

Decoloniality as a social issue for psychological study

Readsura Decolonial Editorial Collective

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Support for this project came from the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues, the University of the Western Cape, the University of the Witwatersrand, the University of Pretoria, the University of South Africa, the Pan-African Psychology Union, the South African Medical Research Council, and the American Psychological Association Office of International Affairs.

Abstract

This article provides a theoretical introduction to a two-installment special issue on decolonial approaches to the psychological study of social issues. Decolonial approaches propose that colonial violence is not confined to the distant past (i.e., *colonialism*); instead, it persists as *coloniality*: racialized ways of thinking and being associated with Eurocentric global domination. Rather than characterizing modernity and its individualist psychological manifestations as *progress*, decolonial theorists use *modernity/coloniality* to illuminate the colonial violence inherent in the modern order and inseparable from modern individualist development. One implication of a decolonial framework is that colonial violence extends beyond physical space to psychological space, such that complete liberation requires forms of psychological decolonization. Accordingly, articles in this first installment consider decoloniality as a social issue for psychological analysis not only to address historical trauma, internalized inferiority, and other forms of psychological violence among the (formerly) colonized but also to recognize the coloniality in features of Eurocentric modernity—e.g., mainstream environmentalism, prevailing articulations of human rights education, or modern individualist lifeways—that appear liberal or progressive.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, there have been increasing calls (e.g., #RhodesMustFall; see Nyamnjoh, 2016; Pillay, 2016) to reveal and resist the Euroamerican-centric character of the global modern order. These calls for decolonization come from both formerly colonized countries of the so-called Global South and communities of racially oppressed peoples in the Global North. They come from Indigenous peoples who demand sovereignty over land and matters such as climate, education, and criminal justice policy in settings that normalize and naturalize European settler conquest. They come from students in postcolonial settings who push to decolonize curricula and the material infrastructure of university campuses, replacing the inherited and continuously reimposed colonial archive of Eurocentric thought with forms of knowledge better suited to local circumstances. Most relevant for current purposes, these renewed calls for decolonization build on the work of revolutionary intellectuals (Biko, 1978; Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 1986), including researchers in the psy-disciplines (e.g., Fanon, 1963/1961; Nandy, 1983), who regard decolonization of the mind—diagnosis and treatment of forms of colonial mentality that accompanied colonial miseducation—as a core and largely unfinished aspect of the decolonial project.

As psychologists who have lived and worked in postcolonial settings of the Global South, these movements have inspired us to consider how our own research and practice might intersect with decolonial projects. Each of us has separately sought and benefitted from collaborations with networks of like-minded scientists, scholars, students, practitioners, and community activists who are working on decolonial issues. We have organized symposia and conferences devoted to decolonial/decolonization projects, and we have edited collections of work to disseminate these ideas to broader audiences (e.g., Adams et al., 2015; Decolonial Psychology Editorial Collective, 2021; Seedat & Suffla, 2017; Titi & Ratele, 2018).

Our efforts eventually brought us together in February 2019 for a conference, *Towards a Decolonial Psychology: Theories from the Global South*, at the University of the Western Cape in Cape Town, South Africa.¹ The conference included addresses from decolonial theorists and psychologists working in South African settings (e.g., Cooper & Ratele, 2019; Kessi, 2019a; Maldonado-Torres, 2019; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2019), webinar presentations from psychologists working from decolonial perspectives in North American settings (e.g., Bhatia, 2019; Fernández, 2019; Gone, 2019), presentations from scholars who were active in the Black Consciousness Movement during and after the anti-apartheid struggle (Moodley et al., 2019), and symposia sessions of presentations organized around a set of common themes.²

In the aftermath of the conference, we proposed a special issue of the *Journal of Social Issues* to extend the conversation to a broader audience. The response to the CFP was enthusiastic. We received over 80 abstracts for our consideration, including more high-quality contributions than we could accommodate in a single issue of *JSI*. For this reason, we have organized contributions to the special issue into two installments. In this introduction to the first installment of the special issue, we offer a brief introduction to concepts around coloniality and decolonial perspectives in

¹ In addition to funding from the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues, support for the conference came from the University of the Western Cape, the University of the Witwatersrand, the University of Pretoria, the University of South Africa, the Pan-African Psychology Union, the South African Medical Research Council, and the American Psychological Association Office of International Affairs.

² Video recordings of the event are available online at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e0xytvYYkrk> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qiSCJ01avKg>.

psychology as they appear from our own epistemic locations. We then offer a conceptual overview of articles that constitute the first installment of the special issue.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: COLONIZATION, COLONIALISM AND COLONIALITY

In a general sense, *colonization* refers to domination, occupation, and often settlement of one location by strangers from a different location. The more particular concept of *colonialism* refers to an ideology and global system of power associated with European imperial domination—a system that, contrary to revisionist narratives, was inherently violent, unjust, and oppressive (e.g., Sonn et al., 2013). Popular narratives of history understand colonialism as a discrete historical period that began with the era of European global exploration and conquest, extended to the creation of globe-spanning empires, and came to a more-or-less definite conclusion with the dismantling of colonial administrations. The resurgence of calls for decolonization disrupts this narrative of conclusion and raises a question. How are the global modern order and associated institutions *colonial*, such that they require decolonization?

A useful framework for considering this question comes from various perspectives of decolonial theory. An important contribution of decolonial perspectives is a distinction between colonialism and coloniality. Whereas *colonialism* refers to a discrete historical period, decolonial theorists use *coloniality* to refer to vestiges of colonial power and associated ways of thinking and being that originated in the colonial period of European global domination but persisted long after the formal end of colonial rule.

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 a 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 (Maldonado-Torres, 2007, p. 243).

Briefly stated, the idea of coloniality entails an understanding that “the *modern/colonial* global order... represents a colonial present that is an ongoing manifestation of, rather than break from, the colonial past” (Adams et al., 2018, p. 13).

The modern/colonial present

The most obvious way coloniality persists is that European imperialism, settlers, and institutions still dominate the modern global order. Coloniality is most evident in the ongoing occupation of land by descendants of European settlers in places such as the Americas, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa. In some cases, this colonial occupation is so pronounced that it naturalizes settler occupation and renders ongoing Indigenous presence invisible (Fryberg & Eason, 2017;

Tuhiwai Smith, 1999). The land becomes synonymous with the settler construction of it as New Zealand, Canada, or the United States of America (for many people implicitly synonymous with whiteness; Devos & Banaji, 2005) rather than places such as Aotearoa, Turtle Island, or Aztlán. Even in settler-occupied countries with black majorities such as South Africa, white minorities own and control a disproportionate share of land and the economy. Moreover, where the state makes an effort to change land ownership patterns, powerful voices in the Eurocentric modern order send strong messages against the reappropriation of land.

With the occupation of land came control of its resources. Colonialism involved plunder of wealth and appropriation of productive capacity (including labor and other resources extracted from human bodies), launching different developmental trajectories that persist into the present. Colonial plunder provided the material basis for the shiny modern growth of Europe and European settler societies, while the corresponding material deprivation and social disruption set the stage for ongoing underdevelopment (Rodney, 1972) of the colonized Global South.

Even after the apparent reclamation of land, political power, and resources from European colonists, material manifestations of coloniality have persisted in what postcolonial leaders referred to as *neocolonialism* (Nkrumah, 1967). The dismantling of political colonialism did not result in broader liberation; instead, colonial relations continued in postcolonial settings under a new guise, with local leaders joining foreigners as the primary agents of appropriation (Fanon, 1963/1961). From this perspective, we inhabit a *postcolonial neocolonised world*: “the structural, systemic, cultural, discursive, and epistemological pattern of domination and exploitation that has engulfed Africans [and other colonized peoples] since the Conquest” (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013, p. 3).

Beyond the occupation of land, coloniality persists in the “occupation of being” (Bulhan, 2015) or “colonization of the imagination” (Quijano, 2007, p. 169). Whereas most discussions of colonialism place appropriate emphasis on material manifestations of violence, this special issue reflects the awareness that colonialism and ongoing coloniality entails non-material or cognitive-universe related manifestations of cultural and epistemic violence that, “among other disastrous psychological consequences ... unsteadies the concepts on which the colonized could build or rebuild the world” (Césaire, 2010, p.140). Indeed, anti-colonial writers in post-independence African settings emphasized that colonial occupation extended beyond physical space to mental space, such that complete liberation from colonialism required mental decolonization (Bulhan, 2015; Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, 1986). A particularly noteworthy manifestation of mental colonization is the ongoing displacement of local knowledge and ways of being embedded in the local language in favor of colonizer languages (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, 1986). More generally, mental colonization extends beyond language to a sort of inferiority complex, auto-oppression, or collective self-hatred associated with *colonial mentality* (Biko, 1978; Bulhan, 1985; David & Okazaki, 2006; Fanon, 1967/1952; Utsey et al., 2014; see Rivera Pichardo et al., 2022).

Finally, coloniality persists in a form of mental colonization that is the mirror image of colonial mentality: an ongoing overvaluation of people of European descent in the modern global order. As writers from a variety of marginalized racial standpoints have noted, people constructed as white enjoy access to human status that does not come without question or without strings attached for people more generally (e.g., Baldwin, 1984; Coates, 2015). Cultural psychological structures of whiteness, including delusional myths of superiority and Eurocentric narratives of history and progress, infect people with a sort of “racial hubris” (Bulhan, 2015, p. 244) or savior complex (Cole, 2012) that enables bold action, often without sufficient concern for broader consequences. This hubris and associated miseducation “has placed everyone now living into the hands of the most ignorant and powerful people the world has ever seen.”

And [they] have brought the world to the brink of oblivion because they think they are white. ... Because they think they are white, they believe, as even no child believes, in the dream of safety. (Baldwin, 1984; p. 92)

Decolonial theorists propose that this form of colonial mentality—*because they think they are white*—is a psychological force that underlies many of our most pressing social issues.

Coloniality as the dark side of modernity

In addition to the distinction between colonialism as a historical moment and coloniality as an ongoing expression of colonial violence, decolonial theorists use the phrase *modernity/coloniality* to emphasize the inseparable role of colonial violence in the production and reproduction of the modern global order. This phrase positions coloniality as the “darker side of modernity” (Mignolo, 2011): the typically obscured shadow of racist violence that supports and is inseparable from—not merely coincidental to—the shiny project of modern growth and development. From the standpoint of decolonial theory, the modern/colonial global order is not a fellowship of nations that emerged after the colonial empire; instead, it is an ongoing manifestation of racism and colonial violence.

An important implication of this idea for the psychological study of social issues concerns the *modernity/coloniality* of the individualist ways of being that constitute default standards of hegemonic psychological science (Adams et al., 2018; Maldonado-Torres, 2007). Despite its growth as a field for international study, standard knowledge in psychology continues to rest on an empirical basis of research in settings that are WEIRD: that is, *Western, educated, industrial, rich, and (supposedly) democratic* (Henrich et al., 2010; see Arnett, 2008; Thalmayer, et al., 2021). In recent decades, it has become more common for psychologists who work in global centers of academic production to question whether the patterns they observe are not so much the straightforward expression of universal predispositions as they are the product of engagement with affordances for modern individualism prevalent in the WEIRD settings where they work. However, despite increased awareness about the WEIRDness of psychology, the tendency is still to understand contextual variation in psychological experience as the product of cultural worldviews divorced from political economy. Decolonial perspectives challenge psychologists to consider the colonial dark side of these modern ways of being.

Understood in this way, the concept of coloniality is doubly relevant for the psychological study of social issues. First, the ongoing coloniality of the modern order is a social issue worthy of psychological study. As many anticolonial and postcolonial revolutionary intellectuals have argued (e.g., Césaire, 2001; Bulhan, 1985; Fanon, 1963/1961; Mamdani, 2017; Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, 1986), the task of decolonization is not complete once colonized communities have reclaimed control over land and material resources. In addition, it requires decolonial liberation from forms of mental colonialism that reproduce colonial violence by imposing Eurocentric beliefs, devaluing local knowledge, and constraining imagination of possible alternatives to the Eurocentric modern global order. Decolonial perspectives challenge psychologists to heal the psychological trauma of colonial violence, to resist colonial mentality and its mirror image in delusions of white supremacy, and to illuminate sustainable alternatives to modern individualist ways of being. We have collected responses to this challenge in the papers that we have included in this first installment of the special issue.

However, the relevance of coloniality is not just as a social issue ripe for psychological study; in addition, the psychological study of social issues is itself ripe for decolonial analysis. To the extent that we, as researchers and practitioners, portray modern individualist mentalities as descriptive and prescriptive norms, we reproduce and add scientific authority to colonial ways of being. The epistemic violence associated with this imposition, normalization, and even naturalization of modern individualist mentalities is a defining manifestation of the coloniality of knowledge within the field of psychology. We elaborate on this idea in the introduction and papers that constitute the second installment of the special issue.

DECOLONIAL RESPONSES IN PSYCHOLOGY: A MULTI-VOCAL OVERVIEW

Although largely operating on the fringes of mainstream psychological science, researchers and practitioners in psy-disciplines (e.g., psychiatry, psychoanalysis, and psychology) have been important contributors to anti-colonial, postcolonial, and decolonial liberation movements (e.g., Martín-Baró, 1994; Nandy, 1983). Perhaps the most influential of these was Frantz Fanon, whose works (1967/1952; 1963/1961) have become foundational texts in the broader field of decolonial studies (Maldonado-Torres, 2019). Despite its origins in the psy-disciplines, Fanon's work has had limited influence in the field of psychology (for noteworthy exceptions, see Bulhan, 1985; David, 2013).

However, there have been other sites within psy-disciplines that offer resources for a decolonial psychology. Perhaps most obviously, Indigenous psychology perspectives contribute to decolonial efforts via the elaboration of local understanding into forms of knowledge and practice that are better suited to local experience than knowledge and practices of hegemonic WEIRD science (Nwoye, 2015; Pe-Pua, 2006; Sundararajan et al., 2020). Similarly, perspectives of cultural psychology (e.g., Adams & Kurtiş, 2018; Bhatia, 2017; Chaudhary & Sriram, 2020; Ratele, 2019) can contribute to decolonial efforts to the extent that they challenge the imperialist, universalizing authority of hegemonic psychological science. At the same time, dominant articulations of indigenous and cultural psychology can fall short to the extent that they focus on reified cultural traditions while neglecting considerations of political economy, power, racialized violence, and the epistemic disruptions of colonialism (Long, 2019; Ratele, 2017). In contrast, various articulations of "ethnic minority psychology" (e.g., Division 45 of the APA) grant more explicit consideration to the racism or coloniality of the modern order from the perspective of racially marginalized communities within European settler societies. Indeed, some of the most provocative work on mental decolonization has come from the perspectives of Black or African-centered psychology (Nobles, 2013), Native American psychology (Duran & Duran, 1995), Asian-American psychology (Okazaki, 2018), or multicultural counseling more generally. Scholars working from the perspectives of critical and theoretical psychology have increasingly adopted a decolonial lens (Beshara, 2019; Fisher, 2019; Pickren & Pickren, 2021; Segalo & Fine, 2020). Finally, various approaches to community psychology have emerged as a leading site of decolonial efforts in psychology (Boonzaier & van Niekerk, 2019; Carolissen & Duckett, 2018; Seedat & Suffla, 2017), especially approaches related to various perspectives of liberation psychology (e.g., Enriquez, 1993; Martín-Baró, 1994; Montero & Sonn, 2009). Although decolonial approaches to community psychology vary considerably, they typically emphasize accompaniment or accompliceship with people in struggles for social justice as a privileged source of insight about

alternatives to modern/colonial ways of being (Kessi & Suffla, 2022; Martín-Baró, 1986; Segalo, Manoff, & Fine, 2015).

Decolonial struggles in postcolonial communities: The South African example

A primary site of decolonial developments within the field of psychology has been South African settings, where the discipline continues to wrestle with its complicated legacy. On the one hand, South Africa was an outpost of European settler colonialism, where gated enclaves of Eurocentric modernity provided conditions for psy-disciplines to thrive. Like other social science disciplines in the South African context, psychology was a prominent site of racist/colonial science, and psychologists were among the chief architects of the apartheid system (e.g., see Duncan et al., 2001; Nicholas, 1990; Nicholas & Cooper, 1990; Seedat, 1997). On the other hand, academic settings provided context for resistance, and psychologists (alongside other intellectual leaders) have played a role in anti-Apartheid epistemic and political struggles (Anonymous, 1986; Cooper & Nicholas, 2012; Foster, 1986) as well as the recent resurgence of movements to decolonize academic settings (Barnes & Siswana, 2018; Sonn et al., 2013). This historical legacy and active struggle have made attention to issues of epistemic violence and decolonization a priority for psychologists in South African settings in ways that psychologists in WEIRD settings have managed to evade and ignore.

Several decolonial developments emerged out of this history. The present decolonial turn in South African psychology is part of a larger social movement that directs deliberate attention to the remaking and politicization of space (see Massey, 2009). Central to these movements is the recognition of the mutual constitution of place and psyche. Constructions of place that glorify colonial conquest and dehumanize colonized people—such as the monument to Cecil Rhodes and the specimen-like sculpture of a naked Sarah Baartman on display at the University of Cape Town (Kessi, 2019b)—simultaneously give material expression to and serve as affordances for various forms of colonial mentality and the coloniality of knowledge. From this perspective, decolonization of place and decolonization of mind must go hand-in-hand (see Lukate, 2022).

Intrinsic to the spatialization of decoloniality is consciousness of the ways that hegemonic psychology makes and consumes space to universalize via imperialist imposition in a way that omits or marginalizes endogenous knowledge and limits the elaboration of alternative visions for the field. Psychologists who are aware of the persistence of coloniality within (and beyond) psychology necessarily understand their discipline as inescapably political, not through a narrow lens that confines politics to government affairs, but instead as social arrangements concerning the exercise of power and the contestation of such arrangements. Consequently, one can understand the spaces in which we work and live as in terms of power: these spaces either enable or disable us (see Gilmore, 2002; Kitchin, 1998; Lukate, 2022).

Beyond conscientization about the coloniality of psychology, a simultaneous objective for a decolonial psychology is the recuperation and production of spaces and standpoints to enlarge, deepen, and demonstrate liberatory projects. Building on a collective history of struggle against colonial, white-centric, Euroamerican, and apartheid psychologies, teams of psychologists working in South African settings have collaborated to create spaces that enable and empower decolonial activity. One example is the Transdisciplinary African Psychologies Programme at the

University of South Africa, launched by Kopano Ratele and currently led by Shahnaaz Suffla.³ Another example is the Hub for Decolonial Feminist Psychologies in Africa at the University of Cape Town, led by Floretta Boonzaier and Shose Kessi.⁴ While multiple in identity and organization, the creators have purposely constructed and represented these decolonial collectives as epistemic, social, and material cartographies of resistance and remaking. These are spaces for radical experimentation where professors and students relearn how to teach and learn from each other, to undertake research, to write and to engage each other beyond universities and consulting rooms. A distinctive hallmark of the collectives is the use by staff and students of emergent decolonial tools to make space for engagement with the public and communities outside of universities on decoloniality, violence, mental health, and other topics.

Although firmly grounded in place-based sensibilities, decolonial spaces and collectives at the forefront of counter-hegemonic struggles in South African psychology mobilize from varying geographic and epistemic scales of community, local and transnational solidarities and activism, and nodes of transdisciplinarity. The goal is to highlight generative and disruptive relationality to stimulate radical affects and imaginations. Teaching psychology while resisting its oppressive tendencies is a central concern for these and other decolonial collectives, and we find liberatory methodologies, ethics, and epistemologies to be indispensable tools for formulating, conducting, and interpreting psychological research.

To summarize, common and over-arching objectives within such constellations of decolonial thought and praxis are twofold. The task is not simply to undo colonial relations within psychology but also to rebuild new relations, knowledge, and practices via an embodied consciousness to disrupt psychology's "global designs" (see Mignolo, 2000). Psychologists working in these spaces aim to reconstruct a psychology from the global South that offers insights about mind for application in the world more generally (Ratele, 2019).

Decolonial considerations in the hegemonic center

The relevance of decolonial approaches for communities of (formerly) colonized peoples is fairly obvious. Effective work in these settings requires that researchers and practitioners recognize and treat manifestations of colonial violence and use local knowledge to co-construct adaptive responses to modern/colonial conditions. The relevance of decolonial approaches may seem less obvious for researchers and practitioners in hegemonic psychological science and the WEIRD societies that disproportionately inform its conceptual and empirical basis. However, decolonial writers have emphasized the necessity of illuminating forms of colonial mentality not only among communities of formerly colonized and other racially marginalized peoples, but also among white and WEIRD-positioned beneficiaries of the Eurocentric modern global order. These forms of colonial mentality include relatively straightforward manifestations of racial domination, such as the endorsement of policies and ideological positions that uphold the racial contract (Mills, 1997) on a planetary scale at the expense of broader solidarities, local ecology, and even long-term self-interest.

³ [https://www.unisa.ac.za/sites/corporate/default/Colleges/Human-Sciences/Schools,-departments,-centres,-institutes-&-units/Institutes/Institute-for-Social-and-Health-Studies-\(ISHS\)/Liberatory-Epistemologies-and-Praxes-\(LEAP\)](https://www.unisa.ac.za/sites/corporate/default/Colleges/Human-Sciences/Schools,-departments,-centres,-institutes-&-units/Institutes/Institute-for-Social-and-Health-Studies-(ISHS)/Liberatory-Epistemologies-and-Praxes-(LEAP))
<https://www.unisa.ac.za>

⁴ <http://www.psychology.uct.ac.za/news/hub-decolonial-feminist-psychology-africa>

In addition, however, these forms of colonial mentality include less straightforward manifestations of racial domination. Chief among these are the modern/colonial individualist lifeways that masquerade as just-natural tendencies in hegemonic psychological science and the WEIRD settings that disproportionately inform scientific imagination. Decolonial perspectives help to illuminate the coloniality in these modern individualist ways of being. Rather than the politically innocent consequence of purely philosophical innovation, modern/colonial individualist lifeways are inextricably implicated in racial violence. Although the violence associated with modern/colonial lifeways falls disproportionately on people in formerly colonized communities, the costs of this violence extend even to apparent beneficiaries who suffer worse outcomes than they might otherwise enjoy given ways of being better adapted to human realities of embeddedness, relationality, and constraint (Adams et al., 2019; Metzl, 2019; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009). These costs can be difficult to understand when considered within conventional perspectives of hegemonic psychology. Decolonial perspectives provide a theoretical framework for illuminating and responding to these costs.

Particularly useful for this purpose are strategies of “knowledge Otherwise” (Escobar, 2007; cf. Decolonial Issue Editorial Collective, 2021) associated with *Epistemology from the South* (de Sousa Santos, 2016; cf. Connell, 2007). Whereas conventional approaches to knowledge tend to portray postcolonial settings of the Global South as relatively peripheral to the project of basic knowledge production, the idea of knowledge Otherwise, takes these settings as a privileged standpoint for the generation of basic theory. From this perspective, the relevance of decolonial efforts is not (only) to provide knowledge *about* Southern settings but (also) to provide an epistemic foundation for knowledge about reality in general *from* Southern settings. In a similar fashion, the primary relevance of decolonial perspectives for the psychological study of social issues is not (only) to diversify the knowledge base or to direct attention to particular topics of interest to people in Southern settings. The more important relevance of decolonial perspectives is as an epistemic standpoint from which scientists and practitioners in general can apprehend, re-think, and eventually counteract the coloniality inherent in the modern individualist lifeways that constitute the Eurocentric modern order.

OVERVIEW OF CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE FIRST INSTALLMENT

Articles in this first installment of the special issue articulate decolonial perspectives in psychology and apply them to a broad range of social issues. In contrast to the disciplinary decadence or “fetishization of method” (Gordon, 2014, p.81) that often characterizes mainstream psychology (see, e.g., Wilson, 2005), the contributions are methodologically pluralist. They include quasi-experimental comparison and quantitative analyses of survey data (Dutt et al., 2022; Osei-Tutu et al., 2022; Rivera Pichardo et al., 2022), as well as thematic analyses of video transcripts (Burrage et al., 2022), Foucauldian discourse analysis (Albhaisi, 2022), ethnographic-styled participant observation (Lukate, 2022; Normann, 2022), and other techniques of qualitative research (e.g., Ficklin et al., 2022). As Atallah and Dutta (2021) note in their contribution to the second installment of the special issue, “Far too often, disciplinary criteria and standards of academic excellence work to silence critical questionings by colonized people” (p. 3). Accordingly, “we do not enumerate questions to be asked, nor do we prescribe guidelines/standards for a comprehensive decolonial approach to the psychological study of social issues. We argue against a checklist or criterion approach to decolonial work” (Atallah & Dutta, 2021, p. 3). Rather than a restrictive and inflexible notion of scientific rigor that approaches *rigor mortis* (Abo Zena et al., in press;

Adams & Salter, 2019), the more important qualities of decolonial work are epistemic modesty (Teo, 2019), reflexivity about researcher positionality (along with its constraints and affordances), and a broader “decolonial attitude” (Maldonado-Torres, 2017) of empathy and common humanity.

The psychology of colonial violence

The first articles in the special issue consider the psychology of colonial violence among communities that were the targets of European imperialism. A longstanding focus of work concerns concepts and methods for addressing the “soul wound” (Duran & Duran, 1995) associated with genocide, epistemicide, and the violent assault on Indigenous lifeways that accompanied colonial conquest. This focus is the topic of the article by Burrage and colleagues (2022), who report a conceptual and empirical analysis of *historical trauma*: “the cumulative and collective effects, both across generations and throughout the individual life course, of deaths due to disease and conflict, forced removal of communities from their tribal homelands, systematic physical and sexual abuse of children in boarding schools, forced or coerced cultural assimilation, and contamination of lands and sacred sites” (p. 28). An important contribution of this work is to counteract the psychologization of (colonial) violence that typically accompanies standard or hegemonic perspectives on trauma, post-traumatic stress disorder, and mental health in general. In contrast to the tendency in hegemonic psy-disciplines to understand and treat traumatic experiences as individual psychopathology, the authors propose a more sociogenic (Fanon, 1967/1952) or ecological understanding of distress that focuses on disruption of lifeways that scaffold and sustain everyday well-being. Consistent with this ecological understanding, Burrage and colleagues observe that testimonies of survivors from an “Indian Residential School” in Northern Saskatchewan, Canada, mentioned traumatic experience of loss and processes of healing not only at a personal level but also at family and community levels.

The decolonial contribution of this work is manifold; here, we emphasize two features. First, the work is decolonial to the extent that it draws upon local understanding as a tool for resistance against imperialist imposition of hegemonic forms. In contrast to the psychologization of mental health and egocentric self-orientations that inform hegemonic psychological science, the ecological conception of psychological trauma—with its emphasis on sociocentric, ecocentric, and cosmocentric self-orientations (Kirmayer, 2007)—is a better fit with the relational and place-based ways of knowing and being that are prominent in many Indigenous communities (Bang et al., 2018; Tuck & McKenzie, 2014). Accordingly, it may provide a better basis for effective healing interventions. Second, the work is decolonial to the extent that it locates the source of injury beyond individual psychopathology to focus instead on damage that colonial violence wreaked on the cultural realities of colonized societies. The important implication is that efforts at healing must extend beyond conventional psychotherapy to include programs that “reveal the dynamics of settler colonialism, privilege Indigenous worldviews and ways of knowing, support the restoration of cultural and traditional practices and, importantly, highlight the significance of a return of land to Indigenous peoples” (Burrage et al., 2022, p. 48; see also Tuck & Yang, 2012).

The case of Indigenous Peoples in North America makes especially clear how colonial violence is not a distant historical memory but continues in the present not only via epistemicide (i.e., elimination of languages, corresponding worldviews, and lifeways) but also via such ongoing material manifestations as occupation of land, extraction of resources, destruction of human ecosystems, and outright murder. For psychologists working in many Indigenous communities, the urgent task beyond treatment of historical trauma is to organize effective responses to this

deadly violence. Such is the case with Ficklin and colleagues (2022), whose contribution to this section discusses the issue of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG). Although cases of MMIWG continue to ravage Indigenous communities, the problem receives little attention in mainstream media. Ficklin and colleagues offer their article as a way to synthesize information about cases into a centralized reference to better address the problem. As the authors note, “this article is decolonial in its very being. We are bringing Indigenous knowledge and activism to the attention of the Western world by infiltrating the colonized structures that currently dictate what information is ‘valid’” (p. 54).

In contrast to the explicit forms of colonial violence associated with Indian Residential Schools or MMIWG, a more insidious psychological manifestation of colonial violence is the internalized inferiority associated with colonial mentality. This topic is the focus of a contribution from Eduardo Rivera Pichardo and colleagues, who report an empirical investigation of internalized inferiority and its implications for political engagement in Puerto Rico, an unincorporated territory of the United States. The authors operationalized internalized inferiority as negative stereotypes about Puerto Ricans and positive stereotypes about U.S. Americans. Among other results, they observed opposite relationships of internalized inferiority (partially mediated by colonial system justification) with two outcomes that one might otherwise understand as similarly anti-colonial. Specifically, internalized inferiority was negatively related to support for Puerto Rican independence but positively related to support for U.S. statehood.

In our reading, these results hint at a distinction between different constructions of liberation. One might consider the option of US statehood to be anticolonial to the extent that it trades the subordinate colonial status of unincorporated territory for inclusion as an equal partner in the modern individualist project of the United States. However, the association of this option with internalized inferiority gives us pause, suggesting a construction of freedom as neoliberal abstraction (Adams et al., 2019) and inclusion on modern/colonial terms that devalue local lifeways. In contrast, support for independence represents a decolonial option to the extent that it proposes to de-link from the modern/colonial order to enable a future informed by respect for local lifeways. Extrapolating beyond this particular case, the work raises questions about uncritical participation in the project of modern individualist development. If coloniality is inherent in Eurocentric global modernity, then one might understand such enthusiastic participation as a form of colonial mentality. We return to this point in a subsequent section.

The coloniality of space

The second section of the special issue consists of a pair of articles that direct attention to issues of space, identity, and belonging. In many Indigenous societies and Majority World communities, place—including land, water, mountains, plants, and other ecological features—is constitutive of self and identity (Tuck & McKenzie, 2014). People experience themselves in relation to particular places that sustain memory of departed ancestors and afford a sense of continuity with future generations of yet-unborn relatives. In contrast to this relational ontology, the modern/colonial project of European imperialism required and reproduced a modern individualist sense of abstraction from context: a zero-point ontology or experience of being in terms of isolated individuals ontologically prior to any social formation, which in turn afforded a zero-point epistemology or sense of positionless observation via a view from nowhere (Castro-Gómez, 2021; Nagel, 1986). As decolonial scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) noted in her classic work on *Decolonizing Methodologies*, this sense of freedom from positional constraint—an experience of not belonging

anywhere in particular—ironically affords a sense of access to everywhere in general: “an ‘attitude’ and a ‘spirit’ which assumes ownership of the entire world” (p. 56). European settlers and colonial officers viewed Indigenous lands as empty space (i.e., *terra nullius*) to which they gave their own names and imposed their own conceptions of land as a separable commodity available for colonial occupation and market exchange. Their extractive industry transformed local ecology, with planetary consequences so profound that they brought into being a new geological age, the Anthropocene. In the context of this coloniality of space, “decolonial projects . . . are inherently spatial projects” (Lukate, 2022, p. 108).

In the first article in this section, Lukate (2022) describes her ethnographic research on the Black hair salon as a decolonial space in which Black women construct, negotiate, and challenge their identities as racialized Others in the English colonial metropole. As Lukate (2022, p. 121) notes, “Black women’s racial identity formation takes place within and against confrontations with dominant standards of beauty” that valorize white features and judge features of Black women as exotic or grotesque deviations. She emphasizes that this “marginalization of Black identities and beauty . . . occurs *in place* through encounters and socio-spatial interactions” (emphasis in original) that construct their natural appearance as undesirable. Confronted with marginalization, women co-construct decolonial spaces—like the Black hair salon—that provide collective symbolic resources for positive social identity and epistemic resistance against the everyday assault on their psychological well-being.

In the other article in this section, Dutt and colleagues (2022) report the results of a participatory action research project with refugees living in and around Cincinnati, Ohio, USA. The decolonial orientation of their work is evident in both the process and product of the research. Regarding the process, the authors worked with a participatory research team that included refugees from Bhutan, Burundi, the DR Congo, Guatemala, Iraq, Somalia, and Syria. Regarding product, the results of the investigation illuminate how the reception of refugees varies in ways that reflect and reproduce the racist colonial history of the United States. First, the experience of refugees varies as a function of national origin; refugees from African settings reported less positive experience than refugees from non-African settings. Second, the experience of refugees varies as a function of current residence; regardless of national origin, participant satisfaction was lower among those who resided in neighborhoods with a higher proportion of Black residents. The authors interpret this second pattern in terms of the coloniality or racialization of space—societal devaluation and disinvestment from Black worlds (cf. Bonam et al., 2017).

Here, we find it useful to recall the history of African-descended people in the Cincinnati area. Across the Ohio River from Cincinnati lies Kentucky, one of several U.S. states that permitted enslavement of people of African descent. Given this location, Cincinnati was an important destination for people who escaped enslavement and other refugees from the racial terror of the U.S. South before and after the U.S. Civil War (Woodson, 1916). Even so, white communities in Cincinnati were inclined to campaigns of deadly violence when they felt that Black population growth threatened white supremacy. Recalling this history makes visible the continuities in the experience of African-descended people across decades, seeking refuge from colonial violence only to face racial marginalization in defense of white supremacy.

The coloniality of modern progress

An important contribution of decolonial perspectives is to illuminate colonial violence in modern individualist ways of being that might otherwise appear unproblematic. From this perspective,

coloniality not only is evident in social issues with explicit connections to racism and colonialism but also infuses relatively progressive movements to the extent that they have their foundation in modern/colonial ways of knowing and being. This idea informs the remaining contributions to this first installment of the special issue.

In one article, Normann (2022) draws upon interview research with Indigenous communities in Northern Norway and the Brazilian Amazon to illuminate the concept of “green colonialism”—that is, ways in which global environmentalist movements impose solutions to the ecological or Anthropocene crisis that suppress Indigenous knowledge and reproduce relations of domination. Whereas articles in the preceding section consider issues of coloniality related to space, Normann considers issues of coloniality related to time (cf. Schmitt et al., 2021). The urgency of the climate crisis demands fast action. However, as Normann documents, such fast, urgent, forceful action often comes with disruptive side effects, especially for marginalized communities. Moreover, one can trace a link between this emphasis on urgency/speed and the high-energy, unsustainable, modern/colonial individualist lifeways that predominate in Global Northern societies. As Normann (2022, p. 177) aptly notes, an APA task force on climate change “suggested already in 2009 how Western culture treats time as a resource, maximized at the expense of natural resources, as energy is required to execute more tasks in less time (Swim et al., 2009).” Simply put, then, fast/urgent action may be ill-suited to address the long-term coloniality associated with the Anthropocene crisis to the extent that such action is part of the problem that it seeks to confront. Instead, the solution to the Anthropocene crisis may require a more sustainable, long-term, civilizational transformation toward the slower, ecologically embedded lifeways associated with many marginalized communities of the Global South.

In another article, Albhaisi (2022) applies Foucauldian Discourse Analysis to a United Nations Human Rights Education (HRE) curriculum for Palestinian refugee learners in Gaza. Her analysis reveals modern/colonial individualist elements in several features of HRE. Foremost among these is a tendency for hegemonic articulations of HRE to abstract learners from context, so that students consider issues of human rights in terms of abstract principles or distant cases rather than the proximal realities of human rights abuse that constitute their everyday existence. Relatedly, hegemonic articulations of HRE promote a modern individualist construction of civic identity as a citizen of the world with allegiances to a global community, at the expense of solidarities with and obligations toward more local forms of community. Finally, hegemonic constructions of HRE articulate a decontextualized form of *tolerance* that “reduc[es] human suffering into feelings/differences, and shift[s] the focus from the issue of justice to . . . attitudes of respect and sensitivity” (Albhaisi, 2022, p. 156). By promoting a modern/colonial model of HRE that focuses on individual rights abstracted from political and historical contexts, the curriculum contributes to the “normalization of the status quo and the continuation of the Israeli settler-colonial project” (Albhaisi, 2022, p. 159).

In the final article of this installment of the special issue, Osei-Tutu and colleagues (2022) extend a decolonial analysis to a topic—the construction and experience of love as a function of different forms of religious participation—that might seem antithetical to discussions of racism and colonial violence. They report the results of a mixed-methods research project in which they compared tendencies of love and care among Ghanaian participants who reported engagement with either Pentecostal Charismatic Churches (PCCs) or Traditional Western Mission Churches (TWMCs). In many African settings, PCCs have emerged as a primary carrier of ultra-modern or neoliberal individualist lifeways, preaching “positive psychology” messages of individual empowerment and personal growth at the expense of family connections and broader obligations (Freeman, 2012; Meyer, 1998). Osei-Tutu and collaborators provide evidence that these messages resonate at the

level of personal experience; engagement with PCCs was associated in responses of Ghanaian participants with tendencies to invest narrowly in relationships that serve motivations of self-expression and self-expansion at the expense of broader, more material obligations.

LOOKING AHEAD: DECOLONIAL PERSPECTIVES ON PSYCHOLOGICAL STUDY

A focus on the epistemic violence associated with modern/colonial individualist lifeways turns the analytic lens back on hegemonic articulations of psychological science. Generally, psychologists do not merely observe the impact of modern/colonial individualist lifeways; instead, knowledge and practices of psychological science bolster and legitimize the authority of modern individualist lifeways and their colonization of everyday life. Indeed, one might even say that psychologists typically serve as “super-spreaders” of modern/colonial lifestyles.⁵ As in the case of Ghanaian PCCs that deploy tools of positive psychology as spiritual exercises, psychological science and practice are a primary site of proselytization into the ultra-individualist version of modern/colonial lifeways associated with neoliberalism (Adams et al., 2019; Bhatia & Priya, 2018, 2021).

Critically oriented scholars have long noted the methodological and ontological individualism of the psy-disciplines (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Stryker, 1997) and the negative implications that such individualism has for conceptions of well-being and treatment (Burrage et al., 2022). The papers in this section extend this tradition. When NGOs create human rights curricula for Palestinian refugee learners (Albhaisi, 2022), they draw on the modern/colonial individualist tools of psychological science that whitewash and sanitize structural racism by representing it as equipotential, individual prejudice (see also Dixon et al., 2010; Hammack, 2011; Malherbe et al., 2021). When people across the world turn to psychologists, pastors, or other counselors for relationship advice, the wisdom they receive rests on modern/colonial individualist constructions of love and well-being that prioritize mutual exploration, self-expansion (Aron et al., 2013), and pursuit of high-arousal positive affect (Tsai, 2007) over more enduring, broader solidarities that afford peace of mind and assurance of support (Osei-Tutu et al., 2022). Simply put, these papers suggest that the psychological study of decolonial issues must include a decolonial analysis of psychological science and practice. Articles in the second installment of the special issue take up this effort.

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⁵ We use “super-spreaders” somewhat ironically to turn language of science back on itself. In his decolonial analysis of the concept, Richardson (2019) notes how the language of “super-spreaders” typically individualizes political economic processes, blames victims of historical and structural violence, and more generally affords ignorance (Mills, 2007) about the coloniality of public health enterprises. In contrast, one can apply the concept of super-spreaders to agents of modern/colonial individualist development who propagate unsustainable lifestyles that contribute to misery and inequality in ways that undermine public health.

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How to cite this article: Readsura Decolonial Editorial Collective (in random order: Ratele, K., Reddy, G., Adams, G., & Suffla, S. (2022) Decoloniality as a social issue for psychological study. *Journal of Social Issues*, 78:7–26. <https://doi.org/10.1111/josi.12502>