EUROPEAN CRITICAL PSYCHOLOGICAL TRENDS: AN OPEN ROAD TO PSYCHOLOGICAL RECIDIVISM[1]

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In a recent study on traffic policies we learned about Ichihara Prison for Traffic Offenders, a groundbreaking initiative established in Japan in 1969 as a governmental response to a significant growth in traffic accidents (Johnson 1991). Under the supervision of Haruo Sato, the first traffic warden who was also a psychologist, the authorities sought to make the prison's environment as similar as possible to life in the free community. As stated in *The White Paper on Transportation Safety in Japan '85* traffic offenders are 'allowed to enjoy a freedom of atmosphere' and 'they are given special corrective education for the purpose of cultivating the spirit of law observation, sense of responsibility, respect for human life, and other moral considerations through daily activities' (cited in Johnson 1991: 65). The main orientation of the moral re-education programs adopted in Ichihara are to be found in Nakian therapy ('inner self observation'), and was to move inmates toward more positive social behaviours. This therapeutic approach is applied as follows:

> For two weeks some half-dozen residents, who have volunteered for the therapy, go to a solitary cell in the receiving cell block on weekdays from 5:30 to 9:30 p.m., on Saturdays afternoons, and all day on Sundays. Staff members go from cell to cell, asking what the individuals are thinking and advising them on how to think about themselves, but offering no specific advice. It is expected that the traffic incident will dominate the inmate's inner observation (Johnson 1997: 147).

In this way responsibility was shifted from the structural level of our culture of mobility (of transport communication based on cars), and the way it reflects and reproduces social differences, to the traffic authorities and juridical-political system and to finally focus on drivers' attitudes and self observation through therapeutic practices.

Psychological intervention in this open prison, it could be argued, is limited to monitoring and challenging inmate's attitudes in the context of apparently free but self-normalizing observations/confessions. However it could also be argued that another main contribution of psychology relies on the prefigurative power of this open prison. Taking the former account psychology would be depicted as a body of expert knowledge and work (as 'psychological discipline') implemented across ruling institutions and professional practices (the 'psy-complex'), while the latter would focus on the way psychology actively engages in the making of and regulation of everyday social practices and relations

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[1] This paper first appeared as a chapter in Parker, I. (ed.) (2015) *Handbook of Critical Psychology.* London and New York: Routledge.

('material psychological culture'). In the case of Ichihara this perspective would also entail consideration of the arrangements and influence of, for instance, the prison surroundings, the reception centre, the dormitory building, and the distribution of the individual sleeping units, and the apparently free practices and relations that they incite or afford. The major question that we would like to raise here would be to what extent European critical psychological issues and trends have been actively implicated in eclipsing and displacing their own material conditions of possibility and everyday mediations.

Taking Ichihara Open Prison as a starting point for what follows we offer a review of the way critical psychology has taken root and evolved in different European countries from the early 1970s to the present with particular emphasis on its material and historical conditions of possibility. In the first part of the text we review the current standing of the main European critical traditions. We specifically discuss the centrality of post-revolutionary Soviet psychology to German Critical Psychology (as an example of formerly critical epicentres in an ongoing process of revival of work important to us) and the multidimensional dynamics of critical psychology in Britain (as the epicentre of critical psychology in Europe during the last four decades). In the second part of the text we argue that these hegemonies have informed and shaped the evolution and positions of the rest of European critical psychology. We end the text with some remarks about the importance of recovering more materialist approaches in critical thinking in the age of the ongoing great financial crisis.

Resourceful geopolitical epicentres

Developments in Russian psychology, such as activity theory and cultural historical theory, were the main resources for early European critical psychology. Despite the lack of consensus on appropriate subject matter for psychological research and appropriate methodologies for studying psychology as a science, the first Soviet psychologists departed from the commonly held and important consideration that the analysis of human action as a unit of psychological analysis (Rubinstein) takes place within social, cultural and material contexts (Vygotsky, Leontiev, Engeström) (Yasnitsky 2011). These psychological concerns based on Marxist philosophy, whose roots can be traced back to soon after the Russian Revolution of 1917, inspired the formation of early critical psychological theory in different countries and regions in Europe (Tolman and Maiers 2001).

German critical psychology developed on the basis of Marxism and activity theory but, as in the psychology of the former Soviet Union, there was no common agreement about which aspects should be incorporated into their theories (Teo 1998). Critical thinking in German psychology appeared in the context of post-Second World War West Germany and was connected to the critique of fascism, authoritarianism and capitalism developed by the student movements in the late 1960s and the early 1970s (Mattes 1985; Maiers 2001; Tolman 1989).

Held (2006) characterizes contemporary critical psychologies in Germany and Austria in terms of their opposition to quantitative-experimental psychology and their affinity to qualitative and subject-oriented methods. According to Held (2006) these opposing trends to

mainstream positivist psychology include the Critical Psychology of Berlin's Freie Universität by Holzkamp (1992, 1972) and others (e.g. Maiers 1991) (in German 'Kritische Psychologie' with capital K), and also in various branches of critical thinking in psychology influenced by the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory, Freudo-Marxism, social constructionism, postmodernism, feminist and postcolonial theory, poststructuralist thinking and similar approaches (in German 'kritische Psychologie' with a small k). For his part Teo (1998: 239) notes that the former current runs close to a constructivist perspective in the 'socialist' countries which pursue an improvement of psychology and scientific epistemology as well as a science of the subject. Paradoxically the later approach, less identified with the former Eastern European regimes, was more oriented to challenging mainstream psychology or abolishing psychology in that form. According to Brunner et al. (2013: 419) some of these other forms of critical psychology in Germany, known as psychoanalytic social psychology, also called 'analytic social psychology' (Fromm), 'political psychology' (Brückner, Horn), or 'critical theory of the subject' (Lorenzer), shared an interest in integrating psychoanalysis into critical social theory, and were established 'at several German speaking universities during the 1960s in the wake of a socio-critical upheaval'. Their major topics of research included authoritarianism, processes of inclusion and exclusion, National Socialism and its consequences and, more recently, questions regarding the constitution of gendered subjects.

In the 1970s German *Kritische Psychologie* reached its peak. In the 1980s, with the final collapse of Soviet bloc regimes, mainstream psychology flourished and with it came ongoing institutional attacks on *Kritische Psychologie*. Foremost in this period of institutional change was the way that critical discourse in psychology, from the 1980s, shifted away from Marxism toward diverse variants of postmodernism, picking up from debates in France and finding its way into the arguments of feminism and multiculturalism in North America. As Teo (1998: 245) puts it '[F]or many critical communities postmodern relativism seemed more attractive than the search for a unified, reality-representing system of categories'.

Way beyond the image of a 'Golden Era' for critical work and narratives of decline (Maiers 1991; Mattes 1985; Teo 1998), methodologically-oriented typologies (Held 2006) or 'renewed politicization and a rekindling of psychoanalytically oriented critical thought' (Brunnel et al. 2013: 420), Lux (2013) identifies a new push for academic critical psychology in Germany. This was a revival mainly due to the students' reactions against the so called 'Bologna process' which was initiated by the European Union to make academic standards and degrees more compatible throughout Europe while promoting free mobility of students and professionals combined with accelerated institutionalization and spread of experimental neuroscience into psychology departments (contemporary 'neurohype').

The progressive neoliberalization of the European High Education Space since the late 1990s and ever more competion for scarce public resources reinforced the affiliation of German psychology with the natural sciences and, as Lux (2013) states, neuro-cognitive psychology become a new sub-discipline of psychology in Germany. This new biological and behaviouristic turn which German psychology has experienced under the aegis of the Bologna reforms has brought other

unintended outcomes. In Lux's (2013: 472) own words such a reinforcement of positivist logics 'has become an important unifying factor which makes new collaborations between different approaches of critical psychology possible. Even those who were hopelessly divided in the past started to communicate again'. In addition a new generation of critical psychologists has emerged despite having to find academic jobs in other disciplines including sociology, public health, educational sciences, political sciences or cultural studies with only very loose connections to psychology and carrying with it the risk of a fragmentation of critical psychology as such.

With Mattes (1985) assessment of past events and the context for the first wave of German Critical Psychology, Lux also considers that the current revival of critical thinking and alliances generally follows the trend of continuously growing social protests and the sharpening of social conflicts in Europe, related to the widening of social gaps. All this constitutes the broader picture or constellation of factors which underlines the atmosphere of change in German critical psychology triggered by neoliberal politics in higher education. To quote directly from Lux (2013: 478):

> While discussing alternatives to the neoliberal program, a significant fraction of the current generation of students turned to Marxism, Critical Theory (Frankfurt School), postcolonial theory, queer and feminist theory, and other versions of critical social theory. The growing interest in critical approaches in psychology which combine social critical theory and the critique of the societal role of psychology results, in part, from this constellation. The development is explicitly strengthening feminist, postcolonial and Marxist psychologies, but also – in the tradition of the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory – psychoanalysis as well as the works, for example, of Michel Foucault and Jacques Lacan.

The lesson we learn from the history of German critical psychology is that its early evolution, self-effacement and recent revival did not rely on epistemological or methodological concerns, nor even on theoretical resources but on wider geopolitical transformations and the way they punctuate institutional policies. We also learn about the impossibility of abstracting critical psychology from social upheaval and protests. As noted earlier, when the students' movement declined in the late 1970s, critical psychology in Germany immediately faced a series of attempts to shut down and undermine its institutional basis.

While German critical psychology has been profoundly punctuated by major sociopolitical turmoil and social mobilizations, the sociopolitical conditions of possibility of critical psychology in Britain are often ignored or approached in a rather elusive way. Such a present absence becomes more shocking when considering that during the last four decades, under the banner of neoliberalism, British critical psychology has become the theoretical epicentre in Europe (and beyond). Recent reviews of critical psychology in Britain timidly reflect upon some of these issues and national tensions (Cromby and Willis 2013). For his part Parker (2014) states that despite the fact that Britain is a 'disunited kingdom', nevertheless it has not given rise to different distinctive forms of critical psychology.

Such a narrative of a unified critical psychology and its inner and outer effects can be better understood by identifying some of its main structural dimensions. In our view a comprehensive picture of the history, dynamics and current state of contemporary critical psychology in Britain can be painted through the following five dimensions: (1) a concern with 'real qualitative methodology' which includes various degrees of methodological solipsism, characterised by pride and critical sensibility, as well as a false political consciousness wrapped up in its own methodological rigors; (2) 'subjectivity deflated' characterised by overdoses of codified and transcribed micro-realism, ethnomethodological hallucinations or discourses and epistemologies influenced by technoscience. Lately some work in this area of work has nevertheless been engaged in reflexive ethnographies developed in organizational settings; (3) 'subjectivity in excess' grounded in psychoanalytic and humanistic theory, which lead the process of psychologizing various aspects of critical psychology under the pretext of finding the 'true subject', self-understanding, self-criticism and political decadence, all packaged in a false and harmful reconceptualization of its own 'subject matter'; (4) 'feminist psychology and gender relations' often characterised by contradictory disciplinary tendencies, being either overly preoccupied by the acceptance of its own particular disciplinary territories or impelled to search out new disciplinary basis for analyzing gender relations and 'developments' beyond psychology; (5) 'action oriented and participatory research' initiated as a transformative approach with many good intentions in the late 1990s, but paradoxically which has turned out to absorb and neutralize radical mental health policies, whether from the established field of community psychology and more recently accommodated critical disability studies.

Under the banner of incipient neoliberal logics developed since the mid 1980s the current hegemony of British Critical Psychology relies at least partly on the level of flexibility and interchanging nature of these five dimensions. In much the same way as the labels which inspired them, 'subjectivity in excess' or 'subjectivity deflated', these dimensions ought to be considered as interwoven 'ideal types' whose nature as signifiers and self-perpetuating power also relies upon their mutual antagonism. The terms 'subjectivity deflated' and 'subjectivity in excess' are inspired by Robert Castel's (1995, 2009) works on the end of the salaried condition in Europe since the 1970s which coincides with the first major crisis of welfare states, and with it, the suppression of major forms of social protection. Paraphrasing Mary Douglas' (1996) theory of styles of thought, we argue that these central dimensions of–British critical psychology rest upon incompatible organizational principles. Peaceful co-existence is difficult and the different strands of British critical psychology cannot exist beyond their mutual antagonism. This hostility between competing dimensions is precisely, in part, what keeps British critical psychology going.

It would not be politically correct or fair to allocate specific colleagues and research groups to any single dimensions in so far as none exist as individuals exclusively in one or the other, but rather in mutual, though antagonistic, dependence. However, under the influence of a current concern with 'reflexivity' in critical psychology, understood here as an exercise in self disciplinary deconstruction and objectification,

we shall comment on those dimensions which we feel most closely associated and-identified with.

The primary resources which inspired British 'discursive psychology' (Burman 1991; Burman and Parker 1993; Parker 1999) were cultural-historical psychology and activity theory, which emerged in the context of Soviet psychology, and French post-structuralism, especially Foucault's work on knowledge and power relations along with feminist developments and psychoanalytic theory shaped later on by political, action and discursive psychology. Discursive work in psychology bought into the sort of methodological trap which can occur when equating qualitative work with critical work and erroneously considering that in doing so the political dimension of discursive psychology was warranted. In this light, it is not surprising therefore that in recent years discourse analysis has been rehabilitated as part of psychology (Parker 2012).

Discursive psychology in Britain has fallen into a debate on methodology which shared some obscured dynamics with mainstream psychological concerns. In this way 'real qualitative methodology', and discursive psychology as part of it, rendered itself open to dangerous liaisons with liberal versions of social constructionist agendas, and with it, a stronger concern with liberal methodological realism. The political liberalism which haunted such a realist approach runs parallel to the psychologisation of studies of subjectivity ('subjectivity in excess') (Gordo López 2002), and with it, a new conceptual space for mystical 'new age' concerns. Former concerns with 'subjectification processes', and their institutional and historical material bases, were to be displaced by a renewed interest in 'subjectivity resources' and soon after experienced a strong influence from US liberal oriented communication and cultural studies. This as opposed to, for example, the first generations of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in Birmingham and its influential updating of Marxist theory and Soviet material concerns for the study of popular culture and consumption as the main resource for resistance to hegemonic socioeconomic trends. Considering this it is telling that the *International Journal of Critical Psychology* was re-launched in 2008 under the name of *Subjectivities*.

A reinforcement of methodological concerns can also be detected among critical psychologists whose approaches were mainly constituted betwixt and between the 'real qualitative methodology' and 'subjectivity deflated'. What prevails now in British critical psychology, mainly with regard to the work formerly identified with the 'real qualitative methodology', 'subjective deflated' and, even 'feminist psychological and gender relations' is a progressive fragmentation and with it a dissolving of processes into neighbouring disciplines and concerns, shifting from critical margins to central disciplinary productions (media studies, sociology, management studies, and the like). The various dimensions which inform critical psychology in Britain and the antagonistic drive inherent to their own logics of critical thinking styles combine to have a rejuvenating effect while regulating the combinatory logics of its own nature as a signifier. Taking these multidimensional dynamics into consideration, liminal positions are also evident.

Alongside Deleuzian agendas, as well as studies of techno-scientific epistemology and reflexivity, there is an increasing interest in taking on the study of the material and social nature of affects, emotions and even neurobiological bases in critical psychological agendas. On the

contrary to the integral socio-biological approaches of the former Soviet Union, current critical research into ostensibly materialist neurobiological approaches is conducted under the hegemony of a new evolutionary theory which can hardly be abstracted from the thriving refloating of capitalism and the geopolitical surveillance and 'transparency' which new social media (Facebook, Twitter, Whatsapp, and so forth) bring about in the current era of 'Big Data'.

Other European critical psychologies

So far we have outlined Soviet and German critical psychology as representatives of former Marxist and materialist traditions (from the time of the post-Soviet States to the 1970s) and British critical psychology, as the most influential current since the 1980s until the present day. We have sought evidence regarding not only the way these trends have evolved but also their connections with wider socioeconomic contexts and transformations. However other satellite positions have also spread out all over Europe. While not easily categorized, there are common connections to German and, mainly, British critical psychology. Contrary to the German and British epicentres, they have never institutionalised their works as a reachable frontier, regardless of their various positions and socioeconomic contexts. For the sake of clarity, while being aware of the danger of oversimplification, we present the following as a guide to some of the major European critical psychology trends, outside of Germany and Britain: (1) Resonances of Marxist and activity theory (in Austria, Denmark, Finland, Poland and Slovenia); (2) Independent and self-organized strands highly fragmented and often absorbed by other disciplines (in the Czech Republic, Cyprus, France, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Portugal and Spain); (3) Remote satellites where critical psychology has been, till recently, mainly absent or meaningless (in Belgium, Island, Holland, Norway, Sweden and Turkey)

Like the two epicentres, these other strands reinforce the idea that the discipline of psychology has been unable to respond to important social needs and problems. They also show the way that the critical margins, which they represent to various degrees, are equally caught up in an irreversible political unresponsiveness or in a relationship of compliance with hegemonic structures (Nissinen 2006; Blakar y Nafstad 2006). Such a lack of responsiveness is more symptomatic in the case of South European countries such as Spain, Italy and Portugal which, paradoxically, with the arrival of the recent and now ongoing financial crisis and the entrenchment of Neo-Con agendas and policies, seem to have experienced a further fragmentation and dissolution into neighbouring disciplines. In forms of resistance to the refloating of capitalism and the intensive attack on the social (welfare) state, some Marxist and materialist approaches remain in Central Europe (mainly Denmark) and have sprung up more recently in Greece, mainly from colleagues educated in the tradition of German Critical Psychology. To a lesser degree this incipient process is also reaching remote satellites (Norway and Sweden, for instance) where before the onset of the financial crisis, and the then inexorable crisis of the welfare states, critical psychological methodological concerns were incorporated into their psychology syllabus since the mid 1990s or were just considered to be

just one more English eccentricity (as it is viewed in Belgium and Holland).

It is not be possible here to go into a detailed and updated review of critical psychology in each of these countries but according to the latest accounts (Dafermos et al. 2006, 2013; Walkerdine 2002, 2001) the most promising outpost of 'real politik' in critical psychology might be found amongst the latest unintended revival of German 'Critical Psychology' and its influence in satellite countries (of Greece, Denmark, Finland and Poland). It is worth noting the work developed during the last decade by Greek colleagues and more recently in British critical psychology research groups. The syncretism developed out of the materialist German concerns is conscious of the reluctance of critical psychology in Britain to materialize their works on wider socioeconomic developments, but also aware of the multidimensional pragmatism which informs British critical psychology. Taken together, this leads us to propose that Greek critical psychologist, along with recent German Critical Psychology revival, are the main critical enclaves. Indeed even more so if the current disciplinary contexts keep them away from the temptation of institutionalization. It is not a coincidence that Germany was effectively a first laboratory for the implementation of extreme neoliberal reforms at the dawn of present Western financial collapse, nor is it a coincidence that Greece has been economically 'rescued', punished, twice already and is continuously under the threat of being kicked out of the European Union.

Final remarks

We began this chapter with Ichihara open prison for repeat traffic offenders to illustrate the way that the discipline of psychology has acted as a highly successful apparatus that confines and dissolves structural antagonism into the realm of individual normalization. Such a process of 'psychologisation' has been assisted by institutional settings and networks of regulations in the 'psy-complex' (Ingleby 1985; Rose 1985, 1996). These regulative networks, as with the Ichihara open prison, purport to transcend traditional psychological confinement by means of only apparently free everyday practices (in a 'psychological culture', Parker 2007). As Papadopoulos (2004: 7) warns us, even if the prison does not look like a traditional prison, it nevertheless 'transforms, mutates, and creeps into the every-day life' of inmates.

Disciplinary psychological practices and knowledge hinges upon an ongoing re-colonisation of everyday psychology (McLaughlin 2011). In this respect, the colonization of everyday life by means of an ever-expanding psychological culture 'operates as twins, two sides of an ideological and material effective process' (Parker 2014). However the current epicentre of critical psychology in Europe seems to have taken the opposite course. It has moved on from analyzing the material and political conditions to enjoying self-reflexivity as the main path to psychological recidivism and imprisonment, primarily by focusing on methodological issues and subjective resources. In this sense British critical psychology has not paid attention to the way that psychology prefigures and masters everyday material practices and mediations. As we argued previously, without a commitment to everyday materiality it will be difficult to counter the highly efficient neoliberal discourses that

strategically address everyday material issues (such as personal security and personal finances) and, at the same time, links them with wider structural phenomena (immigration, delinquency, terrorism or family values) (Gordo López and Pujol Tarrés 2004: 156).

In contrast to its German counterpart, British critical psychology has never responded explicitly to any particular social movement nor has it been ascribed or thought of itself as part of wider geopolitical transformations. If we keep in mind that developments in psychology mainly respond to economic and international political investments (Burman 2008), such a lack of social and economic responsiveness turn out to be highly suspicious given the current hegemony of British critical psychology.

More worrying even is the way British critical psychology has promoted, during the last decade, inventories of other critical psychologies in Europe and throughout the world. Besides the need to attend to both the local and social circumstances which have shaped the different trends and issues pursued by critical margins (Dafermos et al. 2006, 2013), early historical materialist resources have also taught us that the role of critical psychology is the result of different processes of institutionalization which assist production and government. Despite their socio-cultural specificity psychology and its critical margins are major resources for practices and discourses within a world-wide space which 'goes beyond national borders and has a high degree of transnational intelligibility' (Papadopoulous 2002), even more so now under the banner of global neoliberalization processes and the re-energising of capitalism in response to the financial crisis.

Psychology has become an intrinsically productive force. It could be considered, alongside scientific knowledge, as a form of successful 'globalised localism' (Santos 2003: 348-249) or even as the vernacular language of capitalism (Parker 2007). From this angle, psychological disciplines and sub-disciplines, including critical psychology, constitute extensions of global spaces and socioeconomic dynamics, as well as of functioning subjective spaces (Gordo López and Pujol Tarrés 2004). We should seriously consider global tendencies of resistance as much as socio-cultural specificities (Marvakis 2013). The relations between 'epicentres' and 'satellites', their relations and shifts of emphasis, turn out to be highly revealing if we take them to be indicating comparative geopolitical operations while bearing in mind that critical specificities are also congruous with robust and material normalizing outcomes. If we do not engage in such an analysis, we merely satisfy the illusion of countering the geopolitical and postcolonial responsibility of psychological epicentres and their wider conditions of possibility.

Note

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