

Toward a Decolonial Approach to Psychosocial Accompaniment from the “Outside”¹
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If you come here to help me, you are wasting your time.

*If you come because your liberation is bound up with mine,
then let us work together.*

Aboriginal Activist Group, Queensland, Australia, 1970’s

Decolonial philosopher Nelson Maldonado-Torres (2008) confronts us with the fact that “(c)olonialism creates a reality in which some subjects become privileged givers while others do not even have bread to eat or to give” (p. 151), an “us” and a “them.” How are we-- as community psychologists, carrying the privileges we do--to create decolonial ways of working across this colonial binary when our day-to-day lives are implicated in the social structures that reproduce the need and suffering we address professionally?

As community psychologists, to responsibly answer invitations to enter into marginalized communities that are not our own in order to engage in common work, we need to deepen a process of self-reflection, of psychic and relational decolonization. As

¹ This chapter is drawn from *Mutual Accompaniment and the Creation of the Commons*, Yale University Press, 2019 and is a chapter in G. Stevens & C. Sonn (eds.), (2019), *Decoloniality, knowledge production and epistemic justice in contemporary community psychology*. New York, NY: Springer.

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we know, this effort of “relational accountability” (Wilson, 2009) occurs in a historical time that is shaped by ongoing colonialism and coloniality. To begin, it is best not to think that it is possible to fully liberate ourselves from the imposition of colonial relationships, but that we need to maintain a vigilance for coloniality, an openness to critique, and a commitment to a path of trying to ever more deeply understand the interpersonal and intercommunity effects of our own seeing, understanding, and living. Alongside such understanding, however, de-powerment, de-privileging, re-distributing resources (land and wealth), and other actions for social and environmental justice are necessary correlates of relational accountability.

Our discipline—psychology—has its own colonial history, marked by its practices of evaluation, testing, diagnosing, researching *about* people, making interventions, pursuing treatments, and offering prognostications. Its history is marred by its use of the construct of the primitive, its racist arguments, and its collusion with colonial values and forces (Brickman, 2003; Keller, 2007; Khanna, 2003). A decolonial approach to mutual accompaniment interrupts research “on” and proposes instead inquiry by and with those in a particular situation. It interrupts practices of diagnosing and treating “from above” and seeks to create an ethics of being alongside of, of learning together, of acting in solidarity and co-shouldering necessary risks. How are we to put such an ethic into practice?

Mutual Accompaniment

...the choice is between accompanying or not accompanying the oppressed majorities.... This is not a question of whether to abandon psychology; it is a question of whether psychological knowledge will be placed in the service of constructing a society where the welfare of the few is not built on the wretchedness of the many, where the fulfillment of some does not require that others be deprived, where the interests of the minority do not demand the dehumanization of all.

Ignacio Martín-Baró, 1994, p. 46

Liberation psychologist Ignacio Martín-Baró was speaking to those of us who have a choice—by virtue of our social privilege—to work alongside the majorities or to remain apart from them, as we pursue both psychological work and our private lives. Once we make that choice—for accompaniment--another type of work needs to begin: ongoing work to decolonize our minds, relationships, and theories and to face into the need for land and wealth reparations.

For those psychologically-minded practitioners with socioeconomic privilege—often but not always white—the move to more horizontal practices of accompaniment is both needed and vexed. The learning is lifelong; the learning curve is steep, and the need for humility is great. This essay is an attempt to help us—I include myself, a white, upper-middle-class, professional, United Statesian—to get our bearings in decolonizing praxes of community and ecologically-based work. How do we shift our orientation and of what does such a shift entail?

Building solidarity with others to create beloved community—community where resources are equitably shared and the dignity of all members is respected—is a slow intergenerational process. Beyond simply “showing up,” it requires fundamental shifts in one’s life priorities, values, and the risks one undertakes. If a person begins accompaniment from within a binary construct of “helper” and “helped,” a conversion will be necessary to experience the potential and desirability of mutuality in accompaniment. Building solidarity together requires ongoing learning and continuing apprenticeship to cultural and ecological workers who are “inside” accompanists, community members themselves.

By “outside” accompaniment, I am drawing attention to psychosocial accompaniment engaged in by a person or group that does not belong to the group that has requested accompaniment. Outside accompanists who have privilege—i.e., socioeconomic, racial, ethnic, citizenship, ableness—are faced with the additional enduring task of reflexively and critically examining their own positionality and developing a sensitivity of openness and responsiveness to critical feedback they receive from members of the community they are working with that better orients them in their relationships and work.

Shifting Orientations

...speaking nearby or together with certainly differs from speaking for and about.

Trinh T. Minh-Ha, 1989, p. 101

Those of us who have access to excess social and economic privilege have

choices. We can segregate ourselves in a very small corner of a sadly divided world, working to increase our own personal happiness and security, relatively unconcerned with the effects of our living on others; or we can take decisive steps to live in a more inclusive and challenging world where relationships across differences attune us to the lives of others and to the effects of our privilege and the systems that generate them, perpetuating injustice. In doing so, we can engage the struggle to understand how we can most meaningfully build solidarity with others to co-create a more just, peaceful, free, and sustainable world, and set about the work of doing so.

Reverse Osmosis: Stepping Out, Turning Toward

The head thinks from where the feet are planted.

Brazilian proverb

When individuals and communities experience an extremely difficult situation—acute or chronic-- some people from outside may come to “lend a hand.” Others live in a psychic remove that pretends the difficulty does not exist, pretends that they are not implicated, and/or that they couldn’t do anything about it if they wanted to. Privilege, including economic and white privilege, can operate to foster a remove from both knowing about and responding to the critical social and ecological realities of our time and their impacts on communities.

The insults and harms a community is dealing with can be redoubled by the absence of others, and by their failures of acknowledgment, empathic concern, and action. Accompaniment can be a needed—even if insufficient-- antidote to the injuries

caused by others' passive bystanding or active denial of the human suffering in their midst. While accompaniment cannot wipe away the pain born of traumatic injuries—individual or collective—it can begin to set into motion needed processes of psychic and social restoration through witness, support, and work to change the structural conditions that gave rise to the trauma. For this to even be a possibility, potential accompanists with privilege need to challenge habitual and normalized tropisms to turn away from the difficult. Often accompaniers with more relative privilege experience themselves as crossing from the familiar and the comfortable into the unfamiliar and the unsettling. They need to challenge the normalization of their own privilege so that they can see links that may exist between their privilege and the misery or difficulty they are walking toward. This reverse osmosis, of intentionally moving across boundaries in the opposite direction of normative responses that bystand or move away from others' difficulties, is a clear mark of accompaniment from the "outside" and is needed so that one can begin to think "from where the feet are planted," as well as to enable the heart to feel where the feet are planted. I want to clearly differentiate movement across borders that is committed to developing solidarity over the long haul from a voyeuristic and opportunistic movement of privileged people that suits their own curiosity or augments their own self-concept.

Horizontality: Coming Down to Earth and Moving Alongside of Others

For those born and educated into privilege, psychosocial accompaniment requires a fundamental re-orientation. Turning towards and moving alongside are

necessary movements to orient the practice of accompaniment. Horizontality instead of verticality are the needed coordinates. This reorientation involves developing counter-tropisms: to look at rather than to look away, to listen rather than to speak prematurely, to encourage and respect others' leadership rather than always assuming and asserting one's own, to hang in rather than to flit away upon signs of difficulty.

Jordan Flaherty (2016), in *No More Heroes: Grassroots Challenges to the Savior Mentality*, describes the savior mentality as wanting to help others, but not being open to guidance from these very same people. The "savior" believes that others are helped more by him- or herself staying in the lead. The solutions saviors turn to are within the dominant system, even when that system is the problem, because the current system is the one that supports the privilege they do not want to interrogate. To go beyond merely performing horizontality, however, requires efforts to actively de-privilege oneself.

When accompanists are not a member of the community in which the work is unfolding, they are not on their own ground. They join others on theirs—even if this is a temporary place such as a refugee camp. The command accompaniers may wordlessly exercise in their own offices, neighborhoods, and classrooms quickly evaporates. They need to attune themselves to those around them, follow their lead, and lean into discerning how they might be of support to desired social transformations.

Being Invited; Being Asked to Stay Away

A person or a group may not be interested in accompaniment by a member from another group. A community may request that outsiders do not live near or even visit members. Being sensitive to whether or not one is invited and welcome is critical to an ethical practice of mutual accompaniment. There are very legitimate reasons for people and communities to refuse accompaniment or to be quite particular about how and where it is to occur, if at all, and by whom. For instance, a group may be clear that outsiders will take too much time and energy to educate and work with. They may have legitimate security concerns about infiltration by outsiders who seek to undermine their organizations. They may correctly perceive that it is the culture of the “outsider” that is creating the difficulty and so the outsiders’ energies would be better spent within their own community, to transform it. Instead of educating “outsiders” one by one, a community may request that one work within already established networks of solidarity (Land, 2015).

In other instances, a group or community may issue a clear call for accompaniment or if offered accompaniment accept it with few reservations. For instance, international accompanists are often asked for in situations where a community perceives it is under threat. The community may discern that this threat needs to be brought to international attention and that having peace accompanists present may deter violent state or paramilitary incursions on the community. Asylum seekers caught in detention prisons and immigrants undergoing the threat of deportation may welcome accompaniment because they do not have adequate access to the resources they need to advocate for themselves.

Becoming Clear about What an Invitation is For

If an invitation has been extended, it is important to carefully clarify what it is for. There can easily be a collision between what the accompanier thinks in his own mind he has come to do and what is actually desired.

In “The White Savior Industrial Complex,” Nigerian-American writer Teju Cole (2012) describes the harm that white people can do when they use “helping” to feel good about themselves and neglect engaging needed complex understandings of the situations they are sentimentally addressing. Speaking of Nigeria, Cole critiques white people who focus on

hungry mouths, child soldiers, or raped civilians, [when] there are more complex and widespread problems. There are serious problems of governance, of infrastructure, of democracy, and of law and order.... Such problems are both intricate and intensely local.

The problems should not be separated from the foreign policies of white U.S. “helpers,” and, in particular, from the United States’ hunger for Nigerian oil, despite the human cost to Nigerians, other-than-human animals, earth, air, and water. Coles calls for “constellational thinking,” arguing that racial privilege allows white people to deny the constellation of systemic causes in which they are complicit. Instead of indulging a sentimental need to “make a difference,” Cole argues for “due diligence”: doing no harm, proceeding humbly and with respect for the agency of the people around them. He cautions that activists and humanitarian workers need to become aware of how their

actions may play into the hands of people who have more cynical motives. In particular, attention needs to be given to the role humanitarian aid and aid workers can play in sustaining the status quo by relieving immediate pressure on the need for systemic change.

Members of Indigenous Action Media, a group that offers communications and direct support for Indigenous communities, offer a powerful critique of “allyship” in their article “Accomplices Not Allies: Abolishing the Ally Industrial Complex.” It can easily extend to accompanists. They describe allies as most often providing only temporary support, too often romanticizing those they wish to “help,” creating dependency, and positioning themselves as a savior. As an organization, they prefer to welcome those who are willing to be “*accomplices*,” willing to commit a crime, to place themselves at-risk; a person who “has our backs.”

Accomplices listen for the range of cultural practices and dynamics that exists within various Indigenous communities....Accomplices are realized through mutual consent and build trust. They don't just have our backs, they are at our side, or in their own spaces confronting and unsettling colonialism. As accomplices, we are compelled to become accountable and responsible to each other, that is the nature of trust.

We can also think of accomplices as co-conspirators, remembering that *conspirare* means to breath the spirit together.

One thing is clear: being “helpful” is not the application of one’s arsenal of expertise regardless of the particularities of a given situation. Mary Pipher (2002), a

clinical psychologist living in a U.S. city with a large influx of refugees, slowly realized that usual psychotherapy sessions were not what was most helpful to her new refugee neighbors. Sure, many had suffered trauma and needed someone attentive to this. But attention to this did not require doling out a psychiatric diagnosis but being a reliable and caring human being in the face of the egregious wrongs committed by other humans against this particular person and his or her group. Moreover, many refugees, are in more immediate need of learning how to navigate in their new environment so they can gain a foothold of security and familiarity. Rather than apply a lens of trauma to every refugee, accompaniers need to listen closely to where each person is and what it is they may desire assistance with.

Learning New Skills and How to Work Across Levels of Organization

People's needs and desires can be surprising and often they do not neatly fit the skill sets we have developed. We will often need to learn new skills or seek resources we may at first know little about. A group of Colombian social, political, and clinical psychologists from Pontifical Javeriana University have learned this firsthand. For the past seventeen years, they have been engaged in a project of sustained psychosocial accompaniment, leaving the university in order to offer their support to people forcibly displaced by paramilitaries from the countryside to the capital of Bogotá. Many of these displaced persons have experienced acute and chronic violence and often the loss of family members (Sacipa-Rodríguez, Vidales, Galindo & Tovar, 2007). For themselves the accompanists are seeking to construct a daily practice that is consistent with their

understanding of social commitment (Sacipa-Rodriguez & Montero, 2014). The members of this group --Social Bonds and Peace Culture--committed themselves to resist the trivialization of death and the rampant depersonalization of others that characterized daily reality in their society, a society that has been torn for decades by armed conflict.

Stella Sacipa-Rodriguez, one of the co-founders, describes her team's perspective on psychosocial accompaniment:

...we conceive psychosocial accompaniment as a way of offering displaced people support and providing spaces for expressing and recognizing the emotional impact these violent events have had on them. Psychosocial spaces are designed to listen compassionately to the victims of forced displacement, spaces aimed at ensuring that these people feel accompanied, in order to provide conditions conducive to their recovery...

Psychosocial accompaniment is a process marked by respect, acknowledgment of the human dignity of the person who has suffered displacement, a process which seeks to establish bonds and bridges for the renewal of confidence in a work of successive, respectful rapprochement, aimed at opening up the psychosocial relationship, to reach the heart of others from within oneself, through mutual recognition in everyday dialogue, in active listening and in shared work and play (Sacipa-Rodriguez, 2014, p. 67).

Psychosocial accompaniment often includes participatory research and other conscientizing efforts to construct "liberating knowledge," knowledge that will assist in

transforming status quo arrangements that undermine the integrity of body and mind, relations between self and other, and between one community and another (Sacipa-Rodríguez, Tovar-Guerra, Galindo-Villareal, & Vidales-Bohórquez, 2009, p. 222).

[It is] a process of offering the displaced person a space to recognize their emotional experience along with the possibility to express their feelings afterward, reflecting on the facts implied by violent acts. We speak of psychosocial process that facilitates recuperation and repair of social and cultural damage. We believe that accompaniment should be directed toward the affirmation of displaced persons as subjects in their own stories and the reconstruction of the social fabric of the community (Sacipa-Rodríguez et al., 2009, p. 222).

Through the collection of oral histories, the co-creation of support groups, the recognition and valuing of community resources that contribute to empowerment and resilience, the participants are able to create a community that gradually connects through ties of trust. It was in another arena, however, that the participants most desired accompaniment. Many of the displaced families wanted it to be clear in public records and memory that their loved ones were falsely assumed to be guerillas. They also wanted to know where their loved ones' remains are so that proper burials could be conducted. Honoring these deep desires, the psychologists needed to become knowledgeable about and effective in interfacing with relevant judicial and public authorities and processes.

This group emphasizes that a fuller recovery from such psychosocial suffering

requires societal circumstances that make meaningful work, peace, and a dignified life possible. For the psychosocial reconstruction of a community to be ultimately effective, it must be part of a total approach that includes changes in the social, economic, and political life of the country. For these reasons, at a systems-level, the psychologists have also been exploring their possible contributions as psychologists to creating cultures of peace in Colombia.

Resisting Uncritical Representations and Stereotypes of Ourselves and Others

Critical race and Indigenous studies scholar, Eve Tuck (2009), cautions us that spaces where oppression has occurred can become “saturated with the fantasies of outsiders” (p. 412). In accompanying, we need to struggle to become aware of both negative and idealizing stereotypes we bring that lead us to misread situations and to distort the personhood/being of another or others. Once we have discerned these stereotypes, we need to dismantle them, understand their history and functions, and refrain from projecting them. In idealizing projections, I experience either my ideal projections on another or chose only those aspects of their self-presentation that fit with my need to idealize. I avoid or am blind to the complexity and multifaceted nature of the one(s) I am idealizing. The latter was brought to my attention by several educators who work inside of prisons and who noted the tendency of some volunteers to valorize all those incarcerated, failing to appreciate the unique complexity of each person they were working with.

Negative stereotypes that we project can have disastrous consequences. This is true for both human and trans-species relationships. bell hooks gives an example of this in her discussion of dominant cultures' representations of those who are "poor" as lazy, shiftless, and dishonest. In speaking of representations of "the poor," hooks (2006) cautions us to resist normative representations of others that diminish them before we have even had the chance to meet them (p. 248).

Mary Annette Pember (2017) in "This November, Try Something Different New: Decolonize Your Mind," describes how many white people who seek her out as an Ojibwe don't want to hear about what she hopes to share with them: "the diversity of Native cultures, the complexity and history of federal policies affecting us, our sophisticated understanding of our relationship to the earth, or the fact that Native peoples embrace popular culture in addition to their own traditions." Instead, they speak of Ojibwe in the past tense and want to know how they can participate in ceremonies, dances, drumming, and spirituality. "They wanted me to give them Indian names, identify their power animals, and teach them how to be shamans. Mostly they just wanted to play Indian." Her white interlocutors too often stray into defining Ojibwe by their "plight" as seen by many white people. They also unreflectively superimpose idealizing representations, seeing Indigenous as "supernatural noble, selfless defenders of the Earth." Pember laments: "Our cultures, traditions, and spirituality have been subsumed into the great buffet of American consumerism; we are food for hipster and New Age appropriation, one in the dizzying blur of passing social memes." Aware of missionaries' critique of Ojibwe as wasting their time by speaking with one another

rather than being more productive in a Western sense, she ironically proposes that decolonizing our minds needs to begin with just such speaking with one another, getting to actually know one another. This would help us to become aware of our stereotypes, representations, and idealizations.

Looking in the Mirror is Opening Our Ears... and Keeping Them Open

Self-reflection is not a turn inward but a turn toward otherness.

Kelly Oliver, 2001, p. 219

There is much about ourselves that we can never understand with only an inward turn. We discover ourselves in and through our relationships, and particularly in relationships where we are open to differences and to feedback. As we try to better understand what decolonial accompaniment might look like, we have also been describing its potential shadow: intrusion, entitlement, disempowerment, projection, stereotyping, diminishing. It is best to name these potential pathologies that carry over colonial relations. Hopefully, the “accompanier” realizes that she is not the only one doing the looking, the observing. Some of the descriptors applied to would-be accompanists traveling under a “colonial passport” are “fly-by-night humanitarian workers,” “trauma tourists seeking disasters by deserted beaches,” “trauma trophy academics,” “industrial white saviors.” Some try to rebrand their vacations as generosity (Flaherty, 2016). Indigenous Action Media holds up this mirror to would-be allies: “parachuters,” “essentially missionaries with more funding,” members of the “ally industrial network” or “establishment,” “co-opters,” “savior allies,” “action junkie

tourists.” These labels bespeak the harm created by too-frequent failure by would-be accompanists to take the time to deeply enough understand the situation being suffered, to examine their own relationship and the relationship of their country or group to the problem, and to make an enduring commitment to a community under stress. Instead frameworks and interventions derived from one cultural location are thoughtlessly applied to another location one knows almost nothing about. They also speak to the need for soul-searching about who such work is for, and whether the potentially self-serving nature of it has been disguised or minimized.

Hopefully, as accompanists we wonder how we are seen, and are willing to discover things about ourselves we never imagined, or only feared. Of course, what privilege we enjoy is not invisible to those we work with, far from it. By leaving our comfort zone, we may find that what we have taken for granted about ourselves and the shape of our lives is thrown into question. We may feel shame, guilt, and/or embarrassment. We risk a rupture of our certainties.

At the fragile moments of meeting others and in our efforts to reflect on them, we need to be attentive to what we bring in advance of actually experiencing one another. For here we find ourselves, as much—if not more—than we find who we are hoping to know more deeply. In accompanying each other as accompaniers, there needs to be space made for claiming and unpacking these moments.

bell hooks (2006) underscores that “awareness is central to the process of love as the practice of freedom” (p. 248). This love bears no resemblance to the sentimental. It is a *critical* love that identifies blind spots that perpetuate domination. When those

we partner with experience us as open to their critical loving eyes, being “called out” can be transformed into being “called in.” Indeed, embodying the capacity to accept and learn about oneself and others through critical feedback is necessary to deserving any trust in relationships across the differences constructed by injustice and racism. Meeting the challenge of divesting excess privilege and working through the dominance that is ingredient to coloniality makes it possible to slowly enlarge the circle of the “beloved community.”

Jordan Flaherty (2016) counsels,

And, if people from the community you are seeking to support give you negative feedback, if you are a person in a position of privilege and feel “called out,”

Don’t act defensively. Don’t be fragile. Listen, learn, acknowledge, and use the experience as an opportunity to change your approach. (p. 199)

Cross-racial, cross-class, cross-gender, and cross-ethnic relationships can help white activists see themselves from others’ points of view. It is important, however, that they are aware of how to work with their own potential responses of defensiveness, denial and what Robin DiAngelo (2011) describes as “white fragility.” She says that many white people when confronted about their racism or are criticized by people of color are quick to take offense, have their feelings hurt, or respond with denial or anger, rather than take in the learning that is being offered about their attitude and/or behavior. The work of outside accompaniment needs to be understood as including the work of opening oneself to such critique and mitigating against habitual responses that close down the potential learning necessary to be in authentic solidarity.

Reflexivity: Problematizing One's Own Identity, Positionality, Privilege, and Actions

Outside accompanists need to reflect on their own complex positionality with respect to dimensions such as race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexual orientation, nationality, religion, ableness. They need to reflect on how their complex positionality may contribute to perpetuating structural injustice. This entails facing into seeing how our positionality creates challenges and contradictions in our practice of accompaniment. What is the history between the groups we belong to and those we may be accompanying? How does it affect attempts to relate to one another, to understand each other, and to effectively act with each other?

Research on peace accompanists has clarified that outside accompanists, those not from the community inviting accompaniment, may have a very different narrative of why they have been invited from that of the members of the community who offered the invitation. An accompanist may think that both insiders and outsiders value the development of relationships across cultural differences and think that friendships are being formed. Those inside may think more practically about the value of having outsiders present, for instance as a deterrent to violence. The outside accompanist may not be as clear as the insiders that it is the relative value given to a white body or a U.S. citizen over those in the community who are at risk that makes accompaniment desirable. This reality places the outside accompanist in an ironic position, deploying their racial and citizenship privilege even though they may be committed otherwise to dismantling such privilege.

Reflections on and research about protective accompaniment by those involved in it demonstrate the development of nuanced understandings that are possible through a commitment to ongoing reflexivity. Preliminary—often idealistic-- ways of understanding self and others and one's actions as an accompanist give way to more realistic assessments that are truer to our complex identities in relationship to one another.

The practice of international protective accompaniment began in the 1980's when members of *Witness for Peace* and *Peace Brigades International* offered their presence in Nicaragua to help protect communities in danger from the U.S. supported war against the Sandinistas. Thousands of church members from the U.S. joined delegations to travel to Nicaragua and learn first-hand about the Nicaraguans' struggles for peace and justice. When they returned home, they formed part of a powerful lobby against U.S. foreign policy in Central America. Peace Brigades International began to accompany activists and civil society organizations operating in Guatemala, often under death threat (Mahoney, 2013).

Since the early 1980's approximately 1000 volunteers from 12 countries have accompanied human rights activists, refugees being repatriated from Mexico, and victim witnesses. Their presence is aimed at deterring violence by being able to make it known to the international community in ways that could result in sanctions or condemnations. Accompanists help to both increase the political action space for local activists to work in, while decreasing the impunity of local actors who threaten the activists' work (Mahoney & Eguren, 1997). Accompanists witness and report, making violent actions

visible to civil society and the international community. Violent actors—paramilitary or state-sponsored—are usually not looking for witness of their atrocities and international condemnation. They tend to back away when there is an international presence. Other functions of accompanists include encouragement, solidarity, and the legitimizing of human rights activities. The daily life of accompanists can include “escorting human rights defenders; living in communities of displaced people; meeting with the military or civilian authorities; observing a demonstration, checkpoint, or road-block; launching an international alert; writing a report; or simply cleaning a house” (Mahoney, 2013).

Accompanists are careful to establish relationships with their congressional representatives, whom they rely on to help them communicate with generals in charge of a specific geographical location. Once accompanists return home, they are vocal against policies that support the ongoing violence. Their firsthand knowledge of the grassroots situation in a given country has made them powerful spokespersons for developing solidarity movements.

Aware of their excess privilege due to “First World” or U.S. citizenship, and often because they are white, accompanists use the power accrued from their social privileges to help protect others who are deemed more expendable, and in danger due to their commitment to peace and human rights (Mahrouse, 2014). Gada Mahrouse highlights that in doing so, accompanists enter into a contradiction that is best claimed and reflected upon: by using privilege, one is an embodiment of the systems one hopes to be dismantling. Rather than resting in an idealistic representation of one’s presence as benevolent, Mahrouse argues that such accompanists need to understand the paradox

and contradiction of their actions and, if they decide to proceed, to understand that the deployment of privilege is a pragmatic decision and a compromising action. Instead of representing oneself as in solidarity with those accompanied, she suggests seeing one's accompaniment as principled pragmatism, using a troubled and troubling role to increase the safety and visibility of a given human rights struggle.

Etienne Roy Grégoire and Karen Hamilton (2016) adopt Foucault's understanding of reflexivity as thought that questions the very ground upon which one thinks, that attempts to discern where one is located within webs of power. Following Foucault, they differentiate between arterial and capillary power, between overarching power structures and diffuse relations of power in on the ground daily relationships. Using Foucault's analysis of power, they argue that accompanists protecting human rights activists imperiled by state actors are better prepared to understand the large-scale power dynamics, the arterial level, that they are acting within: i.e., the Guatemalan government, the international community, and the Inter-American Court of Human Rights. Whereas, when accompanists are involved in more local conflicts, the capillary level of diffuse power relations are difficult to discern and understand. No longer conducted on the stage of state power, accompanists find it hard to read the conflicting and contradictory identities of the people they are living among with regard to past and ongoing violence, and thereby have a limited understanding of how their presence is actually affecting a given situation. Grégoire and Hamilton (2016) suggest that accompanists take a more agnostic approach to these local situations in which they accompany so that they do not distort and misunderstand them. It is too easy to collude

with oppressive local practices, including corrupt leadership, when one does not adequately perceive and understand them.

Such efforts at reflection and reflexivity do not necessarily end in accompanists from the outside going home, though sometimes this may be the case. Rather they make it possible to trade an untroubled sense of their own identity and privilege for a more realistic and nuanced one. This new view better enables them to understand how those they accompany experience their presence and their role. They become clearer about whether or not their potential to reinforce hegemony is outweighed by the immediate protective effects of their presence and the projects they are engaged in.

Accompanists may bring a practice with a laudable value into a context where it has unintended effects. Psychologists John Dixon, Kevin Durrheim, Philippa Kerr, and Manuela Thomae (2013) found that dialogue opportunities between members of oppressed communities and members of oppressing communities, while potentially encouraging prejudice reduction, can de-energize resistance and protest by diminishing “the extent to which social injustice is acknowledged, rejected, and challenged” by those affected by it (p. 1). These scholars warn against the possible deleterious effects of pursuing elements of reconciliation such as prejudice reduction without prior or at least parallel success at achieving increased justice in areas such as racism, classism, and sexism. Often the word “reconciliation” is a misnomer, because there has not been an established relationship that can be restored. One is actually building relationships for the first time. When efforts toward building relationships between members of an oppressor group and members of an oppressed group occur, the caveat of the potential

negative effect of such meetings on resistance needs to be acknowledged and efforts taken to mitigate against this possible downside. Indeed, Clare Land (2015) says that Palestinians' calls for "non-normalization" reject the building of relationships that give the "deceptive appearance of tolerance, democracy and normal life" because they "create the impression that harmony exists or that it can be created without attention to the return of land and refugees" (p. 251). The kind of mutual accompaniment that is sought is common effort to resist the Occupation for the sake of both Israelis and Palestinians.

From "Helping" and Cultural Invasion toward Mutuality and Cultural Synthesis

Unfortunately, efforts at accompaniment can easily go awry if the colonial framework of "helping," "charity," and "being of service" are not thematized and deconstructed. Too often, humanitarian, community, and psychosocial work occurs within the same structure of colonial relations that gives rise to a community's suffering in the first place. Hierarchical relations are mindlessly reproduced, ignoring or denigrating the knowledge of already marginalized community members. Interventions from the outside can displace and disable indigenous approaches better suited to the particular local context. Ameliorative actions can neglect the deeper causes of distress, particularly those of systemic injustice. When this occurs, creative and transformative work that could have emerged from processes of dialogue and collaboration across differences in experience and knowledge is thwarted. Disempowerment for community members prevails, while "solutions" fail in places that were not understood in advance

of the application of knowledge derived from elsewhere.

Paulo Freire (2000) called this cultural invasion and carefully contrasted it with cultural synthesis. In cultural synthesis people “do not come to *teach* or *transmit* or *give* anything, but rather to learn, with the people, about the people’s world” (p. 180)—there is a synthesis of worlds through efforts of mutual understanding. In culturally invasive approaches, interpretations and interventions are imposed from the outside. Psychosocial accompaniment counters the cultural invasion of exporting to places around the world diagnoses, treatment interventions, and research agendas that should not be universalized and imposed from positions of falsely presumed cultural supremacy. The orientation of psychosocial accompaniment requires that we be mindful of the power of each individual and group to construct meanings and to transform aspects of their world. The creativity and resilience of those accompanied and their own cultural resources for understanding, healing (if needed), resistance, and struggling for structural change should be honored and supported, not usurped, in accompaniment.

Seeking Integrity of Our Understanding with Our Action: The Role of Reintegrative

Shame

Confronting, instead of quickly covering, an experience of shame as revelation of oneself and of society—facing “actual life”—requires an ability to risk, if necessary to endure, disappointment, frustration, and ridicule.

Commitment to any position or to any loyalty, like commitment to another person, involves the risk of being wrong and the risk of being ridiculous. It is

relatively easy to take even difficult action if one is sure one is right, that one has grasped the truth of a situation; it is relatively easy to entertain multiple possibilities of truth and of right action if one remains a spectator on the sidelines. Far more difficult than either is to give everything one is in supporting all the truth one can see at any given time, with full awareness that there are other possibilities and that further knowledge may enlarge and revise the hypotheses on which one has risked everything. Engagement with life and with history—self-discovery and further discovery of the world—has always involved just such risks.

Helen Merrell Lynd, 1961, p. 232

Accompaniment by “outsiders” is a risky endeavor and is best undertaken with an acceptance of likely failures and feelings of deserved shame. Shame, however, can be generative. I distinguish deserved from undeserved shame (Casey & Watkins, 2015; Watkins, 2018). Sometimes we are made to feel undeserved shame by things that happen to us, for instance, being raped, growing up in poverty, being disparaged for our skin color. At other times, we do or do not do something that causes us to feel grave disappointment in ourselves. Perhaps we did something with one intention, and find that grievous unintended consequences resulted and we are suffused with shame for our inadequate forethought or understanding.

Psychosocial accompaniment almost inevitably awakens feelings of deserved shame in “outside” accompanists, feelings that when metabolized have the potential for generating critical insight. This inevitability issues from what “psychosocial” means. The

one who accompanies from the outside in a psychosocial manner has learned to see—to better understand—structurally the social misery they are witnessing. For instance, it becomes clear to them, as Jon Sobrino puts it, that “poverty results from the actions of other human beings” (Griffin & Block, 2013, p. 14).

The capacity to recognize feelings of deserved social shame is not, of course, an endpoint, but a gateway to reparative actions. These not only align one’s evolving social understandings with one’s daily living, enhancing the integrity of the accompanist, but are hopefully catalytic in reaching our mutual goals.

Decolonizing Lenses for Psychosocial Accompaniment

Decolonial lenses for psychosocial accompaniment must include a critical historical lens, a transformative lens (over and above an ameliorative approach), and a strength-based lens (vs. a damage and deficit-centered lens).

Historical Lens

Accompanists learn to see the situation they are addressing in its historical context. This is necessary so that distress observed in the present can be traced to its structural and historical roots. For instance, by seeing the growth in incarceration of people of color in the U.S. through the lens of history, Michelle Alexander (2010), author of *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, was able to understand it as one more expression of a racial caste system that has been present since the inception of the US and its early embrace of slavery. The growth of the prison

industrial complex during the “War on Drugs” was not about containing increasing rates of crime, but reflected the use of the criminal justice system for racial control.

As we endeavor to create and embody decolonial psychosocial and ecopsychological practices, we must ground ourselves in an understanding of the history of colonialism and its present-day embodiment in neoliberal power and practices. We need to develop an understanding of psychology’s complicity with colonial relations and practices. For instance, U.S. students need to understand the 500 years of worldwide colonialism that has brought us to this historical moment, while learning in detail about settler colonialism and slavery in the U.S., the effects of U.S. imperialism, and the development of internal colonies throughout the U.S. This historical understanding clarifies the relative failure of psychology to deviate from individualism as its rooting paradigm, and thus its failure to conceive of the individual within a fully delineated historical, psychosocial, and environmental context. A decolonial approach to community psychology must be a historical approach that includes and centers the experiences of the dispossessed.

Ameliorative and Transformative Lenses

Without understanding the wider historical context of the difficulties we witness, much of the work of helping professions consigns itself to ameliorative approaches. Critical community psychologists Geoffrey Nelson and Isaac Prilleltensky (2005) have clarified differences between ameliorative and transformative approaches. While both are concerned with promoting well-being, they often do so differently. The ameliorative

approach, as they define it, focuses on various interventions at the personal and relational levels, emphasizing values of holism, care, and compassion. The transformative approach engages people in a collective level of analysis, seeking to understand and effect the root causes of affliction. It focuses on eliminating oppression and unjust power differentials, while embodying and enacting values of social justice, interdependence, collaboration, egalitarianism, and solidarity. The transformative approach strives for collective and systemic change through collaborative partnerships and community participation. In their intervention processes these partnerships aim for “conscientization, power-sharing, mutual learning, resistance, participation, supportive and egalitarian relationships, and resource mobilization” (2005, p. 145).

When enhanced well-being is understood through the lens of power, possible outcomes delineated by Nelson and Prilleltensky (2005) are the following:

...increased control, choice, self-esteem, competence, independence, political awareness, political rights and a positive identity; enhanced socially supportive relationships and participation in social, community, and political life; the acquisition of valued resources, such as employment, income, education and housing; and freedom from abuse, violence and exploitation. Outcomes at multiple levels of analysis that emphasize power-sharing and equity are in the foreground. (p. 159)

Psychosocial accompaniment includes both attention at the individual and relational levels, but, like transformative approaches, seeks to understand and address systemic causes of suffering. Through seeing with a wider historical lens, psychosocial

accompanists do not reduce the difficulties a person faces to the individual level of analysis, but neither do they neglect the needs of individuals and communities who are presently afflicted. Refugee communities, for instance, may seek accompaniment to get help meeting immediate needs. At the same time, such accompanists may be involved in advocating at policy and legislative levels for refugee rights while supporting national policy interventions that could reduce the need for forced migration.

Strength-Based Versus Damage and Deficit-Centered Lenses

Unfortunately, human service agencies and providers, as well as community psychologists, have too frequently peddled damage and deficit-centered narratives of the people and communities with whom they work. In addition to the racism that can be an ingredient to such narratives, there also may be self-serving and self-perpetuating motives, conscious and unconscious. As they are currently configured, “helping” professions are dependent on addressing the “needs” of their clients. Seeing others principally through their needs is a highly distorting lens. Such a lens constructs the other in a disempowering light, even if the stated goal is empowerment. “Helping” unwittingly becomes complicit with harming.

In reflecting psychologically on community and ecopsychological accompaniment, we need to become clearer about the lens(es) we are using to represent others and ourselves and their effects. For instance, critical race and indigenous studies scholar and Aleut Eve Tuck (2009) urges us to become aware of the long-term effects of damage-centered research on marginalized populations. While such

studies, she says, have been used in the hope of obtaining needed reparations and political or material gain, it is time to consider the long-term consequences of communities thinking of themselves as broken and being presented to others unidimensionally in this light. Damage-centered studies reduce those studied to speaking of their pain, deprivation, and wounds. When the colonial context of these wounds is not clearly articulated, those who have suffered the wounds are themselves seen through a pathologizing lens, neglecting a focus on the cultural and individual pathologies of the perpetrators. As feminist liberation psychologist Geraldine Moane (2000) underscores, the strengths born of oppressive conditions, such as generosity, courage, perseverance, ingenuity, and solidarity are too infrequently adequately acknowledged and witnessed.

Tuck contrasts the pathologizing consequences of a damage-centered paradigm to the empowering and affirmative aspects of a paradigm focused through the lens of desire. While not denying the loss and despair wrought by colonization and ongoing racism, a focus on a community's desire points members toward the future they hope is possible and the efforts underway to achieve that future. It creates a space for both vision and hard-won wisdom. Tuck concedes that there is a role for damage-centered inquiry to document the harms suffered, but, she says, communities are so much more than the damage they have had to endure. Accompanists need to struggle to avoid both denigrating and idealizing attitudes and assessments, as they try to understand a particular community in a balanced and realistic light.

Mutual Accompaniment as a Pathway to Solidarity and Co-Liberation

Solidarity is an uneasy, reserved, and unsettled matter that neither reconciles present grievances nor forecloses future conflict.

Eve Tuck & K. Wayne Yang, 2012, p. 3

I don't believe in charity; I believe in solidarity. Charity is vertical, so it's humiliating. It goes from top to bottom. Solidarity is horizontal. It respects the other and learns from the other. I have a lot to learn from other people. Each day I'm learning. *Soy un curioso*. I'm a curious man.

Eduardo Galeano, quoted in Barsamian, 2004, p. 146

Some practices of accompaniment can be criticized as still laced with coloniality, exhibiting a condescending paternalism that fails to understand the mutual and reciprocal possibilities in accompaniment. Accompaniment may be, however, a path on the way to more decolonial relationships and work in solidarity. If we patiently penetrate the taken-for-granted "normality" of oppressive social structures and their realities, one discovers that those on the "outside" suffer in their own way—not to the same extent-- from what those on the "inside" of an oppressed community are suffering from. We discover that our liberations are interdependent. At that point, accompaniment is experienced as mutual accompaniment. Often those who begin by thinking of themselves as involved in "service" discover that it has worked in "reverse"—that they have been transformed, have learned, and may have realized their own spiritual poverty. Such experience directly undermines one-sided narratives of helping. Mutual accompaniment is bi- or multi-directional and of benefit to each

partner— not in the same ways, not from the start, not immediately--but through commitment to the long haul of individual, social, and community transformation.

With an intentional and practiced generosity, feminist Chicana writer Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) worked against a politics of exclusion and toward a visionary inclusivity. For instance, she invited white people in, knowing that in time—as she put it-- they would find that that they are not “helping,” but “following our lead” (p. 107). The accompanier becomes accompanied. Anzaldúa argued that Anglos and Chicanos are “implicated in each other’s lives,” that they leak into each other, taking on the attributes of one another. “So we are really neither one nor the other; we are really both” (p. 243). She practiced “calling in” when it is possible. Radical relationship coach Mel Mariposa (2016) distinguishes calling in from calling out, describing calling out as a one-sided declaration and critique of another regarding how they have fallen short that serves little hope for their change. It has a performative aspect that can be shaming and outcasting. In contrast, calling in both holds one accountable and invites one to do better. It rejects a reactive dismissal of someone with some shared values and encourages active listening to build stronger mutual understanding.

Solidarity does not depend on a homogeneity of identity or shared origins. It depends on shared purpose, desire, vision, and action. It entails sharing equitably the work and risk of actions, often disproportionately borne by those with less privilege and power. Collaborative solidarity, as discussed by trans- and Black Lives Matter activists Elle Hearn, Aaryn Lang, J Mase, and Kei Williams, assists the most marginalized to lead the work. It asks people to reflect on how they show up and centers communities to

speak for themselves. This is both a demand and an ethics directed at those of us who are involved in accompaniment from “outside.” Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang (2012) underscore that solidarity is not an endpoint; it is never finally achieved. It is not a resting place but a process where conflicts and challenges rightly emerge. These conflicts and challenges need to be anticipated and taken on as an essential part of the work of psychosocial accompaniment.

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