


# A Decolonial Africa(n)-Centered Psychology of Antiracism

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## Abstract

Coloniality represents the contemporary patterns of power and domination that emerged in the late 15th century during the so-called classic era of colonialism. Although much of psychology and psychological thought has adhered to the logic of coloniality, there is also a considerable body of work that has sought to decolonize psychology. It is within this latter tradition of decolonizing psychology—which seems to have gained increasing attention in recent years—that we situate this article and its attempt to articulate a decolonial Africa(n)-centered psychology that addresses itself to antiracism. While we concede that there are myriad ways by which to practice and theorize such a psychology, we focus specifically on collective antiracist struggle and everyday antiracist resistance. We conclude by considering questions of universalism and epistemology as they relate to a decolonial Africa(n)-centered psychology of antiracism.

## Keywords

African-centered, antiracism, coloniality, decoloniality, racism

## Introduction

Across the globe, 2020 was a time of uprising. Simmering rage over systemic racism transformed into people all over the world mobilizing against racism, police brutality, and the devaluation of Black lives. Unlike similar expressions of protest from several years earlier, however, the 2020 protests appeared to have widespread popular support. Organizations and institutions across multiple sectors—including corporations, professional sports organizations, and religious communities—rushed to signal solidarity with protestors, to express opposition to racism, and to demonstrate reflexive engagement with their complicity in the preservation of white supremacy.

Organized psychology was not isolated from these developments. The protests and related conversations prompted many psychologists to reconsider the field's complicated relationship to racism and antiracist action. On one hand, the study of topics related to racism has a long history in the field of psychology (e.g., Augoustinos & Reynolds, 2001; Foster, 1991; Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000), and some observers emphasized this body of work as they proposed a role for psychology in antiracist struggle (e.g., S. O. Roberts & Rizzo, 2021). On the other hand, organized psychology has often served as an accomplice to white supremacy (e.g., Howitt & Owusu-Bempah, 1994; Stevens, 2003). Accordingly, many psychologists took the occasion of the

protests to turn the analytic lens back on the discipline to reconsider the racism of psychology itself (S. O. Roberts et al., 2020).

Viewed from an African context, it is difficult to deny that psychology is a racialized, colonial discipline (Duncan et al., 2001). Its professional origins in the late 19th and early 20th centuries emerged from a dominant European culture whose existence depended on empire and white supremacy (Holdstock, 2000). Although psychology proved a natural ally to the project of scientific racism (see Howitt & Owusu-Bempah, 1994), it has also been a fertile site for more insidious manifestations of racism via an intense focus on the individual and individualism, as well as the individually raced body. All of this aligned with psychology's preoccupation with an asocial individual psyche, divorced from history and ideology (see Maldonado-Torres,

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2016; Ratele et al., 2018; Stevens, 2018). Today, we see these echoes play out in psychology's adherence to neoliberalism (i.e., the aggregate of ideas that animate the contemporary mode of racial capitalism), whereby psychology offers an intense focus on manageable, knowable, and racialized subjects at the expense of understanding the socioeconomic origins of psychological problems (Adams et al., 2019). Predicated on a "white standard" (Dupree & Kraus, 2020), a psychology of this sort insists on strategies to tolerate and cope with, rather than change, an uncaring and oppressively racist capitalist society (Bulhan, 1985; King, 1968; Martín-Baró, 1994; Ratele, 2019). In many respects, then, psychology has mirrored racism as a social value under neoliberal capitalism (see Suffla et al., 2001) and allowed intergroup hostility (oftentimes grounded in racism) to appear inevitable, if perhaps undesirable (Holdstock, 2000).

### *An Africa(n)-Centered Decolonial Psychology*

It is in the spirit of critical psychology that we take the opportunity in this article to share some decolonial reflections on the psychology of racism (and, therefore, the racism of psychology). Our contribution forms part of a recent movement that seeks to locate psychology—or perhaps, rather, psychologies—in the project of decoloniality (e.g., Barnes & Siswana, 2018; Bhatia, 2018; Boonzaier & van Niekerk, 2019; Carolissen & Duckett, 2018; Ciofalo, 2019; Kurtiş et al., 2015; Macleod et al., 2020; Ratele, 2019; Seedat & Suffla, 2017). Although perspectives vary, a key and enduring component of decolonial thought is a focus on the geopolitics of knowledge or attention to the locus of enunciation and hermeneutical resources that inform academic accounts. In contrast to the basis of hegemonic psychology in settings that are white/Western, educated, industrial, rich, and reputedly democratic (WEIRD), decolonial perspectives center experiences of the marginalized majority of people living in the formerly colonized, or racially marginalized, settings of the Global South. In the present article, we build upon and through this work on decoloniality and psychology (as well as the longer tradition of decolonial psychology out of which this work flows; for example, Bulhan, 1985; Enriquez, 1992; Fanon, 1952/1967; Martín-Baró, 1994; Seedat, 1997) to consider how an Africa(n)-centered decolonial psychology—that is, psychological work that takes Africa as its center of gravity and its locus of enunciation (Long, 2017; Makhubela, 2016; Moll, 2002; Nsamenang, 2007; Nwoye, 2015, 2017; Ratele, 2017a, 2017b; Segalo & Cakata, 2017)—addresses itself to antiracism.

We find it useful to contrast our understanding of an Africa(n)-centered psychology with calls for diversification. Although a shift in epistemic standpoint to an Africa(n)-centered perspective has much in common with

recent calls to enlarge psychological science, it entails much more than simply directing attention to settings and social actors that have, in large part, been neglected by mainstream psychological science. Although diversity is crucial when dealing with issues of representation and inclusion, it is not in itself sufficient to create antiracist, decolonizing psychological praxes. Indeed, liberal conceptions of diversity in psychology can even function to fetishize difference and set up token inclusionism at the expense of meaningfully addressing the coloniality of power (see Malherbe & Dlamini, 2020). In this regard, antiracism may be co-opted by and recuperated into new forms of African, Black, or other non-Western neoliberalism (see Stevens, 2018). Moreover, although the making *Black* of psychology "might go some way towards decolonising psychology in Africa, decolonisation entails more than racial and linguistic representation. Numbers are attractive because they are easily quantifiable; however, decolonisation must extend beyond counting to something more slippery" (Ratele et al., 2018, p. 340). As Gordon (1995) elegantly articulates the problem: "a liberating transformation of the everyday involves *an absence* of representative blackness. For in such a world, black presence would be no more unusual than any other presence in the world; it would, in short, be mundane" (pp. 42-43; our emphasis). Therefore, we posit that decolonization within and beyond psychology must go further than diversity. Rather than diversify hegemonic WEIRD science by incorporating observations about African settings, Africa(n)-centered decolonial perspectives call for something more transformational, namely: re-thinking (perhaps even *unthinking*) hegemonic WEIRD science from the vantage point of African settings (see e.g., Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015; Osei-Tutu et al., 2021; Ratele, 2019).

In this way, an Africa(n)-centered decolonial perspective reverses the typical scientific gaze. Hegemonic accounts typically position patterns observed in WEIRD settings as something akin to a default natural standard, and they tend to portray patterns in African settings as exotic or pathological deviations that require explanation. In contrast, an Africa(n)-centered decolonial perspective takes African settings as privileged epistemic standpoints and turns the analytic lens to re-think psychological expressions of WEIRD modernity from that standpoint.

It is important to emphasize here that the point of turning the analytic lens is not to re-center the very knowledge we wish, to coin a phrase, to destitute; whose power we want to denude (see Becker & Aiello, 2013). Instead, an Africa(n)-centered decolonial psychology addresses itself to hegemonic forms both to *denaturalize* (Adams et al., 2015) and to *provincialize* (Chakrabarty, 2008) understandings that masquerade in hegemonic accounts as general truth. Because hegemonic accounts give the impression that their observations originate from *nowhere-in-particular*, they lay claim to applicability everywhere-in-general (see

the discussion below on “racism of the zero-point”). An Africa(n)-centered decolonial perspective disrupts this epistemic arrogance by positioning hegemonic understandings in historical context, revealing the allegedly general to be imperialist impositions of a WEIRD particular (see Hall, 1991). From this perspective, the WEIRD and increasingly neoliberal patterns that constitute the normative baseline in hegemonic psychological science are neither natural properties of the human organism nor the cutting edge of some racially innocent cultural evolution. Instead, they are inherently racialized ways of being made possible by colonial plunder and capitalistic extraction from racialized subjects (i.e., *racial capitalism*; see R. Roberts, 2015; Robinson, 1983).

### *An Africa(n)-Centered Decolonial Psychology of Racism*

Addressing this Africa(n)-centered perspective to topics of racism and antiracism, one can note how the protests that captured global attention in 2020 are reminiscent of mid-20th century anticolonial social movements on the African continent (see Mamdani et al., 1988). Similarly, the focus of many protests around the world on removing monuments to white supremacy has clear resonance with South Africa’s #RhodesMustFall campaign, whose original focus was the removal of a prominent monument to an architect of colonialism and racist imperialism on the campus of the University of Cape Town; however, the campaign soon transformed into a movement to decolonize the university as a whole. In part, then, calls for decolonization have been about materiality. Students and protesters demanded that the architecture, social space, and demographic profile of universities better reflect their African location (Kessi, 2019). Equally important, the calls for decolonization extended to ontological and epistemic foundations. Whose life-views, languages, literatures, cultural products, and conceptions of reality informed the quest for knowledge?

Responding to these calls, researchers and practitioners in African settings have considered the task of decolonizing or building an antiracist psychology with renewed urgency. As we elaborate below, a central theme of this Africa(n)-centered analysis is a rejection of the psychologization and/or naturalization of racism and to focus instead on the structural and historical roots of racism in the Euro-American-centric modern/colonial order. From this perspective, healthy psychological functioning is less about *adjustment* than it is *mal-adjustment*, disobedience, and resistance to the coloniality inherent in the modern order (Bulhan, 1985; King, 1968; Mignolo, 2009 see below). Similarly, this analysis rejects the understandings of antiracism as merely prejudice reduction or respect for diversity and instead focuses on everyday and organized efforts by individuals and collectives to resist and change social systems which

distribute advantage and oppression on the basis of socially constructed and hierarchized racial categories (S. O. Roberts & Rizzo, 2021).

Before charting directions for an antiracist psychology, we pause to briefly consider two seemingly simpler questions: What is racism, and how have psychologists engaged in the study of racism? Regarding the latter question, several observers have noted that theory and research within hegemonic psychology have tended to psychologize racism by defining it in terms of “the prejudice problematic” (see Henriques, 1984; Wetherell & Potter, 1992). Indeed,

Prevailing implicit models locate the [ultimate] source of racism and oppression in biases of individual people. These models consider the harm of racism to lie primarily in direct, intentional acts of differential treatment motivated by hostility and fueled by ignorance. If an event is characterized by positive affect or evaluation of a group, . . . causes harm that is unintended, results in differential group-based outcomes despite scrupulous application of “fair” principles in each case, or produces harm that is not the result of direct differential treatment, then prevailing models suggest that one should not consider this event to be racism (Adams et al., 2008, p. 221).

In contrast to the relatively narrow view of racism as individual bias, academic perspectives outside of hegemonic psychological science have articulated a broader understanding of racism that links ideas about inferiority to structural forces, which reflect and reproduce ideologies of difference, domination, and subjugation. Racism as ideological (a system of ideas) and structural (written into and perpetuated through social structures) has a long and intractable global pedigree. For example, Philomena Essed (1990, p. 11) saw racism as “the definitive attribution of inferiority to a particular racial/ethnic group and the use of this principle to propagate and justify the unequal treatment of this group.” In his work on racism in the press, Teun van Dijk (1991, p. 26) contended that racism is a system of structural and ideological group dominance that “embodies both political, economic, and socio-cultural structures of inequality, and processes and practices of exclusion and marginalisation, as well as the socio-cognitive representations required by these structures and processes.” Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2010, p. 9) considered racism “the totality of the social relations and practices that reinforce white privilege.” More generally, critical race scholars propose that “racism is far more complex than a set of attitudes and behaviors that we can unlearn in a workshop or two” (De la Rey, 1997, p. 9). Instead, racism is “a marriage of racist policies and racist ideas that produces and normalises racial inequities” (Kendi, 2019, p. 18). For purposes of the present article, we settle on the critical psychosocial perspective of racism advanced by Stevens et al. (2013). They argue that racism is equally affective and macro-political in constitution; it is

substantiated simultaneously in intrapsychic and material formations and realities across both private and institutional spheres. This broader understanding of racism resonates clearly with a decolonial perspective on the topic, a view to which we now turn.

A decolonial focus on the geopolitics of knowledge affords consideration to epistemic standpoints which inform conceptions of racism. Scholarship suggests that different understandings of racism—as a problem of individual bias versus a structurally embedded force—are not randomly distributed across people. Instead, research suggests that the understanding of racism as individual bias (i.e., the understanding that has prevailed in hegemonic psychological science) is especially pronounced among white respondents (Unzueta & Lowery, 2008). Although white respondents are far more likely than Black respondents to define the problem of racism as discrimination “based on the prejudice of individuals,” Black respondents are more likely than their white counterparts to define the problem of racism as discrimination “built into laws and institutions” (Pew Research Center, 2016).

Variation in conceptions of racism across racial groups suggests that the dominance of individualistic understandings of racism in hegemonic psychological science is no accident. Instead, these understandings prevail because they reflect the perspectives and serve the interests of the white practitioners who disproportionately constitute psychological science. With respect to interests, a definition in terms of individual bias serves to define racism tamely and deny its determinative power as an ideological structure (Unzueta & Lowery, 2008). An individualizing definition helps white subjects neutralize threats to individual self-worth; it permits them to insulate themselves from the stigma of racist bias by locating this as a problem of a few “bad apples”; and it defends the integrity of a system from which white subjects continue to derive benefit. With respect to perspective, and closer to a decolonial emphasis on locus of enunciation, an individualizing definition of racism also reflects the white and WEIRD epistemic standpoint that informs how hegemonic psychological science perceives the problem of racism. This epistemic standpoint is partly about preferential white access to the material affordances of wealth that enable a modern/individualist sense of freedom from constraint and abstraction from context, which in turn promotes an overemphasis on individual choice and an underemphasis on situational or systemic determinants of action, racist and otherwise (e.g., Adams et al., 2019). In addition, this standpoint is also about a more explicitly racialized positionality. The psychology of racism has focused historically on what Freeman (1978) referred to as a perpetrator perspective in anti-discrimination law. In considering racist beliefs and actions, the emphasis has been on matters of concern to the people in dominant

groups who were the potential perpetrators of racist beliefs and actions, such as whether the belief or action derived from antipathy or an intention to harm.

In contrast to the basis of mainstream psychology in white and WEIRD standpoints, an Africa(n)-centered decolonial analysis turns the analytic lens on the phenomenon of racism in epistemic and social solidarity with the marginalized majority of people who are outside of the dominant Euro-American center. This “preferential option” (Martín-Baró, 1994) is not only an ethico-political stance of solidarity but also represents an epistemic mode of solidarity. The proposition is that one can best comprehend the human condition—including the operation of power—by treating perspectives of racially subordinated communities as privileged sites of understanding against Euro-American-centric delusions of grandeur and white ignorance (Baldwin, 1984). Applying this strategy to the topic of racism, an Africa(n)-centered decolonial psychology emphasizes four points: *the coloniality of modernity*, *the racism in the structure of everyday worlds*, *white normativity*, and *racism of the zero-point*.

*The coloniality of modernity: How racism constitutes the modern order.* A central idea for a decolonial Africa(n)-centered psychology of antiracism is the concept of modernity/coloniality. Prevailing understandings of modernity emphasize connotations of enlightenment and progress, the steady march of human society from superstition, closed-mindedness, ethnocentric prejudice, and oppressive traditional authority to reason, openness, cosmopolitanism, and individual freedom (e.g., Pinker, 2018). In contrast, decolonial Africa(n)-centered analysis suggests that this celebratory view of modernity is itself a form of collective self-delusion, especially to the extent that this view obscures what decolonial theorists refer to as the coloniality of modernity.

Coloniality refers to the “vestiges of colonial power and associated ways of thinking and being that originated in the colonial period of European global domination but persist long after the formal end of colonial rule” (Readsura Decolonial Issue Editorial Collective, in press) A well-cited statement of this idea comes from the work of Nelson Maldonado-Torres (2007, p. 243):

Coloniality is different from colonialism. Colonialism denotes a political and economic relation in which the sovereignty of a nation or a people rests on the power of another nation, which makes such nation an empire. Coloniality, instead, refers to long-standing patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism, but that define culture, labor, intersubjective relations, and knowledge production well beyond the strict limits of colonial administrations. Thus, coloniality survives colonialism. It is maintained alive in books, in the criteria for academic performance, in cultural patterns, in common sense, in the self-image of peoples, in aspirations of self, and so many

other aspects of our modern experience. In a way, as modern subjects we breathe coloniality all the time and every day.

In other words, as Mignolo (2007a) put it in a now well-known phrase, coloniality constitutes the “darker side of modernity” (p. 463). The modern/colonial world entrenches an ontological and epistemic hierarchy of human beings (Mignolo, 2007b) that, although gendered and bodied in particular ways, has as its basis a color line. It affords to some subjects (at the expense of others) humanity, epistemic virtue, and agency on the basis of socially constructed racial categories (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018). In the register of Fanon (1952/1967), the colonial order relegated Blacks to a zone of nonbeing that strips them of their personhood, dehumanizing them to justify the near-constant onslaught of colonial violence. The modern/colonial order thus makes blackness appear as a part of the human that is to be held apart from humanity (Mbembe, 2019). Coloniality persists through norms, values, and institutions that look to make the world and all of its social relations in a static image of whiteness, thereby limiting freedoms to the logic of racist heteropatriarchal capitalist modernity (see Veronelli, 2015). It is in large part through the potent fictions of race that coloniality exerts its material, social, ideological, and psychological presence. At the same time, it is through coloniality that racism persists in some of its most insidious forms.

A focus on modernity/coloniality calls on us to examine racism not only in its historical manifestations but also as it persists in the present around the globe. Indeed, a decolonial Africa(n)-centered analysis makes clear that Euro-American-centric racial domination was not limited to a discretely defined, colonial past. Instead, it persists in the modern/colonial present, as is evident in the increasing reification of state borders created in the interests of Western powers as well as the growing dominance of European colonial languages as the media of everyday life. Epistemicides (i.e., the near total destruction of ways of knowing which are associated with and generated by subaltern peoples) of this kind are not fading with the passage of time but continue to gain force via assimilation to Euro-American-centric modernity (see de Sousa Santos, 2016).

Another implication of coloniality is the racism inherent in the Euro-American-centric modern order. Again, prevailing understandings associate modernity with antiracism: A force of reason and tolerance with which to subdue stereotype-laden ignorance, prejudice, and racism. In contrast to this liberal veneer of non-racism, a decolonial Africa(n)-centered analysis suggests the extent to which racism is inherent to Euro-American-centric modernity. In part, references to the coloniality of Euro-American-centric global modernity concern its sources in racist violence. Rather than the peaceful blossoming of an inherent liberal zeitgeist, decolonial perspectives highlight how the explosive development of a Euro-American-centric modern order

occurred via the violent underdevelopment of African and other colonial spaces, especially the conquest, plunder, and appropriation (of land, resources, labor, and bodies) that provided the material foundation of the racial neoliberal capitalism that scaffolds Euro-American-centric modern developments (see Robinson, 1983; Rodney, 1972). In addition, references to the coloniality of Euro-American-centric modernity refer to its role in the reproduction of racist violence. Decolonial perspectives highlight how the global hegemony of Euro-American-centric modern sensibilities—especially the rise and proliferation of neoliberal individualist modes of existence (Adams et al., 2019; Bhatia & Priya, 2018)—has increased ecological devastation, undermined community solidarity, widened global disparities, and resulted in other forms of violence that fall disproportionately on the majority of people who inhabit settings outside of the gated communities of affluence that inform WEIRD psychology.

*Beyond individual bias: Racism in the structure of everyday worlds.* A second principle of a decolonial Africa(n)-centered approach to antiracism is to extend the study of racism beyond the focus on individual psychology inherent in the prejudice problematic by considering how “racism is located in the structure of everyday worlds” (Salter et al., 2018, p. 151). From this perspective, one will not find the foundations of racist bias in brain architecture or personality traits. Instead, individual propensities for racist bias (e.g., explicit or implicit prejudice and stereotypes) exist in a dynamic relationship with structures of racist bias embedded in the stuff of everyday worlds (e.g., those monuments to white supremacy which have been defaced and toppled during several #RhodesMustFall and #BlackLivesMatter protests).

The concept of structural racism includes material manifestations that one might refer to as the “coloniality of power” (see Mignolo, 2007a). Centuries of European domination imposed a global system of plunder that impoverished the vast majority of people in African settings to enrich a white minority (Biko, 2004; Fanon, 1952/1967; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018). The concept of structural racism also includes what one might call the coloniality of knowledge and aesthetics: Cultural or ideological manifestations in systems of value that deify European knowledge, artistry and culture as beautiful and true and, by comparison, denigrate African and subjugated forms of knowledge, artistry, and culture (Fanon, 1952/1967). Individual people may come to embody these systems of value as they engage with the cultural and knowledge ecologies that carry these value associations, acquiring habits associated with delusions of superiority (Baldwin, 1984), and internalized inferiority or colonial mentality (David & Okazaki, 2006; Fanon, 1952/1967). As people act in accordance with these embodied ideological associations via everyday exercises of

choice—forwarding Twitter posts, dressing for the day, tuning the radio dial, styling hair, creating or defending monuments to architects of genocide and colonial domination (e.g., Kessi, 2019)—they sometimes deliberately, but mostly inadvertently, serve as vectors for the larger ideological system, extending associations spatially and temporally to infect new situations, and thereby reproducing racially charged realities that condition these associations in the first place.

A particularly important manifestation of racism in the structure of everyday worlds concerns the extent to which racism constitutes other axes of difference that oppress and marginalize people. For example, Robinson's (1983) conception of racial capitalism illuminates how socioeconomic processes of capitalist extractivism and class-based oppression have depended on a racialized hierarchy of human beings. Similarly, racism and white representational viewpoints define and maintain hegemonic constructions of masculinity, femininity, and sexuality. For example, decolonial theorists have illuminated how hegemonic conceptions of gender and sexuality are not race-free, culturally neutral, and universal. Instead, hegemonic conceptions define the boundaries of who is a woman, and indeed the very category of *woman* and its biological underpinnings, in ways that resonate with white understandings and that do not necessarily map onto "Othered" ways of being and existing (Lugones, 2007; Oyěwùmí, 1997). One such example is in the discussion of the gender of South African athlete Caster Semenya (Ratele, 2011). The violence enacted on Semenya extends beyond accusations of unfairness by white female competitors to include invasive medical examinations and eventually the ruling that she would need to undergo medical procedures to continue to participate as a female in future International Association of Athletics Federation events. The categorization of who is male and female imposes life-altering decisions upon marginalized individuals. This is known as *misogynoir*, the combination of sexism and racism (Bailey, 2016) that targets Black women around the world, from Dianne Abbott in the United Kingdom (Palmer, 2020) to Naomi Osaka in the United States and Japan (Razack & Joseph, 2021). *Transmisogynoir*, in particular, brings race and class supremacy together with white cis-patriarchy in the murder of thousands of Black transwomen (Krell, 2017; Lugones, 2007). Suffice to say that a decolonial Africa(n)-centered approach to antiracism necessitates an intersectional analysis of how racism underlies and animates different axes of oppression within the colonial global order. Indeed, intersectional feminism reminds us that a single axis framework erases the experiences of those who are multiply burdened (Crenshaw, 1991), and that manifesting emancipated social worlds requires a holistic understanding of the different ways our everyday worlds are structured.

*Beyond differential treatment: White normativity.* The shift in focus within studies of racism from a problem of individual adjustment to an issue of oppressive realities suggests a similar shift from a focus on differential treatment to the universal imposition and naturalization of whiteness. From this perspective, the racism at the heart of the Euro-American-centric modern/colonial global order is evident not only in cases where actors or institutions subject people from different racial backgrounds to different standards—for example, subjecting Black people to heightened police surveillance and brutality—but also in cases of cultural racism (e.g., Bonilla-Silva, 2010) in which actors or institutions treat all people by the same, Euro-American-centric standards. As we suggested earlier, such cases of cultural racism include the imposition of standards for beauty and artistic expression (e.g., art, music, literature, fashion) that denigrate African forms and elevate European forms, even while appropriating African creativity. Such cases of cultural racism also include the imposition of WEIRD ways of being or knowing—including notions of ability (Dirth & Adams, 2019; Oppong, 2020), care (Esiaka & Adams, 2020), empowerment (Kurtiş et al., 2016), love (Osei-Tutu et al., 2021), merit (Croizet, 2011), methodological rigor (Adams & Salter, 2019), rights (Maldonado-Torres, 2007), and choice and responsibility (Stephens et al., 2009)—as just-natural standards. From this perspective, racism is less about differential treatment than it is the "possessive investment" (Lipsitz, 1997) in white ways of being that masquerade as race-neutral standards for universal application.

*Beyond intergroup relations: Racism of the zero-point.* Related to the idea of white normativity is a manifestation of racism associated with "the hubris of the zero point" (Castro-Gómez, 2007): The belief in the capacity for position-less observation, a "view from nowhere" (Nagel, 1986) that ironically permits knowledge of everywhere (Haraway, 1988). Reworking this term for our purposes, the *racism of the zero point* refers to a tendency to abstract racism from history and to portray dynamics of dominance and subordination as cases of colorblind, equipotential intergroup relations.

One instance of zero-point racism is a prevalent tendency to understand racist dominance and subordination via the discourse of numerical majority and minority. The coloniality of this construction is evident in the extent to which it assumes and imposes the particular situation of white, WEIRD, European-majority societies as an ethnocentric standard. In contrast to this Euro-American-centric standard, a decolonial Africa(n)-centered approach to racism affords the observation that the flow of racist domination typically runs in an opposite direction such that a privileged minority dominates a marginalized majority. This is most obviously true in settings like South Africa, colonial

Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), and several other colonial African states, where a numerical minority of European settlers or administrators imposed racist domination on a majority of indigenous inhabitants. However, it is true of the world in general that a WEIRD minority has imposed regimes of Euro-American-centric racist domination over a marginalized majority. Briefly stated, the prevailing construction of racism as majority domination or “minoritization” abstracts racism from history and portrays it as the exercise of identity-neutral, numerical power, thereby obscuring core features of racism in a globalized Euro-American-centric modern/colonial order.

Another manifestation of zero-point racism returns to the long-standing conflation of racism with prejudice and antipathy (e.g., Allport, 1954). Again, the conflation of racism with prejudice masks historically particular relations of Eurocentric domination—the enduring coloniality of power, knowledge, and being—as a race-neutral case of intergroup dislike. From this perspective, white antipathy toward racialized others and Black antipathy toward white oppressors are equally problematic as cases of antipathy. The important consequence of this conception has been an enduring preoccupation with antiracism work in psychology on prejudice reduction or the quest for intergroup harmony. As psychologists working in African settings have noted, hegemonic psychology has tended to answer calls for antiracist justice with a “let them eat harmony” response (Dixon et al., 2010, p. 76), a response which functions to keep the material inequalities of racial capitalism perfectly intact. With regards to dominant-group hostility (in the form of racist antipathy), this strategy implies that racially subordinated peoples should accept a reduction in prejudice as a substitute for addressing historical violence and an unjust status quo. With respect to oppressed group hostility (in the form of anger about injustice), calls for harmony can blunt the collective rage (see Canham, 2017) that motivates the strenuous effort required for antiracist action. It is this topic of antiracist action to which we now turn.

### *A Decolonial Africa(n)-Centred Psychology of Antiracism*

A decolonial Africa(n)-centered analysis does not necessarily discount psychologies which focus on racist beliefs and attitudes. However, it does resist the psychologization that transforms racist systems into the cognitive dysfunction, trait, or pattern of thinking of an individual subject (Bulhan, 1985) and offers as a remedy the rehabilitation of supposedly maladjusted bigots. Instead, the focus on the systemic nature of racism understands individual racist attitudes, ideas, and behaviors as the product of larger, racist social structures that render white supremacy commonplace (Fanon, 1952/1967; Mbembe, 2019).

Rather than understand healthy psychological functioning in terms of adaptation or adjustment, a decolonial Africa(n)-centered antiracist psychology promotes ways of thinking and being (e.g., Biko, 2004) that foster epistemic disobedience (Mignolo, 2009) or creative maladjustment (King, 1968) to systems that operate in the service of white supremacy (Bulhan, 1985; Fanon, 1963). Ultimately, such a psychology seeks to think a new world, beyond racism, into existence so that we might begin to action this world into existence.

A decolonial Africa(n)-centered psychology of antiracism must address the naturalization and normativity of white supremacy. Such a psychology does not limit itself to counteract manifestations of racism as differential treatment. In addition, and perhaps even more important, it addresses enduring and insidious manifestations of racism as the application of equal treatment according to a single, imposed system—that is, the coloniality of the Euro-American-centric modern order. Thus, although antiracism does not buy into the fictions of psychic wholeness offered by racial categories, it is also attuned to the material consequences of race and racism (Stevens, 2018). In addressing itself to antiracism, a decolonial Africa(n)-centered psychology aims to assist in understanding racist social structures—including its implication in other systems of exploitation and oppression (e.g., capitalism, patriarchy, nationalism, homophobia) which, together, constitute matrices of power (see Mignolo, 2007a)—as well as with repairing the individual and social effects of these structures.

In speaking from but also looking beyond psychology, S. O. Roberts and Rizzo (2021) identify two kinds of antiracism: reactive and proactive. Where reactive antiracism denotes challenging racism whenever it appears, proactive antiracism entails challenging racism before it appears. Both antiracisms, we wish to emphasize, are not entirely distinct from one another. The police officer who murdered George Floyd, for example, sparked a worldwide surge of reactive antiracist demonstration that, in addressing a globalized system of racial capitalism and coloniality, went on to undertake proactive antiracist work (see Ransby, 2020; Ratele & Malherbe, 2020). Similarly, the reactive antiracist initiative of removing the Cecil Rhodes statue from the University of Cape Town resulted in the proactively antiracist Fallist student movement in South Africa. Reactive antiracism may, therefore, serve as the condition for mobilizing proactive antiracism. Nonetheless, within a racist social order, all antiracism is adversarial and antagonistic (Stevens, 2018). In what follows, we consider how decolonial Africa(n)-centered psychology may approach the task of antiracism, in its interlocking reactive and proactive forms, by offering two interrelated spheres within which such psychological work may be of use, namely: organized collective antiracist struggle and everyday antiracist resistance.

*Collective struggle.* Decolonial Africa(n)-centered approaches to collective organized struggle have sought to connect different instances of racist violence to global systems of coloniality, as well as to other instances of racism taking place on and beyond the African continent (see James, 2012). In this sense, antiracist collective struggle—both in the streets, online, and the workplace (see Ransby, 2020; Sweetman, 2018)—operates at the local, reactive level to advance a proactive decolonial antiracist universal.

A question for psychologists and psychology students is whether there is a place for engaging in and supporting collective antiracist struggles within spaces of psychology, such as academic journals, university departments, or professional associations. And for those who work or study in non-WEIRD settings (e.g., psychologists and students in African countries), is there a place for psychology in collective antiracist struggles which are both decolonial and Africa(n)-centered?

As we have already emphasized, decoloniality, in general, and antiracism, in particular, have remained peripheral, usually non-existent, concerns within most of psychology (Holdstock, 2000; Ratele, 2019; S. O. Roberts et al., 2020), with much of psychology's institutional make-up being inherently opposed to decoloniality. The discipline's history indicates that in the main, psychology has been opposed to antiracist struggle (Howitt & Owusu-Bempah, 1994). Those iterations of psychology that seek to advance antiracist agendas oftentimes undertake racial sensitivity programs that merely confine racism to individual behaviors, attitudes, and personalities at the expense of systemic analyses and action (Bhatia & Priya, 2018), and encourage "tolerance" and "respect for diversity" rather than a commitment to dismantling racial inequality, domination, and oppression (Malherbe & Dlamini, 2020). However, there have been subordinated decolonial praxes within global psychology which encourage us to reiterate the belief that decolonial psychological work is able to contribute to the antiracist struggle.

As we are seeing today, all over the world, decolonial antiracist struggle is being met with intense resistance and pushback from governments and individual citizens who are committed to sustaining and defending coloniality. Therefore, although engaging in antiracist collective struggle can foster meaning and belonging among comrades, in the context of a world that is made in the image of colonial modernity, such struggle is also a site of immense trauma. Although there are certainly psychologists who are familiar with working in contexts of collective struggle, there are a great many more who are not. It is crucial that psychology training programs committed to decoloniality revive the neglected history of how psychology has been used to address and work with—rather than suppress—the affective and psychological toll of antiracist work. There are many examples from which to draw here, including

those psychologists influenced by Black Consciousness philosophy who worked in Black community settings in apartheid South Africa (Nicholas & Cooper, 1990; Seedat & Lazarus, 2011), Fanon's (1952/1967) radical psychiatric program in colonial Algeria (Gordon, 2015), and the liberation social psychology work of Martín-Baró (1994) during El Salvador's civil war (Gondra, 2013). In all of these examples, psychologists galvanized the decolonial potential of their discipline by looking beyond it. Psychologists committed to antiracism should thus seek to build upon, learn from, and reactivate their discipline's antiracist legacy within decolonial collective struggle, and to apply their skills in assisting those engaged in this struggle.

What might be the specific contribution of an Africa(n)-centered decolonial psychology to antiracist collective struggle? Although there are many answers to this question, we wish to focus on the role that Africa(n)-centered psychologists can play in working with people to connect antiracist psychological work with local and global struggles for decoloniality. An example of this can be observed in the Fallist campaigns in South Africa, where several psychologists worked with students, critical academics from other disciplines, workers, and community-based activists to make connections between antiracist psychological work, epistemological contestations, and economic struggles. Such solidarity work finds commonalities and points of connection between different struggles (Sweetman, 2018) and is essential for building decolonial coalitions. Psychologists embedded within an Africa(n)-centered and other global Southern-centered decolonial orientations and who are working with antiracist movements may, similarly, foster internationalist links by distributing and sharing mental health practices that have been effective in their contexts. In turn, others immersed in parallel struggles around the world may share their own antiracist psychological practices. It is in these ways that we can begin to elevate the status of mental health within collective decolonial and antiracist struggles, contribute to the development of an internationalist decolonial attitude, begin building local and global networks of decolonial psychological knowledge, and offer something to antiracist decolonial struggles from an Africa(n)-centered psychological orientation.

A decolonial Africa(n)-centered psychology that is committed to collective antiracist struggle has little interest in psychologizing antiracism and instead emphasizes the fundamentally political nature of this struggle. However, this is not to deny the psychical components of antiracist struggles. In other words, we should not disregard subjective processes that take place in the context of collective antiracist, decolonial struggle. Antiracist revolt represents the psychological subject's healthy disgust with, and a refusal to acclimatize to, coloniality (Gordon, 2015). It is within the context of these struggles that the subject can surface and interrogate the racist unconscious, which is formed



within and against a systemically racist symbolic order that cuts across races (see hooks, 1995; Parker, 2003). As such, in what Fanon (1952/1967) refers to as internalization, it can be difficult to determine an external enemy from the enemy that one makes of the self (Mbembe, 2019). Psychologists should thus work with people to surface, articulate and symbolize internalization within the context of collective struggle so that we might loosen, and even eradicate, coloniality's grip on collective consciousness; a grip that not only incalculates a regressive politics but also asphyxiates decolonial imaginaries. Psychologists, in other words, should work with antiracist activists to foster antiracist consciousness as well as challenge the racist unconscious by holding both to the political demands of collective decolonial struggle. In this way, psychologists can work with activists to collectivize the self, bringing to bear a wider project of decolonial emancipation on individual subject formation.

It is within collective struggle that antiracism can move from an individual to a systemic focus, from abstract values to material political goals, and from an issue of identity to an issue of decoloniality. Decolonial Africa(n)-centered psychology seeks to undertake psychological work with those engaged in antiracist struggles and is thus accountable to the activists who undertake such struggle. In fostering psychic and political connections with the self and others, we can begin to develop proactive antiracist subjectivities which endeavor to tear away from those aspects of the self that are willed toward and complicit with colonial domination (Mbembe, 2019). This kind of psychological work (which may require abandoning many of psychology's seemingly essential components) commits itself to a decolonial politics that is enacted in the context of Africa and is for the world (Ratele, 2019). Indeed, decolonial, Africa(n)-centered psychology recognizes that in the context of antiracist collective struggle we can articulate what it means to oppose coloniality, as well as build structures that are premised on decolonial imaginaries and modes of political emancipation which are, at the same time, modes of psychological emancipation. Antiracist struggle is, in this regard, always a conscious decision that stretches our imaginations.

*Everyday resistance.* Although a somewhat nebulous concept, the everyday embodies that which is familiar and habitual, but nonetheless dynamic, in our day-to-day lives. The everyday shapes who we are and oftentimes operates in unseen ways (Harrison, 2000). Racism, as is perhaps self-evident, embeds itself in the everyday in myriad ways (e.g., architecture, idiom, language, custom, ideology) (see Essed, 1990), all of which open up space for more brutal enactments of racism (Mbembe, 2019). This is as true in our day-to-day personal and professional lives as it is in our political lives. Being committed to a decolonial antiracist politics

means committing to addressing racism in the everyday, and indeed how these "nanoracisms" support, enable and legitimate the kinds of systemic racism that belie coloniality by demanding that the colonized continually state who and why they are in an effort to undermine and provoke (Mbembe, 2019).

In contradistinction to everyday oppression, then, we have everyday resistance which, although under-studied in psychology, represents commonplace actions in day-to-day life that undermine oppressive powers (Rosales & Langhout, 2020). Challenging racialized linguistic prejudices as well as engaging in different kinds of refusals, go-slows, evasions, false compliance, pilfering, mocking, satire, sabotage, disruptions, and feigned ignorance can all serve the purpose of everyday antiracist resistance (see Scott, 1985). Such everyday antiracist resistance efforts primarily represent reactive antiracism. However, as we shall see, they can also, cumulatively, produce modalities of proactive antiracism.

If everyday racism is an effort to embed racism within culture (Mbembe, 2019), then challenging everyday racism requires an everyday antiracist resistance, or what Cabral (2016) refers to as cultural resistance, wherein one's day-to-day living and being can render decoloniality, antiracism and Africa(n)-centeredness not only commonsensical but also practical and ethical alternatives to a social system founded on dehumanization and colonial violence (see hooks, 1995). Psychologists working with people who are engaged in antiracist everyday resistance (and the psychological toll that this may have on them) need not neglect collective struggle, but may, in fact, work with activists to bring everyday antiracism into the context of organized collective resistance, and to make the everyday a counterhegemonic imperative within such resistance. We might even understand collective struggle as a politically organized expression of everyday resistance, with the everyday infusing organized resistance politics with an attentiveness to the very dignity that coloniality sought to erase (Cabral, 2016; Mbembe, 2019). Yet, as Rosales and Langhout (2020) argue, everyday resistance represents an important mode of struggle in and of itself and need not be debased for a focus on organized collective resistance. Taking seriously everyday antiracist resistance enables psychologists to move away from deficit models and disciplinary orthodoxies, and to work with people to harness "hidden" everyday modalities of agency which are, for many, fundamental to their survival (Rosales & Langhout, 2020; Scott, 1985). The manner by which psychologists understand and approach decoloniality should thus be attentive to the underappreciated, and oftentimes muted, currents of everyday resistance.

A concern with everyday resistance denotes a concern with everyday experience. In looking to harness everyday antiracist resistance, psychologists can work with people to

connect their experiences of racism (i.e., how they have perpetuated it, been complicit with it, ignored it, repressed it, or endured it) to social structures and histories in ways that oppose the cautionary posture assumed within much mainstream psychology (see Ratele & Malherbe, 2020). In making these connections, we do not take the experience of racism as inevitable but as the result of oppressive learned practices that can and must be unlearned and dismantled. We may, in this sense, begin to decolonize our minds and habits of being (hooks, 1995), and to perpetuate proactive antiracist conscientization that is premised on a decolonial politics whose roots lie in the everyday. For Africa(n)-centered psychological work, ensuring that individuals *see* decolonial visions of Africa in the everyday can strengthen their commitment to fighting for a fully realized humanity in, by, for and with Africa.

Psychologists committed to decoloniality and Africa(n)-centeredness may be well suited to harnessing everyday affect for antiracist purposes (see Ratele & Malherbe, 2020). The repeated and quiet dehumanization through which everyday racism operates produces considerable psychological consequences that need not be “dealt with” or “worked through,” but may instead be channeled politically. Heeding Fanon (1952/1967), psychologists can work with people to acknowledge that it is quite normal to feel dejected and degraded by everyday racism. It is, in fact, the society that allows such day-to-day violence that is abnormal, and that should not be tolerated. Psychological subjects should be vindicated in their feeling and expressing rage, anger and hatred toward an everyday reality that systemically disregards their humanity, and/or the humanity of others, on the grounds of racialized categories (see Gordon, 2015). These feelings represent knowledge in and of themselves; knowledge that emerges from one’s locus of enunciation and that should not be disregarded on the basis of its resistance to linguistic symbolization. Psychologists should take seriously how people feel in and against everyday racism not only because these feelings can serve as the condition for proactive and reactive antiracist action but also because feelings can point toward the kinds of decolonial desires which are continually repressed in contexts marked by coloniality.

Everyday antiracist resistance occurs in spite and because of the daily humiliations, exploitations, and oppressions that coloniality has embedded in the everyday (see Cabral, 2016). Our everyday experiences of racism can guide decolonization efforts in developing what hooks (1995), via Martin Luther King, Jr., refers to as the beloved community that connects individual development with collective flourishing. Psychologists should work with people to enunciate and take pride in the inherently political and emotive arenas of the antiracist everyday, and in this we can create psychosocial spaces wherein antiracist, decolonial and Africa(n)-centered everyday expressions are given

form and are honored as legitimate modalities of resistance (see Rosales & Langhout, 2020). At the same time, we may strengthen the political power of everyday antiracist resistance efforts by connecting them to organized forms of collective resistance (see hooks, 1995).

## Conclusion

Connecting antiracist work to the project of Africa(n)-centered decoloniality reminds us that this historical and intersectional project is concerned not only with fighting for but also with building a systemic mode of emancipation that is at once political, psychological, material, and social in character. We have argued that a psychology committed to this project must enact interventions that go beyond mere “diversity and inclusion” by advancing a decolonial politics. A politics of this sort may be enacted through organized collective forms of struggle as well as everyday resistance action. The provocations offered in this article represent only some of the implications that a decolonial Africa(n)-centered psychology may have for antiracist struggle. Future work may wish to focus on issues of pedagogy, clinical diagnoses, best practice policies, reflexivities, psychoanalysis, psychiatry, or any number of ways in which psychology can contribute to advancing the decolonial imperative within and especially beyond its disciplinary borders.

Having sketched the outline of an Africa(n)-centered decolonial psychology, we must emphasize that the move to connect psychology to decolonial projects—whether seeking to decolonize psychology or to develop a decolonizing psychology—requires a note of caution. The existence of psychology depends in large part on the discipline’s institutional embeddedness within the racial capitalist colonial order (see R. Roberts, 2015), which makes disentangling it from Euro-American modernity a tricky, perhaps even impossible, task. This is particularly so given the historical alignment of so much psychology with coloniality (Seedat, 1997), including its reluctance to address issues related to race (S. O. Roberts et al., 2020; S. O. Roberts & Rizzo, 2021). We cannot forget the extent to which academic and health disciplines like psychology are colonial products, and we must not become deluded about their decolonial potential. Psychology has never determined nor led decolonial struggles. More often than not, a decolonial Africa(n)-centered psychology will require psychologists to look beyond their discipline for their impetus and inspiration.

This brings us to the somewhat ironic conclusion that an Africa(n)-centered decolonial psychology requires that we stretch the capacities of the discipline of psychology, perhaps beyond recognition, even abandoning aspects of it if need be. For example, we have proposed that an Africa(n)-centered decolonial psychology will avoid the tendency to psychologize not only conceptions of racism but also modes

of healing and care (Bhatia & Priya, 2018; Osei-Tutu et al., 2021). Whether or not the kinds of practices that take place in such a psychological (but never entirely psychologized) space look or feel like psychology as we have come to understand it—which is to say hegemonic psychology—is beside the point. What matters is how spaces of this kind prioritize and activate a decolonial agenda and bend psychology toward emancipatory ends.

Although the task of fully decolonizing psychology is perhaps not possible, we have proposed Africa(n)-centered psychological knowledge and practices as a foundation for the kinds of decolonial antiracist work on which the survival and flourishing of the majority of people have always depended. Much psychological theory has individualizing and universalizing epistemic tendencies (many of which are associated with “zero-point racism”) that we must resist if we are to attempt to decolonize the discipline, or use insights developed within the discipline for decolonizing purposes. Ramón Grosfoguel reminds us that “the political, economic, cultural, and social conditions of possibility for a subject who assumes the arrogance of speaking as though it were the eye of God is a subject whose geopolitical location is determined by its existence as a coloniser/conqueror, that is, as Imperial Being” (Grosfoguel, 2012, p. 89). This emphasis on the epistemic position and the locus of one’s enunciation points to the importance of an Africa(n)-centered approach in disrupting the coloniality of knowledge and being not only within but also beyond hegemonic psychology (Ratele, 2019). From this Africa(n)-centered perspective, claims to positionless or colorblind observation are not antiracist but instead have their foundation in the racist logic of white supremacy (see Bonilla-Silva, 2010).

While fully cognizant of both our locatedness in tempo-spatiality, as well as the fact that any psychological research or theory has a center of social gravity, decolonial Africa(n)-centered psychology is not anti-universalist (antiracism is undoubtedly a universalism that it espouses), and certainly does not disengage from fostering emancipatory and critical subjectivities. The challenge concerns the epistemic foundations for a general psychology and its universalisms. The task of decolonizing psychology requires that we draw from notions of the individual and the universal insofar as they assist us in developing psychological theories and practices (which will not readily fit into or be accepted by many of the institutionally established psy-disciplines) which challenge and imagine anew a more just global order. Indeed, the problems are not the concepts but incorrect versions of them: an insufficiently conceptualized individual—in the sense of one that is inadequately contextualized, socialized, or relational—and an insufficient universal, in the sense of an imposed particularity. A core mandate of a decolonial Africa(n)-centered psychology, therefore, remains to “work out new concepts, and try to

set afoot a new [hu]man” (Fanon, 1963; p. 255) and to articulate general psychological knowledge and practices which are de-linked from Euro-American-centric modern/colonial interests and assumptions.

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