

Historical and socio-political perspectives on mental health in the Caribbean region

Guerda Nicolas¹
Anna Wheatley

University of Miami, FL, USA

Abstract

The story of the Caribbean region includes a legacy of eradication of indigenous populations, slave labor, and colonial hegemony that has shaped the economies, social structures, and cultures of each island/nation uniquely. This paper presents a brief historical and socio-political examination of the psychological impact of histories of subordination, in an effort to contextualize the experiences of the individuals in these islands, as they pertain to effectively addressing the region's mental health needs. The field of psychology holds promise for addressing legacies of colonialism on identity and subjectivity, particularly as an emphasis is placed on internal knowledge production. The 2011 Caribbean Regional Conference of Psychology is one such example of a movement towards unification and ownership of Caribbean Psychology perspectives, leaders, and the next generation of scholars.

Perspectivas históricas y socio-política de la salud mental del Caribe Resumen

La historia de la región del Caribe incluye un legado de la erradicación de las poblaciones indígenas, la esclavitud y la hegemonía colonial que ha formado la economía, las estructuras sociales y culturas de cada isla/nación. Éste artículo presenta un breve análisis histórico y sociopolítico del impacto psicológico de la historia de subordinación con el intento de contextualizar las experiencias de los individuos en estas islas, cubriendo las necesidades de salud mental de la región adecuadamente. El campo de la psicología ofrece las esperanza de enfrentar el legado de colonialismo en la identidad y la subjetividad, especialmente en la producción de conocimiento interno. La Conferencia Regional del Caribe 2011 de la Psicología es un ejemplo del movimiento hacia la unificación y la propiedad de las perspectivas de la psicología del Caribe, líderes, y la próxima generación de eruditos.

Myths abound regarding the many island-nations comprising the Caribbean region, largely perpetuated by the tourism industries that drive a large number of the economies therein. Outsiders perceive a locale of warm weather, breathtaking landscapes, duty-free shopping, and an opportunity to 'get away from it all.' Beneath this representation, however, is a history of eradication of indigenous populations, slave labor, and colonial hegemony that has shaped the economies, social structures, and cultures of each island/nation uniquely.

It is useful to begin with a mention of the geographic delineation of what exactly is included in a discussion of the "Caribbean," and, furthermore, what this specific terminology represents. Next, an overview of demographic, historical and socio-political factors is

also provided, to set the context for today's social and psychological landscapes throughout the diverse region. Finally, an examination of the psychological impact of histories of subordination is warranted as we seek to further understand the experiences of the individuals in these islands, as well as ways to effectively address their mental health needs. Multiple authors point out the extensiveness and depth of the colonial experiences and imprint on the region (Higman, 2011; Palmié & Scarano, 2011).

Contextual Overview of the Region

Geography and Sociopolitical Context

Situated largely on the Caribbean Plate, the Caribbean region comprises over 7,000 islands, islets, reefs, and cays throughout the Caribbean Sea (Ridvan, 2007). The Caribbean is usually regarded as a sub-region of North America and is organized into approximately 30 territories, including sovereign states, overseas departments, and dependencies. Socio-politically, the term

¹ Correspondence about this article should be addressed to School of Education and Human Development; Department of Educational and Psychological Studies, Miami Florida, USA.
Email: nguerda@miami.edu.

may also be used to refer to different socio-economic groupings found in the greater region. As it stands today, although independence (or semi-independence) from European/American rule means that there is a discernible and separable Caribbean socio-political geography, there is no viability for economic and sociocultural independence. Rather, institutions such as the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and other regional groups serve to infuse a sense of unity across the region. In fact, CARICOM contains both the Co-operative Republic of Guyana and the Republic of Suriname, found in South America, along with Belize in Central America as full members. Thus, because there is no single definition of “Caribbean,” any reference depends on context.

The term *Caribbean* was invented in the 20th century, as the region transitioned from primary European

to U.S. hegemony. The root word—Carib—can be traced back to 1492, when it was used to refer to an ethnic group present in the Lesser Antilles and parts of adjacent South America, who resisted the conquest of their ancestral land at the time of European contact. The Caribs were known as savage and man-eating, but their reputation was largely a myth propagated by Europeans to implicate the nature of the people as rebellious and in need of enslavement or eradication. The islands are also referred to as the *West Indies*, referring to Christopher Columbus’ belief that he had found Western passage to the Indies upon his landing. Irrespective of different names of the region, a look at history highlights the communality that exists among the different countries of the region.

Table 1.
Original Amerindian Inhabitants and Current Ethnic Groups of Caribbean Islands

Island/Entity	Original Amerindian Groups ²	Current Ethnic Groups ³
Anguilla	Taino Arawak	black (predominant) 90.1%, mixed, mulatto 4.6%, white 3.7%, other 1.5% (2001 census)
Antigua (& Barbuda)	Cibony, Carib, Island Caribs, Gafaruna	black 91%, mixed 4.4%, white 1.7%, other 2.9% (2001 census)
Aruba	Carib	mixed white/Caribbean Amerindian 80%, other 20%
Bahamas	Cibony, Guanahuatebey, Lucayans, Taino Arawak	black 85%, white 12%, Asian and Hispanic 3%
Barbados	Carib, Lacono	black 93%, white 3.2%, mixed 2.6%, East Indian 1%, other 0.2% (2000 census)
Belize	Not available	mestizo 48.7%, Creole 24.9%, Maya 10.6%, Garifuna 6.1%, other 9.7% (2000 census)
Bermuda	Not available	black 53.8%, white 31%, mixed 7.5%, other races 7.1%, unspecified 0.6% (2010 census)

² Abanet, 2004.

³ Central Intelligence Agency, 2013. Note that the table entries come from various sources and thus are not a perfect comparison. The point here is to note that overall drastic change in demographic makeup for the majority of islands/nations.

British Virgin Islands	Taino Arawak	black 82%, white 6.8%, other 11.2% (includes Indian and mixed) (2008)
Cayman Islands	Not available	mixed 40%, white 20%, black 20%, expatriates of various ethnic groups 20%
Cuba	Taino, Cibony, Contemporary "Guajiros" of Eastern Cuba	white 65.1%, mulatto and mestizo 24.8%, black 10.1% (2002 census)
Dominica	Island Caribs, Carib	black 86.8%, mixed 8.9%, Carib Amerindian 2.9%, white 0.8%, other 0.7% (2001 census)
Dominican Republic	Taino, Contemporary "Jibarus" of Puerto Rico	mixed 73%, white 16%, black 11%
French Guyana	Kalina Galabi, Mainland Caribs	East Indian 43.5%, black (African) 30.2%, mixed 16.7%, Amerindian 9.1%, other 0.5% (2002 census)
Grenada	Carib	black 82%, mixed black and European 13%, European and East Indian 5%, and trace of Arawak/ Carib Amerindian
Guadeloupe	Carib, Island Caribs	Not available
Haiti; Hayti; Hispaniola	Taino	black 95%, mulatto and white 5%
Jamaica	Taino, Cibony, Contemporary "Guajiros" of Eastern Cuba	black 91.2%, mixed 6.2%, other or unknown 2.6% (2001 census)
Martinique	Carib	Not available
Monserrat	Carib	Not available
Puerto Rico	Taino, Contemporary "Jibarus" of Puerto Rico	white (mostly Spanish origin) 76.2%, black 6.9%, Asian 0.3%, Amerindian 0.2%, mixed 4.4%, other 12% (2007)
St. Kitts & Nevis	Taino, Island Caribs	predominantly black; some British, Portuguese, and Lebanese
St. Lucia	Carib	black 82.5%, mixed 11.9%, East Indian 2.4%, other or unspecified 3.1% (2001 census)
St. Barthélemy	Ouanalao	white, Creole (mulatto), black, Guadeloupe Mestizo (French-East Asia)
St. Maarten/St. Martin	Taino, Island Caribs	Creole (mulatto), black, Guadeloupe Mestizo (French-East Asia), white, East Indian

St. Vincent & The Grenadines	Black Carib, Island Caribs, Gafaruna	black 66%, mixed 19%, East Indian 6%, European 4%, Carib Amerindian 2%, other 3%
Trinidad & Tobago	Carina, Nepuyo, Island and Mainland Caribs	Indian (South Asian) 40%, African 37.5%, mixed 20.5%, other 1.2%, unspecified 0.8% (2000 census)
Turks & Caicos	Not available	black 87.6%, white 7.9%, mixed 2.5%, East Indian 1.3%, other 0.7%
U.S. Virgin Islands	Taino	black 76.2%, white 13.1%, Asian 1.1%, other 6.1%, mixed 3.5% (2000 census)

Demographic Context

The exploration and conquest agendas of the imperial powers, beginning primarily in the 16th century, set the stage for European settlement of the Caribbean, and the dawn of slave industry in the region. With the vast area to be covered, encompassing many small holdings, the Caribbean geography became a series of isolated and discrete spaces, set apart according to a given colonial conqueror. In fact, neighboring islands under different colonial powers had little contact with each other, resulting in distinctive cultural traits of ruling countries (Barker, 2011). The reach of ruling and formerly ruling nations is especially evident in the various languages spoken throughout the region (e.g., English, French, Haitian Creole, Spanish, Papiamento, and Dutch), the different languages spoken in different contexts (e.g., the official language spoken and the language of *lakay*, or the house), and—perhaps more obviously—in the racial/ethnic diversity found throughout the region.

Aside from colonial settlers, the principle populating waves to the region were the African slave trade (bringing over more than four million slaves), indentured laborers from Asia (nearly a million from India, China, and the Dutch East Indies) (Barker, 2011). As evidenced in Table 1, the near wipe-out of indigenous populations and virtual repopulation of the islands by enslaved Africans and colonial explorers/settlers forever changed the demographic landscape of the region (Palmié & Scarano, 2011). Although communities of native descent exist in Dominica, St. Vincent, Puerto Rico, and some other islands, the majority of the region’s populations have ancestry in Europe and/or Africa.

The region’s population today stands near 40 million people, with relatively high population density (Barker, 2011). Despite the higher number of English-speaking islands, the majority of people actually live in Spanish-speaking countries (64 percent of people in Cuba, the

Dominican Republic, and Puerto Rico), as compared to French-speaking territories (22 percent of individuals, mainly in Haiti) or English-speaking islands (about 15 percent). It has also been noted that island populations would be much larger, if not for levels of emigration—Hickling (2005) estimated that the Diaspora population is twice that of the 25 million in the Caribbean—due to a combination of constraining local factors and opportunistic factors abroad.

Context of Colonization

The Caribbean region has a history dominated by a narrative of invasion, conquest and domination at the hands of European/North American nations. In fact, some islands have changed hands more than 20 times over the course of their recorded history. With the end of European reliance on the islands for sugar production (and the end of slavery), the Caribbean lost its prime status as a resource-rich possession; however, colonial influence continues to this day as extensions of histories of domination/eradication over indigenous populations, forced migration and enslavement of African people, and indenture of Asian migrants (Hickling, Matthies, Morgan, & Gibson, 2008).

As seen in Table 2, the small number of independent nations indicates that there is a degree of variation across the independence status of nations throughout the region, both de facto and de jure. Higman (2011) identifies 24 distinct polities, of which only 13 are true sovereign nations, as defined by separate membership in the United Nations. Indeed, the gap of independence of the different countries exemplifies the significant role that colonization and slavery played in the region. In fact, Higman suggests that the Caribbean islands remained under colonization longer than “the typical experience”—almost all enduring colonialist leadership for more than 300 years, and many closer to 500.

Table 2
Independence Dates of Caribbean Countries

Country	Year of Independence
Haiti	1804
Dominican Republic	1844
Cuba	1902
Jamaica	1962
Trinidad & Tobago	1962
Barbados	1966
Bahamas	1973
Grenada	1974
Dominica	1978
St. Lucia	1979
St. Vincent and The Grenadines	1979
Antigua and Barbuda	1981
St. Kitts and Nevis	1983

Moreover, any discussion of the ‘postcolonial’ is difficult to advance fully in a region where dependencies, commonwealths, and territories are as much a part of Caribbean subjectivity and identity as are fully sovereign nations.

Context of Mental Health

A discussion of mental health and psychology in the Caribbean region brings to light an interesting note about historical descriptions and beliefs vis a vis the field. Hickling (2005) summarizes accounts suggesting that—although mental illnesses in African and indigenous people were not originally recognized by the European colonizers (who believed their brains were not sophisticated enough; Hickling & Hutchinson, 1999)—initial psychopathological classification with respect to African slaves drew on racist and colonialist viewpoints. For example, *drapetomania* was defined as “a mental disease of slaves which caused Blacks to have an uncontrollable urge to run away from their masters, the treatment of which was whipping the devil out of them” (Hickling & Hutchinson, 1999, p. 257). Following the abolition of slavery in the nineteenth century, European colonialist attitudes continued to shape psychopathological classification and nomenclature, and treatment approaches—e.g., psychiatric institutions or asylums, followed by de-institutionalization and the arrival of pharmacotherapy and other mental health services (WHOPAHO, 2011).

Despite high quality research being conducted within the region, there remains in large part a dearth of epidemiological studies and general data regarding the state of mental health in the region (WHOPAHO, 2011). At the same time, subareas of the region have developed at different rates, such that Cuba, Guadeloupe, and Martinique (for example) are regarded as having well-developed psychological services (Ward & Hickling, 2004). On the other hand, psychology in the English-speaking Caribbean more recently began to catch up in many ways, thanks in part to the return of natives trained abroad (Ward & Hickling, 2004). A 2005 study on the epidemiology of selected psychiatric disorders in the English-speaking Caribbean (Hickling, 2005) provided a welcome illumination on the state of mental health in the region. Reviewing 31 papers on the epidemiology of mental health disorders (the majority of which came from Jamaica), Hickling noted the link between the large amount of published work on schizophrenia and psychoses, and the high rates of schizophrenia among (mostly Afro-) Caribbean immigrants to England. In other words, there seemed to be an external driving force to many of these studies, rather than an indigenous-oriented motivation. In any case, the review of articles suggests significantly lower incidence of affective psychoses and suicide in the Caribbean, versus both Whites and Black Caribbeans living in the United Kingdom.

The scope of this paper does not allow for an extensive overview for all of populations in the Caribbean, thus research on Afro-Caribbean individuals is used to illustrate the mental health context (albeit to a limited degree) in the Caribbean. As mentioned above, studies focusing on Afro-Caribbean populations abroad have consistently found the rates of schizophrenia in adults to be higher than in the general population. In fact, during the time surrounding many of these studies, “an epidemic of schizophrenia” was described for the Caribbean population in England (Glover 1989, in Hicking & Hutchinson, 1999). For example, a British study found the rate of schizophrenia among “second generation” British-born Afro-Caribbeans to be 18 times higher than in the general population abroad (Harrison, Owens, Holton, Neilson, & Boot, 1988). A more recent study examining the rate of depression among Afro-Caribbeans has reported similar results (Ward, Matthies, Wright, Crossman, & Hickling, 2000). In addition, a study in Britain examining mental health among ethnic minorities indicated for the first time a higher rate of depression among Caribbeans than among Whites (Lloyd, 1993). Moreover, they found that these individuals were less likely to receive medication for their depression (Neilson & Boot, 1998).

What is unclear from these studies is whether the cultural backgrounds of the individuals were taken into account. For example, historically, African-Americans were often diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia until researchers began to demonstrate that these individuals were being misdiagnosed due to the lack of understanding of their cultural backgrounds (Jackson, et al., 2007; Williams, & Jackson, 2007). The authors of these studies urged researchers to gain a better understanding of depression among Afro-Caribbeans and to develop more culturally appropriate interventions for this population. More recently, research by Williams and colleagues (2007) highlighted the importance of understanding mental health issues among Black Caribbean immigrants from cultural perspectives. Specifically, the research shows that Caribbean individuals experience mental health problems differently than African American counterparts, and that differences also are noted depending on the generation status.

Among the most illuminating research was that done to explain the high rate of schizophrenia among Caribbean immigrants to the United Kingdom, as noted above. While British psychiatrists were suggesting a predominantly genetic explanation, later research provided evidence of environmental factors in the host environment that interacted with biological risk susceptibility to the condition (Hickling & Hutchinson, 2012). The authors had previously cautioned that “the European propensity to believe their nosological constructs are universal...becomes dangerous when nosological characterization is synonymous with pathology and the need for treatment, again in ways that are determined and deemed appropriate by the colonial hegemony” (Hickling & Hutchinson, 2000, p. 94).

The Caribbean Commission on Health and Development notes that although mental health is important and in need of being addressed, the lack of basic epidemiological data across the region makes quantifying the extent of the problem difficult on a broad scale (PAHO/CARICOM, 2006). As can be noted by the selected studies that are available, the majority of research conducted about individuals from the region is conducted about those living outside the region (i.e., emigrants), by those outside of the region, and published outside of the region. As a result, some individuals in the region do not have voices in, or access to, many of these publications. In a striking counter-example, Canino (2007), at the University of Puerto Rico, presents evidence contrary to the popular belief that Puerto Ricans living on the island have higher rates of psychiatric disorder compared other ethnic groups in the United States. In fact, the author concluded that good family relationships and the value of family may serve as a protective factor for those living on the island. This example showcases the

need for research conducted by those on the ground who have a contextual understanding of the population and issues at hand. Indeed, additional studies (especially those conducted by Caribbean researchers) are needed to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the mental health challenges, needs, and resources of the countries comprising the different sub-regions of the Caribbean.

Psychological Impact of Colonization

Some may question the relevance of discussing impacts of contexts and events hundreds of years ago. The reality is that there are both direct (e.g., changes in family structure; economic dependence) and indirect (e.g., effects on identity formation) influences that permeate the region's population to this day. The colonization link has been explored by researchers both inside and outside of the Caribbean region, including the topics of suicide among indigenous Maori youth in New Zealand (Aho & Li, 2010); disturbed racial identification (Hickling & Hutchinson, 1999); colonial mentality among Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (Nadal, 2009); impact on the discipline and practice of psychology (Okazaki, David, & Abelmann, 2008); collective trauma and cultural identity (Taylor & Osborne, 2010; Volpato & Licata, 2010); and identity development in South Africa and Zimbabwe (Richards, Pillay, Mazodze, & Govere, 2005).

What these articles hold in common, then, is the proposal that the psychological impact of fighting for freedom can have a significant impact on the psyche of the individual and their affiliated group of membership, which is not easily eradicated by the passage of time alone. Haiti is a shining example of this struggle. Despite gaining its independence in 1804, Haiti continues to face many challenges and obstacles that impede its development—educationally, economically, and socially. Given the significant impact of colonization, healing is not only needed but is central to the advancement of the nation and its people.

Although certain psychological constructs (e.g., acculturation, ethnic identity, and collective self-esteem) are somewhat foundational concepts in cultural and cross-cultural psychology, the role of larger sociopolitical conditions (especially oppressive or colonial ones) in shaping such cultural constructs has scarcely been included (Okazaki et al., 2008). Some scholars have observed that certain conditions of colonialism persist long after a once-colonized country's formal independence, vis a vis the political, social, and economic institutions of the former colony that may continue to benefit the former colonizer and subjugate the formerly colonized subjects (Okazaki et al., 2008). Thus, we can

think about the impacts in two primary categories: that on the psyche of the individual/collective (e.g., internalized oppression and colonial mentality), and that on the practice and study of psychology (e.g., Western-centered approaches versus indigenous psychologies).

Collective Identity and Historical Trauma

In his acclaimed novel *Black Skin, White Masks*, Martinique-born psychiatrist Frantz Fanon (1986) states that an integral part of colonialism is the devalorization of the history and culture of colonized people, which will lead to their negative self-perception and self-portrayal. In the colonial relationship everything associated with the colonized is portrayed as negative and inferior in comparison to the colonizer. Thus, the colonizer should be emulated while the colonized should be despised. In this light, it is perhaps not surprising that European/American social and cultural values seem to dominate, shaping language, thinking, beauty and other ideals, and cultural practices (Hickling, Matthies, Morgan, & Gibson, 2008).

Over the course of each nation's respective history, each colonial power reshaped the social environment according to its own, leaving a struggle for a sense of authentic identity in the region, much of which remains in place today (Ward & Hickling, 2004). Hall (1989) describes identities as "the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past" (p. 225). In other words, cultural identities have histories of their own, but undergo constant transformation at the hand of influences of culture and power, to name a few. With a mind towards the issues of definition and delineation discussed above, the historical discontinuities have an important influence on the Caribbean's uniqueness vis a vis collective identification.

Okazaki, David, and Abelmann (2008) take a perspective that, under various historical and ideological forces, societies elaborate their own cultural narratives of values and identity. The authors critique, however, that the specific influence of legacies of colonialism have received little attention in psychology. Thus, there is an opportunity to apply a lens of psychology, mental health, and wellbeing to the historical and contemporary impacts of a collective history of rule and/or influence by the "other." Especially from this psychological perspective, it is important to recognize that certain ongoing trauma experiences continue through generations (Kira et al., 2004).

The concept of historical trauma—also referred to as intergenerational trauma, intergenerational PTSD, collective trauma, historical grief, and multigenerational trauma—helps to understand the cumulative, long-term effects of multiple traumatic events on in-

dividuals, families and societies (Haskell & Randall, 2009). Historical trauma has been conceptualized as a collective complex trauma resulting from the legacy of numerous traumatic events experienced at a community level over generations (Evans-Campbell, 2008). Similarly, Erikson (1994) defined collective trauma as "a blow to the basic tissues of social life that damages the bonds attaching people together and impairs the prevailing sense of community" (p. 233). There is a wide array of potential consequences to the collective, including mistrust, suspicion, deterioration in morals and values, poor leadership, dependency, passiveness, despair, and superficial and short term goals (Somasundaram, 2007).

Our Story and its Telling

Within a narrative framework, the conquest and transformation of historical space is fundamental to that of a colonial perspective. What, then, is the story of the region? Modes of artistic and cultural expression—such as unique music, Carnival celebrations, and other expressive outlets—have been ahead of the more "formal" institutions in their promotion of cultural pride and communal self-worth. These elements must also be taken into account in addressing the mental health issues of the different individuals of the regions. Singers such as Bob Marley have been calling us to action for decades, with work such as the well-known Redemption Song, whose words—although written circa 1979—continue to challenge us to heal ourselves from the psychological impact of slavery and colonization:

*"Emancipate yourselves from mental slavery;
None but ourselves can free our minds.
Have no fear for atomic energy,
'Cause none of them can stop the time.
How long shall they kill our prophets,
While we stand aside and look? Ooh!
Some say it's just a part of it:
We've got to fulfill the book."*

Thus, the call for understanding the psychological impact of our past experiences and the need to heal from such trauma was being made early on by writers, poets, and singers. Over the last decades, the field of psychology has seen increasing interest in understanding the integration of culture in the well-being of individuals of various cultural groups. Thus, psychology holds promise for addressing legacies of colonialism on identity and subjectivity, given its increasing concern with the social dynamics of power imbalances. While significant progress has been made in both practice and research in understanding psychological issues of ethnically diverse groups around the world, the Caribbean region

has largely remained under-represented. However, it is clear that psychological well-being is a significant area that is in need of attention at the scientific and practice level.

Within the field of psychology, there are emerging efforts to examine the lasting impacts of colonialism, with research including subjects such as internalized oppression and colonial mentality. On the other hand, the practice and study of psychology in formerly colonized states has in and of itself been linked to colonial legacies, and subsequently given rise to counter movements in the form of indigenous psychologies that draw from the unique context of that society (Okazaki et al., 2008). Indigenous psychology strives for a system of psychological knowledge that is compatible with the studied phenomena/group and their ecological, economic, social, cultural, and historical contexts (Yang, 2000). An indigenous perspective seems especially attuned with the need for what Wood (2003) describes as Psychological Freedom:

“Psychological freedom is possible and essential if we are to live life from the deeper reality of love, peace, wisdom and common sense... the human manifestation of our true spiritual nature; rather than from the blindness of our dead yesterdays... fear, hatred, jealousy, envy and greed. The antidote to the paralysis of fearful thinking lies in understanding the root cause... memory. In understanding the true nature of memory we experience life free of the crippling effect of all frightening or traumatic past events. With this understanding comes a life of psychological freedom” (p. 1).

In other words, making meaning of our experiences allows us to move forward, rather than being stuck in a haunting past that prohibits a sense of ownership, growth, and well-being. As Ferguson (1999) states in his book *The Story of the Caribbean People*, “the Caribbean is finally coming to the understanding that its future lies not with old ties and allegiances but with a common sense of identity and cooperation” (pp. 127). Ward & Hickling (2004) predict positive development for the field of psychology specifically, stating that “[g]iven the needs of society and the huge interest amongst students, we have no doubt that it will go from strength to strength and that in the years ahead a unique Caribbean perspective will emerge” (p. 444).

Regional Developments in Mental Health

The 2011 Caribbean Regional Conference of Psychology is one such example of a movement towards unification and ownership of Caribbean Psychology per-

spectives, leaders, and the next generation of scholars. The theme reflected the priorities of psychologists in the region to promote the overall health and well-being of Caribbean peoples across various aspects of well-being (e.g., mental health and physical development/overall health), age periods, historical and contextual realities, geographical differences (within Caribbean, the Diaspora and the global community), disciplines, sectors of society etc. With over 350 participants (including 100 students) and 20 Caribbean nations/territories (37 worldwide countries) represented, the momentum was unifying and motivating (CRCP website).

In a significant symbol of looking towards the future, attendees signed *The Nassau Declaration*, agreeing to establish a Caribbean psychology organization to promote the field’s development in science and practice. The Caribbean Organization of Psychology Steering Committee (COPSC) was established following the conference to provide temporary leadership in Caribbean psychology and to develop a Caribbean organization of psychology. Also, working groups were created to foster continued development, including a follow-up conference recently announced to be held in Suriname in 2014. The following six subcommittees with specific agendas have also been set: Conference Organizing; Conference Organizing; Caribbean Psychology Organization; Publication; Funding/Finance; Psychology Education and Training; and Website and Resource Bank. Progress to date includes the establishment of a list-serv for committee members; monthly calls of the executive committee of chairs; and a formal presentation at the 2012 International Congress of Psychology in South Africa.

Okazaki (2008) reminds us that psychology has much to contribute to the discussion of legacies of colonialism vis a vis identity and subjectivity—specifically as it relates to social dynamics of power imbalances. In addition, cultural competence necessitates an understanding of the specific nuances and meanings relevant for a given population. This brief historical and socio-political overview aims to spark renewed attention to psychology and mental health in the Caribbean region as a whole.

References

- Aho, K.L., & Liu, J.H. (2010). Indigenous suicide and colonization: The legacy of violence and the necessity of self-determination. *International Journal of Conflict and Violence*, 4(1), 124-133.
- Alexander, J.C. (2004). Toward a theory of cultural trauma. In J. C. Alexander, R. Eyerman, B. Giesen, N. J. Smelser, & P. Sztompka (Eds.), *Cultural trauma and collective identity* (pp. 1-30). Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Barker, D. (2011). Geographies of opportunity, Geographies of constraint. In S. Palmié and F.A. Scarano, Eds. (pp. 25-38). *The Caribbean: A History of the Region and Its Peoples*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.
- Canino, G. (2007). 25 years of child and adult psychiatric epidemiological studies in Puerto Rico. *Puerto Rico Health Sciences Journal*, 26(4), 385-394.
- Central Intelligence Agency [CIA]. 2013. The World FactBook Field Listing: Ethnic Groups. Retrieved from <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/fields/2075.html>
- Erikson, K. (1994). *A new species of trouble: The human experience of modern disasters*. New York, NY: Norton.
- Evans-Campbell, T. (2008). Historical trauma in American Indian/Native Alaska communities: A multi-level framework for exploring impacts on individuals, families and communities. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 23(3), 316-338.
- Fanon, F. (1986). *Black Skin, White Masks*. London: Pluto Press.
- Ferguson, J. (1999). *The Story of the Caribbean People*. CA: Randle Press.
- Hall, S. (1989). Cultural identity and diaspora. *Framework*, 36. Retrieved from http://www.unipa.it/~michele.cometa/hall_cultural_identity.pdf
- Harrison, G., Owens, D., Holton, A., Neilson, D., & Boot, D. (1988). A prospective study of severe mental disorder in Afro-Caribbean patients. *Psychological Medicine*, 18, 643-57.
- Haskell, L., & Randall, M. (2009). Disrupted attachments: A social context complex trauma framework and the lives of Aboriginal peoples in Canada. *Journal of Aboriginal Health*, 5(3), 48-99.
- Hickling, F.W. (2005). The epidemiology of schizophrenia and other common mental health disorders in the English-speaking Caribbean. *Pan American Journal of Public Health*, 18(4/5), 256-262.
- Hickling, F.W., & Hutchinson, G. (1999). Roast breadfruit psychosis: Disturbed racial identification in African-Caribbeans. *Psychiatric Bulletin*, 23, 132-134.
- Hickling, F.W., & Hutchinson, G. (2000). Post-colonialism and mental health: Understanding the roast breadfruit. *Psychiatric Bulletin*, 24: 94-95.
- Hickling, F.W., & Hutchinson, G. (2012). Caribbean contributions to contemporary psychiatric psychopathology. *West Indian Medical Journal*, 61(4), 442-446.
- Hickling, F.W., Matthies, B.K., Morgan, K., Gibson, R.C. (2008). Introduction. In (F.W. Hickling, B.K. Matthies, K. Morgan, & R.C. Gibson (Eds.), *Perspectives in Caribbean Psychology*. University of the West Indies, Mona: CARIMENSA.
- Higman, B.W. (2011). *A concise history of the Caribbean*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Jackson, J.S., Neighbors, H.W., Torres, M., Martin, L.A., Williams, D.R., & Baser, R. (2006). Use of mental health services and subjective satisfaction with treatment among Black Caribbean immigrants: Results from the National Survey of American Life. *American Journal of Public Health*, 97(1), 60-67.
- Kira, I.A., Lewandowski, L., Templin, T., Ramaswamy, V., Ozkan, B., & Mohanesh, J. (2008). Measuring cumulative trauma dose, types, and profiles using a development based taxonomy of traumas. *Traumatology*, 14(2): 62-87.
- Lloyd, K. (1993). Depression and anxiety among Afro-Caribbean general practice attenders in Britain. *International Journal of Social Psychiatry*, 39(1), 1-9.
- Morgan, K., & O'Garro, K.N. (2008). Caribbean Identity Issues. In F.W. Hickling, B.K. Matthies, K. Morgan, & R.C. Gibson (Eds.), *Perspectives in Caribbean Psychology*. University of the West Indies, Mona: CARIMENSA.
- Nadal, K.L. (2009). Colonialism: Societal and psychological impacts of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders. In N. Tewari & A.N. Alvarez (Eds.), *Asian American Psychology: Current Perspectives* (pp. 153-172). New York, NY: Psychology Press.
- Okazaki, S., David, E.J.R., & Abelmann, N. (2008). Colonialism and psychology of culture. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, 2(1), 90-106.
- Palmié, S., & Scarano, F.A. (2011). Introduction: Caribbean counterpoints. In S. Palmié and F.A. Scarano, Eds. (pp. 1-21). *The Caribbean: A History of the Region and Its Peoples*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.
- Pan American Health Organization and Caribbean Community Secretariat [PAHO/CARICOM]. (2006). *Report of the Caribbean Commission on Health and Development*. Caribbean Commission on Health and Development. Jamaica: Ian Randle Publishers.
- Richards, K.M., Pillay, Y., Mazodze, O., & Govere, A. (2005). The impact of colonial culture in South Africa and Zimbabwe on identity development. *Journal of Psychology in Africa*, 15(1), 41-51.
- Ridvan, A. (2007). *A Brief History of the Caribbean* (Revised Ed.). New York, NY: Facts on File, Inc.
- Somasundaram, D. (2007). Collective trauma in northern Sri Lanka: A qualitative psychosocial-ecological study. *International Journal of Mental Health Systems*, 1(5), 1-27.
- Taylor, D.M. (2010). When I know who "we" are, I can be "me": The primary role of cultural identity clarity for psychological well-being. *Transcultural Psychiatry*, 47(1), 93-111.
- Volpato, C., & Licata, L. (2010). Introduction: Collective memories of colonial violence. *International Journal of Conflict and Violence*, 4(1), 4-10.
- Ward, T., & Hickling, F. (2004). Psychology in the English-speaking Caribbean. *The Psychologist*, 17(8), 442-444.
- Ward, T., Matthies, B., Wright, E., Crossman, L., & Hickling, F.W. (2000). Validation of the Zung Depression Scale in a Jamaican population. *West Indian Medical Journal*, 50(Suppl 5), 25-26.
- Williams, D.R., Haile, R., González, H.M., Neighbors, H., Baser, R., Jackson, J.S. (2007). The Mental health of Black Caribbean immigrants: Results from the National Survey of American Life. *American Journal of Public Health*, 97(1), 60-59.
- Williams, D.R., & Jackson, J.S. (2000). Race/ethnicity and the 2000 census: Recommendations for African American and other Black populations in the United States. *American Journal of Public Health*, 90, 1728-1730.
- Wood, J. (2003). "Psychological freedom." Retrieved from http://www.heartlandcircle.com/user_files/other/PsychologicalFreedom.pdf
- World Health Organization & Pan American Health Organization [WHO/PAHO]. 2011. *WHO-AIMS Report on Mental Health Systems in the Caribbean Region*. Report of the Assessment of the Mental Health System in the Caribbean Region (16 Countries and Territories) using the WHO-AIMS Instrument for Mental Health Systems (WHO-AIMS). Retrieved from http://www.who.int/mental_health/evidence/mh_systems_caribbeans_en.pdf

Yang, K.S. (2000). Monocultural and cross-cultural indigenous approaches: The royal road to the development of a balanced global psychology. *Asian Journal of Social Psychology*, 3, 241-263.

Received 01/18/2013

Accepted 03/27/2013

Guerda Nicolas. University of Miami, FL, USA

Anna Wheatley. University of Miami, FL, USA