BOOK REVIEW

PSYCHOANALYSIS AND REVOLUTION: CRITICAL PSYCHOLOGY FOR LIBERATION MOVEMENTS
By Ian Parker and David Pavón-Cuéllar (1968 Press, 2021)

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It is more than one hundred and thirty years since the embryonic beginnings of Freud's psychoanalysis. Freud identified three revolutions in recent history that propelled profound change in how humans understood themselves in the world: Copernicus' displacement of man as the centre of the universe; Darwin's declaration of humans as a product not of God's design but of evolution; and Freud's own revolutionary unearthing of the unconscious by removing the human ego as master in its own house. Indeed, with this publication, the irony is not lost that to align the impact of one's own invention with Copernicus and Darwin requires a particular type of egoic orientation that revealed not only Freud's confidence in his creation but possibly the peril of psychoanalysis becoming an idealised tool of ideology in the very capitalist system that created the conditions for it to be born. In *Psychoanalysis and Revolution: Critical Psychology for Liberation Movements*, Parker and Pavón-Cuéllar point out that, to be liberating, psychoanalysis must itself be liberated from

the fetishised trap of becoming another metanarrative and academic commodity.

The authors put forward a set of ideas about the revolutionary aspects of psychoanalysis but, unlike in clinical psychoanalysis, propose in manifesto form a plan of action that posits clear revolutionary aims, commitments and demands that they consider will connect the personal and political dimensions of people's lives. But what exactly is revolutionary about psychoanalysis? Parker and Pavón-Cuéllar return again and again to answer this throughout their text and are quite specific in their claim that psychoanalysis is a 'valuable tool' within and beyond the clinical setting, where it can provide an analysis of the 'shock capitalism' that feeds off the worldly problems it creates. They propose that psychoanalysis can and should be used to analyse the patriarchal system that not only produces inequality, oppression and toxic masculinity at the individual level but also cultivates consumerism, culture wars, famines and refugee crises across the world at a grander geo-political level. This manifesto's timely release is nothing short of an emergency response, the evidence of whose urgency is exemplified by the many languages into which it is currently being translated, including Italian, Russian, Indonesian, Arabic, Chinese, Greek, Serbo-Croat, Turkish and Hindi – and even currently *Gaeilge*, a language that, along with the Irish people, is "haunted by the history of domination and alienation" (Parker and Pavón-Cuéllar, 2021, p. 74).

Focused and specific but at the same time general and universal, *Psychoanalysis and Revolution* operates as a kind of culturally transferable blueprint that is immensely useful for students, scholars and seasoned clinical practitioners alike. The authors convincingly translate complex ideas into a coherently written text and do well to avoid unnecessary psychoanalytic verbiage that might put off non-psychoanalysts. However, there are some essential psychoanalytic concepts for the reader to embrace, four of which are *the unconscious*; *repetition*; *drive*; *and transference*. With these terms, we know that we are on a Freudo-Lacanian trajectory.

Using these coordinates, the authors situate their subject within language, and it is through speech we connect in the social domain but it is also through speech that we are divided from each other. The unconscious is shaped by the contradictions we experience. The unconscious, as they claim, is made up of "history, economy, society, culture and ideology" (ibid., p. 35). They identify and incorporate the spectres of Marx and Engels' *Communist Manifesto* with Lacan by recognising how the conflicts of our class society are inseparable from our speech and how freeing ourselves from the oppressive experiences of class, race and sex requires us to combat them "within ourselves as well" (ibid., p. 16). The intersection of the personal and the political preoccupies the authors throughout, and they frequently connect the prospects of personal liberation with socio-political transformation.

This text can be of great help to clinicians in understanding how capitalism functions and "the many forms of oppression that disable people" (ibid., p. 16). For some, the authors claim, psychoanalysis has been disconnected from its history, insofar as "politics was kept out of the clinic" and "symptoms [were] to be solved at a personal level" (ibid., p. 6). This indeed disables the emancipating aspects of psychoanalysis, removing it from where it was most needed:

> for those who lack the financial resources to pay for it, for those who must work all the time and do not have even a few minutes to think about desire and for those who suffer from alienation that makes them disinterested in their existence and in their discontent in civilization (ibid., p. 132).

History repeats through the enslavement of signifying chains and returns us to the place of trauma. Psychoanalysis teaches us that trauma repeats in order to be remembered, keeping people stuck and in a repetitive loop of automated thinking and learned behaviour. One progressive lesson the authors have claimed from psychoanalysis is:

> against the compulsion to repeat, it is possible to open up new possibilities in which we may well continue being subject to repetition, for we cannot wish away the

> existence of the unconscious, but we can make more choices (ibid., p. 73).

Parker and Pavón-Cuéllar consider the psychoanalytic concept of 'Drive' to be a force of nature, an "impetus to rebel" enmeshed with speech, in which "drive springs forth at the border between body and culture" (ibid., pp. 81-82). Drive can become enslaved by the machine of capital, which the authors further refer to as the "repressive and patriarchal normalization of desire" (ibid., p. 120). Drive and desire follow complicated paths which are specific to each subject. The manifesto hones in on, for example, the conflicts and contradictions whereby people feel "driven to sex in a culture that is itself obsessed with an ideological series of images of what sex is" (ibid., p. 89). The authors emphasize how:

> psychoanalysis makes such a big deal about sex; people seek refuge in sex and puzzle over why it so often fails to bring them comfort. They are driven to it, and it drives them into the neurotic conditions that psychoanalysis was invented to treat (ibid., p. 90).

Indeed, the authors also consider "those who do not have sex [...] are haunted by a culture that is still always pressing on them the demand to conform to what is demanded of them" (ibid., p. 91). The forms of oppressive institutions that serve the ruling class

are similarly highlighted, in which people are "colonised by ruling class values and ideology" (ibid., p. 65).

Parker and Pavón-Cuéllar think we should not be surprised by the hyper-masculinised and misogynistic elements of this capitalist system while insisting that psychoanalysis is still one of the best means to grasp the nature of our present-day symptoms of misery in life under advanced neoliberal capitalism, with its associated forms of "sexism, racism and colonialism" (ibid., p. 13). It is patriarchal ideology that attempts to discursively harness our conflicted being to further control us, enforcing "the power of men over women and of older men over younger men" (ibid., p. 23) while propelling a culture of hate and fear toward any form of sexuality that is not 'heteronormative', seeing it as something shameful and to be repressed.

They regard elements of feminism as a threat to the subjective foundation of capitalism and the commodification of gender. Feminism offers a critique and endangers the ideological social bonds that structure the bourgeois nuclear family, insisting that "these bonds are deceptive imaginary figurations of real human needs and a reflection of symbolically-sanctioned oppression" (ibid., p. 101). This is why the authors consider feminism, along with the broader lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex and associated struggles as "an indispensable ally of psychoanalysis in the service of liberation movements" (ibid., p. 101).

Parker and Pavón-Cuéllar try to reframe psychoanalysis as an effective resource for liberation movements, whereby a

treatment can be directed societally in which power and the desire for power may be seen as operating from within a transference. A problem they circle and return to is how liberation socialist groups operating under capitalism can become exploited, commodified and captivated by their own utopian ideals of offering something better. Power is embraced instead of challenged. They run the risk of becoming a tool of ideology, as can be seen playing out in institutions in more overt battles over status and power. Psychoanalysis can offer concepts to create an awareness and understanding of how power can appear and operate in the clinic and organisations where it can be historically and ontologically understood. Nevertheless, the authors also insist that psychoanalysis itself:

> must be purified of the sediment of mystifications, prejudices, malign moral values, dogmas, stereotypes and illusions that have turned it from being a progressive approach into one that is instrumentally useful to capitalism and colonialism (ibid., p. 22).

They continue to assert that psychoanalysis must resist the deeply ideological process of psychologisation. When psychoanalysis is guided by its own 'ego' and takes up the illusory position of being the master in its own house, it runs the risk of becoming another idealised world-view. The ego, as the authors assert, "is usually the weakest link in the community" (ibid., p. 41). Psychoanalysis can become part of the problem, along with

other psy professions such as psychotherapy, psychology and psychiatry. These professions are designed to treat and change the individual so as not to change anything else. The authors claim that psychoanalysis should not try to fit into a selection of quick fix treatments that not only offer false promises but lead people to adapt to a sick system that is the cause of their symptoms in the first place.

The authors critically highlight how such individualistic modes of conceptualising symptoms only further pathologise the person as the problem and place the responsibility for treatment failure on them. But, as the authors point out, even failure when understood contextually can be transformative if the subject has enough knowledge of the mechanisms of the impossible capitalist system that consistently distorts the social bonds between people. Radical psychoanalysis alongside radical political practice can show us why we fail. In this context the authors urge the subject, in true Beckettian fashion, to fail better and actually learn from their failures. Psychoanalysis itself, they maintain has "never really been well-adapted" (ibid., p. 146). Moreover, rather than seeking to become adaptive, it needs to remain critical and dialectical if it is to stay effective, radical and revolutionary.

Lacan compares some revolutions to the cosmological context in which planets repeatedly revolve to the same alignment, suggesting that no change occurs. Real revolution, however, involves a fundamental change in power or organisational structures, and this manifesto seeks not only mere

interpretation but demands action. To this end, the authors articulate four demands:

Firstly, the unconscious needs to be allowed to speak. There are plenty of personal and socio-political structures that repress the unconscious in order to deny any antagonism, anxiety and internal division in the human condition. The authors consider attempts such as these as ideological ways of colonising the unconscious, fuelling racist and misogynist discourses. In contrast, the authors claim that the unconscious can be reclaimed by subjects and used as a resource for collective struggle.

Second, if we do not analyse the structures of power, we will be repeatedly condemned to be slaves to capitalist masters creating profit for the ruling class. Our "bodies are experienced as things alienated from us" (ibid., p. 87), like machines caught in a repetitive loop setting. Instead, the authors ask the reader to consider repetition as an opportunity for the construction of difference. If we understand how the mechanisms of power have shaped us, we can "actually learn from history" (ibid., p. 56). Psychoanalysis can provide the theoretical tools to understand the rhymings of history. The clinic can be a space to voice change and subsequent revolutionary action can make the change.

The third demand is concerned with drive and speech and is also relevant in the clinic. The authors' demand is directed to psychoanalysts, insisting that they do not remain silent in the face of the power – especially institutional power – that may accord them privilege and prestige. The authors propose we

speak out against abuse of power, both by psychoanalysts as well as other psy professionals that become contented with trying to change "the individual so as not to change the world" (ibid., p. 148). The authors contend that "we need to turn this illness of the subject into a weapon, to speak of it as a weapon against power, to work through it as we speak of our desire for another world and act collectively on that desire" (ibid., p. 136).

The fourth demand is to serve the liberation movements; psychoanalysis should serve not by depoliticising the political and reducing it to the psychologisation of the personal. Only collectively can we free ourselves. There is a real possibility that people can unite and stand together against imperial powers and revolt, in the way we can see thousands of people risking not only their freedom but their lives taking to the streets of Russia as they protest against the invasion of Ukraine. Moreover, this can also relate to politicians that are not only speaking out against the war but are connecting and speaking out against all military oppression in the West too and across the world.

Parker and Pavón-Cuéllar claim psychoanalysis' alliance with liberation movements needs to be articulated "so that it is brought beyond what it is now, made what it truly can be" (ibid., p. 146). The authors remind us that "we are part of the ecologically interconnected nature of this world and connected to each other, responsible for each other" (ibid., p. 28). Consequently, there are always opportunities to create interconnections, and this, as the authors say, is at the heart of psychoanalysis in helping us to at times disentangle from each

other, embrace our differences and attempt to realign collectively.

Since the authors do, after all, alert us to the difficulties inherent in the attempt to replicate clinical psychoanalysis in non-clinical political environments, I would also propose a point for further critical reflection. Clinical psychoanalysis is one of many paths to emancipation. It might not be for or even suitable for everyone, including the political activist. Additionally, the psychoanalytic path the authors pursue is just one orientation amongst many. For the authors to incorporate and develop other strands of psychoanalysis or other modes of emancipation would be at the expense of the proactive, assertive and unwavering focus of this work. Parker and Pavón-Cuéllar have illuminated the revolutionary aspects of Lacanian theory beyond interpretation in the clinic so it can also be applied so that culture can be changed. They do however, modestly acknowledge a wide influence and infusion of ideas from Marxism, feminism, eco-socialism, anti-colonial, anti-psychiatry and philosophies of liberation.

It was Freud who considered psychotherapy, politics and education as the impossible professions. Here, in this manifesto, the authors critically utilise elements of all three and invite the reader to not just be a spectator but to take a risk and participate in the impossible:

> The ethical-political impulse is that another world is possible, a world in which we freely associate with each

> other and in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all (ibid., p. 151).

Parker and Pavón-Cuéllar propose that a world is possible in which psychoanalysis is possible but unnecessary, where the subject can be anti-capitalist and anti-colonial - where they can express its potential in the truth they speak to power and potentially produce a post-capitalist mode of being. What does a post-capitalist mode of being look like? Here the authors remain traditionally psychoanalytic and allow the revolutionary readers to answer.

REFERENCES

Parker, I. and Pavón-Cuéllar, D. (2021). Psychoanalysis and Revolution: Critical Psychology for Liberation Movements. 1968 Press.