

## Colonizing Forces in Psychiatry

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### Introduction

The relationship between colonizing and psychiatry, or any other mental health care delivery, is a difficult one to approach. For one thing, colonization has strongly negative connotations, and the suggestion that mental health carers play any part in colonizing can prompt defensiveness, denial, shame, and outrage. But from another perspective—those of the colonized, those with transgenerational trauma due to past colonization, and those whose lives are shattered and torn by poverty and depression—finding and receiving appropriate help for mental distress tends to highlight that very relationship and to exacerbate both current troubles and their historical roots and legacy. An examination of colonizing forces in psychiatry does not preclude the fact that some psychiatrists and clinicians help patients cope with mental distress. Instead, this special issue is meant to encourage mental health care workers to take seriously some of the problems in the institutions of psychiatry and related fields while, at the same time, to open dialogue, inquiry, and critical reflection. By taking into account critical studies in colonizing practices, people who care for the mental distress and mental health needs of these populations can not only provide better treatment but live out an ethical imperative to not replicate past historical and systemic harms.

This issue covers only a few of the many relevant issues in colonizing forces, and it may not be evident why populations such as trans people or those who are depressed should be included in the domain. It will help to provide a definition of colonialism. María Lugones says that colonizing does not just involve classification of people into unequal kinds but also ‘the process of active reduction of people, the dehumanization that fits them for the classification, the attempt to turn the colonized into less than human beings’ (Lugones, 2012, p. 75). Such colonizing can be thought of as ‘the coloniality of power,’ following Anibal Quijano’s work. Coloniality, on his account, includes the classification of the world’s populations into races; racialized relations between colonizer and colonized; racialized labor and wages; eurocentrism as the mode of production and control of subjectivities; and a new system of collective authority centered around nation-states and that excludes racialized populations from participation (see Quijano, 2000).

Coloniality, then, constitutes a politics of location that ‘works in the interest of privilege and power to cross cultural, political, and textual borders so as to deny the specificity of the other and

to reimpose the discourse and practice of colonial hegemony’ (Giroux, 1992, p. 15-16). The antidote to such reimposition is that of engaging in border crossings. As the work of Edward Said suggests, the project of overcoming the way that Eurocentric practices locate others as Other, stranger, and subhuman requires that those who are structurally advantaged adopt dual perspectives, a kind of ‘contrapuntal reading’—or geographic and cultural boundary crossing (Said, 1998). This issue provides only a few ways in which to do that. The expectation is that it will spark controversy and criticism, but the hope is that it will also promote dialogue, critical engagement, and reflection on practices that may harm even as they intend to help.

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