

Beyond Decolonisation: Restorative Therapy as a Foundation of African Psychology

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Abstract

This article advances the argument that for psychology in Africa to authentically transition to African psychology, decolonial approaches, while necessary, are insufficient. Drawing on the historical trajectory of psychology in South Africa—from its complicity in apartheid-era oppression to contemporary practices that continue to marginalise African epistemologies – this paper proposes restorative therapy as an essential framework for therapeutic practice in African contexts. Restorative therapy, conceptualised here in parallel to restorative justice principles, centres the restoration of dignity and personhood as fundamental to psychological healing and transformation. Building on Nwoye's comprehensive articulation of African personhood and Mpofu's contextual approach to counselling in Africa, this article argues that restorative therapy must become central to how therapy is conducted in African contexts, serving both reparative functions and enabling a genuine epistemic shift from psychology in Africa to African psychology. The article examines how psychological assessment tools and therapeutic frameworks have historically functioned as instruments of oppression against people of colour, analyses the limitations of decolonial therapeutic praxis alone, and proposes practical pathways for implementing restorative therapeutic practices that honour African conceptions of personhood, community, and healing.

Keywords: African personhood; dignity; reparation; restorative justice; South African psychology, therapeutic justice