



Contextually Responsive Scholarship and Praxis of Human Occupation

Guest editors: Roshan Galvaan, Pam Gretschel and Mapheyeledi Motimele

The focus of this special edition is on human occupation as influenced, shaped, and impacted by context. We invited submissions that foregrounded and interrogated context as a means to understand the complexity of human occupation. Submissions that highlighted and addressed socio-historic aspects of context specifically and its impact on human occupation were prioritised. In so doing, we endeavored to present submissions that would contribute to ongoing discussions that disrupt, challenge, and extend beyond the currently limiting views of context and its complex relationship with human occupation. This focus was informed by our observation that rising social inequality and its effects, both locally and globally, remain mostly peripheral to the sense-making and professional reasoning used in occupational therapy^{1,2}. These calls are echoed in the discipline of Occupational Science. Thinking from a perspective of the transactional relationship between human occupation and contexts from decolonial perspectives³⁻⁷ emphasised how contexts and our actions maintain ongoing coloniality.

As a core constituent of human occupation, context brings to bear the multi-dimensional effects of historicity, affect and politics in shaping human occupation. We propose that analysing how these multi-dimensions occur across situations with various marginalised groups of people may offer insights into how these situations are sustained over time and reveal contextual responsive ways of addressing social inequality. This resonates with the commentary by Van Stormbroek and Rauch van der Merwe⁸ which emphasises the need for the profession to be better positioned for social impact. This commentary problematises the current framing of contextual responsiveness in occupational therapy practice, describing the under-utilisation of useful occupation-based concepts and terminology. While we agree with van Stormbroek's *et al.* proposition that Communities of Practice is a useful approach⁸, we caution that this should involve critical reflexivity so as not to re-inscribe coloniality of knowledge through the categorical use of concepts, theories and frameworks emanating from the Global North.

Contextual responsiveness thus requires research initiatives and approaches that acknowledge and interrogate the colonialities of everyday life, including actions that aim to disrupt and dismantle our colonial legacy. This means that as occupational therapists, we can no longer remain silent on the issue of decolonisation, especially because of the high risk of recreating the same patterns of power that emerged due to colonialism. The paper by Christopher, Joubert and Pillay⁹, "Walking with a smile but her shoulders are hanging down", exploring "Coloured" women's occupational resistance in the face of personal, historied and societal suffocation, offers an exploration of the intersections of race and gender as experienced by 'Coloured women' as they negotiate the 'heaviness' of life through everyday occupations. This piece provides a current day example of the consequence of

the sustained trauma of South Africa's racially oppressive history for this group of women. The paradox of walking with a smile, but with her shoulders are hanging down, describes the tension between perpetuating imposed occupations while seeking opportunities to enact occupations of resistance within oppressive and constraining contexts. In the paper by Benjamin-Thomas, Rudman and Thomas¹⁰, Participatory Action Research (PAR) as an occupational process is proposed as a means of creating opportunities to partner with participants, in this case, children, who in their role of co-researchers help illuminate the occupational injustices that limit their occupational engagement. The nature of the partnership within a PAR is equitable and the aim is to facilitate a collaborative, critical and transformative approach to addressing contextually driven social injustices. In the paper, Human praxis as possible innovation for occupational therapy practice: An interpretivist description from people who enact praxis, Rauch van der Merwe, Basson, Buschow, Crous, Gillmer, Muller and Niemann¹¹ unpack the mechanisms of human praxis encouraging further thinking about how praxis could be used as a therapeutic tool to promote health and well-being for individuals and communities. Exploring human praxis as a form of agency, they propose that human praxis is facilitated through recursive phases between initiators and enablers which individuals navigate in relation to the conditions of constraint drawing on resilience as an enabler.

Decolonial perspectives encourage us to consider, perhaps for the first time, the profession's colonial legacy and the implications of this for what is understood and accepted as standard practice today. The commentary by Cilliers¹² provides some critical questioning of standard ways of positioning parenting in occupational therapy. The author advocates for southern perspectives, encouraging broader considerations about parenting in occupational therapy research, with a specific focus on uncovering and critically engaging with the several relational and contextual complexities of parenting in the Global South. The author pushes us to consider the traditional ways in which we have chosen to work with parents, critically considering the ways in which these ways may have limited our ability to enable and support their engagement. We see the value of using decolonial perspectives⁶ to extend on the viewpoints in this paper by noticing that parents' positioning gives rise to a particular kind of social reproduction and that this may re-inscribe structures that maintain and support coloniality. Reflecting on the situations of social reproduction for marginalised youth in Brazil, Gonçalves and Malfitano¹³ describe modalities used to address the restrictions on movement for youth living in favelas. Drawing on Social Occupational Therapy as a theoretical perspective, the utility of adopting a political perspective to the concept of Every Urban Mobility is described. The description offers insights into different methods used to understand the re-



strictions experienced by youth and thus presents strategies that occupational therapists could use in research and practice in order to gain more insights into experiences of coloniality. Embracing the plurality of knowledges and actions that further the goal of transforming society is a fundamental aspect of embracing humanity, as reflected in decolonial perspectives. Gonçalves and Malfitano's paper gives us the opportunity to embrace such plurality as they make reference to and use of vocabularies and registries that may be less familiar to Anglophone readers. We encourage readers to approach this paper seeking to listen to the wisdom it offers. Finally, the paper by Correia, Wertheimer, Morrison and Silva¹⁴ offers insights into Contemporary perspectives of occupational therapy in Latin America, revealing the richness that emerges from diverse knowledges. Acknowledging the power of glocalisation, these authors describe how global discourses have not rightfully appreciated the sophisticated knowledge for local action produced in Latin America. Through this, they make a cogent case for the ongoing impact of neo-liberalism on occupational therapy and occupational science. We suggest that such neoliberalism is part of the coloniality of knowledge and being that is yet to be undone.

We appreciate each of the papers as a welcome start to a much-needed conversation. While more work remains, we invite readers to engage with these as a beginning as practitioners and researchers, particularly the Global South, continue to develop and share research and perspectives addressing situations of sustained coloniality. Through this we may find pathways to how occupational therapists may contribute to disrupting the status quo of colonialism and social inequality.

REFERENCES

1. Whiteford GE. Sylvia docker memorial lecture: Together we go further—Service co-design, knowledge co-production and radical solidarity. *Australian Occupational Therapy Journal*. 2019;66(6):682-9. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1440-1630.12628>
2. Richards L-A, Galvaan R. Developing socially transformative practice in Occupational Therapy: insights from South African practice. *South African Journal of Occupational Therapy*. 2018;1(1):3-8. <https://dx.doi.org/10.17159/2310-3833/2017/vol48n1a2>
3. Aldrich R, Gerlach A, Farias L, Galvaan R, Sellar B, Laliberte Rudman D, et al. *Critical practice in critical times: Forging relationships between critical theory and socially responsive occupational therapy*. World Federation of Occupational Therapists; Cape Town South Africa 2018.
4. Laliberte Rudman D, Pollard N, Craig C, Kantartzis S, Piškur B, Algado Simó S, et al. Contributing to social transformation through occupation: Experiences from a think tank. *Journal of Occupational Science*. 2018;17. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14427591.2018.1538898>
5. Dickie V, Cutchin MP, Humphry R. Occupation as Transactional Experience: A Critique of Individualism in Occupational Science. 2006;13(1):83-93. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14427591.2006.9686573>
6. Maldonado-Torres N. On the Coloniality of Being: Contributions to the development of a concept. *Cultural studies*. 2007;21(2/3):240-70. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09502380601162548>
7. Mignolo W, Walsh CE. *On decoloniality : concepts, analytics, and praxis*. Durham: Duke University Press; 2018.
8. Van Stormbroek K, Rauch van der Merwe T. Becoming contextually responsive: taking hold of a shared vision for our profession. *South African Journal of South Africa* 2021 ; 51(4). <http://dx.doi.org/10.17159/2310-3833/2021/vol51n5a8>
9. Christopher C, Joubert RWE, Pillay M. "Walking with a smile but her

- shoulders are hanging down"- exploring "Coloured" women's occupational resistance in the face of personal, historied and societal suffocation. *South African Journal of Occupational Therapy*. 2021; 51(4). <http://dx.doi.org/10.17159/2310-3833/2021/vol51n4a2>
10. Benjamin-Thomas TE, Laberte Rudman D, Thomas, DM. Enacting contextually responsive scholarship: centring occupation in participatory action research with children in India. *South African Journal of Occupational Therapy*. 2021; 51(4). <http://dx.doi.org/10.17159/2310-3833/2021/vol51n4a4>
 11. Rauch van der Merwe T, Basson L, Buschow R, Crouse T, Gillmer A, Muller M, Niemann, J-M. Human praxis as possible innovation for occupational therapy practice: An interpretivist description from people who enact praxis. *South African Journal of Occupational Therapy*. 2021; 51(4). <http://dx.doi.org/10.17159/2310-3833/2021/vol51n4a3>
 12. Cilliers NM. Positioning parenting differently: The need for southern perspectives. *South African Journal of Occupational Therapy*. 2021; 51(4). <http://dx.doi.org/10.17159/2310-3833/2021/vol51n4a7>
 13. Gonçalves MV, Malfitano APS. Social Occupational Therapy, Impoverished Youth, and Everyday Urban Mobility. *South African Journal of Occupational Therapy*. 2021; 51(4). <http://dx.doi.org/10.17159/2310-3833/2021/vol51n4a5>
 14. Correia EL, Wertheimer LG, Morrison R, Silva CR. Contemporary perspectives of occupational therapy in Latin America: Contributions to the glocal dialogue. *South African Journal of Occupational Therapy*. 2021; 51(4). <http://dx.doi.org/10.17159/2310-3833/2021/vol51n4a6>