



# A Commentary of Occupational Justice and Occupation-based Community Development Frameworks for Social Transformation: The Marikana Event

\*Thuli G. Mthembu; B.Sc. OT, M.Phil. (UWC), PhD (UWC). <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1140-7725>  
Senior Lecturer Department of Occupational Therapy, University of the Western Cape

## ABSTRACT

**Background:** The Occupational justice framework is significant in enabling communities to collaborate with occupational therapists to strengthen social vision and enhance occupational potential. It has been highlighted that the occupational justice framework could be used in conjunction with Occupation-based Community Development programmes to enrich social transformation through engagement in community-led occupations. However, little is known about the applicability of both occupational justice and Occupation-based Community Development frameworks in designing programmes for communities that experienced collective trauma.

**Purpose:** This commentary explores the Marikana event in terms of the occupational justice framework and its outcomes of occupational injustice. It further unpacks the occupation of protest and the factors predicting protest using the Marikana event.

**Conclusion:** The applicability of Occupational Justice and Occupation-based Community Development frameworks can help occupational therapy clinicians, educators, and students collaborate with communities through a cycle of critical consciousness to achieve social vision, transformation, and healing. Recommendations are provided in relation to community-centred occupational therapy practice, education, and future research within a South African context.

**Key words:** Occupational Justice Framework; Occupation-based Community Development Framework; Social Reproduction.

## INTRODUCTION

Occupational justice is a construct of occupational science with an inclusive agenda of strengthening community participating in health-enhancing occupations<sup>1</sup>. It refers to equitable opportunities and resources “to do, be, belong and become what people have the potential to be and the absence of avoidable harm”<sup>1:32-33</sup>. Malfitano et al.<sup>2</sup> maintain that occupational justice is connected to social inequalities and is concerned with the needs of humans as social and occupational beings. It bridges the gap between people’s well-being and restrictive social conditions<sup>1</sup>. In the critical discourse of occupational justice, it is highlighted that the health promotion tools of enabling, mediating, advocating for environments are used to facilitate engagement in occupations that are just, health-promoting, and meaningful<sup>1</sup>. Occupational rights are considered a part of the occupational justice framework.

Low wages in mining industries confirm that the occupations people engage in, where they live and work are situated within the colonial matrix of power known as political, social, economic, cultural, and historical environments<sup>3,4</sup>. In South Africa the issue of low wages emanated from the historic environment and apartheid legacy, which led to socio-economic oppressions that influenced mineworkers in Marikana<sup>3,4</sup>. Socio-economic oppression affected mineworkers and their families’ occupations related to the sourcing of water and food, preparing food and eating, shelter and sanitation at both their place of origin and where they stayed in Marikana<sup>5,21</sup>. Additionally, the mineworkers grappled with the fulfilment of their well-being needs because of low wages. This is an issue of occupational justice because the mineworkers opted to engage in unprotected strikes to ame-

liorate the socio-economic inequalities in Marikana extractive firms.

The Marikana massacre was an incident that occurred on 16 August 2012 in the North West province of South Africa. Thirty-four striking mineworkers were killed, 78 were injured after being shot by the South African police and 259 were arrested which resonated with the Sharpeville massacre where 69 protesters were killed and 180 were wounded by the police<sup>3</sup>. The Marikana massacre further disrupted the social transformation, participation and lives of mineworkers and their families<sup>3</sup>. As one widow reported, they were “stigmatised as being widows of criminals who attacked the police”<sup>6,52</sup>, and children were struggling to accept that their fathers had been killed. Marikana orphans dropping out of school while others committed suicide. This exemplifies how the massacre affected the mental health and well-being of children while reducing their occupational potential to engage in productive occupations that will assist them to cope with the aftermath<sup>6</sup>. The workplace violence and aggression represented the dark side of occupations that raised social and global concerns about the miners’ occupational injuries and death<sup>7</sup>.

The actions of the mineworkers resonate with Freire’s critical consciousness perspective, which indicates that an assessment of the “systems of social institutions and social traditions that create and maintain conditions of socio-economic oppressions should be conducted by embracing each other’s role in that system”<sup>8:13</sup>. Marikana mineworkers were oppressed, and they saw themselves as active subjects to facilitate the oppressors and other oppressed, as subjects for emancipation and liberation to enable social transformation. This term of social transformation refers to the means of restructuring all aspects of life; from culture to social relations; from politics to



economy; from the way we think to the way we live<sup>9:59</sup>. The occurrences of the Marikana massacre confirm that the deeper frictions and fractures that happened were produced to provide opportunities, reshape, reimagine, and reconstruct the social transformation through a process of critical consciousness.

Critical consciousness perspective underpins the interpretations of the Marikana massacre actions and structures<sup>10</sup>. This perspective further espouses the recognition and analysis of inequalities, injustices, and the commitment to critical actions<sup>10:18</sup>. However, little is known about the applicability of the critical consciousness perspectives in guiding the interrogations and dialogues for dismantling the social and economic inequalities among communities who have experienced the Marikana massacre. The cycle of critical consciousness is useful when dealing with issues related to inequalities and social transformation<sup>10</sup>. It is used with the continuous interrogation of power, historicising the mining industries, and critically listening to each other while engaging with the discomfort related to the injustices. Both critical reflection and occupation-based analysis are part of a critical consciousness, which are used to gain an understanding of the Marikana event in terms of the five outcomes of occupational injustice. The outcomes of occupational injustice are considered as the restrictions and stressful situations that negatively influence the human potential while “creating a health burden, reducing social cohesion by planting the seeds of discontent and social unrest and threaten people’s sense of safety”<sup>1:33</sup>. The outcomes of occupational injustice include occupational deprivation, occupational imbalance, occupational marginalisation, occupational alienation, and occupational apartheid. These outcomes are used to guide the processes of the social transformation.

The Marikana event revealed that the legacies of occupational apartheid still persist in the colonial matrix of power and the coloniality of being, which has led to the community experiencing occupational injustices<sup>3:4</sup>. The mineworkers, women and children had limited opportunities to engage in valued occupations because of the coloniality of power that reinforced occupational deprivation<sup>1:2,4</sup>. The women used to spend long hours engaging in caring and home management occupations which led them to be over occupied. On the other hand, children in the community felt that they were under-occupied, which resulted in a sense of idleness<sup>1</sup>. The mineworkers struggled with sleep and rest at night because they were stressed by the conversations of being retrenched and financial insecurities that affected their mental wellbeing. The mineworkers, women and children experienced occupational imbalance<sup>1</sup>. Additionally, the families of the migrant mineworkers felt discriminated and occupationally marginalised around Marikana because they were not fluent in the local language (seTswana) which made it difficult to access health services. Within the community of Marikana, young people felt that their lives were affected by the intergenerational poverty that had been passed on to them by the parents. Furthermore, the young people felt occupationally alienated because they were living in a zone of nonbeing and meaninglessness life that perpetuated the mental health incidences related to suicides and depression in the community<sup>4</sup>. It is important that the outcomes of occupational injustice are acknowledged and used to guide occupation-based programmes related to social transformation in Marikana. This contributes to Hammell’s invitation that occupational therapists need to “address occupational injustices by collaborating with other to create equitable opportunities for all people to enhance their well-being through engagement in occupations”<sup>4:215</sup>.

The Occupation-based Community Development (ObCD) is a framework developed by the University of Cape Town and

provides a useful way to address the social determinants of health that influence engagement in occupations of social transformation<sup>11</sup>. This framework also allows the formation of social interactions and interrelationships that enable marginalised community members to share their needs and enables occupational therapists to form a collaborative-partnership with communities to address injustices. The ObCD framework offers a practical way of engaging in occupations related to occupational rights, well-being, quality of life and social transformations and has been used in the Western Cape province<sup>12</sup>. Occupational therapists can analyse and describe the Marikana event using the occupational justice framework and its outcomes of occupational injustice to promote social transformation through the ObCD<sup>11</sup>. This means that occupational therapists should work collaboratively with community members to design occupational therapy programmes using community strengths and needs related to collective trauma, unhealthy conditions, and social unrest. The aim of this commentary is to explore and describe the Marikana event in terms of the occupational justice framework and its outcomes of occupational injustice. Furthermore, the commentary unpacks the protest as an occupation and the conditions social reproduction that resulted in a protest in Marikana event. Additionally, it proposes actions for community-centred occupational therapy practice through ObCD to promote social transformation.

Protest as an occupation deals with issues of occupational justice such as equitable opportunities and resources related to cultural, economic, political, and social processes that challenge the status quo or decisions that are seen as unfair<sup>13:165</sup>. There are dark sides of protest as an occupation including militancy, harmful, unhealthy or health-compromising, damaging, deviant, destructive, antisocial, illegal and immoral occupations<sup>8</sup>. Militancy is a form of labour actions that are susceptible to facilitate wildcat strikes accompanied by violence and anger from striking employees fighting for their fundamental rights<sup>14</sup>. People who experience injustices where they live and work engage in the occupation of protest and labour actions to address the conditions of social reproduction such as poor resources, skills, money, and education<sup>3:5</sup>. Drawing from Bourdieu *habitus*<sup>15</sup>, social reproduction refers to the process of maintaining and continuing the social structures and systems based on the demographics, education, and inheritance of material property or legal titles<sup>15</sup>. Additionally, social reproduction includes the availability of job opportunities, wages, work environments, food security, rest, and leisure opportunities as well as community environments that are influenced by a variety of capital. Social reproduction involves four different types of intangible assets, namely economic, cultural, human and social. ‘Cultural capital’ refers to the process of passing inheritances and legacies from generations to generations through education and training to enhance a sense of belongingness, opportunities, and personhood, as part of occupational legacy that promote social transformation<sup>15</sup>. However, Bourdieu cautioned that cultural capital is a major source of social inequality that affect social transformation in families and communities<sup>15</sup>.

Occupations are a central issue for occupational therapists who acknowledge the importance of social transformation at micro-, meso- and macro-levels of communities<sup>12</sup>. A large and growing body of literature has indicated that individuals and population in communities can organise their lives, to the extent that they are able to survive and flourish<sup>12</sup>. It is well established from a variety of studies that the adoption of a critical perspective in occupational science is central to contextual practice which has benefits related to culturally relevant, participatory and ethically responsible practice<sup>12</sup>. This is important for occupational therapists because it enables them to consider

their professional responsibility in promoting occupation, as part of human rights. Therefore, occupational therapists can facilitate social transformation in circumstances similar to that of the Marikana event by embracing a variety of strategies related to the cycle of critical consciousness to promote a praxis-oriented practice.

## PROPOSED ACTIONS

Although many varied actions applying the ObCD framework for addressing the conditions of social reproduction and outcomes of occupational injustice have been proposed, this commentary will focus on the following three:

### Community-centred occupational therapy practice

The Community-centred practice and community-driven approaches should be adopted in ameliorating social conditions and collective trauma that occur in communities exposed to circumstances that result in collective physical and psychological trauma impacting on their occupational capacity<sup>7</sup>. Community-centred occupational therapy is a practice whereby occupational therapists work with communities through partnership and collaboration to design and implement programmes that support community members with common interests, goals and recovery needs<sup>11,12</sup>. The ObCD could be used to design and implement community-led occupational therapy programmes<sup>11</sup>. This framework provides a platform for stakeholders, such as occupational therapists and communities to collaborate with each other and reflect on the well-being needs and rights of the communities that they serve<sup>5</sup>. The collaborative-partnerships between occupational therapists with those from differing cultural and social backgrounds promote interconnectedness, interdependence, and opportunities for occupational potentials. The ObCD framework operates as an enabler to strengthen community actions in the identification of solutions to problems that are neglected in society. The process of identification of solutions is facilitated through participation in meaningful and intentional occupations that promote health and well-being by addressing the outcomes of the occupational injustice discussed above<sup>13</sup>. This commentary contributes to the existing knowledge of occupational justice by responding to Hammell's invitation that "it is time for occupational therapists to address occupational injustices"<sup>5,215</sup>. Thus, occupational therapists should apply the iterative processes within the framework, namely i) initiating intervention, ii) designing programmes iii) implementation, and iv) monitoring, reflection and evaluation of these programmes.

In the stage of initiating intervention, occupational therapists and stakeholders should engage in critical reflection and analysis of the influences of social, health, economic, cultural, and occupational inequalities that restrict engagement in productive and economic occupations. In the second stage of designing intervention occupational therapists need to collaborate with communities to map assets needed for the intervention and apply occupational decision making and choice<sup>11</sup>. In third stage of implementation, community members would engage in productive and skilful conversations while engaging valued and meaningful occupations that espouse their occupational potentials and possibilities to transfer knowledge and skills to other generations. The last stage of monitoring, reflection and evaluation focus on the successes and challenges of the communities' engagement in the occupations that facilitate social transformation<sup>11</sup>.

## Occupational therapy education

- Undergraduate and postgraduate teaching and learning in the field of community-centred practice should be framed using the ObCD framework so that occupational therapy students can formulate collaborative-partnerships with communities. This is within the forte of occupational therapy to address outcomes of occupational injustices and conditions of social reproduction through engagement in occupations.
- Undergraduate students should learn to apply the ObCD framework, as part of the community-centred practice. This would enrich the students' knowledge about community development, community capacity, and community empowerment. The students would learn to collaborate with the community to identify possible solutions to neglected problems related to social, economic, and political environments.
- Newly qualified occupational therapists should be able to apply critical reflexive practice about the real socio-economic, and political issues that influence disadvantaged community's human occupations and engagement in a South African context.
- Bodies, such as the Occupational Therapy schools, and Occupational Therapy Association should be encouraged to collaborate and organise symposiums and conferences to unpack the significance of community-centred occupational therapy practice to address conditions of social reproduction and collective trauma. This would expand the insight into the applicability of ObCD and social transformation. In addition, occupational therapists may come together to share ideas and create opportunities for research to evaluate and consolidate these models and frameworks.

## Future research

- Participatory action research can be conducted to explore community members' experiences of community participation in collective occupations that enriched their health and well-being to address collective trauma. This could also report on the reflections derived pragmatically through the process.
- A collective case study design using an interpretive orientation within a qualitative worldview may be employed to explore how the conditions of social reproduction influence community empowerment.
- Intervention research could be conducted to guide the design and development of community-centred occupational therapy intervention programmes for community members who experienced collective trauma in society.

## CONCLUSION

Applicability of the occupational justice framework and ObCD is a growing field in community-centred occupational therapy practice that is aimed at enriching social transformation in communities that have experienced a collective trauma. It has been highlighted that protest actions were considered to ameliorate the social and economic inequalities and injustices they represent. It has also been shown that the protests appeared as a form of social transformation that people engage in to challenge the *status quo*, which influences their human rights and well-being needs. Overall, this commentary highlighted that occupational therapists, and scientists could collaborate with the community members to design and implement occupational therapy programmes to redress neglected problems and occupational injustices related to conditions of social reproduction. It can be envisaged that the critical reflections regarding the engagement in the identified possible occupations, may help

in learning how to work alongside the communities using ObCD to promote interconnectedness and interdependence, and social transformation through occupations.

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## Corresponding Author

\*Thuli G. Mthembu

Email: [tmthembu@uwc.ac.za](mailto:tmthembu@uwc.ac.za)

