

ANTI-COLONIAL THERAPEUTIC  
APPROACHES TO RACIALIZED  
AND MIGRATION TRAUMA

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GABES TORRES

# PURPOSE

This resource started as an independent study I created under Professor Abby Wong-Heffter while I was a graduate student at The Seattle School of Theology & Psychology in 2019.

It aimed to develop a clinical and political understanding of racialized and migration trauma and their psychobiological effects on racialized communities. It is an invitation for clinicians to be imperatively mindful of these effects during treatment.

Its purpose is to identify, critique, and/or build from the existing therapeutic interventions and approaches that address and treat racial and migration trauma.

This resource also gives the learner opportunities to reflect their own social identities and contexts, and from this awareness, understand how they impact the therapeutic practice and their interpretations of clinical analyses.

This resource is intended for the wide community of therapists, those in training and those who are considering to pursue clinical work. It is a way to make mental health awareness from a racial justice lens as accessible as possible — a form of resistance to academic elitism.

I added changes and suggested material in this resource, as I have learned from more teachers and resources over time.

**Important note:** Because the course syllabus began as an independent study, it mainly focused on my experience as a therapist of color, which then makes this resource primarily designed for racialized clinicians. I recognize this while also knowing that white clinicians will benefit from this resource without appropriating any of its contents.

In love and the spirit of kapwa,  
Gabes Torres

# IMPORTANT REQUEST

If you are to use any of the questions or contents from this resource for an academic or professional project, please cite Gabes Torres.

You are welcome to post about this material and/or your findings from the research prompts on social media. If you do so, I would greatly appreciate that you tag me: Twitter and Instagram handles: @gabestorres

As much as possible, I intend for all my resources to be free for the community. With that, I welcome donations if you wish to recognize the labor it took to recreate and share this material to the public, while also supporting to make my work sustainable.

If you wish to donate, you may do so through this [link](#). If Venmo or CashApp are preferred, my handles are the same as my social media ones.

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## **Suggested APA Citation:**

Torres, G. (2022, February). *Anti-Colonial Therapeutic Approaches to Racialized and Migration trauma*. Retrieved from <https://gabestorres.com/2022/02/19/anti-colonial-therapeutic-approaches>

## **Suggested Chicago Citation:**

Torres, Gabes. "Anti-Colonial Therapeutic Approaches to Racialized and Migration Trauma." [www.gabestorres.com](http://www.gabestorres.com), February, 2022.  
<https://gabestorres.com/2022/02/19/anti-colonial-therapeutic-approaches-to-racialized-migration-trauma/>.

# HOPES & INTENTIONS

## WIDELY KNOWN AS LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Politicize therapy and healing practices by recognizing the learner's intersecting social identities that affect the therapeutic relationship
- Assess clinical interventions and research that address systemic and societal oppression by identifying strengths, limitations, and problems
- Develop critical ways of exposing and keeping accountable the therapeutic theories and interventions that over-pathologize and harm marginalized communities
- Articulate and practice modalities and treatment plans that aim to be anti-colonial and liberatory
- Enhance one's ability to tell the story of their own cultural context and racialized identity, and how they affect the therapeutic alliance and transference and countertransference experiences
- Reflect, create, and engage in ways that are most accessible to learner and/or their audience members (if findings are shared). For example, instead of a written piece of a reflective project, learner can instead produce a podcast episode with transcription.

# PROJECTS

I.

# THE DYNAMICS OF INTERNALIZED OPPRESSION

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## REFLECTIVE

### SUGGESTED RESOURCES:

- David, E. J. R., & Derthick, A. (2014). *Internalized oppression: the psychology of marginalized groups*. New York, NY: Springer.
- Eng, D. L., & Han, S. (2019). *Racial melancholia, racial dissociation: On the social and Psychic lives of Asian Americans*. Duke University Press.
- Fanon, F. (2008). *Black skin, white masks*. London, UK: Pluto Press.
- Morrison, T. (1994). *The bluest eye*. New York: Plume Book.
- Torres, G. (2018). [The violation of hospitality](#). The Seattle School of Theology & Psychology. Thesis presentation.
- Williams, T. K. (2012), "[Understanding internalized oppression: a theoretical conceptualization of internalized subordination](#)." *Open Access Dissertations*. 627.

# THE DYNAMICS OF INTERNALIZED OPPRESSION

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## REFLECTIVE

The learner will review suggested texts and reflect and respond to these questions:

### FOR BLACK, INDIGENOUS, AND PEOPLE OF COLOR ONLY

- What were my initial reactions and responses upon learning internalized oppression?
- What are the main characteristics of internalized oppression among racially marginalized groups?
- How are these characteristics manifesting in my own cultural upbringing and identity?
- What interventions have the authors found to be beneficial to racialized clients in addressing internalized oppression?
- How will my history and story of oppression impact the way I engage with clients who come from contexts of privilege?
- To non-Black and non-Indigenous POCs: How have I, as an individual and community member, participate in anti-Black racism and anti-Indigenous settler colonialism as crucial forms of internalized oppression? Who are the people who keep me accountable when it comes to addressing and lessening my complicity in these forms of internalized oppression?

### FOR WHITE PEOPLE

- How have I, as an individual and community member, participated in normalizing/perpetuating the dynamics of internalized oppression as a white person? Who are the people who may keep me accountable in addressing and understanding internalized oppression?

## II.

# MIGRATION & ATTACHMENT THEORY

## RESPONSE / REFLECTIVE

- Brown, D., Rodgers, Y. H., & Kapadia, K. (2008). [Multicultural considerations for the application of attachment theory.](#) *American Journal of Psychotherapy*, 62(4), 353-363.
- Foster, R. M. P. (2001). [When immigration is trauma: Guidelines for the individual and family clinician.](#) *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 71(2), 153-170.
- Lopez, M. E. (2010). [My Heart Was Over There with you and I Was Here: Exploring the Immigration Narratives of Families Separated During the Course of Migration.](#) *UC Berkeley*.
- Lopez, P. A. (2020). [Intergalactic travels: Poems from a fugitive alien.](#) The Operating System.
- Madziva, R. (2016). [Transnational Parenthood and forced migration: The case of asylum-seeking parents who are forcibly separated from their families by immigration laws.](#) *Families, Relationships and Societies*, 5(2), 281-297.
- Nguyen, K. (Host). (2022, January 19). [Ocean Vuong - Poet and Author of On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous \(Episode 120\).](#) *The Vietnamese Podcast*.
- Pradere, B.I. (2021), "[Black Migrants Matter: A Narrative Study of the Experiences of Haitian Migrants in the United States.](#)" Thesis, Georgia State University.
- Vargas, J. A. (2019). *Dear america: Notes of an undocumented citizen.* Dey St., an imprint of William Morrow.
- Vice Studios, Left Handed Films. (2021). [Flee.](#) Denmark.
- Young Champions of the Earth. (2018, August). [The right to move and migrate: this is our identity.](#)



# MIGRATION & ATTACHMENT THEORY

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## RESPONSE / REFLECTIVE

The learner will reflect and analyze the resources that directly or indirectly address migration trauma or the trauma endured by refugee or non-refugee migrant or immigrants in colonial North America. Please engage with the literature that feels most safe to review at this time, as the contents may be difficult to read/listen to and process.

The learner will analyze and reflect the refugee/immigrant's mental and relational wellbeing in light of forced migration, family separation, detention centers, heightened anxiety and hyper-vigilance because of anti-immigrant laws, behaviors, rhetoric, media, etc. from the lens of attachment theory.

The learner will review suggested texts and consider responding to these questions:

- What are the consequences of immigration and asylum policies in refugee and immigrant families and relationships?
- Based on what I have read, listened to, and/or watched, how have I observed the mental health industry to address the impact of immigration and asylum policies on refugee and immigrant communities' mental health? Have I seen or heard of cases where the industry addressed them well?
- What are the strengths and limitations of attachment theory in understanding how refugees and immigrants build and sustain relationships? Who and what is excluded in attachment theory? Who and what are prioritized?
- In my practice and relationships, how can I be mindful of the ways refugee and immigrant communities in North America form and sustain relationships?

# MIGRATION & ATTACHMENT THEORY

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## RESPONSE / REFLECTIVE

- If learner is a refugee/immigrant or a descendant of them: How does my migration story and attachment style/s affect my clinical work and my relationships overall?

You are welcome to write about what you have learned, create an artistic piece or any project that resonates well with you right now.

Please bear in mind that migration is not always forced or involuntary, and therefore traumatic. For some communities (particularly Indigenous communities), [it is a way of life and an earth right](#).

If attachment theory is unfamiliar to you, you may begin [here](#).

### III.

## RACIALIZED TRAUMA & THE NERVOUS SYSTEM

### CREATIVE PROJECT / RESPONSE

- Comas-Díaz, L., Hall, G. N., & Neville, H. A. (2019). [Racial trauma: Theory, research, and healing: Introduction to the special issue.](#) *American Psychologist*
- Linklater, R. (2016). *Decolonizing trauma work: Indigenous stories and Strategies*. Langara College.
- Menakem, R. (2017). *My grandmother's hands: racialized trauma and the pathway to mending our hearts and bodies*. Las Vegas, NV: Central Recovery Press.
- Mills, C. (2014). *Decolonizing global mental health: the psychiatrization of the majority world*. London, UK: Routledge.
- Heath, T. (2019). [Self Care to Communities of Care.](#) *TEDxMSUDenver*
- Watters, E. (2011). *Crazy like us: the globalization of the American psyche*. New York: Free Press.
- Williams, M. T., Rosen, D. C., & Kanter, J. (2019). *Eliminating race-based mental health disparities: promoting equity and culturally responsive care across settings*. Oakland, CA: Context Press.
- Yehuda, R., & Lehrner, A. (2018). [Intergenerational transmission of trauma effects: putative role of epigenetic mechanisms.](#) *World psychiatry : official journal of the World Psychiatric Association (WPA)*, 17(3), 243-257.
- Zapata, K. (2020). ["Decolonizing mental health: The importance of an oppression-focused mental health system,"](#) Alberta, CA: Calgary Journal.

# RACIALIZED TRAUMA & THE NERVOUS SYSTEM

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## CREATIVE PROJECT / RESPONSE

In this project, the learner will review and critique suggested reading, and analyze and reflect how race-based traumatic stress, systemic racism, intergenerational trauma, etc. impact a racialized patient.

Based on their findings, the learner may synthesize the research in the form of a presentation or project that specifically demonstrates the healing practices and/or treatment plans for racialized trauma. Please be mindful of accessibility needs if material will be shared publicly.

The learner may engage with the following questions:

- What are the physical and psychological symptoms or manifestations of racialized trauma?
- What are the ways in which the mental health industry over-pathologized racialized communities?
- How has the industry of mental health and psychology successfully addressed and/or failed to address racialized and migration trauma?
- How will the learner integrate their findings and reflections in their clinical work?
  - a. What are potential therapeutic interventions/practices that help regulate migration and racialized trauma?
  - b. What are the ways I can use my privilege and access as a clinician to support my racialized patients, even outside of sessions?