

African and African heritage precursors and contributions to Liberation Psychology.
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Liberation psychologists such as Martín-Baró have argued that it is the marginalised that should shape, influence and transform psychology theory and practice.

Despite Community Psychology's emphasis on diversity, respecting multiple perspectives and valuing subjugated voices, the mainstream CP literature still seems to be American-centric to me.

Community Psychology has a long history internationally. Ideas about community, social justice and political consciousness and their links to well being can be traced back in history and to other cultural social contexts (such as the African Diaspora) other than those usually associated with it.

For example African American sociologist, philosopher, historian, novelist, poet and editor William Edward Burghardt Du Bois (1868-1963), is called the father of social science and was a forerunner of critical and Liberation theory, writing in the early decades of the 20th century.

Du Bois' body of work is often been left out of the critical canon. His experience of racism helped him develop a keen concern for the liberation of Black people.

- At 15 he became the local correspondent for the *New York Globe* where he challenged racism, as a writer, editor, and speaker
- He received a scholarship to attend Fisk College, a Ph.D. from Harvard University in 1895 and studied at the University of Berlin

He devoted himself to sociological investigations of the Black experience in America, publishing 16 research papers between 1897 and 1914

At the age of 26 he wrote and published *The Philadelphia negro: A social study* the first case study of a Black community in the United States. This study was also the first time a qualitative approach to studying social phenomena was undertaken

He set the standard for emancipatory forms of research long before the term was used by critical research theorists

He published his famous book *The souls of Black folks* in 1903 and *The World and Africa* a challenge to historians who consistently omitted Africa from world history and he also critiqued American foreign policy

Du Bois critiqued positivism, argued that human experience is not machine-like and research cannot be disinterested and neutral, for it is always informed by particular, albeit hidden, values.

Du Bois influenced critical paedagogists such as Henry Giroux and bell hooks; with respect to his belief that schooling should ground itself on a transformative vision of society rather than simply reinforce the status quo.

He pointed out the existence of structural and institutional racism seventy years before these concepts were understood in mainstream sociology.

Du Bois also anticipated the work of post-structural theorists such as Michel Foucault on subjugated knowledges. Du Bois argued that we are ever-confined by our social, cultural and historical position in the world but potentially emancipated by our appreciation of our position.

With respect to Black Liberation theory (usually associated with Franz Fanon (1925 –1961) Du Bois has been extremely influential.

It is possible that Dubois' promotion of the idea of Pan-Africanism (which focused on the unity of African culture across the globe), contributed to a Pan-Latin Americanist perspective; and it could be argued that a natural outgrowth of the Pan-Latin Americanist perspective has been the liberation theology of Paulo Freire (1970) that subsequently influenced the work of Martin-Baro (1985) in El

Salvador, which in turn influenced the participative research approach of Fals Borda (1987) in Colombia.

Du Bois' is less known as a feminist but he also wrote about women's liberation.

AFRICAN SOCIAL, CULTURAL AND POLITICAL CONTEXT

There are two influences worth reflecting on when thinking about the contribution of Africa on CP:

1. An indigenous sense of community
2. The impact of Western Psychology in Africa

Cultural social context

CP principles have been part of the societal and cultural structure of African society for centuries. It is closely linked to African philosophy and worldviews, which although not uniform and homogenous, are distinct in some ways from Western philosophy. I would argue that CP principles have been part of indigenous social cultural thought and practice of Africa, and the lack of acknowledgement of this is can be part of the devaluation and dismissal of Africa's rich indigenous cultures and traditions.

In discussing Africa and Africans, I do not wish to imply a homogenous group, or feed into the view of Africa as one large, rather insignificant country. Instead I refer to an appreciation of the common elements underlying societies within the vast continent. As with all generalisations there are exceptions to the rule.

Bearing all this in mind, African (and the rest of the Majority world) culture is based on a particular relationship to nature. Nature does not take place within the organism but between the organism and the environment. Even within the organism..... "the function of each organ is defined by what it accomplishes for the rest of the organism". On a larger scale, everything in the universe can be viewed as subtly interconnected.

Nature is not empty or impersonal, and everything relies on everything outside itself for its reality and meaning. As a result self-other is inherently mutual, interacting and interconnected. Rather than isolating the self from its environment in pursuit of universal truths the African cultural Self is relational and always defined and understood in relation to others, and in social context.

The ideas that nothing exists in isolation, the importance of community, and that life cannot be evaluated from a linear, individualistic and intra-psychic perspective is typical of African cultures. The communitarian spirit, as well as indigenous community processes and approach to improving individual and collective well-being through community engagement existed prior to the service sectors that manifest elements of community psychology that were introduced to Africa by colonial powers. Given this cultural perspective, many people may have been practicing CP principles without referring to it as such.

Development of CP in Africa

In addition to this influence, Psychology has been imported as a ready-made product from the West. As Akin-Ogundeji (1991) states the history of psychology in Africa is largely the history of colonialism and the postcolonial era. Many of the powerful academic institutions within Africa are ex-colonial and Western psychology is fast proliferating.

In SA for example Western psychology was easily inserted into psychology in SA due to the fact that during Apartheid all institutions including academic institutions were run by Whites. This made it easier for knowledge from Western society to be seen as superior to local knowledge or knowledge from other parts of the world.

Most university students in Africa in the 1970's and 1980's were reading psychology books written for American students. There has also been a biomedical dominance in psychology in Africa because of the close relationship between psychology and medicine.

CP models in some parts of Africa were adopted almost exclusively from the states.

In the last 2 decades a wave of African psychologists and authors have promoted local knowledge and challenged the individualistic a-political position of mainstream psychology; taking an activist agenda. These critiques included the ways in which CP in Africa at times has been paternalistic and expert-driven, based on a deficit model of “oppressed people”. Cameroonian critical psychologist Bame Nsamenang argues in the book *International Community Psychology*, “Elitist CP-like services were introduced by colonialists and imperialists and totally disregarded local knowledge and world view which can be fundamentally different from those who were implementing CP”. Es'kia Mphahlele (December 17, 1919 - October 27, 2008) who was a South African writer, teacher, academic, artist, activist and African Humanist, spoke of how the White South African community first oppressed Black people, then researched them then wanted to save them. Akin-Ogundeji critiques the tendency of psychology in Nigeria to be largely a classroom research enterprise mainly concerned with the rigours of empirical work which is of little practical relevance to the everyday life of Nigerians.

Critical voices and perspectives on traditional psychology in Africa have always existed and are on the increase. However, some of the critical African voices such as Somali Psychologist Hussein Abdilahi Bulhan have spent much of their professional life working outside the continent in the West.

In order to work towards the transformation of psychology in the West, as well as in the African continent, it seems necessary to draw on subjugated perspectives. A focus on interconnection and mutuality could re- direct psychology away from a preoccupation with pathology, “otherness”, control and efficiency, towards an emphasis on social justice, empowerment, collaboration and compassion. Psychology might then be better able to facilitate liberation and be less a potential instrument for oppression.