts it, the Scramble for Africa “is still charged and controversial, since, to say the least, it signified a new historical form and the possibility of radically new types of discourses on African traditions and cultures” (p. 14). These new forms of knowledge production about Africa would be characterized by diverse and competing perspectives namely colonial, post-colonial, and decolonial. The colonial view of Africa, as mentioned above, would be Eurocentric, in which Africans and their knowledge are viewed as “primitive.” The post-colonial would critique Eurocentrism, transforming its epistemic violence into a tool for epistemic revolt and reclamation of universal humanism. Like post-colonialism, the decolonial thinking would question the legacies and practices of colonialism in Africa, however, disobeying the concept of European ideals of universal humanism, search for alternative ways of being and talking about the human founded on “indigenous” knowledge.

The foundations of modern knowledge and subjectivity in Africa are, indeed, mediated through social sciences, particularly classical anthropology whose rigor, as mentioned above, is compromised by its colonial project. Claude Ake (1982) critiques this imperialist logic of Western social science in studying African societies, systems, and institutions whose truth value is subordinated to domination (xiv) even if the study genuinely has strived for objectivity. Examples, other than the Swiss Junod’s *The Life of a South African Tribe* (1912), include the Belgian Father Placide Tempels’ *Bantu Philosophy* (1945), a study of the Baluba, an ethnic group of Zaire, and their thought; the French anthropologist Marcel Griaule’s *Conversations with Ogotommeli: An Introduction to Dogon Religious Ideas* (1948), a study of the Mali’s Dogon’s cosmogony and cosmology. These anthropologists, despite their Eurocentric tendencies, established the language, content, and methodology through which African epistemology would be practiced. Due to space constraint, the elaboration on Tempels’ and Griaule’s work is not part of the scope of this paper, as the focus, here, is on the cultural production of the Tsonga people of Southern Mozambique as documented by Junod.

Swiss missionaries in Africa, from the late nineteenth to early twentieth century, played a vital role in translating and explaining African social reality particularly to the western world (Harris, 2007). Junod is exemplar in this regard, whose *The Life of a South African Tribe*, first published in 1912, inaugurates the history of social science, particularly, anthropology in Southern Mozambique and in parts of Northeastern South Africa. The two-volume manuscript sought to help missionaries, native commissioners, and other white settlers in the conversion and governing of the Tsonga (1912, Vol I, pp. 8-9). That is why Junod's thesis finds the unfolding triumph of the civilizing mission to be inevitable, where, in his words, "the only salvation for the South African tribe is a regeneration achieved by Christianity, Education providing, at the same time, the enlightenment of the mind" (Junod, 1912, Vol II, p. 542). His racism and "epistemic fundamentalism" or the hegemony of one philosophical tradition as the only one and most legitimate and superior by inferiorizing others (Grosfoguel, 2010), characteristic of Eurocentrism, are unmistakable. In his own words, not only "[t]he great bulk of the tribe is still absolutely savage . . . heathen," but also the civilizing mission is underway as the Tsonga "now stand at a certain distance from their old life" (Junod, 2012, Vol I, p. 3). Throughout *The Life of a South African Tribe*, Junod describes the Tsonga and their knowledge in ironic and ambiguous terms. According to him, "[t]he facility of elocution, amongst the Tsongas, is very great," however it "does not always show much reflection, or many ideas . . . This would require proportion, measure, forethought, and all these virtues rather belong to the arithmetical sense which is so sadly deficient in the Bantu mind" (Junod, 1912, Vol II, pp. 153-154). However, he expresses no skepticism in his own biases against the Tsonga, as informed by the logic of ethnocentrism, Euro-Christian fundamentalism, and the unquestioning devotion to a supposed civilizing mission.

What he presumes to be a deficit of "the Bantu mind" is unquestionably rooted on ontology, the racist assumption characteristic of Eurocentrism and colonialism, which presumes the Black mind and body to be irrational, corrupt, a fall away from white. As Junod (1912) puts it, "*The Life of a South African Tribe* is a collection of biological phenomena which must be described objectively and which are of great interest, representing, as they do, a certain stage in human development. These biological phenomena are sometimes at first of a repulsive character" (Vol I, p. 7). This anthropological discourse is, of course, representative of the logic of the "colonial world" and its Manichean logic (Fanon, 2004, pp. 3-7). As Fanon (2004) puts it, the "[c]olonized society is . . . portrayed as a society without values . . . never possessed any. The 'native' is declared impervious to ethics, representing not only the absence of values but also the negation of values" (p. 6). Racism, epistemic fundamentalism embodied by the civilizing mission, is what makes Junod reproduce the Tsonga as a society with no "values," based on the presumption of a "sadly deficient . . . Bantu mind." Meanwhile, one of the greatest ironies is that Junod (1912) produced over a thousand-page social-science thesis based on the Tsonga social and psychic life—their economic, political, and knowledge institutions—describing the informants as "faithful collaborators" to whom he owes most of his knowledge (Vol I, p. 3). His inconsistencies reveal the very contradictions of colonial social science, in which the "native informant" (Spivak, 1999) is both taken as the translator of his own knowledge and the radical other of it and subjectivity. In its obstinate search for the "savage" and the "primitive," using race as the guiding principle, classical anthropology is a double social science: On one hand, it has a colonial intention to constitute the colonizer's knowledge and subjectivity through othering the colonized in order to rationalize, moralize, and altogether conspire with the

otherwise obviously sinister and dehumanizing nature of the colonizing mission. On the other hand, its racist, savageist, and primitivist worldview reproduce a decolonizing impact. Indeed, within the very interstices of *The Life of a South African Tribe's* inconsistencies—the coloniality of knowledge vis-à-vis the material force of decolonization—Tsonga proverbs shine with humanistic character and spirit that even the lasting works of coloniality cannot eclipse.

### **Towards an African Critical Theory**

The study of human character and spirit in Tsonga proverbs cannot absolutely be dissociated from the history of anthropological discourse in the foundation of African subjectivity, knowledge, and knowledge production. This does not mean to blindly accept the Eurocentric anthropological view on African traditional thought, but rather to look at it from a critical approach. Recognizing the heavy influence of coloniality of knowledge on African thought often supported by the Western metaphysical tradition provides a decolonizing option. Decolonization, here, should be taken from a Fanonian (2004) viewpoint, particularly the epistemic, as in the crucial importance of tracing and rationalizing the hitherto intentionally concealed and disregarded Indigenous past and praxis (p. 148). This is to make a slight difference with the Fanonian (2004) political decolonization or violence and its physical role in confronting colonialism (p. 1-3). Decolonizing the anthropological discourse in African traditional thought demands the approach of subject matter from and through the prism of critical theory. As elaborated by Max Horkheimer (2002) and as placed by Angela Davis specifically within the tradition of Black thought, critical theory envisions a dynamic relationship between humanities (philosophy, cultural studies, etc.) and social sciences (sociology, anthropology, etc.) as a means to social transformation, particularly the reduction of Black dehumanization (Yancy, 1998, p. 22). It is through critical theory that this argument rereads the Tsonga proverbs towards social transformation, particularly the eradication of African dehumanization.

First and foremost, *Matimba ya ngwenya i mati* [The strength of a crocodile is water.] epitomizes how the Tsonga use language in the creation of an aesthetic expression that both mirrors their own environment and conveys universal value systems. As Ngugi Wa Thiong'o (1986) observes, “[l]anguage carries culture and culture carries, particularly through orature and literature, the entire body of values by which we come to perceive ourselves and our place in the world” (pp. 15-16). *Matimba ya ngwenya i mati* is one of the finest expressions of Tsonga orature, an active metaphor carrying a whole set of values with which the Tsonga see themselves as humans in the world. Although Junod seems to recognize the aesthetic universality of this particular proverb—as “[w]hen you are in your own domain you can succeed; do not try to fight outside it. You would be like ‘a fish out of water’” (Junod, 2012, Vol II, p. 158)—he insists on the difference (as opposed to sameness) between the African and European proverbs. He states:

The enigmas certainly furnish us with a very precious meaning of gaining insight into the secret workings of the Native mind, as they form doubtless the quaintest part of their literature, and that which bears the least resemblance to any portion of our own . . . the obscurity of these sayings has been sufficiently obvious. Without special explanation it would be difficult indeed to discover their meaning (Vol II, pp. 157-158).

In other words, Junod interprets the Tsonga proverbs as merely enigmatic, obscure, quaint, even “precious,” and fails to “discover their meaning.” His irony, coloniality of knowledge, and intended audience are clear and consistent in his description of Tsonga aesthetics as less resemblant to “our” European literature, and his role in providing a “special explanation” to white settlers, missionaries, and native commissioners. He has no interest whatsoever in—and, indeed, has not been commissioned for—the task of reading Tsonga proverbs within their own cultural and environmental context—and much less to find any universal value. As contemporary philosopher Richard H. Bell (1997) suggests, although it is natural to be skeptical towards cultures that are “alien to us,” a way to particularly understand African thought from a non-African viewpoint is to engage in cross-cultural exercise, that is, connect “differences with something familiar” (p. 198). On the contrary, informed by and conspiring with the coloniality of knowledge promoted by classical anthropology, Junod does not only deny the relation between *Matimba ya ngwenya i mati* and the European proverb *One feels like a fish out of water*, he also refuses to draw a possibility of common humanity in rationality. Called by his sense of racial supremacy, epistemic fundamentalism, and the civilizing mission, Junod insists in what Mudimbe (1988) calls “mystification” (p. 50) of Tsonga proverbs, seeing them as “folklore,” “enigmas” and “obscurities” to which he then, himself, as the social scientist, reauthorizes a “special explanation,” furnishing himself “with a very precious meaning of gaining insight into the secret workings of the Native mind.” Mystification of the African is, of course, part and parcel of what Mudimbe (1988) calls “African genesis,” in which the social sciences displace Africa and Africans, renaming them “primitive,” as a way to justify conquest, exploitation, and development (pp. 29–33).

Nevertheless, *Matimba ya ngwenya i mati* has all along been a metaphor for socio-cultural, political, and economic “practices” as the Tsonga conceive them. The *mati*, or water—in this case, the rivers and lakes in which the crocodile lives—among the Tsonga, is of a cosmological significance, as it is seen as the space of origins, where the first humans (one man and one woman) came out from marshlands of reeds (Junod, 1912, Vol II, p. 326) growing in these bodies of water. Although Junod has recorded this Tsonga story of creation, he fails to make the connection between this proverb and the traditional genesis story of all Tsonga life coming from *mati*, water. Furthermore, the cultural and proverbial significance of the crocodile, *ngwenya*, whose source of power, according to the Tsonga saying, comes from water—just as human life itself does for the Tsonga—seems to also be lost upon Junod, despite his own detailed account of the crocodile’s various economic and political functions, in fact, more than any other river animals, including the hippopotamus: “the crocodile. . . must. . . be opened by the man of the Court. . . because it contains many things such as marvelous stones used in magic, and bracelets of the women it devoured. The chief appropriates what he pleases amongst those objects” (Junod, 1912, Vol I, p. 379). The socio-cultural-political-and-economic capital attributed to the crocodile is amplified by its symbolic value as a motif of strength in such ceremonies as rites of passage and aesthetics (songs, riddles, and stories). *Matimba ya ngwenya i mati* is a linguistic and cultural artifact that conveys a whole set of views and values through which the Tsonga view life in relation to the natural world.

Moreover, *Matimba ya ngwenya i mati* reflects the very human tendency to rationalize the surrounding environment as well as to both master and transmit knowledge about nature. As Ludwig Wittgenstein observes, “a man’s shadows . . . the rain, the

thunderstorms, the phases of the moon . . . the ways in which animals are similar to and different from one another and in relation to man . . . everything we observe around us year in and year out, interconnected in so many ways, will play a part in his thinking (his philosophy) and in his practices” (Wittgenstein, 1993, pp.127-128). In observing the flora and fauna around them (i.e., the crocodile, its natural adaptation to the rivers and lakes, and the survival advantages that its *mati* habitat provides), the Tsonga clearly derive their “thinking (. . . philosophy) from this everyday experience.” The Tsongas’ observations of the crocodile, while mixed with their religious views (Junod, 1912, Vol II, p. 72) show signs of natural philosophy and traditional biology’s study of living organisms. Upon Junod’s arrival in particular and European colonialism’s, in general, the Tsonga had not only already named the reptile *ngwenya*; they had, in fact, already developed their own zoological nomenclature for the animal world in their surrounding environment as well as their own analysis of animal behavior and their own study of animal anatomy. The saying that “*Mashindla bya ndjako*, the beast which must be opened from behind” (Junod, 1912, Vol I, p. 87) indicates both skill and knowledge in dissecting and butchering the animals familiar to the Tsonga. Although Junod (1912) observes the Tsonga dissecting the reptile (Vol I, p. 87), he does not inquire about how the Tsonga address biological questions, such as what they call the different parts of the beast and what they think their function is. Instead, he shows a preoccupation with mystifying Tsonga interactions with animals, describing as follows: “It is said that crocodiles, when cut open, are found to contain a certain number of stones, as they are supposed to eat one each year, when the rainy season comes on. One of them is chosen and smeared with special medicines and swallowed by the chief” (Junod, 1912, Vol I, p. 365). This emphasis on Tsonga spiritual dissection of the crocodile is, of course, convenient as it justifies Junod’s civilizing mission. He does not link the Tsonga’s knowledge of the crocodile’s anatomy to what he (1912) confesses that the Tsonga know of human anatomy. “I can bear testimony that they have [*Indigenous*] names for most bones of the [*human*] skeleton” (Vol II, p. 332; *my emphasis*), he confides. Then, if they already had names for “most bones of the human skeleton,” wouldn’t the Tsonga have knowledge, too, about the anatomy of other animals, such as the crocodile, coexisting in their environment? Although the Tsonga did not have the anatomical depth that Junod expected to see, the Tsonga did have nomenclature of human and animal body parts (pp. 307-333) in their own language. In addition, *Matimba ya ngwenya i mati* might, as well, have raised questions related to environmental determinism in Tsonga thought as they compare themselves to the crocodile’s strength and existence as predetermined by water, “[w]hen speaking his own tongue, the Native is a crocodile in water. He is strong, he is eloquent, he is somebody” (Junod, 1912, Vol II, p. 272). For the Tsonga, the human success or failure are determined by the physical environment that surrounds them just like the strength of the crocodile is predetermined by water.

*Matimba ya ngwenya i mati* is a classic metaphor for humanism, particularly the concept of individual’s integration versus alienation within a particular social environment and their consequences. In fact, as Lewis Gordon (2008) puts it, “[i]f we define humanism as a value system that places priority on the welfare, worth, and dignity of human beings its presence in precolonial African religious and philosophical thought can easily be found” (p. 186). By saying that *the strength of a crocodile is water*, the Tsonga know that a human being is centered and secure and enjoys humanism when properly placed within a social community. As mentioned, “[w]hen speaking his own tongue, the Native is a crocodile in water. He is strong, he is eloquent, he is somebody.” Meanwhile, the lack of humanism and/or dehumanization leads to alienation, which, for

the Tsonga, and the Mozambican in general, became a metaphysical issue with the Scramble for Africa. The anthropologist's coloniality of knowledge in tandem with Portuguese colonialism brought new forms of social alienation in Mozambique, both in knowledge and subjectivity founded on racism as the organizing principle. After the Scramble for Africa and Portuguese effective occupation of Mozambique, the social pyramid, to match the concept of the colonizer versus the colonized, became vertically and hierarchically organized among whites (born in the metropolis, those born in the colony), *mestizos*, *assimilados*, and the Indigenous, even though the Portuguese "law never recognized a color bar" (Newitt, 1995, p. 477). There was, however, a popular saying common throughout the Portuguese colonial empire, *cada macaco no seu galho* [each monkey on its own branch], meaning each individual ought to know their own place.

Although the Portuguese racial hierarchies did not have the overtly racist signs or plaques that South African apartheid (or North American Jim Crow) did to divide the colonial society, the realities of everyday inequality and discrimination reinforced a social code in which whites, Blacks, and *mestizos* were expected to know their own spheres. The unwritten racial classification was also an economic, political, knowledge, and subjectivity stratification determining one's humanism and access within and/or exclusion from the colonial society. Whites inherently had the right of way; *mestizos* had limited access through their white father; minority Black access was also highly regulated through the myth of assimilation, whereas the Black Indigenous majority, occupying the lowest stratum of colonial society, was excluded, relegated to performing *xibalo* or forced labor. While the myth of assimilation was the hammer and anvil through which the Tsonga new humanism would be authorized, this humanism was not guaranteed, as "restrictions of all kinds had been placed in the way of Africans and *mestizos*" (Newitt, 1995, p. 477). These "restrictions," of course, are founded on racism and the ironies of assimilation and the civilizing mission. Besides being barred from colonial institutions, Black Africans "[w]hen speaking a foreign [European] language. . . are [seen as] caricatures" (Junod, 1912, Vol II, p. 272). With the civilizing mission at work in Mozambique, *Matimba ya ngwenya i mati*, in hindsight, implied that the Tsonga lose their "strength," "eloquence," and "somebodiness" when the "water" or the environment in which they live has been polluted by the toxicity of European coloniality of power, both represented by Junod and Portuguese colonialism.

But *Matimba ya ngwenya i mati* does not stand alone in the collection of Tsonga proverbs, whose didactic and moralistic nature, views and values intend to exhort the human to cultivate character so that one lives a "good or just" or righteous life that avoids evil, harm, and/or "sinister" consequences. Another example is *U nga nwe mati u setela hlowo; mudjuku u ta nwa kwini* [Do not close the well after drinking from it. Where would you drink tomorrow?], a humanistic warning to neither spoil or destroy nor withhold from others that which is essential for life or life-giving. But Tsonga proverbial lessons are not naive; they recognize the human nature's inclination towards risk, danger, and harm (including self-harm), as reflected in the saying, *Mumiti wa nhengele a dumba nkolo wa kwe* [He who swallows a large stone has confidence in the size of his throat]. This is another humanistic piece of advice, meaning those who engage in dangerous activities do so at their own risk. Furthermore, resembling the European proverb that warns against publicly *airing dirty laundry*, the Tsonga say *Mbuti ya shihaha a yi beleki ntlhambini* [A good goat does not bring forth in the midst of the flock.], also signaling that there are matters that cannot be discussed, disclosed,



or practiced among those who are not the most intimate of confidants. In this way, these proverbs (and their people), hitherto devalued by social science, point to a humanistic value system with which the Tsonga have long organized society, worthy of further critical study.

## **Conclusion**

By addressing issues related to ethics, knowledge, and subjectivity, Tsonga proverbs are part and parcel of human character, spirit, and capacity to rationalize the environment, creating universal metaphysical propositions from their particular context—far too long veiled by the assumptions and ulterior motives held by coloniality of knowledge in Mozambique about African thought. As shown above, Junod’s colonialist and imperialist anthropological project—to uphold the civilizing mission through social science—reproduces African knowledge and subjectivity as other and different, creating metaphysical confusion and controversy. His use of race as the organizing principle of knowledge, knowing, and knowledge production—privileging ontology versus metaphysics—has excluded Africans from the capacity to produce knowledge and participate in common humanity. In fact, this continues to raise ethical questions about the rigor presumed by colonial social sciences and the very modern production of knowledge and subjectivity—not only their failure to provide objective truths about other humans, but their outright conspiracy to support a dehumanizing project. Such sayings as *Matimba ya ngwenya i mati* [The strength of a crocodile is water.], *U nga nwe mati u setela hlowo; mudjuku u ta nwa kwini* [Do not close the well after drinking from it. Where would you drink tomorrow?], *Mumiti wa nhengele a dumba nkolo wa kwe* [He who swallows a large stone has confidence in the size of his throat.], and *Mbuti ya shihaha a yi beleki ntlhambini* [A good goat does not bring forth in the midst of the flock.] are metaphysical insights showing a universal human capacity to rationalize the environment, master nature, and produce moral principles with which to guide humanity. Meanwhile, these proverbs continue to circulate through social transactions translated into Portuguese and other Mozambican languages, providing an alternative way of viewing and knowing this world beyond that instituted by the coloniality of knowledge in Africa.

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