

The Department of Clinical Psychology is launching a Public Lecture series *under the auspices of Sedibeng discourses on Epistemic Justice*
Theme: Sedibeng Epistemic Justice Discourses

07 April 2022

 **14h00 – 16h00** |  **Ms Teams** 

<https://bit.ly/3u9ZyV7>

Background to Sedibeng Epistemic Justice series

Historically Western colonial conquests have been predicated on unjust wars waged against the indigenous conquered peoples. On the basis of this conquest the West claimed the ethically unsustainable “right of conquest.” Upon this right, the colonialists committed widespread and ruthless epistemicide. Resistance to this epistemicide took various forms; for example, philosophy of liberation, theology of liberation, Black theology and recently decolonial theory and practice. In all these trends there are agreements and disagreements. These agreements and disagreements actually affirm the geopolitics of knowledge and the politics of liberation. Against this background, decolonial theory is challenged *to some extent* from the African experience. The core argument of this challenge is that decoloniality and decolonial theory *ought to be replaced* by *mothofatso* with particular reference to the African experience of colonization. *Mothofatso*, a vernacular concept of one of the indigenous peoples language, Northern SeSotho (*Sepedi*) means the resolute reaffirmation that the humanness of the indigenous Africans is second to none. *It is the ethical imperative to continue to humanize constantly and insistently both the colonised and the colonizer despite the formal “end” of colonization.* In this sense arguments such as fees must fall, curriculum change and curriculum transformation fall within this discourse. Sedibeng epistemic justice discourse series forms part of this trajectory of resisting epistemicide, particularly but not exclusively, by the West.

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By virtue of the ethically unsustainable “right of conquest” the colonizer from the West *claimed sovereign title to the territory of the indigenous conquered peoples and, imposed its*

epistemology, religion and ethics on the indigenous peoples of “South Africa”, the rightful owners of the land from time immemorial. The practical result of this imposition was and, continues to be, the destruction and distortion of the epistemologies, religions and ethics of the indigenous conquered peoples. Decolonisation, granting reluctantly only political independence to Africa retained and preserved the dominance of the epistemology, religion and ethics of the West. This situation prevails in contemporary Africa, including the much acclaimed “new” South Africa inaugurated since April 1994. Sedibeng is the life sustaining water – the pluriversity and, not the university - from which the indigenous conquered peoples, including the “Coloureds” and the Indians, quench their recurring thirst for knowledge aimed at the attainment of epistemic and socioeconomic justice as concrete practical manifestations of integral liberation. The plurality, diversity and continuity of perspectives on the quest for epistemic and socioeconomic justice constitute discourses on epistemic justice.

The first inaugural public lecture in this series goes under the title:
**THE SEDIBENG SCHOLAR-CRITIC AS ILLUMINANT:
A PSYCHOLOGICAL READING OF THURSTAN SHAW'S
ARCHAEOLOGICAL FINDS AT IGBO-UKWU, NIGERIA**
By Professor Augustine Nwoye

ABSTRACT

In his famous lecture on the racist image of Africa, Chinua Achebe, the illustrious African novelist, of blessed memory, delivered an eloquent rebuttal to “the desire or one might indeed say the need in Western psychology to set Africa up as a foil to Europe, as a place of negations at once remote and vaguely familiar, in comparison with which Europe's own state of spiritual grace will be manifest” (Achebe, 1990, pp.2-3). In accomplishing his aim, Achebe chose as a source of his data and target of criticism, Joseph Conrad's classic novel, *Heart of Darkness*, in which Africa was depicted in the most disparaging light, as a place without history.

In this presentation I pursue the same deconstructive goal as Achebe and will attempt a critical interrogation and revision of the racist image of Africa boldly displayed in colonial psychiatry (McCulloch, 1995). Thurstan Shaw's archaeological finds at Igbo-Ukwu, Nigeria, will form the primary data for accomplishing this objective. Through the contrapuntal examination of the data to be presented, the negative racist representation of the African mind as essentially child-like or lacking in complexity, propagated in much of Western psychological literature will be called into question. This undertaking is considered significant as part of the goal of African psychology is to contribute toward the rehabilitation of the image of Africa grossly tainted and denigrated in the research and writings of prejudiced European psychiatrists and novelists. Another important contribution of the paper is the implication it suggests that, apart from ancient Egypt as a key source of pride in our past, there are other

sites and sources of pride in pre-colonial Africa where the ingenious epistemic achievements of our ancestors are no less deserving of justified celebration.

Prof Nwoye: Academic biography

The first name of the keynote speaker, Augustine, is a happy coincidence with the launch of this series. St Augustine of Hippo is an African, rooted in Africa. He is often presented as an integral part of the history of Medieval philosophy in the West. The effect is to underplay his rootedness in Africa and thus portraying him as a Westerner. In an attempt to restore the African image of St Augustine, Nigerian scholar Innocent Maduokolam Osuagwu in his book: *Early Medieval history of African philosophy situates St Augustine in Africa.*

The first name of the keynote speaker is consistent with the contemporary restoration of St Augustine to Africa. There is merit in the argument that St Augustine was epistemologically WESTERN even though he was geographically African. It is salutary to note that unlike his namesake, Augustine Nwoye calls into question the disparaging way in which Africa is depicted in the Western psychological literature.

Dr. Augustine Nwoye was, until recently, Professor of Psychology and Fulbright Scholar in the Discipline of Psychology at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Prof Nwoye has made original and unique contributions to the definition and study of African Psychology as a nascent academic discipline in universities in Africa. His inaugural lecture at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, entitled: *What is African Psychology the psychology of?* was well-acclaimed and is now published in the prestigious journal, *Theory & Psychology*. His other important contributions to the field have appeared in the *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, *Journal of Family Therapy*, *The American Journal of Family Therapy*, *South African Journal of Psychology*, *British Journal of Special Education*, *Journal of Family Psychotherapy*, *Contemporary Family Therapy*, *Dialectical Anthropology*, and *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Family Therapy*. His upcoming book with Oxford University Press is called *African Psychology: The Emergence of a Tradition*. Prof Nwoye has held distinguished teaching positions in several other universities in Africa, including: The University of Jos, Nigeria; Kenya a University, Kenya; The University of Dodoma, Tanzania, and Covenant University, Nigeria. During his time at Kenya a University Prof Nwoye helped to establish its Department of Psychology, and served as the pioneer Chair of that department. Prof Nwoye has won several visiting fellowships and given public lectures in many universities in continental Africa, Asia, Europe and North America, including the Universities of Cambridge and Suffolk (England), Toronto and Calgary (Canada), Stockholm (Sweden), and Universiti Sains Malaysia (Malaysia).

By far, his most cited publication is *What is African Psychology the psychology of?* which has attracted 2,068 reads. Others include: *An Africentric Approach to Clinical Diagnosis and Treatment* (2015); and *Remapping the Fabric of the African Self: A synoptic theory* (2006).

Prof Nwoye spent his Fulbright Scholarship in the US in 2015 at the College of the Holy Cross and Howard University.