

DECOLONIZATION AND HUMAN MOBILITY IN CROSS-CULTURAL PSYCHOLOGY

DESCOLONIZAÇÃO E MOBILIDADE HUMANA NA PSICOLOGIA INTERCULTURAL

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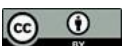
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Abstract

This theoretical essay integrates critical perspectives on cross-cultural psychology, the concept of human mobility, and a policy implementation model to propose a renewed framework for professional practice. Starting from the recognition of cultural diversity as a fundamental reality (Matsumoto & Juang, 2004), the article examines criticisms of Western bias and "intellectual extractivism" in the field (Anjum & Aziz, 2024; Henrich *et al.*, 2010). It is argued that adopting the term "mobility", rather than "migration", offers a more fluid and less charged lens for understanding human displacement and its psychological impacts (Cresswell, 2006). Next, Secchi's public policy model (Abad, 2017) is used as a framework to operationalize the implementation of the APA Multicultural Guidelines (2017), promoting epistemic justice and practical competence. It is concluded that a relevant and ethical cross-cultural psychology must be anti-colonial,

Resumo

*Este ensaio teórico integra perspectivas críticas sobre a psicologia intercultural, o conceito de mobilidade humana e um modelo de implementação de políticas para propor um quadro renovado para a prática profissional. Partindo do reconhecimento da diversidade cultural como uma realidade fundamental (Matsumoto & Juang, 2004), o artigo examina as críticas ao viés ocidental e ao "extrativismo intelectual" no campo (Anjum & Aziz, 2024; Henrich *et al.*, 2010). Argumenta-se que a adoção do termo "mobilidade", em vez de "migração", oferece uma lente mais fluida e menos carregada para compreender o deslocamento humano e seus impactos psicológicos (Cresswell, 2006). Em seguida, o modelo de políticas públicas de Secchi (Abad, 2017) é utilizado como estrutura para operacionalizar a implementação das Diretrizes Multiculturais da APA (2017), promovendo a justiça epistêmica e a competência prática.*



sensitive to power and mobility dynamics, and committed to structured processes of institutional change.

Keywords: Cross-cultural Psychology. Decolonization. Human Mobility. Public Policy. Multicultural Competence.

Conclui-se que uma psicologia intercultural relevante e ética deve ser anticolonial, sensível às dinâmicas de poder e mobilidade e comprometida com processos estruturados de mudança institucional.

Palavras-chave: *Psicologia Intercultural. Descolonização. Mobilidade Humana. Políticas Públicas. Competência Multicultural.*

1 INTRODUCTION

We live in a world of extraordinary cultural diversity, a defining condition of the twenty-first century that presents unique challenges and opportunities for cross-cultural psychology (Matsumoto & Juang, 2004). Cross-cultural psychology proposes itself as the indispensable bridge between the generation of rigorous knowledge and its application to promote human well-being in diverse contexts. However, to fulfill this mission, the field must critically engage with its own legacy and positioning. This article aims to integrate critical, conceptual and practical reflections to elaborate a consolidated view of contemporary transcultural psychology. To do so, it starts from three main analytical vectors: (1) the decolonial critiques of the Western bias and the power structures in the production of psychological knowledge; (2) the re-conceptualization of human movement through the lens of "mobility" and its implications for identity and cultural interaction; and (3) the need for structured models, such as Secchi's public policy (Abad & Abad, 2024; Secchi, 2014), to effectively implement multicultural competence guidelines, such as those of the *American Psychological Association* (APA, 2017). By weaving these threads, we seek to answer a central question: how can we construct a cross-cultural psychological practice that is at the same time scientifically robust, epistemically just, and socially relevant?

2 DISCUSSION

The discussion is organized into three interrelated axes that emerge from the synthesis of the materials.

2.1 Critical foundations and the need for decolonization

Traditional cross-cultural psychology has often operated under a paradigm dominated by Western perspectives. The revelation of the WEIRD problem – the fact that 96% of participants in psychological studies come from Western, Educated, Industrialized, Wealthy, and Democratic societies, which represent only 12% of humanity – exposes a serious distortion in the empirical basis of the discipline (Henrich *et al.*, 2010). This imbalance is not only methodological, but political. Practices of "intellectual extractivism," where knowledge from the Global South is appropriated without adequate recognition or benefit to their communities of origin, perpetuate colonial dynamics (Anjum & Aziz, 2024). Theories such as Ratner's Macro Cultural Psychology (2008) and the concept of intersectionality (1989) illuminate how psychological phenomena are inseparable from macro-social structures of power and overlapping social identities.

Decolonizing cross-cultural psychology therefore becomes an ethical and scientific imperative. This requires going beyond the mere inclusion of diverse samples. It requires genuine engagement with alternative knowledge systems, such as the Ubuntu philosophy, which conceives of the person through community (*Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*) (Nwoye, 2017). Cultural neuroscience corroborates the malleability of these fundamentals, showing how cultural experience dynamically configures brain function (Kim & Sasaki, 2014), reinforcing the idea that there is no universal and acultural psychological or neural substrate.

2.2 Human mobility: a conceptual lens for a fluid world

The second axis addresses the re-conceptualization of human movement. The term "migration," with its connotations of permanence and bureaucracy, is insufficient to capture the complexity of contemporary displacements. It is thus proposed to adopt the concept of "mobility", which encompasses a wider range of movements – seasonal, commuting, student, tourist – and emphasizes the dynamic and meaningful experience of commuting (Cresswell, 2006). "Cross-cultural mobility" goes beyond national (transnational) borders to focus on the interaction and fusion of cultural elements,

recognizing the creation of new identities and social representations in this process (Abad, 2025, 2025; Abad *et al.*, 2025).

This terminological distinction has profound implications. While "migration" can evoke restrictive policy responses and stigmatization, "mobility" facilitates a more inclusive and positive approach, valuing diversity and cultural exchange (Kende *et al.*, 2022). For psychology, adopting the lens of mobility means understanding identity not as fixed, but as an ongoing process of "proculturation" – the reconstruction of the self through dialogue with new cultural elements (Gamsakhurdia, 2020). This requires professionals to develop skills to serve individuals whose experiences are marked by fluid trajectories, multiple belongings and constant identity negotiations.

2.3 From critique to action: a model for the implementation of multicultural practices

Acknowledging criticism and adopting new conceptual lenses is insufficient without concrete mechanisms to transform professional practice. The third axis addresses this gap by employing Secchi's model of public policies (Abad, 2017) as a context for the systematic implementation of the APA Multicultural Guidelines (2017). This template, consisting of seven phases, offers a structured roadmap:

1. **Problem Identification:** Recognize the lack of multicultural competence as a generator of inadequate care and disparities (Sue *et al.*, 2022);
2. **Formation of the Agenda:** Insert the topic on the agenda of associations, educational institutions and government (Secchi, 2014);
3. **Formulation of Alternatives:** Develop strategies such as curriculum review, continuous capacity building, and inclusive institutional policies (APA, 2017);
4. **Decision Making:** Selecting viable and legitimate alternatives through the participation of stakeholders (Secchi, 2014);
5. **Implementation:** Put decisions into practice, with planning and resource allocation (Arredondo *et al.*, 1996);
6. **Evaluation:** Measure effectiveness through indicators such as professional competence and customer satisfaction (Secchi, 2014);

7. **Extinction or Renewal:** Decide on the continuity of policies, favoring their continuous renewal in the face of social dynamics (APA, 2017).

This model operationalizes the commitment to social justice, translating the principles of the guidelines – such as the ecological approach and the focus on intersectionality – into measurable and evaluable actions. It provides a tool for institutions and practitioners to overcome resistance to change and scarcity of resources, critical points highlighted in the literature (Moodley & Ocampo, 2014).

3 CONCLUSIONS

Cross-cultural psychology is at a decisive inflection point. To be relevant and just in the twenty-first century, marked by global connections, persistent inequalities, and intense human flows, it must transcend its ethnocentric origins and embrace profound transformation. The conclusions of this essay, expanded from the discussion, point to the construction of a critical cross-cultural psychology based on three interdependent pillars and operationalized by a clear path.

1. **First**, epistemological and practical decolonization is the non-negotiable foundation. This implies much more than diversifying research samples. It requires a radical rethinking of the sources of legitimacy of knowledge. It means actively rejecting "intellectual extractivism" (Anjum & Aziz, 2024) and promoting epistemic justice, where knowledge such as Ubuntu (Nwoye, 2017) is not only objects of study, but a theoretical and ethical foundation that reformulates concepts of self, well-being, and community. Cultural neuroscience (Kim & Sasaki, 2014) offers here a crucial empirical validation, demonstrating biocultural plasticity, but its interpretation must avoid new universalisms. Decolonial practice is embodied in permanent critical reading, reflexivity on positioning and privilege, and truly equitable research collaborations that reverse historical flows of power;
2. **Second**, the adoption of the lens of cross-cultural mobility reconfigures the object and methodology of the discipline. By replacing the static paradigm of "migration" with the dynamic paradigm of "mobility" (Cresswell, 2006), we redirect the focus to the continuous processes of identity transformation. The concept of "proculturation" (Gamsakhurdia, 2020) accurately describes this

phenomenon: identity as a dialogical and semiotic reconstruction of the self in transit. For professional practice, this requires skills to follow fluid trajectories, multiple belongings and constant negotiations, overcoming linear adaptation models. For research, it requires mixed and longitudinal methodologies that capture the fluidity of the experience of mobility, from ethnographic fieldwork to triangulation with experimental methods (Erzberger & Prein, 1997);

3. **Third**, structured implementation through public policy models is the bridge that connects theoretical critique to concrete transformation. Without implementation mechanisms, guidelines such as those of the APA (2017) run the risk of remaining with good intentions. Secchi's seven-phase model (Abad, 2017) offers an essential context for this operationalization, transforming abstract principles into a continuous cycle of action-evaluation-renewal. From identifying the problem of multicultural incompetence to impact assessment and deciding to renew policies, this model provides a roadmap for training institutions, professional associations, and mental health services to make systemic change by overcoming institutional resistance and inertia.

The future of cross-cultural psychology, therefore, lies in its ability to synergistically integrate decolonial self-critique, the conceptual sensibility of mobility, and the pragmatism of structured implementation. A truly transcultural and critical psychology will be one that: produces knowledge from a dialogue of knowledge that destabilizes Western canons; it understands the human experience through the fluid lens of mobility and proculturation; and intervenes in reality through evidence-informed practices and policies, guided by an unwavering commitment to social justice and equity. Only in this way will the discipline be able to fulfill its double promise: to be a rigorous science of human psychological diversity and an ethical profession that is effective in promoting well-being in a world marked, simultaneously, by deep connections and inequalities.

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Authors' Contribution

All authors contributed equally to the development of this article.

Data availability

All datasets relevant to this study's findings are fully available within the article.

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