Learning Unit 5

Decoloniality and its Implications for African Psychological Intervention

Introduction

In Learning Unit 4, we covered some of the theories that have dominated the field of psychological intervention. You will recall that we have said that these theories that form the foundation of modern psychological theory and practice constitute a psychology that is embedded in Western Euro-American culture. In this learning unit, we will critically examine this monocultural psychology to problematise their relevance in non-Western, particularly African, contexts. The use of the term monocultural may be misleading since in its strictest sense, it implies a measure of homogeneity, which Western psychology is not. Rather the term is used here so as to point to Western psychology as a psychology that is grounded in a particular worldview, i.e., a Euro-American worldview that makes certain assumptions about issues such as about the nature of reality, truth, knowledge, illness, etc.

The ultimate aim here is to arrive at what a decolonial African psychology/approach to psychological intervention would look like in character; a psychology that is better equipped to deal with social and psychological issues facing the Global South such as the impact of colonialism. Keep in mind that the Global South has nothing to do with geography but rather with a grouping of countries along socio-economic and political characteristics. In other words, there are countries in the Northern Hemisphere such as in Latin America and Asia that are part of the Global South because of their history with colonialism and the fact that they are either underdeveloped of developing countries (also referred to as the Third World).

This learning unit will start with a reflection on the limits of Western/Euro-American psychology before delving into colonialism and decoloniality and its attendant notions of power, patriarchy, and racism, as well as the implications these have for the discipline of psychology. Attention then shifts to efforts at countering Western epistemic hegemony and the indigenous psychologies. This is followed by a brief discussion on psychology in South Africa, after we which we critically reflect on the notion

of African psychology.

Learning Outcomes

At the end of this learning unit, you should be able to:

- understand the history of psychology
- know and understand the limits of Euro-American psychology
- explain the relationship between psychology and colonialism
- explain the relationship between knowledge and power
- critically evaluate the notion of indigenous/decolonial psychology.

Key concepts

Euramerican, scientific racism, decolonial psychology, empiricism, economic, social, cultural, and symbolic capital, hegemony, decoloniality, patriarchy, feminism, social Darwinism, epistemic justice, ontology, axiology, cosmology, epistemology, praxis

The history of psychology

According to the archetypal psychologist, James Hillman (1975), psychology emerged from the Protestantism of Northern and Western Europe and its extension westward into North America. Bulhan (1985) agrees that psychology as an organised discipline – psychology in the form today taught and practised – is undoubtedly Euro-American in origin and substance. Jahoda (1984) uses the term "Euramerican" to characterise psychology's emergence and dominance. Others have narrowed down the influence on psychology even more. According to Hall and Barongan (1997), "psychology has primarily been a reflection of the European American male domination and entitlement" (p. 12).

Psychology as a distinct Euro-American oriented discipline was presented as an objective science focusing on the study of human mind and behaviour and predicated on the assumption that bodies, behaviours, society, and the mind were ahistorical and acontextual (lacking in historical perspective and context). Its central aim was to provide empirical (scientific) support for the existence of racial differences, a central concern in the emerging political economy of racist colonial capitalism. Psychologists played a key role in perpetuation of what is referred to as 'scientific racism' through claims regarding "black intelligence, brain size, morality, criminality, and sexuality" (Winston, 2020). Along with other disciplines, psychology served to legitimise and justify the

continued inferiorisation and control of black people and the separate hierarchical treatment of 'race' groups, as well as to justify women's subordinate social position. Such understandings led to a multitude of injurious policies, notably population control policies such as the forced sterilisation of black women in the US (Rutecki, 2011), and anti-miscegenation laws (laws that criminalised interracial marriage and also sex between members of different races) in South Africa (Ratele & Shefer, 2013).

The limits of Euro-American psychology

While it is not denied that that there may be universals in human behaviour and that Euro-American psychology may have applicability to the Global South, it is argued that the type of issue that psychology examines may not be relevant to the Third World (Gilbert, 1989). Thus, a growing body of literature has been critical of the inadequacy of psychology to address issues that fall outside its 'Westrocentric' framework (e.g., Marsella, 1998).

According to Nyamnjoh (2015/2017), the ability of Western psychology to provide answers to social problems in Africa in particular, and the Global South in general, was severely limited for a number of reasons. These were:

1. Its tendency to limit the subject matter of psychology to only the physical realities, with a bias on the observable, quantifiable, and measurable, ignoring attention to the study of spirituality and invisible realities in its theory, research, and scholarship. In contrast to this orientation, African psychology recognises and acknowledges the existence and impact of supernatural forces and other invisible influences in people's life-worlds and the need to include both categories of realities (supernatural and natural) in its study of psychology (Nyamnjoh, 2015/ 2017).

2. Its persistent failure to recognise the complexity of the human being as a doubly constituted being, or a product of the complex mixture of both physical and spiritual elements, in which neither has full primacy. In African psychology, on the other hand, the complexity of the human being is highly recognised as it is believed within the African worldview that when "faced with inadequacies, [African people] every now and then, invest hope, interpretation and mediation in those claiming the status of seers and frontier beings, in those imbued with larger than life clairvoyance and capacity to straddle worlds, navigate, negotiate and reconcile chasms" (Nyamnjoh, 2015, p. 5).

3. Its inability to recognise and work with the assumption and the associated humility that psychology is a human, not a physical, science. This contrasts with the view of African psychology, which works from the assumption that, as far as African human science is concerned, there exists a certain kind of knowledge "that is accessible by intuition (not by direct view of reality), knowledge from a fusing and harmonizing with things" (Senghor, 1970, p. 181).

4. Its tendency to undertake its psychological study of human beings in a mechanised, laboratory-centred, decontextualised condition bereft of background (Cushman, 1990). In contrast, African psychology, operating from the point of view of the African worldview assumes that "People and things adopt different forms and manifest themselves differently according to context and necessity" and, consequently, that the "contamination" of context and background must always be taken into account in any psychological study of human beings (Kirschner, 2015).

5. Its bias in favour of empiricist epistemology as the royal road for achieving reliable human knowledge and its neglect of other ways of knowing in the field of psychology (wa Thiong'o, 2012). African psychology on the other hand, along with several strands of progressive Western psychology (such as cultural psychology, narrative psychology, etc.), recognises the existence of other ways of knowing or multiple epistemologies. African psychology endeavours to adopt an "open philosophy approach" and a globalectical epistemology (wa Thiong'o, 2014) to psychological scholarship. Thus, part of the critical aim in the study of African psychology has been to promote a wholesale rethinking of the restrictive colonial epistemologies we have inherited.

6. Its continuing adherence to the ethic of conversational monologue in its relationship to other knowledge traditions in psychological scholarship. This superiority attitude gives rise to a situation in which mainstream Western psychology's attention to or acknowledgment of psychological knowledge traditions other than its own is either contested, completely ignored, or dismissed with complete impunity (Danziger, 2006b; Davies, 1999).

7. Its overreliance on questionnaire studies using university undergraduates (as spokespersons for humanity) and animal laboratory experiments as its main source of data collection to formulate its theories about human beings (Arnett, 2008). This is in contrast to the approach adopted in African psychology,

where the emphasis is on the need for methodological decolonisation and adoption of the philosophy of constructive alternativism (Kelly, 1955) in its study of human subjectivity, culture, and experience in pre- and postcolonial Africa (Nwoye, 2015). African psychology feels unconstrained, from the perspective of globalectical epistemology (wa Thiong'o, 2014), to explore and appropriate research methodologies – wherever they are found – that can allow it to do justice to the study of the complexity of human experience in the African world.

Self-assessment activity

Critically reflect on the limits of Euro-American psychology. Do you think there is a place for it in a country such as South Africa? Why/why not? Share your views on the discussion board.

Psychology and colonialism

Akin-Ogundeji (1991) states, "The history of psychology in Africa is largely the history of colonialism" (p. 3). Colonisation had a devastating effect through the greedy extraction of not only natural resources but also of entire cultural assets. For some scholars, colonisation has not ended. For instance, Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2021) reminded us to ask whether they (the colonisers) ever left the colonies. Similarly, de Sousa Santos (2016) reflected that the still-existing dichotomies of nature/society, savage/civilised, developed/undeveloped provide evidence that the colonial past remains in the postcolonial present.

The lack of a critical perspective also relates to the fact that the discipline constitutes no more than a fledgling enterprise on the continent. It is only in South Africa that mainstream psychology is well established. In 1991, Akin-Ogundeji estimated that there were about 150 psychologists in Zambia, Zimbabwe and Nigeria. At the time, psychology was not yet an established field of study in other African countries such as Botswana, Cameroon, Ethiopia, Gabon, Ivory Coast, Kenya and Liberia. In these countries, psychology was, and in some probably still is, subordinated to long-established fields such as education, medicine, and psychiatry. In addition to this, some of the critical African voices (e.g., Bulhan & Owusu-Bempah) are working in the West.

Colonising processes privilege the social, cultural, and symbolic capital of colonisers over the colonised leading to marginalising and devaluing indigenous life ways (McDowell & Hernandez 2010). Pierre Bourdieu (1986) used a number of concepts to explain complexities of power dynamics in society, including

economic, social, cultural, and symbolic capital (Garcia and McDowell, 2010).

Economic capital includes not only money, but also capital with which to produce money outside or beyond one's own labour (e.g., income properties).

Social capital refers to the network of relationships linked to the sharing of resources (e.g., being personally referred for a job, borrowing money, letters of support for school or court). Symbolic capital includes signifiers of class and status (e.g., degree titles and occupational status, family name).

Cultural capital includes assets that can be used to gain upward class mobility within specific cultural contexts (e.g., language and style of speech, skin colour, looks, intellect). Cultural capital is most closely associated with the relationship between our cultural and social identities and the cultural and social identities of the dominant group or colonisers in society. Those closest to the centre, to the dominant most powerful group(s), have the greatest cultural capital and typically feel the greatest sense of belonging. Cultural capital is intertwined with social capital as networks are built in part based on reproducing in-group advantage. For example, a company may seek diversity (read non-white hires) yet choose those who most closely reflect the language use, attitudes, dress, cultural practices, and values of the dominant group. This often results in a human landscape, speckled with darkened bodies, which continues to privilege the dominant group without transforming the centre in ways that truly reflect valuing diversity.

Cultural hegemony refers to dynamics within societies where social norms and structures exert and maintain cultural dominance of the most powerful, imposing their worldviews and socio-cultural practices on the less powerful. This is part of the colonisation process that establishes and maintains the advantage of the most powerful over all others and often goes relatively unquestioned.

Economic capital and Modernity, Postmodernity, and technology are often used as proof of superiority; to demonstrate greater "development" of one culture over another. Knowledge is only legitimated when produced by colonisers and is constructed in ways that "prove" the superiority of those in power. For example, herbal medicines have been used for thousands of years throughout Asia, yet in the Western world they are not considered legitimate treatments until/unless there have been (Western) scientific studies of their effectiveness. These studies typically

take indigenous practices and healing methods out of context for examination.

Colonising is sometimes exemplified in the practice of psychological intervention via the privileging of evidence-based manualised models for broad cross-cultural application, the transplantation of Western psychological intervention concepts and techniques to non-Western countries.

While many practitioners start out with a commitment to diversity, there exists no systematic framework for understanding the relationship between difference and power or how social systems really impact our lives. They tend to become aware of diversity when it is visible in the therapy room, embodied or expressed by clients (e.g., race, nation of origin, religion). They neglect to fully consider the ways in which all of our daily lives are shaped by social, economic, historical and political contexts. They fail to recognise and challenge processes that systematically privilege the cultural, social, and economic well-being of some groups at the expense of others. The implication therefore is that psychological intervention can be liberatory and oppressive.

Decoloniality

Professional knowledge can unwittingly be used to maintain dominant group values and privilege, serving as a colonising force (McDowell & Hernandez, 2010). For example, there is little consideration of how experts use the power of a professional position to create an androcentric, Western, theory-bound ideal.

Decolonial theories share a critique of the relationship between power and knowledge, including what was viewed in the modern era as natural, universal, and true. These theories also question the use of powerful rhetoric to create and sustain the status quo of unequal distribution of power and resources. Martin-Baro (1994, p. 63) relied on Weber's concept of power by defining power as "the disparity of resources that occurs in human relationships and that allows one of the actors to make his or her objectives and social interests prevail over those of others." Power is not held as a possession or intrinsic to an individual. It depends on, or resides in, the relationship between people fueled by the nature of the relationship and the resources each has to potentially bring to bear on the other.

Power is discursive, embedded in the creation of knowledge, and our understanding of what is true. Within psychology, this means that those with power can introduce, amplify, and maintain topics,

frames, and speakers that come to dominate theory and practice. A decolonial view of power challenges the effects of centering dominant colonisers' beliefs, values, and worldviews as superior to the life ways of the colonised. These ideologies help maintain control while rules, laws, and social practices serve to materially benefit the colonisers.

We noted earlier that psychology has primarily been a reflection of the European-American male domination and entitlement. Patriarchy is the most common principle of social organisation across nations, social classes, ethnicities, and religious groups. It inevitably leads to gender inequality. With patriarchy, men are centred, dominant, leading figures in social life as well as primary authorities within the family. To use Walby's (1990) words, patriarchy is "a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women" (p. 20). This definition highlights social structures as the problem rather than individuals.

According to the World Health Organization (2014):

Gender determines the differential power and control men and women have over the socioeconomic determinants of their mental health and lives, their social position, status and treatment in society and their susceptibility and exposure to specific mental health risks.

Just as resistance can consistently be found where there is oppression, male dominance and privilege have always met with resistance from women. This resistance, which is generally referred to as feminism, has taken many forms across time and place. Three waves of feminism are often cited from a contemporary Western framework.

The first wave – spans from the late nineteenth to early twentieth century, resulting in women's right to vote and other social and legal rights.

The second wave – the Women's Rights Movement in the 1960s–1980s, resulting in women politicising their personal lives and pressing social change toward greater equity.

The third wave – from the 1990s through the present and focuses on realising promised change and pressing further to dismantle systems of male privilege and patriarchy.

A decolonial critique of the traditional/conventional feminist movement is that it is primarily white, heterosexual, middle- and upper-class women speaking for – and thus generalising the experiences and goals of – all women. These women and their families are typically first to benefit from social change. Howitt and Owusu-Bempah (1994) stated that overall, the feminist movement has neglected the needs and the cause of black women. In fact, the movement has "overridden the perspective of black women" (p. 56). The conflation of race, class, and gender, as well as the privileging of white feminism was captured by Hooks (2000, p. 19) who asked "[in] white supremacist, capitalist, patriarchal class structure, which men do women want to be equal to?"

A decolonial oriented feminist movement has provided a critique of the sexist and misogynistic operation of dominant Euro-American psychology. Criticisms included its operation as a scientific discourse invested in the control of women – working at the level of theory and practice to justify gendered inequities and oppressions (Nogueira, 2001, cited in Mattos, 2015). Theories and practice in psychology have worked to reinforce the gender binary, reassert and reproduce gendered stereotypes, and instil heteronormativity. At the same time, it has worked to pathologise those who do not fit the categories that are constructed as 'normative'.

Critical (decolonial) feminist psychology has worked to challenge the ways in which the discipline has been used in the perpetuation of oppressive social relations, particularly in relation to race and gender as well as recognising the ways in which the discipline exercises authority and power through its methods of knowledge production and through the knowledges it produces (Shefer et al., 2006). It emphasises the deconstruction of neoliberalism and its associated constructs of 'agency, empowerment and choice' (Rutherford, 2018) as well as critiquing universalised assumptions about women's oppression through the lens of white, western, educated and industrialised knowledges (Boonzaier & van Niekerk, 2019; Kurtis & Adams, 2015).

In addition to this, a decolonial lens challenges the coloniality of the discipline as well as the ways in which those who symbolically and materially 'live' outside of the Euro-American 'centre' are erased, pathologised and othered (Boonzaier & van Niekerk, 2019) and continue to be positioned as those in need of 'empowerment' or rescue by their 'white Western saviours' (Kurtis & Adams, 2015; Mohanty, 1988; Rutherford, 2018).

The decolonial feminist psychology agenda involves necessary engagement with race and class, challenging unitary notions of women's identities and experiences (Kiguwa, 2004). Kiguwa has further argued that a critical feminist psychology, located on the African continent should "seek to explore and deconstruct those features of African culture which function to the detriment and subordination of African women" (p. 299).

Racism has been a defining feature of colonialism. Race relationships systematically privilege whites over black people. Differential privilege serves to maintain social class privilege (e.g., access to recourses, networks for seeking employment, comfort and safety of living arrangements).

Race is widely understood to be a social construction. If race is socially constructed, then it is not real, leading many whites to believe that colour-blindness (I don't see colour) is an appropriate attitude. While this is well intentioned, it denies the existence of power and the real material and non-material consequences that racism, even as a social construct, has for black people. This has implications for psychological interventions, particularly in a country such as South Africa where most practitioners are white while whites constitute less than 10% of the overall population of approximately 60 million.

Thus, even in psychological interventions, there is likely to be a need to have critical conversations about race and its impact. Talking about race requires us to have a good working knowledge of race, to be able to assess each client's racial awareness and attitudes, and to skillfully manage conversations across racial divides. Howitt and Owusu-Bempah have documented the elusive quality of racism in psychology (Howitt & Owusu-Bempah, 1990, 1994; Owusu-Bempah & Howitt, 1995). Starting with an account of overt expressions of racism in psychology's theories and practices, they also demonstrate the various ways in which racism manifests itself covertly in psychology. They highlight the remarkable continuities in the racism of psychology which span much of the discipline's history and practice and point to the fact that psychology's racism merely reflects the cultural context in which the discipline is embedded. According to them, "Psychology breathes in the air of racism" (Howitt & Owusu-Bempah, 1994, p. 3). "The history of modern Western psychology … shows its emergence in the context of European conquest, exploitation and domination" (p. 2). "Modern psychology's origins in a climate of slavery, of domination and exploitation of black people, notably Africans, ensured that the burgeoning profession was imbued with racism" (p. 16).

Apart from biological racism, racism also manifests in the degradation of and assault on black culture (Owusu-Bempah & Howitt, 1995). Even those who are not biologically racist target black culture. So, for instance, has black family culture been demeaned as the focus of allegations of deficit and pathology. The black family has indeed become the primary focus of social pathology. The 'new racism' manifests in many disguised forms. In the *'symbolic racism'* of the 1970s, basic American values, such as individualism, were used to express sentiments antagonistic to black people. More recently, the concepts of *meta-racism*, *aversive racism*, and *regressive racism* have been employed to describe the covert racism of many so-called liberals. Metaracists are those who are not overly prejudiced but nevertheless acquiesce in the larger culture that continues the work of racism. Aversive racism is evident in the negative affect towards blacks that motivates avoidance rather than intentionally destructive behaviours on the part of racists, while regressive racism manifests under conditions of emotional arousal.

The writings and the work of historical figures, such as David Hume, Thomas Malthus, Herbert Spencer, and Sir Francis Galton have set the tone for psychological racism (Howitt & Owusu-Bempah, 1994). *Social Darwinism* – the idea that certain people become powerful in society because they are innately better, is held to be equally accountable. The denial of African culture can even be traced to Aristotle, who conspired to obscure the influence of ancient Egyptian scholarship and philosophy on his thinking. Closer to the present time, Howitt and Owusu-Bempah highlight the racism evident in the work of such luminaries in psychology as Thorndike, William McDougall, Terman, Konrad Lorenz, Karl Pearson, as well as Hans Eysenck.

Of the present generation of psychologists, Arthur Jensen has heralded the inferior genes theory of blacks most prominently. Unfortunately, Jensen is not alone in this thinking. Howitt and Owusu-Bempah (1994) present some of the twisted arguments that have been used in psychology by biologically based racist theorists. For instance, the reaction time of Muhammad Ali, who could float like a butterfly and sting like a bee during his prime, has been described as not more than average. Reaction time is considered to provide an index of the brain's ability to process information. The speed with which electrical impulses are transmitted along nerve fibres and across synapses relates to the "neural efficiency model of intelligence" (Rijsdijk, 1997).

Yet, in an earlier study cited by Howitt and Owusu-Bempah, the reaction time of whites, which was found to be slower than that of African American and American Indians, was considered to be a

reflection of higher levels of mental functioning. In this instance, the delayed reaction time of whites was attributed to their reflective ability, which supposedly indicated a higher form of intelligence.

According to Howitt and Owusu-Bempah (1994), even social identity theory, the feminist movement, and the discourse analysis of racism can be seen to covertly propagate psychological racism. They indicated that although Tajfel, who was closely associated with social identity theory, never intended to justify racism. His work, nevertheless, fuelled the ideology that regarded intergroup hostility as inevitable. This came about because his cognitive approach "led him to see the process of categorisation as a basic characteristic of human thought" (p. 48). According to Tajfel's theory of 'minimal group participation', people tend to categorise themselves as belonging to a group on the basis of the most trivial things they have in common, and this tendency, inevitably, enhances intergroup hostility.

The problem with the discourse analysis of racism is that it inevitably assumes "its detectability through language, its reproduction intergenerationally through language and, most significantly, that discourse analysts have a theory of racism. All of these assumptions are questionable and fundamentally misleading premises that reproduce the trap of marginalising racism to the statements of readily recognisable racists" (p. 57).

Howitt and Owusu-Bempah (1994) also exposed the racism in psychology's textbooks, organisations, and institutions. They state that "the political agenda of psychology textbooks has been largely ignored" (p. 69) and that "much of the racism of psychological textbooks is a broad assault on the nature of black cultures" (p. 71).

The two English psychologists trace the racism in psychology's clinical practices (psychological interventions) back to Freud and Jung, and point out its unabated continuation in the diagnostic and treatment practices of the present generation.

Self-assessment activity

Is there a difference between decoloniality and decolonisation, and if so, what is it?

A contestation for epistemic justice in psychology

We previously stated that psychology can be liberatory and oppressive. As a discipline, psychology has the potential to contribute to conceptual understandings of colonisation and apartheid that was characterised by traumatic experiences of violence, a search for belonging, struggles for liberation, collective efforts at mobilisation and resistance against oppression, and towards understanding the affective dimensions of (forced) migration, reparations and reconciliation, institutional transformation, and current social movements. All of these articulations and questions of interest to modern African subjects have deeply psychological dimensions, that, if taken seriously, have the potential to transform the discipline, and make it relevant to contemporary life in Africa and the diaspora (Kessi, Boonzaier & Gekeler, 2021).

However, the ethnocentrism inherent in Euro-American psychology militates against the profession realising it potential in non-Western and particularly Africa contexts. Howitt and Owusu-Bempah (1994) have expressed grave concern about the continuing European hegemony in psychology and about "the 'colonisation' of black psychologists by Eurocentric thought" (p. 117). They argue that the lack of attention to alternatives to mainstream knowledge not only leaves the discipline impoverished, but "The dominance of Eurocentric psychology helps legitimise world-wide inequality" (p. 117). Mainstream psychology has served, directly or indirectly, to strengthen the oppressive structures, by drawing attention away from them and toward individual and subjective factors and by denying the legitimacy of all other forms of knowing that depart from Euro-American conceptions – valued as rational and scientific – are denied.

To decolonise the social sciences in general, and psychology in particular, we must invite dialogue about the opportunities and challenges that address the epistemological hegemony formed within Western regimes of knowledge. De Sousa Santos (2016) proposed the use of frameworks based on "ecologies of knowledges" as counter-epistemologies that confront monocultures and hegemonic globalisation. A counterhegemonic praxis would centre localised knowledges and different ways of being and acting in the world as the central ecology for co-constructing decolonial epistemologies. These counter epistemologies can be said to constitute indigenous psychologies. A discussion of some of these follows.

Indigenous psychologies

Indigenous psychologies are systems of knowledge and wisdom based on non-Western paradigms originating in their particular ecologies and cultures (Kim et al., 2006). Indigenous psychologies deconstruct psychological phenomena within political, economic, historical, philosophical, religious, cultural, and ecological contexts. Kim and Berry (1993) defined indigenous psychologies as "the scientific study of human behavior or mind that is native, that is not transported from other region, and that is designed for its people" (p. 2; cited in Kim et al., 2006, p. 5).

While mainstream Western psychology has attempted to de-contextualise psychological phenomena and has produced universal theories based on White male regimes of truth, indigenous psychologies question the universality of existing Western scientific paradigms and incorporate context, meanings, values, beliefs, and locality into research designs and knowledge generation. Kim and Park stated that "existing psychological theories are not universal since they have eliminated the very qualities that allow people to understand, predict, and control their environment" (p. 31).

The emergence of indigenous psychologies was also inspired by the liberation psychology movement that arose in the mid-twentieth century in Latin America. It was founded on the work of Ignacio Martín-Baró and emerged in the context of repressive military regimes across South America, and as a critique to mainstream Euro-American psychology that was accused of being removed from and implicated in social injustices (Montero & Sonn, 2009). Liberation psychology was about dismantling internalised oppressive power acquired through the "uncritical adoption of knowledge from the North" (Burton & Gómez Ordóñez, 2015, p. 349) through de-ideologisation – a process of uncovering both the values and belief systems that sustain oppressive regimes and the political nature of science as working in the service of oppressive power.

Drawing on Freirian concepts of 'problematisation' and 'conscientisation' liberation psychologists focused on the participation and collective action of communities to mobilise against oppressive cycles and towards liberatory practices (Moane, 2009). Similar to Fanon, liberation psychology is explicitly political in its conception of power and its impact on the everyday lives and totality of experiences of the oppressed, where power is the appropriation of the resources necessary for everyday life (Burton & Gómez Ordóñez, 2015). Importantly, liberation psychology is firmly located in social action where individuals are

conceived as social actors with the agency to make changes in their own lives. This principle also gives psychologists an active role as facilitators of social change through participatory modes of formulating problems, theoretical frameworks and objective safeguards (Burton & Gómez Ordóñez, 2015). This includes exploring the connections between memory, resistance, community, social movements, and policy through a socially engaged critical community praxis (Burton & Gómez Ordóñez, 2015).

Thus, native peoples of the Americas, aboriginal peoples in Australia and New Zealand, Chinese, Japanese, African, Filipino, Hawaiian, Latin American, and Indian scholars (among others) are contesting the imposition of colonised epistemologies and bringing their own systems of knowledge to the center of discourse. Non-Western psychologists have asserted that Western psychological theories and their related praxes are "culturebound, value-laden, and with limited validity" (cited in Kim et al., 2006, p. 4).

The African worldview

African psychologies are linked to the African worldview. In order to better grasp the worldview that emerges from an African reality, it is first necessary to understand, and in some cases re-examine, the notion of culture. Culture has been inappropriately equated with a number of superficial variables like food, music, clothing, and artifacts. Although each of these items is a representation or a manifestation of culture, they are not culture in and of themselves. Culture is a complex constellation of mores, values, customs, tradition, and practices that guide and influence a people's cognitive, affective, and behavioural response to life circumstances. In essence, culture provides a general design for living and a pattern for interpreting reality (Nobles, 1986). There are differences in worldviews between certain cultural groups.

Grills (2002) and Parham (2002) provide us with a more formalised structure through which to examine how culture is operationalised across various racial/ethnic groups. Individually and collectively, they suggest that there are five domains of information that represent elements of culture at the deep structure level, and that these domains are central to developing a better working knowledge of the construct. The five domains include:

- *Ontology* – the nature of reality
- *Axiology* – one's value orientation
- *Cosmology* – relationship to the Divine force in the universe
- *Epistemology* – systems of knowledge and discovering truth

- *Praxis* – consistency in the context of one system of human interaction.

Based on these dimensions, an African worldview looks as follows:

- *Ontology* – Reality consists of an integration of personal and familial lived experiences; religious/spiritual insight and history.
- *Axiology* – The African value orientation is collectivistic; one's worth is based on one's contribution to the group's well-being and advancement; present and past oriented; focused on group/cultural survival and ownership.
- *Cosmology* – Spiritual/religious connection as integration of family and culture; divinity falls on a spectrum of ancestral hierarchy that dictates a reverence for those that have preceded us; connection to, conservation and protection of Mother Earth.
- *Epistemology* – Knowledge and truth is derived from oral history (i.e., ancestral history), direct lived experiences; Western science is limited and not the universal truth of insight and understanding.
- *Praxis* – The focus is on connectedness to others and congruence with others; religious/spiritual guidance and standard for one's thoughts and behaviors; family guidance and shared wisdom; shared lived experiences influence the integration and acceptance into one's behavioral repertoire.

Parham, Ajamu, White, Caldwell and Parham (2016) use these domains to develop a template (see table below) that is useful in distinguishing cultural areas of convergence and divergence between persons of African descent and other cultural groups, and even Eurocentric psychology. They argue that this opens the way for us to explore the extension of these cultural elements into a set of assumptions that guide the work of African-centred psychology both in theory and practice. These are assumptions about the self, our attitudes towards feelings, our approach to survival, our use of language, our views about time, the universe, death, and from what we derive our worth. The differences/similarities between Euro-American and African culture on the basis of these value systems are outlined in the table below.

Table 5.1 Value systems

Euro American	African
1. Fragmented Dichotomised Dualistic	Holistic Spiritness made evident
2. Suppressed/ Controlled	Legitimate/Expressed/Vitality/ Aliveness
3. Individual/ Competitive	Collective/Group "I am because we are, and because we are, therefore I am."
4. Written/Detached	Oral/Expressive/Call Response
5. Metric/Linear	Events cyclical
6. Control	Harmony-ontological principal of immortality
7. End	
8. Material possession	Contribution to one's community

African-centred psychology, in using African values, traditions, and worldview as the lens through which perceptions of reality are shaped and coloured, examines processes that allow for the illumination and liberation of the spirit (one's spiritual essence). Thus, if culture does provide a general design for living and a pattern for interpreting reality, then African-centred psychology, in relying on the principles of harmony within the universe as a natural order of human existence, recognises the following:

- the spiritness that permeates everything that exists in the universe
- the notion that everything in the universe is interconnected
- the value that the collective is the most salient element of existence
- the idea that self-knowledge is the key to mental health.

African psychology then is the dynamic manifestation of the unifying African principles, values, and traditions whereby the application of knowledge is used to resolve personal and social

problems and promote optimal human functioning (Parham, Ajamu, White, Caldwels & Parham, 2016, pp. 28-30).

Decolonial/African psychology – a critical appraisal

Recent scholarship in South Africa has critiqued the emergence of African-centred approaches in psychology. For instance, Makhubela (2016) considered the notion that the process of decolonisation cannot become a particularistic effort to contain psychology within the boundaries of African traditions, epistemology, and cosmogony because this would imply the negation of African contributions to what is now considered Western science. Decolonisation means to assert these contributions and identify them within Western science.

Decolonial psychologists in Africa, as Moll (2007) observes, are generally of two persuasions – those who view psychology as an indigenous area of study marked by distinctive worldviews and lived experiences of the continent, and those who see it as a universal disciplinary practice predicated on and concerned with psychological affairs of Africans yet whose postulates traverse cultures and race.

There is a danger in negating the other-than-Western scholarship and the value of its contribution to universal knowledge that could be considered scientific in nature because it is contained in the particularity of cultural traditions. Makhubela (2016) stated that the unique universalising potential given only to Western scholarship must be decolonised. He referred to Nsamenang and Dawes, who alerted African psychologists about the need to identify aspects of Western psychology that are Eurocentric – such as Piagetian formal thinking being considered a superior cognitive ability – but to not reject all Western theories and empirical findings. In other words, a commitment to a decolonial African psychology does not preclude taking the necessary advantage of what Euro-American psychology has to offer.

Self-assessment activity

- Critically assess the notion of decoloniality and why is it important within the context of psychological intervention.

- Compare and contrast indigenous psychology and western psychology.

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