

ACEPS PRESENTS



ACEPS
THE AFRICAN CENTRE
FOR EPISTEMOLOGY AND
PHILOSOPHY OF SCIENCE

OPPRESSIVE COMPLICITY AND MORAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR COLONIAL INJUSTICE

Tancredo Tivane

15 JULY 2025 @ 11:00-13:00 SAST (UTC+2)

“Colonialism is morally wrong!” Few claims enjoy broader agreement. Moral philosophers who take up this claim usually identify the wrong in terms of foreign imposition, violation of territorial rights, cultural erasure, or the violation of procedural standards of political association (Ypi 2013; Stilz 2015; Valentini 2015; Renzo 2019; Moore 2019; Ferguson & Veneziani 2021; Nine 2023, etc.). These accounts frame the wrong of colonialism as a matter of denial or restriction of agency of the colonized. I argue that while not mistaken, they are incomplete. They tell us what colonialism takes—but not what it builds in its place.

Colonialism does not merely suppress agency—it reshapes it, then returns it in a distorted form. This allows it to persist even after formal decolonization is achieved. It produces what I call **conditioned agency**: the colonized subject retains the appearance of choice, but the content of those choices reflects a moral and political framework engineered by the colonizer. The result is a form of participation that I call **oppressive complicity**—a condition in which the colonized enforce colonial ideology, or internalize colonial values, not always as a willing collaborator, but not as a passive victim either.

Oppressive complicity complicates dominant models of moral responsibility for colonial injustice—both backward-looking (blame) and forward-looking (repair). Prevailing approaches often separate the two, claiming that blame distracts from reparative justice. I reject this separation. I propose instead a dual framework that integrates both.



Tancredo Tivane is a PhD candidate (ABD) in Philosophy at the University of Arkansas, Fayetteville (USA). His areas of specialization are moral philosophy, philosophy of race, political philosophy, and decolonial theory. His research sits at the intersection of these fields, engaging topics such as moral agency, consent, moral complicity, and moral responsibility (blame, repair), often in the context of racial and colonial injustice. He has authored three articles—two accepted for publication and one currently under review—on these topics.

His dissertation, *Oppressive Complicity and Moral Responsibility for Colonial Injustice*, examines how colonial systems reconfigure the agency of the colonized in ways that complicate standard models of blame and reparative justice. He argues that existing frameworks fail to account for the structural conditioning of agency that leads colonized peoples to participate in their own subjugation (oppressive complicity)—not as passive victims, but not as fully free agents either.

**African Centre for Epistemology
and Philosophy of Science**
11th Floor Boardroom @ UJ on Empire
University of Johannesburg

Inquiries: dimphom@uj.ac.za / shened@uj.ac.za

ACEPS: <https://www.uj.ac.za/aceps>

Organisers: Shené de Rijk, Dimpho Moletsane, Veli Mitova

The University of Johannesburg encourages academic debate and discussion that are conducted in a manner that upholds respectful interaction, safety of all involved, and freedom of association as enshrined in the law, the Constitution, and within the boundaries of the University policies. The views expressed during events are expressed in a personal capacity and do not necessarily reflect the views of the University of Johannesburg.



20 YEARS
— 2005-2025 —

Our Future. Reimagined.