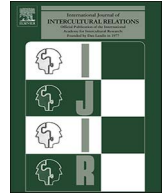
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Review

Introduction to the Special Issue: Colonial past and intercultural relations

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ABSTRACT

The consequences of colonialism are important not only because they shape our “world of nations” at the level of international relations, but because their contemporary repercussions are also present in the psychosocial dynamics at work among former colonized and former colonizing peoples, such as identity building, collective emotions, traumatic processes, intergroup relations, prejudice, discrimination, and acculturation processes. However, there is still a scarce amount of cultural and social psychological studies dealing with the current implications of colonial history and memories in contemporary societies. This Special Issue aims to fill this gap. The main focus here is on the relevance of historical representations and collective memories of the colonial past with regard to contemporary intercultural relations. In this vein, this Special Issue includes eight papers that shed light on the content and structure of social representations of colonial history; the emotional and cognitive impacts of the colonial past; and how colonial past is shaping contemporary acculturation processes and intergroup attitudes and relations. This Special Issue hosts original empirical research employing different methodologies (e.g., interviews, questionnaire surveys, experiments, and case studies), as well as theoretical papers that rely on a systematic review of the empirical literature. Together, the contributions in this Special Issue stress the importance of considering colonial legacies in the study of contemporary intercultural relations. We call for dialogue and interdisciplinary work in this domain between social and cultural psychology and other social sciences, such as history, anthropology, and political science.

Introduction

“It’s a crime. It’s a crime against humanity. It’s truly barbarous and it’s part of a past that we need to confront by apologizing to those against whom we committed these acts.”

Emmanuel Macron, February 14, 2017, from a broadcast on Algerian television channel Echorouk

During his visit to Algeria, at that time French presidential frontrunner, Emmanuel Macron described colonization as a “crime against humanity.” His words sparked outrage among conservative and far-right parties in France, a country which has never officially apologized for its more than century-long colonization of Algeria. This example illustrates how collective memories of colonialism can power the dynamics between minority and majority groups all around the world: both between immigrants from the

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former colonies and the former colonizing nations who today are their host societies and between indigenous populations and the majority groups in former settlement colonies. In parallel, the social integration of ethnic minorities is today one of the primary concerns of political leaders and governing bodies. However, the link between colonialism and present-day relations between cultural majorities and minorities has been constantly and repeatedly overlooked, ignored, or denied. This historical amnesia often serves the aims of the majority groups to legitimize the existing “post-colonial” social order that has persisted even after decolonization (Licata, 2012).

Surprisingly, cultural and social psychology has only recently attempted to deal with this sensitive and important topic (see among others, Bhatia & Ram, 2001; Bonnot, Krauth-Gruber, Drozda-Senkowska & Lopes, 2016; Cabecinhas & Feijó, 2010; Figueiredo, Valentim, Licata, & Doosje, 2013; Haas & Vermande, 2010; Leone & Mastrovito, 2010; Marques, Páez, Valencia, & Vincze, 2006; Okazaki, David, & Abelman, 2008; Pereira de Sa & Oliveira, 2002; Valentim, 2011; Volpato & Licata, 2010). This Special Issue aims to draw the attention of the field of cultural and social psychology to the obvious but oblivious link between the colonial past and current intergroup relations. The main focus here is on the consequences of social representations of the colonial past on identity building, collective emotions, prejudice, discrimination, and acculturation processes in contemporary multiethnic societies. First, we provide an overview of existing research in the field of social and cultural psychology on the colonial past and intercultural relations. Next, we give a summary of the eight papers included in this Special Issue.

The colonial past and intercultural relations: the state of knowledge

Social representations (Jodelet, 2006; Lo Monaco, Delouvé, & Rateau, 2016; Moscovici, 1961; Sammut, Andreouli, Gaskell, & Valsiner, 2015) help people understand and give significance to diverse social phenomena, including their own history (for examples, see Liu et al., 2005, 2009). These social representations of the past, or more widely, collective memories, are necessary to preserve a sense of group continuity and to cultivate values and norms that prescribe behaviors within a group and between an ingroup and outgroups (Bobowik et al., 2014; Licata & Mercy, 2015; Liu & Hilton, 2005; Páez, Bobowik, De Guissmé, Liu, & Licata, 2016; Páez, Liu, Bobowik, Basabe, & Hanke, 2016; Pennebaker, Páez & Rimé, 1997; Pennebaker, Páez, & Deschamps, 2006; Sani, 2008). From this perspective, the colonial era fulfills a variety of necessary conditions for being integrated into a group’s collective memory (see Páez, Bobowik et al., 2016; Páez, Liu et al., 2016 for more details on these conditions). Namely, colonial historical experiences 1) were and continue to be central for social identities, both of formerly colonizing and of formerly colonized nations; 2) they have provoked a significant social change for the groups involved, including a threat to the group identity of the colonized peoples; 3) they are emotion-laden because they evoke, for instance, group-based guilt and shame among the formerly colonizing peoples, and group-based anger but also feelings of shame and inferiority among the formerly colonized; 4) they are transmitted, for instance, through history teaching or celebrations of such events as October 12, commemorated as Columbus Day or Hispanic Day by the formerly colonizing nations or majority groups but also as the Day of Indigenous Resistance by the formerly colonized; and 5) their collective remembrance still serves current needs and goals among members of these groups.

In the following sections, we will review the existing literature in social and cultural psychology that analyzes the colonial past as a “historical charter” (Liu & Hilton, 2005) in the representations of the national history of both formerly colonizing and colonized peoples (see a section on “Collective Memories and Social Representations of the Colonial Past”), that considers the role of group-based emotions that the colonial past constantly evokes (see “Group-Based Emotions and the Colonial Past” section), and that examines how the colonial past shapes current intercultural relations and determines peoples’ lives (see the “Colonial and Post-colonial Ideologies” and “Prejudice and Colonial Past, Acculturation, and Adjustment of Minorities” sections).

Collective memories and social representations of the colonial past

Depending on the role that a group played during the colonial era, the historical narratives assimilated and transmitted by the formerly colonizing powers and formerly colonized peoples may be contrasting (see Cabecinhas & Feijó, 2010; Klein & Licata, 2003; Licata & Klein, 2010). The colonial past and its polemic social representations (Moscovici, 1988) are therefore a controversial topic in the present-day public debate (see Licata, Khan, Lastrego, Cabecinhas, Valentim, & Liu, forthcoming). They fuel tension not only in international but also intercultural relations between majorities and minorities within multicultural societies. Below, we offer an overview of the existing research on how the colonial past is being perceived by formerly colonizing and formerly colonized groups.

The colonizer’s perspective

It is only relatively recently that social representations of colonialism have become polemic among the formerly colonizer nations. Over centuries “the discoveries of the New World” were generally depicted as the civilizing of the “wild” peoples and as golden times. According to these benevolent representations, the colonizers are commemorated as national heroes, and good-natured and moral people. Existing research confirms that there is still support for the narratives that legitimize the past colonial rule. For instance, in the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries, Columbus was usually presented as an adventurous, yet faithful and self-disciplined, entrepreneur, who helped to globalize the world (Schuman, Schwartz, & D’Arcy, 2005). A section of Portuguese public opinion still idealizes “the voyages of discovery,” while minimizing the violence that accompanied colonial expansion (Cabecinhas & Feijó, 2010; Pereira de Sá & de Oliveira, 2002). Studies on luso-tropicalism (Vala, Lopes, & Lima, 2008; Valentim, 2011; see Valentim & Heleno, forthcoming, for definitions) have pointed out that benevolent representations of Portuguese colonial history are still endorsed in the present. In Australia, institutional narratives of colonization still perpetuate the story in which the British populated an “empty” territory, to which they brought technology and culture (Mellor & Bretherton, 2003). In the same vein, Italians share the myth of the “good

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