



**Resisting the Coloniality and Colonialism of a Westernized Community Psychology:  
Toward a Critical Racial Justice Praxis**

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## Resisting the Coloniality and Colonialism of a Westernized Community Psychology: Toward a Critical Racial Justice Praxis

The institutional violence we are now experiencing, coupled with historical and ongoing waves of oppression, is a result and continuation of the legacy of colonialism. The outward eruptions that we are seeing over the last years are a result of American and Canadian settler nation-states that have taken hold in North America but are now in decline. Yet, the perpetuation of imperialism and white supremacist ideologies via the academe and other noneducational entities reproduced through curricula, pedagogy, and institutional policies and practices must still be addressed. The discipline of community psychology (CP) is no exception. As a part of the imperialist empire, CP, a mainstream academic discipline born at the heart of the empire of the colonial ruling class, continuously asks: *What can we do?* We, the authors of this paper, are troubled by this question and respond with a question of our own: *Can community psychology really be part of the solution if it does not acknowledge that it is part of the problem?* Through the lens of five Indigenous, Black, and racialized scholar-activists, educators, and practitioners, we identify three community psychology principles and argue that in practice within Black and Indigenous communities, they are not sufficient. Further, we illustrate that, related to these principles, community psychology is situated within what is termed the industrial complex, and we elucidate the implications of this situating. Lastly, we offer a proposal for how we, as part of the academe and practice, can decolonize community psychology and move it forward to align with current liberation movements and Indigenous sovereignty.

*I can't believe what you say because I see what you do.* – James Baldwin

### Introduction

#### Who We Are

We are Indigenous, Black, and racialized educators, students, activists, scholars, and practitioners across sovereign Indigenous lands. Some Indigenous communities refer to these lands as Turtle Island. In our conceptualization, Turtle Island represents a counter-mapping of imperial colonized geography, to upend settler-colonial discourse of land and place, and resist colonial perceptions of power and control (Hunt & Stevenson, 2016). Given this context, we intentionally acknowledge and honor the First Peoples of Turtle Island as we strive

toward a decolonial praxis. By this, we describe our efforts to de-link our theory, research, and practice, as well as pedagogy away from western eurocentrism that dominates psychology, and more broadly ways of thinking, knowing, and being. Linked by the dual traumas of genocide and displacement, Indigenous and Black communities share a common fate and are often subjected to the same structural and cultural traumas and oppressions, though our experiences may differ. In this article, we use the term Black to signify a political term for describing diverse communities that are part of the broader Afrikan diaspora. This includes people who are first, second, or third generation from the Caribbean, continental Africa, as well as those who are several generations in-continent such as African American and African Canadian communities.

## *Our Response to the Legacy of Colonialism and Imperialism*

Amidst this imperialist colonial history and our refusal to be silent, we come together to share our lived experiences and practices as resistance and praxis. We take a critical stance in deconstructing how white supremacy ideologies manifest in the academe and our communities, specifically in communities where we grew up, live, and work. Now, more than ever, we are specifically focused on calling attention to what we have come to critically understand as a need to decolonize community psychology (CP). Our call to decolonize speaks to the understanding of Indigenous epistemologies and connection to land, while engaging with the urgencies of unsettling whiteness, dismantling white supremacy, and decentering racial colonial logics. Emerging from western eurocentrism (a worldview that is implicitly or explicitly European centered), such ideologies and conceptualizations have continued to oppress Indigenous and Black communities by erasing our histories and knowledges, as well as limiting our power to determine our issues of concern and their solutions. Community psychology, as a discipline, has the potential to play an overarching role in decolonizing academia and advancing social and racial justice in our communities and broader society; however, as it stands, the discipline is ill-equipped to carry that torch forward.

In its current form, community psychology perpetuates coloniality by leaving out the voices and realities of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) in facets of scholarship, curricula, research, and practice. Therefore, influential power remains

<sup>5</sup> “The Other,” describes a dominant ‘superior’ group’s (e.g., white settlers) designation of negative attributes of identity, such as lower status, stereotyping, and morally and

nonrepresentative and inaccessible for the majority. Because CP becomes legitimized through scientific research, this epistemic violence manifests as omitting the knowledge – the ideas, concepts, and wisdoms of The Other,<sup>5</sup> which promotes the inherent hegemonic inferiority of The Other. The Other knowledge is labeled as “folk or myth,” thus further delegitimizing communities who are not of the status quo nor who benefit from the dominant structures (Held, 2020).

As emerging critical community psychologists, we work with our communities and within institutions of higher education to reveal the hidden colonial power of systems of oppression within historic and contemporary contexts. Critical community psychology, as a domain within CP, is one characterized by a socio-historical and political critique of CP’s roots in western eurocentrism and the need to decenter it away from white supremacist logics that reify oppressions. The critical community psychologist is oriented toward the ethical imperative that community psychology must be shaped and informed by the needs, concerns, and strengths, as well as agency and dreams determined by communities themselves. As noted by the Society for Community Research and Action (SCRA) - Community Psychology, Division 27 of the American Psychological Association (2021, para. 1),

In solidarity and close partnership with groups – oppressed through violence, exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, or cultural imperialism – critical community psychology seeks to draw attention to the socially divisive and

intellectually inferior, with the ultimate purpose of dehumanization and exclusion/marginalization of another group (e.g., Indigenous and Black Peoples) (Jensen, 2011; Said, 1979).

ecologically destructive broader patterns and structures – such as capitalism, neoliberal globalization, patriarchy, colonialism, hegemony, and racism – that condition the scope of social problems and engage in collective action to dismantle oppressive social arrangements (Evans et al., 2017).

We are critical of community psychology because doing so will aid the discipline's ability to live up to its purported values. We commit ourselves to dismantling these systems through decoloniality and racial justice lenses, inclusive of practices such as writing, publishing, and producing work that seeks to raise our voices and our community voices in resistance to white supremacy ideologies.

The institutional violence we are now experiencing, coupled with historical and ongoing waves of oppression, is a result and continuation and legacy of colonialism. The outward eruptions that we are seeing over the last several years are a result of the American and Canadian settler nation-states that have taken hold in North America, but are now in decline. Considering this worldwide paradigm shift, the academe, and other noneducational entities, whether inadvertently or intentionally, have historically perpetuated imperialism and white supremacy ideologies through curricula, pedagogy, and institutional policies and practices. To this end, the discipline of community psychology is no exception. Born at the heart of the empire of the colonial ruling class, community psychology, as it was established, is a part of the imperialist empire – a mainstream academic discipline. Therefore, as we are in the throes of the empire's decline, with strong and violent opposition from those who seek to retain hegemonic domination, the question that arises for us is: *Can community psychology*

*align with current sovereignty and liberation movements?* We believe that it can.

This article, then, provides a detailed narrative arguing that three principles of community psychology are not sufficient for practice within Black and Indigenous communities while also illuminating community psychology's place within the industrial complex that perpetuates imperialism and neocolonialism. Further, we discuss the implications of these experiences and then offer a proposal for how we can decolonize CP and move it forward to become part of the solution to align with sovereignty and liberation movements.

## *Community Psychology: In Times of Birth and Early Years*

"Community psychology' (CP) in the U.S. emerged in the 1960s in response to the limitations of [clinical] psychology in solving social problems" (Community Psychology, 2021, para. 1). The discipline was born in Swampscott, Massachusetts in 1965 (CP, 2021), partly in response to the deinstitutionalization of mental health care in hospitals (Toro, n.d.). Additionally, the 1960s and 1970s were and still are considered a time of liberation movements and social justice protest, as Indigenous, Black, and racialized people fought inequity, oppression, and death from police brutality and systemic racism and oppression, while working toward a more just society (Jones & Walker, 2016; Samudzi & Anderson, 2018; Ward, 2018).

Influenced by the "Global South," while slowly coming to understand that there was much CP could learn beyond its imperialist borders, so too did the spirit of liberation for countries under the thumb of white supremacy, manifested via colonization and coloniality. Thus, freedom uprisings did not only take place in the United States (US), but in liberation movements in many nation-states, such as México, in response to the Tlatelolco

massacre (Bosteels, 2018), as well as Afrikan independence movements in countries such as Algeria, Kenya, Angola, Guinea, Mozambique, Eritrea, and Namibia (Fanon, 1963; Obeng-Odoom, 2017). In the settler nation-state of Canada, the Sir George William Affair (1969) highlighted the overt and systemic racism that Black students faced at what is now Concordia University. The students, in resisting racism and oppression, staged peaceful protests in highlighting their objectives. However, the state retaliated with its enforcers in the use of violence against the protesters and spun the story to say that the Black students were riotous, not the militarized arm of the imperialist settler nation-state (Forsythe, 1971). In the 1960s, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders were fighting for their rights of fair wages and adequate working conditions, as well as sovereignty on their lands, stolen by the settler nation-state of Australia, as part of the British commonwealth (Australians Together, 2020).

Community psychology on Turtle Island has a history of responsiveness to community issues in concepts such as (but not limited to) prevention and health promotion, a psychological sense of community (SoC), and an empowerment framework, yet these tenets may not be serving all communities as intended. We take these three examples of CP principles to explain how BIPOC are not served in practice and praxis by the current iteration of community psychology.

Prevention and health promotion. Principle #3 at the Swampscott Conference of 1965, "Focusing on wellness, strengths, and competence (vs. deficits and disorder), including an emphasis on prevention, resilience, and health promotion" (CP, 2021, para. 4) is laudable and has the potential to bring a sense of hope for community health and wellbeing, in theory. However, this principle has yet to reach actual practice in Black and Indigenous communities. Rather

the more notable deficit model continues to be the dominant mode of practice. Community psychology attests to moving away from the deficit model, while a larger trend of individual blame continues. What is visible is a lack of practitioners on the ground in Black and Indigenous communities. At the policy level, BIPOC are left to resist and protest against racism and oppression, the real culprits behind health disparities and mortality rates. If these assertions are not true, then perhaps it has been the silence and seeming avoidance of community psychology to address issues, as described in the next section, that prompt our supposition.

Community psychology reproduces western colonial agendas, focusing on Black and Indigenous Peoples as 'at risk,' 'dysfunctional,' or 'too difficult to work with,' along with other stereotypes and assumptions. Exclusion of BIPOC communities regarding the formations of and input on prevention and health promotion policies is part of the western reproduction of CP (McNamara & Naepi, 2018). Always portrayed as needing assistance from white saviours and having little agency, intelligence, or fortitude of our own accord, Black and Indigenous folks are made dependent and thus infantilized, as well as considered not quite human. It is a miracle any of us have survived on our own. And when white CP practitioners do work in Black and Indigenous communities, are their worldviews considered as part of health promotion? This question remains to be seen. Black and Indigenous Peoples must be seen as fully human, interconnected with our cultures, spiritualities, practices, and the land, and quite able to make decisions regarding our health and wellbeing.

Sense of community (SoC). Much has been theorized about SoC, and in some CP programs in universities, students learn about Sarason's (1974) founding theory, where humans maintain a desire to belong

and are mutually dependent. Sarason believed that SoC is a core discipline component of CP (Bess et al., 2002) and it is incorporated within the discipline as such. Students are likely to learn about McMillan and Chavis' (1986) work exploring SoC as membership, influence, integration and fulfillment of needs, and shared emotional connection. In these theoretical perspectives, the focus is mostly on the individual, based on positivist methodologies and measuring factors considered in SoC theory (Bess et al., 2002). Left unaccounted for, however, are the historical, relational, and sociocultural, as well as political dimensions that shape communities, and our positionalities within them.

In light of McMillian and Chavis' (1986) element of belonging as part of their conception of sense of community, for some of us, as Black, Indigenous, and racialized students, faculty, and practitioners, we constantly hear the rhetoric of belonging to the university community, *We are the [insert university name here]community and we are here to support you!*" Yet, we do not feel as if we "belong" to our university communities. For example, when we are continuously taught via textbooks authored by white, male academics without mention of, for instance, African American psychologists, among them Francis Sumner, the first Black male psychologist, or Inez Beverly Prosser, the first Black woman psychologist, as well as Indigenous scholars and activists such as, Cindy Blackstock, Maria Brave Heart, Arthur Manuel, Pam Palmeter, and so many more. *We do not see ourselves reflected in the canon of community psychology.* This contributes and furthers the experience of not belonging – of being on the peripheries of the discipline, marginalized and invisibilized at the same time, so that our identities and positionalities as Black, Latinx, and Indigenous psychologists make us visible. In addition, works of activists, community leaders, and other postcolonial theorists who have much to say

about the dynamics of Black, Indigenous and racialized communities such as, Frantz Fanon, Paulo Freire, Sylvia Wynter, James Baldwin, Afua Dadesen Cooper, Rinaldo Walcott, Harsha Walia, Emiliano Mundrucu, the Combahee Collective, and so many more, are not integral in the studying of community psychology. We believe such crucial pedagogical omissions serve to erase our identities, perpetuate racism, and reinforce silencing; consequently, *we cannot belong* to these academic communities that purport to support us.

**Empowerment.** Empowerment is lauded as the bedrock and a foundational principle of CP (CP, 2021). For some CP students, Julian Rappaport (1987) is introduced as the developer of the concept of empowerment, as he states, "Empowerment conveys both a psychological sense of personal control or influence and a concern with actual social influence, political power, and legal rights" (p. 121). However, with further learnings and conceptualizations, we come to understand that empowerment is based on more than one theoretical concept, such as the work of Freire (1971/2000), who espoused empowerment as a way to transform one's world by developing critical consciousness as emancipation. Latinx feminists and Black Power Movements have used Freire's conceptualizations in understanding and working toward liberation (Calvès, 2009).

Aside from the perception that the CP canon neglects BIPOC scholars, activists, and community members in the defining of empowerment for their communities, the co-opting of empowerment by capitalist forces now relegates empowerment to the acquiring of material and financial resources. As noted by Frieman (1992, as cited by Calvès, 2009), the process is actually one of "disempowerment," defined as, "a historical process of exclusion from economic and social power," which allows for the enduring maintenance of white supremacy status quo.

This is evidenced by increased poverty in both 'developed' countries and 'developing' countries still suffering under the yokes of colonialism and coloniality (Calvès, 2009; Friedman, 1992). The conceptualization of empowerment has been stripped of its focus on power – in the rebalancing of power – and become individualized, with a focus on individual capacity (Calvès, 2009), within neoliberal globalization.

Riger (1993) discusses how empowerment is typically framed as mastery, control, and other individualistic constructs rather than ideas such as cooperation and communion. Such a framing of empowerment can lead to groups coming into conflict with one another, particularly in the context of racial capitalism in which racialized groups are often placed into conflict and competition over scarce resources or foundation funding. Such competitive and individualistic notions are counter to community building and organizing, leaving community psychology unable to fulfill its promise as a field and discipline.

As examples, we find these core theories do not offer a critical lens nor are they conceptualized through the lenses of BIPOC communities. We perceive the lack of criticality as eurocentric-driven community psychology. Thus, to reiterate, CP must grow beyond western eurocentric philosophical bindings to address the systemic forces of power that work to promote and sustain the white supremacist status quo. This requires a paradigm shifting of the lenses that have so long shone on the perceived deficits of BIPOC communities, and the inherent, built-in systemic racism that continues to burn ever so brightly.

Overall, we argue that because CP continues to reproduce western European epistemology as the dominant narrative, it is situated within what is coined the "industrial complex." Through our eyes, this situating

fosters our call for CP to be decolonized. In the next section, we conceptualize the academic and nonprofit complexes and further explain our positions.

## Community Psychology and the Academic and Nonprofit Complex

We assert that community psychology sits at the intersections of the academic and the nonprofit industrial complex because of its role as a field of practice and knowledge production. An industrial complex is the relationship between capitalism and industry, with other sectors of society such as nonprofits, the nation-state, medicine, military, and prisons (Rodriguez, 2007). As a discipline that is oriented toward the academic, specifically empirical and theoretical research and applied clinical-community practice, CP is constantly navigating between these two domains; each one with a unique set of ethics and implications informed by the institutional structures where the theoretical-empirical and the applied are situated. Straddling these two worlds, CP serves two sets of masters: 1) The norms of the western eurocentric academe and of community-based practice, often in collaboration with nonprofit organizations and, 2) Other public sector services. Unfortunately, this means many of the issues, such as the discipline being constrained by white supremacist ideologies, emerge within the field.

Nonprofits have a symbiotic relationship with the nation-state's attempt to suppress counter-hegemonic struggles through mass incarceration and other forms of violent social control. Social movements are often steered toward adopting structures that mirror nation-state and capitalist structures. Energy and resources for social change are redirected to bureaucratic structures (top-down, committees, executive boards, etc.) that promote the status quo rather than grassroots structures that challenge

dominant norms, structures, and institutions, including higher education. This often legitimizes the racist fears and genocidal attempts of the settler nation-state civil society (Indigenous erasure, anti-Blackness, Islamophobia, anti-Semitism, etc.), forcing movements into more “legitimate” methods of pushing for social change. Social movements are also pressured to conform to standards set by the foundations that fund them, an example of how capitalism co-opts social movements (Rodriguez, 2007). Thus, in addition to our overarching aims to align CP with liberation, other important questions arise that we invite readers to reflect and engage with: *Whose knowledge matters?* And relatedly: *Who decides what is social change? Where do we get our theories? How does a field develop to effectively meet the changing demographics and sociopolitical times when its founders are mostly white men?*

### *Is Community Psychology Benevolent Colonialism?*

We are cautious of offering absolute answers and solutions to these questions, as the answers to these will vary depending on the sociopolitical, historical, and cultural contexts, as well as positionality of the community psychologist. However, we do offer some guidance and recommendation for answering these questions. First and foremost, we must start with acknowledging the problematic western eurocentric hegemonic roots of psychology. The roots of psychology are shaped by the colonial matrix of power – a set of interrelated spheres of management and control, held up by racial and patriarchal epistemologies. In particular, the colonial matrix of power perpetuates the hidden curriculum and foundation of community psychology. To this end, power dynamics come into play when determining expertise, often at the expense of BIPOC communities. Laws are an example of this – laws determine who is criminal, often coinciding with Indigeneity and racialization.

It becomes a basis for war by creating The Other – those who violate imperialist laws and norms become threatening to “our” way of life. Laws rooted in coloniality take on another form when entire communities are The Other. The “War on Drugs” is a prime example, as it was devised as a strategy to oppress and undermine the Black liberation uprisings of the 1960s and 1970s. As noted, community psychology’s rise coincided with state repression of Black liberation, Red Power, and counterculture movements (Ward, 2018), as well as with America and neoliberal capitalism becoming global hegemonic forces. Malcolm X would describe this as “benevolent colonialism” or “philanthropic imperialism” (Thomas, 2017, p 155).

These concerns take on great importance when determining social change efforts. Community psychologists in the academe often must navigate the same power structures and work towards the same capitalist/colonial interests as any other academic field – focusing heavily on integration and legitimization by the academe. Given CP’s relationship with nonprofits, such as, for instance, the American Psychological Association (APA) and SCRA, whose organizational structures are member-led and nonprofit, it is important to discuss how the nonprofit industrial complex reproduces racial capitalism.

### *Erasure and Suppression of Radical Change*

Although a range of epistemologies is practiced and promoted within CP, there is still an emphasis on US-centric positivist research. Indigenous and racial justice that incorporates Indigenous and alternative epistemologies remains on the margins of the field. This is especially problematic given CP’s quest to be legitimized by institutions such as schools, police, military, and nonprofits, rather than by communities. The need for acknowledgement and recognition from these

institutions further justifies the white supremacist status quo, given the historical and contemporary ways these institutions oppress and dominate Indigenous, marginalized, and racialized Peoples. For example, to bring the conversation back to a key principle of CP, discussions and conceptualizations of empowerment often have colonial, neoliberal, individualistic, and masculine perspectives – concepts held deeply within white supremacist ideology. The deficit modeling of BIPOC communities in CP has led to burgeoning academic and industrial complexes as money, status, and career generators, ironically squarely on the backs of those most marginalized, whom the discipline proclaims to “help.” Moreover, without an examination of these systems and in working toward dismantling these systems, the concentrated power, the domination, and white supremacist status quo remain intact.

The systems that perpetuate marginalization continue to operate in our societies and continue to maintain inequity, oppression, and brutality (i.e., in the settler nation-state of Canada, between 2007-2017, one-third of people killed by the RCMP were Indigenous Peoples; a Black person is 20-times more likely to be shot and killed by the police (Yellowhead Institute, n.d.). We do not intent to overlook the ongoing work and efforts happening in communities to relieve some of the distress that BIPOC people endure on a constant basis. However, the manifestations of these systems, operating under the systematic and systemic structures of white supremacy, continue as intergenerational poverty, intergenerational trauma, intergenerational violence, and intergenerational injustice (Beals & Wilson, 2020). Consequently, we ask: *Where is the transformative change that is the purported hallmark of CP?* Without throwing a wrench into these systems, we do not see much-needed equitable changes. So, we must focus on the analyses and redistribution of power

and work conscientiously toward a change of mindset – transformative change in dismantling white supremacist ideologies, and all the concepts that fall within.

## *Fanon's Prehistory and Context of Community Psychology*

Charting the intellectual history and context of community psychology as emerging from and being maintained by white supremacy is the focus of this section. Thus, we center the work of Frantz Fanon, specifically his analysis of the colonial world. Such a critical analysis serves as an example of work that can help move toward the decolonizing and fresh iteration of CP.

Frantz Fanon is considered a founding father of the Afrikan liberation movement. He discussed and theorized the nature of ideology as it relates to race and national culture, his political philosophy confronted the ideological structures of colonialism, and he promoted Indigenous political theories of democratization (Forsythe, 1973; Ranuga, 1986; Staniland, 1969; Grohs, 1968; Adam, 1993; Nursery-Bray, 1980; Jinadu, 1973). Fanon's insights can be used to understand how the racial discourse in America has been appropriated through academic institutions and disciplines, including psychology, in similar ways as justification for genocides, slavery, Jim Crow, and other institutionalized social control of Black/African people.

Fanon provided two important insights that could be used to describe the continued colonial condition in the United States: 1) In the aftermath of an anti-colonial struggle (i.e., the American Revolution) the group most likely to gain power are “native petit-bourgeoisie” (white men who own land/property), not the working people (white men without property, women, enslaved Africans, Indigenous Peoples), and 2) This new ruling class appropriates the racial discourse of the previous ruling class so

they can maintain their position as elites. Many of the illustrations and contexts draw from the US South, given its prominent economic and intellectual role in the global cotton economy, fueled by labor from enslaved and exploited Africans (Du Bois, 1935; Woods, 1998).

The social change that birthed the US settler-colonial nation-state was a violent revolution. Yet, the emerging ruling class reproduced the racial hierarchy of the previous colonial ruling class. This included their foreign policy with Haiti, the next nation to overthrow a colonial power through revolution. This served both an economic and psychological incentive, preventing enslaved Africans from feeling empowered to overthrow their enslavers, some of whom were the “founding fathers,” including George Washington and Thomas Jefferson. More than half of the pre-Civil War presidents owned enslaved Africans (Robinson, 1997). In addition to upholding a domestic racial hierarchy, a neocolonial hierarchy was maintained by the US in refusing to acknowledge Haiti as a sovereign nation and France demanding restitution from Haiti. But it was too late, the dam had been broken. Freedom from enslavement and colonial rule was in sight, but it would not be without trials and tribulations. In America, colonial relations were maintained even with the political emancipation of formerly enslaved Africans. This would be done with and through the assistance of academic institutions, which act as vectors for colonization in their degrading and disenfranchising “scholarship” about Black, Indigenous, and racialized people and communities, viewed as being outside of the bounds of white settler society.

Plantation Social Science. Academic institutions participate in the maintenance of the status quo through the production of knowledge and the reproduction of knowers (Osuna, 2017). This was no different for the racial discourse in service of colonial

structures. Institutions such as Harvard were intimately involved in the cotton plantation economy. Harvard's ascent to global prominence was heavily aided by the donations and services of New England textile mill owners and British banks, both vital segments of the cotton-plantation economy. Additionally, Harvard professor Louis Agassiz was a prominent scientist who helped create racial theories that turned personality traits into biological characteristics of race (Beckert & Stevens, 2011). These hidden facts were uncovered by diligent students engaging in rigorous archival research through Harvard documents. Harvard is but one example of Fanon's warning of the appropriation of racial discourse to upload colonial power relations.

Plantation owners aspired to empire, so they expanded their representations of reality into the social sciences (Woods, 1998). White supremacy, as an ideology of a plantation owner's view of reality, is what founded the US academic discourse on race, institutionalizing plantocrats' views of economics, history, biology, sociology, and psychology. Social Darwinism was the dominant academic perspective on Black life in America; leading academic research was conducted by confederate soldiers, historians, and political economists. “Empirical” social science attached to Black people criminality, lack of industrial efficiency, child neglect, low intelligence, and sexual deviance. Theories of African “barbarism” and Black inferiority were justification for the imperialist occupations of Haiti, Hawaii, Cuba, the Philippines, Puerto Rico, and other nations. Intelligence tests created by psychologists would be used in schools and the military to justify segregation in these spaces. For example, psychologist Lewis Terman (1916) adapted the Stanford-Binet IQ test and promoted racially segregating BIPOC students from white students. Terman sat on the board of several eugenics organizations and his intelligence test would be widely used

in the harm and violence against Indigenous, Black and racialized people.

Institutional Social Control. Black codes and Jim Crow laws also performed the psychological feat of giving a white racial identity social meaning in a racially segregated society, allowing white men without land ownership access to citizenship. This allowed white racial identity to become a form of property. Police and carceral systems participated in the violent upholding of the social order and defending the property of whiteness. They served as an institutionalized form of the slave patrol and “Indian” catchers. Unfortunately, violent policing of Indigenous and Black people has never been solely the domain of official state agents. For instance, the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 called on all white citizens to do their part in recovering “fugitives” and returning them to the plantations from which they escaped (Robinson, 2000). The Dred Scott Supreme Court case ruled that Black people had no rights and they were obliged to defer to and respect white people. Black people were targeted as a population to be managed and controlled (essentially colonized) by white society. Vigilante white supremacist terrorist groups such as the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) were informally deputized to keep Black populations disempowered, oppressed, and in terror, killing thousands and driving away millions to other regions of the country and beyond. Often, their ranks consisted of citizens, ministers, and lawyers. To dispel the illusion that American racism in its most explicit forms is a particularly southern phenomenon, let us consider the fact that Ku Klux Klan members reached 8.9 million in 1925, with most members being from Northern states, as well as in Canada, with a chapter in Toronto, and large followings in the West (Snowden, 2016) For example, Michigan had 875,000 KKK members, while Mississippi had 93,000 members (Woods, 1998).

When explicit race-based rhetoric became unfashionable, southern social science reorganized to provide more race-neutral and sociologically acceptable explanations for poverty. This allowed plantocrats the ability to craft a regional identity that masked the racial and economic inequalities that maintained their power in the Mississippi Delta region. Positivist objectivity was a veil to shroud the racial hierarchy still promoted by social sciences. Instead of biological inferiority, the explanation shifted to cultural deficiencies (Woods, 1998). The concessions gained from the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s and 1970s gave way to law and order and the “War on Drugs,” leading to the increased police presence and surveillance of Indigenous and Black communities. The Black Panther Party would use Fanon’s work to connect police control of Black communities to other colonial situations in the Afrikan Diaspora and Global South (Bloom & Martin, 2016). They demonstrated how often the police served as domestic arms of American imperialism, with the use of government agencies in ensuring that legal surveillance, such as COINTELPRO and mainstream propaganda were used to sustain a state campaign of violence against BIPOC liberation movements (Speri, 2019). There have been several high-profile cases through decades that have brought public awareness, yet they also show how Black and Indigenous lives can be taken with little consequence, as many officers are not indicted by grand juries or significantly reprimanded by their departments.

Police violence exacerbates the already negative effects of racial capitalism on mental and physical health. Indigenous and Black people are overrepresented in cases involving the use of force such as tasers, canines, spray, hands and body use, and weapon use (Goff et al., 2016). According to *The Guardian*, in 2015-16 African Americans made up 12-15% of the US population, but accounted for almost 30% of unarmed individuals killed by

police officers (Swaine & McCarthy, 2017). This hyper-surveillance of Indigenous and Black communities has harmful and destabilizing effects on people and their families. This environmental stressor erodes social cohesion and creates dual psychological and physical effects. The threat of police brutality places Indigenous and Black communities under a state of psychological stress, leading to worse physical, mental, and spiritual health. This hyper-surveillance also furthers the political and economic exploitation of our communities. The 2014 murder of 18-year-old Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri took place within this colonial context of hyper-surveillance and economic exploitation. The predominantly Black community had already experienced parasitic governing practices at the hands of their municipal officials and police, leaving many people with excessive fines and living in fear of being arrested for lack of payment (Wang, 2018).

## A Call for a Decolonization of Western Community Psychology

### *How Do We Escape the Colonial Matrix of Power and Oppression?*

The US settler-colonial empire, founded on stolen Peoples, stolen Land, stolen wealth, and stolen knowledge, is in a state of crisis in the year 2021. The events of the preceding year, 2020, have continued to expose the imperialist and colonial nature of America and the settler nation-state of Canada, as several emergent crises continue to disproportionately affect BIPOC communities. The COVID-19 pandemic forced millions out of work, leaving millions without income, health insurance, and the ability to pay their rent. The economic conditions have not been in such a state since the Great Depression. On Turtle Island, the climate crisis is reaching new levels with wildfires, floods, and drought, meaning that environmental racism is a continual area of struggle. The intersections

of Indigeneity, race, capitalism, and empire intersect again as BIPOC communities are disproportionately vulnerable to collateral damage from an empire in decline.

The murder of George Floyd sparked the largest protests around the world in the last 50 years. There had already been too many murders of Black and Indigenous Peoples in 2020 that had gone without justice, as we saw concurrent explosions of protests in the streets. These uprisings sparked conversations on whether police should be abolished, and justice placed in the control of community. The events of the last year have demonstrated that statues and symbols fall, but social structures are enduring, sometimes through force. We also saw examples of Fanon's references to "native petit-bourgeoisie" employed to manage social unrest and outrage. In other words, selected members of Indigenous and racially oppressed groups are permitted elite status and access so they can be the enforcers of racial hierarchy. During a press conference, Atlanta mayor Keisha Lance Bottoms, along with rappers T. I. and Killer Mike all implored people to go home, with T.I. even referring to Atlanta as Wakanda. It is important to note that as elites of "Wakanda," Killer Mike and T.I. both own significant amounts of real estate in one of the most rapidly gentrifying and surveilled cities in the US. *Wakanda Forever?*

Moreover, the complicity of universities has been on display, through administrations' decisions on whether to reopen during the pandemic, their responses (or lack of) to protests against racism and police brutality, and increasing tuition. Tuition hikes will intensify the Indigenous and racialized class barriers to higher education. For example, in the US, 7/10 Black and Latinx college students attend open access/community colleges, while 8/10 white students attend a selective college (Warikoo, 2016). The commodification of racial diversity adds

difficulty to advocating for Indigenous and racial justice in capitalist institutions. There has been variance in how adept institutions have been in navigating the racial discourse to manage their students and faculty, but this demonstrates academic institutions' historic function of using racial discourse to uphold the social order.

### *Toward a Decolonial Critical Community Psychology*

Thus far, we have offered a narrative on our position regarding why community psychology must be decolonized to play a more intricate role in current liberation movements. As scholar-activists and practitioners, it is also our praxis to propose a call-to-action. We are clear that decolonizing community psychology and broader efforts to advance Indigenous and racial justice is no easy task. Yet, the core of resistance work we engage in is action. To this end, an action worthy of considering is to intentionally integrate Paulo Freire's (1971/2000) theory of *conscientização* within community psychology programs. Freire based his pedagogical theory of conscientização from Frantz Fanon's (1967) psychiatric practice to help his clients *consciousnessize*. Fanon and Freire both engaged in consciousness-raising and psycho-politics as processes of helping others to see how they have psychologically internalized political power structures and racism. Fanon (1967) pointed to colonial and contemporary racism as an "epidermalization of economic inequality." Fanon conceptualized this phrase as racism as an internalized social structure, which is entwined with economic inequities that reproduce conditions of oppression, precarity, and dehumanization (p. 11). El-Amin et al. (2017) argued that, particularly for BIPOC students, the development of critical consciousness is necessary to examine systems of oppression and inequality. This includes understanding the use of language and silencing to better challenge these

oppressive systems, and at the same time, foster student academic achievement and engagement.

Thus, moving to the transformational eradication of issues that stem from white supremacy, we propose that CP move to a more critical stance, beyond prevention and health promotion, sense of community, and empowerment, as its *raison d'être*, to the dismantling of white supremacist ideology and all its systems, within critical consciousness-raising pedagogy. We propose to do so through a Critical Community Psychology (CCP) discipline, an offshoot of CP and an already emerging discipline. CCP then becomes the primary tenet holder of CP, as it encapsulates decolonial analyses of white supremacist power structures, as well as the critique of white supremacy into pedagogy (G. Palmer, personal communication, August 14, 2020). As a broader, more interdisciplinary approach, CCP embraces liberation psychology, Indigenous psychology, critical race, decolonial feminist standpoints, and intersectional approaches (Kivell et al., 2020), vis-à-vis critical praxes and critical epistemologies. Moreover, we critically theorize within our lived experiences. Without the dismantling of white supremacy and the decentering of whiteness, the seven generations to come will live as the seven generations before – not in an equitable society where we are human, where we live with the land, and we are valued within a nonhierarchical egalitarian society. We imagine such places and spaces for those who come after, for those who have come before.

CP must bring to the fore the unrevised and brutal histories of imperialism, as these historical oppressions directly affect the social, economic, and political inequitable conditions of systematically marginalized and Indigenous communities in the contemporary contexts of oppression (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012). Community psychology can then wrest

off the yoke of white supremacy that burdens BIPOC on stolen lands marked by white supremacy. As a discipline, CP can work to set right inequity and oppression with the reckoning of our histories, which then promotes the liberation, healing, and wellbeing of BIPOC people – of all people. Moreover, a significant role of CCP would be to step into an alignment with critical consciousness and healing that affirms humanizing connections.

## **Ubuntu, In Lak'ech: A Philosophy of Community and Humanizing Connections**

In further decolonizing community psychology while influencing the broader academe, we must look to bring to the surface humanizing relationships that allow for true connection, mutuality, accompaniment, and solidarities in action that align with critical consciousness and healing. Frantz Fanon (1963), and current liberation and decolonial critical psychologists, such as Urmitapa Dutta (2017, 2018), Deanne Bell (2018), and Mary Watkins (Watkins & Shulman, 2008), among others, have described the urgencies to rehumanize us and each other.

The Afrikan philosophical principle of Ubuntu centralizes community and emphasizes relationality with all dimensions of existence. A person is a person through their relationships; individuality and interdependence are connected (Davis, 2019; Gathogo, 2000). Restorative justice is a key component that seeks to heal the harm to relationships and communities (Davis, 2019). It is a proactive relational strategy to create a culture of connectivity where everyone can thrive and feel valued. Such practices are related to lower incarceration and crime rates in Afrikan countries. Individual and community safety and security emerge from healthier and self governing communities, not more police or prisons. Inspired by the political philosophies of Fanon and Malcolm X, the Black Panther Party viewed itself as

inextricably tied to the local Black community (Bloom & Martin, 2016). Community programs were a cornerstone. From August 1969 to August 1970, the BPP launched a series of programs that would eventually become the Free Breakfast for Children Program, liberation schools, free health clinics, the Free Food Distribution Program, Free Clothing Program, development centers, Free Shoe Program, Free Busing to Prison Program, Sickle Cell Anemia Research Foundation, free housing cooperatives, Free Pest Control, Free Plumbing and Maintenance Program, renter's assistance, Seniors Escorts Program, and the Free Ambulance Program. Community members also brought all kinds of disputes to the local Party, such as job-related conflicts, evictions, legal problems, and issues with government services (Bloom & Martin, 2016). This was a form of remediation and recognition *without* the interference and need of the nation-state. Future Black student unions and Black liberation organizations would model the Black Panther Party and their ways of rehumanizing connections.

## *Building Relationships of Mutuality through Connectivity*

Rehumanizing connections are those characterized by the experiences, contexts, and relational modalities that affirm our sense of being. That is, our full humanity as we are seen, heard, and embraced as we are, encompassing Indigeneity, race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, ability, age, and class. Indeed, we are human in connection and mutuality with one another, including those who are perceived to be different from us. Humanizing connections can manifest and unfold in multiple ways, depending on the context and the subjectivities of each person and how they may choose to engage with one another. And to promote the centering of humanness and our relationships with Earth Mother in our work, we offer examples of practices that work toward cultivating

humanizing connections. In sharing our writings, we do not intend to denote a certain hierarchy or linear process, but note that these practices are interconnected in nonlinear/nonhierarchical ways.

Firstly, community dialogues that allow for and facilitate reciprocal co-learning, co-sharing and reflection through dialogue or conversation center the importance of stories and narratives. Stories grounded in histories and past experiences, as well as present moments and encounters, can lend themselves to affirming the lived conditions and realities of another person and their relationship to the land. The conversational exchanges need not be spoken, for there are multiple ways to dialogue – ceremony, song, poetry, dance, writing, and cultural performances, among other modes of expression, that can help restore human and humanizing connections. Relationships of connectivity can be social, cultural, and political, and just as importantly, spiritual.

Secondly, the revival and acceptance of all knowledges – practices, traditions, ontologies, epistemologies, and cosmologies – that reflect ancestral, intergenerational, and Indigenous traditions are crucial to survival, healing, and restoring, in moving toward self-determination and in harmony and stewardship of the land. Our ancestors walked paths that many of us have not followed or have not shared in the oral traditions, because they were forced to forget or hide in the shadows of imperialism and colonization – these paths and stories of our histories need to be uncovered, resurfaced, and shared as the legitimate knowledges that they are. We must revive ways of being and knowing that come from the ancestors and intergenerational wisdoms of communities and peoples that are on the periphery. We must rekindle and cultivate our connection with the land and water and all living beings and things that inform and affirm our humanity and equanimity to Earth Mother.

We must allow ourselves to be guided in a good way.

Thirdly, and of relevance to the previous practices, is the importance of strengthening and supporting the thriving, rising, and wellbeing of communities through the eradication of injustice and violence, and consequently a resistance to the institutions that dehumanize and threaten our lives. Commitment to social movement efforts and actions that challenge the militarized violence of institutions, such as those that are so characteristic of our criminal (in)justice systems, including police departments, must be dismantled. Such logics of violence and oppression exist as well within the settings we most often occupy as academics – the neoliberal academe that must also be troubled and contested, and surely efforts must be aimed to transform. Humanizing connections are those in resistance to all institutions, mechanisms, and technologies that keep us from embracing our fullest humanity – resisting actions that do not affirm our dignity to live a fully human life and that disconnect us from the land. Community psychology can offer a humanizing connection in our research, our actions, and our practice.

## **Closing Remarks: An Epilogue Toward Decoloniality and Decolonization**

Through this writing, we have sought to offer a framework grounded in our knowledge of a colonized community psychology. As a discipline, CP has remained silent amid community challenges, such as policing as social control, as well as historical and intergenerational trauma that continues to envelop BIPOC communities. The Indigenous erasure, racist, and anti-Black systemic structures that traumatize BIPOC persist in contemporary times, as white supremacy has consistently permeated Turtle Island since first contact with the white man. We, nor community psychology, cannot remain

unconscious when we continue to live with a status quo that continues to represent the "hegemonic mind" (Martinot, 2004).

We put forward our position that a critical community psychology can offer more tools to support a decolonial and healing praxis, while making a significant impact on the lives of Indigenous and racialized people in working to dismantle white supremacy. A critically decolonized community psychology would center the voices of BIPOC, conduct research, and ferret out truth from "mythologizing the past," and offer a much more divergent psychology that is not steeped in whiteness and white supremacy ideologies.

Our resistance is also rooted in the power of storytelling that can support and cultivate humanizing connections. Language is a political instrument; words are containers of reality used for creation, definition, and destruction (Baldwin, 1979). Indigenous Afrikan cosmologies describe the birth of the universe coming from a universal sound and the creative force of the word (Ford, 2000). We draw from our ancestral knowledge to help our communities as we recognize the strengths that have always existed and will continue to exist within our communities. As Prathia Hall notes:

The people are our teachers. People who have struggled to support themselves and large families, people who have survived in Georgia and Alabama and Mississippi, have learned some things we need to know. There is fantastic poetry in the lives of the people who have survived with strength and nobility. I am convinced of how desperately America needs the blood transfusion that comes from the Delta of Mississippi (as quoted by Brooks, 2014, p. 11)

And as noted by Betty Vásquez (2018), "*It is not an option but rather an obligation to speak out, all of us together, to demand changes.*" Our resistance moves toward a community psychology that is truly humanizing, community-centered and oriented – a community psychology that is embracing of diversity, while remaining vigilant of misrepresenting, romanticizing, and essentializing such differences that further challenge the discipline's potential to contribute to community and societal liberation. We resist being complicit in the oppressions, and commit to community struggles for sovereignty, racial freedom, and liberation, wherever we may find it.

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