

Adrienne Aron

author of

***Human Rights and Wrongs:
Reluctant Heroes fight Tyranny***

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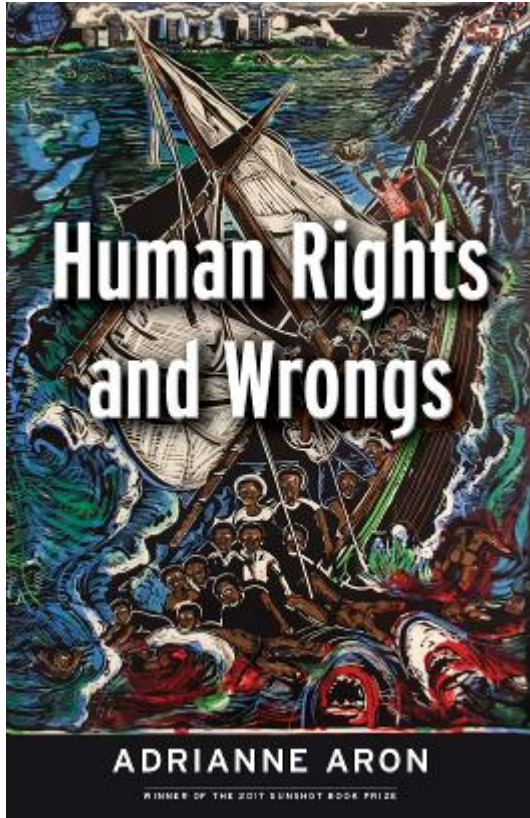
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“Nothing that is human is alien to me.” --Terence, Roman poet and playwright

“I’ve written Human Rights and Wrongs to liberate Terence’s beautiful sentiment from the torturous distortion of a contemporary government that wants us to believe that no aliens are human.” --Adrienne Aron

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HUMAN RIGHTS AND WRONGS:
Reluctant Heroes Fight Tyranny

By Adrienne Aron

True and timely accounts of a psychologist's work with refugee asylum seekers and others with traumatic histories. Aron's experienced and compassionate voice rings out in the national debate on immigration reform and the refugee crisis.

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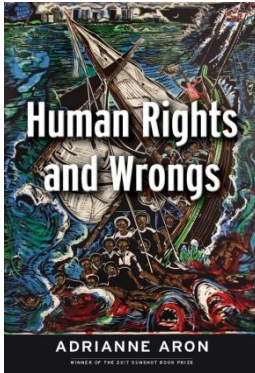
www.adriannearon.com

or www.sunshots.org

Human Rights and Wrongs grew out of Dr. Adrienne Aron's experience as a liberation psychologist serving immigrants and refugees who have suffered traumatic abuse. This experience also generated *Writings for a Liberation Psychology* (Harvard University Press, 1994); her English translation of Mario Benedetti's powerful play about torture, *Pedro and the Captain* (Cadmus Editions, 2009); and several professional articles, book chapters, and lectures about the unique challenges of doing psychology with oppressed populations. For respite, she took up writing short prose pieces, which won her acclaim in the worlds of both fiction and nonfiction. She has been awarded literary prizes by, among others: *New Millennium Writings*, *Able Muse*, the Jack London and San Francisco Writers' Conferences, and the California Writers Club. Adrienne grew up in St. Louis, Missouri, studied political theory at the University of California at Berkeley, and earned a Ph.D. in psychology from the University of California at Santa Cruz. She lives in the San Francisco Bay Area and is an advocate for peace and human rights.

ADRIANNE ARON, author of *HUMAN RIGHTS AND WRONGS*

(Sunshot Press, Sept. 2018, Distrib: Ingram Content Group)



AUTHOR BIO

Adrienne Aron has worked as a waitress, taxi driver, statistical clerk, survey interviewer, note-taker, sugarcane cutter, ghost writer, teacher, and clinical psychologist. She grew up in St. Louis, MO, studied political theory at the University of California at Berkeley, and as a Kent Fellow completed a Ph.D. in psychology at the University of California, Santa Cruz. She is co-editor and principal translator of works by Ignacio Martín-Baró, *Writings for a Liberation Psychology* (Harvard University Press, 1994, 1996) and translator of Mario Benedetti's compelling drama, *Pedro and the Captain* (Cadmus Editions, 2009). She is the author of several articles and book chapters in psychology, and many short pieces of creative prose, several of which—in both fiction and nonfiction—have won literary prizes. Awards have been conferred by, among others: *Able Muse*; *New Millennium Writings*; *Adventum*; Gover; Ricco; Fish; Women On Writing; the Jack London and San Francisco Writers' Conferences; and the California Writers Club.

Adrienne took up fiction writing for respite from her long hours with traumatized refugees. The recognition she received for her short fiction encouraged her to write *Human Rights and Wrongs*, a work of nonfiction, in the style of a collection of stories for the general reader rather than as didactic narrative. Dr. Aron used to think of herself as a psychologist who writes. Nowadays she thinks of herself as Adrienne, a writer who does a little psychology. She lives in the San Francisco Bay Area where she is an active advocate for social justice.

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COMMENTARIES ON *HUMAN RIGHTS AND WRONGS*

“Adrienne Aron’s *Human Rights and Wrongs* demonstrates how the strictures of ‘professionalism’ can limit the effectiveness of psychological expression...[It] ends with a true story and a metaphor. She remembers being lost in the Yosemite Valley. That memory represents the many people lost in our criminal justice system and ICE. What she does not say is the unspoken truth that she also represents a holy helicopter rescuing the dispossessed lost in the forest.”

Blase Bonpane, Ph.D.
Director, Office of the Americas

“Every page I read took me to thousands of stories that I’ve heard, and that at times I felt I’d lived myself. Every page gave me pause, because there was so much tied together there... This book should be required reading for law students and psychologists.”

Felix Kury
Program Director, Clínica Martín-Baró
San Francisco State University, U.C. San Francisco

“A clever joker once said, ‘I dream of a world where chickens can cross the road without having their motives questioned.’ I, as a mental health professional, dream of one where psychologists will understand why Ernesto Cruz drinks himself into a stupor, why Eva refuses to speak about what happened to her in Honduras, why Mrs. Malek is afraid to return to Afghanistan. In a collection of serious yet entertaining human interest stories, Adrienne Aron’s *Human Rights and Wrongs* engages the general reader while inspiring psychologists to think outside the box.”

Shawn Corne, Ph.D.
Clinical psychologist, Albany, California

“Throughout the book the author provides gems and nuggets of hope highlighting the power of story. The ideas are powerful and challenge the reader to examine the resilience of the human spirit and our relationship to others as human beings.”

Hugo Kamyra, Ph.D.
Professor, Fulbright Scholar,
Simmons College School of Social Work

Combining the qualities of a psychologist, a political activist, and a skilled writer, the author draws the reader close to individuals' experiences while informing the reader about recent histories of governmental violence. In other words, *Human Rights and Wrongs* teaches the reader both compassion and justice.

Tom F. Driver
The Paul J. Tillich Professor of Theology and Culture Emeritus
Union Theological Seminary

Q and A with Adrienne Aron

Q: *You grew up in St. Louis, MO and earned a doctorate at U.C. Santa Cruz in social and developmental psychology, but wound up doing clinical work, mainly in Spanish. Where does the language proficiency come from, and how does a background in social and developmental issues translate into clinical expertise?*

A: I learned Spanish in high school, from an inspired teacher who also taught me to love literature. And I continued using the language as I later traveled in Mexico, Spain, Cuba, and Central America. I didn't become proficient in Spanish till I began working in a community mental health clinic in Oakland, California, where our clients were mainly Mexican immigrants. My mentor there, a man with a high school diploma who'd grown up in the barrio and was by nature a gifted therapist, taught me that being tuned in to social and developmental issues was key to working successfully with an immigrant population—with any population, really. What I didn't know at the time, but found extremely interesting later, was that there was a name for this approach—*liberation psychology*—and, not surprisingly, it was developed in Latin America, as a way of working with oppressed populations. It's a derivative of liberation theology, which grew out of the Catholic church after Vatican Two and the 1968 Latin American Bishops' conference that adopted a preferential option for the poor.

Q: *So you are a liberation psychologist, and this explains your approach to mental health?*

A: Yes, basically, that's right. But I would not have been able to articulate that if I hadn't become acquainted with the work of Ignacio Martín-Baró, the psychologist in El Salvador who gave shape to the body of ideas we call liberation psychology. I knew I'd found a kindred spirit when I read his essay "War and Mental Health," which was in my briefing packet when I was on a human rights delegation to El Salvador in 1985. We met, and instantly became friends. He was assassinated by the Salvadoran military, in a massacre of Jesuit priests that took place in 1989. To make his work known in English, I and others took on the task of collecting a representative sampling of his work and publishing it in translation. The book is called *Writings for a Liberation Psychology* (Harvard University Press, 1994, 1996).

Q: *You've also translated writings of Mario Benedetti, the great Uruguayan poet and novelist. Was that in your writer's identity, as opposed to your psychology work?*

A: Yes, and no! What I translated was Benedetti's play, called in English *Pedro and the Captain* (Cadmus Editions, 2009). It is an incredibly powerful dialogue between a torturer and his victim, Pedro. I'd been working for some time with torture survivors, and on speaking about the work, discovered that Americans tended to think of torture as the sadistic act of an evil individual. They did not understand

that torture is an instrument of repression, a weapon in the arsenal of state terrorism, designed to traumatize entire communities. This play, which was very famous in Latin America, opened possibilities for talking about the true horror of torture. I really wanted North Americans to be able to know this play, and when I wasn't able to find a professional translator to make it happen, I took it on—as a psychologist, as a writer, as a translator.

Q: *Many of the people you write about in *Human Rights and Wrongs* do not speak English. Do you consider yourself a translator of their stories?*

A: No, I am more an *interpreter* of their stories, taking their information and placing it into contexts and categories that will help my readers understand their experiences. One of the stories in the book deals with the challenge of trying to satisfy several different interests at once: my client's emotional needs, the fact-based demands of the immigration court, the *gotta win* stance of the client's lawyer, and the ethical strictures of my own profession. I had to figure out a way for all of them to be respected—a task requiring skilful *interpretation*. Interpreters have to anticipate misunderstandings that might arise. In my book, the speakers of Arabic, Farsi, and Haitian Kreyol are people with whom I communicated through an interpreter, and in each case the interpreter was able to provide a nuanced clarification of certain things I was not understanding. Sometimes the lines between translation and interpretation can get fuzzy, but when you're striving to get at the truth, you want to use not just words, but also things like tone of voice and body language, which also have to be interpreted.

Q: *There are 12 stories in *Human Rights and Wrongs*, some containing stories within the stories. When the Guatemalan woman wouldn't talk, for instance, you told about various other cases of "communication disorder," and in your own harrowing overnight in the freezing forest you told of other writers in trouble, other people lost or trapped. Of all these many stories, either principal or secondary, do you have a favorite?*

A: Oh my, that's a terrible question. Every story worth telling is a favorite. But every favorite is prized for a different reason. Maybe it gives inspiration, maybe it's very sad, maybe it's funny, or sweet, or instructive, or illustrative, or triumphant. All the stories that made it into the book are favorites, in a way, chosen because they were, well... *good stories*, stories that somehow reveal what there is to love in the kind of work I do. Felix Kury, a Salvadoran refugee who teaches at San Francisco State University and directs a mental health clinic, the *Clínica Martín-Baró*, thinks this book should be required reading for law students and students of psychology. If even one psychology or law student grew excited enough by one of these stories to begin working on behalf of oppressed and underserved populations, that story would become my favorite of all time.

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