Revisiting Cross-Cultural Communication: Community Psychology Reflections for a Fractured World

分断化する世界における異文化コミュニケーションの再考
―コミュニティ心理学からの省察―

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要旨

本論文は、欧米のソーシャルワーカーと北アフリカのソーシャルワーカーとの間における異文化コミュニケーションに関する研究成果を再訪し、コミュニティ心理学の中核的価値の観点から再解釈することを目的とする。特に、言語、宗教、コミュニケーション様式、社会文化的規範に関する質的知見をもとに、10の主要な学習ポイントを抽出し、それぞれを多様性の尊重、社会正義、生態学的視座、エンパワメント、協働、批判的意識、リフレクシビティといった基盤的原理と対応づけて検討する。さらに本稿は、ミクロレベルの日常的な異文化間相互作用と、東西間の地政学的緊張といったマクロレベルの構造的課題とを接続し、日常的なコミュニケーション上の困難が、より広範な国際的対立の反映であることを示す。すなわち、国際関係における誤解は、しばしば十分に検討されていない文化的前提、権力の不均衡、および価値体系の相違に根ざしていることを論じる。国際コミュニティ心理学（とりわけオセアニア、アフリカ、アメリカ地域に根ざす実践と理論）に位置づけられる本稿は、文化的文脈に根ざし、状況依存的かつ倫理的配慮に基づくアプローチを強調することにより、グローバルな対立分析に対する当該分野の独自の貢献を明らかにする。最終的に、分断化が進む現代世界において、コミュニティ心理学の価値を実践的ツールとして適用することにより、対話の促進、誤解の低減、そしてより公正かつ相互尊重に基づく国際的関与の実現を提唱するものである。

キーワード：異文化コミュニケーション、コミュニティ心理学、異文化間コンピテンス、権力と文化的ダイナミクス、リフレクシビティ

ABSTRACT

This reflective article revisits findings from a research study on cross-cultural communication between Western and North African social workers and reinterprets them through the lens of core community psychology values. Drawing on qualitative insights related to language, religion, communication styles, and sociocultural norms, the article identifies ten key learning points and aligns each with foundational principles such as respect for diversity,

social justice, ecological perspective, empowerment, collaboration, critical consciousness, and reflexivity. By connecting micro-level intercultural encounters with macro-level geopolitical tensions, specifically between Arab-Islamic Eastern and Western nations, the article demonstrates how everyday communication challenges mirror broader global conflicts. It argues that misunderstandings in international relations are often rooted in unexamined cultural assumptions, power imbalances, and differing value systems. Positioned within community psychology, this reflection highlights the discipline's unique contribution to global conflict analysis by emphasising culturally grounded, context-sensitive, and ethically informed approaches. Ultimately, the article advocates for the application of community psychology values as practical tools for fostering dialogue, reducing miscommunication, and promoting more equitable and respectful international engagement in an increasingly polarised world.

Keywords: Cross-Cultural Communication, Community Psychology, Intercultural Competence, Power and Cultural Dynamics, Reflexivity

INTRODUCTION

As I watch the daily news and witness the persistent tensions between Arab-Islamic Eastern and Western nations, I find myself returning to the research I once conducted on cross-cultural communication between Western and North African social workers. Although the geopolitical scale of these conflicts differs significantly from the interpersonal and community-level interactions explored in my study, the underlying dynamics such as miscommunication, cultural misunderstanding, and power asymmetries, remain strikingly similar. This reflective article revisits key findings from that research and reframes them as analytical tools grounded in core community psychology values. By doing so, it seeks to demonstrate how insights derived from localised practice can illuminate broader global conflicts and contribute to more culturally responsive approaches to international engagement.

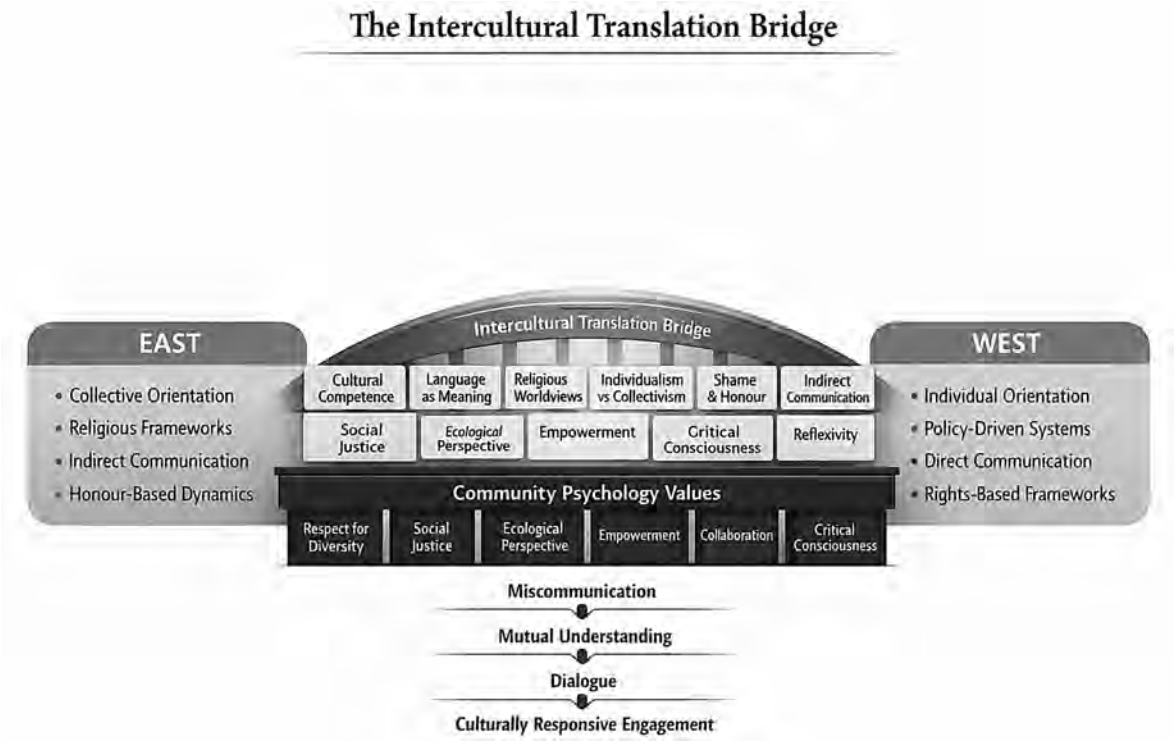
To synthesise these insights, I propose the *Intercultural Translation Bridge* as a conceptual framework for understanding cross-cultural communication in contexts of conflict. This framework visually represents the divide between differing cultural worldviews, conceptualised as Arab-Islamic "East" and "West", and highlights the processes required to navigate this divide. The ten learning points derived from this research are positioned as practical tools that enable movement across this bridge, while core community psychology values form the foundation that supports ethical and effective engagement. These values are widely recognised within community psychology literature (Kloos et al., 2020) and further articulated by the Society for Community Research and Action (SCRA, n.d.).

Rather than viewing cultural difference as a barrier, this framework conceptualises it as a space requiring translation, reflexivity, and mutual adaptation. It is through this lens that the following key learning points are presented.

Based on the conceptual work described above, Figure 1design was created by author, then, the original design was smoothed out by using ChatGPT(OpenAI, 2026)as follows:

Figure 1

Theoretical Framework: The Intercultural Translation Bridge



1. Cultural Competence as a Political Necessity

(Value: Respect for Diversity)

One of the most fundamental insights from the research is that cultural competence is not merely a professional skill but an ethical and political necessity. Research participants frequently described how Western-trained practitioners imposed their own frameworks, often unintentionally, resulting in resistance and breakdowns in trust(Okuyama, 2011).

This reflects the core community psychology value of respect for diversity, which requires not only acknowledging but actively valuing different cultural perspectives(New Zealand Psychological Society, 2002). In the context of Arab-Islamic Eastern and Western relations, the absence of such respect is evident in the application of Western-centric political frameworks to a society shaped by distinct historical, religious, and cultural experiences. Cultural competence, therefore, becomes a form of political literacy, that is, an essential tool for navigating difference without domination.

2. Language is More than Translation

(Value: Ecological Perspective)

The research revealed that language barriers extend beyond vocabulary to encompass entire systems of meaning. Terms such as "psychologist" or "therapy" carried stigmatising or culturally inappropriate connotations, producing discomfort and even shame among participants(Okuyama, 2011). This insight aligns with the ecological perspective in community psychology, which situates communication within broader cultural and social systems(Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Similarly, in international relations, concepts like "freedom" or "democracy" are not universally understood but are shaped by local histories and lived realities. Effective communication, therefore, requires an ecological sensitivity to how meaning is constructed within specific contexts.

3. The Invisible Power of Religious Worldviews

(Value: Respect for Diversity)

Religion emerged as a central force shaping communication, influencing what could be said, how it could be expressed, and what was considered appropriate. Research participants emphasised that religious beliefs were deeply embedded in everyday interactions and professional practices(Okuyama, 2011). This reinforces the community psychology commitment to respecting diverse belief systems(New Zealand Psychological Society, 2002). In some cases, religion is not separate from political life but is integral to it. Ignoring this reality risks misinterpreting motivations and reinforcing cultural misunderstandings. Respecting diversity, in this sense, involves recognising religion as a legitimate and powerful framework for meaning-making(New Zealand Psychological Society, 2002).

4. Individualism vs. Collectivism

(Value: Social Justice)

The tension between individualistic and collectivist value systems was a recurring theme. Western practitioners often emphasised autonomy and independence, while local practitioners prioritised family cohesion and collective responsibility(Ben-Ari & Pines, 2002).

From a community psychology perspective, this reflects issues of social justice(New Zealand Psychological Society, 2002). Imposing individualistic norms onto collectivist societies can marginalise local practices and reinforce global inequalities. Similar tensions emerge when Western ideals of individual rights are promoted without regard for collectivist social structures. A social justice approach calls for the recognition and validation of multiple value systems rather than the privileging of one over another(New Zealand Psychological Society, 2002).

5. Shame and Honour as Social Regulators

(Value: Respect for Diversity / Cultural Relativity)

The concepts of shame and honour played a critical role in shaping communication. Research participants noted that direct criticism, particularly in public, could lead to loss of face and damage relationships(Dwairy, 2002). Understanding these dynamics requires cultural relativity, that is, interpreting behaviours within their cul-

tural context rather than through external standards. In geopolitical contexts, public criticism or sanctions may be experienced not only as political actions but as affronts to national dignity. Respect for diversity, therefore, includes sensitivity to symbolic and relational dimensions of communication(New Zealand Psychological Society, 2002).

6. The Importance of Indirect Communication

(Value: Ecological Perspective / Contextual Sensitivity)

Indirect communication emerged as a culturally appropriate strategy for addressing sensitive issues. Research participants highlighted the importance of tact, nuance, and relational awareness in maintaining effective communication(Okuyama, 2011). This reflects the ecological emphasis on adapting to context(Bronfenbrenner, 1979). In contrast, Western communication styles often prioritise directness, which can be perceived as confrontational in other cultural settings(Dwairy, 2002). This mismatch can contribute to escalating tensions. A contextually sensitive approach would involve adapting communication styles to align with cultural expectations.

7. Hierarchy and Authority

(Value: Empowerment)

The research identified hierarchy as a key factor influencing communication. Respect for authority shaped how individuals expressed themselves and interacted within professional settings(Irani, 1999). While hierarchy can structure communication, community psychology emphasises empowerment to promote more equitable and participatory relationships(New Zealand Psychological Society, 2002). In international relations, power imbalances between nations exist. In addition to respecting the leaders from non-dominant countries, recognising the power imbalances is a first step toward fostering more balanced and respectful engagement.

8. The Role of Mediators

(Value: Collaboration and Community Participation)

Local mediators played a crucial role in bridging cultural and linguistic gaps. These individuals facilitated understanding by translating not only language but also cultural expectations and complex concepts such as shame and honour(Al-Krenawi & Graham, 2001; Al-Krenawi & Graham, 2003; Cohen, 2001; Irani, 1999). This reflects the value of collaboration and community participation(New Zealand Psychological Society, 2002). Effective communication is not a unilateral process but a shared endeavour that requires the involvement of those embedded within the cultural context. In global politics, mediators and diplomats serve similar functions, highlighting the importance of inclusive and collaborative approaches to conflict resolution.

9. The Danger of Assumed Modernity

(Value: Critical Consciousness)

The research cautioned against equating visible modernity with Westernisation(Okuyama, 2011). Despite outward signs of modernisation, traditional values remained deeply influential(Young & Shami, 1997). This aligns

with the development of critical consciousness, a core value in community psychology that involves questioning dominant assumptions and ideologies(New Zealand Psychological Society, 2002). In the case of some Arab-Islamic Eastern countries, assumptions about modernisation can lead to flawed interpretations and policies(Young & Shami, 1997). Critical awareness allows for a more nuanced understanding of how tradition and modernity coexist.

10. Reflexivity and Positionality
(Value: Reflexivity / Ethical Practice)

Finally, the research underscored the importance of reflexivity. As a researcher, I became increasingly aware of how my own cultural positioning shaped my interpretations and interactions. Reflexivity is central to ethical community psychology practice(New Zealand Psychological Society, 2002). It requires the practice of cultural safety, which includes ongoing self-examination and an acknowledgment of one's influence within any interaction(New Zealand Psychologists Board, 2005). In international relations, a lack of reflexivity can result in the projection of one's own values onto others, perpetuating misunderstanding and conflict.

CONCLUSION

This article has argued that intercultural conflict between Arab-Islamic "East" and "West" is not simply political or ideological, but deeply rooted in failures of understanding, translation, and engagement across differences. Drawing on the findings of this research, the *Intercultural Translation Bridge* framework conceptualises these divides as spaces that can be navigated through intentional practice, rather than as fixed barriers.

By presenting ten key learning points as practical tools, and grounding them in core community psychology values, such as respect for diversity, social justice, empowerment, and collaboration, the framework emphasises that effective intercultural engagement requires both skill and ethical commitment. These values, widely recognised within community psychology literature(Kloos et al., 2020)and articulated by the Society for Community Research and Action(SCRA, n.d.), provide a foundation for more equitable and context-sensitive practice.

Importantly, this perspective challenges deficit-based and Western-centric approaches by highlighting the need for reflexivity, cultural humility, and mutual responsibility. While these tools cannot resolve large-scale conflicts alone, they offer a meaningful lens for understanding and engaging with them more thoughtfully.

Ultimately, this article invites a shift in perspective: from seeing cultural difference as a problem to be managed, to recognising it as a space that requires careful, ethical, and collaborative translation.

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