

## Special Thematic Section on "Decolonizing Psychological Science"

# Stages of Colonialism in Africa: From Occupation of Land to Occupation of Being

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### Abstract

This paper draws primarily on my own scholarship, supplemented by the limited academic resources available in the "peripheries" of the world where I live and work (namely, Somali society and Darfur, Sudan), to consider the relationship between colonialism and psychology. I first consider the history of psychology in justifying and bolstering oppression and colonialism. I then consider the ongoing intersection of colonialism and psychology in the form of metacolonialism (or coloniality). I end with thoughts about decolonizing psychological science in teaching, social, and clinical practice. To decolonize psychological science, it is necessary to transform its focus from promotion of individual happiness to cultivation of collective well-being, from a concern with instinct to promotion of human needs, from prescriptions for adjustment to affordances for empowerment, from treatment of passive victims to creation of self-determining actors, and from globalizing, top-down approaches to context-sensitive, bottom-up approaches. Only then will the field realize its potential to advance Frantz Fanon's call for humane and just social order.

**Keywords:** coloniality, decolonial, metacolonialism, Franz Fanon, Africa

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When the editors invited me to contribute an article to the special section of JSPP devoted to decolonizing psychological science, I jumped at the opportunity to do so. The article presents me an opportunity to join in academic discussion on the psychology of oppression to which I was an early contributor (Bulhan, 1985b), but which I had abandoned for more urgent and focused work on trauma treatment, conflict resolution, and social reconstruction in the widely publicized Somali disaster and the Darfur conflict (see Bulhan, 2008; 2013a, 2013b).

With no access to libraries or viable internet links to journals, I have worked mostly in isolation to make the best of a dilemma that an individual of my background encounters. The dilemma is this: either to stay in academic centers in the West and obtain the most current information, but remain practically irrelevant to African needs; or to jump into actual frontiers of oppression in Africa and work toward change, but become cut off from academic circles and resources. Given my choice of the latter option, I therefore do not know how much I can contribute to



an ongoing academic discourse that has developed while I worked and lived in “peripheries” distant from Western academia centers. However, my current work and life in Africa affords me the possibility to *under-stand*—i.e., to comprehend from *below*—how the colonized peoples in these distant peripheries live, rather than speculate about them from lofty heights of academia abroad. I want to share here some of the benefits I gained from this *under-standing* of colonial heritage while I worked and lived in Africa during the past sixteen years.

Psychology, like all other disciplines and human endeavors, has emerged, developed, and today operates in economic, political, social, and cultural contexts. Neglect of these contexts by establishment psychologists—and their role in oppression generally and European colonialism particularly—has been one of the hidden and not often recognized dangers of a discipline that claims to specialize in the science of the mind and behavior.<sup>1</sup> Decolonizing psychological science cannot therefore proceed unless we first understand the history of colonialism—the precedents instigating it, its underlying motivations, the transformations it has undergone, and the consequences that followed. I review in this article not only the history of colonialism, but also how establishment psychology continually maintained symbiotic and mutually supportive relations with colonialism. I first highlight the origin and early stages of colonialism, before focusing later on its contemporary form that I call *metacolonialism* because it shows that colonialism did not end; on the contrary, colonialism in its metacolonial form continues to influence the thought, behavior, and being of colonized peoples even more than did earlier forms of colonialism. I conclude with proposals for decolonizing psychology.

## Colonialism and Coloniality

Colonialism in its classical form began in the Americas with European invasion, occupation, and exploitation (Quijano, 2000). Its driving motivation was and is not only pursuit of material exploitation and cultural domination, but also European self-aggrandizement to compensate for gnawing doubts on the wholeness and integrity of the self that, in different ways and intensity, assail people everywhere. Colonialism from the very beginning was therefore economic, political, cultural, and psychological. Its economic and political motives were most obvious at the beginning; the cultural and psychological motives integral to it all along became more intense and manifest later. Moreover, the fallout of colonialism is multiple and pervasive; its development and expansion affected the thought, behavior, and generally the life of colonized peoples. The methods and agents of colonialism changed, as did its primary foci of assault.

Colonialism is often misunderstood or narrowly defined. Some mistakenly confine it to either a geographic area or an era. Others, convinced that colonialism is outmoded and passé, view it a system no longer operative in Africa and generally in the world. Still others narrow it to a system imposed by and serving only inhabitants and descendants of Europe, ignoring that colonialism would not succeed or sustain in the past and present without local collaborators, minions, and conveyor belts essential for all forms of oppression to take root and persist. No wonder then that discussion on colonialism turned stale in Africa during the last several decades after most African countries attained independence. Euphoria swept through the African continent before and soon after African territories hoisted flags, sang national anthems, and celebrated the rise of African leaders to power. Africans believed then that the Europeans had left for good, that therefore Africans could move forward unhindered to enjoy the freedom and prosperity they thought in immediate grasp. This was not so. The euphoria and rising expectation soon gave way to disappointment and despair because colonialism left behind enduring

legacies—including not only political and economic, but also cultural, intellectual, and social legacies—that keep alive European domination.

A critical legacy of colonialism not sufficiently analyzed is the way formerly colonized peoples acquire knowledge, understand their history, comprehend their world, and define themselves. Latin American scholars (e.g. [Dussel, 1985, 1996](#); [Mignolo, 2000a, 2000b](#); [Quijano, 2000](#)) have presented fascinating analyses on colonized ways of knowing, behaving, and being. Particularly valuable contributions of these Latin American scholars are the concepts of *coloniality*, *coloniality of power*, and *colonial difference*. These concepts illuminate not only economic and political consequences of colonialism, but also the Eurocentric epistemology, ontology, and ideology emanating from, supporting, and validating European monopoly of power, hegemonic knowledge, distorted truth, and deformed being of the colonized. Their writings emphasize that colonialism is not identical or coterminous to coloniality. The former refers to political and economic relations by which one nation dominates and exploits another; the latter denotes enduring patterns of power as well as a way of thinking and behaving that emerged from colonialism but survived long after its seeming demise. [Mignolo \(2000a, 2000b, 2003\)](#) in particular underscores that coloniality rests on epistemic and ontological biases that promote validation of European hegemony and superiority while invalidating, marginalizing, and eroding the knowledge, experience, and rights of colonized peoples (see also [Alcoff, 2007](#); [Maldonado-Torres, 2007](#)). We cannot understand well why the quest for African freedom and expected prosperity did not materialize after independence unless we understand the historical precedents that gave rise to colonialism, its social and intellectual foundation, its enduring as well as changing aspects, and the cascading disasters that followed.

Discussing the multifaceted, complex, and paramount problems of colonialism can be of necessity brief and sketchy in an article such as this. I highlight below the antecedents of colonialism and quickly review early forms of it before the emergence and lingering on of metacolonialism, the latest and most pervasive of colonialism.

## Antecedents of Colonialism in Africa

I mention here three antecedents of the adversarial and exploitative violence of colonialism for succeeding generations.

### Crusades

The material greed, cultural domination, and self-aggrandizement characteristic of European colonization—as well as the use of religion and racism to justify the pillage and massacre of non-Europeans—are evident in the Crusades. The Crusades started in 1095 when Pope Urban II appealed to all Christians to defend the Eastern Orthodox Christians against Muslims, liberate Jerusalem, and enable Christian pilgrims' safe passage. This was the stated goal; an unstated goal was that the Catholic Church, then the most powerful and wealthiest institution in Europe, faced pressure from competing kings and warlords who threatened the Church's hegemonic authority and land monopoly in Europe. Similarly, European kings sought to unify their people and enlarge their power by joining the Crusades against Muslims. The European public too found opportunity for personal wealth and glory in the pillage of Muslims. They believed the Pope's promise of forgiving their sins if they killed Muslims. They thought that they would return to Europe with a clean slate from sin, wealthy and glorious (see [Graham, 2006](#), for a succinct account).

In short, the diverse motives for the Crusades included desires for power, wealth, spiritual salvation, personal glory, and especially a need to construct coherent European identities against an external and convenient enemy.

The massacre and pillage of Muslims and Jews alike during the Crusades unified Europeans with the myth of superior race waging a “just war” on behalf of God.

### Colonization of the Americas

The colonization of the Americas subsequently offered Europeans new opportunities for material exploitation, cultural domination, and self-aggrandizement through claims of religious and racial superiority (see Quijano, 2000). Not only did the distinction between Europeans and Non-Europeans become more concrete in the Americas, but also the distinction of *races* became a convenient justification for exploitation. This distinction of races and associated claim of natural superiority enabled Europeans to carry out three cataclysmic assaults by use of maximum violence (including genocide) that later became global. The first assault was on *the world of things*, particularly the land of conquered non-European peoples to exploit gold, silver, and other commodities. The second assault was on *the world of people* for obtaining free labor and carrying out sexual exploitation. The third assault was *the world of meaning* by changing indigenous religions, knowledge, and identities.

### African Slave Trade

The colonization of America subsequently fueled the capture, transport, and enslavement of Africans in the Americas and the Caribbean. The Atlantic Slave Trade represents the largest importation of slaves in the history of the world. This trade not only caused immense suffering for persons forced into slavery, but also enabled Europeans to expand their settlement in the New World and earn substantial capital for Europeans to finance the industrial revolution (cf. Williams, 1966).

At least three outcomes of slavery seem certain. Firstly, slavery pauperized and depopulated the African continent, stealing its young and productive members and derailing the political history and economic development of its people. Secondly, this system of slavery consolidated the dominant-dominated relations between Europeans and non-Europeans, making racism the primary justification for colonial exploitation that continues to the present in different guises. Thirdly, Europeans and their descendants reaped more than economic benefits from slavery. Fed better, their population increased. With new wealth and industry, they developed better technology with which to further conquer and exploit others (cf. Rodney, 1974). The Atlantic Slave Trade therefore intensified the mix of different motives—greed for material possession and consumption, combined with racism and self-aggrandizement—that began with the Crusades.

Slavery ended when it no longer was economically productive because the burgeoning Industrial Revolution made it inefficient and dispensable. Yet the European pursuit of profit, racism, and self-aggrandizement did not end. Instead, it grew more with the development of industries that required more raw materials, more cheap or free labor, and more markets for manufactured goods. Classical colonialism provided a convenient alternative to satisfy these needs.

### Classical Colonialism

Classical colonialism in Africa started in the nineteenth century. Like the colonization of the Americas and the Atlantic Slave Trade, it was *systemic violence*—organized, continuous, methodic, and willful. It was not only integral to capitalism, but also coexistent with racism, cultural domination, and European self-aggrandizement.

Whereas slavery focused on exploiting isolated and captive *individuals*, the submission and exploitation of entire *populations* required sophisticated methods and numerous agents. The first point of colonial assault was *occupation*

of *land* by force of arms. Land contained not only the world of things, but also the world of people. Taking control of the land provided colonizers the raw materials they needed and geopolitical advantage in the competition among them for colonies. After occupation of the land, *control of the population* followed to acquire not only cheap or free labor and market for manufactured goods, but also gradual erosion in the world of meaning. Thus, instead of exploiting defenseless individuals in alien lands as in slavery, classical colonialism held *populations captive in their own land*, forcing them to serve the same economic, racial, and self-aggrandizing motives that gave rise to and sustained the Atlantic Slave Trade.

Lasting occupation of land, exploitation of human and material resources, and quelling resistance required the *erosion of social bonding, indigenous beliefs, values, identities, and indigenous knowledge*. Colonialists achieved this by using different agents including missionaries, anthropologists, physicians, and journalists. Since violence and outsiders' propaganda alone cannot sustain oppression, colonizers resorted to local agents to carry out the colonial mission. The most important of these were individuals educated in colonial schools or serving as subordinates in the colonial system. These so-called local elites inherited the colonial state whose function was not to serve the colonized but to exploit them. Classical colonialism ostensibly ended when these local collaborators demonstrated, through training and internalization of colonial values, their proclivity to serve as auxiliaries of neocolonialism.

### Neocolonialism: Return by the Back Door

The ostensible demise of classical colonialism in Africa began in 1957 when Ghana became independent, followed by the formal independence of other African countries in the 1960s and 1970s. The world wars were a critical historical juncture in stimulating the ambition for freedom because they showed three essential facts. Firstly, Europeans did not share the solidarity they previously projected; instead, they fought one another with shocking brutality. Secondly, the war revealed to Africans that the White man was not superhuman; in the battlefield, he too panicked, bled, and died like Africans. Thirdly, Africans realized that they could challenge Europeans in armed struggle in the quest for freedom since they had risked their lives during the world wars to defend European freedom. Recognizing these three facts initiated—firstly in the mind, subsequently in action—the demise of classical colonialism.

The African public found new inspiration in hearing from their children the rhetoric of freedom and call to end of colonialism. Not surprisingly, their anticolonial rhetoric focused on *liberating the land*—that is, to kick out the colonizer. Neither they nor their leaders gave much thought beyond that specific and narrow goal. It turned out that the so-called local elite wanted only to replace the former rulers and govern in the same way, using the same laws and institutions. After independence, the flawed colonial state turned into a neocolonial machine that not only oppressed the people, but also worked to the advantage of former colonial powers and their allies (Bulhan, 2008).

A number of African politicians and intellectuals focused attention on *neocolonialism* (Amin, 1973; Nkrumah, 1965): ways in which former colonizers (joined by the United States and the USSR) controlled behind the scene economic and political power. They also presented evidence on how European countries continue to plunder material resources of the former colonies and dictate flawed policies serving European interests. Similar to the dependency theorists (Frank, 1970; Prebisch, 1960), these writers on neocolonialism shed light on the methods and consequences of European economic and political domination in Africa. However, most analyses held that

economy is the substructure of neocolonialism; hence, they did not discuss the role of culture and psychology in the perpetuation of colonialism.

### **Metacolonialism: Latest Stage of Colonialism**

The latest modification in the previous form and presentation of colonialism is *metacolonialism*. According to the *Random House Unabridged Dictionary* (1993, 2nd Edition), the prefix *meta* in Greek translates to *after, along with, beyond, behind, or among*. I therefore mean by *metacolonialism* a socio-political, economic, cultural, and psychological system that comes *after, along with, or among* the earlier stages of colonialism that I described in the preceding pages. One can also define it as a colonial system that goes *beyond* in scope or *behind* in depth what classical colonialism and neocolonialism had achieved.

Metacolonialism revives an old system of colonial exploitation and oppression that masquerades in the more savory euphemism of *globalization*. Many analysts write about globalization in glowing terms, often extolling it as a system of worldwide innovation that shall bring great advances to humanity. Yet these writings seldom answer this question: Who actually benefits from this new craze, and who suffers because of its global effects? We find the answer not directly from the words of its promoters and defenders, but in the structures of power and global locations where its decision-makers concentrate. Specifically, metacolonialism emanates from the same geography and societies as did the Atlantic Slave Trade, classical colonialism, and neocolonialism.

Unlike earlier forms that were national or regional, metacolonialism not only grows globally and penetrates deeper in the psychology and social relations of all peoples, but also exercises its global power of hegemonic mystification that blurs to some degree previous distinctions of social class, ethnicity, and race. Although writers on colonialism used dichotomous distinctions between colonizers and colonized or between White and Black races to draw attention to the drastic contrasts of the two groups' unequal fortunes and history under colonialism (e.g., Fanon, 1967, 1968), such Manichean distinctions are no longer adequate. Metacolonialism brings about a wide spectrum of beneficiaries and victims. Some of the formerly colonized elites are today material beneficiaries of metacolonialism (especially in comparison to the mass misery of their societies), flaunting trivial material benefits while ignoring their subjective victimization. Even the traditional beneficiaries of colonialism—namely Europeans and their descendants—are today in some respects victims of metacolonialism in ways they neither realize nor wish to critically examine. Accustomed to racial hubris—exaggerated pride and inflated self-confidence—passed on to them by earlier generations, they remain stuck in the old Manichean division of the world associated with myths of racial superiority. Our concepts, formulations, and analyses must therefore keep pace with the dynamic and sophisticated changes of metacolonialism.

## **The Psychology of Metacolonialism**

Metacolonialism manifests in both objective and subjective domains to a far greater degree than the classical colonialism and neocolonialism that preceded it. I illustrate below some of its manifestations, realizing that space of an article permits neither extensive listing nor detailed discussion (but see Bulhan, *in press*).

I begin this review with a discussion of the contest over reality and memory. Much writing exists about colonial onslaught on the worlds of things and people, but not much about its assault on the world of meaning and associated contest over defining reality and preserving memory. Although less obvious than the contest of arms and political

control, the contest over reality and memory plays a central role in the objective and subjective lives of the colonized. What do I mean by contest over reality and memory?

## Contested Reality and Memory

Much of recorded history is partly mythology, partly a product of selective recall, and partly interpretation of what transpired. What is recorded is seldom that which actually took place because the events that transpired have gone through different recall, interpretation, and retelling by people who experienced them, people who heard about what had transpired, and (generations later) people who write about those events. Even participants of the same historical events differ in their account and interpretation of what actually took place. Each generation modifies written history according to its needs and interpretation, building on selective recall and distortion.

The contest over reality and memory becomes most intense in conditions of oppression where both reality and memory distort to preserve the *status quo* of domination and exploitation. Metacolonialism in the way I define it enlarges the distortion of events in memory because written history is mostly about the valor and benevolence of the European colonizer. Students continue to learn this history in schools, libraries preserve it, statutes freeze it in time and place, and public and professional media disseminate it. In short, the worlds of things and people exude, reflect, and perpetuate the story of the European colonizer. This story valorizes the colonizer and turns into a potent weapon of domination while it invalidates and vilifies much about the colonized, including their culture, their epistemology, their ontology—indeed their very existence as human beings. The colonizer's reality and memory under these conditions take the status of the only valid knowledge worth preserving and disseminating while the colonizer's self-aggrandizement entails the diminution or negation of the colonized.

Accordingly, the colonized do not exist except for the needs and convenience of the colonizers; they are no more than appendage and fodder to the history of colonizers. The story of the colonized remains untold due to censorship and social amnesia enforced in crude or subtle ways. If writers of this story are not directly harassed, the media industry seldom publishes their alternative story; professional journals winnow it out; publishers reject manuscripts; and tenure review committees consider it a sign of radicalism or proof of idiosyncratic obsession to excavate a long forgotten past too uncomfortable to recall. Not surprisingly, then, many avoid such adventures, making vague the distinction between enforced censorships and self-censorship.<sup>ii</sup>

There is another problem. If one endeavors to tell the story of the colonized, the teller is from the start stuck neck deep or totally submerged in the maelstrom or disaster the colonizer had created.<sup>iii</sup> Not only does one wade in the dissimulated history and scholarship of the colonizer's metacolonial systems of education, but also the world in which one lives—including institutions for which one works—contradict one's story about the colonized. Moreover, any work that one manages to publish will be in media inaccessible to the people the story is about.

One who writes critically on colonialism in the peripheries distant from Europe and North America faces a different problem. The writer does not have the latest information and technology, or even a reliable internet connection, to keep abreast on the work of others or to participate in exchange of ideas with them. This state of isolation diminishes critical engagement conducive to scholarship. What is more, life in that part of the world presents two other perils. On the one hand, local tyrants find threat in ideas unfamiliar to them, assuming that what they do not know or understand is necessarily subversive. On the other hand, security agents of those who control global power are likely to apply the label "terrorist" or "terrorist sympathizer" if the writer is non-European or especially a Muslim who lives in the distant frontiers that contests of reality and memory provoke atavistic religious radicalism.

Either way, whether in the West or outside of it, imposed censorship and self-censorship limit discourse on colonialism and coloniality.

I start with these remarks to underscore four points. First, a key indicator of domination is the power to name the world and the self, interpret the past, and preserve memory of it. In usurping that power, the colonizer finds a more insidious and potent psychological advantage than use of lethal arms. Second, because of the lost contest over the defining and naming of reality, the experience and story of the colonized await documenting and telling. Not hearing or reading about either, people assume they do not exist. Third, the forgotten or distorted past leaves the colonized in a state of ignorance and confusion, with no lessons learned to understand the present or chart a new future. Fourth, establishment psychology historically played a significant role in the contest of reality and memory, serving as a potent tool for concealing the violence of colonialism and distorting the experiences of the colonized. To this day, the Eurocentric and reductionist roots of establishment psychology prevent even well meaning researchers and practitioners from exposing the ravages of colonialism or acknowledging the experience of the colonized.

### Manifestations of Metacolonialism

I turn now to manifestations of metacolonialism. To begin with, metacolonialism established the dollar and (recently) the euro not only as the primary currencies of exchange, but also as measures of human worth. This is colonization of economics, wealth, and self-evaluation. Metacolonialism also dictates that international laws promulgated by Europeans are just and essential laws for 'civilized' conduct in national and international relations. This is colonization of individual and group behavior, nationally and internationally.

Europeans and their descendants today enjoy *freedom* and *opportunity* in space not only in their land but also beyond.<sup>iv</sup> Indeed, after nearly denuding resources of the earth, they endeavor to colonize outer space (including the Moon and Mars) for more resources. In contrast, space increasingly represents *unfreedom* and *constraints* for the metacoloned in ways worse than described under classical colonialism by earlier writers—like [Nkrumah \(1965\)](#), [Amin \(1973\)](#), and [Rodney \(1974\)](#). For example, urban communities in Africa have become concentration camps of disease and death—with profuse shantytowns, crowded hovels, open sewers, pervasive poverty and filth. In addition, their lands and coasts are dumping sites for the West's toxic waste—including nuclear and medical wastes—with devastating and enduring consequences for the fauna, flora, and human health. This is colonization of space.

Home too is no longer a place of intimacy and security for the metacoloned. Economic forces beyond the control of individuals invade it to instigate conflict among members, caught as they are between confused needs and increasing wants, neither of which they can satisfy. Meanwhile, radio and TVs programs bombard them at home and other private places with metacolonial propaganda, mesmerizing people with images of material rewards and ostentatious display of European models of beauty. Children bring to the home metacolonial ideas contradicting their culture and identity while their parents live in crushing frustration in the workplace or more likely suffer chronic unemployment. Their governing state, often a tool of metacolonialism, invades homes at will, usually after midnight, to capture anyone suspected of sedition, terrorism, and the like with no due process of law. The minority of Africans with access to internet and mobile phones are also subject to external controls without their knowledge. These new technologies permit agents of metacolonialism near and far to snoop what they say, do, and think. This is colonization of place.



Metacolonialism also surfaces in the colonization of time since most people today believe that *real time* is only the way Europeans define, interpret, and measure it. In reality, time has no single or universal meaning, and cultures vary in how they understand and interpret it (e.g., Bulhan, 2013a; Mbiti, 1970). The dominant conception of time in the world today rests on a Newtonian paradigm and global capitalism that not only equates time with money, but also divides, manages, and manipulates time and human energy for productivity and profit contradicting the culture and interest of the colonized. Today, almost everyone in the world, regardless of culture, wears watches based on European conception of time and pegged to a location in Europe. In short, European conceptions of time today regulate energy, work, and therefore lives of peoples in the world. This is not only colonization of time, but also metacolonized regulation of human energy.

Metacolonialism also affirms that Europeans and their descendants are superior to all other human beings in intelligence, power, beauty, and wealth. This is colonization of values. Related to this is the notion that Europeans and their descendants represent the ideal or personification of beauty. People of color increasingly internalize this self-defeating notion. They use chemical and electrical means to lighten their skin, turn smooth their kinky hair, or simply wear imported wigs to hide their natural hair texture and color. This is colonization of beauty. Metacolonialism, like its antecedents, also glorifies Western education and knowledge as the tickets to enlightenment and the 'good life,' while vilifying and eroding indigenous education and knowledge. This is colonization of knowledge. Using modern telecommunication equipment and the internet, Europeans have the right to monitor communication and information of all people, including who talks to whom, how often, where, and for what purpose. This is colonization of digital information. Metacolonialism also sets the Europeans and their descendants as the sole dispenser of aid and compassion for victims of violence and oppression in Africa. Yet, this compassion is primarily self-serving since the countries and organizations delivering the aid gain indirectly or directly by selling products of their farmers and manufacturers or by collecting hefty overheads for service rendered (Maren, 1997). This is colonization of compassion, reaffirming simultaneously the incompetence and dependence of aid recipients, while reasserting and further inflating the self-aggrandizement of Europeans (Bulhan, *in press*).

Promoters of metacolonialism also affirm that one finds the good and moral life by embracing Europeans as demigods and assimilating their culture while eroding the religious heritage of non-Europeans. Advocates of Global Western Culture do not mince words or hide their mission. They malign and deprecate the lives of non-European peoples. This is colonization of not only culture but also religion. Moreover, western education in non-European societies erode or change indigenous languages. For instance, Africans schooled in neocolonial educational systems choose to speak English or French to show sophistication and so-called modernity, gradually abandoning their indigenous language. They even change their indigenous first names to European names like Peter, James, and Joseph. If they speak to their people in the indigenous language, they sprinkled English or French terms in their statements to achieve the same impression of sophistication and modernity even if their people do not understand the full meaning of their remarks. This too is colonization of language and identity.

Metacolonizers also claim that only their classifications, their diagnoses, and their treatment of physical and psychological disorders are most scientific and effective when they turn a blind eye to the *oppressive social conditions* that cause or contribute to hunger, disease, premature death, depression, trauma, and psychosomatic disorders. In the name of advanced treatment, they also manufacture potent drugs that silence the rage of injustice and they erect institutions with high walls that sequester victims. Instead of healing victims, the forced silence and incarceration condemn them to psychological and social death. Cut off from society and inter-subjectivity with others, those identified as mad have become less accessible to ordinary human contact and social bonding; therefore

less psychologically and socially alive. If truly scientific and socially responsible, their metacolonized healers and caretakers would contribute to change the historical and social conditions producing these symptoms and afflictions. This too is colonization of medicine and madness.

## Metacolonial Motives and Goals

As successor and culmination of earlier forms of colonialism, metacolonialism likewise serves Euro-American material exploitation, cultural domination, and psychological self-aggrandizement. These motives persist by inertia of history, residual social and political structures of domination, and collective socialization through effective media and schools. Metacolonialism added to these factors its potent methods: conditioned mass passion for consumer goods imported from abroad and an effective dissemination of the belief that this stage of colonialism (globalization) represents a great advance in human history. What therefore changed are not the motives but the methods and tactics of satisfying those motives.

By focused assault on the world of meaning, metacolonialism also penetrates deeper than classical colonialism and neocolonialism into the psyche and social relations. It occupies and controls the *self* or *being* of the metacolonized both in their psychological and social existence. After subjective occupation and control, the metacolonized automatically cooperate without need for the crude methods used by previous forms of colonialism. Nonetheless, metacolonialism, true to its colonial roots and essence, resorts to outright violence when necessary. It has in store efficient and deadly violence in case of resistance to it, including modern tanks, deadly missiles that seldom miss their target, drones controlled from distance, war robots that neither bleed nor die, and nuclear bombs capable of complete annihilation. Because the *Being* of the metacolonized is occupied and possessed, they also come to believe that they are materially better off than ever, even when they see in TVs and newspapers only the alluring images of the consumer goods (like cars, flashy clothes, and electronic equipment) by which metacolonialism entraps and mesmerizes. If few of them get only a small number and cheap imitations of these goods, they believe that they too share in “the good life” of the European—a belief reinforced by the admiration and envy of the less fortunate majority around them. While starving for lack of food, these less fortunate compatriots continue to be enthralled by the shared delusion of metacolonial material opulence and redemption supposedly coming to them in the near future by magical means.

There is indeed more to metacolonialism than the consumer goods or the desire to satisfy constantly invented and therefore insatiable wants. At its highest advance not yet achieved, metacolonialism aims to establish a “New World Order” which already shows its telltale signs. This New World Order will for instance do away with the colonially formed nation-states, as we know them today, and replace them by a central authority managed by Euro-Americans and local allies they select. It will use one currency, one international court, and one mega-military establishment like the expanded NATO or its successor supposedly to ensure world peace. It will “homogenize” cultures into Universal European Culture, as stridently advocated by neo-liberals for “Global Western Culture.” Most languages will die as will indigenous knowledge in non-European societies. Religions will gradually erode in substance and meaning, but devotees may retain rituals that do not threaten the new world order. If they present threat, as do some Muslim fundamentalists, most of whom use Islam for self-serving political aims, metacolonial powers and their regional allies will jointly organize themselves to clobber them to total submission or eliminate them using a sophisticated technology of death. Computers based in the United States and Europe will store personal details of individuals, wherever they are in the globe, monitoring their movements, their human connections, and their communications.

These metacolonial prospects and plans are not far-fetched; we are already in the throes of metacolonialism. However, the most devastating application and consequences of it fall on Non-European populations who—by culture, politics, and behavior—are on the fringes of the envisaged New World Order. That is too why institutions like the IMF and World Bank focus their work on these societies. This is why the International Court in Hague investigates or tries more Africans dictators than American or European perpetrators of similar or worse crimes against humanity. It is also in Africa that the largest numbers of “international peacekeeping forces” operate, because people of color once again occupy the lowest rung in the hierarchy of human rights and expected norms of equal treatment.

## Psychology and Colonialism

The emergence and growth of psychology as a discipline took place not only at a time of social change and conflict in Europe but also while Europeans and their descendants carried out violence in search for profit and self-aggrandizement of a cultural, social, and psychological character. As Europeans conquered much of the world, imposing themselves in action and ideology as the only honorable model of humanity, the discipline of psychology emerged as a specialty and arbiter of human experience. Never emerging in a social vacuum, psychology (and its medical counterpart, psychiatry) played their part in the history of European colonialism serving as its agents in its different stages (Bulhan, 1980, 1985b, 1993). They also benefited funds and prestige from the conquest and exploitation of the rest of us. They justified slavery, as did missionaries, journalists, biologists, and anthropologists. For instance, some declared severe psychopathology in slaves who ran away from plantations. Soon after emancipation, others declared that emancipation of slaves would bring their extinction with “unerring certainty”. Still others insisted that emancipation already brought former slaves severe and manifest deterioration in mind and body because they were innately incapable of living freely.

During classical colonialism, psychologists and psychiatrists embarked on racial comparisons of the size of the brain, concluding from biased measurements that Africans belong to a lower evolutionary phase. Studying Africans “in health and disease,” Carothers (1953) concluded from a small sample of patients in a Kenyan psychiatric hospital that Africans were akin to “lobotomized Europeans” or at least to neurotic Europeans. Other researchers measured IQ pegged to their culture and affirmed that Africans and their descendants show lower intelligence in comparison to Europeans (e.g., Croizet, 2008; Croizet & Dutrévis, 2004; Kamin, 1974). Taken together, these works justified colonialism and perhaps assuaged the troubled conscience of Europeans about colonial violence.

The contribution of psychologists and psychiatrists in justifying colonialism did not end with classical colonialism. After 1960 when Africans attained formal independence, the Eurocentric psychological and psychiatric literature shifted from affirming the innately incompetent Africans to asserting alarming rates of mass depression and other psychiatric disorders (Bulhan, 1985b; Prince 1967). This recalls earlier claims that Black slaves were innately incapable of living free or sane without a White master. In the era of metacolonialism, the psychological and psychiatric literature is more subtle and refined, as is the case with its other covert applications. Actively incorporated into control of the mind and the market are new ‘technologies’—subliminal programming of TV broadcasts, psychological techniques of interrogation and torture, and a wide range of potent psychiatric medications with little discussion of the social causes of distress or disorders caused by the ravages of colonialism.

In spite of this sordid history, psychologists and psychiatrists often show a convenient social amnesia, ignoring their complicity with colonialism both in its crude and subtle forms. For two disciplines that claim commitment to study and unmask repressed psychological experience, such neglect and avoidance about evidence of service to colonialism is curious indeed. In moments of idealistic reverie, a person sharing professional affinity might hope that psychologists and psychiatrists would be different from colonial soldiers and administrators. Yet studies of the history of colonialism, as well as knowledge of psychologists' and psychiatrists' role in colonialism, lead to this conclusion: Economic self-interest, political allegiance, defense of delusional superiority in race, and wish for self-aggrandizement take precedence over commitment to reason, objectivity, and justice in scientific thought and behavior.

## Decolonizing Psychology

Social and political systems seldom die or dismantle easily; they often reinvent themselves for three chief reasons. Firstly, the economic and political interests they served in the past continue to prevail in subsequent generations. Secondly, the institutions—schools, law enforcement agencies, courts and others—that served those interests do not readily change. Thirdly, those who grow up under these systems—beneficiaries as well as victims—get so indoctrinated through childhood socialization, schooling, and adult experiences that they do not seek or accept alternative ways of looking at the world. Turned into true believers or acting as programmed robots, they defend the oppressive structures as if life would be impossible without them. In fact, they would (and often do) sacrifice life to defend and perpetuate these systems, however unjust.

As I described in detail elsewhere (Bulhan, 1985b; Chap. 4), several conceptual problems of establishment psychology derail it from its declared mission of advancing the well-being of people and push it toward unquestioned service to colonialism in its different stages. The first of these problems is *Eurocentrism* that not only infuses cultural bias and errors in establishment psychology, but also makes it a ready tool for European exploitation, racism, and global self-aggrandizement. Related to this is its assumptive, methodological, and experiential *solipsism* that predisposes Europeans to believe that their experience is the most valid in the world and provides the only model of humanity. The *positivist foundation* of psychological inquiry also limits and distorts human experience as it seeks to measure, control, and predict human behavior not only by emulating the basic sciences, but also by remaining loyal to the colonial project of measuring, controlling, and predicting the colonized. Positivism also brings with it other problems—like establishment psychology's analytic-reductionist bias, its trait-comparison bias, and stability-equilibrium bias—all of which exclude holistic, contextual, and dialectical perspectives. Decolonizing psychology requires abandoning these flaws in theory and practice incorporating the following steps.

### From Individual to Collective Well-Being

Establishment psychology rooted to capitalism and the resulting culture of misanthropy gives priority to the fetish of individualism instead of advancing collective well-being. In theory and practice, its diagnostic classifications, narrow definition of liberty, and positivist method of inquiry rest on individualism. Individuals do indeed count and deserve focused study, care, and liberty. However, exclusive focus on individuals—shorn of their historical, cultural, and social context—reveals avoidance or disregard of the fundamental truth that human beings are above all social beings and that individual well-being or liberty means little without collective well-being and liberty. Only when collective well-being and liberty are secure can questions and comparison of individual difference have

meaning and value. Better still, study and treatment of individuals must work from the perspective of advancing the well-being of the collective on the one hand and reducing tyranny of the collective on individuals on the other.

### **From Obsession With Instinct to Promotion of Human Needs**

Since its beginning, establishment psychology was obsessed with instincts. Theories of instincts seldom led to valuable and lasting insight on human behavior. Instead, such theories not only postulated fixed traits, but also reified characteristics of people in ways that afforded justification of slavery, colonialism, racism, and sexism. (For instance, McDougall [1908] catalogued numerous instincts and attributed “instinct of submission” to black people.) Focusing on human needs introduces a different outlook and outcome. Individuals cannot state their presumed instincts, but they can affirm their *needs* and *wants*. Thus, while theory about instinct exists in the mind of its proponent who claims institutional authority and professional credibility, study of human needs forces one to shift the line of inquiry and predisposes one to engage in *dialogue* with the persons concerned who can explain what they *need* and *want*. In short, emphasis on needs and wants may reduce the scourge of solipsism and Eurocentrism in establishment psychology.

### **From Adjustment to Empowerment**

The promotion of adjustment to oppressive structure and alienated living often occur in psychotherapy or the larger industry called mental health whose overriding aim is to change persons referred to as “patients” rather than enabling them (if not joining them) in changing the conditions (economic, political, cultural, and social) that primarily caused or contributed to the distress, mild or severe. Emphasis on adjustment not only decontextualizes the problems of the oppressed but also burdens the “patient” with inordinate degree of patience to an oppressive system, including the obvious hierarchy of power in the doctor-patient relationship replicating the colonial situation. Moreover, traditional therapy begins with a subtle process of Eurocentrism, racism, and victim-blame, all affirming or implying that the “patient” caused or contributed to his or her problem. Little wonder then, that patients from oppressed communities seldom seek therapy unless brought under duress by relatives, the police, or by court order. If they seek therapy on their own, they frequently drop out at very high rates because of the adjustment-orientation, power-relations, decontextualization, and victim-blame of Eurocentric psychology (Bulhan, 1985a, 1985b, 1993).

### **From Passive Victims to Self-Determining Actors**

No doubt, oppressive systems produce countless victims subjected to hardship and injury. Yet a perspective promoting change avoids freezing people in the status of victims who only deserve sympathy and charity. Even when people experience hardship, danger, and injury, they make choices. Albert Camus said that even a person forced to the gallows chooses *how* he or she faces certain death—to weep, scream, shake, or die with dignity. People always make choices by rationally calculating their prospects of winning or losing in war, business, and other human encounters. In each case, they consider the resources and means available to them as well as the conditions favoring them or not.

Slaves and the colonized must choose between two impossible options: *die*, thereby avoid oppression altogether; or *live*, marking time until ready to regain freedom and perhaps turn the table on the so-called victor of today. Just as the person forced to gallows makes choices, enslaved and colonized people also make choices, whether or not they make them out of ignorance, fear, rational miscalculation, or a combination thereof. To overstate their victimization prevents critical analysis of choices and freezes them in permanent incompetence, dependence,

and hopelessness. It also reinforces their belief, internalized under oppression, that they have no choice but to continue life in misery from one generation to another.

At the same time, to affirm that the colonized *have choice* not only declares that they can transcend their present condition, but also prepares and empowers them to make choices. Frederick Douglass, a former Black American slave, stated that power concedes only to a *demand* and that *refusal* to endure oppression sets the limits of tyrants. Decolonized psychology analyzes the conditions that victimize people, making them objects or minions of others; it also affirms that they are self-determining actors—if not immediately, then at least in the future. It educates them about self-defeating strategies, explores with them how best to set limits to tyranny, and prepares them to make necessary and effective demands for change.

## From Top-Down to Bottom-Up Approaches

Fifthly, decolonized psychology pursues change using *bottom-up* rather than *top-down approach*. The top-down approach is not only imperialistic and arrogant but also it seldom works, neither at the level of the individual nor that of the collective. Many therapeutic interventions or programs of social change fail because they are imposed top-down by individuals or groups who claim superior authority and knowledge, often supported by threat or exercise of violence. The change they claim to bring about is also minimal, superficial, half-hearted and self-serving. Not only do they affirm or imply that they alone know best what is good for the individuals or groups they claim to help but also they devalue and infantilize them by their approach that actually replicates the situation of oppression. They also show that the project of change is theirs, claiming victory for all successes and blaming the recipient of help for all failures. These characteristics of the top-down approach often breed resentment and subversion among those supposed to be recipients of help. That is why traditional approaches to therapy and international peacekeeping missions fail with people caught in colonial oppression and associated devaluation.

The bottom-up approach requires patience and humility as well as openness to learn the experiences, thoughts, and perspective of the other. In this approach, one abandons the hubris and imperialism of the top-down approach. The bottom-up approach forces the self-declared helper to examine motives, question dominant theories, and be open to learn the experiences, thoughts, and traditions of those one seeks to help. The bottom-up approach also affirms that the so-called recipients of help own the process and product of change; that success and failure are shared; and that change is reciprocal because the supposed “helper” learns, gets healed, and grows alongside “the recipient” of help (Watkins, 2015, this section).

## Conclusion

A broad consideration of colonialism suggests that this system of domination entails contest of reality in three worlds: *the world of things*, *of people*, and *of meaning*. Driven firstly by economic motives, colonizers attacked the world of things to obtain raw materials and markets for manufactured goods. To obtain cheap or free labor, they not only occupied the land but also assaulted the world of people to force submission. Once they conquered the people and occupied the land, they assaulted the world of meaning because no system of oppression lasts without occupation of the mind and ontology of the oppressed.

The old and crude forms of colonial rule have changed to the more subtle and sophisticated (also more intense and expansive) form that I have called metacolonialism: a consolidation of capitalism, liberal democracy, and

Western Culture into a unified and globalized force for economic, political, and cultural domination. In metacolonialism, the primary target of domination is *the total being of the colonized*—economically, culturally, socially, and psychologically. The governing values, ethos, and ideology of metacolonial ways of being include a connected and interdependent world with a shared set of international laws, markets, and monetary standards formulated and governed by supposedly “neutral institutions” like the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Bank. The prime indicators of metacolonial well-being are the quantity and quality of the imported material goods people consume, the houses they live in, and the gadgets they own. Their common denominator is crass materialism in a world of power and wealth inequity confirming the being of a minority, partially confirming that of an intermediary minority (called local elite), and totally disconfirming that of the majority.

In this context, the analyses and insights of Frantz Fanon (1967) in *Black Skin, White Masks* are more relevant today than they were in the heyday of classical colonialism and neocolonialism. Clearly, there can only be occupied, distorted, and shriveled being (versus wholesome and healthy being) when so much of objective and subjective life—the economy, the political order, space and time, culture, knowledge, beauty, and even reason—are occupied. When the colonized believe they are happily marching toward prosperity and redemption, it makes liberation far more complicated and difficult.

In short, colonialism is today more entrenched objectively and subjectively than it was in the past. Effective and sustainable change can come only when those within the center of the metacolonized world and those in its peripheries work together both to *deconstruct* metacoloniality in its different forms and jointly *reconstruct* a more just world on the ruins of the old. The call for collaboration is not appeal for sympathy or generosity; those at the centers of metacolonialism also pay heavy but hidden costs for injustice and dehumanization of others. I therefore see the project of decolonizing psychology as a means toward broad-based critical thinking and collaboration on what to *deconstruct* and how to *reconstruct* for the benefit of all.

I endeavor to contribute to systemic and peaceful change in the meta-colonized part of the Africa in which I live, trying to make a difference in Somali society that has experienced more than its share of colonial violence and metacolonial mystification. To this end, I started Frantz Fanon University in Somaliland so that a new generation of African students can learn and advance decolonized psychology, medicine, and social sciences. This is no doubt a small step in the global project of decolonizing psychology that requires larger, coordinated, and sustained work by people in different parts of the world. Frantz Fanon University welcomes collaboration of individuals and institutions in that respect. I also hope this issue of *JSPP* devoted to decolonizing psychology will inspire such collaborative work.

## Notes

i) By *European*, I mean not only those citizens of Europe but also their descendants who settled in the Americas, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, or elsewhere and who promoted and benefitted from colonialism. I also mean by *establishment psychology* the discipline of psychology that first emerged in Europe, subsequently grew in North America, and today dominates psychological theories, method, and practice of psychology in the world.

ii) I learned this subtle censorship in academia while teaching at Boston University when a high-ranking administrator tried to block my tenure, approved at all levels of university committees and by six external reviewers, because the administrator found my book on Frantz Fanon too radical. As soon as I earned tenure with approval of the Board of Trustees, I took a year-long sabbatical leave and soon after resigned from Boston University. After several years running a thriving consulting firm I

co-owned with my former student, I returned to Africa to help in conflict resolution, social reconstruction, and treatment of trauma victims.

iii) I use male pronouns only due to limitation of language, not to suggest that the colonial experience is exclusive to men. I use these pronouns to represent both men and women.

iv) For these definitions and a fascinating discussion of space and place, see Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*, St. Paul, Minnesota: the University of Minnesota, 1981. As he explained, space—a geographic unit, an interval between two points or objects precisely measurable—allows freedom of movement and transcending our present condition. Place (like home) is marked off space to which we endow value. While we universally associate space with *freedom and opportunity*, we associate place with *intimacy and security*.

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