

Community psychology and its (dis)contents, archival legacies and decolonisation

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Abstract

This article serves as the introduction to the Special Issue on Liberatory and Critical Voices in Decolonising Community Psychologies. The Special Issue was inspired by the Sixth International Conference on Community Psychology, held in South Africa in May 2016, and resonates with the call for the conscious decolonisation of knowledge creation. We argue that the decolonial turn in psychology has re-centred critical projects within the discipline, particularly in the Global South, and offered possibilities for their (re)articulation, expansion, and insertion into dominant and mimetic knowledge production. In the case of Africa, we suggest that the work of decolonising community psychologies will benefit from engagement with the continent's multiple knowledge archives. Recognising community psychologies' (dis)contents and the possibilities for its reconstruction, and appealing to a liberatory knowledge archive, the Issue includes a distinctive collection of articles that are diverse in conceptualisation, content, and style, yet evenly and singularly focused on the construction of insurgent knowledges and praxes. As representations of both production and resistance, the contributions in this issue provide the intellectual and political platforms for social, gender, and epistemic justice. We conclude that there are unexplored and exciting prospects for scholarly work on the psychologies embedded in the overlooked knowledge archives of the Global South. Such work would push the disciplinary boundaries of community psychologies; help produce historicised and situated conceptions of community, knowledge, and liberation; and offer distinctive contributions to the global bodies of knowledge concerned with the well-being of all of humanity.

Keywords

Africa, critical, community psychologies, decoloniality, knowledge archives, liberatory

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The Special Issue, resonating with the call for the conscious decolonisation of knowledge creation, is envisaged as a space to critique the assumptions and far-reaching influences underlying the dominant knowledge economy in community psychologies, considered to be largely shaped by imperialism; colonialism and coloniality; neo-colonialism; globalisation; and Euro-American ethnocentricism. The Issue was inspired by the Sixth International Conference on Community Psychology (ICCP2016), held in South Africa in May 2016, which sought to contribute to the larger global project aimed at dislodging the ideological, intellectual, and material arrangements of the hegemonic knowledge economy; called into question that which is construed as critical knowledges; and reflected on the meanings of liberation and community. As a prologue to our review and discussion of the specific contributions made to the Special Issue, below, we identify and locate the early iterations of community psychologies, principally in South Africa. We also offer a historicised reading of Africa's knowledge archives as a partial analysis of the archaeology of knowledge production on the continent and its confluences with community psychologies.

In one sense, the focus of the Special Issue is neither exceptional nor altogether new. Many of these concerns have been raised in earlier works located in critical, feminist, and liberatory manifestations of community psychology in South Africa, Latin America, the Middle East, Australia, New Zealand, and some parts of the Global North (a review hereof is beyond the scope of this article but is well documented in the literature). In South Africa, specifically, debates starting from the mid-1980s raised questions about the intersections between power, the psychological, materiality, colonial occupation, and knowledge (e.g., Anonymous, 1986; Butchart & Seedat, 1990; Cooper, Nicholas, Seedat, & Statman, 1990; Dawes, 1985, 1986; Eagle, Hayes, & Bhana, 1989; Foster, 1991; Manganyi, 1991; Nicholas, 1993; Nicholas & Cooper, 1990; Potgieter & de la Rey, 1997; Seedat, 1997; Seedat, Cloete, & Shochet, 1988; Shefer, van Niekerk, Duncan, & de la Rey, 1997; Strumpfer, 1981; Turton, 1986; Vogelmann, 1987; Whittaker, 1991). These analyses focused on the ethnocentric, classist, racist, and gendered foundations and formations of Euro-American enactments and theories of psychology (see also Bulhan, 1981, 1985; Seedat & Lazarus, 2011; Suffla & Seedat, 2004). Such work also questioned the relevance and appropriateness of Euro-Americanised psychologies for the African context, implicitly and at other times explicitly, highlighting matters related to epistemic justice, agency, and independence (see also de la Rey & Ipser, 2004; Holdstock, 1981; Ratele, 2017). Those concerned with racial oppression produced knowledge about the racialisation of Black subjectivities, the erasure of Black experiences, and the exclusion of Blacks in the processes and institutions of knowledge production (see also Duncan, van Niekerk, de la Rey, & Seedat, 2001; Seedat, 1993; Seedat & MacKenzie, 2008; Stevens, Duncan, & Hook, 2013; Stevens, Franchi, & Swart, 2006).

Irrespective of the historical, geographical, and socio-political context, particularities and issues, it would seem that critical work within the discipline was patently focused on producing knowledge to resist and expose dominant methodological, epistemic, and intervention traditions; support transformative and social justice ideals; and advance human welfare and liberatory-oriented theories. In critical community psychology, this work – broadly embodying a liberatory, social justice, and resistance-oriented knowledge archive – contested the inherited Euro-American knowledge archive, which traces back to the Swampscott Conference, held in Boston, USA, in 1965. Considered by many in the Global North as ‘the origin of community psychology’, the Swampscott Conference was influenced by Euro-American knowledge traditions and liberal democratic ideals of the civil rights movement, and in fact persisted the colonising impulse to universalise notions of ‘truth’, community, subjectivity, and social change (see Fryer, 2008). The Swampscott event was also silent on the workings and the ideological effects of ruling psychologies, which are predicated on control and erasure, and serve interests antithetical to the principles of social and distributive justice, inclusion, relational accountability, and participation (see Seedat, 2015). Unlike the psychology of decoloniality that awakened a humanism and an attitude founded

partly on compassion, generativity, and promises of distributive justice (see Seedat, 2017, this issue), ruling psychologies minister to the hegemonic neoliberal order. Ruling psychologies are enacted to naturalise extractive relationships, acquisitiveness, and accumulation, and privilege extreme notions of individualism and competitiveness. With little or no mindfulness about history, legacy, and community – and their intersections with contemporary forms of alterity, inequality, and exclusion – ruling psychologies have limited regard for social responsibility, collective transformation, and pluriversality.

Much of the critical corpus in psychology has tended to remain marginal in relation to ruling psychologies. However, the decolonial turn, introducing a particular grammar and conceptual frame into the social sciences and humanities, has redrawn attention to the key issues raised by feminist, critical, indigenous, liberation, Marxist, and Black psychologies. The decolonial turn offers ‘a shift in orientation, a form of theory and critique generated by that shift, and a set of relations’ (Maldonado-Torres, 2017, p. 113) that unmasks oppression, injustice, and liberation in respect of knowledge, power, and being, thereby placing the accent on that which is customarily silenced and obscured by hegemonic psychologies. Thus, the decolonial turn has effectively re-centred critical projects within the discipline, particularly in the Global South, and offered possibilities for their (re)articulation, expansion, and insertion into dominant and mimetic knowledge production in psychology generally, and community psychology specifically.

In the case of Africa, the work of decolonising community psychologies may do well to remain sensitive to and engage with the continent’s multiple knowledge archives, as well as their intersections. Here, we draw on the work of Zeleza (2007) to delineate a few of the distinct intellectual traditions that arose during the different phases of African historiography. Zeleza (2007) recognises the Afro-Christian, Afro-Islamic and griot archives or libraries, which emerged during the ancient era, and the colonial archive, which arose during the era of the slave trade and was consolidated during the colonial period, and at the same time engendered opposing perspectives. In the context of coloniality, these knowledge archives remain in consonance with each other (see Zeleza, 2007).

The Afro-Christian archive, articulated by theological and philosophical thinkers, viewed history as both universal and meta-historical and celebrated divinity. The texts of St Augustine from present-day Algeria, for example, greatly influenced the development of Christianity. The Afro-Islamic archive, represented by eminent African thinkers of the time, made seminal contributions to the growth of Islamic theology and philosophy and promoted the diffusion of Greek, Roman, and Asian knowledge to Western Europe. Islamic scholars from North, West, and East Africa produced works dealing with their respective societies. The Islamic tradition inspired the establishment of many universities in Africa. The griot archive, embodying oral traditions and narratives cast in a participatory ethic, and typically associated with West Africa, was vast in its scope; among others, it aimed to connect the past to the present and cultivate a sense of collectivity. The griots, as guardians of tradition, fulfilled multiple roles; they served as advisors, mediators, interpreters, teachers, warriors, praise singers, and musicians. The griots of West Africa are emblematic of the global indigenous knowledge archive.

The colonial archive, tracing back to the 15th–19th centuries and marked by the Atlantic slave trade, etched a Eurocentrism that constructed Africa and Africans variously as ‘primitive’, ‘savage’, and other-than-human. From its inception, this archive – as articulated in early travelogues and historical and anthropological writings – manufactured the continent and its people as deficient and lacking history, culture and humanity, and reified difference (see Mudimbe, 1988; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013). Work produced in reaction to the colonial archive, which may be read as the early decolonisation of African knowledges, established the basis for 20th century nationalist and Pan-Africanist thought. Each of these traditions aligned to specific methodologies and interpretations in their engagement with historical knowledge sources, but together supported the humanisation

and historicity of Africans. The 20th century also witnessed the emergence of the post-colonial tradition, which was suspicious of grand narratives of nation, class, gender, and the like. Still, 'the epistemic erasures, omissions, fabrications, stereotypes and silences' (Zezeza, 2007, p. 15) on which the colonial archive was founded persist to this day.

Each of these knowledge archives would have spawned particular theories and enactments of community psychology, even if the field as we know it did not exist at the time, and even if the construction of "community psychology" – historically yoked to Eurocentric interpretations – did not and does not recognise these. The Afro-Christian archive may have regarded modes of being in the world as integral to erudition. The Afro-Islamic archive may have produced psychologies for psycho-spiritual and ethical praxis. We may surmise that griots were central to the promotion of the overall psycho-social well-being of their societies. They seemed to have been significant in producing a historicised psychology in which memory of the past is linked to psychologies of the present. Conversely, the colonial archive has produced ahistorical, acontextual, and pathologising interpretations of individuals and their social systems, and universalised their imbedded psychologies based on epistemic modes of Western knowledges and their pairing with power. These deny and appropriate Africans' capacities to know, represent, and act for themselves and their communities, and propagate discourses of othering. Knowledge traditions that have emerged in reaction to the Eurocentric order, to which theorisations and enactments of community psychology continue to be bound, work to reclaim and reorient the subjugated psychologies of Africa as a project of emancipation. The works of Fanon (1963, 1967), Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986), Biko (1978), and Bulhan (1985), among others, inspired by a decolonising attitude, described the psychology of oppression and asserted critical intellectualism, Black political independence, and anti-racial praxis as the founding blocks of liberatory psychology.

The aforementioned sites of knowledge do not represent an exhaustive set of African knowledge archives, nor is it our intention here to undertake a detailed analysis of those identified above. Instead, we appeal to the historical account of African knowledges to expose the extent to which the colonial or Western archive has succeeded in discounting and submerging Africa's other knowledge archives and associated intellectual traditions, and simultaneously to display the possibilities for retrieving some of the near invisible knowledge archives of Africa. Despite the uneven exchanges that may have occurred and continue to occur between these archives, the work of developing decolonised (community) psychologies must therefore be located within the larger project of centring African knowledges as they are constituted by these archives.

(De)Coloniality, epistemic attitude, and ethical praxis

This Special Issue, recognising community psychologies' (dis)contents and the reconstruction possibilities arising from archival engagements, includes a distinctive collection of articles that are diverse in conceptualisation, content, and style, yet evenly and singularly focused on the construction of insurgent knowledges and praxes. In probing and troubling the onto-epistemologies underlying community psychologies, the authors assume an oppositional epistemic attitude that privileges a decolonial view of humanity, one that is fundamentally concerned with ethical praxis in promoting forms of justice.

More specifically, three perspectives frame this issue of the *South African Journal of Psychology* (SAJP). First, true to the spirit of social justice-oriented scholarship, the Issue is a space where the contributors collectively disrupt orthodox, received, and taken-for-granted knowledges, so as to reconstitute – generatively – the boundaries and scope of what we have come to understand as community psychology(ies). Second, the Issue is inhabited by disobedient voices and positionalities, including those of activists, students, and poets, and non-hegemonic knowledge traditions that

jointly agitate for the continuing reorientation and reconstitution of the content, production, dissemination, and consumption of knowledges in community psychology. Third, the Issue represents an organically-evolved sense of community among us that has supported the deepening of dialogue and fostering of solidarity across geographies, interests, and intellectual passions, as may be evident to the reader in the contributions that follow.

Representative of both the central theme and track themes of ICCP2016, the contributions to this Special Issue are organised around four key contemporary conversations in community psychology: *Knowledge Production and Contestation in Community Psychology*; *Decoloniality, Power, and Epistemic Justice*; *Teaching and Learning in Community Psychology*; and *Community Psychology in Context*. Emblematic of ethico-political praxis (see Maldonado-Torres, 2008), the contributions are focused on restoring epistemic justice as an ethical practice in community-centred psychological work, and thereby resisting the machinations of coloniality and domination. In so doing, the contributors invoke and mobilise concepts inherent to liberatory-oriented decolonial archives.

Accordingly, we read Nelson Maldonado-Torres' article, in part, focused on community psychology as knowledge, and the contestation for representation and epistemic authority, as an attempt to stir conversations about the politics of knowledge production and how particular concepts and theories have gained ascendancy in community psychology. Maldonado-Torres and his two discussants, Ursula Lau and Fatima Castillo, inspired by decolonial thought and a commitment to resist and undo the 'coloniality of knowledge, being, and power' (see Maldonado-Torres, 2016), make a case for pluriversal enactments of community psychology that are attuned to geographical and temporal particularities. Together, these analyses go to the heart of community psychology's disciplinary identity. Works set on reconstituting disciplinary identity would need to, as Lau suggests, unsettle the power dynamics inherent in efforts to decolonise engagement and, as Castillo urges, delink from neoliberal discourses and practices. Once situated within the larger intellectual project seeking to critique methodologies used in research, intervention, and analysis, Maldonado-Torres' work may be viewed as a call for self-reflection and self-critique of community psychology as a knowledge-making enterprise.

Resonant with Maldonado-Torres and his discussants, and linked to the theme *Decoloniality, Power, and Epistemic Justice*, Christopher Sonn and his co-authors steer us through a conversation focused on transcending "disciplinary boundaries" and "speaking back to critical knowledge, liberation and community". Their article, written in a conversational style, contributes to dialogues about the theories and practices of decoloniality, and the propositions that decoloniality may offer for re-shaping the identities and representational forms of community psychology. In reflecting on the conference proceedings, Sonn and his co-authors suggest that decolonial expressions of community psychology may be conceptually and pragmatically deepened through trans-disciplinary and social movement engagements and alliances, multilingual discussions, and institutional transformative work in academia and broader society. In acting on the call for multilingualism, decolonial thinkers are simultaneously invited to consider the influences of academic language that may conceal our positionalities and police knowledge-making processes, and ultimately exclude the very marginal voices that the project of decoloniality seeks to engage. As language constitutes a form of authority, privilege, and disciplinary power, a decolonial community psychology is necessarily obliged to demystify academic language through inclusive language ideologies and language practices that value multiplicity and differentness.

Overlapping the themes of *Knowledge Production and Contestation in Community Psychology* and *Decoloniality, Power, and Epistemic Justice*, the articles by Garth Stevens and his co-authors and Floretta Boonzaier distinctly focus our gaze on racialisation and subjectivity from colonial to contemporary times. As integral to the processes of deconstructing the enduring legacies of coloniality and experiences of Blackness across diverse contexts, these authors alert us to the dominant

psychologies underlying the relationality between Blackness and Whiteness, the racialisation of gender, and the multiple dimensions of Blackness. Stimulated by *Underneath Blackness*, a knowledge-making project initiated by co-author Deanne Bell, and framed by an intimate conversation between transnational selves, experiences, and contexts, the contribution by Stevens and his associates exposes the yet oblique tendencies in community psychology's engagement with the analytics of Blackness. This critique resounds in Boonzaier's focus on the colonality of gender (see Lugones, 2008). In unmasking the interaction of racism and patriarchy in the geopolitics of representation, Boonzaier implicitly questions community psychology's accountability in addressing the epistemic violence enacted by forms of knowledge tethered to sexism and racism (see also Lykes & Moane, 2009). Cautioning against essentialised constructions of Blackness, we interpret the two analyses as an implied attempt to rethink the meanings of liberation and epistemic justice for oppressed people.

Ibrahim Makkawi, a scholar indigenous to Occupied Palestine, and his discussant, Rachael Fox, as well as Ronelle Carolissen and her associates, offer a critical focus to the structure, form, and substance of teaching curricula. Their respective articles, concerned with *Teaching and Learning in Community Psychology*, appeal for a scrutinisation of the shaping influences of pedagogical traditions and interpretive frameworks on teaching and learning. Their contributions are indicative of the innovations, as well as tensions in curriculum design and instruction within globalised and localised developments in tertiary education, and community psychology in particular. Their work alludes to the intersections between students as knowledge producers and citizens, and the demands of professionalisation and career pathing. They suggest that the particularities of our diverse contexts warrant a pluriversal orientation to teaching and training. This being the case, are there nonetheless core competencies that should be universalised across teaching programmes? Do community psychology teaching curricula stand apart from those of liberation, feminist, social, political, or critical peace psychologies; should they stand apart? Perhaps most pertinently, what is it that community psychologies should train graduates to do in the 21st century? (see, for example, Watkins & Ciofalo, 2011).

Makkawi, as well as Carolissen and her colleagues are rightfully calling for destabilising comfort zones and dominant knowledge structures that exclude and prevent innovation; they are challenging universities to rethink their identities and practices as training institutions (see also, for example, Boidin, Cohen, & Grosfoguel, 2012; Long, 2016; Mbembe, 2016; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2016). Institutions of higher learning in many parts of the world are in the throes of social and economic crisis. Students are challenging the content and structure of curricula, funding arrangements, and the representivity of our teaching faculty (e.g., Gibson, 2016; Kamanzi, 2016; Naidoo, 2015). Student protests are asking fundamental questions about the roles and functions of universities and the intellectual responsibilities of academics and researchers, which has sparked a fierce and sometimes highly polarising debate. Universities that are governed by neoliberal managerial regimes, and marked by robust debates and students' articulations of decolonised learning and development, require community psychology to create and support spaces for engaged and socially relevant research, despite the many institutional constraints on knowledge production. Fox, in her response to Makkawi, draws our attention to the disruptive power of critical knowledge and the danger that it represents for neoliberalised and other dominant institutional formations. Together with intensifying student agitation for transformation, perhaps this requires community psychology to reassess how it does resistance in neoliberalised university spaces while simultaneously performing liberation in marginalised and subaltern spaces. Thirusha Naidu's poem at the closing of this Special Issue is both an act of activism – the workings of art and activism – in its performance of disruption and resistance, as well as a turn to decolonial aesthetics (see Maldonado-Torres, 2016), that speaks to contemporary struggles in the academy. In this, Naidu alludes to the inverse danger of *not* criticalising our intellectual spaces, praxes, and engagements.

The article by Glenn Adams and his colleagues, which draws from a Special Thematic Section of the *Journal of Social and Political Psychology* (JSPP) on decolonising psychological science, offers an instructive analytic lens through which one may come to understand decolonising approaches to community psychology practices in context, including some of the work shared in this issue. The contributions by Shose Kessi and Mohamed Seedat are located within the theme *Community Psychology in Context* and, respectively, embody enactments of community psychology across diverse contexts and subject areas. Consistent with the core principles of decolonial thought and practices, their analyses are intended to accord representation to enactments of community psychology, which raise questions about the roles of community psychologists, and epistemological and ontological diversity within such enactments.

Kessi and her two discussants, Gabriela Tavara and Shabashni Moodley – both of whom are students – ask questions about the social structures within which community psychologies are done. Likewise, they prompt us to think about the possibilities and challenges inherent to performing decolonised community psychologies. Kessi's contribution raises the profile of work that goes to the idea of distributive justice; work that speaks to such issues as violence, gender, race, sexual orientation, migration, dispossession, health, homelessness, food security, socio-economic inequality, climate change, and disease outbreaks; work that also asks us to reconsider the relevance and appropriateness of community psychology. However, there is also the matter of substantive justice, which calls for a closer look at community psychology's epistemic and ontological assumptions. Kessi pushes us to rethink the assumptions about what and who constitute community (see also Urmitapa Dutta in Sonn et al., 2017, this issue), as well as about intervention and liberatory praxes.

In consonance with Zeleza's (2007) idea of engaging multiple archives or libraries, Seedat's article nudges established disciplinary boundaries in community psychology and intersects these with critical peace psychology to extend knowledge. His analysis attempts to be responsive to the submission on knowledge decolonisation and Africa's knowledge production that the reclamation of African humanity obliges us to focus on key moments, spaces, and transformations. His inscription of a psychology of humanism rests on the examination of Nelson Mandela's leadership and South Africa's development interventions at a defining juncture in the country's political history. In considering the humanising impulse of decoloniality, Seedat invokes Hook's (2004) notion of psychopolitics in reference to both the politicisation of the psychological, and the application of psychological theorisations to politics. It is this conceptual complementarity that evinces both the strengths and potential of critical community psychology as a liberatory project, and as much its limitations in addressing the material, epistemic, and ontological conditions that mark subjectivities and knowledges under colonising regimes.

While Kessi's and Seedat's conceptualisations and praxes disclose many of the analytic principles delineated by Adams and his co-authors, they appear simultaneously to resist the conceptual mapping that emerged from the Special Section of the JSPP. They seem to place between and also beyond the three decolonising approaches gleaned and explained by Adams and colleagues: decolonisation as indigenous resistance, decolonisation as accompaniment, and decolonisation as denaturalisation. We agree with Adams and colleagues that these approaches are not mutually exclusive. We also appreciate their contribution as a generative intervention in creating continuities in the recent revival of decolonising thought in psychology, and as a provocation to examine further the complexities and multiplicities inherent to our collective decolonising efforts. In this respect, Adams and associates advance a sound foundational base of concepts and methodologies – the "psychology of decolonisation" – to build upon. In Tuhiwai-Smith's (2012) conceptualisation of the conditions that are central to the struggle for decolonisation, this psychology of decolonisation articulates the coalescing of ideas, social categories, and tendencies that she observes as key to catalysing opportunities for transformation.

Whatever their particularities, decolonising practices of community psychologies are signified by their attitudinal orientations that affirm situatedness, marginal voices, liberatory modes of knowledge creation, ethico-reflexive praxes, non-hierarchical learning and teaching, and dialogical community engagements, constantly intending to transcend the obsession with formulaic methods. As representations of both production and resistance, the contributions contained in this issue provide the intellectual and political platforms for social, gender, and epistemic justice, and inspirations for the continued decolonising of community psychology(ies) by activist-scholars and scholar-activists.

Even though all of the contributors seem to appeal to and invoke the liberatory knowledge archive, there are other unexplored and exciting prospects for conducting scholarly work on the psychologies embedded in the overlooked knowledge archives of the Global South. Such works, requiring imaginative and intrepid visions, would push the disciplinary boundaries of community psychologies; help produce historicised and situated conceptions of community, knowledge, and liberation; and offer distinctive contributions to the global bodies of knowledge concerned with the well-being of all of humanity.

We reiterate that the Special Issue is a call for a critical, compassionate, and resistance orientation to decolonising community psychology(ies) that embraces patience, struggle, and determination. In this spirit, we close with an extract of the poem *Still I Rise* by Maya Angelou (1978).

Leaving behind nights of terror and fear
 I rise
 Into a daybreak that's wondrously clear
 I rise
 Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave,
 I am the dream and the hope of the slave.
 I rise
 I rise
 I rise.

Acknowledgements

We extend our sincere appreciation to our comrades, friends, and colleagues – Nelson, Ursula, Fatima, Christopher, Caterina, Urmitapa, Peace, Bret, Garth, Deanne, Hugo, Ornette, Floretta, Ibrahim, Rachael, Ronelle, Eduard, Tanya, Puleng, Brett, Shose, Gabriella, Shabashni, Glenn, Luis, Tuğçe, Ludwin, Ignacio and Thirusha – for their scholarly, imaginative and activist contributions to this Special Issue. We are grateful to the reviewers for their constructive and insightful comments. We thank Nick Malherbe for the administrative assistance provided on the Special Issue. We especially appreciate the support of the SAJP Editor-in-Chief, Anthony Pillay, and the space that he provided for the diversified forms of writing contained in this issue.

Funding

The authors received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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