

Conference in Cape Town: Toward a Decolonial Psychology

An increasing number of psychologists writing from postcolonial settings in the Global South have observed that the majority of work in psychology still reflects and serves the interests of a privileged minority in the WEIRD¹ settings that disproportionately inform the science. They have challenged researchers and practitioners to articulate different understandings of thinking and being, more conducive to broader human welfare, as a crucial step toward a psychology suitable for the entire planet.

In response to this challenge, SPSSI joined a group of South African partners to sponsor a small conference, *Toward a Decolonial Psychology: Theories from the Global South*, in Cape Town, South Africa on February 21-22, 2019. The venue for the meeting was the University of the Western Cape (UWC), an institution with a proud tradition of decolonial struggle that provided the foundational training for many of the psychologists in attendance. Beyond the historical significance of the venue, the history of decolonial struggle came alive in many sessions, including a conversation on *Decoloniality and the Black Consciousness Psychology of Steve Bantu Biko*, featuring Kopano Ratele (University of South Africa and South African Medical Research Council) and Saths Cooper (former President of both the International Congress of Psychology and the International Union of Psychological Science). Among other topics, the conversation touched on Cooper's work as a student activist and his imprisonment for his anti-apartheid activities (during which he shared a cell block with Nelson Mandela).

The conference featured keynote presentations by Nelson Maldonado-Torres from the Department of Latino and Caribbean Studies at Rutgers University (USA), Shose Kessi from the Department of Psychology at the University of Cape Town (UCT; South Africa), and Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni from the Change Management Unit at the University of South Africa. An important theme across these and other presentations was the need to confront the colonial violence inherent in mainstream knowledge forms. This colonial violence is evident not only when researchers and practitioners impose mainstream knowledge upon postcolonial spaces, but also in the everyday application of such knowledge in WEIRD centers of power. Researchers have charged that mainstream psychology eagerly promotes unsustainable modern lifestyles associated with ecological degradation and colonial violence. Against this coloniality of knowledge and being, contributors to the conference called for psychologists to play a leading role in denaturalizing the racist status quo of Eurocentric global domination. The beneficiaries of such a decolonial psychology are not only people in postcolonial spaces, but also the eager participants in Eurocentric modernity who, in the words of James Baldwin, "have brought humanity to the edge of oblivion: because they think they are white."²

¹ That is, Western, educated, industrial, rich, and (supposedly) democratic; see Henrich, J., Heine, S. J., & Norenzayan, A. (2010). The weirdest people in the world? *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 33, 61–83.

² Baldwin, J. (1984). On being white . . . and other lies. *Essence*, 14(12), 90–92.

Feeling disappointed that you missed the event? I have good news. You can find video recordings of sessions at the following links:

- February 21 at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e0xytvYYkrk&t=174s>
- February 22 at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qiSCJ01avKg&t=31s>

In addition, SPSSI sponsored a conference webinar featuring presentations from Sunil Bhatia (Connecticut College), Jesica Fernández (Santa Clara University), and Joseph P. Gone (Harvard University). You can find a recording of that webinar here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IVUgdCmianU>