# Introducing Decolonial Feminist Community Psychology

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This volume is situated within the revitalised 'decolonial turn' in psychology, a turn which has been argued to recentre critical approaches such as feminist, critical, liberatory, indigenous, black and Marxist psychologies within the discipline (Seedat and Suffla 2017). The colonial and imperialist roots of psychology are now almost taken-for-granted in much critique of the discipline and the ways in which it functions in the mainstream (e.g. Howitt and Owusu-Bempah 1994; Kessi and Boonzaier 2018; Macleod et al. 2017). In the postcolonial period, psychology in Africa (and elsewhere) has been argued to have 'retreated into scientism' involving the uncritical application of western scientific methods to the study of African people (Mama 1995). In reflecting on the post-liberation period on the African continent Amina Mama (1995) has argued that:

> "… (psychologists) seemed to have buried their head in the sand of empiricist methods, travelling about the continent administering questionnaires and tests to obscurely defined groups of subjects, and then using these to make all manner of generalisations about an African subject who has remained entirely mythical." (p. 38)

In South Africa in particular, the location from which a large part of the contributions to the book emerge, there has been longstanding recognition of the role of psychology in enabling and justifying institutionalised racism through apartheid (Nicholas and Cooper 1990). Given this history, as well as the contemporary ways in which knowledge production within psychology continues to pathologise those

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with long histories of suffering (Kessi and Boonzaier 2018), there is little argument against the idea that psychology must indeed be decolonised. Everyday life in global Southern contexts is steeped in inequalities, global capitalism, migration, refugee crises, violence, migration, and dispossession that provide a rationale for adopting a wide-angle approach to well-being and liberation. There is growing recognition that the problems-in-contexts described as ‘postcolonial’ resonate with and emerge from histories and ‘presents’ of imperialism, colonialism and metacolonialism (Bulhan 2015), neoliberalism and hyper-capitalism. Despite technological advancements that could be argued to bring people in diverse parts of the world closer together, divisions between the global North and South have deepened and have been maintained through the rise of neoliberalism, predatory hyper-capitalism, and the institutionalisation of poverty though development imperatives (Escobar 1995). At the same time, the dominance of hegemonic, Euro-American-centric modes of theorising shapes knowledge economies in the South and often misrepresent or speak over local knowledges. The lens of decoloniality is useful for recognition of the continuities in the decimation, destruction and dispossession wrought by colonialism and for challenging the ways it manifests in the present through knowledge production, representation, and everyday life.

In this book, however, we make a case for feminist critique to be situated alongside the decolonial critique of psychology, community psychology in particular. In contemporary contexts, decolonisation discourses specifically centre racialised subjectivity, to a large degree ignoring the ways in which this is intersected with other forms of subjectivity and power, with gender being amongst the most important. The book aims to bring together the strands of critique in knowledge production and theories, emergent methodologies and critical and reflexive community psychology practice to argue for a decolonial feminist community psychology.

## Towards a Feminist *and* Decolonial Community Psychology

Formally recognised as a sub-discipline of psychology for approximately 50 years (Yen 2008), the development of community psychology was seen as a response to ongoing debates around psychology’s relevance as a discipline (Martín-Baró 1994). There is consensus in the literature (see Yen 2008) pointing to the origins of the field of community psychology as located in the USA with the Division for Community Psychology established in the American Psychological Association (APA) in 1967. Scholars, such as Yen (2008), speak to this emergence of community psychology as shaped by the social and governmental policies of the time and the social and civil rights movements of the 1960s. Community psychology has been defined as “the applied study of the relationship between social systems and individual well-being in the community context” (Hanlin et al. 2008, p. 524). It can be distinguished from other fields of psychology through its focus on ecological, community and prevention perspectives, as well as on social power and the privileging of praxis in addition to theory (Nelson and Prilleltensky 2010; Rappaport 1977).

Community psychology's development has been characterised by is heterogeneity, methodologically and in terms of practice. In the west, in contexts such as the US, the development of this sub-discipline has emerged concurrently with the discourse of social and civil rights, while in southern contexts such as Latin America and South Africa, discourses of liberation and resistance to colonial oppressions have been key to community psychology's assembly (see Martín-Baró 1994; Seedat et al. 2001). Countries such as Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Germany, Puerto Rico, Venezuela, Mexico and Cuba saw the development of community psychology in the 1970s, often in the context of political oppressions and exclusions and propelled by discontent with mainstream clinical psychology (Yen 2008). Importantly, forms and interpretations of this sub-discipline are variable and have been taken up differently across global contexts, with some approaches functioning to reinforce the status quo rather challenge it (see Seedat et al. 2001). Euro-American, malestream (cf. Arnfred and Ampofo 2010) forms of community psychology, although diverse, largely serve to reinforce the capitalist and patriarchal status quo, rather than challenging oppressive systems at the structural level (Seedat et al. 2001).

In a similar vein, although positioned as a universal response to social injustices and practices of liberation, scholars have shone a light on the incompatibility of some feminist perspectives with movements towards decoloniality (Kurtiş and Adams 2015). Mainstream feminist psychology's departure from liberatory principles is in part the product of neo-colonial manifestations of hegemonic Euro-American, northern feminist knowledges but also as Kurtiş and Adams (2015) suggests, its "complicity with neo-colonial tendencies [within] hegemonic psychological science" (p. 388). Western and mainstream enactments of feminism in psychology have tended to universalise understandings of 'gendered oppression' and liberation through the lens of western, educated, industrialised knowledges (Kurtiş and Adams 2015). Much of these discursive forms of colonisation reproduce racial and cultural knowledges that leave womxn[1] living outside of the Euro-American centre – usually black, poor, and gender non-conforming persons who are affected by racist, patriarchal, misogynistic and homophobic violence– subject to their own erasure, othering and pathologization (Ampofo 2010; Mohanty 1988). Positioned as 'producers of knowledge' (Connell 2014), feminist theory and activism located in the global North have largely favoured the interests of the middle- to upper-class, white, cisgendered individuals – imposing western feminist values on others, whilst re-presenting those in the global South as unitary, singular, powerless and ignorant (Mohanty 1988). At the same time, neoliberal discourses of empowerment, as Rutherford (2018) has argued, has had a long reach in global development initiatives. The key character who figures in this discourse of 'empowerment', is the "racialised, third world girl" (Rutherford 2018, p. 624) who

[1]We use the terms 'womxn' and 'mxn' to unsettle the essentialisation of normative notions of gender and sex. Through these terms, we aim to centre the experiences of black womxn and mxn located in the global South, as well as those who identify as transgender, intersex, queer and all womxn and mxn who have found themselves erased from dominant norms of femininity and masculinity.

is saved by white philanthropists and/or her 'feminist sisters' in the global North. Through the imposition of western, white feminist values, womxn in the global South are positioned as: "look[ing] to their liberated sisters in [Western] worlds for rescue" (Kurtiş and Adams 2015, p. 389).

Despite the goal of feminist community psychology being to attain social justice, the approach also presents with a number of problems, particularly in its mainstream form. Currently, mainstream forms of feminist community psychology are regarded as having much potential, yet are "designed to liberate a privileged few to participate in the ongoing domination of the marginalized many" (Kurtiş and Adams 2015, p. 389). It appears that feminist forms of community psychology have struggled to free themselves from the shackles imposed by the domination of white, western feminism. Scholars have moved these debates forward to imagine more critical, liberatory agendas for feminist and community psychologies, which first and foremost require engagements with a process of decolonization, and to importantly liberate these scholarly practices and approaches from neo-colonial modes of *doing* and *thinking*.

The work of Frantz Fanon (1967) presented an important historical turn in critiquing mainstream psychological science, moving the discipline towards a decolonising agenda. In sidestepping the pathologizing and individualist mantras of mainstream psychological science that position experiences of distress and oppression as a product of the self, Fanon (1967) provided a situated understanding of the psychological and emotional distress experienced by the colonised within the oppressive structures of colonialism. Martín-Baró (1994) through his agenda for the development of a liberation psychology, broke away from the individualising agendas set forth by mainstream psychological thinking and instead cultivated a consciousness of a community psychology praxes for the disenfranchised and one with social justice at its centre. Since these early contributions, there have been a range of works toward theorising the decolonisation of the discipline of psychology, including its different branches such as community psychology. According to Seedat and Suffla (2017) decolonising approaches to community psychology are united 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" (p. 428)

In addition to these advances towards establishing a decolonial community psychology, we centre African, black, intersectional, postcolonial and decolonial feminist perspectives because of their capacities to recognise that the colonial project was not only a racializing one, but that it was fundamentally gendered too. African feminist thinkers, for example, have long recognised the importance of imperialism and coloniality for shaping racialised and gendered subjectivity and power relations (Lewis 2011; Mama 1995; Oyěwùmí 1997). African feminist approaches have also foregrounded an understanding of womxn's experiences within and after colonisation and imperialism. Furthermore, decolonial feminist Maria Lugones (2010)

argues that the decolonisation of gender/feminism cannot be accomplished without simultaneous attention to racial, class and other inequalities. This book aims to foreground such perspectives in its argument for a decolonial feminist community psychology, centring perspectives that have been marginalised.

The challenge to decolonial thinking has not only emerged from scholarship on the issue but has also been highly visible in decolonial activisms. It is no accident that protests around decolonisation have occurred in primary spaces of knowledge production, such as universities, across the global North and South (e.g., #RhodesMustFall in South Africa and at Oxford University; #AsiGanaChile – The Chilean Student Movements; #RoyallMustFall at Harvard University[2]). At the same time, some of the social movements around decolonisation have faced challenges and contestation around their marginalisation of feminist (in particular, intersectional feminist) concerns and politics (Omar 2016). Black feminists, such as bell hooks (2015), have cautioned against the erasure and silencing of womxn in activist movements based on advancing racial justice. In this regard, social movements that do not seriously address intersecting oppressions and identities are at risk of failing to advance true social justice.

## Articulating a Decolonial Feminist Community Psychology

This book includes contributions that provide exemplars of modes of engagement, research, dialogue and reflexive practice that espouse the principles of an emerging decolonial feminist community psychology. In the first chapter Mavuso, Chiweshe and Macleod draw on narrative-discursive methods infused with African feminist theorising in their work on pre-abortion counselling and decision-making amongst Zimbabwean and South African womxn. They show how African feminist theorising enables understandings of womxn's experiences and resistances informed by race, culture and womxnhood – highlighting the multiplicity and complexity of African womxn's experiences and challenging essentialised notions informed by white western feminist discourses that we refer to above. At the same time, Mavuso and colleagues' work advances a decolonial feminist agenda through thinking beyond the research paper and the advancement of their own academic careers in the development of a policy brief on pre-abortion counselling guidelines emergent from the narratives of the womxn themselves.

In another chapter that foregrounds a methodological approach toward the advancement of a decolonial and feminist community psychology, Távara draws on her feminist participatory action research with Andean womxn in Peru. She illustrates how Andean womxn who have suffered long and continued histories of colonial and patriarchal oppression reflect, contest and make meaning of development initiatives introduced in their communities. Távara shows how the

[2] See for example https://www.theguardian.com/education/2016/apr/13/racism-harvard-law-school-slaveholder-seal

project served as a space for the womxn to actively reflect on their local knowledges in relation to dominant development discourses that enter their community. Importantly, the chapter engages with how womxn challenged western feminist notions of the assumed victimhood of indigenous Others by subverting ideas about the assumed passivity of womxn who actively take up subjective positions as 'mothers' or those involved in assumed 'feminine' tasks such as knitting. Womxn reclaimed these meanings and actively construct themselves as the producers of knowledge about their own lives. This work resonates with the earlier arguments about how western feminist discourse positions womxn in the global South as "singular monolithic subjects" (Mohanty 1988, p.333) without agency.

Our chapter follows on from Mavuso and colleagues' and Távara's contributions that engage with methodologies that have the potential to exemplify a decolonial feminist community psychology, this time within the context of research on intimate partner violence. Given the high levels of mxn's violence in the context of intimate heterosexual relationships, a focus on transgenerational traumas and the epistemic violences enacted on people is required. We suggest that these relationships can be interrogated through life history methodologies on the lives of black mxn who have been historically oppressed, and who currently perpetrate partner violence against womxn. Importantly, we attempt to bring into view the complex intricacies of privilege and disadvantage that shape their lives through our reflections on the application of the life history methodology with two mxn. Fundamentally, we engage with and begin a critical dialogue around what it means to humanise research participants, particularly marginalised black mxn who have been positioned in research and public discourse as inherently violent, isolating their very racialised and classed identities as 'risk factors' for violence. We thus foreground potential opportunities offered through the life history approach and what that might mean for a decolonial feminist community psychology as well as its capacity for challenging normalised ways of *doing* and for consciousness-raising.

Decolonial feminist work involves ongoing critique, including the critique of approaches that are assumed to be liberatory. Participatory action research is an established method within community psychology that is informed by liberatory ideas around participation, consciousness and social change. Although these ideas are central to decolonial feminist work, the methods by themselves cannot be assumed to be inherently progressive. In the fourth chapter of this volume, Cornell, Mkhize and Kessi critically interrogate the participatory dimension of a photovoice process. They reflect on a photovoice process from three varying positions of power, the academic research supervisor, the postgraduate student researcher and the research participant. This interrogation of 'participation' is an important critique because, although participants are frequently regarded as co-researchers and included in the research process (usually the data collection phase) they rarely participate in the scholarly dissemination of the work, being excluded from the production of knowledge more broadly. Cornell and colleagues' chapter also amplifies an issue that is rarely articulated in academic writing, namely an illustration of the process of intergenerational feminist mentorship – work that is fundamental to nurturing the next generation of feminist, decolonial scholars.

Continuing with critiques around the taken-for-granted transformative nature of the PAR project put forward by Cornell and colleagues, Malherbe, Suffla and Everitt-Penhale interrogate issues of youth voice, power and reflexivity through the process of participatory film-making and the enactment of critical feminist reflexivity. They reflect on a youth driven participatory film-making initiative on teenage pregnancy aimed to facilitate a 'coming to voice' and conscientisation of young South African people. The intention of the project was to work against discourses that position young people as incomplete adults, lacking in agency and activist potential, whilst at the same time working against the silencing of the experiences of young people in both feminist and decolonial community psychologies. In what they describe as complex work that is fraught with contradiction, they reflect on the concerns, challenges, uncertainties, regressions and successes inherent in community-centred work that hope to engage with liberation but may inadvertently interact with coloniality. In this regard, the emancipatory potential of youth's 'coming-to-voice' to enact social change requires constant critical reflexivity to approximate a decolonial feminist community psychology praxes.

The chapter by Ali provides a critique of the decolonial turn in community psychology through illustrating how the identity of Muslim womxn in Australia are shaped by colonial structures of power that are simultaneously heteropatriarchal. Ali focuses specifically on the ways that gender intersects with sexuality, race, ethnicity and religion in the lives of Australian womxn. She draws on the Borderlands theorising of feminist scholar, Gloria Anzaldúa to reveal that the womxn's gendered bodies become a platform for ethnic Muslim communities to construct borders around identity and to resist colonial power by asserting moral superiority. Ali shows that her work, beginning with Borderlands theory, with its focus on multiplicity enables us to move beyond binarisms that have been inherent in much mainstream psychological theorising. Ali's work concurs with our argument that beginning with the work of feminists in the global South means that questions around resistance to coloniality and imperialism will already be centred. Decolonial feminist work must therefore, not only engage in critiques of western, imperial feminisms but must begin with and centre feminisms emergent from the global South which are developed from the experiences of womxn in these geopolitical contexts.

The chapter by Matutu follows by providing insight into what a decolonial feminist research agenda might offer for a reconsideration of research ethics in community psychology. The chapter interrogates notions of community, especially applied to a critique of marginalised groups, specifically LGBTQI+ groups and their erasure in community psychology scholarship. Centring feminist decolonial research in his work with non-gay identifying mxn who have sex with mxn, for Matutu, means interrogating questions about how the research might be humanising, non-oppressive and ethical. On the latter point, the chapter makes an important contribution on the limits of the regulatory ethical requirements that researchers are compelled to adhere to and how these are limiting for the kinds of decolonial feminist community psychologies that we imagine. Matutu undertakes critical ethical reflexivity to interrogate the ethical quagmires he encountered in his research and to make a case for a considered ethics in practice as ongoing and dialogical.

Psychology, and psychological knowledge production has not traditionally centred questions of activism. Both decolonial and feminist work has centred social justice and made the point that we must begin by centring the needs and desires of the 'epistemologically disenfranchised' (Garuba, personal communication). At the same time decolonial work means that we need to push the boundaries of our disciplinary thinking; which for psychologists could mean that we need to begin with questions of activism to ask: where does activism fit into our scholarly endeavour? This is a question engaged in the chapter by Kiguwa and Segalo who write and identify as two decolonial feminist academics. They reflect on the challenges and the gaps in relation to teaching, supervision and mentorship, research and community activist work and how these gaps serve as obstacles to the fulfilment of a decolonial feminist community psychology. For Kiguwa and Segalo, a decolonial feminist psychology disrupts the binarism between scholarly and activist engagements towards transformative praxes that works in the interests of the disenfranchised.

The theme of activism is also taken up in the final contribution by Shefer who illustrates the operation of a decolonial feminist community psychology in activist spaces of social movements and artistic expression. Shefer reiterates the earlier argument that decolonisation work must foreground gender, as well as class, race and other intersectionalities, and in some cases, this form of intersectional engagements in such movements may already exist. Through what she terms, *performative activism* and *activist performance*, Shefer provides powerful examples of the ways in which young people in South Africa have deployed intersectional and decolonial discourse that brings the inequalities of race, gender, sexuality, age, dis/ability to the fore through a range of creative, performative modalities that also engage the body, affect, materiality and subjective experience.

## Decolonial Feminist Community Psychology: An Ongoing Conversation

When we put out a call for contributions to this volume we had envisaged receiving contributions that would help us to develop and envision an emerging decolonial feminist community psychology. We had not imagined that such a form of psychology already exists. The contributions to this volume illustrates that a decolonial feminist community psychology is already here. This decolonial feminist community psychology takes questions of activism seriously, begins with decolonial and feminist theorising from the global South, engages critical reflexivity and critical ethical reflexivity, is anti-essentialist, acknowledges multiplicity and intersectionality, centres the voices and concerns of the disenfranchised, deconstructs notions of community, considers issues of representation and whose interests might be served by the work. We consider the development of this work as ongoing and we are pleased to have begun this conversation.

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