

Voice to the silent: An ecology of local  
knowledge in psychology

by

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Maria, for the time and space

Declaration

I declare that: *Voice to the silent: An ecology of local knowledge in psychology*, is my own work, that all the sources used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references, and that this dissertation or research project was not previously submitted by me for a degree at another university.

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Notes about the text:

1. All participants in this research granted permission to present their conversations here.
2. Names have been changed to protect the identities of the participants except where this was specifically not requested.
3. To simplify the reading the feminine third person pronoun has been used throughout.

## SUMMARY

### **Voice to the silent: An ecology of local knowledge in psychology**

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Mainstream psychology is argued to be a discipline of western orientation and thus problematic when applied in non-western contexts. It is recognised that psychology has an important role to play in the developing context of South Africa and thus the relevance and appropriateness of psychology as an applied discipline in both practice and research is of concern to local practitioners. Previous research into the problem has been presented from western academic frameworks but little has been recorded exposing local voices on the subject, or proposing useful approaches to praxis. In an attempt to address these shortcomings in the discipline, this study explores the academic context as well as some local voices from the field on the relevance of mainstream psychology as currently practiced generally in South Africa. A framework for reflecting on practice at a meta level, in an ecologically sensitive approach, is proposed.

Considering the history of the problem, constraining factors to the development of a more appropriate praxis in psychology are seen to include epistemological issues in the discipline emerging from western academic hegemony and contributing to the perceived previous elitism of psychology as a discipline. The study deciphers issues around epistemology in as far as they impact on the problem. Epistemological issues call for an exploration of indigenous or local knowledges in an attempt to arrive at a relevant and appropriate praxis of psychology in the local context.

In the handling of the research material, the study adopts a narrative literary stance in a postmodern attitude, to avoid epistemological issues arising from conventional approaches to research. The voices from the previously silenced majority are presented through stories of experiences involving human problems and psychotherapy in the township of Mamelodi, east of Pretoria in South Africa.

The research material is discussed using ecological and evolutionary language at a meta level. The researcher distinguishes between what takes place in a professional dialogue and how she reflects on this process. Ecological and evolutionary language at the reflexive meta level is considered to facilitate a context-sensitive approach to psychology as a discipline practiced in a non-western context.

Key terms: local knowledge; epistemology; ecology; western; non-western; hegemony; context; culture; globalisation; developing; indigenisation

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