

**The productivity of difference; or, translation as liberation**  
***Psychology of Liberation: Theory and Applications***  
**by Maritza Montero and Christopher C. Sonn (Eds.)**

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The readily-available nature of social scientific literature, and specifically psychological literature in English poses almost as many hazards to the development of a truly cosmopolitan, transnational social science as it offers us opportunities for breaching the language barriers that segregate traditions of scholarly writing.

At its worst, for many scholars and social science practitioners, English serves as a mechanism of exclusion – from ‘international’ publication, meaningful conference participation, and from contributing to the production of theoretical resources. This is however; frequently obscured by a ubiquitous discourse that presents English as the self-evident *lingua franca* for global academic exchanges, and *the* academic language in the world today. This discourse appears as the ideological opposite of the processes of exclusion mentioned above– English is represented as a mechanism of *inclusion*, of intercultural dialogue and understanding of the obliteration of boundaries, and of joint and borderless activity. Those of us who have benefited from English as ‘international language’ are therefore, easily lulled into a complacent acceptance of the monolingual drone, and in the process miss out on the wealth of dialogues and debates carried on in languages other than English, in the margins and footnotes of so-called ‘international’ social science.

It is for such reasons, somewhat cursorily mentioned above, that a transnational social science requires, alongside its obviously reliance on English and other link languages, a critical awareness of the marginalising and silencing effects of linguistic hierarchies and regimes of language in different knowledge ecologies. But we need more than awareness in this case. A genuinely transnational social science would place special emphasis on the epistemological (not simply technical) function of culture and language brokers— to rupture lines of linguistic exclusion or pockets of inaudibility; to create new and dynamic lines of communication and information collision (not simply information flow); and to secure, at the same time, the irreducibility and above all *productivity of difference* in the social sciences. The linguistic default of transnational social science should perhaps not be English, but the various practices and processes of translation.

I had the above (perhaps somewhat jumbled) thoughts when I read this volume by Maritza Montero and Christopher C. Sonn, which has been excellently edited. The value of this book is not simply that it introduces its readers to theories and applications of Liberation Psychology (or, rather, Liberation Psychologies)—although that in itself is of course, valuable. Liberation Psychology has been a vibrant movement in Psychology for some time now, especially in Latin America, and provides the South African reader specifically with social, cultural and political worlds which, even though less familiar to us than the Euro-American worlds of much mainstream Psychology, are nevertheless, frequently more relevant to our own concerns and more productive as points of comparison. It also offers its readers, and once again, specifically its South African readers with theoretical and practical means to imagine and actualise more potent links between the fields of Critical (Social) Psychology and Community Psychology. In South Africa, at least, these areas of the discipline are perhaps too easily isolated from one another, adding to the ease with which both can be marginalised and/or co-opted. A more sustained dialogue along the lines of some of the Latin American examples in this volume could perhaps further unleash and bolster the radically democratic and transformative spirit than animates, at their best, both Critical and Community Psychologies in South Africa.

However, more than its introductory function, which it fulfills admirably, the volume also excels as exactly the kind of cultural and linguistic brokering I mentioned as a crucial component of a transnational and ‘translational’ social science. To begin with: the transnational. In the practice of social science, ‘globalization’ too frequently simply refers to an acknowledgement of the increasing power and dominance of American culture and values, as well as a subsequent re-orientation of local social scientific theories and practices to reflect that dominance. Globalization, in these terms, simply means the characteristic and demands of a particular locale is writ large, and that other, more marginal geopolitical regions disappear from view. Or, of course, they are addressed, but then in the manner of what used to be called Area Studies— as reflecting the economic, cultural and military interests of the dominant

world powers. This volume, however, foregrounds regions such as Latin America, South Africa, the Philippines, Australia, Ireland and Iran, and does so on their own terms. This is no makeshift application of a *Made in the USA* form of Psychology to 'local' issues that have themselves been filtered through psychological discourse in order to assume their shape as legitimate and appropriate 'problems'. The contributions, one and all, are alive to the political realities and contradictions of the places they write from.

Secondly: the 'translational'. This volume makes available in English, for the very first time, accessible discussions of work that only exist in other languages, especially in Spanish. There is an enormous amount of very relevant literature available in that language on the topic of Liberation Psychology, which we lose out on by assuming that all things relevant will inevitably be (already) available in English. It is not, and it will not be, without the labour of the kind performed here so well by Montero, Sonn and their contributing authors [On that point, my only critical comment]. It is a pity that language itself is not given sustained theoretical and practical attention here. The politics of language deserves a place alongside the many discussions of other relevant dimensions of marginalisation, oppression and liberation, such as culture and identity. Language does not only emerge as a barrier and a facilitator of dialogue in the transnational spaces of social sciences, but especially between different social groups and between groups (especially minorities) and states – and, more frequently than not, language politics trade on and entrench the vulnerability of particular social groups and classes.

Nevertheless, this is a fascinating resource and should be read and discussed widely. All involved should be commended for the clarity and urgency with which the vision of Liberation Psychology is communicated in these pages.

**Title:** *Psychology of Liberation: Theory and Applications*

**Editors:** Maritza Montero and Christopher C. Sonn

**Publisher:** Springer

**Date:** 2009

**ISBN:** 978-0-387-85784-8

**Pages:** 464

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