Linking North-Atlantic psychological knowledge to the government of the South: The “psy complex” at work in the Colombian context

Hernan C. Pulido-Martinez
Pontificia Universidad Javeriana
Bogota
E-mail: cpulido@javeriana.edu.co

It has being widely recognised that psychological knowledge is underlying many organizational conceptual frameworks and interventions (Hollway, 1991; Rose, 1999). Studies conducted in fields such as critical psychology and critical management studies have pointed out psychology’s involvement in the “making up” of the subject at work and the governance “at distance” of workplaces. Most of these studies have considered the place of psychological knowledge in North-Atlantic societies where psychology is produced. It has been established, for instance, the network of elements and relationships that open a space for psychology in those societies where this knowledge is produced, and the central place that psychological knowledge has in governing and producing certain types of workers (Hollway, 1991; Townley, 1994; Donzelot, 1987; Rose, 1999; Triantafillou & Moreira; 2005). However, the place of psychology regarding the exercise of the international neo-liberal rationality of government and the constitution of workers subjectivity in locations where this knowledge is more applied than produced has been rarely considered. Though researchers in the South point out the importance of a politics of location, most academics and practitioners interested in psychology are immersed in a celebratory attitude regarding the expansion of work psychology. It has left aside the neo-colonial dimensions of psychological knowledge (Staeuble, 2005). The dissemination of psychological knowledge from the North-Atlantic societies to the South is very often considered as a taken for granted progress and/or as part of the modernization process of work settings. Thus, independently of culture psychological knowledge and strategies are applied. It is considered that work psychology brings about the beneficial effects it promises such as, workers well being and enhancements in productivity. This paper explores the “local” nuances that emerge when psychology is applied to the world of work in Colombia. Insights from postcolonial theory are brought about to analyse data from psychological interventions applied to the health and transport sector which have been under a radical transformation. The analyses show the “international flows and connections” of work psychology as a vehicle to exercise particular rationalities of government.


