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An Introduction to the Special Issue on Racial Justice and Anti-racist Practice in Community Psychology

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Introduction to Part I of the Special Issue



Author(s): Jesica Siham Fernandez, Geraldine (Geri) Palmer, Dominique Thomas

Abstract:

The proliferation of racially charged incidents in the United States, Europe, Australia and across the world (Dastagir, 2017; Harris & Bogel-Burroughs; Politi, 2016), along with surmounting hate crimes against women, immigrants, LGBTQ+ identified people, and ethnoreligious populations, such as Muslim and Jewish communities (Potok, 2017), have brought an insurgence of activism. The activism, along with the persistence of local, national and transnational community organizing efforts, grassroots mobilization, coalitional emergent strategies, and waves of social movements, have all been aimed at disrupting institutionalized racism and the assemblages of racialized colonial violence. The jaws of colonial power -- as well as colonialism and coloniality that manifest as anti-Black racism, nativism, and intersecting forms of oppression implicated in racialized violence -- must be disrupted and dismantled!

Article:

The proliferation of racially charged incidents in the United States, Europe, Australia and across the world (Dastagir, 2017; Harris & Bogel-Burroughs; Politi, 2016), along with surmounting hate crimes against women, immigrants,

LGBTQ+ identified people, and ethnoreligious populations, such as Muslim and Jewish communities (Potok, 2017), have brought an insurgence of activism. The activism, along with the persistence of local, national and transnational community organizing efforts, grassroots mobilization, coalitional emergent strategies, and waves of social movements, have all been aimed at disrupting institutionalized racism and the assemblages of racialized colonial violence. The jaws of colonial power -- as well as colonialism and coloniality that manifest as anti-Black racism, nativism, and intersecting forms of oppression implicated in racialized violence -- must be disrupted and dismantled!

As co-editors and co-chairs on the Council for Cultural, Ethnic and Racial Affairs (CERA) we refuse to be bystanders and passive spectators of what we have continuously witnessed as hegemonic, oppressive and dehumanizing. As comrades, Geri, Dominique and I (Jesica), with support from GJCPP Editor Dr. Nicole Freund, we no longer could remain on the sidelines of what we observed as institutional racism, colorblindness, whiteness and anti-Blackness, both within and outside our discipline, including SCRA as an organization. The two-part installation of this special issue in the GJCPP on Anti-Racism and Racial Justice Practice has been in the making since May 2019. It has taken at least two years to see this project come to fruition! The circumstances that animated this special issue in the first place were grounded and informed by our experiences and identities with various intersecting positionalities, yet united by our embodied subjectivities and experience as *critical community psychologists of Color*. We cannot and will not deny that our racialized experiences within the discipline have been wounding; yet we, among many other BIPOC community psychologists, refuse to be seen as victims, silent and disempowered. We have crafted this special issue out of a deep commitment that is guided by the love, dignity and respect we hold for ourselves, our communities, and the community psychologists of Color and others with intersecting identities at present and who came before us -- and who we know contributed to shaping the discipline, even though we may not see their work or voices featured in the community psychology cannon.

Thus, this special issue is a manifesto (of sorts) to affirm, uplift and honor BIPOC community psychologists, practitioners and allied scholars, educators, professionals, healers, activists and artists, who have given so much to the discipline in their own ways. It is also intended to recognize that the work of racial justice and liberation cannot be done alone; we need allies, white allies and co-conspirators to build coalitions of resistance, refusal and radical hope. This is what we have set out to do with these two special issues. We humbly offer them as a mirror to validate experiences of struggle and possibility, as well as a compass to guide those seriously committed to racial freedom in action, not just in words, gestures and performativities.

Since our conversations on the special issue began in May 2019, so much has happened that has further reinforced our commitment to this project. We need not name the persistence of racial violence that has assembled time and time again through the carceral state, police brutality, anti-immigration policies, and gun violence, and of course in the context of COVID-19. Indeed, we cannot remain ignorant nor indifferent to the assemblages of violence reproduced through racial capitalism, heteronormativity, patriarchy and modes of power, privilege and oppression. We are human, and because of our shared humanity we cannot allow hegemonic discourses, racial regimes and oppressive practices to continue. The persistence of violence that dehumanizes is antithetical to our shared collective oneness with all beings. These are the values underscoring and emanating from the special issue that we have set out to illustrate via the fifteen papers that we feature. Our efforts, goals and intentions with leading this special issue on Anti-Racism and Racial Justice Practice is to underscore, animate and provoke continued dialogues, reflections and actions committed to deconstructing systems of racialized oppression at the crux of hegemonic power that maintains the status quo, including whiteness and white supremacy.

In striving toward an anti-racist, decolonial/decolonizing (Kendi, 2019; Maldonado-Torres, 2017) and liberatory praxis (Martin-Baro, 1994; Fanon, 1963; Camp, 2004), several

theories and frameworks have informed the development of theory, research, pedagogy and practice oriented toward racial justice at the intersections of health, environmental and social justice. We recognize that some of these have emerged from within our discipline; however, we also note that some have emerged through multidisciplinary, transdisciplinary, Indigenous, decolonial and feminist epistemologies, often rooted in community struggles for sovereignty and liberation in the Majority World. Encouraged by these movements and efforts to reclaim ways of knowing, being, and relationship building, as well as dignity, rights, land, and agency, communities here and there continue to resist and deconstruct white supremacy, thereby creating space or apertures to pause, reflect and unlearn/relearn and engage in actions. The special issue is a contribution to this process, and an exercise that invites readers to consider and engage with the following questions, as the contributing authors in this special issue have done:

1. What is racial justice and what does it look like within (and outside of) community psychology?
2. How is racial justice engaged and practiced among our communities?
3. To what extent, and in what ways, has the discipline advanced racial justice and for whom?

With these questions as our guide, we underscore the importance of racial justice and anti-racist work. We describe the implications of anti-Blackness, colorism and colorblindness within community psychology, and how the inability to engage and address these concepts and their manifestations question the integrity and values of the discipline, and compromises the humanity and dignity of communities whose bodies are read in racialized intersectional ways.

Themes in Part I

In Part I of the special issue we therefore feature the work of practitioners, emerging scholars, and scholar-activists of Color, as well as those whose institutional affiliations and

positions are often under-represented in the field, such as HBCU's, HSI's and community colleges, as well as at institutional spaces outside the university and the academy. Our objectives and goals were threefold: 1) to feature examples of community psychology practice that demonstrate racial justice and anti-racist work within and beyond the US context; 2) to highlight research, specifically studies that have participatory action research (PAR) approaches, photovoice and other methodologies that are inclusive of, with and for systematically marginalized and Indigenous communities, and that has been used to inform academia and practice; and 3) to expand and build upon, or even trouble, community psychology theories by integrating and making space for critical race theories, intersectionality, decoloniality, and perspectives outside of the canon that attend to the racial formations, and racialized structures of power and oppression.

All eight contributing papers to Part I of this special issue have engaged these goals, often tracing the roots of racism entrenched in coloniality and colonialism, as Beals and colleagues have done, through an interrogation of the Western-Eurocentrism in community psychology. Similarly, Silva and Las Gatas through the use of autoethnography disrupt the coloniality of power, and in doing so they honor their individual and collective stories as they strive to transform their high school conditions. In alignment with struggles for and of resistance to colonial power and structural violence, Agung-Igusti and Sonn, in collaboration with Colour Between the Lines, describe the importance of self and relational determination in creating and transforming settings toward liberation. Indeed, it is the struggle for freedom and liberation from racialized violence, which similarly guided the work of Collins and her collective of students within a HBCU classroom where undergraduate students' sociopolitical agency and critical consciousness of racialized power was facilitated. Relatedly emphasizing the use of qualitative research, such as community-based research and participatory action research in particular, Guishard and colleagues reflect upon the lessons learned, the missteps and successes, from the Community Engaged Research Academy, a multimethod project in the Bronx. While the first few papers are situated within the United

States context, with the exception of Beals et al in both the US and Canada, and Agung-Igusti and Sonn in Australia, the contributions of Miranda make explicit how racialization and racism has no borders or boundaries as Roma communities in Spain forge spaces to heal and experience health justice. Across the world there is an urgency to heal from the sociohistorical and contemporary legacies and entrenchments of colonial power and racialized violence, and Harden and Deligio bring us back to the United States through their work on addressing the importance of state sponsored violence, specifically in relation to policing. Part I of this special issue therefore ends with a dose of radical hope and storying that is offered by Sommerville's contributions on the value and imperativeness of intergenerational messaging to affirm humanity, and fundamentally that Black Lives Matter.

Closing Remarks

We invite and encourage all who come across our special issue to consider the guiding questions and objectives that animated this special issue. Specifically to consider these writings in relation to their own embodied subjectivities, positionalities, academic or professional training, and their practice -- the praxis of every day resisting/existing. The sociopolitical contexts and hegemonic discourses, characterized by a rise in systemic violence rooted in white supremacy and racism, as well as heightened racist nativism at the intersections of power and difference, compel us as community psychologists to engage with the present moment. As scholars, practitioners, educators and organizers, within and outside academe and, to a degree, community psychology, we question the presence of institutionalized racism and whiteness within the spaces and places wherein we engage our praxis, and where our communities are located, as well as where knowledge is co-constructed and produced. We are turning the lens inward and outward to consider and truly describe what anti-racism and racial justice is, and must be in community psychology.

It is our deep humbling hope that this two-part special issue will be received with a *curiosity* to reflect, learn and feel what is moved or unsettled; that it fosters the *critical*

compassion necessary for us to bridge and engage in difficult dialogues about whiteness, white supremacy, racialized violence and colonial power not just within our respective institutions, community settings, and spaces of practice, but most of all *within* ourselves, the *discipline and SCRA*; and, that it **creates** -- that it “cracks the fortress,” as Pillay (2017) writes, so that psychology can “start laying the foundation for a new enterprise altogether, one not complicit in varieties of violence” (p. 137).

Author(s)



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Jesica Siham Fernández, Ph.D. is an Assistant Professor in the Ethnic Studies Department at Santa Clara University. She received her PhD in Social Psychology and Latin American & Latinx Studies from the University of California, Santa Cruz. Grounded in a decolonial feminist praxis, she engages critical PAR paradigms and approaches to support BIPOC communities, especially Latinx immigrant families, youth, and student activists in mobilizing to actualize collective conditions of community thriving, sociopolitical wellbeing, and decolonial liberation toward transformative justice. As a teacher-scholar-activist, Jesica’s praxis is rooted in a commitment to racial justice and anti-oppression toward decolonial liberation.

Geraldine (Geri) Palmer, Ph.D. is a scholar-activist, practitioner, educator, and writer who uses an interdisciplinary approach of community psychology, social psychology and sociology to understand and work on issues of concern among Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) including racial justice and anti-blackness practices. She earned her Ph.D. from National Louis University, Chicago. In addition to her position as Assistant Professor at Adler University she is the Cofounder and Managing Director of Community Wellness Institute (CWI). Through CWI, Dr.

Palmer and a team of consultants facilitate The F.A.C.E. of Justice workshops with topics on anti-racism and anti-blackness practices and social and racial justice, provide consultations with non-profits to help them strengthen their infrastructure, and conducts social research. Her teaching, research, and praxis has its foundation in her dissertation study which focused on homelessness particularly among Black/African Americans, and currently centers on language that often reproduces colonialism ideology, dismantling the code of silence, and historical trauma among Black/African Americans.

Dominique Thomas, Ph.D. is editor of The Community Psychologist. He attained his BA in psychology from Morehouse College and his MA and PhD in community psychology from Georgia State University. He was a Scholarship to Practice Fellow in the National Center for Institutional Diversity at the University of Michigan. Dr. Thomas is interested in the areas of Black identity, racial socialization, activism, Afrofuturism, and the Black Radical Tradition. He co-edited a special issue of Community Psychology in Global Perspective, Black Lives Matter in Community Psychology and is co-editing a forthcoming special issue in the American Journal of Community Psychology, Imperial Algorithms: Contemporary Manifestations of Racism and Colonialism.

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