

EDITORIAL

Decolonisation and psychoanalysis

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INTRODUCTION

This special issue of *Psychotherapy and Politics International* is dedicated to the connections of psychoanalysis with colonialism and more precisely with decolonisation. The authors of the articles are psychoanalysts and academics who have reflected on the colonial order in previous works. Most of them, members of the Ubuntu International Network of Psychoanalysis and Colonialism, participated in the network's Second International Colloquium on Decolonisation and Psychoanalysis—Colonial Discontent: Our Lands, Languages, Bodies, Memories, and Horizons of Transformation, held from 13 to 15 November 2023 at the Federal University of Minas Gerais, in Belo Horizonte, Brazil.

As a testimony of the colloquium, this issue is composed of eight peer-reviewed articles and a Note from the Frontline. The authors come mainly from formerly colonised countries, primarily Brazil, but also Mexico, Malaysia, South Africa, and Guyana, although two of them are currently working in the United States. These places of enunciation illuminate the theme of the special issue.

This editorial begins with a historical overview of the connections between psychoanalysis and colonialism. Then, as in other editorials of *Psychotherapy and Politics International*, we present the papers published in this issue. Finally, we dedicate a section to the Ubuntu International Network and the 2023 colloquium.

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PSYCHOANALYSIS, COLONIALISM AND DECOLONISATION: THE HISTORY THAT LED US TO THIS SPECIAL ISSUE

If we ignore colonialism, we will not fathom the depth of meaning of Freud's references first to the 'savages' who would be 'closer to the primitives' (1912/1996a, pp. 11–12) and then to female sexuality conceived as a 'dark continent' (1926/1996b, p. 199). Perhaps the very idea of the ego as a product and expression of a kind of colonisation of the id cannot be understood without contemplating the colonisation of America, Africa, and Asia by Europe. Many of Freud's and his successors' ideas could be historically determined by the colonial order in which they appear.

The colonial order and Freudian theory are inseparable. Psychoanalysis was born and developed in a world sustained by colonialism and neocolonialism. This was not explicitly recognised and studied by Freud but by some of his followers, as we now see in a summary of what has been developed in detail elsewhere (see Pavón-Cuellar, 2024).

The first Freudians to ponder colonialism between 1910 and 1940 used psychoanalytic concepts to justify colonial domination. This was the case with Owen Berkeley-Hill and Claude Dangar Daly in India, Barend Jacob Frederick Laubscher in South Africa, John Ritchie in Rhodesia, René Laforgue in Morocco, Jorge Carrión in Mexico, and Arthur Ramos, Afrânio Peixoto, and Julio Pires Porto-Carrero in Brazil. These authors tended to denigrate, animalise, and pathologise the colonised African and American natives, either by diagnosing them *en masse* or by reducing them to their bodies, their drives, their unconscious, and the pleasure principle. The same authors also tended to praise the European colonisers, conceptualising them as the ego, consciousness, rationality, and reality principle. These representations of the agents and victims of colonisation logically justify the former colonising the latter.

After the first Freudian apologists for colonialism, most of Freud's followers critically reflected on colonial domination and its effects on subjectivity. The first Freudian critics of colonialism seem to have been the Brazilian Oswald de Andrade and the Martinican René Ménil, who gave psychoanalysis, between 1920 and 1930, a clearly subversive anticolonial orientation. Later, between 1930 and 1950, subversion gave way to explanation in the works of the white psychoanalysts Wulf Sachs in South Africa and Octave Mannoni in Madagascar, who resorted to psychoanalytic theory to explain the subjective drama of the colonised. This kind of explanation, especially as proposed by Mannoni, was harshly criticised in the 1950s by Martinicans Aimé Césaire and Frantz Fanon. Both authors denounced how psychological explanations concealed the objective, material violence of colonialism.

Fanon never lost sight of colonial domination in its cultural, socio-economic, and cultural materiality. However, this did not prevent him from studying its ideological, discursive, and subjective effects. Psychological complexes do not appear here, as in Mannoni, as predispositions or predetermining factors of colonisation, but as consequences and manifestations of colonialism. This is the same for other authors from the 1950s to the 1960s,

including Albert Memmi in Tunisia and the lesser-known Santiago Ramírez and Francisco González Pineda in Mexico.

The connection between the ideological–psychological and socio-economic levels of colonialism became more dialectical between the 1970s and 1990s in authors such as Edouard Glissant in Martinique and Ashis Nandy and Homi Bhabha in India. These authors used psychoanalysis to study the unconscious psychic processes that could accompany and result from colonialism, both in the colonisers and the colonised. Regarding the colonised, Glissant saw a neurosis in them, Nandy an identification with the aggressor, and Bhabha mimicry and stereotypes.

Rather than diagnosing or describing the colonised psychoanalytically, the Palestinian Edward Said revived in the 21st century an interest in the anti-colonial potential of the Freudian heritage that had already interested Andrade and Ménil 80 years earlier. He found this potential in the problematic aspect of Jewish identity for Freud. His approach allows us to understand one of the most violent forms of colonialism in the present: that of the State of Israel over the territories and populations of Palestine.

In recent years, we witnessed a proliferation of authors adopting a psychoanalytic perspective to think about colonialism. These authors tend to situate themselves in the continuation of the classics to which we refer. Sachs, Mannoni, Césaire, Memmi, and Fanon are the main authors who have served Ranjanna Khanna in her reflections. Livio Boni and Sophie Mendelsohn have studied Mannoni's contribution. Said is a fundamental reference for Robert Beshara and Thamy Ayouch. Ayouch also follows the ideas of Homi Bhabha, which are allied with those of Nandy in the reflection of Mrinalini Greedharry in India. Many other authors are mainly inspired by Fanon's work. This is the case with Derek Hook, David Marriot, Lewis Gordon, Karima Lazali, and Lara and Stephen Sheehi.

CONTRIBUTIONS TO THIS SPECIAL ISSUE: EIGHT PEER-REVIEWED ARTICLES AND A NOTE FROM THE FRONT LINE

Fanon is the main reference for one of the articles in this special issue: Derek Hook's 'Intersections of Racist Identification, Love and Guilt: On the Vicissitudes of Colonial Masochism'. In this article, Hook analyses a section of *Black Skin White Masks* in which Fanon reflects on the way white colonisers can fantasise and enjoy scenes in which they are denigrated and humiliated by the colonised. Hook perceives here an unconscious colonial masochistic enjoyment that could be addressed by a psychoanalysis committed to decolonisation.

Similar to Hook's article, Sheldon George's 'Knotting the Psyche: White Fantasy and Racial Violence' concerns white fantasies that mediate the relationship with black subjects. The fantasy that interests George is that of totality that masks the reality of the white subject's

lack. This fantasy of totality is correlative to racial violence. Although Sheldon focuses on racism, his reflections clearly point to the colonialism from which racism comes. It is in the colonial matrix that white fantasies are formed, such as those of totality in George and masochistic ones in Hook.

Both Hook and George deal with fantasies and other unconscious processes enjoyed by whites and colonisers. Conversely, Andréa Máris Campos Guerra and Monica Lima are interested in unconscious processes suffered by colonised and coloured subjects. In her article 'Crypt: About the colonised unconscious', Guerra proposes the concept of 'crypt' to describe a defence mechanism by which the experience of colonisation is enclosed as a drive intensity without being translated into the linguistic sign. The crypt is something real that resists the symbolic, unlike the operations described by Lima in her text 'African Diaspora, Interlanguages, and the Unconscious', including idealisation and abjection, identifications and the vacillation of identifications. These operations occur in language, and it is there that they are unravelled through a literary work.

Language is also the field of reflection of Nayara Paulina Fernandes Rosa, Ana Paula Farias, and Mariana Mollica in their article 'Colonisation and Language: From Imprisonment by the Colonial Language to Subversion through Language'. This article focuses on the psychic effects of a specific aspect of colonisation: linguistic imposition and the correlative extinction of native tongues. The extinction of indigenous languages is equivalent to the disappearance of the original cultures in which those languages are spoken, each culture with their unique ways of conceiving the internal and external world, subjectivity, and the objective universe. Native cultures can serve to challenge psychoanalysis, as in the article by Juliana Vieira and Thais Klein and in that of David Pavón-Cuéllar. In the first, 'Provocations from Amerindian Perspectivism to Psychoanalysis', the authors engage in a dialogue between Freudian theory and Amerindian perspectivism conceptualised by Brazilian anthropologist Eduardo Viveiros de Castro. In the second article, 'Decolonisation of Psychoanalysis and Mesoamerican Conceptions of Subjectivity', Pavón-Cuéllar proposes a decolonisation of psychoanalytic theory based on the critical evaluation of the ancestral knowledge of the native peoples of Mexico and Central America.

Similar to Pavón-Cuéllar, Ahmad Fuad Rahmat critically approaches psychoanalysis and seeks to decolonise it in his essay 'Exploring the Mother's Geography: On Klein's Settler Unconscious'. This article unravels a hidden form of settler colonialism in Melanie Klein's psychoanalytic theory, specifically in her ideas about love, guilt, and reparation, where Fuad detects a colonial logic of appropriation and domination of spaces. Fuad even proposes the term *settler unconscious* to refer to what is revealed in Kleinian conceptualisations.

While Fuad and Pavón-Cuéllar seek to theoretically decolonise psychoanalysis, Anna Turriani makes a practical, Freudian-inspired decolonial proposal in her Note from the Frontline, 'Decolonial Approaches to Multidisciplinary Supervision: A Case Extract'. This note

illustrates how decoloniality can guide supervision, specifically the supervision of public health workers in Brazil, focusing on educators working in peripheral and vulnerable territories. The account of the experience exemplifies much of what is at stake in the other texts in this special issue.

Despite all their differences, the articles summarised here share both a psychoanalytic perspective and a desire for decolonisation. This desire takes two forms: that of decolonising psychoanalysis and that of using psychoanalysis to understand colonialism and achieve decolonisation. The comprehensive and decolonising use of psychoanalytic theory predominates in the texts by Hook, George, Guerra, Lima, and Fernandes Rosa et al., as well as in Turriani's Note from the Frontline, while the decolonisation of the Freudian heritage appears as a central purpose in Fuad, Pavón-Cuéllar, and perhaps also to some extent in Vieira and Klein.

UBUNTU NETWORK AND COLLOQUIUM

Most works included in this special issue come from the Ubuntu International Network of Psychoanalysis and Colonialism. Established throughout 2021, first online, the Ubuntu Network focuses on the research and dissemination of studies and clinical practices arising from the intersection between colonialism and the Freudian legacy. It is proposed to carry out a decolonial movement on the geopolitics of the psychoanalytic field. It takes up the classic assumptions of psychoanalysis and subverts them from their reverse or dark side (Dussel, 1992).

The Ubuntu Network understands that modern rationality was structured symbolically and materially in the configuration of a normative Western flat mirror (Quijano, 2011). Western reason ideologically condenses hegemonic values that perpetuate relationships of domination. Some of its consolidation strategies are Eurocentrism, whiteness, patriarchy, sexism, class oppression, ableism, and ageism. In this mirror, the discursive demarcation of the Other, bodies, races, genders, classes, subjectivities, and sociability are projected. From alienated submission to emancipatory separation, neocolonial strategies advance in dialectical conflict with counter-, anti-, post-, or decolonial criticism (González Casanova, 2007).

Gathered around this research programme, initially 10 and today 13 researchers dedicate themselves every two years to a work plan. The network dedicated its first year to scientific exchanges between its founding members. Always with written work and oral presentations, we were able to visit countries and borders based on imperial incursions and their contemporary effects. To date, eight meetings have been held.

In the second year, we published the book *Ubuntu: Psychoanalysis and Colonial Inheritance* (Guerra & Lima, 2023). Written in Brazilian Portuguese, the book contains 10 chapters by the

first members of the network. We also promoted the Second International Colloquium on Psychoanalysis and Decolonisation, already mentioned. The colloquium brought together, in addition to the members, more than 400 psychoanalysts at six axis tables, three parallel seminars, more than 120 papers presented, and multiple cultural activities. The colloquium was preceded by a visit to the municipality of Ouro Preto in Minas Gerais, Brazil. The city was developed during the gold cycle in the country's colonial period (18th century). It is known for having been the site of an important episode of revolt and attempted decolonisation, called 'Minas Gerais conspiracy' (*Inconfidência Mineira*).

In 2024, the Ubuntu Network published texts by network collaborators in the periodical *Penumbra* (USA). The network also gained a virtual tab with new writings on the *Collectif de Pantin* website (France), an international reference at the interface of psychoanalysis and decolonisation.

This special issue continues the decolonial turn in psychoanalytic geopolitics, a turn operating from the Global South. The issue strengthens alliances, disseminates other horizons, and imprints an epistemic-political act, a point of no return, on psychoanalytic theory and clinic. We invite each reader to dive into this intersection and extract the effects of its oriented decentralisation!

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