

What and for whom is a decolonising African psychology?

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journals.sagepub.com/home/tap**Nick Malherbe  and Kopano Ratele**

Institute for Social and Health Sciences, University of South Africa & South African Medical Research Council-University of South Africa Masculinity and Health Research Unit

Abstract

Contributing to work that locates the place of psychology in countering coloniality, we explore in this article what and for whom is a decolonising African psychology. We answer these questions not with a definitive statement, but through several moves, signals, and routes. First, we conceptualise African psychology as a kind of transdisciplinary praxis that occurs within psychology as well as outside of the received bounds of the discipline. However, rooting this praxis-oriented psychology within a decolonial attitude ensures that African psychology takes emancipated visions of Africa and of the world from Africa—rather than the disciplinary dictums of psychology—as its starting point. Then, in considering for whom a decolonising African psychology is for, we insist that such a psychology, taken as transdisciplinary praxis, is ultimately *for everyone* in its humanistic commitment to those lives that have been partialised under coloniality. This commitment does not, however, render a decolonising African psychological praxis immune to recuperation, and measures must be taken to guard against this.

Keywords

African psychology, decolonial, decolonising, praxis, transdisciplinarity

When deconstructing a decolonising African psychology we are left with little to grasp firmly onto, or even to use when mapping situated psychological knowledges and practices. While a decolonising psychology (which we can understand as a mode of critical, emancipatory knowledge) is a pathway toward decolonial psychology, we shall dwell on the former while keeping the latter as a beacon of our deconstructive efforts. Where both “Africa” and “psychology” house within them a universe of contested connotations,

Corresponding author:

Nick Malherbe, Institute for Social and Health Sciences, University of South Africa & South African Medical Research Council-University of South Africa Masculinity and Health Research Unit, PO BOX 19070, Tygerberg, 7505, South Africa.
Email: nicholas.malherbe@mrc.ac.za

paradigms, approaches, applications, misuses, and even political orientations (see Ratele & Malherbe, in press), the notions of decolonisation and decoloniality—despite entering into popular parlance—continue to be misunderstood and evoked in ways that depart from their fundamentally radical impulse (Quaintance, 2020). It is this somewhat fraught theoretical and social landscape that serves as our primary concern in this article. We wish to make clear what is meant by African psychology when it is grounded in and aimed at what the Puerto Rican thinker Nelson Maldonado-Torres (2017) refers to as a decolonial attitude. The axis of such a psychology is not psychology's disciplinary demands and dictums, nor is its audience only psychologists and their students. This kind of psychology, which takes Africa as its centre of epistemic gravity, is also not characterised by a quest to define Africa's definitive theoretical or representational co-ordinates. Nor does it endeavour to "return" to a precolonial fantasy of Africa. Rather, a decolonising African psychology (i.e., a critical and creative project to decolonise psychology as well as Africa) looks to prioritise decolonising sociopolitical struggles that occur in, with, from, and—crucially—for Africa. A decolonising African psychology must, therefore, be shaped by, held accountable to, and formed through the complex politics of those engaged in decolonial struggle. If, as psychologists, we take psychology's disciplinary legitimacy, rather than existing decolonial struggle, as our reference point, we risk our work being recuperated into coloniality's matrices of domination.

From the onset, in conceptualising a decolonising African psychology, we run into several complications. Surely a psychology so intensely rooted in particular historical conjunctures (e.g., slavery, conquest, colonialism, or apartheid) has little to say about the world beyond Africa. Similarly, what can a decolonising African psychology contribute to more "objective" general psychological theory and practice? There are other issues too. Does a decolonising African psychology not, by its very definition, act to displace the professionalised, institutionally affiliated and ever-neutral psychologist? Perhaps, though, to avoid closing ourselves off from reconceptualising psychology from outside of hegemonic centres, these are not the kinds of questions that we should be asking at the beginning of working toward a decolonising African psychology, or any psychology that aims to challenge and subvert coloniality and global apartheid. Instead of seeking to outline its specificities, and to neatly resolve its tensions and contradictions, we are urged to explore what is (and what is not) possible when we hold such a psychology accountable to, for instance, the political, economic, and epistemological demands of decoloniality, and what this means for the actors who conceive, practice, and make use of this psychology.

In what follows, we unpack the answer to our central questions: what and for whom is a decolonising African psychology, over several tactical moves and steps, each of which speaks to and expounds upon the composite parts of what we see as the answer to these questions. We begin by conceptualising African psychology as a mode of transdisciplinary planetary praxis within psychology, but equally imperative, undertaken outside of the received boundaries of psychology. We argue that although transdisciplinarity is not a priori decolonising or decolonial, embracing a transdisciplinary orientation as a defining value and approach is essential to moving psychology outside of its own (often-times oppressive, depoliticising, and asocial) disciplinary lore. We then consider what a decolonising African psychology as transdisciplinary praxis entails, after which we look

to answer the twinned questions of who and what this kind of psychology is for. We insist that it is precisely because a decolonising African psychology is for everyone (i.e., while decolonisation grapples with epistemic violence, privilege, and exclusion, a psychology characterised by a decolonial attitude is not only for those who identify with Africa or the majority world) that it necessitates a loss of and/or a disidentification with power as it is constituted by the colonial-modern global order. At the same time, it seems likely that a decolonising African psychology, as an emancipatory project, will be met with resistance from those materially rewarded by coloniality as well as those who have internalised its violent hermeneutic. Lastly, we reflect on who it is that might practise a decolonising African psychology, as well as the danger of such a psychology being recuperated into dominant systems of colonial modernity, and how the decolonising imperative compels us to act against this.

African psychology and transdisciplinary praxis

There is some enervating conceptual confusion surrounding the term African psychology. This is due in part to the definitionally nebulous and contested words that comprise this term. Depending on where one stands, both “Africa” and “psychology” denote a plethora of images, political orientations, and ontologies (Ratele & Malherbe, in press). Signifying either term in their complex and contradictory fullness is impossible. Moreover, the meaning of African psychology has been made somewhat murky with the increasing cultural cadence that has been garnered by African-centredness and decolonisation (see, e.g., Mkhize, 2020; Nwoye, 2015; Quaintance, 2020; Ratele, 2017, 2019). Is African psychology, in every instance and every sense, always Africa(n)-centred? What are the implications of geography for psychological practice? And what is the role of decoloniality in all of this?

It is perhaps useful, then, to denote what it is we mean by psychology before we discuss African psychology. Although psychology, in the main, has been conceptualised in several, often conflicting, ways, Tisaw and Osbeck (2007) provide us with a useful working definition here, noting that mainstream psychology can be understood as “a conception of psychology-as-science and commitment to experimental methods as the basis of inquiry” (p. 158). For the purposes of our argument in this article, it is important to note that no matter where in the world this “psychology-as-science” is practised, it tends to be hegemonically Euro-American-centric in its approach (see Dlamini, 2020; Pillay, 2017; Ratele, 2019; Teo, 2015). Is African psychology, then, a remedy to the Euro-American-centrism of mainstream psychology? Offering some clarity here, Ratele (2017) writes that African psychology denotes “a broad category of the body of knowledge and practices that encompasses all of what psychologists in, or in relation to, Africa do” (p. 316). African psychology, therefore, can and oftentimes does contain within it a mode of mainstream psychology (see Ratele, 2019). Indeed, Euro-American psychological science dominates (in) Africa. Crucially, though, such a psychology is not, by definition, *for* Africa (i.e., attuned to the emancipatory requirements of Africa which, as a mutualist imperative, always also refers to global emancipation, see Davis, 2016). In other words, African psychology is not *de facto* always progressive in its political orientation, let alone Africa(n)-oriented or decolonial. There is, therefore, more than

one legitimate definition of African psychology, among which we wish to extricate a psychology that is critically—which is not to say only oppositional in a political sense but also creatively, in what people do to make their everyday lives more livable—oriented from and toward Africa, and is thus more often than not outside of the so-called mainstream.

We make a fetish of Africa if we do not permit it the full range of political orientations, voices, internal contradictions, dynamism, fantasy lives, impossibilities, changeability, as well as potentialities (see Mbembe, 2001; Ratele & Malherbe, *in press*). Like most mainstream psychology, much of what is found in African psychology can be and is too often characterised by a (usually understated) conservative political, economic, and cultural orientation. We wish to argue that African psychology is at its most conservative when it prioritises the disciplinary demands of psychology over the liberatory requirements of Africa and its socioeconomic justice arrears. But what are these disciplinary demands, and are they necessarily opposed to justice?

Writers, such as the critical psychologists Ian Parker (2014) and Thomas Teo (2015), have long averred that mainstream psychology and capitalist modernity developed in the early 20th century together, almost at a stroke, and in many ways psychology has functioned to adapt people to capitalist domination in all of its racialised, classed, and gendered guises (see Danziger, 1990), including colonial extractivism (see Ratele, 2019; Rodney, 1972). In the case of the African continent, in addition to capitalist exploitation as one of the conditions that facilitate and spur on the development of mainstream psychology, colonialism was a core enabler of psychological expertise (Bulhan, 1985). Today, we see the legacy of mainstream psychology's entwinement with capitalist colonial-modernity in the discipline's direct involvement in socioeconomic inequality, patriarchal oppression, racist state violence, and torture (see Levine et al., 1974; Seedat & Lazarus, 2011; Wessells et al., 2017). Additionally, many psychologists in Palestine, the United Kingdom, the United States, South Africa, Algeria, Australia, and many other places in the world have worked to quell political dissidence by rendering emancipatory politics a result of psychological maladjustment, rather than a rational reaction to systemic injustice (Coimbra et al., 2012; Fanon, 1963; Makkawi, 2017; Seedat & Lazarus, 2011). Although it is unlikely that psychologists working today would openly declare their discipline's affiliation with colonialism's and capitalism's entwined and brutally violent histories, mainstream psychology is deeply enmeshed within a global socioeconomic and cultural order that sustains itself through such violence. The alignment of mainstream psychology, all over the world, with the status quo renders it complicit with systemic and epistemic violence (Teo, 2015). If African psychologists and their students are to reconstitute themselves as a force for social and economic change, they must begin to look beyond mainstream psychology and to conceive of as well as approach their work differently.

As with psychologies from all around the world, African psychology contains a critical tradition that exemplifies how an emancipatory psychology can push back against mainstream psychology's oppressive, depoliticising, and/or individualising tendencies (some examples here include Bulhan, 1985; Duncan et al., 2001; Fanon, 1963, 1967; Manganyi, 1973; Memmi, 1991; Nicholas & Cooper, 1990; Seedat, 1997). We believe that what makes a critical African psychology critical and Africa(n)-situated is precisely

that it is less concerned with mainstream psychology than it is with the economic, social, political, cultural, and environmental problems that confront African people. Critical African psychology, by definition, it would seem, continually looks beyond mainstream psychology's disciplinary borders to address the oppressive living conditions of, and articulate possibilities of emancipation for, psychosocial subjects. This is to say that in steering psychology toward socioeconomic change by harnessing knowledges that lie outside of mainstream psychology, critical African psychology, while still an orientation within psychology, represents what we might refer to as transdisciplinary planetary praxis that harnesses knowledges and practices beyond the bounds of psychology (see also Ratele et al., 2020). Indeed, considered as transdisciplinary praxis, we can turn psychology against its masters and their handmaidens, and move it away from the discipline's elite concerns and internal quibbles that have little to do with the conditions of, existence of, and the possibility of a good life for, the majority of people (Martín-Baró, 1994).

While embodying transdisciplinarity does not infuse African psychology with an inherent criticality (indeed, transdisciplinary praxis is not an intrinsically emancipatory praxis), be it decolonising or Africa(n)-centred, for African psychology to begin to take on a critical attitude, it must look outside of mainstream psychology, which is to say that it must seek to become a psychology that strives towards socioeconomically oppositional and, ultimately, emancipatory transdisciplinary praxis. In other words, for African psychology to embrace emancipatory ideals, it must begin to orient itself around a praxis that is transdisciplinary. Among other forms of injustice, an emancipatory transdisciplinary praxis is aligned with formations of resistance against economic, racist, gender, technological, sexual, environmental, epistemic, and political oppression (see Ratele & Malherbe, 2020). Yet, we encounter several tensions and contradictions when we embrace African psychology as critical transdisciplinary praxis within psychology. For instance, it may well be argued that even mainstream psychology has, to some degree, always represented a transdisciplinary orientation of sorts (see Brown & Stenner, 2009). Indeed, much mainstream psychology relies on biological language and computer science metaphors, and even tries to emulate physics. It is for these reasons that Wolfgang Maiers (2001) has deemed psychology an imitation science. Similarly, we might ask why anyone would bother entering into psychology (and spend years learning its rules, idioms, internal debates, and assumptions) if they intend to abandon its canonical features? For those of us who embrace African psychology as an emancipatory transdisciplinary praxis, though, these concerns are of little value as they continue to take mainstream psychological science as the central frame of reference for understanding African psychology. Far more important are the various ways in which we can move African psychology in different directions, some of which may draw upon mainstream psychological knowledges, but many more will push back against these and flow towards and into other knowledges.

A decolonising African psychology

So far, we have argued that if much of African psychology, like most iterations of mainstream psychology, is politically regressive in that it is aligned with a neoliberal colonial/

modern status quo (Ratele, 2019; Teo, 2015), then moving African psychology in more critical directions requires us to look beyond mainstream psychology, and to not understand psychology within the disciplinary histories and structures of its mainstream Euro-American-centric variants. We should perceive critical African psychology as what has been called antipsychological psychology (Ratele & Malherbe, in press), or what we might also term transdisciplinary planetary praxis. While not all transdisciplinary psychological praxis is progressive, the development of a progressive psychology must embrace transdisciplinarity because, among other things, it offers us a means through which to better see others' worlds, see more, or see differently. Thus, through a critical assessment with psychological theory and a harnessing of critical nonpsychological thought, we may repurpose psychology so that it might function as a psychologically situated mode of socioeconomic critique and, ultimately, for purposes of social, economic, political, and cultural change, all while guarding against such a psychology being absorbed back into the mainstream which has, over the years, recuperated many forms of critical psychology (Parker, 2014).

However, even what we call critical psychology has, in large part, been developed in, with, and through Euro-American-centric contexts (Teo, 2015), which begs the question: how might we situate critical psychology in and, more vitally, for Africa? Here, we wish to turn to what Maldonado-Torres (2017) refers to as a decolonial attitude, which represents a disposition that strives to decouple, evade, destroy, and/or remake the contemporary modes of oppression that emerged out of the "classic" colonialism of the late 15th century (see also Maldonado-Torres, 2016). These modes of oppression, known collectively as coloniality, structure present-day society in particular ways (Mignolo, 2007), and work to foreclose potentialities of emancipation by defining the possibilities of the present against fundamentally dehumanising sociohistorical dynamics of power (Gordon, 2017). The decolonial attitude, however, recognises that coloniality is never totalising or inevitable, and that it has always been resisted. The place of mainstream psychology within the project of coloniality is multifaceted and contentious. Nonetheless, when we consider mainstream psychology's historical complicity with coloniality (e.g., in colonial India, apartheid South Africa, Nazi Germany, and occupied Palestine), adopting the decolonial attitude within African psychology not only demands that such a psychology look outwards, toward existing decolonising struggles, but also inwards, at the sort of colonial residue that is baked into mainstream psychology. In the words of Ignacio Martín-Baró (1994), "a psychology of liberation requires a prior liberation of psychology" (p. 32).

At this point, we might say that although a decolonising African psychology is certainly a kind of critical psychology, in many ways it resists critical psychology's (often-times muted) Euro-American focus (Ratele et al., 2020; Teo, 2015). Indeed, critical psychology rarely proclaims its geographic location and thus, in many ways, silently reproduces Euro-American centrism and logics, albeit from a progressive standpoint (Pillay, 2017). In speaking to this often unstated Euro-American centrism of critical psychology, as well as that of mainstream psychology, a decolonising African psychology does not seek to develop distinct geographically bounded silos for critical psychology (a critical psychology for Europe, one for Asia, another for Australia, and so on). To the contrary, the goal of such a situated psychology is to advance epistemic and political

transparency by declaring the orientation of its critical psychological praxis as well as the location (and the histories and struggles locked into this location) from where one undertakes this praxis-oriented psychology. Decolonising African psychology, in short, seeks to address critical Africa(n)-centred psychology to the task of decolonising knowledge, power, and being (see Maldonado-Torres, 2016, 2017; Mignolo, 2007). Thus, in working from and for Africa, a decolonising African psychology looks to find and create spaces for psychology and psychological knowledges within struggles for decolonisation.

Attention to one's locus of enunciation (see Mignolo, 1999) does not mean that a decolonising African psychology strives to completely abandon Euro-American psychological traditions (both critical and mainstream). We have friends and lovers in Europe and North America. We also have friends and families in Africa and on other continents who love Europe and North America. Rather than abandon European and U.S. psychologies, we search for seams with these traditions that might prove useful for decolonising struggles; to be used in conjunction with, and reconfigured through, decolonising Africa-centred knowledges (Ratele et al., 2020). Dominant models of trauma, for instance, have been criticised for heavily emphasising individualism, passive subjectivities, and a liberal conception of human rights (Meari, 2015). If, however, we consider trauma in conjunction with decolonial thought, such as Boaventura de Sousa Santos' (2016) notion of insurgent cosmopolitanism (i.e., a subversive mode of globalisation), Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's (2009) conception of re-membering (i.e., recovering histories that have been dismembered by coloniality), and Sylvia Wynter's (2003) model of humanism (i.e., a full conception of humanity that stands against coloniality's partialised ontologies), we are able to develop, within psychology, a culturally grounded, systemic, counter-hegemonic, and decolonising approach to understanding trauma that is attentive to place, political economy, history, and ideology.

In recent years, we have seen a burgeoning of research into the decolonisation of African psychology, as well as into harnessing African psychology for decolonising purposes in the classroom, the clinic, everyday life, communities, and beyond (see, e.g., Barnes & Siswana, 2018; Boonzaier & van Niekerk, 2019; Carolissen & Duckett, 2018; Macleod et al., 2020; Ratele, 2019; Ratele & Malherbe, 2020; Seedat & Suffla, 2017). In each of these instances, psychology's somewhat parochial scope is stretched under decoloniality's ambitious demands, with Africa centralised not through psychological discourse, but via decolonising engagements. In this, the construct "Africa" comes into focus for the psychologist not as an abstract entity to be moulded to the discourses of neoliberalism (e.g., "Africa rising"), fetishisation (i.e., overidentification), or coloniality (e.g., "the dark/savage continent, ripe for imperial adventure"), but as the locus and object of humanising emancipatory struggle (see Ratele & Malherbe, in press; Wynter, 2003). Here, Africa signifies those who share in the histories and progressive struggles of the continent, and who strive for the liberation of all people, beginning with those who are most oppressed under coloniality (see Asante, 2009; Ratele, 2019). In this, a decolonising African psychology requires that psychologists work with people to disidentify with coloniality's ego ideal (Hook, 2020), and to begin to psychically identify with formalised decolonising resistance (e.g., the Movement for Black Lives), or everyday decolonising resistance (e.g., refusing coloniality's demands in homes, workplaces, public spaces, and intimate spaces). A decolonising African psychology is, therefore, able to play a role in connecting

our resistance to external coloniality with a rejection of how coloniality affects the mind (see Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 1986); which is to say, linking subjective decolonisation with social struggle (see Nandy, 1983; Ratele & Malherbe, in press).

Reminiscent of Stuart Hall's proclamation that "I am not interested in Theory, I am interested in going on theorizing" (as cited in Grossberg, 1996, p. 150), a decolonising African psychology identifies with movement and becoming (*decolonising*), rather than endpoints and being (*decolonised*), precisely because liberation is a never-ending task that speaks to a society in flux (see Montero, 2007). Grounding itself in this way ensures that those who practice such a psychology are always attuned to the decolonial requirements of the conjuncture in which they find themselves. A decolonising African psychology looks to reckon with how the politics of place and of looking influence one's psychosocial praxis (see Mignolo, 1999; Ratele, 2019). This does not mean that every actor from a geographic location aspires to and is united by a singularly constituted decolonial attitude, but rather that the histories and struggles of one's location profoundly influence the decolonial knowledge-making enterprise. It is for this reason that a decolonising African psychology is always a pluriversal endeavour that remains attuned to one's locality as a means of addressing coloniality as a global structure (see de Sousa Santos, 2016). A decolonising African psychology is thereby rooted in the particularities of place (i.e., how coloniality has been constituted within particular societies, communities, organisations, and, importantly, how it has been resisted), as well as the universalities required for decolonial solidarity-making across spaces and borders. The role of psychologists within a decolonising African psychology is neither a priori nor is it to be determined by individual psychologists or mainstream psychology's disciplinary dictums. The function of a decolonising African psychology is to be decided by those engaged in decolonising struggles that are with and for Africa as well as the world and its poor, oppressed, unfree, or subhumanised majority. It should, therefore, be conceded that the existence and praxis of a decolonising African psychology are always contingent. Psychologists must be prepared to abandon their disciplinary investments and practices if these no longer serve the interests of decolonisation. A willingness to cede one's disciplinary identity in this way ensures that decoloniality, rather than psychology, lies at the core of a decolonising African psychology.

What and who is a decolonising African psychology for?

In his seminal text, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986) troubles himself with a similar question, following his decision to turn toward writing in his native language, Gikuyu. Having resolved the question of language and the form of the story he would write, he asks, "but who was I writing for?" (p. 72). While the question of writing in an African language is one we do not take up in this article (however, see Dlamini, 2020; Segalo & Cakata, 2017), we cannot ask what a decolonising African psychology is for without, at the same time, considering who it is for. Indeed, if the purpose of such a psychology is to serve the psychosocial and political interests of oppressed and colonised peoples from within Africa and the world, what this psychology is for is also, effectively, who it is for. If, then, a decolonising African psychology's purpose is the decolonisation of everyday life from within an

orientation that is for Africa and the world of the subjugated, such a psychology is potentially *for* everyone. In this regard, a decolonising African psychology represents an often underconsidered kind of humanistic psychology. However, its humanistic essence does not mean that a decolonising African psychology embodies a liberal preoccupation with consensus or absolute permissiveness (see Malherbe & Dlamini, 2020). An African psychology that strives toward the decolonial attitude is, in the first instance, always a social and politically committed psychology whose primary concern is those lives that have been cheapened and partialised by coloniality (see Wynter, 2003).

Decoloniality demands our material and psychic disinvestment in identifications with White, cisgendered, heteropatriarchal capitalist modernity/coloniality (see Hook, 2020). Although such identification always produces a psychic hollowness, it has nonetheless ensured that the material comforts of a minority of people are dependent on the degradation and social death of vast swathes of the planet's population (see Fanon, 1963, 1967; Rodney, 1972). A decolonising African psychology should, therefore, encourage disidentification with coloniality from all people and, with respect to Africa, to do so in a range of African voices and languages that seek to articulate the concerns of African liberation within the linguistic register of those fighting for this liberation (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 1986; Segalo & Cakata, 2017). Disidentification of this sort may also inform the kinds of emancipated consciousness fostered in collective decolonising struggle (Memmi, 1991). Such disidentification is, however, not only an imperative for oppressor groups. It also calls upon the oppressed to resist currents of coloniality among those who may be understood as close or familiar, that is, the intimate enemy (see Nandy, 1983). Frantz Fanon (1967) recognised that the intimate enemy may even reside within one's self when he called for colonised subjects to "kill the oppressor within" by confronting the ways in which coloniality has been internalised (see also Memmi, 1991; Thompson, 2019). If African psychology is to harness decoloniality in ways that do not fetishise or make sacrosanct static notions of Africa, then it should endeavour to understand how vertical violence (i.e., the violence enacted by authorities, from above) and horizontal violence (i.e., the violence enacted between group members) are linked under coloniality (see Fanon, 1963, 1967). In this way, we can begin to more effectively resist coloniality's near totalising purview.

Decoloniality entails a loss of power for some and an intensely action-oriented introspection from all, and this is precisely what renders it a project that is potentially *for* everyone. Mainstream psychologies of oppression (see Watkins & Shulman, 2008), for instance, are ultimately a social malady that, while privileging some groups, negatively affect both oppressed and oppressors, albeit in vastly different and unequal ways (see Fanon, 1967; Memmi, 1991). To remove the oppressor's power and to prevent oppression at structural, vertical, and horizontal levels will free everyone. Regardless, a psychology that is aligned with decoloniality proper has always been resisted by those who benefit from and subscribe to the logic of colonial power because it is common cause that power is enjoyable. Furthermore, there is the matter of historical trauma and entrenched modes of coloniality that exist at social and psychic levels. No matter the material gains that have been made, a decolonising African psychology must reckon with the legacies of coloniality, legacies which are of concern to everyone.

Who should use a decolonising African psychology, and who might use it anyway?

There is tension when formulating who it is that should make use of a decolonising African psychology. Indeed, if a psychology of this sort can and has been taken up most usefully by activists, community organisers, cultural workers, and students involved in decolonising struggles (see Ratele et al., 2020; Watkins & Shulman, 2008), what is the place of the psychologist here? Put differently, if a decolonising African psychology is to cast a sceptical eye onto psychological traditions so that the discipline might be repurposed for decolonisation within, by, and for Africa, is the conventional figure of the psychologist (and its “neutral” subjectivity) even necessary? Some would posit that the risk of the psychologist co-opting and/or psychologising decolonising energies is too great, and that although there might be a use for a decolonising African psychology, there is little use for psychologists. While we are sympathetic to such an argument, we are not yet prepared to entirely abandon our conviction that psychologists can be of use to African-centred struggles for decoloniality as well as the related task of advancing a psychology made for the purpose of decolonising the mind.

Although it cannot be assumed that psychologists possess the definitive understanding of psychological issues underlying African-centred decolonial struggle (i.e., social struggles, be they environmental, economic, political, or cultural), perhaps psychologists can work with people to set up spaces for holding some of the traumas that people involved in these struggles encounter. Such struggle need not be defined by trauma, as some psychologists may be wont to do, but the traumatic constitution of struggle also cannot be ignored. In South Africa, for example, the emphasis on forgiveness for apartheid-era crimes does little to facilitate the kinds of therapeutic spaces required to reckon with intergenerational trauma (see Kaminer et al., 2001); a trauma which, in South Africa, is defined by naked colonial violence. Psychologists who seek to work with and for decolonising African-centred struggles should work with people to enunciate the trauma of coloniality, and ensure that our visions of a decolonised future attend to such trauma. This work is important in ensuring that the psychic damage that coloniality has wrought is taken as a central feature of decolonising resistance politics. Psychologists are by no means the only figures who can undertake work of this kind, but they may be able to contribute to it in useful ways.

When we consider who could and should use a decolonising African psychology, it is crucial to keep in mind who might use it anyway. There is, in other words, reason to guard against recuperation. By recuperation, we mean to refer to the subsuming of radicality into an existing unjust social order. We see this in claims that female representation in the leadership structures of oppressive political regimes represents feminism; that socialism be confined to university discourse and speculation; and that antiracism is best exemplified through “diversity training” (see Fraser et al., 2019; Ratele & Malherbe, 2020). As decoloniality continues to garner cultural cadence, there is a risk that it, too, is drawn upon to attend exclusively to the symbolic, while ignoring the political, psychological, and material (Quaintance, 2020). Decoloniality, when recuperated, is rendered “safe,” denuded of its radical and disruptive impulses, and is therefore no longer decolonising. We can see this in the worlds of policy, academia, and art, where the language of

decolonisation has, in some instances, been drawn on to offer (and obscure) what are effectively liberal reforms (see Malherbe & Dlamini, 2020). We must guard against a decolonising African psychology's recuperation by ensuring that it is never the sole product of psychologists. Indeed, it is when such a psychology is no longer determined by groups and individuals engaged in decolonising struggle that it cedes its decolonising potential.

Conclusion

A decolonising African psychology is never *for* mainstream psychology. Nor is it *for* static images of a “new” or “rising” Africa that open themselves to commodification, fetishisation, and/or racist discourse (Ratele & Malherbe, in press). Such a psychology is, always, a mode of advancing the decolonial attitude—an individual and group disposition that encourages resistance to oppressive powers that emerged during the colonial era (see Maldonado-Torres, 2016, 2017). It is when those practising African psychology seek to prioritise the demands of decolonisation through the decolonial attitude that emancipatory iterations of both psychology and Africa come into focus.

In our unpacking of what and for whom a decolonising African psychology is for, we have identified several key components of such a psychology. We began by noting that because of mainstream psychology's historical complicity with coloniality, African psychology, if it is to be at all critical, must be taken up as a kind of transdisciplinary, critical, and creative planetary praxis, effectively offering itself as an antipsychological mode of psychology (see Ratele & Malherbe, in press). Embedding this psychological praxis within a decolonial attitude, we argue, looks to ensure that African psychology works for everyone by aligning with the struggles of those who coloniality's mechanisms of dehumanisation render subhuman, or other-than-human (Wynter, 2003); those who Fanon (1963) referred to as the damned of the earth. It is when a decolonising African psychology is no longer accountable to the emancipatory demands of the damned of the earth that it becomes something quite different, and is likely to be recuperated into coloniality's ever-shifting matrices of power. In such cases, a decolonising African psychology is no longer decolonising.

If the decolonising project is always ongoing, asymptotic, and incomplete (which is what renders it decolonising, rather than decolonial), it follows that those seeking to put African psychology to work for decolonising purposes should not—and, indeed, cannot—stipulate the precise contents of such a psychology. At the same time, because a decolonising African psychology, in our view, represents a kind of praxis within psychology that draws from other disciplinary knowledges, we should not confine it to the level of abstraction. Following this, the tension that is housed within a decolonising African psychology is thus: it is to remain rooted in the psycho-materiality of decolonising struggles while, at the same time, it is to ensure that those involved in these struggles, who possess knowledges of their own, determine how, when, and if African psychology is to be used. In other words, the precise co-ordinates of what a decolonising African psychology *is* cannot be prefigured as it is always those for whom such a psychology is *for* who will determine its pragmatic and theoretical constitution. While we need not work to resolve this tension wholesale, we should strive to hold it within our psychological work,

and to always wrestle with its valences, deadlocks, and emancipatory possibilities. In this way, we act to resist a decolonising African psychology becoming a static, repetitive, unreflective, and even subjugating kind of rhetoric by embodying an action-oriented and dynamic praxis within psychology that is attuned to the dialectics of actually existing struggle (Dlamini, 2020; Malherbe & Dlamini, 2020; Martín-Baró, 1994; Ratele, 2019; Ratele & Malherbe, in press; Teo, 2015). We might, then, conclude that a decolonising African psychology does not offer us a map for practising psychology. Rather, it serves as a compass, pointing us toward the direction that critical and socially creative psychology should be headed, and where it should not go.

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ORCID iD

Nick Malherbe  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4968-4058>

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Author biographies

Nick Malherbe is a researcher at Institute for Social and Health Sciences, University of South Africa and South African Medical Research Council–University of South Africa Masculinity and Health Research Unit. His research interests include culture, psychological praxis, and visual methods.

Kopano Ratele is the director of the South African Medical Research Council Masculinity and Health Research Unit and professor at the University of South Africa where he runs the Transdisciplinary African Psychologies Programme. He has published extensively and his books include: (coedited with J. Hearn, T. Shefer, & F. Boonzaier), *Engaging Youth in Activism, Research and Pedagogical Praxis: Transnational and Intersectional Perspectives on Gender, Sex, and Race* (2018) and *The World Looks Like This From Here: Thoughts on African Psychology* (2019).